

Racism Over the Past 50 Years—Has Anything Changed?

My family moved to the segregated South from the Midwest in 1962. As a child, I was shocked by the racism I saw. My pediatrician had separate waiting rooms for blacks and whites. Gas stations had bathrooms labeled “men,” “women” and “colored.” Two years later, the Civil Rights Act was passed, and schools were integrated in stages. In my case, black students began attending my high school in Lakeland, Florida, when I was in 10th grade.

Florida had horrible racism in that era. My friend Harry Jackson’s father, who lived in Tallahassee, saw a man who had been lynched hanging from a tree. Our state was a dangerous place for outspoken black men. In my senior year, I wrote editorials for the school newspaper to help with the integration process. I wanted the students to accept each other and went out of my way to make friends with black students.

I remember one editorial on racism I wrote on Feb. 13, 1969—50 years ago this month. I recently pulled it out and was struck with how much has changed and how much hasn’t. That was only five years after the Civil Rights bill, and the South was not yet fully integrated. Race relations were improving, and yet now, while we’ve seen many more improvements, racial tension is as high as ever.

As a teen, I’m not sure I understood how many atrocities were committed against blacks. Of course, less than a year before, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated and, a year later, so was his brother A.D. King, father of my good friend Alveda King. I believe had Dr. King lived, racial relations would be better today, and he perhaps would have become president.

In the segregated South with its Jim Crow laws, white people clearly promoted racism. Until we understand this, we will fail to understand both the progress that has been made and the depth of forgiveness and love needed to heal our nation.

As a teenager, I saw that when it came to attitudes, both sides harbored racism. Today, that's still true, especially when so much in politics and the news seems to be racially motivated. Even though blacks have all the same rights and a higher standard of living than in the past, they complain about white privilege. And there are some, especially on the left, who call anyone they don't agree with "racist." A few leftists have called me racist merely because I voted for the white candidates who ran against Barack Obama. Though I would have liked to have voted for a black president, I couldn't support one who affirmed abortion on demand.

Since 1969, I've embraced what my mentor Pastor Jack Hayford taught: There's only one race—the human race. As Alveda King teaches in her new book, *We're Not Color Blind*, we're one blood created by God. Still, though, the reality of one human race has yet to sink in. When we reconcile the issue of race with God's Word, repentance, forgiveness and transformation will prevail.

With that disclaimer, here's some of my article (you can read the full editorial [here](#)). If what I wrote still applies, then we who follow Jesus—both blacks and whites—must lead in making this change or face 50 more years of the same, or worse, tensions. I wrote:

"Since integration has been forced upon us the past several years, most blacks and whites have quietly accepted integration as inevitable and mix congenially with each other. ... Most are more liberal now in their attitudes toward the other race than they were five or 10 years ago. It would appear prejudice and bigotry are slowly disappearing. Overt actions of racism are less frequent now than they were at one

time.

“But what about attitudes regarding racism? Are they changing too? Are blacks and whites willing to accept each other on a personal level? ... Are whites willing to accept blacks? ... Are whites willing to look on their black classmates like they look upon other whites? Are they willing to put away all prejudice and racism? Are blacks, too, willing to disregard racism toward whites? Are they willing to put aside their resentment toward the evils suffered by their people in the past caused by whites? Are they willing to realize the whites living today are not the ones responsible for the slavery of their ancestors? Are blacks willing to quit trying to prove their equality and understand whites are usually ready to accept them if they just prove themselves? Are blacks willing to accept whites too?

“Racism is racism no matter what color or who is prejudiced toward whom. Only when members of both races are willing to accept each other as equals will real racism truly be absolved.”

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