

F Your Racist History***

E110: Racist Cartoons, Toys, Nursery Rhymes, Songs, and Popular Phrases

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Show Notes

Over the centuries, white supremacy has been marketed to American children through popular toys like “mammy” dolls and in cartoons with names like “Little Black Sambo.” More recently, several of Dr. Seuss’ children’s books have also been criticized as being insensitive by promoting racist stereotypes. Many rhymes and songs that we learned in our own childhoods, and that we may now teach our children or grandchildren, are also deeply rooted in racism. This not-so-subtle conditioning to white supremacy as children can lead to unconscious bias in adults. In this episode of *F*** Your Racist History*, we explore the racist undertones in our beloved childhood entertainment as well as the overt racism in some commonly used phrases and music, even the lyrics of the United States’ National Anthem.

EPISODE SCRIPT

Introduction

When news broke recently that six Dr. Seuss children's book titles were being pulled from publication because of their insensitive, racist depictions of certain ethnic groups, the decision prompted a hailstorm of criticism from some people screaming about the evils of so-called "Cancel Culture." Side note: if "Cancel Culture" really existed as they claim, you probably wouldn't be listening to yours truly on this podcast or anywhere else for that matter. We'll go into why later. But, here's Fox News with their hot take:

Contrary to the clips you just heard, Dr. Seuss wasn't canceled, and the choice to pull six books from the Dr. Seuss catalog of over 50 wasn't the work of President Joe Biden. The books' own publisher, Dr. Seuss Enterprises, the organization that holds the publication licenses of Dr. Seuss's complete works and manages the image of the late author, made that decision. They issued the following statement on March 2, 2021:

"Dr. Seuss Enterprises, working with a panel of experts, including educators, reviewed our catalog of titles and made the decision last year to cease publication and licensing of [these] titles: ('And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street,' 'If I Ran the Zoo,' 'McElligot's Pool,' 'On Beyond Zebra!,' 'Scrambled Eggs Super!' and 'The Cat's Quizzer.')

[They] portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong. Ceasing sales of these books is only part of our commitment and our broader plan to ensure Dr. Seuss Enterprises' catalog represents and supports all communities and families."¹

For many people, this decision—which was more of a symbolic gesture since most of the books pulled were already out of print—was long overdue. When former First Lady Melania Trump gifted Dr. Seuss book sets to children's libraries around the country in 2017, a Massachusetts librarian made headlines for rejecting the works because of their racist overtones. The Japanese American National Museum, who has "long documented these divisive images in our nation's past," issued a public statement cheering the move to officially retire what has now become known as the "Seuss 6":

¹ J. K. Yamamoto, "Six Dr. Seuss Books Pulled from Publication for Racial Imagery," Rafu Shimpo, March 6, 2021, <https://rafu.com/2021/03/six-dr-seuss-books-pulled-from-publication-for-racial-imagery/>.

“The mainstreaming of racism and prejudice is deeply embedded in our culture. It is high time that Dr. Seuss’ work is examined,” said Ann Burroughs, President, and CEO of the museum.²

So, why is it significant that six Dr. Seuss titles were pulled, all including drawings of racial stereotypes? Many people argue that the stories and illustrations are harmless, that the push to remove artifacts like these from our children’s early development is “liberal censorship” and an erasure of our history. Coincidentally, these are many of the same folks who refuse to acknowledge other parts of our history, things like this podcast hopes to shed light on.

There are valid arguments that violence depicted in movies and video games can make some children more prone to violence. If that’s considered, why can’t the same logic be applied to kids who constantly consume racially insensitive books, cartoons, and other media like music? Does that, in turn, desensitize a child or make them more predisposed to buy into harmful racial stereotypes as an adult?

Many researchers and scientists agree that unconscious bias, i.e. prejudice or unsupported judgments in favor of or against one thing, person, or group as compared to another, is influenced by what we encounter during our upbringing.³ In a 2018 study by Northwestern University, researchers studied bias tendencies in pre-school aged children, and through their experiments, found evidence that “children revealed a strong and consistent pro-white bias,” even at age 4. The researchers also noted that children were “sensitive to verbal and nonverbal expressions of adult bias.”⁴

In other words, kids’ brains are like little sponges. I don’t think it’s that far of a jump to assume that if we are brought up watching, reading, listening to, or playing with things that depict white people as strong, smart, powerful, and righteous, while depicting well, basically everyone else who isn’t white, as subservient, lazy, criminal, less intelligent and dependent, or as outright

² Joseph Duong, “JANM Supports Decision by Dr. Seuss Publisher to End Publication of Six Children’s Books | Japanese American National Museum,” www.janm.org, March 5, 2021, <https://www.janm.org/press/release/janm-supports-decision-dr-seuss-publisher-end-publication-six-childrens-books>.

³ “Unconscious Bias,” Vanderbilt University (Vanderbilt University, December 19, 2016), <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/diversity/unconscious-bias/>.

⁴ Danielle R. Perszyk et al., “Bias at the Intersection of Race and Gender: Evidence from Preschool-Aged Children,” *Developmental Science* 22, no. 3 (January 23, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12788>.

savages, even if you don't consider yourself a racist, you may unconsciously show preference towards white people in your normal life.

