

Structural Racism 101

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SPEAKERS

Clive Nwonka, Peter Coffin, Angie Speaks

00:00

Angie Speaks 00:36

Hi, everybody. Thank you for coming today we are having a discussion about institutional racism, and the media. Today I am joined by my co host of Low Society podcast Peter Coffin. And Dr Clive Nwonka, who is a researcher on institutionalised racism in the media. He also has a book coming out as well. Peter and I are members of the podcaster society and we both make content on YouTube. And I also have a background, working in the media in England here as well so I definitely have a few hot takes about this, about this subject as well. Thank you. Thank you for coming. Would you like to. Does anyone have any opening remarks about the subject. Dr Clive. do you like to open.

Clive Nwonka 01:30

Sure. So, I've been thinking deeply about some of the events of this summer, in Minnesota, George Floyd, and the aftermath of those events in popular culture. And one thing I noticed quite quickly was the admission or the recognition of structural racism within a number of media outlets, which was one of the more surprising expected outcomes of that event, and as someone who studies Film, the Media and media institutions. There's something that I've been tryin to unpick and explore since that moment, which is our contemporary understanding of what structural racism is how its manifest in the media. And this admission that we saw in the immediate aftermath. And I'm coming to the understanding that our ideas with structural racism. And when I say us I mean, those on the receiving end of structural racism and the understanding of structural racism by mainstream media institutions are very, very different, different meanings and also different intentions and manifestations. And that is what I've been trying to explore in my research in conversations with colleagues, and hopefully this evening is the ways I think we should be critiquing the immediate reaction to this phenomenon called structural racism that we're seeing amongst a number of cultural media institutions and what the implications are for the battle against racism.

Angie Speaks 03:19

Thank you for those opening remarks. I definitely agree I definitely saw the conversation kind of get a shot of adrenaline after the George Floyd incident occurred. But I was also quite disturbed by some of the ways the media reacted to the kind of calls for accountability in that regard. It kind of struck me that quite a few kind of entities were using haphazard solutions in order to kind of deflect from, You know the real kind of concerns that people had about structural racism in these institutions either by kind of haphazardly pushing out representation as a kind of a cover for deeper institutional problems, or by kind of making nods to Black Lives Matter or nods to social justice in a very kind of cynical fashion. And also, you know, those there was this kind of, I know that you know Robin de Angelo's book 'White Fragility' came out during that whole period as well and it kind of made the argument that structural racism is about bad people in positions of power. When it's actually about, you know, it's about institutional and historic forces that enact limiting programme on minorities. It has very little to do with the morality quote unquote of individuals it's kind of a system that perpetuates itself. These are kind of the concerns that I've had around, especially around the discourse and and how the media has reacted in this kind of weird haphazard way that oftentimes doesn't have very much in terms of addressing the deeper systemic issues. Peter.

Peter Coffin 05:14

I more or less would just second, all of that.

Angie Speaks 05:22

What do you what do you think, Dr?

Clive Nwonka 05:26

Um, I think I'm interested in your definition of structural racism and how you feel. In certain courses. It represents a kind of system that's been built with institutions of racism because one of the shifts, I'm seeing. In my research, and my thinking is visually around the idea of structural racism as being described by the media at least anyway. As this kind of atmospheric racism and what I mean by atmospheric racism, it's been described to me, what I've seen is a racism, that is born by a pack mentality. Within institutional cultural spaces. Be them in schools, or our legal systems or our cultural institutions, where there is an atmosphere of racism that takes place when people come together in certain areas or certain institutions or public spaces or private spaces even. And all we need to do is dismantle that structure. And that pack mentality and atmosphere and racism is resolved. For me, there's a slight problem and the problem is, it seems to de-individualise, racism, so we can no longer be a good person who is guilty of racial harassment, racial discrimination. And that is the atmospheric quality. There is no accountability for an individual who is guilty, of harassing someone in HR or denying someone opportunities. And in many ways, it's very very predictable. Because, thinking about Stuart Hall the Jamaican cultural theorist, and his idea of incorporation. And he's thinking about hegemonic power, and its ability to incorporate and suppress the oppositional force and make you work through its own agendas. And when we're seeing culture institutions, media institutions who have been guilty of a long legacy of racism, now have begun to use the language of the oppressed, structural racism. We instinctively understand that there will be some modifications to how they understand the language you're using. And the idea of structural racism, I think is a way of de individualising, the complicity and culpability to racism within institutional space. So, I think it's a slightly different take on the way you see things and I think there is also significant implications in there but I am seeing this

cynicism in when inherently racist institutions are now using the language of the challenge to racism and what the implications can be as well.

Peter Coffin 08:16

You in some respects even have a bit of a commodification of the sort of aesthetic of anti racism going on. We see, I mean, you mentioned white fragility Angie, that's, I mean that was a very popular book it did very well. I mean it discusses a systemic racism, but I don't know that it really actually gets down to the nitty gritty of what it even means by systemic I read it twice, actually, and I didn't really. I wasn't really particularly impressed by it we've talked about it on our podcast more than a few times at this point but, um, I guess my question. I had a question in there, I'm thinking, what is in your opinion, as somebody researching this, what is your opinion on where the actual impetus of, sort of, how do we. Okay, so how do we tackle this, who is actually accountable. And, um, what would be, I guess my question is what is the preliminary manner of addressing what we're getting at here.

