But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids

But Why Live: A Discussion About Race and Racism

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[Jane] This is But Why: a Broadcast for Curious Kids. I'm Jane Lindholm.

For eight weeks this spring, we're bringing our podcast to the airwaves for live radio shows in collaboration with Vermont's agency of education. Now, many of you are out of school by now, but we're hoping you're still enjoying having a radio program that is designed just for you, not for the adults. Today, we're going to tackle a topic that's been in the news a lot lately and might be something that your family is talking about more than in the past. We're going to talk about racism and skin color. We're going to learn about the movement and the phrase Black Lives Matter. And we're going to talk about protests and why some people want to change the way police departments and officers work in the United States.

Now, as I said, some of you may be learning about these things for the first time, but for lots of you listening, conversations about race and racism are things you've discussed in your family a lot. Maybe some of you have experiences you'd like to share about how you experience race and racism. We want to talk about the ways that you try to make sure everyone has a fair chance at a good, safe and happy life. So please add your voice to this conversation. We've been getting lots of questions in advance of the show, questions that you have about protests and racism and what racism is. Some really interesting things to go over and discuss here.

And if you haven't had a chance to send us a question. Grab your adult and give us a call. You can also just send an email to questions@butwhykids.org. And we're joined today by two authors who think a lot about how to discuss all kinds of differences, including the way we're all different in our skin colors and her family histories. They have a new book that's actually coming out today. It's called The ABCs of Diversity: Helping Kids (and Ourselves!) Embrace Our Differences. Their names are Joy Harris-Smith and Carolyn Helsel. Thank you both for joining us for this important conversation today.

[Joy and Carolyn] Thanks for having me  Thanks for having us.

[Jane] Yeah, we're really excited to talk with you and really excited to get to the questions that lots of children have been asking us today. But let's start with a question that we got from Tilda, who's three and lives in Wisconsin. And so we should talk about what this holiday is. It's called Juneteenth and Tilda says what is Juneteenth? Why is Juneteenth important? Joy, could you start us off by talking a little bit about this day? Juneteenth.

[Joy] So Juneteenth until probably just to this year, in the midst of all that was going on was a sort of unofficial holiday throughout the U.S. celebrating the liberation of slaves. I mean in particular, as you started to mention earlier it was the last, sort of the people who were in Texas, I believe it was Dallas, in Texas who were finally let go. They were informed that they were free.

[Jane] Yeah. So they were informed that they were free, these slaves in Galveston, Texas, and the people who considered themselves slave owners. This was two and a half years
after the Emancipation Proclamation, which was supposed to free the slaves. And it was even after the end of the civil war. But for kids living today, it may be hard to imagine that there was a time when you couldn't get information at the moment it was happening. In fact, a lot of cases, as we now know, you couldn't even get information within days or weeks. There was no e-mail. There was no Internet, there was no TV.

[Joy and Carolyn] Right

[Jane] And why is it important? And why do you think today in 2020, people are noting Juneteenth perhaps more than they have been in the past, or perhaps especially for families who didn’t celebrate Juneteenth in the past, that this is something that that more Americans are noting as well?

[Joy] I think it’s becoming something because you know it’s right before July 4th. Right? And so, we celebrate this liberty of our country and our freedom, but yet we have these indigenous people who have been here since the country’s inception and who have yet to really experience that freedom and so I think the idea is to try to remind both the country and ourselves that African Americans, people who are descendants of the African diaspora in this country are free have been made free and that is also just as important as celebrating you know the our country July 4th and what that stands for.

[Jane] All right. Well, let's get to two more questions about race and racism. And we're going to as well, talk about some current events. We're going to talk about protests. We have questions about why are there protests happening around the world that seem spurred on by something that happened in the United States, what are people protesting. And we're going to talk more deeply about questions of race and racism and what it means to be anti-racist. Well, let's start with a question from Amanda.

[Amanda] I'm five years old and I'm from El Salvador and I live in Vermont and my question is: “what is racism?”

