



SUBSCRIBE SIGN IN

# When I Started Riding, I Was Treated Like I Didn't Exist

HOW COULD SOMETHING SO INNOCENT AS RIDING A BICYCLE MAKE ANOTHER HUMAN BEING FEEL DISCARDED?

BY ERICA ELLE Jul 27, 2020



Jeffery Salter / Redux Pictures

have been met with racism in various roles as a bike rider, from being the average mom cyclist to being a professional rider agent. The subtle and often not-so-subtle actions communicating, “You all do not belong here” are recurring.

## RELATED STORIES



Racism Should Be Treated Like Doping



What it Means to Never See Black People Out Riding

Five years ago, as a new female cyclist I understood the chance of returning home safe was higher if pedaling with a group. In search of a place to learn and—most importantly—not get left behind in the middle of the road alone, I visited different group rides. Club members, always middle-aged white males, sometimes one or two females, would engage in friendly morning chat amongst themselves while getting suited to pedal. Not once was I welcomed. Eventually I dropped any expectation of being acknowledged. I also learned that getting abandoned on the road during the no-drop ride was part of the territory. How could something so innocent as riding a bicycle make another human being feel discarded?

I'm a woman, a mother, an executive finance professional, and a dedicated church member, and I was just looking to return home safely to my family after a bike ride. I wish non-Black people in cycling could acknowledge the all-encompassing Erica alongside my skin color and make a concerted effort to find reasons to connect. Perhaps they'll find that I too am a mother who struggles with finding time to pedal, that I own a bike trailer to pull my toddlers, or that I also have a Starbucks addiction.

I founded [Level Up Cycling Movement](#) because I could not identify where I, nor the people around me, fit within the cycling industry. It was as if we were non-existent. Level Up was created to fill some of the major gaps necessary to begin building a place where people of color can have community, organize to address issues plaguing our community as well as build an infrastructure where the next generation can partake in cycling as an organized sport from amateur to professional.

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

Jeffery A. Salter

**“I am hopeful we will all band together to ensure every human is truly free, free to experience the basic freedom of riding a bicycle.”**

While as a UCI rider agent, I was involved with signing the first woman of color to the world stage, my work as an agent isn't one of simply discovering existing talent and representing. That's the easy part. I became an agent to be a bridge between people of color and professional cycling. After sitting with a few aspiring young racers and long time fans of bike racing, it became apparent opportunities for people of color to race within the U.S. were slim and at the Continental and World Tour level, basically non-existent. The lack of access to information was a recurring issue, no one could explain, "How to become a Professional Cyclist." I watched young people train and race with their hearts first, idolizing and studying cycling sensations like Peter Sagan, Mark Cavendish, and Annemiek Van Vleuten while in the pit of their guts possessing an understanding that a chance to race as a professional most likely will never arrive. Opportunities for development, high level coaching, support with equipment and nurturing currently doesn't exist.

A message to all who are in the fight for racial justice, know we are upset. We may not be upset with you personally, however we welcome your sincere voices and most of all we welcome unity. We see and feel heightened hostility all around us, we are currently managing disappointment from family and friends who have not stood with us, but most of all we are trying to process and heal from the traumatic deaths played out before us. Healing processes differently for each of us. Some of us are confused, depressed, or angry, while others have the ability to stand up and fight. Understand we possess a certain level of mistrust due to a system that has slaughtered us. Give us time if we do not seem open to communication. Soft nudges in the right direction often work. In 2020, I am hopeful we will all band together to ensure every human is truly free, free to experience the basic freedom of riding a bicycle.

*Erica Elle, 38, is a financial professional, UCI rider agent, and founder of Level Up Cycling Movement.*

---

MORE STORIES FROM BLACK PEOPLE WHO LOVE BIKES

---

---

MORE FROM  
**CULTURE**

**Why We Must Talk About Race**

**Black Riders Are Stopped By Police More Often**

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

---

**How Bike Riders Can Be Anti-Racist**

**I Got Stopped Riding Because I 'Fit' a Description**

**I Dream of a Day I Can 'Just Stick to Cycling'**

**I Love Being a Black Cyclist, But It's Exhausting**

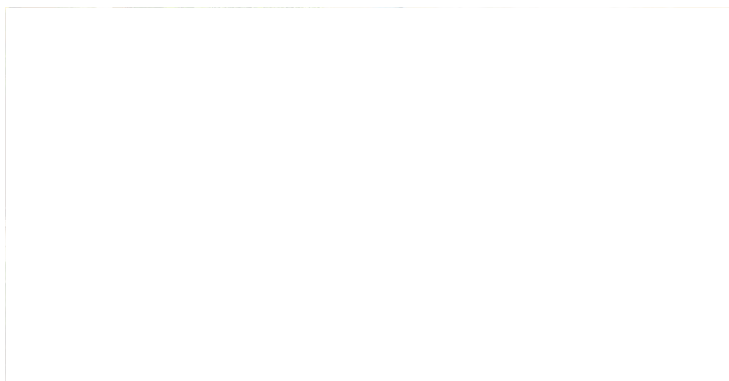
**No, Bikes Don't Discriminate. But Cyclists Do.**

**What It's Like to Be Black For a Day**



Ask Yourself, Who Gets Left Behind in Cycling?

Nelson Vails: Black Lives Matter Opened My Eyes



Culture

I Got Stopped Riding Because I 'Fit' a Description

The More I Won, the Bigger the Barriers I Faced

I Dream of a Day I Can 'Just Stick to Cycling'

Should I Wear a Mask While Cycling?

I Love Being a Black Cyclist, But It's Exhausting

What It's Like to Be Black For a Day

# Bicycling



Newsletter

Give A Gift

About Bicycling

Why Did I Get This Ad?

Subscribe

Other Hearst Subscriptions


Press Room

Being Green

Customer Service

Community Guidelines

Advertise Online

 Hearst Men's and  
Enthusiast Media  
Group - A Part of  
Hearst Digital Media

A Part of Hearst Digital Media

Bicycling participates in various affiliate marketing programs, which means we may get paid commissions on editorially chosen products purchased through our links to retailer sites.

©2020 Hearst Magazine Media, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Privacy Notice](#) [Your California Privacy Rights](#) [Interest-Based Ads](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Site Map](#)