

30-Day Anti-Racism Challenge Blog



Starting Sunday April 4th, on the 53rd anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Geoff and the other program leadership will be posting here every day as they embark on a 30-Day Anti-Racism Challenge. Some posts will be longer, some shorter, but we welcome you to join us in this experience either through thought and reflection or by taking the challenge yourselves.

https://medschool.cuanschutz.edu/docs/librariesprovider60/im-heartbeat/images-pdf/30-day-anti-racism-challenge.pdf?sfvrsn=71ee6bba_0



Day 8: Recognizing Racism in your Community Reflection by Dr. Danny Gergen

“How Black people experience racism in Denver, and their visions for reform”, Taylor Allen

In this article, four Black people in Denver describe how racism has affected, and continues to affect, their lives. Each individual shares a single story from a lifetime of similar moments.

Instead of summarizing their lived experience, I will reflect on what I can do to make their vision for reform a reality.

<https://denverite.com/2020/06/16/how-black-people-experience-racism-in-denver-and-their-visions-for-reform/>

Demetrious Jenkins Sr., 44

Jenkins' vision for reform is "fostering a relationship between officers and the communities they police". In practice, he describes better funding and organization of youth centers and better communication between communities and police. For me, to make Jenkins' vision a reality, I can donate to youth centers and similar projects and support reforms that decrease policing at community events. Overall, after reading Jenkins' story I felt angry and disheartened. Angry that he and so many other individuals have been forced to live with the fear of being "detained" on a daily basis. And disheartened, that after 50 years of something like the PAL, the best example the group can put forward is "Three times a year, PAL works with Colorado Avalanche and police officers to allow kids to play street hockey".

Demetria Lister, 26

Lister's vision for reform is more bias training for healthcare workers and a more standardized way for doctors to gather information about a patient's symptoms. Within her story she states, "I told him that this is really frustrating because doctors never believe Black pain and never take us seriously...And I'm not just going to have you send me home to die by myself because I live alone." Lister's story is a powerful reminder of the importance of recognizing our own implicit biases during every patient encounter. There are multiple ways I can work to make her vision a reality. First, I can continue to engage in bias training. Second, I can create a mental bias checklist/framework. Essentially, ask myself, "what biases might I have?" during every patient encounter. And finally, I can reflect on my own history taking process, and whether my own process lends itself to a biased interpretation, and subsequent under-treatment, of Black patients' pain.

Elijah Beauford, 21

Beauford's vision for reform is to both teach Black history accurately and hire more Black and brown teachers. Last summer, the premier episode of the HBO series *Watchmen* depicted the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. I was not aware of the Tulsa Race Massacre prior to watching this episode. I am ashamed of my paltry knowledge of Black history. I can certainly do better in educating myself about Black history on a regular basis. Beauford closes by saying, "[white people] have a bunch of idle time to focus on racism". Going forward, I can work to make Beauford's vision a reality by continuing to engage in similar reflection.

Barbara Berry-Bailey, 68

Berry-Bailey's vision for reform is better education on implicit bias and cultural competency. She shares a story of being asked, "Are you the caregiver?" by medical staff when visiting members of her congregation. To make her vision a reality, I can commit myself to calling out,

engaging, and debriefing on microaggressions and biases that appear on the wards and in conversations with colleagues.



Day 9: Educate yourself on the History of Busing in Denver **A reflection by Dr. Julia Limes**

[21 years of busing: Denver readers recall their stories - Chalkbeat Colorado](#)

Today we are taking a closer look at the history of busing in Denver with the major underlying topics of school integration and equitable educational opportunities. There is a lot to digest and reflect on here. This article goes through a basic history but has quite a few links to articles and studies for a more in-depth review.

