

Coconut Man

 By [Siphosethu Stuurman](#)

13 Apr 2011

South Africa is a country that is obsessed with race and I suppose if one considers our past then, in some way, this fixation is understandable. But the manner that race matters have been, and continue to be, played out in this country's politics is rather concerning and does not do our "rainbow nation" any justice. However, what got me really thinking about race is a series of unrelated events, starting with the fact that my work colleagues jokingly call me a "coconut".



A black and white world

I obtained the "coconut" trademark at the office because of the radio stations I regularly listen to. Apparently, the likes of 5fm and 94.7 Highveld stereo are "white" stations and a person of colour has no business listening to them. Now before you start thinking that I probably work with dumb people (far from it actually, they are intelligent award-winning journalists), however, they form part of the older generation and have experienced a large fraction of the apartheid years. So the world is pretty much black and white in their eyes, though they would never admit it.

Race seemingly defines who we are

What I find interesting, though, is that even amongst the "born-free generation", i.e. people who were born, or at least grew up, in a democratic South Africa, race still separates us in a big way. From music to sports and hangout places, race seemingly defines who we are and our tastes in things. I also observed with interest a white boy, probably of my age (21 years), who took the same taxi as me from Midrand to Joburg last Sunday. He was visibly nervous and edgy, as if he was on enemy soil, and I may be wrong, but I assumed that he was freaked out because of the fact that he was the only light skinned person in the taxi.

If that was indeed the case, then it is rather disappointing that a person would feel threatened by being in the presence of people of colour. However, the taxi driver's rudeness did not make life any easier for the noticeably nervous white boy. Johannesburg taxi drivers do not entertain any person who addresses them in English regardless of skin colour.

"Rock music and black people are like oil and water"

I also happen to be a rock music fan and I'm interested in seeing the Irish rock pop band The Script when they visit South Africa in June. I am hoping that they will give me some consolation after missing their fellow Irish rock band U2, when they rocked SA in February this year. However, I have an issue because none of my black friends are willing to go with me to see The Script. Even if I had enough money to buy them VIP tickets, they would still not be interested. In their minds, rock music and black people are like oil and water! If a concert line-up does not have any of the local house music DJs, then I must forget about my friends coming to that gig.

The young must lead

Now, I would like to think that I am not a "coconut"; I am very aware of my race and I strongly support some of my traditional and cultural obligations as a young Xhosa man. I also refuse to let my race determine which activities I should engage in. I will continue to watch Test cricket instead of a Soweto derby match between Kaizer Chiefs and Pirates, and I will certainly not switch over to Metro fm instead of 5fm. While we are nowhere close to being the "rainbow nation", we are certainly not doing ourselves any favours by putting so much energy into our difference. While the elderly may still have pent-up anger over what happened in the past, the young need to take responsibility and pave the way for a truly multiracial South African society.

ABOUT SIPHOSETHU STUURMAN

Siphosethu Stuurman studied towards a Bachelor of Journalism (Honours-level degree) at Rhodes University, specialising in Radio & TV broadcasting and also majored in Industrial Sociology.

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