RURAL WHITENESS, REALIZING RACE

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Rural Whiteness, Realizing Race

Panic filled me as I sifted and dug through the clothing I held in my ten-year-old arms. I was not prepared for her to ask me to use my hairbrush, I didn’t even know if I had a brush. I had never met a person of color before this Saturday afternoon Statewide Honors Choir performance, and suddenly she wanted to use my brush. My mind filled with things I had been taught by my family, my grandparents and cousins. Number one: I should never let other people use my brush, but I was still searching for it. And number two: there were all those things that made us different. Mom said it was bad to be racist; everyone was the same. Why then did they say to “lock your car doors” when we drove through Pittsburgh, and why did my grandmother say she couldn’t go to the mall she liked because there were too many Black people going there now? I didn’t know what to think, but I was still rummaging through my things. After searching for this brush, stuck in the chaos of a fifth grade music recital bathroom, I realized that my sister was carrying
it. I told her apologetically and a little nervously, “My sister must have it. I don’t know where she is”. I felt bad that I couldn’t help. It was nice of her to ask; I wish I had been more prepared.

Today, I still wish I had been more prepared, more knowledgeable as a child about race and racism. The people who told me that racism was bad, that we are all the same inside, were the same ones who made racist comments and jokes. When I was finally faced with a race other than my own I didn’t know how to act. However I did have ideas as to what to believe. I remember that day in fifth grade, not because I was nervous or confused. When I left with my parents I was waving goodbye with a big smile on my face to the girl who had tapped me on the shoulder and asked me for a favor. I had made a friend. I was proud to show my parents that the stories they told were wrong. I had made a friend and she was Black. Though at the time I felt like I had won a protest and made a point, I know that there were race issues that were not handled well. They had never been addressed before then and remained silent until I began to notice my own race and social location. My story as a child should not be dismissed without a critical reflection on what caused the hesitation and nervousness that I felt. This story illustrates the power of and resistance to racism that has the possibility of being carried with an individual and later used, when power is more effectual in dominant adult discourse. It speaks to a larger culture of racism that is often disregarded as a joke, peer pressure, or a simple slip of the tongue but is nonetheless fundamental to the reproduction of hatred.

I was ten when I first met a person of color, but this was not intentional and for the most part not my parent’s transgression either. I grew up in an area of Pennsylvania that is 99.6% white and today has more hate groups than any other place in the country. I
am like most people living there: white, rural, and working class. My parents did not get a college degree, and my mom stayed at home for the majority of my childhood while my father trudged through the woods checking the meters of natural gas wells. In many ways we were like everyone else in the neighborhood. We were comfortable with our race, working to improve our class position, and always struggling to win higher status in the community. In high school the only time that race was an issue was when I witnessed people telling racist jokes about African Americans in front of the only Black student in the school, as if he was white. I was confused as I listened to my cousin’s hip-hop and rap music while he complained about Jewish people getting all the money and black people as dangerous and lazy. I did not know what to think when a girl in my class walked around school for half of a day with a swastika drawn in lipstick on her forehead. No one told her to wipe it off. And I was intimidated and appalled when a group of white boys gathered around a canvas I was painting and ordered me not to include the African American girl that I had originally sketched. It seemed that race issues were always present in this environment, but were never discussed, and often never acknowledged. In high school I was aware of the racism in my community, and I believed that it had not effected me. I didn’t hesitate to shun racist jokes, to implicate people in their overtly racist comments, make artwork and write essays about race and racism. However, I did not realize how much this culture of racism was imbedded within my identity as a white woman, in a “race-less” place, rural northwestern Pennsylvania.

I was one of the few in my graduating class lucky enough to come to college, especially an out-of-state prestigious private school. When I got here, I did not feel that I had somehow conquered class-reproduction or gone farther than my classmates. I felt
like I had been transplanted into an alternate universe. Before I arrived I had not really internalized the fact that not everyone was a white, heterosexual, conservative Christian like myself. Not only was I surprised by the diversity of my new home, but also felt that I was too poor, uneducated, and rural to ever make it in college. These feelings of shock and inadequacy subsided as I became accustomed to the diversity and I embraced it. This transformed into the questioning of power structures that I, up to that point, had naively participated in conserving.

In studying race, specifically whiteness, in northwestern Pennsylvania, I am speaking of my own experiences and my own identity. In searching for the truth behind race issues and white identity in this place, I must implicate myself in perpetuating racist attitudes and social structures, if not only for my own ignorance of diverse cultures. Like all whites I cannot escape my white skin and the privileges I receive because of it, but I can question that privilege, in an effort to understand my position and enact anti-racist change. This ethnography of whiteness in northwestern PA is as much about myself as it is about the people I interviewed. Although we have had different experiences and have lived in different parts of the country and world, we came from the same roots, born white and rural into the racism of northwestern Pennsylvania.

I chose to use ethnographic methods for this research for a number of reasons. I know the place I speak of as my home. Although it is flawed, it has made me who I am and has motivated me to become more. I must speak of this place and it’s people through the stories and emotions that it invokes. I must allow those who lived this experience share it so that, with respect of their words, we can fully understand the impact of growing up in this space and the obstacles of leaving it for more diverse places. There is
no way to understand the lives written here with quantitative analysis, graphs or charts. One cannot measure the scope of racism with a survey, and cannot understand white race identity through numbers. Only through interviews and observation have I learned about what it is to be white in northwestern Pennsylvania and how that today is part of a larger history of racism.

To understand our present state, we must understand those who have come before us. In researching the history of race in the United States, I have been able to better understand the events that contributed to white racial privilege and in turn white racism. When studying the silent and invisible topic of whiteness, it is especially important to understand histories that are universally known, but to also learn what has not been explicitly taught but is entwined in the stereotypes of racist thinking. Most understandings that white people have of People of Color are based on stereotypes, which are rooted in a very specific history of racism in the United States. In this sense the things we do today are not separate from the actions that took place centuries ago, and are likely to influence the workings of tomorrow. We do not live in a vacuum. We live in response to what has happened in the past, both around the country and in our back yards.

This ethnography is an effort to understand and share what it is to live as a white, rural, working-class youth in this area in hopes of explaining the social pressures and social power structures that are at work to sustain class and racism reproduction here. It ultimately contributes to a critical discussion on the intersectionality of race, class and critical pedagogy in rural communities. Through interviews and observation, questions and answers, we can begin to understand whiteness in northwestern PA. How is whiteness formed in this area? How do hate groups and racism inform white race
identity? How does this identity change when one moves to a more diverse space? And how can racism and whiteness become more of an issue to white people who grow up here? In answering these questions we will be informed of the steps that must be taken in creating awareness and illuminating racism and white power. And in understanding, we will know how to better inform those who are today unconsciously perpetuating white power as well as generations to come.

This ethnography is arranged around core topics that frame the lives of the interviewees. The paper begins with a summary of critical whiteness theory, and is followed by a history of race in the United States and in Northwestern Pennsylvania. Following that is a description of the sociological methods I used to complete this research. The body of the paper covers discussion topics including ruralness, living in an entirely white community, class and occupational impacts, and the ways rural schools affect racism and potential for higher education. Following those sections is a discussion of the effects that different types of higher education have on the white race identity of my interviewees. The ethnography concludes with a synthesis of my findings and questions that merit further exploration.

**Theory**

Race was first thrust into sociological thinking with Max Weber and his discussion of social status. Subsequently the development of race theories began with a focus on people of color. “Racism has long been discussed in terms of stigma of being a
Person of Color and the disadvantages that accompany this stigma. Those opposed to racism have spoken of the need for People of Color to group together and “fight” for their rights” (Skoglund, 1993:1). Whiteness studies did not sprout directly from these ideas, but were influenced by them and initially by the ideologies of Black feminists in the 1970’s and 80’s. Historically women of color have pioneered racial identity development and have long urged white women to study their own race: whiteness. With this urging and criticism of the modern white feminist movement, white feminists became aware of their whiteness through the study of the new Black feminist ideas and the questioning of their whiteness, beginning in the late 1970’s. At this time theorists began to view racism as a problem that white people must address. From this grew critical whiteness theory that we know today, which is ever evolving.

Before critical whiteness could be imagined, the study of race relations and white racism was essential. Theories on race have been transitory throughout history, always changing and developing. Today,

race can no longer be considered a fixed, ontological essence or unitary, transcendent category predicated on the epistemological reasoning supplied by anthropology, biology, and other physical sciences. Rather it is a framework for articulating identity and difference, a process that governs the political and ideological constitution of subjects/agents in history (San Juan, 1992).

This framework for articulating identity, when used to denigrate people of color and uplift white people manifests itself as racism. There are various definitions of racism. San Juan states, “by ‘racism’ is meant ideas, systems of thought, institutional practices, and all behavior that deterministically ascribe fixed roles and negatively evaluated group characteristics (moral, intellectual, cultural) to peoples on the basis of selected physical attributes whereby their oppression and exploitation are legitimized and perpetuated” (San Juan, 1992). Feagin, Vera, and Baturn go on to say,
In its fullest definition, racism is a system of oppression of African Americans and other people of color by white Europeans and white Americans. There is no black racism because there is no centuries-old system of racialized subordination and discrimination designed by African Americans that excludes white Americans from full participation in the rights, privileges, and benefits of this society. Black racism would require not only a widely accepted racist ideology directed at whites but also the power to systematically exclude whites from opportunities and rewards in major economic, cultural, and political institutions. While there are black Americans and other Americans of color with anti-white prejudices and sporadic instances of people of color discriminating against whites, these are not central to the core operations of U.S. society (Feagin, Vera, and Batur; 2001).

Whites often misunderstand this point. However the understanding that there is no Black racism is integral to understanding hierarchies of power and white privilege.

From the study of racism, came the study of whiteness, a set of theories that are nuanced and changing, as systems of racism change. No one today really knows exactly what whiteness is; most people agree that it is heavily involved with issues of power and power differences between white and nonwhite people. Whiteness is profoundly influenced by demographic changes, political realignments, and economic cycles and cannot be separated from hegemony. Whiteness is always mutating, always reinscribing itself around developing meanings of race within the larger framework of society (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, Chennault, 1998).

Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey wrote one of the more radical definitions of whiteness, one that is not only applicable to people who were born with a white skin. The white race cuts across ethnic and class lines. It is not only or necessarily a part of the proportion of the population of European decent, for those classified as people of color can trace some of their ancestors to Europe, while African, Asian, or American Indian blood flows through the veins of many considered white. Also, a membership in the “white race” does not require or signify wealth since there are many poor whites and some people of wealth who are not white. The white race consists of those who participate in and take advantage of the privileges of the white skin in this society (1996).
It is possible for people who are not seen in society as white to act under the guise of whiteness even against the best interests of their own race. People were not born originally favored because of their white pigmentation but they were defined as, given the label of “white” because they were favored (Ignatiev and Garvey, 1996).

The idea of whiteness is hard to grasp, and most commonly references white racism, or white privilege. To understand white racism is not only to find what white people think of people of color, but also what whites think of themselves. Thandeka believes that there is a time, often in childhood, when Euro-Americans become white, an incident or two that helps shape their white racial identity. During this incident, they learn to think of themselves as white in order to stay out of trouble with their parents or guardians and in the good standing with their peers or the community racial standards (Thandeka, 1999). Unfortunately when this transformation takes place these individuals put aside feelings of unity and experience a quiet breakup of their core sense of themselves as different from their own community’s racial ideals. There is often a sense of moral failure and loss of self-respect produced by this American social process that forces Euro-Americans to become ‘white’ in order to survive (“Learning to be White” Thandeka, 1999).

However, when whites think of their own race they are not often reflecting on a painful transformation. Whites have also developed a group of “sincere fictions”, that is, personal or group constructions that reproduce societal myths on an individual and group level. In these fictions whites portray themselves as “not racist” as “good people”, even as they think and act in racially disputable ways as arbiters, assistants and passive participants. It is common for white people to say, “I am not a racist” often and
ironically, in conjunction with negative comments about people of color (Feagin, Vera, and Batur; 2001).

Another facet of whiteness theory says, that whites do not need to be and are often not aware of their racial motivations to inflict harm on people of color (Feagin, Vera, and Batur; 2001). One part of this problem is that we are not aware of how our roles in society were constructed in relation to those of people of color. This is especially important because knowledge about a socially problematic situation is a critical tool in dismantling it (Frankenburgh, 1993). Most white people lack that knowledge and have little need or desire to access it. When we compare whiteness to racism we can easily see that whiteness isn’t as aware of itself as racism is. Though whiteness does discriminate, it does not realize its biases well enough to articulate its logic or process of judgement (Rodriguez and Villaverde, 2000). Ignatiev and Garvey explain the ignorance of whiteness further by referring to the white race as a club that enrolls certain people at birth, without consent and raises them as a child of whiteness, according to its rules. In most cases, members of this club benefit from their membership without questioning the costs of their membership (Ignatiev and Garvey, 1996). Arguably the biggest problem anti-racism work has to face is that whiteness survives in such abundance because people don’t realize they are a part of it and often do not understand how whiteness is woven into everyday life and almost every established institution.

Because such dynamics have been naturalized and universalized, whiteness assumes an invisible power unlike previous forms of domination in human history (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodrigues, Chennault; 1998). Because the idea of whiteness is seen as neutral, invisible or even non-existent, it is very well suited to design the social
group that is to be seen as the ‘human ordinary’” (Kinchele, Steinberg, Rodrigues, Chennault; 1998). But, in order for whiteness to maintain itself in the privileged seat of rationality and superiority, it also has to construct negative images of non-whites (Africans in particular) as irrational, disorderly, and prone to uncivilized behavior. Whiteness is seen and strives to represent as a stable rock of rationality surrounded by chaos and disorder, whiteness presents itself as a non-colored, non-blemished, pure category (Kinchele, Steinberg, Rodrigues, Chennault; 1998). Unfortunately the history of stereotyping and racism in the United States has done a very good job of giving people of color a bad name and making white people that “pure” category. Part of the ‘work’ of whiteness involves making things seem or appear natural and timeless so that people accept situations and ideologies, without ever questioning their socially and politically constructed nature. Whiteness has the power to legitimate certain epistemologies even initiate and maintain historical amnesia (Kinchele, Steinberg, Rodriguez, Chennault, 1998).

In the face of this “absent presence”, it is crucial that we politically, culturally and educationally make whiteness strange (Kinchele, Steinberg, Rodrigues, Chennault; 1998). Making whiteness visible to whites exposes the discourses, the social and cultural practices, and the material conditions that hide whiteness and its dominating effects (Wray and Newitz, 1997). By naming whiteness it is displaced from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance. To speak of whiteness is to assign everyone a place in the web of racism. It is to assert that dealing with racism is not merely an option for white people, but that it shapes white people’s lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life (Frankenburgh, 1993). The
meaning that we give to the white skin is constructed through ways we communicate and communicated to about whiteness. The challenge of dismantling whiteness lies not in the individual’s attempt to change his or her communication patterns; but we must understand that this form of communication is embedded in our social fabric and is much larger than a problem of individual actions (Nakayama and Martin, 1999).

Randall Robinson confirms the invasion of whiteness on society by stating,

In America, whites have caused all Americans to read, see, hear, learn, and select from a diet of their own ideas, with few others placed to make suggestions, not to mention decisions. The airways, mainstream press, publishing houses, commercial distribution networks, school systems, universities and colleges, in one way or another are all controlled by whites. The museums are overwhelmingly established to celebrate white achievement. So are monuments, renamed rivers, mountains, valleys, dams, bridges, and streams. State and federal budgets, to which Asians, Hispanics, and African Americans contribute, are uniformly controlled by whites (2000).

Because of the imbededness of whiteness and confusion about race relations and multiculturalism teachers and citizens alike are making whiteness worse with their efforts to end racism. For example, “Instead of teaching kids to speak about race-- theirs and others—with any sense of the histories of privilege and disadvantage that imbue it, teaching tolerance reinforces that communities sanction silences and evasions” (Twine, France and Warren, Jonathan, 2000). The tension and confusion around the issue of race only works to make things worse.

While the deconstruction of whiteness is useful we must be vigilant to ensure that a focus on whiteness doesn’t become yet another excuse to re-center dominant voices and to ignore the voices and testimony of those people of color whose dreams, hopes, lives, and very bodies are damaged by current relations of exploitation and domination (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodrigues, Chennault; 1998). Today many whites still believe that there is a social cost attached to being white rather than being a person of color. Whites often think of themselves, as the ‘new losers’ in a playing field that they believe has been
leveled now that the United States is supposedly equal, color-blind society. Since “times are tough for everybody” policies to assist “minority groups” - for example affirmative action is unfairly supporting “non-whites”. With this attitude, whites claim status of victims (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodrigues, Chennault; 1998). This common re-centering of the dominant voice works again, like much of history, to make people of color the miscreant and white people the innocent victims. Some conservative discourses go as far as to say that, the barriers to social equality and equal opportunity have been removed. Whites, hence, have no privilege.

Fear is one of the factors, which spurs whiteness. More specifically, fear of the unknown, fear of the “other” prompts whiteness. Whiteness uses its own comfort to measure how other people should live, think, work, play, feel and so on. Whiteness doesn’t allow itself to know the other, because it doesn’t need to know the other to exist, while people of color cannot avoid learning and knowing whiteness not only as it is force fed to this nation but as a method of self protection (Rodriguez and Villaverde, 2000).

Ruth Frankenburg wrote, that when white people look at racism they tend to view it as an issue that people of color face and have to struggle with, but not as an issue that generally involves or implicates them. With this view, racism can be conceived as something external rather than a system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self (1993). Toni Morrison said,

Evasion has fostered another, substitute language in which the issues are encoded, foreclosing open debate . . . it is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference . . . according to this logic, every well bread instinct argues against noticing and foreclosed adult discourse.

The neo-liberal notion of “color-blindness” is actually a move toward “color evasiveness” and “power evasiveness”. Color-blindness asserts that we are all the same
under the skin; that, culturally we are converging, and that, materially, we have the same
 chances in American society. Therefore, any failure to achieve is the fault of people of
color themselves (Frankenburgh, 1993). Many white people believe that if we could only
ignore race for a while race relations would take care of themselves. In all reality white
people are scared (Myers, 2000). “They close their eyes to what is happening around
them because it is easier not to know” (Ignatiev and Garvey, 1996)

White racism involves widely socialized ideologies and omnipresent
practices. The prejudices and myths used to justify anti-black actions are not
invented by individuals, nor are they based only on personal experiences. (Feagin,
Vera, and Batur, 2001). Whiteness refers to a historical systematic structural race-
based superiority. Using the construct of whiteness allows a discussion where no
one is a racist and permits an exploration of ways in which some people happily if
unwillingly and unknowingly benefit from and informally reproduce patterns
established by racism (Nakayama and Martin, 1999).

One must remember that whiteness is not an unchanging, fixed, biological
category impermeable to its multifaceted cultural, economic, political and psychological
context. There are many ways to be white. Whiteness interacts with class, gender, and a
range of other cultural and race-related dynamics. The social construction of whiteness is
not consistent or logical. (Nakayama and Martin, 1999). Whiteness is not a simple
concept or an easy problem to remedy. It takes a close and careful reexamination of
history, the human character and present day society to even begin the fight.
History

This section does not attempt a complete description of racial formation in United States history but attempts to highlight parts as these developments impacted an understanding of race settlement patterns in northwestern Pennsylvania. The sociology of race, whiteness, and education in northwestern Pennsylvania is inseparable from the history of immigration, African Americans, Native Americans and Asian Americans in the United States. Kincheloe notes that the beginnings of whiteness formed long before this notion was ever acknowledged in an academic institution.

A dominant impulse of whiteness took shape around the notion of rationality of the European Enlightenment, with its privileged construction of a transcendental white, male, rational subject who operated at the recesses of power while at the same time giving every indication he escaped the confines of time and space... Reason in this historical configuration is whitened and human nature itself is grounded upon this reasoning capacity (Kincheloe, 1998:5).

He goes on to explain, before the rise of modern science, the mythology of Christianity had already established the groundwork for thinking via the symbolism of color (San Juan, 1992:8). Furthermore, the roots of segregation can be traced to the "Calvinist ideal of predestination and the contiguousness of sin connoted by dark pigmentation" (San Juan, 1992:8).

With Darwin and Mendal, the notion of stable pure racial types is replaced with organically evolving species influenced by the force of natural selection. Adapted by sociologists... Darwin’s theory served primarily to rank racial groups in an ascending scale based on their supposed development toward successful human adaptation: from primitive to civilized, from underdeveloped to industrially developed of advanced societies (San Juan, 1992:8).

