

Racism a Personal Perspective

By : MichaelS76

An essay about my personal experiences with racism. The use of African American as a designator of race and not point of origin. The fact that we are essentially all Africans, having all originated from Africa. How we should abandon African American as a designation of race for Black people, since they are as American as I am, a Caucasian born in the United States. United as a people of good intention and the desire for equality for all let us abolish this tendril of racism that has made its way into the 21st century. I will end with a quote that ends my essay 'â We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happinessâ .

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by Michael Dale Sipes, Jr.

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First, I am not racist, far from it, as you will clearly and unambiguously come to appreciate by the time you finish reading this true account concerning my early childhood experience with racism. My first best friend in Elementary school was not a white boy, but a black boy named Kanod. We were both in the third grade and at the young naïve age of seven, I did not see Kanod as any different from myself. Nothing about Kanod was different to me, not even the obvious difference in the color of our skin because I connected to Kanod on a deeper level. He and I both faced ridicule on a daily basis because we were both different, and to a third grade boy different meant something about your appearance. Kanod was teased for being black; I was teased for being both overweight and from a poor family. Unlike my extra weight, Kanod could not change the color of his skin so he took the brunt of the daily assaults. However, never by me, Kanod was my best friend and I never looked at him as being any different from myself. One day during a bully session in the school bathroom, I stood by his side and defended him as any good friend would. He was not my only childhood friend; I had white friends too. However, it would not be until the fifth grade that I would meet two boys named Kevin and his younger Brother Darren, two boys who are now men and more Brother to me than friends. As children and into adulthood we develop friendships that we consider best, or above the rest that we keep close, Kanod, Kevin, and Darren are those friends. I remained friends with Kanod until he moved away that summer with Kevin and Darren taking his place. However, the impression that Kanod's friendship had on me has stayed with me to this day, reminding me that people are much more than a sum of their physical attributes, that good character was not skin deep, but rather in the depth of their soul.

It was 1989 and I was now facing a new challenge and I was scared to death, and rightfully so as I waited on the bus to take me to Jr. High School. I thought that the kids in Elementary school were mean, and I had expected older kids to be more understanding, boy was I wrong, these kids were pure evil. Once again, my weight and old worn out clothes brought me more ridicule and torment on the first day of Jr. High School than I had received in a month in Elementary school. Kevin and I stayed in touch now and then, but we no longer lived close to each other and I had no friends at all. It was then I thought about Kanod, I wondered how his life turned out and how he was taking Jr. High School. I do not remember much from Jr. High School and probably for good reason. It was not until High School that I finally began to fit in. I began working for a woman and her elderly Mother who was in her late 90s. We became good friends and are still friends to this day. Her Mother, Miriam lived to be 102, but sadly, I had moved away and missed the last few years of her life. She was a special woman, spunk, loving life she went for a brisk 2-mile walk every day and read constantly.

High School was a much better time for me since I was working and able to buy nice clothes, becoming one of the best dressed kids in High School. I had lost all my extra weight and had put on so much muscle from lifting weights that I was quite buff as one girl put it. I had turned from an ugly duckling into a handsome young man, too handsome as some girls called me plastic face because my face was so flawless. I guess you just cannot please everyone, someone always has something they must find wrong with you, but it does not mean that it is true. I have learned you cannot please everyone but as long as you are pleased with yourself, that is all that matters. High School was a blur and seemed to come and go so fast, about as fast as an Army recruiter who talked about the wonders of the Army and whose card I placed in my wallet. However, I had bigger dreams, I aspired to go to college, to become a doctor, but my Father destroyed my hopes and dreams,

