

The Evolution of Racism
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I. Introduction

While listening to the participants in my story circle, I noticed that each story, though all about racial conflict, was different in terms of the time period in which the story was presented. Upon further reflection of this, I discovered that each participant illustrated two different forms of racism in their stories. For this paper, the two different forms will be referred to as implicit and explicit racism.

These two different forms of racism relate to two extremely different time periods. The Jim Crow Laws which lasted until the Civil Rights Movement allowed for people to discriminate against blacks in an explicit, or open, manner. These laws, simply put, made racism socially acceptable because it was written into the laws of the time. It is because of these laws that racism before 1965 was explicit racism.

However, after the Civil Rights Movement “succeeded” and Jim Crow Laws were abolished, racism did not simply disappear. Though the laws regarding race seemingly changed over night, the battle with racism still continues to this day. This movement, however successful in ending government sanctioned discrimination, did not end racism, it merely changed it. Through the stories in my circle and class readings, I realized that racism today is implicit and is much more difficult to detect. Today it is more subtle, harder to see, like a virus; and it is this definition which I will use with regards to implicit racism.

II. Doing Justice to the 2009 Story Circles

We did story circles at the Akron Urban League on May 27, 2009. Our circle included me and another University of Akron student of a similar age, and six members of the community. The ages of those involved in our circle ranged from early twenties to late seventies. In our group, there were three females and five males. We recorded the stories and transcribed them in the ARM Lab at the university. On the basis of my evaluation of the stories in my circle this paper will focus on the evolution of racism and what it means to those affected by it and how it changed with both political and cultural contexts, which highlights the importance of looking at racism as a socially constructed concept and set of relationships.

Explicit Racism

Explicit racism was the most common form of racism before the Civil Rights Movement. At that time, racism was a government sanctioned, socially accepted view, and acts of discrimination against blacks were legal. For this paper, explicit racism will be referred to as acts of discrimination which are open and legal. Several of the stories in our circle focused on this main theme.

One gentleman whom I will refer to as Greg¹ was sitting to my left, and he recalled a very disturbing event in which he went to a restaurant with his family. As he explains it,

¹ On the night of the story circles, I was a part of group #2. In order to personalize each story, as was done for me, I am going to refer to each participant by a pseudonym, or false name, to protect their anonymity.

“Okay I guess I was born in 1960 so think I was a couple years old maybe, the first thing that I really noticed was think we was in Alabama and this restaurant wouldn’t serve blacks and we were hungry so my Aunt and my light skin sister they went around to order our food so they come back with our food. From there I guess were eating so I’m eating then all a sudden I feel something in my mouth and these people had put maggots in my food, and you know that was Alabama you know in sixties, and it right now today I don’t eat nothing on my if I get a hamburger it’s plain everything is plain, I got to look at my food before I eat it.”

In this story we can see what people are willing to do to other people, simply because their skin is darker, when they know that the police, courts, and prevailing social customs will back them up. In this story, there is no discussion of whether or not he would sue the restaurant or even wait out behind the restaurant to give the chef a piece of his mind, because that would have been unthinkable in the context of the time period, in a place where racism was explicit and legally supported; there would have been no one there to help him if he had chosen to challenge his attackers. We also see that the scars left behind remain deep and painful, impacting his ability to enjoy a rich and varied diet today. For food lovers this might be the most unbearably painful consequence of this story, but for the rest of us, it is an example of how actions can affect someone for their entire life.

When Greg was telling his story, I was looking around the circle at all of the shocked faces. It seemed to me that even though these open acts of racism are unbelievable and horrifying, it really takes someone brave enough to endure something like that and to be strong enough to share it with others. Seeing life through this man’s eyes truly helped me to understand what it was like to have something like that done to you, and to be forced to walk away from it. This is a type of courage I find admirable and difficult to imagine in my own life.