Non-white people saying, were being colonized, exploited, enslaved, and eliminated by Europeans during the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment era — were viewed as irrational and, thus, inferior in their status as human beings. “As inferior beings, they had no claim to the same rights as Europeans—hence, white racism and colonialism were
morally justified around the configuration of whiteness and reason.” (Kincheloe, 1998:5).

Racism and whiteness have had a long history, influenced and begun by ideas that first originated outside of the United States, across an ocean in Europe.

I will continue my history of Northwestern PA, within the United States, many miles away, before the white man walked upon the soil of northwestern Pennsylvania with the founding of Jamestown, Virginia, the first English settlement in North America in 1607 (Horton, 2001:26). Shortly after the first English settlement was established, in 1619 the first Africans were brought to Jamestown Virginia as slaves and the very next year the Pilgrims arrived on the Mayflower in New Plymouth Massachusetts (Horton, 2001:26). The residents of the New World had brought with them the racial hierarchies that had been imbedded in the social fabric of Europe.

By 1630 schools in the colonial New England were being used to maintain the authority of government and religion. The goal was to create a good society, well-ordered and religious as to win God's approval and be molded by the rest of the world (Spring, 1994:6). In 1670 Africans had been in British North America for approximately fifty years. That year there was a repeal of Virginia law that had allowed free blacks and indentured servants to vote. Any rights that they originally had been given were lost with this repeal (Horton, 2001:26). Racial tensions grew over the next few years.

In Pennsylvania, tensions arose due to lack of employment, and competition from people the majority viewed as "others". Between 1707 and 1722 white laborers in Pennsylvania complained of competition from slaves (Horton, 2001:34). Also, at that time, the population of Germans in Pennsylvania was growing so quickly that the English began to fear loosing control over these new immigrants. Consequently, in 1727
Pennsylvania assembly passed a law requiring all male German Immigrants to swear an oath of allegiance to the British crown, also German newspapers and books were banned and schools were set up to "Americanize" these newcomers (Spring, 1994:15). Outside of Pennsylvania, Slaves were becoming active in protest of their confinement.

In 1753 the French claimed the territory of northwestern PA that had formally up until that time been inhabited by a variety of Native American tribes (Davis, p. 57). Even as the Europeans began to inhabit this area, "the Indians remained long after the whites had settled in the townships, but they were always civil, and no serious trouble ever occurred between them" (Davis, p.586). So begins the history of white people in northwestern Pennsylvania and a relationship with Native Americans. In 1758 the suggestion of liberty surfaced as Pennsylvanian Quakers demanded that their members not hold slaves, because it went against their religious belief systems (Horton, 2001:52). Again there was a legislation of change when in the 1760's Pennsylvania experienced a great influx of German and Irish indentured servants. With so many people to do work, William Penn proposed a limit to the number of slaves in Pennsylvania. However, soon the demand for cheep labor grew and within three years of his first proposal, Penn decided that slavery was more economical, and became a slaveholder himself. Philadelphia promptly became a major slave-trading center (Horton, 2001:34). By 1766 it was estimated that Pennsylvania had a population that was one-third Quakers, one-third Germans, and one-third religious minorities and slavery was becoming strong (Spring, 1994:13). In 1770 African Americans made up more than 21% of the North America’s total population (Horton, 2001:52).
From 1775 until 1783 fighting began as the colonies went to war with the English in the American Revolution (Horton, 2001:52). During this time the Pennsylvania Abolition Society was established in Philadelphia. It was the first abolition society in the nation (Horton, 2001:52). Later, in 1777 the Vermont constitution abolished slavery in that state. In 1787 the United States Constitution was adopted (Horton, 2001:52). That same year the Northwest Ordinance outlawed slavery in the Territory northwest of the Ohio River (Horton, 2001:76). It looked as though a pattern of civil rights and activism had begun and was growing. Shortly after the war, public schools began to build nationalism, in order to shape good citizens, reform society and teach patriotism (Spring, 1994:28). In 1789 George Washington was elected the First president (Horton, 2001:76). The following year, The Naturalization law of 1790 was passed to deny citizenship to all nonwhite immigrants, (it was in effect until 1952) (Daniels, 1997:9).

Because of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 issues of race all across the country were shifting but northwestern Pennsylvania was just beginning its recorded history. By 1804 areas in northwestern PA were becoming more populated. As the population grew, northwestern PA became more industrialized. The years between 1820 and 1840 saw great advances, both material and intellectual, in the area. “It was a period of road-making, of bridge-building, and of the opening of churches and schools; of the introduction, too, of many conveniences and ameliorations in modes of life” (Davis, p.97). In 1820 the first churches were built in Clarion county and were Lutheran. Other Protestant religions soon moved into the area (Smith, 1883:584).

In the larger United States, the Trail of Tears marked the 1830’s. In 1842, the supreme court, in Prigg v. Pennsylvania, ruled that states may not be compelled to
enforce the fugitive slave law, meaning that slaves who escape to non-slave holding states, must be returned to their masters in the slave-holding state and again be enslaved (Harrison and Glibert, 1994: p82-83). Repeal strengthened the slave holders power and further enhanced the problems for African slaves in the United States.

The discovery of gold in Sutter’s Mill, California began the first gold rush in 1848 and brought the first numerically meaningful immigration of Chinese to the United States (Daniels, 1997:3). Between 1849 and 1882 250,000 Chinese came to the United States by choice. More than ninety percent of them were male. As late as 1880 there were fewer than 5,000 Chinese women in the United States, and most of them were “slave girls”, prostitutes brought to the U.S. against their will (Daniels, 1997:5). In 1849 Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery in Maryland (Horton, 2001:126). The following year, congress passed major compromise legislation containing a harsher federal Fugitive Slave Law, which provided federal assistance to slave holders, allowed ‘reasonable force’ to be used in retrieving a run away slave, and provided penalties for assisting slaves in their flight (Harrison and Glibert, 199 San Juan, 1992:8). In the Dred Scott v. Sanford case of 1857, the Supreme Court upheld the right of slavery to expand into the territories, refused to free Scott, and denied black people the right to United States citizenship (Horton, 2001:154).

In 1865 President Lincoln was assassinated and slavery was abolished with the addition of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (Horton, 2001:176). After all of this, in Alabama on a December day in 1865, six young men decided to form “a club”, the original Ku Klux Klan in America (Chalmers, 10). In 1868 the Fourteenth
Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, removing racial restrictions on U.S. citizenship (Horton, 2001:176).

However, in northwestern PA, in 1869 newspapers were covering the issue of Black suffrage and publishing the sentiments of the area’s citizens. Articles published were similar to the following examples from the March 27th addition of the Clarion Democrat (the local newspaper) and ran for weeks. Articles read, “the negro suffrage amendment must fail” and “every radical in the State Senate voted... to force negro suffrage upon the State”. Before 1870 the Klan was having a widespread impact: “by the time of the national presidential election, the Klan had managed to substantially rearrange things” (Chalmers, p. 16) turning votes against northern republicans in hopes that southern democrats would win the race.

In 1870 the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution removed racial restrictions on voting, (Horton, 2001:176) that is until the “grandfather clause” in 1890 was put in place. Excluding most African Americans and all Asian and Native Americans (Daniels, 1997:32). In 1882 the “Chinese Exclusion Act” was written into law, suspending immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years. It permitted only the entrance of teachers, students, merchants, and “travelers for pleasure”. In 1892 the act was extended ten more years and in 1902 it was made “permanent” until 1945 when the act was repealed as a wartime gesture (Daniels, 1997:14). The Chinese Exclusion Act became the hinge on which all American Immigration policy turned. However, in 1893 in northwestern Pennsylvania “Lee N. Young, Clarion’s Chinese laundry man, faced deportation... but local attorneys won him the right to stay” (unknown). In this time of extreme racial
prejudice the people of northwestern PA fought against the norm. But the Chinese exclusion act had ended the era of free and unrestricted access to the United States.

Civil rights were taking another bad turn when in 1883 the United States Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights law of 1875 unconstitutional, making it legal to segregate or close to certain races public accommodations (Horton, 2001:176). This decision was made in five separate cases (Daniels, 1997:34).

Between the years of 1860 and 1920, one out of seven Americans were foreign-born (Daniels, 1997:38). By the end of the 1880’s more than five million immigrants had come to the United States. Two thirds of them were from Western Europe and one sixth were from southern and Eastern Europe (Daniels, 1997:39). “Immigrant workers from southern and eastern Europe in the new American industrial workplace of the mid-nineteenth century aspired to and eventually procured whiteness; they viewed it as a payment for the exploitation of their labor” (Kincheloe, 1998:9). Between 1880 and 1920 one third of the Jews in Eastern Europe migrated, ninety percent of them to the United States (Daniels, 1997:71).

In 1896 Supreme Court Plessy v. Ferguson case “separate but equal” public facilities were declared constitutional (Horton, 2001:176). With this eight to one vote they enforced segregation, which lead to Jim Crow laws in the south (Daniels, 1997:34). Between 1900 and 1908, there were serious race riots in New York City, Springfield Ohio, Greensburg Illinois, Atlanta, and Springfield Illinois. The 1908 Springfield, Ill. riot lead to the formation in 1909 of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), established largely by Jewish reformers (Daniels, 1997:54).

Even as African Americans gained social strength, other minority groups were suffering.
In 1907 Congress created an Immigration Commission, alarmed by the abundance or unwanted “others” entering the country (Daniels, 1997:63). The “Gentleman’s Agreement” was put into practice between 1907 and 1908. With this legislation, Tokyo agreed to stop issuing passports to Japanese laborers bound for the United States (Daniels, 1997:74).

In 1910 the first city ordinance to require segregation by city block was established in Baltimore Maryland (Daniels, 1997:55). In the same year, 1913, the Wilson administration began instituting segregation in Federal service jobs, and President Wilson himself, publicly endorsed “Birth of a Nation”, a film glorifying the Ku Klux Klan (Daniels, 1997:57). In 1914 World War I began. Between 1901 and then, some thirteen million immigrants had entered the United States and more and more Americans became convinced that immigration was a serious problem (Daniels, 1997:58).

As the majority wished, 1914 marked an economic decline and a sharp drop off in immigration. After 1915, slacking immigration meant an economic boom for the United States, therefore manufacturers began recruiting workers from the ranks of African Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and some women, even against their racist ideals (Daniels, 1997:79). In 1915, the supreme court disallowed city ordinances requiring blacks and whites to live on separate city blocks (Daniels, 1997:55).

United States involvement in World War I occurred in 1917, when the U.S. declared war with Germany (Horton, 2001:200). Nativism was immediately directed at Germans and people of German decent. In 1917 a bill was passed that all future adult immigrants would have to enter the United States literate and created the “barred zone”,

...
an area marked by certain latitude and longitude lines that barred immigrants from all of Asia except China, Japan and the Philippines (Daniels, 1997:81).

African Americans were not having any better luck with the government. The south was finding ways to keep blacks from voting and northern cities created an increasingly effective system of residential segregation and easily placed public schools so that they would be segregated, even without the Jim Crow laws of the South (Daniels, 1997:55). In the summer of 1919, “Red Summer”, white/black racial disturbances left scars on at least twenty-five American cities (Horton, 2001:200).

Schools at this time were creating “Americanization” programs, teaching personal cleanliness, middle-class values, and discipline more appropriate to the factory than the classroom. In many if not most cases, disdain for the immigrant heritage was deliberately instilled in the children of the foreign born. Most adhered to the “melting pot” approach, which saw immigrant culture as something to be boiled away, as impurities are boiled away in making steel. Many social workers and teachers consciously turned children against their immigrant parents (Daniels, 1997:90-91).

The 1920’s marked a time of change in the African American community. It was the time of the great migration of African Americans from the south to the north. Over 750,000 African Americans migrated, which in turn created hostility in white workers and unions and resulted in race riots. This decade erupted with African American art and literature in the Harlem Renaissance, unfortunately this time of good fortune did not make much difference in the everyday lives of most blacks (Daniels, 1997:128). By the 1920’s the Racist Right had begun to grow again when the transmission of the myth of an “international Jewish conspiracy” (first circulated during the French revolution) reached
the United States and "fear and antagonism towards immigrants and naturalized aliens was at its height" (Ridgway, 17). At the same time there was a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan with five million members (Daniels, 1997:129).

In 1921 the Invisible Empire of the KKK moved into "the rolling farm country, mining valleys, small towns, and cities of Pennsylvania" (Chalmers, 236). The Klan worried at this time, mostly about Roman Catholics, foreigners, and unendorsed Prohibition. They confined their activities to church visits, charitable and fraternal affairs (Chalmers, p. 236). Meanwhile, nationally, Henry Ford, the influential automobile tycoon, was hard at work producing anti-Semitic publications so popular that they were circulated around the world and printed in 16 different languages. He became "the only American to be favorably mentioned in Mein Kampf" and when Hitler heard Ford might run for president in 1923, he said, "I wish I could send some of my shock troops to Chicago and other big American cities to help in the election" (Ridgeway, p.43). The first recorded account of Klan activity in northwestern Pennsylvania was in 1923. "In 1923, a man named T.P. Branch from Pittsburgh rented an office in Oil City to establish, or perhaps bolster a KKK chapter" (Haraldson-Bering, 2002: 2). Increased Klan violence and demonstration marked 1923 in Pennsylvania and by 1925 the PA Klan had Peaked with one hundred thousand members. In 1926 the Klan died down again in most of the nation. However, "in 1926 newspaper photographs show a Klan parade on Liberty Street in Franklin, PA its members baring their faces to the crowd" (Haraldson-Bering, 2002:2). The absence of masks is attributed to the Klan’s assertion that it was a "super-patriotic organization" (Haraldson-Bering, 2002:2).
Also in the 1930’s the federal government began building separate segregated housing projects and by 1936 the majority of African Americans were voting for democrats, Franklin Delanor Roosevelt had been elected president (Horton, 2001:248). Southern democrats in congress inhibited Roosevelt from pressing for an anti-lynching bill in 1936 (Daniels, 1997:127).

The Racist Right returned in force and between 1940 and 1970 “the reborn Klan developed strength from opposition to desegregation and spread rapidly north as racial tensions increased in that area” (Jenkins, p. 228). In 1941 Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States enter World War II (Takaki, 1998:190). “The army promptly began the evacuation and internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of them, citizens by birth” (Takaki, 1998:188). Three years later the war had ended (Horton, 2001:248).

In 1946 in Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia, the Supreme Court declared segregation on interstate bus travel unconstitutional. In 1948 President Harry Truman ended segregation in the United States armed forces. Between 1950 and 1953 Americans fought the Korean War, for the first time in integrated military units since the Revolutionary War (Horton, 2001:264). In 1952 for the first year since 1882 no African Americans were reported to have been lynched (Horton, 2001:264). With the 1954 court case Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka segregation in schools was put to an end (Kleg, p. 272). The Supreme Court declared public school segregation unconstitutional, saying separate is “inherently unequal”. In 1955 the Montgomery Freedom Association, led by Martin Luther King, Jr., began a bus boycott in Alabama. In 1960 students sat in at Woolworth lunch counter, in Greensboro, North Carolina to protest segregation (Horton,
The 1950's were a time of change that continued to grow into the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's which was often met with violence.

In 1960 year John F. Kennedy, a Roman Catholic, was elected President (Horton, 2001:268). In 1961 an integrated group of Freedom Riders are attacked and beaten in Alabama. Three years later President Kennedy sent federal troops to Birmingham, Alabama, to protect demonstrators from white rioters. Later the same year some 250,000 join the March on Washington where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech at Lincoln Memorial. The same year NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers was murdered at his home, and four black girls attending Sunday school were killed by a bomb in Birmingham, Alabama (Horton, 2001:268). The next year President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting racial discrimination in public accommodations, employment and education (Horton, 2001:268). The same year, in Pennsylvania, the administration of Redbank Valley School (Clarion County, northwestern PA) refused “to accept a Negro girl as a student teacher.” “Thirty one college students, including five Negroes and some faculty members demonstrated in front of the Redbank Valley School” (unknown).

By this time “anti-Catholicism virtually ceased to be a major component of the public platform of the Klan Organizations, to be largely replaced by pressing black-white issues, which gave northern Klans a much more ‘Southern’ image”(Jenkins, p.229). In 1966 the Black Panther party was founded in Oakland California (Horton, 2001:294). In 1967 more than forty race riots occur in the summer months. “It was not until the urban rebellions of the ‘internal colonies’ (ghetto, barrio, reservation) in the late sixties that the centrality of race in the preservation and reproduction of the United States social order
came to be recognized in the burning district of Watts, Los Angeles; and in the streets of Detroit, Chicago, New York City, Atlanta, Miami and elsewhere” (San Juan, 1992:6). The next year Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated (Horton, 2001:294).

In 1969 hundreds of thousands of people participate in urban demonstrations against the Vietnam War (Horton, 2001:322). In 1971 the Congressional Black Caucus was created, Jesse Jackson organized People United to Save Humanity. The next year congresswoman Shirley Chisholm became the first Black woman to run for president (Horton, 2001:322). In 1973 the Vietnam peace accord was signed and the war was over.

At the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, neo-conservatism and the New Right forces succeeded in constructing a social bloc that implemented an authoritarian populist program under the banner of ‘traditional American Values’. The themes of individual rights, market rationality, anti-statism, and laissez-faire liberalism were deployed in a universalizing strategy to decontextualize race and institute a project or reinforcing the individualist ethos (San Juan, 1992:7).

In 1978, Sociologist William Julius Wilson published “The Declining Significance of Race”. Arguing for the growing importance of economics in determining opportunities for black Americans (Horton, 2001:322). As evidence that this is not true, the next year the Ku Klux Klan killed five people at an anti-Klan rally in Greensboro, North Carolina.

The year of 1980 marked the beginning of the Reagan era. In the 1980’s the farm depression hit northwestern PA without mercy and many farmers found hope in the racist far right that urged them to “fight back” (Ridgeway, 7). More importantly, the far right provided small-town America with an interpretive framework with which to understand what was taking place: purported ‘hidden truth’ behind the nightmare chaos of the times” (Ridgeway, 8). In 1981 more than 300,000 people from labor to civil rights organizations joined a Solidarity Day demonstration protesting Reagan administration policies (Horton, 2001:322).

In the eighties, paradoxically, the ‘color-blind’ federal policies of integration had produced a more intense de facto segregation in schools and workplaces. And despite the disguise of racial bias in the more acceptable language of social class, we observe today the ‘color-blind’ life-style of the ‘silent majority’ in the endemic display of bigotry and unrelenting hatred toward peoples of color by middle-class youth on campuses and young working-class whites in urban communities (San Juan, 1992:3). Though the 1980’s were a time of apparent racial justice, in all actuality it was a time of building ways to work under the disguise of whiteness.

The 1990’s were a time of ignoring the significance of race, though the actions of people speak louder than their ideals. In 1995 the O. J. Simpson trial and acquittal for the murder of his wife and her friend became an international media event that divided the nation along racial lines (Horton, 2001:340). The same year, hundreds of thousands of black men participate in the “Million-Man March” in Washington D.C., to demonstrate commitment to families and communities. “The Million Man March was seen by many, whites in particular, as part of the tearing apart of America that the president mentioned. At least 40 percent of federal workers in D.C. stayed home, but only 9 percent were Black men who might have gone to the March. Most of the absentees were white. The Washington Post reported that commuter traffic from D.C. Suburbs was down 70 percent -- 70 percent!” (Myers, 2000:20) on the other hand “the Million Man March was a very mainstream event in a black neighborhood, hardly a radical enterprise” (Myers, 2000:20). Later that year a bomb destroyed the federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people sending the country in search of a foreign terrorist on whom to place the blame. An American white male was not their idea of “terrorist material”. In 1996 a rash of black church burnings in the South prompted federal investigation (Horton, 2001:340).

Today there are "52 white supremacist groups said to be active in the state of Pennsylvania, including seven-teen factions or subdivisions of the KKK and 18 groups of alleged Nazi 'skinheads'" (Jenkins, p. 230). The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission reports that this number is more than any other state in the country (Haraldson-Bering, 2002:4). Also, "several rural northern counties now have 'militias', not necessarily racist in ideology but deeply suspicious of federal authority and often with loose connections to established extremist groups" (Jenkins, p. 230). Not only are militia groups active and visible, but the KKK appears frequently, wrapping copies of fliers around widely distributed newspapers (The Spirit, 1988), and in rallies, parades, and demonstrations, even in schools (The Spirit, 1998).