Article recap along with a few linked articles I read – skip ahead to reflections below if you don't need a recap, this is also for me to help solidify my learning on this topic 😊:

In the late 1960s the Denver Public School Board discussed how to integrate schools and put together the Noel Plan, led by Rachel Noel who was the first elected Black woman in Colorado as a member of the school board (as a side note, her husband was one of the first Black surgeons in Colorado, and he practiced at Rose, the only hospital at the time to grant privileges to a Black physician). After the school board voted down some of the integration proposals in the plan, eight families sued DPS, with Wilifred Keyes as the lead plaintiff. After the district court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, 1/3 of Denver school buses were burned at the bus depot and a pipe bomb was placed at Mr. Keyes' front door in acts of domestic terrorism.

The case eventually went up before the Supreme Court in 1973. Known as the Keyes decision, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and ordered DPS to de-segregate its schools, expanding the Brown v Board of Education ruling to include districts that were segregated and maintained segregation due to "de facto segregation." Consequently, DPS started a busing program that lasted until DPS requested an end to busing in part to declining enrollment, which was granted in a District Court ruling in 1995.

The data supports school de-segregation and the benefits of a diverse, equitably funded school environment but also reveal issues that are not fixed by integration. Studies have demonstrated how it has helped Black students academically with increased high school graduation rates and reduced the likelihood of living in poverty, and these benefits extended to the next generation. Most studies found no change in achievement with white students and white students with more black classmates were more likely to have inter-racial relationships. But, in one study in the south, fully segregated school districts that became fully integrated had the number of Black teachers decrease by a third. Another study in the Bay Area found that Hispanic and Black students in a busing program had an increased likelihood of being arrested for non-violent, possibly related to bias among white communities and white police officers.

At the end of the main article, they publish Denverites' reflections on their experiences with busing. The perspectives are varied and call out many of the themes found in the studies – the huge benefits of integrated schools and the exposure to a diverse population, the racism and division that still existed in integrated schools, the logistical problems created by busing, the “white flight” to the suburbs since de-segregation was only occurring within a district, the significant inequities in funding, and the current re-segregated state of our schools. If you don't have the time to read the article, read these quotes – nothing can beat the power of stories. Finally, coming back to today, segregated schools and lack of equity in education are issues we still have to address. Although many metro neighborhoods are less racially segregated (72% of cities), in the majority (62%) of cities the **schools are more racially segregated over the last few decades**. Between 1990 and 2015, Denver's neighborhoods are 20.5% less segregated, but the schools are 22.5% more segregated.

Reflections:

- Because of the educational and socioeconomic impact on Black children and other minorities and the foundational impact diversity has on how kids view others and interact with the world, interventions to create an equitable educational experience and diverse schools are some of the most powerful and important changes we need to make.
- I went to a socioeconomically and racially diverse elementary school and I feel very lucky for this formative experience. But, I also related to some of the comments about the division that still existed within my school, particularly in middle and high school. I also didn't recognize at the time how my white, upper class privilege gave me an advantage within the school – I just saw the similar classes, teachers, after school activities, etc. I have realized that integration alone is not sufficient – how the schools teach about race and class, the equity within the school, representation among the teachers, the implicit bias teachers and administrators have, are just a few things that can lead to a very different experience within the same school.
- One of the main things I will think about and carry forward is how our schools have become re-segregated again. What do we need to do on a local, state, and national level to address this? What can I do personally? My elementary school is also an example of the increasing segregation in our schools. I couldn't find statistics on race, but from a socioeconomic standpoint my elementary school has become less diverse - ~50% of

students qualified for a free or reduced-price lunch when I was in 5th grade, compared to ~80% now. The socioeconomic make-up and average family age in the neighborhoods have not changed. What has changed is the majority of upper-middle class students are going to private schools or optionally enrolling into another school in the district.

- There are some obvious and some nuanced reasons why we have slid further from the goal of diverse schools and an equitable experience for all students, and likewise solutions (and how to enact those solutions) may be nuanced and complex. For me, I am going to commit to:
 - Reading expert opinions, experiences across the country with different solutions
 - Advocating with who I vote for, what I donate to, where I volunteer, and what I bring attention to in my social circles. I am luckily surrounded by toddlers who will soon be going to school and the topic of deciding on schools comes up frequently in my circle:)
 - Continuing to learn more about neighborhood re-integration and policies to promote this
 - Personally, when I investigate schools, going beyond the test scores and online ratings. Thinking about the diversity, the teachers and their mission, how the school handles equity issues.



