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[MYKEL BROADY] Hello and thank you so much for joining us today. Welcome to the second special black history month episode of unwritten, where expert authors join student hosts for discussions on the most important current events of our day. I'm Mykel Broady a sophomore at the university of Nevada Reno double majoring in marketing and management. I also have the luxury of being a Campus Ambassador for Pearson.

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[TAYLOR KING] I am Taylor King a sophomore at North Carolina A&T majoring in business administration. I am also a Pearson campus ambassador. Today we'll explore perceptions of race in society and racial disparities in education. These are two themes that are incredibly important to us as black students and inform our experiences.

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[MYKEL BROADY] We are excited to be joined by the amazing Dr. Neil Lewis Jr a behavioral intervention and meta scientist at Cornell University and wild Cornell medicine. He is an assistant professor in the department of communication division of general internal medicine and graduate field of psychology. Dr. Lewis is also a science communicator who writes about the application of social and behavioral science research and policy and practice at 538 and elsewhere. Also as of the 11th edition Dr. Lewis is a contributing author of the Pearson title: Social Psychology.

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So, we'd like to start today by hearing from you Dr. Lewis about your perspective on black history month and why it's important.

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[DR. LEWIS] First, thank you all for having me on the show. It's really great to have the opportunity to talk to you all, and I'm looking forward to this conversation. So, as I think about the history of black history month and why it's important, I think about it a lot through the lens of some of the research that I do in psychology. My research psychology falls into the category of work that we call situated cognition. The basic idea behind situated cognition is that you really can't understand how the mind works without understanding the context in which that mind exists. The reason they think black history month is important is because it gives us a better understanding of our social context the history behind how society developed and evolved over time. Is important for understanding how and why that society is the way it is today. Why the people are the way that they are. You can't understand that broader history without wrestling with the role that black people have played in it. For the rest of the year, we often ignore those contributions, but this month every year we take the time to face that history. To face black history and doing that helps us all to learn more about who we are as people, who we were in the past, who we are now, and who we might be in the future. That's why I think black history month is so important.

02:58

[TALYOR KING] Wonderful well we so appreciate that perspective, and so now we'll just dive right in. Could you speak a bit about social perception? How it operates and whether or not it varies at all regionally or culturally.

03:11

[DR. LEWIS] Sure, perception's a really interesting thing we like to think about perception and how we see the world as objectively, exactly how it exists. However, the reality is that what we see is a combination of what's there and what we want to see. What we're socialized to see or in some cases not to see. Where we grow up the people we interact with, the media we consume, what you learn in school all of those things end up shaping how we see the world. To connect that idea specifically to black history month here are all these disparities people have. I'm here about right so we talked about disparities in education, there are disparities in health. If you never learned about the history of things like redlining in the United States or in other policies that were explicitly designed to limit access to resource to black Americans, then you might perceive um that well the reason that black people experience all these worst outcomes is because there's something deficient in black people. Whereas, if you learn about this broader history the broader context then you start to see how all of these processes are related and affect these outcomes.

04:33

[MYKEL BROADY] Yeah, well you hit the nail on the head there, and kind of to follow up on that today we're hearing a lot about unconscious bias. What is that exactly describing and how does it impact the social perception?

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[DR. LEWIS] Yeah, so unconscious bias, implicit bias, there's all sorts of terms flooding out floating around. What is happening there is related to these broader processes that I'm talking about. The worlds that we live in in our minds try to make sense of the world, so we notice all of these patterns. We tend to see these association between some groups and good things, other groups and bad things and the mind sort of ends up encoding those as these ground truths about how the world works. That's what we end up seeing in these various tests of unconscious bias. The implicit association test is one that you might have read about in your textbooks or heard about in your classes. It's picking up on these associations that you've learned through society about groups and different categories. Those associations can sometimes end up guiding your behavior. For example, if you're starting to think of some groups as bad and other groups is good that that can affect how you interact with people in those groups. It also affects how you treat them how they end up and like so that's really the broader idea that's happening behind what we call unconscious bias.

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[MYKEL BROADY] Absolutely, and what I typically associate to unconscious bias is also ignorance, because I feel like ignorance plays a huge role, because that's something we're all born with. At least last time i checked, right. So, there's a choice though with ignorance as, Daryl Davis talked about it, we can either turn ignorance into fear, we fear what we don't know which then may go into hatred. We hate what we fear and then that can ultimately lead to destruction. We want to destroy what we hate and what we fear. I'm not just talking about destruction physically, but mentally. We can place these walls

so that we're forever ignorant to the truth, but like I said there's also a flip side. We can turn our ignorance into genuine curiosity. We can decide to learn more pick up a book, look up something online, in turn that can then lead to sympathy. People can begin to be sympathetic even if they didn't experience the same experiences, and so what this all could lead to is fellowship amongst all races. That's what I feel like is a decision we should all begin to start choosing. I'm interested to hear kind of what your thoughts on ignorance and the role it plays in society especially in regard to the social perception of people?

07:29

[DR. LEWIS] Ignorance is something that I think about a working differently at different stages of your life. So, the reason I started out by talking about these broader contexts are some things that you learn, or you don't learn depending on where you are. One of the things I've become interested in the research lately is looking at things like even history textbooks, how much do they talk about black history? How much do they talk about and how do they talk about it? This has been like an area of a lot of controversy in the United States. This has been like an area in terms of you know every state sort of gets to decide how they teach history and their version of this. If you think about what kids are learning from early on in life as they start to learn about these concepts. Sometimes, they're learning there's more nuance and deeper histories and so you have that growing up that then shapes how you view and interact with people later in life.

