

**On Wed. June 12, 2019 Kaolin was a guest panelist along with Dr. Audrey Murph (Educator), Kelly LaRoe (Disabilities Advocate), Dr. Bibiana Restrop (Physician) hosted by by Jacqueline Williams-Hines the autism specialist and founder of No Small Victories.**

While the link to the entire program will be posted on this website this post includes the questions posed to Kaolin and her answers along with some recommended readings starting with **Jacqueline Williams-Hine's** introduction to the program for the benefit of those who would prefer to read the piece:

Real Life Wednesday with Jacqueline: Topic "When They See Us; Kory Wise's Story" on **NSV Online** Radio, hosted by Jacqueline Williams-Hines who said: "This is the show where there are No Small Victories... and every accomplishment shall be celebrated! Families we are breaking a tradition today. As you know, when we have a family round table on Real Life Wed., we usually have no topics, no guest, and no agenda. Just me and you family...Keeping it real. Well today we are going to keep it real. This show may be disturbing to some of you family, I can tell you it has touched me in a way that I cannot put to words. On May 31st Netflix premiered a four-part movie series entitled "When They See Us" depicting the ordeal suffered by four African American and one Hispanic youth publicly titled "The Central Park Five" charged with the rape and brutalization of a central park jogger on April 19, 1989. This case would go on to polarize the nation prompting calls for the death penalty from a wealthy businessman who would go on to sit in the highest office of our country. After serving many years of incarceration these young men were exonerated. Tonight, after my show Oprah Winfrey will interview not only the cast of the movie but the now more appropriately titled "Exonerated Five." on her OWN network. Upon viewing the ordeal suffered by Kory Wise, the only youth tried as an adult, and a youth with developmental delays my heart broke. This conversation today family is a result of that. As a parent we ask ourselves, what will happen to my child if something happens to me. Today I will ask, what will happen to my child when I can't protect him?

## Question # 1:

**Jacqueline:** Kaolin, your body of work centers around dismantling racism by educating white people on white privilege and the construct of racism, why is this something that white America should care about and why is it imperative to families like ours?

**Kaolin:** In these times we have learned there is a split, a division, a duality in America between what white's believe they have earned and what they have inherited.

There is a tragic attachment within the collective white psyche regarding rights to social justice for ex.; decent health care, education and housing. White privilege is not a simple delusional aspect of racialized vanity. It is a stronghold in our history that precedes us. White's get confused about family loyalty, tradition, ancestral strengths and even their faith when pitted against the violent hatred against blacks, and POC we see every day and night. They get confused by it and do wonder what their role is in it and what to do about it.

**Therefore white people should know about the construct of racism because without knowledge their denial runs deep. It also becomes an addiction shrouded in ignorance & self-deception.**

Here are two aspects of the problem as it exists today that remain severe impacting our disabled children and those whom we rely upon for help:

1. The system has pulled a fast one on white's which is being magnified by the corruption in the politics of the day. Whites are angry!
2. The problems with racism are transparent –
  - a. Racism is and always was violence.
  - b. There are many ways to destroy a person.
  - c. Putting them in prison for a crime they have not

committed is just one of the ways.

- d. Investing more in prisons run by privately-owned for profit businesses is another rather than educational systems is another and there are many more ways.

Prof. Carol Anderson speaks of this in her book “White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of the Racial Divide”

**It is imperative for white families, all families like ours to see the construct** because the dynamics involved in it are disastrous: Cutting programs, no school lunches; improper inadequate health care systems in particular communities; prejudice impacting our children’s education; misdiagnosis, low expectations of them, forbidding hairstyles, accepting bullying and intimidation etc. is unacceptable. It all hurts. It is a wound which needs to be healed. “Beyond Fear: Twelve Spiritual Keys to Racial Healing” by Aeshah Ababio-Clottey and Kokomon Clottey cover this topic beautifully. It is an ideal book for teachers who are white and having problems with their own recognition of racism among their peers.

Teachers, administrators, special needs instructors are amazing in their gifts, knowledge and insights into the welfare of their students and parents. However cultural insensitivity has been a broad cloak thrown over the work, the abilities and idealism of the past for several years so more work must be done

**Our children are a part of the system that has intentionally compromised them due to racist infrastructures. Disassembling them is work.**

*There are considerable struggles in the family with a disabled child and systemic racism should not be one of them. And we mustn’t forget classism relies upon racism to keep it going. It is a symbiotic union.*

For ex: Many whites believe they are smart however in Jane Elliott's "A Class Divided Then and Now" edited by William Peterson you find that the self-esteem of white's is painfully low. *Why?* The guilt of racism is a fact of their life. It interferes with the idealism we are often full of and it interferes with teaching.

