

Why do we still have a Civil Rights Movement?

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Recently a young man asked me, "Why do you still do volunteer work with civil rights organizations?"

The person asking thought there was no longer any need for a civil rights movement in the United States. He said there has been a great deal of change between the 1960s and today regarding the laws that support the civil rights of all people. He said we now have an African American woman as secretary of state and Illinois Sen. Barack Obama is running for president of the United States. He went on to say there have been a lot of changes in the past 47 years and many of them have been positive for African Americans.

Many African Americans have graduated from college and hold some very important and high paying positions. There are African Americans in almost every branch of our government, on TV, in the movies, in music, in sports and in corporate America. Yet, the civil rights movement is still going on and he did not understand why.

I told him, while it is true that we made a great deal of change to the laws that supported the concept of "separate but equal" during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, we did very little at that time to change the hearts and minds of many people who perceive African Americans and other cultures as being inferior to them because of the color of our skin, the shape of our eyes, or the way we speak.

Today, we are working to change the hearts and minds of these people. We also are aware of problems such as racism, poor education, excessive poverty, violence, unemployment, poor housing, poor health care, poverty and hopelessness that are still a part of the daily lives of many African Americans in our country today and we work to bring about change in these areas.

The young man went on to ask me what we do to bring about changes in the hearts and minds of these who don't agree that we are all members of the human race. I told him that there are many people and organizations working on the problem and they use a variety of methods to bring about their desired changes, I use dialogue and example to get people to understand the situation and change their perceptions.

The young man went on to tell me that he thought I was setting a good example. He said he knows a number of African Americans who live in the Poconos and are also setting very good examples. He said they have nice houses, good jobs and/or are nice people.

He asked why more of these people are not working to improve the situation of those who don't have their level of education, jobs and living conditions. He said while many

of these people set good examples, aren't they concerned about those who do not?

I asked him to explain his question and he went on to say, if the government and the majority community are responsible to some extent for problems such as racism, poor education, excessive poverty, violence, unemployment, poor housing, poor health care and hopelessness that impacts low income African Americans and other people in our country.

Who is responsible for black on black crime or the high dropout rates of young black people from high school and college? Who is responsible for blacks selling drugs to blacks, or blacks who use drugs? Who is responsible for Hip-Hop and Rap musicians who promote violence and disrespect for black women? Who is responsible for black gang violence or the high numbers of young black men in jails for crimes they committed? Who is responsible for young unmarried black women having multiple babies by multiple men, and who is responsible for black men who don't provide any support for the children they have fathered?

He asked if the civil rights movement was equally concerned about correcting these problems as well as those caused by others outside of the African American community.

I told him I hope the movement would be more aggressive in our efforts to also correct these problems. I told him that his questions reminded me of something my father used to say to me when as a young child and I would tell him things that I had hoped would get my brother into trouble. He would tell me that before I attempt to remove a speck of sand from the eye of my brother; I should be sure that I have first removed the sand from my eyes.

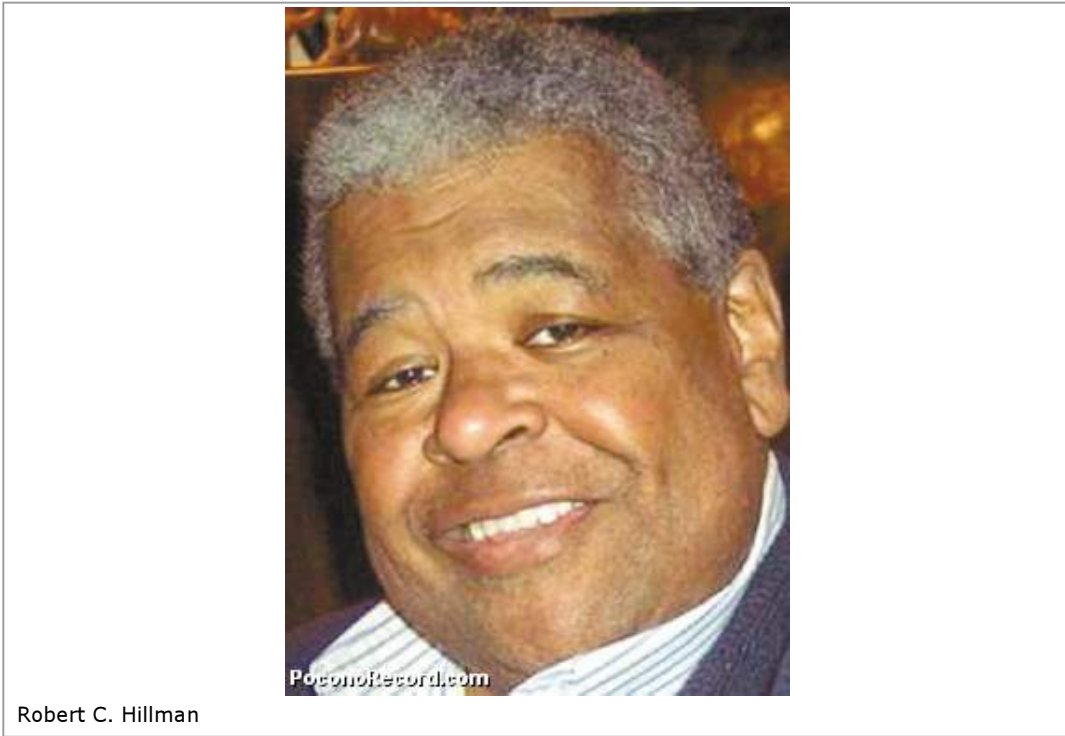
It took me some time to understand what he was trying to tell me, but eventually I understood and I stopped trying to get my brother in trouble. I found that my brother and I got along much better after this. It may also take some time for the leaders of the Civil Rights movement to learn the lesson and to start working on all of the things that are holding us back as a people. When they do, I am sure that many people will learn to respect us more and see something more than just the color of our skin.

The young man told me that he had to leave because he was going to be late for dinner. He thanked me for talking to him and said he now understands why I do what I do and why the Civil Rights Movement is still needed.

He said he hopes some day soon, people will understand that our nation is comprised of many different cultures; but we are all members of the human race and need to work together to bring about a lasting concern for the Civil Rights of all people.

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