

# Black Lives Matter

*God in heaven, in your Word you have given us a vision of that holy City to which the nations of the world bring their glory: Behold and visit, we pray, the cities of the earth. Renew the ties of mutual regard which form our civic life. Send us honest and able leaders. Enable us to eliminate poverty, prejudice, and oppression, that peace may prevail with righteousness, and order with justice, and that men and women from different cultures and with differing gifts may find with one another the fulfillment of their humanity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

from The Book of Common Prayer, 825

**St. Paul & the Redeemer | 2014-2015**



## The Vision of St. Paul & the Redeemer

We seek to become a community that mirrors the radical hospitality practiced by Jesus. We do that in five important ways:



**We Praise God**



**We Invite All**



**We Connect Lives**



**We Nurture Faith**



**We Serve Neighbor**

4945 S Dorchester Ave  
Chicago IL 60615  
(773) 624-3185 | sp – r.org

### Contents

Testimonies from Black Vestry Members December 10, 2014	3-5
Sermon by the Rev'd Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows December 14, 2014	6-7
Personal Narratives by Parishioners January 15 March 15, 2015	8-15
Sermon by the Rev'd Peter C. Lane January 18, 2015	16-17
Personal Narratives by Parishioners Continued January 15 March 15, 2015	18-23

**In response** to the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner in New York and the Black Lives Matter Movement, the parish held a meeting in our church on December 10, 2014. Gathering together in prayer and in solidarity with the #Black Lives Matter movement, they heard personal stories from black members of the parish vestry.

On December 14, the Rev'd Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows, priest associate, delivered an Advent sermon, reflecting on a season made even darker by the continued protests over the killing of black men by police. She stressed the difficult imperative of working for racial reconciliation and social justice.

Prompted by the parish gathering and the sermon, a 2015 SPR Martin Luther King Committee was formed. Co-chairs Romonda Bumpus and Shirley Knight and committee members Deborah Crable, Twila Jones, Melvin Parks, Rosemary Gooden, David Daniels and Michael McKee gathered personal narratives from parishioners and clergy that, in the tradition of Martin Luther King, Jr., centered on racism and works of racial and social justice.

The committee set up a link where you can access the personal narratives as well as the earlier sermons and testimonies: [www.spr-blm.org](http://www.spr-blm.org). This print version of their work is another way to share the stories of the clergy and parishioners of St. Paul & the Redeemer Church.

## **Romonda Bumpus**

For years, I have known that we are not a country that values Black Lives – but the deaths of Eric Garner and Mike Brown have brought the institutional racism of our country into the brightest light.

I have been witness to the men in my family being harassed by local police for years. They have been the victims of “driving while Black”, “walking while Black,” and “jogging while Black.” They have been pulled over, and stopped not for driving over the speed limit, but for driving the speed limit in a neighborhood where Black men are not often seen. They have been taken to jail on jogs, because they could not provide identification while being in the park close to closing time. They have been pushed against fences and frisked because they matched the description of a robber in an area – yes – “that description” – of a young Black male height 5’7 to 5’10.

The young men in my family were taught at an early age that if they were stopped by the police, they should fully cooperate. They should answer all questions with “Yes, Sir or No, Sir” ; they should never resist, and if taken to the police station the only thing they should ask for is a phone call, to reach out to the closest relative. They were taught to be passive to the point of being subservient, because being subservient could be the difference between living and dying.

I remember the first time that I began to truly understand the extreme difficulty of being a Black man in our country in the present age. I was home from college on Thanksgiving break, and my cousins from Pittsburgh were in town. There had been a series of dinners, as is often the case with my family, but I’d noticed that at the end of all of these dinners, the men in my family were settling into closed door conversations. I cornered my brother and cousins after one of these conversations, to find out what was going on. My cousins explained that they were playing basketball at an outdoor court on their campus at Carnegie-Mellon, with some of their classmates. The local police came onto their court and asked my cousins, the only Black men in the group, to provide their school IDs, in order to make sure that they “belonged” there. My cousins refused.

## **Donna Larrieu**

When Peter asked me to share my thought on the topic of Black Lives Matter and the recent events in Ferguson and New York, I was initially unsure on what to say. As a black person I have been a witness to and indeed experienced various forms of racism, discrimination and prejudice, thus I have a lot to say.

My earliest memory of the awfulness of racisms was in the 1960s. My cousin was assaulted by white youths for simply riding his bike in the wrong neighborhood. My mother sent my brother away to boarding school just to get him out of the city. I attended an all girls Catholic high school that went from 90% white to 100% black in just 4 years! Almost every black person in America has a similar story to tell regardless of economic standings or geographical location.

They stated that they were being harassed because they were the only Black men there and they weren’t going to stand for it. They were arrested. My uncle retrieved them, and admonished them for not just producing their IDs. The closed door conversations were because my uncles and father thought that all of the young men in the family needed some “retraining.”

I was shocked hearing this from my cousins. I mean this was 2000 – not 1960! Why were my father and uncles telling them that they still had to cower and lower their heads when white police officers asked them questions?? Why did we still have to be silent? Our grandparents had fought for the right for us to be at these prestigious schools...and now we just had to act like we were so grateful for the opportunity that we never did anything but “go along to get along”??!

My dad and uncles were telling the young men in my family this because they knew...they knew that things were different in some ways from how they were in 1960, but not very different in others. Sure, there were no barking dogs, and fire hoses attacking them, but there were subtle forms of attack. They knew that my cousins could have easily been Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown or Eric Garner. They knew that the end of my cousins’ stories could have been completely different.

Every day, like my mother does for my father and my brother, I pray for my husband, brother and cousins. I pray that they make it to work and home without incident. I pray that they come home whole, and not broken by a system that undervalues them. I worry when they are driving, and when they go on jogs with their hoodies on after dark. I worry because by so many, they are seen as a threat, a menace, or a “demon.” They are not seen as someone’s loved one, someone’s husband, and someone’s brother. Their BlackLivesMatter.

Let us pray for our country. Let us pray for a country where our sons do not have to live in fear of the police. Let us pray for a country that believes that #BlackLivesMatter.

Living while black in America is not easy even though I feel that I have been one of the lucky ones due to my hard working parents and middle class upbringing. I often reflect and parallel my life with that of the black students I teach in Englewood who are not so lucky. Teaching has taken me into certain neighborhoods and homes, and exposed me to life styles that are foreign, unfamiliar and downright dangerous and unlawful. I have interacted with parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and students. The overwhelming feeling from this group of people is one of being marginalized, disenfranchised and unconnected to mainstream America. The feeling of being less than or other than is pervasive and tangible. When my students are engaged in casual conversation about their lives and their future, they often use phrases like, “they (the man) don’t understand,” “nothing will change,” “what else can I do,” “I can’t wait till I get my own Link card,” “I’m going to jail any way,” and “I gotta get what I can cause I’ll be dead by the time I am 25.”

How do I convince my students that their lives, their black lives matter?

The tragedy is how some in one race perceive themselves and their perceptions of others races (stereotyping). The black person knows the reality of their existence in America. We are reminded every day by the subtle racism in the media, the segregated neighborhoods, the schools and by the police force, the surveillance and profiling. The white person can both understand the disparity and try to compensate or claim to be unaware even though they are exposed to the same subtle racism. There is a great need for cognitive restructuring where each person can recognize their own value and talent without diminishing the value and talents of others.

The actions of Michael Brown and Eric Garner that preceded their deaths were manifestations of a system that found fault with their poor judgment, lack of education, hopelessness and simply not knowing a better way. The

## Mel Parks

Growing up, the realization of what it means to be a black man wasn't always evident to me. My family, like many others, is composed of a wide variety of ethnicities including Native Americans (some of which still live on reservations), Puerto Ricans, Jamaicans and Germans. In this type of family, one of the earliest lessons I learned, was the strength, beauty and respect of diversity. I learned early on that people are different and that difference shouldn't dictate how you treat someone. I grew up on Chicago's North Side originally in Humboldt Park and later the Rogers Park and Ravenswood neighborhoods. My life involved friends from all over the world; my best grade school friend hailed from the Philippines, and I fondly remember spending many nights after school sharing her culture with parents, siblings and pets as we watched and discussed the latest cartoons. Sure, there were black kids among my friends, but we didn't make a point of holding black only outings or events, because we all were friends Black, White, Latino, Romanian, Bulgarian, Thai ... we just wanted to be together and enjoy life as children.

Understanding much better than I the world we were living in, my mother sat me down one day for a serious conversation. She said, "Tomorrow is not promised for any of us, and I want you and your sister to be prepared to take care of yourselves if, God forbid, anything should happen to me. I also want you to understand the world we live in. You're a male, you're black, and you're gay. According to many people and just like in the game of baseball you have 3 strikes against you, and so the game is already lost before it has begun. You have to be the best whatever you do in life - period. You will have to watch what you say, how you say it and who you say it too because you are a black male and it's just not the same for you as others" As a teenager, hearing this was a shock to me, but I also trusted my mom and knew in my heart that she was doing her job to prepare me for life as I began to mature and grow older - which would lead to new experiences.

The stark difference became even clearer as I attended high school on the far south side at Corliss. Being inundated in South Side black culture opened my eyes to a world I knew nothing about. Books assigned as

reactions of the police officers were manifestations of the same system that turned a blind eye to their poor judgment, inadequate training, lack of understanding or a refusal to understand the predicament of others. The shamefulness of it all is that more often than not the victim is black and male. It is not enough to have affirmative action programs or Title One Schools when an unarmed black person can be shot dead or strangled in a choke hold by the law for nothing more than a misdemeanor.

