

Scene on Radio

That's Not Us, So We're Clean (Seeing White, Part 6) Transcript

<http://podcast.cdsporch.org/episode-36-thats-not-us-so-were-clean-seeing-white-part-6/>

John Biewen: When I was a little kid growing up in Mankato, Minnesota, yes, we did. We played cowboys and Indians, at least a few times. One year when I was nine or ten, my mom and dad gave me an Indian brave getup for my birthday. There was some sort of headband with a feather at the back, faux buckskin pants with fringe, and, the best part, a bow and arrows with those little suction cups on the end. (Back then, we're talking around 1970, my parents hadn't had their consciousness raised about that sort of cultural appropriation.) Maybe only because I had the outfit, I got my little brother and a couple friends—for the cowboys, we had guns with suction cup darts—and we ran around the yard shooting at each other.

Tim Tyson is another white guy, roughly my age. You may have heard him in a couple of our recent episodes. Tim grew up in North Carolina.

Tim Tyson: So, as a white Southerner, you know, we played Civil War the way people played cowboys and Indians, or house. We played Civil War, and of course nobody was a Yankee. All the Yankees were imaginary. We never made anybody be a Yankee for heaven's sake.

[Music]

Tim Tyson: And then, you know, I thought of the world somewhat as Up North and Here. So there were sort of two places in America for me. There was Up North and Here.

John Biewen: I'm John Biewen, it's *Scene on Radio*. Welcome to part six of our ongoing series, *Seeing White*. We're exploring what's up with white people, and the idea of whiteness. How it got constructed and how it works in the world.

So far in the series, we've mostly talked about the Americans who call ourselves white as more or less one group. For example, we presented slavery as a cornerstone of the national story without emphasizing that it was practiced to very different degrees in different parts of the country, or that Americans, mostly white, slaughtered one another in part over the right to enslave people. The actual shooting stopped in 1865.

This time we talk North and South. But this is not a dive into history like the last few episodes. We're not gonna retell the Civil War or go deep into the history of anything. Instead, a different sort of exploration.

There's something I've noticed for a long time, even before I moved to the South sixteen years ago. Something about the way people like me—white northerners, especially educated, progressive types—the way we view white Southerners.

Allan Gurganus: Right

Liz Phillips: Mmm-hmm.

John Biewen: A few years ago, when I was working on that doc we played for the last episode, "Little War on the Prairie," I sat down with some friends here in North Carolina—white Southerners who've spent serious time up north amongst white Yankees. I wanted to know if their experiences were what I'd imagined they would be.

Allan Gurganus: In a way, you develop a thick skin growing up in the world as a Southerner. Because you have to be, as Obama has had to be, you know, a hundred times smarter just to break even. And you have to be so articulate and so intelligent and so well-read as a Southerner to vindicate and justify yourself in the world of the north.

John Biewen: That's Allan Gurganus, the novelist. His books include *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All* and a collection of stories called *White People*.

Allan Gurganus: My mother grew up in Illinois and my father grew up in North Carolina, so I'm the product of a mixed marriage. So I've had access to both sides of this particular fence.

John Biewen: Allan grew up in Rocky Mount, North Carolina and now lives in the town of Hillsborough. Along the way he went to school in New York City and lived in Manhattan for a dozen years, and spent three years at the Iowa Writers Workshop in Iowa City both as a student and a teacher. Like all the Southerners I talked to, Allan had stories about northerners being surprised he was intelligent and articulate. But also, of course, there's the race thing. And let's just get this out of the way: nobody you'll hear in this piece is trying to minimize or excuse the racial sins of white Southerners, past or present. Here's Allan.

Allan Gurganus: I once heard the great Mississippi writer Eudora Welty asked why so many great writers came from Mississippi, and she paused in her amazing ladylike way and said, "Maybe it's because we have so much to explain." And I think as Southerners we have gone to calisthenics school explaining ourselves. If you can come to terms with how the money was made in your own family over six generations, you've pretty much passed the course in world history and are ready to be ... tried.