Clive Nwonka 09:35

I mean, that's such a difficult question to ask.

09:39

I know I apologise for it being a far reaching question, it's one that to my mind was, super important.

Clive Nwonka 09:45

It is, and it becomes harder and harder to do things that were suggested in a question, which uncover and identify the individuals in institutional cultural spaces within the media who are guilty of that racism. And often, we need to put our faith as unreliable as it may be in the law. And the reason why I think the law becomes very important is because I'm really in agreement with what Angie mentioned about some of the methodologies that she saw in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd, which was the idea, of representation. We need more representation. In particular, outlets in the media to remedy what we saw. On that day now. What happened to George Floyd wasn't a lack of diversity. What happened to George Floyd was racism that actually resulted in the loss of his life. Now, it's something very very interesting but also very very lamentable in the idea that a man is killed, for being black, and our instant response, what I call a rapid response and very very classic response in demanding better, more representation in Hollywood, in the media, in people who read our news in the evening, or write our stories in our newspapers Now, those things are very, very important. I've researched for 10 years about these things. My point is, those things are not going to be connected to what happened to George Floyd. Unfortunately, it was a failure of the law. There is something inscribed in that police force that made them think what they're doing is lawful, and they'll be protected, in some way, by the law in their actions. So, I was equally disappointed. We didn't put our faith, and our attention in legal reform Both in the US and in the UK. But equally I can completely understand why this is much more broader than what happened at that moment, but also a long legacy and history and culture and presence of racism in all its forms individual, institutional, cultural, systemic. But I think, a balance of attention. In terms of the response was immediately into thinking about the politics of representation. And I'm not quite sure, that should have been the immediate response at the time. I don't want to labour, an answer, but I use the term of rapid response. What I'm seeing is what I'm saying cultural compensation. Cultural compensation, the methods that power uses often to remedy and respond to demands and

uprising against structural racism. However, defined, food, culture, so we saw very much in the UK but maybe in the US as well. The immediate sharing of black literature on social media. Read your Angie Davis, read those classic texts that talk about race and now those things are really important, but black culture is always in the mainstream a temporary experience. The mainstream is often only interested in black culture, in its value in its promotion in its recognition in the aftermath of moments of racial disquiet, which means it's very very temporary. It doesn't last their attention, which means we cannot put our faith in cultural conversations to be the long term solution to much much bigger problems.

Angie Speaks 13:53

Um, I just I wanted to say quickly just before I continue on the point. I've been asked to shout out the world transformed. org. If you want to see more content. Go there if you want to donate as well. There are also possibilities for you to do that there as well and we also urge you to be civil in the comments as well. That's just a housekeeping I've been asked to do. Back to the point. The part of the reason why I brought up the, the idea that you know institutional racism isn't necessarily tied to the morality of individuals, is also because of my own personal experience, I worked as a literary agents assistant for many years before I started doing YouTube and podcasts and I was damned from the beginning in that regard because of certain backgrounds that one is expected to have it to thrive in those types of industries. The types of people who tend to work in those industries and driving those industries tend to come from certain backgrounds. There are certain social mores in those industries as well, that are as a result of those backgrounds and the types of universities and the types of educational access and all of these different factors play a role as a way of gatekeeping people of colour out of the process, but it also kind of works around class lines as well because I was not from the same class background as the people who I was working with. I was definitely not from the same class backgrounds as the people who I was working for either. And these mechanisms, often they affect, obviously, black and minority people more because we make up a disproportionate amount of the poor and of the working class. And those barriers aren't necessarily there because of the morality of individuals there are historic forces that have kept, gatekept people of colour from being able to gain prominence in certain positions. So I kind of think it's somewhat problematic to lay the blame at the feet of individuals all the time I mean of course there are going to be individual cases of bigotry, but the majority of what I suffered while working in these fields wasn't people being outwardly awful towards me. I was dealing with kind of historic forces, social mores, class expectations. Things that I had gained access to that then became an inhibiting factors for me in those kinds of environments, and it's as if the racism kind of does itself in that regard, it's already kind of this pre built mechanism. And even though a lot of the people who I worked with and for were very quote unquote well meaning white liberals who, you know, read the Angela Davis and you know, we're tweeting woke, woke things every day on Twitter and try their best and we're trying to be really good allies. There was still these institutional barriers in front of me. And a lot of it had to do with these kind of social and societal forces that already acted as a gatekeeper between me and being able to sort of thrive within these institutions. I think that institutionalised racism is, is something that is, it's been perverted in the current discourse. Because a lot of, like I said, a lot of people think that it's about bad people quote unquote in positions of power and if we just replace those bad people with quote unquote good people then things will be better. But there's a, there's an overall issue with the way things are structured in the media to begin with. And these, these forces that I'm talking about also have a lot to do with certain access that black people are denied in society as a whole. In general, that then kind of acts as an impetus for, for us to thrive in in certain environments.

And I guess yeah that's been my, my experience with institutionalised racism and the way that it functions.

