

As a part of the Public Scholarship course, students were required to review their educational experiences from pre-k to the present. The goal of this assignment was for them to assess the ways in which they were treated based on their marginalizations or their privileges. Students provided three terms for what their narrative would share — the terms were not to be included in their narrative. After reading their narratives aloud, a class discussion connected their terms to the associated experiences. There are a total of four narratives in this issue, three are also accompanied with a voice recording by the author.

The following is one such narrative.

An Educational Narrative by Henry Loran

Growing up white in what is referred to as “Deep East Oakland” is not something that many people are able to do. However, it is my story, and race has always been a big part of my life, even when my peers and I didn’t necessarily know that. In my neighborhood, there are three white residents that I know of. My parents and myself. Now you may be wondering, “How does that work...? Or why did he grow up there?,” or “what’s a white boy doing growing up in Oakland?” East Oakland is arguably the only part of Oakland that has not yet been plagued by gentrification, and before you say anything, no, I am not trying to start it. My grandmother was born in Oakland, and grew up in the house I live in today; and around the time of the FHA redlining, she was told by “some men in suits” that there would be some change around the neighborhood, “change that she may not like” and that these men would give her cash, which they said they had brought with them in a suitcase in their car in exchange for the title to the home. My grandmother politely refused, and never opened the door for those men ever again. Since then, she watched the neighborhood evolve into what it is today. A hub for People of Color, with small businesses run by many different kinds of people around the area, a food desert, riddled with inconsistent and militant over-policing.

I went to an elementary school where I was one of probably twelve to fifteen white kids. The majority of my friends, teachers, and principals were People of Color. Like any other kid, I got in trouble with my friends frequently for playing in class, joking at “inappropriate times,” and even getting in the occasional fight. I knew that race was something that mattered because my name from kindergarten through fifth grade to anyone who wasn’t close to me was “White Boy.” I had no problem with this, neither did my parents, it almost made sense to me: “Well, they call me White Boy because I *am* a White Boy, and I’m one of the only ones around here.” It was not until fourth grade when I started to see the difference in treatment between my friends and myself. I remember the situation vividly, because I remember how upset I got. My best friend in elementary school, who is my best friend today, and I were playing basketball on the school

playground like we always did. And, like we always did, we got into somewhat of a heated argument with the other boys we were playing with. There were four of us, three black boys, one white, none over the age of nine. When yells turned to shoves, a young teacher ran over to us to break up the brewing fight. When yells turned to shoves, a young teacher ran over to us to break up the brewing fight. What happened next, will always upset me. The teacher herded me away from the scene and told me to “just sit right over on that bench, sweetie.”

I sat on the bench, watching my three friends while they continued arguing. The teacher, Ms. Hicks, completely changed her tone with them: “What are you boys doing?! Come with me, I’m taking *all of you* to the principal’s office.” My best friend looked at me as if to say “Here we go again” and I got up from my seat and began to walk with them. Ms. Hicks said to me, “Henry what are you doing?” “Going with you to Mr. Young’s...like you said.” She looked puzzled. “No, Henry I’m taking these gentlemen with me to the office, you stay here and have recess. You didn’t do anything wrong.” *Now could that be?* I thought to myself. *What just happened? Why are they getting in trouble?* I ran up to her as she walked away. “No I was playing with them too, it was all of us.” “No, Henry I saw the whole thing, you didn’t do anything wrong, just go back.” What I said next took everyone by surprise. “Why are they in trouble and not me? Is it because I’m White?” Ms. Hicks, who was Black, definitely wasn’t expecting that. She didn’t necessarily appreciate the comment either. “Okay, Henry, you wanna go to Mr. Young’s with us? You just earned a spot.” My friends nervously held back their laughter as we walked to Mr. Young’s office. When we got to the office, again they separated us. Three Black boys go in first, and then I go in alone. When my three friends walked out, Adrian, my best friend whispers to me, “Just tell the truth.” I walk in to Mr. Young’s office, and he asks me “Okay, Henry, what would you like to talk about?” As I tell him the story of what happened, at each turning point he offers me a buyout. “Did they make you do it? Did you want to do that? Are they really your friends?” and even “Are you sure you got the story right?” I finally explained what happened when Ms. Hicks got involved and I told him, “She put me to the side and said I had nothing to do with any of this, but I did. She was acting like I couldn’t have done anything to get in trouble.” Mr. Young, a Black man, then told me, “Well, Henry, *kids like you don’t usually end up in trouble unless they’re brought into it. You were just an innocent bystander.*” I should have pressed him, I should have said what I said before, I should have asked him why; but I was 8 years old, I had a phobia of the principal’s office, and I knew that at the end of the day, I wasn’t going to change his mind. When I walked out of the office to go talk to Adrian, I asked him, “Why are they treating us so differently?” He answered plainly, “because you’re White.” From that day

forward, I noticed it more and more. The stereotypes got stronger, our race separated us further, and the issues grew in intensity. My friends would ask me to go into the corner store with them so that the owner, who was 99 times out of 100 a Person of Color, wouldn't think they were stealing; and when that didn't work, they would give me their money so that I could purchase it alone.

Even though I knew the answer, I would ask Adrian, "why won't they think I'm stealing?" To which he would respond, "because you're white, and white people don't steal."

The Three Terms: White Privilege, Internalized Oppression, Double/Triple/Quadruple Conscious



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