

The Hideous Face of Racism

By Isabella Wong

Age: 11

Taking the rightful blame for the riots in Cronulla in January 2006, the hideous face of racism lingers today and goes unnoticed by those who have not experienced it.

Racism, one of the biggest challenges in our world, is the belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability, and that one particular race is superior to others. All over the world people suffer from racism whether living in a wealthy or in under-privileged societies and this can result in divisions between different races.

Harmony Day held annually on 21 March, was introduced by the Australian Federal Government to remind all Australians to celebrate our many successes as a diverse and harmonious multi-cultural society, to recommit to our common values of respect and goodwill towards our fellow Australians of all backgrounds, and to say "NO" to racism.

As Social Justice Leader at my school, St Mary's, North Sydney, I feel it is my responsibility to work towards preventing future and stop present racist comments, attitudes and actions in our school community. Learning about the origins of racism in Australia has been an important step in my role.

Racism in Australia originated when the first European settlers arrived and when the British established a colony, therefore English became the official language and Christianity became the dominant religion. All citizens were British until we became a democratic, multi-cultural nation. This history started the early division between the English and the Aborigines and that division unfortunately still remains today with many Aborigines living in poorer environments and not having the resources many of us take for granted.

In recent years there has been racism against migrants from Asia: their accent; appearance and abilities all seized upon. With the riots in Cronulla came racial discrimination against Lebanese Australians and many people had the false idea that all Lebanese acted in aggressive ways. We may not

have realized it but just as many European Australians acted aggressively during those riots as well.

Apartheid, the division between 'blacks and whites', or in other words, an official policy of racial segregation formerly practiced in South Africa, involved political, legal and economic discrimination against non-whites. This means so-called 'blacks' were completely cut off from the white man's world with separate schools, separate public toilets and transport, and were separated from everyone but their own race.

When we hear racist comments or jokes, how should we react? Unfortunately discrimination is alive in Australia today and still affects many people. Just a simple racist opinion can change the way another thinks and the media, on which most of the public rely on to form their opinion, creates myth, stereotype and wrong information about race and serve it up to a public who believe it.

So where will racism go in the future? Racism could go in any direction in Australia as it all depends on the people of our country who are willing to make a difference. We have to change the future by changing the present.

What can we do?

I believe we have to educate children about racism and its impact on the peoples of the world, and encourage children not to believe in it. I desire to see the hideous face of racism to vanish forever and relationships between different races vastly improve.

“Accomplishments have no colour”
by Leontyne Price