Similar to Greg’s story was a woman, Diane, who told a story about when she was younger and her family was able to move into a white neighborhood. Diane and her family were able to move into these new homes because the builder experienced a lot of pressure from the neighbors who did not want the homes to be built. So, the builder decided, in her words, *“I’ll put a bunch of black families in there and really tick the neighborhood off cause it was all, you know a white neighborhood.”*

Once Diane and her family had moved into the home, they experienced several instances in which the neighbors would threaten them. She then went on to describe the next few years:

“We encounter different things, you know, things happening, little things left on our porch. You know, just things that were happening there to kind of, little notes like “Niggas go”, “go back” you know “get out of our neighborhood.” Because at that point in time, I don’t think my kids really realized what it was to be in that kind of environment. We did because our family, our parents family were from the south and had been there, and saw the different things that where you could only go to this barber shop if you were black, or if you went into the ice-cream parlor, you had to stand. You couldn’t sit. And this kind of thing. They had never experienced that. But, out of the houses, there were four of these homes built there. And he put in all black families. They burnt out”

three of the families. We remained in that neighborhood, in that, in that ah home until we were, when we decided we were moving.”

Just as Diane described it, the racism that her family had experienced was explicit racism. The people who treated her and her family in this manner did not care that they were treating these people unfairly because it was socially acceptable to act this way towards blacks. While it was no doubt illegal to burn three families out of their homes, even without the explicit support of the law, the racism here can only survive in a context where the white families expect there to be no legal response, no police action, no government inquiry, and ultimately no need to burn out the fourth and final family to enforce this very explicit and culturally enforced racial segregation.

One of the most memorable gentlemen in our story circle, Charles, had experienced quite a lot in his lifetime. Had we been given more time with this project, I would have liked to ask him more about when he was growing up. But for now, I only have one story from him about life in Akron during World War II. Charles was a young man at this time, and he recalled seeing the KKK carry crosses across a field. In his own words,

“The Klan used to go up and burn crosses up on the, it’s a monument, above the ball field. I don’t know if its still there or not cause we used to get back up on the, uh, parkway back there and the older guys used to pile rocks, up there. And uh, during the day... But I was smaller, there was the older guys, they could throw better than I could. And we would wait for them, they’d come, and you could see the cross all the way down Euclid. They’d be burning that cross up there in the park.”

Once we had left the Akron Urban League, I purposefully drove home a different way so that I could drive through the area which Charles had described. I was unable to find the monument which he had referred to in his story, but I did find the field. I tried to imagine what he had seen in that area as a young child. The only thing I could think of is how the Klan members would have looked to a young boy, and how he probably did not understand what it meant to throw rocks at these men other than it was one way to resist or at least make one’s presence known.

The power that the KKK held in Akron is an unfortunate part of our city’s history. From about 1900 to 1930 the Summit County local chapter of the Klan was the largest chapter in the nation, including the county sheriff, Akron mayor, several judges and county commissioners and nearly the entire Akron School Board as members. This story, although seemingly showing only this dark side of Akron’s history, also shows something much more important. It shows that the youth, at the time, were willing to stand up for themselves and their community. Even though these young men could have been executed for these actions if caught, and even though they could only stand up for their community in the shadows and toss ineffective weapons at frighteningly powerful white men, they were still willing to protest the rally and fight. It is this courage and strength that would lead to the Civil Rights Movement when the context was ready to support it.

Another participant, a younger female, Sarah, told a story about a family member who had been living in Mississippi in the 1960’s. In her story, her family member was part of the integration of black voters, and was selected to help others register to vote. She said,

“He (referring to her family member) became like what you call a deputy registrar, and so African Americans would come to his store to register to vote and to get information that they needed to vote. Well, a lot of the white people around were pretty upset because they still didn’t believe that African Americans were capable of being able to choose our leaders or smart enough to choose our leaders.”

Sarah then went on to describe how some members of the community decided that they would do something about this “problem.”

The whites decided to burn down the man’s home. The problem with this, which Sarah then goes on to describe, *“He believed his daughter was still in the house because his daughter, his youngest daughter, was nowhere to be found. So he ran in the house and never came out.”* Once the fire had been extinguished, the authorities found her family member with third degree burns all over his body, because of the timeframe and medicine at that time; he did not survive.

