

The Trials and Triumphs of a Joyful Black Man in America

“As a man amongst men, I create a world of Love and understanding by loving myself and understanding others.

**Michael “Powerful Tiger” Taylor
Land of My Grandfathers July 2002**

Growing up as a young black male in the inner-city projects of Corpus Christi Texas I was acutely aware that being “black” somehow made me different. As I watched television and looked through magazines and books I realized that the people I perceived to have all of the wealth were white people. When I asked my mom the reason for this her response was that there were lots of blacks that were wealthy, but the white people did not want to show that on television. When asked why not, she responded by saying that this was the way that white people could control the minds of black people and keep them from attaining wealth. Even as a child, there was something about that comment that I did not agree with. I wanted to understand how the mind worked and most of all I wanted to understand how white people could control the minds of black people?

As I progressed through elementary school I remember the tension and fear I felt as I interacted with white kids in my class. At the age of nine I had my first experience of racism when a white female classmate approached me after a spelling test. In this class the person who scored an A on a test would receive a gold star, which was then placed on a poster board in plain view for all the students to see. It just so happened that I had the most gold stars of anyone in the class and the teacher would always encourage me to do well and to be comfortable being at the top of the class intellectually and academically.

After this particular test the white female classmate came up to me and said, “my mom says that all niggers are dumb and stupid and even though you may have more stars than I do I am still smarter than you”. I stood there in shock and disbelief and was unable to respond. Even though I had the evidence to refute her comments, as a nine year old the pain of her words cut me like a knife. I felt angry yet ashamed because this was not the first time I had heard those words. But this was the first time that I had heard them targeted directly at me by one of my peers.

My most painful experience of blatant racism occurred when I was seventeen. I was in high school and I met and fell in love with my high school sweetheart. She was a wonderful supportive caring person that incidentally happened to be white. When we met, she was somewhat of a wild child. She came from a pretty wealthy family yet hated her father and was into drugs and rebellion. She was a C and D student that liked to skip

school and hang out at the beach with her friends. After going out with her for a while I convinced her to turn her life around and give up the skipping school and abusing drugs. She changed her attitude and became an A and B student. We were extremely close and shared that high school infatuated kind of love that feels so deep that it stays with you for a lifetime. After going out with her for over a year her father found out that we were dating. One night I got a phone call from him and it was obvious that he was not happy. As he began speaking I knew that I needed to keep my cool and not disrespect him. I listened to his objections and gave him an opportunity to get everything off of his chest. When he finished, I made the mistake of telling him that he did not have the right to decide whom his daughter should date. I tried to convince him that I had been a good influence on his daughter and that he should be happy that she was doing so well. My hope was that I could get him to understand that I was a good guy that was actually good for his daughter. Of course he could not hear a word I was saying. He was adamant about the fact that he knew what was best for his daughter and I was just some young punk trying to take advantage of his little girl. After screaming his disapproval of our relationship for several minutes he then said something that completely caught me off guard. Although I knew he was angry I did not expect to hear these words, “There is no way that I will allow my daughter to date a nigger. I will kill you before I let that happen”. Although the words were painful, it was the venomous feeling of anger and hatred that came through the phone that ripped out my heart. Even today almost thirty years later I can still feel the hatred in his words. His anger came from deep within his soul and it was apparent that his anger wasn’t just about me but about all black people.

As I sat there in disbelief I immediately went numb. A part of me wanted to defend myself and curse at him and retaliate in some way. My initial feeling was anger, which I quickly subdued to avoid getting into a shouting match. Another part of me was extremely afraid because I did not know whether or not he would actually attempt to take my life. But the feeling I remember most after his comment was sadness. I remember a sinking feeling in my gut that was the result of being invalidated as a human being. I knew that he viewed me as less than a man and in his mind I was not good enough for his daughter simply because I was black. It was dehumanizing and demoralizing.

How could this man hate me so much and not know anything about me? How could he pass judgment on me without ever seeing me or speaking to me? Why could he not see the positive influence I had had on his daughter? Why was I not allowed the opportunity to meet with him and talk to him so that he could see how much I really cared about his daughter and that my intentions were to simply love and support her? So many questions so few answers.

