

Welcome A Deep Dive I'm Reggie.

I thought I would begin the second season the podcast by taking a look at an aspect of race that's rarely discussed. The other. Othering is as fundamental to racism as is melanin.

Thanks for joining me for Negritude.

I thought I might begin the second season talking with an episode about racism. Not something polemical, but rather more personal.

Angela Davis:

This moment is a conjuncture between the COVID-19 crisis and the increasing awareness of the structural nature of racism. Moments like this do arise. They're totally unpredictable, and we cannot base our organizing on the idea that we can usher in such a moment. What we can do is take advantage of the moment.

I think that many people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, who had not necessarily understood the way in which history is present in our lives today, who had said, "Well, I never owned slaves, so what does slavery have to do with me?" suddenly began to get it. That there was work that should have happened in the immediate aftermath of slavery that could have prevented us from arriving at this moment. But it did not happen. And here we are. And now we have to begin.

We all have a role in that beginning. From where we are, with what we are able to do. So this is my offering.

Othering was used by the colonizers to create and sustain the negative and inferior views and assumptions about the colonized natives. It came in particularly handy when justifying slavery both during and I most certainly after.

During slavery it gave slave masters a way to define a group of people who were subhuman indeed of handling. It was so effective that poor whites were able to identify with the wealthy slave owners so fervently that many of them laid down their lives to protect a system of wealth creation and production that oppressed many of them as well.

Peter Burnett, the state's first governor, saw indigenous Californians as lazy dangerous savages. While he acknowledged that white settlers were taking native territory and bringing disease, he felt that it was the inevitable outcome of the meeting of two races.

"That a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct must be expected," he told legislators in the second state of the state address in 1851. "While we cannot anticipate this result but with painful regret, the inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power or wisdom of man to avert."

One of the things that's always boggled my mind is how did a race of such inferior people manage to be such good stewards of beautifully pristine lands that the Europeans had to have it.

There is another aspect to othering that make it potent which is a sort of historical amnesia, what Gore Vidal called the United States of amnesia. But we'll get to that in a bit.

There is not a Person of color within the sound who does not understand how other works it just as importantly how it feels. I didn't experience the sense of being different when it comes to race until I was a teen.

I grew up in Washington DC in a little neighborhood where the elementary school was at the top of the Hill where we lived. At the bottom of the Hill grocery store the Barber shop where my step-father and I conspired that I might achieve an afro. The first step being a shape up, look it up, and then a conversation with my mother, deep dive results.

Going back a bit, I remember the riots of 1968 after the murder of Martin Luther King and I remembered the displeasure of the adults around me at the looting and the rioting that had taken place the conversations about how some of the shop owners patrol the front of their stores to protect their property they worked so hard for. This was a very confusing time for me 'cause in addition to this there were many adults around me who understood the reason for the rioting they just didn't approve of the result. As an adult now I understand the rationale much better.

As a young person it felt that after the riots and instruction of the District of Columbia that things should have got back to normal but of course as an adult I realized that things never quite got back to normal in terms of when I lived there at any rate and soon what began to happen is that families like ours began to move to even leave here even greener parts of Washington DC or out into the suburbs that ringed the District of Columbia which is what we did.

Just before junior high school was ending I got word I don't even remember how now that a new school was opening this school was outside of my school district and it was in the suburbs and even deeper suburbs of Maryland in a fairly all white community I didn't think of any of this at the time but it had a performing arts element and it was new and something was sparked in me and I thought I want to go to the school. I asked my mother if she would sign the paperwork to make it happen and she said to me she would do it on one condition which was that I would have to get to and from school on my own every day on time without a problem and I just like an old Hollywood actor said hey sure I can do that no problem and so I was enrolled.

In many ways this sort of casual decision on my part changed my life. In some ways I felt free to be myself, free to indulge myself and whatever my interests were I didn't think about the sort of music I listen to or the things the art that I like to the stuff that I read is being black or being white as I was accused of buy the black kids in school but I'll get to that in a minute.

The thing that I could never have expected was that this newfound freedom came with considering myself as a black person . What I mean by that of course is that before this I never thought of myself as a black person because I grew up with black people I went to school with them my family is full of them I've never considered myself in any way the other a counterpoint to whiteness and suddenly I was or at least I was considered to be that.

I remember vividly the first time someone in the drama club I belonged to at school said to me that when she looked at me she didn't see a black person I was a bit thunderstruck by this but I am my mother and my grandmother's child after all and so I said to her will Amy I invite you to see me as a black person I see you as a white woman. I think we even might have laughed at it at the in the moment. in that moment I didn't really understand the weight of what she meant or that I would I would hear this again and again and again . But slowly I did begin to understand what it meant that I was one of the good ones and to think of somebody is black was to think of them

as the other in a way what my school friend was doing was accepting into the fraternity of whiteness which doesn't really have a label or an identity per se.

