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***EFFECTS OF RACISM IN OUR SOCIETY***

Racism is something we've all witnessed. Many people fail to believe that race isn’t a biological category, but an artificial classification of people with no scientifically variable facts. In other words, the distinction we make between races has nothing to do with genetic characteristics. Race was created socially, primarily by how people perceive ideas and faces we are not quite used to. The definition of race all depends on where and when the word is being used. In U.S. history, the meaning of the label “white” has changed over time, eventually adding groups like the Italians, Irish and Jews. Other groups, mainly African, Latino, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Asian descendants, have found the path for worldwide social acceptance much more difficult. The irregular border of ethnicities touch educational and economic opportunity, political representation, as well as income, health and social mobility of people of colour.

So where did this type of behaviour begin? There are many ideas thrown around as to how racism began, though the truth lies in the history of mankind. Before people were able to travel and experience difference groups of people, we predominantly stayed in the same kind of area with the same kind of people. We feared things that were different, and were lacked the power to face those kinds of things. All this changed once we did, in fact, obtain this level of human advancement, but the fear never drifted. The truth is, racism began as soon as people faced those of different races. We’ve always the fear of change, not to mention the unknown.

It seems that is racism has been around so long we would have been able to overcome it as our species developed, but contact with those of whom we are afraid of often lead to disputes, which, in time, is what caused racism to transform from people simply disliking each other, to the permanent and indestructible foundation of common racism and prejudice.

Contemporary racism is said to have been derived from many places, one of the most common ideas being upbringing. As a child, you are reliant on your parents to help you become who you are. Part of that involves their own, distinct opinions, that of which children don’t have the maturity to form on their own. They need the help of their parents, and this is often where the problem starts.

If you were told that all Asians were sneaky or all Whites are evil or all Blacks are criminals, you can bet that you are going to feel this way about them. “Upbringing is the largest cause of racism”-Anonymous. Even if we allow yourself to get to know some of them, this will always be in the back of your mind.

Another suggestion as to how racism makes it’s way into our heads is through the almighty media. As we grow up, media becomes a factor of our lives whether or not we want it to be, and is also a major source of how racism keeps itself active. Since the 70’s the media has been giving us racial labels, one of the largest supplies coming from crime shows like “Law and Order”, and “CSI”. When dealing with crime, people of colour are reflected in the demarcation of “them” and “us”. Whites are often represented as the “good guy”, or the strong, law obeying citizens. They often target people of colour, sometimes without any sort of evidence. Directors and writers use racial stereotypes to make a more complex story with more suspects.

In the novel, “The Power of One,” by Bryce Courtney, a young, white, African boy named Peekay lives in a world where the government, the country, and the world revolves around racism. World War II is coming to an end, and in South Africa, the whites seem to hate the blacks just as much as the blacks hate the whites. Peekay was raised by a compassionate and loving black woman he refers to as “Nanny”, due to the unsafe conditions at home with his bad, mentally ill mother. He grew up with Nanny and his best friend, who was also black. To Peekay, racism didn’t exist.

The author, Bryce Courtney, didn’t intend on writing a book fully based on racism in South Africa. He grasps a trace of apartheid by Peekay’s experiences as a white boy by unhurriedly soaking it into South Africa as a toxin.

“Adapt, blend…develop a camouflage.” This thought went through Peekay’s mind once he had been exposed to racism, having been forced to attend a boarding school full of bigger, darker students. In Chapters One and Two, as a mere five-year-old, the bright protagonist Peekay is already addressing the necessity of affecting camouflages in order to survive the system. He is often forced to act differently around people of different skin colours in order to fit in better to prevent himself from getting beaten or teased.

Peekay faces his first taste of racism the very first night at the boarding school. One boy, known as “The Judge”, who was much older, stronger, and darker than Peekay, comes up with the nickname “PissKop” for Peekay, because of Peekay’s habit to wet the bed that was caused by The Judge’s, along with the help of many other older black students, tendency to beat Peekay and spit in his face. The Judge also convinces Peekay that Hitler is determined to march all Englishmen in South Africa into the ocean, and even forces Peekay to eat human faeces.

