

A Path Forward: Privilege, Power, and the Impact of Race

October 2, 2020

October 2, 2020 (New York) – On September 21, Proskauer hosted the second of our *A Path Forward* speaker series, *A Path Forward: Privilege, Power, and the Impact of Race*. The event, following a discussion on Juneteenth entitled, [A Path Forward: A Conversation on Being Black in America and Effective Allyship](#), featured [Tim Wise](#), one of the nation's most prominent anti-racist essayists and educators, in discussion with Proskauer partners [Mary Kuusisto](#), [Bradley Ruskin](#) and [Nigel Telman](#).

During the discussion, Tim guided Firm colleagues, clients and alums in a conversation around privilege, power and the causes - both formal and informal - of institutional racial inequities.

Before handing the mic to Tim, Chairman Steve Ellis welcomed attendees. “Embracing our role as leaders in the community, we’re engaging in and taking on conversations that are often difficult but needed learning experiences as we continue to collaborate for change,” Steve said.

Tim led the discussion by emphasizing the importance of dismantling racism that manifests in school classrooms, courtrooms and neighborhoods. Tim said, “Systemic racism and institutional racism can operate and can function even without overt bigots in the picture, without any overtly racist individuals in the frame at all.”

He referenced U.S.-wide data to illustrate this point. Tim said, “The rates of school rule infractions of white kids and black kids and Latino kids, is roughly identical, but the rates at which black and brown kids are suspended or expelled is two to three-times higher than the rates for white kids.”

This example, among others, led to Tim reinforcing the notion of understanding white privilege in this context. He talks about struggles that span all races, like financial difficulties and family issues, but points to the struggles that are unique to Black Americans because of systems that are structured in such a way as to disadvantage people of color.

One of the imperative questions Tim addressed during the audience Q&A was, “Why is it not enough to be color blind?”

Tim responded, “Not only is it not enough, I think it's actually incredibly dysfunctional for a couple of reasons. Julian Bond, a great civil rights legend and activist, used to say that ‘to be blind to color is to be blind to the consequences of color.’ So if color is having consequences but we have resolved not to notice, not think about it, not to talk about it – then we can't resolve the consequences.”

About the *A Path Forward* Speaker Series

A Path Forward is Proskauer’s ongoing speaker series offered in conjunction with regularly scheduled small group forums to explore specific concepts relating to racism, equity, and inclusion. The speaker series is open to the Proskauer community, including our clients and alumni. We are committed to continuing these educational dialogues in the hope that through these mutual learning experiences, our collaboration for change becomes that much stronger.

[Related Professionals](#)

- **Mary B. Kuusisto**
Partner
- **Bradley I. Ruskin**
Partner
- **Nigel F. Telman**
Partner