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again. The day after my 18th birthday, he came into my bedroom, which was sparsely decorated with things bought with my money I made from cleaning my friend's house. My Father was a very selfish man who made me pay for all my clothes, most of the furniture in my bedroom, my daily food, even shampoo and toothpaste. He kept me from going to prom after I had made a date with a girl named Lallah. She had asked me one day before getting on the bus to ride home if I would take her and I said yes. I was so excited to go to prom with her and she was thrilled as well. I told my Father that I needed to rent a tuxedo and that I did not have the money but it was really something I wanted to do and could he help me. He got upset and did not answer me, but just a few days before prom, no tuxedo, no real plans, he decided that he and I were leaving for New York for a site-seeing trip. I was both in shock and disbelief, how could I tell Lallah about this without her hating me for the rest of her life. I saw her the following day and before she got on the bus, I told her that I could not take her because my Father was taking me to New York. The look on her face was one I will never forget, she tried to look as if she understood, but after taking her seat on the bus, she looked out the window at me crying. I will never forget that, nor forgive my Father for hurting both her and me. Ring dance and the senior cruise were pretty much the same story, my Father said I did not need to go and he did not have the money, yet he was buying lavish dresses and expensive jewelry for his girlfriend. It was not as if he was poor far from it, he had worked his way up from sweeping floors at the Norfolk Naval Shipyard to being the crane plant supervisor and made a very nice salary of nearly \$60,000 dollars in 1995. It was around this time the he found out his princess was actually seeing a guitar player and just using him for his money. I guess God has ways of getting back at the selfish and wicked. The only thing I have from High School other than a diploma is a senior yearbook, which I paid for. When he approached me the day after my birthday he said while smiling that I was now 18 and an adult and his obligation to me was over. I need to start either looking for a job or join the military. Well, I had other plans or so I thought, but now he destroyed my plans, my dreams, once again. I had not even graduated High School yet and he was telling me I needed to get a job and move out. Therefore, I dug down deep, there in my wallet was the recruiter's card, and I made the decision to give him a call. One thing I can definitely say about recruiters is that they are some of the slickest liars our great military has to offer. It did not take long before I had agreed to enter the early entry program.

Ten days after graduating from High School I left for the Army and was forced to live, eat, sleep, and shower with every race, creed, sexual orientation, personality and more than you could imagine. I learned to get along with everyone and I learned that the morals and scruples I had as a child served me well in the Army. The Army instilled in me the core principle that we are all equal; no matter the sometimes-striking differences and that, I could trust my life to any soldier, no matter what race they might be. I met another soldier by the name of Kelly while in field medic school, I do not remember his first name since we all called each other by our last names. He was Black and we became very good friends, actually, he was one of only three friends that I had the entire time I went to field medic school. I went on to Laboratory technician school meeting more friends, some friendships that have lasted until this day and will last for the rest of my life. Kelly moved on to his permanent duty station while I went to another company for more training.

My experience with others of different races and especially Black people up until that point and until today for that matter have always been a good one. Yes, there are those who are Black who sell drugs, commit crimes and do all the terrible things man is capable of, but so do Whites, Asians, Mexicans and all the rest of the different races there are. People often are brainwashed by what they are spoon fed by the media, whether that be in their local newspaper, major news centers or their local news channel. For instance, a particular news channel in the southern United States might focus on a Black man who robbed a liquor store, but not report a White man who broke into a home in search of prescription drugs and killed the entire family in their sleep. However, you have to remember that whatever major news centers or your local news channel is broadcasting is greatly influenced by the opinion of its major shareholders and/or president of the company, not to mention the region in which you live in. I often go to family reunions for not only my immediate family but also my extended family. Often I hear older people make racist jokes, in particular Black jokes, at which time I get up, slam down my drink, and sigh in disgust, making everyone look at me, and then walk away. I think they get the point, because the old man now looks like an old fool and shuts up. I am very fortunate that one side of my

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family is completely free from prejudice and hatred of any kind toward Blacks or anyone different from themselves. Growing up I never heard my Father or Mother say the N word, or negatively talk about Black people or any other race for that matter, quite the opposite actually. I was taught to accept and respect all people of all races, shapes, and colors. Unfortunately, there is always another side to every coin. The other half of my family has racism, but also has other issues such as molestation, gossiping, bickering and most are now separated and don't talk to each other. I think the state of the other half of my family speaks for its self about the good of racism, bickering, gossiping, and definitely molestation. I was molested at an early age by my Uncle and can attest to the damage that it inflicts upon its victim, especially when that victim is a child. Around that time I had my first encounter with a Black person, a boy just a few years older than myself, perhaps seven or eight years old. He approached the screen door of the apartment we lived in and muttered something. He then asked me to come closer to the screen door to hear what he was saying. Being young and naive, I did just as he asked. He then heaved and spit all over the side of my face and into my right eye through the screen door. My Mom, hearing the commotion, ran from the bedroom and chased the boy away. I did not associate his bad behavior with his race; to me it was just another kid, albeit a rather bad one. That first encounter was one I will never forget, not because he was Black but because it taught me that there are evil people in this world and I needed to be more cautious

