

*Race and Racial Conflict*  
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*I. Introduction*

On May 27, 2009 I did a story circle with seven individuals including myself, who were nice enough to tell their experiences with racial conflict.<sup>1</sup> In doing the story circles I have discovered that racism and racial discrimination are among the most upsetting adversities in our society. Although racism is not as extreme as before (for instance, from Jim Crow racism to modern forms of racism)<sup>2</sup>, it still occurs, and seems like it will occur for many generations to come.

Racism can destroy communities and a person's self image; it can divide people, it is related to white privilege and unawareness, and can lead to hopelessness. In this paper you will read these individuals' stories (including my own) on how race and racial conflict has affected us and some of the factors that can lead to racism.

I will also list some fixes we can try to remove racism. Yet, this is a hard task knowing that racism has been around for such a long time. If we try to be open-minded we can begin to start making sense racism.

*II. Doing Justice to the 2009 Storytellers and Their Stories*

Race and Crime

The black community continues to fall behind the white community in every practical outcome; such as educational level of attainment, occupations, and level of income. This inequality between the black and white race points to the power of racial differences in this world. It also strengthens the idea that racism is simply a matter of ignorance. Race can destroy a person's self image, character, self-esteem, and integrity. Modern day racism can have a strong impact on a person's character, especially men.. This can include police racial profiling. This is when a police officer pulls over a minority for no particular reason, but only because they "fit the profile" of what a criminal should look like; usually what that means is the person is black.

Martin Lawrence has even made a satirical film focusing on police racial profiling called "*Run Tell Dat.*" In the film he does a stand-up comedy show where he says if you are stopped by the police then they will give you a DWB, in his definition this means driving while black. Even though individuals are not engaging in any criminal activity whatsoever to be pulled over, that individual is still being targeted, and being singled out on the basis of race. A young man, who participated in the story circles, was generous enough to provide me his experience of racial profiling which targets predominately black neighborhoods for drugs and blatantly ignores the scourge of drugs in the upper middle class areas where affluent whites reside. A system that imposes prison sentences onto black offenders and rehabilitation for white offenders are all factors which concern and at times rightfully inflames black Americans.

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<sup>1</sup> Story Circles is a group of at least three people gathered around in a circle to tell a story about a particular topic or issue. During the story circles mentioned in my paper the eight of us individuals gathered around to tell our story on how race and racial conflict has affected us. In these story circles analyzed some of us told more than one story and some of us told only one story.

<sup>2</sup> Modern day forms of racism can include police racial profiling of black men or even hiding racism in fact a person may be racist. Also the "black friend phenomena" and this may be if a person says they are not racist because they have a black friend, when in fact if a person can count how many black friends they have on their hands then they are in fact racist.

*“...When it’s like certain part times of the year you know what I’m sayin? When like a whole bunch of like cops around, a whole bunch of stuff go on but when they bring out like other police like state troopers and everything, like they just bring them to like mostly the black neighborhoods. You know what I’m sayin like the white people don’t be doin nothin. You know what I’m sayin cus like my mom she stay like waaaaaaay out the way, but I don’t never see no police like when it’s like a whole bunch a state troopers out I go to where she stay at. I go to her house you know what I’m sayin, cus you know what I’m sayin I just know just sit around you know what I’m sayin, just chill cus I know dey gon be out like all night and whoever you is you know what I’m sayin, basically they gon pull you over no matter what’s going on like. But like it’s just like I think it’s like a whole big old racist thing like they tryin find black people with dis and dat, dis and dat, dis and dat, but you know what I’m sayin they got all da white kids at the house they makin bombs everything else you know I’m sayin. They riding around with what they want to ride around with they never get pulled over you know what im sayin? Unless they just riding around wantin to be a fool riding around all drunk and stuff surving. But like blacks can just be ridin on the street, not bothering nobody and they’ll have like 50 police and you know what I’m sayin they get pulled over and the police put all type of guns on them and everything you know what I’m sayin? And the police cars following them jump on them and everything...”*

In this story you can see the relationship between race and crime. Crime is not seen here as a heinous act but instead it is seen as a black tendency. Having dark skin is treated as if it is a crime. This is seen in the article “Racial Typification of Crime and Support for Punitive Measures,” where the authors Chiricos and Welch assess whether support for harsh punitive policies toward crime is related to the racial classification. The authors of this article argue that regardless of the racial composition of a neighborhood an explicit link between race and crime may be the basis of support for more punitive measures (360). They find that particularly for white Americans “racial typification is a significant predictor of punitive attitudes toward crime (378),” meaning that the more likely a white American is to support harsh punitive approaches to crime the more likely it is that this same person tends to see crime as a black problem and criminals as having black faces.

