

If it's not about race, don't talk about race

By David Morse

It is interesting and discouraging that we, as a nation and as a people, talk so much about not being racist but act so much like racists to prove our lack of racial bias.

By this I mean we strive to prove we do not base our actions, opinions or decisions about people or events based upon the race(s) of those involved. Yet whenever something happens, the first bit of information we want to know is the race(s) of those involved.

Statistics we keep on crime, employment, housing, education, population, politics and everything else are segregated by race. To make matters worse, every analysis and comparison is divided by race, skewed by race, and these racial differences are used to demonstrate any distinctions are biased by the race(s) of those involved, all designed to fuel an argument that we are or are not racist.

Yet woe be upon anyone who would stand to voice an opinion that there are any differences between people because of their race. But then, every report on television, every article in the newspaper, every posting on social media and all conversations are carefully crafted to mention the races of those involved, without appearing to be racist in making apparent we are sensitive to the matter of race.

Confused yet?

We all play the game. "Officer-involved shooting in XX city, more when we come back," says the news. What is the first thought to flash in our collective minds? Was the man (we always assume it was a man) who was shot black? Was the cop white? Did an irresponsible white cop overreact and shoot an innocent black man?

Please don't lie. All these thoughts race (pun intended) through your mind. Why? Because wonderful, overbearing, carefully crafted statistics and readings have made us hypersensitive to an issue we should not even consider, one that probably should not even be mentioned in the news reports: the race of the parties involved.

The white cop who approaches a car full of white people with a lackadaisical and inattentive attitude is far more likely to be shot than the black cop who approaches a carload of black people alert and with an attention to detail. The white person sitting in a car who points a gun at a black cop is far more likely to be shot than the black person who has hands on the steering wheel when approached by a white cop.

Change the races in any way possible and the results are the same. Any cop who approaches any situation with a lazy, inattentive attitude is far more likely to get hurt than any cop who approaches alert and attentive. Any person who approaches a cop in a threatening and confrontational manner is far more likely to get arrested or hurt than a person who is civil and calm. Race is not the deciding factor.

Yet our manner of analysis pushes race to the forefront. This is because, unfortunately, the first element we see and the most prominent thrust upon us for the past several years is race. Most of public reaction, unfortunately, is driven by race.

Anytime an officer shoots someone, there has been a failure in our system. Should the officer have shot the person without just cause (which is actually very rare — I think most cops are more likely to hesitate firing and get shot themselves than to shoot without provocation), then there has been a breakdown in training and community relations. If a person threatens an officer and forces the officer to shoot in self-defense, there has been a breakdown in education and support in our community. In either case, race is not the factor that needs attention.

Any solution should not emphasize and cannot be based upon race. Any solution that focuses on race is a failure by definition because that “solution” exacerbates the basic problem: an artificial and forced separation of people into groups based upon a difference that should be irrelevant. What is to be done?

First, when each of us hears about a situation, let us not begin with the thought or question of race. When we hear a discussion focusing on race, we should ask, at least internally: Why? Is race the most important factor, or is the politician or activist or talking head fueling an agenda rather than discussing or reporting on the issue?

All solutions start with individual persons changing their own attitudes and approaches. That is what we can do. That is what we must do. If we collectively don't, the problem will never be truly solved.