

Manuel Pierre

Racial Biograhly

Dr. Perez

Racial Reconciliation

My earliest memory of race was walking through Disney World at the age of 3. Three Chinese women were staring and giggling at me. Then they came over and without asking started touching my hair. They started say "It's so curly and it's so nice." Then my mom pulled me away.

I have had negative experiences with my racial identity. Starting from a young age I was aware of how I was perceived. I grew up in Orange, NJ a predominantly African American town. The local businesses were owned by South Koreans and Middle Eastern Men. My mother would always send me to the store on errands. Whenever I would enter one of these stores the owners would always harass me and other black boys who came in there. They would follow me around the store. They also told me to empty my pockets on many occasions and always treat me like a thief. I thought that if I made sure I was dressed neat and clean and that my hair was combed that they would view me as different. So when I would went out I would make sure I was well put together. I am not sure if that made a difference. I know now that no matter how I was presented that I would still be discriminated against.

Growing up I was the only black boy in my elementary class from kindergarten to eighth grade. In fifth grade one of my white classmates told me that black people are only good at

basketball and he called me the “n-word”. Later on that year the other white boys in my class ganged up on me in the schoolyard and demanded I fight them one by one. They were my supposed friends.

I started growing conscious in fourth grade. I used to think I was white because white people surrounded me most of the day at school. Then one of my classmates let me know I was black. I learned the most about racial diversity in my college days. It was there I took my first courses in African American History and joined the Black Student Union. One of the courses that I enjoyed most was Civil Rights where I learned a lot about the writings of Martin Luther King Jr.

During my early childhood I thought I was white because I was surrounded by white people and due to the difference in my skin tone and curly hair. From fourth grade to 8th grade I was characterized as a black kid who talked like a white boy. Also being called a “n-word” made me realize I was different from the boys in my class.

During high school I was lost as far as my racial identity. Being Haitian I was not fully accepted by the Black American group and not accepted by the white male group in high school. When I was 15, I was on the way home from the movies in NJ. My brother was driving when a State trooper pulled us over. They took my brother to the rear of the vehicle and questioned him while I sat and waited in the front passenger seat. One of the police officers flashed a light at me and asked me to get out of the car.

He asked me “why do you have your hands in your pocket” and I replied “I am cold”. I felt uneasy about the situation. During my college years I learned a lot about Black history and

embraced my culture. I studied my history and gained an appreciation for it. I was still confused because I was not fully accepted by members of my Haitian or African American culture so I felt lost for a while. Post-Graduation which I consider between 2003 and 2008 being back in NJ, I did not consider race often.

On my way home from on River Road in Edgewater two white Police officer stopped me and my best friend for no reason. They questioned me about where we were headed. I told them I was headed home from work. They told us, "if you let us search your car, we will let you go". We wanted to go home so we obliged and they let us go home. Also, I had a white female administrator her harassed me for years. She said "you have the mentality of an eight grader". I subsequently suffered situational depression for a number of years from working in a hostile work environment.

In 2008 I decided to explore my Haitian Culture by listening to the music and watching the media. I asked the older members of my family a lot of questions. I have been on this journey ever since. The concerns I have about my racial past is the times I did not stand up for racial justice. I always felt like I can stand up to do more in certain situations. I am encouraged by the foundation I have built through my education in Black history. I have read history from primary sources as Jemar Tisby recommended in his book. I have a good grasp on history that helps me learn more.

Through racial justice create a better society for my two sons. We all need to do our part to advocate for racial justice. I would like my grandkids to live a world that is closer to racial equality.

I can actively fight racism in my ways. One of the ways is by becoming active in elections by voting for candidates that stand on platforms that support social justice. Secondly is to support organizations that push for justice and equality for all people. Finally, I would build an institution that fights for social justice and the rights of marginalized people. In light of what I have done before I will continue to educate myself on the issues of social justice and defend others when I am called on.