Sarah also recalled that everyone in the neighborhood knew who had committed this crime, but *“they (referring to the authorities) knew who they were, you know it wasn’t a secret, who burned the house down. These people were not found guilty or arrested til like 1997 so it was like a whole thirty almost forty years before anybody was held responsible for these certain actions.”*

These obvious acts of racism show how the mentality of whites at that time were so prejudiced that even a man who had been wrongfully, and obviously, murdered because of his skin color and because he provided other blacks with a place to register to vote. Regretfully he would not receive justice. This story speaks of just how little the life of a black man was worth in those days. It was not until the legal views of whites were forced to change that these acts were considered a crime. And even then, it still took another thirty years for justice to be served against the people responsible.

When this story is related to Charles’ story, it shows the inner strength of individuals can invoke change. For instance, even though Sarah never specifically stated that her family member received threats, it is my understanding that before burning his house down, he would have had some kind of intuition or threat that violence may come to him if he continued to help others. But just as the young men in Charles’ story, her family member decided that he would not be pressured, and he continued to fight for what was right, courageous against the cowards hiding their faces under their hoods.

This inner strength is also shown by Diane’s story and how her family was one of the last black families to leave the neighborhood. But in her own words, they were not forced out of the area, they instead moved out when they felt it was time. They endured numerous direct and indirect threats, and still, their inner strength told them to keep fighting. Yet, it is difficult to imagine that watching three other homes owned by black neighbors burn to the ground did not significantly impact their calculation of when the right time had come. These emotionally charged stories each contain secondary threads about individual and family strength in the face of irrational hatred.

Implicit Racism

It is this strength that led blacks to begin to assemble and fight for their rights. This led to the Civil Rights Movement, the abolishment of Jim Crow Laws and the end of the

“separate but equal” doctrine. It also was a contributing factor to something else, the evolution of racism. Instead of discrimination and prejudice ending, it merely changed its form. Racism was once explicit and supported by a legal and cultural hegemony, and it was easy to identify. But soon after the 1960’s racism became more implicit and much harder to detect because of its hidden nature.

Implicit racism was a very evident theme in a second set of stories which we recorded. Unlike explicit racism, implicit racism took several different forms. For this paper, I will separate implicit racism into three separate categories. These are racism expressed by individuals, Eurocentric education, and racism and abuse of authority by police.

Individual Racism

One of the participants, a younger male whom I will refer to as Dennis, recalled his experiences in a private, predominantly white, high school. He said,

“And as a young man, I did not understand, I didn’t see everything. And I thought, I started to see more and more as I got older. And I never really felt completely embraced by my white counterparts. It felt as though, I wasn’t just a friend, I was their black friend. It was kinda like being black was like a commodity. You know, its cool, he’s black (long pause) and they couldn’t really see me just as a friend, as a person.”

When he said this, I got an image in my mind of someone who was so frustrated with society, his peers, and most of all the way in which he was treated because of his skin tone, but he could do nothing to change this. I also saw that he was very emotionally affected by his experiences, it was clear that he had been hurt.

Dennis felt that he needed to learn about his own culture, and it was this view that led him to go to a historically black college. In his words,

I started thinking about myself, I started thinking about how, how even us, we view our culture. We see it in a negative light. ... But then, I mean, it just started to hurt me more and more, the more and more I started to study about how we see ourselves due to society putting some impressions on us. And that’s what drove me to go to a historically black college. And there, I started to see, even though it’s a black college, its kinda like the white experience, in a sense that, you’re completely comfortable. You don’t have to impress anybody. Whenever I’m around a group of white people, I feel I have to represent my entire culture. I have to be on my p’s and q’s. I have to speak articulately, and not use curse words. I can’t really be myself it seems like.”

This story shows how the views of a society can affect the minds of its youth. Dennis grew up surrounded by whites and recognizing that ‘the white experience’ meant living a life that was ‘completely comfortable’ where one could just ‘be myself.’ But while he could see this, he was not accepted as ‘just himself’ in this white culture.