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Other times you don't learn it in your school's curriculum and that's one way in which we end up being divided, it's just like what do we even teach people? Then, of course, there's choice in the matter and their choices are different levels. There's the policy makers superintendents and they can decide which history textbooks are they going to buy and teach in the schools. However, later as you become an adult, you also have some choice in what books you're going to buy what are tv shows are you going to watch, who you're going to interact with. We have to think about that full developmental experience, because that affects what you're ignorant about and what you're not. It's nuanced. There's certainly a choice, but we also have to think about how that initial set of information you're exposed to leads you to seek out those future opportunities. SO that's one way that I've been thinking about it.

09:49

[TAYLOR KING] Awesome, I think that's a really great reminder that that it is a choice, and you can either remain ignorant or you cannot. I think that's a really strong point. Back to you Dr. Lewis, I think I speak for all of us when I say your research focus is incredibly interesting. Particularly, your study of motivations for pursuing goals and how identity and social context impacts those pursuit efforts. Can you tell us what your findings have found with respect to black communities particularly in our pursuit of education?

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[DR. LEWIS] Yeah, absolutely so this is one of the first topics I became interested in studying. It's frankly the reason they went to graduate school in the first place. to really try and understand what the barriers to equity and education are and what can we do about it. What we've learned over the years is there's one perspective out there that well the reason that um black students don't go to um college at the

same rates as white students for instance is black students just aren't as interested in education or not as motivated. So, we looked into that and don't find much evidence for that. That aspirations, educational aspirations, are at least as and in many studies even higher in black communities than in white communities. So that's creates an interesting question then if the aspirations are equally high, why aren't the outcomes the same? You get into then is some of these historical processes that we've been talking about. Do you have the same educational opportunities along the way?

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The schools that you're growing up in are often different because of these resource differences. So black schools predominantly black schools tend not to have as much funding. In part because of the way school funding works in the US, school funding comes from things like local taxes so if there's less wealth in a neighborhood, the school is not going to have as much money to go on. The funding that's there affects like, do you have the new textbooks or are you using sort of older books? Do you have enough teachers to have the small classes that can provide quality educational experiences or are you in experiences? Or are you in overcrowded classrooms? All of these things add up and end up influencing educational outcomes. The big conclusion from my work so far, and it's not just my work it's lots of other people's work is that if we really want to understand and address these inequities we really have to think more holistically. We need to think about the broader set of systems that lead to these outcomes.

12:48

[MYKEL BROADY] That's awesome, and you talked a bit about those, and I want to go a little bit further with that. So traditionally understood minority ethnicities are growing populations. We see this reflected in the U.S census and other studies. what are your thoughts on how institutions, like education, can better address inequities that stem rather outdated social perceptions of minorities?

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[DR. LEWIS] Addressing inequities in education is sort of a big topic of focus these days, and universities are making all kinds claim about wanting more diverse student bodies. If they want to achieve that there are a couple things they need to do right. One is first acknowledging the inequities that exist and why those came to be in the first place. Think about what that means for life on their on campuses. They're going to have to think about who universities were designed for. How the campus policies, campus structures campus cultures have been optimized around one group of students, namely wealthy white students historically. How might you need to change the institution then to be a more inclusive place so these are bigger things that universities have to think about.

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I don't have a sort of one-size-fits-all solution for all universities. They're going to have to look on their own campus and figure out what the specific issues are. However, one thing that universities can do as they work towards these efforts is actually just talk to the students who are there and try to figure out what are the things that are barriers to your minority. student's success their well-being on your campus their sense of belonging on your campus. Talk to them and figure out like what needs to change, and then actually listen to them, because that's another barrier. There are many listening sessions and this task force reports and that end up falling on deaf ears and creates even more frustration. When you talk

to your students, and they provide their input actually listen to them. Try to incorporate on that feedback.

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[TAYLOR KING] I definitely think your first point speaks to the systemic issue of education as several things in our nation are as systemic. Moving on Dr Lewis with black history month being a time to reflect on America's history, which can often be overwhelmed by pain and trauma what are some ways that you incorporate joy and celebration into this month.

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[DR. LEWIS] I'm glad you asked that question, because this is a recurring issue with this month. How it's talked about broadly as just about the pain suffering trauma, and that's important to acknowledge, but there's also been a lot of great progress that we also have to acknowledge too. Going back to where we started this conversation, acknowledging the other broader contributions that black people have made to this country and around the world. That brings me joy too. That's something i think we need to think about acknowledge not just the past, but the many inspiring stories. Also just remembering how people have been able to turn some of those sour moments into really productive and positive things too. That's been another way that I think about it and try to make the most out of this month. You need both it's not just a story of trauma, it's also a story of triumph.

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[MYKEL BROADY [Yeah, and I love what you just had to say there. I just want to say as we wrap up this special episode of unwritten for black history month on behalf of Taylor and I we just want to say thank you so much Dr. Neal, not only for your time, but also your great insight.

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[DR. LEWIS] Thank you so much for having me it's been really great talking with you all today.

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[MYKEL BROADY] Well, we're super glad. Taylor's smiling. Taylor, do you have anything to add?

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[TAYLOR KING] No, that's about it.

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[MYKEL BROADY] For all our viewers out there. Please stay safe have a great day and happy black history month!