

*Urban League Story Circle #3*  
Tracee McClain

*I. Introduction*

On a warm rainy Wednesday evening May 27, 2009 people from Summit County were arriving at the new Urban League to participate in a unique experience. The University of Akron invited community members to participate in the Color Line Project.

This project, originating in New Orleans, LA, deals with issues of race. Our participation involved telling stories that dealt with race or racial conflict. All participants (excluding the U of A students) began in a large circle. They then began to count off #1-8; there were eight story circles with eight chairs in each circle. Participants reported to their corresponding circle number. My story circle was #3; initially I had 4 participants but another was added shortly after we began.

The instructions were very basic: Respect the story teller; no interruptions; talk and record your story into the digital recorder; tell a personal story about race or racial conflict; time limit is roughly 3 minutes. I informed them that the stories would be anonymous however I did ask for their age; the youngest was 20 and the oldest was 72. I had full participation from the members of my story circle; some stories are longer than others some are stories from as early as the 1940's and some are as recent as last month (2009). No matter the era, the gender, or the story teller; some major common themes emerged: Racial Profiling, White Privilege, Nihilism, and Lack of Cultural Buffers (sense of history/identity).

Prior to this evening we studied selected scholarly articles dealing with American racial disparity based on race. The aforementioned themes are from articles that demonstrated the same context as the stories in the story circles. These stories show a complex diversity contained within these broad general themes. They show manifestation of the themes as well as evolution. These echoing themes also give legitimacy to the personal stories of racial conflict as told in the story circles here in Akron, Ohio. These stories demonstrate a collective unified African American experience dealing with race and/or race conflict. [Note the words Black and African-American are used interchangeably].

*II. Doing Justice to the Stories*

To begin we need to clarify terms that will be used or referred to within the context of this paper. Racial Profiling is identified as a broad theme; it became very evident in several stories. Usually racial profiling is thought of as a police activity, but these stories demonstrated that any White person and especially authority figures can racially profile people of color. According to Chiricos, Welch, and Gertz in their 2004 article, "Racial Typification of Crime and Support For Punitive Measures", "There is a belief system that constructs crime in terms of race and race in terms of crime" (p.360). A young story teller told of the constant harassment he and his friends experience by the Akron Police Department, for simply gathering together or wearing urban gear, jewelry, or fronts on their teeth.

*Yes I wanted to talk about how the police be treatin young Black men. Not only White cops Black cops also. I've been incarcerated before but I also changed my life. But the police judge us by them clothes we wear if we got golds in our mouth, earrings jewelry, and stuff like that. It be hard for us to*

*ride around and do anything we want without getting pulled over, being chastised by the police. I just want to know if that could change<sup>1</sup>*

This story illustrates that racial profiling has incorporated the stopping of African Americans whether they are driving or simply gathering together. Apparently their attire is the criterion used to warrant being stopped and questioned by the police. Another African American male story teller told multiple stories of Ohio Police encounters; one included police brutality against him that was witnessed by a White female passenger:

*I've seen something funny one time. I was in the car with a Caucasian lady and the police pulled us over (laughter). At the time I had a blue and white Eldorado, so they just associated me with that lifestyle. But I'm working I got a job. I'm doing what I was supposed to do. They took me out the car and slammed me all on the car. (laughter) and asked her to say "Tell me that he's kidnapping you and we'll lock him up". (laughter) and I was coming out of Parma out of Rockside Road. So I was just outside laughing but I had this silk suit on, he done tore it up...my, they done roughed me up wasn't nothing I could do, but at the time I was so hateful because they had actually roughed me up because this Caucasian woman was sitting in the car, and I never forgot that. But and I told her she was in the car crying being hysterical. Finally she said "My father owns Lodi Construction Company". and they backed up. When she said, she said who she was they left me alone. But they were tearing up my car, slammed my head on the hood of my car; bust my eye...I mean they probably would have killed me. if they could have. But if she had said the wrong thing they probably would have killed me. But she was hysterical and she was a good friend, and she stuck up for me<sup>2</sup>*

Clearly this story was more reminiscent of what we consider as being racially profiled while driving. The story teller admits he was pulled over because of the type of car he was driving which at the time was associated with "pimping" and the white female passenger further fueled the stereotype. We see in this story the Black man understands the routine, because police have done this to many Black men before. He isn't hysterical; and his laughter is out of frustration and helplessness.

