

520 Pine
Goleta, Calif
July 16, 1963

Ivan Allen, Mayor
City of Atlanta, Georgia

Honorable Sir:

In the city of Atlanta, live descendants of the Huguenots I, too, am descended from. And after reading the enclosed story by clear-writing Catherine Mackin - I'm glad they went to Atlanta!

Throughout the West, and I assume throughout the United States, newspapers carry front page stories nearly every day about the South's race incidents. In the groceries, in the laundromats, in theaters, on vehicles of public transportation, wherever casual conversations occur - race problems are discussed.

I was born and lived until I was 9, in a very segregated, very loyally Southern, Texas town. Then we moved to Seattle - at a time when very few Southerners ever left the South, in 1915, just before World War I ~~to Seattle, Wash.~~ Here I was catapulted into a melting-pot type school.

The teacher taught Civil War History "all wrong," and inwardly I raged. She thought I pronounced "pounds" when we studied arithmetic, all wrong, and kept me in during the lunch hour "to learn to pronounce our language right." I cried and kept protesting I was pronouncing it right. My family was indignant at her intolerance of a child's Southern accent - but in time, of course, she succeeded in obliterating it.

By happier means, my feeling that only those with eyes shaped like mine, skin the color of mine, hair with the degree of curl of mine, were "the best" people. There were Chinese, Japanese, Russian Jew, German Jew, Negro, Canadian, Italian and French children in my room.

I learned with awe that the very short-sighted little Chinese girl and her equally short-sighted little yellow brother, struggling with English, were the best students in the room. I learned that the Jewish youngsters went not only to our school, but at 4, to one conducted by the rabbi, and Saturdays, for piano and violin lessons - and I saw no signs they were "less than me" in anything they accomplished. They were "better!"

And the Negro children awed us with songs they knew from a slave grandmother - songs sung throatily in melodious voices. They got along as well in school as I did, and I had been doubly promoted twice in Texas.

When race problems occur today, or I hear them discussed, I think how the Negro children sympathized when I skinned my knee - and tore up a handkerchief to bandage it. When ~~we~~ fought Japan, and "hated" the Japanese, I recalled truth and loyalty - not treachery - from my days with Japanese playmates.

When I attended University of Washington, I attended a Sociology course "Race Problems" with students from all over the world - and earnestly we explored our likenesses - as well as the differences environment produces

The learned, world-traveled professor, R.D. McKenzie, now dead, predicted even then (1927) eventual war with Japan - because, he said, "the United States repudiated the 'Gentlemen's Agreement' while the Japanese were assiduously keeping their side of the bargain - and Japanese 'face' will never recover without returning the blow."

He predicted trouble ahead in the United States, ^{as} and Negroes slowly improved from their state of servitude; became able to learn of freedom, equality and democracy - for whites but not for them.

In two World Wars, Negroes learned abroad of an equality of treatment they had not known at home. They learned America loves their music and their strength in athletic pursuits. The inevitable demand for complete equality of treatment, so upsetting to so many whites, our Dr. McKenzie long ago prophesied.

It is ^{more} hard to unlearn any attitude gained in childhood, and Americans today, in every state, are being asked to unlearn ^{have been} more attitudes and to adopt new ones, than has ever occurred before. This is true all over the world. For hundreds - nay, thousands, even millions, of years, generation after generation lived alike, thought alike, produced craft alike. Dr. Adam Treganza, speaking of California Indians, declared that any Indian girl who might want to create new designs to weave into her baskets, would be thought sick. Basket designs, attitudes toward neighboring tribes, ways to deal with the gods, magic for making the game appear for the hunter - these were learned from tribal members, and for untold ages, went unquestioned.

Today - Grandfathers are scarcely done vowing man will never penetrate outer space, when a grandson-aged youngster does it. And in our relations with other nations, children either study, and come to respect, cultures of others - or, if at the moment we are having differences with these nations - children learn attitudes of suspicion and fear toward them.

Somehow, in Atlanta - fortunately - attitudes must have been long ago growing of "live and let live." How wonderful if more cities can follow Atlanta's example. But even more wonderful it would be if cities can go one step further:

"Live, and help live!

Because America's Negroes do need help, in order to live. It isn't Christian, it isn't neighborly, to become observers, here: to say, "Okay, now Negroes have their freedom. Let's just wait - they'll make a bust of using it!"

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They do need friendly guidance: people ~~mainly~~ neighborliness or more formally trained inteaching to point out, "We do things this way." Heck, I didn't know why clipping the grass edging the sidewalk of my new trailer home was so difficult until a neighbor pointed out I didn't have the right tool!"

Uses of language, housekeeping methods, personal grooming - these things, some Negroes need to learn. Other Negroes or whites need teach them: people who are white, living in farm areas, are also "out of place" when first they move to town. . . More power to you, ^{Sis,} and to Atlanta!

Very truly yours,

Lois Hennessy
Lois Hennessy - retired newswriter