

Elena Aguilar:

Welcome to the Bright Morning podcast. I'm Elena Aguilar. And welcome back to our special series, What To Say When You Hear Something Racist.

So friends, today, I have a special guest with me, Stacey Goodman, who is my husband, and he also does all the sound engineering for the podcast episodes. But he's here today to engage in a conversation with me about how the content of this series needs to be modified and thought about when we are people of color, either hearing something racist that someone else says, or witnessing racism, or when we are experiencing something racist, and how to then say something.

So Stacey is a Black man who was born and raised in Memphis, Tennessee. He is also an artist. He was a teacher for almost 20 years. And I asked him to record this conversation with me because we talk about this kind of stuff all the time. And I find our conversations to be a really critical part of my own learning journey, my own reflection process. And I thought you might want to hear some of the things that we talk about when we're sitting around at home.

Before we get into this episode, I want to thank Sylvia R. J. From Wisconsin for being a podcast supporter. Thank you so much, Sylvia. If you are interested in becoming a Bright Morning podcast supporter, please check the show notes. And also if you haven't already signed up for my weekly wisdom newsletter, make sure to do so. The link is in the show notes, and you will then be amongst the first to learn about new resources and get invitations to upcoming webinars and so on.

All right. So in this series, I have introduced to you the framework called the three Ps in which you think through your purpose in saying something about the racism that you've witnessed, you think about the power dynamics, and you think about possibility. So those were the last episodes, and I encourage you to go back and listen to those if you haven't already.

And so I want to welcome Stacey Goodman, and thank you for being a part of this conversation.

Stacey Goodman:

Hi, everyone. I'm excited to be a part of this conversation.

Elena Aguilar:

Thank you. So Stacey, I want to first acknowledge that in one of our conversations about this content, this podcast series, you said, you're missing something in this series, you're missing some really critical elements. And so I want to actually just invite you to share what it is that you shared with me and your perspectives on what's missing and what we need to dig into more deeply.

Stacey Goodman:

I think we need to talk about how people of color who have been leading this conversation and starting the conversation often are dealing with this and how they are usually the ones who have to either hear something and fill this burden of having to respond. So what do you do when someone says something racist, and the thing that is said is about you or your community?

Elena Aguilar:

And we have an enormous community of BIPOC educators who listen to this podcast and who attend our workshops. And sometimes, I know I specifically talk directly to BIPOC educators in my books, there are sometimes sections. And I also do recognize this is an important conversation, I think not only to address to BIPOC educators or folks listening, but also, I don't know, Stacey, you can tell me what you

think about this, what is the value for White people in hearing this conversation that we are about to have around, what do you say? What do we say when we experience racism? I'm just curious what you think? Are we opening up what is really tender and painful and difficult to the White gays? Or is there value?

Stacey Goodman:

I guess there's a value. I think the difference is that people of color feel like they have no choice and seems that White people often may not notice and are presented a choice of saying something versus not saying something without the feeling that they have something personally or their community has something personally at stake. And so I think that's a huge difference.

I'm assuming that White people often hear things that are said that are racist and can choose to walk away from it without the same level of stress or agitation. But I would like to think that there are times when so much can be said, and having the tools to say it is valuable.

Elena Aguilar:

I think you're also raising what, for me, is perhaps a fear, which is that, yeah, White people have a choice in a sense to say something or not to say something and can walk away, maybe if they didn't say something with a sense of guilt or maybe even shame or regret. Whereas people of color, whether we say something or not, I think we walk away with having had another experience of feeling harmed or hurt. And the cumulative impact of that over the course of a lifetime is a lot.

And so I know there are so many times when I witness something or hear something, whether it feels like an attack on my community or on the communities of folks that I love, that I feel like in those moments, I'm so tired of having to say something. And now I have to say something again. And I'm so exhausted, and I'm so tired of having to say something because it feels so constant. What are your thoughts?

Stacey Goodman:

Yeah. I was in a situation in which I was teaching at a school, and there was a school-wide presentation from a man who had done development work in Africa. And his generalizations, his gross stereotypes of the people of Africa he was working with were really offensive. And I was sitting in the audience of 400, 500 people. I was one of a few African American teachers in a school that was predominantly White.

