

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

Race in Freemasonry, and Why It Never Should Have Mattered

By Jaime Gonzalez, PM
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Before any of us became Freemasons, we learned that our institution takes “good” men and makes them “better.” Is there anything “good” about responding negatively to people because of the color of their skin? Wouldn’t we be “better” men by treating everyone equally? How can we be leaders in our lodges and communities if we do otherwise?

Among the landmarks of Kentucky Freemasonry are that a man must profess a belief in God, the fatherhood of God and the immortality of the human soul ⁽¹⁾. We also find in our Book of Constitutions, in the Standing Resolutions, that Freemasonry is universal in scope, and professes to be a Brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God ⁽¹⁾. In the book of Genesis, 1:27 we read that God created man in His image. In verse 31, God saw everything that He made and said that it was very good. Since God made everything in the world, including us, why would any of us treat anyone negatively merely because of the color of one’s skin?

Before our preparation and admittance into the lodge, we are informed during the “door lecture,” or “interrogatories,” propounded by the Senior Deacon (or his stead), that we accept into our order men of all faiths, creeds and races ⁽²⁾, ⁽³⁾, ⁽⁴⁾. A candidate for each degree is then received upon certain implements and tools, and is taught to apply those teachings toward all mankind, but more especially toward a brother Mason. Our Bible, or other Volume of Sacred Law, is to be our rule and guide through life, and to be the guide for our faith and practice. Our Bible lecture teaches that the Divine Charity that is extended to us, should, by Masons, be extended to all mankind. We are invested with certain grips, whereby we may know another in darkness, as well as in light. We learn that Freemasonry regards the inner quality of man, not the outer. We obligate ourselves to abide by the bylaws of our lodge and to abide by the constitution of our grand jurisdiction, even if they change or are amended. We also obligate ourselves to not wrong a brother. We are taught to square our actions, and we then learn the lessons of morality, equality and rectitude of conduct. In the

Opening Charge, we are reminded of the great objects of the Fraternity, among which is the promotion of a correct knowledge of the duties we owe to God, our neighbor and ourselves, to practice with assiduity the sacred tenets of the craft, to improve in everything that is good, amiable and useful and to act with dignity becoming the high moral character our Institution. Among the many reminders for our actions outside the lodge contained in the Closing Charge are, "Let the world observe how Masons love one another," and to "do good unto all."⁽³⁾,⁽⁴⁾.

There are black Americans, or African-Americans, Hispanics, and Asians in all levels of business, government and the military. Across the country, men of every race and creed are business owners, chief executives, city council members, mayors, judges, state and national legislators, Supreme Court justices, military Generals and Admirals, and cabinet secretaries. African-Americans have been elected to the offices of Vice President and President of the United States. Could we say that Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech, "I have a Dream" was spot on, when he said that he hoped his children would be judged by the content of their character, and not by the color of their skin. While King, a Baptist minister, was not a Freemason, he may have been influenced by his father and grandfather, who were both Prince Hall Masons. These individuals realized their accomplishments because of their hard work, skill and expertise and not because of their outward appearance.

Jackie Robinson is credited with breaking the "color barrier" in Major League Baseball in 1947. One might argue that an important share of the credit belongs to the men who signed Robinson to a major league baseball contract and who authorized the integration of major league baseball. Without the baseball commissioner's approval of Robinson's contract, integration would not have happened, at least not at that time. The Commissioner of Major League Baseball in 1947 was a man known as "Happy" Chandler. Albert B. "Happy" Chandler, Sr. was an Army veteran, state legislator, Lieutenant Governor, two-time Kentucky Governor, U.S. Senator, and, of course the second Commissioner of Major League Baseball. After leaving the Commissioner's office, he returned to Kentucky and was instrumental in public school integration following the landmark Supreme Court case of Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954. During this tumultuous time, Governor Chandler called up the National Guard to enforce the integration of Sturgis High School in 1956, and he signed an executive order to ensure equal rights of blacks and whites with respect to access to Kentucky state parks. One more comment about Happy Chandler -- he was a 50-year member of Landmark Lodge No. 41 in Kentucky. Happy Chandler could not have approved Robinson's contract were it not for Branch Rickey. Rickey was a collegiate and professional football and baseball player, coach and team owner in Ohio and Missouri in the early twentieth century. Rickey was an Army veteran of World War 1 and commanded an Army chemical training unit. Branch Rickey was

also a Master Mason in Tuscan Lodge No. 240 in Saint Louis, Missouri and later joined Montauk Lodge No. 286 after moving to Brooklyn, New York. Rickey is credited with starting what we know today as the minor league baseball farm system. While serving as General Manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Rickey signed Jackie Robinson to a minor league contract on August 28, 1945. Robinson had been playing in the Negro Leagues for the Kansas City Monarchs. Could it be that both Chandler and Rickey, being military veterans, leaders in their respective fields, and Master Masons, viewed the inner qualities and on field player abilities of Jackie Robinson?