The White friend is unfamiliar with this behavior by the police; in her world police don't behave this way. There is psychological and very real material consequences associated with being racially profiled: The cost of auto body repairs, replacement of an expensive suit, and if he dared to get medical treatment for his injuries. How could he possibly file an insurance or medical claim for something that never officially happened? The psychological damage is more profound suffering that type of disrespect and humiliation knowing if he tried to assert his human rights he may have been killed. Enduring ordeals like these and knowing they may happen repeatedly throughout your Black lifetime would tend to make one bitter, frustrated, angry and distrustful of police. Imagine how any one but especially Blacks would feel every time they drive and see a police car? Imagine the anxiety they experience having to encounter police at all. Could experiences like these have given rise to the open challenges to authority demonstrated by our youth? I am sure they have contributed to it because profiling has become widespread and varied. A different form of racial profiling extends beyond police activities and deeply pervades into the work environment. Another story teller told of being

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<sup>1</sup> story teller #7

<sup>2</sup> story teller #6

treated coldly and rudely after the White receptionist realized her bosses' previously arranged interview appointment was with a Black female newspaper writer instead of a White one.

The next major theme that surfaced in many stories in a variety of ways was that of White privilege. The meaning of White privilege can't be specified, however it includes attitudes, behaviors, access, exclusivity and expectation on behalf of White people. Author Peggy McIntosh states in her article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack", "White privilege is like an invisible weightless backpack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visa, clothes, tools, and blank checks" (p.1). This was evidenced in a story told about two Black women peace officers on vacation at a Mexican resort. There were only four other Americans there who happened to be two White elderly couples. One of the White men tried to solicit the Black women assuming they were prostitutes:

*This story happened I think I was 27, I was living in San Diego, and uh my best friend was from Akron because I was from Akron. And I convinced her to fly out to San Diego meet me; we go down to Mazatlan for Carnivale; spend 4 days there, spend 2 days in Vegas, 2 days in L.A. and then she goes back to Akron. Well I was a probation officer, she was a police officer and we were traveling alone, but we were staying at my uh bosses' time share and my boss was a female and she's Mexican. So the people in Mazatlan were very gracious. They were Mexican, they were hard working; they were like us. And they would do the same thing. They couldn't speak a lot of English but they let us know. It was the feeling, it was the same soul, and they had as much. They would give us extra stuff, not that we required it or wanted it. So in the middle of uh the resort was the place where..it was the main restaurant, and it was run by a family. The bartender was an older man and he had his younger sons working there; hard working individuals. But I noticed that um I think our second night there, there arrived 2 sets of elderly White people from America. The one guy, he had to be in his sixties; late sixties. Well I guess he was an alcoholic because he was sloppy drunk. So on our next to the last night there we were inside the restaurant and it was time almost for the restaurant to close. But they hardly got Black people down there so we were telling them stories. And we had the same stories (you know) and we were having a good time and we were just sitting at the bar. My best friend wasn't even drinking cause she doesn't drink, and uh I might was having a Margarita or something. Well this White man first comes in with his wife, sees me and my [uh] best friend at the bar. It's Mazatlan 95 degrees, so we have on swim tops and wrap arounds, sitting at the bar. Well then they walk out, and then 20 minutes later this White man comes back and tries to saddle up next to us at the bar. And we're trying to have a family conversation with our new Mazatlan friends, and then he leans in to me and my best friend; who are peace officers and asks "How much?" OH MY GOODNESS!! Our faces dropped! Me and my best friend looked at each other because we couldn't believe it. We paid 2 thousand dollars to fly to a luxury resort; to treat ourselves because we're hard working Black industrial women, and we get accosted by a crotchety old White man who thinks that we're prostitutes because we're Black. Well somehow I was able to translate that to my Mexican friends (laughter). They locked the doors. They wanted to beat this man down, but they let him escape with his life. But that just put a damper on us, on our whole trip. Like Black women can't get a...you can't go somewhere. You're trying to celebrate sisterhood and yet there's always one. Some White man; he does not see that you're successful and you're sitting there; you afforded your own vacation- you gotta be a prostitute.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> story teller #1