But I was very grateful when a White female colleague of mine stood up and actually said something to point out the racism in what he was saying to these students. And I was very grateful because I think the content of what she was saying was, first of all, it was taking a burden off of me, feeling like I would have to say something, but also as a Black man, that conversation would've taken on a different dynamic, and there is a more defensive posture that White people might take. So it's not only an issue of whether they're going to have their feelings hurt. It's whether they're going to hear you, once you start opening your mouth. And that's the real danger. They're responding more to your identity. And the threat is not only going to create tension, but it's also closing down any possibility of a conversation. So having an ally step in is often useful. It's unfortunate it has to happen that way, but also it is a bit of a gift sometimes to the people of color who feel like they have to be the ones who have to bring it up.

It's a very typical situation when you are one of a few in a situation like that, there's a pressure to say something when you don't want to. There's pressure to say something when you feel like you have to. There's pressure to represent, but there's also the representation you are being burdened to bring to that community that that can only go so far, because once you truly start challenging the status quo, the

conversation is often shut down. And that experience, it makes you cautious. And it also puts your relationship to the community in a very charged space that makes being one of a few more difficult.

Elena Aguilar:

Yeah. There's so many things I want to pull out and just elevate in what you just shared. I think just going sort of backwards, at the end, you talked about the impact of being the one who names things, calls things out, says something and really what it creates a kind of dynamic or tension or discomfort for you in and the rest of that community, especially when there aren't a whole lot of other people who share your identity markers in that group. And so it's alienating and isolating and lonely.

I also want to just go back to this story that I've heard you share before. And it really stuck with me. There's hundreds of people listening to this expert who's been brought in, who's talking about this project, who's saying really offensive things, and you're thinking, am I going to have to say something? Am I going to have to be the one again? And then your White colleague stands up and says something very clearly about how problematic what this person was saying was. And I want to just name sometimes I think that there is conflict or even confusion for people around, should I say something, or would that be stepping up to try to relieve the discomfort of other people in the room? And so sometimes I wonder about whether your colleague had doubts about whether she should stand up.

I think it is important to acknowledge that when I think about the three Ps, purpose, power and possibility, she did have some positional power in the school. And so as a school leader, there was perhaps even more responsibility on her for saying something, for interrupting what was happening in the moment. But I do just want to acknowledge that sometimes it's worth exploring the difference between being an ally and performative allyship, and even when do you stand up and when do you allow or invite other people to stand up for themselves, and how do you know? It's complicated.

Stacey Goodman:

Yeah, it is complicated. It feels like you have a ticking time bomb in your head, and you can say something after the fact. For example, if that White colleague hadn't stood up and said something, an email could have been sent out and provided some critique of what he said, and that would've had a different impact. It might even had a more powerful impact. It might have prompted another meeting about that conversation. But there is a power to saying something at the moment, and it often feels like when you're in that situation, you're suddenly not in the conversation. You're no longer really hearing what's being said, because you're in your own head thinking about how should I respond? What do I say to respond? How would I feel?

I often think that the simplest calculation I do to figure this out is will I regret not saying something at the moment? And I probably will most often feel some regret if I don't say something. So that has forced me to say things, even when I know it may not be heard, or it may not go over well, or it might create tension. Because I said, well, at least I've gone it off my chest, and I've thrown it back to the person who said it. And if they're agitated or angry with me, then yeah, it can spoil the relationship, but at least it's lightened your burden. And you feel like you have stood in a place of courage that other people before you who've had to deal and say more difficult things.

Elena Aguilar:

I really hear you saying you speak up to say in integrity with yourself. And I think the more we know ourselves and the more we understand what causes us to feel out of alignment with our values, what causes us to feel regrets, the more we constantly, regularly take action to say something. Can you give a

couple of examples of times when you have said something, and maybe those have been in those different levels of power dynamics? So the power dynamics we think about in the second P are power is equally shared, you have more power than someone, someone else has more power than you. Can you think of any examples when you've said something maybe to a boss, to a student, to a colleague, a family member, a friend.