Day 10: White People Assume Niceness is the Answer to Racial Inequality: it is not.

Reflection by Dr. Dan Heppe

In this article Dr. Robin diAngelo discusses some of the concepts introduced in prior exercises this month and then delves into a specific behavior-niceness- that propagates racial inequality. She quite specifically names and describes “niceness” along with corresponding behaviors, and

more importantly elucidates the multiple concurrent and downstream consequences of these behaviors. Previously I had given some thought to some of these concepts, but perhaps have not thought deeply enough about them to see the wide-ranging effects. For this reflection I want to go through several of the ideas that stood out to me and how reading them has helped me examine my own behavior.

-What it means to be white- This remains one of the fundamental components for me- to continually reflect on how my life has been shaped by being white- the privilege with which I have walked through life and the implicit biases that have formed along the way. Only by continuing to examine this can I advance my ability to navigate racial tensions in a constructive way. One brief example- examining 2 recent events in our country and going back to the Peggy McIntosh article from earlier last week- 2 things I have NEVER worried about and will NEVER worry about: 1) A police officer attempting to tase me during a traffic stop and accidentally killing me with their firearm instead. I do not worry that police officers will attempt to tase me during traffic stops. 2) Having to ensure that I pull my vehicle over in a well-lit area during a traffic stop to ensure proper lighting for camera documentation of my encounter with the officer. I remember a time when I was in college, riding as a passenger in a car at night in a very rural and empty part of Texas with a white friend of mine driving, when a police officer pulled us over, perhaps for speeding- I can't remember. I do remember that we were on a dark section of deserted highway, the officer searched our car thoroughly for about 30 minutes, then let us go without even a warning. I wonder what might have happened if we weren't white?

-Racists are mean, nice people cannot be racist- This goes back to the idea that racism is not just individual and intentional acts of overt meanness- but a system of white supremacy. A system that myself and other white people can then feel exempt from because we are "nice". Here again, I don't believe I have ever participated in overt acts of racial meanness, but I haven't thought deeply enough about how my "niceness" and other actions might be perceived, what they might imply, and some of the more insidious downstream consequences. "Be nice and carry on" does not break with white solidarity and silence.

- Proximity is seen as lack of racism- This, like niceness, is used like a sort of shield. If I am nice AND I live/work/interact with people who are not white, then I am not racist. I know I have had these thoughts at times, though if I am honest I still lead a fairly segregated life (where I live, work, my friends, etc). The idea of "it can't be me because I treat everyone with respect (i.e. I am nice) and I have various forms of proximity to non-white people" is a sort of superficial shield that I feel at times. It does not however absolve me or anyone from being a part of systemic racism. In fact, I need to shed the idea of a "shield" completely.

-Telegraphing niceness-something white people do to alleviate their anxiety and to demonstrate that they are not racist. Have I done this in the past? I don't truly know because I haven't consciously considered it, but probably. Even if I don't engage in the

more overt forms of telegraphing that the article describes (see below-“the white smile”)- there may be more subtle things I do that I am less aware of, body language or tone of voice. This is something that having read this article and having it named for me I can be more deliberately aware of.

-Kindness is compassionate and implicates actions to support or intervene. Niceness is fleeting, hollow, performative- This really gets to the core the problem with niceness. The idea that one is just being nice- in a fake way. This is problematic in that it does nothing actionable and can lead to negative consequences. I really like the description of kindness instead- this carries compassion that is demonstrated by actions of support or intervention. I feel like I can really grab ahold of this- am I just being nice or truly kind and how can I know the difference? I can begin by asking myself if my actions are supportive and if not can reflect on and modify my behavior.