John Biewen: What drives my Southern friends nuts about white northerners is not the references to Southern guilt, per se. It's the flipside, the implied Yankee innocence. And the presumption that northerners are in a position to educate the clueless, racist Southerner. My friend and colleague Alexa Dilworth also spent time in Iowa City, as a poetry student at the Writer's Workshop in the late 1980s.

Alexa Dilworth: One thing that happened when I was there is the movie *Mississippi Burning* came out. I think that was my first year there....

John Biewen: Alexa grew up in northern Virginia, spent summers with relatives in northern Florida, and went to undergrad and grad school at the University of Florida in Gainesville. She's lived in North Carolina for more than 25 years.

Alexa Dilworth: Yes. I think of myself as a Southerner.

John Biewen: So, back to her story about being a student in Iowa City when a certain blockbuster film came out. Her fellow students were from all over but were mostly non-Southerners.

Alexa Dilworth: A number of people came up to me and said, hey, this movie is showing downtown at the Englert, it's called *Mississippi Burning*. I think you might want to go see it. And the first couple of times I was, oh, thanks for the movie tip. Third, fourth time, like, why do people keep asking me if I've seen *Mississippi Burning*, if I have the intention of going? About the fifth time, you know, I'm kind of like, okay, everyone thinks I should go see *Mississippi Burning* because I can't possibly know about Freedom Summer or civil rights workers in the South, or, I wouldn't know about any of this. And I realized they were really hoping that I'd get edified. You know, [clucks] "You really need to get over there and learn something about where you're from." It really stuck in my craw, I have to say. I just couldn't believe it.

Michael Che: Tomorrow is Super Bowl 51, and it's the New England Patriots vs. the Atlanta Falcons....

John Biewen: Earlier this year Michael Che, on *Saturday Night Live's Weekend Update*, upset some people in Boston with this remark.

Michael Che: For three hours, I just don't wanna talk about any social issues or politics. I just wanna relax, turn my brain off, and watch the blackest city in America beat the most racist city I've ever been to. [Laughter]

Liz Phillips: Boston was the most segregated place I'd ever lived.

John Biewen: Liz Phillips is another friend and colleague. She grew up in Chapel Hill and now lives here in Durham. She spent a dozen years in Boston, and loved it in many ways. But, about that segregation.

Liz Phillips: I mean, where people lived, where people shopped, sporting events.

John Biewen: Just a whole lot less of people literally being in the same space together across racial lines, right?

Liz Phillips: Yes.

John Biewen: A WHOLE lot less than you find here.

Liz Phillips, laughing: You're gonna get me in trouble, John.

John Biewen: No, I'm not. I'm gonna get us all in trouble if I can.

Liz Phillips: Yes. Yeah.

John Biewen: And yet. Liz says, when Bostonians learned that she was from North Carolina....

Liz Phillips: There was often a, "hmm. Hmm!" What is my face doing? "Oh. You don't say! Hmm." Or sometimes even, "Wow!"

I was at a party one time, chatting with somebody I'd never met, and in the course of it told them that I was from North Carolina. And this person said, "Wow! What's that like?" And I felt I knew where this was going but I said, well, what's *what* like? "You know. Living in the South. All that race stuff." And you know I can't even remember what I said.

I didn't say anything profound like "The weight of history is heavy and painful and always present."

[Music.]

Liz Phillips: You know, "the race stuff." As if "the race stuff" isn't everywhere. In every town, every city, every region, every state. It was kind of breathtaking.

[Music.]

John Biewen: So, I wonder if you've heard this. And I think I've heard it said mostly by white Southerners, but here's how it goes, I just want to get your reaction.

John Biewen: Here I'm talking with Shannon Sullivan. She's a philosophy professor at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. One of her books is called, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of White Privilege*. I told her about an expression I've heard from white southern friends.

John Biewen, to Sullivan: "Northerners" – meaning northern whites – "northern whites love the race but hate the people. Southern whites hate the race but love the people."