[Jane] So Amanda says, what is racism? We got this question as well from Tilda, who we heard from before, who’s three and lives in Wisconsin and Will in Wisconsin. And here’s how Elliott frames the same question.

[Elliot] I'm six years old and calling in from Portland, Maine and my question is: “what's the difference from race and racism?”

[Jane] Carolyn, could you start us off by talking about what racism is and what's the difference between race and racism?

[Carolyn] Great question. Racism is the idea that one race is superior to another. And the idea of race is that people, because of different skin colors, are actually part of different groups. Now, this idea is pretty new in the history of humanity We've only had this idea of race as having different groups of people for a few hundred years. And we're realizing that over time this idea changes; but that we're actually only one human race. But because of people wanting to make good reasons for why they were having some people as slaves and made up this idea of race to say: “Oh, it's OK for us to enslave persons who are from Africa because of the color of their skin. So it's an unfair concept to begin with. But, the idea of racism is that the categories that we still put people in still matter; and people still have ideas about whole groups of people just because of the way they look. Just because of the color of their skin.
Let me slow down and ask you to clarify that again Carolyn; because this is something that is a new concept to some adults in addition to some kids; because you hear about race, you can see that people have different color skin and different ways that they look. And you're saying race is kind of a "made up" concept. What do you mean by that?

Yeah, well, all of us have different color of skin. There's something called melanin that makes our skin color different. But if you were to look deep down at the DNA of each of our bodies, each of the tiny cells that make up who we are, you can see that we're all a lot more similar than we are different. And scientists over a hundred years ago were trying to make the argument that people who have different skin color are different races. And they tried looking at people's head sizes and hair color and noses and all sorts of things to try to, again, make this concept of race make sense. But in actuality, nobody can really do that. There's really no difference between people who have different color skin. We're all the same underneath. It's just the way that we look that is different.

We have some other questions coming in that are similar. So let's go to our callers. Ethan is calling in from Burnaby, British Columbia. Hi, Ethan

Hi.

What's your question?

Why are there both black people and white people?

And when you say, why are there both, you mean what? What do you mean by that? Why do some people have darker skin and some people have lighter skin? What are you trying to get at Ethan?

Yeah. Why do some people have darker skin, a lighter skin?

Good question. And I'm going to pair your question with one from Nicolina, who's calling in from Ocean City, New Jersey. Hi, Nicolina. You're on the radio.

Hi.

What's your question?

My question is: "How did we come to have different races?"

Well, thanks for that question, Nicolina. OK. So Joy, Nicolina and Ethan are both asking about this question then of, you know, why do people have different skin colors? And Carolyn was talking a little bit about how we have this idea that people are different races based on their skin colors and sometimes on family background. But how did this come to be and why? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Sure. So some people believe it depends on your sort of belief, in terms of religion. But then it also looks at sort of the history of our world and sort of where people believe civilization began. And then just like we have different cultures and different languages; depending on where you live, the weather is different and my coauthor Carolyn
started to mention, there’s melanin where you live, that affects us all differently. So, where you live in the world, how much sunlight; all of those things impact how we all look on the outside. Where people who tend to live in northern places tend to be lighter in complexion. And as we go closer to the equator and pass the equator sometimes people tend to get darker. So it is important. It has to do with sort of this where you live in the world in addition to the melanin that Carolyn mentioned earlier.

[Jane] Yeah. Tell us a little bit more about melanin Joy.

[Joy] So melanin has to do with again it’s a I believe it I don’t want to say it’s a hormone; but it is a pigment. It happened a dark brown pigment that occurs in the hair and the skin and even the iris of peoples’ eyes. That’s why some people have the very dark brown eyes as opposed to light blue eyes or green eyes or hazel eyes. And it’s based off the exposure to the sunlight. So depending on how much exposure you have to the sunlight, what impact sort of your body’s reaction to the melanin? So, that’s why sometimes when it’s summertime, you’re supposed to wear sunblock to kind of, protect you a little bit from the sun. And so the melanin does a little bit of that as well. But it’s exposure to the sun and the melanin in people’s bodies that produces the color.

