

Racism and Ethnocentric Cognitive Bias

By: Loretta Whitson, Executive Director CASC

There is a lot to say on this matter and this article will only scratch the surface. Right now, a lot of people are hurting. America has not addressed the historic racism that exists, and raw emotions is the national reaction to racial injustice. The killing of George Floyd may be a tipping point for change.

I watched the videos of the horrific events that transpired in Minneapolis. I felt anger, and despair that was rising from my 60+ years of hearing, listening, reading and witnessing racially fueled atrocities. It is difficult to look at the image of George Floyd pleading...the inhumanity resonates with us all.

While the outrage is palpable; it is not disproportionate to the crime. It is however, a wake-up call for many. I use the word "peace" quite often as a conclusion to an email or letter. As aspirational as that is, I believe peace will never exist unless it is preceded by "justice". This moment is a call for deep reflection...including myself, who as a white person has for the entirety of my life lived comfortably within "white privilege", while the Black community and others have not.

Ruth King writes that "Racism is a heart disease, and it's *curable*." In her book, "[Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out](#)", she explores crucial topics and challenges us to think deeply about what is required of us individually and collectively. As we struggle to face the challenges presented by our U.S. racial history with greater courage and kindness, we must identify our own discomfort as a core competency to transformation. The question is, do we have the personal will to do so? To step out of our comfort and into courage.

Anger, despair and hope can reside simultaneously within us! In my despondency, I have hope in generations that are younger than the baby-boomer category I fit in. I have hope that protesters who are on the street in nearly every corner of this country will be heard. I have hope that the lessons of the past will quell our skepticism into real action.

In Ancient Greek folklore, a [phoenix](#) is a bird that regenerates, obtaining new life by arising from the ashes. While George Floyd's death is beyond tragic and the disturbing lack of humanity was made so real through the number of videos available, it is also a call to build upon the ashes - to demand racial barriers be taken down and removed once and for all.

California Education: On Monday morning (June 1, 2020) California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond declared, "Bias is at every sector of our society". He goes on to tearfully say,

"We have to be courageous and honest about the racism that exists in this country, that could lead to such a senseless death at a time when we as a nation haven't even healed from the deaths of Ahmaud (Arbery) and Breonna (Taylor), that we would be understandable faced with a horrific killing of a man who begged for his life, who pleaded for his life."

Superintendent Thurmond invited individuals - including students, parents, educators and others to participate in solutions to combat institutional racism and bigotry within education. CASC has committed to do everything we can to ensure school counselors from throughout the state are at the table contributing our unique perspective towards making widespread fundamental changes.

We must start with institutions and organizations that foster toxic cultures. Toxic cultures that are built into the structure of their very existence and that foster the anti-Black racism we have come to know as “normal.” Educational institutions represent a large part of that greater eco-system, and while hard to face for some, racial and ethnic inequalities loom large there too. As one reporter ([Ricardo Cano](#)) said recently, “Few goals in education have been as frustrating and urgent as the effort to fix the [deep, generational disparity in achievement](#) between the haves and the have-nots in California schools”.

The Brookings Institute published an [article](#) in February of this year linked to a report that they were completing saying,

“The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) reports large, persistent gaps between Black and white students on educational outcomes such as school suspensions, uptake of AP classes, assignment to special education and gifted and talented classes, and grade-level retention. How might we explain disparities in these outcomes? As we argue in a forthcoming paper in the American Educational Research Journal (prepublication version [here](#)), schools are responsible for these disparities—and they have the capacity to do away with them.

Therefore, we know disparities exists in education and, in some ways, we throw up our hands in a can’t-do jester of “its beyond me” when it’s simply not.

CASC’s Efforts: CASC recognizes school counselors’ social responsibility to disrupt racism in schools. As such, in early 2017 the CASC board and its various members worked with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing to include “*Leadership and Advocacy in Social Justice, Equity, and Access*” as a School Counselor Performance Expectation in the recently adopted PPS training standards.

CASC recognizes that to be anti-racist is to be in a constant state of striving, course-correcting, and growth. In 2018, understanding the need for professional development in this area, CASC added “Social Justice and Equity” as a professional development strand in our state conference.

Most recently, CASC has been leading the way in California with our work with the American Civil Liberties Union over the past two years. We have been working diligently to draw attention to the overuse of cops in schools and the lack of school counselors whose work is evidence-based and effective in reducing racism and bias. We also have worked to draw attention to the disproportionate number of students of color suspended/expelled. <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/school-prison-pipeline/cops-and-no-counselors>

The issue at-hand was schools over-reliance of policing in California schools as compared to the evidence-based strategies of hiring school counselors which research shows have been instrumental in reducing school behavioral issues such as bullying, school-yard fights, verbal altercations, drugs and alcohol issues...and the list goes on. While this is one element of the work we are doing, we know more is to be done.

CASC is here to support school counselors and to let our state leaders know that California school counselors are fed-up with the countless acts of racism and institutional bias that exist today. We will continue to do our part to educate our members, stakeholders and the community related to inequalities, and injustices and how the work of school counselors is based on the value of equability and justice for ALL. Together throughout this state, school counselors contribute to changing mindsets

and broken systems and long held biases and injustices. We applaud you for the work you do daily... your advocacy and the heart you have for our children.

CASC has a number of [resources](#) that we hope will assist our members with ways of approaching racism and bias in a classroom setting. I want to thank a number of school counselors who contributed to the resources aforementioned including Lezya Weglarz who also oversees the Covid-19 resource [website](#). CASC also welcomes you to share resources you have found helpful via [CASC Facebook](#) page. Please share other resources in the comment box below.