

Beverly Tatum_final

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SPEAKERS

unknown, Justin Angle, Beverly Tatum, Larry Summers

- B** Beverly Tatum 00:00
One thing that every leader can do is ask who's missing from our picture? And what can I as the leader do about that?
- J** Justin Angle 00:22
This is a new angle, and I'm your host, Justin Angle. This show is supported by first security bank, Blackfoot communications, and the University of Montana College of Business. Hey folks, welcome back. It is an honor today to welcome Dr. Beverly Tatum to a new angle. Dr. Tatum is President Emeritus of Spelman College, and a clinical psychologist widely known for her expertise on race relations. And as a thought leader in higher education. She is the author of several books, including the best selling modern classic, why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria, and other conversations about race? On March 3, the University of Montana community will join Dr. Tatum for a president's Lecture Series conversation on race, gender, class, and their interactions. You can register for that event@www.mt.edu/president, Dr. Tatum. Thanks so much for coming on the show today.
- B** Beverly Tatum 01:22
Thanks so much for having me.



Justin Angle 01:24

Well, everybody here is excited for your upcoming visit. I'll be at virtual. It's been a wild ride of late in the country. And in your home state of Georgia in particular, how are you doing?



Beverly Tatum 01:38

Well, I'm doing just fine. But you're absolutely right. It has been quite a tumultuous time. And for those of us who live in Georgia, we're glad that the election season is finally over.



Justin Angle 01:48

And how are you making sense of the moment we're living through right now?



Beverly Tatum 01:52

Well, I draw a lot of wisdom from Dr. King's last book, it was published in 1968. It's titled, where do we go from here, chaos or community. And I mentioned it in the context of what's happening right now in our society. Because if you read that book, even though it was written 50 plus years ago, it very much describes a society where there's been a period of progress, and then push back against that progress. And he talks about the fact that after every period of social progress, particularly in the area of race relations, there's been pushback against it. And I think if we think about the modern civil rights era, leading up to perhaps the election of President Barack Obama, as its sort of climax, you know, finally, we have broken that barrier. But almost immediately afterwards, we've seen a rise in white supremacist activity, a heightened visibility of white nationalist groups, etc. And certainly, that event, on January 6, when the Capitol was stormed, by groups, often representing or seeming to represent such organizations, we can see that as that kind of pushback that Dr. King was talking about. At the very end of his book, he says, He asks a question, and he basically says, we have a choice to make each of us whether we want to choose chaos, or community. And in my mind, I think we've all seen what chaos might look like. And that gives us inspiration, perhaps, to try to work harder toward creating a sense of equitable and shared community.



Justin Angle 03:33

That's such a powerful and useful way of thinking about a chaos or community. even thinking about community, I wonder if it helps you for our listeners to maybe start with some terminology? Because it seems like to me that that race and racism are two terms with contested meaning is defined differently by different people at different times. What what are those two terms mean to you? Like? How should we think about them?

B

Beverly Tatum 04:03

Sure, well, let's start with the word race, which is, I think, a word that we use a lot as kind of a shorthand to describe groups that have been racialized. And what do I mean by that? What we know what biologists tell us today in the 21st century, is that there really is only one race, the human race, right? We are all part of that human family. And the physical differences, the skin color differences, or the hair texture differences, or the eye shaped differences that we notice from one group to another, are really relatively insignificant from a genetic point of view. In fact, there is more similarity across groups that we think of as different than within groups are, you know, someone who looks very much like me in terms of their skin color or their hair texture might be genetically more different from me than someone who is described as white and who has a very different outward appearance. So we know that these categories that we have used over time socially constructed their inventions of the human mind, but not actually biologically meaningful. That said, we know that those inventions have social meaning. And someone who was labeled White is having a different life experience than someone who was labeled black or Asian, or indigenous. And so, it is important for us to recognize that racialized groups have varying experiences as a consequence of the next word, racism, right? Racism is a system that is structured to situate one group in an advantaged position over another in the context of our own society, we can easily talk about white people being systematically advantaged by racism in the past, as well as in the present. And that system of advantage manifests itself in terms of how education has been structured, how employment operates, how access to capital, at banks, or real estate, or access to health care. All of the systems that are important to our daily lives are influenced by underlying assumptions about who deserves what, who is entitled to what kind of consideration and who is less deserving. Again, that's an invention of, you know, our society. And if you invent something, you can decide not to use it right, you can change how that operates. But it's important to recognize that racism is not just about individual attitudes, we sometimes conflate the term prejudice, and racism. Prejudice, of course, has to do with individual attitudes about people, different from yourself, or people like yourself, you can have positive prejudices, as well as negative prejudices, but we tend to think of that word, when we hear prejudice, we tend to think of it as a negative attitude, often based on limited information stereotypes about some other group. Many people when they hear the word racist, like if you were to say that's racist behavior, or that person is behaving in a racist way, will say that, you know, if they're saying it about you, you might say, No, I'm not prejudiced. I don't have hostile feelings towards How could anything that I be doing be called racist if I don't have racial animosity in my heart? And the short answer is, you don't have to have animosity to reinforce the systems that have been put in place long before you were born. And that lead to inequitable treatment or outcomes for ethnic groups.