[Jane] So everybody, every one has melanin. It’s just some of us produce more melanin than others. And that has an impact on not just what our skin color looks like, but, as you said Joy, our hair and our eyes and other things in our body that can look different from one person to the next.


[Jane] And even within a family can look different. You might look different from your brother or sister. Your skin color might not be exactly the same. You might have hair that looks different, has a different texture or a different color in your eyes may be different.

[Joy] Absolutely. My God, my children are both lighter in complexion than I am noticeably lighter; to the point where people used to wonder whether I was their Mom.

[Jane] So, let’s talk a little bit about something that some children may be hearing about in the news. And, you know, maybe this is something that you’re talking about with your parents and your family and your teachers, but maybe not. So let’s talk about this. So we’ve got a note from Dom. Dom says, I’m eleven years old and I’m black. I live in Eureka, California. So Dom has two questions. And I’m going to ask Dom’s second question first. So Don wants to know about George Floyd. George Floyd, he says: “Why was George Floyd a random black guy who died by police or was there a reason that police would want to kill him?” And Magnus, who lives in Wisconsin and another child named Robbie, also really want to understand why George Floyd was killed by a police officer. Magnus says: “I thought police officers were supposed to help people, not hurt people.” So, let’s talk about this, because this is something that’s really difficult for a lot of people to talk about and think about. And Joy, I can hear you responding to these questions. It sounds like it’s hard for you to think about how children are feeling; thinking about this news to.

[Joy] Well, they’re asking powerful questions. And just to hear, you know, we read, I read through some of them; but just to hear you give them voice now and having heard some of the children’s voices. It’s amazing; because they’re listening. You know. You think that it’s just the adults that are paying attention. No, the children are listening and they’re
paying attention and this is evidence of that. And we have to answer to that. We have to answer to them.

[Jane] Hmm. So what can you say by way of explanation? Because there are a couple of different kinds of explanation when we talk about George Floyd. So one of the things is just to talk about what actually happened to George Floyd. And then, the point of the show today and I think what a lot of people are questioning and a lot of children are trying to wrestle with is, how does the death of one person, how is a history of racism or a country that doesn't always treat people the same based on their skin tone? How does this situation fit in to that historical context? But for people who haven't been following, not all kids know about George Floyd without getting too deep into the details. Joy, can you just tell us what happened?

[Joy] Sure. If I have the most of the facts correct. George Floyd was in a store purchasing something and using money that the clerk believes to be counterfeit and called the police.

[Jane] And counterfeit means fake money. It wasn't made by the government.

[Joy] Yeah, right.

And so the cops arrive and there were about four of them. It was said in one instance that there was some kind of tussle. But it's sort of the, you know, back and forth. But the end result was that one of the officers leaned on or had his knee on George Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. And as a result, he died.

[Jane] Yeah, so that's what happened to George Floyd. And one of the other things we're going to talk about in this program is a lot of protests. There have been a lot of people going out to try to get their voices heard; to talk about racism and to talk about the ways that police often treat people who have darker skin, people based on.. on their skin color. And so, George Floyd was really one of the people who spurred this current movement on because people heard about what Joy is talking about. And it felt so wrong not only to hear about this; but there was a video. And so people have been able to see this. And it really angers people. It makes people incredibly sad because; of course, when one person dies, that is so sad and so awful for that person's family and for everybody who loved him; but also to think about the ways that this is part of a bigger system. And so, we're going to talk about that, too. And so, we need to get into this question of racism. So, we're going to do that in a moment. And if you have questions that you want to share with us that you are grappling with. If you and your family are talking about things and you still think I need another perspective, give us a call or you can send an e-mail to: questions@butwhykids.org We'll be right back.

[Jane] This is But Why: a Broadcast for Curious Kids? I'm Jane Lindholm. Today, we're talking about race and racism. While these issues are always important to discuss, we're having this conversation today because we know that many young people have questions about the things you're hearing in the news and the protests you may be seeing or even joining in your towns and cities. Some of you have experienced racism directed at you, and we're listening to your questions and experiences alongside questions from kids who have not experienced these things.