- “The white smile”- deception of niceness makes it difficult to decipher trustworthy allyship from disingenuous white liberalism- Here I reflect back on my reflection (mirrors upon mirrors...) about allyship. This is such a powerful example for me of why fake niceness is so dangerous- being unable to decipher true allyship from disingenuous sentiment. I had not previously thought much about fake behaviors in this context, but I think this is another key thing to keep in mind in the context of my prior reflections around allyship- in particular ensuring that it is genuine. Because if it is not genuine then it might be more harmful than if I had done nothing at all.

The article concludes with a paragraph of suggestions. I know that I can pay more conscious, deliberate attention to ensure my behaviors reflect kindness and not niceness-genuine allyship and not disingenuous white liberalism. I certainly acknowledge my ongoing limited perspective on race and can improve this, in part, through authentic interaction and not just proximity. I can insist that racism be discussed in my workplace and that racial equity is demonstrated by actual outcomes. I hope I can have the courage to make these actual practice changes in my life.



Day 11: The Harlem of the West: Learn about Five Points Reflections by Dr. Amelia Bowman and Dr. Yasmin Sacro

Dr. Bowman:

After watching today's video, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72ace02hs1c>) it would be easy to smile, and say, "Isn't it great that we have the Five Point Jazz Festival to celebrate the heritage and history of the neighborhood." It would be easy to say, "We've come so far, look how we are celebrating diversity." It would be easy to feel satisfied. But this month is not about satisfaction

Looking to the past, how did Five Points become the "Harlem of the West." By the time the 1950's came, it was no accident that Five Points was predominately an African American and minority community. In reading more about Five Points, it seems the location was initially desirable, largely due to its proximity to downtown. However, as transportation and roads improved, modern conveniences, such as electricity and plumbing drew whites to newer areas of the city, like Capitol Hill.

I am struck by this fact. It feels like the white inhabitants of Five Points gave their hand-me-downs to the African American community as they moved on to something better. Was there any effort to modernize the homes in Five Points? What kind of effect on education and health did this have on the children who lived and grew up in Five Points as compared to the "new" neighborhoods?

During the 1950's, the famous musicians like Nat King Cole and Ella Fitzgerald were also playing at predominately white establishments in downtown Denver. So why isn't downtown Denver known for its Jazz history? Because although the musicians were talented enough to entertain

white audiences, segregation meant they could not stay in the downtown hotels. Each night, after performing at white venues, the Black musicians returned to the Rossonian Hotel, and other Five Points venues, to get some rest.

On one hand, I am thrilled Jazz music found a home and flourished in Denver. At the same time, it is crucial to recognize the way in which racism and segregation shaped this legacy. Jazz musicians may have visited Five Points because it was a successful and diverse community, but they stayed because it was the only place that offered shelter. It does not detract from the rich history of Five Points to acknowledge the environment that shaped its creation.

The story of Five Points continues past the Jazz age, and into the present. As the civil rights movement dismantled segregation, there were also unintended consequences. One such consequence was a sharp decline in the population of Five Points as Black and minority families were suddenly able to buy homes in other neighborhoods. Most recently, Five Points has been a focus of revitalization and gentrification. This effort has gone so far as to re-name the area "RiNo."

To me, the recent history of Five Points is the most uncomfortable. Rino has become synonymous with all that is up and coming in Denver. In contrast, the name Five Points tends to be associated with crime and violence. How does changing the name of an area change its character?

As I think about Five Points in the larger context of this anti-racism month, I wonder exactly what my role is. Today, I recognize the legacy of success and segregation that shaped the neighborhood of Five Points. To echo what Dr Limes and Dr Heppe have said, I challenge myself to learn about history from sources other than textbook, striving to appreciate how both positive and negative forces shape our past and future.

