

Recognizing the Choices You Can Make

A friend of mine, whose mother is White and father is half Black, says that he is in a unique position; like other mixed people with fair skin (e.g. Mariah Carey), he is often thought to be just White. He is, therefore, often privy to comments he would otherwise not be had his partial African heritage been more pronounced.

Specifically, he is often faced with the challenge of responding to racist comments made by Whites who mistakenly believe that a shared race automatically translates into a shared perspective about those of other races and ethnicities. "Because we are all White, we must hold the same ideas about Blacks, Asians, Latinos, Arabs, etc.," goes the thinking.

This kind of thinking isn't limited to Whites. Blacks often assume other Blacks feel the same way about Whites, and so on.

The point is, most of us have, at one point or another, been exposed to the prejudiced ideas of others, who assume (often incorrectly) that we believe as they do.

How do you respond to bigotry?

Many of us choose to ignore racism, bias and bigotry, rather than confront it. Perhaps we are so shocked, or made so uncomfortable by the ignorance demonstrated by such bigotry, that we feel we can only stand mute in its presence. Or, perhaps we fear negative repercussions - such as being viewed as an outsider - if we fail to stand unified with "our group."

Whatever the reason, writer Nadine Smith says, "we can do better."

Choosing the Best Response to Bigotry

To quote an old Rush (the classic rock band) song, "Even if you choose not to make a choice, you still have made a choice."

Whether you choose to respond verbally to bigotry, or not, you are still making a choice.

http://racereactions.about.com/od/skillsbuildingresources/a/respondtoracism_p.htm

Ms. Smith points out: "Most of us at one time or another have been a part of discussions where appeals to racial prejudice were employed. How we responded in that moment probably revealed more about us than anything alleged about the targeted group. Whether we stood up as we might have, or caved in to remain comfortably safe, we all know that we have more work to do to stamp out this evil."

Finding the courage to interrupt hate speech and uninformed ignorance, when it occurs, can translate into a victory for all. Following are some ways you can choose to counter bigotry:

- **Just Say No:**
There is nothing more withering to a bigot than to be told that their bigotry is not shared, and worse, that it's unacceptable to you.
- **Reject Their Manipulation:**
Birds of a feather don't necessarily have to flock together. Shatter the bigot's assumption that your shared race translates into shared ignorance - recognize it as the insult that it is, and enlighten the biased individual on the differences in your values and views.
- **Allow Your Actions to Communicate Your Beliefs and Values:**
For example, refuse to socially "freeze out" individuals or groups because of their racial, ethnic, religious or other identity. Instead, take the initiative to invite individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate in group discussions or social events.
- **Don't be a Follower:**
Object when peers resort to cheap tactics, such as trashing other groups, as a means of forging solidarity within your group.
- **Assume Responsibility for Change in Your Immediate World:**
It is often said that change starts with one person. Another of my favourite quotes says: Be the change you want to see in the world. Recognize that if each of us confronted bias, bigotry and racism in our daily lives, we would, each of us, play an important role in ultimately shaping social norms