

Labels within themselves are not always negative; in some circumstances they can be used to help humanity understand and identify themselves. However, these labels, such as the racial, class, and religious labels we use in everyday life are more akin to brands. These brands often come with a long list of negative connotations. Instead of bringing power and pride to the people these labels were created for, they are used as a tactic to classify, dehumanize, and diminish. Black and white is no longer used as a descriptor for skin color. The meaning is warped and utilized to reinforce negative stereotypes. Whereas comparatively “white” is used to reinforce power and privilege.

For racism to exist, a group must come forward and assert one’s claim of supremacy and domination over another. This domination, however, does not propagate followers. Instead, it gives birth to slaves, which can be literal as per the case in the 1600’s or figurative in the case of the poverty stricken in the 21st century. Modern America does not give room for black people to flourish; instead our country separates us by using factors such as Section 8 housing to create separate neighborhoods. This of course becomes more convoluted when cops from urban/upper class areas are sent to monitor those in poverty stricken neighborhoods of which these officers have no previous knowledge no property investment, no family or friends.

Part of the reason police brutality is so prevalent in our society is the continued dehumanization of black people. White Americans do not treat black Americans as their equals. This is evident in our justice system that refuses in many cases to prosecute white officers for the beating and harassment of black individuals, often unarmed. There are many names that support this conclusion: Roodney King, Eric Garner, Michael Brown Jr., Oscar Grant, etc. Often, our media will use these faces and twist the crime so it looks as if the victims are at fault by portraying these children or black men as “gang-bangers” or “drug dealers” or “drug addicts.” Implying that their lives were for the taking, instead of holding the officers at fault for their actions.

In the 21st century many of us are urged to look forward and forget the past. We are often reminded when we protest racial injustice that slavery ended in 1865. However, it is not mentioned that yes, slavery might be dead, but racism never ended. Our current political climate might have changed and the circumstances have changed, but racism is still very much a part of our reality. There might not have been a recent event such as the Greenwood Massacre, but there was a Unite the Right Rally in our lifetime. To combat racism we must come together and start a conversation. Racism will not be solved by one group; it takes all of us together. White Americans must face their privilege and work to dissolve the power gap. We cannot allow things to stay the same. We must all take responsibility. Whether that’s by helping our neighbor or speaking up loudly. As humans our greatest gift is our empathy and our compassion. So take a chance and talk to those you wouldn’t normally, but instead of pointing fingers, discuss how one can make a change.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said that, “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.” When it comes to activism, one must accept this statement for what it is. The