Years later, as an adult I was watching on an old episode of The Dean Martin Celebrity Roast show. I was having a rather bad day and thought that this 70's TV show would be fun to watch and have some good old clean humor that might brighten my mood and maybe get me to crack a smile. The episode I chose was the roast of Sammy Davis Jr. To my surprise, I heard more racist bickering and "joking" than I had ever heard before in my life. Moreover, to make matters even more confusing was that the Black guests, with the exception of one laughed along with the racist jokes, as if they were either expected to or afraid not to. It did not make me crack a smile, but made me realize something more profound. I realized that my great-grandfather's and grandfather's generation were both one of the most destructive and racist generations still alive. Not only did they carry on with racism, they built the most destructive device known, the hydrogen bomb. I do not think they realized what Einstein did at the time, that they were not only building the most destructive device ever known, but also perhaps humankind's own gallows. I then thought about my Father's generation, they too had racism, but much less than the previous generation. Then I thought about my generation and the next. Currently we are the future, and fortunately, for the Earth, we are more conscious about the environment and of each other. We truly believe that all men and women are created equal as it is written in our supreme moral law of the land, the Declaration of Independence. We are the generation that just might save humanity from itself. I have always thought, it is not until my great-grandfathers and grandfather's generation dies that much of the racism and destruction of the Earth will die with them. Unfortunately, right now, those who are the most destructive, racist are currently in power. I do not necessarily mean President Obama, whom I voted for twice, he is Black, and I do not view him as being racist at all. I am referring to Presidents before and possibly after him and all the senators, governors and mayors who are currently in office. I hope to live to see the day when those from my generation are in power. I hope, no I pray that we can do better, we must, for the entire Earth and the survival of humankind depends upon it. Whether it's the development of new nuclear weapons, global warming, which is a fact, not a theory, over population or our dependence on fossil fuels for practically everything we produce we must change or face the extinction of our race either entirely or as we know it.

One aspect of racism that I find objectionable is the use of African American when referring to Black people either in person, on legal documents or government forms. At one time, Blacks were Africans and then referred to as Negro and then African Americans, certainly not by choice due to being forced into slavery. Now hundreds of years after being forcibly taken from Africa they are no longer Africans, but Americans just as much as I am. I am part German and part Cherokee Indian and the rest is unknown, but I consider myself White but more importantly American. When I talk about not being African, I am only referring to the fact that Blacks are Americans and only using the word Black as a designation of race and not a point of origin. We are both Americans, and I especially do not mean to disregard or belittle a Black person's great

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heritage just as I have feelings about my own heritage, but I believe that in order to have equality we need to refer to all of those who are legal citizens, Americans. A Black man named Gibre George, who is an entrepreneur from Miami has said, "We respect our African heritage, but that term is not really usâ", and later went on to say, "We're several generations down the line. If anyone were to ship us back to Africa, we'd be like a fish out of water." Mr. George also said that "It just doesn't sit well with a younger generation of Black people; Africa was a long time ago. Are we always going to be tethered to Africa? Spiritually I am an American. When the war starts, I'm fighting for America." I can fully understand Mr. George's feelings about his patriotism and his respect for his heritage, and just as with Mr. George, if a war broke out; I would be fighting right alongside of him for America, not for Germany where some of my ancestors came from hundreds of years ago. I can also understand his fish out of water feelings when referring to being shipped back to Africa that is exactly how I would feel if I were shipped back to Germany. One of the biggest problems with a label is that it does not fit well with the fact that Black people have multiple ethnicities just as whites do and it challenges America's original black-white classifications. In the 1960s, "Black" came back as an expression of pride, a strategy to defy oppression and renewed the spirit of most Black people at the time. Today there are those who do not want to be referred to as African, and there also those who do not want to be referred to as an American. Black is a way of bridging the divisions between the two ideologies of the same people and allowing them to move forward and prosper just as they have since a Black man moved from the slave house to the White House. Besides serving in the Army, voting for Obama for President was something I felt proud doing not only for myself but for my Country. His election showed me that we are changing as a people and things are moving in the right direction, that there is hope for humankind after all.

