

We can do better

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The other day I overheard someone say, “There you go again, playing the race card.”

Look, I don’t like labels. But the reality is that some people throughout history – and right up to the present day – have been put at a disadvantage with respect to the opportunities afforded them simply due to their race.

When Barack Obama was elected, a lot of people said, “I don’t like him, but it has nothing to do with his race.” Right. Come with me to my hometown in rural west Tennessee on the weekend and sit in the local diner. Some of the folks there will tell you exactly why they didn’t like the former president.

Can White people be discriminated against? Of course. It happens all the time. But for any White person in the United States to claim they have been subject to the same kind of systemic discrimination as people of other races is pretty disingenuous.

My family didn’t have a lot when I was growing up; by today’s standards, we’d probably be below the poverty line. Still, I had more opportunities than my Black friends. Just being White was – and is – an advantage in a predominantly White culture.

The cold, hard reality, at least for me personally, is that my parents were racists. My grandparents were racists. Did I love them? Sure I did. But the comments they used to make about people who didn’t look like them were obviously racist.

“I have nothing against them, but I wouldn’t want you to marry one.”

Overlooking attitudes and behaviors simply because they were family members – or to invoke that overused phrase, “they were just a product of the times in which they lived” – would be giving my relatives a pass they did not deserve.

We can do better.

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