Racial Bias Goes Retro

Editor-in-Chief Kate Ferguson-Watson takes a look at racism in America under Trump.

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The other day, as I watched more of the fallout from Donald Trump's questionable victory in becoming president of the United States of America, I thought hard about all the breaking news about him. Each tweet and executive order he issues further crystallizes my fear that racism is being OK'd in America.

In a society where many believed that we'd been catapulted into a post-racial world, the hoopla that followed Barack Obama's historical win as America's first African-American commander-in-chief evolved into a stinging backlash.

One evening, a news story struck me hard. The report showed a Muslim girl in tears after her mother was verbally attacked by strangers because of her religion. The bullies had wielded Trump's name like a club to batter her mom's humanity and relegate her to the status of a nonentity whose presence in the United States might soon be nullified because followers of Islam aren't welcome here.

The teenager's disbelief and outrage as she spoke with a reporter about the incident wrenched my heart. When the journalist cut the interview short, I was relieved. But the girl's words and pain remained fixed in my mind. Like many people, she wondered how this man who launched such vicious and dismissive attacks on the character of whole population groups could have become president.

Perhaps, part of the answer might lie in the denial many Americans—both Black and white—began to embrace during the past few decades. As generations have come of age without ever having witnessed Jim Crow or the battles of the Civil Rights era in a divided America, young people who aren't rooted in the history of this country have forgotten that race is still a core issue.

The shell shock I've seen imprinted on the faces of folks such as this young girl reflects the realization that the world as we know it may be a sham. But to me, the real kicker is that the highest achievement ever sustained by a Black person in America—Barack Obama's win as president—seems to be the very thing that stopped the clock and sent us spinning backward in time.

When Obama claimed the keys to the White House, many people on both sides of the color divide

couldn’t believe it. Was this presidency an idea whose time had come? Interestingly, like the Muslim teen, some in the United States exhibited the same shell-shocked expression. After Obama’s win, what followed wasn’t too long in coming: Members of his own party and of the opposition turned on him for reasons that seemed purely race-based.

Clearly, the hard truth is that we still live in a fractured and divided country. Trump’s presidency simply drew the covers off the ugliness that continues to simmer just beneath the surface of life in these United States. My hope is that the time for healing comes soon.

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