**Label-Free Bill**

**(Starving Racism)**

 Have you noticed that almost every “news” story describes the people involved by their race? I find that … racist. What is the point of describing someone based on his or her race? A person’s race does not define that person. Even the hue of one’s skin has no bearing on the person’s thoughts, actions, morals, values, education level, intelligence, and so forth.

 Imagine for a moment that instead of race, we described the color of shirt that the person happened to be wearing. It seems irrelevant to us, but what if it happened so often that you begin to think that people wearing red shirts tended to be more hostile or violent, while people wearing blue shirts tend to be calmer? It does not matter the shade of the color, just that the person was wearing either a red shirt or a blue shirt. Now, what about the people wearing purple shirts? They are technically wearing red AND blue. So, are they hostile and violent, or are they calm?

 I know that sounds like a ridiculous example. But, describing people based on race seems just as ludicrous to me. Is your personality defined by your race? Or is it defined by a lifetime of experiences, some good and some bad? I think it is the latter. Does race affect our choices? Of course! If your parents are African-American, you probably know what collard greens are. A white person may not know what they are, and even if they know what collard greens are, they probably have never tasted them. Race helps to shape us, our customs, and our lives, but they do not define us.

 We have seen the racial tensions in the United States increase in the past decade or so. Some say that they have always been there, just under the surface and now the media is finally bringing these issues into the light. That may be true. But, it’s also possible that the media is adding fuel to something that does not need to be inflamed.

 However, when the media constantly describes the subjects of a news story by their race, it automatically sets up a division. Do we need to know whether the suspect was black, white, Hispanic, or some other race? Do we need to know the race of the national spelling bee champion? Does it matter? In 99% of the situations, race has no bearing on the story.

 I would also like to suggest that describing people in racial terms in completely outdated and often inaccurate. First, there are so many interracial couples and individuals that it makes it difficult to accurately assign a race to a person. The best example of this is our last president. People claimed he was the first black president. But, he really wasn’t. He was mixed. To call him the first biracial president would be more accurate, but not completely. There may have been other biracial or multiracial presidents. Presidents Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Dwight D. Eisenhower have all been reported to have had anywhere from 10% to 50% of African American blood. None have been confirmed nor proven false. So, what can we say for certain about President Obama? He was the president with the most melanin. In other words, he was the president with the darkest skin to date.

 But that does bring an important issue to the forefront. With so many people being interracial, biracial, or multiracial, how can we accurately define a person’s race just by looking at him or her? We have seen errors before. A news report comes out describing someone as white, only to find out later that the person was really Hispanic, or someone described as black and we later find out that the person was Hispanic or Middle Eastern.

 Even describing someone as black is not very descriptive. “Black” could refer to someone with a “milk chocolate” light brown color, anyone with dark brown / black skin, or anyone in between. Racial descriptions are simply not accurate in describing a person’s skin color, nor the person’s more important qualities of character and integrity. So, what should we do?

 The answer to the currently inflamed racial tensions is quite simple. Shut up! Stop talking about race. Do not use it when describing another person. After all, you may be assigning a wrong racial designation to that person. So, stop labeling people based on what race you “think” that person is. It is highly inflammatory to refer to a person’s race. I think it should be considered discriminatory speech and be banned, but with a few caveats.

 There are certainly times when the public has a “need to know” about the color of someone’s skin, although these situations are rare. One such time would be reporting on a story where a particular school has reported that someone has been trying to lure children into a vehicle when walking to and from school. Information about the vehicle and the person could be vital to protecting children. Describing the potential suspect by race does not go far enough and has the potential for inaccuracies. It would be better to describe the skin tone of the potential suspect by using a melanin scale, like the one below.



 1 2 3 4

 5 6 7 8

 9 10 11 12

 13 14 15 16

 In situations where the public has a “need to know” in order to protect the public, a scale similar to the one above would be a more accurate tool to describe the person of interest. This takes the “race” out of the equation and allows us to view people as people of various shades, rather than some arbitrary label. As you can see from the scale above, someone who is a 7 – 9 could be a tan Caucasian, a light skinned African American, a Hispanic, a Middle Easterner, or any combination of those. The racial label is not a full and complete picture, but using the scale above gives a more defined and accurate description, without assigning a racial label.

 Racial tensions will not decrease immediately. But over time, we will see a dramatic shift in American culture. When we stop talking about each other in racial terms, we will start to see each other as simply Americans. Sure, we will still be able to see the diverse skin tones, but those skin tones will not be a factor of the person inside the skin. Rather we will see the skin tone as irrelevant to the person’s character as the color of shirt the person is wearing.

 Of course there are a few situations where the racial label will still be needed, such as in medical situations. There are some disorders and diseases that only afflict certain racial groups or are more prevalent in certain racial groups. However, these are situations where the racial label is only spoken of in confidential settings, such as between a doctor and his or her patient.

 We may not be able to completely erase racial discrimination, but we certainly have the opportunity to decimate the vast majority of it by simply starving it of oxygen. When the media uses racial labels to describe people, it shines a magnifying glass on race, making something insignificant seem gigantic. It is time to rethink racial labels, how discriminatory, and how ripe for mislabeling they are. It is time to be united, as one people, as Americans, as humans. The only real race we all belong to is the human race. And if you think different racial groups are all that different from each other, just remember that the fairest of white people and the darkest of black people, still share 99.9% of their DNA (National Human Genome Research Institute, FAQ page, “Why are genetics and genomics important to my health?”, <https://www.genome.gov/19016904/faq-about-genetic-and-genomic-science/>, updated 3/2/2016, retrieved 5/8/2018). So, why do we quibble over that measly 0.1%? Sounds a little juvenile and insignificant, don’t you think?