Over the past year there have been race-related riots in Cincinnati, lawsuits against universities in an effort to abolish Affirmative Action, death threats and rumors of racially motivated murders at Pennsylvania State University, and a huge influx of patriotism and racial profiling following the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In the fall of 2002 Aryan Nations headquarters moved from Idaho to Porter County, northwestern PA. These are just a few examples of how racism works in this country, examples that barely touch on the immensity of whiteness.

This country has a changing but still very stable history of racial prejudice and discrimination that is systematic, institutional and relentless.

From its inception, the United States has been distinguished as a socio-historical formation with specific racial dynamics. It was contoured by the expulsion of American Indian nations from their homelands and their genocidal suppression, an inaugural and recursive phenomenon followed by the enslavement of millions of Africans, the dispossession of Mexicans, the subjection of Asians, and so on. The historical origin of
the United States as a nation-state, traditionally defined by the revolutionary enlightenment principles enunciated by the 'Founding Fathers', cannot be understood without this genocidal foundation. Racial categorization thus became the principle of exclusion and inclusion that continues to inform and reinforce all other social antagonisms (San Juan, 1992:5).

San Juan goes on to say, “The history of the United States has been and continues to be narrated as the success story of white European immigrants” (San Juan, 1992:6).

Although many white people seem to forget, “Racist practices . . . are an integral element of United States history, including present-day American culture and society. This means not simply that Americans have inherited racist attitudes and prejudices but, more importantly, that institutional forms of racism are embedded in American society in both visible and invisible ways” (San Juan, 1992:12). In the twenty-first century we face both danger and opportunity; it is the danger that the civil rights struggles of the sixties may be “dissolved in an unprecedented social amnesia and the opportunity to learn from experience and advance race relations in an emancipatory, counter-hegemonic direction” (San Juan, 1992:23). The steps we take in understanding race and the history of race in this country will help to determine which path our country will take. By knowing our own complicated histories we are better prepared to understand the actions we take today and the future we shape for tomorrow.

Methods

This ethnographic research aims to promote a full understanding of the lives of people who live in Clarion, Armstrong and Jefferson counties in northwestern Pennsylvania. It examines what happens to their opinions about their own white race as
they mature into adults and are given the responsibility of shaping the thoughts and opportunities of future generations. Although I approach the subject matter critically, this account is meant to inform and correct, not shame or demonize the people it speaks of. It is intended to open the minds and eyes of white people to whiteness as “a set of social, economic, and historical practices on the quotidian and systemic level” (Kenny, 115), and to explore the ways in which whiteness is hegemonic, problematic, and transformable.

I have been collecting interviews, newspaper articles, and stories from northwestern Pennsylvania formally for two years and informally for my entire life. Much of my data of the last two years has been collected through interviews with teachers, guidance counselors, high school students, neighbors, family members, friends, acquaintances and perfect strangers. Using the Internet and e-mail I have distributed electronic interviews about high school experience and achievement, race relations, and popular culture. These interviews were conducted to satisfy other class requirements, but have also informed this project. In all there are over 70 interviews from previous projects, ranging from short discussions with strangers to extensive written e-mail interviews.

Most recently my methodology has become more centered and ethnographic in nature. This year I conducted a seven-part interview series covering the following topics: growing up in northwestern Pennsylvania, high school experience, college/working world experience, feelings about and of nationalism/patriotism, individual ethnicity, feelings about people or color, and exploration of whiteness. I spoke with 10 respondents about all of these aspects of their lives through e-mail, over the phone, or in person depending on the practicality of each method for the respondent. Three of my respondents are heterosexual white males, the other seven are heterosexual white
females, all are ages 21-24. Eight of them still attend college, two have graduated and one has a permanent job. Students hail from the following colleges: Clarion University of Pennsylvania, Oberlin College, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University, Long Island University: Friends World Program/ The University of Pittsburgh, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Carlow College. I have known all of the respondents longer than the span of time in which this study was completed. The majority of them attended my high school, one is a distant relative, and one is a friend from college. Aside from my ten primary informants, I have spoken to members of the faculty at the local high schools and a state university.

I interviewed my respondents in depth in order to get to know them not as numbers or combinations of facial features, but as people who live within a newly contested space and identity. My ethnographic fieldwork also incorporates stories that people told as I watched and listened to them in their everyday lives. The people I talked to and observed are the experts of their lives. I treat them in my research as vast sources of knowledge, and I record them as accurately as possible in order to formulate a concrete understanding and truth that can be honestly critiqued. I consulted a variety of scholarly journals and books to facilitate my research and have also conducted a phone survey on race relations/opinions and other longer surveys on whiteness, education and class.

When I returned to northwestern Pennsylvania to conduct my interviews I had a vague assurance that what I planned to do there was unheard of. Not only was I returning to the place from which others who had escaped had not returned, but I was returning as a different person, a stranger with new and controversial ideas. I had gone away to college,
a rare occurrence for my small town and high school, and moreover to a college that was out of state and for those who had heard of it, progressive.

If going away from a working-class white community to a prestigious upper-middle class school was not enough to blow my cover, when I spoke the word "race" the common response exposed my "otherness" with a tenseness that made words labored and exact. I came into my ethnographic space as an insider/outsider, a white woman researching whiteness in the place I was born and lived my entire life. The subject of study I had chosen only complicated my social location. Whiteness in the United States occupies a hegemonic position precisely because it cannot and will not speak its own name. I found my self, as Kenny explains in her study of whiteness in her middle-class white neighborhood, "studying an intentionally invisible home from within, a normative platform of invisibility" (p: 114).

As an ethnographer of rural working-class whiteness, I needed to devise methods for naming the unnamable, marking the unmarked, seeing the invisible, and communicating as an insider/outsider among the self and the "other". Furthermore, my methodology had to be fashioned to combat the dilemma that people whom I studied are especially blinded to the prejudices and problems that whiteness creates by the prejudices that are directed toward them as a lower/working class, often negatively stereotyped community. I was interested in the cultural meanings of race and the social and political effects of those meanings but attempting to take those meanings from people who do not see the everyday practices that racialize them was difficult.

Ultimately, however, I could not cast off my own identity in attempting to elicit detailed personal and ideological disclosures from my respondents. When I originally set
out to find participants for this study, I ideally was interested in a cross-section of the rural community encompassing Clarion, Armstrong and Jefferson counties of Pennsylvania. My first inclination was to find participants who spanned the entire class, educational, and political/ideological spectrum. I was not able to do this. The only individuals who agreed to work with me were those who were confident enough in their own social positions, those who had been in college, like myself.

For the respondents, agreeing to the interview process meant taking the risk that they would be asked about uncomfortable topics. With a gap in social location, the possible topics that I could have asked them about themselves and their community could have put them in a position of embarrassment or shame. The people that refused to talk to me essentially made that decision due to the systems of working class reproduction present in the community. Because of these system of class reproduction we are now too far removed from each other’s lives to sustain comfortable contact, and finish or in some cases even begin the interviews. In essence, I was not able to make or keep contact with individuals who were said to be on the “fringe” in high school, or those who now are working as laborers in the community and did not have the opportunity to go onto higher education.

Alternately, I have been able to collect a sample of individuals who are now attending or have graduated from college, many that have above average economic, educational, and liberal ideological predispositions. In studying the intersectionality or race, class and critical pedagogy in this rural community, I hope to deconstruct the motivations that underlie white racism and white privilege, which are frequently invisible
and function through normalcy and result in the perpetuation of racist structures and institutions.

Admittedly, the ten primary respondents do not fully represent the population I first intended to study. Nevertheless, these individuals speak of a growing segment of young people who are beginning to venture out of their original communities and across state and ideological/identity lines. These are the people who bring rural Pennsylvania into the rest of the world. They are the hope that this very closed community may gain access to the ideals of the larger and more diverse United States.
The Importance of “Place”: Ruralness

I would think of the little town where I grew up where there were just a thousand people and I know because I counted everybody one day. I knew everybody, like my neighbors, in all their houses, and that little house there, that’s where I lived my whole life so, that’s most definitely home, and its most definitely rural. I had neighbors on either side of me, but there was my back yard was a field, and across the street from me was a field, even though there was a house to the left and the right, it was definitely the country, with more cows than people.

Comfort and Quality

When you get past the image of rolling farm lands and old cars on dirt roads breathing in the sent of freshly spread manure heavy in the air and the intense green of the trees that line your path with forests, your mind tends to settle on the people of this place. The first sentiment that most informants report is of the unique love they feel in this place and an appreciation for the fellow human being.

People were generally friendly; if you would walk out on the street people would say hi to you even if they didn’t know you, but most of the time they did know you. Nice people. They are willing to get to know you if they don’t know you (Amber). Not only are the people northwestern Pennsylvania “friendly” in the experiences of residents of the area, they are good, quality people.

“I guess you can find good people in a small town, good people . . . growing up in a small town definitely has its advantages. I mean you get to know everyone, a big trust factor there”(Sue). One can trust people here, even more than other places as this resident who has lived elsewhere has explained. And even though the people here may have a few flaws, they are “ultimately good people”(Neil).

So, everybody always looked out for everyone else . . . You grew up in a safe environment; you grew up with not only your family looking out for you but your neighbors. And everyone else in the town who knows you looks out for you(Trish). It takes a village to raise a child. These accounts speak of a bond that rural people have a solidarity that they value and protect. One of my interviewees suggests, “I think people are very friendly, maybe it was because of the socio-economic status. A lot people didn’t
have a lot of money so there wasn’t a lot of snobby-ness a lot of people were pretty helpful”(Amber). Most people are in the same economic situation, struggling to get by, this gives them a common obstacle to battle, a commonality that brings them together.

Rooted

Change is often thought about in these rural areas as something to fear. The slow-paced, comfortable lifestyle of rural America is something to be valued. When I asked, “Where was your family from before they came to northwestern PA?”(Amber) so many people thought for a while, searching back in their genealogical minds and came up with the answer, “They have always lived in that area”(Amber). It is very common for generations of people to not only live in this same area, but to actually live in the same house from the time their ancestors first came to settle from Europe, to the present day.

One of my informants explains, “strong working-class family values, lack of resources, fear of change has kept almost everyone geographically close to one another”(Glenda). This is all true. When one looks in historical records and sees the names of their ancestors as the first white people to settle this area, or when they look around to their neighbors and see a family that spans generations, it is clear that people just don’t leave this area. A history rooted in rural northwestern PA usually makes it harder to leave, because there is so much that cannot be known in this place and no resources to help educate people to get out of their present situation and this community. more importantly, people who live here are comfortable with their rural lifestyle.

When we talk about “home” even those who see flaws in the place they grew up can appreciate the place they remember.
Without me going off on some poetic tangent, I most definitely like the things were I am from and I’m always going to have memories, about the typical romantic stuff, about the woods and the old church where I’m from. And like my father grew up there and the steps from the schoolhouse were he used to walk to school in the wintertime, you know they are literally still there in that town. What I loved seems to be the landscape more than the people (Neil).

Even the most extensive critics value the place they grew up and see how it has impacted them positively.

Because this is where I grew up. This had a very big impact on me as a person and there’s no getting away with that. I don’t care how long I’m living in a city. I like being surrounded by nature; I really like a big yard. I want a home I don’t want a house or an apartment. I want a lot of land too (Carl).

There is a sense of freedom in the words that this interviewee speaks about his home and the specific environment that he comes from. Another interviewee says, “If I had to pick I would most definitely pick to live in the country” (Christy). Yet another interviewee says, “when I look back on it doesn’t seem so much smothering, as it seems warm and embracing” (Trish). Living in rural places is comfortable, but its more than that. “When I go to the country I feel free, safe, and in touch with nature. It’s so peaceful and beautiful. It gives me a rest for the rest from the world” (Christy).

Income, Labor and Life

A lot of what it is to be rural is tied up in class and a family history of work and tradition. The most salient social problem on the minds of rural people is the problem of economics, the problem of jobs and a low-income existence. Most everyone I talked to listed this as the biggest problem that rural northwestern Pennsylvania faces. They all mentioned jobs that their parents, neighbors, family members had and most expressed, “when I think about my experience growing up everyone was poor, everyone was struggling to survive” (Neil).
The history and income levels of people in this area vary with a median household income of approximately thirty thousand dollars and close to twenty percent of the population below the poverty line today (U. S. Census Bureau). In the recent past the median income of this area has been lower and the poverty level higher. Even so, the income level and working-class status of many of the people in this area promotes valued trait that is held by the majority of people who live here. Speaking of the construction job of her father and it's influence on her life, one of my interviewees explains “It's probably made me a lot harder worker then a lot of kids because I grew up knowing you have to work for what you want, things just don't get handed to you.”

Not only are people in this area friendly, but they have a good work ethic; they may struggle but they don't give up. This creates a dichotomy between the working class and the white-collar world and greatly increases class-consciousness, the likelihood that education will not be valued, and produces a strong anti-upper-class sentiment among the working class.

The blue-collar work ethic of our parent's generation is met with opposition today.

I don't want to worry about being laid off from a factory job and I want to enjoy the job that I go to everyday. I don't want to struggle by having the job that they have. I think that I have taken their experience and tried to learn from that and to try to change what I do so that I can have a family that can grow up in a nice area and so I don't have to work different jobs (Amber).

These two contrasting viewpoints create obstacles and confusion for high school children and young adults who are involved in higher education.

I am conflicted with wanting to be a housewife mom and wanting to "do something with my life" (my mother’s experience in her relationship with my father forces me to believe those would) (Glenda).

It is difficult to negotiate loyalty to your community and it's class status, and the consequences of higher education, knowing that it may ruin your relationship with
community members. Often, individuals must choose between belonging to a new group that they were taught to be suspicious of and prospering economically, or belonging to their home and community and reproducing the same class struggles that they experienced growing up. A solution to this problem involves going to a local college, or moving back to the community as an adult. By geographically staying within the community, one can avoid becoming an ideological outsider. But in leaving the community for a prestigious college and not returning to “settle down” is like exclaiming superiority over your community and siding with the “enemy”.

The majority of the families whose children do eventually attend college are those families that do not have to worry as much about income and making ends meet. The majority of my ten primary respondents were in this type of situation. They often did not even notice that people around them were less well off. The mother of this informant is an English professor at the local University and his father owns a sporting goods store. “I think my family was functioning at just about the same income level as other families we knew when I was growing up. If we were any different, I never noticed”(Simon).

Another informant whose father was the superintendent of the school district and whose mother is a teacher said of her family income. “I guess it wasn’t really similar because my father has an important role and my mother has a fairly important role which was a little higher paying than what everyone else seemed to have so I guess our income level was different”(Diana). She saw that her parents not only made more money but also were more important to the community, putting a value judgement on types of labor. This type of attitude in both children and adults creates a divide in the community along economic
lines and ultimately determines who eventually does or does not leave the community after high school, who does and does not go to college. As Cynthia Duncan writes,

the social structure of these chronically poor . . . communities is made up fundamentally, of two classes: upper-class families that control the resources and participate in mainstream economic and political life, and lower-class families that are powerless, dependent, and do not participate. The poverty of the have-nots is inseparable from the privilege of the haves (Duncan, 1999:191-192).

Also, having knowledge that you have less money than most of the community around you and certainly less than the average middle-class American leads children in this situation to have self-esteem problems and trouble that they will be able to compete on and economic and educational level. This lack of self esteem may appear as a lack of motivation causing these children to do poorly in school or even with high achievement fail to apply to any or the caliber of higher education they are able to perform at. Gibson (1996) explains, “knowing oneself to be existentially hated or held in contempt has the doubly damning effect of causing one, at some more of less conscious level, to hate oneself” (p. 386). This often results in “self-fulfilling prophecy” in which the stigmatized person takes on the role that the “normals” assign to her. Therefore, the necessary requirements to go to college are not met, or self-esteem and information about college is so little that a low-income or working class economic status keeps these adolescents out of higher education and helps to reproduce that same class status in the next generation.

The people operating in the middle of this community’s income bracket are likely to have lived in situations similar to this. One informant says of his father

I know that for my father whether you enjoy your job is not part of the equation. You know you go to work, you do whatever you have to do and it’s work so you’re not supposed to enjoy it. As a matter of fact I think that if he did enjoy his job he would think he was doing something wrong, he would dislike having a job that was easy or pleasurable (Neil).
This is the type of work most men in the area do, most are “laborers” they work on construction crews, or operate heavy machinery, work in coal mines, or in factories. Often this makes life more difficult for the entire family.

My father really had to work, so when my father was in the coal mine all those years, he was a big dick head because I mean working down in a hole was like hell. And so, you know he was a jerk, you know and he was violent and mean and angry and all that stuff that goes along with that (Neil).

Doing work that was exhausting and then sitting down to pay bills and not having enough money left to make ends meet is devastating.

Though the work that many men in this area do is toilsome and relentless, they are viewed by the larger society as lazy because they are not making a certain amount of money. “Working-ages adults are expected to support themselves, and poverty among this group is viewed by many Americans as indicating a lack of discipline or effort” (Gilens, 1996: p. 522) even when they are working.

The vast majority of homes in this community are heterosexual two-parent homes, and most mothers do not work out of the home until they absolutely have to. This is evidence that the community is still operating very largely under traditional gender roles of male as the breadwinner and female as mother who stay home and take care of the children. Very often husbands whom in most cases control all the income and property of the family, do not allow their wives to get a job or any type of higher education until it is absolutely mandatory to make ends meet, and then it is only for a short time.

For a while my mother worked, sometimes she would work part time jobs. And I had friends whose mother’s worked part time jobs and the effect on the family seemed to be the same effect it had on our family...when they had to get jobs, the household had more income but emotionally things certainly got thinner during those times (Neil).

In addition to this, women in unhappy marriages seldom get a divorcee because they have no income and everything they own is in their husband’s name. Problems are intensified by the stigma attached to counseling, the cost involved with that, so families or
individuals who are having problems often “stick it out” echoing their already strong work ethic, and complicating the home-lives of many children and spouses. The stigma of divorce and counseling is largely contributed to by the presence of an intensely conservative Christian culture. Living in these situations of low income brings about high stress. Lower income families, where both parents are forced to work and still have an income that falls below the poverty line, face similar or more intense stresses.

**Status**

There is more to the economics in this rural area than conflicts with more urban and or wealthier places and people; there is a competition within the community in terms of affluence.

In economic terms, I don’t want to say everybody, but there are so many lower to middle class people and particularly where I lived, you know kind of up in the hills. They were all kind of lower-class working people. You know? They saved up and then if they could buy some cheap gas-guzzling American car they really thought they were affluent (Neil). Class status here is determined by the car you drive and the clothes you where. In kids having the “cooler clothes” was the ticket to popularity and having the right car was a way that their parents found well-ranked place in the community. Having real wealth in terms of savings and ways of managing money was not nearly as important or as widely understood. Lack of capital was easy to ignore when looking for a higher status in this rural community, but was not able to move families to a higher-class status. Most people live paycheck to paycheck and worry about money, even as they drive their shiny “gas-guzzling American car”.

Material things were a good way to make a name for yourself as an adult, but as a child, if you were good at sports in this area you didn’t even have to wear the “coolest” clothes to make a name for yourself.
Sports are a big thing in this area. Well, for the younger people they are the biggest thing. If you stay in this area and grow up, I don't know if it gets you jobs or anything but so far it hasn't gotten me anything. High school-wise it is the big thing, it's not just students, its teachers and all that. They notice all that. Psychologically it helps (Carl).

In this area where most people believe that they can not afford to send their children to college, they hope that strong athletic performances will buy their children a place in higher education. Again this is a way to escape class reproduction, but it is a gamble. None-the-less, high school football players become heroes in this town. “In the winter and fall high school football games, different kinds of sports, soccer and basketball. Wrestling and volleyball. Everyone seems to rally around the high school when that’s in session, I mean it’s a pretty big public drawing”(Diana). As a result tax money that is intended to enhance public schools is often used to enhance the athletics departments, in turn taking money away from education, which is the real way to transcend class reproduction. The community approves of and supports this delegation of funds because it creates an easy form of entertainment in a place with little. It also reinforces hegemonic gender roles, in an effort to preserve the conservative and gender-biased community that is northwestern Pennsylvania. It is a way to reproduce “traditional”, home-style, uncritical but comfortable values.

