

## This paragraph on a black kindergartner's view of the world is absolutely crushing

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The [New York Times](#) has one of the saddest stories about modern racial bias I have ever read, as told by [Ebbie Banks](#), a black 17-year-old from Palo Alto, California:

I tutored a kid. This little black kid. He looked up to me a lot. One day he asked me, "Mr. Ebbie, is jail a good place to be?" I said, "Why would you ever ask that?" He said: "My daddy's in jail and he said he gets three meals a day. And sometimes my mom can't make me food and I'm hungry." I went home and I cried that night. This is a kindergartner. Teachers told him he was going to jail. I looked at him as a 5-year-old. I didn't see a criminal. I didn't see a drug dealer. I didn't see a rapist. I didn't see a gangbanger. I saw myself, when I was a little kid 10 years ago. The candidates, a lot of them, are from very privileged backgrounds and benefit from a white, male, Christian power structure. And that's O.K. I don't think that white people should feel guilty about their privilege. But they should feel a responsibility to acknowledge it.

The paragraph comes from [a great series of stories](#) by the Times about how different people view the 2016 elections, which you should [absolutely read in full](#).

Banks's story is perhaps the most tragic anecdote in the series. It conveys one of the worst aspects of racial bias in America: Even children — kindergartners! — are vulnerable to racial prejudice. It is shocking that a little kid lives in a world where jail might seem like an appealing option, and his *teachers* are apparently telling him that he might go to jail.

But it's not just anecdotes. This prejudice is something that research on subconscious racial biases — also known as implicit bias — has found again and again: Black children, like their parents, tend to be viewed as less innocent and more aggressive for no reason other than their race.

**Most people are at least a little racist, even if they don't know it**



*Mladen Antonov/AFP via Getty Images*

As part of a study published in the [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#) in 2014, researchers studied 176 mostly white, male police officers, and tested them to see if they held an unconscious "dehumanization bias" against black people by having them match photos of people with photos of big cats or apes. Researchers found that officers commonly dehumanized black people, and those who did were most likely to be the ones with a history of using force on black children in custody.

In the same study, researchers interviewed 264 mostly white, female college students and found that they tended to perceive black children ages 10 and older as "significantly less innocent" than their white counterparts.

"Children in most societies are considered to be in a distinct group with characteristics such as innocence and the need for protection," Phillip Goff, a UCLA researcher and author of the study, said in a [statement](#). "Our research found that black boys can be seen as responsible for their actions at an age when white boys still benefit from the assumption that children are essentially innocent."

""I've never been so disgusted by my own data""

[Other research](#) suggests there can be superhumanization bias at work, as well, with white people more likely to associate paranormal or magical powers with black people than with other white people. And the more they associate magical powers with black people, the less likely they are to believe black people feel pain.

[Another study](#) found people tend to associate what the authors call "black-sounding names," like DeShawn and Jamal, with larger, more violent people than they do "white-sounding names," like Connor and Garrett. In fact, study participants associated characters with black-sounding names and neutral backgrounds as equally dangerous as characters with white-sounding names and criminal records.

"I've never been so disgusted by my own data," Colin Holbrook, the lead author of the study, said in a [statement](#). "The amount that our study participants assumed based only on a name was remarkable. A character with a black-sounding name was assumed to be physically larger, more prone to aggression, and lower in status than a character with a white-sounding name."

### These biases can seriously impact people's lives

As one can imagine, subconscious racial biases can have real effects on people's lives — such as their job prospects. In [one study](#), researchers sent out almost entirely identical résumés — except some had stereotypically white names, while others had stereotypically black names. The white names were *50 percent* more likely to be called back for interviews.

#### Killed by police during arrest, by circumstances

2012 SUPPLEMENTARY HOMICIDE REPORT, FBI

■ *Black*   ■ *White*   ■ *Hispanic*

##### US Population



##### All victims



##### Not attacking when killed



##### Not attacking when killed; not killed with rifle or shotgun



*Joe Posner/Vox*

These biases also may contribute to greater use of force by police. [Studies](#) show, for example, that officers are quicker to shoot black suspects in [video game simulations](#). Josh Correll, a University of Colorado Boulder psychology professor who conducted the research, said it's possible the bias could lead to even more skewed outcomes in the field. "In the very situation in which [officers] most need their training," he said, "we have some reason to believe that their training will be most likely to fail them."

Knowing about implicit bias and its consequences is important, researchers say, not just to prove how terrible the world is but because awareness is one of the ways to combat such biases. Police departments have, for example, [taken steps](#) to train their police officers to resist their biases. And in the case of the child Banks was tutoring, it might have been helpful for the kid's teachers and other adult figures to be aware of their own biases — to not send the wrong signal to an impressionable young child.

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