

## THE SEED OF PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

Throughout history we had learned about the Holy War, (800 years ago) where thousands of eastern European Jews were slaughtered in the name of Christ, 400 years ago the wars between Catholics and Protestants that killed thousands, 150 years ago was slavery. History accounts for many cultural stereotypes, but our own personal history accounts for many of our biases too.

Prejudice and discrimination are negative manifestations of integrative power. Instead of bringing or holding people together, prejudice and discrimination push them apart.

When one group holds negative stereotypes of another group and discriminates against members of that group based on those stereotypes, they are prejudging without evidence or without allowing for individual differences. Our culture has hundreds of ready-made stereotypes; leaders are dominant, arrogant men; very smart people are weird; teenagers are music crazed car fanatics, etc. Yes, sometimes we have a leader or a teenager like that stereotype but it would be an injustice to automatically assume this for all.

Ninety years ago, a great black scholar, W.E.B. Dubois, reminded whites that prejudice doesn't just spring from the human mind in a vacuum (Gaines & Reed 1995). It is exploitations; not just a mental process that contributes to prejudice against the minorities and to self-doubt within those discriminated against. For example, Blacks, women, Orientals, the poor, the unattractive, the handicapped, etc. are all discriminated against and are constantly reminded that they are a minority.

Rural and suburban American have always looked down on the poor, urban dweller – 80 years ago it was the Jews, Italians and Irish, today it is the Blacks, Mexican, Puerto Ricans, etc. Many sociologists see prejudice as caused by social problems. It has been found, for example, that persons who are low in the socioeconomic status or have lost status are prejudiced because they look for people to blame.

What is Discrimination?

Discrimination takes place when someone is treated less favorable on grounds of their race, color, nationality or ethnic origin. It is not necessary to prove that someone intended to discriminate against you: it is sufficient only to show that the outcome of their actions was that you received less favorable treatment. Discrimination is not the same as prejudice or racism.

Prejudice is when you prejudge someone, making assumptions because of some characteristic like their color or appearance.

Racism is the belief that some "races" are better or superior than others.

In many cultures, it is not surprising to observe it is generally accepted as being the “norm”, that which is perceived as being “different” is treated as if it were “less than”, in other words, “different” means “inferior” and most of the time we blame powerless and innocent people for something they didn’t do. When we look to these actions we can immediately identify our standards of life have been violated: the reason, the justice and the tolerance. When can we call ourselves civilized? They day we can care about each other without looking into our differences.

Please join the Human Rights Commission, Pacelli and Austin High School students and community members in the Martin Luther King Celebration on Monday, January 17, 2005. A march will begin at 10:00 AM from First United Methodist Church; we will proceed to Austin High School auditorium where we will listen to featured speaker Otis Woodard beginning at 10:20 AM. Anyone with questions can call 434-2863. The Human Rights Commission, Welcome Center, First United Methodist Church and Austin Public Schools are cosponsoring the event.