*Why racism? Why?* You might remember Public Enemy's album "Fear of Black Planet"(1990)? They tell you. So does Dr. Frances Cress Welsing's "The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors"? The fear of the loss of whiteness *and its dominance* is an obsession among whites because it is inevitable that whatever dependency, conscious or unconscious whites have of Blacks in particular as losers is being challenged and white's don't like to lose. They like to win at all costs - it is what they are used to. It is what they have been trained to believe is their inheritance.

Race/ism was a political construct after all and it is being deconstructed as I speak.

As Toni Morrison once said, although I am paraphrasing it now, without a bottom there is no top. White consciousness, national consciousness has depended upon racism so they'd be on top. As that goes ... and it is going white's have no idea who they really are. There is an identity crisis going on now. And with regard to the economy they were told would be a comfort-zone if they did not rattle the chains of racism by dismantling it before but now there is no comfort-zone. There is only fear.

***Now why do we need to know racism is a social construct? Because the impact upon the life of the special needs child depends upon community; a community committed to wellness, to wholeness and to the fulfillment of one's potential: Because the family relies upon trust within the community for its wellness and wholeness and the lack of knowledge regarding the imprint of racism upon us remains today as it was yesterday immoral and unconscionable.***

## Question # 2:

**Jacque:** We have talked about ways of bringing all stakeholders to the table; white, black, Hispanic, etc. to work on understanding racism. Why is this so important for families of children with disabilities?

**Kaolin:** **Because we are vulnerable. Because we are engaged in a series of involuntary relationships in which we are dependent upon other people's knowledge of our child: A child who will not be known like we know them, or loved them like we love them: A child who will rely upon us more than anyone else in the world for years if not a lifetime.**

**Because parents grow as a parent with the child in relation to their abilities & disability, and we form greater understandings of ourselves along the way. We will be introduced to how capable we are and limited we may be. We are gauging multiple realities.**

This involves vulnerability. When parents have a child with, let's say with a cancer they are not expected to become oncologists however the bias' and judgments regarding the parenting of a disabled child is daunting. **When racism from others is involved it is a de-stabilizing factor the racist cannot help us with. We cannot even let them know what we think of them and may not be at liberty to change doctors, teachers or school for our child.**

There is no trust which is exasperating! Then you try to figure out if you are being a responsible enough parent when in fact you are a stellar, insightful parent experiencing the ravages of the pain of racism in your child's life and the hold it can and does have over both of you.

***So what matters? What do you do?***

**Language matters. Speak up when able... cautiously when necessary. You are an educator. You are an interpreter. You are not a suspect.**

And there are excessive expectations projected on to the parents from a system that is derelict in its knowledge of racism. There are culturally incompetent advisors in school systems that families of color are coping with. Culturally

incompetent therapists you can be referred to or even mandated to see, or whom your child might be mandated to see. Make note of everything both positive and negative transitions.

There can be a tendency to crack-under-pressure, to second guess yourself because you and your child are quite alone on this complicated journey.

**There is a need for non-prejudiced support within the community and schools.**

If you already do know your child's school subscribes to a racist paradigm then you also know that you, your family, your child is even more vulnerable and that is frightening!

What one *does not want* to become is an apologist yet sadly racial bullying and intimidation can cause one to feel guilty for being of color, for being disabled, for having a limited income or less choices for care, or less power in these situations, etc. However you have power. Edward F. Dragan, Ed., wrote an excellent book about that, "The Bully Action Guide. How to Help Your Child and Get Your School to Listen" since you simply *must* be able to navigate it in the best way possible for you and your child. Here are a few samples of potential problems and how to deal with them when you are faced with a teacher, an aide, and/or an administration that is not culturally competent:

1. If your school or the child's teacher is failing your child visit with teacher and the principal.
2. Have a friend or family member go with you.
3. Keep documents and dates regarding your concerns and the responses you are receiving for your concerns.
4. Do not meet with anyone alone.
5. Do not let them close the door at a meeting. *It should remain ajar.*
6. Also affirm any positive outcomes as you

- are developing relationships that matter.
7. Should developments go awry you may need a lawyer so best to keep track along the way!
  8. And as Kelly LaRoe the disabilities advocate has stated on the show tonight your child has the legal right to record any meeting she/he has with any staff.

You may feel defenseless, guilt-ridden and afraid for your position within a white supremacist strategy. This is intentional.

**Racism was designed to confuse you and displace you. Racism was designed to create uncertainty and insecurity within you regarding your authority over your own life and the welfare of your children!**

Guilt or depression is often a precursor to anger and even rage. When you cannot fight back you can internalize the powerlessness you are experiencing as you advocate for your child. But you have power.