Justin Angle 08:19

So that framework is really useful. And you know, I think for a lot of folks like that distinction between, you know, actions and attitudes and systems is important, but also it sort of helps people I think, understand that. Yeah, you may be a person who, you know, you don't think you have any outwardly prejudicial attitudes or have not engaged in any prejudicial behaviors, but just by simply operating within the status quo of systems as they've been designed over generations, like, we can do better, right, as individuals to sort of act to change the systems for the better.



Beverly Tatum 09:00

We certainly can do better. There's no question about that. But it's important for us to be able to see the systems in order to change them, okay, if it's invisible to you. You don't know what to do. You may not even be aware that there's a problem. In fact, one of the reasons that I think it's important to have conversations like the kind I will be having at the university in a few weeks is to really open up dialogue to help people see what the problem is, as I like to say, you can't solve a problem without talking about it. But yet many people are hesitant to engage in conversations about racism or the construct of race, because they have learned growing up that it's impolite or it's a source of conflict or somehow it will make things worse, if we talk about it. But to not talk about it is like being the ostrich with the head in the sand. You know, you really can't solve the problem unless you take your head up, look around and discuss it.



Justin Angle 10:04

Indeed, I've heard you tell stories of, you know, observing parents shushing their kids for asking questions about, you know, hey, what why does that person look different than than I look or? Or whatever it is. You know, can you foreshadow your talk a little bit like, you know, I'm an educator in a state that's, you know, largely white. Our classrooms at the University of Montana are largely white like yet we have to be participants in this work and be able to have conversations I need to be able to, you know, Shepherd conversations in this space, can you foreshadow some of the tips you might give us for getting to that place?



Beverly Tatum 10:42

Sure. Well, let me say that, you know, one of the things that I look forward to, in this interaction that we're going to have is that it truly will be a conversation, as opposed to a prepared lecture. Okay. And so in that spirit, it's sometimes hard for me to predict exactly

what we'll be talking about. Because in part, it will depend on the questions, my conversation partner poses, etc. But certainly, this question that you have raised is a common one, which is, you know, if my classroom is predominantly white, how do I start that conversation? And is it even necessary? And the short answer is, it is necessary, even if you're even if every student in your classroom is a white student, because all of us, regardless of race, or ethnicity are living in and a multiracial, multi ethnic world in which these questions are going to be relevant in the workplace, they're going to be relevant in your child's school, they're going to be relevant in your neighborhood, perhaps, even if it's an all white neighborhood, just asking the question, why is that? You know, is it just a coincidence that there are no people of color? Or are there patterns that have created that reality? Whether that's lending patterns, or long ago housing covenants that prevented people from selling their property to people of color, and that history of structured segregation is part of why our, our neighborhoods, our communities look the way they do. So having these conversations is important. And many faculty members do feel unprepared, perhaps because they haven't, they didn't have them growing up when I worked with teachers doing professional development, which is something I did for many years. Often teachers would say, you know, I don't know how to do this, because no one did it with me. These weren't conversations that we had, in my home, or even in my school, I don't know where to start. And when someone says that, to me, what I often suggest is that you start by having conversations, not with your students, but maybe with your peers, maybe becoming part of a book study group, for example, reading something together, maybe like my book, why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria and other conversations about race and talking to each other? about, you know, what ideas resonate? what's troubling, where do you feel stuck, and getting in the practice, of sitting with discomfort, but also engaging honestly and openly with others, is, I think, a great way to start to prepare for having that kind of a conversation with your students.



