

ONE WHITE MAN'S VIEW ON RACE

I remember thinking we were all equally affected by racism. My high school had students from Black, Irish, Italian, and Puerto Rican backgrounds. But the neighborhoods we returned to remained fiercely segregated. A Black gang would periodically attack us in our Irish section. Similarly, an Irish gang would raid the Blacks or Italians. The Puerto Rican neighborhoods were at a distance, but tensions were similar regardless of culture.

Years later something changed my view. I married a minority and saw my wife, and now grown daughters and extended family, being discriminated against regularly. As a young man I didn't fully understand how much easier it was for me. We would often quip, "Everyone's racist!" While generally true, it glossed over entrenched racism that minorities still face.

I remember visiting high school friends in nearby Little Italy one night. Three Black youth who entered 'uninvited' were chased out by an angry mob. A buddy and I expressed displeasure, only to realize we had better leave too! ... Thirty years later I revisited Little Italy and saw people of various colors playing and living together. Even Little Italy became a melting pot!

Few imagined how integrated places like Little Italy would become. They're integrated not because of protests and finger pointing. Neighbors, old and new, grew into cohesive multi-racial communities through socializing, dating, working together, attending the same schools and churches, and intermarriage.

By definition racism is, "racial prejudice or discrimination" and not the fault of any one group. The victims and oppressors change by time, place, and color. In the US, darker skinned are still most affected by it today. Other times and places were, are, and will be different. But the real solutions remain the same – by looking

past color and coming together as 'one people' in everyday interactions and relationships. Finger pointing keeps us focused on our differences.

I've been told by well-intentioned individuals how historically racist my 'color' has been. But 'color' is a broad generalization. My particular 'White' ancestors were also oppressed and abused. They weren't all put in chains by Black and White slave traders, but they were subjugated for centuries. And even if my ancestors were slaveowners (they were not), fault finding of any 'color' is prejudicial and furthers our divisions. History should be used to educate, not to perpetuate.

Finger pointing and color shaming is also popular in today's politics, film, and music. Personally, it provokes memories of my mom, dad, and a friend, who were all victims of racism. My mom and dad were almost killed, and my friend was in fact "murdered" – all for being White. In summary, we shouldn't fight racism with prejudice and blame. Let's work together as 'one people' to eliminate racism and prejudice from all of our communities regardless of color.

Please see References