This story was an age old stereotype used for Black women or any women of color. The arrogant attitude displayed by the elderly White man offended not just the two women, but the Mexican men as well. For him to assume his color or perceived station in life put him above others or meant darker skinned folks were there to service him demonstrates the essence of White privilege. Another story that illustrates the actual practice of White privilege involves A Black man being stopped and treated like a trespassing criminal at a Parma apartment complex that didn't rent to people of color. Although the Black man's White girl friend rented the apartment for both of them; management assumed he was a White man:

*When Ms. {} told her story I saw ub a similar situation where I, I was dating a White lady. In 72 we stayed in Parma which was unheard of for a Black person to stay up there. And ub the young lady I was dealin with, went and got the apartment and when she went and got the apartment she put my name on it, but they didn't see my face. And they took the money and was all for us moving in and the whole nine yards. So when I left North Akron and came to the apartment complex and they saw me. The security swooped on me like "Nigger what you doing up here blab-blab-blab", and I said "Here go my key to my apartment, I live here sir". Ub they didn't believe it, they called the outside police it was a big hassle. They wanted to lock me up; they wanted to find something wrong. So at the time she was my fiancée, when they came and they found out my name was on the lease, I had signed it. They took the money and thought I was White. They actually thought I was a White man*

Here we see an effort to use the law to enforce racial segregation, but the lease was signed; the down payment already collected. The manager, security officers, and local police officer each assumed there must be some law that was broken because their privilege as White men depended on being able to keep black men in their place and out of white spaces. The reaction was immediate and severe and "it was a big hassle", just trying to move into an apartment that was leased to them rightfully and legally. However extra obstacles appeared as soon as his skin color was shown; how dare he try to move into a White Only complex. They were offended by his audacity and his race. The next paragraph was an image summary that we did at the conclusion to each round of story circles. The same story teller continues and gives his perspective on how to deal with the current issues of profiling by offering a possible solution that will equip the younger generation with the thick skin Blacks from the earlier generations had to develop in order to live.

*So they (you know) I seen it all I've seen too much prejudice in my lifetime and I understand what the young man was saying about ub the police profiling us. Thinking that every, every, every Black man is a criminal, and how you dress is an image. I've seen all that and (, and) but what's hard to me is that there's nothing going on that's trying to make ub young Black men or young Black women to understand where they came from. What people had to endure to get them to where they are now, and the struggle is not over you know it. This is not something that just started going on; this has been going on since we got off the bus. So we got to deal with it. We got to figure out a way to, to...It'll never end probably in our lifetime but we got to figure out a way to make our [gener], our people the ones that's coming behind us understand that there's a legacy that they have to carry on and no matter what they have to endure, they have to endure it for the people coming behind them.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Story teller #6

The “Racial Typification” article offers possible explanations for the skewed perceptions people have about people of color. It says many Whites associate crime with Blacks and vice versa, and it is because of this irrational fear that they demand more police intervention which includes: more arrests, incarcerations and lately more homicides of Blacks; Black men in particular. This perception is also shared by some other authority figures like teachers or staff employed by school systems. A story teller told of an incident that happened in an elementary school here in Akron where a White substitute teacher threw her out of a chair in the reading group and put a White student in her place: Both of the students were hurrying to occupy the first reading chair as usual and incidentally the students were best friends. However the Black student beat the White student to the chair and sat down first making the White student fall onto the ground. The teacher not knowing the relationship of the students or the meaning of occupying the first reading chair threw the Black girl out of the chair and put the White student there instead. Both of the students were hurt by the teachers’ actions. The actions of preferential treatment of White youths over Blacks can be seen in the practice of not permitting Blacks admittance to various venues. The next story focuses on how Blacks are being stopped and denied entrance to The Mall Zone allegedly because one Black male didn’t have an ID. They watched as a group of White kids were admitted without having to show ID at all:

*At the Mall Zone Friday to Monday you’ve got to have an ID to get in if it’s a group of kids 18 and older cause I guess minors are goin to the mall stealin. And one day me and my friends we went up there, one of us didn’t have no ID’s. We all look older than 18 but they didn’t let us in. And there was a group of White kids that came in; they was they was little kids like 11, 12. They let the kids walk right in. So my dude said “We can’t get in?” and there was only one of us who didn’t have no ID. We said “We all looked older than 20”, but they just told us we had to leave. But we just had to stand there. There was nothing we could do about it but look<sup>5</sup>*

