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What it Means to Never See Black People Out Riding

WHEN I DON'T SEE ANYONE WHO LOOKS LIKE ME, IT SYMBOLIZES ALL THE BARRIERS THAT WE HAVE FACED.

BY RACHEL OLZER Jul 27, 2020



When I leave my house to ride, my identity follows me. While cycling is a means for relieving stress, there is always the background stress of being acutely aware of my existence and my presence in a white, male dominated sport. Being a Black cyclist means that I am all too aware that this sport was not built with me in mind.

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I have experienced many instances of racism, including while biking. I have had people question whether I stole my bike. I have had people stare me down at trailheads. But I think it's important not to rely on individual instances of racism. Racism functions as a structure that keeps cycling white and male dominated. Getting rid of individual instances of racism toward Black or other cyclists of color will not mean that our problem is solved. Structural racism requires structural changes. We need the industry to take a look at their boards of directors or managers; the athletes they sponsor; the content they produce or share: Is it representative of the full range of bicycle users that currently exist? Can we imagine a more inclusive cycling community than the one that we've built? Racism in cycling doesn't just happen. We built the cycling industry to be the way it is and we can and absolutely should rebuild the industry to be something different.

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We have to act as though it is possible to change the world and we have to wake up every day ready to work together to do so.

I wish that non-Black people understood what it's like to never see people like you while out riding. It's not simply about wanting to see Black people for the sake of seeing Black people. It's about what the absence of seeing Black people means. The absence of anyone who looks like you symbolizes all the barriers that we as a people have faced because of structural inequality. When you don't see people who look like you it's a reminder of the hundreds of years of racist practices that have led up to that moment when you got to the trailhead and you were the only one. It's not an accident that they aren't there. It's an intentional system of practices and policies that you know you are just lucky enough to have survived. Many of us know people stuck in cycles of poverty, addiction, lack of opportunity, and we know that it's not necessarily any fault of theirs.

I hope people who are committed to fighting for racial justice understand that once you enter the movement, there is no turning back. The work is never ending and ever evolving. It occurs in your homes, in your offices, in your communities, on the trails, in the streets. It is everywhere, because that is how deep racism truly runs. This is not simply a current problem. This is not simply a U.S. problem either. This is an historical and on-going battle. Anti-Blackness is global. White supremacy will likely never be dismantled in our lifetime; however, we have to act as though it is possible to change the world and we have to wake up every day ready to work together to do so.

Rachel Olzer, 28, biology Ph.D. candidate and cofounder of [Pedal 2 the People](#), a collection of stories from Black, indigenous, and people of color who ride.

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