

Urban League Story Circle #3

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 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

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:

*“ŋə 'hU_]b['UWɑi hi hY\Ub[]b['dUfhi hYm^ gh_]'' b' i ghifai ' _bck E' hUk Ugb[ŋif][\ hmai ' _bck 'k \Uhi
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
a Ub' UbX' ^ gh\Ub['\]a žhU_ Y\]gk]Z\Uj Y\]gk]Zr f][\ h]b' ZcbhicZ\]a ' hUk Ugb[ŋif]right.”*

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
V] hYfb\gg' =ŋ] Yghb '6' UW' dYcd' Y\Ub[]b['Zca ' hYg' Zf' k \Uhf Yf' fUgb hY dYcd' Y\i b['Ya "' =ŋ] Yghb'
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
]bZM]ci gX]g]Ug' ' H\YmXcb[ŋi bXf ghUbX' k \Uhi hUha YUbg' H\Yd hYd fYU' n' X]b[ŋidUm hY df] W h'
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*

Ok I got a job at the board and uh the Lord had gave me the job. Cause I (you know) had back in
HAYha Y]b`hY+\$fjmai `UX'hc`UY Y6`UW`dYcd`Y`Gc`hYm[U Ya YhY`eV`UbX`=k YbhiUbX'hc`X`hY
man and he said he liked the way they judge you. You know how that woman kept worrying the
judge, t\Uhgk \Uh=X]X`Uh`hYVdUX`_Ydhk cffm]b[`hY`a`Ub`< YZ]bU`m[U Ya YU`eV`UbX`g]JX`
I @]ghbz`h`Ym]Ybch[dbbU`i bXfghUbX`Wl`g`h`Y`rk`YfY`d`Y`X]Wl`" =U]bhi bXfghUbX`k \Uh`Y`k`Ug
telling me, but when I got on the job the supervisor been told everybody h\Uh=X]Xb]h]`_Y`h`Y`a`"Gc`

6Y]b['dca]h] YUvā hīd fgr'j Ygk YŋYgc W]h]W' cZi fgr'j Yg'fihai ' _bck E' ↑ ghī \ 'fihai ' _bck 'k \Uhi=
a YubēI Māi ŋŋYbc' [ccX" Māi F'XUXXrk Ugby] Yf' Ubm[ccX' U' 'hUhi_] bX'czh]b['hUhi\Ug]he young
guys thinking (you know) losing before they can win because of the things we do because of all the
damage that has been done¹³

K \Uhi\Ym]b_ 'cZi gUgdYcaYf][\hifihai ' _bck E'bc'a Uhhf' nai ŋŋYg W]g] ' nai ŋŋYh]b['hc'k cf_ '
\UFX' nai ŋŋYh]b['hc' do the right thing. Every Black man is not a criminal and every Black woman
]g]bchiU' dca]h] hYgc' hYm]fihai ' _bck E' H\Y gh] [a U' hYrk YfYhU [\h]gdUgg]X' do' fihai ' _bck E']h]g]bchi
something that these people learned somebody taught them that, and until we find a way to break
hUhc' X' I H\UhdYgab]gk cfh' Ygg' hUhdYgab]gbc- [ccX' Yŋ] [dbbU'fcV' nai 'cf' k \Uhi] Yf' " =h]g]h]g]g
[dbbU'ab]bi Ydca]]b['Vā h6' UWgmai b['6' UWg]h]g]g' &\$\$\$ UbX']h]g]Yā g']_ Y]b' &\$\$\$ hYm]Y
[c]b['VUW' hc' hY (\$ŋ] ' 7U g' hYm]di `` Blacks over like (finger snap, snap snap) clockwork (you
know) and k \Uhi=gY]g]hUhi\YfYŋ]U' bYX' hc' fY Yfgr]h' =Xcb]ŋi _bck \ck' z' =Xcb]ŋi _bck 'k \Uhi k Y
\Uj Yhc' Xc' cf' Yb]Z]h]g]dca] VYVī h]h]g]ga Yh]b['\Ug]hc' WY' XcbY"¹⁴

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.

References

Chiricos, T., & Gertz, M., & Welch, K. (2004) *Racial Typification of Crime and Support For Punitive Measures* *Criminology* v42n2 ,359-388

McIntosh, Peggy *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack* (nd)

Story Circles # 3 Story tellers # 1,3,4,5,6,7, The Urban League Akron, Ohio 05/27/09

West, Cornel (1993) *Race Matters Nihilism* (pp.15-31) Boston: Vintage Books