Peter Coffin 18:34

I don't have anything to add to that. That was very, well, specific to your experience but I would. So from my perspective is, I had mentioned the sort of commodification a little bit of anti racism as an aesthetic and as an affect. That's kind of for me. You mentioned the sort of perversion of the discussion in the mainstream media and for me that's kind of where we start to see how that happens. My opinion there is specifically that sort of in order to defang what is ultimately a very popular sentiment which is that the police shouldn't be killing on our black people. We sort of turn it into a consumable we sort of turn it into a thing that we can you know imbue and sort of like, purify ourselves or at least feel as though we're taking action that we, you know, we're watching all of the right content on this we're reading all of the right articles and I think this is in line with what you were saying Clive. I think that, you know, we've really, I think that the primary area where a lot of all of we're thinking overlaps is probably in this in the media. The media is handling this because it really wasn't like, hey, so here's the thing. Like this. As far as structurally, we could elucidate how police are structurally racist how there are incentives that are in front of these people to, you know, disregard you know certain. I mean really, it's against the law to kill somebody. But just certain social mores actual laws etc etc. and for me that's kind of that's kind of where I've kept my focus on.

Angie Speaks 20:40

I was just gonna say I also think that I also think that part of the conversation that's obfuscated is the material empowerment of people of colour. You know I live, I just moved to a new place. But I used to live in a kind of shared accommodation with a bunch of people who worked in the media industry as well and I was listening to a zoom call that one of my roommates was on and they work in a very sort of creative field. And it was during the George Floyd incident, it was about a couple I think a week or so after it occurred and, you know, they were all on this zoom call that was mandatory by the company where they were expressing black lives matter sentiments and talking about how the company needed to do better, even though the majority of the white of the people who work at that company, are white and there were no real specifics about how they were going to or no real explorations of the issue of why there was no sort of diverse presence within their company it was more just empty platitudes about Black Lives mattering and about you know the the horrors of racism and obviously it's coming from a place of human concern but there was no real material exploration done to kind of look at why there's this kind of disparity in terms of black kids, usually being able to enter the industries post graduation. And, you know, a lot of it has to do with, you know, the fact that the conversation around material empowerment for black people, whether that be access to education or programmes or resources is often obfuscated by the representation question. That kind of what power uses to obfuscate, the, the need for material intervention, a lot of the time. I remember one of the, I got my literary agency job through a programme that was specifically meant to help BME that's BAME which is like the term in the UK that we use BAME postgraduates to get into media industries and you know it was defunded by the Tory government, and it no longer exists in as much of a meaningful capacity as it used to. There are all kinds of material roadblocks for why black people are underrepresented in the media and I feel like that gets obfuscated through these sort of symbolic gestures, quite frequently.

Clive Nwonka 23:19

I mean, that is one thing I agree with you on holistically. And that speaks to the often conflating questions of anti racism, with questions of diversity, and there is a huge body of research and thinking out there about the ways in which dominant power, often uses this idea of diversity as this kind of demonstration of work consumed progressiveness and responsiveness to anti racist questions obviously we both know just today. The Academy have now announced the diverse city standards based on the UK model, which I've critiqued to respond to what is widely known as structural and systemic racism in Hollywood. And we wait and see what the results from that will be, but that's a classic example of the solution of diversity to the problem, which is racism. Now, you mentioned Peter, the idea the commodification of anti racism, which is something that was overt, across those first few weeks in the aftermath of George Floyd. And if we think about the media as inherently neoliberal institutions. The one thing we know about neoliberalism, it has this very very sophisticated way of incorporating difference between elements of power. And this, to your point, Angie about your class background. Being a crucial and driving factor, alongside your race as well. in your exclusion industry. And from institutions. And even that moment of cultural compensation, where we're seeing this rush. And this rapid response to represent racial difference in previously kind of white and pristine institutions. History tells us, data tells us that often it is those with the most cultural capital, who will succeed and ascend in these institutions, and sometimes very frequently those are interracial questions as well. And the growing and mobile black middle class who often send by virtue of the class background in these particular institutions, which is very acceptable to particularly neoliberal media institutions, as well. And this often creates the kind of cultural spaces that you've experienced, I've experienced as well. So, I think the commodification of anti racism is probably one of the biggest challenges that we on the left are facing now, and how he tried to push back from the the neoliberalization, that is, to me, I think, an area of concern.