Our guests today are Joy Harris-Smith and Carolyn Helsel, authors of the book *The ABCs of Diversity: Helping Kids (and Ourselves!) Embrace Our Differences*. Their book is for adults, I think; but Joy and Carolyn are both parents. And I think I hear a kid in the
background, too and they love to tell you about these issues. We like hearing kids. That's the whole point. So, kids, if you have a question, you can give us a call or you can send an e-mail to: questions@butwhykids.org. So, we're talking a little bit about a man named George Floyd who died recently after having a police officer had put his knee on George Floyd's neck and George Floyd couldn't breathe and he died. And so, lots of people have been talking about this and asking questions and thinking about how this man's death fits in to a larger picture in the United States about how we treat people based on their skin color and background. So, Joy was talking about this before the break. And Carolyn, maybe we can double back on Dom’s question about the police. Why would the police want to kill someone like George Floyd. And Magnus, who said I thought police officers were supposed to help people? And Savannah, who says, why are the police being so harsh? Can you help us understand how policing fits into a conversation that we’re having about race?

[Carolyn] Yes, there are a lot of really great police officers out there who are doing their best to keep us safe. But as part of the conversation that we're having across the country now, we're becoming aware that a lot of police officers, instead of helping people with darker skin, actually see them as people who are criminals, instead of keeping them safe. And they treat them with suspicion, which means that sometimes they can hurt them in ways that are not fair because they already assume things about that person, just because of the color of their skin. So, we're trying to see how we can help police officers be better at their jobs. But some people are saying, you know, police officers actually started back at the end of slavery when white people wanted to try to re-enslave people who had been freed. And one of the ways that they did that was to make it illegal for black people just to hang around. Like if, black people didn't have a job; they could send people to arrest them and say “you’re loitering”, which is just hanging out. Which meant that people could be put in jail for doing nothing. And then when they were in jail, they could continue to pick cotton for the jails and for the white people who owned those cotton fields. So, the whole system of policing started when slavery was ending.

And so we’re also having conversations about what does it mean as a as a country to have a police force that continues this long history of putting people with darker skin in prison when they haven't done the things that people say that they're doing. So, we're having a lot of really hard conversations. And I'm so glad kids are asking these hard questions because we as grownups don't know all the answers. But; we're trying to figure these things out ourselves, too.

[Jane] So here are some questions that we've gotten about how and why racism started.

[Max] My name is Max. I'm 6 years old and I'm from Warlingham, NH. How did racism start?

[Mia] Hi my name is Ma. I'm 5 years old. I live in Raleigh, NC. Why did the racism start?

[Pope] Hi my name is Pope. I’m 9 years old and I live in Underhill, Vermont. My question today is: “Where and when did racism start?”

[Rosa] Hi But Why. This is Rosa from Plattsburgh, NY and I want to know: “How did black stained people start getting treated badly?”
Jane: We also got similar questions from a Anora who's seven and lives in Poultney, Vermont and says: "When did black people start being treated badly in the United States?" And Ada in California, who asks too: "Why did racism start?" So, Joy and Carolyn, maybe both of you can tackle this question. But, Joy, why don't we start with you?

Joy: Can you just say it one more time? I was I was listening to, like, all the questions.

Jane: Yeah. I mean, I think that the thing that all of these young people are wondering is; when and how and why did racism start? And we've talked a little bit about this.

Joy: A little bit about it.

Jane: Yeah, about slavery. But just, you know, I think this is a question that that really bothers a lot of people. And if you're young, especially before you've studied a lot of history, it might be baffling. So, yeah. How and how and why?

