

Who is Robert Graetz?

February 20, 2019

While visiting the civil rights capital of the world I pulled into Cleveland Court and asked two young black boys who were riding bikes which apartment belonged to Rosa Parks. They responded with a question of their own "Who is Rosa Parks?" The Cleveland Court Apartments is a historic building in Montgomery, Alabama. It is significant to the history of the modern Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Unit 634 was home to civil rights activist Rosa Parks.

This is why Black History Month is needed. There are things we all need to know about American History, including Black History.

I love living in Alabama. However, upon arriving to the Yellowhammer State I was puzzled by segregation. This week I traveled to Montgomery to attend the Regional State Finals in basketball to root on our boys' basketball team. The event hosted several teams competing for an opportunity to play in the state semifinals in Birmingham. Most cheer squads were all black or all white. Most teams were all black or all white. For a guy who went to a very integrated high school twenty years ago this is almost laughable.

How can this be? Montgomery is the bedrock of the civil rights movement. A place where people fought for integration and fifty years later the city and state is more segregated than it was when the movement started. I wonder what E. D. Nixon, Ralph David Abernathy, Vernon Jones, Johnnie Carr, Georgia Washington and Doris Crenshaw would think about our progress today?

Public and private schools in Montgomery are ninety percent one race or another. It amazes me. In the rural hunting town of Union Springs where this article is originally published, there aren't many social events that include an accurate representation of the races. My background, personality and upbringing afford me the opportunity to mingle with both races; and you know what? They like each other, but for whatever reason they don't mix and mingle.

The public schools in town are almost all minority. The fan base that attends the sporting events match the enrollment. I went to a play this week. I love plays and I have been in several. I almost moved to California in 2001 to pursue a career in acting. There were several people in attendance, many were from out of town. Stan "Chilly" Cooks is a talented actor, musician and local politician. He and I were the only two African Americans in attendance.

There was a dinner before the event that featured minority children serving white patrons. I know the children and the patrons, and I am positive that neither of them recognized or realized the dichotomy between the groups. It's not mean, racist or intentional. It just is.

This Sunday I am preaching at First United Methodist Church in Union Springs. This church is the epitome of tradition. Which is neither good nor bad. I don't know if many African American preachers have preached there before, but I do know that on Sunday the members will see me as their brother in Christ, not a black guy. However, the mixing of the races is not the norm in certain parts of our country. Especially our southern churches.

On April 17, 1960 on the NBC show, Meet the Press, Dr. King said, "I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hours in Christian America. I definitely think the Christian Church should be integrated." He went on to admit that his church had no white members and like all my pastor friends he said, "We would welcome [any race]."

Pastor Robert Graetz was the Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in segregated Montgomery, Alabama in the 1950's. Trinity was a black church with a full-time white pastor.

Now that's a black history fact or you!