

Autobiographical Essay

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Introduction:

Race is real because we make it real. The characteristics of race such as skin tone, body shape and hair texture are all characteristics which are only skin deep. The more scientifically advanced we become the more easily we are able to prove that biologically there is no difference between a Black person and a White person, or an Asian and a Chicano. Thus if we truly are the same, biologically, then why is there such a strong distinction between racial groups? Why is it that society views people of different races as different from one another? This is because race is a socially constructed idea and each new piece of scientific research continues to support this idea of race as a socially constructed idea. Race is an idea that was brought about and has been carried on through the social environment. The concept of race is culturally transmitted from one person to the next and a person's idea of race, what race is and how it is defined, will vary from region to region (Machery & Faucher, 2005, pp 1208-1211).

General History of Education in Brandon, Florida:

Not long after Mr. John Brandon moved to the Tampa area in 1857 and the first school was built in 1914 in an area that is now called Brandon. The school was called Brandon school and it housed all grades. This building also served as the first church in Brandon, similar to colonial times when churches and schools were very much blended. However, while according to John Rury, in *Education and Social Change*, "Perhaps the most fundamental talent of Protestantism was the belief that each person needed to form an individual relationship with God. To do this, of course, ... every man, or person, should be able to read the Bible and interpret it himself, This required literacy ..." which lead to the need for schools. I am sure the church and school in Brandon were more separate due to the separation of church and state.

The principal of the Brandon school for thirty four years was E.F. McLane. Within a matter of a few years McLane's school had too many students and an elementary school, Yates Elementary, opened in 1953 to alleviate the over crowdedness, leaving grades six through twelve at the Brandon school. In the years that followed the Brandon school grew larger, this prompted the building of another school. This new school was built on the property adjacent to the Brandon school in 1973 and it was to house the tenth through twelfth graders, it was called Brandon High School. This relieved the Brandon school which became solely a junior high school and was renamed McLane Junior High school, after its principal of 34 years ("McLane middle school,").

#### De-Segregation in Hillsborough County, Fl.

Hillsborough County is located along the central part of the west side of the state of Florida and it is not impervious to the race issue. Race has played a role within the school system in Hillsborough County. In 1958 the Hillsborough County desegregation case was filed by two lawyers, Thurgood Marshall and Constance Baker Motley. Initially the school district of Hillsborough County delayed the desegregation process as long as they could. "The county school board engaged in a variety of stratagems designed to delay as long as possible the coming of meaningful desegregation. After eleven years of pupil assignment laws, and one-grade-a-year desegregation they couldn't prolong it anymore. Desegregation plans were drawn up and sent to the courts for approval." They wouldn't be telling students that a "quality education was at the end of the bus ride" anymore (Days, 1992, p.36). "As a result of this action, Hillsborough schools have been considered desegregated since 1971" (Days, 1992, p.34).

Though the government may have considered Hillsborough County schools to be desegregated, the district continued trying different desegregation options. As a seventh grade White boy living in Brandon in 1975 my father was bused from Brandon to Tampa to attend Franklin Junior High school which was over eleven miles away when his local junior high school was just less than three miles away. My dad was a young White boy sent to a new city with a school full of Black students. A product of the one-grade-a-year desegregation, my dad shares that he didn't know anyone and he was scared. He stated that he did not feel that much learning took place that year. He was intimidated and felt that he always had to "watch his back".

While the Hillsborough school district has been recognized as being a leading example of a fully desegregated school district, it has accomplished this through discrete means. Means in which it attempts to put an end to de-facto segregation. The magnet schools, IB schools and charter schools are all located in areas of low SES. This forces students who want to be in the IB program to commute from their suburban neighborhood to the inner-city school which houses the schools with these special programs. This way the IB students bring diversity and help to balance out the high numbers of Black students who are attending their neighborhood inner-city school (Days, 1992).