Joy: Well, I believe that, if I'm not mistaken, it started sort of in a period of history, was known as the Enlightenment. And this is when, I think Carolyn began to mention and talk about, how people wanted to justify the differences between cultures and the differences they found. Because, as you know, they didn't have technology the way that we do today. And so, you know, when people would get in a boat and go somewhere or visit, they would encounter different people and they didn't know that these people existed. And so they began to just, you know, as they started to, you know, conquer and there were wars and different things, they started to try to justify and find reasons for the differences between the groups of people that they came in contact with.

Jane: Yeah. So, Carolyn, to follow up on that, too, you know. We're thinking about this question of racism. And, you know, I'll also say that questions about, you know, people's skin color and how they look are not just about whether you consider yourself black or you consider yourself white. There are lots of different skin colors, lots of different backgrounds that people have. And so, it's not necessarily just a question of black and white; but that is one that that a lot of people are focusing on right now because of the history in this country around black people and around the evolution of slavery in the United States. But what about this idea of "when and how and why racism started"?

Carolyn: I'd like to think about it in ways that kids can understand. If they would imagine if they have another sibling, like a brother or a sister; imagine if you could tell your brother or sister what to do and they would have to do it no matter what. They would follow your commands. They would bring you things. They would do your chores for you. They would pick up your room. They would bring you a sandwich when you wanted. If you had the power to do that and you could, how would that feel? It might feel kind of good. It might feel kind of exciting at first. You might like it. But then after a while, I imagine you might feel a little bit bad about it. You might have some feelings that, well, this isn't fair; that I'm making my brother do all of these things. But because you're so used to your brother doing everything, that feeling of badness you don't act on. Instead, you take that feeling of badness and you put it on your brother. You try to make an excuse for yourself and say, you know, my brother is actually bad and that's why he's he has to do all of my chores. My brother is actually, you know, he's not smart. And so, I'm the one that really has to tell him what to do. So, one way to think about how racism starts is to think about how we feel about ourselves and how we feel about other people. And when we do bad things, sometimes we don't like to feel bad about ourselves. So instead, we put those bad feelings onto others and we think badly about other people in order to make ourselves feel good.
again. So, after slavery and during slavery, as white people enslaved black persons, instead of feeling bad about that, that unfair situation, white people thought black people weren’t smart and they couldn't do things on their own. But they also intentionally made it so that it was harder for black people to get an education or to do things that helped them to feel good about themselves. So, there’s a lot of laws that were passed to make it so that black people weren’t allowed to read or to write or to get together with other people. And then later on, after slavery, there were laws that made it so that black people couldn’t live in white neighborhoods. It made it so that black people had to live only in certain neighborhoods. And because those neighborhoods didn’t have a lot of money, the schools weren’t very good. And so, again, instead of white people feeling bad about the situation of: “Oh, it's not fair for our white kids to have good schools and those black kids to have bad schools”, white people just blamed it on black people. They said, you know, black people just aren’t very smart. And that's why those schools aren't very good. So, you see, it's really complicated. But a lot of it has to do with how we feel about ourselves and the ways that we take out our feelings of feeling bad and put that on to other people and let that be an excuse for really, really unfair situations.

[Jane] Here's a question that we got from Sophia.

[Sophia] I'm eight years old and I live in Chicago, Illinois. My question is; “Does racism exist just all around the world?

[Jane] So, Carolyn, you’re talking about this idea of treating people differently and treating people badly. And Sofia wants to know, does this happen all over? Is this just a U.S. problem?

[Carolyn] Unfortunately, it is a problem all over the world and people who are lighter in skin color, often are given better treatments, in other countries compared to people with darker skin color. And again, it's not very fair. And that's why a lot of the people around the world are protesting after seeing what happened to George Floyd. Because, it's not just something that happens in the US. But, it happens all over the world. And people with darker skin are saying: “We are tired of this and we don’t want you to treat us badly.” And so, people are standing up and saying: “This is wrong”. And then there's a lot of people with lighter skin who are who are seeing that and realizing: “Yes, this is wrong”. So, both people with light skin and darker skin are trying to work together to make the world a better place.

[Jane] Let's just listen to some of the questions that we've been getting from kids here as we head into a break, starting with this one from Nathan.

