

As I am writing this my heart is aching. I have been struggling to find the words. The Black Community is experiencing a pain, loss, and anger that cannot be put into words. The lives of Rayshard Brooks, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others were stolen by police, and the racist criminal justice system they operate within. I recognize that I could never fully understand the experiences of my Black friends, colleagues, and fellow community members. Nor can I shoulder their burdens, however much I may want to. Because what we are seeing is not simply a reaction to one, three, or even countless instances of police violence. It is the response to hundreds of years of intergenerational oppression.

When Juneteenth was approaching and I learned more about it I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Horrific and tragic.

According to Dr. Phillip Atiba Goff, Co-Founder and CEO of the Center for Policing Equity, systemic racism does not begin or end with law enforcement. "What we're seeing is the bill come due for the unpaid debts that this country owes to its Black residents." Now more than ever, it is important to affirm that Black Lives Matter.

The criminal justice system in the United States has a massive problem with systemic racism. Black people are more likely to be accused of a crime, and more likely to serve longer sentences. According to [The Sentencing Project](#), "African Americans are incarcerated in state prisons at a rate that is 5.1 times the imprisonment of whites." But this problem is not just about criminal justice reform. Racism is pervasive in our society and in daily life.

The reality is, there are many of us who do not think about the color of our skin when we go into a store, apply for a job, or get pulled over. But for Black residents in America, their identity is held over them constantly, like a target on their backs. In a study done by Case Western Reserve University posted on [Science Daily](#), eighty percent of Black shoppers surveyed reported experiencing racial stigma and stereotypes. This held especially true in higher end grocery and specialty food stores.

The point my article is not to point blame or cast judgement on anyone. There are some in the White Community who express deep shame and self-repudiation for their privilege and their ancestry. This is not necessary or helpful to uphold the dignity of Black lives. Rather than becoming overly self-critical, White people can play an important role as a listening ear. Black people have had their experiences ignored for too long. They deserve to be believed and trusted as the experts of their own lives.

In addition, White people can keep an eye or an ear open for their own bias. We all have implicit biases, and being aware of them may help to prevent a subtle, day to day form of racism called micro aggressions. Following someone in a store may not seem like a big deal, but it can be seen as degrading. These incidents contribute to a broader culture where people of color are not made to feel safe or welcome.

Finally, a good way to be an ally to the Black community is to dedicate time and resources to organizations fighting for justice in communities of color. Racism impacts many aspects of life for Black Americans, and one of these is in food disparities. Communities of color are often neglected by or priced out of organic, healthy food retailers. This contributes to health disparities and gaps in overall wellbeing. [Eater](#) has published a list of organizations working to correct this injustice, including the National Black Food and Justice Alliance and the Black Church Food Security Network.

To my Black friends, colleagues, and community members, I see you, we see you, and we are standing with you. Please know that I am here to affirm your experiences, and that I am working to cultivate anti-racism in myself and in those around me.