Throughout the history of the United States and western Europe, many immensely popular children's toys, books, and nursery rhymes were riddled with racial stereotypes that influenced generation after generation of young children. Maybe even you. Ever heard of Mother Goose? The original story featured a caricature of the main antagonist portrayed as a dishonest Jewish person. Familiar with "Eenie, meeny, miny, mo, catch a tiger by its toe?" The original version didn't have kids catching a "tiger" by the toe. Many popular 20th century cartoons produced by the likes of Warner Brothers and Looney Toons also featured outright racist imagery. Bugs Bunny was sometimes shown in blackface, a popular minstrel-era performance method where a white actor donned dark face paint and acted out Black stereotypes. In fact, it wasn't until 1968, in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, when some of the most explicitly racist cartoons were banned from being shown on television in the United States.

Today, we are going to discuss some of these examples of racist children's entertainment and much, much more. This is episode 10 of *F*** Your Racist History: **Racist Cartoons, Toys, Nursery Rhymes, Songs, and Popular Phrases.***

Racist Toys

Play is an integral part of our childhood, and for many of us, it accounts for the way we spent endless hours when we were young. Scientists agree that play is vital to our development of social skills, creativity, problem-solving, and intelligence.⁵ It influences our earliest thought patterns, desires, and opinions. Play is even educational—teaching us math, logic, and interpretive skills.

Many children's toys attempt to mimic the culture in which they are made, i.e., dolls are modeled after so-called "real life" of the time. In the nineteenth century, however, toy makers' vision of real-life was twisted into things like the mammy doll. Mammy dolls were given to little white girls to perpetuate the stereotyping of Black women as servants and caretakers of white homes.

⁵ Stuart L Brown and Christopher C Vaughan, *Play : How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* (New York: Avery, 2010).

In popular culture at the time, mammy's were typically depicted as an older, larger, desexualized woman with very dark skin. She was, in part, a warped redemption arc for white men during this period. The implication was that white men couldn't possibly find this portly Black woman attractive and, therefore, would not rape her (layers of problematic toxic male thought here). While in reality, the enslaved women who were forced to work within a plantation home were multiracial with lighter skin (a more visual representation of the sexual exploitation of Black women). They were usually of slim build as a result of both their young age and starvation diet.⁶ In essence, the "Mammy" character was created to make white people feel comfortable and safe around Blacks and less guilty about the havoc they had wreaked on people of color.

Another popular doll during the early-to-mid 1900s was the Topsy doll. Topsy is the name of a Black character in the classic book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Toy manufacturers created dozens, if not hundreds, of different types of 'Topsy' dolls. And all of them were based on the description provided in chapter twenty of the famous Harriet Beecher Stowe novel:

"She was one of the blackest of her race; and her round shining eyes, glittering as glass beads, moved with quick and restless glances over everything in the room. Her mouth, half-open with astonishment at the wonders of the new Mas'r's parlor, displayed a white and brilliant set of teeth. Her woolly hair was braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction. The expression of her face was an odd mixture of shrewdness and cunning, over which was oddly drawn, like a kind of veil, an expression of the most doleful gravity and solemnity. She was dressed in a single filthy, ragged garment, made of bagging, and stood with her hands demurely folded before her."⁷

And just like today, children used their toys to recreate scenes that they observed, either in their everyday lives or in popular culture. For example, *Secret Garden* author Frances Hodgson Burnett once recalled using her Topsy doll as a child to re-enact scenes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She claimed to tie the doll up and whip it, its unchanging expression suggesting that she (Topsy) enjoyed it.⁸

⁶David Pilgrim, "The Mammy Caricature - Anti-Black Imagery - Jim Crow Museum - Ferris State University," Ferris.edu, 2012, <https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/mammies/>.

⁷ Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Chapter 20 - Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe," www.readprint.com, n.d., <http://www.readprint.com/chapter-8796/Uncle-Tom-s-Cabin-Harriet-Beecher-Stowe>.

⁸ ROBIN BERNSTEIN, "Children's Books, Dolls, and the Performance of Race; Or, the Possibility of Children's Literature," *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 160–69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41414088>.

These are not to be confused with another type of popular racist doll, the Topsy-Turvy doll from the early 19th century. These were dolls that are a sort of two-in-one, meaning each end of the doll had a different head and torso that connected at the waist. The skirt is two-sided and flips over to reveal the other doll. Although there are numerous innocuous versions around today, the original depicted a Black character (which looked like a mammy) and a more fancily dressed white character on the opposite end. Recent analysis of historical case studies of people who owned these toys suggests that these dolls helped children internalize the social divisions (and perceived racial supremacies) between Black people and white people. Others argue that these dolls were created to show the fine line between white children and the Black women who were charged with their care, and may have even been created by Black women on plantations—although evidence to support this is hard to come by.⁹

Other Toys

Dolls were not the only popular racist toys. In 1912, Sears advertised mechanical toys that featured “darkies playing the flute or accordion.” The “Alabama Coon Jigger” was another popular musical toy that featured a racist depiction of a Black man dancing. These types of mechanized toys were popular and used to promote the myth of the “happy slave,” a prominent stereotypical narrative from the pre-Civil War period.