In addition, Jerome Miller offered a hypothesis for the rise in incarceration rates by saying, “there are certain code words that allow you never to have to say race but everybody knows that’s what you mean and crime is one of those... so when we talk about locking up more and more people, what we’re really talking about is locking up more and more black men.”<sup>3</sup> Miller suggests that crime is “typified” in our culture as a black phenomenon and that our fondness of incarcerate at higher rates than ever before is tied to this.

## Race and the Communities

Once we have made a relationship to how a person’s self image can be destroyed then we can highlight the relationship between racism and the destruction of communities. Racism promotes barriers within communities and across communities. The most obvious of these barriers are minorities that cannot afford to live in a more suburban area so instead they are left to live in a more urban area. Racial minorities are placed at a disadvantage in unequal numbers in these urban areas. In some situations there may be a minority in a suburban area that is viewed as unequal, and this will make that minority feel inferior. In this sense, race inhibits some communities in Akron, Ohio from collaborating or becoming equal. An example of this racial barrier is evident in the story by the woman who resides in Fairlawn when she says:

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<sup>3</sup> “Racial Typification of Crime and Support for Punitive Measures”, 359

*“...I live in Fairlawn and I live in Fairlawn because I can’t afford to send my children to a private school and they need to be properly educated you talk about the funding. They are in Copley school district and there is a huge difference, and my children’s father are like if they want to learn something they can learn it, and I’m like they cannot learn something if it is not being taught. The curriculum basis is so different I have a girlfriend who actually grew up in Akron and they moved out to Copley when she was in 7th grade. She was a straight A student at Perkins and when she got to Copley she was making straight F’s because it was just that far off the spectrum. So I think the racial barrier for me basically what I wanted to say is just my differences in growing and having that almost like an identity crisis. I knew I was black, I was a black child, I had black parents. I was always black but I wasn’t accepted by my peers because of where I lived and how I talked, and you know, and how I dressed, and where I went to school. Education was important to my mother and we did live in a town house so that I could go to school and get an education and become better educated. So once again that was really difficult.”*

This mother’s story was not only about racial barriers in school choices, but it also highlights barriers related to school funding, scholarship availability and residential opportunities more generally.

*“I was also talking about my children and the funding I live here in Akron now and we live out in the Copley school district because I know that the fundings there, the funding for the public schools are there cus I can’t afford to send my children to private schools. So I have to live in an area where I can’t afford to buy a home which I can’t afford in other areas. But since I can’t you know I’m forced to stay in rental property cus I want my children to receive the same advantages and the same scholarships as anybody else and things of that nature. She goes on to say, “Umm as an adult raising two male children I think I see a whole different side of racism not only as a mother in my defensive but also as a black I’m defending my black sons constantly. Now we do live a neighborhood that is not predominantly white that is the majority white. So we are still minorities in that area and there are several black children in that area as well.”*

Here the young woman links educational and residential barriers to police behavior.

*“But I do notice that nobody wants to come to my house because they don’t want to bit Miller Road, because of the police it’s like they know you are automatically in that neighborhood my children don’t get taunted with as much but they’ve had cousins come visit and they have literally been walking down the street or going to the park. The cousins have gotten stooped and harassed by the police officers in Fairlawn they would say “you know you don’t live in this area” you know they’ve actually had to come get me and I had explain to them these are my nephews what’s the problem what where they dong were they loitering you know what exactly was the problem and I think my horizon has really been broadened once again being a mother of two black males because they’re so many instances that didn’t pertain to me as a black woman because I guess they weren’t so intimidated by me so it was easier for me to get into place maybe that my son’s were not able to get into. And I didn’t realize that that was such an issues and I’ve actually have gotten jobs...I’ve actually been told by you know my white employers that I’ve gotten a job at how articulate I was so basically it was like wow here’s this black girl right here and she’s actually educated you know and so I’ve had many instances with it especially growing up and not being excepted by one race and then becoming a black adult and not realizing that you know that nobody really cared either way the I was gonna have to find my own way and find out who I was.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Story Circle # 4, Storyteller # 6 (Akron Urban League, 2009)