He seems to be noticing white privilege, or the view that white culture is the norm and all other cultures are to be compared against white culture, and that with dark skin he does not fit into it. He is saying that when he went to an all black college did he finally experience what he had previously thought was the white experience. He got that at the

black college, but thought of that comfort as the white experience, as white privilege, a privilege he could not get in white society.

Dennis was able to study as an individual and then attend a school in which he could finally learn about his own culture in a positive light. For the first time, Dennis was taught to appreciate who he was and where he came from. But unfortunately, not everyone is able to do this. It is a tragic story to tell, but until black culture is taught in a true and culturally unbiased manner, the youth of America will continue to view black culture in a negative light; this is the essence of a Eurocentric education which I will be discussing later.

When Dennis told his story about how other students viewed him, the participant which I referred to earlier as Sarah told a second story in which she had personally experienced a form of implicit racism similar to that of Dennis. In her story, she described how there was a girl she attended school with who she felt did not see her and other blacks in their school as people. In her own words,

“And most of them (referring to her classmates), like, seemed ok with being around black people. But there were like, you know, a few ignorant people who though like, I’ll act down or I’ll ‘act black’, whatever that means. And try to fit in with like black people. And I remember in tenth grade I had night school. And there was this girl... we were talking and she was always around me and all the other black people that were there, and she was just so, you know, interested in portraying that she was such a cool person and that she had all these black friends. Like not just friends, she had black friends, like, it was key to her to point out that she had black friends.”

To Sarah, the girl seemed like she had been trying too hard in order to seem like she fit in. She then went on to describe how the girl would use socially sanctioned words which are not supposed to be used because of their negative connotations.

However, when I heard these stories, the point that sticks out to me was when Sarah and Dennis were intent on expressing that they were referred to as “black friends.” It was this fact that caused me to realize that the girl, though trying to portray herself as “cool” or as a non-racist, actually proves this to be incorrect. The girl in the story does not see her friends who happen to be black as simply being her friends; she sees them as her “black friends.” The same is true of the story in which Dennis viewed himself as “the black friend.” It is this inherent distinction in the mind of the individual which allows racism, though slightly less detectable, to continue.

Dennis then went on to conclude his story with an important point that

“And another thing, I think nowadays we encounter a lot more ignorance with white people as apposed to like racism. Um, their always going to ask you questions about “do you wash your hair, do you know your dad?” You know, things like that, I mean, that they’re just making these hasty generalizations that they see on tv or they see in the media, which aren’t true and they don’t apply to everyone. And I think that’s what we mainly see nowadays as apposed to the blatant in your face nigger and burning crosses nowadays, but I think it still has a devastating effect on us.”

Echoed through his words is a testament to racism today. The whites in his school believed in the stereotypes of blacks, so much so that they had to ask questions which they felt were

“ok.” But this shows the distinction which is made between the races, the distinction is that blacks and whites are not biologically similar. The comment, “*do you wash your hair,*” is part of the stereotype, and the fact that Dennis had been asked that shows that the whites in his school truly believed in these stereotypes.

Just as Dennis said, these forms of racism are more common today. He said “*nowadays we encounter a lot more ignorance with white people as opposed to like racism.*” This comment, shows that racism today is not only different, he also shows that it will never end. To him, this form of racism is something that will always be there and will not change. But it is my belief that if we can incorporate African American history into our education, this ignorance would end.

Eurocentric Education

Another important factor which has had a large impact on implicit racism is education. Education has a great impact on how a society views certain aspects of itself. The same goes for today and how our children view the world. One theme which was prevalent in several of the stories is that the children of today do not receive a proper education with regards to African American heritage, culture, and the impact of African Americans in the history of the United States.

Charles said it best in his second story when he said that,

“Well what we have to realize too that uh racism is caused by the ability of one group to impose their will on the other now a black man cant be racist black people can’t be racist because they don’t have the power to impose their will on another group we have been imposed on. And as far as education uh talk about black colleges and everything black folk have been given an Eurocentric education, something they cant use when they leave I mean they’re set up to fail if they wanted to give `em an afro centric education something they could understand then it would be um a step in the right direction.”