Coin banks, a common present for thrifty young children, often featured the likeness of blackfaced minstrel characters. For children’s parties, minstrel costumes were also widely available for purchase throughout the Jim Crow Era. As minstrel shows grew in popularity in the late 1800s, so did puppet counterparts that could appeal to the whole family. Particularly well-known examples are the various characters in the Punch and Judy show, especially a Black servant character called “Jim Crow.”

⁹ Julian K Jarboe, “The Racial Symbolism of the Topsy Turvy Doll,” *The Atlantic* (theatlantic, November 20, 2015), <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/11/the-racial-symbolism-of-the-topsy-turvy-doll/416985/>.

Family games also had overt racial overtones. One game called “Chuck” featured a stereotypically caricatured Black target that players had to toss (or, that’s right, “chuck”) a watermelon-shaped disk at, gaining points for getting it in the wide-open mouth of the target. Carnival-style games like “The Game of Sambo” and “The Little Darky Shooting Gallery” involved using Black characters as target practice for toy guns. Bowling games like Parker Brothers’ “Sambo Five Pins” featured a racist fictionalized story about a character named Sambo, a derogatory label assigned to Blacks after the Civil War, who “was a good ole Southern Darky...” And, various card games such as Old Maid, (you remember that one) often featured caricatures of Black women.

Racist Cartoons

The advent of motion pictures and television meant that racist depictions of Black and brown people also made their way to big *and* little screens. For decades, Walt Disney Corporation, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (or MGM), Looney Toons, R.K.O Radio Pictures, Merrie Melodies, and Warner Brothers all produced racist black-and-white cartoon reels specifically for kids. Early animations were primarily based on “stock characters” and included popular, albeit stereotypical, vaudeville and minstrel characters, like Jim Crow, Zip Coon, Sambo, Uncle Tom, and, of course, Mammy.

Sketches included a variety of racist tropes including singing and dancing caricatures, the so-called “angry Black woman” sending her “good for nothing” husband off to work, re-enactments using shoe polish to shine Black skin, romanticization of the Old South plantation culture, and false depictions of so-called “exotic,” “savage,” “ignorant,” and sometimes even “cannibalistic” people of color.

The “Censored Eleven” are a group of Warner Brothers, Merrie Melodies, Disney, and Looney Toons cartoons deemed too offensive for audiences in 1968. The list includes parodies of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* and *Goldilocks*, as well as a (*quote*) “plantation melodrama” called “Uncle Tom’s Bungalow.”

Since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, many of these cartoons have been censored or removed from most platforms due to their insensitive and racist nature. As awareness of these

issues continues to grow, we must analyze the content we consume critically, and that sometimes means reassessing many of the things we loved when we were young.

Like me, many other 1970s, '80s, and even '90s babies also grew up watching cartoons and movies loaded with racist stereotypes.

In rare episodes of the classic MGM cartoon *Tom and Jerry*, there was a house servant character known as "Mammy Two Shoes," and it was still broadcast on Saturday mornings in '90s.

Other examples include the stereotypical depictions of Native Americans in Disney's *Peter Pan*.

And the Siamese cats (and the song they sang) in *Lady and the Tramp*.

The character of King Louie, an ape, in *The Jungle Book*, modeled after Louis Armstrong, has also been deemed problematic. There is some debate over whether or not the lyrics of "I want to be like you" is racial coding.

The fact that King Louie, who is based on a Black man, wants to be more human-like and become civilized parallels pro-slavery and segregationist beliefs that Black people were more akin to apes and monkeys in the jungle than to white people in general. Sure, Mowgli isn't white, but he represents civilization, which is inherently linked to "whiteness."

Other racist stereotypes include the Alley Cats in *The Aristocats*.

As well as The Crows, including Jim, from *Dumbo*.

The opening song in *Aladdin*, "Arabian Nights," drew criticism from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee for these lyrics after the film was released in 1993:

"Where they cut off your ear,
If they don't like your face
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home."

Disney agreed to alter the racist song lyrics and re-released the film with the following modification:

A disturbing fact: Public Policy Polling from 2015 found that 30-percent of Republicans and 19-percent of Democrats said they would bomb the fictional city of Agrabah from the animated film *Aladdin*.¹⁰

Nowadays, many of these shows and movies carry a warning statement about historical context. For example, Disney's content warning reads as follows:

“This program includes negative depictions and/or mistreatment of people or cultures. These stereotypes were wrong then and are wrong now. Rather than remove this content, we want to acknowledge its harmful impact, learn from it, and spark conversation to create a more inclusive future together.”

Other streaming services and content providers offer similar statements when accessing problematic content. This is a more recent trend, with most content warnings popping up in the last few years.

Racist Nursery Rhymes

Other memories from our childhoods do not yet come with a warning label.

What about the song that plays from your neighborhood ice cream truck?

