



Philosophical Ponderings of a Farmer

My Journey Towards Anti-Racism

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This is a first draft of a work that is very much in progress. It's something I've been thinking about for a while, but I just got it down on paper yesterday. I'm sure I've made a lot of mistakes, so please don't hesitate to point them out. Or to share any comments you may have!

"I am a racist." Not the first words I was expecting to hear from my college professor's mouth. I was a sophomore in college, taking a class called Critical and Alternative Voices. By the end of class that day, I realized that I, too, was a racist. Not overtly, not intentionally, but because my entire life I had unwittingly benefited from the structural racism on which our country was founded.

Here is what I wrote, in 2002, after that single meaningful lecture:

"In high school, I was supposed to go on my first "real" cultural experience in Bali, Indonesia. I grew up in a white middle class community and was looking forward to meeting people who were different from me. Unfortunately, the trip was cancelled due to riots in Jakarta, and the school instead organized a last-minute trip to the Navajo and Hopi Nations in Arizona. I was extremely disappointed; although I knew the US had other cultures, I hadn't experienced them before and they all seemed, to me, to be lumped together as "boring," not the exotic "other" I was looking for. The 2 weeks I spent on the reservations, interacting with some of the warmest, most welcoming people I had ever met, made me realize how wrong I was, that you do not have to cross borders to cross a border culturally. There was so much I didn't know about my own country. I passed generalized notions of "others," with little to no personal experiences on which to base these assumptions. The trip made me more interested in embracing the amazing diversity of my country."

Yes, these thoughts are disturbing in so many ways. Primarily my obsession with what I call "the other." They show how far I had to go, how much I had to learn. But they also show how for the first time in my life, I realized the depth to which my upbringing and my sheltered life exploited others.

We spent the rest of the semester decolonizing our bookshelves, looking at race, class, and gender in the United States and around the world, delving deeper to attempt to understand how the world works to benefit white man. This class was the ONLY course I took in college, aside from ceramics, that did not count towards one of my two majors or my minor. And it was the most profound experience I had during those 4 years. It was life-changing.

The following semester, while studying abroad, I found myself dating a black man in Ecuador, a country that was not particularly friendly to interracial couples. It was the first time I had experienced discrimination - we were asked to leave a bar, watched as taxi after taxi would pass us by, and slurs were thrown at us when we walked down the street. We spent hours discussing race, and approaching racism from personal experience, instead of through an academic lens, provided a unique perspective for me.

Despite the eye-opening experiences I had as a young adult, I'm embarrassed to admit that the concept of structural racism fell off my radar as I grew older. Since I do not "see" racism in sheltered, white-liberal Port Townsend, I forgot about it. Yes, I am the first to admit that I am privileged. I grew up in a white middle class community. I went to a private, liberal arts college. And I was able to make the choice to become a farmer, a profession I knew would not pay me a living wage. I was able to choose a life of poverty, I was not forced into it. At the same time, it is so easy, as a white person, to claim that there isn't any racism in our progressive little town. But that is simply not the case, and I deeply regret that I allowed this complacency to creep into my mindset.

I know this is not about me. But I hope that reviewing my personal history helps you understand how easy it is for any white person (myself included), even one with the best of intentions, to simply accept their race privilege or to think that racism doesn't relate to them. And I also hope it helps you realize that this is wholly unacceptable.

It took a pandemic and a murder. And many other murders before that. It took too long. But I am now trying to reverse my complacency.

Farming is hard, but it is easier for me than it is for a BIPOC person because of the systems upon which our country was founded - slavery, land dispossession, redlining, exclusion from loans and aid

programs, discrimination and so much more. I acknowledge that the land I farm was stolen from the S'Klallam people. I know that I am not to blame for our country's history and the actions of our forebears; but the fight for justice, the fight to break down white supremacy, and the fight for accountability are certainly my responsibility. I know that I will never understand the experience of BIPOC people, but I can do my part to stand in solidarity, to be anti-racist, and to ensure true freedom for all.