

To those who say...“Things are different now”
by Nat Christian

A sunny day in an upscale neighborhood: A Young blonde, blue-eyed guy in baggy cargo shorts and oversized white t-shirt walks down the street.
Cute. A student?

Another sunny day in the same upscale neighborhood: A young black guy in the same baggy cargo shorts and oversized white t-shirt walks down the same street.
Run! He’s up to no good.

Why?

I’ve never met a “white” man and I’ve never met a “black” man.
The paper that this will be printed on is white - never met anyone that white.
The font that I type is black - never met anyone that black.

I’ve met humans with the black experience and humans without.

As a white man it is an experience that I can’t truly comprehend and feel unless I am “black.”

But, I can use my imagination - free of my anatomy and influences which have been shed on me and maybe come closer to comprehending.

Imagination. Imagine a young black couple who play by the rules. They work hard. They are aware of prejudice but feel that overall society has and is slowly getting better. So they really try. “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” They have a young daughter. They want a happy and safe life for her. They enjoy the holidays. The young daughter feels security, love and joy. The future promises good things - acceptance, security, hope. The daughter turns 10 years old. Her parents let her walk to school alone for the first time. As she walks, a car passes and someone in the car yells out to her “XXXX” - one of many most awful names. Just one time, one name. In an instant, the daughter’s life has changed. She’s lost her innocence. Her trust. Lost her security. Her youth. Her outlook for the future. She feels she is not a part of this society. From this day and for the rest of her life when she walks into a roomful of white people, at school, at work, she feels the difference no matter how un-biased they seem to be. Along her journey through life as she, many times optimistically tries to to restore her trust, she will encounter more situations and more reminders that beneath some of the smiles there is prejudice and hate.

Imagine your daughter, son, sister, brother, mom, dad, friend or yourself experiencing this during every week of your whole life. Countless instances where a relative or friend was treated unfairly, harassed, hurt or shot and killed. And you would know of countless more instances that were not caught by a nearby camera, and you are deeply affected by it because it still happens to perhaps you or your daughter, son, sister, brother, mom or dad, friend. Week after week, year after year and it doesn’t stop, and there is no solution and you hear “We need to have a conversation.” Sure, another conversation. When we all know that with that phrase the solution’s goal post just moves further each time.

If you are black then at some point you or your daughter, son, sister, brother, mom, dad or friend is going to say “Stop.” “Black lives matter.”

Does uttering “Black lives matter” mean that other lives do not? No. It means that black lives matter and that the unfairness, the injustice in every aspect to a black person has to stop.

Black doctors, scientists, sports pros, entertainers, teachers and those in other professions have all experienced the injustices. When one speaks out against injustice, some whites wonder why.

The mix of black and white culture started out and continues to be severely one-side, harshly unjust.

Slave owners felt that they were better than the slaves. After slavery was abolished, that perception with most whites still existed and was handed down through generations. That perception was perpetuated in books and then in the movies, TV and all forms of media. Stories written and told from the perspective of whites had an underlying given - whites are better. Vanity leads to physical power, economic power, intellectual power, conquests big or small, personal-work-creative-political status, you name it – self image. Vanity, to feel elevated over others, needs to suppress others.

So slaves were freed but the perception of the black person was not freed. Thus after the abolishment of slavery in 1865 and up until 1968, the Jim Crow era was born - still legally denying blacks the right to education, to hold jobs, to vote. Enforced by fines or arrest. Parks, restaurants, many public places were segregated. That persisted until 1968. Only 52 years ago. World War II's GI Bill created in 1944, helped Whites accumulate wealth, but was denied to 1.2 million Blacks who had bravely served their country. In segregated schools, skilled education like plumbing, electricity and printing were only available to white students. Over the years, white veterans, amassing wealth in skilled positions, flowed into new suburbs. Northern universities reluctantly helped in admitting Black students, and Southern colleges barred Black students entirely. 95 percent of Black veterans were pushed to unaccredited and underfunded Black colleges. Tens of thousands of Black veterans were simply turned away. In 1947, of the more than 3,200 VA-guaranteed home loans in Mississippi, Black borrowers received only 2. In New York and New Jersey, Blacks received fewer than 100 of the 67,000 mortgages insured by the GI bill. By 1956, nearly 8 million mostly white veterans had received education or training and 4.3 million home loans worth \$33 billion. This was denied to most Black veterans. Employment, college attendance and wealth surged for whites along with civil rights, widening the gap between whites and Blacks and it continued to grow wider and wider.

