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IUK ARCHIVES

*For his file -*

**Comments to the Kokomo Rotary Club  
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of International Business**

Two months ago a 13-year-old black boy was attacked and beaten into a coma by three white teenagers, apparently because he was riding his bicycle on the "wrong" street in Chicago. At that time I suggested that the Rotary Club, either as individual members or as a collective, should take a public stand and make a public statement that this type of outrage cannot be tolerated or condoned. I would like to thank and commend those of you who supported that suggestion. I noted that the members of the Rotary Club are the movers and shakers of the society and the leaders of the community and that people will follow leaders in any direction. There was recently the example of a leader supposedly leading his followers up to a space ship on a comet, but he led them instead to mass suicide. However, I hope that the leaders in the Rotary Club will find a more suitable direction to lead their followers.

I stressed the point that those people who are in positions of responsibility and authority simply must develop and display the vision to see beyond the attitudes, beliefs, restrictions and constraints of our American culture. They must develop and display the courage to challenge and to break out of the systems, customs and traditions which are based on those cultural restrictions and to work for the benefit and betterment of the entire community. At that time I noted that our American culture, --language, religion, food, clothing, political and social concepts-- is based largely on English culture. Five hundred years ago the English conducted a campaign which vilified and denigrated Africa and Africans in order to rationalize and justify using their greater military power to enslave the African people and to force them to work on the rice, cotton, sugar cane and tobacco plantations of the American South and the Caribbean Islands. As a result of this campaign, a totally negative, subhuman creature, "the African", was generated and became the target of hostility, hatred and fear in English culture although the African people apparently were not known well enough and had not done anything to the English people to deserve or warrant such attitudes and behavior. In very similar manner, practically every one on earth is already filled with hostility and fear, geared up and prepared to assault, attack and kill the first alien-from-outer-space, a figment of our own imagination, since not one person on the face of this planet can reliably claim to have laid eyes on an alien-from-outer-space. The hostility towards Africans in particular and non-white people in general, nurtured in England over the past 500 years, is displayed to one degree or another in all of the present countries of predominantly English culture--England, US, Canada, Caribbean Islands, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. Even those countries in Asia and Africa which were colonized by England--India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Ghana-- share some of these hostile attitudes.

After that meeting ended, one of the members came over to me. He is a retired executive of a major international corporation. It can, therefore, be safely assumed that he is a competent, intelligent and well-educated person. Unfortunately, however, he is also a fairly standard product of our American culture. He said to me, "I do not believe that there is hostility towards black Americans. I don't recall any particular hostility towards them as I was growing up".



His statement indicates that he is very typical and representative of the millions and millions of white Americans who have never had to face or deal with the hostility from other white Americans which is directed at black Americans. Consequently, when black Americans complain about "cultural racism", "institutionalized racism", "systemic racism" and "environmental racism", white Americans believe that they are simply thin-skinned, over-reactive, hypersensitive, exaggerating, paranoid, lying or all of the above.

I said, "You grew up in the 30's, 40's and 50's, when this country was totally and thoroughly segregated by race. You're probably right that there was no particular hostility towards black Americans as long as those black Americans stayed in their place at the very bottom of the society. But, the second that a black American tried to get out of his place at the bottom of the society, there indeed was hostility towards him--violent and vicious hostility, including both private citizen and public police attacks. Meanwhile, there was the all-pervasive, ever-present, generalized hostility throughout the society because you simply do not deliberately and consciously offend and insult people that you like, you do not discriminate against people that you like, you do not segregate out people that you like, you do not lynch people that you like and you do not enslave people that you like."

He stood and looked at me a moment and said, "You know, I had never thought about that before."

Of course, that is a major part of the problem. White Americans simply do not have to think about all of this color and race nonsense. Black Americans are forced to think about it all of the time because they are faced with it all of the time. I pointed out to him that it was only three years ago, that is, 1994, when every state in the union except Hawaii had a law on the books, stating that anyone with "one-drop-of-African-blood" was officially classified as "African". This is the only group to which these laws applied and they were intended to ensure that the segregation and slavery laws could be implemented and enforced.