[Nathan] And I am 4 ½ and I’m calling from Seattle. And my question is: “Why do white people think that racism is Ok?”

[Jane] And Nathan wondering why do white people think that racism is Ok. Here’s another way a lot of you have been phrasing these questions.

[Alice] Hi my name is Alice and I live in Salem, Massachusetts. I'm 8 years old. Why are people racist?

[Larkin] Hi, my name is Larkin and I live in Pacifica, CA. And I'm seven years old. Why are people of color not treated well as white people?
Lori: My name is Lori and I'm from Medford, MA and I'm eight. Why are people with darker color skin treated badly?

Nixon: I am Nixon. I am six years old. I am from Nashville, Tennessee. And my question is, why are black people treated differently than white people?

Faye, who's seven and lives in Alameda, California, says: “Why do some white people think that black people are not as good as them?” Lily is eight. Lily lives in Medford, Massachusetts and wonders why are people with darker colored skin treated badly and why are people with lighter colored hair treated fairly? And here's Max.

Max: I'm nine years old from near Boston. My question is: “Why is there so much racism?”

Jane: Now, lots of kids with so many questions here, wondering about what is racism, why is there racism and what do they do about it? And let's listen to this question next from Jayden.

Jayden: I'm eight years old. My question is: “What is a white privilege?”

Jane: Joy, what is white privilege?

Joy: Wow. It is the ability to, or freedom to be able to kind of move in and throughout society without having to think about or wonder about if you are going to be treated differently; because of the color of your skin. It's not having to give it a thought. You go into the store to buy some candy and you don't have to worry about whether or not someone thinks that you're going to take it without paying for it. So, it's the freedom to move throughout society without ever wondering whether you'll be treated fairly.

Jane: You know, Joy, a lot of adults have been grappling with this concept. A lot of adults who say: “My life is very hard”, you know, “I live below the poverty line. I don't have enough money to feed my family” or “I have had really bad things happen in my life. And when you say I have privilege, that I have maybe a better head start, that doesn't feel right to my life”. So, can you explain that it's not necessarily that your life is easy. It's just right. Your skin color isn't one of the things that is likely to your life harder, right?

Joy: Absolutely. So, you know, to go back even to that example, you know, the person who might be white and says: “You know, yeah, I've had a lot of things happen to me. I'm struggling to pay my bills. How do I have white privilege?” Well, you have it because if you and I both walk into the store. More than likely people are going to follow me. They're not going to care whether or not you have the money, but they're going to question whether or not I do.

Jane: Just because of the color of your skin.

Joy: Just because of the color of my skin.

Jane: Yeah. So that's one concept that I think is something that a lot of people are thinking about. Let's go to Rory, who's calling in from Louisville, Kentucky. Hi, Rory. Nice to talk with you.

Rory: Hi.
Hi. What's your question today?

Why are there protests?

Rory, thanks for the question. So, Carolyn, why are there protests? People may have been watching the news. They can see lots of pictures of protests. Lots of kids may be going to protests. It's also a difficult time to be protesting because we're all very worried about this virus the Corona virus, COVID-19 and how to make sure that we are protesting safely if that's something that we're doing. But maybe you can talk a little bit, Carolyn, about why there are protests right now and what a protest is.

Well, a protest is when a lot of people get together out in the streets. And because, they're out in the streets, there's a lot of people that can see them and can hear them. People might have posters that they carry and they march from one place to another. But, all of these people who are protesting, are saying something's not fair and we want to see change. And protests have been a way that people have used their voices to say to people in power that this is not right. Right now, all the protests are going around the country and around the world because of George Floyds death. But, also because of racism and people being really tired of racism across the world. And so, people are standing up, people who are have darker skin as well as lighter skin. All coming together to say this is not fair and we want to work for a different world.

All right. You said the world. Well, here's what Sam is wondering, which is involving the whole world.

I am 10 years old and I live in Nottingham, NH. I understand why U.S. people are protesting; but why are people around the world protesting?