I am not a politician, historian nor activist, just a concerned citizen trying to live. My thoughts and emotions are somewhere in the middle between Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison's comments when asked about racism, "we must forever be vigilant". And LAPD beating victim, Rodney King's plea of "can't we all get along."

readings freshman year, I had covered in 6th or 7th grade, the neighborhood was filthy and full of dilapidated buildings, little to no grass, no animal life outside of rats and possums, the school had bullet-proof glass windows and personal CTA buses to minimize the frequent fighting, bathrooms had no toilet tissue, mirrors or stall doors ... it was truly a jungle and apparent to me that Chicago didn't care about the lives or quality of life for its black population. Freshman year of college brought a warning from the black student council of never driving through a southern Illinois city called Anna, because "Ain't No Niggas Allowed"; military life brought the usual questions of "what gang are you in?" "How many times have you been arrested or in jail?" once people learned I was from Chicago; because all black men from Chicago were felons and gang bangers. I've experienced the clutching of purses/crossing of the street when white women and men see me approaching; the switching of seats on a bus or train next to white person; I've been stopped by Chicago police and interrogated while driving because a young black man, can't possibly have a clean record and be a veteran of the US Army ... I must have stolen the vehicle ... only to have the officers insincerely apologize, explain their reasoning and wish me a pleasant evening

These situations and many more have happened in my life, but I also remember welcoming several soldiers from a southern Illinois town much like Anna that volunteered to deploy with my heavily black/Latino unit to Iraq and Kuwait. One night while celebrating our departure date home, one of them said to me "I didn't like black people before. I was scared of them and knew nothing about them except for what was on TV. We don't have black people where I'm from, but you've changed my mind and I now know all black people aren't what we see on TV or hear in the news and I wanted to share that with you because it has changed my life."

And that's my prayer as we gather here tonight at SPR; that no matter our differences and the obstacles we face solely because of who God has made us, let us never lose hope and stop praying for change that is possible. Even if that change occurs one soul at a time, it's one less person on the wrong side of thinking black lives don't matter, because black lives matter today, tomorrow and forever.

## **Adetayo Adegoke**

I come from Nigeria, a nation of incredible diversity, with almost four hundred tribes and over thirty dialects and cultures and food. We are equally divided as Christians and Muslims. There is numerically more native diversity in Nigeria than all the nations of the Americas put together. My country is bound together by a border that envelopes less than twice the state of Texas.

Over the centuries, we have been allies and bitter enemies, competing for limited resources in what is really a country flowing with milk and honey. We competed not because of an innate belief that one tribe is better than the other, but rather because it is human nature. The color of my continent is black, from gold to people. Children do not have to carry the unnatural burden of racism.

So many of us journeyed to this country as teenagers, the first of our families to migrate to another nation. We were young and naïve, understood very little and knew even less. For the first time in my life, I had been stopped by cops in a predominantly white neighborhood for no reason other than being out of place. I have been stopped while walking with my Caucasian wife by cops, asking her if she is okay.

As new migrants, we learned to layer ourselves with thick coats of clothing; we also learned to layer our souls against the insidious effects of racism. We do this, not just for ourselves and our sanity but because we understood early on that it was critically important to do so, for our future family, and our new nation. It is a price I choose to pay, a burden I choose to carry.

I choose to carry this burden not because I think my shoulders are strong enough to bear this weight, but because I remember the Word of God through his servant David, "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help? My Help cometh from the Lord, who made Heaven and Earth. He shall not suffer my foot to be moved. He that keepeth me will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel, Nigeria, and the United States, shall neither slumber nor sleep." I believe that God is not asleep in this great nation.

Is it possible to love two nations? I do, with all my soul, with all my heart, with all my might. I see and have experienced great promise, numerous blessings but also great waste, and sorrow, and ignorance. It is this love that makes me examine myself and this nation of ours with a heavy heart, but with faith that with God's love through our actions, tomorrow's stories will be a better one. The sins of racism committed yesterday and today cannot be defeated by acts of violence or singular events.

It is only with a constancy of open dialog, unbiased education, inclusiveness, and most of all love that we can conquer it. It is through forgiving, but never forgetting, always remembering the sacrifices of so many that we can cause this terrible sickness to pass from our nation. I pray for the souls and families of many that have been taken by violence in this nation through acts of racism. May God keep them and bless them. God bless this nation of ours. Amen.

## The Rev'd Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows

Preached on Sunday, Dec 14

As we continue to process the events of the day--the continued protests over the killing of black men at the hands of police and generally lament the poverty, disease, mudslides, and other disasters these days, this Advent, seem darker than usual. And I don't think it's my mood. Advent is supposed to be dark – this period when we intentionally look forward to the second coming of Christ with all of the upheaval that comes with it. But this is a bit much.

We are given scriptural texts specifically chosen for this third Sunday of Advent and though there are nice words in here – rejoice! freedom! Oil of gladness! I find no comfort. Let's take a look at this passage from Isaiah.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me to preach good news. At first blush, Isaiah sounds remarkably comforting to us – and we so want to be comforted – all of us. Isaiah's message told by the unnamed prophet is "to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion ... "

After years spent in exile, after a period of being called back home, after confronting the monumental task of rebuilding a broken and dispersed community of people called Israel, all of the promises that come before in the 60 previous chapters of Isaiah – promises written over many, many years by different prophets – these promises are still being made. The people still mourn and grieve because there had been no glorious kingdom of God established after the exile as they anticipated. They still needed comfort. And we live now, in a world into which Jesus has already come once – this Jesus who preached on these texts in his first sermon in the Temple and declared that all of these promises were being fulfilled as the listeners heard him. We hear these words in the light of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner in Staten Island, the second anniversary of the massacre of the innocents in Newtown, CT and I'm clear, are you not, that not only do we still want to be comforted--we are still in exile. We have not yet found our way back. The superhighway that Isaiah spoke about in last Sunday's passage is like the Eisenhower at the evening rush – going nowhere fast. We want to cry freedom, we want an end to the mass incarceration of young black and latino men, we want the year of jubilee – the year of the Lord's favor – and we want comfort for those very many who are in mourning.

Being comforted and being comfortable are different things. Advent time – this time we are in – is not about being comfortable. Advent is about waiting for Christ's return, it is about waiting for the consummation of all things when all people, all of creation will be reconciled to each other and to God. Advent is about finding our way back – home. It is about loving a God who made a home, here among humanity, in the person of Jesus. So when I'm asked, what "can we do" in the wake of Ferguson and the rest; what can we do, when the protesting is over – all I can say is that it is complicated.

Sure there is advocacy work to be done and policies to change and reforms to effect. Ultimately, though, the answers to that question – which I believe is aimed at getting at the structural and systemic forces that make institutional and hence, individual racism and privilege so difficult to dismantle – the answers to the question will vary with each of us. But let me tell you what I'm doing. It's a small little thing called "going home".

So let me say, by way of confession, that over the past few years I've been slowly coming out as a kid from the projects. I cannot express enough what a big deal that has been for me. It is an admission that has me examining my own internalized racial oppression, identity, feelings of abandonment – and my own acts of abandoning my community in the name of survival – and I hope ultimately giving me the courage to use what little privilege I have as a multiple degreed, Ivy educated black professional to actually do something to make a difference.

At the age of ten my family moved to a housing project in Staten Island – not too far where Eric Garner met his fate. We had left Brooklyn and relocated to a place where my own innocence of people of many races and backgrounds living together more or less peacefully was shattered. This was the place where I had to learn to navigate the White adults spitting on me and calling me the N-word as I walked home from school each day and the Black school kids wanting to fight me because I spoke funny and used words they didn't understand. I hated this place. I took solace in the library and the classroom and dreamed of getting out. Each night gunshots would ring out on the basketball court below my window as I did my homework. I strategized and dreamt about a different life – frankly, a Park Avenue classic six apartment was the dream. I saved my allowance and later after-school job money so that I'm pretty sure I was the only teenager walking around the projects in a Brooks Brothers navy blue, brass-buttoned blazer. Success meant getting out and never looking back. But as it turns out, going back just may be my salvation.

For me, confronting the pain, violence, and for many, hopelessness of that place is critical in order for me to take all of this talk of racial reconciliation and social justice from an academic exercise that I can study and read about till there's no tomorrow, to an experience of true compassion, empathy, and solidarity. This is about me amending the hashtag, BlackLivesMatter to #AllBlackLivesMatter. All Black lives – especially, especially, the ones seen as expendable and disposable because of where they live, how they speak, what they wear. I don't have time to do it, I'm hearing and remembering stories I don't want to hear or remember. But this little bit of "putting myself back together" and finding wholeness, will be I pray, a key to me effecting that wholeness that I desire for the whole community. This is about intentionally entering the brokenness to find that actually, those who made it out are not the only survivors.

This is also an exercise in Advent hope. It is about paying attention and believing in spite of the "evidence" that in the darkest of days, a light shines forth. From broken and abandoned dreams, hope is birthed. It is about trusting that transformation comes from unexpected places – whether it is the backwater of Nazareth or the housing projects of Staten Island, or the

streets of Englewood. In her book *The Liturgical Year*, Joan Chittister says of Advent, " ... this is the season that teaches us to

wait for what is beyond the obvious. It trains us to see what is behind the apparent. Advent makes us look for God in all those places we have, until now, ignored."

I don't know what "going home" looks like for you. Maybe it is a hard, difficult look at the places that have made you who you are and being curious about it. Maybe it is looking at the place where you live and move and have your being right now, and asking yourself, is this life you're living and creating, helping to effect the change you desire for the world. Returning home – moving toward wholeness-is what God most desires for us and the pathway as Isaiah and other prophets make clear, will not always be simple, clear or easy. But each time we go to those places – whether it is a street address or the part of your heart that has been hollowed out by complacency, sorrow, fear, and anguish – each time we go to those places we have to look oh so carefully lest we miss what God is doing in front of our very eyes.