Upbringing is a very strong factor of what influences people to become racist, or to have even slight racial views. In Peekay’s case, he had gone from one extreme to another. At home, Nanny and his best friend were the only people he could call family, besides his mother who spent time at what Peekay called “The Mental Breakdown Place”. When sent to the boarding school, he wasn’t expecting the black students to dislike him because of his skin colour. He saw the black kids as merely bullies, and before they started bullying him hadn’t anticipated them to gang up on him because they were black. This is what caused Peekay’s neutrality with the racist society in which he lived. He gave each person a chance to be a good person, because he had seen the good in different ethnicities to which many people were stubborn to open up their minds.

The power of one, or the idea of how one person can make a significant difference, is an important idea in relation to challenge in the novel. Giel Piet, one of Peekay’s boxing coaches who had been sneaking tobacco to all of the prisoners, was forced to eat faeces by Sergeant Ballman, a white racist who works at the prison. If Giel Piet had refused to eat the faeces, the guards would have found the tobacco, resulting in the prisoners getting beaten along with Giel Piet . As Peekay witnessed this happen to his coach, he thought, "It made me angry. Angry it was done. Angry I couldn't do anything to stop it."

But how does racism really affect society? Visibly identifiable members of racial and ethnic oppressed groups continue to struggle for equal access and opportunity, particularly during times of stringent economics. Often, the targeted race has a harder time doing things such as finding a well-paying job or house. While there have been some sizeable gains in the labour force status of racial minorities, significant gaps remains. Racism is rampant in all areas of employment. For many members of exploited racial and ethnic unit, there is always an economic depression. Studies show that people of colour are the last hired and the first fired. As a result, budget cuts, downsizing, and privatization may disproportionately hurt people of color. In February 1995 the unemployment rate for African Americans was 10.1 percent as compared to 4.7 percent for white Americans (Berry, 1995). The unemployment rate for adolescents of colour is approximately four times that of white adolescents. What's more, In America, the Majority of unemployed men are black, and compared to other races, Blacks and Latinos on average have disproportionately low income.

Other than simply getting a job, getting and keeping a house is often a difficult task for those of colour. The job of a landlord is to rent out houses to reliable people or families, though a racist landlord could make it difficult for a family of colour to find a home. Widespread housing discrimination against Americans of colour in U.S. neighbourhoods is sometimes referred to as a “national” problem, something that must be fixed by new government policies. Housing segregation in the United States developed slowly and deliberately. By law, property owners may not refuse to rent or sell housing, make housing unavailable to, set different conditions or privileges for sale or rental of a property, impose different rates and terms on a loan, refuse to make a mortgage loan, or discriminate in appraising property due to a client’s ethnicity, and because racism cannot be seen, these rules are very vague. Available evidence suggests that blacks and Hispanics face higher rejection rates and less favourable conditions in securing mortgages than do Whites with similar credit characteristics (Ross & Yinger 1999). It has been reported that blacks pay more than 0.5% higher interest rates on home mortgages than whites do and that this difference persists with income level, date of purchase, and age of buyer.

During the Great Depression, people of colour had a much harder time getting past the financial hardship because of the racial stereotypes that had before been thrown around. In the book, Whitewash Race: The Myth of a Colour-blind Society, Michael K. Brown says “In the late 1930’s, black unemployment rates were two to four times higher than white unemployment rates.” Few Blacks had any financial savings to caution them from the full affect of the Depression. Blacks that had before has troubles getting a well paying job the faced the same challenge with a much larger margin for failure. Mrs. Roosevelt was particularly fretful about the financial difficulties encountered by racism.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, by Mildred D. Taylor, is a story about a black family, the Logan’s, from the south, living frugally in order to preserve and keep their patch of farmland. Because the story takes place during the end of the Great Depression, one of the worst times in history to be a black farmer, money has become very sparse for the family and for the neighbourhood. The children of the family, Cassie, Stacey, Christopher-John, and Little Man, live in a world where white kids rule and they know it. White kids had the freedom to do anything they wished to do, from threatening the kids they thought were inferior to hammering kids who socialized with black kids, or even walked with them to school. This was the case for T.J., a friend of the Logan kids who often walked with Cassie and her brothers to school, more often than not with a price.