Shannon Sullivan: Yes, yes, yes, yes. I think that in a funny way that captures some of the differences that Southerners in particular would like to point out. [Which] is that, it has a different style to it—"it" here being racism or white domination—has a different style, definitely a different style North vs. South. But the fundamentals are not that dissimilar. The other way one of them goes, kind of an African-American folk saying, right? "In the North, they don't care how high you get"—okay, "they" being the white people. So, "In the North they don't care how high you get as long as you don't get too close, and in the South they don't care how close you get as long as you don't get too high."

John Biewen: [Laughs] Yeah.

Sullivan: So, different ways of managing social distances, physical distances. So it happens in different ways. There's been a long history of this. Different forms of etiquette, you know, manners, habits, and styles. The styles are different, but they have a way of supporting, still, a society that privileges and advantages white people.

John Biewen: In her newest book, *Good White People*, Sullivan explores strategies that some white folk use to distance ourselves from white racism.

Shannon Sullivan: Looking into the ways in which “good” white people set up differences that often are class differences. There are also regional differences between the white people who are supposedly not racist—those are the good ones—and a lot of dumping that goes on against the bad white people.

John Biewen: Sullivan says these strategies are usually unconscious and well-intended. They come from an impulse to not participate in racism. But that doesn't make them helpful. One of the strategies is Colorblindness—insisting, “I don't see race.”

Shannon Sullivan: It's almost like a pride in being completely clueless about the world in which we live as white people, if we can't see how our own whiteness, along with other races, is operating in it. And that actually allows white supremacy and the other things I've been talking about to hum along quite happily and unchallenged. If you can't see race, then how in the heck are you going to see racism?

John Biewen: And then there's the well-worn “white trash” strategy, looking down on poorer white people as the problem, the real racists. This can overlap with Northern superiority toward Southerners, who are often stereotyped as lower-class and poorly educated whether they are or not. Sullivan thinks, sometimes, working-class and Southern white folks are responding to this kind of condescension when they hurl back the words “politically correct.”

Shannon Sullivan: And they're looking at the "good" middle class white people and saying, "You know what, you don't believe this stuff you're saying any more than the rest of us. Your so-called anti-racism is a stick that you are using to beat us other white people down with. You're not any better than the rest of us. You just have a certain kind of language that you're using that draws class distinctions between the good white people and the bad white people."

John Biewen: At this point in the conversation Shannon gets uncomfortable, worried she'll be misunderstood.

Shannon Sullivan: God, that term politically correct is just so thorny there. Um...

John Biewen: She wants to make clear she's not just agreeing with people who throw the phrase around. People are right to use inoffensive language instead of racial slurs, she says. But she thinks there's an aspect of the, "you're just being PC" accusation that deserves to be taken seriously. That is, the implied skepticism that the folks claiming "good white people" status are really so terribly woke, or innocent. Here again, she's paraphrasing what she thinks the so-called 'bad white people' are often feeling.

Shannon Sullivan: "These words you're using, these so-called new and improved words, are just papering over the same old habits of white privilege and habits of white domination that you say you're criticizing."

[Music]

Tim Tyson: When we got to Wisconsin, people heard our accent, they heard the South in our voices....

John Biewen: Tim Tyson, the guy who played Civil War as a child in North Carolina, spent a decade in Madison, from the mid-1990s until 2005. He taught in the Afro-American Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin. Tim is a Civil Rights

historian and author of the best-selling books, *Blood Done Sign My Name*, about a racial murder in his hometown in North Carolina, and, his latest, *The Blood of Emmett Till*. Since he moved back home to the South, Tim spends much of his time advising the North Carolina NAACP. He pretty much devotes his life to understanding and fighting racism. So let's just say, when Tim and his family first moved to Wisconsin and he heard people talk about race in the way Midwesterners do, he heard them loud and clear.

Tim Tyson: When people heard our accents they would ask us where we were from, and we would tell them and they would say, well, How do you like it here? And we liked it very much and also we were being polite. [Laughs.] So we began to tell them all the things that we really liked about Wisconsin so far.