About a week ago I finally made it over to the Holocaust Museum in Skokie – I pass it all the time but never made it in. I'd been urged by friends from church and the community to check out the exhibit on race. It is a well done exhibit that takes the anthropological approach to reinforce the idea of race as a social construct but that also explains the evolution of physical features that account for the diversity in the human family. It also has what seems to be hours of video of personal testimony from folks speaking of discrimination, bias, and genocidal violence because of racism in this country. The exhibit is a good one but, frankly, didn't tell me anything I didn't really already know. It reminded me that what is happening to Black men today is part of a long string of racial atrocities. I left feeling a bit exhausted and a bit resigned that it was ever thus, and ever shall be. After I exited the exhibit I made my way to the gift shop. I thought I might check out the permanent exhibit about the horrors of the Jewish Holocaust but I didn't want to take in more depressing narratives – I was full up. As I entered the gift shop a man pointed to a table where another, older, White man was sitting and he asked me, "would you like to meet a Holocaust survivor?" So I gave the only answer I could give. "Of course. Of course, I do."

## The Rev'd Dan Puchalla

Transcript of video. To view, go to [spr-blm.org](http://spr-blm.org)

I think the Black Lives Matter movement is highlighting that racism, in this country, is not just a problem of policing. It's not just a problem of the courts, it's not even just a problem of economics. It's the problem of the soul. It's a spiritual problem, it's a cultural problem, it's something that's so deeply-seated in just the way we are in the world and it's going to take that kind of work – that kind of work of adjusting the way we look at the world, of adjusting how we see one another. Of adjusting our expectations and our norms and our sense of what is fair and who gets access to what is fair.

## Shannon Cate

One form of the confession in the Book of Common Prayer says: "We repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf."

I am going to go out on a limb and begin with the assumption that there is no one in the SPR congregation who would self-identify as a racist, let alone a white supremacist. We pride ourselves here at SPR on our racial integration. We enjoy our diverse worship that celebrates people of many backgrounds. We cross social boundaries at coffee hour and learn about people with lives different from our own.

But as a person who is identified as "white," I am convinced that there is much more I need to do to bring a true sense of racial justice to my own world. As a white person in the United States, I have had a great deal of evil done on my behalf. And "repent" is not just a word that means I'm sorry about this. It means roughly, to turn around and go in a new direction. How can I go against the direction of evil I have not willfully done, but that has been done on my behalf? One way to begin, is to identify something many have come to call "white privilege" and its role in my daily life.

Race is not, of course, the only way that privileges are unevenly awarded in our society. Class, education, region, religion, national origin, gender, sexuality – you name it – if there is a way to categorize people, it has been used as a hierarchy to privilege some and discriminate against others. But for now, right here, I am going to focus on race, because it is of critical importance to my own life and the lives of people I love.

"White privilege" then, is not about the deficits of minorities – things like discrimination, or prejudice or being the target of hate. Rather, the idea of privilege arose to make people aware of the perks they get for being on top of a racial hierarchy. One of those very "perks" is not realizing that you are even receiving them. They are treated as an ordinary, natural expectation, and thus made invisible to the people who receive them. But once you do look carefully at some of those and the history behind them, it is easy to see that being white means benefitting from a social structure that was built on racist assumptions and via racist structures. (Ta-nehisi Coates's recent work in the *Atlantic* magazine is a great introduction to understanding how this

When I was thirteen we moved to Florida and I went to a new middle school which was about 80% African American. That gave me an opportunity, at that age, to appreciate the different ways people are treated as they grow up in this country. I saw how when I did well in school my teachers encouraged me, they gave me enrichment activities, they pushed me to do even better, but I saw when my black peers did well in class teachers acted with surprise and even sometimes made fun of them when they said the right answer as if it were a shock to them.

works: [http:// www. theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/](http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/)).

White privilege is something I began teaching about as a graduate student, when I was single. I used to ask my students to add something to the list of privileges identified by Peggy Macintosh in her famous essay on the idea. I always added one of my own too: "I can teach about race and be considered 'neutral' on the topic because as a white person, I am considered to be rational and disinterested."

But I have never been neutral on race. Being white has given me benefits that have nothing to do with my own merits – perhaps most notably, in that my merits are considered to be truly mine. I am assumed to have earned my places at educational institutions, rather than having been handed them "unfairly" by affirmative action. Once on campus, no one has questioned my right to be there. I've even wandered around in areas marked "restricted" as a visiting student at Oxford University and no one ever questioned me because I looked like the kind of person who probably belonged there.

In adopting my children, I became keenly aware of the difference between being a white woman who could afford to adopt a child and being a Black woman who couldn't afford to keep one she bore in her own body. I became aware of the violence foster care and adoption does to Black families (the work of Dorothy Roberts is especially enlightening on this topic) by separating generations from each other and cutting off roots that may be shallow and weak to begin with, given the racial violence that erases Black history in countless structural and personal ways. I learned that white families are more often offered support to stay together under the same circumstances in which Black families are separated by the child welfare system.

And now, raising my Black daughters, I see evidence every day of the way white children are given a "pass" on behavior that my girls are penalized for – sometimes hatefully, as when a man kicked my nine-year-old out of his tee-shirt shop on our family vacation because he didn't want her handling the shirts without buying them first, or when a man at the beach on that same vacation threw my seven-year-old's shoes in a garbage can, then



yelled at her when she came back to look for them, calling her irresponsible on a beach littered with white children's left-behind toys.

I have learned that childhood – and its presumed innocence – is itself something of a white privilege, when research shows that white people estimate the age of Black children roughly 2 to 3 years older than white children of the same age. So my ten-year old might seem to be a teenager to a stranger at the park. Maybe that is why a white woman, not aware that I was my daughter's mother, chased her off a swing at the playground so her own child could take a turn first. Meanwhile, actual white teens regularly colonize the swings at the same park. I did the same without incident in my own teen years.

White privilege means I could go shopping alone as a child – riding my bike to a gift shop near my home to buy Christmas presents for my family – and was never accused of shoplifting or followed suspiciously around the store. I have to teach my own kids to hold their hands behind their backs and stay very near me in stores so as to avoid as much suspicion as possible from shop employees like the ones my partner observed watching our daughter so closely that they missed a grown white woman stealing candy from their bulk bins.

White privilege means that when I tell white people about my children's experiences they believe me. They are shocked. They do not think I have a chip on my shoulder, I am "too sensitive," I am "race-baiting," or imagining racist logic behind experiences that have some less insidious explanation. White privilege means people listen to me and take me seriously when I talk or write.

## **Deborah Crable**

At a restaurant where the cashier takes your order, I was unaware that the cashier needed the table ID number to place my order. The inconvenience of stepping out of a long line to get my table number was ridiculous!!!! I was cold, tired, hungry and the only black person in the establishment! I silenced my obvious thought – just bring the order to the only black person here. Later, I questioned my inclination to play the "race card." When approached as a patron, I responded from my ethnocentric view as a unique black patron in an environment void of black people. Another annoyed patron ultimately retrieved my table number. Later, I felt ridiculously silly realizing I was being rude and obnoxious and more important, had violated the spirit of the 1960 Greensboro Four Lunch Counter Sit-In that spawned

I can't shake my white privilege. It is structural. It is evil done on my behalf. But I can repent of this evil by acknowledging how it enslaves me, and how it enslaves my children, by listening to them, believing them, and most of all listening to and believing other Black people who can understand personally what it means to be a Black child. Those are the people I look to when I want to learn more about what my children need to grow up as confident and capable as they can. For me especially, repentance means acknowledging how very much I have been given simply because I was born into my own skin. Ironically, given the way adoption works, my children themselves are with me largely because I am white. I repent by working to make the world a place in which Black women – like the ones my children will someday become – are not at greater risk for losing their own children whether to child welfare services or to violence. That begins, in a small, daily way, with listening to Black adults, without defensiveness, without fear, and learning from what they say.

I am grateful to the bottom of my heart that SPR is a place where I can practice this repentance with a joyful spirit, making wonderful friends in the process. The Church doesn't just ask us to feel guilty about big evil systems we can't control. It gives us an opportunity to go in a completely new direction. Thanks be to God for that.

other sit-in protests, which ignited the Civil Rights Movement. The initial four Agriculture and Technical University freshman students who demanded equal-race service at the Woolworth's "for Whites only" lunch counter. Lesson learned: Moving beyond race-based identity qualifiers to realize Dr. King's vision of human equality is a challenge we must confront and reconcile every day. The challenges range from the most egregious racially motivated incident to the subliminal. It is difficult, if not impossible, to deconstruct imbedded 'Social DNA' that defines racial identity and holds remembrance strands of painful, racial realities. To honor Dr. King's vision, our primary identity consciousness must be rooted in accepting that we are, first and foremost, members of God's human family. How bold and transformative is it to put our humanity before racial or ethnic identity?

## Sheila Bator

Bob and I met and married in the midst of involvement in the civil rights movement. In 1963 I was working for the Catholic Interracial Council of Chicago as membership secretary, which basically meant I kept track of and contacted members when there was a need for rapid action. Although never the group's plan or mission, CIC mostly reacted to what was going on in Chicago and the wider world rather than initiating programs. And there was plenty to react to.

On a wider scale, I participated in the 1963 March on Washington, riding the train with thousands of other Chicagoans, marching in the streets from the railroad station to the Washington Monument, settling around the reflecting pool for the speeches and then marching back to the train, exhausted and not sure what we had accomplished but certain that it was something we had to and wanted to do. (All in all, I made 5 trips to Washington in those days and never walked on the sidewalk, just in the streets.)

After the March on Washington, I met Bob when he joined the CIC and we began spending lots of time together. We really didn't date; we were too busy, and Bob's car trunk was usually full of picket signs. When we drove to Washington to lobby for the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, we were part of Chicago's interreligious, interracial delegation. Just before leaving Chicago, we realized there were many Jewish and Catholic members in the delegation but no Protestants. With about an hour to departure, I called Bishop James Montgomery and asked if he could get a short Episcopalian priest who could be packed and ready to leave in 20 minutes – and he did. Amazingly, he didn't question my peculiar request. (We had built up a terrific working relationship.) Bob's car was a two-door Chevy Corvair with a back seat too small for ordinary size people. Within the hour, Fr. Iver Lawrence of Trinity Church showed up (!) and the three of us were off on a 14 hour drive to Washington D.C.

