

# Mannie Jackson: Black in America

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At a recent 2021 Hall of Fame basketball gathering, there were private discussions about a social media posting on the subject of wealthy/successful Black professionals doing more and returning to their hometowns to either live, invest or visit. Participants sought a discussion on social responsibilities; particularly in their hometowns.

What follows combines comments from the group and my personal views on visiting my hometown of Edwardsville, Illinois.

The first Fifteen years of my life were primarily spent being educated and socialized in a small agriculture town of approximately 8800 people...

The remaining relationships from my childhood are a half dozen blood relatives and approximately 25 friends. I visit Edwardsville four or five times a year and each time I go back I simply cannot help thinking of two things; first, is how incredibly kind the young and older folks are; secondly the whiteness of everything and everyone around me. That part hasn't changed in over fifty years. As I eat in my favorite restaurants, I do notice the owners are mostly older white males and I wonder whether its bias or just happenstance and that the employees seem to be the same. I feel anxiety as I walk the streets, I recognize there is some tension; because many people talk nervously about race. In recent years one of my relatives had a regrettable encounter with local law enforcement that still haunts him; my only advice was to be careful and count his blessings.

The seeds of Racism are embedded in America's laws, regulations, and institutions.

Because of a historic lack of truth; Blacks and Whites are often confused and understandably fear each other.

As a kid, there were signs displayed in my hometown reading "open to the Public" but my family could not go inside. These signs actually caused arguments and hurt feelings.

The Hall of Fame group was amused by this story but quickly returned to expressing guilt about not doing more for the communities that raised them and contributed to their development.

The social media post the meeting began with, explained that life; even for a wealthy well-educated person, can be confusing – the post also reminded me of my feelings and why I approach being Black in America as a war-and a full-time life or death job. It's a peculiar situation- this double-consciousness has often put me on edge – according to W. E.B Dubois; Black folk essentially always look at themselves through the eyes of the many negative myths people believe about someone who looks like me, and of course measuring every soul with the tape of an uncaring world. I assume I'm disliked and not trusted; therefore, I prepare for the worst. By most success standards, I'm an American but I too control multiple souls, multiple thoughts, unreconciled strivings, and two waring souls in one dark-skinned body whose dogged ambition and strength keep it from being blown away. The group joked about putting white friends in Black masks and having them survive in their old neighborhoods.

When asked how I acquired a leadership attitude; I responded by saying as a 21-year-old Harlem Globetrotter I saw myself as a working tourist and dutifully took time to say to foreigners that I was an American Negro ( most had no idea about the significance of 'Bull' Connor or kKK or why my saying Black versus Negro or Colored seemed important). I actually became the team's Goodwill Ambassador for Capitalism,

Democracy, and unbelievably the Fourteenth Amendment. And every stop, in 105 countries, I challenged youth and leaders to examine their way of life and the changes required. Imagine, all this from a 21-year-old raised in a segregated region .... It felt empowering.

This Hall of Fame group unanimously agreed, the USA is a great country with much promise and potential. When ask about my loyalty, I responded by saying I consider myself a global citizen and I have absolutely no desire to be Africanized in America.

I have a love for my African heritage, I've donated millions of dollars and worked in South Africa as Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of MarTech Controls and befriended many great people. My wish is for America to be an even greater world-class location and I also want Africa to be a world-class continent, but my home is America. My Nigerian bloodline serves as a message to the world that America is, in fact, a "melting pot " capable of dealing fairly, productively, and positively with internal and global matters.

My challenge to the small group was to encourage all parents and schools to teach kindness and fairness as a way of life?"

One of the youngest participants closed with this vision for being BLACK in AMERICA. " Erase the identity game and accept we are temporary passengers on this great planet- and do our very best Ambassadorial work in hometowns and within our families".