



Racism In The Free Market

*The hate and ignorance behind the Jim Crow
"No Colored Allowed" signs is still evident in 1991*

By Teresa Jefferson
Staff

You know the story. It's the same song for African-Americans and other targeted minorities everywhere. You go into a store, and all you want is to look at the merchandise, ponder a purchase and be treated with a little courtesy. But there many times when you must confront overt racist actions when all you really wanted to do was shop in peace. White America can have no idea what it feels like to enter a place of business and be treated like an outcast, not because of what you are wearing, how much noise you are making or how much money it looks like you make, but because of the color of your skin. I challenge any African-American to honestly say they have never been the object of racist treatment — overt or covert — in places of business. I do not know any. The setting and the characters may vary, but its always the same song. Raise your hand if you know exactly what I am talking about, if you have felt the clenching of teeth as you try to stay calm and not cause a scene, thereby perpetuating a stereotype, if you have heaved a heavy sigh of frustration when you hear others remark misunderstandingly how oversensitive African-Americans are, or if you have experienced the bewilderment and anger after the obvious snub of a

bigoted clerk who is probably not even old enough to drive. Here are a few examples that may bring back some not-so-pleasant memories.

1.) You hear there is a sale at a local department store, so you go in to check it out. No sooner than you walk into the door than an obvious undercover security person starts following you, pretending to shop. Now you know you entered the store at the same time as a few more people, but somehow you are picked out as the

criminal threat. The only difference between you and the other unharassed patrons is the skin you are in.

2.) You make your habitual stop in the record store to see what's new. Immediately you notice all the R&B, soul and rap cassettes and anything else predominantly purchased by African-Americans have been moved to the front of the store. You inquire why and receive some vague comment about security risks.

Is it me, or in both these occasions have you been slapped across the face, told in so many words that you are nothing and your strides for equality and acceptance in this country count for nothing

and left at the cash register to defend your entire race? I once heard a white professor proclaim she knew exactly what African-Americans felt. She said many times she had been snubbed in stores because of the way she dressed, or because she had her kids with her. I just shook my head in utter frustration. How could she possibly compare the two? She could go home and change, drop the kids off, return and receive totally different treatment. I, on the other hand, could enter the same store

from a chauffeured limousine with jewels and cash spilling onto the pavement and Ph.D's pinned to my coat and still be considered a worthless nigger who wandered off the street probably just to keep warm or pocket a few things and who definitely cannot afford anything in the store.

Every time it happens (and it happens all too often), I shudder. I shudder to think that in this day and time I am forced to deal with such ignorance on a day-to-day basis. The "No Coloreds Allowed" signs may have been removed from the walls, but African-Americans in 1991 must still face the hate and ignorance that placed them there.

Commentary

Black Ink March 25, 1991

Check Out The Wesley Foundation

On Wednesday, April 10, the Western North Carolina Conference Board of Ministry is sponsoring an Ethnic/Minority Conference at the Pfeiffer Science Complex on the campus of Bennett College, Greensboro, 1-4 p.m.

ALSO:

Residencies are available at Wesley Foundation (an intentional community) for the 1991-92 academic year. Since the 1960s, it has committed itself to an interracial community. Applications are available at the Union or at the Wesley Foundation, 214 Pittsboro Street, 942-2152

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