Another pastime that permeates rural Pennsylvania is hunting. There is a very prominent culture formed around hunting to the extent that schools are closed for a week during deer season, there are publicized contests and children begin carrying guns at age seven or eight. “My dad’s hunting. I started hunting with him when I was twelve. My entire family hunts and lives on a meat-producing farm”(Trish). Hunting is a traditional part of most boys’ initiation into manhood and that of many girls, as is the case of this interviewee. It is a way for children to bond with their father, but it is also a way of reproducing a notion of “taming nature”, controlling ones environment, survival of the
fittest, violence, and hegemonic masculinity. Hunting is an excuse to assume a seat of
time and domination over something that can easily be thought of as unimportant, a
serious threat, or an intruder. This exposes young children to a culture where it is
expected and celebrated when you kill another being. Later hunting becomes an avenue
for male bonding in clubs like the National Riffle Association and gun owner’s
associations, conservative groups that are often linked to hate groups. Hunting as an
activity runs along a conservative vein, as does the unspoken rule in this area that all must
be an active Christian.

Most families in this community can be described as “Primarily two parent
(male/female) homes, white, Christian, traditional working-class values.” There
is a strict social rule that families raise their children in the church. One interviewee said
that she was indubitably left off many a birthday party list as a child because her family
did not belong to a church. Others spoke about the anti-Semitism in the area.

A lot of times if you were Jewish people would make remarks, if you were Jehovah’s
witnesses, the same would happen with them, so different religions. You were Catholic,
Methodist, or Presbyterian. Not being a Christian was really not that accepted there
(Amber).

This Christian conservatism helps to remedy the fact that “Many families living on
isolated properties prevents community solidarity to an extent, but that is somewhat
compensated for by the expansive role of the church (however superficial)” as
one interviewee states. The role of the church not only created solidarity but also
reproduced conservative ideas about sexuality, gender, and race roles. In a recent festival
parade a church-sponsored float, adorned with confederate flags made the statement that
God would forgive and welcome all members and ancestors of the American Revolution
weather they side with the Confederates or the Union soldiers. In effect this public
display said that racism is just fine, even God-approved. Religion in this area helps to
create a culture and community and promotes good deeds, but it also eliminates many groups from public acceptance and enflames issues like teen-aged sex, racism, sexism and homophobia. However, the average citizen feels that "in lots of ways they are ultimately good people you know, these nice people that go to church, these old women. They aren't those loud mouthing red necks. You know what I mean" (Neil). Christian conservatism also feeds onto political conservatism that is rooted in family and community histories very much before any recent events. One interviewee insists, a little insulted that I would think she may not be patriotic "I've always been patriotic, it was how I was raised", as if a lack of governmental support was poison.

A Closed Mind

Most people will agree that this area of Pennsylvania is beautiful. The people here are friendly to their neighbors and acquaintances, but most will also readily admit, especially when they have moved away from the area, that some of the stereotypes about low-income, rural folk are undeniably true.

"I like the way it looks; I like the way it felt. What was bad? I'm surrounded by a certain populace of people that I wonder how and why I ended up the person I am today. It seems like it would be totally different and I think of my experiences when I was younger" (Neil). This populace of people that the interviewee speaks about are the major component to the community. They are the factory workers and farmers, the children who do not get the chance to go to college.

One interviewee describes feelings and ideas she has about this place in rural American as follows,
Judgement, conflict, bottom of the barrel, ignorance, backwardness, exclusions, (see a theme?!) I can appreciate the value of small town living, growing up in nature, etc. in my own life, but at the same time for as many goods as there are, there are many more bads. From time to time I go home and find it so cute and American but then I remember that those things don’t exist and its all a fucking hypocritical, superficial, club that I don’t want to be in (Glenda). Here we see conflict between the positive and negative influences of this area.

She tries to explain herself in a more objective way.

Uneducated, uh you know I hate, that’s such a big statement to make, but if you’re asking me. When I think about people from my hometown, when I think about people, you know around here, Pittsburgh area. You know, they don’t go beyond their front door, I guess would probably be the easiest way for me to say it. I mean what ever they need, whatever they want, whatever they don’t have, that’s what they’re worried about. It’s very rare to go beyond that and you know, not open to other ideas or other people (Glenda).

She clearly explains that people in this area really don’t know much about larger society and do not try to find anything new, unless it will clearly and easily benefit them. This could happen for a variety of reasons, including issues of status, class and motivational variables.

My next interviewee, Amber, has been very supportive of the area, has expressed how patriotic she is, and has fairly conservative views, but still she is able to see many flaws, especially now that she has left the area. “I can think of negative things now that I have been away: not open-minded at all”(Amber). This feeling applies to every difference form piercing, to sexual orientation and race. If there was anything different about anybody at all . . . They don’t accept people for who they are. They would rather look on the outside than the inside(Amber).

She continues by saying,

I know that by witnessing all the things that went on when there was someone who as gay or lesbian, all the name calling and people would put them in such a class. They would make fun of them and not associate with them, and really make it known that that was not accepted, they were not open to that at all (Amber).

Amber goes on to talk about how people who are not white are also not accepted and are subject to the same type of treatment as gays and lesbians. As she addresses this subject
of conservatism, she mentioned that much of the bigotry and closed mindedness comes from the older people in the community. Another interviewee elaborates.

And I know those old people and they may not be drinking beer and breaking bottles but they contribute to a lot of the racism and hatred of other people. You know they don’t make anything any better. That was my experience. On the flip side of that there would be all these people who totally were rednecks and broke bottles, caused trouble and where ignorant, not fun to be around (Neil).

Neil looks at the two most noticeable conservative groups, focusing on the older generations first, who tend to reproduce bigoted ideas in the ways they talk to their children and as leaders in the community. He also recognizes the stereotypical notions of rural-ness, the young, low-income “troublemakers” who dwell at the outskirts of mainstream culture.

A combination of deeply rooted love, comfort and appreciation for this rural area of northwestern Pennsylvania ensures that many will not even leave the area, and those who do will return. Although romantic notions of “rural” are what motivate people to return, one cannot ignore the largely republican, conservative ideologies that work in this space to keep others out.
Whiteness: A Construction of Power

Meanings of Whiteness

Most people from northwestern PA can see and would tell you, when asked about race, something like, “everyone was basically a white Christian and so growing up it really didn’t effect me at all” (Trish). Even if they had the opportunity to leave the community and live elsewhere for some time many would say about their new home, “and when I came here it didn’t effect me because the majority of people here are open minded enough that race doesn’t really play a big part. Either that or I’m blind and I just don’t notice it” (Trish). Unfortunately, as a white person, the statement that, I’m blind and don’t notice it may be the most accurate way to describe how white people who do not dedicate time and energy at some level to anti-racist work, actually are. They are blinded by the their comfort, “because growing up where I did, things were just too homogeneous; everybody was white” (Neil) and never was forced to think about race, in any realistic or critical way.

Here, whiteness means the majority and being a person of color, particularly an African American, means pity from those who are sympathetic, harassment from those who hate you and a combination of both from those who want to be politically correct but are so confused by the novelty of your skin color and the suppression of racist thoughts and fears, that they insult and injure because they can’t understand what it is to be a minority and they don’t know how to be critical of their race when there are so many personal advantages to reproducing whiteness. Simply stated, “It was never an issue because it didn’t have to be an issue for me. I’m a white male. I’m the power position in
the country" (Carl). Being white in northwestern Pennsylvania means not internalizing that you are the power position, and acting on racial assumptions because there is no evidence to prove them wrong.

More socially conscious people will be able to say when talking about race and racism,

I see kids I see people my age, I see kids who are continuing to be brought up that way, who are not getting the experiences that they should be getting if we are to evolve. A lot of people think that sameness is good, that constant is good. But it's not. You don't evolve that diversity, and evolution needs diversity. That's my fear that this area kind of represents a lot of the country because a lot of the country is like this (Carl).

These are the people who realize that the area is not changing enough to open its eyes, to become clear-sighted. And these are the people who not only see that it is a problem that their grandfather talks in racial slurs, but understands that this area, though it is isolated, is not the only one of its type.

Though whiteness in this area is the dominant identity, most people I talked to had never given it a thought, the majority were confused by what I meant when I said "white", and preferred the term Caucasian when forced to talk about themselves. Also, much of the population I spoke to agreed that whiteness meant nothing to them or to society at large. Only one person I spoke to said anything to the effect of, "I think that it means everything. I think that there is not really thought put into otherness. I think that there's just so much intense discrimination that there's nothing but whiteness" (Glenda).

Thinking about whiteness

Whiteness can be viewed as a negative identity for various reasons to some people in Clarion, Jefferson and Armstrong counties, but is advantageous in most facets of life in that community and the rest of the United States. Thinking about being anything
but white in northwestern Pennsylvania has brought people to describe the experience in obvious ways saying,

Boy it would suck, you know just to be different and live where I live, you know what I mean. I, the town where I was from, the really really small town where I was from. I just remember thinking I would hate to be the first black person to move there, or you know the first Puerto Rican person to move there. It just would be, I don't know really hard (Neil).

Especially children in this community, have different reactions, not really thinking about what it would be like for a person of color to live in northwestern PA but simply interested in what people of color are like.

I can just remember being very curious, because you know there were no persons of color around my house. I mean I had a Korean cousin and there were a couple of Koreans in my high school but other than that there was no real color. I was just kind of curious as to like, well what's the big deal, I just don't get it (Trish).

When growing up, one understands that there are people of color, but no one really knows very much about them, at least not directly. Even though there is no explicit information about people of color, there is always certain knowledge that there is something different about people of color, something exciting or something negative.

This interviewee knows a few Korean people, but no Korean families. The people she talks about are all adopted by white families. When looking at them and talking to them, she doesn't see any difference, in her mind they become just another white person. They do not fit the stereotypes that she is exposed to. So her curiosity about people of color remains.

An interviewee talked of her whiteness like it was ordinary and boring, something that wasn't very useful but was there and part of her.

I guess, we have kinda like the generic ethnicity because it has been around for so long and its been dominating for so long that it has become the obvious ethnicity. It's everyone's ethnicity, you know. It's like being Latino or being Asian, you know it's like a little club that you can be in. You know what I mean? Because you still have a white man's generic ethnicity that you assimilated into but at the same time, you contained your own ethnicity and its kinda like a little club that you can be in and enjoy (Trish).
She talks about people of color as having the luxury of their race, the added bonus that they can, would like to, should and have assimilated into Euro-American culture. She thinks that a duel identity is like a game. In thinking this she fails to acknowledge any racism that being a person of color promises. She ignores the fact that many people of color do not want to assimilate into white culture, and if they are forced to assimilate, people of color will get very few of the benefits that white people are allotted. In addition to that many people of color are forced to psychologically deal with being of two cultures both of which they may not fit into completely or comfortably. The same interviewee goes on saying,

It's like the culture that everyone kind of joins. It's the open ethnicity, anyone can be a member of it because it's such a wide, predominant ethnic role. And I think that that made it easier for other cultures to assimilate into our society because they can. I mean they’re half assimilated anyway because they like created and brought upon themselves the culture of the white man and then they can just slowly, slowly bring their own identity into our culture and give us flavor, and I think it’s a good thing (Trish).

This statement is extremely problematic, not only because she insists that people of color want to be like white people with assimilation, but also that they brought this assimilation on themselves, that they wanted it and made it happen. She then thinks of non-white culture as some sort of seasoning, something that can be used by the dominant race to make it less boring. She is in favor of taking, without acknowledging where this “flavor” came from, she doesn’t care, as long as its stimulating and exciting. Also there is no thought of saying thank you or acknowledging the cultures that provide the “flavor” she enjoys.

Other people from this area realize that what they thought growing up was wrong, but normally only after they step back and are challenged to take a look at it. This interviewee talks about race in a way that is very true to the experience of most people from this area. It is true to my experience and answers questions as to why people living
amongst the most concentrated number of hate groups in the country say that they see no racially based problems.

Okay lets start from day one. I used to be like; racism isn’t that big of a problem. I’m not a racist, I don’t know any people who are racist, I don’t really see any really big racist problems, so in the city they might have a problem, but in general it’s not that big of a problem, okay. Now I know that that’s a fuckin’ ign’rant thing to say, you know that’s so ignorant, but coming from New Bethlehem I was like. I don’t know why I thought that, because really, my family’s racist. but I was like, you know people aren’t. I mean it was really ignorant. I don’t even want to think about how ignorant I was, it’s embarrassing (Glenda).

One of the reasons most people are not aware of or don’t believe that the racism in this area is a problem is hidden in action, or lack there of.

I don’t think, well white people say, well I’m not actively discriminating against people, I’m not hitting or hurting anybody, you know even if they just say, say derogatory things. They still don’t consider themselves racist because they’re not out there you know whatever beating people up and shit. But they don’t realize what an impact they have on their kids (Glenda).

There are very few people of color in this community, and therefore very little opportunity to physically harm or verbally abuse them. When these few people of color are harassed there is never any news about it. There are not enough people of color to form any kind of alliance, or support group, so the only people who are in the position to help them, those in the positions of power, are the white people of the community. Any news of racial discrimination would bring shame on an already stereotyped rural community, so most of the time, even if assaults are reported the are lost in the interest of community reputation. Many children, who are harassed, even by teachers and administrators in school do not report it. If they did, white people here are so ignorant to what is racist, they would treat it as if the student was imagining it, that it was no big deal, that they must be paranoid. If people in the community do not recognize that there is a problem with racism, then there is no effort to “fix ain’t broke”.

Even when racism was recognized, though it isn’t always physically exhibited, it may not be thought of as abnormal or problematic.
I was in this other world. Everything was okay and I heard my grandparents saying you know the derogatory, rude, god awful, horrible things, but I didn’t think that and I knew that wasn’t right. I mean it wasn’t even like my parents told me that, it was just like. What are you kidding me? Look, there’s this kid (Korean) and I know him and he’s okay. Here’s this guy (African American), I’ve known him for five years, he’s like my big brother and he’s all right. Here’s these Irish folks and they give me free video games so they gotta be alright. (And that wouldn’t be a race thing, but they get really discriminated against in New Jersey for being the drunken silly Irish people). And then when they did that Ku Klux Klan thing (her friends began spending time with the son of the Grand Dragon of the KKK), I think it sort of just put it all together. Like Jesus Christ I don’t ever want to be here; you know it made me think I don’t ever want to be like them. But it was never an issue, you know what I’m saying, it was never like I thought oh my god look at these poor people. I never thought that, and that was another the obvious, in a sense I was ignorant to that (Glenda).

Even thought this racism is very intense in northwestern Pennsylvania, and most people have at least one person know who is not white, the connection between racist comments and how they may effect friends who are not white is never made. It is clear that there is discrimination. It is clear that there are at least a few people of color. But it seems that, Kevin (who is Korean) isn’t discriminated against that much. Because he really, I don’t think he was. I think he was thought of as white. Yeah and so, that’s like, that sort of formulated my opinion about race relations. And that’s where I think I got into some trouble, because I was like you know, what are you talking about, it’s not that bad. I grew up with Kevin and you know he was okay. And I knew all those people were racist, but they didn’t really, they didn’t physically allow their hatred to manifest itself and I think that was my thing. It was like he wasn’t, he might have been made fun of and teased when he was a little kid, but when he got older I don’t think he had that many problems (Glenda).

Because it was white people who made the racist comments, and white people who assess the levels of tolerance and racism, most of the time racism goes undetected.

So, I think you just get people who don’t have a clue, the subject’s never been discussed. Like in my case, it was never discussed and you know you didn’t really know what was going on and it didn’t seem like an issue and it didn’t seem like it was racist and then once you said it in front of people of a different race. Then they were like, what the fuck are you saying that for (Glenda)? When one leaves the area, and asks the opinion of someone who is not white, they can easily see that what didn’t appear to be a problem, though it was clearly racist, is in all actuality a big problem that must be dealt with.

When someone from this area really thinks about races that are not white, there is often more fear than any initial feeling of supremacy or hatred. This fear is not
understood by many outsiders and is catalogued as racism, a label that is as dreaded as much as the groups they wonder at.

The kids in my class, they don't understand that these people come from these small towns and are scared shitless of them, and you know they don't want to be. So many of these kids really are innocent I think. You know, you have like two (Korean) kids who actually come from somewhere where they have their identity. And the other ones have been under those ridiculous parent's thumbs and in church every Sunday. Those kids are going through all this shit and then this multicultural world is upon them, and not only that but they have their freedom and now it's time they're making their identity, Jesus, they're eighteen twenty years old. They don't know who they are. These kids are afraid. I think they're afraid of black people, and not from like a racist point of view, but because they don't understand it, they don't know about it. They don't know why everybody sits out on their porch in black neighborhoods. I mean what are they doing? And you know they're just sitting out on their porch, but that doesn't make any sense. You know, they're so different. And in a lot of ways and its like they've got their own kind of slang and I don't get it, you know. This stuff is intimidating; it's intimidating to me. And then they don't want to be a racist and what if they say something, what if something their grandfather said slips out of their mouth. I got that, I was really afraid of that when ever I started being, you know interacting with people from other races. I just kept thinking, my god what if I would say something. And it was really weird when everybody told me that I had this luck because I was a racist, so who knows, I don't know (Glenda).

She ended her speech, deflated and exhausted, as it had been passionately delivered.

This is a confession of the real feeling that white people from this community have when they finally go into another community that is not all white. What they know about people of color is at the front of their minds, but they are trying to push it back because they know that their grandparents’ comments, their friends and the jokes they told are wrong, but that is all they know. There is a lot of fear and nervousness surrounding these moments of interaction. These situations are very high stress because you have been taught all your life that there is a huge difference between you and a person of color, something that was so different that people of color are never discussed unless it is in a negative way. With this background, if you are able to leave the community, you are more nervous, confused and scared than anything, and if you stayed in the community, you have no reference or reason to think that the grandparents that you have aspired to be
like, are wrong. At least their thoughts weren’t hurting anyone, and the jokes were funny. Weren’t they? With this socialization, before you know it the “other” becomes a mythical idea and you don’t even notice the racist slurs you spout.

This type of scenario does happen, and things that are obviously racist to better-informed individuals no longer appear to be inflammatory at all. This is how the community reproduces racism, without even noticing it.

*What’s more important?*

The majority of people in this area would agree that race is not the primary reason for discrimination. Even some of the “liberal” thinkers explain that life chances, have to do with race in a very disconnected way. I think the poorer you are the less your chances of achieving what ever you want to achieve are going to be, and because of a culture of racism, those certain people are economically disadvantaged. And of course there are always going to be specific instances of racism where you get discriminated over. But I think it’s a larger cultural program that causes real problems (Neil). This statement at least asserts that race is part of the problem, but ignores the fact that race is always visible and involves cultural, historic, and institutional systems of power that extend beyond class and touch even the wealthiest of people of color. One of my interviewees explained that in this area that economically we are all the same. Well, in this area, economically everybody’s either right above or right below the poverty line so, there’s not a lot. There’s a pretty wide span in income, I mean like between doctors and people that work at McDonalds, but people of all races are in both positions. It’s still predominantly white but that’s just because of the area that we are in. But there are, I had a cardiologist in Brookville that was Indian, and there are others I guess (Samantha).

She changes her stance to explain that economically there is variation but not a racial divide along class lines. Is this really true? She says that she had a cardiologist who was Indian, but is he the only one? Most people of color are at or near the poverty line like most white people in this area. People in this area are similar in that most are not cardiologists, or lawyers, or even teachers. Most are blue-collar workers in factories or do
maintenance, construction, or janitorial worker. In this sense we are united in our poverty and class becomes less of a factor. Diana strongly believed that whiteness, "I don't think it puts you at an advantage, but I guess it would more depend on social standing in the New Bethlehem area more than being white" (Diana). She feels that this social status, which could be connected to family history and reputation in the area, visibility in the community, and group affiliations has more weight than race. This is probably true for the simple fact that most people are white and those who are not are not thought of as part of the community, or alternately they are thought of as another white person. If social status is really what determines success in this place, then hard work is all it takes to make something of oneself.

Yes, I mean if somebody really wants to do something with their lives, it's only them who can hold them back. The only person who's holding you back is you. And I definitely, I strongly agree with that point. So, I do think, if people want something bad enough they can get it (Diana).

This statement that frames the American Dream, is not at all the American reality.

Unfortunately more people than only this interviewee believe that all it takes to be successful is hard work. She has the luxury to think this not only because she is white, but also because she is from one of the wealthier and most powerful families in the town and larger community that we grew up in. Diana has only faced the challenges of sexism in being a woman, which she refuses to admit are affecting her life at all. With the strong belief that all it takes is hard work to achieve your dreams, this interviewee and many other people hold the assumption that poor people are poor because they are lazy, women are not promoted because they are stupid, and the majority of African Americans are impoverished because they are lazy and stupid. These assumptions are easy to believe, with the influence of a hegemonic masculine white supremacist world, and are even more
dangerous where there is little or no opposition to these ideas and the power structures that perpetuate them. Northwestern Pennsylvania is one of those places.

