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A life hindered by restriction and segregation

Jarred Michael Kennedy
The University of Toledo

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A Thesis
entitled
A Life Hindered by Restriction and Segregation
by
Jarred Michael Kennedy

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Masters in Liberal Studies Degree

Dr. Lawrence Anderson, Committee Chair

Dr. Judy Lambert, Committee Member

Dr. Julie Lengfelder, Committee Member

Dr. Patricia R. Komuniecki, Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

August 2011

An Abstract of
A Life Hindered by Restriction and Segregation

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The Civil Rights Era not only changed the United States but impacted the world. The unjust treatment of Blacks made it illegal to discriminate not only against African Americans but all ethnicities. Through extensive research I gained insight on the mistreatment of African Americans and the hardships endured. Historic leaders surfaced during this era that deeply impacted the status of African Americans. Racism and segregation still exist in society but not at the enormous rate it did during the Civil Rights Era.

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Chapter 1

The Movement Begins

The Civil Rights Movement highlighted the discrimination and racism African Americans endured. African Americans fought for racial equality during the Civil Rights Era. Although the movement began in the late 19th century, the Civil Rights Movement took flight in the 1950s. (Wren, 2005, p. 3). Courageous leaders fought for racial equality which carried this movement into the 80s. The southern region of the country entertained the most overt racism existed. “The African-American Civil Rights Movement (1955–1968) refers to the movements in the United States aimed at outlawing racial discrimination against African Americans and restoring voting rights in Southern states.” (Wren, 2005, p. 15). My thesis focuses on several leaders and key moments during this era. My thesis also incorporates historical quotes from Black leaders and examines how their diligence transformed equality for Blacks. I will provide a chronological timeline of historical events that took place before, during, and after the Civil Rights Movement. Finally, the conclusion of my thesis offers an interview from James Jones, an African American male. Jones suffered first hand racism as a Black Male, growing up in Montgomery, Alabama. Through perseverance, hope, and optimism: African Americans broke the shackles from Jim Crow laws. “Many of those

who were active in the Civil Rights Movement, with organizations such as NAACP, SNCC, CORE and SCLC, prefer the term "Southern Freedom Movement" because the struggle was about far more than just civil rights under law; it was also about fundamental issues of freedom, respect, dignity, and economic and social equality.” (Wren, 2005, p. 23).

Jim Crow Laws were local and state laws that discriminated against African Americans. These laws supported the thought that Blacks were inferior to Whites. “Examples of Jim Crow laws are the segregation of public schools, public places and public transportation, and the segregation of restrooms, restaurants and drinking fountains for whites and blacks.” (Wren, 2005, p. 69). The origins of Jim Crow Laws originated after the Civil War. (Brown, 2005, p. 16). These laws were indoctrinated into Whites so thoroughly that Blacks were not allowed to vote or share the same facilities as Whites. (Brown, 2005, p. 28). “The Civil Rights Act of 1875, introduced by Charles Sumner and Benjamin F. Butler, stipulated a guarantee that everyone, regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude, was entitled to the same treatment in public accommodations, such as inns, public transportation, theaters, and other places of recreation. This Act had little impact.” (Wren, 2005, p. 71). African Americans suffered many years of racial injustice before Jim Crow Laws were uplifted. It was not until 1965 that courts put an end to legal racial segregation. (Wren, 2005, p. 89). “By 1965 efforts to break the grip of state disfranchisement had been under way for some time, but had achieved only modest success overall and in some areas had proved almost entirely

ineffectual. Finally, the unprovoked attack on March 7, 1965, by state troopers on peaceful marchers crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, en route to the state capitol in Montgomery, persuaded the President and Congress to overcome Southern legislators' resistance to effective voting rights legislation. President Johnson issued a call for a strong voting rights law and hearings began soon thereafter on the bill that would become the Voting Rights Act. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 ended legally sanctioned state barriers to voting for all federal, state and local elections. It also provided for Federal oversight and monitoring of counties with historically low voter turnout, as this was a sign of discriminatory barriers.” (Wren, 2005, p. 101)