In this story there is racial inequality in this Fairlawn community. For instance, here the storyteller sees her children as deprived of the everyday liberty of walking down the street, a barrier that non-minority citizens might not face because their skin color happens to be a lighter color. Instead minorities are faced with racial challenges. This is also seen in the article “The Mark of a Criminal Record,” by Devah Pager. In this article Pager points out the relationship between being black and having a criminal record. She also points out the effects of race and the racial differences that still exist today. She states firmly when she says the chances of a black applicant getting a callback for a job is 40% less than a white applicant getting a callback for a job. In this article all one can see here is race. The reason that a black person is not getting the call back is because his skin color happens to be dark. Statistics are higher if the black person has a record with the law. In this case black applicants need not even apply.

It is saddening how you can take the same two individuals one being white and one being black with the same level of attainment and the white applicant will be the one to get the call back.

#### Division among Individuals due to Race

Once we have made a solid relationship between race and crime, race and the community then we can start to make a connection between the division among individuals due to race and racial discrimination. Racism can be expressed through words, emotions, feelings, or thoughts. Racism can be viewed as a social control theory, a learned theory, or as a social disorganization theory. Social control can be seen in this story:

*“....I went to [a local high school] for a year I played basketball ... and several mornings when we would get there... there would be spray paint on the bathroom wall which was a red brick wall niggers go home. And this was 1983 and so we had heard about incidences that had happened cus in Akron they had just began busing I think in 1981 or 82; busing the students from the west side out to [a local city]. And so that introduction to those comminutes was not a welcome ... and this was mainly from the residents in the neighborhood ... So but that niggers go home on the bathroom wall is an experience that I remember very vivid.”<sup>5</sup>*

This storyteller is talking about division among his fellow athletic peers due to his skin color. This is definitely a form of social control an related to the data seen in “Coercive Mobility and Crime: a Preliminary Examination of Concentrated Incarceration and Social Disorganization.” This article discusses the social cohesion, informal social control, neighborhood level crime. Rose and Clear argue that coercive mobility can damage local network structures and undermine informal control. Coercive mobility can disrupt social networks in a variety of ways. Rose and Clear point out, incarceration removes people from their familial and friendship relationships and relationships are strained when residents withdraw from community life to cope with financial problems. A person incarcerated over and over again leads to vicious cycle which undermines a person self image and to a loss of hope that spirals a downward cycle of drug and alcohol abuse. To the extent that disproportionate coercive mobility can damage local social networks which leads to a human destroyed and the family is destroyed.

#### White Privilege

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<sup>5</sup> Story Circle # 4, Story # 3 (Akron Urban League, 2009)

Once we have made a concrete relationship between race and crime, race and the community, and the division among individuals due to race and racial discrimination, then we have to make sense of the connection between race and unawareness. Many people do not believe that racism still exists. Should I say this again many people do not believe that racism still does exist.

Many whites hold a lot of prestige and access to things that blacks do not have access to. Because of this, some whites may not see racism as still existing because they have never been discriminated against and they will probably never be discriminated against to the extent that blacks have been discriminated against. Blacks have to deal with discrimination in the job-market and most importantly in the criminal justice system and in the educational system.

There are still hate crime groups in this world such as the KKK, skinheads, and white supremacist. We have just recently had in the news a 70 year old white supremacist male shot and killed a black guard. Not only did he kill the black guard but he left a note about his deep hatred for Jews, blacks, and even the president. If these groups still exist today then why are so many people still so unaware of racism? It seems that whites have the privilege of not even knowing that racism exists simply because they are white. Whites have a privilege of getting a better job, better education and many endeavors in life. White privilege includes the luxury of remaining unaware. In this next story white privilege is seen from this storyteller when she says...