Angie Speaks 26:39

I think part of that is because the conversation around racial progress, often creates cross class subjects, which is an issue of course and I mean, we are all neo liberal subjects which is also why I'm kind of sceptical of the idea of a black community that exists. I mean, you know, in the past there was definitely a black community but now we are all atomized neoliberal subjects, and what the black community has really become has become sort of a neoliberal category where it's like I have something in common with Oprah Winfrey because we're black, even though we don't have anything in common because we're not from the same class background at all. And that's kind of why I'm sceptical of how these conversations about anti racism within the media often create this cross class confusion. And I think that a lot of it has to do with just material empowerment and access, those issues are usually the things that act as barriers for people of colour, being able to find empowerment, empowerment on their own terms empowerment that isn't just like a gilded cage of Oh, here you will be the perfect kind of neoliberal subject representation of your demographic. However, you have to do that on our terms, I think, I think that it kind of reminds me of, you know, the 1990s when Britpop was like a huge thing. And part of the reason why this huge boom in music and culture was because there were grants that were being given out from the government to, you know, the young entrepreneur, I forget what it was, it was like some weird like leftover from the Thatcher era thing but you saw a lot of young musicians and comedians and, you know, taking advantage of that like little tiny bit of material access that they had, then enabled them to, you know, do things like have a band or do things like spend time making music

or spend time, you know, pursuing creativity in that regard and, you know, that was a big cultural kind of boom from that, where you had music coming from, you know, members of the working class members of a class that oftentimes doesn't have the time to, you know, you have to have that kind of access.

Peter Coffin 29:03

So Clive, anything to add to that.

Clive Nwonka 29:50

Um, I mean, I'm in agreement with that and just thinking a bit more specifically around structural racism. In the aftermath of George Floyd. And this recognition. I think one of the key things that I'm observing which kind of ties with your point around the commodification of anti racism, is use of language, and I kind of mentioned this already in regard to using structural racism what it means to different people by institutions, but certainly in the UK context, we saw in that rapid response. Institutions, such as Channel 4 or the BBC or by others saying we are inherently anti racist organisation. Now, I don't remember any moment prior to this summer, where you've heard any public institution, use the word racism or anti racism within their practices.

Peter Coffin 30:54

Particularly anti racism if there's some racial concern I've always noticed, they've attempted to stay in the area of diversity, because generally a diversity concern rather than a race racism concern or racial.

Clive Nwonka 31:09

Or representation. Which is a very very euphemistic way of talking the same thing. Because what that does is seems to suggest to us that. What happens in the institutional space is simply against atmospheric haphazard arising of the exclusions exclusion of particular people on the lines of race or class, or gender or other things as well. And it denies the reality that things are brought into being. Okay racism is performed representation is performed by decision making by individuals by pack mentalities. So, that shift dramatic shift in language from diversity representation and under representation sorry to structural, and anti-racism, I think there's a key shift that we saw in that period of time. Then the implications of that for me. I'm not convinced by the ability of the mentioned organisations to unthink and rethink that legacy of racism within the period days in the aftermath of George Floyd, because in the UK, we have devised institutionally a language and practice of anti racism. That we write in legislation, what we have as you all know, is a language of diversity and inclusion. We haven't got that instinctive practice of what anti racism looks like. So, what we then descend into instinctively is our native indigenous practice, which is more diverse inventing a greater representation in the fields, the bizarre edge and surface level image of racial and cultural and gender difference. That is the key shift that I'm identifying key which really maps on to your point around the quantification of anti racism, which is also in my understanding the bulk recognition of racism, without doing deep, deep analysis. What that means, how it manifests. What is this impact on those living on the cutting edge of structural racism that takes a generation that isn't an awakening that takes place within a matter of days. That's why we need to retain a scepticism and cynicism. In the months afterwards, and see we're really convinced that those institutions and organisations have done that, deep thinking through what structural racism means and how it impacts those live on the cutting edge of it as well.

Peter Coffin 34:08

For sure. Like, obviously just adding, you know, a fist into your avatar on Twitter for your brand account isn't. It's of course not, antiracism, but that's, I mean, I mean that's been the extent of what a lot of the public facing entities have done. And I do want to, it's performed on, on, you know the basis that I do agree with you like racism is absolutely something that is performed it's a, it's a, an action that requires participation and it does require that participation, but I also, I wonder what your opinion on like the incentivization of it sort of is like how you know structurally when we're talking about you know why racism arose like the current form of racism. What we characterise as race and as sort of a descendant of race science which was sort of an ideological obviously not real science it's a pseudo science justification for slavery in the United States and ultimately, you know, in other places in the world as well. And I think that a lot of a lot of what we, what we deal with as far as you know where these things are coming from institutionally are. I think that it is sort of a descendant of the need to justify you know some form of exploitation. Obviously, we're talking, you know, slavery we're talking, you know people after the slaves were free we're all talking about the fact that, you know, people don't have the Institute, or it's not necessarily institutional but they don't necessarily have the resources to enact any form of class mobility, because they're, they're coming from literally nothing they were slaves they were free and oh my god why can't they achieve the American dream. Um, I think to some extent. There is a sort of like incentivization that keeps people performing these things and I'd be curious to think, curious to ask what you think of that. Or exactly like what kinds of where that, like, more or less, not just like simply like what do you think the incentive is but you know kind of how that that role plays in this.