People liked that for a little while but when they'd gotten all they wanted, they wanted to interrupt us and they always said the same thing: "Well, it's not perfect." They wanted us to know we hadn't dropped into paradise. And they would say, "Well, you know, we've got these people from Chicago coming up here to get on the welfare." And they would explain, you know, I think Wisconsin's welfare payments were 18 dollars a month more than Illinois's or something, and they had this idea that their lavish generosity, and the dependent and lazy African-Americans were flooding over the border into Wisconsin to get on the welfare. And this was almost universal. People told us this story over and over again. "Those people from Chicago," which was what they said instead of racial epithets, but...

John Biewen: What Tim's describing is familiar to me, because the same debate took place next door in Minnesota in the 1990s. In fact, I covered the story of black migration to Minneapolis for NPR in 1997.

John Biewen, NPR: In a metropolitan area that's still 90 percent white and that views its quality of life as a fragile treasure....

John Biewen: In both states, a lot of white folks got alarmed by a relatively modest influx of lower-income black folk. This is tape of Barbara Carlson, then a radio talk show host and candidate for mayor of Minneapolis.

Barbara Carlson, NPR, 1997: This is a city very close to under siege. It doesn't make any difference where they are from, if they are poor. But it is a poverty issue and very, very often it is an African-American issue.

John Biewen: In fact, the evidence suggested most of those African-Americans were moving in search of the plentiful jobs and safer neighborhoods in Wisconsin and Minnesota. I interviewed Ed Briggs at the time, who'd moved up from the depressed Steel town, Gary, Indiana, and was making sandwiches at a Subway shop in downtown Minneapolis.

Ed Briggs, NPR, 1997: If you want something, Minnesota is the place to get it, because I came up here on a Monday. I got here on a Monday night, to be exact, at 10:00 I got here, okay? And that Thursday morning at 8:00, I had two jobs!

Tim Tyson: It had nothing to do with the extra 18 or 11 dollars a month or whatever it was. There were parents coming from Chicago and Gary, Indiana and places like that looking for decent schools for their kids and a place out of the difficulties of life in the inner city in America. So there were some. But we're still talking about a small amount of the local population – four percent, five percent. But if you get out from Madison, they think Madison is wildly integrated, overrun with black people, among other things. When, you know, it's really ... [a] very white place. [Laughs.]

John Biewen: Another long-running news story that fascinated Tim during his time up north was a racially-loaded fishing dispute. Bands of Ojibwe Indians were asserting their right to fish in their traditional way, using spears, on territory they'd given up long before in northern Wisconsin. Spearfishing isn't permitted if you're not Ojibwe, but the tribe secured those rights in 19th century treaties. Still, some white sports fishermen were

furious. They put on camouflage and blaze orange clothing and formed crowds on the edges of lakes where the Ojibwe were fishing.

Tim Tyson: And there was all manner of venom, and the scenes that were being shown on the TV news were very angry scenes that frightened me and reminded me of some of the brutal moments in the history of the civil rights movement.

NPR, Chris Julin: The protesters scream racial slurs at the spear fishers. Sometimes they throw rocks, or shoot ball bearings from slingshots.

John Biewen: This is from an NPR report in the early Nineties.

NPR, Woman: No! We're building 'em houses, we're paying for their education, we're giving 'em food stamps, they're on welfare. Them bums don't need our fish and our deer and our trees!

Man: Hey, timber nigger!

Woman: You're a big fat timber nigger is all you are!

Man: You're lucky you got police protection tonight, boy!

Tim Tyson: And I could see that the struggle over fishing rights wasn't really about fish. You know. That there was something ... it was about the Other.

John Biewen: During his time at the University of Wisconsin, Tim would sometimes get invited to give talks off-campus, at churches, museums, community colleges.

Tim Tyson: But the frustrating thing about being in the Midwest, as a white Southerner talking about the Civil Rights Movement, is whatever I said, the only thing people could hear was, one: Things sure were awful down South, weren't they? Two: Isn't it great

that you can be here with us, that you're now in the land of enlightenment. And that was very amusing to me, but it was also frustrating because I couldn't really, it wasn't doing any good. They didn't learn a thing from listening to me talk about the Civil Rights Movement.