When Charles had finished his story, Dennis responded with describing how his high school did not teach him about black history. Instead of black history being a required part of his education, he was offered an extra credit assignment. He then went on to say, “*We are not being taught our own history. I started to go around and ask certain white people ‘do you know who Malcolm X is?’ And the vast majority of em said no, and to me its like how can such a huge part of American History not be, not be taught in the schools?”* Dennis then went on to give a specific example of how bad education in America is in saying that, “*I thought the Holocaust was worse than slavery. And that’s so false, but that’s the way they try to make it high school... when in actuality it was about a few million in the Holocaust, and about maybe sixty million in the slave trade but, but the way the way they try to make it seem that the Holocaust is so much worse!”*

In his experience, Dennis found that he had been taught about important historical figures, but all of them had been white. Though there were numerous and very influential black figures in history, learning about them was not a requirement. More importantly is the fact that none of the other students in his high school knew who these figures were either. As Dennis said, “*I had to come to college just to learn and it really took me that long to really appreciate my own culture and who I am and I think uh if more black people appreciated who they are in their culture*

they would do better for themselves, but that's not the case". I think that this statement is true for all members of the African American community. Since history is taught from a Eurocentric perspective, in order to develop an appreciation for their own race, it seems that the people in our story circle either had to go to a historically black college or seek higher education that is taught from an Afrocentric point of view.

Though Dennis was able to go to a black college and find appreciation for his own race, one participant in our circle was not as fortunate. This gentleman grew up in the era of the Civil Rights Movement. It was at that time that the education system did not allow for young black men to be educated in any other manner than the Eurocentric View. So, instead of going to a black college, John took responsibility for his own education. In his words,

"I enjoyed being around when the Panthers was here, the black nationals was here, you know, up in that era. And I always, you know, I listened to all the guys that was like if they were bums. And they would say 'buddy, why are you playing with them dudes, talking to them, give'em a quarter, give'em a dime, nickel whatever?' I said, 'because they can tell me something you can't tell me.' And that how, that's how I learned."

Though John was not formally educated about black history, he learned through listening to others tell their stories. Just as this study is trying to do, John listened to what people had to say and he was able to learn more than any school could have taught him. He was able to develop an appreciation for his own culture by taking it upon himself to learn what the schools of America refused to teach him.

Racial Discrimination by Police

When our story circle was telling their first stories, one younger gentleman was very open about his experiences with the police. Once Jeff began to tell what had happened to him, the rest of the group seemed to follow his example and explain how they had been affected by the discriminatory actions of the police.

In Jeff's first story, he talked about an instance where a police officer stopped him at a bus stop in front of his school. He said,

"I don't understand some of the things that they (referencing police officers) do to me and my friends. I remember one time, matter of fact, right across the street at this bus stop, and I'm a student at this school right here and I had papers in my hands... and this police officer at first he pulled up and he asked me what am I doing here and it kind got me upset a lil bit and I a little got frustrated a lil bit and I look at the bus stop like I'm under I'm bout to uh, I'm at the bus stop and I started to get smart with him and I just left it alone like I'm at the bus stop sir so he drove up the street and then he ... about probably three or four minutes later he drove back down again and he pulled in my parking lot right there he sat and looked at me probably in between four or five minutes. And my bus came, it dropped me off this was when we had remember main street bus stop downtown I went downtown and when I got off at that bus and like it was crazy like that same man was sitting at that bus stop waiting on me!"

Jeff then went on to conclude his story by saying, *"the police to me is 'pose to be ones who protect and serve us and it's like they more racist than anybody out here."* It is this last comment which I feel

is the most important analysis of what is occurring in America today. As Jeff says, the police are supposed to protect us, and yet it is the very people the police are supposed to be protecting that are harmed by their presence.

In Jeff's second story, he said

"I don't ever wanna call them for help just because of the little issues I got into. And, like, in my life, it's just not with me, I mean, it's probably everyone in my family, we don't really trust the police at all. Like, really feel like they today's KKK with a badge. And you know with them with a gun and everything."