Author McIntosh states “I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen”<sup>6</sup> Her statement gives us in insight as to how some White people think about access to public places. Ironically many Blacks feel the opposite; they have come to expect an inequitable inconvenience when it comes to public accommodations. There is always some anxiety because you don’t know if you are going to be treated like a person; or a Black person. If treated like a person you are able to receive the same access, amenities, and good customer service available to Whites. If treated like a Black person everything is usually substandard and the goods are suspect. Some ignorant racist people intentionally give spoiled, rotten, or soiled items purposely to Black people. In many privately-owned stores in Black neighborhoods; shop owners sell expired or substandard products including can goods and meats. Shelf items are covered in dust and the stores are usually dirty. But the residents are poor so they patronize these places. Owners are also known to extend credit to these people as well.

The final but most pervasive and profound theme is that of nihilism; this was expressed in many if not all of the stories. Nihilism is eloquently and accurately defined by Dr. Cornel West in his book, “Race Matters”, “Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far

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<sup>5</sup> Story teller #7-2

<sup>6</sup> McIntosh (p.5 #23)

more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world” (p.14). Nihilism is like a disease that plagues the spirit of Blacks that have had traumatic experiences pertaining to race that have left an indelible mark in their minds and hearts. Here is a story about how a Black man was shown an actual tree used to hang Black people when he visited the South:

*I'm talking about the hanging part they just killin us (you know) that wasn't right you know what I mean? That when they showed me that tree down South that disturbed me and then, like back then they could drink a beer Ku Klux Klan; we was down where they was. They could go get a Black man and just hang him, take his wife have his wife right in front of him that wasn't right.<sup>7</sup>*

This experience had a devastating effect on the story teller; it still haunts him today. Another Black man recalled his racial imprinting from being born in the South prior to the civil rights movement:

*I was born in Montgomery Alabama in 1952. When I grew up I saw all the racial hatred and bitterness. I've seen Black people hanging from trees for whatever reason the people hung em. I've seen people run from white people because they were scared to look at em. The word Nigga was never mentioned when I was growin up, but now I see a Black people using the word as if it was an infectious disease. They don't understand what that means. They[ they] really didn't pay the price to to know what racial equality or racial tension is so, to me a story about racism is a story of forgetfulness because most Black people forgot where we came from to get to where we are and to me I have a problem with that because they don't identify. So my problem with race is that race is taught it's not learned it's taught from people around you people that you deal, with people you associate with the color of your skin doesn't separate a person. A man or a woman your understanding and your ideology in life is what separates us. So race will be a conflict for the rest of our generation on this Earth. because we'll never agree to be equal. Once a person is looked at as a slave they will continue to be looked at as a slave. You are not equal to as they say; the Caucasian race because a former slave could never have the same understanding as the former slave owner .So now they color it they say; "Well it's racial equality" but it's no racial equality it's no equal rights in America. Because it's haves and have not, and it's not about color it's about who you, are and what you have.<sup>8</sup>*

There also was a story that happened when the story teller was a child during the 1960's in the North, right here in west Akron. It was an incident that involved three Black females and two White teenage boys:

*A short quick one that something that impressed me when I was younger. I was walking, my sister and I was walking to the store with my mother. She was, we were walking with her and um there was some, a couple of White guys who lived on the street. They used to live on Haynes Street there. Um they were coming, they were approaching so uh-uh (how did it go?) um they steps aside. I think they stepped aside as we were coming because (you know) the way we had the sidewalk and they said to my mother "You better be glad the Civil Rights Law passed". and at the time (you know) I was trying to figure it out, but I knew it had something- Mama just didn't say anything just kind of something we have to ignore and go on; but it really affected me. I knew it had something to do with*

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<sup>7</sup> Story teller# 4

<sup>8</sup> Story teller #6-1

*race but I'm still developing stuff in my head. But I remember them saying "You better be glad the Civil Rights Law passed" almost like "We wouldn't have to do this" (you know).<sup>9</sup>*

Another story told of how a White bus driver put an entire bus load of Black children off the school bus six miles away from the school; they were forced to walk, because he resented having to drive Black children as a job and therefore despised them. He just snapped and they suffered the repercussion of his anger. Racists don't need a logical or legitimate reason to act as they do.