The professor John A. Powell says, "Race is a little bit like gravity," "experienced by all, understood by the few."

I've never been stopped or harassed by the police but I certainly have male relatives primarily who have infuriated heartbreaking story and I've certainly witnessed a few of these infuriating episodes. The one I recall most completely happened during that racist failure of a program stop and frisk, in NYC's Soho neighborhood when a police car then two, then three pulled up on three or four black and Latino boys were surrounded, shoved up against police cars, pockets gone through. I remember the kid's stony faces and one Latino boy who looked in my direction as we locked eyes. I held his gaze until he looked down because I wanted him to know that I saw him and this. As I scanned the scene I noticed one of the black officers looking at in my direction with a mixture of annoyance and something akin to smugness that I could barely read.

I leaned against the building I was standing in front of watching until the police chatting amongst themselves dismissed the kids, got back into their cars and took off, leaving these young men standing there as they begin revving themselves back up with macho nonchalance and swagger that didn't quite fit their beautiful faces and wirey adolescent frames.

The police hadn't found anything obviously but the thing that haunted me then and senses what does this do to you when this happens to you on a regular basis on the way home from school on the way to some athletic practice on the way to the movies on a date hanging out with your friends? Looking at those young men what I could see our young people my nephew or any other young person who looks more who looks closer to being a child than an adult.

One of the things that struck me about this incident is the way in which these young people were treated. Listen I understand that policing can be a very difficult job I grew up with two police officers who were beat cops and then detective and I've heard a lot of stories and I understand how difficult it can be in a country that is armed to the teeth and we send them out to deal with it. And it is also possible that those young men might have committed a crime but even if they had committed a crime it was very unlikely that they were hardened criminal and what was clear is that they were children young teenager and that interaction with them could have left a positive or negative imprint on them as they go through the rest of their lives.

And this of course makes me think of Tamir Rice who was a 12 year old boy sitting in a park with a toy gun and the 26 year old police officer who rolled up on the scene jumped out of his car and shot and killed this child within seconds. What would have happened if that police officer could see himself or his nephew or his children or his neighbors in that child? Would have taken more time to have a conversation or ask the child to put down the toy gun down or to see for himself that it was a toy and not a weapon. It's almost unavoidable to draw parallels between what happens in some of these police incidents and what happens in war we're soldiers are trained to see the enemy as the other so that they're easier to kill.

But of course that's not quite accurate because when it comes to othering in the United States it's part of the fabric of racism white people are raised to see black people as intrinsically and fundamentally different from them. I would venture to say not just different, but inherently and uniquely dangerous.

When I was a junior when I was a senior or junior in high school I had a girlfriend who is white and who through some trauma in her family had emancipated herself it was living on her own and going to high school and working after high school to support herself she had a roommate and for some reason on this afternoon we decided to go to her house something that we hardly

ever did and I never thought about why we were in her bedroom when she suddenly became panicked and said we had to go and as we packed up to leave we almost made it to the front door before her roommate put her key in the lock and walk through the door and suddenly we were the three of us standing in the living room. The roommate looked disturbed and asked if she could see my girlfriend alone they went into the one of the back bedrooms and had a conversation and when my girlfriend came out she was on the verge of tears we got into her car and drove to the pizza parlor that we always hung out at and it was there that she told me that her roommate was throwing her out of the apartment because she had a black man my girlfriend in that apartment with her and the roommate who had to be all of 21 or 22 didn't approve of mixed race relations and suddenly my hardworking brilliant girlfriend was on the verge of being homeless for the crime of race mixing. It's true that this happened more than 20 years ago but it happened long after the civil rights movement and those sorts of actions had taken place so we're not talking about ancient history either. Of course she did find another place to live and was happy to not be living with her and avowed racist.

Having told that story I do think that younger people are starting to outright reject racism as a structural given. You can see that in the protests that many young people are refusing to buy into the lie or half-truth about the inherit-ness of race that's been passed down to them like some bankrupt legacy. In part because their lived experience tells them something different and in part because it feels like a lie. And though we have much work to do that's a very encouraging indeed.

My pal Robert and I were talking about gone with the wind and whether or not it would be taken down or shown and in the course of this conversation I sort of jokingly said to him well the South might have lost the war but they did not lose the war of ideas among white southerners. In fact the delusion lie that the civil war was fought over things other than slavery is a notion that's deeply entrenched for some white southerners. And that lie is sort of like a lazy virus that's passed along from one person to the next until you have white southerners angry about the Confederate flag being taken down as it's flown over federal buildings many of them unaware that those flags and symbols were put up in the 1960s as a racist symbol to warn black people to not step out of place. Instead many white people in the South view the Confederate flag as a symbol of their heritage in the same way that they think about watermelon iced tea and I would offer that idea is a feature and not a bug and it cannot be simply dismissed as ignorance.