[Music]

Tim Tyson: But see the South becomes the bearer of the bad stuff. So, all things bad are projected onto the South, and then that's not us, so we're clean.

[Music]

Allan Gurganus: All of us in this country are answering daily, if we're paying any kind of attention, to the sins of the fathers and the grandfathers that are visited, as the Bible says, unto the second and third generation.

John Biewen: The writer Allan Gurganus says white folks who feel innocent because they're not Southern should remember, the rest of the country is just as much America as the South is. And the tone for America, as a whole, was set right from the start, by the European who quote-unquote 'discovered' the place.

Allan Gurganus: Columbus is a curious figure. I mean, the more you read from his journals, the clearer it becomes that he was a mercantile agent. He was literally the agent of Ferdinand and Isabela. He got ten percent of everything that would be made in this nation. Which is why he wanted gold, first and foremost. And instead of taking gold back on that first voyage—he couldn't really find enough, so he took people back.

And he admitted that they had been extremely generous to him. The first day, the first sighting, in Columbus's journals, he says, they approached us in the water carrying flowers, fruit, parrots and certain dried leaves, meaning tobacco. And he handed them his sword to demonstrate his power, and they were fascinated by the color of the metal

and they ran their hands along the blade edge and cut themselves. And his immediate thought on that first day was of selling them into slavery. There seemed to have been no wonder in him, no gratitude. It was immediately cash and carry.

And I think that that's a legacy that is borne out today. It's just, it's the air we breathe. So I think the responsibility is shared, and the legacy is so much more nuanced and compromised than most people would prefer to think.

[Music]

[Phone ringing]

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Hello.

John Biewen: So how's it going, Chenjerai?

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Pretty good, man. Another day in paradise.

John Biewen: [Laughs.] Yes, well, and you live in the Deep South now. Clemson, South Carolina, where you teach. And remind me, where else in the country have you lived, and where'd you grow up?

Chenjerai Kumanyika: I was born in New York, in Harlem. I grew up mostly in Upstate New York, Baltimore, and New Jersey. But I've also lived in Chicago, Los Angeles, and like Philadelphia. So, you know, kind of all over the place.

John Biewen: Dr. Chenjerai Kumanyika, media scholar, artist, and organizer. Our conversations are a frequent feature of the *Seeing White* series.

John Biewen: And what about all this, what do you notice about, does it more or less ring true for you, some of the stuff that you heard in the piece? And we heard a lot from white Southerners kind of venting. But did this kind of general picture ring true for you,

about some of the differences? And some of the similarities, I should say.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah. I mean it's hard to really put language on it. It's like a lot of my friends and white people in the north have the right politics. But, you know, there is kind of like a weird homogeneity to the spaces that they move in. And in the South, on the other hand, you've got people who constantly invite you to dinner, invite you to church, but they also might vote against the Voting Rights Act, you know. And everybody doesn't fit in those categories clearly.

But like the dynamic that you're talking about with Shannon Sullivan, I'm very much familiar with it. This idea that northern white people kind of look down on Southern whites and assume that they're the only problem when it comes to race. I mean, I have friends up north who will just be like, you know, they'll like worry about me, like they've never seen racism. "Oh my god, what's it like down here? You're in Clemson?! Oh man, we've gotta get you up here. We've gotta get you out of there!"

John Biewen: Right.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: And I'm like, "Out of there to where?" Like there's no problems where you are?"

John Biewen: So Chenjerai, my great-great-great grandfather was a captain in the Union Army, I'm very, very, very proud to say. In fact, you're welcome.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: [Laughs.] Thank you. And I will bring some "Woke" biscuits for your family to share. [Laughter.]

John Biewen: Right? So I'm absolved for all time of all considerations about—and I'm joking, of course, but in fact I do hear this kind of thing...

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Me, too.