The White female author McIntosh, offers some poignant information which helps contribute to nihilism; "One factor seems clear about all interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms which we can see embedded forms which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never an invisible system conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth"(p.8). Many Blacks experience oppression at the places of employment, especially if they are the first or only person of color there. Sometimes it is directed at Blacks because they are occupying positions formerly held by whites. These stories show the complexity of methods used by employers, co-workers, or places of employment:

*I worked up at one of the elementary schools here in the cafeteria and I was going to Washington D.C. with the class. And I had did all of the things that I should do, report that I was going, uh I wanted to be off (you know) and called in and everything. So the supervisor came out, who was White and because I did not talk to her directly she went and reported me again and told me I had no right to get on the bus to go without talking to her first. And I, my reaction to her was that I've done everything I should do so...In fact in the remarks she said she was going to fire me. I said I've done everything I needed to do; everything was done correctly so if you feel that it was incorrectly I'm outta here. And that's I, I just went on. But the whole thing was she thought that (you know) in her coming to the school that I should have come to her directly when it was not in the contract to go to her. It was said, the contract said to call and report off. I had done all of that, but I guess she thought that (you know) I can bluff you and you would (you know) go along with it. So when I went on to Washington D.C. with the class, came back and in my mailbox at school was a little note (you know) to come down to uh the Board of Education, which I did go down. And when we got in the room there, I guess she felt I was going to slender down and tell a different story. So I told the right, and her face just turned red as a beet's (giggle). Because I had (you know) followed all of the rules. So the person in over her. Though she did everything she should do then there is nothing else (you know) that she should have done anything different. But I felt that she felt that I should have said (you know) "Oh I'm sorry" or something like that. But nothing in (you know) nothing was done wrong so here again that was a little bit of prejudice I felt and racial discrimination.<sup>10</sup>*

This story showed how although the Black employee followed the required procedures, the White supervisor wanted the employee to adhere to a different set of procedures which including dealing exclusively with her. Here is another story dealing with a Black man being the first of his race at a place of employment:

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<sup>9</sup> Story teller #5-2

<sup>10</sup> Story teller #3-2

*Ok I got a job at the board and uh the Lord had gave me the job. Cause I (you know) had back in the time in the 70's you had to have Black people. So they gave me the job and I went and told the man and he said he liked the way they judge you. You know how that woman kept worrying the judge, that's what I did at the board; kept worrying the man. He finally gave me a job and said "Listen, they're not gonna understand cause they were prejudice". I aint understand what he was telling me, but when I got on the job the supervisor been told everybody that I didn't like them. So when I went to work man, everybody was naggin at me and I said "What's wrong?" And the White guys they took to me, you know what I mean? They were prejudiced but they took to me, they had to because they saw the Lord God in me. So when the dude told me "Hey listen, I aint think you like workin with us". I said "Man I never say that". So when I went up there and confronted the supervisor all the workers went with me, cause I didn't say that but he just told a lie on me. Told all the workers that I didn't like working with them cause they were White. He tried to turn it around but when I went to question him about it (you know) he just turned red. But them cats they started liking me every since then. But the Lord gave me that job, but now they out of business cause you can't do God's people wrong."<sup>11</sup>*

Many times someone else is responsible for causing discord and animosity amongst employees as attested to by the previous story. This next story involved A Black man being in a position of authority at his place of employment:

*In 1986 I worked in San Diego California Balboa Hospital as an X-ray Tech and EMT, and I got pretty good in the profession to the point where the radiologist would leave me in charge of the X-ray room at night. I encountered a lot of prejudice because the White people felt that as a Black man I was in a position that I wasn't qualified to be in. And I waan't supposed to be orderin quote unquote White people what to do. Uh so this particular nurse came to me and asked me for an X-ray, and then she took the chit which you order X-rays and threw it at me. And I looked at the chit and it fell on the floor and I told her "You throw at dogs". And that gave me a bitter taste in my mouth where I just quit the job. I quit working in the medical field, I quit because I felt at that time I had seen enough prejudices in my life and I knew that I probably would have went off and did the wrong thing with this individual. Because I felt that if this world is so based on color; and if I'm not equal to those people. I can do the floor, I can do the toilets but I can't run this department because I'm Black. And to me that was a slap in the face. So as a Black man no matter how educated you become, no matter how gifted you might be it's always that stigma that you're Black. You know that it's a quote unquote uh-uh what do you call it? uh-uh It's a folklore where we're not capable of doing this, and that's completely wrong. Because everybody's capable of doing anything whether you're Black, Asian, or whatever. But it seems to me that Black people always have this stigma type that we can't do it; and we're not going to do it properly and we shouldn't be telling White people what to do."<sup>12</sup>*

