

## Black and White: Don't judge someone till you have walked a mile in their shoes

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*Photo names, date and location unknown*

Don't judge someone till you have walked a mile in their shoes.

An experience I had in the 90s keeps coming back to me. I was church leader in Columbia, South Carolina, and one day I had some errands to run. Debbie D, a sister who was in town that day, came along so we could talk.

Debbie is black, and about my age. I wasn't looking out for anything, but I felt something different right away. As we're walking to the bank, I notice that we're getting looks I don't usually get, walking around white like I am. People assumed we were a couple, we were getting unfriendly looks, uncomfortable looks. Hard looks, stares, glares.

I realized I usually just assume I'm going to have people look at me like I'm supposed to be here, I'm welcome, or at least I'm just another face. This was different. And it's not anything that makes headlines or seems blatant. But it's clearly there.

I have to admit there are times when I have been baffled by claims of racism, of discrimination. There is too much general language, like 'systemic racism' and 'white privilege' etc. that are hard to understand. I wanted to hear clear examples, something I could wrap my brain around.

This experience, though it was brief, has stuck in my mind. There were no 'YouTube moments', no slurs or blatant insults or 'We don't serve black people here' gotcha moments. But I could clearly see and feel people treating us differently. It is subtle. If you never had the experience, you could just shrug it off, like "You're imagining it." If you've had the experience, you know exactly what we're talking about.

So here's something I would recommend if you're white and not sure what the fuss is about: find a friend, associate, ally, coworker, classmate, or church member who is black. About the same age, opposite sex if you can, so you seem like you could be a couple. Go to the bank, go shopping, go to a restaurant, walk down the street. Just relax and do what you usually do. See if you notice anything different about how people look at you or treat you. Let them do the talking, see if they get the same response you generally get.

Take a walk in their shoes for a while. See how it feels.