

NO ROOM FOR MR. GOLDBERG

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At a time when the whole world suffers from concern induced by the rival ideologies of East and West, each section of the earth has its own burdens of animosity. Moslems distrust non-Moslems, Jews who escaped extermination in Central Europe find themselves in the new State of Israel surrounded by anti-Semitism, and many of the colored peoples of the world suffer indignities at the hands of whites who invent an elaborate doctrine to justify their condescension. The checker-board of prejudice in the United States is perhaps the most intricate of all, and is unfortunately not to be solved in one day, by one person, or with one organization. Many experiences, motives, and causes, are entwined to create prejudice and discrimination in human beings. One Negro leader attempting to analyze these has said, "The main difficulty of the race question does not lie so much in the actual condition of the minority group as it does in the mental attitude of the discriminating group," and often this attitude exists because of stereotyping. Stereotypes are not identical with prejudice, but are often a cause of prejudice because they are used as rationalizations for irrational thinking.

A textbook definition of stereotyping is, "...an exaggerated belief associated with a category." By stereotyping, I mean that when we hear a given word such as "Negro," we think not just of a racial category, but our mind is laden with pictures and judgments of the Negro as lazy, stupid, or immoral.

Strictly speaking pure open-mindedness cannot exist, because a new experience must be redacted into old categories. Thus the human mind has no choice but to think with the aid of categories.

However, overcategorization or stereotyping is perhaps the commonest trick of the human mind. Think about any group of people, teen-agers, truck drivers' chorus-girls, Jews, and a standardized picture forms in your mind.

This invalid association is what I am presenting to you, the unjustified stereotype, what it does to you as an individual, and what can be done about it.

One summer two Toronto newspapers carried between them holiday advertisements from approximately 100 different resorts. A Canadian social scientist undertook an interesting experiment. To each of these hotels and resorts he wrote three letters, mailing them at the same time, and asking for room reservations for exactly the same dates. One letter he signed with the name Mr. Goldberg, the second with the name Mr. Corsentino, and the other Mr. Lockwood. In reply to:

Mr. Goldberg:	52% answered	36% offered accommodations
Mr. Corsentino:	58% answered	32% offered accommodations
Mr. Lockwood:	95% answered	93% offered accommodations

None of the hotel managers knew Mr. Goldberg, Mr. Corsentino, or Mr. Lockwood. Their decisions were obviously made not on the merits of the individual, but on Mr. Goldberg's and Mr. Corsentino's names, labeling them as members of a given group.

Many times the ill thinker has no first-hand experience on which to base his judgment. In answering Mr. Goldberg's or Mr. Corsentino's application for a room, the action was framed to accord with the categorical generalizations of the group as a whole. We pay little or no attention to individual differences and overlook the important fact that Mr. Goldberg, who may be a fine gentleman, is not the "Jew" whom we may have some good reason to dislike. Or Mr. Corsentino is not the "Italian" whom we do not care for.

Too frequently individuals are afraid to examine their standards. The most important categories a person has are his own set of values, but seldom does he weigh them; rather he feels, affirms, and tries to defend them.

I had a high school friend who was Jewish and because of this became tagged "Christ killer." She was so persecuted that her family finally moved to another section of the city. Some time later I was expressing my sympathy for her to another friend who remarked, "Well, as a Christian I know that it was the Jews who killed Christ, so I am glad that she's gone."

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In her selective and unexamined thinking she overlooked such relevant facts as that it was Pilate who permitted the Crucifixion, that the soldiers who executed it were Romans, that the mob was only in part composed of Jews, and that Christianity in its early days was preserved entirely by men who were Jews.

How easily we grasp some half-truth and allow it to so completely warp our judgment. We become so wrapped up, and depend so much on these mental pictures we have of others that we even resort to contradictory stereotypes. We realize that a dislike requires justification so any justification that fits the immediate situation suffices. To better explain this let us leave the field of prejudice for a moment, and consider a couple of everyday proverbs. Compare the following:

It is never too late to mend
No use crying over spilled milk

If one state of affairs exists we can call on one proverb to "explain" it. If the opposite state prevails, we can call on the converse proverb. And so it is with stereotypes. If one accusation at a given time seems to explain or justify our dislike, we call upon it; if a contradictory accusation at another time seems more apropos we invoke it. The need for consistency and uniform logic seems not to trouble us.

Let us consider how this psychological process affects us as individuals. As S. I. Hayakawa has written, "The danger of stereotypes is that they become for all people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, substitutes for observation."

Hence, quite aside from the injustice which stereotypes do to others, they impoverish their users.

The beatnik who stereotypes the rest of the world as being crazy and withdraws to live in what he believes is a novel, unique way is just stereotyping himself, because no one fits this strait jacket so perfectly as someone whose opinion about others are fixed and inflexible. He loses his capacity to be himself, to see the world in his own unique and independent fashion.

When a person votes for the man who fits his standardized picture of what a candidate "should" look like or "should" sound like, or plays the role someone in his "situation" in life "should" play, he is ever so meekly leading the life that others define for him. By dwelling in a well-defined little world he may avoid some hurts and disappointments, but he also misses the heights and joys of knowing "different" human beings; the greatness and complexity of the human character and personality.

But can people suddenly drop standardized pictures by a blinding vision of Truth? Unfortunately, no, sharp swings of ideas about people often just substitute one stereotype for another. The true process of change is a slow one which adds bits and pieces of reality to the pictures in our heads until gradually they take on some of the blurredness of life itself.

But how do we do this?

First, we can become aware of the standardized pictures in our heads, in other peoples' heads, in the world around us.

Second, we can learn to be chary of generalizations about people, especially when they use the inclusive word "all". As F. Scott Fitzgerald once wrote: "Begin with an individual, and before you know it you have created a type; begin with a type, and you find you have created--nothing."

And finally, when we find evidence contrary to our opinion, let us examine our belief in light of the new evidence. There is no more chastening thought than that in the vast intellectual adventure of science, it takes but one tiny exception to topple a whole edifice of ideas. Perhaps our ideas have been wrong.