

ONE OF THEM

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

"If I go into a supermarket and one of them is bagging groceries in my checkout line, I'll move to another line." Them, in this instance, means black people.

"Only one black had come into the bar the day after the robbery and murder. He felt the cold stares and left as soon as he'd bought what he ordered to go." Should that black person have felt any responsibility for the murder which had occurred the day before? Was he guilty of something simply because of the color of his skin? Is every black person responsible for and answerable for the actions of any other black person simply because they happen to be black? Some people seem to think so. Those same people are probably among those who will tell black people that

they should not hold every white person accountable for the actions of a few. If it is something which should be done on the one hand, why can it not be so on the other?

"Some people don't read the newspapers, 'a customer said.'" Can such an inference really be made simply because a Black person committed robbery and murder? The one has nothing to do with the other even though some would like to believe that they do. Is every white person responsible for the actions of James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of Martin Luther King? Is every white person responsible for the actions of Byron de la Beckwith, the assassin of Medgar Evers. Is every white person responsible for any number of atrocities which have been visited upon the

persons of black people? The answers to all of the above question are the same. No.

August 10, 1981, five sentences appeared in an article penned by Jim Barrows, Assistant Managing Editor of the Las Vegas Sun Newspaper which negated what had been, up to that point, a very sensitive, moving article. I have no doubt that the deceased mother did indeed make the comments as they were reported. She was probably still in shock. She was angry. She wanted to hit back. Who wouldn't? Someone very close had been taken away and such a thing does not happen without some kind of reaction. Things which are said in the heat of anger, are usually not thought out and the speaker is not always responsible for statements

made under such circumstances.

I do not like to spend my time writing about these kinds of things but they need to be written about in order to allay some of the possible future responses to such comments. It is always difficult trying to figure out how to best perform the task without aggravating the condition.

Where to begin? It is not always easy to confront a bad situation head-on. This is especially true when dealing with ultra-sensitive matters. They must, nevertheless, be addressed. I will do this in quite a circuitous or round about manner in order not to be disrespectful and to illustrate, by example, how sensitivity can exist even in a hot house.

Bear with me if you will but, I warn you, you'll have to read the whole thing in order to find out who didn't do it.

"Bob! What happened to your hand?" "Aw, I had a little accident." "We really took a pounding yesterday, huh?" "You'll never know how much of a pounding we took."

That conversation might have taken place between two GIs at almost any battlefield in any war. Bob's friend had "bought it" during the bombing the day before. Upon discovering that his friend was dead, he smashed his fist against the side of a building. He jammed his thumb and fractured the wrist.

Bob was angry with the enemy. They had killed his friend. He was angry at them collectively because he did not know which of the millions of soldiers had been the one who pulled the trigger. That's the way it is with war and, like the "godfather" would say: "nothing personal, just



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Several weeks ago, four Canadian tourists were slain while making a vehicular turn on Las Vegas Blvd. The person who smashed into them was a white Texan who was being chased by a white police officer. Their relatives probably said: "Is that the way they are out there in Las Vegas? It's not safe to go to Las Vegas. Those people in the United States are dangerous." Can you imagine the leaders of our community getting such mail as that and, in their chamber meeting, saying things like: "those people are not being very fair about this whole matter. Every Las Vegan is not responsible for what happened to their relatives." Another would say: "I wasn't even in town that week. Remember, we had gone to South Africa to try to encourage more tourism from our neighbors south of the border." Someone else would say: "Let's not get carried away. They don't really mean that. They're not going to be jumping out of their automobiles everytime they see a car with Texas license plates or Nevada plates or plates for any other of the fifty states of the Union. They cannot reasonably blame an entire nation for what one individual did." Still another would say: "Yeah. But you know

how some people are."

That is the scenario we're dealing with in the case of the robbery/murder. Somebody did it. But not a whole race of people. The whole race should not be looked upon as murderers. "...one of them..." A statement made out of anger? I hope so.

As a child, I lived in constant fear. I knew even at the ripe old age of seven that most of the majority of the people living in my town simply did not like me and that the remainder hated my guts.

Attempting to comprehend why so many people disliked me was an insurmountable task. It wasn't just me that those people hated. They hated my brothers, my sisters, my parents, all of my relatives and everyone else who happened to possess that lone quality, a black skin. That alone seemed to suggest that disliking black people was an American tradition worth preserving -- by some people.

By the time I was fifteen, I had decided that somehow I was going to reduce the number of racist people by pointing out to them, on every occasion, how illogical it was to hate people simply because of the color of their skin. I did not realize then that to try to logically solve an illogical problem was itself illogical.

I began making a study of hatred. I looked for it everywhere -- at school, in the movies, at church, on playgrounds, on streets, during Christmas holidays -- everywhere. I must report that everywhere. I looked, I found it to one degree or another. I felt like Sherlock Holmes and his search for Dr. Moriarty. Everywhere. Lurking.

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