



The Sting of Prejudice

In mid-20th century Toronto, when and where I grew up, anti-Semitism was particularly virulent. As there was no black population to speak of, the haters picked on the Jews.

Many of Canada's largest corporations would not hire Jews, there was a brutal anti-Semitic riot, and into the late 1930s, public beaches had signs that read "No Jews or Dogs Allowed."

Growing up in a Jewish enclave, I was protected from the worst of it. But my father, a rug salesman who made house calls, went by his first name, Allan, so as not to be identified as Jewish. Many people at the time would not want Jews in their homes. Mr. Allan was welcome, Mr. Abrams might not be.

In 1957, my family took its only vacation, a road trip to Cape Cod. When we arrived at our hotel in Hyannisport, Massachusetts, the desk clerk told us the hotel was "restricted" (i.e. no Jews). My family—mother, father, brother, and 6-year-old sister—were escorted with our suitcases out into the street. It stung.

I imagine that most Jews, blacks, Muslims, and other minorities living in North America have similar stories to tell—or far worse. They all sting.

As an adult, I have rarely experienced blatant anti-Semitism, but I have experienced the subtle kind—even in Bloomington.

I have been told that a businessman here, who I have met only twice briefly, referred to me as a *shyster*, a word often associated with anti-Semitism

that means someone who is disreputable, unethical, or unscrupulous.

A few years back, a freelance contributor and I had an artistic difference of opinion and parted ways.

I later found out he told people the reason he was let go from *Bloom* was because he was sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. This was categorically false. My concern was that people would think that because I'm Jewish, I would not employ anyone who supported Palestinians. I'm thankful that people who know me saw through the B.S. Still, it stung.

Again, I'm sure that most blacks, Muslims, Asians, Hispanics, and other minorities have experienced these kinds of subtle prejudice throughout their lives—and far worse.

Sadly, today, racism in all its forms is on the rise. Could it be because our president has said there were some fine people among the white supremacists who marched with torches in Charlottesville shouting anti-Semitic slogans, or that he calls Democrats anti-Jewish, or that he says Mexicans are rapists and murderers, or that he locks Hispanic children in cages, or that he has a history of discriminating against blacks, or that he calls African countries shitholes?

It stings every day.

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