

Review: True Colors by Diane Sawyer

This is a reflective essay about true colors. "True Colors" was a segment aired in 1991 on ABC News and hosted by Diane Sawyer with the goal of determining the ways people are treated differently based on their race. To do so, Sawyer set up an experiment of sorts that followed two similarly educated and aged men who were friends since childhood; the main difference between the two is that one man was white while the other was black. The main goal of this project was to determine whether black people are differentially treated on the basis of their skin despite the equal rights that the Constitution affords them. The two men were given recorders so that the news team can keep track of their interactions with other people.

In the first part of this experiment, ABC news dropped the two men off at a store to see how the local people would interact with them. When the white man walks up to the service counter in the electronics department, he is instantly greeted by a staff member who offers him help. However, when the black man walks up to the same counter a few moments later, he is completely ignored by two salesmen. The differential reaction to the two men occurred in every department and type of store that they visited. It was interesting to note that this reaction was independent of the race of the salesman; the black salesman was just as likely to ignore the black customer as the white salesman. This shows that there is clearly an underlying belief that black people should be treated differently; even though both the white and black participant showed interest in the products being sold, only the white participant received any attention from the salesmen. This is a weird phenomenon because instead of the salesmen acting on their potential ability to make a sale and therefore profit, they were only willing to assist white customers.

One of the other major distinctions between the two male shoppers was that in one store, an employee followed the black participant not to help him, but rather to ensure that he would not steal any items from the store. The white participant did not receive this same kind of negative attention. While the news report states that the reason for this may be that crime statistics show that black people are more likely to commit crimes, it is arguable that people should not target every black person simply because of this statistic.

In another experiment, both the white and black participants are “locked out” of their car a few feet apart. While people were willing to help the white participant and tried to give him advice, no one stopped to help the black participant. When the two men went to ask about the same car from the same salesman, the white man was asked to put less down on the car by about \$1000. In addition, the overall price for the car was different for the two men. ABC News then revealed itself and asked to see the manager determine why the two men were given a different price for the same car just minutes apart. The salesman responded that the two men were given different prices because the prices “are all different”; when Diane Sawyer clarified that they were looking at the same car, the salesman and the manager both refused to respond. According to further research on this matter in this true colors essay, black people are regularly charged more for cars by salesmen simply on the basis of the color of their skin.

In one of the last segments in this experiment, ABC news also showed that jobs discriminate against potential employees based on the color of their skin as well; white applicants are more likely to get a job over black applicants. This information is all very upsetting, and it’s sad to know that so many people operate on racist beliefs and actively discriminate against people with different skin colors. Unfortunately, white men are treated as

superior to black men; hopefully, we will be able to alter the attitudes of the majority in order to create social change.

Works Cited

“True Colors”. *ABC News With Diane Sawyer*. ABC. 1991. Television.