

# FORUM

## White photographer floored by discrimination



**Nigel Alston**  
Motivational Moments

"Tolerance, fundamentally, is a personal decision - a belief that every other person on earth is a treasure."  
-Southern Poverty Law Center

It's not often a friend asks for a personal endorsement - especially when it comes to race.

And when it happens, it means that someone has been doing some serious soul-searching.

"Help, I need your endorsement, if I deserve it," he wrote. My friend was seeking understanding about black and white prejudices and about trusting people who are different.

I could tell by the tone of his request that he was doing some serious soul-searching. The intensity of the message was as forceful as water flowing out of a fire hydrant at full blast.

A black family came to him after seeing his work on display at a bridal show. They were "an outstanding black family," he said, "very lovely and obviously educated."

They liked his work and the quality enough to visit his studio to discuss their daughter's upcoming wedding.

It was what the mother didn't see in the studio that caused her antenna to rise - the race of the photographer.

"Her most important issue with me was that she didn't see any black brides on my walls," he said explaining the situation. She wanted to know how many weddings he had done for black brides.

"A handful," he responded. The questions continued to come.

"Do you have any black friends in the area?" they asked.

They even wanted to know if he had photographed any weddings at a particular black church.

The answer, "no."

He had too much to overcome. No black photographs of beaming black brides on the wall, no experience with black weddings and for this couple, he had not taken pictures in a prominent black church.

"I have never felt so helpless and victimized, especially when I know that if only these people knew me," he continued.

He offered this explanation to the woman: During his years in the business, he found that many blacks prefer to take their business to black photographers.

He wasn't prepared for what happened next. The couple requested the name of a good black photographer.

He was accommodating and gave them the name of a black friend who is also in the business.

"I couldn't believe it," he

said. "I feel I lost good business because I am white and can't believe anyone doesn't recognize the fact that I see everyone as having red blood and green money."

He was hurt. It disturbed him that he could lose a sale solely on the basis of race.

He wrote me because he said he trusted my opinion.

"You know, the thing that bothered me wasn't the fact this family wasn't comfortable with a white photographer, it was that they relied on their bias toward whites in general rather than judging me personally."

What bothered him that one time was something that was an everyday occurrence for most black folks. He was floored to be a victim of discrimination.

He wanted to know how people could get past skin color, ethnicity or religious differences.

"How could this obviously intelligent black family not recognize my personality?" he asked. "Why did they judge me by the sins of race past?"

Answers to that question required me to dig a little deeper and look into the issues that divide us.

There are prejudices and stereotypes inside each of us. It's baggage we don't want to admit to carrying, but it's easy to see when we're impacted by it.

Digging deeper means getting beyond the surface to really uncover the issues that need to be resolved.

We don't always want to do what we are uncomfortable

doing. "It is not fair nor smart for whites or blacks to judge by skin color," he said.

"Did I make a mistake telling her about black folks preferring black photographers? Did that sound like I didn't really want her business?"

We still have a long way to go in the area of race relations, and incidents like this illustrate what some of us have been faced with for a lifetime all because of skin color.

A white friend remarked recently that she hopes one day that people will see each other as people.

"We will love them or do business with them because we recognize and value their gifts and don't see the 'differences' whatever they may be," she said.

According to "Ten Ways To Fight Hate," a community response guide published by the Southern Poverty Law Center, we all grow up with prejudices. It takes effort to see them as clearly as others do. We each have the power to change our attitude to overcome our ignorance and fears, and to influence our children, our peers and our community.

It's tough work to dig deeper. That's why so few do.

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## NAACP lawsuit has merit



**Rev. Carlton Eversley**  
Guest Columnist

This is the fourth in a series of articles on the work of the NAACP Education Caucus this year. We have met every first Tuesday of every month since January precisely at 8 p.m. at Dellabrook Church and have been serious about organizing the entire black Forsyth County population in matters of public education. The African American church has been central to this effort because, for better or worse, it is still the only wholly black-owned institution in our community. Moreover, at its best, full-time African American clergy leadership can be totally accountable to our community without being yanked on a chain by white power elites.