John Biewen: ...from white folks in the north, which is, you know, this wanting a merit badge, really for the whole, almost the whole country sometimes, but at least everybody who wasn't in the 11 Confederate states. That this tremendous sacrifice was made to free the enslaved black people between 1861 and 1865.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah, well I mean, first let me just say, war is real and you know I understand people lost their lives. So I don't I don't want to dishonor people who, who lost their lives fighting for the right thing. But I think that way of looking at things is really problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, because it sort of doesn't recognize all the ways that black people contributed to our own liberation, both on and off the battlefield. But the other thing, I think, is that the evidence, when you really look at what was going on at that time, you look at the economic issues and the reasons for going to war, and the attitudes of a lot of people in the north, the evidence just doesn't really support the idea that everybody's primary interest was freeing enslaved black people.

John Biewen: Well, and even Lincoln himself. Of course there's the really famous quote that he, it was from a letter that he wrote during the war to Horace Greeley, the abolitionist who was kind of chiding him, right, for not doing more more rapidly to free the slaves. And he wrote, in this open letter in the newspaper in 1862, said, "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it.... What I do about Slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save this Union...." So, he says absolutely clearly what his first priority was, and it wasn't freeing the slaves.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Yeah.

John Biewen: He was a critic of slavery but he wasn't, you know, as historians will say, he was not an abolitionist. He wasn't actively fighting to tear down slavery.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: That's right. And in fact, you know, you have the Fugitive Slave Act that gets passed in 1850, which gives Southerners, you know, slave owners, the right to go into the north and retrieve their slaves, the people who had endured the horror of escaping from that holocaust. And so you would think okay, well, what was Lincoln's position on this, when they try to pass that law? Lincoln, once the law is passed, Lincoln doesn't really oppose it, right? Lincoln, the Great Liberator, is sort of supportive of the Fugitive Slave Act. He does, he makes some effort to make sure that people who are free, legally free blacks, wouldn't be called back into slavery. But that effort doesn't really work. And then, you know, ultimately Lincoln urges congressional Republicans to 'abandon all opposition, real or apparent' to the Fugitive Slave Act. So, that's deep to me.

John Biewen: Yeah. And you know I think Lincoln, of course literally thousands of books have been written about him, and he's a complicated guy and it seems that he evolved and I think there were, it's pretty clear that to some degree and at some times he was genuinely morally troubled by slavery. But yes, I think at the very least it's, I think we have to acknowledge that he was not in a kind of straightforward way a moral crusader who was primarily out to save the enslaved black people. It's just not accurate.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: And I think that those abolitionist politics are tricky, right? Those politics between the North and South are complicated even now. Because it's, part of offloading racism onto the Southern bigot, right, is also about making racism into primarily a psychological phenomenon. So the first step is you make it seem like all the bigotry and bad racial attitudes are in the South. And of course, as you've illustrated already, that's just not even close to true. But then, you're also ignoring the North's deep investment in the Southern economy, and their connection to all these other forms of white supremacy that ultimately bind the North and South very closely together in this web of racial capitalism.

John Biewen: Right. So the cotton was grown in the South because that's where the weather was right to grow cotton. But the entire country was tied up in that economy.

And, in fact, the cotton trade continued all the way through the Civil War, right? Because the North couldn't do without cotton and some, some have argued that the war could have ended sooner if the North had been willing to actually cut off that, the Southern cotton economy, but it didn't want to do that.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: That's right. And there's all these ways that you see northern businesspeople invested in the Southern economy, right? In January of 1861—Eric Foner talks about how 30 businessmen from New York came down to, they took a train to Washington D.C. And they had this petition signed by 40,000 other businessmen that outlined a whole bunch of concessions the North was going to make to the South, including, they were going to accept the Dred Scott decision! Right? And it wasn't just the business sector, either. You have, like, Mayor Fernando Wood, who, you know, before the Civil War, basically says that rather than join the Union effort, New York City should secede!

John Biewen: The Mayor of New York.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: The mayor of New York is saying that New York City should secede rather than to support the Union effort. So, I just don't know how that really, I mean, what does that do to this narrative of like the whole North opposed to slavery?

