

Hi. My name is Jim Bindon and I'm an old white guy who wants to talk about race. I'd like to start with my background and how I got involved in trying to understand race. I grew up in San Francisco from the late 1940s to the late 1960s. My first exposure to race and racism completely went over my head. When I was five years old I visited Texas and Louisiana. At the same time as the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott was going on to protest Jim Crow laws, I was drinking from the "White" drinking fountain. I remember the labels on the drinking fountains, but they made no sense to me and it never occurred to me that I was witnessing racism in action. I was aware of segregated residential patterns in San Francisco, but it felt to me like there was an air of tolerance in the city. In hindsight, I realize that was just my white privilege ignoring racism. When I was in grade school, the Hunter's Point public housing project was built almost exclusively for blacks; earlier public housing projects had been almost exclusively reserved for whites. I didn't know about this. I thought my high school class was diverse with Italian Catholics and Eastern European Jews and WASPs like me tracing back to England through both parents, as well as African Americans, Mexican Americans, and 2nd or 3rd generation Asian-Americans with mostly Chinese or Japanese roots. Many of the Japanese students, of course, had parents who had only been freed from the "relocation centers" after World War II when they were no longer a threat to national security because of their race¹. This also was never discussed openly. I learned about it through a family friend in Los Angeles who had a Japanese friend who had lost his property when he was sent to one of the centers. I was about 10 when I met him and I had no real idea of what had gone on. This came back to me in a conversation I overheard between two inductees into my high school Hall of Merit when I was inducted in 2010. Both of their families had been in the camps. It's interesting what you don't see when you don't look.

I was blithely unaware of the history of racism in the San Francisco Bay Area. If I had studied it, I might have learned about it being a hotbed of eugenics early in the twentieth century. The first president of Stanford University, David Starr Jordan,² played a key role in expanding eugenic sterilization in the U.S. In 1915, the year my dad migrated to San Francisco from Canada, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition³ was held. The Race Betterment Foundation⁴ had a display at the exposition that left no doubt about the superiority of some kinds of Europeans. Mexicans and Chinese had suffered extreme prejudice in California since they first arrived in the nineteenth century. Black migrants started coming in large numbers in the 1930s and were subjected to similar racism. But growing up I was unaware of this history. When I was

in the fifth grade, I remember my father yelling at the national news on the television when the Little Rock Nine⁵ were prevented from enrolling in high school. It was easy to feel superior to the racist southerners who were blocking their way. Like most white families steeped in the American “racial smog,”⁶ we rarely spoke about race. When we did address it, it was mostly to confirm that we weren’t racists. And for the most part, I thought that was all that was needed.

I graduated from high school and joined the Naval Reserves to avoid being drafted into the Army at the height of the Vietnam War. I attended U.C. Davis as a freshman, following a pre-med curriculum. At the end of my freshman year, I was called to active duty. I was thrown together with sailors from all over the country during my training as a Hospital Corpsman. That was the first time I witnessed racism face to face. When I finished my two-year tour, I went back to school, this time at Berkeley. I was late registering and I couldn’t get the introductory course in psychology that I wanted. I could, however, get into the introduction to physical anthropology. The team teaching it included two members of the National Academy of Sciences, Sherry Washburn and F. Clark Howell. In spite of difficulties including the firebombing of the auditorium⁷ where that class was held, and later having to dodge clouds of pepper gas from circling helicopters,⁸ I fell in love with this discipline which for me merged the best aspects of science with behavioral studies. Little did I know that I was embracing the home discipline of race.

I got married and didn’t return to Berkeley for two years. One of the courses I took when I returned foreshadowed my later interest in race—that was Human Variation taught by Professor Vince Sarich. He taught a very different version of race than I would when I finally got around to it, one that viewed human races as valid biological units with significant evolutionary separation. Needless to say, he did not present Richard Lewontin’s then just-published analysis of genetic variation proving how little race actually counted for. From Berkeley, I went to study human adaptation for my grad work at Penn State. My mentor there was Paul Baker,⁹ a member of the National Academy of Sciences. His mentor at Harvard had been Earnest Hooton,¹⁰ who had almost single-handedly established the biological validity of race in twentieth century American academia. I had no idea of the legacy that I was pursuing. I experienced racism against myself for the first time in my first field season as a grad student when it was difficult to obtain housing in a Japanese residential area of Honolulu. That was a good lesson—it stayed with me.

