

Unconscious Racism

By Joe Myers

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Most of us feel that we aren't racists. I recently watched a recorded episode of Law & Order SVU that was aired 11/12/20. It was very enlightening, and should cause us all to stop and think.

The scene, echoing a recent news event, is NYC Central Park. A white woman is calling the police, claiming that a black man is menacing her and her son. The police arrive, and, upon checking, discover the man has outstanding warrants. They arrest him in spite of his protests that he was doing nothing to provoke her. A body was then found nearby, an apparent rape. SVU was called, and Captain Olivia Benson was given the responsibility to decide whether to take the black man in, or release him. The warrants alone weren't reason enough to hold him. She chose to take him in. The rape investigation went in another direction. During his questioning he said that he always worked out in the park after finishing his shift, but there were a couple of un-accounted hours between the two times. He explained that he was with his 12-step mentor. The mentor backed up his story and he was determined to be uninvolved with the rape. He sued the NYPD. Benson was interrogated by a black officer from Internal Affairs. She was asked why she didn't perform a check on the white woman. The thought had never occurred to her. It was pointed out that, had she checked, she would have found out that the woman had several false complaints recorded against her. This bothered Benson and she met with the man to apologize. He told her that he had lost his job because his addiction had been exposed. He didn't let her off, saying that she didn't have to live her life walking on egg shells. She thought again about the white woman. That woman hadn't worried about being arrested. No one was scrutinizing her. Thinking about her own behavior, she was stunned, and realized that she had to think about her unconscious racism -- as should we all.