Lynching was a method of intimidation used to oppress Blacks. Originating after the Civil War, Whites used this act of violence to terrorize Blacks. (Brown, 2005, p. 54). Before the Civil Rights Movement, nearly 5000 African Americans were lynched. (Brown, 2005, p. 57). “Violence in the United States against African Americans, especially in the South, rose in the aftermath of the American Civil War, after slavery had been abolished and recently freed black men were given the right to vote.” (James, 1986, p. 12). Whites viewed lynchings as punishment for transgressors. An example of this racial injustice was the story of Emmett Till. “Story of a Black male boy who was murdered in Mississippi at the age of 14 after reportedly flirting with a white woman.” (James, 1986, p. 55). The groups behind these lynchings were the Ku Klux Klan. Whites discouraged Blacks from voting, education, and working. Blacks became hesitant to speak out and fight for their rights. “After the war, southern whites struggled to maintain

social dominance. Secret vigilante and insurgent groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) instigated extrajudicial assaults and killings to keep power and to discourage freedmen from voting, working and getting educated. They also sometimes attacked Northerners, teachers, and agents of the Freedmen's Bureau.” (James, 1986, p. 13). The violence became physically and mentally engrained into the mindset of Blacks. African Americans remained determined to achieve better treatment despite the constant threats of the Ku Klux Klan. (Wren, 2005, p. 234).

Chapter 2

Leadership

The Civil Rights Movement began from the unjust treatment towards African Americans. Jim Crow laws, lynchings, and segregation united Blacks during their hardships. Faced with tumultuous times, Black leaders emerged despite their compromising circumstances. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks arose as leaders. Although faced with set backs, these leaders and many others refused to be impeded. The leadership displayed during this era left these leaders with a legacy today. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an example of a leader who strived for change in a peaceful manner. “Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. It is a weapon unique in history, which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals.” (Thomas, 1995, p. 3). Contrary to Dr. King’s beliefs, Malcolm X was a leader who did not foresee change occurring by the turning of the other cheek. “I see America through the eyes of a victim. I don’t see any American dream. I see an American nightmare.” (Thomas, 1995, p. 43). Dr. King and X offered contrasting leadership styles, but both men shared a common vision, equal treatment for African Americans.

Although leadership does not have color or a face, America was not prepared for a colored man to emerge as an exceptional leader. As the son of a minister, Dr. King was a pacifist who strived for change through non-violence. As a Black male in Montgomery, Alabama's racist culture, Dr. King bared the brunt of racism. His experiences and observations led to Dr. King's rise as a prominent leader. Dr. King followed his father's footsteps in becoming pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. (Wren, 2005, p. 44). A strong worker for civil rights, Dr. King was an active member in the NAACP. He led the Negro non-violent demonstration in 1955. (Wren, 2005, p. 52). The Negro non-violent demonstration declared it unconstitutional to segregate Blacks and Caucasians on city buses. By 1957, Dr. King was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. (Wren, 2005, p. 56). This organization instilled leadership within the Civil Rights Movement. As the mistreatment of African Americans continued, Blacks needed a charismatic, courageous, and witty leader to arrive through their oppression. Dr. King surfaced as a go-to leader during the Civil Rights Movement. His legacy is celebrated today as the most glorified leader during the Civil Rights Era. "Delivered to over 200,000 civil rights supporters, the speech was ranked the top American speech of the 20th century by a 1999 poll of scholars of public address. Congregating at the Lincoln Memorial, participants listen as Martin Luther King delivers his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. "I Have a Dream" is a seventeen minute public speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered on August 28, 1963, in which he called for racial equality and an end to discrimination. The speech, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, was a defining moment of the American Civil Rights Movement." (Wren, 2005, p. 168).

