

ON THE MOVE

RACISM

Story by
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Illustration by
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Still alive in America

Tyrrik McKeiver can sense the employees' eyes on him when he walks through a department store.

"That's the way I've always been treated," said Tyrrik, 16, a parishioner at St. Bridget's Church in Rochester.

And Tyrrik claimed that his mom, when house-shopping in the village of Hilton several years ago, found a limited selection of homes — once real estate agents realized she is black.

This past spring, Dan Cooper-Vince heard racial jokes from fellow students when world-renowned peace advocate Arun Gandhi, grandson of Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi, appeared at McQuaid Jesuit High School.

Meanwhile, Ivelisse DeJesus said she has even sensed racism within her own ethnic group. Ivelisse, a dark-skinned Puerto Rican, recalled being avoided by a light-skinned Puerto Rican customer while she was working in a supermarket during high school.

"Most people, when they first see me, think I'm African-American. She was, I guess, really bothered," said Ivelisse, 22. "She didn't want me to take care of her, she wanted to go to the boy next to me. He was (clearly) a Latino."

The U.S. civil-rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s sought to minimize racial inequality. However, Tyrrik, Dan and Ivelisse believe that racism is still very much alive.

"We have progressed, but not as much as some people think," said Dan, 16, a youth-group member at Rochester's Corpus Christi Church.



**MUSIC AT
11:30 AM
MASS**



Sunday, 10 October 1999

Congregation

Missa de Angelis - Gregorian chant VIII

Choir

Gloria - Vivaldi

Organ

Hommage to Messiaen - Robinson

Agnus Dei - Nibelle

Ite Missa Est - Nibelle

Daniel Brondel, *choirmaster*

Brink Bush, *organist*

Saint Anne Church

1600 Mt. Hope Ave. Rochester

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"That's the reality of life. Discrimination has declined, but it's never going to go away," said Tyrrik, a junior at Aquinas Institute.

Tyrrik was reminded of this sad reality by a 1998 killing in Jasper, Texas. A black man, James Byrd Jr., was chained to the back of a truck and dragged along the ground until he died. John King and Lawrence Brewer, who both had links to white supremacist groups, received death sentences for their part in the murder. A third white man, Shawn Berry, is awaiting trial.

"It was a shock. I thought we had grown out of that," Tyrrik said.

Therein lies one of the problems surrounding racism, said Anita Thomas, a professor at Northeastern Illinois University. She asserted that Americans still need to discuss racism, but noted that people who are uncomfortable with the subject — especially adults — avoid such discussions by saying it has already been dealt with.

"It's like, 'That stuff happened a long time ago; let's not talk about it,'" Thomas said at the Catholic Charities USA annual conference in Rochester Oct. 3.

Thomas' lecture on multicultural diversity was one of two workshops that day on the subject of racism. She suggested that teens "encourage dialogue on racism as much as possible — among each other, elders, teachers, community leaders."

On a positive note, Tyrrik, Dan and Ivelisse said they have never encountered racial difficulties at their respective high schools. And Tam Dinh, 14, said that she's one of the few Asian-Americans at Greece Arcadia High School but nobody gives her trouble about it.

"They hang with me; they don't treat me any differently," said Tam, a parishioner at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Rochester.

Tam, whose family is from Vietnam, added that her faith in God has helped keep her from developing a racist attitude.

"I don't really look at (race). I just meet the people," she said.

Ivelisse said she has Asian, black and white friends, and really doesn't care to differentiate by race when selecting her companions.

"I befriend everyone," said Ivelisse, a graduate of Irondequoit High School who attends Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier Church in Rochester.

Dan said he has no racist tendencies because "I was raised that way. It's not an issue." He also believes that these traits get molded during "the early years of your life."

"People are going to stick to their views if that's the way they were brought up," Ivelisse agreed.

Yet Dan said teens can curb the spread of racism to the next generation if they denounce racist attitudes.

"I tell people how stupid they sound. They're just not funny; they don't have the slightest idea what they're talking about," Dan said.

Meanwhile, Ivelisse is perplexed that people would even waste their time dwelling on cultural differences.

"Everybody wants to be different. But the thing is, everyone's the same. They just have a different physical appearance," Ivelisse said. "There are so many people you could relate to; why would you isolate?"

COMING NEXT WEEK: Ithaca blood drive