Justin Angle 13:32

You know, that seems like a great place to start. I mean, I've been engaged in some of those conversations, you know, with colleagues at a variety of levels at our institution, and, you know, I think you'll find a community kind of eager to engage in the conversation with you, but still, you know, finding its way along that trajectory. You know, this is one thing that, you know, we deal with in Montana, we are a blue dot in an increasingly red state. Yeah, so I interact with students that are, you know, are in people that are often just sort of dismissive of the, of the notion of systemic racism? How do you start a conversation there with people just sort of, you know, they kind of rely on that actions and attitudes definition of racism? How do you engage somebody like that to get them to kind of understand, you know, the realities of this system as you described it?

B

Beverly Tatum 14:32

Yeah. Well, let me say that, you know, I have now 40 plus years of teaching about racism. And when I started, which was in 1980, the first time I taught a course on racism was in 1980, in California, at the University of California at Santa Barbara, which at the time, was a very homogeneous student population. The black student population was very small, less than two percent, the Latino population that much bigger, very small Asian population. I suspect it's more diverse today. But when I was teaching that class way back when an inexperienced Professor just getting started, I found that my students often did question what I was sharing with them. You know, we would read articles about racism in housing or racism in education or racism in economic policy, you know, we would read things, and I would think that the articles would speak for themselves and students would say things like, well, this is dated information. That article might have been, you know, two or three years old, still pretty recent. But there was this resistance to really learning the information there was a desire to see society as fair and I appreciate the desire to see society is fair, but but not to the extent of not being able to acknowledge the real problems that we have to address.

J

Justin Angle 16:07

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U

unknown 16:20

Raging wildfires, has scorched a record number of acres and killed Canadians to climb from those devastating wildfires.

J

Justin Angle 16:26

Last year, wildfire scorched a landmass nearly five times the size of Yellowstone National Park. It was the largest area burned since reliable records began. fires are getting bigger and hotter, and more devastating than ever before. What all that fire means? And what to do about it depends on who you ask.

U

unknown 16:49

The forest, taking fire is really something. Not only a gift to us, it's more more of a gift to the land, there will always be fear of fire. I know that and I don't pretend there won't be.

But in certain situations, there shouldn't be.

- J** Justin Angle 17:03
I'm Justin Angle. And for the last couple years, I've been talking to scientists, historians, and firefighters themselves to hear their stories.
- U** unknown 17:13
You owe it to the guys that died.
- J** Justin Angle 17:16
I wanted to figure out how did we get here, we're going to knock fire out of the landscape.
- U** unknown 17:21
Remember, only you can prevent forest fires.
- U** unknown 17:25
It was a crazy ambition.
- J** Justin Angle 17:26
And where do we go? It just knowledge is freakin power.
- U** unknown 17:31
I'll talk about in an upcoming week. But this is me hitting the panic button.
- U** unknown 17:36
Am I making any difference here with the science? That's what I wonder sometimes.
- J** Justin Angle 17:42
This is Fireline, a six part podcast series from Montana public radio in the University of Montana College of Business, about what wildfire means for the West, our planet and our

way of life.



Justin Angle 18:00

Coming March 9, subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.



Larry Summers 18:06

I'm Larry Summers, Harvard President Emeritus, and former treasury secretary, you're listening to a new angle.



