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JOURNAL ARTICLE

# Confronting Institutionalized Racism

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## Confronting Institutionalized Racism

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When I was invited to submit a paper for this issue of *Phylon*, I immediately knew that my topic would be "Confronting Institutionalized Racism." That is because I have become convinced that it is only by naming racism, asking the question "How is racism operating here?" and then mobilizing with others to actually confront the system and dismantle it that we can have any significant or lasting impacts on the pervasive "racial" health disparities that have plagued this country for centuries. However, it has taken me a long time to actually write this piece because each time I started, I had so much to say that I didn't know where to start or end, or what my tack should be. Should it be a presentation of a scientific roadmap for addressing the impacts of racism on the health and well-being of the nation's children? Or a review of the domains of racism that should be covered in any measures that we develop or use? Or an outline of strategies we might employ in launching local efforts to combat institutionalized racism in our cities?

In the end, I decided on this format, a conversation centered on/in what I consider to be some of the emergent questions facing us today as we seek to understand *and intervene on* the impacts of racism on the health and well-being of this nation. Some of these questions are: Why discuss racism at all when talking about health? What is racism? What is "race"? Is there something about the environment that we have previously not named that we can usefully describe as the racial climate, and if so, how do we measure it and what is it doing? If we want to confront institutionalized racism, what does that really mean and how do we get started?

So sit back in your office chair or your airplane seat or your bed, and wander with me as I raise and seek to answer some of these questions. After all, it is only in the raising of important questions and the naming of the un-nameable that we will be able to focus our tremendous personal and intellectual resources on a system so powerful and pervasive that the majority of Americans are still in denial about its very existence.

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\*\*The author would like to acknowledge discussions of these issues with members of the Measures of Racism Working Group at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## Journal Information

Welcome to Phylon, the peer-reviewed journal that W.E.B. Du Bois founded at Atlanta University in 1940. Phylon has moved from a quarterly to a semi-annual publication and each issue will be defined by a special topic of general interest to faculty in the humanities and social sciences. With each volume we will encourage joint authorship by academics from various disciplines so that not only is the theme of the article presented, but it will be discussed in a Du Bosian interdisciplinary fashion taking into account historical, political and socio-economic interpretations. We believe that it is time to recognize that many of us in nominally separate fields and disciplines are working on the same problem from slightly different angles. The full text version of Phylon is only available to users within Atlanta University Center. Individuals outside of the Atlanta University Center may contact may contact the editor-in-chief, Dr. Obie Clayton (oclayton@cau.edu), for subscription access options.

## Publisher Information

Clark Atlanta University (CAU) is a comprehensive, private, urban, coeducational institution of higher education with a predominantly African-American heritage. It offers undergraduate,

graduate, and professional degrees as well as certificate programs to students of diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Clark Atlanta was established in 1988 by the consolidation of Atlanta University (1865), the nation's first graduate school for African Americans, and Clark College (1869), the nation's first four-year liberal arts institution to serve a

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