

# Wokeness Distorts the True Measure of a Man

*They dismiss most of what a person has stood for and accomplished by reducing their life to labels.*

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How would you answer this question: What is the measure of a man?

Martin Luther King Jr. weighed in with this perspective: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

To make the discussion more interesting and the question more personal, allow me to introduce my hero, my dad. Although he passed away over 20 years ago and the daily pain of his absence has faded, occasions of profound sadness arise when I think about how much I miss him. Oddly enough, he recently came to mind when I was pondering a recent moral-judgment tirade of some woke folk. I suppose juxtaposing fond memories of my dad with irrational social justice behavior warrants explanation.

## Measuring my Hero

From 1947 to 1981, my dad ran a restaurant in a rural Central Florida setting located near a Black community on the outskirts of town. One of our neighbors was Mr. Alexander, a true southern gentleman and a farmer. As a neighborly

gesture, my dad helped feed Mr. Alexander's swine by collecting our restaurant scraps in a barrel that Mr. Alexander serviced every week. Dad also owned a 28-acre tract of land behind the restaurant that was a failed orange grove experiment. Dad grew up around farming and was familiar with the hardships and risks of that career choice. So, in addition to helping feed the hogs, Dad also allowed Mr. Alexander to freely use the land to farm watermelons. I still have fond memories of Mr. Alexander plowing that field with a mule in the blazing Florida sun.

Dad grew up in the South during hard times. It was an era that left a deep impression on his soul and an environment that shaped his thinking. And while he was supportive of Mr. Alexander's desire to profit from watermelon farming to provide for his family, my dad would not have supported my courting Mr. Alexander's daughter. My dad did not believe in racial superiority; rather, he believed in racial separatism when it came to certain matters such as love and marriage. I sometimes wonder how Dad would react to my ongoing, long-term mixed-race relationship today. My guess is he would just give me that old bear hug I sorely miss!

Since we now have more context, let's return to that recent woke outburst I mentioned in the outset. As I was processing the details of that temper tantrum, the thought crossed my mind that if Dad were alive today and the opportunity arose, he would likely be a prime target of such tirades. Without a doubt, the woke among us would not hesitate to slap a "racist, privileged, white male" label on him. I am not suggesting that my dad's generosity toward Mr. Alexander was somehow noble or virtuous and elevated his morality above reproach. Instead, I share this story to provide context when it comes to

measuring a man. I just happen to believe the task requires much more than the convenience of dismissing most of what a person has stood for and accomplished by reducing their life to labels generated from the factory of misguided zealotry. It is unfortunate that the true measure of a man can be so easily discarded at the whim of an obsessive, postmodern social justice movement.

## **Measuring Privilege**

This discussion about my dad would not be complete without navigating the dicey waters of white privilege. So, let's brave those waters! Our man of privilege was born prematurely in 1921 following a six-month pregnancy. He was born at home by a midwife and weighed a mere one pound. The local physician said he would not live, so my grandmother did not even name him; the midwife did. He was so tiny they placed him in a doll bed and fed him milk with an eyedropper.

As a consequence of his premature birth, Dad had severe curvature of the spine, cerebral palsy, and was 80 percent deaf. When he was 8 years old, the stock market crashed, and the Great Depression began. His parents were poor, and school was challenging. There were no special classes for disabled people. He eventually graduated high school at 21 years of age by reading lips during the day and books by kerosene lamps at night.

I know my dad lived most of his adult life in pain; I could see it in his face. His departure from this world was as difficult as his arrival. He suffered a severe heart attack and battled heart disease, which rendered him mostly bed-ridden for the remaining decade of his life. But, against all odds, he lived 82 years on the planet. He lived a life of difficulty and made his way through sheer hard work

and determination. He was like a reflection of my grandmother, a woman who never stopped moving and insisted there was always work that needed to be done.

My dad was of a different time, a generation that possessed a different perspective on social issues. I am sure he would find it difficult relating to woke students of this generation screaming about injustice while sitting in Ivy College classrooms, given his recollection of the barefoot and physically demanding two-mile treks during which he willed his twisted body forward to a one-room schoolhouse. My dad is not my hero because I feel sorry for him, nor do I wish him any sympathy. He is my hero because he never complained. There was no lack of pride in America, no grievances, and no special requests. He never contended that he was entitled to anything other than the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

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Dr. King's answer to our lead question is memorable, especially since it conjures up thoughts of judging character in the face of challenging situations. Life is a collection of moments that can easily be overshadowed by a singular action or viewpoint that may be out of step with modern cancel culture. Given the binary choice of either the man who had a positive impact on the social and economic well-being of the Alexander family or an alternate version who was supportive of my dating Mr. Alexander's daughter, I prefer the version I got and am confident Mr. Alexander did as well. Moreover, in the end, I do not care about how other people measured my dad while he was alive or would measure him today. To me, he always stood 10 feet tall and always will.