

Privilege and Democracy

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The word and concept, racism, is something that the majority of people in American society fear to talk about or to discuss. Race is a touchy subject and a problem that people try to avoid. If you ask anyone if they consider themselves a racist most likely the answer would be 'no'. I, as a white Serbian, thought the same thing. However, after reading Beverly Tatum's "Defining Racism" in *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* and Peggy McIntosh's article, "White Privilege and Male Privilege," I started to re-examine my perception and definition of racism. I wonder how race influences my world as a white, female, heterosexual, and what role it plays in American society.

In the first chapter of the book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in Cafeteria* Tatum defines racism as "racial prejudice" (9). The term racial prejudice is a term that I have [heard](#) since I was born. It is the term that the majority of people use in order to describe racism. It is a term that has been introduced to us and it was something that I never questioned. I understood its meaning, but I had never experienced it, until I came to the United States, Middlebury College. At the beginning, I could sense that this country had a history of oppressive racism, but at the same time after living here for two years, I

have come to the conclusion that racism is still present. It is hard to understand why, because for me it is so refreshing and [rewarding](#) to integrate and live with people of different races. I do not have that opportunity in Serbia, since there, we lack diversity.

Tatum asks us to think of racism not only in terms of personal prejudice, but as something larger, that operates as a system of privileges: “advantages and privileges in a particular society” (9). This idea provides me with a different perspective. Many people of a different race and color are citizens of the United States, but do not have the power or equal opportunity for education or jobs compared to white citizens of this country. Simply being white in the United States opens many doors. By introducing this new way of looking at racism, Tatum sparks many thoughts and I realize that being white is still a great privilege in this sheltered society.

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