

Thoughts After Reading *Just Us*, by Claudia Rankine

I've read many books and articles stating that judging people by their character and not by their skin color is racist because doing so ignores racial inequities, and that people of color daily live with disadvantages due to America being systemically racist. They say that if we see each other as individual people rather than our skin color group, white people can continue their position of advantage and privilege and ignore how unfair America is to non-white people. This thinking eliminates individual responsibility and assumes all people with the same skin color have the same experiences. My life is an example that this is not true. This kind of thinking does not offer any solutions and condemns our country to bitterness and strife. It also breeds more hate when every negative situation that occurs is instantly categorized as racist, such as "White Cop Shoots Black Victim" when the facts may be that the "victim" is a criminal who resisted arrest and racism had nothing to do with the incident. Why do we allow this?

When we stop seeing each other as unique people, as individuals, and see nothing but skin color, we will continue to decline, even when it's done with good intentions, such as hoping to make things fair by proclaiming "white people are privileged" and "non-white people are victims." To say so is racist, insulting to non-white (and white) people, and benefits no one. Often provided as evidence of America's racism is data showing disparate outcomes for different races, lumping everyone into general categories without regard to individual circumstances, which is terribly prejudicial and inaccurate. Many circumstances lead to each person's outcome, including factors in and out of their control. Pursuing "equal outcomes" is destined to fail. Life is not fair and outcomes will never be fair. We are all born with different advantages and disadvantages that span way beyond skin color. Is it okay to assume, looking at me and judging me by the color of my skin, that I am more privileged than someone with darker skin? That is racism. We need to move past this and thrive together, as a team of Americans. None of us start from the same "fair" point, and you can never engineer things for this to be so. I think "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut illustrates this well. Even siblings from the same family and environment have different outcomes and advantages and disadvantages. People with any kind of "privilege" can squander it, and people without "privilege" can overcome it, and America allows this equal opportunity.

From the start of Claudia Rankine's "Just Us" book she writes, "You go down there looking for justice, that's what you find, just us" (the Richard Pryor quote). A more accurate quote would be, "You go down there looking for racism, that's what you find, racism." She gives many examples of when white people were rude to her and she called that racism. When we jump to that assumption, it poisons us all. What about when black people were rude to her? What about when white people were nice to her? Is all of that racism, or non-racism? Wouldn't we be healthier and more positioned for success if we view each other as fellow humans, rather than particular races?

When Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," I don't believe he meant blackness/brownness/whiteness

would disappear, but that we'd see each other as equals, as individuals, to be evaluated by our uniqueness, which includes our skin color, the way we carry ourselves, our decisions, our behavior. Why is this approach now considered racist?

Our library group discussed men who hold "pink-collar" jobs, particularly, one man who is a librarian. If people are surprised to find out his profession, does he assume that is misandry? I retired from a profession that was male-dominated, with most people thinking I was a secretary or an airline stewardess, but I never jumped to the conclusion that America is systemically misogynist because of these assumptions. If we see a white man covered in tattoos with a shaved head and a leather vest, would we be surprised to find out he's a surgeon? Is that racism? Why do we say it is racist to see a black man with dreadlocks and assume he is not a lawyer, as discussed in our group?

I will admit that I get fired up when I hear people badmouth America. I have traveled extensively and have never found a place that offers more freedom and protection for every race than America. If one exists, I'd like to know. We are stronger, healthier, and more successful when we work together as Americans rather than splitting into groups based on the color of our skin (something we have no control over) and blaming each other for unfairness (which will never be solved).