That same summer CIC fielded teams, also interreligious and interracial, of clergymen to walk the areas of Chicago experiencing serious racial unrest and in some instances, riots. Much of that summer's tension revolved around efforts of black families to integrate all-white neighborhoods. In a not-so-happy coincidence, the homeless shelter where Bob and I now volunteer is a stone's throw (literally) from the park where Martin Luther King was stoned.

As a Roman Catholic at the time working for a Roman Catholic agency, some aspects of the civil rights movement especially resonated with me. Two stand out: the Episcopal priest who drove with us to Washington. (All members of our Chicago delegation were male religious except for me and Bob.) The plan we had for housing them consisted of decamping them in monasteries or rectories. When the next morning came, the men housed at a Christian Brothers monastery were invited to say Mass. When a sleepy Bob got the question, he thanked them for the invitation but explained that he was not a priest. Father Lawrence accepted gratefully. Later, he told us how

pleased he was to have experienced the ecumenical spirit of being invited to say Mass at a Roman Catholic facility. The Christian Brother, his altar server, told Bob it was the most perfect mass he had ever taken part in. Pleased as Bob and I were at all the enthusiasm from host and guest, we knew the ecumenical movement had not sanctioned Episcopal priests as celebrants at Roman Catholic altars. I called Bishop Montgomery again (and he took the call) and asked him to curb the enthusiasm. Once again, the good bishop came through.

Previously, there were more tricky social justice endeavors. In 1963, one day a Loyola University student came to CIC and told us she had been refused use of the swimming pool on the top floor of Lewis Towers which did not belong to the University, but to the Illinois Club for Catholic Women. The pool had been open to female Loyola students, but our student was Black. She asked for our help, aware that CIC had already assisted a black businessman gain membership in the hitherto all-white Knights of Columbus in Chicago. Since the swimming pool access was a student issue, we organized students to picket in protest. Among those responding to our call were four nuns. This presented a quandary. With my boss out of town and not readily reachable. I wasn't certain we could do this and specifically uncertain I could do this without authority from someone significantly more important than "membership secretary."

In the 1960s we were used to picketing and protests, but so far as I could remember, none had involved nuns. So I felt I had to move the question up the chain of command: CIC's chaplain and then whoever he received orders from. The answer came back swiftly---from the Cardinal no less. Stop the nuns. As it turned out, they didn't feel they needed permission from anyone. They did, however, want my advice. I didn't have any but felt that I had to honor their resolve. I hid the nuns in a conference room until the time for the protest. While they remained hidden I called the local newspapers and national magazines. At that time, the press was the only serious protection civil rights protestors had. In those days picketing by nuns wearing habits was unheard of.

*Time* covered the protest along with a photo of the nuns picketing. None of the nuns nor I suffered any obvious repercussions. The pool was drained and nobody got to swim in it anymore. It is now an oddly shaped Loyola University conference room with very high ceilings.

## Robert Bator

I grew up in the 1940s and 1950s in Chicago's McKinley Park, a blue collar enclave with lots of churches, corner grocery stores and bars. Three Roman Catholic churches, all within blocks of each other, were founded to serve Irish Americans, Polish Americans and German Americans. Integration meant living alongside someone of a different ethnicity, rarer still, someone of a different religion.

When I signed a pro-integration petition in 1963, *The Chicago Defender* noted with surprise that it was signed by someone living in area code 60609.

From the 90s on, the area became more diverse. It's now two-thirds Hispanic with Whites and Asians making up just the rest but with a black population of only 1%.

Above, Sheila covered her work and our meeting at the Catholic Interracial Council. I want to add my reflections to hers.

One of her aunts announced she wouldn't come to our wedding if blacks were invited. Sheila's co-workers would understand, she averred. Well into the 1960s in obeisance to white privilege, it was assumed blacks would know when to bow out. Example: In the 1960s, St. Rita High School booked its prom at the South Shore Country Club which didn't allow blacks as members or in its facilities. One parent announced the black students would understand – and stay home. Sheila's aunt also announced that if the Cardinal knew what she was up to she'd be in trouble. We dismissed her warning.

Turns out she was partly right. As Sheila explained, she got the word that the Cardinal didn't want nuns picketing over the denial of membership to a black student to the Illinois Club for Catholic Women and its members-only swimming pool. A son of Julia Lewis, the woman who wouldn't admit the student, in an interview exclaimed he would no more expect a nun to picket as to belly up to a bar.

Re: The Washington, D.C. trip to support the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Yes I was gob smacked that Sheila could 1. Get a bishop to take her call and 2. Unquestioningly, deliver a short Episcopalian priest who could drop everything and, on very short notice, go on a long car ride with us.

I don't remember much of what we did to lobby for the bill except being lectured by Senator Everett Dirksen. More memorable: the Illinois delegation, among others, was invited to the East Room of the White House to hear President Johnson. His remarks included "we shall overcome," prompting some hisses from the audience as some felt he was appropriating that mantra. History has shown, however, that he steered that bill through Congress, including getting it out of a committee headed by a Southern Democrat who was keeping the bill from coming up for a vote.

A few years later, the Urban League asked me to pose as a neighborhood resident and observe a demonstration in Marquette Park for signs of

violence and police inaction to same. To illustrate how restrictive that neighborhood was: A restaurant reviewer went to a Lithuanian restaurant in the area and found the cooks, the wait staff and the customers all stared. He felt like Alice Cooper at a D.A.R. convention. Another example: Some locals wanted to get back at outsiders demonstrating at an anti-Vietnam rally in Marquette Park in the 1960s. They trashed a VW on the surmise that only someone not from the neighborhood would own a foreign car. They were right. The car belonged to an outsider, but he was a Roman Catholic priest. Whoops. That didn't go down well in that predominantly Roman Catholic neighborhood. However, the priest was Father George Clements, and he was black – another black person marching in "their" neighborhood.

The Marquette Park community (Chicago Lawn) is now majority black.

In the 1970s there were very few integrated areas on the south side of Chicago. In the late 60s we were living in South Shore and looking for a public school for our daughter. One school would not let me in to observe a kindergarten class until I got the district superintendent to intervene. One visit, and I could see what they were hiding, so we put our daughter in Bret Harte School even though we didn't live in its attendance boundaries. A teacher there asked the principal how we could get in. In a stage whisper she intoned "Tell them to use another address!" Later, we dropped the subterfuge and moved to Hyde Park.

So strange did Hyde Park seem to my relatives in their ethnic enclaves, my mother once sent a card with our street address but Hyde Park, Illinois, as the city. The card was delivered as addressed, without correction.

Growing up in a multi-racial and multi-cultural community, our children got quite a world view. In second grade my daughter Miranda had a secret friendship with a black Muslim girl whose parents were black separatists. When my kids went off to college, they sought out foreign students as their American peers seemed rather insular. Case in point: my daughter's dorm mates were surprised by her Jewish boyfriend. They didn't envision her previous Hispanic or Black boyfriends. That takes me back to my childhood when a mixed marriage meant a marriage of a Catholic and a nonCatholic. Race was never part of the equation.

In many ways race is still part of the equation in Chicago. Jennifer Baskerville-Burrows finds it the most segregated city she has ever encountered. But inroads exist. As noted, the neighborhood that fought to keep out blacks is now majority black.

On the eve of Obama's first election, Jonathan Alter in *Newsweek* noted that some of the children and grandchildren of the cops and factory workers of that community were gathered in a multi-cultural, multi-racial assembly in Grant Park. Sheila and I were there. Asked by a reporter what it felt like, Sheila said it felt like the March on Washington. Amen. As James Baldwin wrote, "The world is white no longer; it will never be white again."

## Carol Moseley Braun

Transcript of video. Interview by Deborah Crable. To view, go to [spr-blm.org](http://spr-blm.org)

One of my earliest memories of the civil rights movement was with Dr. King. When he came to Chicago I had to be 15 or 16 years old. He was going to march over in Marquette Park, and my mother and my parents said oh no don't go over there; there's going to be trouble, whatever. And I was a teenager – so of course I went over to join the march and it was interesting because it was such an ugly, ugly atmosphere. I think King even described it as one of the worst experiences he had.

Marching down the street I had nuns on either side of me, and the catcalls against the nuns and the N word and all this. It was just ugly. The guy on the other side got hit and he was bleeding, but he was a veteran of Selma. He was a veteran of the marches in the South and so he just took his handkerchief out and stopped the bleeding from the rock that hit him in the head.

A funnier story was this kid along the road who was my age roughly, you know, young teenager started with screaming "Seme-humans go home. Seme-humans go home." And I looked at him and made eye contact with this kid and said "It's not semehumans; it's semi-humans SEMI!" He said "I didn't know how to spell it. Oh thanks." It's that sort of thing: Connecting on a human basis made a difference. In that moment we subsequently went into the park where Dr. King was hit. They started throwing rocks and bottles and the civil rights marchers from the South had a stratagem where they put the women and children in the inside. Dr. King was like in the very middle and the women and the children and then the men and then the veterans was the way they arranged these circles around King when it got really violent and I can remember thinking I need to get a rock or a bottle and throw back. This is not working for me.

And then Dr. King – He stood with all this kind of calm about what he was facing, what we were facing and didn't react, didn't respond. And it was again one of the moments when you get an education; it was like oh now I get it. I get why nonviolence is the better response. I get why love toward these people is the better response. I get it now. Then that made a huge difference because a lot of my friends were talking about you know go get your gun, get ready for the revolution and all the rest of it. We could talk about that too.

But I never – I participated in the free breakfast program of the Black Panthers, but I never went down the road of advocating violence, of advocating that kind of armed resistance to what we were facing. But rather went in the direction that King and some of the other leadership were talking about in terms of using peaceful resistance and nonviolence as a response to the ugliness of racism.

