

The Historical Perspective

By Alex Hassell



Alex Hassell is an Anglo-Scottish-Welsh-Irish-German American who was born in Port Charlotte, Florida. Up until 7th grade he was homeschooled, at which point he spent two years in Imagine School at North Port and is currently in his third year at Edison Collegiate High School. As a student in ISNP, he encountered a wide variety of people with different ethnic and racial backgrounds, some of whom he grew to be close friends with. He is an active member of the historic Florida Community, specifically a volunteer living history and historic weapons interpreter at the Castillo De San Marcos National Monument and is a member of a Revolutionary War reenactment group, the 60th regiment of foot. Throughout his life in Southwestern Florida he has witnessed the development of a racially conglomerated but sometimes conflicted community. Alex uses something he calls “the historical perspective” to get a new viewpoint on the roles different people have played in society and how they have changed over the years.



When it comes to my skin color, the only words that can be used to describe it are “pasty white.” My European heritage shows clearly in both my lifestyle and family. Growing up with my mother as my teacher was an interesting experience that gave me a feeling of social isolation for many years. It was not until 7th grade in Imagine School at North Port that I got to truly experience a mix of people different than me. By 8th grade I had built up a close group of friends all who were like minded individuals, aka white. But my wider group of friends was about as

diverse as possible. Two girls who both were interested in me were Asian-American and Jamaican born. Another one of my friends was from El Salvador and constantly tried to convince me that Communism was the best system of governance. About one-fourth of any given classroom was non-white at ISNP. The school was very small which meant that I often interacted with other cultures in a middle school environment. Moving from one small school to another greatly benefited my social development and understanding of different races.

When I moved to Edison Collegiate High School three years ago, I was expecting to find much less diversity at school that was supposed to be for the elite of Charlotte County. What I got was instead the most racially diverse school in Charlotte County. The school society at ECHS was identical to ISNP in that racial tolerance was high and there was little conflict between different racial groups. What I saw and still see are people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds associating with other students who are on the outside very different from each other. For most of my life I have seen people interacting with each other not caring about skin color and it particularly holds true in the schools that I have attended.

Throughout my study of history and my observations of how different groups in society are formed I see a pattern that often has less to do with race and skin color and more with a struggle for power, and more often than naught race is simply used as an excuse to exert power over another group or society. An excellent historical example of this is the age of Imperialism, in which predominantly white European nations used race as an excuse to colonize Africa and much of the world. From my perspective of living in South-Western Florida, racism appears to have gone into hiding; however, in several groups/organizations I have observed a trend of a few bad people taking control of the group and ruining it for the majority who only care about what the group was formed for. A commonality is that all the power hungry leaders that I have seen

personally are women, but this is probably a coincidence. In every group I have been a part of or have observed from the outside there is a tendency for conflict among people who have very different ideas and backgrounds. "Conflict and change are as inherent in the social world as order and permanence" (Barto 6). I see evidence of the prevalent sociological idea called *Conflict Theory* almost everywhere I look; in the news, groups struggling for control, in nature animals fighting for dominance, and in my life people arguing for power. From this I must conclude that different groups will always fight for power, as long as there are two humans on this earth, and that all we can do is ensure the right group ascends power.

Historical Perspective is something that I like to use to look at my life and the world around me in a different way. Although its name suggests an emphasis on past events, "The object of historical perspective is to sharpen one's vision of the present, not the past (Lawrence 307)." Because of my extremely high interest in early American history, I have spent a lot of time, far more than the average teenager, studying and reading history. Since the age of 12 I have been going to St. Augustine every December to participate in a reenactment of the British occupation of Florida during the 1770s. Being surrounded by history and like-minded individuals has greatly increased my view point on the world we currently live in. "Historical perspective is a simple but crucial tool in understanding the present context of social research" (Lawrence 311). Taking a Psychology and Sociology course has perfectly intermingled with my interest in history and experiences with other people allowing me to broaden my horizons and see people without bias, only as who they are.

References

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