While walking to school on the first day, Cassie and her brothers are cascaded in red dust as a bus full of white kids skids past, though they eventually get their revenge on the kids by sabotaging the bus. This is significant not only because it shows us just how boorish white kids were to black kids, but it also shows that black kids had to walk to school, and to some black kids, according to Cassie, the walk is so long they are forced to drop out of school. Cassie, being in fourth grade, attends a school especially for black kids. On the first day back to school, she and the other students are staggered to realize that that year they would be having books in the class, something that at that time was a luxury for an all-black school. Though once Cassie sees the books, she quickly sees why the books were given to them. The books were old and dirty, and on the inside of the front cover clenching to stay on was the label “Nigras.” Infuriated, Cassie refuses to take the book, and is ultimately whipped for her quarrel.

It isn’t until a black man is killed by a group of white men without consequence that the Logan kids grasp the idea of how dangerous living in a racist, white community could be. Racism becomes the problem revolving around the Logan family. Cassie doesn’t understand why they are treated differently and doesn’t want to back down because of the colour of her skin. Stacey, on the other and, agrees to keep a low profile in the white community as to not trigger any alarms that may cause an issue.

This novel does a good job of showing how the effects racism on a specific race simply cause racism itself to stay functioning. After all they endure, at the end of the book the Logan family are a healthier family than they were at the start, mainly because of their capability to see through each other’s skin colour, something the rest of the town was unable to do. The disruption of the school bus, though it was simply a small revenge, shows how close the kids had become because of everything they had been through because of the white kids. Racism brings races together, making races seem like a tighter bondage, and ultimately making it easier to target races.

Racism had existed throughout human history. It is regularly defined as the detestation, or belief that someone is less than human, because of skin colour, place of birth, and mores. All of these arguments are based on a false understanding of race; in fact, some contemporary scientists could argue that the classification of races used today is inadequate, and that there are more meticulous and proper ways of categorizing humans. What may seem to be considerable "racial" differences to some people, such as skin colour, hair, and facial shape, are not of much scientific significance. It has been said that there have been greater biological differences between people of the same race than if we were to compare the same trait to a different race. One philosopher writes: "There are few genetic characteristics to be found in the population of England that are not found in similar proportions in Zaire or in China….those differences that most deeply affect us in our dealings with each other are not to any significant degree biologically determined."

Often what causes people to act racist is the fact that they have learned to conceal fear with racism. Many individuals react with fear towards those who look or appear different than them. Fear is what makes us uncomfortable, making us need to protect ourselves and defend, mostly causing pain and discomfort to the person or object of the fear. Instead of attempting to fix and deal with the differences, the wall between the two maintains; union and agreement are never attained.

So how do we put an end to this? The sad fact of the matter is that, during this age, we won’t. People were born differently, and it’s only human to retaliate negatively to things or people we aren’t used to. Scientists believe there is the tendency in all animals to selectively preserve their own kind even at the cost of a different animal type, which is in essence what caused racism, not to mention prejudice in general.

As humankind progresses, our way of thinking becomes more complex, as does the world around us. The values we once had aren’t forgotten, but replaced with new values as our old ways hide in the back of our minds. Though they are present and may re-emerge if a change in life conditions calls them up, they are no longer the dominant. This genuinely is the hope for mankind in their fight to end racism. In the future, if we can surmount the silliness of racism to the point where no one senses it, we will be in fine condition. The most effective way to begin this, through the words of Morgan Freeman, is to ***“Stop Talking About It.”***