DC: So the greatest lesson learned from King regarding racism that we need to uplift even today when we take a look at black lives matter?

CMB: Humanity that at the end of the day it really is about our humanity, that is the things that bind us together not the things that divide us. Whether it's color or race or class or ethnicity or sexuality or whatever. You know you can slice and dice the humanity in so many different ways that separate people and those separations almost automatically give rise to antipathy and antagonism. Whereas if you talk about those things that make us one, that bring us together as human beings that reflects the essential dignity of each person. If you approach it from that direction then what you do you set up a paradigm that gives rise to positive things, positive developments, you know, integrating society, improving society making things better for the next generation as opposed to worse. And so that really is our challenge: to stay focused on the human, stay focused on that part of us which is godlike.

And understand that it is that part of us that sometimes gets challenged. I mean I can imagine that the people who in France right now who have lost family members in the raid right now are hurting, but if the response is one of violence and antagonism and antipathy toward others instead of loving them. Then that response leads down a very ugly path that serves no one's interest in the long or the short run. Whereas the other response which is to say look we've got this. This is an argument we're having to debate. We don't agree with each other. We're going to work through it because we've got this thing in common because we are all inhabitants of this planet in this space and time. That's a different approach that gives rise to positive developments as the civil rights movement did.

DC: As a member of the church laity how do you think the church can best respond to black lives matter today?

CMB: By holding up that light by talking about Black Lives Matter. By talking about what are the failures, what are the things that bring us together again. We have economic issues that go into black lives matter; we have psychological ones and cultural ones. I mean anytime you start off associating black with bad this is breaking it down you start off with those sets of associations and the media, then portrays, not just the media but our culture portrays blacks and particularly black males as inherently dangerous then small wonder that a person who might be armed will react and respond negatively and in a very bad way when confronted with that reality. So what's in the room matters – the impression, the images, the associations – those things do matter.

And as the church continues the conversation, about what brings us together, what makes us alike – that black families want the same things for their children that white families do. That poor families want opportunities for their kids just like rich families do. That if we focus in on those things we can like the rich families do, do together. That if we focus on those things we can do together and do on behalf of one another, you know we don't have to be the same. We're never going to be the same, but the point is, can we focus in on those things that maximize our collective impact on improving the quality of life for everybody and that's where the church, I think, can come in, and be the most effective because it does reach for those core values that Dr. King was trying to promote.

My youngest memory of what it meant to be black in America was Emmett Till. And so the Emmett Till thing. Think about it. You got protests of what got around Ferguson, but at the time that Emmett Till was killed a young black man getting shot by the police was like not news. It didn't make headlines. It was oh well, there goes another one. Now it's something that captivates people's attention. A positive development I think.

I'm going to end with my funny story. We were little. I was about 8 or 9 years old my brother was about 6 or 7. We took the train down to Alabama where my mother's family farm was. And when we got to Union Springs we were thirsty, but my mother wouldn't let us drink out of the water fountain. Cause they were segregated and there was a white water fountain and a colored water fountain. So my mother said well we'll just wait until we get to my grandma's house and we'll get some water there. She was not about to drink out of a colored water fountain My little brother (and I stood there). And I mean I got along. I got it. OK. Whatever. I was being obedient. The girl, right.

My little brother, however, threw himself onto the floor in the middle of the train station and had a temper tantrum screaming I want some colored water! I want some colored water! He thought it was going to come out green, and yellow and blue and purple and he had to have some of that stuff. Right? I want some colored water.

That's my earliest memory, but again my second one was Emmett Till.

## David Daniels

I always have trouble writing down my memories of my life growing up in the 50s, 60s, and 70s; made only more difficult when I try to paste the Civil Rights Era- Revolution, Era, Period, Movement – into my divergent life. I was raised on the South Side (life-long South-Sider) by my grandmother, who migrated to Chicago from Nashville, Tennessee, and worked as a maid, had a daughter my mother, who was murdered in a club on 55th street, with a father unknown to me (my male parentage was always a matter of mystery and debate, although I think I later met some half-siblings). I was baptized a Roman Catholic, because I was born "out of wedlock" and my prenatal care was provided by Misericordia, which then was a Roman Catholic home for unwed mothers operated by the Sisters of Mercy. They had a deal: we will take care of the needs of an unwed mother, up to birth at least, but the child and the mom had to become baptized Roman Catholics. My grandmother was raised and always talked to me about the African Methodist Episcopal, AKA AME church, but I think to seal the deal she also decided to leave that version of the Episcopal faith and was baptized a Roman Catholic as well.

I don't want to make this too much of a personal historical in, commitment to, criticism by and of, and eventual development into a progressive Obama supporter, who still believes in social justice – a Eurocentric humanist concept, as is the Constitution, which I swore an oath to protect when I became a lawyer 40 years ago. At the same time now I know that full constitutional rights were not extended to the "Negro" until the Second civil rights revolution/movement, in the 50s, 60s, and 70s, because of the historical reality of the racist and unjust state-based apartheid Jim Crow laws, enacted after Reconstruction proved that those evanescent "rights" could be snatched legally by a white majority who wanted to keep a racist system of power and subjugation in place, even after untold amounts of blood had been spilled during the Civil War.

Today in the wake of what some naively call a "Post-Racial" period because Barack Obama is our President – an amazing fact which I never in my wildest dreams believed would happen in my lifetime--there are some operating in the guise of so-called conservative "Tea Party" politics who want to pass state, and or change federal law to circumscribe those constitutional and "Civil Rights" which the Second Civil Rights Revolution/ Movement so successfully managed to make law and practice in the late 20th and early 21st Century. My suspicion is those advocates really want to go back again to subjugation of "Blacks" and others of color who do not conform to notions of what white privilege can allow.

There are so many challenges to the principles upon which "Civil Rights" are founded, including power, religion, fanaticism, hate, fear, color supremacy, among other realities of human nature that one, in my view, can never accept, that the principles behind those rights, and the fair extension of those rights can be taken for granted. They are continually under attack, and those who truly believe in a country, a society, a world in which they are extended to all must continually be aware of, fight for, educate about, and be prepared to die to defend them if necessary.

So how did I come to this position? The South-Side project boy raised by a poor but proud woman who was a part of the Great Migration from the South, who was also so proud her dad was a Pullman Porter and deacon in his AME church? Came north to get a better life, and had to struggle to live one, and even after losing her daughter became bound and determined to raise a good, moral, intelligent Black man? (I am still working on that). Well, she provided the foundation; I became a fervent learner and observer of the world as I was growing up, learning and growing as I went, both formally and informally, and scaffolding my personal experiences during the whole of the Baby Boomer world – and what a scary, wonderful, awesome world it has been – to realize how important the sacrifices of Medgar Evers, the leadership of Dr. King, the growth and downright coolness of Malcolm X, or the conversion of the Irish elite scion, Bobby Kennedy, into a serious fighter for Civil Rights, or even Lyndon Baines Johnson, a Southern senator from a racist state who supported and signed the signal Civil Rights legislation of the Second Civil Rights Revolution/ Movement have been and continue to be.

I am proud and excited, and continually learn and believe with my faith in Jesus strong of the goodness of the human experience but wary at the same time. We have come a long, long way from when I was born in that Catholic home for unwed mothers in December 1946, and the world is changing in so many ways. Even though I criticize Eurocentric principles on the basis of white privilege as a late life scholar, who has been a civil rights and criminal lawyer personally, I fight for them because they are right. My job, and I feel our job, as followers of Christ is to do the same. Even if our faith is bound in religious principles and history, our humanity is bound in recognition of the equality of humans, no matter their color, gender, sexual orientation, transgender status, national origin, or whether they were born rich and powerful, or poor and weak.

## Jerry DeMuth

Change can take time. And when it comes it can occur in unexpected ways.

What happened in Selma, Alabama, bears this out.

And Selma, like Birmingham before it, and many places today, shows the importance of video images.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, on whose staff I served for two years and that was best known for its spearheading role in the Mississippi Freedom Summer, had been organizing in Selma for two years when the Southern Christian Leadership Conference announced that its head, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was going to come to Selma and lead a march.

The film *Selma* somewhat accurately relates the story of this march, stating that, after two years, SNCC workers had failed to register a single African-American to vote. And while the film shows the impossibility of answering the registrar's questions, it fails to mention that those seeking to register needed, as a sponsor, someone who already was registered. And while the film shows an African-American crowd at Brown's Chapel, no local black church would hold a voter registration rally when SNCC first arrived. The first voter registration meetings were held at St. Elizabeth's, the Edmondite mission church of the Society of St. Edmond, and the church was surrounded by the often present Dallas County Sheriff Jim Clark and his deputized posse, who, according to the film, never were present at such gatherings.

The exhaustion-causing violence of posse members was the reason SNCC was then on its fourth field worker in Selma, violence that was little known outside Selma and outside SNCC.

On July 5, 1964, when the nation's eyes were on Mississippi because of the Freedom Summer project and the three still missing civil rights workers, I was sent to Selma with Black Star photographer Dave Prince to cover a continuation of SNCC's voter registration efforts there. The gathering at AME Zion Hall seemed little different than other voter registration rallies I had attended except for the presence of five photo and note-taking whites among the 150 or so blacks in attendance.

As Dave and I prepared to leave, gathering up lights and other camera equipment, we saw about 70 posse members lined up across the street, and

when we finally began to leave, the gas-mask-clad posse members were beating people, including people on the porch of a nearby home and were firing tear gas under the home where youngsters had taken refuge. After a warning shot, the posse members turned on us, mostly my head and Dave's camera.

This was life in Selma eight months before Bloody Sunday and the reason SNCC initially opposed Dr. King's planned march – fears that such a march would create an atmosphere that would be even more tense, violent and hate-filled, making it even more difficult to organize. And fearing the expected violence I, who had been in Selma again just a few days before what was to be Bloody Sunday, left on Saturday, driving to Atlanta, listening to the Metropolitan Opera's broadcast of Wagner's "Die Walkure," with the ride of the Valkyries playing as motorcycle after motorcycle ridden by state troopers passes me on their way from Montgomery to Selma.