Yeah. So, Carolyn, if we've been talking about some of the specifics about racism and the way people are treated in the United States, you know, Sam's wondering why are people in other parts of the world protesting right now?

Because everybody around the world who experiences racism is really mad that it's still happening. And seeing the voices of people rise up in protests here, has also encouraged other people around the world to stand up and say: "We want to see change in our country, too." Because everybody wants to be treated fairly. Nobody wants to be treated worse because of the color of their skin. And so, people everywhere around the world who experience racism are saying: "We've had enough. We want this to stop. We want everybody to be treated fairly."

We got a question from Gabe in Virginia. One of Gabe's parents sent us a note along with the question and writes: “My son and daughter listen to your show every day on our drive to school. As a black mother, I'm really happy that you're doing an episode on racism. We live in Richmond and the governor just announced the Robert E. Lee Monument was coming down. This raised a lot of questions for my kids." So, here's how Gabe asks the question.

I'm 6 years old and my question is: why are the Confederate monuments?

So Joy, this Robert E. Lee monument has to do with the Civil War. We've been talking about Juneteenth earlier and the end of slavery. And Robert E. Lee was the
president of the Confederacy. And, you know, Gabe’s question is a good one. Why is there a monument to somebody like Robert E. Lee?

[Joy] Well, I guess at the time, he was heralded as an American, as someone who stood for the beliefs that a lot of people had. And so, they wanted to honor him. And I guess over the years, no one ever questioned or thought about, as we looked at what our country stands for or what we say what our country stands for, questioned why there was this statue of a person who in some ways didn’t really believe that all people were created equal. He wanted to, keep slaves in slavery and he fought to keep it. But no one ever questioned it. And I think that, some people at the time believed that he was a great American and perhaps in some ways he was. But at the same time, as time has gone on, no one has ever questioned why that statue still remained.

[Jane] Let's go to Judd, who's on the line with us from Asheville, NC. Hi, Judd.

[Judd] Hi.

[Jane] What's your question, Judd?

[Judd] My question is: “Why are some police not supporting protests?”

[Joy] Well, the police are known to be, a brotherhood. And so, I think some people, there are police who are joining. Right? They support the protesters. They support the right to protest. But then there are others who probably feel uncomfortable and don't want to be seen as not standing up or being in connection with those people, with the other police officers who are dealing with the ramifications of their actions, or dealing with the consequences of their actions.

[Jane] Carolyn, it's really hard. You know, if you if somebody tells you that you're doing something wrong; even if you can see that what you're doing is wrong or is mean. It doesn't feel good to be told that you're doing something wrong. And sometimes I think that, when we think about this situation with police officers, there's maybe a system that exists in our U.S. system, which we've talked about, that has historically favored people with lighter skin rather than darker skin. So, it's hard to figure out maybe how to say: “Yes, I haven't been doing the right thing.” And so, as Joy said, some police officers are supporting protesters and are calling for changes, but some aren't. And it's difficult to try to figure out maybe how to move forward. How do you advise people who are feeling uncomfortable with this conversation to move forward

[Carolyn] I encourage people to think about why they're feeling uncomfortable and to acknowledge that it is really hard to feel like you've made a mistake or you've been wrong about something. But one of the amazing things about humans is that we can change and we can grow and we can do things differently. One of the reasons why slavery was able to be abolished and ended was because people of all skin colors realized that slavery was wrong and they worked against it. And so even today, people who have maybe not been talking about racism before or didn't realize that it was still a problem; even today, they can still change and they can make a difference. And so, I want to encourage people who do feel uncomfortable to trust that it's a long process; that we can't get rid of racism overnight; but that if they feel uncomfortable, that they can keep having conversations and keep
talking about it and keep learning from one another; because the more we know about each other and the more we share our stories, the more we get excited about being part of one large human family around the world.

[Jane] Let’s go to Beckett. Beckett has been waiting for a long time on the line from Winter Haven, Florida. Hi, Beckett. What are you questioning today? What do you want to talk about?