The school district of Hillsborough County is officially under unitary status. It began pursuing unitary status in 1958 and achieved it legally by 2001. The Hillsborough school district has over 237 schools. It is the third largest school district in the state of Florida with 194,525 students in its public schools in 2011 and it is 8th largest public school district in the entire US ("Largest 100 u.s.," 2011). In the 2004-2005 school year, 48.5% of students in the Hillsborough County school district were White, 23.5% were Black and 24.9% were Latino ("Desegregation of public," 2005).

Schools in Brandon are no different from those of colonial times when some aspects of schooling were meant to train students for the work force. As Rury describes, "...education became vocationalized, or focused on training for specific operations..." (Rury, 2009, p.62). Brandon high school offered classes to help students to become more skilled for a specific job; these classes included drafting, shop, vet assistant, cosmetology, business, home economics and ROTC.

#### A Closer Look:

Consider two different middle schools. School one is a title one school and has the following statistics: 54% of students are testing at or above level in reading, 50% of students are testing at or above level in math, 87% of students are testing at or above level in writing, 35% of students are testing at or above level in science and the school grade for the past five years consists of four Cs and one D. Now consider school two. School two is not a title one school, and it has the following statistics: 75% of students are testing at or above level in reading, 77% of students are testing at or above level in math, 99% of students are testing at or above level in writing, 57% of students are testing at or above level in science and the school grade for the past five years has been all As ("2010-2011 School improvement," 2010).

There is quite a difference between the two schools, maybe one would think that school one is an inner-city school and school two is located more towards the suburbs. Actually, the two middle schools are located in a suburban area one mile apart from each other. The difference is the zoning for the two schools. School one, McLane middle school, has 30 different feeder schools, schools from over thirteen miles away in Tampa, in addition to the surrounding neighborhoods. Then there is school two, Mann middle school, which has only three feeder schools, all of which are consistently A schools.

This information tells me that the Hillsborough school district has not found a solution yet. So while they were praised for being a leading example of de-segregation within their schools, there still remains work to be done.

#### Assessment of Sociocultural Environment:

I feel that from elementary through high school I have always attended schools that were well balanced as far as the demographics of the students. Not that one third of the students were White, Black and Hispanic, but it was comparable to what I would see in public, outside of the school setting. Walking through the mall or at the grocery store, the distribution of the different races paralleled what I was used to seeing in school. Granted I didn't attend any type of school that offered special programs such as an International Baccalaureate program or a focus on fine arts, I simply attended my neighborhood public school. The students who attended my schools were the neighborhood children. None of my schools had students bused in from the city.

The demographics for the schools I attended are listed below. At my elementary school, 62% were White, Non-Hispanic, 17% are Hispanic and 9% are Black, Non-Hispanic. 47% of the students are considered economically disadvantaged (ED). At my middle school, 60% were White, Non-Hispanic, 19% were Hispanic and 12% were Black, Non-Hispanic. 47% of the students attending the school were classified as economically disadvantaged ED. About 52% of the students in my high school were White, Non-Hispanic. 21% were Hispanic, and 18% were Black, Non-Hispanic. 40% of the students attending the school were classified as ED ("2010-2011 School improvement," 2010).

#### Conclusion:

While I do feel that I received a decent education through the public school system in Hillsborough County I do not think that all the students in Hillsborough County can say the same thing. The quality of one's education depends too much on the location in which the student lives. Among the two hundred plus public schools in the Hillsborough school district there are too many inequalities for students that depend on which school they attend. One student could live in a suburban area in Hillsborough County where 87% of the school population is White and the median family income is \$85,000 and then another student could live in subsidized housing in the inner-city where 87% of the school population is Black and the majority of the students are on government assistance, the two students *should* receive the same education, but the reality is that many times, they do not. This is a problem and until the education system has found equality they should not settle. Just because Hillsborough County is a unitary district which has been labeled as "desegregated", it needs to continue to work at improving its schools.

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