This shows that the fear of the police is a widespread mindset that stems from how the people are treated by the police. Jeff even went as far as to say that he could be in danger and he still would not call them. It makes me wonder how effective the police can be when citizens would rather be in danger than have to deal with the officers.

Until this point, there was one gentleman whom was reluctant to speak. It seemed to me that he was a little shy, but he was listening very intently to each person as they spoke. After Jeff had told his story, the gentleman, whom I will refer to as Bruce, knew that he had a story that he wanted to share with us.

Bruce explained that he has lived in the area for a long time, and in his story he said,

"this racial profiling as far as police is concerned is ridiculous. I was walking down the street and they pulled up on the curb and blocked me off, and asked me for identification, and what am I doing in this neighborhood. I said 'I've been livin here all my life, I said this is my neighborhood.' (the officers response was) you know this is a drug area. I said 'so in other words, what are you saying to me, that I'm not allowed to come outside my own house.' I can't have this drug activity going on around here. And so, you know, that's really disturbing. And then I see it all the time, especially young guys, you know, um, racially profiling, stopping them for absolutely nothing really. They make up something when they do stop them. Matter of fact, not too long, the other night they stopped me pulling in my driveway. And ah, I got out; they told me to stay in the car right in my driveway. And I said, what's the problem, they got up and they said "Oh...you...ah...fit the description of somebody." And then ah they rode off, but not before they humiliated me."

It seemed that each member of our story circle has been affected by the police in some way. But Greg, in particular, had the saddest story to tell. Prior to our class beginning, Greg's [close relative]² was shot in front of his son. In the Akron area, this has come to be known as the Stevenson Shooting. In his story, Greg recalled the event for our group in saying,

"And right now what I see as far as police going force now it to me I feel like it's a straight Klan rally especially 2nd shift and 3rd shift it's a straight Klan rally you know um I mean I had my little run ins. And then my [close relative] got killed by the police last year got shot 22 times, in front of his son, and when he got shot in front of his son my [close relative] told me that that police was like

² The [brackets] are used to show that information relating to the identity of the participant has been deleted and exchanged with a similar, but less revealing, term in order to protect the identity of the participant.

he was on drugs you probably just his adrenaline to kill a black man, you know just to shoot like that and he said they was just mad you know right now today ever since then they still harass the family they don't too much they have they did a couple things to me lie try to run me over downtown in broad daylight but what happening is instead of taking it out on the older ones they taking it out on the younger ones, and you now as long as the can discourage them and get them to the point where they got them locked up and just harass them they dirty I don't trust them and that's it"

Once our story circle had concluded, I went home and tried to find out more about the story. According to an article in the *Plain Dealer*, a man had been shooting a gun on the streets. Stephenson's wife had called the police, but prior to the arrival of the police, Stephenson and his son went to find the man. Upon arrival, the police saw Stephenson with a gun and ordered him to the ground. Within seconds, Stephenson was shot by two officers over 22 times. According to one of the officers, Stephenson had been reaching for the gun when the officer fired at him.

After the event had taken place, reporters were interviewing the brother of the man whom was shot, he said, "*How is it justified when they say a man is pointing a gun at police officers, but then he gets shot in the back while he was on the ground? It's rough for the family, and the community is shook up behind this.*"

This event is one of the most tragic encounters with the police that I have ever heard. My emotions were only compounded when I heard this story by the fact that the man in our story circle was not talking about something he had read in the news, or seen on TV; he was talking about his family and his own life. There is nothing that one can say in a situation like this, but I will say that it is racism and deep seeded hatred that led to this man's unfortunate death.

Racism, either implicit or explicit is deadly to those affected by it and spiritually damning to those who express it. The trade-off is not fair, and in no way equivalent, but that is what we are faced with today. And until something is done, we can expect to see and hear stories similar to these for the rest of our lives.

