

**Race can't be used as a prejudice**

During all the discussions concerning 'race' relations and 'racial' unrest preceding and following the civil unrest in Los Angeles the cause and therefore the solution to racism has remained unidentified. While reading about civil unrest in the USA Today (May 4th 1992) I came across a story in which a young man who was arrested for looting made a statement in which he unknowingly and implicitly identified the crux of the issue. He said that he regretted the damage done to HIS people. The context of the story made it clear that he was using the term HIS to refer to members of his own race. I submit that it would be impossible to make a more racist statement and by making such a statement this young man was admitting that by identifying a specific race as HIS, he was allowing his thoughts and emotions concerning other individuals to be based strongly if not solely on skin color. In other words he was saying that race was important, especially as a factor in determining his behavior toward others. After reading many news reports and discussions on the problem of racism I have concluded that this man's view is the rule not the exception. Even the people who have called for action to promote 'racial harmony' have accepted the existence of real differences between races which must be overcome.

The solution to racism is for people to treat other people as individuals and make judgements about them based only on rational criteria and to realize that race or sex are not rational criteria. Race must become as insignificant in peoples' minds as it is in reality. But to treat people as individuals requires independent thinking which is what most people especially nowadays appear unwilling or unable to do. This is a great tragedy though, because significant numbers of people engaging in honest, serious and rational thought is a necessary precondition to solving all of societies problems including racism.

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**Human potential is a significant resource**

Where I grew up, we swam in the irrigation canal that ran through our fields, a couple of hundred feet from the house. My father raised and killed the animals, as needed. We wore sneakers from the grocery store and cut out the toes when they started getting too small. My mother fried chicken every Sunday for dinner, the noon meal. We smothered bread with gravy and called it a cowboy sandwich. When were five or six, my brother and I helped water the corn.

I am ultimately grateful for having grown up where I carried tubes down the corn rows, dyed myself with ripe mulberries before a swim and went to a one-room schoolhouse. Romanticism is but a dimension of reality for any life, and it has shared the colors of my canvas with hues of denial, limitation and fear. My background gave me as many obstacles to overcome as it provided tools to revive a beaten spirit or repair a fractured heart.

While I gained priceless insight and unique experiences from my relatively isolated early life, I also learned to deny my dreams. I learned to believe that I would never be bright enough to pursue them. I learned that my value as a woman depended on a husband and sons. I then learned that I would remain unhappy as long as I believed so much of what I had initially learned.

Partially as a result of the sometimes arbitrary combinations of personalities which comprise families, I've had to relearn many things in order to become a happy person.

Relearning begins with some relatively indepth self-recognition. When we realize that we may be responsible for our own unhappiness, an inner investigation begins which appears to go on forever. We must discard those elements of our rationale that impede

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our personal growth and development; as difficult as it sounds simple.

The personal growth gauntlet seems to be the rule, not the exception. Individuals and corporations invest big bucks into workshops and seminars dealing with empowerment, motivation, self-esteem, self-acceptance and toleration. We Americans can't buy enough books telling us that it's okay to be what we are. The common bonds of humanity include fear and pain, as well as a desire to live a bit beyond their perimeters. For all of the faddish bygones and excesses of the self-help movement, the underlying motivation is a genuine effort to make our lives more tolerable, even pleasurable by learning not to manipulate the world, but to control our reactions to it.

Extraordinary human potential lies within each one of us. The fulfillment of this potential is subject to infinite obstacles with endless degrees of intensity. Where the obstacles and limits of human potential are extreme, the resulting behavior is often, eventually negative. This was evident recently in East Los Angeles. Despair replaces hope for individuals who cannot envision or believe in their own potential. Some of them die by their own hands.

Human potential is probably our most violated natural resource. The scope of human potential abuse reaches from nationalized oppression to the degradation of children in families. These destructive behaviors have infested civilization throughout history into the present. We now face the

management of a technologically ultra-advanced world with an emotional capacity evolved to the point of wiping sleep from it's eyes. Still, as we blink and look about us, we object to seeing human potential abused on the basis of skin tone, or by the occurrence of one's place within a family.

The foundations of human potential are dignity, self-respect, self-validation, compassion and tolerance. Dignity comes through trying to do what is right, and by acknowledging and learning from what we've done wrong. Self-respect happens over time, as we choose to do what is right when it is the most difficult of our choices. Self-validation means that we may stand alone in some of our beliefs. Compassion puts us in someone else's shoes and enlightens us a bit to universal pain. Tolerance is the mortar of these building blocks, restraining insinuations and accusing tongues.

Racism, sexism and violence are definitive offenses of human potential. Less obvious but completely common are the idiosyncrasies within families that injure us as children. Unchecked, such injuries are taken into relationships at all levels, personal and professional. These injuries are perpetuated by our resultant defensive interpretation of the world. The cycle is broken by dealing with the injuries, instead of reacting to them.

The preservation of any natural resource rests in individual responsibility. When I recognized my unhappi-

ness, it became clear that I was responsible for the fulfillment of my own potential. I would have to restructure my belief system, and re-examine my interpretations. This required a wildly scary departure from the familiar into the unknown.

Fortunately, that unknown has been populated by angels.

People have believed in me for absolutely no apparent reason, whatsoever. I have been encouraged by people who barely know me, but do know the value of encouragement. People have stood by me when I've been hard-pressed to leave the darkness of my apartment. I understand the empowerment which accompanies encouragement and support. While the responsibility for my development rests with me, peer empowerment has been a substantial motivational force.

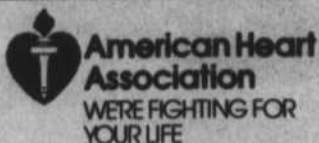
Most of us carry from our background the very obstacles that prevent the fulfillment of our human potential. We may also possess the tools with which to overcome those obstacles. It is a necessary time in our evolution to regard human potential as the resource that it is. We may act by taking steps to fulfill our own potential, as well as offer support and encouragement to those around us who struggle with those very same steps. Through such positive interaction, we can teach ourselves what is possible. We can affect the type of change that allows people to overcome the socially imposed constraints of poverty, race and gender by planting the seeds of empowerment that enable individuals to believe in their own possibility.

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