[Beckett] Why are people still mean to blacks; even though Abraham Lincoln ended slavery so long ago.

[Jane] Beckett, thank you for waiting on the phone line for your question. You know, this is, I think, one that a lot of young people and maybe some adult people wonder too. Like if we know all of this, if we’re having this conversation, why are people still mean to people based on their skin color? Joy or Carolyn, which one of you would like to talk about this?

[Joy] Go for it, Carolyn.

[Carolyn] Well, I think we continue to hear messages. We continue to hear stories that make us think ideas about people. And when you grow up surrounded by people who say bad things about black people, then maybe you start to believe those things, too. So, a lot of people grow up in places where they only hear bad things about black people. And if that’s the only thing you’ve ever heard, then you’re going to think bad things about black people, too. So, it’s really important as you go to school and as you’re in your in your communities and if you go and play sports; that you listen to what people say about black people and if you hear people saying mean things, that you start to question that and say that’s not very nice what you just said about that person.

[Carolyn] And you also, if you think about the things that you learn about in school, who are the heroes that you get to read about? Are you reading about people who are only light skinned? Or you also get to read about heroes who have black skin? Because, the stories that we tell, the stories that we read, the books we read, they can also help us all, change the way that we think about one another. Because, if we’ve only heard bad stories, then we often just make those same bad assumptions.

[Jane] Let’s keep talking about ways that we can take action and make changes. And we have some questions about that. So, Sophia is calling in from Pasadena, California. Hi, Sophia.

[Sophia] Hi.

[Jane] What’s your question?

[Sophia] My question is, how can kids stop racism?

[Jane] Yeah. So, Sophia, you’re asking, how can kids stop racism? Nahara in Becket, MA, you’re asking a similar question, right? What’s your question, Nahara?

[Nahara] How can we help stop racism?

[Jane] Great questions. Joy and Carolyn, this is a good, good way for us to wrap up the hour and talk about what we can do and what we can do as kids. You know, even if we
can't drive, even if we can't vote, even if we don't have all the power in the world, what can young people do right now to stop and end racism? Joy?

[Joy] So, I think one of the things that kids can do; is to stand up for fairness. Most of you know or have a good sense of what is fair, what's right. And, you know, it just may involve beginning to stand up or say something when you see something that might not be right. And then also extending yourself to be a friend to some people who might seem lonely; regardless of what race or ethnicity or religion they might be from. If they seem to be alone at school, introduce yourself and try to be a friend. That may help other people realize that it's OK to have friends who are different from you.

[Jane] And that extends to all kinds of differences?

[Joy] Yes, that extends to all kinds of differences.

[Jane] Carolyn, what would you say?

[Carolyn] I'd also say that even though kids feel like they're either young, I want you also to know that you can make a big difference. A lot of the protests around the country were led by people that aren't much older than you. We had teenagers and people that are in their early 20s and late teens, who are the people who organized some of these major peaceful protests across the country. So, kids just like you, who are a little bit older, are able to make these kinds of differences. And encourage, maybe talk to your parents about writing to your politicians; because racism isn't just about how we treat each other; but it's also about the laws in the ways that our government treats people differently. So, do what you can to help your parents also be politically active in working for more justice society.

[Jane] Joy, do kids who consider themselves white have a different role in ending racism or more of a role maybe than they think they've played in the past, then kids who are darker skinned?

[Joy] I think that everyone still has a role to play. I think that children who are white or come from that background need to recognize the ways in which they have privilege. And so, that's a great discussion to ask your parents or even an adult that you feel comfortable talking with, to better explain what white privilege is.

[Jane] That's Joy Harris-Smith and Carolyn Helsel. They're the authors of the new book just coming out: “The ABCs of Diversity: Helping Kids (and Ourselves!) Embrace Our Differences” Joy and Carolyn, thank you very much for having this conversation with us.

[Joy and Carolyn] Thank you for having us.

[00:46:52] And if you want more resources, we have them from Vermont's agency of education. You'll find them at: Butwhykids.org.