

Sometimes it's hard to fight prejudice

I have always viewed myself as a reasonably intelligent and unprejudiced person. I firmly believe that, had I lived during the early part of this century, I would have opposed anti-Semitism. I would not have stood still for the "Gentlemen's Agreement," by which Jews were barred from hotels, restaurants, etc. that normal people frequented.

Similarly, if I had been alive during the 1800s, I assumed I would possess the intelligence and foresight to oppose slavery. Of course, I'd see the foolishness of believing that someone was less than human, simply because of the color of his skin.

And why shouldn't I have thought this? Any reasonably intelligent person can recognize the inherent flaws of racism and prejudice; whether they live in ancient Greece or modern-day Miami. Naturally, they would feel compelled to speak out against the ignorance, hatred and fear of those around them.

However, though I assume I would not have been overly prejudiced myself, I am beginning to wonder if I would have taken an active stand against the bigotry of others. I am beginning to have my doubts.

Why? To do less would be less than human. It would be hypocritical and shameful. It would mean my moral viewpoint was an accident of society and had nothing to do with my supposed compassion and humanity. Surely, that isn't the case.

Yet I am beginning to have my doubts. Why? Well, when an acquaintance of mine commented on a recent, minor election by saying to a room full of people, "How could they elect a gay to office?" I said nothing. I was silent, though what he said galled me.

If he had said, "How could they elect a black (or Jew or woman) to office?" I would have been upset. But, I could have taken comfort in the thought that society would not have supported him. As a rule, we have come to realize that bigotry

speaking out

MICHAEL GILTZ

based on race, ethnic origin, creed, or sex is ignorant and wrong. Our laws and culture reflect this.

I am not stupid. Bigotry does, and always will, exist. But, when he said, "How could they elect a gay to office?" we both knew that he could go anywhere in the country and say that without fear of retribution. Society stands behind him. Our laws and culture reflect this.

I should have stood up, faced him, and said, "How can you say that? You should be saying, 'How can we bar 10 percent of the population from joining the military, simply because of their sexual preference? How can we keep two consenting adults from getting married? How can we watch people dying from a tragic disease, and only raise a symbolic finger — until a famous movie star also dies from the disease?'"

Inevitably, someone would have said, "What are you, gay or something?" And I would have said, "Must I be black to oppose apartheid, Jewish to oppose anti-Semitism, a woman to oppose sex discrimination?" But, it wouldn't have mattered. So, I said nothing.

Maybe next time I won't be quiet. Maybe next time I won't sit still for prejudice. Maybe next time I'll reaffirm my supposed humanity. Maybe.

But I'm beginning to have my doubts.

Michael Giltz is a second-year UF student.