

Colored People?



Steven Brown

Introduction

Every day we hear the terms "black" and "white" being bandied about in reference to human beings. Nevertheless, I believe these widely accepted phrases are inaccurate, emotionally evocative and should not be a part of our normal discourse. Besides, is there really a need to make these particular distinctions? I say no.

Definitions:

First, let us look at the semantics. The American Heritage Dictionary defines these words as follows:

"Black - Being of the darkest achromatic visual value; producing or reflecting comparatively little light and having no predominant hue."

"White - An achromatic color of maximum lightness, the complete compliment or antagonist of black; the other extreme of the neutral gray series."

Using these definitions, I challenge you to find any living human being that could be described as black or white. You may say you have seen a person who could be considered "black", and I suppose for that person, the word may be accurate, and therefore, you could conceivably use that term. But why would you need to do so.

In my experience, I have been completely around the world, visited 24 different countries, and I would dare say I have never seen anyone fitting the definitions above. There are those who might be considered, at best, light tan, beige, dark brown or maybe even mahogany. But for the vast majority of people in this world, the words "black" and "white" are misnomers when referring to the color of people.

What A Perfectionist!

I realize I'm being literal; however, more serious implications compel me to be extremely honest. A large majority of the times we hear someone referred to as "black" or "white", color is irrelevant. For example; how many times have you heard something like this: "Black juror, John Smith said..." or "Brenda Johnson, a white Representative said ..." These terms; "Black" and "white" are not only unnecessary, but inapplicable as well.

What if we used accurate terminology to describe skin color? At least it would illustrate the absurdity of this practice. For instance: "John, a light tan person who...", "Linda, a dark brown librarian...", "80 percent of beige people say..." or "All fawn colored doctors believe..." How ridiculous, you may say. Still, it is no more ridiculous than what has become commonplace in our society.

What's a "Pig Mint"? (A breath freshener for swine?)

What possible relevance could there be in pointing out the amount of pigmentation someone has, or doesn't have in his or her skin? To me this is akin to grouping everyone with brown eyes or red hair together and making blanket statements about their character traits, mannerisms or lifestyles.

Another reason we should not use colors to describe people is these words tend to evoke the very racist and/or prejudicial attitudes we've worked at overcoming for the past 50 years. A great American once said; "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

However, even some proponents of racial equality still use these irrelevant words, seemingly oblivious to their implications. For instance: Read the following two statements. "Joe Johnson, a black professor at Columbia College, was elected to the City Council" or "Joe Johnson, a professor at Columbia College, was elected to City Council." Now, which of the two preceding sentences would be more likely to "conjure up" racist or prejudicial feelings in the mind of the reader?

Even though the writer may not have had any intention of bringing up such thoughts, it could still be perceived this way. So why even draw attention to inconsequential facts such as color of skin, instead of the important ones?

A Filter in Our Brains?

It is our perceptions that more often than not, will shape our beliefs, thoughts, and convictions. These perceptions are like filters, through which we view the world. The problem with this is, sometimes our filters are constructed of incomplete, fallible or inadequate material. Therefore, we may tend to perceive people inaccurately, unless we have all the facts. Therefore, if our perceptions are faulty, we cannot see others for who they really are; individual human beings.

Are We Colors Or People?

This brings me to another important point. Many people often use the term "blacks" or "whites" independently of any reference to humanity. For example, in his column, "The Dangers of Misconceptions", Hugh P. Price uses the words black/s or white/s in this manner 25 times; and Bradley Inman, in his article, "Does Discrimination Persist In The Housing Market?", also uses these phrases in the same way 39 times, i.e. "*.... how **Blacks and Whites** view housing bias.*"; "*The study found that **Blacks are more suspicious of Real Estate Agents...***" or "*for example, 10 percent of **Whites** surveyed said...*"

I'm not quite sure why anyone would use such language. I can only speculate they may be subconsciously dehumanizing the issue in order to treat it as merely information. However, we're dealing with people made of flesh and bones. Individuals are unique in their own way. We all have our own circumstances, dreams, trials and triumphs. Nobody can truly speak for another person, because there are no two human beings exactly the same. Therefore, how can we group people together and make broad generalizations about everyone in these "groups". All this does is divide us further, based on our differences.

You Might Be A Redneck If...

I know some of you are thinking to yourselves; "this guy has gone off the deep end!" You may be right. As a self-proclaimed "Reformed Redneck", I have grown so weary of hearing people use ridiculous concepts such as the shade of epidermal tissue to categorize what they believe are societal groups of people, for the benefit of their hatred, prejudicial attitudes and outright racist beliefs.

You may also be thinking; "so, what do we call 'them'?" Oh, I don't know...how about...**PEOPLE!** What a novel idea! Of course there are also some other titles and labels that you may have heard before: ("Mr., Mrs., Sir, Ma'am, Doctor, Sister, Brother, Father, Reverend, Man, Woman, Boy [in the legitimate sense], Girl, Officer, Chief, Butcher, Baker, Candlestick Maker, etc...") and the list is almost infinite.

Words Have Meaning

There are also terms in use today, which could alleviate the traditional black and white dilemma. Such as: "African-American (this is accurate only if the ancestors actually came from Africa, not the West Indies, Caribbean, Australia, etc.); European-American (the same rules apply); and Anglo-Saxon (relating specifically to Western Europe). Nevertheless, I would restrict these terms to situations when absolutely necessary for scientific or statistical purposes. We must also guard against casually throwing them about, lest we group and divide our country (and world) even further.

What can we do to turn the tide of inaccurate, inappropriate and dehumanizing terminology? We could make a conscious effort to think about what we say or write before we do so. We might also determine to only use legitimate phraseology as mentioned above.

A Word from Our Creator

Jesus said in Luke 11:17 - "***every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth***". Therefore, it also stands to reason; a nation divided against itself cannot stand. Just like the old saying goes: "United we stand, divided we fall."

The Apostle Paul also wrote in his letter to the Christians in Galatia (Galatians 3:28) "***There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.***" This was a call for unity in the churches of first century believers. In other words; if we share the same Jesus as our Savior and Lord, then that makes us part of the same family. Paul also made a similar statement to the church in Colossi (Colossians 3:11), reminding them of the need for unity as well.

Get Real!

I realize there are cases when ancestral heritage is deemed to be of some importance. Sometimes racial lineage information is needed for scientific purposes, i.e. Medical, genealogical, or historical. Other times it may be necessary for census data, such as demographics and population growth studies.

I often have a problem, however, with fitting into the categories offered as choices on most statistical forms. For instance, the normal choices for racial/ethnic group are "White", "Black", "Asian", "Hispanic", or "Other". Now, since I am not white, black, Asian or Hispanic, I usually choose "Other", which normally throws them for a "loop", and probably leaves them scratching their heads for some time.

One Big, Happy Family!

Some people may not want to hear this part, but it has to be said. According to the Bible in Genesis 3:20, "***Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.***" This means all our ancestry can be traced back to the first humans, (Adam and Eve).

But even more recent than that, Genesis Chapters 7-9 tell us that Noah and his family "***replenished the earth***". Therefore, we have all descended from the same lineage if you trace it back far enough.

Moreover, and most importantly, as people on planet Earth, we surely have at least one thing in common. We are all members of the same race...

...The Human Race.

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