Killing America's Biggest Problem

Vanquishing racism requires much more than meaningless gestures and rhetoric.

March 29, 2021 By Kate Ferguson

Almost 400 years ago, American society was a study in stark black-and-white. The lines of demarcation were clearly drawn according to the color of one's skin. As the country progressed, new ideals took root—that we are all human beings regardless of differences in our appearance and that all men are created equal and have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Unfortunately, these ideals remain just words on paper.

Substantive change continues to elude America. At the heart of the matter is the abiding belief cherished by some that one race is superior to all others. In a society where pop culture focuses on trivialities, little thought is given to doing anything meaningful to make the world a truly better place for everyone.

A recent snafu on the popular show The Bachelor exemplified America's preoccupation with making on-the-surface changes that do nothing to dismantle the structural racism that supports inequality and oppression.

To summarize, a firestorm ensued after the program's host criticized those who felt that a contestant's attendance at an antebellum-themed party rendered her a racist. The woman apologized for having attended the party, characterizing her decision to do so as "offensive and racist." The hubbub continued after the host acknowledged that the woman should have objected to the theme of the party in the first place, but he refused to condemn her attendance. He also did not censure her for remaining quiet about the incident after it was uncovered.

Frankly, what does this matter? Can we not focus on what structural changes need to be made in our society? Stamping out racism requires its removal from inside our institutions and from our culture and values.

Although various laws address racism, legislation has never ripped it from the heart of America, where the seeds of racism have taken root. Structural racism exists and flourishes in spite of many people's best efforts. Numerous individuals have given their lives fighting for a diverse and democratic society where communities can coexist in peace and harmony. However, this dream remains elusive.

Governments worldwide support the mindset that for some to live well others must have nothing.

For some to be uplifted, others must be oppressed. What is it inside us that feeds on enmity, chaos and confusion? Is mutual respect for all our differences an unattainable goal?

Black people all over the world seem to be at the very bottom of the social order. Apparently, darker skin prompts a visceral and negative reaction in people, which makes me wonder if we will truly ever overcome.

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