Stacey Goodman:

The one situation I think of most often is one in which I, as a Black man, was at a meeting with two colleagues who were the leaders of the inclusion and equity department at our school. They were a Latinx woman and an Asian man who were very confident in their ability to talk and critique. And I also have to say this, it seems a little bit snide, they both were humanities teachers. And I think humanities teachers assumed that they were better informed about these situations. And I was an art teacher, although a Black man, bringing up something that I thought was nuance in how Whiteness was defined based on where you were. And I was speaking specifically of how Whiteness is seen differently in Latin America and a person from Latin America comes to the United States suddenly is no longer perceived as White very often. And that it's contextual.

And my two colleagues who were the head of this department pushed back at me. And I felt like there was a power dynamic and some authority, well, there was two of them versus one of me, that made me feel a little intimidated. And I also felt like I couldn't find the word to respond. I think I concluded with something like, well, I just disagree. And that feels a little bit sad and a little bit from a position of weakness. But sometimes you just have to close a conversation like that.

Another situation is during a school faculty meeting, a White colleague who had been teaching at that time at the school for more than 20 years, and I had been teaching at the school for fewer than five years, said something. She was a White female teacher. She was a humanities teacher. I was a Black, younger art teacher. And it was in regards to the Civil War and how students should be taught about race. And she said something that played the race card that was provocative.

Elena Aguilar:

Do you think she was saying something racist? Is that the memory?

Stacey Goodman:

That's an important question. I think often it's not that the person is saying something in race. She says something to me that was what I call playing the race card that she would not have said to a White colleague. She used as an analogy, whether White students should be talking about how the Bible constructed racial identity. And my answer was, yes, of course they should be. But she was saying that as a provocation. And I think because she brought in race to a conversation that originally had nothing to do with race, I felt she was saying it to me because I was a Black colleague.

Very often when people say something racist, it's actually rare when people say something explicitly racist that can be called on. But very often what is said is racist by implication, is racist because they're speaking to you in a way that they would not speak to or say the same thing to a White colleague. And that's when you suddenly have to respond in a way that might appear defensive, or a little paranoid, or can always put that White person who you think is saying something offensive in the position of gas lighting you, basically. And people of color often feel like that gas lighting situation is pretty common. So you feel like it's racist, but it's not explicitly racist enough for you to directly respond to it.

Elena Aguilar:

In some ways, this is what makes racism so incredibly insidious and destructive. In an earlier episode, I talked about the continuum of racism, and yes, it might be less common that we directly experience blatant racism in our face. And most of the time things happen that leave us wondering, the restaurant is pretty empty, why were we sat in the back by the bathroom? Or why is the woman working in this store following me around? And so that's the thing. It leaves you always wondering. And it's problematic to say like, oh, this is a microaggression. How micro is it when you experience dozens and dozens of these kinds of experiences all the time, which are sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle messages that you are inferior. You are less than. Your thoughts are not as valid. You are not as competent, as clear, as valuable.

And that's what makes you question your own sanity, question whether you are too sensitive, start looking around and thinking, well, maybe she's following me around because... So you start wanting to assume the best in people, or you start thinking, well, maybe they didn't invite us to their parents' dinner party because we're new, and they just don't know us yet. Or maybe they're responding to our child in this way because..., and you never really know. That is what opens up this whole gas lighting and self doubt.

Although both of us have had the experience of people saying, you're so articulate. Wow, you speak English so well. You're so articulate. I get you speak English so well, and you're so articulate. Stacey just gets, you're so articulate.

Stacey Goodman:

You can respond to things like, yeah, you're pretty articulate too.

Elena Aguilar:

Well, you know what I used to say? You speak English so well. Well, yes, that's because I was born in England.

Stacey Goodman:

I think there's a way of bringing people in while calling them out. And I'm not very good at it, because I think you maybe have a better sense of humor than I might have. I kind of tighten up, become serious and frustrated. And people can take their frustration and criticism and put it in humor. And that kind of can add a little bit of lightness to a harsh critique, like say, oh dude, that's so racist.