A few of the sources I used to learn about Five Points:

[Five Points Whittier Neighborhood History](#)

[Five Points, Denver, Colorado](#)

[Stepping back in time to the Harlem of the West](#)

[The Jazz roots of Denver's Five Points, uncovered](#)

[Rossonian Hotel](#)

[Opinion: "Rino?" "Five Points?" Why a new name hurts in a storied neighborhood](#)

[Five things that make Five Points residents really, really mad](#)

[Five Points, Denver's central neighborhoods are summer's most violent neighborhoods](#)

[No Prejudice Here: Racism, resistance, and the struggle for equality in Denver](#)

Dr. Sacro, a primary care physician in the Five Points neighborhood:



Every day, as I walk into the clinic that I call my professional clinical home, I pass by a framed letter from Coretta Scott King and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This letter was addressed to Dr. Bernard Gibson for whom the Denver Health Eastside Clinic in Five Points is named. The letter was written in 1967 one year before Dr. Kings' death:

"We cannot deny the dreadful conditions found in our society and in the world. Global holocaust is no longer a mere technological possibility, it is a direct and escalating threat. The spirit of man everywhere has been dampened, and often his mind is engulfed in gloom. And there are millions of hungry children, and defeated fathers, and frightened mothers in our land and others.

We – these people, you, all of us – must not only have hope for the unknown future, but also confidence in our capacity to change the menacing present.

The task is stern and provocative. Among the moral imperatives of our time, we are challenged to work all over the world with unshakeable commitment to wipe out the last vestiges of racism."

The excerpted statements above embolden my steps into clinic each day. They give meaning, a purpose to my role at Eastside. How can I change the "menacing present"? How do MLK's words

of 1967 ring so true in my ears during a global pandemic, particularly after the events and protests surrounding George Floyd's death? How can I not shake the images of Daunte Wright's parents in my head as the 'defeated fathers' and 'frightened mothers' of this very tragic current moment referenced in this decades old letter?

After watching the 4:21 minute video for today's challenge about Five Points as the Harlem of the West, I considered various ways to reflect on this neighborhood that has been my career home for 5 years. Perhaps I'll write about the people mentioned in the video and give them more recognition than a fleeting name mention:

Dr. Justina Ford, Colorado's first Black woman physician, whose house is now a museum in Five Points and by her estimation delivered 5,000 babies for the "plain colored", "plain white", and "foreign groups"¹ of the surrounding area. A Black woman who was told upon applying for her medical license by the examiner: "Ma'am I'd feel dishonest taking a fee from you. You've got two strikes against you to begin with. First off, you're a lady. Second, you're colored."¹ A Black woman who didn't own a car and would pick up the phone to call taxicab services, merely stating her name with a cab rushing out immediately— her old-fashioned Uber rating cred renown among cabbies for her important medical work and reliance on the city's cabs.

Charles "Charlie" Burrell – who celebrated his 100th birthday this past October. He is most widely known for being the first African American to be a member of a major American symphony, the Denver Symphony Orchestra then later the San Francisco Symphony. Often referred to as "the Jackie Robinson of classical music", he is also a prominent jazz player in the Five Points music scene, the "on-call" bassist for jazz groups as they came to play at the Rossonian Hotel, sharing the stage with jazz legends like Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, and Count Bassie, to name a few. To think that this man, with powerful and percussive hands, was once hired as a "bedpan specialist" for Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in 1949.

Or maybe I'll write about the redlining of Five Points in the 1930s that drew boundaries that banks and other financial institutions would not cross, perpetuating segregation. Or how the Denver City Council deemed the Welton Street corridor blighted in 2012 with plans for urban redevelopment and "revitalization". We are witness to the changing neighborhood in the patients we see in our clinic, as evidenced by a January 2020 Westword headline of "How Gentrification has Changed the Five Points Neighborhood."

But all in all, what it comes down to about Five Points is the community and the people.

It's not just another Harlem. It's a neighborhood that has weathered the undercurrents of race in America with a both familiar and spontaneous melodic jazz line. Walk the neighborhood and you can feel the rhythm of being in Five Points: there's a thrum of inclusivity, a syncopation of energy and resilience, a steady beat of survival.

