

On racism

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I spoke to a friend last night and said I was fed up with this blog. He expressed surprise, suggesting he never thought he'd hear me say that. I explained.

I hate racism. I always have. I have reason to. As someone who appears to have all the characteristics that have offered undue advantage (white, male, etc.,) I have most definitely experienced racism.

Maybe people don't recall now how the Irish were once treated in this country. I lived that experience when growing up. If anything identities you as Irish when you don't otherwise sound it the name Murphy does.

The casual name calling was normal, whether it be Paddy, Spud or whatever.

And I recall the slight implication that with an Irish name, could you really be trusted? I was 11 when the Troubles really broke out, and always proud of my name. And I was unafraid to speak out for the country in which I had some of my origins whilst always condemning violence.

Most especially, I remember the fear that my father never lost that his name created within him, which was that it would always prevent him from being able to assimilate into the society into which he was born of an Irish father, but which he feared would never quite accept him. This tainted his whole life.

That is a lived experience of racism that was pervasive, unthinking and indifferent because I suspect that almost all those who were racist were not in the slightest bit aware of the fact that they were being so - calling someone Spud because they had the name Murphy was just what you did back then, as if causal reference to the impact of a famine deliberately imposed on Ireland at cost to millions of lives lost or changed forever was acceptable because it was normal.

And so yes, I am sensitive around such issues.

And I will not tolerate racism.

Or the casual acceptance of it.

Of course I accept that mistakes happen. I make them too, I know.

Dammit, for years I lived with this situation thinking it was just what I had to do: that this was normal and the price of having an Irish background.

And then I realised it was not. That I had been mistaken. That this was unacceptable.

And thankfully, and in fairness, it has changed. Which gives me hope. My sons, who are more Irish through their mother than I am, will never suffer this.

But the reality is that the causal acceptance of racism goes on. We all know that and see that. And the implications for many are very much worse than anything I suffered, by a massive margin. I don't claim anything else. I am not saying that this has now been an impediment for me: I was lucky because attitudes changed. For many they have not. All I am saying is that this lived experience makes me aware of this issue.

And when I see many on the left claiming that statements are not anti-Semitic when those who suffer as a result think that they are then I go back to that experience of mine and the casual nature of so much of what was said to me, and the acceptance that it was normal as justification; and not even justification, but as the basis for a claim that it does not even exist. Except it did.

And that makes me angry for those who have to suffer similar claims now.

So please don't say that a comment is not anti-Semitic here when some who suffers as a result clearly think that it is. I am not willing to tolerate it. And if you don't like that, either don't comment or please don't call again. The choice is yours. But those are my rules. And I have very good reason for them. And if you don't like them and want to stay on the blog please don't say so. There are some things on which I think intolerance is quite acceptable.