Clive Nwonka 36:45

So, when we say the incentivization, of racism, within a institutional cultural space to think about the media. I mean, I can't help thinking about Cedric Robinson and his kind of classic critique of racial capitalism, to the kind of different manifestations of it that we're kind of grappling with now. And in many ways, Angie's kind of spoken to some of them. Yeah, to the ability of neoliberalism to stratify racism on class lines. In terms of the, I think for me, thinking about the media. What incentivizes racism is, it's denial in a very paradoxical way. The absence of analysis, or recognition of racism, the kind of analytic injustice that black and brown people experience within institutions is often I think the incentive for the continuation of racism within institutional cultures, be that on screen stereotypes of black and brown people. The absence of black and brown people in the key decision making roles within how the media is constructed, and the kind of structural racism that Angie and many people have been describing in the last few months in the aftermath of George Floyd, I think. Absence is often the incentive, the absence of discussion. The absence of recognition. And what we've seen now in the last few months is. I want to be. I want to be convinced that many institutions have now recognised the modes, and forms, in which they have denigrated and destroyed and discriminated against, black and brown people. But it's always in a fine balance within the need to deny. Right. In order to maintain a kind of status quo, where blackness, brownness is always a negated identity within these spaces. So, I'm not quite sure of the answer your question directly but I think for me, the lack of willingness to acknowledge and identify is another way of sustaining the kind of racism we've seen.

Angie Speaks 39:15

I would argue that these institutions are not incentivized to do this sort of examination. I mean, if we're going to talk about racism, as a general concept. It's a justifying ideology, one that's been created in order to kind of create an underclass of people to exploit, The conception of racism in the first place was, you know, it wasn't just for the creation of white supremacy, it was, in order to extract labour for things like sugar, cotton and all of the other things that, you know, were part of the economic extraction of chattel slavery. And the racism that still persists in our society acts upon this justifying ideology in order to just sort of continue to perpetuate the class division between specific people, and the ruling hegemonic, kind of, you know, elite in that regard. And I don't think that these institutions are incentivized to do this kind of examination, that you're talking about, they're incentivized, especially because they're near liberal institutions they're incentivized to maintain the status, a status quo, one that suits their, their aims and one that continues to perpetuate these mores. And that's when I, that's why I mentioned the concept of cross class subjects because through representation that's what occurs. They create cross class subjects, people that you know the larger poor and working class, black community are supposed to quote unquote identify with because of this amorphous category of race, when there is obvious class contradictions. Beneath that form of affiliation. Um, and I mean, the media, the things that the media perpetuates these hegemonic ideologies about race, whether it be essentialism or, you know, the idea of putting out bad images or exclusion even, all, all kinds of work to continue to perpetuate the standards that have been used to oppress people of colour in society, which is part of the reason why I feel like there just isn't a real incentive for these, these institutions to really examine what the issues are. And I mean obviously there's quite a lot of pressure for them to sort of show that they are but I don't think that there is any real incentive for them to really dig down deep into the structural issues. When it's so easy for them to make these kind of tepid symbolic nods to the issue and kind of have the problem go away. I mean, there's an entire diversity industry that exists. I mean, Robyn D'Angelo the writer of white fragility makes millions of dollars from, you know, going to do diversity talks at you know these different companies, you know, getting paid thousands, or 10s of thousands of dollars for, you know, her sharing her opinions on anti racism so the company can then have this symbolic kind of like look we did the anti racism thing like you know we're not the bad guys like we paid someone to pay someone \$10,000 to come give a talk about diversity. You know, there's an entire industry around this sort of thing I mean even within Hollywood the diversity writer and all of these different forms of things that have kind of it's kind of a way of the professional managerial class, managing the problem of racism of institutional racism in that regard. Kind of finding these managerial strategies to deal with like these very deep systemic problems that don't just end with the media but are issues in our society as a whole and have a lot to do with the material disempowerment of people of colour. So I feel like if we want to really get to the bones of this issue we have to kind of, you know, not allow these distractions to obfuscate conversations about real things that are going to make a difference in the lives of poor and working class people of colour real things that are going to be able to give us access in that regard, you know, decent education programmes ability to the ability to kind of have access to the knowledge and information of technologies that allow you to thrive in certain industries as well because that's another thing that kind of gatekeeps. You know there are plenty of material things that these companies would be doing if they actually cared about trying to kind of create diversity that isn't just sort of this sort of tepid nod to to the issue. Have I killed the conversation?

Peter Coffin 44:26

I'm thinking.

Angie Speaks 44:32

I mean, I mean like I remember like I was listening in on the zoom call and the person, my flatmate, where he they work in like the audio field and you know the company was sort of talking about, you know, not having enough diversity and this and that and blah blah blah. But the thing is, how many graduates, because obviously you have to have a specific educational background to be even considered for the position. How many graduates are coming out of those programmes that are people of colour, how many are people of colour, how can we, you know, how can we sort of look at the roots of these issues in that regard because there are all kinds of barriers that don't just start with the institutions themselves. It is kind of this thing in society as a whole, which is my point, I guess.

Peter Coffin 45:25

Yeah. And then you ultimately have to ask the question, you know if racism is a justifying ideology. What is it, justifying. And currently, because I mean, the question of going back we can answer I think a lot easier. But currently, what is what is racism as a justifying ideology justifying, is it necessarily a, an entirely. What's the word tangible like material thing or is it the ramifications of a historical process. Yeah, I would argue that it very much is that like you put lots of people at a specific disadvantage materially speaking, and you end up with. As Angie put it an underclass, and you sort of need to have the ability to say all right well our society functions, our society there's a reason for you to be emotionally invested in the status quo, that you're going to defend and you're going to deny the existence of these types of things. What are your thoughts on on that sort of an aspect of it ideologically speaking. What are your thoughts on on sort of how this how this ideology is disseminated, do you have any thoughts on that.

