

## **"Man of his time" is not an excuse for overlooking a hero's bad values, his racism or religious hate but a reason for firmly condemning him**

Human nature likes to pretend there is something new under the sun. In fact there is nothing. We want to pride ourselves on how socially and morally progressive we are. But people who we would violently disagree with do that too. Liberals are always at each others throats and often enjoy one another's downfall. People of many centuries ago thought it was progressive to leave sick babies on a hillside to die of exposure.

The perception of yourself as progressive goes with historical ignorance and a total lack of humility. Then you join a group of cranks who think like you do and you feel affirmed and almost divine.

The reality is that the person in the past was as much of a person as you and shouldn't need to be shown how wrong it was to treat any person as below human. The stupidity of thinking somebody should be your slave or beneath you is clear to you. When the prejudice is put into action you get a new clarification - how ugly and harmful and potentially harmful it is.

When society has always said to put yourself in the place of the other to treat them as you would like to be treated there is no excuse. We cannot use the limitations of our time and age as an excuse. True humanitarians do not make excuses for people like Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, Lenin or even Lincoln. And especially when these figures proclaimed liberty and claimed to value it so much! It is possible they did know they were evil and still advocated evil to fit in their society and be popular and relevant.

Paradoxically, you are claiming to be superior to them when you think you know better and excuse them as products of their dark age. This is not about you for real people bled for and over the attitudes and actions of those people.

The other problem is that in many places today communities still hiddenly or openly let bigotry and hate and racism thrive. We cannot pretend that racism was everywhere in the past but not today for today it is still significant and still dangerous. There is no clear cut difference between the past and today and its more fluid and deceptive than you would think.

It is not our place to forgive and say it does not matter for that is saying those who were hurt by them do not matter. They cannot stop mattering just because they are dead. Feeling pain and anger over the hurting of another is decency. We cannot say that we need to forgive so we can feel good. That is just selfish and we must live in the real world where it is not all about us.

In 2019, many students campaigned against Gandhi's statue being placed in front of Manchester Cathedral as he was a racist. They said as he was complicit in what the British Empire did to the people of Africa and did so out of a racist hate for black people. The statue went up and then a Gandhi must fall campaign broke out on social media.

One thing that stands out to me is how he referred to Africans as "half heathen natives." That is clearly a religious slur.

Responses to the demands include the statement that he was indeed bigoted and racist but say they were products of the time he lived in. So unpack that. If you are racist or bigoted and promote hate in a society that does it with you, you are not responsible as an individual. The right way to look at it is that it is COLLECTION of individuals who are under the banner of hate and racism. It does not matter if it is one person or many. Bad people feel it is easier and safer to be bad if they have a bad society around them. They can murder and feel less responsible than they would otherwise. When responsibility is diffused like that and spread you find it harder to feel pangs of conscience for the terrible things you do for you think it is not just you but many others. For that reason Gandhi's society does not absolve him in the slightest or ask for mercy. It asks for unrelenting judgement. If he had murdered somebody with his bare hands he would be cancelled from the annals of the heroes so he should be judged for his hate and racism. A doctor who saves a million children and sexually molests one will be damned in the eyes of society and so should Gandhi.

Another complaint is that how he became a much better and more inclusive man later on is being ignored. But a bigot getting into a high position and then mellowing sends the message, "Bigotry can bring you to power." He was a hero for bigotry and then he softened. That is nothing to praise.

The reality is that the statue sends a mixed message. It makes people ask how he thought and why he thought it. It may lead them to racism. The erection of the statue says his racism and hate were not enough to justify the statue of some consistent peace maker going up. Reasons and excuses to be racist are successful enough without this. It is true that racists don't need Gandhi's logic or his example to become racist or more racist but it does not help.

Sara Khan liberation and access officer at Manchester University Student's Union put it well by saying, "This statue would not promote peace but instead promote Gandhi's racist and anti-back ideology and promote continued violence in Kashmir."

One thing for sure bad things such as racism and slave owning act like diseases. They spread. They are like the flu when it sweeps through society. You do not see it until the symptoms show its presence. People may act and look cured of hate and racism but are still hankered for underneath. That is why anything that can be reasonably seen to promote or advertise racism and sectarian hate is dangerous.

Religion and spirituality on occasion have endorsed racism and fostered it. Consider new age writings that demonise certain races such as Isis Unveiled. And there is the Book of Mormon where the Indian's dark skin is down to a curse from God. Consider how Jesus said the Jewish people of his time preached hate of enemy. He would not help a Lebanese woman's little child who had a demon. The text says it was an impure spirit so it was probably tempting the girl or possessing her or both. He refused basic spiritual aid to a child for her race though it only took less time than it took for him to tell the woman she was a dog and that he had to give the bread to the Jews not to the likes of her. He helped in the end which was just racist virtue-signalling. He was not even in ministry at the time for the text says he was having a break and the woman found him by chance so he was trying to argue that he had to focus on giving the Jews freedom from demons. It was a shameless excuse. The story appears in Mark's gospel where Jesus gives no real new teaching and in fact very little teaching but he was able to step out of character to deliver a malicious teaching to a suffering woman.

Strong opposition to respect and celebration of bigots and racists and war mongers is a must. No debate. The man of his time thing is a justification for not pulling down the current consequences of such a person's actions. It is a justification for the culture being oppressive. Take Jesus as a good example and Muhammad. They are called men of their time and nobody realises their religions need dismantling and it is honouring their errors and evils by neglecting to do so.