

Living White . . . Very Well
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Recently (January, 2010), a representative of the host of a radio show emailed me saying he had read some of my writing on race from a white perspective and wanted to set up an interview with the host and me. "You seem to have some great advice for those of us [racially conscious white people] who would like to be proud and happy but find it difficult to do so in our current malaise." The issue or concern embedded in that statement would be the theme of the interview, he wrote, and to best get into it, he proposed the focus of the exchange be on two selections in my book *Living White: Writings on Race, 2000-2005* (a collection of my writings that had previously been published elsewhere), "Rearing Honorable White Children" and "Living White." He made it clear that he was open to where I wanted to take things in the interview, and that in particular he was interested in my current thinking on this general topic. "Please feel free to comment on and develop the ideas you have already laid out in your writings." I wrote him back saying I was amenable to the interview and the topic and that I'd think about what he suggested and get back to him when I was clear about the specific direction in which I wanted to go in the interview.

The interview invitation has prompted me to reflect on my current thinking about being proud and happy and effective--it quickly became clear to me that I wanted also to deal with effectiveness--as a racially committed white person in this difficult time; the radio show representative is right, the world isn't a friendly place for whites who care about the current status and future wellbeing of their people, and that can get them out of sorts. Some ideas have come to mind and I'll outline them here and, if I can manage it, get at least some of them into the upcoming interview, the date of which, at this writing, is not scheduled. What follows is a list, but while I leave things disparate I believe these ideas go together reasonably well:

To begin, having read them over, I think that the two selections in *Living White* the host's representative refers to--"Raising Honorable White Children" and "Living White"--have held up well since the

book's 2006 publication and speak for themselves, and I recommend them to readers. Amazon sells the book.

I feel the need to sketch out how I define proud and happy, the two terms in the proposed interview topic.

While more than a few people see pride negatively, even to the point that it is considered a vice, or a sin, I see pride as a good thing, at least when it is kept within bounds, when it doesn't become arrogance or smugness, and when it is balanced off against other good things, like love and compassion and responsibility and generosity. *Being proud of yourself it is a sign that you are probably doing something right in your life.*

I view happiness as *someone's general, pervasive, persistent, physically felt, experience of satisfaction, gratification, and peacefulness about the way his or her life is going.* It is a conclusion one reaches: "I like what I'm doing." "I'm doing what I ought to be doing." "This is it." "This is right for me." "I'm on the right course." "I'm being responsible to myself and my circumstance." "Yes." That doesn't mean that one is free of down times and hits that hurt, but the basic through-line of one's life, the basic story, the defining experience of one's existence, is that life is good, right, true now.

Pride and happiness are interconnected. I can't imagine happiness without pride, or pride without happiness. At the phenomenological, immediately experienced, level, prior to the words, the labels, we apply to them to give them articulate meaning, pride and happiness greatly overlap, to the point that perhaps they are virtually, or even completely, one and the same. It might be that when you are feeling happy in a basic, fundamental way, what is really going on is you are truly proud of yourself; and that you can't really be happy if deep down you aren't proud of how you are conducting your life. In this writing I'll refer to both pride and happiness, although in doing so I'll reflect the manner in which, for me, the two concepts coincide.

To pride and happiness, I'll add the term effective, or efficacy. By effective and its variants--or personal power, or success, other terms that get at the same concept--I am referring to getting good things accomplished as you define good things. So *being effective, or powerful or successful, isn't about getting just anything done, it is about getting good things done.*

And again there is interconnectedness: *Pride and happiness and effectiveness go together.* I'm trying to imagine someone being prideful and happy without accomplishing good things in his or her life. You can't just talk a good game in your living room; if you are going to achieve pride and happiness you have to be making something worthwhile happen. Which is not to say you have to be moving mountains or never know failure; but you do have to be getting something you truly value accomplished. That is a rule of the game of life you have to take into account if you want to be proud and happy.

It is better to be happy and productive than unhappy and unproductive with a reason for it, even if it is a really good reason. Achieving tangible results, or at least shooting for them, is the way to feel good about yourself and your life, and it is the way to be good for the world; it's far better than trying to lead the league in articulateness about why it isn't happening for you. Or at least it is in the long run; to be sure, in the short run--an hour, a day, a week--blaming, complaining, defeatism, cynicism, and self-pity make things better. But very soon that uplift wears off and you feel down in the dumps and you wind up drinking wine until it's time for bed.