Clive Nwonka 46:57

I mean, you guys kind of put it very nicely yourself as I listen to you can speak I think the material aspect of racism is critically important. And I can't help thinking about the response and methodologies, people are now using, to try and unpick, or even manage those manifestations. Yeah, you mentioned, because one of the things that I've observed is this, I wouldn't call it a new phenomenon, but it's a heightened methodology, which is an anti racist training or unconscious bias I mean or racial awareness training, and the more insidious things that we can absorb in mass institutionalise,d a kind of genre of anti racist work. And then, one of the things I thought about in this was that iconic image during the far right riots earlier on this summer of a black man carrying one of the racists out from being ambushed in to safety in to the arms of the police. Now that became the iconography for weeks of that of that moment. Now, thinking about that in the context of anti racist training, there are a lot of people saying, well, maybe that person will kind of rethink or unthink his racism given that he's been saved by a black person from being lacerated. Now me thinking about questions of social justice. I would rather kind of see that person in prison for his crimes and for his racism. Now, if in that period of time, he begins to unthink or rethink his racism obviously that's fantastic but do it in prison. So there is, I think, a social justice question to be cynical about do we try to reform people's thinking around racism or do we try and get justice when it is acceptable to black people and minorities and their notions of safety. Because the ability to rethink or unthink racism or unconscious bias training is a very very long and slow process. Where as justice on the other hand, should be a very very rapid response within reason. And that was the two modalities that mean we were grappling with in our aftermath response to your

kind of guess broader question is, what is acceptable to people. They want to come in which racism. Is it the idea of unconscious bias training and uplifting society, on mass, or is it the idea of an explicit justice, what is acceptable to people, of course, let's not assume a homogenous population you think the same. My response may be different to Angie's among other people as well. But there is something that I found particularly displeasing at some level, about this idea of unconscious bias training, being the solution to racism. Angie thoughts?

Angie Speaks 50:22

I definitely agree I think it comes down again to material empowerment. Part of my problem with the unconscious bias training that sorts of in vogue among the corporate kind of world, is the fact that there's something, you know, innately, you know, insidious about people who are in a position of power over you as a worker rooting around in your psychology, there's a power imbalance there. As you know, the owner of capital, a member of the owning class, and somebody who works to create profit for them, then having their psychology rooted into by their boss, um, that that kind of has a bit of a weirdness to it that makes me uncomfortable and again mostly, most of the time. It's about liability for the company it's not necessarily about, you know, trying to improve society. And secondly, the reason why I bring it back to material empowerment is, if I was materially empowered, as a black person if I also had due course in my workplace that wasn't just HR. HR is there to protect the company it's not there to protect anybody, but if I had due recourse in my workplace, if I was materially empowered, you know, if I was able to have self determination in that regard. Then, I wouldn't really care about what anyone's unconscious biases anyway, because I'd be able to do my job, and I'd be able to be materially empowered in that regard. That's their, you know, headache, but the fact of the matter is the reason that they have their unconscious biases have impact is because of their institutional position of privilege, my lack of material empowerment and my lack of due recourse. And I would rather address, my life of material disempowerment, and my lack of due recourse in the workplace than start rooting around in people's psychology. That's their business, and everybody has some form of unconscious bias. We live in a society that programmes you to have some kind of unconscious bias, even other black people have unconscious bias. You know I was, I was talking to my, my grandmother about it recently, we were out in London and she crossed the street because a young black man was walking past her, and you know she had nice jewellery and she, you know, has horror stories about England and this and that and bla bla bla, and even she has the unconscious bias as an elderly black woman because that was what she was taught, growing up those are the images that she saw growing up. So I don't think that rooting around inside people's psychology is the answer I think that dealing with the material issues that result, and allow those unconscious biases to have any kind of power is what we should really be focusing on as the left. I think that corporate diversity training is incredibly pernicious and I also think that it's something that ends up creating more problems, and more division and hostility and more resentment among people who otherwise as workers have more in common with each other than they do with the owning class, which is why I kind of, I find that kind of thing very very pernicious.

Peter Coffin 53:48

I would say, I have another thing to maybe ask about here. My thought is, I mean the idea that, let's say, I mean obviously in the way that the system works right now we can't really totally like topple the sort of the way that justice is applied. I mean, we can ask a question like what is justice, what what are we, attempting to accomplish with justice. But I'm, I have my thought is I'm a little bit inherently

suspicious with trusting the law to sort of, sort out anti racism when the law has also kind of like the people who enforce the law currently or were, you know, when the George Floyd type incident like they're the instigators of that incident they're, they're repeatedly sort of in the driver's seat so to speak with this type of thing and I do understand how if we were to take these types out of the general populace. And perhaps inprison them. I mean that that at least stops that person from doing it but I'm curious as to how specifically that addresses it systemically because the system itself. The, the police themselves are there they're actors within, they're moving parts, they're part of a whole there. And if we're ultimately trusting the law. I'm curious, being that they're the enforcers of the law that are enacting the sort of atrocities that we're talking about here. I'm curious, how do we move forward from the perspective of, Hey, you know we leveraged the law against these people when they're in fact the people who are supposed to be enacting those laws.

