

August 2, 2017  
*Opening Eyes....*

Remember this image?

I can tell you where I was when the trial of O.J. Simpson for the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman came to an end.

Along with millions of others across the city (I was living in the L.A. area at the time) and across the country, I tuned in to hear the verdict.



The television showed scenes of people who had gathered in groups to hear the verdict. The reactions, to me, were surprising. I saw groups of white Americans who sat in shock and stunned by the acquittal. We witnessed groups of African-Americans gathered and were cheering the ending of the trial and the ultimate release of the accused.

I remember watching the trial and wanting the white Bronco chase. I remember watching Rosa Lopez (the next-door maid) give her testimony. I recall watching the multiple lawyers who argued the case for both the prosecution and the defense. I can still see in my mind the sidebars with the lawyers and the judge, the testimony of the police detectives and the crazy media circus that was generated by the trial.

I was stunned at the verdict, and I could not comprehend how the black community saw things so differently from me. I was confused and angry; I was shocked and felt like justice wasn't done, and I couldn't understand how others could not see what I saw.

As I have tried to understand that moment, our nation is rocked by racial violence, "Blue on Black" crime, African American citizens killed (accidentally or intentionally) by members of numerous police departments. There is a tidal wave of support for police among many communities and disbelief among the African American peoples – and I sit stunned (in much the same way I was more than a decade ago).

Only in the last couple of months have I begun to understand that there is a large gap in understanding and perceptions between me (and my Anglo-American culture) and those who are African-Americans. Our life experiences and our perceptions the history of the judicial system in America are vastly different – and these experiences shape how we see events as they unfold.

I am currently reading a book entitled *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* by Philip Dray that said something that made me sit up and take notice. He posed this question: "Is it possible for white America to understand blacks' distrust of the legal system, their fears of racial

profiling and the police, without understanding how cheap a black life was for so long a time in our nation's history."<sup>1</sup>

In thinking about the question, thinking about the books I have been reading recently I have had to answer that question with this: "No...it is not possible for me to fully understand the experience of African Americans." And if that is true, then I need to be open to listening to the other side of the story.

I realize that I need to open my eyes to see things differently – from someone else's point of view and even from another cultural point of view.

I still don't know that I understand the dynamics behind the OJ verdict. But I do know that I want to see that event through different eyes so that I may respond to my Black brothers and sisters in this world differently.

I may not change my mind, but I do know that I must see with different eyes. I may even need to open them to see how things are!

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2002), xi.