Disadvantages of Whiteness

Because of antiquated and conservative ideas that permeate northwestern PA are so much a part of learning as a child, some “whites feel threatened by the current state of race relations because we used to be the majority and now we’re not”. The statement that white people are no longer the major racial group in this country is entirely false. But because there has been rumor that people of color will be the majority before 2050, white people are beginning to become uneasy in anticipation, (though when analyzed quantitatively this rumor is actually impossible) (Myers, 2000:37). They view a loss of power that would come with a new majority as a disadvantage.

Also, most people in this area are eager to say that there is some type of reverse racism at work, weather it involves employment or education. One interviewee said,

I was very much disappointed that when applying for scholarships to find that you could get a scholarship for being black or being a Native American. There were all these scholarships for different races but there was really not very much for whites and I thought that was kind of odd I guess that’s because maybe we get a lot of advantages as it is (Amber). Though she guesses that there are advantages to being white she still feels cheated out of something that she deserved. This feeling of “reverse discrimination” is intensified in men, even those who seem to understand a lot about racial power structures. This feeling is further enhanced because, with ignorance about race that comes from living in an almost entirely white community, white people here feel that, not only have they done nothing wrong to people of color (many of them have never even met a person of color) but these institutions are punishing them, set up to keep them out of jobs that they have had trouble finding in the first place. Affirmative Action and similar programs are a
"double blow" to people who feel as though they struggle everyday to survive, as much as or even more than people of color, due to their economic status. Many white people faced with these issues feel insulted and angry.

What they don’t realize is that being in this culture, being white in a white world, “almost engenders ignorance of other culture, not even other cultures but other people’s worldview or experiences”(Neil). White people in northwestern Pennsylvania rely on what family members, community opinions, and an education by white teachers using old, Euro-centric history books teach them about the world. They have no way of knowing what they are given is biased, and have little motivation or opportunity to do further research of the truth in this small, secluded and comfortable community.

Although there is comfort in this community and comfort in being a white person, as popular culture makes knowledge of other cultures available to white people, and as white people become further and further from their ethnic heritage, many white people feel that there is an emptiness in their identity. One interviewee said of whiteness, “Well, I guess it increases you chances of being boring, you know that’s for sure”(Neil). Because so many feel this way, appropriation of music and dress from other cultures is becoming very popular, even when the individual doing the appropriating has never experienced that culture by being part of it or even knowing someone who is. One of my interviewees talks about her daughter, who has grown up in this area,

my daughter has this fixation with, she couldn’t wait to go to college, and she hoped her roommate was going to be black, because she loves the quote unquote black music. And she loves the way black people talk. That’s how she puts it, the way black people talk. She was hoping, she was just hoping that her roommate was black, because she loves that. Now I don’t know exactly what it is about that race that appeals to her but its kind of interesting, that that’s the way she feels (High school English teacher).

It is interesting that she feels this way, especially because her only access to black people has been through television and other forms of media. But there is an
attraction to the “other” that stems most likely from a feeling that being white is boring. Not only is this problematic because it is making a decision based on a media-generated stereotypical image of race alone, but she is also trying step into and belong to a group or with a person she was never invited to join, she is inviting herself in. This interest in people of color also is based in notions of exoticism and does not critically examine any of the power structures that are at play. It ignores personality differences, and the racist northwestern Pennsylvania ideologies that she has been raised by. These are the only ideas she has, and race is much more complex than what can be explained by television and music videos. This type of hope is not intrinsically disastrous, but it does operate almost entirely on stereotypes, not real relationships, that function to name entire groups of individuals without their consent. The line of presumptive thought that says, white is boring therefore non-white must be fun, can only lead to problems.

Advantage of whiteness

There is no reason to acknowledge racism when everyone is white and no one seems to mind ignorance of it. The fact that this area of Pennsylvania is so homogenous is just one of the advantages of being white and living there.

But if you’re white in the like whatever normal middle America, then you’re most definitely at an advantage because of the whole set of, social and personal issues that are not even going to exist for you. Because the culture which you live in is really homogeneous and you know it’s based around your cultural history (Neil). As a white person you can find comfort in the music found on the radio here, the food sold in the stores, the hair product that are available and more over the people who surround you. You do not have to worry about people fearing or hating you, or giving you side-ways stares or following you in stores; you are like everyone else. As a white person
you’re more trusted by the mass population. I think there’s a lot to say about being white and the power that comes with that and it’s like that in a lot of countries where white is the dominating race and white is fast becoming not the dominating race in our society and, but yet I think it still holds the power because every real powerful position in this country is filled by a white person (Trish).

This trust comes hand in hand with power, the power to decide who is getting what advantages.

Our culture and our schooling, everything you get taught in schooling is in terms of white, Indo-European whatever. So you feel like you’re supposed to be there, almost some kind of entitlement. Or you’re actually, or you’re actually unconscious of that and you feel at home but you don’t even consciously think about why (Neil).

Being white is having comfort that is not even acknowledged “in a country that was built by white people and at one time or another thought that white people were the people who had the right to be in charge, so that still permeates our society”(Neil). For this reason, one can honestly say to the question: How is being white similar to being a minority in the U.S.? “I don’t think it is . . .”(Glenda) and go on to talk about the everyday, every hour inconveniences, racist comments, glances, looks, actions, interactions with people, products, media and education that is in some way racist and alienating. “All these little pressures they have to put up with and how difficult that is. Like I said before, that would probably make me pretty crazy. So it’s the same. We’re all humans, you know all that nice stuff. But really, you know, it’s not the same”(Glenda).

Emotions of whiteness

Today more and more people are realizing that all race and ethnicity are not the same, in that there are racism and cultural differences. When they realize this they have a variety of reactions. In thinking about being white one of my interviewees admitted,

I think guilt. I know that I can’t make up for what happened, but I can make sure that I don’t become somebody who allows it to happen again. I don’t think anybody should be enslaved to anybody . . . I don’t know usually its, actually I think it’s jealousy because white people just have no culture and things like that I guess . . . I hate the fact that, I mean I really hate the fact that you have to do all these interviews. I mean it shouldn’t be
that way, it shouldn’t be an issue. But it is, it definitely is. It makes me angry that people feel like they have to be better than. You want to be a success, you want to be the best you can be but it makes me really angry that people carry over personal things to an entire group. And it really makes me angry when people make broad generalizations about groups. Like you know, all black people are good at basketball and all white people are good at hockey, like you never see black hockey players. And then you get into that political correctness of saying things and everything’s so hard and I don’t know. So, guilt and anger and jealousy. Nothing really good, you know it’s hard to think about it. I guess if you sit and thought about it all the time you’d go crazy. That’s how you feel, you feel crazy and you have to walk away from it for a while. And I can totally see that. So, I guess. I think about it enough to make sure I don’t hurt other people’s feelings, but (Samantha).

This story came as a flood of emotions, from a woman who as been struggling with her whiteness, for some time. She seems as though she feels almost powerless but seriously frustrated with the problems whites have created. Samantha appreciates other cultures, and though she knows little about them, would like to learn. More than anything she is sorry, angry, afraid and confused.

Others have totally different feelings associated with whiteness that are also a reaction to being told that they are a part of racism.

I think that they start feeling threatened if somebody accuses them of being racist. I think that they are thinking that they haven’t done anything wrong, that there’s more of them than there is of another culture and that you know, they were here first and that they aren’t doing anything wrong (Amber).

A reaction like this one is based in the belief that whites have traits that somehow make them superior. Her reaction is not at all concerned with how people of color have been historically marginalized and targeted in violence and abuse. It also does not acknowledge that there continues to be a culture of racism in the United States today that people of color face and fight relentlessly. And though some whites feel that they are entitled to more respect, others fear that the problems they have created will not easily be forgotten or forgiven. “And I think looking back through history whites have always conquered and taken over things and I think lately now its changing and I don’t know if people are scared of repercussions from the past”. As the rumor that people of color will soon be the majority in the United States circulates around the country, we see more and
more white people feeling afraid, guilty and uneasy about the state of race relations. A few still feel that race is not their problem, but more and more are beginning to feel that something horrible wrong has occurred and continues to deprive people who are not white of their rights.

**Resistance**

People of northwestern Pennsylvania who now notice that racism is a problem that can be contested are beginning to talk a stand. In doing so, these individuals take the risk of alienating themselves from their family, friends and other support groups. One interviewee explains,

> My mother’s family is really racist. So, its funny because when I was home for Christmas my cousin goes to Penn State and she brought he boyfriend, and I was drunk as I usually am on Christmas, no I actually wasn’t, but I was belligerent as I usually am on Christmas. And I said to her boy friend who was like this guy I would tell I didn’t like. I said “Penn State hu? You guys go to Penn State? That campus is full or Racists.” You know, “are you a racist?” And he looked at me, square in the eyes, and he didn’t even answer me. And my aunt, who doesn’t even know the kid that well, jumped in and said, “Well, Andy *tries* not to be a racist. We all try, but sometimes its hard.” and I was just like, oh my god (Glenda).

In telling me about the racism in her family, this interviewee also shared how she, decided to stand up to this racism. Thought she treated her actions almost like a game, she was able to make the people involved stop and think about their race, even thought she received hostile remarks in return. Luckily these individuals are not integral to her main support systems and so she did not hesitate to insult them.

> Though Trish replies "Hell, no"! When asked if she ever talked about being white with her family. She then goes on to say how she has talked about problems with racism in her family, as if racism is separate from being white.

> Well, yeah um, my family is very racist and so to piss people off I always said that I was going to marry a black person, when I got older. And I really just ignored my family, because they are very racist and they make racial jokes and I tried to just ignore it because if I listened to it I would just get pissed off and angry (Trish).
Trish clearly disagrees with her family’s position on race, but does not confront it directly. She creates conflict, but in making ungrounded claims, she removes the seriousness of the situation. It is obvious that. Because she has no particular person in mind who she would like to marry, saying that it will be a black person, makes it obvious that she is only saying this to get a reaction from her racist family. So, this doesn’t really make them look at their racism and their whiteness, but it encourages them to worry more about their daughter and about the problems that they believe black people create. Also, the fact that she ignores most of the racist jokes and comment her family makes just encourages them to make more.

Every bit of resistance to racism helps, but some is by far more effective than others. The fact that there are individuals working within their families to stop the reproduction of racist ideas encouraging. It is a sign that, though people may have to the leave the area, or “grow up” to understand racism here, they do come back to confront what they have learned is wrong.

*Trying to be liberal*

There are now a number of young people resisting racism within their families, creating an awareness of the problem, and returning from college to do so. Unfortunately there is still a vast population who return without awareness, and those who never go away to more diverse spaces. Though young people try to be “liberal”, when it comes to race, their whiteness is often glaring.

One interviewee told a story of how she grew up, during the first four or five years in the south. She tries to explain how she can’t be racist when she was exposed to black people and had black friends. Her story goes,
when we were down there we had a nanny and she would always take us over to her house and she had so many children, you’d think she was just a mill, but um. I never really was turned on to the notion that they were really any different. Even now I have very good friends who are African American and see them any different than any other of my friends who are white. I don’t think that. I’m not holier than thou in thinking that I don’t think that I’m totally naive to racism but every now and then you get the thought of, you know, well this isn’t right. But I really don’t perceive racism as a problem for myself (Diana).

She told me about having a nanny as a child to demonstrate that she had Black friends, in hope that this would prove that she was not racist, though she never stated that the nanny was black but relied on the stereotype of southern nannies to guide my thoughts. Further, the way she described the nanny as a “mill” like a machine, is a stereotypical and rude way of describing an individual and her family. If she had been white the amount of children she had may have suggested that she was running a good Catholic family, or that she had simply chosen to have a large family. It is likely that a white person would not have been likened to a machine of production. Also, a person hired to do house work is not in a position where she is treated equally to the people living in the house where she works, and is also supporting a tradition, especially as she is interviewee describes her, of the mammy figure. My interviewee again offers evidence that she is not racist by saying that she has African American friends, and finishes by stating bluntly that she does not see racism as a problem for herself. This statement would be more believable if she had not tried to use a racist description of her nanny as a sign of anti-racism.

The same interviewee later talks about how she has to struggle with her emotions when face with difference. “Well, I try not to feel superior that’s what I try not to feel. Because I don’t think I am really superior to any other person even if they are white, in any other way. So, I guess I should just keep a level head about that”(Diana). It is not only that she has to be vigilant of the comments she has learned living in a racist environment, or try to navigate feelings of fear and confusion with people who are not
white but she actually has to suppress a feeling of superiority. She goes on to talk more about superiority. "I don’t feel comfortable around when people are self-granulizing themselves as being a superior race. I mean because we get criticized, Americans and especially the whites get criticized for doing that" (Diana). She is unhappy when others do not suppress the feelings of superiority that they have, not because it puts people of color at a disadvantage, or because it helps to perpetuate racism, but because it makes her look bad. It puts her in a racial group and labels her as something she is uncomfortable with. This is a problem, but bigger problems arise when groups that have been historically stereotyped and marginalized are marked with labels that hold them in marginal positions. The larger problem is that there are white people believing that they are superior.

This belief has lead to systems of racism that are clearly still here, alive and functioning today. Though racism is so apparent, in northwestern Pennsylvania especially, white people still have a difficult time seeing it, or they do not like to admit there is a problem. As a white person, "In this area I’m less prone to racist comments, but I would not call that an advantage. In the US, I hope we are all equal". This interviewee sees that there may be racist comments made to people of color in this part of Pennsylvania, but she doesn’t see how that would put people of color at a disadvantage. She doesn’t acknowledge the fact that there is institutional racism, or the effects racist comments are bound to have on one’s self-esteem and achievement, especially when those making the comments are the people who are in charge. She then goes on to say that the larger United States is not racist, which must mean that she has very little experience with the rest of the United States and that she has suppressed any debates
about race, police beatings, et cetera that have been broadcast across the nation. However, it is easier to believe that there is not a problem, because that saves white people from accepting any blame and perpetuates the idea that people of color should deal with race issues and white people are free from this burden and responsibility. When she speaks about Affirmative Action, we again can see that she does not believe that there is racism that actively places people of color at a disadvantage.

I don't see a need for affirmative Action if the most qualified individuals are hire/ chosen, etc. every time. It is supposed to make sure that the workforce is represented so I don't really think it serves a purpose because it's not supposed to be about meeting quotas, quotas are illegal, but that seems to be what it has become (Sue).

To her, the system is faulty, even unfair, especially in a country that she believes has gotten over its racist ways.

With the assumption that there is no racism and an increased enthusiasm for nationalism in the United States, more than one of my interviewees thought that complaining about things this country lacks was entirely unreasonable. "We have so many freedoms here but people still complain that there are still freedoms and rights we should have that we don't have now. This shows how greedy Americans can be. They have so much already and they still want more" (Christy). Another interviewee takes it a step farther.

I think U.S. citizens should wake up every morning and be thankful for the country that they live in and the freedoms and rights that they have compared to other countries, and if you have a complaint then do something about it or leave, especially at times like this (Sue).

Not only does she think that people shouldn't complain, but she also believes that people who have problems should fix them without help, even if they are not the ones causing the problems. This again removes the blame and responsibility that comes with problems in race relations from white people and returns it to people of color. And, if you can't remedy your own problem, quit complaining or leave. She seems to believe that a way to
create national unity is to push the “problem” people out, because they are a threat to the strength of the country. She in no way sees race as a white person’s problem.

Another common tactic that “liberal” white people use to mask the problem of racism, is to say that race doesn’t matter, that we are all the same, to act as if they are “color-blind”. “One of my best friends here at school is black and no, she never really talked about whiteness. Why would she, it doesn’t matter what color we are, we’re friends”. Though they are friends, color can still be an issue, and probably is an issue of an African American woman in an almost entirely white community. She probably is forced to think about her race every day, but does not talk about it with her white friends, because they are white, and living in and having grown up in a culture of racism. It is hard to trust white people with the topic of race, especially in this area. Many of my interviewees have told me that “Skin color really means nothing”(Christy). The idea that skin color is not an issue, and that it should not be talked about is taught at a very young age.

I don’t really think about it. When I see a person, I honestly do not think about their skin color. My mom always tells me a story about my cousin Samantha. She is African American. When growing up, my mother showed my sister and I a photo of Samantha and us. She asked if we could tell her what was different about Samantha. Haley and I looked and said she has pants on and we don’t. Mom said yea but what else. We continued to name different things. We never once mentioned that she had a different skin color. Then mom said to us, well she has a different skin color than both of you. I guess we looked at her and said, ‘yeah, I guess. So’? Mom said that she was proud of us at that moment that we didn’t notice the color of Samantha’s skin and that was the way it should be (Christy).

By teaching children not to notice skin color, by teaching them not to talk about race, whiteness continues to be invisible. If difference and more importantly the inequalities that occur because of that difference are not talked about, problems will remain invisible to white people. Today, in an effort to be equal, liberal, fair, people proclaim with confidence, “I never think about being white. If I did I would think I had some kind of
problem . . . I don’t think about being white. I have more important things to think about” (Sue).

We have been taught as white people, living in this community that people of color are in many ways different than we are. We have grown up hearing racist comments that are uncontested from some of the most influential, admired, and loved people in our lives. Some of us realize this is wrong, others are forced to suppress a feeling of superiority when thinking about race relations, others are just scared out of their minds. The more “liberal” parents have taught their children to ignore race, to avoid the topic, and to forget that it’s a problem. The luxury of living as a white person in an almost entirely white community is that you can forget and live comfortably, and that’s what most people here do.
High School and After

Problems in Pedagogy

The primary way to unlearn racism is to go to a place that has more diversity and a more progressive outlook. One of the most common ways to more from the community is through education. Although if as a young adult you do not leave this area, what has been taught to you in school had the potential of becoming much of what you know about race. What is taught and what is omitted for school lessons often follows a pattern of white supremacy. Because the community is almost entirely white and conservative, teaching style, and subject matter was just that: based on conservative white ideas. Neil went on to say that how he felt his education helped to shape his white race identity.

I think, yeah sure it had shaped it, because I mean how much history is in like the history books that I learned out of that didn’t have to do with European history, or even? I think that the history books that are written have a political and cultural agenda, and they only show one point of view (Neil).

It is with this agenda that students are taught to know only whiteness, and this makes it strange, if not difficult to experience anything but white conservative images and people. This same interviewee went on to say how whiteness in curriculum has changed his thinking, though he was not always conscious of it.

Our culture and our schooling, everything you get taught in schooling is in terms of white, Indo-European whatever. So you feel like you're supposed to be there; almost some kind of entitlement. Or you’re actually, or you’re actually unconscious of that and you feel at home but you don’t even consciously think about why (Neil). Whiteness operates on the unconscious level. As this interviewer said, he felt comfortable, at home because of what he was learning, and so did most of the other students. But, not all students in this school were white, there were a few People of Color. Because the teachers are all white, like most of the students, they do not even think that what they are teaching could put one group at ease and another on edge, one
group at an advantage and the other wondering why they were left out, or even worse. It is taught that hatred, colonization, and racism toward people of color is okay (because white people are not directly implicated as the problem) and that racism is a thing of the ancient past, an therefore not a problem, certainly not a problem for the white person. Samantha speaks of her history books.

They had that European conquered these barbarians and 'marred them good', and taught them civilization and did all these wonderful things and brought them new food and brought them new tools and brought them new diseases, yeah! And you known (Samantha). In her sarcasm, she describes how positively racism was talked about in history books, and how it was unproblematised in almost every case.

Glenda also realizes that there are limitations to the community demographics, but does not excuse the schools from their responsibilities to educate the children of the community.

In that school district, not only does it not physically have diversity, but I don't think that's really necessary, it could still teach about other cultures, it could still teach about other races, but it doesn't it gets completely ignored”(Glenda).

However, just the mention or race, and civil rights created a stir in a senior history class. Some white students thought that learning about race was extraneous, others were ignorant of it. The range of responses was wide, but both opinions cited here are problematic. On one hand white kids are being taught that race is not their problem, and that they should not have to deal with it, as if their own race was non-existent, on the other hand other kids have not been informed of even the most basic history of racial tensions in the United States. With out some knowledge that there is a problem and that it is historic and continues today, these students are more likely to subscribe to racist ideologies, often without realizing it.
Samantha talks about this lack of multiculturalism and how it puts her at a disadvantage.

In this area. It puts me at a disadvantage because I don’t really get to know things about the black community. You know nobody makes me, nobody made a point in making us learn about other people because there was no feeling of, I mean I know this is going to come out the wrong way, but. You know if we had had black kids and Asian kids in class in high school the teachers may have been more. They might have been, ‘oh well we need to learn about them, we need to learn about people, do a unit’, not that a unit is enough but, ‘and learn about their culture, where their roots are’. But because we didn’t have that influence at all it was kinda, those people, those other people. And you know, if there was a unit, it was everybody in one unit. It wasn’t a unit on each individual culture but. You know that there is a disadvantage because I feel very ignorant and very unlearned about other cultures (Samantha).