*"I grew up a little south towards Massillon and I went to a private school which was ya' know predominantly white. There were a couple of different races there but all the teachers and everyone was white and then I went to high school and it was a richer area I would say, like a middle class/ low class but my family and I we were like on the low end which was kind of the minority but it still was majority white,...and I remember a handful of black people actually my brother his best friend is African-American umm.. but I guess I never looked at it as black and white I mean he acted just the same to me actually this class has really opened up my eyes just I guess you know like you were saying mis-education. I just wasn't taught any of the things that went on with people because of their races..."<sup>6</sup>*

The next story you will read is also about white privilege. This white privilege is impending from schools when he says:

*"The boys [in the news] that been umm getting threatening letters they called them the "n" word and everything; this happened in [an out of town state]. I don't know if ya'll ever hear about it on the news? Okay well me and my Granddad was in the hospital. And it was so low you couldn't hear it [referring to the television] so I turned it up so everyone could hear. But umm I guess there were three black students they were all brothers umm they were talking about the death threats they been getting...Umm and then they went back to the principal it's a mostly all white school. They went back to the principal and umm they seen the letters and at first they thought it was a joke. A joke about you know killing I guess niggers that's how they put in the letter."<sup>7</sup>*

From this next storyteller we can find that white privilege and racism does still exist. These three black students had an opportunity to attend a predominately white school where they felt they would be better educated, but instead they were confronted with racism again because of the color

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<sup>6</sup> Story Circle # 4, Story # 5 (Akron Urban League, 2009)

<sup>7</sup> Story Circle # 4, Story # 7 (Akron Urban League, 2009)

of their skin. These students were not as privileged as their white peers because they were not white. This storyteller also talks about the lack of funding for certain schools, and how black girls are being taught that “white is good and nothing else matters.”

*“... it’s funny because you know like a lot of people like to pretend that racism don’t exists because Barack’s president...and it very well do. And that’s just shown that just nobody was listening, you know, me and my Granddad probably was the only ones that were listening to the TV, you know. It was pretty important stuff and umm... you know when he said it was a joke I just looked down and just started shaking my head thinking (laugh) wow. But you know it’s just not there and it varies in Akron public schools also*

*(Story # 5: umm hmmm.*

*With these schools like [local catholic schools] and umm you know that they don’t like to get into bout how money they receive. They receive so much money that Akron public schools so well deserve cus you know I’m tired of seeing Garfield, it’s like it’s been destroyed or something, I guess they’re rebuilding it later but I don’t think it’s gonna be much big improvement you know. Compared to all those schools like Saint V, Hoban, Tallmadge,*

*(Story # 5: umm hmm)*

*All those suburban schools and I’m just sayin racism it does exists people don’t want to look at it but it do exists (Laugh). He also goes on to say: ... I guess the things you see on TV or you know that umm white is good and nothing else matters (Laugh) and you know the proves it with you know I guess a while back ago with Oprah, or no it was Tyra Banks and she had this doll test she had little black children saying umm which doll do you think was prettier and they had a white doll and a black doll and all of them you know favored the white doll because that’s what they grow up learning don’t matter if it’s in school or at home or even if they’re even outside you know it’s just its messed up.”<sup>8</sup>*

*Story #1: What color were the children?*

*Story # 7: They were Black....Umm black as in the color but true to the definition*

In these stories you can begin to see the privilege that whites have over other racial minority groups. Many whites today have been educated into thinking that racism is not an important factor. This is the view of how some whites think today! In “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack,” McIntosh is writing from a white female standpoint and admits that she was herself in fact mis-educated about racism. She says, “As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.” McIntosh is contending that white people have privilege over other minorities and they are not aware of it. This privilege is seen in the job-market, in school, and in any social network one can think of. Many whites are not concerned about racism because it does not have an effect on them and McIntosh makes that point clear when she say, “Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the US think that racism doesn’t affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see “whiteness” as a racial identity.”

