

"Color Blind in the System"

As of this writing, I've been incarcerated over 17 years. I've seen and experienced racism on almost every level, and let me tell you - it's surprising and disturbing in the same breath.

"Ignorance allied with Power is the most ferocious enemy justice can have."

- James Baldwin -

On the administrative level, discrimination and racism flows throughout the system like an unchecked ebola virus. For instance, in the Mich. Dept. of Corrections (or Mich. Dept. of Corruption), there are only two classifications of prisoners: white and nonwhite. I guess if you're not white you're an "other."

I won't classify every white staff member as racist because that would be blatantly false. But those who are, still exist in alarming amounts. Sadly, they've been known to discriminate against fellow staff.

Although there are a few racist staff at each facility, none are more prevalent than in the Upper Peninsula. I've spent time in the U.P. and experienced racism at its peak. It was then I created the phrase, "These white folks make white people look bad." These staff meetings could readily double as a KKK rally. What's really sad, locals from the U.P. say it's not racist in the community, it's the staff itself.

These officers violate prisoners' civil rights overall, but when it comes to Blacks and Hispanics, civil rights become a myth. If you're a "nonwhite" and file a complaint regarding racism, discrimination, or other due process violations, you are likely to find yourself in segregation on fabricated charges. Trust me, I've been through it twice.

And that's just the beginning. They've been known to assault prisoners, and/or allow other prisoners to do it. Any property that wasn't willfully destroyed by staff has been known to arrive at one prison, while the inmate arrives at another.

When it comes to racism amongst prisoners, the majority of it derives from the blacks. Shocking ain't it?! I completely understand being outraged by or at the system, but it doesn't end there: They take out their pinned up frustration on the whites. Since white prisoners are a minority, some blacks take full advantage of this opportunity to "get back" for all the years of oppression... as though this particular inmate was the cause of slavery and its ensuing aftermath. Help me make this make sense: I'm suppose to hate you because of something your ancestors may or may not have done to my ancestors? Are they serious right now?

I never anticipated being subjected to racism myself, but since I tend to associate with all races and nationalities and found myself consorting with more diverse groups, I've been called "Uncle Tom,"

"Sell Out," or "White Boy" (a term used to degrade white men). They really despise that I talk like I'm fairly educated and not stuck on ebonics. (Forgive me for passing the 4th grade). They hate that I like a variety of music other than just rap. And the fact that I've outgrown the "hood" mentality is simply treason in some eyes.

It's never been in my DNA to discriminate based on race, and I won't start now. Besides, if I did, I'd have to include my own family, and that's COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE! Which reminds me of a guy I knew that was a member of the Nation of Islam. Every other word from his mouth was "henkey" -thrs, or "billy" -that, or "crackers". The irony is that he has a child by a white woman he claims to love dearly. Things that make you say WTF?!

I had a close friend ask me recently why I associated with the "white boys" more than my own. After a very brief pause, I laid it all on the table. Considering he's a member of the Moorish Science Temple of America, I knew my answer would be hard for him to accept:

"It's not in me to discriminate based on color of skin. Show me a time in history where that has ended successfully. I can't bring myself to associate with anybody who discriminates because of race, and since most of the 'brothas' were borderline racist, I couldn't be around it.

I don't have to watch my back or wonder if I'll get paid, unlike the 'brothas' who got more excuses than the law allow.

It's not that I hate my own people. In fact, I love my fellow black men and women... I just despise 'niggaz'. I don't discriminate against anyone, but I am highly allergic to STUPIDITY... of all races."

The more I began associating with the "Angry Black Men," the more of their traits I acquired. I started blaming everybody and their memma for my actions and problems, and it felt good placing blame elsewhere other than myself. Deep down, I knew it wasn't me. So I parted ways... and slowly but surely the racism began.

I leave you with a single question to ponder: Will you still demand to be called a "Black Man," yet act like a "nigga"?

Sincerely,

A Not so Angry
Black Man

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