

# An Anti-Racism Pill?

Category: A Turn for the Better  
written by Neeta Nayak | August 5, 2024

Years ago, I had a bedridden patient—Mr. T—with extremely advanced Parkinson’s disease.

He was Caucasian, and the nurses warned me that he harbored extreme nationalist tendencies. Most of the caregivers in his nursing home were female and either immigrants from Africa or Black Americans. He was utterly cruel in his treatment of them. When they’d help transfer him from his bed to a wheelchair, for example, he tried to kick or punch them and issued a stream of profanities. His use of the B-word and the N-word was commonplace.

The situation was so nasty that we eventually contacted his sister and asked her to intervene. She drove six hours to get there and gave her brother a stern warning: “If you’re not nice to these women who clean your dirty diapers several times a day, regardless of the color of your skin, you’re not going to find anyone to help you, and I won’t visit you anymore, and the whole family will want nothing to do with you.”

The sister’s visit was a wake-up call and Mr. T was a transformed soul.

At my next visit, he said, sadly, “I am sorry for being mean. I grew up in a small town in rural America. Everybody in town was white. I had never seen a Black person except on TV. The first time I saw one was when I got here. I am truly ashamed. My sister told me I am racist. I don’t want to be racist anymore. You are my doctor. Can you prescribe an anti-racism pill that can cure me of this terrible disease?”

His contrition made me think: Even a hard-core racist was able to take a turn for the better. Wouldn’t it be great if we *could* invent a pill to cure the disease of racism/sexism/ classism/ageism and other needless societal oppressions?

Humans aren’t born judgmental. But early socialization too often means people acquire these tendencies by late toddlerhood. By the time someone is a teen or young adult, it takes much education to break a pattern of prejudice. There is a disproportionate burden of oppression borne by humans in colored bodies.

The staff and Mr. T’s sister were happy that he acknowledged his bias before he passed away from his Parkinson’s. Such a transformation is uncommon, though; many go to the grave with their prejudices intact.

Wouldn’t it indeed be wonderful if there were an anti-“ism” pill!

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