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<sup>8</sup> Story Circle # 4, Story # 7 (Akron Urban League, 2009)

## Hopelessness

Once we have made a tangible relationship between race and crime, race and the community, and the division among individuals due to race and racial discrimination, and white privilege and unawareness then we can make a connection between blacks and hopelessness. Hopelessness in the black community can stem from many different reasons; from always getting pulled over by the cops, to knowing that no matter how hard one may strive the societal racial difference for that minority is still 40% less than that of whites attainment. This hopelessness can be seen in several stories as well.

This is my own personal story that you will begin to learn about...

*"...my father used to own a business. ... I grew up as this I guess upper class rich girl; I guess you would say he used to make a lot of money. ... So my father ended up losing the business. So we became very poor and I began to see a different side of the world ... so race has affected me in a negative way because whites would look down at me in a negative way, then when I was poor. My family and I could not get as much benefits as we used to get when we were rich... When my father owned the business they would try their best to try and get him out of there. The health department would always come up to the business and they would find anything to write him up for. And sometimes when the customers would come up there as soon as they found out that a black person owned the business some of them would try and call corporate on us and try to find any little thing to complain about. So in the end they finally got my dad out of there."*

In my story race impacted me in a very negative way. You read here about the inequality in black ownership. My father owned a business and upon losing that business my family and I had to move into an urban neighborhood. It was not until I moved to the urban neighborhood that I was looked down on, so I then began to feel a sense of hopelessness for the black community. Also, so many people would try to call corporate on us to get us kicked out of the business (not to mention the health department and their constant pop ups). This story gives an example of how a black family can have hope one minute and then lose it so very quickly. Next we will learn about another story and his feelings of hopelessness that the black community may have toward the police...

*"...you know it was a Saturday noon about 4 o' clock and umm usually one of the standards in our neighborhood is we play cards and drink and do that kind of stuff so that is what was going on in the apartment at this particular day. And when the police got there...one of the gentlemen that was there said you 'all don't have to let them in unless they have a warrant. And the police got angry with him then they stormed the door and, mind you they already had the fugitive in hand cuffs. He was taken away. They stormed into the apartment and began macing everyone in there including the children. And there was a young ten year old um boy who um was caught in the cross fire of the mace and the wells of his eyes were full of mace and umm he could have very well of lost his sight and they proceeded to beat the young men who made the statement to not let the police in and then handcuffed him, put him in the wagon. ... And again those young boys, the young children that were at the residents were also were affected, they were maced and all the policeman had to say was we are sorry that we maced your son."*

In this story you read about the hopelessness that this man felt towards black America. The storyteller here also talks about the sort of "empathy" that the police had towards the mother of the son that was pepper-sprayed. Next, you can read in his story, how the community was afraid of

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<sup>9</sup> Story Circle # 4, Story # 3 (Akron Urban League, 2009)

testifying to the incident that they witnessed. You will also read about the hopelessness that story 3 has for young black men....

*"... Again it is 4 o'clock in the afternoon on the Saturday and people witnessed all of this but the police understood that no one would testify against them because people in that neighborhood are too afraid. And when the young sister who did tell us her story who owned the apartment, her name was [Personal information]. She began to get harassed by the [local police department]... but certainly there is an element there that is reckless and dangerous and they do not have any regard for the human being, in particular the black human beings. And they will kill and we've seen proof of that."<sup>10</sup>*

This storyteller is speaking of hopelessness in the black community not only towards young black men, but also towards young black females. He even refers to this hopelessness as danger that young black men and young black girls are in. This is a definite story of hopelessness in the black community.

Next we will learn about storyteller 1 and his feelings of hopelessness towards the criminal justice system...

*"It's dangerous but we have to learn white people. When you seat on the jury the police is lying ... and we just won a case where the police lied and the jury didn't accept it. They always lie in court*

*(Story # 6 umm hmm)*

*Not just sometime always. .... This is what I wanted to say this is what I want this group to know about I can tell you stories to curl your hair but they won't solve the problem we need to solve. I got beautiful stories of whichever side you want to tell all night, interesting stories but it won't solve the solution of bringing America together."<sup>11</sup>*

The storyteller makes a point about the inequality among blacks in the court room. This story is related to the article "Narratives of the Death Sentence." The article expresses how the consciousness of average American jurors gets racialized. Fluery Steiner provides a powerful narrative analysis of juror reasoning over death penalty cases that investigates the various ways race is mobilized as a hegemonic narrative. Hegemonic Tales is referred to as racial discussion presented as common sense, and serving as way of social control.

