

Who Said White Men Can't Dance?

It's past time for us to get rid of our racial stereotypes.

I was not invited to any of the Inaugural parties in Washington last weekend, but I happened to be in the city for a conference in the D.C. suburbs. The pastor hosting me, Paul Carrette, is from the Caribbean island of Dominica. He has church members from Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Jamaica, St. Vincent and other countries, plus many African-Americans and a few Caucasians from the U.S. and England.

I expected the worship at Church of Living Waters to be lively since the praise leader is a Nigerian. There was plenty of rhythm. The band included a drummer and a bongo player—plus a guitarist and several talented singers. But when we shifted into the third song, it seemed like the congregation was holding back. Only one man, an older deacon, was dancing on the front row.

I wondered: Were the people tired from our weekend conference? Was this just a case of the Sunday morning doldrums? Or had the sophistication of this powerful city dampened the people's exuberance?

I could tell Pastor Paul was slightly frustrated because no one was getting out in the aisles. He had already announced that the Lord was going to bring great freedom during the worship time. We both knew God wanted lavish praise. At that point I stepped to the microphone.

I told the people that I had just returned from Nigeria, where Christians are known for their uninhibited worship. During some of my visits there I have danced for an hour, to the point that I was soaked with sweat and my feet ached. So I exhorted the people to start moving.

At that point, Harold Andrews, the associate pastor of the church, jumped up from his seat to make an observation. "Did y'all see what just happened?" he asked. He was amused that a white guy had just exhorted black people to dance in worship!

We all laughed, the people got loosened up and the excitement chased away the Sunday morning blahs. Many people moved to the front of the church and began to dance. Some were doing the Electric Slide. I was trying some African moves with a Ghanaian brother named Kevin and my Ethiopian friend Paulus. Those who weren't brave enough to dance in the aisles were swaying and clapping from their seats.

A little bit of heaven came down to earth that day.

And in that atmosphere a racial stereotype was exposed. Who said white men can't dance? Who said black people are always the most rhythmic? Who said skin color has that much power? I sensed that part of the breakthrough we felt that morning was a victory over the racism that has plagued our country.

After the service, Harold, the associate pastor, came over to embrace me. He is a dignified-looking African-American with an obvious grace for leadership. We did a fist-bump and immediately noticed something funny: My "white" skin was

almost exactly the same shade as his
“black” skin!

We rolled up our sleeves and held our arms together. We matched perfectly.

Harold and I realized immediately what God was showing us. We are not divided by race or skin tone or culture. We are so much more the same than we are different.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose life we celebrated this week, agreed that race is highly overrated. “We may have all come on different ships,” he said, “but we’re in the same boat now.”

His dream that his children would be judged “not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character,” was based on his Christian faith in a God who created all human beings from “one blood” (Acts 17:26, KJV) and whose kingdom is made up of “every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9).

If you compare skin pigments you will see that there are only slight variations between the darkest Africans, the palest Europeans and the ruddiest indigenous peoples of Latin America. White is not really white; black is not black; Chinese people are certainly not yellow; and Native Americans are not literally red.

We are all varied shades of brown because God made us all from the same clay. And He created all of us to worship Him with total abandon—whether you were born with rhythm or not.

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