I noted that the racial segregation laws were on the books until 1964 and the introduction of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This means essentially that everyone over the age of thirty has spent their formative, most impressionable years under the direct influence of the segregation laws and those people under the age of thirty have been only slightly less influenced by those laws. The hostile and hate-filled attitudes and behaviors which caused the racial segregation laws to be written in the first place and which were required by the laws did not end on the first day of January, 1965, but continue right down to the present day with slowly diminishing frequency and strength. The racial segregation laws of this country were intended to insult, humiliate, intimidate, segregate, restrict and exclude native-born black Americans from every aspect of American society--political, economic, cultural, social, educational and religious--and to direct hostility towards them, whether one wanted to or not, whether one was black or white and whether one was native-born or immigrant.

The racial segregation laws were not the result of the actions of people on the fringes of the society. The laws were the result of the conscious, deliberate, discussed and debated



thoughts and actions of the leaders of the society. The repeal and removal of those laws were also the result of the actions of the leaders of the society, obviously a very different group from the first one. This is why it is so critical and necessary for the members of the Rotary Club to play an active Rotary-oriented leadership role in the community.

Recently one of the members here reported on his hiking trip around China. He reported that he did not notice any hostility towards him from the Chinese people because he was a white American. We have all seen the pictures and stories in the National Geographic magazines. For over 100 years white American photographers have been able to go into the most remote, primitive, backward and savage places on earth. Nevertheless, they were obviously greeted with some degree of hospitality and cooperation since they were able to take their pictures and write their stories.

In July, 1995, a black photographer for the Indianapolis Star went to do a story in Linton, Indiana down near Vincennes. As the officials of the city were showing him around, some of the good citizens of Linton felt compelled to yell out, "Get that nigger out of town". The embarrassment and apologies of the city officials do little to lighten the atmosphere in such situations.

In October, 1996, a school teacher from Marion, Indiana was returning home from a conference in Indianapolis. Feeling a little queasy, she decided to stop at a restroom in a service station near Elwood. When she went in to get the restroom key, she was told by the attendant, "We don't let niggers use our restroom."

These examples illustrate the hostile atmosphere--actual or potential--which continues to pervade our society to an unacceptably high degree.

In March, 1997 one of my colleagues and his wife, who are from Greece, were in Denmark at a conference on the status of women in the world. The people there were from all parts of the world and had traveled, worked and lived in the US. One of the major topics of conversation was the continuing negative influence of color and race in the US. This came not only from people from Africa, Asia and Latin America, but also from people from Southern Europe, such as Greece, and even from Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Although the people from Northern Europe might not be directly affected, they were certainly aware of the problem.

I have wandered the streets of many towns, cities and villages all over Europe, from Spain to the borders of China. I have never once run into any hostility that I could say was caused by the color of my skin or by my so-called "race". I did run into curiosity, interest, hospitality and friendliness. But, I have never once run into the type of blatant, open-faced, undisguised, unrepentant hostility that I have run into in various places in this country.

That is not to say that Europeans are perfect. I have known people in Austria, Romania and Russia, who later came to this country and settled in New York, Philadelphia and Cleveland.



These people learned very quickly how to be good Americans and to fit into the culture, because it was to their advantage since they were white. On the other hand, black people that I have known from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean were very hesitant and reluctant to become "American", in that sense, because it clearly was to their disadvantage.

Obviously, I am not saying that each and every native-born white American is a violent and vicious racial bigot. But, I certainly am saying that there are far too many such people in this country and that the hostile attitudes towards Africans and other non-white people which we inherited from England continue to have far too great an influence in our American culture. These attitudes warp and distort our international relationships, our inter-cultural relationships, our inter-racial relationships and our interpersonal relationships. These attitudes and behaviors warp and distort the hearts, minds and spirits of all Americans--black and white-- and they certainly hound and bedevil the lives of all black Americans.

Several years ago one of my students became very upset and incensed by these statements. She said, "I resent being called a racist. I'm from Minnesota and my husband is a Lutheran minister. I do not have these attitudes, I am not a racist and I resent your implying that I am." The following week she came up to me after class, very agitated, and said, "You know, my mother came down from Minnesota over the weekend. And I found out that my mother is a racist. How could I have known my mother all of these years and not known that she was a racist?" I replied, "I don't know your mother at all and I could have told you that." She continued to ask questions and to discuss the issue for nearly three hours. She was extremely disturbed by the possibility that in spite of the fact that she was from Minnesota and that her husband was a Lutheran minister, she might still have been unconsciously influenced by or taken on the standard American racial attitudes right along with the other aspects of American culture.

