

I'm Sorry, Do I know You?

Written by Jeffrey L. Boney
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Have you ever been out to, say the mall or a restaurant, and you recognize someone and approach them to speak only to have them say those dreadful words, “I’m sorry, do I know you?” You do your best to explain how you know the person, but it just doesn’t seem to register with them and they shake their head and shrug their shoulders, unable to put two and two together.

Or maybe you were on the opposite end of the spectrum, where you were the one that didn’t recognize the other person and they tried their best to reach out to you and explain how you know one another.

Whatever the case may be, it is an uncomfortable feeling.

The foundational premise behind the entire situation is that you or the other individual had “history” with one another. Whether it was a brief and/or limited encounter, historical experiences and relationships can be ignored or denied, but it doesn’t change the fact that it took place.

Many of us have been to or still attend family reunions or high school class reunions. You may recognize and remember many of your family members or classmates at the reunion, but some of them you probably have never met or don’t remember at all. More importantly, although you may not remember or possibly never met any of your family members or classmates, it doesn’t negate the fact that the people in attendance are your family members or your classmates.

There are many people that refuse to go to any of these reunions, because they choose to have nothing to do with their family or their high school.

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I recently attended my 20 year high school class reunion and I must say that it was great seeing many of my former classmates and remembering what it meant to be a graduate of Jack Yates High School in Third Ward, Houston, Texas. Knowing the "history" of Yates and knowing that my grandfather, father, aunts, uncles and cousins all attended Yates, gave me the passion and desire to want to go there as well. Regardless of many of the negative things that were said about Yates by people that didn't attend there, those words were overshadowed by the historical relevance and shared passion given to me by my family and others in the community. It is difficult to have a passion or meaningful thought about something, if all you see and hear about it is what is bad or negative or wrong about it. I talk to many of my high school classmates regularly, while I only see other classmates at special events, such as class reunions. Regardless of whether I see or talk to my classmates on a regular basis, we have that ONE thing in common, we are graduates of Jack Yates High School and nothing can alter or change that.

On a different note, I have recently been on a quest to do more research about my family genealogy and learn more about where I come from. I have been on this quest after learning more about my family than I never knew, having stumbled across information or being surprised by withheld information. I have been overwhelmed with many of the things that I have come to know about my family, being a descendant of slaves, and learning how my last name was even derived. It has been a fascinating journey and I am even more driven to find out more about each side of my family, better understanding who I am and where I come from. When I was younger, my family used to plan and ensure we attended family reunions annually. Family members from across the country would gather together to connect and discuss the "history" of our family, so that we would never forget. Somewhere along the way, on my mother's side and my father's side, my immediate family stopped attending regularly and then altogether. As a result, through numerous years passing since seeing one another, relationships became distant. Because of this distance between one another, the only way to re-establish a solid relationship with my family is to make a commitment to connecting with them and build upon the family "history."

Two different scenarios, but the common denominator is the same for both..."history."

I have been overwhelmingly surprised, here of late, at the number of black people that believe we are living in a post-racial society and that learning about their African and African-American "history" is not important and irrelevant in the times we are living. Our "history" consists of great and outstanding things, coupled with atrocities and negative circumstances. It is all a part of our "history." One of my African-American colleagues told me about two weeks ago that they didn't think that teaching their child about slavery and the atrocities suffered by African people and black Americans was necessary.

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Isn't that a part of our "history?"

After hearing that, it brought me to the realization that we are one of, if not the only culture group in America, that has completely detached from our heritage and our "history." If you look at immigrants that travel to the United States and/or other culture groups in the U.S., you will find that they embrace their culture and teach their children to do the same.

What is the African-American culture in the U.S or does one even exist? Is it the African-American culture or is it an adopted European culture that we have settled to accept as our own? Do we even care to know who we are and where we come from in order to teach our children about themselves?

"History" is important and if you do embrace or if you don't embrace and learn your "history," you are destined to repeat it. That can be both good and bad. There is some "history" that is worth repeating, while there is some that you need to avoid repeating.

I don't want to treat my black brother and my black sister as a stranger, having to say to them, "I'm sorry, do I know you?"

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