As a result of the lack of multiculturalism, and a skimming over many issues, and groups of people, not only is it detrimental to children of color here, but white kids are also hurt, because they are ignorant. Ignorance about race in most cases leads to racism in this community. This is the danger of not mentioning race, ignoring the fact that it is white people who are racist, and that it is white people who need to think about change.

What rural public school systems teach children about their class and self worth is almost as shocking as what they teach about white race identity.

**Teachers and the others**

Glenda’s story goes like this,

One of the first things in every class that happened to me throughout my Jr. high, high school career: the teachers made reference to my stereotyped image. They said, well I’m going to put you in the front because I know you’re a bad kid, I’m going to put you in the back because I know you talk too much. They physically placed me based on what they had heard about me from other teachers. In terms of my academic potential it was definitely a combination of my own, I didn’t want to apply myself. I didn’t want to go with the system, based on what ever: adolescent rebellion due to the fact that they were hostile toward me at times, based on my family, based on the way I acted. They did have the opportunity, you know, I was a gifted student and I didn’t get any kind of support. The ways that they wanted to support me is that they wanted me to say that I need psychological help because I have a bad family. Which I didn’t think that I needed, ah and I still don’t. I think my family was supportive in and of itself. That was the only way that they ever tried to support me. And to a larger extent, it was just because they wanted information; that they just wanted to have something against me, like I couldn’t handle it. But any time I was struggling academically or the fact that I wasn’t getting A’s when I should have been, no body took interest in that, no body ever tried to say hey you could
really be doing better, you're a smart person. It was always like, 'well you don't want to act like we want you to act, so forget you' (Glenda).

While in school she could not get away from teachers treating her as if she had chosen the wrong path, as if she was some type of lost cause. At first they didn't want to physically put Glenda in her place, and by the end they were prying into her personal life and blaming her academic situation on her behavior. They never thought that maybe Glenda's behavior was not like everyone else's because they had done something wrong.

*Influence College*

The stories that follow are not isolated incidents. This is not representative of just one person who had been labeled as a trouble-maker; it is the story of every other student, myself included, who aspired to go to a "competitive" college after high school, no matter what their relationship was with faculty and staff at this high school.

The story begins with a guidance counselor advising this student in the college application process.

If my adviser my senior year would not have told me that I would never be able to make it in a competitive academic environment I would have applied to Bates and Tuffs. Would I have gotten in there? I don't know. I don't want to go back and change it, I'm happy where I'm at now and I'm happy with what I did, but at the same time I could have been at a different level. I would have been a completely different experience. I might have made the same choice that I have made now, but at least I wouldn't have had that (Glenda).

The opportunity to prove to herself her academic ability was lost when this individual bluntly said that she would not get in to any of the schools that she chose. He told her not even to apply. "He said that I would never compete. Where did I want to go? Bates or Tuffs, or somewhere wonderful like that, so I didn't even bother applying to them"(Glenda). She now realizes that, even though she loathed this person who was telling her she would never make it, he had a powerful effect on her decisions.

It doesn't matter, I mean when somebody, even if you don't respect that person, having somebody sitting in front of you telling you "you won't make it, you'll never make it" it
definitely effects you. I don’t care how strong of a person you are. That would have definitely made life different, I mean if he wouldn’t have told me that. And it carried over, even though I didn’t apply, I was still at Friends World going, I can’t do this, I’ll never make it doing this, I’m not smart enough. I don’t have the skills to do this (Glenda).

Not only did his opinion convince her not to apply to the schools she wished to attend, but also his influence continued to linger. Today, though Glenda is very successful, there is still a force reminding her that there was that one person who believed so strongly that she would never make it. Coming form a rural environment, with few resources, and even fewer college-educated role models, this feeling of inferiority becomes a crippling problem. Some are not as strong-willed as this interviewee, and most are not as successful.

Guidance councilors in rural settings routinely discourage any type of four-year college education, they do not want to get rid of the resources they have.

The first thing that should be said is that they don’t prepare you at all to go to college. They’re preparing you to go technical schools, or to enter the work force right after high school. Going to college was something that you had to take on, on your own. People said, ‘what are you going to do?’ but they never said ‘do you know how many choices there are? Here’s the field of economics, here’s psychology’. Those subjects weren’t ever talked about, so how are you prepared to make a decision on what you want to do for the rest of your life, if you haven’t even begun to be exposed to half the things there are to do. Its like if you want to be successful you are either going to be a doctor or a lawyer, if you want to be a teacher, here’s how to be a teacher. And that’s pretty much where people go (Glenda).

Every student that graduates from this school has had entire presentations given by multiple technical schools and a guidance counselor who strongly discourages going to a four year college, saying that a college education will never get you a job, and four year schools are too expensive. Student who have parents struggling to make ends meet, would be stupid to waste all that extra time and money on something that would leave them unemployed. Every single student hears this, no matter what his or her GPA or SAT scores. However, there are no presentations from any four-year college, and if a student asks about information about four-year schools they are more often than not discouraged from even considering them. When the only resource you have about a college education
is inaccessible and coming from a vastly incompetent, but esteemed “professional” hired to help, it is not surprising that most students do not attend a four-year college after high school. “The whole education part of it as well as the whole fact that they didn’t say, go to college, be successful here’s how to get money, here’s how to apply, nobody did that”.

Money is also an issue that is not addressed by the guidance system in this high school. It is logical that a family making ten thousand dollars less than the ticket price of one year at Oberlin College, would think that they can never send their child to even a six thousand dollar public school or community college, let alone a high-priced private school, but just the opposite is true. My sister has been working with a friend of the family whose daughter is graduating high school this year. This girl is second in her graduating class, has scored over a 1300 on the SAT and is known statewide for her musical abilities, but until my sister began talking to her and her family, college was not even an option to be considered. It is not that this family of five did not think that their daughter should go to college, but they did not realize that it could be afforded. My sister spoke to the girl’s mother, telling her that she should look at all of her options, considering with most thought prestigious private schools. The woman looked at her in disbelief and with shame, tears filling her eyes. “We didn’t quite make $19,000 last year”. This number, $19,000, was set in her mind next to the $30,000 plus ticket price of most prestigious schools. How could her daughter ever go to one of those schools? My sister answered her embarrassed tears. “Then she’ll go for free”. Instead of the guidance system making it clear to perspective students that there is financial aid available, they suggest staying close to home, joining the armed forces, or going to a technical school.
Income and the lack of knowledge about financial aid often keeps those who have nothing else stopping them from going on to any higher education at all.

Interviewee sums up frustration in a short paragraph with the passion and profanities that any student that realizes the injustices of the high school we both graduated from would.

My fucking guidance counselor told me not to bother applying to any big name colleges cause I would never make it! Granted I had problems with the fucked up Friends World program but maybe if I was encouraged to apply at Bates and Tufts and Oberlin like I was going to do before I let that idiot destroy my self-confidence I would have fucking graduated by now! And if you would like a list of the tens of people with similar stories from not only Edward Janik but also from other guidance counselors at Redbank Valley I’ll get you one that spans 30 years! (Sorry I know I’m getting excited, and that you won’t be able to use any of this because of the profanities and the fact like I’m not writing like an intelligent person, but I have a genius IQ and that school could have helped me but it only tried to push me down to make me act like a lady, to make me act like a fucking mindless robot) (Glenda).

It is passion like this that allowed her to get so far, if only more students could see beyond the working-class path that is institutionalized and intentionally set out for them in this community and school system.

There are so many factors working against the actualization of individuals in this community enrolling in college. These are pressures that are linked to class, status and geographical location, some are intensely institutionalized, and some come from a history of class compensation. It is not coincidence that many students do not go on to a college education and it is not a coincidence that even fewer ever finish their college education. In high schools that are not supportive of those who wish to leave, where racism is taught by teachers and students alike, it is not surprising that so many students stay in the area where it is no diversity but there is community and family support, where it is comfortable.
Looking back on school

Most of the people I interviewed thought that this school system was not that bad, they had all gone to college, and if high school was good enough to get you into college, it wasn’t that bad. Most interviewees thought that the good values and safety of the community outweighed the shortcomings of the school. However, those who expected more from their education, those who aspired to leave the area and attend highly ranked colleges, where they have since learned more about diversity and things outside of the intellectual agendas of people in northwestern Pennsylvania strongly disagree. When I asked an interviewee if she “Would you want your children in this school system?”, her response was quick and certain. “No, hell no”! I inquired as to why she felt this way and she explained.

The diversity issue, the exposure issue. I’ve had just strange experiences relating to other cultures and other races, not because of my beliefs, but because I don’t know about them. Even because I come from that area, people automatically stereotype me as racist. Its something that really has presented itself as a problem in my life on several occasions, where people have said, ‘you’re from a small white town. You don’t know anything about black people. You never will. You’ve got to be a racist because this is where you come from’ (Glenda).

There are elements of truth in this stereotype of rural white people, but the racism that most people carry out of this place, and admit to is not intentional. It is the result of living in a space filled with white people, in a school filled with white people and in a community that refuses to talk about race as a salient issue. This lack of discussion leads to and stems from a deficiency in resources to knowledge, a lack of cultural capital,

I felt very, like I was completely ignorant for a long time. So I didn’t think I was going to make it there and that was basically it. I mean socially fine, it was the academics at Friends world its self that were sort of like, not the academics but it was like what everyone else knew, you know what I’m saying, all the stuff that they brought with them (Glenda).

This interviewee went to an activist, international program with Long Island University. She was not prepared to meet people of other cultures, she had not traveled like her first-year class-mates. She didn’t know what she wanted to do with her life and had been
given few resources in high school. It was this type of support, this cultural capital, the knowledge of what it is to go to college, of what it is to live with people of other cultures, that cannot be found in this community.

Due to lack of resources, material and psychological, students graduating from this place are not prepared, even from an interpersonal standpoint to go on to achieve their dreams.

People who graduate from Redbank Valley, they think they are never going to get anywhere, its institutionalized. That’s what they’re taught. You’ll never get anywhere, you’re never going to really do anything so why not take this message, take this bet, why not settle, why not just go with what’s comfortable and not try to really do anything cause what if you fail? I think that mentality is so institutionalize that people just (Glenda). People just give up before they take the necessary chances. In a place where there is confusion about self-worth and intellectual ability, economic resources and race issues when it comes to higher education, it is not a surprise that many students do not leave the community to go to college. But it is none the less disappointing. Of those who do go to college, it is likely that they will not finish within four or even five years, only four of my ten main interviewees will graduate on time. With be at their school for at least one extra year. Keep in mind that these interviewees are some of the highest achieving students in the community that I drew from. I can list many more that began college and never finished. Statistically, of low-income students who do enroll in a four-year college, only six percent receive a bachelor’s degree in five years. Forty percent of high-income students receive their bachelor’s degree in five years (King, 1999:p. 184).

Also influential in keeping young adults in this rural area is that students are so ill informed about the larger world and options for them that one can not even imagine what they are missing. There is a fear knowing that they are from a low-income, rural place, that they are not as well qualified to go on to do what the fabled “rich kids” accomplish.
There is a stigma that unconsciously tells individuals that their abilities are limited, that there is a barrier that they will never be able to cross, no matter how they try. One interviewee explains some of her experiences in a non-traditional college program.

And I also was at a meeting with the top people from the, with the Napie prince and princes. I was talking with diplomats and organizers and revolutionists from all over the world at the peace conference in Nepal and I just looked at my self and said look where I’m coming from to here. I would never have dreamed that that would have happened. It’s not that I was on the level that they were on but you never ever think that you’d get to meet these people. You know, I had dinner at the Nicaraguan embassy and drank a beer with the head of the DEA for all of Central America and the Secretary of Defense from Nicaragua. That you’d never dream of ever being in that position coming from a small town. I don’t know what that is; I don’t know what you’d call that (Glenda).

The accomplishments that she speaks of are things that most people will never do, but they are things that could happen. Being from this area, young adults assume that they do not have what it takes even to do things as common as complete a college education, let alone getting to know foreign diplomats.

This type of insecurity emotionally affected some of the interviewees that chose to take the challenge. One explains her feelings after struggling to get out of the community and then face the obstacles of an individual ignorant to the rules of larger society, having been influenced by the more conservative ideologies of this area. “I have the self-esteem of a battered wife” (Glenda). Another interviewee explains how he imagined what his life would be if he were not able to leave from the area.

If you had not gone to college? I’d probably be unhappy if I did that, that’s the first thing that comes to mind, I guess I probably be physically tired and emotionally frustrated, I mean I would assume so, but you never know. I don’t know; maybe I would have gotten a job pushing papers somewhere and I’d have time to read books and I’d have my little routine and life would be okay (Neil).

He admits that he would not enjoy his life in this area as a working-class person, but is willing to imagine that it would be okay.

Unfortunately, most people in this place, when considering the comfort, kindness, working-class values, and fear of the other that they have gained living here their entire life, decide to stay, to settle, to believe that life will be okay. And with all the obstacles in
front of them, great love for their home and encouragement from their peers, family and
community to stay, they normally settle for a life in northwestern Pennsylvania, and
forget about the dreams that seem so distant and impossible as an adult. In remaining
part of this rural community young people not only reproduce the class status of their
parents, but they also reproduce unconscious racism in this area; they reproduce their
own whiteness.
College: Learning Race

Those who are able to go to college, have a variety of options, but often the same old school. The majority of people going to college from this area go to the local state university, Clarion University of Pennsylvania. It is close enough to make an easy commute every day so many students live in their parent’s homes and attend school day-to-day, avoiding campus life. Of the ten people I interviewed, four of them attended Clarion University and six other schools were also represented, ranging in ideological frameworks from liberal to conservative, from as few as forty people in one location to the main campus of Penn State. Of the ten people, I have chosen four representatives to discuss in depth. They have been chosen to illustrate different educational situations.

The first two individuals that I will review attend the same institution, Clarion University, graduated from the same high school, and both say they are unaffected by their class status, which is similar. In this comparison, I hope to find differences and similarities with interest as to how higher education influences their white identity. The next individual I will discuss lived on the fringes in high school, standing out in a crowd with her loud opinions and seemingly fearless critique of authority. She went to a college program that is both activist, and international, where she learned in a different part of the world each semester. Another individual when attending high school in Clarion county embodied the “ruralness” of this community, and came to Oberlin for the sole reason that he would be able to continue playing football. I will discuss how his experiences at Oberlin have effected his white race identity. In all, I will be discuss basically three different cases: how Clarion University affects white race identity (since it is the institution most attended by people in the area), a white woman with progressive
ideologies and her experience in a activist school, and a white male with more conservative views and his experience in a progressive institution. I will then briefly discuss the effect that more conservative schools have on people who claim liberal ideologies, and the effect of conservative schools on those who identify as conservative, in brief. These discussions will be brief because conservative institutions do not generally challenge the ideologies of those who are from a rural Pennsylvania, where they have grown up in a culture of racism.

Clarion and its influences...

Simon Family

Simon is the only child of parents who at least have all the course work done for their Ph.D. His mother is an English professor at Clarion University and his father runs a sporting goods store. Simon says his parents never left the area because it was easier not to, that is the reason he is attending Clarion University and doesn’t plan to leave afterwards. He does not want the responsibility of living on his own. He also does not like to leave home for any extended period of time. Since he is the only child, essentially every thing he did as a youth was solitary. His hobbies have always allowed him to isolate himself from everyone else. He favors rural places because they have fewer people than more urban places. In Jr. high and high school he admits, “I wanted to be persecuted but was mostly ignored, which is almost worse. I would have been a misfit wherever I’d gone to school. I had my mind set on it.” In high school he was clearly on the periphery, not shunned by his peers, but anti-social and quite by his own accord.
Simon felt out of place in high school, living in “a self-imposed exile”, that “helped me feel a little out of place and develop an identity as such”. He felt that teachers were indifferent, “most of them saw teaching as a good job that brought in a decent pay check”. He recalls despising high school at the time he attended but now he is not sure how if he truly enjoyed it or not. He remembers feeling, “jealousy at having not been chosen to join the elite circles. In recalling his college application process, he said “Clarion was the obvious choice for me because it allowed me to continue living in an extended adolescence. The process was very painless”. He enjoys Clarion for it allows him to remain in his comfort zone.

As a young child he said of his dreams, “I wanted to be involved with the military because I though it was heroic and manly. I grew out of that rather quickly”. As he grew older his interests changed form cartoons to music and writing. His family and church were always his greatest support systems, and he felt that he was pretty much the same as everyone else in terms of income. Unlike other people his family had the ability to travel and do other things that many people in this area can not afford to do. He goes on about his home,

I feel a deep attachment to my home, the physical structure of the building itself, the hills surrounding it, the people who live near me, etc. Further, I’m suspicious of most people or environments outside of my home and feel somewhat awkward when removed form that immediate setting.

Though he loves this place, he admits that he has “become increasingly aware of the conservative nature of most rural people as opposed to the more liberal mainstream”. In talking about race and his position in society, “Being a white male, I’m always in the demographic majority, and I’m not even sure that a dominant white cultural aesthetic exists...I can’t see it because I can’t step outside of it”. He goes on to talk about his race later,
white people are always presented as the most moral, intelligent, and clear-thinking people who have ever existed... therefore minorities have been trampled in order for the dominant culture to retain their position. To a large extent I see that as our American story--- rising to great power at the expense of those who could be brought under our dominance.

He adequately understands issues of race in this country from a critical whiteness standpoint.

Sue
family

Sue and her family have lived in this area for generations. Growing up, she wanted to be a nurse or a teacher. Her dad worked at a variety of jobs during her childhood, including farming and working on a coal mine, he also worked dredging rivers for sand and gravel and eventually joined a union and now operates heavy machinery for different construction jobs. Her mother was a waitress for a while, and then became a librarian at the public library and is now a librarian at the public high school. Her father enjoyed hunting when she was a child and was a member of the American legion, where he is very involved. Her parents’ jobs served as a reminder to go to college, so that she would not have to work as hard as they did. When she entered Jr. High school she became very involved in athletics. In retrospect, she believes that a combination of athletics and youth group kept her out of trouble and helped her to make friends. Eventually she would like to return to this area to raise a family.

While growing up, and still today she is very patriotic, having had the influence of her father and the American Legion. She also does not believe that her gender has really influenced her life, and that racism probably isn’t a problem in this area. One of the three people of color in her high school that she knew did not seem to have any problems. She worries about someday not getting a job or raise due to a minority in that same position,
and says she doesn’t know how she will handle it. She likes living in this rural area, sees very few problems with race or education, and believes that existing problems will probably dissipate soon. Though she says that living in this community, “we have missed a lot of cultural stuff, like just interacting with people with other beliefs and religions,” she believes that “I don’t think it really has hurt me because I try to respect other cultures like I want mine to be respected.”

In high school she never felt out of place and listed most teachers as being interested in her wellbeing. She sums it up saying, “I loved high school, I know that sounds sick but it’s true. I was involved in everything and I really enjoyed band and sports and my friends and classmates.” She would even have her children attend the same high school. And looking back on her decision to go to Clarion University, she says, “I don’t think I would change things because everything is working out extremely well for me here at Clarion. I don’t regret this decision at all and I wouldn’t have changed a thing.”

Both these individuals appreciate the rural area that they are from and both are happy with their decisions to stay here and to attend college at Clarion University. They both had economically comfortable childhoods, and many similar experiences in high school. Though they are from the same place with similar social locations, they were raised to value different things, and in high school were valued by different subsets of people. High school Sue was “popular”. She had a large core group of friends who were generally appreciated by the majority of the students, teachers and faculty. Her social life was very comfortable and she moved through the system of education very smoothly, without protest. Simon on the other hand felt uncomfortable from the beginning, having
come to the school district in seventh grade from a private school in Clarion, he began his social networking a later. He is also was naturally shy and was actively engaged in protest against the social structure of "popularity". Essentially, he was at the periphery looking in. From these two different standpoints Sue and Simon entered into Clarion University from the same geographical location, but at different social locations. Keep in mind that both of them had been influenced by the ruralness, whiteness, and schools, but in different ways. Sue was influenced in her parent's involvement in the American Legion, a patriotic organization of people who have been in the U.S. armed forces and hunting, while Simon's influence came from his mother's enjoyment of reading and travel. Even these differences indicate varying levels of progressiveness.

