

*Under stay-at-home orders, a tradition spread from one Brunswick office to another: At day's end, a colleague sends a short essay to his or her working-from-home office mates. The Review is selecting a few to share with a larger audience. On July 10, Hayley Singleton, an Executive Assistant, shared this with her New York colleagues.*



## “Too Black & Not Black Enough”

**A**S A WOMAN OF MIXED RACE I AM IN THE unique position of existing in two worlds. I am consistently both too Black and not Black enough, living in an ambiguous middle ground between two often opposing communities. I am not Black enough to seem threatening to my white neighbors, but I am Black enough to be told by a high school classmate that I only got into a prestigious college over him because of Affirmative Action. Since George Floyd's death, my Black friends speak to me of our shared anger and fear. We are Black together. My white family and neighbors feel comfortable talking to me about how rioting isn't the right way to protest. “It's horrible what happened to George Floyd,” they say, before qualifying and justifying his death with “but...” We are white together.

To many of the white people in my life, I am a more palatable kind of Black, so much so that they are able to forget my Blackness because it doesn't align with their stereotypes of it. I grew up in a suburb, I work in corporate America, I'm a nerd that loves Russian literature and *The Lord of the Rings*. I am not like the “other” Black people by whom they feel threatened. My kind of Blackness is comfortable enough for my white family and friends to use my existence in their lives as proof they are not racist. None of this is new

Brunswick's  
**HAYLEY SINGLETON**,  
a woman of mixed race, reflects on the conversations, judgments and perspective that come with “existing in two worlds.”

to me, nor is ignorant commentary by well-meaning people new to any person of color. My boss at my last job spoke proudly of how she didn't see me as Black but as a person, as if the two were mutually exclusive. I have been asked by strangers more times than I can count “what are you?” as if I am some fascinating new species they've discovered, as if my non-whiteness is a curiosity they are entitled to examine. This isn't new, yet the comfort of white people justifying casual racism to me, at a time when the racial divide in our country is so stark, puts me in a particularly uncomfortable position.

The way I see it, our problem isn't hate so much as it is willful ignorance. It is a society desperately clinging to the fantasy of a utopian post-racial world because to acknowledge racial inequality is to accept culpability. So instead we relegate the concept of racism to the arms of Jim Crow and pretend we've left it far behind. What I'm hoping to convey is that racism is not just the KKK and segregated drinking fountains. It is far more insidious. When it was no longer able to live happily on the surface of our lives it slipped deeper, weaving its way into almost every aspect of our society, a rotting patchwork of injustice sewn into our nation's ideals. The ignorance I and all those who look like me have faced, though not always a threat to our physical safety, is much more than an unpleasant comment here and there. It's a theft of identity. It takes all that you are and all that you've done and strips that away until there is nothing left but your skin. It is the reinforcement that we will never be equals. That is racism.

What I have struggled with these past few weeks is remedying the racism of those who don't believe in it. People who consider themselves allies but whose support wavers as soon as a window is broken or a TV is stolen, as if those items are worth more than our lives. How do we solve a problem believed to be extinct? How do we wake the self-proclaimed “woke”? I don't have the answers, but I have to believe it can be done.

I'm sure by now at least 99 percent of you have seen *Hamilton* (thanks Disney+), so you'll be familiar with Lin-Manuel Miranda's words of wisdom: “History has its eyes on you.” It has its eyes on all of us. This is a moment for our country, a chance to be better than those that came before. And I am hopeful that we are seizing it. I see in the crowds of protesters people who look like both my white mother and my Black father. I hear Al Sharpton, Ayanna Pressley and so many others speak, and it's not just the Black community that's listening. Change will not happen overnight. But I have hope that one day the two worlds I inhabit will stand as equals on common ground. ♦