Beverly Tatum 18:18

And so one of the strategies that I found as a new instructor was to ask my students to do field observations, I would send them out to the local mall or, you know, a local grocery store and say, you know, I'd like you to go to the grocery store on this side of town, walk the aisles, see what's for sale, what does it cost, observe who's shopping. And then I'd like you to go to the same chain, same grocery store chain, but in a more affluent, predominantly white part of the town and see what you observe. And students would come back with really interesting observations. They would note that some products were actually more expensive, same products but more expensive. In the lower income community. They would note that you couldn't take your grocery cart from the store to your car, because there were barriers presumably to prevent people from taking the grocery carts. But that was a different shopping experience than in the more affluent part of the town. Some of my students would go apartment hunting in pairs to see what would happen if two white students went and said they were trying to rent an apartment versus if a white student paired with a black student or two black students went to the same place. And what they observed when they came back was real life examples of housing discrimination, and real life examples of differential treatment. And so then it was easier for me to say these are exciting samples of what we're reading about. It's not just your imagination, here's what the patterns have been, and why they continue, even after the passage of the, you know, civil rights acts of one kind or another. So the, what I called it, you know, experiential learning, self generated knowledge, giving students the opportunity to go and observe, you know, go and just people watch and see what happens, you know, who's being followed around in the store? And who is going about their business without any question, who is able to use a check or a credit card without someone asking for additional identification, all of those kinds of experiences, started to help my students to see what they were reading about with not just theoretical, but actually real in people's daily lives,



Justin Angle 20:57

You know, that sort of experiential learning and getting people out observing the world around them, you know, it would be it would seem even more important to get students to engage in that activity Now, given how our media environment is constructed, and how we can sort of live in different in different versions of reality, just sort of based on the information diet, we consume through these, you know, social media platforms, news, media, outlets, whatever. This would seem like a technique to maybe help break through some of that,



Beverly Tatum 21:33

Certainly, and, you know, helping students in general, think critically about the sources of information that they're taking in and how to question you know, what is true and what's not true and cross reference. And all of that is, of course, part of what we hope everyone would get from their own university education experience.



Justin Angle 21:54

Sure. And so having spent, you know, time at a wide variety of colleges and universities, what sort of advice would you give to university leaders? I mean, what, how should leaders of universities be thinking about the role universities can play in making our society more just and inclusive?



Beverly Tatum 22:14

I think this is really an important question. And I really have come to appreciate what it means when people say leadership matters, because it really does. I mean, we certainly seen within our nation, that tone comes from the top right, you know, so what kind of tone you set as the leader ripples through the organization in ways that perhaps go far beyond what you might even have imagined. So being if you're in a leadership role, being the person who says, we want to have a community where everyone feels included, we want to have a community where all of our participants are able to have a strong sense of belonging and can thrive in this environment. Just saying that you think that's important, is a good place to start. But what does it mean to actually translate into action? I like to talk about what I call the ABCs. And what do I mean by those ABCs. The A stands for affirming identity. The B stands for building community. And the C stands for cultivating leadership. A affirming identity is really about the fact that all of us, every one of us as a human being wants to feel seen, heard and understood by other people. But we know that those students who come from historically stigmatized communities, marginalized

communities often enter College and University spaces feeling as though they are not being seen. They're not being heard. They're not being understood, in part because they don't see themselves reflected in that environment. I like to use the analogy sometimes of a group photograph, if we were together with a group of people, and we all got huddled together for a group photo, and we got a copy of that picture, each of us would do one thing, when we got that picture handed to us, the very first thing we would do would be to look for ourselves in it. We'd want to know how am I looking? Was I smiling? Or my eyes open? You know, how did that picture come out? But if for some reason, you got your photo back and you had been digitally removed from that picture? You were missing from it. You would say what's wrong with this picture? I was there, the camera went off, how come I'm not in the photo. If we think about our university environments as like a group photograph that we've all sort of stepped into this picture, and we want to see ourselves on the walls in the curriculum, standing at the front of the classroom. We want to see ourselves represented in that picture. And some people will see themselves very easily. But other people will go a long time before they find themselves in the picture. And that in visibility starts to wear not just on, it doesn't lead just to ask what's wrong with that picture, it can sometimes lead to asking what's wrong with me, or people like me that we're not being included in the curriculum in the classroom, in the symbols of the institution. And so one thing that every leader can do is ask, who's missing from our picture? And what can i as the leader do about that? If we get in that habit, it really goes a long way. Because you start to notice, gosh, we don't have members of this group. As part of the leadership team. We don't have members of this group, and our faculty, we don't have very members, very many members of this group in our student body. What can we do about that? So asking that question, is a way of affirming identities for all of the students. The B building community speaks to the fact that, particularly in learning environments, the leader is almost always trying to create a shared sense of vision, where everyone shares a sense of mission, and we're all rowing in the same direction, toward the goals of the institution. In order for that to happen, you want people to feel invested in that community. And so you do things like, bring the community together for special events, you do things like, you know, give speeches and presidential lecture series, and you do things like celebrate the wins of the football team, or whatever it might be, you know, you do things that are intended to build community. But that building of community is only successful if everyone feels included. So the A of affirming identity, and the B of building community have to really go together. But the sea, cultivating leadership is really also very critical. Because what do education institutions do? We are preparing the next generation of students, for civic, and corporate and public and private leadership, we are educating the next generation of leaders. And we want those leaders to be able to lead effectively, in an increasingly diverse society. You can't be an effective leader, if you don't know how to engage with people different from yourself. And so you have to be able to practice. How do we create those opportunities for practice, when we have students

