

# 19 Things Black People Need to Know About Racism Today

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## rac·ism

*/ˈrɑːsɪzəm/* 

*noun*

the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics or abilities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races.

- prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.

"a program to combat racism"

*synonyms:* racial discrimination, [racialism](#), racial prejudice, [xenophobia](#), [chauvinism](#), [bigotry](#), [casteism](#) [More](#)

Since the post Civil Rights Era, the Black community has largely abandoned its collective struggle against continued racism and discrimination. Gone are the demands for justice and an end to inequality. They have been replaced by narratives of meritocracy, “colorblindness” and the bootstrapping individual negro who can single-handedly rise above his circumstance to beat the odds stacked against him. As Pharrell recently explained, today’s Black is a “new Black” – a Black blind to racism and the everyday struggles of its community. Blackness should evolve as we continue to redefine it for ourselves but not at the cost of dismissing the challenges we still face.

The “New Black” should be both forward thinking *and* informed. Regardless of the amazing feats accomplished by single individuals, a system of racism still exists in free America that is currently waging a war on the Black community. Millions are being taken prisoner. Through legislation, discriminatory legal practices and segregation, the clock of Black progress has been ticking backwards in recent history.

Here’s what you should know:

**1. It hurts to admit, but racism is alive and well.** Many Black people fear that admitting or accepting the prevalence of racism will negatively impact their sense of autonomy. While we are all individuals with our own struggles who should not allow anything or anyone to hold us down, it is important that as a community we fight the many forces that threaten our collective physical and psychological well-being.

**2. Morgan Freeman was wrong, race has everything to do with income inequality today.**

Intergenerational poverty has crippled the Black community, limiting access to education, healthcare and employment. If Morgan Freeman believes the history of slavery and Jim Crow plus present-day discrimination in the form of unfair sentencing practices, predatory banking practices and school segregation has no effects on income inequality, he is either willfully ignorant or simply—[yes it must be said— a sell out.](#)

**3. The Black church has been both a friend and frenemy.** Historically, the church was a powerhouse center for activism, Black advancement and cultural dissemination. Unfortunately, the Black church today took bribes from banks that specifically targeted the Black community for [subprime mortgages](#) (a mortgage with an initial low-interest rate that skyrockets within a few years) which have decimated the Black middle class community.

**4. The success of African or Caribbean immigrants in America does not represent a non-racialized America.** Immigrants self-select and must meet various requirements in order to enter the United States. That means that such individuals generally represent the most successful minority of their entire population. Their success is often used as a political pawn by politicians who conjure up tales of the “model minority” to derail important conversations about America’s race problems. Our Black community comprises people of West Indian, African, South American and American heritage alike. We must not be divided.

**5. Despite media depictions, Black men are good fathers.** The story of the absent, worthless Black father is a myth. Multiple studies have found that resident African-American fathers spent more time or the same amount of time providing physical care, feeding and soothing their infants as [White fathers](#). Adjusted for income, it has also been found that African-American fathers report more frequently participating in caregiving activities and participating in more cognitive activities with their children than both White and Latino fathers. Non-resident fathers of ALL races tend to have difficulty maintaining relationships with their children, however that is not an exclusive Black male pathology.

**6. “There are more Black men behind bars or in the legal system today, than there were slaves in 1850”—Michelle Alexander.** Of the 2,000,000 men in prison 841,000 are Black (39.1%). Despite modern stereotypes that characterize Black men as more violent than Whites, both groups commit proportionate numbers of crimes. However, multiple studies have found that Black men are not only more likely to be “randomly” searched (stopped and frisked), but are also more likely to be found guilty and [receive harsher sentences than Whites](#). Most of the Black men in today’s prison system are not even locked up for criminal offenses, but for illegal sale and possession of drugs (crimes largely ignored in middle class and poor White communities).

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This dehumanization and unfair incarceration of the Black man is not new to America's racist prison legacy. In Alabama in 1865, as Blacks gained their freedom, White racial stereotypes of them shifted from the happy, child-like and foolish Black slave to a lubricious, aggressive population of reprobates in need of restraint. Within two decades Blacks went from 2 percent of the prison population to 74 percent.

**7. And there is Big money involved.** The US annually spends 70 billion dollars on incarceration, probation and parole: A 127% increase since 1987. Local police also receive large government grants to support the continued "War on Drugs" in the form of cash, training and military equipment and laws permit law enforcement to seize and keep private property obtained while enforcing this war, even if an individual has not been found guilty of a crime.

Want more information? Read "The New Jim Crow" by Michelle Alexander.

**8. Schools are waging a war on our children.** Students of color face disproportionately unfair disciplinary action when in school and many are funnelled into the prison system vis-a-vis the "zero tolerance" policies implemented in the late 90's.

\*\*40% of children expelled from school each year are Black

\*\*70% of children arrested or referred to law enforcement are Black or Latino

\*\*Black students are 3.5x more likely to be expelled than White students

\*\*Black students are twice as likely to not graduate high school.