When I taught my first class at the University of Alabama in the late 1970s I was more worried about teaching human evolution in the bible belt than I was about teaching race in the south. My early classes included short modules on the lack of validity of claims about race and intelligence. I cut that topic out entirely later in the 1980s when it seemed to me that the students no longer needed the lesson. One of my running partners in those days was an administrator at the university. I went to his office one day in the late 1980s and saw a shelf of race and IQ books. I realized how ignorant this Ph.D. was on the topic of race. As a result, I started taking more care to cover race in every class, taking a cue for many of my presentations from Steven Jay Gould's book, *The Mismeasure of Man*.¹¹

That was where I stood when the *Bell Curve*¹² was published in 1994. It was clear to me that this was a book that required refutation in the classroom—but, I was in the middle of my stint as chairman of the anthropology department and I didn't have the time to create a new course focusing on the issues raised by the *Bell Curve*. I started doing more reading about race and after finishing my gig as chairman, my second semester back as a professor I offered a tutorial on race to build my own background along with the students', then I proposed my course on race where I could formally try to undo 150 years of bad anthropology. About this same time I became interested in my personal genealogy and began finding my maternal and paternal family lines. At one point, I exchanged emails with a distant cousin on my mother's side who had done a lot of work at fleshing out that side of the family. When she shared her resources with me, one of the items that she had obtained was an 1815 will from my mother's great great grandfather that included an appraisal of four slaves, "one Negro woman named Betty, one Negro girl named Milly, one Negro boy named Tom, and one Negro girl named Mariah." The four humans were appraised at a value of \$920. Reading that document changed my understanding of my privilege in a way I don't think anything else could have. I have since corresponded with another distant relative that comes from a side of my mother's family formed by one of my mother's great uncles taking one of the female slaves and starting the black wing of my maternal family. At least he had the good grace to take her as his wife—I don't want to think about the African American relatives I have out there as a result of rape of female slaves (like in the Jefferson line but on a much smaller scale) in good 'ol Virginia. Learning these things about my family history made the race course all the more real and important to me.

The second time I taught the course, I picked up a book by Joseph Graves, “The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium,”¹³ that played an important role in developing the course. I loved his description of the history of the race concept and the accessible way he related biological facts about human genetic variation. I already taught a lot about variation in other courses, so what I needed here was to add in the historical information and make human variation understandable to folks without a biological background. Over the years I have become much more familiar with the literature on slavery, Jim Crow, institutional racism, white privilege, patterns of DNA variability and other race-related topics.

The students took to the material—many thinking seriously about the idea of race for the first time in their lives. Because of the student response (and my own love of the class), I continued to teach the course for 8 years after my retirement. I still do guest-lectures on race for my colleagues. One of my anthropology colleagues, Dr. Jo Weaver, has taken over the race class. A former anthropology doctoral student at UA, Dr. Tina Thomas, sat in on the race class and teaches her own variation of it now at Juniata. Through the race class, I also became acquainted with a history professor, Dr. Erik Peterson, who teaches about the history of the race concept and who is letting me collaborate with him on a book project about the history of race and science.

Because of all my work over the last 20 years—and also because of my lived experience, I think I have things to say about race that may be helpful in putting it into perspective for others. At the very least if you listen along, you’ll learn some fascinating trivia for cocktail party talk. Thank you for bearing with me.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internment_of_Japanese_Americans

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Starr_Jordan

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panama%E2%80%93Pacific_International_Exposition

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Harvey_Kellogg#Race_Betterment_Foundation

⁵ <http://www.littlerock9.com/index.html>

⁶ <http://www.newsreel.org/transcripts/race1.htm>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_World_Liberation_Front_strikes_of_1968

⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Park_\(Berkeley\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Park_(Berkeley))

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_T._Baker

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earnest_Hooton

¹¹ http://www.amazon.com/Mismeasure-Man-Revised-Expanded/dp/0393314251/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1287336438&sr=1-1

¹² http://www.amazon.com/Bell-Curve-Intelligence-Structure-Paperbacks/dp/0684824299/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1287336090&sr=1-1

¹³ http://www.amazon.com/Emperors-New-Clothes-Biological-Millennium/dp/0813533023/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1287336914&sr=1-1