

points of view

# Embracing diversity removes suspicion

**THE FLASHING RED** light in your rear-view mirror takes you by surprise. Then you notice you were driving 47 miles per hour on a road where the speed limit is 35. You weren't really speeding. It's a well-travelled road and nobody drives at 35 unless there is a traffic jam. But facts are facts. You were driving faster than the posted speed limit. So you pull over and curse your luck because you happened to be the one guy the cops decided to stop.

For most of you, the story ends here. Most of you are white. If you are black, the story could be the same. But you would have to wonder. Were you stopped because you were speeding or were you singled

out because your skin is dark?

**PREJUDICE** is so insidious not only because it is so widespread but also in a society as separate as ours is, it is so inevitable. When two races live so far apart — in practice if not in distance — then there is a natural suspicion born of ignorance and unfamiliarity.

Look at it this way. If you are white and you are ignored by the sales staff in a department store in an almost all-white suburb, you figure the store needs to improve its service. If you are black, you wonder if you are being purposely snubbed.

Now let's look at real rather than theoretical examples. Two women, both black, live in suburbs where



**Rich Perlberg**

they are a very small minority. They are accepted in their neighborhoods, but they have both had experiences where they and visiting black friends or relatives have felt uncomfortable because they felt police were giving them extra attention.

IN ONE case, relatives were packing up and leaving for a long

trip home when police stopped by to see if there was "a problem." Is this good police work where officers conscientiously check out something that looks unusual? Or was the presence of blacks the only reason it looked unusual?

The two women had slightly different reactions. One was irritated; the other said she understood. When she was a child, she explained, everyone in her neighborhood was on the lookout for unfamiliar cars. In many suburbs, she reasoned, an unfamiliar black person looks out of place.

It's racist of white suburbanites to think that way, but that attitude isn't going to slip away as long as our communities are segregated. And

segregated they are. Birmingham, for instance, has one black resident for every 500 white residents. Other communities have rates that are just slightly higher.

**THE DESIRE** to change that — or even to acknowledge that it should be changed — has not always been evident. Happily that's changing.

For two years a Committee on Race Relations has been meeting in Birmingham (I sit on that committee, so you can be aware of my prejudices). Included on that committee are the city's mayor, school board members and administrators from Birmingham and Bloomfield schools, members of the clergy and, belated-

ly, a few black residents.

Farmington Hills is actively embracing its cultural diversity. Its annual Founders Festival celebrated the 63 languages spoken in the Farmington and Farmington Hills communities.

"I think we are so lucky to have this multinational community," said Joan Dudley, a vice chairwoman of the community's Cultural Awareness Committee. "Let's flaunt it. It's fun."

That's the spirit. Once that attitude becomes widespread, once all communities are open to all people, then the only person you will have to blame for your speeding ticket is yourself.

## 2 Jesse's shared trials

As a reporter who spent years writing both about sports and politics, I found it an interesting coincidence that the U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials and National Democratic Convention have shared the news stage this week. I see a thread between them through the name Jesse.

You don't have to guess, of course, that it's the Rev. Jesse Jackson of whom I speak in reference to the Democratic Party's floor show at Atlanta. Today's the day he's NOT supposed to be nominated a candidate for vice president of the United States, yielding instead to Sen. Lloyd Bentsen of Texas.

This Jesse is a black man, as you don't have to be told. So was my other Jesse, the one with Olympic credentials. The name: Jesse Owens, a poor kid from Decatur, Ala., who ran and jumped to collegiate fame at Ohio State University and then became an international symbol in the 1936 summer Olympic Games at Berlin when he was snubbed by one of the most evil men in world history, Adolf Hitler.

**HITLER DIDN'T** like blacks. For that matter, he didn't like Jews either. What he'd have done about a Sammy Davis Jr. boggles the mind. Oldtimers used to insist that Jim Thorpe was this country's greatest athlete of the 20th Century. Maybe he was. I never saw him in action. But I do know that King Gustaf of



through bifocals  
**Fred Delano**

Sweden called Thorpe the best in the world when the American Indian won both the decathlon and pentathlon in the 1912 Olympics.

Did I say Indian? Well, goodness me.

As I reflect on Owens, I think back to the sunny afternoon of May 25, 1935, when I was one of the lucky spectators sitting in on the Big Ten Track and Field finals at Ann Arbor. In fact, I had a doggone good perch in the press box right next to Wilfred Smith of the Chicago Tribune who wrote:

"Within the space of two hours, the 21-year-old colored athlete tied the world record for the 100-yard dash and smashed world records in the 220-yard dash, 220-yard low hurdles and the broad jump."

**"THE MARGIN** of superiority, not only over his immediate competition but in comparison with the records of all athletes from the days of the Greek Olympians, who was so outstanding that the 10,000 who crowded the wooden stands of Michigan's Ferry Field hardly could believe what they saw."

To this day, Owens' feat remains the greatest athletic performance I have ever witnessed in person.

AS FOR the Jesse Jackson in this week's headlines, since April I've been saving a column by E.J. Montini clipped from the Arizona Republic when I was in Phoenix. I quote:

"If you're liberal and white, you're probably not looking for a legitimate reason to dislike Jackson. You're looking for an excuse to cloak the real reason that Jackson bothers you."

"Which is that he is black. 'No black has been elected to the U.S. Senate since 1972. There has never been a black governor, even in the most liberal states."

"It's not a fluke. Nor is it the work of Republicans and conservative Democrats alone. Some very white, very liberal people have helped to keep black people from the top spots."

"We may be willing to accept black co-workers, black employers, even black elected officials on just about any other governmental level, but the thought of a black president, Jesse Jackson or anyone else, bothers us. It might even frighten us."

As soon as some of my racist friends admit that Montini was right, maybe we can get back to agreeing how great Owens was — an element that makes the sports world more fun than politics.

## Library sleuths FBI plan is barking up wrong tree

If our nation's librarians have their way, there won't be spies in the stacks.

We will still be able to march with purpose through rows of books, pursue information in the library computer, or just pursue the stacks aimlessly, learning whatever we wish.

But the FBI would like to change that.

Heaven help those of Eastern European descent, or who have a foreign accent of any kind. You're considered suspicious. And they want librarians to spy on you.

Information about the FBI's "Library Awareness Program" has recently hit the national news wires, although our local librarians have been reading about it in their trade publications for about six months now.

Federal Bureau of Investigation officials are concerned that non-Americans are getting their hands on sensitive material by piecing together unclassified information available at local libraries.



**Casey Hans**

They have asked librarians at several locations across the country to spy on people who look suspicious and feed information to the FBI about what these people are reading, studying and checking out.

"I personally find it restrictive, prohibitive and dangerous," said Farmington Community Library director Beverly Papal. Many librarians and other representative groups, including the American Library Association and Michigan Library Association, concur.

"I'm personally against it," added MLA president Clara Bohrer. "The right to privacy is one of the basic tenets of our profession." The MLA board is currently considering putting its stance

in writing and forwarding it to legislators.

Bohrer is also assistant director of the Farmington Community Library system. Here, at one of the larger community library systems in the Observer area, employees are required to read the Michigan statute on privacy and to sign papers saying they understand it and will follow it.

Also, the library does not keep records on what individuals previously checked out and "wouldn't want to," Papal added.

The FBI said its Library Awareness Program is centered in the New York City area. But there have been reports across the country from librarians who have been approached by FBI agents. According to Papal, one ALA report cited a case occurring at the graduate library at the University of Michigan.

Privacy is certainly the main issue. But in light of our supposed cultural and ethnic awareness, a program such as this one could set our progress back years.

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