

Racism

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I saw the film “Pleasantville” and felt uncomfortable all the way through it. What disturbed me was the obvious message that those that advocate “Family Values” are racist, redneck, up tight and close-minded. The movie inferred that those that are free to be promiscuous are the “real” people. Because of this ability, they turned from “black and white” into people with color. The producers threw in a nod towards art and literature as ways of freeing the mind, but the majority of those in the movie that became Blessed with new insight and pigment came to it through sex, and only after freeing their minds through sex did they become interested in books. A racist accusation was made clear when the black and white townspeople began putting up signs banning “coloreds” from the stores.

Racism. The other day while watching the TV show “Walker,” my six-year-old son observed, “It’s bad white people against the good Indians again.” How sad for him, a small boy of both American Indian and German-Irish heritage. I immediately told him that it’s wrong for TV to continually portray white people as rednecks. How is a young boy of both heritages to feel? More importantly, by rousing minority anger and mistrust toward white people, how is the problem of racism in America remedied?

The following night, we watched a show about the bad white people against the good black people.

The horrible massacres in Rwanda were committed by black people against black people. The horrible bombings in Ireland are committed by white people against white people. In Somalia, it is black against black and in Bosnia, again, white against white. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge committed horrid atrocities against their own people, and in early America; Indian Tribes warred and took coup on other Indian tribes.

So I am tired of hearing about how horrible white people are. There will always be evil people in this world, but white people have hearts just as big as the others do. The truth is, all humans are quite capable of evil and if we are ever going to move away from our hateful behavior in America, we are going to have to take a more mature look at the problem than simply blaming all wrongs on the bad-white-rednecks (low-income, conservative whites) and/or those that would like to see a return of family values (whom, as the movie “Pleasantville” brought out, are frequently seen as rednecks and hate-mongers but have also been interpreted as Christians).

Let’s clarify what hate is and what it isn’t. Sitting in the kitchens of my in-laws, I have heard hurtful words said about white people. I’ve heard that white people don’t love their kids the way Indians do, aren’t as hospitable as Indians and aren’t as smart as Indians. But I know that some of these things said are not said with hate, but frustration and lack of understanding, many times without realizing how it can hurt. I have also sat in the kitchens of many white people and seen the same thing. What is said is not always hate, but many times frustration and misunderstandings.

Many of us have prejudices based on ignorance. Ignorance partially encouraged by our culture that formerly picked on minorities but now continually portrays white

people as rednecks. The other day a white man entered our shop. Tall, gangly and loud, he had the thickest southern accent I'd ever heard. He was even chewing tobacco. A real hick. Of course I assumed immediately that he didn't have a brain in his head. I even assumed he would recoil at the sight of my husband. After all, he must be a redneck, right? It wasn't until after we'd worked with him a little bit that I realized I was wrong. I had prejudged him. I apologize.

I was reading in a newspaper article that due to a labor shortage, the Japanese needed to bring in workers from outside Japan. But being a society that is rigid in its culture, they thought it best they invite people that have Japanese background. If I remember correctly, they brought in people of Japanese decent that had been living in Brazil.

Surprise, surprise, friction grew between the Japanese nationals and the Brazilian nationals. The problem was that although the Brazilians were of Japanese decent, they had grown up in a different culture and were prone to doing "irritating" things, like play a loud Brazilian game and other such "obnoxious" things. Now regular Japanese are avoiding the Brazilians, and even disliking them.

What has happened here isn't "racism". They are of the same race! What has happened that there is a group of people that aren't "obeying" the preset standards in a certain society. We all grow up, in our families, neighborhoods, and in the larger neighborhoods and even larger society with a set of "rules". Call it Miss Manners, or "Social Sense," or whatever. Whether it is a "standard" against slurping your soup at the table, or refraining from other behavior deemed in society to be "rude" or "obnoxious". We have unspoken rules in our society and as children we learn to live within them.

"High" American society has a different set of standards than "low". High Americans have always disliked the ways of the low, no matter what color they were/are. Think "white trash". Or the Irish when they first began migrating to New York

What people like to call racism does not, in fact, have as much to do with the color of skin as it has to do with "that group of people" disregarding the standards of the larger society. They are playing loud music on the street at night, and our family was not raised to do that. They spit on the street. They speak funny and don't say "please" and "thank you". They don't clean up their yards. They put old couches on their porches. They entertain themselves in a way we were taught isn't right. They make up jokes I don't understand. They congregate on the corner at night and that scares me. They won't live by our rules! Darn them!

But now in reverse, there are those that make deliberate and nasty accusations against conservative whites. The Montana Human Rights Network (MHRN) has continually made remarks and held conferences against what they call "religious extremist groups." What are religious extremist groups according to them? A March 1993 newsletter states that anyone that seeks to proscribe or eliminate abortion rights, teach creationism or oppose pornography, including the Christian Coalition, Family Issues Forum, and Focus on the Family is an extremist. The article went on to accuse these groups of having "agendas" and of doing things as horrible as running for political positions. Correct me if I am wrong, but if a politician does NOT have some kind of agenda, why is he there? One would hope our politicians DO have goals and ideas and are not there just to warm a seat. Apparently this particular human rights group has a problem with free speech and the right of all citizens to vote and hold office.

MHRN and other groups like them don't seem to see the hate they themselves are promoting. I may not agree with everyone's thoughts and feelings but I must see the human in others. Holocaust survivor Corrie TenBloom, when confronted with the death camp soldier responsible for killing her sister, initially recoiled in hate. But then, after she looked to God, reached out to the man and forgave him.

We must understand that we all, no matter the race, tribe, political or religious difference, really are the same within. None of us are better than or worse than any one else.

Obviously love can't be forced. It is a decision each individual can only make on their own. But while we can slowly get there by teaching our children that hate is wrong, we have to be careful of what methods we use to teach them. People may recoil at the thought of teaching about God's love, but hate shouldn't be part of our teaching method either. We can't prevent children from hating one group by teaching them to hate another. This must stop. Low-income, and/or conservative whites aren't trash.

I've read somewhere that God is Love, (although I won't admit it was at a Bible study). I pray that we start looking within our own hearts for a willingness to love those we disagree with. It is the only cure for what ails us.