

ANDY FREDERICK

No one takes blame for racism

When I heard of the rioting over the death of a young black boy last week in Brooklyn, I was reminded of a song I used to sing in elementary school.

"Who Took the Cookie From the Cookie Jar?" wasn't just a song, actually. It was also a game. The students would take turns claiming it wasn't they who took the cookie from the cookie jar, but someone else. That would go on for a few minutes, and then the teacher would decide it was time for the song to end, and so it did. We never did find out who took the cookie. But I know it wasn't me.

Of course, it was just a simple children's song with nothing evil or insidious about it. But the song does a darn good job of illustrating the problem we have with prejudice in this country.

Most Americans have been fighting racism for years. Or rather, most of us say we have been. Although many of the stereotypes are gone, the hate remains.

Americans think the problem stems from those who still insist their race is superior to all others. The reason prejudice remains, then, is that we have been unable to reach those ignorant red-necks.

I've exaggerated just a tad. But, in essence, that's how the problem of prejudice is perceived: The world is divided into two parts, liberals who are blind to race and religion, and bigots who hate everyone different from them.

If only that were the case. But it's not that simple. The problem is that no one wants to accept responsibility for prejudice.

"I'm not the one with the problem," people think. "It's the other guy." And that's reason enough to hate him.

In a Brooklyn neighborhood Aug. 19, a car driven by a Hasidic Jew went out of control and hit two black chil-



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dren on the sidewalk. One was killed. To many, the incident was cause to be sad. For for many others, it was another reason to hate.

There had long been tension between blacks and Jews in the Crown Heights neighborhood in which the accident took place. Then, the child who died became fuel for the fire, and the flames of hatred burned out of control.

Hours after the accident, a Hasidic man was murdered. He was not involved in the accident, but police believe his murder was an act of revenge. A black teen-ager has been charged in the killing.

Rioters also looted two stores, set fire to one and threw rocks and bottles at police.

The rioters have reasons to be upset. They always do. But where does it get them? Where does it get any of us? The racial tensions don't end with the blacks and Jews in Crown Heights.

Today it's blacks and Jews, tomorrow it will be Hispanics, then it will be whites, then Chinese. We all give lip service to love and peace and unity, but when push comes to shove, we push and shove.

Many blacks do not like the way they are treated by whites. The whites' prejudice is wrong, they say.

But many of the blacks in Crown Heights hate Hasidic Jews and think their hate is justified. Hasidic Jews hate blacks. Why not? I'm sure they have their reasons as well.

Now a black child is dead, killed by a Hasidic Jew. Blacks are outraged, and whites sit on their sofas watching the rioting on television, or in their lounge chairs reading about it in the newspaper, and they hate the blacks for rioting.

That makes blacks hate whites for their prejudice and Hasidic Jews hate whites for not dealing with blacks, and Christians hate Jews for killing Christ, and whites hate Mexicans for taking their jobs, and Chinese hate blacks for being uneducated, and so on and so on and so on.

Meanwhile, all of us claim to abhor prejudice. The solution, we say in unison, is for the other guy to stop being so hateful.

Who took the cookie from the cookie jar? Not me. It was someone else, and I hate them for it. And they hate me. Same reason.

All of us want, but none of us are willing to give. Oh, we all think we're doing our part, but someone else keeps screwing things up. That's a great excuse to hate.

And we wonder why prejudice still exists.

Frederick is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan photographer, arts and entertainment reporter and columnist.



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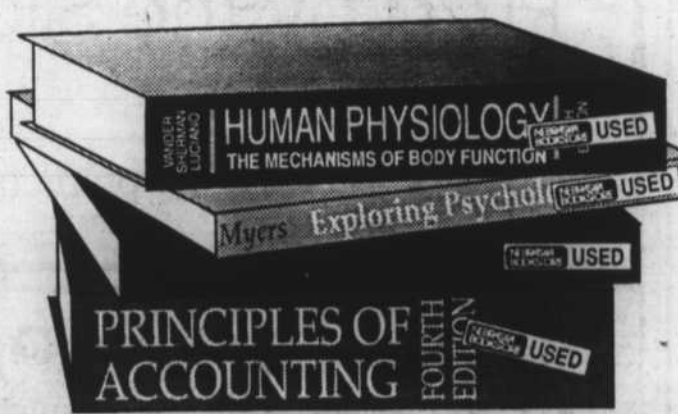
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