

Can a White Man Speak to Black Americans?

For more than six years now, I have used my daily talk radio show to facilitate dialogue on difficult and divisive issues, asking my listeners to shoot straight with me just as I do with them, even saying at times, "Let's commit to speaking the truth to each other even if it means offending one another. Otherwise, how can we make progress in our understanding?"

We have done this numerous times when it comes to race issues in America, wading into dangerous and controversial waters with the commitment to learn from each other and grow closer together in the Lord, knowing that what unites us in Jesus is far greater than anything that divides us. (Having worked with ethnic churches around the globe for decades, our profound unity in Jesus is readily apparent.)

Over the years, I have had countless African Americans thank me for tackling these issues on radio and in writing, and they have encouraged me to keep the dialogue going, which is something I am determined to do.

At the same time, reading some responses to my last article, "A Public Appeal to Lebron James," I was reminded of just how far we have to go to deepen our trust.

Will you allow me to speak freely and openly?

In response to my appeal to Lebron, one commenter respectfully stated that, "Dr. Brown could be a tremendous blessing for all Americans if he used his show, writing and mission to help white people understand that their sons are treated very differently by the police than the sons of black mothers and fathers."

But that is the very thing I have been doing for years.

Absolutely!

For example, in my article, "The George Zimmerman Trial in Black and White," I created a fictional dialogue between a black man and a white man, beginning with the black man saying, "Once again, an African American is deprived of justice. How many more times must this happen before things change? A black teenager on his way home from the store with Skittles is shot dead by an overzealous community watchdog. A jury with 5 white women and one Hispanic woman exonerates the killer so he can walk away scot free. This is 21st century America? This is justice?"

As the fictional dialogue intensified, the black man urged the white man, to "talk to some African Americans over a cup of coffee – don't worry, they won't try to mug you or steal your wallet – and ask them to tell you about their world, about corrupt cops and morally bankrupt judges, about parents being beaten in front of their children's eyes without consequence, about the seething frustration black Americans have lived with for decades – no, centuries – and then you would understand why we are so outraged today."

Are you going to tell me that, as a white man, I don't get it?

The first two points in my article, "5 Obvious Lessons from Ferguson, MO," were: 1) "The racial divide in America remains wide and deep," and 2) "Much of white America still doesn't get it," explaining that "black Americans have been victims of injustice much more than we [meaning, white Americans] realize."

In my follow up article, "Ferguson Must Be Redeemed," I stated that, 1) "No verdict could satisfy both sides"; 2) "There's enough evidence to support skepticism on both sides"; and 3) "This is not about Ferguson," noting that, "If the shooting of Michael Brown was an isolated incident, then the protests would make no sense. But it is not. It points to a much

larger, national issue, one that runs deep in the psyche of black America.”

Yes, I get it, loud and clear, and I am constantly bringing these issues to the attention of my white brothers and sisters nationwide. (Here’s a typical radio show devoted to this very topic.)

In yet another related article, “Some Inconvenient Truths About Ferguson,” I wrote, “There is a reason that black America is hurting,” adding, “I refuse to believe that there is no basis for the grief and anger experienced by many black Americans today. I refuse to believe that, all too often, they are not victims of injustice.”

I closed the section by stating, “At the very least, we need to understand why many blacks so deeply mistrust our legal system (without for a moment minimizing the evil of arson and looting). They have had their dignity and personhood attacked more than enough times by now.”

To repeat: Yes, I get it! In fact, my most recent, relevant article was entitled, “Who Is Killing Off the Black Americans,” where I talked about the numerous attacks on the African American community, including the high rates of abortion.

What concerns me, though, is that when I try to share another part of the story with my African American brothers and sisters, my perspective is often rejected, as if only white Americans have blind spots. The fact is that all of us do, and all of us need to hear each other out, even when it hurts.

In my public appeal to Lebron, I made clear that I understood the message he and other athletes had been sending but urged him to consider sending another message as well.

Some have said to me, “Dr. Brown, the cops are not being

demonized by these gestures. These athletes are just showing solidarity with hurting black Americans.”

Actually, cops are being demonized, to the point that: 1) The St. Louis police department objected in the strongest of terms after 5 St. Louis Rams players began their game with the “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot,” gesture; 2) after a police officer in Denver was critically injured when he was hit by a car, high-school demonstrators shouted, “Hit him again!”; and 3) more and more policemen are fearing for their lives as they go about enforcing the law and doing their jobs, as protesters have even thrown rocks and explosives at them.

Don’t tell me there’s no demonizing of the police. There certainly is, especially among young people of all colors, and it would be wonderful if, along with their message of solidarity for hurting black Americans, athletes sent out a message of honor for the men and women of law enforcement.

I’ve spent years listening to and learning from my black friends and colleagues. I only ask my black friends and colleagues to do the same with me.

If we both work on removing the beam from our own eyes, then we can help remove the speck from each other’s eyes.