Dr. King let it be known on Sunday morning that he wouldn't be going to Selma to lead the march because of other obligations or concerns never made clear, and SNCC, fearing a leadership vacuum, chartered a plane and flew some of its experienced leaders to Selma. (I was in SNCC's Atlanta headquarters and witnessed the almost franticness of the responses.)

But while there had been little or no news coverage previously in Selma, and certainly no film cameras, the expected presence of Dr. King drew all the major press, including all the major TV news programs. They captured still and, more importantly, moving images of not only Sheriff Clark and his posse but also Colonel Al Lingo, Director of Alabama's Department of Public Safety, and his state troopers, all acting at their most violent extreme. And those images would be seen throughout the country.

It ensured that the Voting Rights Act would be introduced and become law.

But today, even if some police violence, revealed by today's frequently and easily available video, is so extreme that it leads to drastic and meaningful changes in police training and behavior, this nation's problems related to race and class are so great that these problems still won't be solved. There may be no easy answers to today's problems, problems that also existed back then.

## The Rev'd Peter C. Lane

Sermon preached on January 18, 2015

I saw the movie *Selma* this week. The courage exhibited by that African-American community is inspirational. The leadership provided by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King is remarkable. I hope, though, that it will honor the Rev. Dr. King's memory if I speak about white people today. Not about vicious racists like Alabama Governor George Wallace. Not because there are not such racists today, but because if we got rid of all of them, racism would not go away. Well-meaning people who disapprove of racism still inadvertently perpetuate its unjust structures. I want to talk today about implicit bias and unconscious prejudice. King was brilliant at dramatizing horrible racism. He knew it would activate a country. The recent events of Ferguson and Staten Island themselves dramatized a shameful condition. I want to speak about actions and ideas that are hard to dramatize. I want to talk about ambiguous situations, where discerning the line between racism and not-racism requires well-formed moral imaginations. I want to talk about white privilege, about how white privilege contributes to our malformation, and how our cultural blindness to white privilege perpetuates injustice.

Blindness to privilege perpetuates a system that holds certain advantages for a few. You all remember our 43rd president? George W. Bush. For those in our community who were supporters, forgive this joke, but it makes an important point. The quip about Bush was that, "he was born on third base, and thinks he hit a triple." In that quip the damning sin is not being on third base. The damning sin is the ignorance of the privilege that got you there. You can fill out the rest of the story: someone standing on third base, unaware of his myriad privileges, looking across the diamond, clapping politely for those who leg out a single or work a walk. White America is on third base and thinks it hit a triple.

I'm not just pointing a finger. I've learned enough to know that I must be blind to many privileges and that my moral formation must have been distorted by white privilege. I once took part in an anti-racism training that included a clever exercise. We were handed a worksheet with something like 20 pairs of power and non-power possibilities. White/ Black. Male / Female. Straight / Gay. Rich / Poor. Highly Educated / Not Educated. Athletic / Not Athletic. etc., etc. I had to circle the ones that fit me. The theory of the exercise was that we humans are instinctively blind to our privilege, but if we can be taught how it feels to be in the non-power position in one area of life, we might be able to have our sight restored in others. Your well-meaning preacher is at a significant disadvantage. All of my circles were on the power side. You will not have to be told that doing the exercise did not heal me of my blindnesses. If only it were that easy!

White privilege is pervasive. 25 years ago Peggy McIntosh wrote a very helpful article, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack." She lists dozens of subtle privileges, including:

I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.

(Here's one I particularly enjoy.) I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.

I can speak in public ... without putting my race on trial.

I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge" I will be facing a person of my race.

Pointing out these privileges goes against the cultural wave of our day. It questions the myth of the meritocracy. It does not mean effort plays no role. A mentor of mine once told me that many doors would be opened for me, but I would still have to walk through them. And I have worked to walk through some of them. But how different from the advice that must be given to a person without privilege. "First, you're going to have to get the door open..." Now *some* of the advantages that Macintosh points out are not inherently scarce. They are part of culture we would want for everyone. But other white privileges are "negative types of advantages which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies," like the one where the person in charge is likely to be of my same race. Macintosh concludes that the key political tools to maintaining white privilege are silence and denial of the privilege. Or to use the word I have been using in this sermon, "blindness." "Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power, and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already." Well-meaning whites have privileges that reinforce present hierarchies and continue racial bias.

Every day white privilege has its subtle impacts. Three examples: If you send two of the same resume, one with a stereotypically African-American name and one with a stereotypically white name, the one with the white name is roughly 50 percent more likely to be called back. An all white jury is 16 percent more likely to convict a black defendant than a white defendant. But if a jury has just one black member, it will convict white and black defendants at the same rate. A third study, using a video game simulation, showed that African-American images were shot at a higher rate than whites, even those who were not holding guns. The cumulative effect of each of the subtle impacts of white privilege contributes to the deep inequities in our society. In the last decade the racial pay gap, wealth gap, and college gap have all widened – not narrowed. 12% of the general population is African-American, yet 50% of the prison population. My eyes



have slowly been opening to our criminal code as part of white privilege. How many other blind spots?

Certainly laws and procedures and structures must change. But those laws won't change unless we change. Who are we? There is a notion out there that our moral imaginations are beautifully formed and we merely lack gumption or something. The reality is that many moral imaginations are malformed because of privilege and selfishness. It is not true that free of any constraints our autonomous selves would flourish amidst fairness. There is a reason the Selma marchers went from singing hymns in church to marching. Their moral imaginations were being formed. White people need reformation of our moral imaginations, need the gift of sight. It is the height of hubris and a byproduct of privilege to assume we do not act on racial bias, to assume that we are fair, sinless people. Let us put ourselves to work on our moral formation, listening to racial minorities, doing fierce moral inventories, letting go of privilege when it keeps others out, attending to who is at the table when decisions are made, recognizing the limitations we face in doing anti-racist work. If we do not focus on character, if we merely tamp down the truly offensive racists, if we do not urge individuals to grow in empathy and kindness and friendship, then we merely leave the culture to be shaped by unseen privilege and the prejudices of unconscious bias. So many situations don't have a bright line between racism and not-racism. There is ambiguity. Intuition is called on. In ambiguity, character counts. Intuition relies on the formation of the soul.

The Psalmist sings to God, "For you yourself created my inmost parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb... I am marvelously made." There is no doubt about the equality of all people in the eyes of God, each marvelously made. But all fall short of that glory. And so there is not equality in society. The Rev. Dr. King once said, "Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability." How true that must be. I confess my blindness, I pray for the strength to reform my unconscious bias, and I trust in a God who will see justice through. Let me end by quoting some of the conclusion of King's speech delivered in Montgomery at the end of that Selma march. It is full of faith. "I come to say to you [today], however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because 'truth crushed to earth will rise again' ... How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice... [God's] truth is marching on."

AMEN.

Sources:

Irwin, Neil, Miller, Claire Cain, and Sanger-Kats, Margot. "America's Racial Divide, Charted" *New York Times*, August 19, 2014. <http://nyti.ms/1paArKg>

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March" [http://mlkpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc\\_address\\_at\\_the\\_conclusion\\_of\\_selma\\_march/](http://mlkpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_address_at_the_conclusion_of_selma_march/)

Kristoff, Nicholas. "Racism without Racists" *New York Times*, October 4, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/05/opinion/05kristof.html>

Levin, Yuval. "Taking the Long Way: Disciplines of the soul are the basis of a Liberal Society" *First Things*, October 2014 <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/10/taking-the-longway>

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack" <https://www.isr.umich.edu/home/diversity/resources/white-privilege.pdf>

Moyers, Bill. "Racism in America: How Did We Get Here?" *Moyes & Company*, January 1, 2015. <http://billmoyers.com/2015/01/01/get-bill-talks-raceamerica/>

Mullainathan, Sendhil. "Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions" *New York Times*, January 3, 2015. <http://nyti.ms/1yjZSyH>

## Rosemary Gooden

My reflections include excerpts from a sermon I preached at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary on the Feast of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Every year on the anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, WFMT rebroadcasts Studs Terkel's 1963 program, "This Train." Studs interviewed several people who were on the train going to Washington. They talked about their dreams and what they hoped the March would accomplish. I was captivated by two women who spoke quite eloquently and passionately about racial injustice. One woman, an African American, said she didn't believe in heaven or hell because living in America was hell. Despite her views, she apparently had enough hope to make the trek to Washington at great sacrifice. She had to go without sleep and return to work as soon as she got back to Chicago. The other woman, a white suburbanite, believed that it was time for racial segregation to end, and that African Americans should have freedom and equality. She said a friend described her as someone with "an overworked commitment to justice."

One of the most important ways I have been impacted by the Civil Rights Movement is through voting. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 eliminated poll taxes and literacy tests, allowing southern African Americans to vote for the first time since Reconstruction. Countless African Americans shed their blood and suffered indignities and humiliation in order that all African Americans could vote freely for the candidate of their choice. Since my eligibility by age to vote, I have voted in every election except for Election Day, 2010, when I had a small stroke and had to go to the ER. When I passed the polling place on the way to the garage, not knowing what was

## Toni Daniels

Transcript of video. Interview by Dorothy Crable. To view, go to [spr-blm.org](http://spr-blm.org)

My name's Toni Daniels. I was born in Meridian, Mississippi, at the height of segregation. When I was three, a polio vaccine was available to supposedly everyone. Since my parents were away, my grandmother took me to have my vaccination. When I came back home I was pretty ill. The next morning I ran a high temperature and my grandmother called the doctor back and said, "She's pretty sick," and he said that's the way kids are after they have vaccinations. Don't worry about it. Then she called him about two o'clock and said, no, she's really ill. And he said I'm on my way to vacation. Don't bother me about this anymore.