My pal Robert and I were talking the other day about the consternation that went on about taking down confederate flags and monuments. I said to him that the South might have lost the war but they certainly did not lose the propaganda game about themselves and the rationale for fighting the civil war.

For me it's easy to understand why so many southern whites would have bought into the idea that the war was fought over other things, after all how do you maintain pride about a war in which so many people were killed so that a few wealthy folks could maintain their empire fueled by chattel slavery. So the final result is that you have statues in parks commemorating people who are mostly forgotten but they are attached to a larger legacy. You have the Confederate flag being flown over federal buildings even though those flags were put up in the 1960s and 50s to remind black people of who was in charge that warning was accompanied by the threat of violence which attaches itself to the Kul-Klux-Klan and other forms of violence.

The stories and myths about black people have been brilliantly deployed to define what it means to be black and often these definitions are internalized by black people. There isn't a black person listening to this episode, who hasn't had the experience of being told by other black people that they sound white or that their interests are not black enough.

Racism is often discussed in shades of black and white but for me outside of my concerns about structural racism like the justice system, law enforcement, poverty, and housing I am most animated when it comes to the racism that occurs within communities of color. Even there where we often have so much in common the racism and melanin shame runs deep. It is also a place where you can see the most clear how the infection of racism has spread and metastasized.

As these conversations are so often black and white the racism amongst groups of colored folk is often lost or muted. I would say for me my interest in racism is most focused on its occurrence amongst other people of color.

Not that long ago I met someone who had newly arrived in the city from El Salvador his English wasn't so great my Spanish wasn't so terrific so we would often meet with the computer and chat and we got to know one another and I was lucky enough to help him find his way and navigate some of the city as he settled in one of the first jobs that he got was in a shop run by a first generation Chinese family now and then when I was in the neighborhood I would sometimes stop by when he was getting off work and we would go and have a meal on one of these occasions he introduced me to the store owners they were friendly and off we went for our meal the next time I spoke to my friend he told me that the day after he had introduced me to the shop owners they had warned him gravely that he should avoid having any kind of relationship with black people because they are dangerous.

One of the things that I'm interested in this political season is to see what sort of political alliances if any grows out of having a female vice presidential candidate who is both black and East Indian, Tamil at that.

Today, the expression micro aggressions is used to describe what I'm talking about when I refer to othering. But I would suggest a lifetime of these microaggressions is anything but micro.

Developing a hyper awareness of one's self and the terror you represent. Being aware of your proximity in confined spaces or crossing the street so that the white women ahead of you will stop pretending not to be terrified when they are terrified, being followed around stores as you watch and report the towheaded blonde guy stealing an entire shelf of candy, or my personal favorite, acting as a warning beacon for white men and sometimes other men of color to check for their wallets. Can all be a bit warring and for some people psychologically damaging particularly if you don't have a strong grounding in who you are. Or as my grandmother would say, know your people, know where you came from.

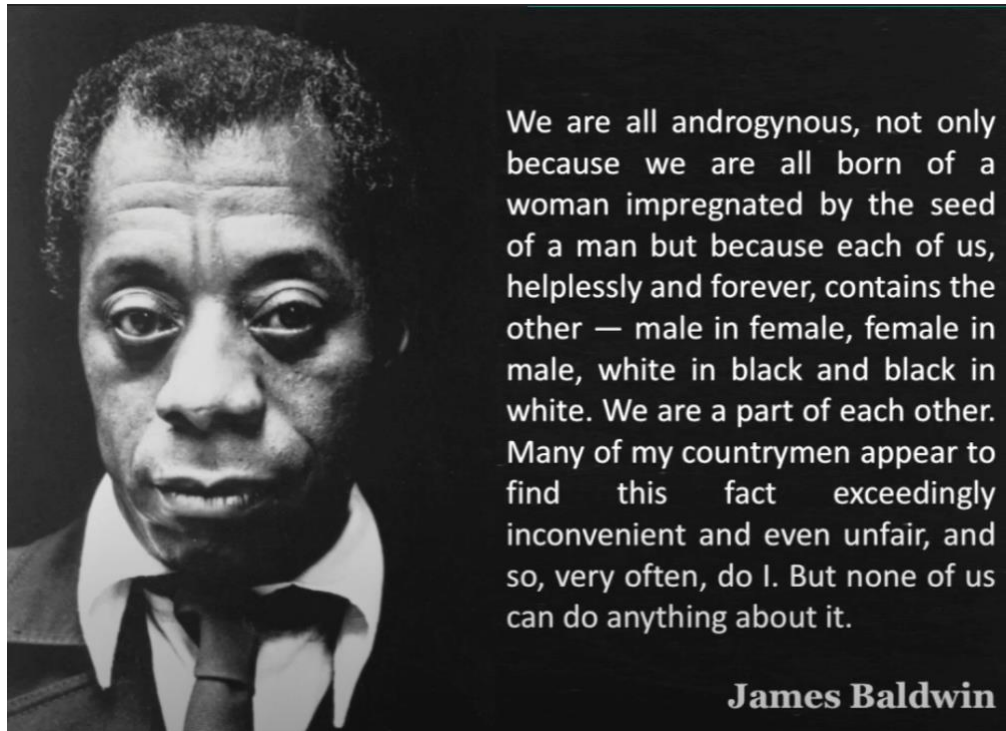
I think one of the most helpful aspects of all of this is it these things are people made they don't come out of nature they don't take some great twist of biology to change or you change how their constituted they are rooted in human beings and the stories that we tell and how we decide to live with or without one another and all of that stuff is infinitely fixable.