These elites, including School Board Chairman Donny Lambeth, Superintendent Donald Martin and School Attorney Douglas Pungler, have variously sought to ignore, minimize or dismiss our efforts as being off-base. When the NAACP says we want high expectations for all students, equitable discipline, proportionate black hiring, Afrocentric curriculum and racial/cultural sensitivity training, the educational elites pretend these are accomplished facts. When we say we will simultaneously sue this district for resegregating and organize as many African Americans as possible to embrace and

support the virtually all-black schools in our neighborhoods, they say they agree with the latter, but the former is crazy!

Our position is, if our lawsuit is "crazy," why does the School Board have a \$10,000 retainer to the Hogan, Hartson law firm of Washington, D.C., and why are they apparently prepared to spend another \$250,000 to \$330,000 of our taxpayer dollars to defend a lawsuit that we haven't filed? The NAACP does not believe this School Board and this superintendent will do right by our all-black schools without the coercive power of a lawsuit; nor will they show any real interest in desegregating all of this county's schools without a lawsuit. We believe underlying all of this is a steadfast devaluing of the black community's parents, administrators, teachers, students, pastors, business persons, etc.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a certain attitudinal and philosophical affiliation between the educational elites and the more openly rabidly racist white supremacist elements in Forsyth County. On May 25 I received the following letter, which I will quote from and edit extensively:

Dear Rev. Eversley:

I attended my daughter's graduation from high school last week. Never before in my 44 years of living have I realized what savages your race truly is. Before the graduation exercises began, one of the school administrators asked the audience to hold any and all applause until after all the graduates had

received their diplomas. Well, you guessed it. The n---s could not hold back. The n---s in the audience reverted back to their days of living in the jungle and swinging through the trees. Every time a n---s name was announced the yelling, hollering and give-a---ing began. Total disrespect. Total savagery. You want to come to our schools. You protest all of the time. You say that you are our equal. Well B---T. You can take the n---r out of the jungle but you can't take the jungle out of the n---r. We just wish that you would build your own schools. Then you could swing through the vines and yell and holler and give a--- all day long. In reality, you n---s haven't yet evolved into civilized human beings. Total disrespect. But what else would you expect from something that is still akin to a chimpanzee.

Andrew J.

Note, as always, Andrew J. is another coward from the white community lacking an ounce of manhood it might take to sign his full name. Perhaps he and Mark and Sharon C. from Kernersville 27284, who I quoted from another hate letter in an earlier column, are fearful of an actual public debate on race and education. This would be a battle of wits in which we'd be armed to the teeth and they'd be utterly defenseless. Normally, I shield my family from the stream of hate mail I've received since moving to Winston-Salem in 1982.

However, when I got Mark and Sharon's letter on May 11, my 14-year-old son was in my

office with me. It included some personal attacks on my intelligence. My son had just seen me earn my doctorate on May 8 as the highest honor graduate in a class of 207. He wanted me to find a way to debate and disagree with Mark and Sharon. I assured him that smart people don't lower themselves to caring one little bit what idiotic morons like Mark, Sharon (or Andrew) think about them.

What's much more important is what the School Board, superintendent and school attorney think of us because they have something to say about our children's educational destiny. Early on in this redistricting resegregation process, there was a public hearing on the so-called magnet theme zone choice plan at North Forsyth High School. A white parent made thinly-veiled racist comments comparing (white) children at Whitaker or Jefferson to black children at Paisley. He said, "These people don't care about education and their parents don't care about education."

Highly ranked administrators (white) and white School board members, not one rose to say, "We won't tolerate racist comments, thinly-veiled or not, in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools." Silence is assent. Our educational "leaders" say they won't tolerate racism but they don't confront it as it occurs every day in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. I'll write more later.

*The Rev. Carlton Eversley is pastor of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church*

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