Along side Dr. King, stood Malcolm X. His audacious style of leadership startled America. X's innovative leadership style opened the eyes of Americans. (Carson, 1991, p. 9). "Malcolm studied the teachings of Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad. Muhammad taught that white society actively worked to keep African-Americans from empowering themselves and achieving political, economic and social success. Among other goals, the Nation of Islam fought for a state of their own, separate from one inhabited by white people." (Thomas, 1995, p. 75). X legally changed his name from Little to X in 1952 after being released from prison and joining the nation of Islam. (Carson, 1991, p. 14). As X began to dissect the Nation of Islam, he became more enlightened by their religion. X began to speak out on behalf of the nation. Unlike King's non-violent philosophies, X's beliefs supported the theory of "an eye for an eye". "I am a Muslim, because it's a religion that teaches you an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It teaches you to respect everybody, and treat everybody right. But it also teaches you if someone steps on your toe, chop off their foot. And I carry my religious axe with me all the time." (Thomas, 1995, p. 199). X's revolutionary style of leadership has been questioned but his impact has not. His unprecedented style commanded the attention of America as civil unrest divided a nation. "The legacy of Malcolm X has moved through generations as the subject of numerous documentaries, books and movies." (Thomas, 1995, p. 324).

"The mother of the Civil Rights Movement" was a title given to Rosa Parks. (Wren, 2005, p. 199). Dr. King's rise to national prominence came with the assistance of

Parks. (Wren, 2005, p. 201). She is remembered for refusing to give up her seat on a city bus. Her participation in the Civil Rights Movement cemented her legacy in America's history. She was the secretary for the Montgomery, Alabama chapter of the NAACP. In her early years, Parks married Raymond Parks, a member of the NAACP. "In December 1943, Parks became active in the Civil Rights Movement, joined the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP, and was elected volunteer secretary to its president, Edgar Nixon. Of her position, she later said, "I was the only woman there, and they needed a secretary, and I was too timid to say no." (Wren, 2005, p. 321). Park's courageousness was instrumental during this movement. She is renowned as a Civil Rights Icon. "On December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, Parks, age 42, refused to obey bus driver James Blake's order that she give up her seat to make room for a white passenger. Parks' act of defiance became an important symbol of the modern Civil Rights Movement and Parks became an international icon of resistance to racial segregation. She organized and collaborated with civil rights leaders, including boycott leader Martin Luther King, Jr., helping to launch him to national prominence in the civil rights movement." (Wren, 2005, p. 343). This boycott lasted 382 days. In 1956 Blacks shared buses with Whites. Buses were desegregated and have been since this date. "During these days of boycott, Blacks were arrested; homes were bombed and were subjected to personal abuse." (Wren, 2005, p. 349). Parks is recognized as the "First Lady of Civil Rights" and her refusal to give up her seat forever changed history.

Chapter 3

Desegregation

Blacks sought to desegregate schools but found themselves met by racial injustice. The governor of Arkansas blocked students from entering Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. (Brown, 1995, p. 43). “The Little Rock Nine were a group of African-American students who were enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957. The ensuing Little Rock Crisis, in which the students were initially prevented from entering the racially segregated school by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, and then attended after the intervention of President Eisenhower, is considered to be one of the most important events in the African-American Civil Rights Movement.” (Thomas, 1995, p. 47). This event gained national recognition and President Eisenhower was forced to intervene. Similar events took place in 1960 when Black students sat in at a diner in North Carolina. Although being refused service, these individuals elected to make a stand. “While not the first sit-ins of the African-American Civil Rights Movement, the Greensboro sit-ins were an instrumental action, leading to increased national sentiment at a crucial period in US history.” (Thomas, 1995, p. 56). Diners were not the only public institutions that prohibited Blacks access. Swimming pools,

libraries, and public parks were among the facilities Blacks could not share with Whites. Blacks and Freedom Riders from the North protested to grant Blacks equal treatment. Despite the harsh treatment during protests, citizens did not retaliate with violence. (Brown, 1995, p. 57). Some Whites did not agree with the racist ways of the South, and this led to over 1,000 Blacks and Whites marching together for racial equality. (Brown, 1995, p. 68).