I share these three true personal stories because as a black man I realize that my experiences are really just a microcosm of the challenges facing black men even today. I personally believe that our media still does an irresponsible job of portraying black

people in general. The media generated perception is that being black is synonymous with being poor, uneducated, unmotivated and somehow a burden on society. Although I do not believe that the media can control how black people think, I am aware of the power that the media does have on a person's perception. Since a person's perception is their reality, the media definitely has an influence on people's minds.

It is my fervent belief that people in general are not born racist. Hatred is not a part of a person's genetic make up. Racism is something that is learned and people usually learn from the environments in which they are raised. Unfortunately there are still some parents that teach their children that black people are inferior as human beings and sadly enough some black people have accepted this as true.

As a black man, I realize that people are going to judge me and have preconceived ideas about who I am. I understand that no matter what I do the stereotypes of black men will precede me and somehow I will have to prove myself over and over again. I know that people will be afraid of me, will think less of me and put the label of "black" man on me no matter what I do.

So as a black man what can I do? How do I deal with the multiplicity of challenges that I face on a daily basis? Do I throw my hands up in defeat and give up? Do I accept the stereotypes and become just another black male statistic thrown into the ever-increasing prison population? Do I succumb to the pressure and lose my identity and try to become someone that I'm not?

In order for me to deal with the aforementioned challenges, I choose to first and foremost see myself as a man, not just a black man. If I see the world only through the lens of a black man I limit my perception of the world. When I let go of my attachment to being black first, I open the door to infinite possibilities for myself as a human being. This is not a denial of my ethnicity it is simply an affirmation of my true potential and my humanity. This awareness gives me an entirely new perspective on the world.

With this perspective I can honestly say that I absolutely love being a black man. I have come to this conclusion as a result of the past fifteen years of doing my emotional work and removing my shadows. I am now completely comfortable with who I am as a human being and I recognize that I am a man who happens to be black. I am proud of my racial heritage but the true source of my power transcends the color of my skin.

When I view the world from this perspective I begin to recognize that although there is ignorance and hatred in the world, racism in and of itself is actually an over-used word in our society that keeps us separate and in denial of our oneness. This does not excuse injustice and oppression for people of color it simply acknowledges that racism is a disease of the mind. In objective scientific terms it isn't real. It is a man made creation that

exists only in our minds.

As I reflect over my personal mission statement:

*“As a man amongst men, I create a world of
Love and understanding by loving myself
and understanding others.*

I fully grasp the implications of what these words mean to me. By loving myself and removing any blocks to my awareness, I am able to understand others without judgment. This allows me to constantly be in the moment without being attached to things that have happened to me in the past. By healing my anger and forgiving those who have hurt me I can be fully present to people in my life. Therefore I do not think in over generalized statements and use words and phrases like those white people, or them and they. I live in the moment and address each individual situation in the moment. This is the beauty of healing your heart. It frees you from your past and keeps you in the present moment.

Life has taught me that you have two choices in response to anything that happens to you.

The first is to become bitter or the second choice is to become better. I have chosen the latter and it has definitely made me a more joyful man. I live by the adage that “if it does not kill you, it can only make you stronger.” I am grateful for all the challenges I have overcome because I can clearly see how they made me a better man in the process.

My intention is for you to have a new perception about black men after you finish reading

this article. The truth is we are no different than any other group of men. We are loving, caring, compassionate, sensitive, intelligent, forgiving and courageous. We love our country and our families. We deal with all of the same emotions and challenges as any one else. We do not all blame society for our challenges and we are constantly making positive contributions to America. We are definitely an asset to this country not a liability.

I am reminded of a lesson I learned from Wayne Dyer in which he taught me that I should never focus my attention on that which I am against. Instead, I must focus my attention on that which I am for and I will experience that as a result. So instead of being against racism I am for unity. Instead of taking a position against hatred I take a stand for love.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said. *“We’re afraid of each other because we do not know one another, we do not know one another because most of us are separated from each other.”* My intention is to remove the perceived separation and create oneness. This is the driving force in my life. I want to be the change I want to see in the world and I invite

you to join me in creating a world of love, peace and unity.

In the immortal words of John Lennon, *“You may say that I’m a dreamer, but I’m not the only one. I hope someday you’ll join us, and the world will be as one.”*

Won’t you join me?