Stubbornly refuse to let anybody make you unhappy and self-disrespecting. Our ultimate power--it can't be taken away from us no matter what--is our fundamental posture, our overall bearing, as a human being. We may not be able to, now or ever, get things done to the extent we'd like, and inevitably we are going to make mistakes and do the wrong thing, and, especially if we are a white advocate or activist, we may well get the word that we are nothing, ignorant, and bad, and perhaps we will never figure out exactly what we can and should be doing with our lives, and the roof may be caving in on us; but nevertheless, no matter what is going on, we can stand tall. And I mean stand tall both figuratively and literally. So right now, let's you and I stand tall--literally, stretch up high, and radiate honor and pride in ourselves and our race and our heritage. We don't need to give over our dignity, our pride, our personal majesty, to anything or anybody. Indeed, we may need to fix things in ourselves and in our lives, but we don't have to do it as hangdog human beings.

One of the ways to figure out what to do to get proud and happy as a racially conscious and committed white person is to *develop a healthy perversity of sorts*. What I mean by that is, identify what the people who have it in for whites would prefer us to be like, and push us to be like, and go in the opposite direction. For instance, they love it when we mope around over on stage right in the grand opera of life. We need to do just the contrary. First, we need to cheer up. That doesn't mean becoming Pollyannaish; we don't have to set aside, or deny the worth of, critical analyses and deep, objective insights into the hard realities of our current circumstance. It is to say that tough-mindedness and a positive mental attitude are not antithetical. And second, if at all possible, we need to move to center stage. The message coming at us hard is that our adversaries sing the arias while we stand around silently in the back row of the crowd scene. No, no, no, that's not how things have to work.

We need to elevate our standards. We need to dare to commit to becoming more than *sort of* prideful, *sort of* happy, and *sort of* productive as white people to being really--really, *really*--prideful happy, and productive as white people. Connect living white with living well--really, *really* well. Again, be perverse: they want us to have limited (we might call them realistic, that's just fine with them) hopes and ambitions and make do with the crumbs tossed our way. Thinking that way should be a signal to shoot higher--way, way, way higher.

We need to examine our assumptions. We have been living in the hands of the enemy. Since our earliest days, we have been deluged with negative, debilitating notions about our race, our heritage, and ourselves as white people: from the schools we attended at every level; from the news media; from the arts and entertainment industries; from the publishing establishment; from the politicians; from the mainline churches; and from our families, peers, friends, and lovers who have bought into the sell that has been coming at us all. And much of it has taken hold: it is stored inside us as crippling feelings, images, ideas, and assumptions about who we are and where we came from and what we can and should do with our lives as white people. Most of all that is tacit rather than explicit: that is to say, we are not consciously aware of it. It is imbedded in the not-

fully-articulate "buzz of aliveness" that is us as we experience ourselves at each moment in time. It is part of the totality of "me" that gives meaning and direction to our lives and provides the basis for our state of being--happy, sad, optimistic, pessimistic, hopeful, passive, active, and so on. The challenge for each of us is to identify what has been put inside us, understand how we have been conditioned, poisoned, which includes how we, as a consequence of our conditioning, have put poison inside ourselves, make explicit what is largely implicit, and expel what shouldn't be there, rid our bodies (which includes our minds) of what weakens and immobilizes and subordinates and distracts us, and replace it with what ought to be there: that which empowers us and makes us proud and happy now and on our death beds. All to say, we need to purge ourselves, scrub ourselves clean.

And what might be inside us that we need to expel? Perhaps these assumptions:

- That the white race is indeed, as the critic and essayist Susan Sontag put it, the cancer of human history, and that to side with whites is to, well, come out in favor of a killer disease. By the way, Sontag did ultimately offer an apology for her often-repeated statement, saying that it was insensitive to cancer victims.
- That to be a racially conscious and committed white person, to engage in analysis, advocacy, organization, and action on behalf of the rights and wellbeing of white people, is to be an ignorant, backward, extremist, racist, violence-prone bigot; and that if you have any tendencies in that direction you should stifle them and defer to your betters.
- That if you stick your head above the foxhole about race, you are going to get it shot off. That plays out as being scorned, marginalized, relegated to pariah status, and/or getting fired from your job if somehow you ever got hired in the first place. If they catch sight of you and decide to destroy you, you are helpless to do anything about it; you are powerless, so lay low.
- That there is nothing you can do about race. It's over, case closed. History is moving in another, better, direction than what you are about. You are on the outside looking in. You aren't the action.