III. Final Reflections

The experience of hearing these stories was very emotional for me; in part because I have personally been a part of the problem in the past. In my high school, there were very few black people, so I had never experienced anything like what the people who shared with me had. But through the course of listening, I found out that the distinction between white and black friends is still a racist view. I am personally guilty of this act, and it is not something that I am proud to admit, but I feel it is important to share.

This experience taught me about myself, but it also helped me to see where I had been wrong and why I had been wrong. The simple fact that ignorance had led me to my distinction between friends is a small part of a much bigger picture. The ignorance that I had experienced is because of implicit racism today. Though I had no intention of offending my friend, I did not know that my actions were offensive.

It is this fact that shows how racism has evolved. Where racism was once a clear expression, by either calling someone a name, burning a cross, or by placing live maggots in

a burger; racism is no longer that distinct. Instead of explicit racism, we have implicit racism, which allows for laws to be written which may not refer directly to blacks, but still have a disproportionate effect on blacks, or for white youths to grow up believing that blacks are in some way genetically different from themselves, because they have never been taught anything different. It is these policies which allow racism to continue.

There was a film that came out a few years ago, *Crash*, in which the implicit racism of not just whites vs. blacks was shown but racism against all races. In this film, the beliefs and stereotypes of people are shown to have a direct impact on the way in which they act towards each other and treat each other. In the end of the film, there is no real ending, in other words they do not sugar coat life. It shows that there is no end to the distinctions which we make in our own minds.

This film greatly impacted my view of racism, but this film shows the link between both explicit racism and implicit racism. It shows that when you begin with one, you can end up with the other. When I heard these stories as the Akron Urban League, it made me think of how each story illustrates two different forms of racism, and upon final reflection, I can see just how large of an impact this has had on people. It is easy to blame a society for the actions of its youth, but these stories are reminiscent of how our society has led our views. When the Civil Rights Movement succeeded in changing the laws, it did nothing to impact how whites view blacks. But more importantly, it did nothing to change how whites are educated about blacks. It is this fact that seems to be the most important with regards to race. Though the views of whites who grew up with explicit racism are more difficult, if not impossible to change, it seems that the effects of their views are still resonating in education. And it seems that, until education of black culture and black history are fully integrated into school curriculum, the effects of the past will continue to haunt our future.

There was another, much more positive aspect to some of the stories I heard, which still sticks with me today. Though most of the stories spoke of grave injustices done to the participants and their families, there was still an essence of hope in each story and in the circle itself. These members of the community were willing to come forth and share their stories. In telling their stories, they spoke of things that had happened and also things that they had done in response. For the young man who was not pleased with his education, he chose to take his education to another level and learn what he felt was important; the gentleman who was murdered because he was helping other blacks register to vote, his family continued to fight for justice for over thirty years; the older gentleman who threw stones at the KKK rally in defiance of what was acceptable for the time; and all other participants, including the gentleman who's [close relative] was shot, they are all brave for coming into the Urban League and sharing their stories with us, and for sharing with me I would like to personally thank them.

Their stories helped me to understand that implicit racism does exist and that it is echoed in the education of America's youth. Though the Civil Rights Movement changed the laws, the education system remained the same. Each story helped me to understand that my education led me to be ignorant. I am not using this as an excuse, like some would, I am using this fact to show that there are millions of whites who have grown up with the same education that I have and would share my views. Different from them, I took this course and actually listened to the stories that were shared with me. This experience negated what I

had previously learned, but sadly, this project is on a much smaller scale and has only affected those who are directly associated with the project. But the hope is that others will read these stories and a change can finally begin.

It was the inner strength of the participants which led them to come to the Urban League that night and help our class understand what racism is and where it is. After that night, it became our responsibility to make sure that we helped these peoples' voices be heard. And it is in that experience that I feel I have changed the most. It is one thing to help yourself, but it is a whole new experience when you help others. I guess that this project showed me that a change is possible, you just have to be strong enough to speak out against the norms of a society, and hope that somewhere there is someone who is willing to listen.

References

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Story Circle Stories, Story Circle # 2, stories collected on May 27, 2009 at the Akron Urban League for *Law, Mediation and Violence* at the University of Akron.