

How Racist?

You recently re-read your journal entries from ~7 years ago because you wanted to start writing again but also wanted to delay writing again. You also, of course, wanted to be able to delete anything embarrassing. Anything that might embarrass you because of your romantic feelings/fantasies that never panned out or your small thinking. Although, before you started the re-reading, you had no particular memory of an incriminating entry, just a vague uneasiness that present you would not like everything past you had written.

Past you wrote about an incident that you think about at least once a year. Along with many of the other racist incidents in your life, you cannot prevent yourself from thinking on these. You would like to forget because it makes you melancholy. You don't actively try to remember these incidents. Your mind just brings them back to you. There doesn't appear to be any trigger. They just invade, quite like the racist incidents in fact. You don't expect to be met with racism. It happens and catches you unawares each time.

Past you wrote of a time at the beach with high school friends. Taylor was telling you all about her new friends in college. Emma would be studying abroad in France next year. Jenna wanted to be a doctor; she was pre-med. Samantha was "very black".

The way that present you remembers this situation was that it was bad and that you said something and that no one cared what you had to say. That everyone, including Taylor, defended Taylor against you. That you were the mean one for pointing out that this was racist. Present you and past you are both clear on that point. You both agree that this incident was racist.

What surprises present you is how much past you apologized for your friends. Even though past you wrote in your journal the many reasons why this was wrong, past you still made it a point to say that Taylor was not racist, nor were the friends who defended Taylor. It was the words that were racist. Taylor shouldn't have said racist words. But Taylor? Taylor wasn't racist for saying racist words. She just needed to be careful that she not say racist words.

But is this really what past you wanted? Did you simply want to protect Taylor from saying racist words in the future so that no one would think she was racist? Because you believed that she wasn't racist? It seems that the answer was yes. You do remember, when you confronted her, saying something vague, along the lines of "that could come off as racist". Not "that is racist". But why? Why did past you do this? Present you is disappointed in her, but present you also hates to admit that you understand.

You went to the beach to have fun with friends that you had not seen much of over the past year. You didn't expect to deal with this. There were days left of that beach trip. You didn't have your own car. You would have to drive back with all these friends in a few days. You didn't want to ruin the trip for yourself. You didn't want a confrontation that would linger the rest of the trip. And these were your friends. You didn't have a lot of friends, and you did like these ones even if they were racist. It makes sense that you would gently rebuke them. But for you, the confrontation has lasted all these years and will probably last your entire lifetime. This incident is not over for you, and it defines you. For Taylor, for everyone else, do they even remember this incident? Does it mean anything to them? Have they thought about it every year for the past 7 years? No. You are sure that they haven't.

Even if they have thought of it once over the past year when white people have been waking up to the racism in American (because of the pandemic, they have the time for this introspection), they certainly haven't thought of it as much as you have. Despite the fact that you see Taylor's Instagram

posts about ending racism, supporting black lives, etc., you doubt she remembers or feels the incident in the same way that you do. You feel anger for the words, not the friends, that you knew then were racist and the guilt of not being able to make your friends understand the racism. But Taylor? Maybe at best she feels some guilt.

You are happy that she seems to be more aware of the racial tensions in society. You are not interested in making her feel guilty about this. You haven't talked to most of these friends over the past 7 years except for a handful of times. When will you ever talk to them again? Not this year even though it is your 10-year high school reunion. Because of the pandemic, you will not have this. And frankly, while these friends are probably people you would still like, you have little interest in reconnecting. Why place yourself in a situation where you are surrounded by white friends who will occasionally hurt you? You can just continue being safe with your minority friends. Those are the people that you are friends with now, for the most part.

What also bothers you is that after past you wrote of this incident, past you wrote of another of which present you has no memory. Present you thought that she remembered all her traumas. What is scary is that apparently there are so many traumas that you end up forgetting them. You become numb. It is not that this other incident was not bad, it was that you simply can't remember it. It would hurt too much to remember them all. Past you writes about indifference to this incident while also, as an academic exercise, explains to the blank page of the journal why the incident was racist. Past you is articulate because the blank page does not argue back with more racism and gaslighting. The blank page does not get angry with you or judge you. Even though past you feigns indifference in several sentences, the many sentences describing the incident belie the indifference.

You are sad for past you for not taking more of a firm stance against racism in your writing. Present you would not be so forgiving of these people from whom you have long since drifting away. Present you also believes that in her writing she would not be so forgiving of the people that she is currently close to, but what does present you actually know? Present you is just another past you waiting to be born and who is scorned by future you for the feebleness of your thinking.

This must be what internalized racism is. As a minority you instantly recognize racism. You instantly are angered by it. You can state all the reasons why it is racist and yet you shy away from screaming racism at the top of your lungs, even in your own mind.