



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Residuals of Racism

Residuals of Racism Report 1

September 7, 2010

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Today, I attended a ceremony held in northern Idaho to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of a successful law suit against the Aryan Nations. The September 7, 2000 case and its decade-old celebration made news across the nation.



Figure 1. The commemorative plaque.

As shown in Figure 1, a plaque was unveiled to commemorate the occasion. Some of the notables who participated in the event are shown, as is the statue of an eagle which is part of a veteran's memorial park located at a county courthouse.

This event was an exceptional situation as the panhandle of North Idaho does not offer much fodder for news feeds. FOX and CNN steer away from this part of the country because they focus their biases on more provocative locales. Up here, life is low key, not much controversy.

The townships in which I live and shop---Coeur d' Alene, Hayden, and Hayden Lake---are reflective of a bygone era in America. If not bygone, then seemingly going away: People are civil. Bars are rare. Churches are plentiful. Prayers are prevalent on Sunday, gin is not. A "No sir" or "yes sir" will not evoke a second look.

This setup both aligns and misaligns with my views. I respect some of these aspects of Americana. I shy away from others. But overall, the arrangement has a lot going for it for people who have migrated here from the semi-chaos of Los Angeles and LA's surrounding numbing suburbs.

Other than Lewis and Clark passing nearby many years ago, north Idaho's major claim to fame (more accurately, infamy) has been the Aryan Nations (AN). This organization made its home here during the late 1900s. AN was founded in the 1970s by Richard Butler, as part of a group that came to be known as the Church of Jesus Christ Christian.

The name of the church is at odds with the credo of the organization. The leaders of this movement call themselves "church pastors" yet preach white supremacy, Nazi slogans, and violence. I am not well-versed in Bible verses, but their beliefs seem at odds with their church's name-sake. During my youth, the Baptist Sunday School teacher taught non-violence and acceptance of others' ideas.

Northern Idaho is not known for its liberal inclinations. Tea Party members and evangelicals are pervasive. Churches are within sight of one another in most parts of Hayden and Hayden Lake. Bibles are used in charter schools.

I saw my first black person after living here for several months; same for Chicanos and Asians. (I wrote a report on this experience, available at Blog.UylessBlack.com. Scroll down to Immigration and Emigration. Click on minorities or immigrants.)

For those who have followed the teachings of many parts of the Bible---and certainly of Jesus---it could be assumed that such a culture would be nearly devoid of sentiments such as hatred and intolerance. But such is not the case. Neighborhoods up here have been peppered with Aryan Nations' literature, acts openly espoused by members of the Church of Jesus Christ Christian. A few homes have porches decorated with Aryan Nations and WW I Imperial German flags.

To be fair, not all that many homes are so-festooned. The pervasive practice is to decorate a porch with an American flag. But to also be accurate, some of the people who fly American the flag are known to use this flag as a front to espouse beliefs anathema to America's Constitution and Bill of Rights.

Whatever the rationale behind the name behind Aryan Nations, the Church of Jesus Christ Christian was founded in 1946 by Ku Klux Klan member Wesley A. Swift. He was a significant member of what is known at the *Christian Identity* movement in the United States.

According to Chester L. Quarles, professor of criminal justice at the University of Mississippi:¹

Christian Identity is a label applied to a wide variety of loosely affiliated believers and churches with a racialized [sic] theology. Many promote a Eurocentric interpretation of Christianity. Some of the Christian Identity movement's followers hold that non-Caucasian peoples have no souls, and can therefore never earn God's favor or be saved. Believers in the theology affirm that Jesus Christ paid only for the sins of the House of Israel and the House of Judah and that salvation must be received through both redemption and race.

More shortly from Your on the Street Reporter

¹ Key in Aryan Nations.

Residuals of Racism Report 2

September 7, 2010

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter, continuing the report on a ceremony held in northern Idaho to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of a court verdict against the Aryan Nations.

These essays are sent to a wide variety of readers. From your letters, I have learned you range across the political and religious spectrum and maybe the racial tolerance spectrum as well. For this latter possibility, I can't speak for sure, because I've never had a reader attach his or her name to an email containing racially disparaging comments.

So, assuming there might a closet racial malcontent lurking in my mailing list---or an anonymous reader receiving this report, I would like to use this essay to communicate with you, to look at race from your view, and ask you look at race from mine. For starters, I'll issue the first challenge and ask you to respond.

Who Started this Stuff in the First Place?

The distant past is an integral part of the present. For this discussion, the origins of the Aryan Nations go back to ancient times when we humans learned to fear and distrust those who were not of our ilk. Back then, it made sense. The protection of a tribe from another tribe was key to the tribe surviving. In those days, a visit from a neighbor was not to borrow a cup of flour. It was to deflower the tribes' women and sac their flour sacks.² We humans became hard-wired to suspect anyone whose appearance differed from those around us. It was a simple and practical matter of survival.