1963 proved to be a significant year for African Americans. This was the year Dr. King wrote his "Letter from Birmingham Jail". "While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms." (Wren, 2005, p. 199). While African Americans marched, the commissioner of public safety allowed dogs to attack protestors. (Brown, 1995, p. 122). "These images of brutality, which are televised and published widely, are instrumental in gaining sympathy for the civil rights movement around the world." (Wren, 2005, p. 204). Medgar Evers was secretary of the NAACP in the state of Mississippi. In June of 1963 he was murdered. His killer, Byron De La Beckwith was acquitted even though tried twice. His case was left at a split jury.

(Brown, 1995, p. 74). This left Blacks outraged. Although Blacks began to lose leaders from the violence of Whites, they would not be deterred on their pursuit of justice.

In 1963, a bomb exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. The explosion left four girls dead. “The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was used as a meeting-place for civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Ralph David Abernathy and Fred Shutterworth. Tensions became high when the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) became involved in a campaign to register African American to vote in Birmingham. On Sunday, 15th September, 1963, a white man was seen getting out of a white and turquoise Chevrolet car and placing a box under the steps of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Soon afterwards, at 10.22 a.m., the bomb exploded killing Denise McNair (11), Addie Mae Collins (14), Carole Robertson (14) and Cynthia Wesley (14). The four girls had been attending Sunday school classes at the church. Twenty-three other people were also hurt by the blast.” (James, 1986, p. 47). The deaths of these innocent children led to rioting. Although the untimely events caused much strife in 1963 for the Black community in Birmingham, this event served as a strong back-bone going forward.

On January 23, 1964 poll taxes were eliminated. “The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a network of civil rights groups that includes CORE and SNCC, launches a massive effort to register black voters during what becomes known as the Freedom Summer.” (James, 1986, p. 221). President Johnson signed the Civil Rights

Act of 1964. (James, 1986, p. 230). This prohibited the right to discriminate against citizens because of their race, religion, or national origin.

The summer concluded with the murder of three civil rights workers. Two White males and one Black male were found in a dam after a six week investigation. (James, 1986, p. 244). “James E. Chaney, 21; Andrew Goodman, 21; and Michael Schwerner, 24, had been working to register black voters in Mississippi, and, on June 21, had gone to investigate the burning of a black church. They were arrested by the police on speeding charges, incarcerated for several hours, and then released after dark into the hands of the Ku Klux Klan, who murdered them.” (Thomas, 1995, p. 221). America’s national headlines were once again rocked by the violence perpetuated by the Ku Klux Klan. Although Blacks gained the right to vote, the violence surrounding them was a constant threat to their well being.

Malcolm X was murdered in 1965. X was assassinated while giving a speech in New York. “Malcolm X, the 39-year-old leader of a militant black nationalist movement, was shot to death yesterday afternoon at a rally of his followers in a ballroom in Washington Heights. It is believed the assailants are members of the Black Muslim faith, which Malcolm had recently abandoned in favor of orthodox Islam. Pandemonium broke out among the 400 Negroes in the Audubon Ballroom at 166th Street and Broadway. As men, women and children ducked under tables and flattened themselves on the floor, more shots were fired. Some witnesses said 30 shots had been fired.” (James, 1986, p. 200). Segregation, violence, and racism hindered the Negro from progressing in

society, but X's revolutionary style of matching an "eye for an eye" will long live forever dawning him a leader willing to stand up to the aforementioned inequality.

While protesting in 1965 Blacks were confronted by policemen. Blacks were marching in Montgomery, Alabama to gain voting rights. (James, 1986, p. 111). "Blacks begin a march to Montgomery in support of voting rights but are stopped at the Pettus Bridge by a police blockade. Fifty marchers are hospitalized after police use tear gas, whips, and clubs against them. The incident is dubbed "Bloody Sunday" by the media. The march is considered the catalyst for pushing through the voting rights act five months later." (James, 1986, p. 234). Although members of this movement were injured, it was another ground-breaking movement towards getting the right to vote. In August of 1965, the Voting Act of 1965 was passed which made it possible for Blacks to vote. "Literacy tests, poll taxes, and other such requirements that were used to restrict black voting are made illegal." (James, 1986, p. 214).

