We Need Healing Now

Racism is negatively affecting the overall health of Black people.

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Incessant incidents of racism are negatively affecting the overall health of Black people.

Several months ago, a Black Yale University graduate student had the cops called on her by a white student at the school. The Black student had fallen asleep in a common room in one of the university's dorms, an activity that in the mind of the woman who dialed 911 warranted police intervention. Thus, "napping while Black" was added to the growing list of actions that frequently put African Americans at risk of getting arrested, beaten, killed or all of the aforementioned hate-driven reactions to our presence in this country.

Today, encounters of this kind make the news on a regular basis. The message is quite clear to people of color that they're not wanted in this country because some individuals believe that—simply by virtue of race or ethnicity and religion—nonwhite people don't count among those who belong in America.

Of course, there is no justification for any of this, except that the current administration in the White House supports this backlash against diversity and inclusion in the United States.

But the state of our union aside, what about the status of our health? Scientific findings show that the overt and covert racism faced by African Americans can trigger a host of physical and mental illnesses among us. All the incidents we experience that dehumanize, dismiss, insult and invalidate us, which also reflect the unfair aspects of power and privilege, have become an epidemic that many experts consider a public health crisis.

In theory, the right to exist shouldn't depend on the color of one's skin. But, sadly, in a world tainted by intolerance, it very often does.

Studies also show that experiencing frequent episodes of racism affects Black people in very negative ways. These biased and prejudicial behaviors are nothing new in the United States. But the fact that they've escalated at this point in time is both disheartening and disillusioning.

Some believe that it's still possible for Americans to improve race relations. In addition, many clinicians are committed to raising awareness about how racism affects people's health.

But, realistically, these efforts to promote racial healing, health and wellness are overshadowed by daily headlines that hint there may be worse yet to come.

To stop those darker days from dawning, it’s my hope that individuals will start to take a harder look at those in power who are working so hard to stress our differences instead of celebrating our similarities as human beings.

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