Clive Nwonka 55:51

Yeah, I'm with you, and I do share trepidation with that as well. And I'm trying to think for a moment in a much more broader global anti racist struggle, then the north atlantic projects or the kind of UK projects as well, because laws, of course, are kind of bound up in notions of democracy. Which mean different things to different regions of different people. What is lawful in the states is obviously different in the UK will be different in South Africa will be different in other nations as well. So, I do share that scepticism. That we can put too much faith in the very legal institutions that have for decades and decades and decades perpetuated the very racism we're criticising.

Peter Coffin 56:42

They're the actors, they're the people doing this so to speak.

Clive Nwonka 56:47

And that does create a conundrum. A problem, thinking about, again, a global anti racist movements that has due regard for different understandings and conceptions of what is legal and what isn't. What is democracy what isn't. That's a huge challenge and I haven't got the answer to that.

Peter Coffin 57:14

No one person is gonna sell.

Clive Nwonka 57:17

But it's a important for further discussion both online and offline, is how does one sustain a question of a global racial justice agenda. When at some level. I want to kind of put up, faith in the legal system has done so much damage to us.

Peter Coffin 57:41

Yeah, that I mean that's kind of. That's what I'm really, I like that's where I have a bit of a hang up on this idea because observing these incidents repeat over and I mean we literally deal with, you know, we see a media hype, at least for, and obviously it's not an entirely genuine media hype on account they do a lot to minimise certain aspects of it. But we end up seeing this same cycle go over and over and and for me it's it's. I feel as though there needs to be some kind of large scale change that. That is maybe not like we need some form of I think populist movement oriented around this and I would say

that obviously BLM is a manifestation of that sentiment, but ultimately we're, we're kind of seeing it defanged by again to go back to the media representations and the commodification of anti racism, they've sort of the media has managed to sort of redefine what BLM is in some respects, or perhaps create a sort of spectacular. They're allowed their own their check them check here as to what, you know, these sentiments can ultimately lead to. It was abolish the police at the start it turned into defund the police pretty quickly I think because the media characterise the idea of abolishing the police in a certain way. And I'm not necessarily saying that abolishing the police is possible or even something that necessarily everybody wants. But, I mean, that's an instance of what is more or less a radical demand being, you know dumbed down into a more in system, what's possible today or tomorrow type demand which ultimately like in some respects may even not necessarily be helpful at all if we defund the police we create maybe a power vacuum instead of, you know, addressing some form of systemic thing and I ultimately I think I'm going around in circles in here a little bit and I apologise for that but yeah I ultimately I find that when we're. It does what like, to what extent are we are we, you know, signing our own death warrant by, by taking the same type of systemic, you know, putting our trust in the system and to what extent are we bound to it, I guess that's that's. I'm sure a balance that, not one of us is going to be able to come up with like an actual like you do 60 40, or something like that but, yeah, that's my that's my concern. Yeah, go ahead.

Angie Speaks 1:00:34

I definitely think that my major concern is how conversations about anti racism now seem to be doing the job that racism once did. In the sense that it creates essential categories, it obfuscates the material conditions that black people are currently facing. It also kind of creates an avenue for cross class subjects to hijack the conversation in that regard. And it also justifies the poor material conditions that black people are under by using symbolic kind of gestures to obfuscate the problem. I think that we need to radically think the way that anti racism functions, the language around anti racism, the demands of anti racism. I think we also need to radically rethink the idea of a black community in that regard because we are all neo liberal atomized subjects, you know, back in the day, the black community existed very much, there was the church. There were different activist organisations that were you know all kinds of different places in the real kind of collective space where the black community operated, and was legitimate, but now you know we're now seeing the black community being atomised by neoliberalism in the way that everybody's atomised by neoliberalism. And by the neoliberal mode. And now when you think black community, you're thinking digital spaces or characteristics that you have, arbitrary characteristics that you have in common with cross class subjects, a lot of the time, you know, black Twitter being, you know, that kind of space, you know, black celebrities and the sort of position that they occupy politically within this sort of black consciousness. I think that there are a lot of things that we need to radically rethink in order for the goals of anti racism. And for the goals of, you know, general working class solidarity and people being lifted out of poverty and you know the goals of the left to manifest themselves, because right now we're up against something incredibly formidable, and something incredibly insidious that's kind of able to derail all of that kind of energy into what then ends up becoming something that atomizes us and something that kind of devolves into the logic of neoliberalism which is market logic the marketization of all aspects of life, signifiers, um, you know spectacle all of these all of these different aspects kind of end up obfuscating the real, some of the real material issues that that black people are facing. I mean, George

Floyd. The reason that they, you know pounced on him in the first place is because he was, he wasn't he like forging checks for \$20, who has to do that: poor people.

Peter Coffin 1:03:44

Yeah, exactly. There's a counterfeit \$20 bill I think he was trying to pass.