The storyteller continues to tell his story of how racism reflected him. In this next story the storyteller is explaining how Willy Lynch said that racism would last for only three hundred years. The storyteller goes on to say that racism will last longer than three hundred years. In this sense, the storyteller felt that racism would last longer than three hundred years because the light skin was turned against the dark skin and the tall was turned against the short and the female against the male, also the ignorant against the educated.

*"Do you realize that there was a guy by the name of Willy Lynch? .... And he said the ideas that he would have would work for a thousand years he said three hundred year. It will work longer than that. He said*

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<sup>10</sup> Story Circle # 4, Story # 3 (Akron Urban League, 2009)

<sup>11</sup> Story Circle # 4, Storyteller # 1 (Akron Urban League, 2009)

*turn the tall against the short, the dark skin against the light skin, the females against the male the ignorant against the educated.”<sup>12</sup>*

Story 1 is continuing his conversation about hopelessness when he refers to hopelessness as a “situation that we can’t escape....”

*“..... Well what we’re discussing is the time that we have to develop an idea that can save the condition of or starting the condition that we find ourselves in we’re we locked into a situation in seeing that we can’t escape. That situation is racism that interrupts our total being. One of the things we are discussing is how this is not an accident or is an incident. It started the day we go to school or go to church and this something else we have to discuss tonight as we go around....”*

He also mentions how anyone can spot a black person coming from twenty miles away when he mentions...

*“If she had her a Cadillac and a million dollar gown who would know she was poor?”*

*(Talking to Story # 7)*

*You can’t hide your blackness though wherever you go I can see you coming twenty miles away as a black guy; so in order to hear words we have to learn to deal with this situation. This is what this whole group needs to talk about. Now our life stories are very good, very good I love them. You ain’t got time for all of this to come together we right now being killed like this young man’s family.”*

*(Touching Story # 2).*

*We being shot down like dogs in the street!”*

This storyteller is making a comment on how the black community cannot hide their blackness. In this sense, the storyteller is signifying that black people are going to be discriminated against because of the color of their skin and it is no way that they can hide it. Not only is the storyteller explaining how it is hard to hide a “person’s blackness”, he also talks about the lack of correspondence that blacks face from “being shot down like dogs in the street.”

In this logic, the storyteller is underlining the way that people treat the black community. He highlights that the black community is not being treated like human beings instead they are being treated like dogs on the street. The storyteller says this when he says we being shot down like dogs in the street.” You can understand the hopelessness in this story for the black community.

### *III. Final Reflections on Stories, Data, and Understanding Racial Conflict*

#### Data

In gathering all of my information about racism from the stories, I have learned that racism is still very much present in our society. As I have mentioned racism is not as extreme as it was before. Racism is a mental illness if someone is still racist today. Racism is a big issue in America; we are losing lives still due to racism. It still exists even though people try to hide it. Racism destroys, it

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<sup>12</sup> Story Circle # 4, Story # 1 (Akron Urban League, 2009)

exists, and it is now more hidden. People are now trying to hide their racism by trying to maintain that one black minority. Even if so, in this sense that person might say “oh I am not racist, I love my black friend Damon because he is not like all the others.”

Racism is seen in politics, education, and in the job-markets. The political system has used racial tactics by putting the black community in ghettos and I throwing blacks in the welfare system. If they do go to school and get a job then their education is used a safety net to only give a black so much to get ahead. Racism is found in fear, greed, and a lack of understanding, and compassion for people as a whole.

### Understanding Racial Conflict

Racism has been around since the beginning of the creation of men. Yet, racism is still an important issue in America. Racism is present to black Americans through education, the job-market, the real estate market, trying to receive loans and any other basic need; blacks are consistently treated far worse than the white community. From racial profiling, (which is the same as “I know you did it because you are black”) in the criminal justice system, to the inequality of black applicants filing out a job application. The concepts that I have mentioned in the beginning of my paper must be understood before anyone can realize the impact that racism in America has on the black community.

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Story Cricles. Story Cricle # 4