Unfortunately many people of color can identify with the sentiments expressed in that story. Why is nihilism so all-consuming at this point in our social evolution? What has changed so drastically within America and more specifically the Black community that allows this nihilism to exist? During the image discussion the matter was addressed without using the term nihilism:

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<sup>11</sup> Story teller #4-2

<sup>12</sup> Story teller #6-2



*Being positive about ourselves we're so critical of ourselves (you know) just uh (you know what I mean) "You're no good! Your daddy was never any good" all that kind of thing that has the young guys thinking (you know) losing before they can win because of the things we do because of all the damage that has been done<sup>13</sup>*

*What they think of us as people right (you know) no matter you're successful you're trying to work hard you're trying to do the right thing. Every Black man is not a criminal and every Black woman is not a prostitute so they (you know) The stigma they were taught is passed on (you know) it's not something that these people learned somebody taught them that, and until we find a way to break that old "That person is worthless, that person is no-good he's gonna rob you or whatever". It's[ it's] gonna continue profiling bout Blacks young Blacks this is 2000 and it seems like in 2000 they're going back to the 40's. Cause they pull Blacks over like (finger snap, snap snap) clockwork (you know) and what I see is that there's a need to reverse it. I don't know how, I don't know what we have to do or even if it's possible but it's something has to be done.<sup>14</sup>*

Distrust of dealing with police and a real fear that they will be harmed physically or possibly even killed is a real issue in the Black community:

*Now I don't know I say God was involved because at the time uh back then you can easy come up missing. I mean how can you be handcuffs and hang yourself? You know these are the things they did to Black people at that time when they was locking you up. You accidentally hung yourself or you were suicidal or it's impossible to put your hands behind your back; put a noose on your neck and then jump off a chair.<sup>15</sup>*

*Yep some of us seen a lot of prejudice and some of us heard of it; but when you live it and you had a lot of experience with it, it makes you wonder what's really going on in our world (you know). Why is it that I'm a man, you're a man, that's a woman, that's a woman and we're not equal. We're not looked upon as equal, we're not even dealt with as equal. I'll break the law, this White guy'll break the law; they'll give me twice as much time as him (you know). And we look at the justice system we look at our society and where does it start and where does it end? (you know) Is it our society? Is it the laws we put down or is it the morals and value that we pass on? I mean where do we how do we change this?<sup>16</sup>*

### III. Final Reflections on Stories and Racial Conflict

This story circle assignment initiated a dialogue about race that needs to be continued. People having to recall a painful or sometimes buried memory that marked you psychologically was not an easy or comfortable task. There was no advanced preparation involved for the story tellers. In most stories emotions overtook the story tellers which is evident in the text of the stories; some trail off or jump to forgotten details. Make no mistake, these story tellers aren't lacking in intelligence or articulation skills. Sometimes it just isn't possible to add verbal text to humiliation, fear, degradation, disappointment or frustration. My intention for this paper was to allow the stories to speak for themselves. In retrospect I realize that because I was

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<sup>13</sup> Story teller #5 images

<sup>14</sup> Story teller #6 images

<sup>15</sup> Story teller #6 images

<sup>16</sup> Story teller #6 images

present for the telling of the stories, my perspective or interpretation of the stories put me at a different vantage point. {Good point!}

Hopefully I achieved some measure of success in conveying the emotions or the hidden meaning behind the words. You can't see the contorted faces, the closed eyes, the lowered shaking heads; or even the raised nodding heads in silent agreement. The laughter mentioned wasn't the type of laughter issued forth when something is comically funny. It's more reminiscent of the choice between laughter and tears: It happened and you can't change the past, as the saying goes "what doesn't kill you will make you stronger." In their souls I could hear the tears. I hope we can continue with our examinations of our personal biases and ourselves. If we begin to have further discussions that are real, honest, and true to our experience, than those who are White can begin to see the Black perspective. We all need to acknowledge we are all products of this racist American society; how it affects or influences us is displayed on a more personal level. The election of President Barack Obama shows that possibly America is ready for a change; not only in attitude but also in treatment of African-Americans in general.

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