Some say just say Black, because they feel it is more politically correct than saying African-American. When you are speaking to or of a person who is Black, you do not know their ancestry, so why slap a label on them. A person you call Black or African American may be from Cuba or Nigerian or even England for that matter. Using African American, as a catchall does not work as well as one might think, and is wrong much of the time. When referring to the race of an American you do not hear of any South American Americans, Nauru Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Americans, or Nigerian Canadian, Americans. When you listen to it that way, African American, South America Americans, Nauru Nagorno-Karabakh Republic Americans, Nigerian Canadian American, they all sound strange, out of place, and some most certainly and most importantly out of time. African American is just the next step after Negro which was the designation for Black people prior to the 60s which compared to today's vernacular, is absolutely without a doubt racist in nature. The designation changed in the 60s to Black as in â Black Powerâ. Unfortunately again repression took its toll and the designation changed again to African American in the 1980s. Today many are resisting this progression by holding on to a name from the 1960s, which was popularized by the developments of the American Civil Rights Movement. Many great men such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, A. Philip Randolph, Stokely Carmichael, and countless others protested the conditions of the United States' segregated society, and lobbied for better treatment for people of the Black race. The Civil Rights Movement even made its way into mainstream music through one of my favorite musicians James Brown and his slogan "Say It Loud - I'm Black and I'm Proud". Most Black people disagreed with the term African American because some descended from U.S. slaves, some are pure immigrants with a separate history "African-American" is not the sign of progress hailed when the term was popularized in the late 1980s. Instead, it is a misleading connection to a distant culture. I would give anything to have met Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X and listen to them speak. They were two great intelligent men at that time with a vision for the future for all men and women past, present and future to be equally American regardless of their race or point of origin. Most American's fail to realize and do not know due to a lack of researching and knowing their own history is, if you want to label people by their place of origin and not their place of birth and citizenship, then in fact we are all Africans by decent and place of origin.

Man and women both came into being in Africa in the fertile crescent of the Nile delta in what is now modern day Egypt. At that time, the continents were closer together and Europe was connected to Africa giving man a path to migrate to Europe and Asia. From there man migrated to all the other continents. North America being

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the last to be colonized by man at the last ice age, those were true Native Americans. Unbelievably, like it or hate it, embrace or reject it, the fact is we all share a common thread of African heritage. Having knowledge of the true origins of all men and women and my desire for the complete abolition of racism in my lifetime, I feel that as a Nation, united as one, we need to abandon African American as a designation of race. Since in reality we are all Africans, having all originated from Africa many epochs ago. I feel that Blacks citizens just as White citizens are equally American just as any other race born in the United States. Regardless of their point of origin hundreds of years or epochs ago, they are no less American than anyone else is. It is time for all Americans to begin to refer to Blacks as Americans and not African Americans in our everyday vocabulary, on government forms and other documents, for those of us born in the United States, we are all proud of our heritage and of our citizenship. Change is the new buzzword, so let us actually make change instead of just talking about it.

One of the most proud moments of my life and the first time I have ever voted was when Barack Hussein Obama II, a Black man was sworn in as President of the United States. Before I die, I want one last bit of equality for all and that is to have a woman as President of the United States. As a citizen of this great Nation, it is our duty to be involved in issues that have a profound effect on our relationship with each other and the ever-continuing stewardship of the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence on which this great Nation of ours was founded upon. I want to end with a quote from the Declaration of Independence, which has a major influence on human rights. â We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happinessâ .

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