When I talked to our 17 year old son, he seems to be in an environment where calling people out on their racism is common enough so that they can do it in the flow of conversation, and it doesn't stop and cause serious crisis. It would be great if we get to the point where calling people out and responding at the time that things are said that are offensive becomes so normalized that it becomes part of a normal conversation, although a contentious one.

Elena Aguilar:

Well, I mean, maybe we can get to the point where it's not contentious. I think we can actually really, and it would be a great benefit to depersonalize this conversation, and there's a difference between what you're saying is racist, and you are a racist, or you are racist. There is a difference. And to me, this comes back to the definition of what is racism and the origins of it and understanding that broader context and understanding that if we think about racism as a toxin, a pollutant, to use Beverly Tatum's analogy, it's like smog in the air, and we've been breathing it in since we were born, and it's in the air.

We have to be really intentional about not breathing it in. If we can look at the way that White supremacy works and the way that it indoctrinates people since they were born through the media and so on and so on, we can understand that it's almost inevitable that everybody's going to be racist. And so when you say, hey dude, that's racist, we could get to the point where like, oh damn, thank you. Yeah, that is racist. I do have some problematic, distorted, dehumanizing notions about this person or that group of people., And I'm so grateful for you for calling my attention to it. And I'm saying all this on a very superficial level. I want to acknowledge that. There's a lot more depth to unpack about what this all means. But I do think that if we can shift the way that we understand what racism is, it doesn't have to be question of your security.

But yeah, I think that's a great example of our son who, by the way, is 18. You said he's 17. He's 18. And I know it's hard.

Stacey Goodman:

You can edit that out.

Elena Aguilar:

No, I know it's very hard to, we're dealing with our son being a senior in high school and not wanting him to grow up. But anyway, he does go to a very progressive independent school in San Francisco. And I know that the school has played a big role in cultivating that kind of community. And it is helpful. And it does seem like our son and maybe some of his friends and maybe more of his generation are also clearer on when they are hearing racism. And that's why I have talked about this before, about you have to know what you're talking about. You have to be able to identify the reflections of racism or the symptoms of White supremacy. You got to be able to know when someone says to a Black man or a Latinx woman or a person of color, oh, you're so articulate, that's racist.

And you got to know why. You have to understand why it is that I'm saying that's racist. And I'm not going to tell you why right now. But if that's something that you're not sure about, yeah, why is that racist then that is an area for you to continue your learning in. Or why is it racist when someone says, this is something else I heard a few days ago, someone said, oh, I've heard that Mexican restaurant is really good, but that part of town is just too shady for me to go to, shady part of town where the Mexican restaurant is. That's a racist statement. That is a coded euphemistic statement about an area of town, a community, which is populated by people of color and correlated with danger. And so if we can get to the point where we're like, oh, hey dude, that's racist. And we can respond with, oh, thank you. Yeah, I need to unpack that. I need to figure this out.

Can I say one more thing? I wanted to go back to just acknowledging I felt sadness when you said some people can be more humorous. They can turn it into something funny. You said something like I start feeling strong emotions is what I interpreted. And I felt sad at that point because I feel like this is this additional burden on us, or at least this is the way you're feeling is not only do you have to be able to not have those kind of emotional responses, which are normal, emotional responses, but then you're supposed to have this additional comic skillset. But that is why we love so many of the BIPOC comics who can take a quick turn and stab at White supremacy when they hear it. But we are not all brilliant comic people. But I felt sad.

Stacey Goodman:

No, you shouldn't feel sad. What a waste.

Elena Aguilar:

I can feel sad if I want to.

Stacey Goodman:

Yeah. You're allowed to feel sad.

Elena Aguilar:

Thank you.

Stacey Goodman:

I think there are ways you can present a response to something racist in a way that, if it can't bring humor, a way that slows down the conversation, if you have time, you could tell a story. You could say, oh, that remind me of something that someone once said. And then by analogy, you can sort of point out that what that person said was racist. And so they can hear you.

Or as Elena has pointed out in earlier conversation, you can respond with a question. And part of that is, and I know this is maybe controversial, is maybe the tone you bring to is like, if you can ask that question in a way that it sounds like you're truly inquisitive and not accusing them of something, then it can help.