John Biewen: And, speaking of New York, you know you had the draft riots in 1863, in which thousands of mostly Irish working class men protested—it started out as a protest against the draft and then it turned into a race riot. And they attacked black people and killed something like 120 black people in a race riot. And that was tied to frustration with having to go fight this war.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: That's a lot different than, like, New Yorkers were just really excited to go fight, you know, against slavery.

John Biewen: Right. Exactly. And if we wanted to, you know, continue the stroll through American history, after the Civil War the South crushes Reconstruction and the North, you know, really stands by. And then you have a hundred years of Jim Crow segregation and the North stands by, really until this Southern Civil Rights Movement which was of course led by black people. And at that point, you know, there's something of an awakening of the conscience of some people across the country. I don't want to minimize that. But, yeah. To have a sense now, in 2017, that you can look back at the sweep of American history and say, wow, we, those of us who live outside the 11 Confederate States, we've really been principled anti-racists all these, all these years. It just really doesn't stand up too well, does it.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: That's right. And I mean, the things you're pointing out, the attack on Reconstruction was systematic, happened throughout the United States. And all the way until today, you know, you talk about redlining and housing discrimination. That was systematic and instituted by the federal government and was also throughout the United States. Look, this wasn't about, you know, bigots who don't get it in the South.

John Biewen: Yeah.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: And another thing I want to point out is, like, today in American towns and cities, they're still deeply segregated, right? And that's the case everywhere, not just in the South. In fact, if you look at the most segregated cities in the country, a lot of them are in the north. Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago, New York, Cleveland, St. Louis, and Boston. So, it's everywhere, but it is definitely in those northern cities, too, right now.

John Biewen: So you know, as we talk about this, what comes to mind again is that thing Tim Tyson said, the civil rights historian from North Carolina who talked about the time he spent in Wisconsin. And he said that, you know, when he gave talks about the Civil Rights Movement in the South, people didn't learn anything. And that's because

they, they didn't think that he was talking about them and their place. And I can vouch for that. You know, that's where this piece comes from. This is all very familiar to me as someone who grew up in Minnesota and lived in Minneapolis-St. Paul for many years, where there was a kind of, pretty pervasive sense that we're pretty enlightened here we're not in the racist part of the country. And you know, there was, I don't want to caricature people, either. There was clearly people who had, who were, you had the whole spectrum of people's awareness, right? But I would say, kind of the standard-issue sensibility was that 'We don't have, we don't have a need for any kind of deep transformation. Not like those people in, you know, Birmingham or Charleston or Jackson, Mississippi, who have so much more to answer for and so much, so much work to do.'

Chenjerai Kumanyika: I know, man. You know, I just look at the map of the last election, right? And I mean, Trump was saying some horrible and very explicit things about people of color, and his policies are now starting to back them up. And if you just look at that election map, right? I mean, there's a lot of red on there all over the place. Now, you know it's, like, so I'm not saying everybody who voted for Trump is racist. But what I am saying is, those people up there on Long Island, in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, that voted for him, they got a lot in common with the people down here that they're calling rednecks.

John Biewen: Well, and speaking of Donald Trump, the man himself, I don't think he's from, I don't think he's from Hattiesburg, is he.

Chenjerai Kumanyika: Nah. He's from New York. [Laughter.]

John Biewen: Thanks as always to Chenjerai Kumanyika, and our editor on the series, Loretta Williams. Keep listening. We're gonna keep on *Seeing White*. I so appreciate those ratings and reviews on iTunes. Thank you. As more and more of you do those, and subscribe to the show, the app puts us in front of more eyeballs. That's how it works and it's why I keep making this plaintive request.

Our website is ScenonRadio.org. There you can find links to the books that are informing these recent episodes. Like our page on [Facebook](#), I'm on [Twitter](#), [@SceneonRadio](#). Music this time by Lee Rosevere, Blue Dot Sessions, and Lucas Biewen. A shoutout to Chris Julin, who did that NPR piece on Wisconsin fishing rights.

The show comes to you from the [Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University](#).