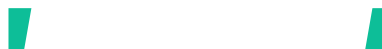


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THE BLOG 07/01/2015 05:09 pm ET | Updated Jul 01, 2016

It's My Job to Raise Children Who Are Not Only Not Racist But Actively Anti-Racist



By Mandy Hitchcock

Eight: the number of southern black churches that have burned in the last ten days.

Nine: the number of black bodies gunned down in a Charleston church by a young, racist, white male two weeks ago.

Countless: the number of unarmed black men, women, and children who have been killed in recent years by police officers who were supposed to protect them, or by others who, feeling threatened, have chosen to take the law into their own hands.

Zero: the number of times I have discussed race or racism in any meaningful way with my white four-year-old son.

Of all of the many privileges I enjoy as a white woman in America, this is by far the most significant. My white son could breeze through the rest of his life without ever having any meaningful conversation about race and racism. Having [already lost a child](#), I will fear many things for my children as they continue to grow, but I will never have to fear that they might be endangered by one thing over which I have absolutely no control: the color of their skin. I will never have to have a conversation with them explaining why they or their friends have been treated differently, or why they need to act in certain ways during encounters with police officers or with certain kinds of white people.

What a luxury. What a privilege as a mother to be able simply to ignore race and racism if I wanted to, if it were too uncomfortable to discuss, if I just didn't know what to say.

Because I don't. Know what to say. Even though I've known for a long time that [it's important to begin talking about race and racism at an early age with children](#), I've put it off, using a rationalization I know for



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“He won’t even know what I’m talking about.”

But the real reason is that I’m afraid, because I’m not even sure how to begin. We have many black friends, including several close ones, but none whom we see on a regular basis. We live in a predominantly white town, and our kids go to a very small, mostly white preschool. Descriptors like “white” and “black” to describe actual people will likely go over my son’s head at this point.


What a luxury. What a privilege. Did you know that [black four-year-olds are far more likely to be suspended from preschool than their white peers?](#) FROM PRESCHOOL, FOLKS.

Last night, I was listening to a recent episode of This American Life called “[Birds and Bees](#),” in which the producers explored a few subjects that are really difficult to talk about with kids. Race was one of these. In that [segment](#), self-described socio-political comedian Kamau Bell explained that he, too, has been struggling with how to discuss race and racism with his almost four-year-old daughter. Bell is black; his wife is white. And while it made me feel a little better to know that black parents also struggle with how, and at what ages, to have these conversations with their children, it served as a powerful and important reminder, at a powerful and important time, that the parents of black children have very different reasons for having these conversations than do parents of white children. Parents of black children are trying to help their children survive and thrive in a culture that does not value their lives, even though their ancestors built the very foundations of America through nearly three centuries of enslavement, torture, rape, and murder.

As a parent of white children, I have the luxury of never even having these conversations at all. And [given the current difficulty of getting white people to understand white privilege and institutionalized racism](#), I think that’s probably the route that many parents of white children have taken in the past several decades. Parents assume that racism is taught, and if racism is taught, then as long as they don’t teach it, then they’ve done their jobs.

But Dylann Roof does not exist in a vacuum. The Dylann Roofs of the world, the church arsonists, the Darren Wilsons, the George Zimmermans, the Confederate-flag flyers, the preschool teachers who suspend black children at higher rates than white children, the politicians who blame poor black people for being poor—they are all allowed to exist because parents of white children thought it was enough not to teach their children to be racist.

It is not enough. While we must absolutely listen to and try to understand and love our black brothers and sisters, while we must absolutely bear witness to the pain that is the black experience in America, while we must absolutely stand in solidarity with black people, racism is a white problem. It was created by white people, and it must be solved by white people. It is not the responsibility of our black brothers and sisters to teach us how not to be racist, to educate us about racism, to explain white privilege to us, to tell us where to begin. It is our job as white people to do that work. It is our job to raise the generation of white children who will end racism in this country.

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It is my job to give him the vocabulary to understand not only race but racism.

It is my job to make him understand that his privileges as a white male in this country are built upon those nearly three centuries of enslavement, torture, rape, and murder, and that with great privilege comes great responsibility.

It is my job to make him understand that he must use that privilege to dismantle its very foundations.

I am not sure where to begin. I am scared. It may go over my son's head. But it is my job not to let it.

I am not sure where to begin, but here are a few steps I am taking:

- Joining a local anti-racist parenting group
- Reading everything I can about talking to kids about race (Google is an excellent place to begin)
- Asking my local librarian for age-appropriate children's books that I can read and discuss with my son

One: the number of times by the end of this day that I will have discussed race and racism in a meaningful way with my four-year-old son.

I am not sure where to begin, but I must begin somewhere. And I must begin now.

It is my job.

A version of this post originally appeared on mandyhitchcock.com.

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