In college their interests also differed. Simon is a History major who likes to write in his spare time and only commutes to the school, saying "I've never really even scratched the surface on what the average Clarion student thinks or does. I have no idea, and worse yet, I don't really care to find out". He tries to avoid spending time on campus, feeling uncomfortable much of the time, though he says it is now just part of his personality. It seems that a lot of his views may not have come from the students at clarion, but from other sources. Though he says that in college "I learned how incredible close-minded people are, both on the liberal and conservative ends of the spectrum". His assertion of this leads me to believe that he has seen both ends of the spectrum, and chooses to be somewhere in the middle, weighing all arguments. In this way he has become more progressive than many of the people in his hometown who do not question or see both sides. Though he seems to get annoyed with "liberals" he has fairly progressive ideas of his own. Clearly, he has thought about racism and whiteness in the
United States and in northwestern Pennsylvania. For example he understands that racism has not vanished, "now, though I think racism is so subtle and unconscious that even those who are responsible for it may not even realize it. People of color are still making less money, getting worse jobs, fewer opportunities, etc."

Sue on the other hand is a Business major, saying that political attitudes vary with departments. "Well, that differs depending on what building you are in... the business department is fairly conservative, but the art, philosophy majors seem to be more liberal". She also says that during her time at the school, "I guess if anything did change I've become even more conservative". She goes on to say that she doesn't think about different social issues and will not answer my questions about race and things of the like. She says that "I'm an accounting major, we aren't looking for any kind of worldly view". For this reason she refuses to think about issues that may be part of her life, like race, class, gender and sexuality issues. Also, she believes that Affirmative action is a bad idea, because "we are all people with people traits". She also feels that she should not be thinking about her own race. "I never think about being white. If I did I would think I had some kind of problem."

Did the Clarion University experience change the way these two individuals see themselves as white? What part did it play and how did their college experiences differ to produce such contrasting attitudes?

*Clarion University*

Clarion University is a small state-affiliated school set on the southern hills of a college town in northwestern Pennsylvania. The university enrolls approximately six
thousand students. In a quaint little town, along interstate 80, is the college that many of my high school classmates now live and attend college with the other 93% of the college population that came from different parts of Pennsylvania. Many of my high school classmates chose this school because of it’s close proximity, rolling admissions, and low tuition. Others come to this school for it’s “excellent business program” and even more highly praised education department, which educates the vast majority of teachers for the surrounding area. The majority of students who attend this university are white, approximately 92% and the largest minority group on campus are African Americans who make up 4.7% of the population of the school. The Greek system is also popular here. And the main attraction is the Captain Loomis, a bar located at the center of town. Every person I interviewed said “most of the kids I’ve come across seem to spend the majority of their time drinking beer, recovering from drinking beer, and searching for more beer”. Though one interviewee did mention that there are a lot of student activities saying, “I guess someone must go or they wouldn’t continue to have them”.

Depending on the person, their exposure to outside experiences, and their major, Clarion is an excellent school. To others it is a disappointment, less academically challenging than high school. The two people I spoke to who went through Clarion University’s Education program say it “didn’t prepare you for the real thing”. They were both expecting more from their education, especially having spent over four years at this school. Only 30% of people who attend Clarion University, graduate in four years. If you are not white the statistics are even worse. 21.2% of non-white females graduate from Clarion University in four years and 0.0% of non-white men graduate in four years. This to me is astounding. Even as the white women that I interviewed were disappointed with
their experiences at this university, at least they managed to finish. More than half, 58% of the men of color originally enrolled in the university do not return for a second year. With this low record of retention, one must wonder what type of environment this school provides for people of color and in reproducing whiteness.

If you talk to white people attending this school, most will say that race is not an issue. Some appear offended that has been brought up, and others will say that it is a problem, but not for them. Coming from the same rural and virtually all white community I cam from, they said of race,

it was less of an issue, we didn’t, it never, I never really thought about it. Like, I don’t know, like I don’t know, there were mostly only whites there at college, and there were some blacks and Hispanics but it never was a problem for anybody.

It clearly was not a problem for white people here, but in consideration of the retention rates of people of color, I am sure that race is a very salient issue in their lives, especially while living in this environment. Race is not an issue for the white individuals because they still do not encounter a large number of minorities, even in this new and supposedly “diverse” institution. Less than 400 people of more than six thousand students at Clarion University are people of color. Judging by retention rates, it seems that those 400 people are not receiving the resources they need, not to just be happy with the institution, but to bare living in this environment.

Though retention rates are low, professors that I spoke to feel that they are doing all they can and all that is needed to serve students of color here and inform white students about themselves. When I spoke to the Chair of the history department, at Clarion University, he explained that there was a black studies minor and began listing the classes taught about people of color. Later he said that he thought that most history classes had an element of history about people of color, especially the American history
courses. He talked about the department as a whole saying: “We want to insure that there
is enough integration in those courses so that we can say, so that when they walk away
they have some sense of race and gender diversity, but realistically, you only have a
handful of lectures through the course of the year…”. In the same breath he goes on to
praise the Education department for their efforts to include multiculturalism. “I think about
our Education students with the multicultural education class, they take a three credit
course in multicultural education, so all the people in that field of study are exposed to
that”. They are exposed to a multicultural education class, but what is taught in that class
and is just one class enough?

When I spoke to the white woman who as the head of the education department,
one of the first things she mentioned was their Multicultural Education course, but
admitted that this is the only course in the major that is specifically about race. When I
spoke to one of the education students about this class, she said that the class was
“basically, like what to do differently if you have a black kid in your class”. She
described the course saying that it really did not mention educating white children about
race, but focused mainly on the special needs of minority children. This is a start, but I
contend that an anti-racist, multicultural education is equally or even more important to
the teaching of the rural white students whom most graduating teachers will find them­selves in the classroom with.

Unfortunately educating white people about racism and race issues is not
discussed within this class. In reading through the Multicultural Education class syllabus,
I can clearly see that this class is meant for white people who are preparing to teach a
multicultural classroom. The course is not set up for people of color who may be taking
it, and it does not discuss how white teachers should teach an entirely white class, at least not in the outline of the class. Sixteen of the resources listed as “consulted texts” were published in the 1980’s or before. Only four were published after 1990. With this knowledge base, much of the information taught by these professors is likely to be outdated. As race theory and multicultural teaching is always evolving, it is vital to always be referencing new material. With the Education major twice as popular than any other major in the school, and with the knowledge that these graduates are the people who will be teaching the next generation, a lack of curriculum on multicultural education, or worse a miss-education on multiculturalism is at the very least startling. It is bound to produce negative consequences for these college students and the students they eventually teach. The next most popular major is business. The business major who I spoke to was insulted that I would even bring up the topic of race and whiteness. When race is not an issue for the white administration and professors of the University, it is not an issue to the white students who attend here.

Though the chairs of both these departments assured me that their departments and this school was doing all it could to explore race issues, I found it hard to believe their claims. After actually hearing about what was offered and talking to white students who hadn’t even noticed race as a topic of concern, I was convinced that issues of race must be a large problem, more than any of them knew.

I next spoke to the Chair of Minority Student Services. He directs a program that was begun in 1990, because there wasn’t a strong, because the administration, at least the African American population felt that there was a need to have a place for, particularly African American students. Since they are the predominant group on campus, have a place they can identify with, have a place were they can seek comfort, a place of advocacy, some thing structured not just different professors from different areas of the institution trying to
Before Minority Student Services was begun, just twelve years ago, one part-time employee was in charge of taking care of the race issues that an entire 6,000-student campus might have. He only had an office and few other resources. The new Minority Student Services is a much more supportive, and stable system and environment for students on this campus. This program is focused on leadership, and supporting students of color, taking part of the responsibility off minority faculty at this institution. Mr. Laugand believes that the faculty of color who are here are doing more than their share to support students of color on this campus, but there are simply too few faculty of color.

When he speaks of the area surrounding the college, particularly Clarion the town, he says,

I know there have been instances where the environment have not been very welcoming. In terms of and it’s not, I wouldn’t say really hostile, but situations were students maybe were ignored in restaurants, or don’t feel they receive the same type of service, or they say that they have been sort of watched in stores. So they don’t feel that they are getting fair and equal treatment, and in that sense, that’s sort of not welcome. And then there have been incidents with police when students haven’t had very pleasant experiences. Although I see these experiences as more than “sort of not welcoming” this individual seems to accept the racism of this area, admitting that it is bad but not “really hostile”. This type of acceptance strengthens these problems. He later goes on to talk about a program that is no longer in existence but used to create a forum for discussion of race issues between the campus and the town. It consisted of community persons, business people and police, and some university representatives. Unfortunately “it sort of died down”. Another thing that is dying down is the black studies minor, which was once very popular. Mr. Langaud attributes this to the absence of a professor who has been and is still on sabbatical. He notes that the absence of these programs is problematic.
However, he talked eagerly throughout his interview about a program that a student organized some years ago called “Building Bridges”.

This program is very successful in reaching a large proportion of the student body in a forum that promotes dialogue and is strengthened, as it is incorporated into the classes that people take. This is how it works. The program is requested by an instructor, who asks their students to gather questions about race as it applies to the subject being taught. When the questions have been collected they are given to facilitators in the Building Bridges program who spend time finding answers for these questions. The next class period is dedicated to a session with the facilitators, (who are an intentionally diverse group of people), where there is discussion about the questions that have been asked. After the dialogue, the students are asked to write a mission statement: goals to be more conscious and accepting of people who are unlike them.

Unfortunately even with such a promising program this school still has a long way to go in terms of anti-racism. Mr. Laugand says that when asked if racism exists on this campus, the overwhelming majority of students respond: *that no it does not exist.* But what do we make of the retention rate of students of color or the harassment they face? Even with programs in place to inform the majority of white people about their racism, and to support people of color, there is still an enormous gap in retention and achievement at this rural State University, attended by people who live in the surrounding areas, and Pittsburgh, PA.

With this information one cannot pin point the direct influences that this school has on shaping white students’ thoughts about race. One might guess that white people in majors that promote more learning about people of color might become more accepting
of them. One might even say that an experience in the Building Bridges program might
spark progressive thinking. However, these variables are not consistent enough to affect
any real change in how people of northwestern Pennsylvania see race. Even those who
live on campus are subject to the same whiteness and racism inside the university as
outside.

Race within a university setting is complicated issue, one that is ever changing
and is so multifaceted that even a progressive university can have tremendous problems
with racism. Whiteness is not addressed nearly enough for white students to realize that
they can and should be the people working against racism within themselves and within
their universities. However, even if whiteness and racism is realized the battle is not easy
and will not be won through student activism that only has a four year memory of
institutional history. Moreover, progressive ideas and actions of faculty and staff are
often muted and an overwhelmingly disproportional workload for faculty of color or
intimidation by hegemony at the administrative level which has the power to push out
even the most determined individuals. These problems are structural and
overwhelmingly concealed with voices that are silenced.

(liberal to liberal)

Glenda

Glenda is a very strong willed, incredibly intelligent, charismatic hard-working
woman, who has lived secluded in northwestern Pennsylvania or as a carnival worker in
New Jersey most of her life. Her mother lived a very controlled and unhappy life married
to her father whom Glenda doesn’t know well. After their divorce her mother became a
teacher but for a while had no job or money, which her older brothers made up for by working. Though her father never finished college, he was very cunning and a good businessman and now owns an amusement park in New Jersey. Growing up Glenda was secluded to those two places: the woods of PA and the “carnie booths” of New Jersey. At that time she knew very little about social activism as an ideology, but was socially active in much of her high school career, fighting battles against a school system that works to reproduce working-class values and to silence and push students out. When she left northwestern Pennsylvania, though her guidance counselor had told her she would never get into college, even with a genius IQ, she went to a college that took the approach of an alternative international activist program. In this system she learned through internships in a different part of the world each semester. Through travel she learned first hand about her own ignorance about social issues and quickly understood her social position more clearly. She speaks with a sharp tong that cuts to the point without apology. She is one of the most intelligent and critical people I have ever met.

In speaking about her “activist education” she begins, disappointed with her lack of knowledge,

Besides what Melani Cheers taught me in the few months that we hung out our senior year I didn’t know any of this activist shit, I mean nothing, nothing. Now I look back and I can’t imagine how I was so fundamentally ignorant, I understand why of course, because of the area I grew up in and my family, but now that I know it’s totally like living in a different world and the change happened nearly over night.

She continues jumping through her experiences in the Friends World Program, and taking us around the world through what she learned.

Anyway, I’m in Costa Rica and all of the things about world issues that these activist Friends Worlders have been, to my annoyance, preaching about make sense, although they were all extremists. ...go to Napal for the Global Youth Conference over our millennial holiday, lesson learned: hey, I’m at something pretty important here and I don’t know half the shit their talking about, but they want my opinion: I could do something/ “make a difference” (how after-school specialish, eh?)... Alright then I go to Thailand and I’m travelling and getting more international experience and understanding... then I go to Haiti... the last straw of my Friends World career but big
time learning experience, we’re talking huge here, can’t even begin to explain it right now.

Through her exploration of the world, she has learned more than most could imagine and with this experience, she is able to decide what it is she will do with her life.

But, I came to the conclusion that I wanted to learn more about international community development and especially examine if from a humanistic or social perspective rather than an economic one... business experience... so: I’m going to social work and global studies under grad, international affairs graduate work and who knows where that will get me. But it’s weird because who would have fucking thought this is where I would end up!

Coming form a high school where they told her most days of the week that she would not be able to make it, she was not acting like a lady, not getting good enough grades, not accepting what they were trying to shove down her throat, she has now traveled the world. This experience is vastly different than almost any other college education. It is the extreme of “liberal” or progressive. This is what makes it unique.

This political orientation challenged Glenda to not only critique the obvious large power structures, but to also to look at the ideologies and actions of those “activists” who are working to make justice, and forgetting to critique their own strategies.

She describes her frustrations after transferring to the University of Pittsburgh, a more traditional school.

Going to Haiti that was like a class for me. Nothing can ever compare to that. Never in my life I thought I would learn so much there. To learn like that, there’s no comparison. There’s no class that could ever teach you as much as I learned in that two and a half months. And then here, at Pitt (University of Pittsburgh) I mean I have a political consciousness class that’s pretty good. But at the same time, when I compare that to how I studied at Friends World, by being in Africa and looking around. You know, you listen to other people in classes and they just don’t get it. They don’t understand, just this or that. How millions of people are starving or that globalization is taking the resources out of the country. And no one, although they show these increased GDP; all it means is that 5 people in the country are making a million dollars, not that everybody is getting an equal share. That’s an elementary example, but they don’t understand and I don’t think there is really a way to teach that with out actually putting community work around it. 

She goes on to talk about the pedagogy that the Friends World program used.

They were just comfortable and they could look around and learn, you know what I’m saying. They could take every word and learn from it, you know. It wasn’t that searching for the key point. It wasn’t going to be on the test. It wasn’t that pressurized: is this person gonna get an A and fuck up the curve? Is this professor gonna want me to memorize this? Do I need to learn these countries and their capital cities for the test next
week? And you know every bit of your life was incorporated into the curriculum. You know what I'm saying? It wasn't intrusive, but they would understand. She later critiques this style saying that this did not motivate everyone to work. Some people would major in Yoga and others studied the sociological view of international affairs. Rewards for work in this system were also not satisfactory. Some who did little work received much more credit than others who did much more work. Thought there were flaws, the experience that she had taught her more than any traditional class can.

Today, within a traditional school system, most of her critical thinking is not needed for her classes.

I just have to memorize this stuff of the test, right? So, you know most of my thinking goes into the class and the system, you know, professors. That's where my critical thinking goes into play because I'm constantly going, 'why the fuck is this like this? This is so jacked...' and pretty much preempted any critical thinking about course material I'm trying to study.

It is clear that everyone can not have Michele’s experiences, and that everyone would not desire them, though they sound exciting. However, they do help to show that a hands on, socially conscious institution will probably do the most to open one’s eyes to social issues in the world. In this case a progressive individual was thrown into an activist school without knowing about the school or about herself as an activist. Luckily, she fit well into this environment and benefited from the diverse experiences that she had. Before going to Friends World she believed that racism was not a problem in northwestern Pennsylvania and she thought that feminists were just strange women who wanted something to whine about. After her Friends World experience, she is more aware and critical of whiteness than even books written on the subject. This is an example of how a liberal education can encourage critical thinking and a broader worldview. Luckily schools do not need to be this extreme to alter the thinking of people from northwestern Pennsylvania, or other isolated and conservative cultures.
Carl

When growing up, Carl was involved heavily in athletics, including football and track. He enjoyed school, but it was not ever his main focus. His parents had come to the area from Pittsburgh to attend Clarion University. His father had finished college and began working at a chemical factory, and his mother became a secretary. He says that economically he had a very secure childhood. And he was always skeptical of the "hillbillies and rednecks" of the area. He had no interest in hunting, though he loved the outdoors. His interest in sports began as a child and followed him to college. This interest at least partially grew out of a longing for popularity that he did not have as a young to adolescent child, because he didn't have the "right" family name, or the "right" clothing. Sports were his ticket to popularity. Also, when choosing a college, he was interested in a place where he would still be able to play football and run track. Oberlin College was the place he chose. He knew little about the school before he got there other than a wide variety of people go there and decided to majors in History and Computer Science.

He can see now how northwestern Pennsylvania had effected him before he left the area.

The old fashion values definitely had some effect. I mean, I was pretty conservative, and then because race was not an issue it presented quite a shock when I left this place and it is still rattling me now. Because of my experiences, I had a different perspective and they were challenged quite a bit, when I left. Like my view that like, because I never really saw the racism I was thinking that it was past us a lot. I mean sure there was some things left, but I was thinking that for the most part we were past this racist mind set. But at the same time I can notice myself, going even in the city or whatever and see a black guy on the street kind of standing there, kind of standing around there and you kind of take a second look. Because of my lack of experience, because of my assumptions, it also made me feel guilty too, and it's still now. And I hope that black people don't take this (the wrong way) because it could look like that. It could look like I am a racist or something, but I kind of feel like, whenever I run into a black person or a see a black person then I get this feeling that they're not going to like me because I'm white. And so it's just a sense of guilt that it has given me that I would like to not have. I may have some flaws but I am still not nearly as bad as a lot of people around here that have no guilt.
Leaving this community and entering into one with more diversity was quite the shock for Carl, as it is for most people in this area. He had never thought about racism before and he had certainly not thought of himself as a racist. Oberlin College and his relationships there have now motivated him to think about race and racism; he understands white privilege. Today he talks about race admitting,

Growing up it was never an issue, but looking back on it and what I have learned, it defiantly did, I mean it was never an issue because it didn’t have to be an issue for me. I’m a white male. I’m the power position in the country. So it didn’t play a part because it didn’t have to play a part, because I was secure. Though he understands his white, male privilege, he still feels torn by guilt and confused about what he is to do about it. This response is common for white people who are open to changing their ideologies and long to help, but are stuck not knowing how to act as a white person. With an active effort to facilitate anti-racism and social justice, over time the guilt will pass. A few weeks after the interview where he spoke about feeling guilty, the guilt associated with race had changed to a more proactive approach race and whiteness. Race “has become a real issue and changed how I view myself and my country. I feel a need to take responsibility and action so future generations won’t have to”. This is an idealistic view that does not sight any real plan, but it contains strong motivation to create change. In remembering this individual before he went to college, it is apparent that he has transformed from a person who did not notice racism and who most likely participated in it, to someone who is ready to start acting on his anti-racist feelings.

Carl’s story is testimony to the fact that people who are self-labeled as conservative can be so influenced by a different environment and the people who inhabit that place that they change. College can heighten awareness and motivate others to
become active in the fight against racism, in the same ways that they formerly helped to spread it.

*(Conservative/Liberal to conservative)*

Those who are highly conservative usually elect to go to non-progressive colleges, where they will be comfortable and where their ideas of racism and whiteness will be supported. However, those people who are self-proclaimed liberals who find themselves in a college that is not known for its progressiveness have the potential to create two different identity outcomes. First, people who are active liberals may take the initiative to begin groups on campus that speak to social justice. However, what happens more often than not: the school may work to reinforce whiteness within the individual who believes what she is saying and doing is liberal.

College can have a huge impact on how white individuals from this community in northwestern Pennsylvania think about their race. It can further justify their ideologies, whether supportive or against racism, or it can open their eyes to new thinking about race and their position as a white person. The impact of college is influenced by experiences that occur in one’s childhood and adolescence, and it is shaped by factors within the institution. Everything from the classes that are offered, the classes that are taken, and the major that is selected can be influential, as can be the pedagogy of professors in most disciplines. Another substantial influence seems to be activism on campus and the popularity of progressive ideologies by the college and its students.