gathered on a college campus on a university campus, when students are there, it might be for many of them, the first opportunity that they've had to really be with people whose life experiences is different from their own, whose religious affiliation is different from their own, whose racial background may be different from their own. And learning how to engage in that environment is a critical component of becoming an effective leader. So universities have a unique opportunity to not only create an affirming environment, where everyone feels included, but also create a learning environment where perhaps uniquely, our students are able to practice some leadership skills that they're going to need for the rest of their lives in what is an increasingly multiracial, multi ethnic society?

J

Justin Angle 28:48

Well, I'd love to close with the question a little bit more down the lifecycle, if you will, for parents, you know, the audience that you're going to encounter here, you know, a lot of folks you know, want to be responsible parents and help engage in conversation with our children in productive ways. You have heard your story about that chocolate milk conversation. How would you advise parents that want to do better in this space?

B

Beverly Tatum 29:16

One of the things that I would say is that it's very important to recognize that young children notice difference. They are not, as some parents will like to tell you, colorblind, right? They do notice differences and they will ask questions. It's very common for a three year old, or a four year old to see someone who looks different than they do and ask about that. It doesn't mean that they are showing bias or prejudice. It just means that they've noticed something and they're curious about it. And parents can feel very confident about responding to those questions. If they follow the child's lead. And, you know, watch a TED talk like mine: Is my skin brown because I drink chocolate milk?, which is about my conversation with my own three year old way back when, when he was asked that very question by one of his classmates who, who speculated that perhaps his skin was brown because he was drinking chocolate milk. That's a three year old question. But it's a question that opens the door to talking about shared humanity as well as physical differences. And that's a conversation that all of us can have with our children and should, again so that they will be better able to function effectively in a diverse society.

J

Justin Angle 30:36

Indeed, Dr. Tatum last question, why did you say yes to the invitation from the University of Montana?

B

Beverly Tatum 30:42

Well, why not? I have to say, you know, I love having the opportunity to speak to university communities. I'm sorry that I can't come to Montana in person. I know it's a beautiful state. And I would have enjoyed that visit very much. But I'm looking forward to the conversation. And I'm excited to know that there will be not just students and faculty members, but parents and educators, K through 12 in the audience, and I look forward to our engagement with each other.

J

Justin Angle 31:13

We look forward to a two this has been amazing. Before we close, where can people learn more about you and your work online?

B

Beverly Tatum 31:22

I have a website and it is Beverlydanieltatum.com.

J

Justin Angle 31:28

Okay. Thanks so much for sharing your time and wisdom to us. And thanks for saying yes to to visit us. All be it virtual.

B

Beverly Tatum 31:36

It's my pleasure.

J

Justin Angle 31:37

And remember, Dr. Tatum will be joining our community as our next presidential Lecture Series speaker on March third. For more information, visit www.umt.edu/president. Thanks for listening to a new angle. We really appreciate it. A new angle is presented by first security bank, Blackfoot communications and the University of Montana College of Business with additional support from consolidated electrical distributors and drum coffee. AJ Williams is our producer, Jeff Ement. John Wicks and BTO made our music and Jeff Meese is our master of all things sound. If you have any questions, suggestions, comments, insults, whatever, please email me at anewangle@umontana.edu if you like what you heard, tell your friends about it. Thanks a lot. See you next time.