Old habits die hard, even if they are millions of years old. They are posited in our brain stems. They functioned admirably in the distant past, but they are not attenuated to the present. Yet they continue to function, at odds with reality, and at odds with humanity and humaneness. Thus, I pose a simple scenario to address one aspect of our racial heritage: that of skin color:

Upon our births, you and I had no choice as to which womb contributed to our skin color. We had no choice which woman our dad impregnated. I dropped from the womb with white skin enveloping my body. Let's say you did, too. Another person was also helpless to choose his parents. He dropped from his mother's womb with black skin wrapped around him.

Skin. The external layer of our bodies. Offering protection from the elements, it reveals our ancient geographical origins. Not much sun: white skin. Much sun: black skin. With gradients of sunshine and skin color in-between.

All of us are the innocent bystanders of our parents' origins. We've no control over where our parents or their parents, or theirs...came from. Coppertone and sun lamps notwithstanding, we cannot control the color of our skins.

² Flour did not yet exist. Deflowering did. Couldn't resist.

As an additional modest idea, we've no control on who our parents bedded. Their romps on a mattress led to you and me. Fun as it might have been for mom and dad, we were not consulted about this get-together and its aftermath. Nor was the black man. Yet, the black man is demeaned by our white culture because he was born with a different colored skin than ours. He's the victim of fate, of the bad of luck being born black.

Is that a reason to hate this person and to form a church to institutionalize the hatred? To demean a completely innocent member of our race? Or as luck might have it: of you or me? Our womb-drop was fortunate for us, but we had no say about it. Yet, many of us think we are superior to those whose origins are from dark-skinned people.³ Why do we think we are superior because of a genetic roll of the dice? I have never understood this concept.

This report is a challenge to write. I am trying to focus on the specific ten-year anniversary ceremony of the lawsuit, yet I continue to meander to the subject of prejudice. I thank you for your patience. And I would like to hear from you--pro or con. Your identity will not be revealed.

To conclude this segment of the report, for more than 20 years, the Aryan Nations trained its members on their compound, about 1 ½ miles from Hayden Lake. In July 1998, three men guarding the compound opened gunfire on two motorists. According to an Internet release about the case:

Victoria Keenan and her son Jason had stopped their car briefly on a public road in front of the Aryan Nations compound to search for a missing wallet. The three guards, hired by Aryan Nations founder Richard Butler, fired bullets into the Keenans' car, chased them in a truck for four kilometers, forcing Mrs. Keenan and her son to drive into a ditch, and then beat them with rifles and threatened to kill them.

What happened after this incident can only be described as inspiring. It was not the government who intervened to take down AN. It was a group of grass roots citizens. They met the AN head-on, *not a safe chore*. They even funded their own court case and won a verdict. Ten years ago to this day of September 7, a jury in Kootenai County, Idaho ruled against AN in a suit that bankrupted the group and "...drove the Nazis from North Idaho."⁴

Happy endings are not all that common in real life. Real life itself ends with the unhappy wrappings of death's shrouds. But for this battle in northern Idaho against the Aryan Nations, the ending was a happy one.

The Keenans won a \$6.3 million lawsuit against AN. The Aryan Nations compound was transferred to them. Shortly thereafter, they sold the compound to the Carr Foundation, a human rights organization which converted the compound to what is now called "Peace Park."

Gregg Carr spoke at the ceremony. He is shown in Figure 2 (left photo), along with other people (right photo) who took-on a risky venture against a dangerous, violent organization.

³ Speaking from the perspective of a white person.

⁴ Nick Rotunno, "A Place of Peace," *Coeur d'Alene Press*, September 8, 2010, pp 1 & 6.



Figure 2. Standing up.

Also speaking was the mayor of Coeur d’Alene, Sandi Bloen, “What a great day this is. Today, because of the heroes standing here, we can celebrate the fact that we don’t live in fear. Silence never did win any rights. Silence never did pick up and make us a better place. Today, instead of a place of hate, we have a place of peace.”

This part of Idaho has rid itself of a racial pestilence. Does racial bigotry still exist? Sure. But not just up here. It is still pervasive. Not too long ago, I overheard two men commiserate with each other about the fact that their last name was not Black. How sick is that...especially if your last name happens to be Black?

I am pleased that my last name might connote an affiliation with the blacks of America. With a group of people who have made their way against almost impossible odds. Black is beautiful? You bet. Black power? In more ways than one. Excuse the French: Go Williams sisters and kick some ass on the tennis court of life.

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