Well meaning laws were enacted to deal with these issues, but they didn't erase the perceptions of blacks, which have been ingrained in the minds of whites. Perceptions further perpetuated, because economically, the starting line for blacks was way, way behind whites. There were whites within the same economic status as blacks, but whites didn't have the built in, handed down perceptions about them that blacks had. A non-educated white had better opportunities and could get jobs easier than the educated black who had the albatross of other people's perceptions around his/her neck. White people's children were not subjected to prejudices that black children were. This privilege, whites still have to this day. Imagine if you had that black experience.

With such inequalities, the economic gap between whites and blacks widened further. Black people with economic hardships see that if a white person's relative get seriously ill, that white person's economic position usually is better and helps that relative get better. But the black person's relative either dies or becomes seriously ill for a long time, thus furthering his/her economic hardship. At times survival leads to crime. So, when we see crime on the news and it involves a black person, it perpetuates the myth that blacks are more "dangerous" than the whites. The young black guy in baggy cargo shorts? That myth hasn't cracked (even when most mass murders and serial killings have been committed by whites). Some progress has been made. But ingrained perceptions about blacks were never truly exorcised, and such perceptions have kept most from truly pursuing the American Dream.

Because of these ingrained perceptions in white people, some (I emphasize some) police officers are more aggressive towards black people. In their minds, blacks are dangerous and lesser than whites. The perceptions ignite the officers' reactions and there is less remorse when a black person is killed. A U.S. president, Ronald Regan, is surrounded by armed secret service and police officers when a white man approaches and shoots him with a gun. The white assailant is wrestled to the ground. Not killed. A young white man with a rifle crosses state lines shoots and kills protesters, then just walks away from the scene and is arrested later. No altercation with guns drawn. He's not killed, but simply arrested. Yet a black man may be 20 feet away from a police officer with a cell phone in his hand and he is shot and killed. Or a black man may be walking away on the street with a small knife in his hand and he is shot multiple times and killed. Or a black man doesn't obey an officer and runs away, so he is shot and killed. Or a black man who is already handcuffed and subdued on the ground with an officer's knee pressed down on his neck, pleading "I can't breath", is suffocated till he dies. Many, many more stories. Imagine.

Black lives matter? Of course.

To this day, all black persons have throughout their lives experienced that young daughter's experience, and receive injustices that whites don't. A lot of blacks feel real danger when a police car drives up behind them, knowing that unless they act in a certain way, they have a good chance at being shot and killed. They feel they will never have a chance.

Imagine if it was you or your daughter, son, sister, brother, mom, dad or friend.

Early movies and books depict small life in America in a loving way. Whites - romance, comedies, dramas. Blacks - caricatures (with very few exceptions). Stories, images and perceptions embedded in great-grandparents', grandparents', parents' minds were handed down. One can say "I didn't do anything, slavery ended 155 years ago" or "Things are different now." Yes. But the false perceptions, ingrained in people's minds, handed down for over a couple of centuries has not ended and has promoted a multitude of injustices and deaths.

Handed down? Ingrained? I don't think there was one white baby just out of his mother's womb who immediately had prejudice toward blacks.

So first slavery then not. Then there was 155 years of horrendous events where blacks were abused systematically, murdered systematically, economically held down systematically, denied a good education denied good health care, were victims of severe prejudice that limited blacks' ability to move ahead, and yet - after all of this, blacks gave and still give it a chance. There were flare-ups, frustrations and riots when the black patience with the extreme injustices (and cover-ups) got thin. But afterwards they would give it another chance, because blacks - Americans who have given as much if not more to this country than others, want fairness. Not much to ask.

Picture yourself or your daughter, son, sister, brother, mom, dad or friend within this cycle.

There were other nationalities and races who were prejudiced against. But because of slavery and the subsequent handing down of perceptions, none have had the never ending systematic injustices in all areas as blacks have had.

Imagine that young daughter growing up. Imagine if this experience were yours.

Black lives matter. Let's shine the light. This has to stop.