

Introduction

In 1991, at about age 21, as an immigrant from the Caribbean island of Trinidad, I began living in the United States of America when I attended the University of Miami and obtained a master's degree in marine affairs. Immediately after that I began what would be almost ten years of biological fieldwork living aboard ships. The first four years were in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska on board commercial fishing vessels, doing work for the National Marine Fisheries Service. This was followed by five years of work for the Army Corps of Engineers from 1996–2001 as an endangered species consultant, working on ships rebuilding beaches and keeping shipping channels deep everywhere from the Texas/Mexico border to Sugar Island in New York. Both jobs involved a fixed period aboard a ship and then as much time off as you needed before getting back on board a ship if you needed to. My typical rotation was three months on followed by one to three months off.

I took advantage of that flexibility to make sure that I traveled to every state in the United States in between ships, and I have spent time hiking, camping, driving through, and just experiencing every region of the country. I can confidently say that I have seen and experienced more of this country than most Americans will in their lifetimes, and I think I love it and appreciate it more than most of the people who knew its freedoms from birth and consider them normal.

Like most foreigners, when I initially arrived, I believed that America was a utopian meritocracy, and the American dream was guaranteed if you worked hard. And because most of this country's wealth is held by white people, I believed they owed their success only to hard work. I

reasoned that if I just behaved like them and conformed to their norms, success would be certain. And so, I worked really hard, graduating first in my law school class in 2003, and now, 21 research articles, two books, and countless national and international presentations on effective teaching later, I am a chaired and tenured professor of law.

But I now understand that my impression of America as a utopian meritocracy, uniformly and routinely rewarding hard work regardless of a person's background, is a fiction. However, we find it difficult to unsee this fictional utopia because powerful evolutionary and essentially human, unconscious, cognitive processing mechanisms obscure the reality that American society, like all human societies, is saddled with deeply rooted systemic discrimination and biases.

Unconscious racism versus conscious racism is an excellent example of the difference between unconscious brain function and conscious brain function. To illustrate the difference between conscious and unconscious racism I provide first, an example of when I experienced conscious racism and then an example of when I experienced unconscious racism. Before exploring these examples, you first need to understand what I look like.

Phenotypically, I am mostly East Indian. My father is mostly the descendant of indentured laborers who were brought to Trinidad to replace the slaves in the sugar cane fields after emancipation. I say mostly twice above because three generations ago a white plantation owner "carried away" a 14-year-old Indian girl and had children with her. That 14-year-old Indian girl is my great-great-grandmother.

My mother is Jamaican, Black and white, but that is an oversimplification. She is the descendant of both African slaves and of Europeans from everywhere, in a uniquely Caribbean way. Her mother is the daughter of a Scottish woman who met and married a half Black, half Irish medical student from Jamaica when he was studying in Scotland. Her father was the son of a half Black, half Irish man and a white woman. A robust oral family history indicates this woman was of Jewish descent. For example, my grandmother consistently mentioned that the star of David she wore until her death was a gift from her "Jewish in-laws" and that my grandfather, who was a talented musician, routinely played music in the synagogues in Jamaica because of his mother. For reasons that will become apparent in Chapter 5, it is critical to mention here that my grandmother's maiden name was Dryden.

Early in my prelaw career as a marine biologist I experienced conscious racism. I boarded a ship and was introducing myself to the captain, chief engineer, and cook on the bridge who were all white males. I barely got two words out of my mouth when the chief engineer asked me in a flat tone I will never forget, "Are you a nigger? Because I don't like working with niggers." Just as my Caribbean brain was Mr. McGooing its way through this and leaving me thinking, "Oh cool, real racists! I gotta write home and tell them I've met the people we always see on TV that hate people who aren't white," the cook jumped in and proudly tried to demonstrate to the others that he went the furthest in geography class, by exclaiming "No, he's a sand nigger/camel jockey. It's obvious!" I never felt fear or anger.

In fact, by the end of that tour I was great friends with the person who pronounced me a "camel jockey," and I came to understand that his open racism was an honest expression of the reality of his upbringing and not a personal and empirically based hatred of me as a person. By the end of that trip that person told me that he was 14 years old the first time he ever saw a person of color and had no idea "what" he was seeing. Despite his reflexive reaction to me, he turned out to be a kind human being, who, once exposed to difference, was apologetic for his presumptions about different people, and we got along famously. The others remained assholes for reasons unrelated to racism.

Fast forward 20 to 25 years, and it's 2007, and I am beginning my job as a tenure-track law professor in Topeka, Kansas. My biracial three-year-old daughter and white wife join me on this journey. The experience of that child, the 2016 election, and the ease with which my opinions on things I was the most expert on were dismissed and given short shrift by colleagues and friends who adored me, introduced me to another form of racism, way more harmful than the conscious racism I experienced on the boat.

It introduced me to the racism of people who genuinely supported anti-racism and genuinely believed they were anti-racist. People who became genuinely offended and hurt when you pointed out to them that they engaged in behavior that reflected and perpetuated racist societal structures. In other words, it introduced me to unconscious racism and the reality that an essential aspect of being human is constantly and without realizing it, reframing reality such that we are able to act completely inconsistently with our genuinely held beliefs while simultane-

ously remaining blissfully unaware we are acting inconsistently with them.

This book is an attempt to understand systemic racism and to shed some light on the more complex but difficult truths about American society and for that matter, all human societies. It uses contemporary examples to illustrate how the very things we consider good and hold moral, dear, and fundamental are products of the identical, unconscious cognitive reframing mechanisms that blind us to society's powerful and unforgiving systemic prejudices. This reality is difficult to acknowledge. Yet acknowledge and explain it is what I try to do. But explaining them involves delving into some humbling and disturbing aspects of human brain function and behavior.

Reading this book might initially make you uncomfortable and even defensive, but as the book explains, truth and discomfort are necessary waypoints on the path, *if such a path exists*, to actually achieving the society most residents of this unique and magnificent country genuinely desire.

And at the end of the day, it is important for me to make certain the reader knows this is a book written out of love for the United States, the country and its people who gave me opportunities that would not have been available to a person like me in any other society. But true love is honest.