You might think of this tune as “Do Your Ears Hang Low?,” or the lesser known “Do Your Balls Hang Low?,” neither of which, thankfully, mention ice cream. But the original version, produced by Columbia Records in 1916, had a much different tone, playing on the stereotype of Black people as (quote) “mindless beasts of burden greedily devouring slices of watermelon.”

Although the lyrics and title have changed over time, the connection with ice cream is through this racist version of the song. And, it was this offensive version (minus the lyrics, of course) that

¹⁰ Dan Evon, “Did 41 Percent of Trump Supporters Favor Bombing a Fictional City from ‘Aladdin’?,” Snopes.com, December 18, 2015, <https://www.snopes.com/news/2015/12/18/agrabah-aladdin-republican-poll/>.

would have been played in ice cream parlors and over Mr. Softee ice cream truck speakers across the country when most of us were kids.¹¹ Maybe even today.

This is not the only common tune you might remember that is tinged with racism.

The song most people would know as “Ten Little Monkeys.” It started out as a song that counted the ways in which young Black boys might die, except for the last one who was somehow lucky enough to survive the brutal rhyming ordeal and get married.¹² It was used as a minstrel song in its original format, as well as the equally racist “Ten Little Indians” (or “Injuns” depending on who was singing it).

The tune many of us have used to pick between various options when we can’t make our mind up also has a hidden racist lyric. “Eeny Meenie Miney Mo,” wasn’t always followed with “catch a tiger by its toe.” The original lyric utilized an anti-Black slur and suggested a potential hate crime all in one, presumably prepping young slave catcher hopefuls for a life of violent racism.

It’s not necessarily a nursery rhyme, but *Oh Susannah* is often used as a kid’s tune. How many of us remember the second verse? Let me refresh your memory.

The once popular kids’ chant “Chinese, Japanese, Dirty Knees, Look at These,” mocked East Asian immigrants, particularly after the Chinese Exclusion Act (in 1882). The children’s rhyme asserts that Chinese and Japanese people were dirty and promiscuous.

Several other popular children’s stories have dark origins as well. *Old Mother Goose*, for example, is full of anti-Semitic language and imagery, and the antagonist is depicted as a dishonest Jewish person. Despite scrubbing and a reworking of the old story several decades ago, this original version is unfortunately still easily accessible today.

Because of a popular 1993 film adaptation, the following example became a favorite of many young American tweens in the 1990s and early 2000s despite being written by a British author

¹¹ Theodore R. Johnson, III, “Recall That Ice Cream Truck Song? We Have Unpleasant News for You,” NPR.org, May 11, 2014, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/05/11/310708342/recall-that-ice-cream-truck-song-we-have-unpleasant-news-for-you>.

¹² Frank Green, “Ten Little Niggers,” 1869, https://www.parkkinen.org/ten_little_niggers.html

over 100 years ago. *The Secret Garden*, a classic children's novel written in 1911 by novelist Frances Hodgson Burnett, contains some not-so-subtle racist imagery and remarks. When the main character, Mary, the daughter of a British government employee stationed in India, is left orphaned, she is sent to live with an uncle in England. Upon her arrival, she meets her new maidservant, Martha, who tells her she thought the young girl might have been Black since she was from India and that "there's such a lot of blacks there instead of respectable white people." Mary becomes enraged and declares, "natives are not people!" Then, just to hammer home the message with a bit of symbolism, all of Mary's "Black" clothes that she brought with her from India are replaced with "nicer" white clothes.^{13 14}

Popular Common Terms

We've talked about toys, cartoons, and nursery rhymes that are blatantly racist, but what about the less obvious? There are words and phrases baked into our daily vernacular that are steeped in racist history, and most of us have absolutely no idea where they came from.

Used the word "gypped" lately? It's not uncommon to hear the term uttered in frustration in a situation involving cheating or theft. But, the word popped up in 1899 as an abbreviation of Gypsy, a derogatory term assigned to the Romani people and defined as "a sly unscrupulous fellow." The term is a harmful pejorative. So, the next time you voice your frustration over being treated dishonestly, try to avoid this term that wrongly equates dishonesty with an entire culture of people.¹⁵

"Grandfathered in": this common term is used to refer to someone or something that is exempt from a new rule or context. But, the origin of the phrase dates back to the Civil War, when the abolition of slavery and the passage of the 13th and 14th amendments freed all enslaved people and granted citizenship to people of African descent. The problem that this created for powerful whites, however, is that now those citizens (at least the male ones) would be eligible to vote. As a result, a whole host of things like literacy tests and poll taxes were invented to keep Black men from exercising their right to vote. But then what about all the poor white men who

¹³ "The Secret Garden Chapter IV Summary & Analysis," SparkNotes, n.d., <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/secretgarden/section3/page/2/>.

¹⁴ "The Project Gutenberg EBook of the Secret Garden, by Frances Hodgson Burnett.," www.gutenberg.org, n.d., <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/17396/17396-h/17396-h.htm>.

