

White Is Not Just a Skin Color

Jordan Freundlich

I had my first, “Oh-my-god-I’m-white” moment in 6th grade. I was walking into my middle school, the Timilty, where I was one of four white kids. Two black women looked at me and did a double-take. They then whispered to each other, “I didn’t know we had one of those at this school.”

Of course, before I went to the Timilty, I knew I was white, but I had never really realized what it meant to be white. At the Timilty, I was around kids who had very different lives than I did. At the Timilty, I discovered that what I thought was normal—for example, having season tickets to a local sports team—was actually not normal. In

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fact, many of my classmates had never been to a professional sports game. While I travelled to Colorado for vacation, most of my classmates stayed home and watched TV. And while my family paid for extra tutoring to prepare me to take a test that would get me into the most well-funded school in Boston, most of my peers of color could not afford this benefit. I have received many privileges because of my skin color, but why wasn’t I ever aware of them? Because I never had to be.

White privilege means growing up in a world built to cater to your needs. White privilege means growing up in a world that has been systematically engineered in your favor at the expense of people of color. White privilege means growing up

in a world where you never even have to be aware of white privilege because you think it’s just...normal.

If I hadn’t gone to the Timilty, if I had followed the educational track I was placed on

at birth, I easily could have gone through my life never having an, “Oh-my-god-I’m-white” moment. It is far too easy for white people to remain ignorant to the meaning of our skin. White is not just a skin color. It is a history that includes terror and cruelty; it is a history we must grapple with.

How do we grapple with it? Well, for starters we must develop relationships with other white people who are grappling with white history and with present-day white supremacy. We must challenge each other to learn and grow and figure out how to fight racism. Furthermore, we must never stop. It will take a long time to undo the effects of racism.

Most white people are not rich. Many white people may have worked hard to get what we have and what we own, but much of what we have is rooted in centuries of oppression. We have benefited from an uneven playing field. We need to challenge racist systems in our society, while on a personal level, we must teach our children to love. That’s how I believe we can combat racism.



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AFTER YOU READ: Discuss the concept of an “uneven playing field.” What advantages does the author say he had as a result of being white?

