

Anti-Racist Parenting Event Review

Sofia Piraino, Project Humanities High School Intern (Spring 2021)

In the wake of Black Lives Matter protests last summer which drew attention to police violence against African Americans, many of us have found ourselves re-evaluating what our own views of race are and how they impact our decisions. A major component that shapes how we see race is how we were raised to talk about it, or not. An open discussion hosted by ASU Project Humanities and facilitated by Maureen Costello, Executive Director of the newly established Center for Antiracist Education, the event *Anti-Racist Parenting* featured panelists Dr. Kareem Neal, Professor Brandon Yoo, and Michelle Renteria who addressed how to raise children to be not only non-racist but actively anti-racist. Often, race is a subject considered too uncomfortable or intimidating for families across the racial spectrum and for very different reasons. Children then are taught consciously or unconsciously that being allegedly “colorblind” is the solution to the issue of racial injustice, but "colorblindness" doesn't address systemic or cultural racism that children encounter and prevents them from understanding race in general.

Anti-racist parenting promotes open discussion on race in order to dismantle systems of oppression, ideally preventing children from developing racist attitudes, or failing to identify racism around them. However, many parent attendees shared that they were taught that identifying race at all was the root cause of issues surrounding racial injustice, as Shannon Norris put it, “I used to think that not seeing race was a way to level the playing field.” So, in order for children to understand other people’s races or their own, they must feel comfortable discussing it, as well as recognizing what race is and how it impacts the way someone interacts. Clearly, race is often linked into other systemic oppressions like sexism, homophobia, and ableism which all intersect in disadvantaging a person. Many family attendees pointed out that showing any unfair power structure in the home can lead to acceptance of others. Panelist Kareem Neal addressed how it is important to dismantle any imbalanced power dynamic.

The important steps to being an anti-racist parent are creating a comfortable, equal, and open environment to discuss race as well as initiating the discussion. According to attendee Barbara H, “Keep it simple, honest, and forthright and don’t make it uncomfortable. Make it ‘normal’ to discuss.” Like many other attendees, I used this section of the program to look back on my experiences discussing race as a child.

This program provided an insightful introduction to changing how parents address race everyday. According to attendee Alicia Shindo, “I have to practice anti-racism on a daily basis and that it is not a one time thing.” Being an Anti-Racist parent or family member or educator who mentors-- "teachers are parental even if they are not parents" (Facilitator Maureen Costello)-- isn't an easy or short-term commitment, but doing so can help create a much better world for all of us, our children/students and our families.