Some years ago the Chief of Police called me in to talk to his police officers. Some of the officers growled and grumbled that they were sick and tired of being blamed and made to feel guilty for what happened 100 years ago. I had to explain to the officers that the Chief called me in not for what happened a 100 years ago, but for what had happened last week. If what happened 100 years ago had stopped happening 100 years ago, we would not have a problem today. The problem is that those things are still happening and some that happened 100 years ago continue to have results, consequences and effects today.

I grew up on the southeast side of Indianapolis. Two miles down the street a railroad track curved in and paralleled the street and formed four short, block-long streets, dead-ending against the track. For whatever historical reasons, all the people on one street were white, on the next street--black, on the third street-white and on the fourth one--black. Would anyone care to make a wild guess as to which of those four streets were paved and had side walks and curbs and which of those four streets were unpaved and did not have sidewalks and curbs? I have asked that question of people from other countries. Of course, they don't even understand the question because they cannot see any possible connection between paving a city street and the skin color of the people living on the street. For Americans, however, it is perfectly obvious since



everything is connected to skin color. Everyone who grows up in this culture knows that American culture and the systems based on that culture are set up to work to the detriment and disadvantage of black Americans. Even though all of the people there were paying the same taxes, they were not even expected to expect the same services from those taxes. The tragedy of the situation was that it was seen by black and white alike as perfectly natural and normal, thus indicating the degree of psychological warping and distortion caused by our culture. Even though the decision to pave the streets in that pattern was made nearly 100 years ago, the consequences of the decision continue down to the present--the streets are still like that right this minute. If anyone suggests paving the black streets, there might well be a cry of "reverse discrimination" and "racial preferential treatment"--so entrenched is the view that the status quo should remain the norm. The beliefs creating a situation of different treatment of those streets is indicative and representative of the beliefs calling for different and unequal treatment of black and white Americans in all other areas of the society.

In 1960 I came to Kokomo to teach at IUK, which at that time was located in the complex of buildings on West Sycamore Street where the Howard County Museum is now located. Dr. Victor Bogle was the director of the campus then. When my wife and I came up to see about a place to live, he had checked a number of possible places in the want-ads in the paper. One apartment house was a couple of blocks east of the campus on Sycamore, so he suggested that we go see it first. A woman came to the door, he explained who we were and that I would be teaching at the University and that the house would be very convenient to the campus. She looked at us with the standard level of cultural racial hostility and said, "Why, I wouldn't have any place for those people to live." Dr. Bogle who, of course, had never faced this type of situation before, was much taken aback by such a display of blatant bigotry. We went back to his office to telephone the other places and to check out their racial views first, since he did not care to personally repeat the first situation.

When he called Willis Hochstedler, who had a house for rent on his dairy farm east of Kokomo, Willis said, "I don't care what color they are as long as they are decent people". The Hochstedlers are of Amish-Mennonite background and consequently, do not share many of the general American cultural attitudes. We lived on the Hochstedler farm for 13 years and essentially became a part of their family and of the Mennonite community in the area.

In 1972 I decided to build a house because a lot down the road had come up for sale. I asked Willis to buy the lot for me, because Dr. Ted Clarke, a black physician here in town, had been refused a lot in the area a few years earlier. Willis had no problem with that, he bought the lot, turned around and sold it to me and we built a house on it.

In 1993 Gerry Stroman, who is on the IUK professional staff, a member of Rotary and whose husband is an engineer at Delco, arranged over the telephone to buy a lot down by the Izaak Walton League. However, when the seller met them at the lot and saw that they were black, suddenly the lot was no longer for sale. Understandably, the Stromans were upset, they called me, we contacted some other people and we prepared to go to the Howard County



Planning Commission to protest this outrageous behavior. Meanwhile, the seller's real estate agent and his lawyer had contacted him and apparently explained that his intended actions were illegal and unethical. As a consequence, the Stromans bought the lot, built their house and are now living there, we hope, along with non-hostile neighbors.

Until recently Gerry was on the Taylor Township School Board. She spent much of her time in the school system protesting to the people there the racially-motivated incidents involving her daughter. These ranged all the way from acts of simple insensitivity to conscious and deliberate insults. They could come from any quarter and from anyone--students, their parents, faculty and staff. Unfortunately these attitudes are learned so early and so thoroughly that they simply become a basic unconscious part of the personality and psychological make-up of many people.

In 1945 I was working for a garden nursery and we were planting trees in Speedway, Indiana. A little blonde girl--three years old--came out, looked at me and said, "I don't like colored people." Of course, there is no possible way that this little girl in her three years of life could have reached that particular conclusion on the basis of her own contacts and experiences in Speedway in 1945. She had sucked that attitude in right along with her mother's milk.