But again, it shouldn't be our burden. We should be able to say things the way we want to say them and express emotions that we want to express. But when I think about it, a lot of the emotions I'm feeling at the time is not really because I'm feeling offended or upset about what someone said, but all the emotions of not being sure how I should respond and how it's going to be received. So once I can let that go or have the skills to address and respond to those things that are said, then it might lessen the burden. And I might be able to bring in humor or a clever little anecdote.

Elena Aguilar:

You did say this might be controversial to bring up tone because people of color have been tone policed. And I think we should also say there is more complexity or more nuance. There are some groups of people who are given more permission to use a broader range of tones, and response to certain groups of people's tones of voice is different from others. Black men or Black women who use a tone of voice that is perceived to be angry are going to have a different kind of response perhaps to, I don't know, a Latina woman who is perceived to be angry. There's just a different context. And I just want to acknowledge that. And yes, it is controversial. I think one of the ways that sometimes I can be thoughtful about the tone of voice I use is that I often recognize when someone says something to me that I'm like, whoa, that is racist. And you're talking about me. You're dehumanizing me. I recognize that the intensity of my emotion in that moment is the culmination of a lifetime of experiencing people's perception that I am inferior, less competent, don't belong and so on.

And so I know that sometimes my response can be very intense because it is that reflection of a lifetime. And as I have done my own processing and healing, and I can recognize, okay, so what this person in front of me just said right now that is racism, although they may not think it is racist, this is a person in front of me right now, and I can consider my purpose, whether that is to interrupt or to educate or to build that relationship. And that allows me to find the tone of voice that in that moment feels right to me. And so when I can kind of go through that process, I actually feel more empowered. I'm not using a tone of voice because I'm afraid of how you'll respond. I'm using a tone of voice that feels aligned with my values and my integrity and who I want to be.

Stacey Goodman:

The other situation that might be worth addressing is when you're talking to someone who's unapologetically racist. And when you call them out on their racism, they'll say, well, yeah, that's what I think. Black people don't like to work. They're lazy. Yeah, you can call me racist. It's fine. And I think a surprising number of people are in situations when they go back home, and they have to deal with a parent or a grandparent who says something, and there might not be much you can do or say to change their mind. But I do think that's worth at least not letting it slide and risking being alienated or getting a parent angry with you because you're calling him out on something. And I know a lot of people have been dealing with that, especially in the past 5 to 10 years, as more of these conversations are entering our homes, regardless of our ethnic or racial identity.

Elena Aguilar:

Yeah, again, the kind of things you hear that are along a continuum, and when we're talking about overt unapologetic racism, that requires some different kinds of responses. And actually we have an upcoming episode that I recorded with my teammate, LesLee, where we were talking exactly about that and about the process she went through to make decisions about what to say and how to engage with family who are very overtly racist. And so that is coming up.

Stacey, is there anything else you feel like you want to say or raise before we close up this conversation?

Stacey Goodman:

I think that's it for me. I think there's always something I'll think of later, but we'll keep having the conversation.

Elena Aguilar:

Yeah. I think there's so much to talk about. And I'm just so aware in this podcast series of how many things we haven't really dug into, like Stacey and I have talked about cultural appropriation and how to engage people in a way that doesn't shut them down. And we've talked about antisemitism and where does that fit in? And that's something that I do want to bring in. There's conversations for us to have about people of color making racist comments about other people of color. And there's a lot to explore and to unpack. And I hope that listeners are beginning to compile or add to their list of areas that they need to learn about, that they want to learn about and explore. And some of that will happen through this podcast. And some of it won't because there's just a limit to what can be done.

So Stacey, thank you for having this conversation with me.

Stacey Goodman:

Thank you for having me.

Elena Aguilar:

I always appreciate our conversations, and I hope folks got something out of this.

And thank you for listening. If you have not rated and reviewed us on Apple podcast, we would really appreciate it. And I want to thank LesLee Bickford, who is the podcast producer. And Stacey, at the end of our podcast, I always thank you for doing the sound engineering, and I'm sure you hear that when you do that sound engineering, but thank you for doing the sound engineering.

All right, everyone, take care, and we'll be back next week.

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