You aren't legitimate. So just go passive. Oh, if you must, vent anonymously on the Internet, but be satisfied with that, and really, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for even doing that. What's wrong with you?

I'm exaggerating here to make a point--or am I?--but in any case, you get the idea: inventory what's been put inside you regarding your whiteness and get rid of what shouldn't be there and replace it with what should, and that is the perception that white people have as much right to identify with their race and feel good about themselves and their people as anybody else on this planet. They have as much right as anybody else to affirm their race and heritage and join with their brethren in shaping their own destiny. There isn't one standard that applies to everybody but white gentiles, and let's be candid, we are talking about white gentiles here, Jewish whites are doing all of this, and legitimately. It is gentile whites that, in our time, have been forbidden to do any of it. Enough of that injustice.

Get in shape. Get in the best physical and mental condition you can. Your body and mind are your instruments in getting prideful, happy, and effective--so hone them. Weight management, eating right, getting off harmful substances--excessive alcohol, drugs, bad food--getting your body toned and flexible, learning to calm down and center, getting proper sleep. We know full well what to do. It is just that today would seem to go better if we put this project off until tomorrow . . . and tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, and then we die.

Clarify your priorities. I talked about this in a thought a month or so ago on this site, "On Priorities and Next Steps"--you are invited to review that material. Basically, the idea is that in order to take charge of our individual lives rather than being bounced around like billiard balls by external people and forces, we have to be explicitly clear about, fundamentally, the direction in which we are heading in our individual lives at the moment. And that's not just around race. Race is a part of our life, albeit an important part, but it is not all of our life. A life well lived includes love and work and honor and personal integrity and quality and joy and peacefulness and adventure, and while race relates to all of that, it isn't equated

with all of that. What are your five or six or seven top priorities, goals, in your life right now? Decide to make them a reality. Start taking action, now, to manifest them in your life, in the world.

Control what you give attention. Don't attend to whatever those in power, those doing the talking nowadays, want you to attend to. The anti-whites are very good at calling attention to themselves and getting people to think and act within their frames of reference. They are so ubiquitous it is impossible not to look at them and see things, including ourselves and what we need to, or ought to, be doing; but as fast as we can manage it, we need to switch from their focus to ours: and that is perking up and going to work to get positive things done consistent with our fundamental priorities, both individually and as a race.

A big tent is good. There isn't just one way to live well as a white person or serve the cause of white people; there are many ways. We can draw a lesson from other, successful, movements in this regard: the black, women's, gay, and Jewish movements, and the anti-war movement of the 1960s. These movements didn't do business in just one way. All of them had both soft-edged and hard-edged components. Blacks had Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X, women had the radical feminists, gays had ACT-UP, there was The Jewish Defense League and Meir Kahane, and the anti-war movement had the Weather Underground; and while there was infighting among factions within these movements, there was also an awareness that a variety of orientations and approaches can suit the needs of the different types of people drawn to any movement, and that multiple orientations and approaches, including ones that are widely condemned by the mainstream, can complement one another and serve the overall cause. All to say, while the white power skinheads' way is not my particular way, they are OK with me; I'm not one to try to run them out of the white movement. My view is you do the best thing you can think of to do for your race given who you are and the circumstance you are in, and I'll do the same. I'm writing this on a Thursday afternoon; it is the best thing I can think of to do. Look at yourself and your situation and do the best thing you can think of to do. We all do what we can, we all do something, and we all respect and support each other; that's the best way forward as far as I can see.

Be careful. The people who have it in for white people are enlistees --or is it draftees? co-optees? suckers?--in a gallant campaign against the forces of darkness, and they will, in all good conscience, mow down any of the enemy that gets in their sights. You have a career going and bills to pay and perhaps a wife or husband and children to guide and support and parents to care for. Anticipate the possible negative consequences for yourself and those you care about of anything you do. Historically, individuals have found it necessary to work underground to serve the causes they believed in. That may be the case for you.

There is always something worth doing. My experience has been that if you know what your priorities are and you look around for it, there will always be something good to get done, including about race. It may not be a big thing, and it may not be somebody else's favored thing, and you might have to go out of your way some to get at it, but it's there and you'll see it and it is your good thing right now, and if you take it on that will be a step toward pride and happiness for you. I'm not going to give examples; I don't want to channel your search. I really believe that if you look for what to do, you'll find something that fits you. Your personal, call it existential, challenge is to do that.

So that's what I came up with after thinking about the interview. I'll post this writing on my web site, and then see if I can get the gist of it into the interview itself.