



*Perspective*

## Can We Agree This Is a Problem?

by Scott Lamm, MD Candidate-2022

I grew up understanding very little about my own privilege. I knew that because I was white, I wouldn't be followed while shopping, or stared at for walking around my neighborhood. I grew up with Officer Friendly telling me he was there to protect me, but little did I know, it was only because of the color of my skin that I was guaranteed that protection. With the lack of diversity growing up, I stayed complacent on my views on racial injustice. I grew up being told the South Side of Chicago was an area I shouldn't go to. It was "dangerous." It didn't occur to me that the south side could also be the complete opposite. It took until college, when I met friends who grew up in those areas, that my upbringing and my education were instilling racist and bigoted ideas.

### Can We Agree This Is a Problem?

I grew up in a bubble. My town is only 0.7% Black. That's a total of only 283 residents. The origin of the suburbs was rooted in racism and racist policy. The "white flight." A hundred and twenty years after its incorporation, my town is still no different. Up until the 1950s, it was illegal to sell a house to a Black family in my town. I learned this fact last week. I should have learned that years and years ago. This part of my upbringing failed me.

### Can We Agree This Is a Problem?

There were very few Black kids in my elementary school, middle school, and even high school. I grew up in a system where there were few people different from me. I grew up ignorant of my own privilege because I did not see or learn about and from other cultures, other races. Black history and culture were taught by white teachers who had the same or similar upbringing as myself. In high school, I took a course called Urban Studies. It was aimed at learning the

history and culture of Chicago. I can recite the original name of the city, all about the World's Fair, but the class neglected to talk about the vibrant Black history of Chicago or the racial injustices. The class neglected to talk about the development of the projects, the gentrification that had pushed Black residents further and further South. Chicago's history is rich in Black culture and Black oppression. Yet, I hadn't learned a single part of that history. That side of Chicago's history was completely erased.

### Can We Agree This Is a Problem?

It wasn't until college that I was able to pop the bubble and learn in a diverse space with and from people of all backgrounds. I took classes on social identity, classes about how language defined culture and people. It was a breath of fresh air to be able to immerse myself. I learned to open my mind and ideas and finally understand and comprehend my privilege. But why did it take this long? From then on, I knew it was my job to best educate myself and do my best to use my voice to stand up for racial injustice. I wish this was something ingrained in me before. Today, maybe we wouldn't be rewinding history if we all just had more opportunities to understand how racist policy has continued to disadvantage Black communities.

### Can We Agree This Is a Problem?

We can't continue erasing history. We can't continue to fail our society by neglecting these topics and not standing up for our Black neighbors. Our society has failed to educate us. Anti-racism should be ingrained in our education from the start because many students fail to welcome new ideas that late in life. It is unfortunately easier to stay in the bubble we were brought up in. But we can change that. Racial discrimination, racial injustice, racial inequality, racist policy should be taught at all levels of schooling. We need to develop a society that treats everyone with respect and dignity.

We as future physicians owe it to our colleagues, friends, partners, and patients. We must continue to educate ourselves and be willing to take in new ideas. We must learn to be anti-racist. Ensure we are not complacent, but

instead fight for the lives of others, and specifically right now, our Black colleagues, Black friends, Black partners, and Black patients. The United States has a problem. I hope you agree. If we don't rise up now, when will we? Now let's take some action.

*Scott Lamm is an MCW–Milwaukee medical student.*

Return to *Transformational Times* by selecting the browser tab to the left at the top of your screen, or by using your browser's back arrow.