Fifty years later in 1995, in Indianapolis my little niece--six years old--came home from starting the first grade. She was all in tears because the white kids in the class had teased her about being black. Of course, my sister-in-law, who is a teacher in the school system there, was furious. But, who is she going to be furious at--six-year-old kids in the first grade? By the first grade they have already learned that, because of their skin color, they are automatically on the winning team in American culture. They are merely carrying out the dictates of that culture by pointing out to their black classmates that they are automatically on the losing team. We all know that a person's attitudes, behavior, self-confidence and self-esteem are quite different when he or she is on a winning team or a losing team. We continue to produce far too many people who are completely out of touch with reality and who, depending on the color of their skins, have under-inflated or over-inflated egos.

In 1946 my brother came home from fighting against the Germans in Italy. Because of the segregation laws, he could not even buy a cup of coffee in the train station in Washington, DC, our nation's capital, even though he was standing there in the full uniform of an officer of the United States Army. He said, "I just came back from fighting for people like you." Do you think that made any difference? Do you think that he got his coffee?

Eight years later I was living in Vienna, Austria. I met a fellow there who was a police officer and who had fought in the German army earlier. Apparently, he had not fought very well. He had been captured and spent time as a prisoner-of-war in Kansas and in Mississippi. He told me that he thought that he got better treatment in the U.S. than black Americans even though he was a German prisoner-of-war who had fought against the country and they were supposedly citizens of the country, expected to be ready to fight and die for it. Because of this difference in



treatment, Lena Horne, the great black entertainer, refused to perform with the USO tours because the segregation laws allowed the German prisoners-of-war to sit in the front of the halls and required the black American soldiers to sit in the back.

Some years ago we went over to visit this man's family in Vienna. At the time his three daughters were six, seven and eight years old. When we walked in, he said to them, "This is your Uncle Herbert and your Aunt Lillian". Even though the three girls had never seen us before in their lives, they came over, hugged and kissed us and sat on our laps, because we were their uncle and aunt. We went for a walk in the park. The six-year-old walked along holding my hand. When we met some of her little friends, she introduced me to them as her uncle. Can any of you even imagine imagining scenes like that anywhere in this country?

In Germany I talked to people who had been brutalized and dehumanized by the Nazi system. The Nazi system was based on the belief that Germans are so superior to everyone else that they have the right, duty and responsibility to brutalize, dehumanize, dominate and exterminate every one else. Although the Nazis were in power only twelve years, they caused the deaths directly or indirectly of nearly 100 million people and the destruction of billions of dollars worth of property. The people I talked to, who had been brutalized and dehumanized by that system, were Germans. In order to brutalize and dehumanize others, you have to also brutalize and dehumanize yourself. These people lived twelve miles from the death camps at Dachau. They said, "We didn't know what was going on over there. We were not Nazis. We did not hate the Jews." "Did you do anything to help the Jews? Did you try to find out what was going on and change the system?" "No." "Then your personal views don't make much difference. If you are in a system which is headed in a certain direction and is taking certain actions and you merely go along with it, then you are heading in the same direction and are supporting those actions regardless of where you want to go and what you want to do."

In February a great furor erupted in Germany, dividing the country into two opposing blocks. A touring exhibit opened. It was based on newly discovered documents and photographs which proved beyond a reasonable doubt that great numbers of ordinary Germans took direct and personal part in the genocidal atrocities of the Nazi period. This of course is quite contrary to the common view that only a handful of crazed, sadistic SS troopers were involved. Many Germans want to retain this view and to remain in a state of denial. Others maintain that in order to lift the blight of the Nazi period from the German National Soul, it is necessary to expose, face and deal with the truth of that period, no matter how unpleasant it may be.

Now that you are all depressed and dejected, is there any hope that in this country we can make the necessary cultural and systemic changes to get beyond the various problems and move on into the next century? We are talking about making fundamental changes in basic elements and areas of our culture and society. However, we have already done this a number of times before and should be able to do it again, so there is plenty of cause for optimism and hope. We went from a colony of the British Empire to an independent country then to a major world power



and finally to the dominant world super power. We went from an agricultural society to a manufacturing society and then to a service-oriented one and now we are building an information-based society. We went from a slave-based culture to a racially--segregated one, then to one based on racial discrimination and are now heading towards one based on non-discrimination or even anti-discrimination.

