Racism deserves to get the red card

By Rich Mkhondo

Sport is supposed to be the epitome of the level playing field, where people are judged by their performance on the field or court, not by the colour of their skin. My favourite sport, football, has the capacity to bring people together. I am paired by the fact that when it comes to the poisonous hate of racism, the game has also been there, done that.

It is hard to think of a single month in a single year in the past generation in which there has been no racism in sport. As we bade farewell to 2011, England and Chelsea captain John Terry was alleged to have racially abused Queens Park Rangers defender Ferdinand. Terry was said to have used the words “* *** ****” with Ferdinand—The Terry incident came soon after the spat between Liverpool forward Luis Suarez and Manchester United defender Patrice Evra....While we have advanced from the days when banana skins were tossed at black players, the fact that a footballer could insult a fellow professional in terms of his skin colour is an affront to these enlightened times....

No matter how far we have come in the fight for equal rights, racism is still a major issue every day, everywhere, as well. All of us are guilty of it, one way or the other. We all judge people based on appearance without even realizing it. Of course, we would like to think that we have moved beyond issues of race, ethnicity and skin colour—that is still a major issue every day, everywhere, as well. All of us are guilty of it, one way or the other. We all judge people based on appearance without even realizing it.

Why do we act in these horrific ways, and what do these terrible events have to do with the everyday racism that does not make the headlines?

Ell Siegel, an American educator who founded the philosophy of Aesthetic Realism, has an answer. He explains that racism begins with the hope for contempt—the “false importance or glory” a person gets by making less of the quality of other people.

In his book James and the Children, a consideration of The Turn of the Screw by Henry James, Siegel writes: “According to Aesthetic Realism, the greatest sin that a person can have is the desire for contempt. Because as soon as you have contempt, as soon as you don’t love, you may think to see another person as having the fullness that you lose, you can rob that person, hurt that person, kill that person.” Contempt, Aesthetic Realism explains, is the cause of every injustice—from ethnic ridicule and slurs to the deadly forms of racism, bombs and war.

One of the clearest places where contempt can be seen is on the pitch where a footballer or a tennis player may treat his fellow professional as a racist, but all of us can yield to the temptation of wanting to feel superior to other people, especially when we feel unsure of ourselves.

Racism deserves to get the red card. People are now insisting more than ever that they be seen with the fullness and justice they deserve.
Racism can end

Dear Editor:

As two persons—one black, one white—who have been friends for over 25 years, we like so many others are very angry at the killing of young Trayvon Martin.

We feel it is a national emergency that people use this tragedy to once and for all understand what racism comes from and how it can end. And yes racism can end!

The answer is in the important philosophy and education Aesthetic Realism, founded by Eli Siegel. It explains that there are two desires in every person, regardless of the color of their skin. The first is our deepest desire: to like the world honestly and see meaning and value in things and people. The second is the desire for contempt, “the addition to self through the lessening of something else.”

Contempt is so ordinary, from making fun of a person who makes a mistake or thinking you’re better than another—because of the section of town you live in. Contempt is also what makes for the great injustices of this world from war to racism—it’s what made for slavery and Nazism.

In the international journal The Right of Aesthetic Realism to Be Known, of June 25, 1997, titled “Racism Can End,” Chairman of Education Ellen Reiss wrote: “The big thing people have not known about racial prejudice is that it does not begin with race. It begins with how one sees the world.”

Unfortunately, these horrors will continue unless the larger and stronger desire for respect is gone after, and the desire for contempt is criticized in all of us. We want the tragic and unjust killing of Trayvon Martin to be a means of something people have not known about racial prejudice is that it does not begin with race. It begins with how one sees the world.

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