Angie Speaks 1:03:48

Yeah. Yeah, the majority of the people who have been who are picked on by police. The majority of the black people who are assailed by the police, the majority of the black, who have been killed and lost their lives are people who also were dealing with major economic major economic deprivation and that economic deprivation is then exploited through the racism that we suffer like the places where you see the highest police presence in London for instance are usually in poor neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods that are low income, you won't go to Kensington and see police officers, you know, literally around the blocks, but I was in, I was in Kilburn yesterday and there was a huge police presence and yeah Kilburn has a lot of black people who live there, but it's also quite a multi cultural part of London, and the poverty is what leaves, people vulnerable the lack of economic access the lack of access to decent quality of life is what leaves people vulnerable to these kinds of, you know, attacks on their life and attacks on their humanity and attacks on their ability to thrive and be normal I feel like as the left one of our primary objectives. I don't I can't even believe I have to say this in 2020, but it kind of does seem as if the left has sort of lost its way a little bit but our primary objective should be to empower people materially, and to. And I feel like so much of that fervour for material empowerment, you know, gets lost in the mire I mean, there's no anti racist movement of the past that believes that the goal of anri racism could be achieved under capitalism, it's the reason why people like Martin Luther King were socialists, the reason why you know, that was a deep, anti capitalist sentiment within these movements because the goals of anti racism are deeply at odds with the goals of the current system as it exists right now, and I feel like a lot of what we're seeing is people trying to manage the problem of anti racism within the current systemic paradigm. And that runs into a lot of of tension and issues and I feel like it's a conversation that's largely obfuscated because of this kind of rigidly constructed neoliberal identity politics that has kind of over overridden the conversation about anti racism within the quote unquote black community and in also other communities too. But yeah, I guess that's how I see it. We've been here for an hour now So do you have any closing remarks, is there anything that anyone wants to say in order to kind of close out the conversation and you know put, or to respond or anything.

Clive Nwonka 1:06:52

Um, well just very briefly, um, I think, for me, as someone who studies the media. Which kind of ties on both the points you're making, I'll be brief is this idea of the commodification of anti racism and its manifestation in the media. And one term cultural compensation. I'm thinking, those two things are, or will interact in very powerful ways to degrade what is possible for the anti racist movement and us thinking very sceptical about putting our faith, not just in the law but even in the media to be the response and solution to these problems and obviously one manifestation is diversity that you can see more and more. As a result, I think it's a time now where we can push back against the fallacies I think that just come in that model or industry, or genre, because those things to me are not indexed to a truly anti racist practice.

Angie Speaks 1:08:04

Thank you very much.

Peter Coffin 1:08:09

I more or less agree with i like i think i do think that there is definite need for more scepticism, particularly in areas on the left, that you know are sort of. I think there's a little bit too much acceptance from the media narratives that we were seeing I think that the left has, you know, you see the x company say like, you know, x slogan I don't want to say any specific slogan because I don't want to. I don't want to imply that I'm against any of these slogans but you end up getting a lot of people who just sort of accept that and like yeah, we're doing this, we're we're along those were along the lines of that like they, they were using the reusing images, they see there, and it is it's a scepticism in these institutions that ultimately like we do need to be putting forward I very much agree with that i think scepticism in the law scepticism in the media scepticism in all of this. And I think to Angie's points the best things that we could be trying to do in order to unite people across these types of anti racism movements is ultimately exactly what she's saying what what can we do to materially empower people of colour, particularly people of colour of working class, and ultimately like you know those things actually do. They create cross racial solidarity because they aren't necessarily just the interests of people of colour however they disproportionately help people with colour. So in some respects, I think that that's something that we could be doing a little bit more of as well the solidarity aspects of it. Yeah, I think that there's a lot in common with everything we've all been saying today and I think obviously there's there's some areas I think that anybody is going to, you know, find some difference some disagreement, but ultimately scepticism solidarity, that's that's the way to go.

Angie Speaks 1:10:20

I definitely agree that anti racism is a universal fight. I also one of the areas that I have tension for me has definitely been, the way that the conversation has been like, essentialised and racialized in a way that makes it seem as if it's only you know a thing that affects those people those racialized that the racialized other basically over that. I definitely agree with your point that antiracism is a universal struggle, and I feel like, again, a lot of the movements of movements of the past around that were centred around antiracism understood racism, or at least grew to later on understand racism and anti racism is a universal struggle. And I think the more people see that the better it is. And the more it becomes less about racialized other, quote unquote, ally, the more the more the more kind of energy that we will have around, around these, these causes,

Peter Coffin 1:11:23

Helping our fellow human beings, is a good thing.

Angie Speaks 1:11:30

So, any any last words anything. All right. Thank you guys in the audience very much for listening to this chat, I had a really great time we all had a really great time talking to you thank you for all of your comments. Sorry that we didn't have time to get to questions but we hope you enjoyed it. Thank you very much, Dr Clive. We really appreciate you being here. Thank you Peter I guess even though I'm going to see you later on anyway. And you, thank you to everyone in the audience, and thank you to take you to the world transformed for, for having, allowing us giving us the platform to have this

discussion. Do visit the website, do you make a donation if you're able to, that definitely helps out. Thank you very much, and we shall chat to you later. Goodbye.