You have to know that in Meridian there were all white doctors. There were no black doctors and about three o'clock I had no muscle tone, I couldn't hold my head up. I couldn't sit up. My uncle came. He was in his early

happening to me physically, I told my husband I had to vote. Needless to say, he told me we had to get to the hospital. So I didn't vote in that election. I recently received a phone call from a campaign worker who asked me if I was going to vote. I responded: "Of course."

I want to end my reflections with an excerpt from a sermon by Martin Luther King, Jr. Unfortunately it, doesn't get the attention that the "I Have a Dream" speech does, but it is just as moving.

On February 4, 1968 in his home church, Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Dr. King preached a sermon entitled "The Drum Major Instinct." Near the end he talked about his funeral: it shouldn't be long; the person eulogizing him shouldn't talk too long; there should be no mention of his awards, including the Nobel Peace Prize, and no mention of what divinity school he attended. But these are the things he did want people to mention: "If you want to say that I was a drum major for justice, say that I was a drum major for peace; I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind."

Today, more than ever, there is a need for an "overworked commitment" to ending racial injustice. In the words of our baptismal covenant, I will "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being."

twenties. So you can imagine the panic he was in. He wrapped me in a blanket, put me in the back of the car and successively went to three different hospitals that would not take me. Every time we went in they would say we don't know what she has but don't bring her in here. We don't take black children in here. We will not take a black child in this emergency room. We had driven 20 miles, well more than 20 miles. He drove to the next county where there was a county hospital and took me to the emergency room. We were getting the same runaround and a young white doctor came out and said I think this kid might have polio. And if we don't do something about it now, we're going to lose her. It was nice to know that a young white intern thought that my life mattered. Consequently, I got polio, due to a polio vaccination.

DC: Wow. Your reflections on Dr. King today?

TD: Well, I was a kid during all of that movement, pretty young about 10.

So I was aware of what was going on. I was also very aware of the Black Panthers and Malcolm X because I lived in Los Angeles during the academic years and in Mississippi, three months of the year. So I was very aware of all of that.

I just finished reading a book called *The Failure of Nerve* which talks about why we don't have leaders any more.

## Twila Jones

I am a claimant of a birthright long denied. I missed "The Movement" proper due to my late 1970s arrival on the planet. However, I was raised to be acutely aware of its importance to me. The struggle for Black civil rights in America, the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and countless others, has had a profound impact on my identity and outlook. It is completely enmeshed in the formation of my being.

I learned "Lift E'vry Voice" at the piano of my kindergarten teacher before ever learning a single bar of "The Star Spangled Banner." I went on field trips to Operation P.U.S.H. headquarters, listened to countless renditions of "I Have a Dream," stared up in wonderment at the pantheon of Black pioneers. Always before my eyes were the activists, inventors, educators, artists, athletes, entrepreneurs, and dreamers. I was amazed by their strength and courage in the face of naked, unreasoning hatred and wondered if I were even worthy to tread the path they had fought and often died to lay out in front of me.

Now that I am older, I have become more acutely interested in the stories of my ancestors. They are dying at an accelerated rate now and those who remain are often reluctant to speak of the "old days." With a little patience though, stories of the dark past can come to light. America has made undeniable progress. Unlike my parents, I do not personally know victims of lynching. The rapists responsible for the blue eyes, ruddy hair, and freckles that still pop up from time to time among my relations might not today enjoy the same impunity they once did. The laws that proclaimed Black folk were not quite human have been stricken from the books. More than that, in spite of the quieter though still persistent drumbeat of this culture that Blackness equals otherness and inferiority, I have been given the tools to know better.

People are not willing to be out in front and to be a leader. I think King's one of the last people that we saw that didn't have a failure of nerve. And I think it's important for us to continue to reflect on the fact that he and Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln were willing to be leaders out in front and lose their lives, the way very few people now would be willing to put themselves on the line.

The manifestation of the dream, the birthright that I claim is full status as an American. I call myself African American, one whose ancestry is drawn primarily from

Africa, but I am no footnote in history, no obsolete farm machinery to be discarded now that the greedy and selfish purposes for which my ancestors were brought here have been thwarted. For you see, those same ancestors helped to build this nation's economy under duress with no hope of fair compensation. They expanded its frontiers and fought wars in its name. They loved and remained loyal to this land that to this day often refuses to meet their progeny in good faith and be fully open to them, hiding (mostly) behind benign ignorance and polite deferrals instead of white hoods, burning crosses, vicious dogs, and bullets.

It matters not. I am nonetheless 100% American. I am in exile from no other place and I am going nowhere. America is my birthright. It is my home and all within it my kin. Those who take to crossing the street, clutching purses and pearls, or taking flight to exurbia to avoid having to gaze upon me will never make it any less so. I strive to honor the dream daily by showing up to my place at the table with my head held high, by striving to teach my students to know their intrinsic worth, and by speaking truth to power when I must. By refusing to constantly justify my humanity and citizenship I live that dream into imperfect reality moment by moment.

It may be a long time before Americans of all colors can look at my face and see me for what I am, their sister. It may be longer still before the day will come when I can count on more of my fellow Americans to understand that the elimination of racism and the pursuit of justice for all people is no act of charity but a moral obligation. The battle is now nebulous and complicated, the leaders dispersed, and the front difficult to discern. But if Saint Martin is right and the arc of the moral universe does indeed bend towards justice I want to be one who helps it on its path.

## Celia Scott

Transcript of video. Interview by Dorothy Crable. To view, go to [spr-blm.org](http://spr-blm.org)

I married an African American. I have two beautiful, biracial children and unfortunately I ended up with a divorce and ended up with raising my children as a white parent with biracial children. As far as Dr. Martin Luther King is concerned he was one of my heroes. I just cry every time I think about his speeches and what he meant.

DC: When you heard about his death, what was that like for you and where were you?

CS: I was in Sweden. I was walking down the main street of Stockholm and I saw it in the newspaper. I couldn't read Swedish but I could see just from reading the Swedish, I understood what it said and I was moved to tears that somebody who was peacefully demonstrating would get gunned down like that, and I wondered what America was like. I had never been here at that time and I wondered what kind of a country it was here and how that could happen because that sort of shootings in England or in Europe at that time were just unheard of. I had been raised in a neighborhood where there were Africans, West Indians, Indians, Arabs, just everybody, a mishmash of people. And I had gravitated towards these people. Maybe because I saw them as the underdog. Because even in Britain at those times, people from other countries weren't welcome. You know we were British and even though we had a fair share of colonies now the colonies were coming home, so to speak, we didn't recognize them and we didn't want them there. They

## Mary Kohrman Hayes

Fifty years ago I was 12. I lived in a rural, Bible belt, segregated town, in the Appalachian foothills. I was poor but white. The luck of my birth afforded me a better life. Both parents had jobs. I had a home and clothes, was well fed, went to school and was sent to church every Sunday. I had opportunity.

My parents were racists. Anyone who wasn't "us" was labeled with a degrading term, dehumanized, and blamed for the luck of their birth. My father was an equal opportunity racist but the only minority presence was African American. "They" were "good for nothing, filthy . . ." Insert "N" word. There was always a lot of focus on "dirt" because, "soap is cheap."

The "coloreds" (that was the polite term) were segregated in an area called Nailer's Run. The few dozen shacks looked much like shanty towns everywhere. There were dirt streets that were always muddy, unpainted buildings with tin roofs, outhouses, clothes lines and a constant burning garbage pile

were supposedly taking our jobs from us which actually wasn't true and I was very much for any movement that was going on in England at the time to welcome these people into our society and into our country.

My mother was very liberal in her thinking. She in fact had welcomed West Indians into our church. She had walked down the aisle, down the center aisle of the church with a crowd of Jamaican people who had wanted to come to our church and had been excluded and she brought them up to the front pew and sat them down and said you belong here This is your church too. I always remember that from my mother so when I became excluded I didn't understand that either and the other thing that happened was that white Americans seemed to think that I was one of them, that therefore if I was white, I agreed with them. But they didn't see my children, they didn't know my background. They thought that I was one of them which I wasn't. I was very much outside of their society.

DC: What do you mean "to be one of them"?

CS: There's a certain segment of American whites that have this seems to be inherent racism that they don't seem to be able to get rid of. And they make remarks to people like me and I guess other white people that they think are on their side. That's the only way I can describe it.

DC: What is your hope for the future?

CS: Peace. 100% peace. An absence of violence.

in the middle. I am certain there was no gas or electric service. I know there were no phones. These things weren't unusual. My grandparents had outhouses and wells with hand pumps. They fished and hunted; had gardens and canned food for winter. They had jobs, got "food stamp," had medical care, clean water, electricity, gas and even a vehicle. They had opportunity.

Soap is cheap – if you have a job and money. Soap may be cheap but food isn't. In Nailer's Run there wasn't even a small patch of land to garden. Soap may be cheap but cloth for clothes isn't – neither are shoes. Soap may be cheap but coal for a fire isn't. When your basic needs are met – Soap is cheap.

By the time I was 12 opportunity had arrived – for us. My grandparents had indoor plumbing, a telephone and television. I was heading off to Junior High and preparing to be confirmed. Our minister talked to our confirmation class about the civil rights movement. (This was all new to me – never heard a word about this before.) He talked about God's love for everyone – -Not based on skin color. "All people were created by God, therefore, everyone deserves to be treated with kindness."

When I walked out the church door it was not God's love I saw. Everywhere I heard hate and racist messages. I watched my father dress in "blackface" and perform degrading skits in the Minstrel while an audience of "good white folks" laughed and applauded. Mixed nuts; harmless right – nope . . . . My dad would say about the large Brazil nuts, "Don't eat the 'nigger' toes."

Sixteen was a pivotal year. I was teaching Sunday school and driving myself to the local hospital where I volunteered. "Mixed race" twin boys from the Children's Home became my students. The boy's parents died in an "accident" and neither family "wanted" them. My minister brought them to church every Sunday. In one breathtaking move he integrated his parish. The importance of this meant nothing to me.

