

# Explaining Why Black Lives Matter To My White Child

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Recently, I had to explain the "Black Lives Matter" movement to my daughter. She had heard her mother and me talking about the protests across the country. She didn't understand why people were protesting, and, like many who don't understand, she asked a version of the question, "Don't all lives matter?"

Her question was not rhetorical but sincere. As some context, we are white. My daughter is 7, and her two best friends are both people of color. One is African American and the other is South American. My daughter simply couldn't understand why any of them would matter less or more than the others.

In addition, this year she learned about Martin Luther King Jr. She wants to be like him when she grows up. She believes that he fixed the problem of racism. Like many other well-intentioned white Americans, this is easy for her to believe. We don't experience the racism and bias suffered by people of color, and because we and our friends are not racists, from her perspective, it doesn't seem to exist.

This belief in a post-racial society is central to the criticism of the "Black Lives Matter" movement and begins with the assumption that our social and political institutions treat all citizens equally. Sadly, this is not the reality.

The racism against which the Black Lives Matter movement is reacting is systemic and clandestine, not overt. Bias lies in the application of the law and the various myths we tell ourselves about equality of opportunity and the fairness of the distribution of resources.

A mistake made by those critical of the Black Lives Matter movement is to confuse this effort to raise consciousness about systemic injustice with a critique of police — not the criminal justice system, but police officers themselves. These are separate objects of concern.

There are "bad cops," but they are the exception, just as there are those who would use the Black Lives Matter movement as cover for their own violent agendas. One need not be critical of the vast majority of police officers who do their jobs with the best of intentions to recognize the deeper problem, one found in the underlying norms and expectations of our social and political institutions.

So, why "Black Lives Matter"? The answer begins with the uncontroversial belief — the same one my daughter started with and the same one that has been used as the rhetorical response by those who oppose the Black Lives Matter movement — that all lives matter.

Implicit in the idea that all lives matter is that they all matter equally, and today, that is clearly still not the case. In the end, I told my daughter that "Black Lives Matter" should be said, because — as disappointing as this may be — it needs to be said.

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