

A Personal Paradigm Shift
Reflective Paper
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The term paradigm shift would seem most appropriate with regard to my enlightenment as a result of the material addressed in this knowledge area. I was raised in a family where there was absolutely no mention of ideas that might imply the marginalization of any particular group of humanity. In the early 1960s my family were members of (and my parents leaders in) a multicultural Christian congregation. Since my father was a minister in the church our family had many invitations to dinner at the homes of the parishioners. I didn't hear any mention of the fact that they were black, Asian, Hispanic or anything else. Consequently when my younger sister was baptized it did not seem strange to me that her God-parents were an African American couple.

I also had women who were examples of strength who were not just in the kitchen, bare-foot and pregnant. My mother's, mother's mother was born on the frontier of California in 1892. Her father had acquired a homestead in the Antelope Valley section of the Mojave Desert. Here he built a business of growing various crops and raised a family. My great grandmother was the youngest and only daughter. She learned to do all the work that her brothers did on the farm but did not sacrifice her femininity, attracting the attention of an older man who had emigrated from Holland. Apparently the marriage did not work out so she ended up being a single mother at a time when this was not considered an acceptable social state. Instead of going home to live with her parents she stayed where she was (Newhall, California) and got a job at the post office. She eventually rose to the position of Post Master. When I talked to her about life back then she would always emphasize that she was the Post MASTER. Her daughter showed the same type of mettle when her husband was conscripted during World War II. At the time the military compensation was not adequate for maintaining a family with three children so she took their

meager savings and started a business selling stationary and office supplies as well as establishing a Western Union franchise. At the time this would be the equivalent of opening an Apple Store since the only mode of communicating with family from afar was by writing a letter or sending a telegram.

These circumstances informed my point of view with respect to the value of any individual without any regard to gender or ethnic origin. In my heart I felt that we are all human and nothing else mattered. In time I came to realize that there were many who did not hold to this view. Still I was convinced that the conviction which I held to were the best.

Yet I see now that much of my knowledge has been skewed by a historical account that was from the view of the Caucasian-European conquerors of the Americas. We, the invaders, had won the war of conquest and thus we wrote the history textbooks. I had first suspected that there was more to the story when I read the book “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” and saw a television special about the so called “trail of tears”

My view of African-Americans was one of idolization. Jesse Owens, O.J. Simpson, Willie Mays, Wilt Chamberlain, Flip Wilson and Bill Cosby are just a few of my childhood heroes and favorite entertainers. Yet it never dawned upon me that they might have a very different view of the world or even of themselves.

Growing up in Southern California, I had many classmates who were descended from the Chumash, the prominent local Native-American tribe. Others were Latin-American, mostly of Mexican heritage. Because we did not dwell upon such things it never really occurred to me that they were of their respective heritage. In fact it didn't dawn upon me until recently that one of my best childhood friends is

of Mexican heritage. If I had thought of it then perhaps I would have expected nothing more than a different ethnic cuisine as their contribution to the world.

Too many years in the US Navy gave me an up close view of the manifold cultures of the United States. Serving on board a ship we had very little privacy as we shared the close confines of our berthing compartment (a very big bedroom). Inevitably we grew more familiar with each other's values. One thing I believe each population group has in common is that young men will drink too much and chase strange women no matter where they are from. But I had the pleasure of knowing and working with a Cajun electronics genius from the Bayou, a Hill-Billy from the mountains of West Virginia who could barely communicate in English, but could hear what was wrong with a diesel engine by only listening for a few seconds. At one time I had a young African-American man working for me who was one of the few who had been given an ultimatum by a judge and chose the Navy instead of the other alternative. Though he would be thought of as a "thug from the hood" today yet he was my most industrious subordinate, learning to use the computers in our office (a very new thing in the early 1980s) when everybody else was terrified of them. His effort saved me and my workers and me hundreds of hours of work.

As I have been reading these pieces from alternative epistemological stances I have seen frustrated dreams and aspirations. Like a bird trying to fly with clipped wings. I have seen those who do not seek coddling or special treatment but only equality and the opportunity to rise to the highest level of their ability and effort. I have increased empathy for those who are not like me but I do not pity them since I am in reality no better than they as well as no worse.

Recently I was discussing this KA with an associate who is of Puerto Rican heritage. I was saying how much better things were since the 1960s. Luis told me a

story of when he was traveling during a transfer while he was serving in the military. He and his wife had stopped at a motel (in West Virginia) which had very few cars in the parking lot and no sign indicating that there were no vacancies. When he tried to check in the clerk at the front desk (a Caucasian man) told him they didn't have any rooms. This happened in 1999. I was astounded. He then told me of another incident he experienced while in Miami, Florida. He had stopped at a bodega to get some water but he was met with anger on the part of the proprietor. Apparently this man was incensed at the fact that Luis wasn't speaking Spanish.

The West Virginian clerk lived in a world where it was inadvisable to have a dark skinned couple with foreign accents staying in his motel. The man at the bodega felt that a dark skinned man with a Latino accent must speak Spanish. Both were biased to the point of being bigoted. Luis learned that he should be more selective in where he tries to stay the night or get a drink. He shook his head as he told me these stories and smiled, having pity for people like these.

Each of these and I myself, hold in our being that which we know by manifold methods. But what we observe via empirical methods may hold no more sway over our thoughts, words or deeds than that which we know by faith. Our individual epistemological stance is our discrete reality. It may be steadfast and unmovable or blown about by the winds of change. But it is what we know.

In the end I am more convinced of the rightness of my way that ever yet always willing to entertain a change in direction.