

How I Experience Racism

I am a white woman in my mid-60s, who was recently asked how I experience racism. To my profound regret, I experience racism through my complicity in it - dating back for generations in my family.

I am a 7th generation Texan; my people came to Texas from Germany in the 1840s. The family lore is that our ancestors were attracted to Central Texas by land grants. "Land grant" does not adequately describe the racist reality: land which had been carefully stewarded by Native Americans for millennia, was given to Europeans -- for the sole purpose of displacing Native Americans. Hence, my birth in Texas is rooted in racism.

Similarly, the wealth accumulation which I, and six generations of my family, experienced, is also rooted in racism. I focus on wealth accumulation because in families that are Hispanic &/or People of Color, wealth accumulation is significantly less than in non-Hispanic white families. The story of how wealth accumulation, rooted in racism, occurred over generations in my family follows.

My maternal grandparents owned a dairy farm outside of San Antonio. I have childhood memories of undocumented men from Mexico who worked for my grandfather. The men and their families lived in rudimentary houses, in the back of the farm, near the cow pen; it could not have been a pleasant place to live. The city of San Antonio eventually grew to surround my grandparents' farm, increasing the value of the land. I recently received a small inheritance, the result of the sale of the land years ago. Neither the Native Americans, nor the Hispanic workers, benefitted as I did. Wealth accumulation, rooted in racism, was passed between generations in my family.

My father was the first in his family to graduate from college, courtesy of the GI Bill. He purchased our first home with a VA loan. In the ten years after WWII, these two programs resulted in perhaps the greatest transfer of wealth from the US government to individual citizens - and built the middle class. Because of racism, the GI Bill and VA Loan programs were mostly denied to Hispanics and People of Color. Wealth accumulation for my family of birth was rooted in racism.

In the early 1980s, a few years after graduating from Texas A&M University, I was hired by Hewlett-Packard (HP). I worked as an engineer for numerous years before being promoted into management and climbing HP's corporate ladder. For years, I patted myself on the back, thinking that my abilities and hard work were the reasons I was hired and promoted by HP. I have come to learn the actuality.

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) overwhelmingly benefited one group of people: white women my age \pm 5 years. EEO was intended to bring minorities, specifically Hispanics and People of Color, into the professional workplace. Since women were still underrepresented in the workplace, white women were included in EEO's umbrella of minorities. White women were the true beneficiaries of EEO. Throughout my career at

HP, I was always the first woman hired, or promoted, into an all-white, non-Hispanic, male workgroup. I was simply the right white woman, in the right place, at the right time. I personally benefited from racism, likely at the expense of Hispanics &/or People of Color who were equally or better qualified. My personal wealth accumulation, modest though it may be, is the result of racism.

I used to take it as a point of pride that my Texas forebears never owned slaves; they felt they had been slaves in Germany and were not willing to enslave others. However, racism is a form of slavery – and I have benefitted from racism.

After recognizing and wrestling with my complicity in racism, I experienced a period of repentance and lament. Afterwards, I felt led to redouble my efforts to end racism. I educate myself in the hope of becoming an ally. I acknowledge that during my ally journey, I will make dumb white lady mistakes; I commit to accepting criticism with an open and grateful heart, doing better next time. I have used my gift of a national platform through Presbyterian Women to provide antiracism resources to others. I share my complicity with racism story with groups and individuals - praying that people with my skin color will also be motivated to work to end the myth of a hierarchy of human value. I contribute financially to Hispanic and People of Color entities that advocate for racial and gender equity. I ask God daily to shine light on the next few steps in front of me, so that I may steadfastly advocate for reparations and equity for all of God's children.

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