

The First, the Only. Enough Already

It seems to me that it may be time to put the real meaning of certain, no longer so flattering footnotes, the asterisks, and milestones on the table.

We should entertain open conversation and discussions about an array of truisms that in 2021 may seem so flattering, so noteworthy, but yet thought provoking, nonetheless. Yes, I can appreciate the fact that context is important.

After recently reading quite an interesting article in the New York Times by Samuel Getachew, titled, "The Toxic Troup of Black Exceptionalism" where he shares his experience within the secondary education system in Oakland, CA. It gave me cause to reflect. I am sure we can all relate, either from our own family, or by other tangential means, exactly the writers point about focusing less on lauding the few who thrive despite racism.

My family experience alone, encapsulates a black family in Fayetteville, NC where my parents raised three sons during the Jim Crow era. One went on to be the first black graduate from Stanford University, the other, a full scholarship recipient from an all black high school, to attend Fordham University in New York. Oh, yes, I was able to carve out a few significant accomplishments of my own. Not the least of which was being the first black elected to the Governors' Council of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts since 1896. The first, and only black corporate executive, for several years with Dunkin Donuts of America, now just known as Dunkin.

In reality, the past is not past us.

It seems like just yesterday that I would marvel at the mere sight of a black airline pilot, and even, at the time, a flight attendant of color. I have particular sense of pride when I see a black professional quarterback or in Division I college football program. Why? Because I remember when it was standard procedure to attempt to shift highly acclaimed black high school quarterbacks to defensive backs. I remember the acid test that was in place to help gauge the football intellect an athlete; it was called the Wonderlic test. Michael Vick, as I recall, did not score that well. Nevertheless, he overcame the odds and excelled until outside elements led him astray. I am fortunate to know the family of another stellar quarterback star of color, our own Justin Fields, now of the Chicago Bears. It is comforting to know that ones talent and work ethic are determining factors for opportunities for success.

Mr. Getachew put it so aptly, "I don't want to see another inner city success story emerge from my community. I want these stories to be so common that they are unworthy of such coverage."

My point is basically this. Whether we examine the world of education or athletics, the exceptionalism being exhibited by a few individuals can give us the false sense of accomplishment. It is just too apparent, in my book. Of course, I have the utmost respect for a pioneer like Alain Locke, the first African American Rhodes Scholar. One would hope that the number since Mr. Locke be numerous and expanding. Pioneers can still inspire us all.

It would be so disingenuous of me if I did not take a jab at another area, in particular, politics. Thank goodness we are beginning to see the evidence of a paradigm shift from just voting for candidates just because of their hue and not their competence, experience and vision.

A couple of recent Democrat Primary election results in the two cities of Buffalo and Rochester showed two incumbent black mayors put out to pasture. The first case of Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown, he was first elected in 2005. Then other is the Mayor of Rochester, Lovely Warren. She ultimately displayed shallow leadership abilities, especially when it came to public safety and public access. The voters had likely had their fill of these incumbents and wanted a change, a new face, albeit, black as well. The newbies were able to break through and will most likely take a sip of from the cup of public service, after the November elections. This bodes well for the future of these two cities. Yes, you can actually add the City of Atlanta to that list. In my opinion, Mayor Bottoms put her finger in the air and did not like the temperature reading she got. It is so much more than the hue and cry of being the first, the only to be elected to a position of responsibility and high visibility. It is with hope that more voters will take the time to do their research, ask questions and seek more than what Zoom access provides us.

Moreover, we must take a dim view of indolence, incompetence, and poor to average performance in all areas. Anyone can be average, but with extra effort, excellence is often well within ones grasp.

Fortunately, we live in a world of possibilities. One never knows what tomorrow will bring. If you are like me, you will take those odds, with sincere gratitude.

Until next time