¹⁵ Janaki Challa, "Why Being 'Gypped' Hurts the Roma More than It Hurts You," NPR.org, December 30, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/12/30/242429836/why-being-gypped-hurts-the-roma-more-than-it-hurts-you>.

wanted to vote? These new disenfranchisement measures could very much restrict their ballot access, so, to circumvent any issues for white men, several states passed Grandfather Clauses, which meant anyone who was descended from a former voter or who had voted prior to the 14th Amendment being passed (i.e. white people), could continue to vote without the new restrictions. The term “grandfathered (in)” has become a common part of our vernacular, but it originated as a loophole to prevent white voters from being disenfranchised by laws created to keep Black people from voting.¹⁶

Maybe it’s just because their origins—and the harm that these words and phrases have caused—haven’t been made clear to some of us until recently, but I hope we are also smart enough to rethink our widespread use of sexist and racist phrases like “master bedroom,” “Indian giver,” “Spirit Animal,” and “whipped into shape,” among others, too. Now that you know, is it something you want your children influenced by?

The Star-Spangled Banner

Even the United States’ National Anthem, which has come under fire in recent years for a forgotten fourth verse, is not free of racist American tradition.

As the story goes, Francis Scott Key became inspired to write a poem called “The Defense of Fort M’Henry” while he watched the British bombard Fort McHenry in Baltimore during the War of 1812. The poem was put to music, and the name was eventually changed to “Star-Spangled Banner.” The lyrics were considered controversial even during its day, particularly because of the following verse:

*No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.¹⁷*

¹⁶ Alan Greenblatt, “NPR Choice Page,” Npr.org, October 22, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/10/21/239081586/the-racial-history-of-the-grandfather-clause>.

¹⁷ Gillian Brockell, “The Ugly Reason ‘the Star-Spangled Banner’ Didn’t Become Our National Anthem for a Century,” *Washington Post*, October 18, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/10/18/star-spangled-banner-racist-national-anthem/>.

The reference to “hireling and slave” pertains to the 2nd Corps of British Colonial Marines. This Corps was largely made up of escaped enslaved Black men who went over to the side of the English after they were promised freedom and land in exchange for their military service.¹⁸

Some historians argue this is a clear jab at the Black Colonial Marines and an ironic glorification of slavery within the “land of the free and the home of the brave.” Others believe Francis Scott Key’s lyrics are more about defeating the British and aimed at whom he deemed as deserters of the United States, as there were Black soldiers (free and enslaved) fighting on the side of the Americans during the War of 1812.

The fact that Francis Scott Key was a slave owner and openly flaunted his racist beliefs, a man who thought African Americans were an inferior race, doesn’t help assuage the arguments for the Star-Spangled Banner not being a somewhat racist anthem. Another little known fact about Francis Scott Key is that as the district attorney of Washington D.C. in the late 1820s, he influenced President Andrew Jackson to appoint his brother-in-law, Roger B. Taney, as Chief Justice to the U.S. Supreme Court. Don’t recognize the name? Justice Taney wrote the Dred Scott decision in the late 1850s, which stripped all freed Black people of their American citizenship.

Regardless of Francis Scott Key’s personal racist history, the fourth verse effectively kept the song from becoming the national anthem for over a century until President Herbert Hoover officially named it so in 1931, thanks, in large part, to organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy. By that time, though, only the first verse of Francis Scott Key’s foundational poem remained since the original was decidedly anti-British, and Britain had by then become an American ally during WW1. Side note: a parade was thrown in Baltimore to celebrate this historic war victory, during which a color guard stood at the front waving Confederate flags.

Conclusion

Everything we’ve discussed today represents some historical aspect of white American culture, and yes, that culture, brewed amidst imperialist traditions and white supremacy throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, is steeped in racism.

¹⁸James A. Peroco, “The British Corps of Colonial Marines,” American Battlefield Trust, June 15, 2017, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/british-corps-colonial-marines>.

The prejudice and racial bias of adults seep into artistic creations meant to teach life lessons to kids. Yes, *some* of these stories, songs, and rhymes that we've discussed may have been written with so-called valiant moral lessons from the time in mind, but when a child is plied with colorful (and wrong) images that suggest "White is good, and Black is bad," or "Japanese people are evil saboteurs," or that "Black women are happy mammies here to serve white children and their parents," etc., that child is set up for a lifetime of bias and prejudice, whether unconscious or overt. And it's time we accept that is exactly what happened.

While many of the examples I've discussed in this episode are from more than 50 years ago (making some of them what shaped the foundations of most adults alive today), these songs and stories are the cultural elements that stick with us and shape the society we live in. They are passed onto future generations, and in *some* cases, they can be used to heal old wounds. They can also be used to inject hatred and anger and incite violence, a premise I am unfortunately personally acquainted with.

It's no secret that I belonged to the white-power skinhead movement for eight years of my youth in the late 1980s and early '90s. I was recruited when I was an angry and isolated 14-year-old in 1987. My mind was a sponge, and I absorbed every bit of racist propaganda I could get my hands on. And once I was fully indoctrinated, I began to make my own. After forming a white-supremacist rock band, White American Youth, I started writing and producing white power music. I went on to head a second hate rock band called Final Solution, the first American racist skinhead group to perform in Europe. We performed at rallies and festivals all over, but my recorded music was also a very effective recruiting tool outside of those circles. Young people who were just as lost or broken as I had been, listened to my songs and lyrics and bought into the racist rhetoric of the neo-Nazi movement because of it.