White supremacy exists because you have power and racists are afraid of it. *They are afraid of you!*

So work with that knowledge as advocating for yourself and your child means coping with a duality within this unique struggle.

**Parenting is a gift, a highly individualized gift between your child and yourself.**

**You want safety for yourself, your child and your family. You want equanimity within the educational system you are each dependent upon. You want hope AND favorable results for your efforts and you deserve them!**

### **Question # 3:**

**Jacquie:** In today's political and social climate in the United States, how do families go about creating dialog that will be heard, and not used as fuel for the fire of "race baiting"?

**Kaolin:** We know that race baiting uses racially derisive language, actions, or other forms of communication in order to anger, intimidate or coerce. Racism is cunning and manipulative, some of our habits regarding it also are.

So start the dialogue at home. If you need to reach out to a family member or friend, do it.

There are a couple of points to make here about this. One is that frustration draws more empathy from others than anger. Yet even more than denial anger is the root cause of the dysfunctional elements of communication about racism. People do not want to be displaced. The dissolution of a racist ideology is displacing many right now.

Underneath it is fear: Fear it won't go away. There are attachments to the value of racism in everyone's life because no one knows what it is to live without it. Think about it for a minute ... it is almost unimaginable.

Race baiting is manipulation, a distraction that turns the victim into the manipulator. It happens most often when people are afraid or embarrassed about what they do not know. But you also know what you know. You 'know' your experience. Whether or not someone else can handle it is their problem, not yours. Living with what they do not know is your problem.

When I work on this subject in groups people speak from the 'I'. It's a go-around and others listen. It is a weight over all of us. I often ask: "If you woke up this morning and there was no racism how different would the day have been so far?"

Then there is silence.

Next a sigh and people's minds and bodies are free of the weight it carries. It takes time to be able to answer that question, because there is so much pain in that word, 400 years of pain and confusion.

In a sense, though this may not answer your question, any dialogue about racism requires patience. It just does. You can pick and choose when and where you'll discuss it. That is as imp. as whom you might discuss it with.

But of course the conversation can be dropped in a minute. It depends upon what you really want from it. People change yet real change is an unfolding. I have never changed because of someone else. I change because there is a moment of recognition, of synchronization that matters. It transforms me. I have no control over it. It has value. It stirs me-up. It puts a conflict to rest. We do not change one another. We do present the conditions, the dialogue, the possibilities for healing to be present, engaged. You do that with your disabled child every day.

As a white person there is no justification for racism, none at all. I have heard the lamest excuses for it. Unbelievable and yet white's do see it differently because when we walk away from our involvement in racism we walk away with the social powers aligned with white supremacy. Any person of color, even family members of color need to reconcile that fact for themselves: *Why do I know this white person? What are my expectations? Can those expectations be met when there is a social imbalance of power between us? How do I reconcile that?*

I am white. I have no answers to those questions.

I have my own questions.

But I can say that whites are conscious of the advantage and get insecure about it, afraid of it and humbled by it. It is terrifying. And to your point, without more communication nothing will happen. No changes will come so we talk and will keep talking.

Then I look to our rights about this subject:

1. Anyone who wants to has a right to talk about racism.

2. When we do we are interpreters of one another's reality in the work we are giving voice to. That is it. That is all and that is plenty!

3. Be patient but don't accept abuse.

4. We are articulating obstacles that had not been articulated before.

5. White people have had the choice, the power to change this and the more they can connect the dots without guilt, shame, fear or anger the better off we will be.

6. Do the 'processing' of it all elsewhere.

7. Do not hold POC captive to your pain nor the consequences of it.

8. Manipulations do not work in effective conversations.

9. The more prep for conversations about racism and white privilege the better.

I have also worked with people who use a tape recorder to vent before having a conversation about racism with someone.

What have I done? I have drawn out the word 'racism' because it can get the conversation to be more honest. EX: I wrote a piece called ***Racism, What's Racism*** which will be in my 2<sup>nd</sup> book. Really everything is racist ... I use a photo of the white supremacist paradigm and have had meetings at my place about it. I also, suggest reading "Boundaries" and "Integrity" by Dr, Henry Cloud, as both are useful tools for having difficult discussions and relationships.

Racism is a challenge for each of us independent of and in relation to one another. Another excellent book on this subject is "the guide for white women who teach black boys" by eddie moore jr., ali michael, marguerite w. penick-parks with forewords by Glenn E. Singleton and Heather Hackman The lower case title is explained by the authors in their introduction. "White Privilege Unmasked" by Judy Ryde is also excellent. And of course so is my book "Talking About Race: A Workbook about White People Fostering Racial Equality in Their Lives."