**9. American schools are becoming increasingly re-segregated.** Remember when decades of activism bore fruits in the form of federally mandated school integration? Those days are now gone. States, not the federal government, now have control over its own integration policies and it is safe to say White people are still not excited about integration based on the shifts back to segregation seen in many schools [nationwide policy](#).

**10. Personal success of an individual does not negate the existence of racism.** The most influential man in the country is Black, President Barack Obama. One of the richest women on the planet is Oprah. Yet, both of these individuals have been subjected to racial profiling and it has been made clear that their achievements do not mark the end of the fight. Racism does not end because one person "makes it."

**11. Black people must reclaim "personal responsibility."** One of the most fallacious charges of American racism is that Black people are irresponsible, and this charge continues to exploit a reality where Black people can never prove themselves perfect enough. As long as there is one

example of poor decorum or there exists a single instance of questionable character, Black integrity will be vulnerable to American racism. However, it is not Black people's obligation to be super-human. It is our obligation to be of the human variety and to claim that right. The failure to do so has allowed spurious racial statistics, steeped in the inaccuracy of racial engineering itself, to go unchallenged. This has enabled everything from the myth of the Black welfare queen to commercial Blackploitation imagery to misrepresent the resilience of the Black community. Nothing short of our responsibility has allowed Black people to endure what we have for as long as we have.

**12. Do not let the absence of the word “nigger” fool you, politics are still racist.** White America has evolved its political language, excluding outright racial epithets and replacing them with low-key allusions, but don't be fooled today's political coded language is still very racially charged. Words/phrases like “thug”, “welfare state”, “drug war”, “crime war” and the imagery of the “lazy Black man” are all weapons employed by Democrats and Republicans alike to gain White approval from the lower and middle classes who fear Black progress infringes upon their own financial well-being.

**13. Race is false. The experience is true.**

Trying to illuminate racism can sometimes feel like swinging at air. One reason is because race is a fallacy. Race does not actually exist. The *idea* however is deeply ingrained in the American psyche, so much so that it has spawned vocabulary like “Black-on-Black crime,” “White Hispanic” and “White culture.” Race is posited when broadcasting IQ rankings and government statistics but is somehow less clear when debating reparations. As soon as race comes to weigh on America's moral record it is customary to question, “Well, who is Black?” Indeed, who is Black? Who is White? These classifications remain socially arbitrary and scientifically inadequate, which has allowed American racism to create any statistical reality it wishes. Still, the idea of race is no less real in affecting how many people have come to be treated as members of American society. The mere perception of someone as “Black” has effectively enabled the devastating practices of racial profiling and mass incarceration to continue even today.

**14. Black women need Black men out of prison.** Discussions surrounding the Black male/female relationship tend to center around dating or marriage “preferences” while a much bigger picture is ignored. Despite claims that Black men are more likely to date interracial than black women, the dating/marriage pool for Black women has been most affected by the disproportionate number of Black men behind bars. What is the future of the Black family where 70% of college educated Black women are unmarried and 1-10 Black men between 20-30 are in prison? #BringBackOurMen

**15. The average African-American bloodline is more American than a White one.** Despite White America's attempt to classify itself as “American,” to the exclusion of all people of color (including the Native people who remain the original “Americans”), African-American ancestry dates back 200 years on average, whereas the average European-American's family history is roughly 100 years old.

**16. Black cultural property is still under attack.** Black music and dance has always been a source of exploitation by commercial entities that cyclically appropriate, commodify and rebrand our art for “mass appeal” by recruiting White faces to market Black artistry. It has been done countless times in the music industry with genres ranging from Ragtime, to Country and Rock music where Elvis Presley is now referred to as the “King of Rock”, despite the genre being historically Black.

Today, Black faces are disappearing from R&B and Hip-Hop and being replaced with the likes of Justin Timberlake, Robin Thicke, Mackelmore and Iggy Azalea. Will Mackelmore and Iggy Azalea reign as Hip-Hop’s king and queen? Without a collective effort, most assuredly.

**17. It is important to be inclusive of White people in discussions about racism.** Although being born under the auspices of Whiteness can confer certain advantages, specifically the ability to dismiss the relevance of racism itself, it is important to remember that many White people have aided in the struggle against White supremacy.

**18. “People of Color” is a complicated term.** One of the common responses to addressing the Black/White dichotomy is that it excludes all other minority groups. However the Black/White dichotomy actually overlaps the broad grouping of “people of color.” Many people of mixed heritage — Native-American, Middle-Eastern, Caribbean, Asian, African — continue to be functionally encompassed by the Black label, and demonstrate why progress like the Civil Rights movement benefited many more than just African-Americans. However, culturally isolated minority demographics, like the Native Americans, are still suffering racial injustices specific to their communities. For this reason it is impossible to ensure a visibility-for-one-visibility-for-all platform, but we should be mindful and supportive of one another in building a better future.

**19. We need new Black leaders.** Black progress hinges on the leadership of young people and a new generation of concerned, connected individuals unafraid to speak, be heard and take action. Generations before paved a path that has enabled people of color to obtain higher education and access to better jobs. It is time for this new generation to demand progress for the next to come.