Race riots erupted in August 1965. "The term Watts Riots of 1965 refers to a large-scale riot which lasted 6 days in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, in August 1965. By the time the riot subsided, 34 people had been killed, 1,032 injured, and 3,438 arrested. The riot is viewed by some as a reaction to the record of police brutality by the LAPD and other racial injustices suffered by black Americans in Los Angeles, including job and housing discrimination." (Thomas, 1995, p. 65). The rioting and laws against discrimination pushed President Johnson to issue affirmative action. These laws allowed minority employers equal opportunities for employment. No

specific year outweighs another in the Civil Rights Movement, but gaining the right to vote was a historic feat for African Americans.

In 1966 the Black Panther party formed in Oakland, California. Huey Newton and Bobby Seale were the founding fathers of this group. "The Black Panthers, U.S. African-American militant party, founded (1966) in Oakland, Calif., by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. Originally espousing violent revolution as the only means of achieving black liberation, the Black Panthers called on African Americans to arm themselves for the liberation struggle." (Jackson, 2003, p. 12). This militant group shared similar ideas with Malcolm X. As Blacks grew tired of police brutality and terrorism from the Ku Klux Klan, they combated force with force. "In the late 1960s party members became involved in a series of violent confrontations with the police (resulting in deaths on both sides) and in a series of court cases, some resulting from direct shoot-outs with the police and some from independent charges." (Jackson, 2003, p. 43). The Black Panther Party alarmed America with its brash methods of self defense. The Black Panthers officially ceased in 1982, but the revolutionary party is remembered for challenging social, cultural, and political injustice. (Jackson, 2003, p. 78). "The group's "provocative rhetoric, militant posture, and cultural and political flourishes permanently altered the contours of American Identity." (Jackson, 2003, p. 70).

Chapter 4

Going Forward

On April 4th, 1968 the world was shaken by the death of Dr. Martin Luther King. “Martin Luther King, at age 39, is shot as he stands on the balcony outside his hotel room. Escaped convict and committed racist James Earl Ray is convicted of the crime.” (Wren, 2005, p. 301). The Death of Dr. King impacted African Americans very deeply. (Wren, 2005, p. 231). As Blacks mourned Dr. King’s death, some preached a violent retaliation was not what Dr. King would have preached. (Wren, 2005, p. 311). Although against King’s wishes, “Violence and controversy followed. In outrage of the murder, many blacks took to the streets across the country in a massive wave of riots.” (Wren, 2005, p. 312). Dr. King predicted he would not be alive when Blacks reached the promise land, but his powerful speeches and vision allowed others to see a promising future despite an obscured present. “A man who won’t die for something is not fit to live”. (Wren, 2005, p. 129).

As important as King was to the civil rights movement so was his congregation. One’s effectiveness as a leader is measured by his or her ability to reach their followers.

His encouraging "I Have a Dream" speech resonated with Americans nation wide, especially Black Americans. (Wren, 2005, p. 239). The Civil Rights Movement did not stop after Dr. King's assassination. Blacks continue to face racism, but past leaders put their lives on the line to improve the quality of treatment of Blacks in society. It is paramount to recognize past leaders and their sacrifices. During their trials, Black Leaders such as: Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks dawned as exemplarily leaders. Whether these leaders innately possessed leadership qualities or developed them through life experiences, they were able to unite Blacks to share a common goal and vision. These three leaders along with several others attracted the attention of America in its fight for racial equality. Although some of these leaders have come and gone, their flame still burns today with the celebration of their great names. "I am - Somebody. I may be poor, but I am somebody! I may be on welfare, but I am - Somebody! I may be uneducated, but I am - Somebody! I must be, I'm God's child. I must be respected and protected. I am black and I am beautiful! I am - Somebody! Soul Power!" (Brown, 1995, p. 302).

