

Digging Deep into Racism
Wesley Baynes

I. Introduction

We did story circles at the Akron Urban League on May 27, 2009. Our circle included myself and three African American males, a Bi-racial female, and a Caucasian female. We recorded the stories and transcribe them back at the university. On the basis of my evaluation of the stories in my story circle this paper will focus on Racial Inferiority, implicit racism, and dealing with cultural awareness. These topics will help us understand some of the different layers that shape views within the black community. The stories give an insider's view on how many African Americans have been shaped due to racial conflict. Next, we understand why the black community feels a sense of dissatisfaction towards leadership in society. Then, we will examine the outcomes of racial conflict in society. We will also explore how the lack of structure and abundance of angst affect the black community. Finally, we will see the results of racial inferiority within the black community [actual or perceived inferiority?] and the role racial stratification plays within the black community.

There were several stories in my story circle that encompassed racism. In order to analyze the stories around racism, the paper will examine three topics: Racial Inferiority, Implicit Racism, and Reflection & Awareness. In each story you will be able to relate to one aspect of the story and racism. The stories will take us through a chronological look at racism and how it has changed.

Racial Inferiority

In my story circle it was evident that the participants had been affected by racism in many different ways. America teaches us now that we're human beings and that we are equal based on that fact. The truth, however, comes from our history here in America that the black community has not been treated as equal and this has resulted in the denial of equal opportunity. The story teller #2 shares a very emotional story about his great uncle (told to him by his cousin), who was a very imposing, strong and sometimes an intimidating man. His uncle was a man with over 300 acres of land; nevertheless the white community affected his life and the lives of his family.

Father being a big imposing man um her Mother being a very fair skinned woman she was commonly mistaken for being a white woman. Um, they use to say that when they would go to town in a wagon that um she would he would make her ride in the back and she would tie a bandanna around her head to some people would say

The storyteller goes on to tell us how the white community targeted his family because of the color of their skin. The white men in the community tricked him and took what was not theirs. They took his land, his livelihood, and his dignity as a hard working family man. The storyteller makes us aware that the daughter of the great uncle is still emotional to this day. These white men treated this man as pond scum or an obstacle, not a human being. Because he was Black and that meant inferior to whites, they did not think his property was as sacred as the property owned by whites. So they just took it.

this large opposing black man had all this land so they made a lot of claims and made a lot of approaches to him to try to get him to sell the land So one night as his daughter is saying these towns men actually went to his neighbor, his best friend and said go borrow his shot gun, tell em you goin huntin. They did that so that when they would come to him he would be unarmed. And they went out and borrowed his shot gun and um ok the relative said, the relative said that um that afternoon as they were kids and played outside they could look across the field as see the coned hoods over the crops. And her mother grabbed him and brought him inside. Make a long story short, they banged on the door for him. Um her mother told them to go upstairs and told him to go um, he heard this ran downstairs, they shot him. Drug him out by his ankles. Drug him down the dirt road to the end of the road which was a gravel road and hung him up in a tree.²

My Grandfather told me when I ah, as I was thinking back when I first started being conscious about race. He grew up in the South and he had a job that was called a Pullman Porter. And at that time that was one of the best jobs that blacks, Negroes whatever could get they worked the train. And he said his first day at work, he went to the Quarter Master to get em a pair of pants and the guy gave em, the pants were too short, they came all the way up to his knees. So he said he he went back to the Quarter Masters he said he was a big huge white guy wi

This story tells us that the events towards blacks in the south not only impacted the black southern community, also had a great impact on the minds of the black community in the north. This fear that was imposed on the family began to shape this storytellers view on racial inferiority.

Within the same story the teller shares with us when he was a boy, him and his grandmother would have lunch at Woolworth's. Woolworth's being the local department store had a cafeteria where people would have lunch while shopping in the city. The storyteller tells about his first experience explicit experience of racial inferiority:

I was about ten years old I had went downtown right here on main st. and we went to eat lunch with my

forever to get a hot dog and a coke

there was a difference.⁷

mind I could realize at that point

The story tells us how in the sixties that the black inferiority was explicit. The white community expressed their ethnocentric views visually by separating the blacks and the whites. The grandmother's statement was the overwhelming thought processes of many blacks in the community.

The storyteller continues to show how racial inferiority has molded his outlook on life with his story about a golf ball. The results of the incident is a part of him today.

I was about fifteen years old and I had a girlfriend that was liven in seven stories west. Which is way out on

it Fairlawn cause it was way aw

and these bunch of little white boys are in the car and I noticed one of them leaned out of the window and I

that golf ball at home. And I never like golf even up till Tiger Woods started playing I never really like golf that was a personal attack.⁸

This story is a great example of how events shape individuals. This man saw the game of golf as a

the stories articulated in the story circles. These stories of implicit racism became more apparent with the individuals in their thirties and forties.

that the black church

-five percent African American and twenty-five percent Caucasian, German. Um my father is bi-racial and my mother is one hundred percent black. But I find myself battling with people on a daily basis to prove my blackness. And I think that everybody probably has some type of mi

*sometimes we even have race within our own um race. Um so I just wanted to share that.*¹⁴

Reflecting on this story one of the men in the story circle shares a similar experience with the group. His mother conformed her communication style to adapt to black culture. He goes on to tell us how confusing it was to deal with the stratification within the black community. He shares his impression of the story of the struggle within in the black community.

come in all shades and colors you know. And just to understand, that you know my mother not only when she was an officer in the banks, when she went to work you know Corporate American then when come home she had to come and deal with it even in our own family in our own community you know this this this stratification in color and the lack of understanding

ghettoize yourself when you come home. I always just say that you know black folks have have are the first bi-lingual people because we have to go and put on our voice when we go to work, we go to school then come home and put on another voice when we we get back so just the confusion of it all and and and just trying to wrap my mind around that whole concept of we just we all the same folk regardless of what we look like you

*and all this and all that so confusion is what I was thinking.*¹⁵

One of the most powerful statements made in the story circle was by the young man, in his late teens, passing on every opportunity. The young man¹⁶ was given a living history lesson on the racial conflict that has existed in society. He was given a firsthand account on how racism moved from explicit to implicit and internal racism within the black community. The silence that this young exhibited intrigued me, was he silent because he hadn't experienced racism or has racial conflict become so implicit that the youth today don't know how to define racism. The youth of today have arguably been led to believe that there are equal to there white peers, but in reality they have to contend with the same obstacles that many of the storytellers have and will continue to deal with over time. The difference is that the racism is more implicit today, making exposure and awareness more difficult.

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

that affected their lives of individuals in the community. The dialogue brought young and mature adults to an environment where everyone felt safe to share their experiences. The exchange of stories is one way that the African American community can start healing and positively impacting our community. Initially, I thought my circle was full of individuals that had been educated here in the community that had first hand experience with racial conflict. The conflict ranged from cultural to institutional. On the surface, the participants showed the emotional impact to themselves. The participants expressed the confusion and dissatisfaction of conflict management. Their stories helped me to better understand and appreciate the level of scholarly data because these participants were living researchers. The experiences that the participants told were in line with articles written by Cornel West, Peggy McIntosh, and Michael Tonry. Cornell West shares with us his opinion of "Nihilism" and the solutions for our community. Peggy McIntosh explains to us the theory of