I see these attributes in my patients, long dedicated to this clinic home where often their own parents and siblings and children have received medical care, some for decades. As the only



Day 13: Dear White People **Reflection by Dr. Katie Suddarth**

“I am tired.” This is an expression I have said to myself every single day for the past year. But after reading this letter in the Annals of Family Medicine, the predominant emotion that I felt was one of embarrassment and realizing whenever I read “I am tired” it immediately made me reflect “my life is easy”. Yes, the past year has been different but nothing about this past year was truly “hard” for me. While I was enraged by the murders of so many black and brown persons of color, it was easy for this devastation to fall from the forefront of my mind as systemic racism is not something that I experience...ever. I do not face micro and macro-aggressions on a daily basis. I am not asked routinely to do more, to give more of my time and energy to help others understand the impact that systemic racism had on my life, my race has not been disproportionately impacted by the health and financial impact of the pandemic. I should not be tired, I am incredibly privileged and fortunate.

Remember that it is a privilege to educate yourself about systemic and BIPOC racism, when the alternative is to experience it

This sentence really stood out to me as I read this letter. The anti-racism challenge has opened my eyes to so many aspects of racism happening every day all around me that I never really processed or recognized before. While I am fully committed to making every attempt to step up to the actions mentioned in the letter: to listen to Black people and people of color, to support vulnerable communities, to use my own privilege to make meaningful change to the systems that keep systemic racism intact, I must remember that it is a privilege to do so. I must also acknowledge that I will never come close to understanding what it means to experience it, neither will my children. I must remind myself every day to try to understand how my life would be different if I were a person of color. And if I am feeling tired, remember the burdens that so many others have to bear that I do not.



Day 14: Educate yourself on how to use your white privilege to fight racism

Reflection by Dr. Danny Gergen

"4 Steps that I and Other White People Can Take to Fight Racism", Christina Marie Noel

The article by Christina Marie Noel, a white woman, essentially asks, "What can white people do to fight racism?" The article is framed as a broader reflection on the author's journey to become a better ally. Overall, she posits the following as steps that white people can take to fight racism:

1. Understand what white privilege really means
2. Recognize unconscious bias
3. Learn about the history of systemic racism and its impact on society today
4. Become an ally

Within each of these broader points she provides a number of resources. My goal is to return to a majority of these articles over the next few weeks/months as I too work to become a better ally. While reading this article I reflected most about white privilege, and how it has manifested in my life and the lives of those people close to me.

When I was a freshman in high school, a family friend, a white man, was involved in a motor vehicle collision. At the time, all I was told by my parents was that he ran a stop light and hit another car. The occupants of the other car luckily suffered no injuries. The family friend was hospitalized briefly in the ICU and then discharged. Ultimately, the family friend suffered no short or long-term consequences. At the time, I remember being relieved to hear that things "turned out alright".

A few years later, when I was in college, I eventually found out why things "turned out alright". In reality, the family friend had overdosed on narcotics, fallen asleep at the wheel, and rolled into the intersection. However, after hiring an expensive lawyer in the area, the man was never charged with anything. The lawyer had successfully argued that, due to a series of technicalities and "missteps" by various parties, it was unfair to charge the man with anything. The legal system agreed. The man never faced any consequences, and the incident had no broader effect on his life going forward.

This story is an example of white privilege exerting its effect on the legal system. It is an example of how “inequality is deeply entrenched throughout our systems”. This man did not have to fear for his life when interacting with police and received the benefit of the doubt at every turn due to the color of his skin. His white privilege ensured that his mistake did not continue to follow him.

This article emphasizes just how easy it is to float through life as a white person, protected by white privilege, and ignore the injustice and inequality that Black people face on a daily basis. By returning to this article and its numerous references, I can continue to do my part to recognize my own white privilege, shine light on my own unconscious biases, continue to learn about race as a social construct, and, more importantly, become a better ally.