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# Everything Counts

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*“The truth is... everything counts. Everything. Everything we do and everything we say. Everything helps or hurts; everything adds to or takes away from someone else.”*

## Countee Cullen

As we begin the arduous process of navigating the issues that have consumed the landscape of this fall season, these words come to mind helping me keep things in perspective. Everything counts, what we do, what we say, it is all part of the narrative called "Our Story." The good, the bad, and the ugly, regardless of the content, it is the truth of our existence. Each time we fail to speak truth we miss an opportunity to become a responder to the needs of our neighbor in answering God's call. Each time we distort, manipulate or change for saintly adaptation the context and reality experienced, we cripple ourselves and others from seeing the fullness of the story. Each moment gives way to its own context and truth which is vital in how we identify, process, name, face and respond to systemic racism, its structures and co-conspirators, whether willing or unknowing.

Countee's words remind me that there should be an intentional effort to fully embrace the truth of our existence, and then be willing to speak and lean into that truth, knowing what is at stake if we don't accept the truth of "Our Story." The truth is, as we pull at the string of racism in hopes of unraveling its toxic ugliness we find that its tether is interwoven into the entire garment.

Isabel Wilkerson speaks about the issues of racism, or "Caste," as she refers to it in her book, *Caste, The Origins of Our Discontents* and uses the analogy of an old house to drive the conversation into perspective.

Wilkerson compares the issues and discontent of intentional structural casting in America to an old house, built generations ago. The structure has endured a multitude of storms along with people who have lived there over time. The house already exists with its many flaws that have been left unattended and are original to its foundation.

As you live in this house you see and hear signs that the soundness of the house is in question. The wind whistles through the windows or the plaster is swollen from a leaking roof along with countless other problems that seem to appear at different times and seasons. Despite being a witness to these factors, the person finds themselves deciding whether they really want to submit the house to inspection under the infrared light, exposing the house's flaws and defects.

Do you want to perform research on the house, its builders, the structure which could reveal the source of those issues, or do you try to ignore that any problems exist? Why?

I think because, like that string, as you pull at it, you realize that the issues, the problems, the sin, the injustice, go much deeper into the house than you would like to admit. Its roots are found in the structural timbers and foundation of the house. The work, the cost — whether emotional, financial, social, or spiritual — are unmeasurable factors that create fear to the house owner/occupant, leaving them with more questions than possible solutions.

What will it cost to fix this problem? How much are you willing to invest? How much is enough? At what point does the cost of the restorative work outweigh the source or the problem? Is there ever a maximum limit to this work? After all, no one is trying to lose themselves in the process, right? But is this not a reason to learn the complete story of the house? Also, what's at stake if there is no effort in addressing the problems? Cullen's words speak prophetically as the infrared light has revealed the depths racism exists within this house.

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Now that we have begun to see how deep this issue is, we can't decide to ignore what has been revealed. Deflecting, projecting, and rejecting does not change the fact that there is some real work that must be continued. Beyond paint, beyond curtains, shutters or furniture, there is some work that must be completed to fix problems which, if left ignored, can cause the house to be condemned and declared uninhabitable. Wilkerson tells us that a problem can't be addressed unless it is seen. But we must be willing to see the entire story of this house and then, only then, will we ever be able to truly rebuild it for the future.

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