

'If I dated Black girls...'

Written by George E. Curry, NNPA Columnist
Tuesday, 28 January 2014 00:14



"I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

Friday, January 17, I gave the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day speech at the University of North Alabama in Florence. I was glowingly introduced by my niece, Rachel Gandy, who is a senior at UNA.

I told the audience that having grown up in segregated Tuscaloosa, Ala., how satisfying it was to see "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners" sit in the same classrooms, if not at the table of brotherhood. I didn't use those exact words, but they got the point: revolutionary changes have taken place in my home state since the 1960s and the South in general. So many changes, in fact, that public schools in the Deep South are more desegregated than any other region in the nation.

During my visit, I met a young White male – who shall remain nameless – who works in the same campus office as my niece, spoke fondly of Rachel, and recounted with glee their study together last summer in Costa Rico.

After my speech, when I was doing my usual Friday afternoon radio segment with Rev. Al Sharpton, I was told that this young man said, "If I dated Black girls – I tell Rachel this all of the time – she would be at the top of the list."

I am sure he meant that as a compliment – it wasn't.

First, it's presumptuous to think that Rachel, who is smart and beautiful inside and out, would want to date him. Second, for all the talk about racial progress, there are large segments of our society who make decisions based on race and nothing else. Whites do it. Blacks do it. Latinos do it. And so do Asians.

After I got over the shock of the young man's comment – well, I still haven't gotten over it, as you can see – I thought back to a 2010 Pew Research Center study that found that a record

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14.6 percent of all new marriages in the United States in 2008 were between spouses of a different race or ethnicity from one another. That's more than double the percentage for 1980.

Interestingly, rates more than doubled among Whites and nearly tripled among Blacks. But for both Hispanics and Asians, rates were nearly identical in 2008 and 1980.

For me, there was another story within the story: "When Whites, Hispanics and Asians decide to marry outside their group, African-Americans rank last in their choice of mates."

It's easy to dismiss the kooks such as former Louisiana Justice of the Peace Keith Bardwell who resigned under pressure in 2009 after he refused to perform a marriage between a White woman and a Black man.

But things are supposed to be different with this so-called "post-racial" generation. My niece is an honor student, was in the university's homecoming court, is charming and beautiful. Yet, the young man at UNA couldn't see beyond her color: "If I dated Black girls...."

Fortunately, Rachel's love life is not dependent on whether this young man dates "Black girls." There are plenty of African American and every other kind of men vying for her attention. It's the idea that this fellow got to know my niece as a person yet found her unqualified to date solely because of her race is what galls me.

While growing up in Alabama, I was told that part of the problem was that Blacks and Whites had not been allowed to interact under Jim Crow, not even in sports. However, when those barriers came down, or so the thinking went, racial prejudice would vanish and people would be judged as individuals, not as part of a supposedly superior or inferior race.

In three decades, there will be no majority race in the U.S., according to the Census Bureau. And that means that all racial and ethnic groups will need to learn to step outside their comfort zone to interact as equals with those who don't look like them. In his "I Have a Dream" speech, Dr. King said, "I have a dream that my four little 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."

Obviously that day has not arrived. Until it does, it's incumbent upon all of us to make sure that it doesn't just remain a distant dream.

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