When I finally decided to get out in early 1996, I spent years trying to hunt down and eradicate every trace of the hate music I once created, but I didn't get it all. Now, with the proliferation of the Internet, white power music is easily accessible once again; in 2017, I found out just *how* accessible my old songs were.

That summer, I was contacted by a producer at ABC who had found a post made in a white-supremacist forum by neo-Nazi terrorist Dylann Roof four months before he killed nine people in the Charleston "Mother Emanuel" Church Massacre on June 17, 2015. Roof had

posted lyrics to a white power song he'd heard and he wanted to know who the artist was and how he could get his hands on a copy of the full album.

It turns out I authored those lyrics. The realization that I made something that may have somehow influenced someone to murder nine innocent people is almost more than I can bear, but it's the reality. Rather than deny it, I acknowledge this. I believe redemption without accountability is just another form of privilege. I choose to hold myself accountable.

My point is this: the things we create, the things we say, have power. For good and for bad. And they can't simply be erased or forgotten. The stories and songs that we share with our kids and young people influence them in more ways than we can understand. And it's our responsibility to ourselves and each other to ensure equality for all from the start.

Racism isn't a core value we are born with; we have to *learn* to hate and judge others for the way they look, who they love, or where they are from. Unfortunately, while our American ancestors have been great at many things, they've also been very good at indoctrinating us and our children with ideas that are plagued with white-supremacist themes. And many of us are predisposed to show bias in favor of white people, and a lot of that has to do with what we encountered when we were young. Are we still passing this along to our children today? If we just ignore it, will the damage it has already caused just go away? What will it do for future generations?

Old habits die hard. Even when people illuminate the racist nature of some of these works, resistance is enormous. Think of the backlash to Dr. Seuss Enterprises making the decision to pull some of the pieces in their collection from publication, for example. But we have to be diligent in the face of resistance so we can stop the intergenerational cycle of perpetuating racism and bigotry. Building a truly inclusive and equitable society must start with recognizing the harm certain language and images carry, and then doing the work of "unlearning"—as my friend Dr. Bernice King likes to call it—the biased ideas that reside within us.

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Source Notes

<https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/antiblack/> - the digital museum tour goes through an excellent exhibit about racist toys, cartoons, and games.

<https://www.janm.org/press/release/janm-supports-decision-dr-seuss-publisher-end-publication-six-childrens-books>

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<https://www.rd.com/article/psychology-of-prejudice-racism/>

Implicit Association Test (IAT)- 51 percent of online test takers show moderate to strong bias

“We’re not born with racial prejudices. We may never even have been “taught” them. Rather, explains University of Virginia psychologist Brian Nosek, prejudice draws on “many of the same tools that help our minds figure out what’s good and what’s bad.” In evolutionary terms, it’s efficient to quickly classify a grizzly bear as dangerous. The trouble comes when the brain uses similar processes to form negative views about groups of people.”

Research shows that once we become aware and understand these psychological pathways that lead to prejudice, we may be able to train our brains to function in the opposite way.

Our ability to categorize is a survival instinct: predatory animals or poisonous plants, for example. But when this categorization extends to people, it leads to prejudice.

“Much psychological research into bias has focused on how people ‘essentialize’ certain categories, which boils down to assuming that these categories have an underlying nature that is tied to inherent and immutable qualities.”

When you essentialize race, you think of people in a certain category and make assumptions about their characteristics.

Common stereotypes about African Americans: loud, good dancers, good at sports

“In polls, for example, few Americans admit holding racist views. But when told to rate the intelligence of various groups, more than half exhibited strong bias against African Americans.”

Within humanity, tribalism rules:

“Humans are tribal creatures, showing strong bias against those we perceive as different from us and favoritism toward those we perceive as similar. In fact, we humans will divide ourselves into in-groups and out-groups even when the perceived differences between the specific groups are completely arbitrary.”

Studies show prejudice and essentialism make us less innovative and creative.

“Essentialism appears to exert its negative effects on creativity not through what people think but how they think,’ concludes Tadmor. That’s because ‘stereotyping and creative stagnation are rooted in a similar tendency to overrely on existing category attributes.’ Those quick-judgment skills that allowed us to survive on the savanna? Not always helpful in modern life.”

Snuffing out overt racism will not end prejudice, and that’s because most people learn prejudice and inherent biases from less obvious sources.

Studies show that putting people in scenarios where a person of a different race is a member of their own team can override the tribal tendencies of our brains.

“Another successful variation had Nonblacks think about Black role models or imagine themselves playing on a dodgeball team with Black teammates against a team of White people (who proceed to cheat). In other words, it appears that our tribal instincts can actually be co-opted to decrease prejudice, if we are made to see those of other races as part of our team.”

“These studies suggest that, at least for the short time span of a psychology experiment, there are cognitive ways to make people less prejudiced.

