

# Racism at Work

RAW Truth Session #1 – January 27, 2021

## *Racism and Systemic Racism: What are They & How Do They Relate?*

**Dr. Sabrina Dent, Senior Faith Advisor**

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Former program coordinator for the Doctor of Ministry Program at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University.

Past president of the Interfaith Community of Greater Richmond (ICGR), a group of 20 faith communities and denominations committed to developing respect, understanding, and cooperation amongst its members.

### **Presentation Overview**

Dr. Sabrina E. Dent, DM. was both informative and inspiring. Dr. Dent started by quoting Angela Davis, 'Racism is so dangerous because it does not necessarily depend on individual actors but rather is deeply embedded in the apparatus.

**Racism** is defined as a **belief** that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits that produces an inherent superiority of a particular race; and behavior or attitudes that foster this belief. **Systemic racism** is a **political or social system** founded on racism and designed to execute its principals. i.e. intentional racism. "It is not easy to eradicate racism that is deeply entrenched in the structures of society," Dr. Dent stated. She discussed identities from an 'Identity Wheel,' race, ethnicity, role, education, gender, class, etc., and asked, 'What influences your opinion about race in America?' Dr. Dent

presented examples of both racism and systemic racism from both a historical and current perspective and prompted an active participation from the audience.

## **Summary**

Dr. Dent started by quoting Angela Davis, "Racism is so dangerous because it does not necessarily depend on individual actors but rather is deeply embedded in the apparatus", and that, "It is not easy to eradicate racism that is deeply entrenched in the structures of society."

She discussed her identities as a black woman, mother, native of Petersburg, etc. as a focus for others to delineate as they enter the conversation, i.e. to be mindful of their own 6 most important identities from an 'Identity Wheel,' race, ethnicity, role, education, gender, class, etc. to make the point that we each have our own perspective on issues of race. She asked 'What influences your opinion about race in America?' education, family, media, values, etc.

Dr. Dent showed a picture of the Jan. 6 insurrection and invited the audience to say what they saw in the image. Dr. Dent read the dictionary definition of racism: '**Racism** is defined as a belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits that produces an inherent superiority of a particular race and behavior or attitudes that foster this belief' and gave examples both historical and current. **Systemic racism** is a 'political or social system founded on racism and designed to execute its principals.' i.e. intentional racism.

Dr. Dent then gave a historical review of systemic racism in the U.S. affecting blacks, Jews, Asian-Americans. A video was presented comparing a white child in an well-funded school (real estate tax supported) system with a black child in a poorly-funded school system, established by 'red-lining' and limiting access to housing and funding to blacks. Implicit bias was discussed as assumptions about race, in particular its application to reviewing applications for jobs.

The audience was invited to examine their own implicit biases. Through the presentation, the audience was invited to present their reactions. The impact of racism such as micro-aggressions (commonly held practices such as minimization of issues or 'color-blindness') on African-Americans produces a 'healthy paranoia' and some means of deception as a means of survival. Racism shows up in public policies and graphic and vivid examples were provided showing "we still have a lot of work to do."

"How Do We Address Racism?" By "Allyship: association with the members of a marginalized or mistreated group to which one does not belong," and "speaking out courageously." Examine you biases. Engage in dialogue. Acknowledge religious freedom

issues in history. Understand religious and non-religious identities. Reimagine advocacy and engagement. Dialogue is *not* debate, mediation or conflict resolution. Key skills are an open attitude, listening, speaking, responding and reflecting. The wheel showing the 'religious landscape in America' was discussed.

A question and comment period followed.

*Where are we today?*

We have a lot of work to be done. Education, access to health care, employment practices, transportation, housing in Richmond and Petersburg,

*What are important steps we can take to prioritize?*

Do you know how others are and have been impacted? Dialogue, power of the pen; issues that you know are disenfranchising, write your representative. Be active within your own institutions, organizations. See something say something.

*Does church have a bigger role to play*

Definitely; all religious institutions have a responsibility to provide a different narrative.

*Will we always have systemic racism among us?*

We are talking about centuries; its in America's DNA. Hopeful part is that it will happen someday

*How important are inter-racial, inter-religious relationships?*

Very important; to develop in an organic and authentic way. Our common ground is our humanity. Dialogue is a specific type of conversation; listening, sharing an image, respecting perspective. There is a time to push back, especially in public policy, to take the extra step, take a risk (it comes at a cost!). In marginalized communities we take a risk every day.

*Racism is a white peoples' problem; what do white people have to do to deal with the trauma of their past actions?*

Study history and recognize complicity. Invite a family conversation. Research; don't expect it to come gently;

*As a community organizer I don't think they (the people I'm dealing with) realize that the pie isn't getting bigger; some will have a lot less. What is required to be an ally;*

Sometime means listening and being quiet; allow them to lead in the problem solving.

*Mankind needs a hierarchy, a pecking order. Doesn't that make the discussion about racism more difficult?*

Who developed the hierarchy? What does it mean to have a hierarchy? I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors; enslaved Africans; I recognize I am the daughter and bring my community along in my work; I am because of their actions; there is no hierarchy, all the work I do is about human dignity, as a member; for me there is no hierarchy. Systemically there is; housing, food insecurity, so much more we need to talk about.