

Do Our Skin Colours Define Us?

By Jerry Maxwell

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Right off the bat let me get this straight, all lives do matter but right now it's the black lives that are in trouble and need your support. So please, all I'm doing is asking for you to understand my perspective. My name is Jerry Maxwell. I am a seventeen year old black male from Bancroft, Ontario. You probably do not know me but if you are from Bancroft you most likely know me as one of the very few black people in town. If I am being honest racism is something I have experienced my whole life. Though if you are in the position I was in you most likely feel alone in this problem. This feeling caused me to just accept a norm that was so wrong for so many years.

I was born in Haiti (Caribbean country) and at the age of three I was adopted to an all white Canadian family. The family was christian and taught me my whole life to always accept and love people for who they are, no matter what. Sadly as accepting as my family was not everyone else was the same way. When I was younger kids said things, you know, "can I touch your hair", "why do you look different", "what's wrong with your hands", "you look weird" but I mean I always just saw it as the fact that I was a race they had never seen before. They were just innocent kids. But how about when I was in middle school or highschool? Was it right for them to say "oh he'll steal it", "He only likes basketball", "You look like a thug", "No blacks aloud"? I mean when was it because they were uneducated or was it because they were ignorant?

Anyways I didn't know what to do about the way I was treated so I just kept it bottled up. People said I was just a really chill black guy that didn't get offended easily. That wasn't true. Not at all. It hurt so much hearing those words and remarks coming out of the mouths of the people I called "friends". But instead of facing it I just thought, people weren't physically beating me because I was black, so I should just suck it up. My life is "easy" compared to a lot of other black people's. I felt like mental pain wasn't as big of a problem as physical pain. I should just stay quiet and try to "fit in" with the other kids. So that's what I did. I ignored my own race. My own heritage. The words of hate. I just lived like this was normal. I was so wrong. The way black people are being treated is horrible, and I definitely should not have had to sit there and act like that's the norm. No black kid should grow up with that mindset.

And to say that I magically got better and all the racism I was experiencing disappeared when I started acting this way is just a lie. It doesn't get better. It only hurts more and more as you get older. I don't think people understand how much it hurts when they say, "dude, you're not even that black". What do you mean? Being black is who I am, regardless if I don't act like a certain stereotype. You can just strip us of our race, of who we are. I'm black. If I don't dress a certain way or talk a certain way, doesn't mean that my skin colour is a lie and I'm white now. Being black isn't based on a stereotype, it's based off your skin. If someone has black skin,

they're black. There's no specific way they have to talk or walk or act, they'll always be black. So accept them for that.

That's the other problem today. We don't see each other as equals. Why? Are we not capable of doing what you do? Are we not also human? Do we not have a heart? Can we not love and care for people as well as you can? Why are we discriminated against because our skin colour is different than yours? Why do you need to watch us extra closely when we walk into a store? Are we more likely to steal something than our white friends? Ask yourself. Forget all stereotypes and past issues and ask yourself, "why should I say or do these horrible things to you when you have never hated me for who I am?" It's not fair.

Other than the fact I'm black do you really know me? Did you know I'm a christian? Did you know I have never been in trouble with the law? Never been fired? Never physically abused someone in an act of anger? I aspire to be a teacher, not a criminal. I have always cared about people for who they are. I never judge people for their past. If you don't know me as the good person I always have been, and aspire to be, why do you treat me the way you do? Even when I was a young innocent boy, why was treated that way? And it's not just me, so many other black people are good people. Black people aren't more inclined to crime because of their skin colour. But if we just sit here and treat all black people like that's the case, what do you think that does to their minds. If your whole life you're told that you aren't right because you have a different skin colour, what do you think you're doing to the culture? We are just as strong and capable as you but yet you sit here and treat us like we are a mistake. Like we don't belong. Where is the justice? Where is the freedom? I don't want to grow up in a world where being black, being who I am, is wrong.

Despite all the racism I've experienced in my life I've experienced much more love. I thank everyone who has always loved me for who I am. The ones who don't expect something from me based on my skin colour. The ones who understand that there's other races in this world and accept that and love them all equally. For all the bad people in this world there are so many more good people. The problem is the good people are being too quiet. Afraid of judgement. I'll be honest I wasn't comfortable getting in front of a crowd and saying this, that's why I wrote it instead. Yeah I'm just as human as you are. But I wrote this to show that even though I may act like I don't experience racism, it is something that I have struggled with my whole life. I've always felt alone in this issue and like I can't do anything to stop it. But recently I've been shown that's not true. People do care. People do have my back. People do love and care about black lives. So please keep helping. Keep saying something. See that's the great thing is that we all have amazing strengths. We need to use those strengths to stand up against what we know is right and wrong. Even if you don't feel comfortable doing something huge, you'd be surprised just how much hugging a black person and saying, "I do care about you" does.