To be sure, it will take more than consciousness-raising to erase the deep tracks of prejudice America has carved through the generations. But it’s a start. Taking the IAT made me realize that we can’t just draw some arbitrary line between prejudiced people and unprejudiced people and declare ourselves to be on the side of the angels. Biases have slipped into all our brains. And that means we all have a responsibility to recognize those biases—and to work to change them.”

Longshore, D. (1979). Color Connotations and Racial Attitudes. *Journal of Black Studies*, 10(2), 183-197. Retrieved July 24, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784327>

<https://rafu.com/2021/03/six-dr-seuss-books-pulled-from-publication-for-racial-imagery/>

- Dr. Seuss Enterprises announces they are ceasing publication of six Dr. Seuss titles that depict harmful racist stereotypes: ‘And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street,’ ‘If I Ran the Zoo,’ ‘McElligot’s Pool,’ ‘On Beyond Zebra!,’ ‘Scrambled Eggs Super!’ and ‘The Cat’s Quizzer.’
- They also said the decision wouldn’t affect ‘The Cat in the Hat,’ ‘Green Eggs and Ham,’ and ‘How the Grinch Stole Christmas.’
- The Japanese American National Museum issued a statement of support: “The Japanese American National Museum (JANM) welcomes the decision by the publisher of Dr. Seuss’ books to end publication of six of the author’s children’s titles that depict harmful caricatures of people of color, including Asian Americans and Blacks. One example is the stereotypical image in ‘And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street,’ of an Asian man with slanted lines as eyes, wearing a conical hat, and carrying a bowl with chopsticks.”
- “JANM notes that there is a darker historical context to Theodor Seuss Geisel’s work. Well-documented studies of his career as an editorial cartoonist reveal racist cartoons that depict Black people as crude, barefooted and wearing grass skirts, and Asians as a dangerous race not to be trusted.”

<https://www.npr.org/2020/07/09/889502179/is-it-enough-to-remove-words-with-racist-connotations-from-tech-language-hint-no>

- Racist connotations associated with tech language- master/slave, blacklist/whitelist.
 - Master program is dominant over the slave programming.
 - Blacklist includes things that are excluded or not allowed in coding.
 - Web developer Caroline Karanja wants to see the language in the industry updated to be more reflective of the society we live in today. Ultimately, she wants to see more investment in POC tech companies.

<https://nypost.com/2021/03/02/dr-seuss-didnt-have-a-racist-bone-in-his-body-stepdaughter/>

- This article is about the decision to pull the 6 Dr. Seuss titles and how his still-living step children feel about the decision.
 - “There wasn’t a racist bone in that man’s body — he was so acutely aware of the world around him and cared so much,” Lark Grey Dimond-Cates said of her late, now-embattled stepdad, whose real name was Theodor Seuss Geisel.”
- Lark Grey Dimond-Cates, Seuss’s stepdaughter, told the Washington Post: “I think in this day and age it’s a wise decision. I think this is a world that right now is in pain, and we’ve got to be very gentle, thoughtful and kind with each other.”

- She also described him as “a product of his time,” and said he would revise drawings over time.
- Per Dr. Seuss Enterprises: “We believed that it was time to take action,” DSE said in a statement to The Post on Tuesday. “We listened and took feedback from our audiences including teachers, academics and specialists in the field, too, as part of the review process.”

<https://nationalpost.com/entertainment/books/here-are-the-wrong-illustrations-that-got-six-dr-seuss-books-cancelled>

<http://www.jaas.gr.jp/jjas/PDF/1999/No.10-077.pdf>

Pertinent Quotes from this paper:

- Racial boundaries have remained ideologically fixed for an extended period as demarcation lines to describe “essential differences.”
- Stereotypes with racial markers serve to confirm, reproduce, and invent racial differences.
- It is important to bear in mind that latent racial ideologies are not very susceptible to historical contexts that exist on a rather surface level. It has been reported in a number of previous studies of racial or ethnic images in advertising that little significant change can be observed in ethnic or racial images prior to the beginning of the civil rights movement. Seiter attributes this to the fact that a dominant group’s position is relatively stable and unproblematic.
- In 1920, 47 percent of native-born whites, 60 percent of blacks, and 53 percent total of Indian, Chinese, and other races were engaged in gainful occupations. With regard to occupations stereotypically associated with racial minorities, in 1920 only about 25 percent of the number of janitors and sextons were blacks, whereas 44 percent and 31 percent were composed of native whites and foreign-born whites, respectively. Similarly, only 20 percent of those in the waiter category were black. Blacks portrayed as cooks and porters and other service occupations were significantly over-represented in advertisements
- Thus, although there are certain occupations highly over-represented both in number and percentage by minority groups such as the laundry and porter categories, other occupations strongly associated with minorities were in fact more highly represented by whites both in number and percentage (Our advertising and media portrayals of minorities were not only inaccurate in their racism, they over represented POC in service positions that were actually dominated by whites.)
- it is clear that race and gender interplay with the images of minorities consumed in American society to construct and reinforce racial boundaries.
- Conversely, especially in the South, whites displayed resistance to the positive use of blacks in advertising. According to Kern-Foxworth, advertising agencies as well as TV programmers feared a white backlash. For example, during the 1950s, whites living in the South boycotted Phillip Morris because it sponsored a Chicago beauty contest that was won by a black woman.