Change in Masonic lodges often happens slowly, as most lodges meet only once or twice per month. Change is even slower at the Grand Lodge level, because the Grand Lodge of Kentucky meets only once per year. Grand Lodge committees meet at various times throughout the year and make their recommendations or reports during the Annual Communication. Among the several standing and special committees, is the standing Committee on Fraternal Relations which is composed of three Past Grand Masters and appointed by the newly installed Grand Master. This committee relies on the recommendations of the Conference of Grand Masters of Masons of North America (CGMMNA) which has a similar committee⁽⁵⁾. Grand jurisdictions around the world petition various other Grand Lodges for fraternal recognition. Since 2006, it has been the opinion of the CGMMNA that Fraternal Relations or amity with Prince Hall Grand Lodges remains the prerogative of each Grand Lodge. The Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Maryland requested amity with the Grand Lodge of Kentucky some time before the 221st Annual Communication. Since the Grand Lodge of Kentucky recognizes the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Kentucky, the committee saw no reason to not grant Fraternal Recognition to the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Maryland. A motion was made, seconded and passed by the delegates of the Craft granting such recognition⁽⁶⁾.

Regarding the inner quality of man, recall that in 1 Samuel 16, verse 7, we find “for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” In Leviticus 19:18, we are told "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." From an anatomical or anthropological viewpoint, we are all the same on the inside. Have you ever had a blood transfusion? Maybe an organ transplant? Would you care if the donor was different than you? When we look about in acemetery, we see headstones -- there is rarely an indication of race on the grave marker.

In summary, how can we as Masons, hope to enter into the Celestial Lodge above, if we knowingly treat people negatively here on



Earth? Can we truly hope to meet the Great Architect of the Universe and hear the words “well done thou good and faithful servant” if we are not good and faithful, if we treat people negatively, merely because of the color of one’s skin? We are obligated to adhere to the Book of Constitutions which delineates in Standing Resolution 17 in part: That Freemasonry is universal in scope, that we are to welcome to our doors and admit to our privileges worthy men of all faiths, creeds and of *every race* (emphasis added) who believe in a Supreme Being, as stated in our Degrees and lectures, there is no reference to the exclusion of any petitioner with regard to race, creed, and/or faith, in any of the accepted Rituals and/or Monitors authorized for use within the constituent lodges chartered by the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, F. & A. M., and; it is incumbent upon the Brotherhood to abide by the Laws, Rules, Regulations, and Edicts of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, F. & A. M. and be what they profess to be. Additionally, that no negative reference is to be made by any officer or member of any lodge chartered under the constitution of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, F. & A. M. in reference to a petitioner’s faith, creed or race at any time in the conferral of the Degrees, lectures, obligation, by proficiency lecturers, etc. or during any lodge Communication. Further, it is the responsibility of the Master of each lodge constituted under the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, F. & A. M. to insure strict compliance with this edict⁽¹⁾.

We were informed during the Charge in the South, that some men are born Masons; that they have Masonry in their hearts without ever entering a lodge. We also learn that some men are carried on the rolls of the lodge and perhaps receive the highest honors of our fraternity, yet still never become Masons at heart. We have been taught, invested, instructed and charged. I hope that our members can carry our faith in God, and Masonry in general in our hearts, and live the tenets of our Craft in all we do. Let us live according to our teachings, free of animosity, hatred and bigotry; and remember to “love your neighbor as yourself,” as found in Leviticus, 19:18. Exhibiting racial bigotry and hatred is contrary to God’s word, our teachings, and is disharmonious to the soul. Wouldn’t we want someone to treat us the same way? It is, therefore, incumbent upon us, all of us, to govern ourselves accordingly.

1. Book of Constitutions, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 2022
2. The Trestle Board by H.B. Grant, copyright 1914
3. The Kentucky Monitor by Henry Pirtle, copyright 1947
4. The Kentucky Monitor by Henry Pirtle, copyright 1990
5. Telephone conversation with M.W. Bro. Terry Bowman, Past Grand Master
6. Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 2020,

Jaime Gonzalez is a Past Master of Valley-Daylight Lodge 511, currently serving as Junior

Warden of Buechel Lodge 896, a member of William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Past District Deputy Grand Master, Past President and current Secretary of the Greater Louisville Masonic Education Association, he is a Senior Ritualist and serves on the Credentials Committee as Chairman, Grand Lodge of Kentucky.