One of my colleagues said to me last spring, "What do you people want anyway? You're always whining and bellyaching and complaining and protesting something or other. Look how far you've come." Because my colleague is a faculty member of Indiana University, I had to speak very slowly and very simply to him so that he could understand. I said, "Look at it this way. Suppose I am in Kokomo and my grandmother is in Evansville and I want to visit my grandmother in Evansville. So I go down US31 to Indianapolis and west on I70 to Terre Haute--100 miles from Evansville. You see me in Terre Haute and say, 'Why on earth are you still driving? You've come all the way down from Kokomo. Look how far you've come!' And I say, 'But I'm not in Evansville'." Even my colleague, a faculty member at Indiana University, could see and could understand that it doesn't matter how far I've come, whether I came from Kokomo, or from Ft. Wayne or from Canada or from England, I'm going to keep driving until I get to Evansville. Even he could see that and because he had no logical or rational or sane response, he simply turned and walked off.

Although our society has progressed a long way, there is still a long way to go. However, more and more people in positions of responsibility and authority, for example, heads of businesses and organizations and city mayors, are making the necessary conscious and deliberate efforts to include all segments and constituencies of the population in all of the activities and decisions of the society and of the organizations.

I often cite Chancellor Hill of IUK as an excellent example of the changes that are possible. She said that she grew up in Baltimore, Maryland with all of the standard beliefs, biases, prejudices, stereotypes and perceptions which were normal for people in Baltimore some fifty years ago. However, Chancellor Hill has been able to overcome and get beyond these cultural restrictions to a remarkable degree. Shortly after she came from New York City to Kokomo as the new Chancellor, she called me into her office and said, "Everyone is white around here." I, of course, replied, "Where are they? Who are they?" Because I had never noticed that everyone was white at IUK. We invited 50-60 members of the black community in for lunch one day, so that we could make our new Chancellor feel more at home and could put some color back into her life.

Chancellor Hill has worked very hard during her time here at making the University a part of the community and making the community a part of the University. She has also worked hard at including in the concept "the community" the black community as well. Under normal circumstances all across the country, when the term "the community" is used it automatically excludes whatever black community there may be and it does not matter whether the black community is 5% of the population as here in Kokomo, or 50% as in New Orleans.



Consequently the concerns, interests, needs, problems and desires of the black community are generally not included in the discussions about "the community".

Nevertheless, there is great cause for hope as more and more of the past traditional barriers--cultural, ethnic and geographic--are being breached or removed. The great success of the various community-wide activities and events-- such as the anti-Klan Unity Celebration, the Minority Business Council presentations, the IUK International Day Festival, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration, the Enhancing Minority Attainment Conference, Black History Month Activities, Black Expo Luncheon, Womens Community Guild Banquet and others.

In Indianapolis I see great cause for hope in overcoming barriers and creating a sense of community in the long-running Indiana Black Expo and the International Festival, major regional events and attractions, and in the rise of numerous ethnic restaurants, introducing the city to different cultures and tastes and creating very interesting and surprising combinations. I went to the Balkan Fest at St. Constantine's Romanian Orthodox Church where people from the Balkans were exhibiting their various music, dances and foods. I went in and spoke to the priest in Romanian. He said, "I'm not Romanian, I'm Serbian from Chicago". I went to the Afghan restaurant. The waitress was the daughter of the Russian couple that owns the Russian delicatessen. I went to the Russian restaurant which is owned by Russian Jews from southern Russia. One waitress was a non-Jewish Russian from northern Russia and the other was a black American. I went to the German restaurant and bakery. One of the bakers was a black American who was busy making traditional German cakes, cookies and pastries. The people sitting at the next table were from Austria. The woman had been living in Muncie for thirty years and the couple with her had just come over to visit her for a month. We spoke to the waitress in German. She was a big blonde woman. She replied, "I'm not German. I grew up in France. My mother was French and my father was Spanish." I went to the Greek restaurant. The waitress brought over the appetizer--saganaki--which is a piece of cheese. She poured cognac over the cheese and set it on fire. Then she squeezed lemon juice over it to put out the flames and all the time she was doing all of this, she was shouting, "Hopa, hopa, hopa!". I thanked her in Greek and she replied with a drawl, "I'm not Greek, I'm just a hillbilly from Eastern Tennessee." Now, that is really cause for hope!