- Issues involving racial stereotypes are complex by nature and require different modes of analysis. Racial boundaries exist not only on the superficial level of racial categories divided by skin color, but they often take more covert forms deeply rooted in the human psychology of cognitive differentiation, which is eventually linked to social hierarchy or Orientalism.
- The point here is that the images attached to minorities seem to be mere projections of complex selves of whites, to which they could be transformed to “better” selves exhibiting higher social class, civilized lifestyles, sophistication, and good-looks by purchasing these products.
- Racial boundaries, although derived from the Western traditions of color ideology, as well as Western colonization and modernization, are not merely aftereffects. They continue to affect contemporary society, and are reproduced and reinforced by the consumption of racial images and stereotypes in capitalist societies.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/10/18/star-spangled-banner-racist-national-anthem/>

- During the war of 1812, Francis Scott Key undertook a mission to negotiate the release of his friend, a Maryland doctor taken prisoner during the British siege of DC.
- During the negotiation, Key overheard the British planning to attack Baltimore and was forbidden from leaving the ship until after the attack was complete.
- While watching the bombardment of Fort McHenry, he became inspired to write a poem, called “The Defense of Fort M’Henry.” It was eventually set to music and renamed the Star Spangled Banner. The third verse contains these controversial lines:

*No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave,
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.*

- These lines refer to the Colonial Marines, many of whom were escaped enslaved people who went over to the side of the British after they promised freedom from servitude and land grants in exchange for their service.
- One opinion is these lines are thought to be racist and threatening toward the Black Colonial Marines who were laying siege to Baltimore.
- Another opinion given by University of Michigan musicologist Mark Clague is, “‘The reference to slaves is about the use, and in some sense the manipulation, of Black Americans to fight for the British, with the promise of freedom.’ He also noted that Black people fought on the American side of the war as well.”
- These lines were considered controversial in their day, and abolitionists fought to keep the song from becoming the National Anthem.
- Another argument for the song being a racist anthem is the racist history of the man himself. Key served as the District Attorney of Washington D.C. under Andrew Jackson, and is no doubt a major reason that Jackson appointed his brother-in-law, Roger B. Taney, as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Taney wrote the Dred Scott Decision in 1858.

- All but the first verse was cut in the 20th century because the song was largely anti-British, and the relationship with the US had changed dramatically with Britain becoming an ally.
- In 1931, Herbert Hoover made the Star Spangled Banner the National Anthem after a long fight by groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy.
 - “The elevation of the banner from popular song to official national anthem was a neo-Confederate political victory, and it was celebrated as such,” Morley wrote. “When supporters threw a victory parade in Baltimore in June 1931, the march was led by a color guard hoisting the Confederate flag.”
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/03/arts/music/colin-kaepernick-national-anthem.html>
 - This article contains an interview with Mark Clague, a musicologist at the University of Michigan, on why the Star Spangled Banner isn’t racist.
 - Over the years, over 100 different sets of lyrics emerged. Clague said, “There are versions that talk about temperance, about women’s suffrage, about presidential campaigns, including Abraham Lincoln’s. The one I wish everyone knew about was one about abolition from 1844, beginning “Oh say, do you hear ... ” It repeats Key’s phrase “the land of the free,” but as an ironic statement. I wish teachers would contrast that version with Key’s version, as a way of showing how singing the anthem isn’t a mindless, rote ritual, but part of a long history of exploration of what the country is about.”
 - What’s the most important part of the anthem?
 - “For me, it’s the punctuation that ends the part we sing. After “land of the free,” we have a question mark, not an exclamation point. Is the flag and what it represents still there? Are we winning the battle for freedom that this country was founded on? That’s where Colin Kaepernick has started a productive conversation. If there are people who don’t feel the song represents them, we need to pay attention to that. But if we just reject the song as racist, or declare that it isn’t our anthem anymore, we don’t fix the problem.”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/08/28/even-republicans-should-care-about-racist-history-star-spangled-banner/>

- 1904, the US Navy began playing the Star-Spangled Banner at its functions and the Army required officers and enlisted men to “stand at attention and uncover” during the song.
- Post-WW1, the “bombs bursting in air,” lines seemed to some as overly violent and inappropriate, but organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy rallied to banish dissenters and cement the song as the US National Anthem.
 - “The Veterans of Foreign Wars and the United Daughters of the Confederacy responded by mobilizing to marginalize dissenters. These all-White organizations launched a petition drive to formally designate “The Star-Spangled Banner” as the one and only national anthem. In March 1931, Congress acquiesced. The elevation of the banner from popular song to official national anthem was a neo-Confederate political victory, and it was celebrated as such. When

supporters threw a victory parade in Baltimore in June 1931, the march was led by a color guard hoisting the Confederate flag.”

- African American, Black National Anthem was James Weldon Johnson’s “Lift Every Voice and Sing”

<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/03/03/dr-seuss-publishing-problematic-racism-473373>