



URBAN CURRENT

One Cross

Weeks ago the nation's first black president stood in Washington, D.C. celebrating the 50th anniversary of the historic march on Washington and Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

That celebration stands in stark contrast to another event that brought jaw-clenching attention to race this year, namely the trial of George Zimmerman for shooting Trayvon Martin.

Both events have sparked waves of discussion, media coverage, and water-cooler talk. How could one event be so powerfully positive and the other so ugly and divisive? The elephant in the room is the deeply divergent views between many black and white believers.

You have to love the dear souls who stand up and say, "We need a national conversation on race." All the while, some are screaming down anyone who does not share their perspective. So much for fostering genuine conversation. The idea that people who don't agree with me are racist or hate me is mindless — not to mention not helpful to any pursuit of understanding or the broadening or deepening of one's thinking.

Much was made of race and profiling in all the hype and headlines around Zimmerman. In the trial, race was not an issue and profiling really didn't get much play. Is this where I go on record? I have been profiled three times. I mean, I have been stopped by police three times. Nobody can tell me it wasn't about my appearance. I don't offer this to counter anyone or anything. I simply contribute it to the conversation. Each time I was engaged in ministry. During one of these I was spread eagle, hands on top of the car, frisked in full view of hordes of school kids walking down the block. Were these stops racial? Two were for sure. In all three, the police were just doing their job.

Speaking of perspective, I've had a couple rude awakenings. Naturally, I assume my own perspective is informed, wise, balanced, complete, and right. Imagine my shock when in conversation with my African-American pas-

tor prayer partner, two or three sentences completely stop me cold because they contain a view I hadn't considered. It doesn't mean I automatically agree. It doesn't mean I throw my perspective out and embrace his. It means my perspective is now broader and, ahem, "more complete."

I have to admit, I had strong reaction to my white brothers, sisters, and friends running out and buying hoodies a few months ago. A nice gesture, and I'm pretty sure I understand the heart behind it. But I wanted to say to those folks, "Every cause has symbols. Causes are not won by symbols. Is the cause of justice worth your life?"

Google "Humboldt Park Chicago Shootings" or "Garfield Park Chicago Shootings." Virtually all of these are black people shooting other black people, and we have not even seen an arrest, much less an unpopular verdict. I've lived here 40 years. I invite my newly-hoodied white friends to move in alongside me. Upon completing your first ten years of living in a hoodie neighborhood, laboring for the good of the hood, I will personally conduct your graduation ceremony presenting you the hoodie of your choice.

Symbols are easy. Talk is cheap. Christians ... walk the talk — live the life — love our neighbors.

The Zimmerman trial reminded us there are different perspectives on the same issue and that conversing with each other we all learn.

In Washington in 1963, King said "We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protests to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny."

King never made the white man the boogie man, though he could have.

President Obama said in his speech August 28, 2013, "Because they marched, America became more free and more fair ... To dismiss the magnitude of this progress — to suggest, as some sometimes do, that little has changed — that dishonors the courage and the sacrifice of those who paid the price to march in those years."

It is ironic that in the face of such duly noted headway, those who see racism in every breeze and racists behind every bush don't advance the conversation necessary to take us forward. Neither is the gap bridged when I dismiss views not my own.

At this late date, it behooves every believer to do everything reasonable, and some things unreasonable, to learn from our brothers and sisters of different ethnicity and culture. Bridge the gaps, build relationships, serve, love, and never ever allow unnecessary, unbiblical division to mark us. Four decades pastoring a multi-cultural church have taught me the potent witness of people different from each other loving and serving Christ together.

Jesus' blood either makes us one with Him and each other or we're all going to hell.

There is one cross, one Savior, one way, one truth, one life, one church of God in Christ, one heaven.

Perspectives and politics are not more powerful than the cross.

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