

“Something New Under the Sun”

by

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Malcolm X said, “The study of history is sufficient to reward all research.” Although I may not be able to fully explicate the saying, a simple interpretation is that history can be very beneficial during research processes. If one really wants to know the essence, meaning, and evolution of a topic, it is necessary to study the history of that topic.

Which brings us to racism and discrimination. Recently, our lives have been fraught with discussions of this topic. Simply put, people of different skin color and ethnicities are having difficulty getting along. Young and old, small and large, rich and poor, can’t seem to live congenially. What we know is that problems of this nature have been with humans for a considerable period.

Which brings us to an historical question: “Have persons of different skin colors and ethnicities ever lived together in complete harmony in human history?”

After his pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm argued that Muslims of all colors were at peace with one another while performing religious rites in that Holy City. But Malcolm would have to agree that, although the religion of Islam forbids discrimination and racism within the brotherhood, Muslim culture has a history of slavery and distinction partly based on skin color and ethnicity.

The civilizations of Europe always drew lines of distinction between Whites and non-Whites. Even the communist and socialist nations were unable to completely inculcate color blindness into their societies. In fact Russia’s breakup reflects, in part, not only the thirst for democracy and economic freedom, but also the separation of ethnic groups—some lighter and some of darker skin tones.

Till now, persons in the nations of Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and the Middle East differentiate themselves based on skin color, clans, tribes, or ethnicities.

So when and where in human history can we find people of different skin colors and ethnicities simply living peaceably together in one civil society as people?

I am not an historian, so I can’t be completely certain about the following assertion. However, to my knowledge, such an arrangement has never existed.

What does this assertion mean, if, in fact, it is true? Thinking optimistically, it means that Americans should place their current circumstances in historical context; realizing that what is being attempted here (creating a pluralistic and nondiscriminatory capitalist democracy) has never been achieved before. We all know from our life experiences that inventing can be a

trying and tedious process. With inventions there are likely to be failures before there are successes.

On the other hand, pessimism may force another question, “If it has never been achieved before, then what makes us think that we can achieve it today?” I submit in response that we are a scientific people who have come to know that we are not really different people (genetically)—even with our skin tone and ethnic differences. Maybe our acceptance of science will help us resolve our differences. At a minimum, science may assist us in engineering our society so that we look less different.

At the same time, differences can be stimulating. Remember that there are social cycles, and those on top today will be on the bottom tomorrow. It could very well be that the discriminated against (recipients of racism) are motivated to become better (economically, educationally, socially) than the discriminator (racists). One could argue that color and ethnic differences and discrimination provide incentives for humans to keep moving forward and to evolve to higher and higher levels.

These perspectives on differences and discrimination should force us to realize that we truly are in a grand experiment; one that we should take more time to ponder and design. If we perform this experiment thoughtfully and correctly, we could be the creators of something new under the sun.

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