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Child Welfare is Not Exempt from Structural Racism and Implicit Bias

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Social workers and social scientists have a duty to educate, clarify and raise consciousness when empirically unfounded conclusions that can be harmful to marginalized populations are promoted as fact. Some may read Naomi Schafer Riley's blog for the American Enterprise Institute – [No, The Child Welfare System Isn't Racist](#) – and deem it as just another piece written from a shortsighted perspective steeped in white privilege. Others, however, may become even more convinced that implicit bias is an overused claim in child welfare and that racism is a thing of the past.

In response, we aim to push back on assumptions that stem from lenses tainted by privilege and facilitate cultural humility and compassion in discourse on this critical issue. We attempt to briefly address four of the main problems in the article that reflect a larger narrative that is intent on discrediting and denouncing the impact of institutional racism and implicit bias on black families in child welfare. We approach this as a serious matter because ideology of this nature can have a dangerous and detrimental effect when used to justify policies and approaches that disempower and penalize marginalized groups of people.

First, a fundamental flaw with the original article is that it restricts the definition of racism to overt and intentional acts and/or conscious thoughts held by individuals. It reinforces the misconception that racism is simply a problem of rare, isolated events and that it is most accurately understood as a relic of the past. It makes an erroneously and not so subtle jab that advocates of racial justice ignorantly equate racism and racial bias with "nosy white ladies who are interfering in the lives of black families."