Sharon was my first nonwhite friend. It was summer and we often volunteered late at the hospital. I would drive Sharon home. She was the only child of a single mother. They lived in a tiny trailer home on an empty lot. We shared a love of nursing. Then my parents heard that I was "hanging around with a colored girl." "A 'good girl' like Mary Sue with those kind." My reputation would be ruined. Thank God I found my voice. I told my parents that I didn't share their beliefs. Sharon was a wonderful, bright, caring person and her mother was a hard working woman.

It was 1969. I began working with the "Youth Association for Retarded Children." The first child I was assigned was a 12 year old, nonverbal, black boy with autism. I saw him weekly and drove him to therapy and activities. My parents remained silent. The next year I went to nursing school – Sharon did not. I had opportunity.

I discovered the civil rights movement late. My nursing class was integrated – one black girl – 29 white. Rose was the first African American to graduate from that nursing school – she was our president and at the top of the class.

But it was Imogene, my best friend, who changed the trajectory of my life. I learned the power of God's love. Imogene was an exotically beautiful woman. Her father was a minister. Her parents welcomed me into their home and educated me about race and culture. They carried the genes of African, European and Native Americans. They had travelled internationally. My world was less than a 500 mile radius of rural Southern Ohio and West Virginia. I had never been in a large city, on a bus, train or plane. They knew history, the arts, and understood culture, and our society. Everything I had learned at home, in my community and at school was wrong. I became the minority and was met with acceptance, patience and kindness.

There is such a deep sense of shame associated with my childhood. I rejected my family history. But I share my story now – an ugly, shameful story – because I pray that it shows that the cycle of hate and racism can be broken.

Today I live in a huge, richly diverse city. I have a Jewish husband of nearly 30 years, a 23 year-old son who embraces both his Jewish and Christian side, a 16 year-old son whose birth mother is white and birth father is black and a 12-year old daughter of Maya heritage. I have been given opportunities that, at 18, I could not imagine. But I believed then, what I know now: Every individual – without exception – deserves opportunity. And every individual has a responsibility to work toward a better life for everyone – without exception.

## Ellen Wiggins

Transcript of video. To view, go to [spr-blm.org](http://spr-blm.org)

I feel so grateful to belong to a parish that welcomes all to the table. In practicing that inclusion it is important that we take the time to be steeped in our stories. I'm so grateful to all of those who put together, organized and provided the education and shared their stories so that we could know each other better. It's such a rare place when you know people are challenged in ways that make them uncomfortable. So when our rector made his sermon on Martin Luther King Day about white privilege, it really was important for

## Shirley Knight

"Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood."

Martin Luther King, Nobel Peace Prize 1964

As I reflect on Dr. King's dream and hear people say we've come a long way, I wonder. As I recall my participation in the fight for equal rights for all (housing, jobs, equal education, equal justice, voting rights, human rights, women's rights) I see not a whole lot has really changed. Yes there have been gains, but, many of those gains are in danger of being recalled.

The old stereotypes of African-Americans are alive and flourishing. We are portrayed as lazy and looking for a handout. African-American men are portrayed as dangerous, uneducated and unfit fathers. There seems to be no need to respect our African-American President, who is educated, a good father and very obviously not lazy. People are very comfortable referring to him as Obama rather than President Obama. You don't know me.

George Zimmerman, police officers in New York, Missouri and Cleveland kill African-American boys and go unpunished, yet Marissa Alexander gets 20 years for firing a warning shot into the air at an abusive husband.

Public schools are routinely underfunded.

Officials in states, (north and south) openly try to pass laws that limit or do away with individual voter rights. You don't know me.

Our gay brothers and sisters are under attack because some disagree with their lifestyles. You don't know me.

The poor are still neglected, no matter their race. You don't know me.

The unemployed have seen their benefits disappear; food stamp benefits have been cut, making it hard for families to put food on the table and seniors' social security benefits are always under attack. You don't know me.

the majority white congregation to look at those things which had contributed to their not knowing.

Though in challenging us, it asked us to note – no matter how open we think we are – you think you maybe know there's so much we don't know.

I'm so grateful to the Black members of our church who were brave enough to share their stories and their truths, and I'll do everything in my capacity as warden to support the programming that actually calls us to be challenged and deeper in our faith with one another.

I say you don't know me because in most cases either we assume that because none of these things affect us they don't affect others or we really want to know the experiences of others but are afraid to ask and some believe a person's difficulties are their own fault.

Race, class and lifestyles are hard conversations to have, but, these conversations must take place. Otherwise we will never know each other!

The mayor of New York, who is white and married to an African-American woman, recently came under fire because he said he had the "if you are stopped by the police" conversation with his son. The union president said the mayor was "throwing the police under the bus." However, if you don't know the need for the conversation, or in this case, I suspect the conversation is well known, but a headline dictated the union leader pretend ignorance. A black male is more likely to be stopped by police than his white counterpart. The union president was quick to condemn because his son(s) would not have the same worry. I'm sure the minority officers while remaining silent, recalled as young men that same conversation.

After the Travon Martin shooting, news commentators learned that he had been followed because he looked "suspicious." Many said after talking with their "black friends" they were shocked to learn that many of them had experienced being followed because they looked "suspicious" scenario.

They asked and gained some insight into being a black male in America.

Each week as I work at the SPR Food Pantry, I am reminded that being hungry makes no distinction based on race, class or age. Our guests are Black, White and Hispanic, old, young, employed, unemployed and disabled. Anyone passing by and seeing the long line would conclude here is a bunch of poor folks needing food or a bunch of freeloaders. How they got to a point in their lives where they need help feeding themselves and their families almost never crosses the onlooker's mind.

They don't know that one man only gets \$15.00 a month in food stamps, another has 4 children but only has part-time employment, a mother of 2 has lost her job and takes care of a mother with Alzheimer's, a family of 7

only comes when the cupboard is bare, their mother is too ashamed to come herself so the children come or the young couple who are both students and working part-time. These are our neighbors.

I have not experienced all the things I've listed, but, they all have one thing in common; they are allowed to prosper because we do not try to get to know one another. We are content to unconsciously (in some cases consciously) believe the stereotypes planted in our minds. You don't have to experience discrimination to know it exists in many forms. Being silent won't make it go away!

Be courageous and make an effort to get to know those around you, whether they look like you or not. Find the joy in realizing how much alike we are.

Not everyone will open up, but, you'd be surprised at the number who will! More of a surprise may be how you appear to others!

## **Romonda Bumpus**

I spent my early years in an almost entirely African American community. My school was all Black as was my church. My grandparents' church was the same, as were the schools and churches of my cousins. When choosing a high school, my father insisted that I consider all the options that I had -- high ranking public schools, Catholic high schools and suburban elite prep schools. I was accepted into an elite prep school, and with financial support of the school and my whole community, I matriculated there. It was in those years that I experienced the subtle and overt racism and classism that made me keenly aware that I was Black. And in the minds of some of my classmates and teachers that made me inferior.

My grandfather, who drove me 45 minutes each way to school and home, told me that I had to work harder and study more to prove that I was good enough. And he told me I had to show all of those who thought less of me that I was just as worthy of my place on that campus as they were. I understood that I had the added responsibility that it was with great sacrifice that I attended this elite prep school, and so I was not just a 14-year-old freshman, but a model of my entire race. If I did poorly, it was not just that I was not a good student, it was that all Blacks were not smart, not dedicated and lazy. This is the burden I carried every day, and it was not a light one to carry.

I felt the uniqueness of my skin color and socio-economic status in so many ways at such an impressionable age that it became ingrained in my definition of self. I had to be a strong Black woman, who stood up for herself, worked hard, and called out injustice. As a ninth grader after the first of many racial incidents on campus, my classmate told me, in front of our entire homeroom class, that "If all of the scholarship kids left there wouldn't be any racial incidents." My teacher just stood there dumbstruck; I felt that he should have said something to defend my place on campus. But he did not, so I had to stand up for myself and define my place as my classmates'

In Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus says "Thou shalt Love thy Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt Love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." In order to "love thy neighbor" we must KNOW thy neighbor! We must not judge by color, lifestyle, religion, politics, gender or stereotypes.

Try seeing those who are fighting life on so many different levels not as victims but as survivors. Unless we continue to talk about our differences, no matter how uncomfortable, Dr. King's dream will continue to be just that, a dream.

"We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

equal. But, he did not, so I had to stand up for myself, and define my place as my classmates' equal.

Yet, having to define myself in this way at such an early age prepared me so well for the rest of my life. I knew then as well as I know now that while my education would afford me some privilege, my color and my gender will always define me. And no matter how many degrees and accolades I obtain, I am still incredibly likely to be followed around in boutiques by security guards and asked if I am the help in department stores. I am still told with a slight surprise in intonation, that I am "articulate, well spoken and well read." But what else would I be? How else would my parents have raised me?

When I sit down with African American women who are senior to me, I am so thankful that they share their stories with me, because they demonstrate to me the strength that is deep in our bones. They show me that despite all the progress that we have and have not made, the opportunities that I was afforded came because of their great sacrifices before, during and after the Civil Rights movement. And I am inspired even further to stand up to injustice wherever I see it.

So while we can debate sun up to sun down about how much our society has or has not changed since the Civil Rights movement, I can certainly say that the opportunities afforded to me were not afforded to my great-grandmother or grandmother. They did not have a voice, but since I do, I must shout to the rooftops when there is injustice. My voice must be used to inform and bring understanding, and it must be used to bring to light how far we still need to go. Because I'm "well-read and articulate," I need to use those skills to be the voice of the many Black women and men who continue to not have a voice.

I hope we can all use our voices for them.

**St. Paul & the Redeemer Episcopal Church**

4945 S Dorchester Ave | Chicago IL 60615

(773) 624-3195 | [sp - r.org](http://sp-r.org)