Although racism is still prevalent in America, African Americans are no longer bounded by discriminatory laws. African Americans have blossomed into corporate leaders, athletes, and prominent business owners. The torch has been passed, but Blacks must recognize the long haul their predecessors traveled to appreciate their current liberation. America honors distinguished Blacks by celebrating Black History Month. Schools and street names appear in cities across the country named after Black leaders. For a country born into slavery, this thought was not imaginable. Jackie Robinson,

Michael Jordan, and Barack Obama are household names Americans celebrate in 2011. Stokely Carmichael, Jesse Jackson, and Thurgood Marshall are influential Black leaders not easily recognizable but still contributed substantially to the Civil Rights Movement. The determination of those leaders paved the way for Blacks' voices to be heard. A Country that once promoted racism is now led by an African American President. "In his inaugural address, Mr. Obama acknowledged the change his presidency represented, describing himself in his inaugural address as a "man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant. "Our predecessors understood that government could not, and should not, solve every problem. They understood that there are instances when the gains in security from government action are not worth the added constraints on our freedom. But they also understood that the danger of too much government is matched by the perils of too little; that without the leavening hand of wise policy, markets can crash, monopolies can stifle competition, the vulnerable can be exploited. And they knew that when any government measure, no matter how carefully crafted or beneficial, is subject to scorn; when any efforts to help people in need are attacked as un-American; when facts and reason are thrown overboard and only timidity passes for wisdom, and we can no longer even engage in a civil conversation with each other over the things that truly matter -- that at that point we don't merely lose our capacity to solve big challenges. We lose something essential about ourselves."

(BARACK OBAMA, speech to joint session of Congress, September 9, 2009).

Chapter 5

A Personal Reflection

To acquire personal insight on the Civil Rights Movement I interviewed James Jones. I have known Mr. Jones for numerous years. He is an active well respected member of my church. My interview provides examples of Mr. Jones experiences with racism, and the hardships he encountered growing up during the Civil Rights Era.

Mr. Jones opened up about his remembrance of the racial hardships during his youthful years. His adolescent years took place in the 1950s and 60s. He explained how segregation impacted him and his family. Mr. Jones recalled being denied restaurant service, and being turned away from White businesses. His recollection of this story was not equivalent to any information presented in history books. Although difficult to recount these painful memories, Jones expressed his perseverance gave him the strength to push through these perilous times.

Mr. Jones patience was tested on numerous occasions. He recounts the racist slurs shouted toward him and his family. Although difficult to turn the other cheek,

Jones and his family took heed to Dr. Martin Luther King's peaceful philosophies.

Jones' stories allowed me to illustrate the hardships he was forced to encounter. Jones chuckled while expressing his battle with racism, but reassured me the situation was not taken lightly at the time. Jones explained how his troubling youth left him better suited for the world today. As Jones and I continued to converse, he emphasized racism has not completely gone away and will always exist.

Racism and segregation are issues that have surfaced all over the world. There is no how-to book when facing racism. Overt racism is obvious and deliberately meant to harm others, and subtle racism is behind the scenes but equally as damaging. Diving into the complexity of racism is not simply done. Jones' stories allowed depicted his lifestyle was growing up as a Black male in a segregated country.

I have not experienced racism to the extent Mr. Jones has. Although aware of the racism during the Civil Rights Movement, my interview with Jones painted a portrait of difficult trials for Jones and other Blacks in America. Jones explained when mistreated, he strived not to let his emotions fester and cause more conflict. He never returned the racist mistreatment he once received. Growing up, Jones hoped for a brighter future where racism was not an issue in this country. Although racism is still present, it is not at the level it was during the Civil Rights Era. At the conclusion of our interview I was delighted to garner the invaluable information Jones shared with me. Jones reflection on the Civil Rights Movement and his childhood shed light on the unlawfulness described

throughout my thesis, but gives a clear depiction of the struggle Blacks sustained in “the land of freedom.”

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