And of course when I say fixable I don't mean everybody someday some bright morning it'll all change well of course it won't we're all human beings we see the world differently and some people will never change and for me that's alright because the victory is in the numbers and as far as I can see there are two potent ways in which we change this legacy of racism and one of the most vital things to do is that we must tell our stories and our history and we must tell all of it. This concept isn't very complicated we all know this from our personal lives that when you have secrets and lies that they tend to fester and they affect the entire body sooner or later so the best thing is to have the thing out to tell the whole truth.

And in doing that we will discover people who have done extraordinary things people who have changed the world that they live in and that change is spread in ways that we are completely unaware of because no one's ever told us which of course then light spark for other people to

make the changes they want to be to make the changes they want to see to venture out further from their expectation or their boundaries. Tell the whole truth tell the whole story so that each one of us knows our history so that each one of us knows our collective history.

I love this James Baldwin quote that says:



The other way to drown racism is through empathy and compassion. By challenging those nasty little stereotypes, when they pop up in our head, then we will be able to form an army of folks demanding from our governments the treatment and the world that we want to live in.

I like the idea of sharing our pain. Our experience of suffering as a disabled person, native people, coalminers. Hearing each other's suffering then talking about our collective future.

One other thing I want to address is shame. Many white people, some would say not enough, are defensive around the topic of race and one of the emotions that surfaces is shame. As Dr. Brené Brown says shame is deadly. Brown says, "Shame need three things to grow secrecy, silence, and judgement." All three of those surround racism and the airing of it.

What happens when those emotions are active most of us shut-down. I thought of this when I saw a photograph and some of the protests a very small children a group of them who was sitting on the ground and in this protest they were giving up their privilege. Aside from a deep sigh I thought to myself well these children are being taught something by the adults around them well-meaning as they are something that is not helpful. First of all you can't give up something that you've inherited it's part of a system it comes along with your parents and your birthright the question is like any inherit what are you going to do with it. And you can't do anything with it until you acknowledge that you have it nothing to be ashamed of nothing to feel guilty about but something to be aware of and from that awareness grows a course of action.

And for me really action is what is required on all fronts. As a man it is not enough to know that men have male privilege and to not do anything about it or think deeply about it and commit to myself or oneself what one is going to do about asserting or dealing with that privilege.

There's also something slightly superior about feeling ashamed or embarrassed about historical events. The crimes and the abuse perpetrated by the founders on whichever country you live has implicated you. You may not be slammed to the pavement or your children murdered by the police. By the dent of our collective history, we are all implicated in the outcome. After all, slavery wasn't just bad for black people. It was and is a stain on the entire.

Do you know that Bjork song "It's in Our Hands." It's on the Deep Dive Website.

The beginning lyrics are:

Look no further, Look no further, Look no further
Cruellest almost Always to ourselves
It mustn't get any better!
It's in our hands, It always was
It's in our hands, In our hands
It's all there, In our hands, It's all there, In our hands

It's in our hands.

Music

Thank you for joining me for the first episode of season two. In this season I'll continue to explore some of the people, places, and events that help us better understand how we got here and where we're going. From the history of housing and race in the United States that has historically contributed to the wealth gap between the races. I will also share my genealogy search that begin with my sister collecting records and oral histories long before computers were readily available. I'll take a look and gay black men and their place in defining the Harlem Ren. There might even be a story about the history of the sock.

Thanks to Joshua rich for allowing me to use his beautiful song Rain as the podcast theme song.

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Thanks for joining me. See you next time.