However, when one thinks about the ability of higher education to inform individuals from this kind of community about multiculturalism and anti-racism, they must also consider who elects to go to these colleges. First, many people in this
community are bared from higher education due to many social facts. The few who surpass the barriers in front of them, are often in a higher socio-economic class than other people in this community, though not nationally. Or they have contacts outside the community to relatives or friends who can give them guidance. Other advantages may be parents with a higher level of education, a rebellious spirit, or disgust with the area. These determine if you will go to college, but which college to go to is yet another issue. People who see themselves, as conservative will most likely attend an institution where less progressive ideologies are supported. As will “liberal” students attend colleges that support their ideologies.

Real change within this community in higher education, at the colleges and universities that the majority of school students in this area choose. This is not often a decision based on the ideology or reputation of the institution, but is swayed more concretely by the low cost, proximity to home and low selectivity of the college. The colleges I speak of are the community colleges and state universities that dot rural America. If more anti-racist programs could be integrated into the curriculum so that even commuting students are exposed to them, anti-racist information will be carried home, back to the conservative communities where these people grew up and often wish to return.
Conclusion: Speaking my Name

Critical whiteness theorists have said over and over again that whiteness is power, it is hegemonic advantage over those who are not white. It is closely linked to racism and many whites, though they benefit from it daily, don’t even believe that it exists. Whiteness is silent and for that reason is more dangerous than other type of more blatant racism. This is what we know about whiteness as a power structure, but what can we glean from reading the descriptions of northwestern Pennsylvania; how can whiteness be better understood in this area where power structures are complicated by low-income and rural stigma? How is whiteness powerful in a place with no diversity and little social mobility? Is there more to whiteness than just a dominant power structure? Does whiteness have a larger cultural value that white people can identify with or are there only negative connotations? In summation, what is whiteness in northwestern Pennsylvania? Is it more than power; is it power at all; or is it something else entirely?

Many of these questions have been answered, others remain a mystery yet to be explored. In rural northwestern Pennsylvania white race identity is difficult to define. However, whiteness can not be separated from power or the intersectionality of income and ruralness that makes people in northwestern Pennsylvania at times feel defenseless. Whiteness here is even more invisible than elsewhere, though it fills almost ever home and business. One cannot live in northwestern Pennsylvania their entire lives and see whiteness. And even thought racism is prevalent, residents of this place and of the white skin will not be able to identify the “racists”, because these “racists” are our
grandparents, you're neighbor, my teacher, her uncle, his cousin and so on. They are hidden in behind the images of "good people" and the relationships we have with them.

Only when you venture out of this community and see that racism does not have to manifest itself as physical or verbal violence to be problematic. Three white girls, driving past a Chinese Restaurant, speaking in their most humorous impression of Chinese dialect is just as damaging to this place as racial slurs that are directed at the homes and businesses of minorities. In both cases, whether racism is hidden or apparent, it sets a precedent for what is accepted and what is normal communication. In this community racist slurs are not even recognized as such; real people are only known as images on the television or beats on the radio; and whose who live here in a skin to match the fabled "other" are treated as counterfeits: white people who stick out a little more, who have more culture, who have more "flavor". Racism and whiteness is not noted as a problem in this community because white people here do not understand what racism is, white people here have eluded social definitions of cruelty because they cannot put themselves in the "other's" shoes. They do not know anything but whiteness. To learn, one must leave this community.

I left at age eighteen, headed for Oberlin College, unprepared for what that meant in my life. I arrived, shy and conservative, carrying all the things I had learned about the world and not realizing there was so much I did not know. At Oberlin College my whiteness was silent, so afraid that I would unknowingly say something wrong, that I chose not to speak. Over time and with mistakes and corrections, I am now able to speak my own name in the larger conversation of race and know my whiteness more often than
not. By understanding inherent prejudices of whiteness, I can work to combat them, in
realizing my flaws I choose to improve them.
Works Cited


- Clarion Democrat, Clarion PA. March 20-27, 1869.


Appendix # 1

Interviews

- This is the original letter sent out to recruit participants for this study as well as the various interview designs and surveys used.

Hi,

I am contacting you all because I am looking for people to help me with my study of northwestern Pennsylvania, namely Clarion, Armstrong, and Jefferson counties. I have chosen you because I know that you have lived much, if not all of your life in northwestern PA, and I already am at least acquainted with you as an individual.

I am conducting an ethnographic study of northwestern PA for my senior honors project in Sociology at Oberlin College. This means that I wish to interview you multiple times between now and March 2002. I hope to speak to you many times so that I can get a concrete idea of your experiences living in northwestern PA. If you decide you would like to help me with my project, I will be contacting you and interviewing you through e-mail, telephone, or in person. Don't worry, I will pay for all of the telephone bills, travel expenses, etc. and am fairly flexible in scheduling meetings. This means that the only thing you have to commit to this project is time and honesty. I will be talking to you hopefully once a week or every two weeks, for only about an hour or two, (possibly only through e-mail but sometimes in person, if at all possible). We will mostly be discussing your feelings about living and growing up in northwestern PA and the experiences that have shaped how you think about things and who you are. I will also ask you about your experiences with school and education, everything from kindergarten to wherever you are in your education today.

If you are willing to help me or need more information before you commit, please contact me as soon as possible. Also, if you are not interested let me know. And if you know anyone else who would be interested in talking to me about living in northwestern PA, who is between the ages of 19 and 25, and attended a high school in Jefferson, Clarion, or Armstrong counties (not necessarily graduated from high school) please send me their e-mail address, phone number, or have them contact me. I am especially looking for people who transitioned right into the work force after high school, or attended a technical school (their e-mail addresses have been harder to come by). I hope to hear from you all soon. Please pass the word along to anyone who may be interested.

Thanks,

Gloria Adams
gloria.adams@oberlin.edu
(440) 774-7136
This was given to anyone who responded to the previous letter sent out by electronic mail

First Survey

1. What are your Age, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity?
2. What is your hometown, and where do you live now?
3. Where did you go to elementary, high school and college (if applicable)?
4. What is your major and/or minor in college (if applicable)? What are some of your general interests, or groups that you are involved with?
5. What year in college are you (if applicable)?
6. Do you have a job, what is it (if applicable)?
7. What is the home town(s) of your parents?
8. What level of education have your parents obtained and what educational institutions have they attended, from elementary school on up?
9. What are your parents's occupations?
10. What economic class category would you place your family in?
11. How long have you lived in the Jefferson, Clarion, Armstrong county area?
• This interview was conducted with my ten primary respondents over the telephone, through Electronic Mail and in person.

Interview questions:

Growing up in Northwestern PA

1. When you were growing up, what was this area like? For instance the economic situation, jobs people had, landscape, industries, organizations, what are the people like (friends, parents, neighbors)?
2. Where was your family from before they came to this area? Why did they decide to come here?
3. How did your parents come to the jobs they have now?
4. What effect do you think your parents jobs or interests have on you?
5. Do your parents enjoy what they are doing? How does each parent differ in their opinions of what they spend their time doing? How has this affected your life?
6. As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? What do your dreams as a child? Why do you think you wanted to do these things? What did you start out wanting to be? Did it ever change? When? Why?
7. As a child, what did you do for fun? What did you spend most of your time doing as a young child, up until now? How has it changed over the years? What hobbies have you had over the years?
8. Were you involved in any sports or other groups growing up? How did that influence your life?
9. Were your parents or neighbors active in any organizations or groups, when you were growing up? Do you think that affected your life?
10. Was your income level different or similar to people you knew growing up? If there was a difference did that affect your life at all? Have the influence of your parent's income changed since you have gotten older? Did this influence change when you went to college (if applicable)? Why or why not in your opinion?
11. Has your parent's occupation affect your life? How? Was their occupation similar to the occupations of your friend's parents?
12. What comes to mind when I say "home"? Describe images of what home means to you/ what do you remember most about your home as a child?
13. What feelings, ideas, and images do you associate with rural places, particularly northwestern PA? Have these associations changed, as you have gotten older? How?
14. Have you ever wanted to live in a more urban area? Why or why not? What is good and what is bad about living in a rural place, this place in particular?
15. One could say negative things about living in this area in terms of income, job availability, education and race. What issues have you seen centering around each of these topics? What issues are positive in your mind? What ones are negative?
16. What benefits do you think you’ve gotten from living in this area? What negative things have played out in or influenced your life living here?
17. Do you ever wish you had grown up elsewhere? Why or why not?
18. Do you like the area you are from more or less since you have spent a few years away or in college (if applicable)? Specifically, how have you're feelings changed?
19. Do you think that urban places, ideas, culture has affected this area and you, even though we are not in an urban center? How?
20. Have you seen or noticed an increase in urban culture or popular culture influence?
21. How has being a male/female influenced what you wanted to do with your life and what you have done with your life? How has your gender influenced your childhood dreams?
22. Has anyone suggested that you should do or think certain things because of your gender?
23. How has your race or ethnicity influenced what you have done with your life and your childhood dreams/ did your race or ethnicity ever play an active role in your life when growing up? Does it affect things in your life now? How?
24. Has anyone ever suggested that you should do or think certain things because of your race or ethnicity?
25. How do you define yourself ethnically?

High school:
1. In Jr. High or High School did you ever feel out of place? What factors made you feel this way?
2. Did what you were learning ever make you feel out of place? Was there any subject matter that you felt didn’t apply to you, or would not be important in your life?
3. Were the teachers and faculty of your school, for the most part, encouraging and interested in your well-being and achievement? Who was and who was not and how?
4. Did you like or dislike high school? What did you like and what did you dislike? How could your high school experience have been better?
5. Would you want your children in this school system? Please list why or why not.
6. Did you find adequate support and guidance when making plans for after high school? Who supported you? How? Who discouraged you? How? How did this influence the outcome of what you decided to do?
7. What factors influenced what you decided to do after high school? How did you respond to these influences?
8. Why did you make the decision you did? Are you happy with the outcomes of your decisions?
9. Would you change things if you had them to do over again? What would you change? What are you happy about and what do you regret?

College:
1. Why did you decide to go to the school that you did? What factors influenced your decision?
2. How do you feel about the school that you attend/ed (like or dislike, etc.)? Why? Have you ever wished you had gone somewhere else? Why?
3. How would you describe your school? (# of people, political attitudes, demographically, % of people in what majors, strengths and weaknesses of the school, well-known r little-known traits, Greek system?, social atmosphere, student involvement, etc.) What do people spend most of their time and energy on?
4. What classes have you taken? Which have been your favorites? Why? Describe the class.
5. What classes surprised you with their content or taught you most about things you did not know or think about? How did you respond to this?
6. Initially, when arriving at college when and how did you feel out of place or were you surprised or shocked by anything at college? What made you feel comfortable, why?
7. Do you ever feel out of place now? When and why?
8. Have your opinions on social and political topics changed since going to college? How? Why? Examples.
9. How do you think you would be different or the same (socially, physically, morally, psychologically, politically, emotionally, intellectually, etc.) if you had decided to go straight into the work force after high school?
10. In comparison to the rest of the U.S. population your age, with your training, do you feel more less or the same in terms of education and ability to intellectualize? Why? Examples.
11. With your college education, do you feel you have gotten a full and adequate view of the world or do you feel you are/were missing something?
13. Are there any changes in political views or social stance/opinion that occurred during college that you plan to stick to afterwards? What? Why? How?
14. Has your race or race in general become more or less of an issue in your life since going to college? How has it affected your life?
Work world:

1. What is your job? Do you see this as a life-long / long-term occupation or a temporary way to make money?
2. Do you enjoy your work? What do you enjoy most? What do you dislike the most?
3. Would you have chosen a different job or occupation if that was an option? If you plan to change your job/occupation what would you change it to?
4. How did you come to this job? What influenced your decisions? List factors.
5. How do you think doing this job/occupation has influenced your thinking, about the world, local issues, moral, social and political issues?
6. Have you or do you ever feel out of place or uncomfortable at your place of work? When? Why?
7. Do you share similar social and political views as your co-workers or do you find yourself disagreeing with their opinions, conversations and jokes? Give examples.

Nationalism:

1. What is your image of an American? Here in Pennsylvania and at the national level?
2. What images in society do you identify with being American?
3. How do you feel about being an American citizen?
4. What do you think is good and bad about American social and political systems? Are there flaws? What?
5. Do you feel more or less patriotic since the September 11th events and those that followed?
6. How do you feel about the recent influx of patriotism?
7. What problems do you see with the United States right now? (i.e. Economic, political, social, race, class, gender, sexuality issues).
8. How does the government influence these power structures? Does it?
9. Can you think of a reason one would dislike and be competent in their dislike of the United States?
10. What situations could make someone feel so uncomfortable in the U.S. that they would want to live elsewhere?

Ethnicity:

1. How do you define “ethnicity”?
2. Who in your family were the original immigrants to the United States?
3. Where did they come from? When and why?
4. What is the most common ethnicity where you grew up?
5. When you grew up did you consider yourself a member of an ethnic group?
6. Would you say that being _______ is important to you?
7. What meaning do you or does your family attach to your ethnicity?
8. Are these things ethnically important: holidays, food, dating, and neighborhood dynamics?
9. Have you benefited from being _______? Have you been negatively effected or discriminated against be cause you are_______?
10. What are some traits of _______ Americans?
11. If you could be a group of any ethnic group you wanted, which would you choose? Why?
12. Do you think that there ever could be a time when being an American ands being a _______ could be in opposition?
13. Do you think that public schools should teach more about the contribution of _______ to American life?
14. Do you think your ancestors faced discrimination when they first came here?
1. What is your reaction when people say that there is a problem with race relations in the United States today? Is there a problem? Why or why not? State examples.
2. Do you think that all people have an equal chance at achieving their dreams in the United States today? Why or why not? What could make then equal/unequal? How?
3. How do you feel about the notion of “colorblindness” when talking about race relations?
4. How do you feel about affirmative action? Why?
5. How did you think about people of color growing up? How did you think about people of color whom you knew growing up? How do you think about people of color you know now?
6. Are there people within your family who are not white? Do they ever talk about their own ethnicity or race? Do they talk about whiteness?
7. Are there people within your main group of friends who are not white? Do they ever talk about their race or ethnicity? Do they ever talk about whiteness? What do they say?
8. When you hear people who are not white talk about their race or ethnicity, how does that make you feel?
9. When you hear people who are not white talk about whiteness, how does that make you feel? Please sight different situations/ feelings/ reactions if you have experienced them.

**Whiteness:**

1. What does it mean to be white in the United States and in this area of Pennsylvania in 2001?
2. What would you define as a white culture?
3. Why do some whites feel threatened by the current state of race relations?
4. How is being white different from being Black or Asian?
5. How is being white different from being Black or Asian in Clarion, Jefferson, and Armstrong counties?
6. How is being white similar to being Black or Asian?
7. How is being white similar to being Black or Asian in Clarion, Jefferson, and Armstrong counties?
8. What objects would you place in a museum of white history?
9. Do you recall ever noticing your race when you were in elementary or high school? When? What prompted it?
10. Do you recall noticing the race of people who are not white when you were in elementary or high school? When? What prompted it?
11. Do you recall the mention of race in elementary or high school? When? In what context?
12. Have you ever talked to someone about being white before this? When? What was the discussion about?
13. How does being white put you at a disadvantage? In this area and in the U.S. as a whole?
14. How does being white put you at an advantage? In this area an in the U.S. as a whole?
15. Have you ever talked about being white with your family?
16. Have you ever talked about people who are not white with your family?
17. Are you conscious about being white on a regular basis? How often? When do you think about being white the most? What situations?
18. What are you thinking when you think about being white? Is their pride, guilt, hostility, nervousness, celebrations, etc.? Why?
19. Has there been mention of or are their groups on your college campus that focus on Critical whiteness, Comparative American studies, or anti-racism? Do you think there is a need for them?
20. How do you think that your education has played a part in shaping your white race identity?
• This interview was conducted in person with History and English Teachers at Redbank Valley High School with teachers who agreed to meet with me.

High School Teacher Survey

History, English teachers

1. What classes do you teach?
2. What was your training on how to teach English/history?
3. Do you regularly attend educational institutes for teachers to update your knowledge base? If not, what factors prevent you?
4. Who decides what is taught in your classes? What criteria do you have to follow?
5. What core topics or themes do you cover in a semester? Why those?
6. Think about the courses you teach. Do you teach anything about people of color? Why or why not?
7. When do you teach information about people of color and what do you teach?
8. Can you envision expanding your curriculum to study more about people of color, their struggles and triumphs, and in a more multicultural, actively anti-racist way, etc? Why or why not? How and what would it help; how and what would it hurt?
9. What benefits or problems would teaching more about people of color create (for the students, the teachers, the administration)?
10. Do you think there are any problems with the way things about white people are taught? What? Why?
11. Do you think there are any problems with the way things about people of color are taught? What? Why?
12. Have you heard of the term "critical whiteness" (*)?
13. How do children learn to be white?
14. Do you think that things that may be exclusively beneficial to white people are taught here? How is that beneficial to students? How is that detrimental to students?
15. Would you say that anything taught here either contributes to or facilitates white privilege or racism? How (how not?)
This survey was sent by electronic mail to high school teachers in three school districts

Second Teacher survey

1. How long have you been teaching? Did you begin right after college? When did you graduate from college? Where did you go to college?

2. Do you think that your experiences while in college changed your awareness of, or ideas about People of Color? Did race ever cross your mind while in college? What experience(s) motivated your thinking about race?

3. Did you feel more aware, less aware, or unchanged in your feelings about race and racism after college? Why do you think that is?

4. How do you think your college helped teach white people, while you were there, to be white, i.e. less aware of or receptive to the needs of People of Color, inadvertently racist, or blatantly racist? How do you think college made white people, while you were there, more aware of the needs of People of Color and less racist or anti-racist? Why do you think this is?

5. How do you think that college today helps teach white people to be white, i.e. less aware of or receptive to the needs of People of Color, inadvertently racist, or blatantly racist? How do you think college today makes white people more aware of the needs of People of Color and less racist or anti-racist? Why do you think this is?

6. If your college experience changed the way you think about race, or if there was an incident that made you think about race differently, has this made an impact on the way you have lived your life since that time?

7. What influences the ways you teach about race, whether teaching about race means teaching a student of color, going over the Civil Rights movement during Black history month, teaching literature written by or about People of Color, or answering questions or concerns that students may have about race, etc.?

8. Do you think there are enough resources at your school for students of Color who attend? Are there any support groups or clubs, multicultural materials and curriculum, faculty of Color that they may be able to talk to about academic and social concerns, etc.?

9. What are the reactions of students to student teachers of Color? Does it vary with the race or ethnicity of the student?

10. Do student teachers today bring with them a greater awareness of multiculturalism into the classroom than they have in the past? If yes, how do you think that this added curriculum is positive and how is it negative? Does the amount of multicultural material brought to the classroom vary with the race or ethnicity of the student teacher presenting it?

11. How do you think education helps shape white race identity formation?
This Telephone Survey was used to contact over 250 people in Clarion, Jefferson and Armstrong Counties of Pennsylvania.

Phone Survey on Race Relations

1. How do you identify racially or ethnically?
2. Do you think there is a problem with race relations in this area?
3. Do you think that there is a prevalence of racism in this area?
4. Have you ever thought critically or talked about your race before?
5. Do you think of yourself as a white person?
6. do you think that in everyday life there are advantages to being white?
7. do you think there are any disadvantages to being white?

# of hang-ups
# of otherwise hostile comments
take notes, record tone afterwards on tape recorder
Clarion University
Minority Student Services

Rogers J. Laugand III, Director

1. What types of resources do you offer?
2. What populations do you service?
3. What populations utilize your services the most?
4. Do you feel that there are problems with race relations here? What? Why do you say that?
5. Are there any student support groups or safe spaces for People of Color on campus?
6. Are there any actively anti-racist groups on campus? What? What role do they play? How prominent are they?
7. Are there any groups on campus who do work to critically examine whiteness as a power structure?
8. Do you think that there is need for more support of People of Color?
9. When was “Minority Student Services” created at Clarion? What was the motivation to create it?
10. Do you think that students of color here are getting enough support from their professors?
11. Are there enough professors of color to support the students’ interests, and personal needs?
12. What are the hiring patterns and retention rates for faculty and staff of color? Are most of the People of Color who are hired in temporary or tenure track positions? Is the college able to retain People of Color over many years? If they do not stay at CUP, are they dismissed or do they normally resign?
13. What subjects are Professors of Color at CUP hired to teach?
14. Do you think that there is a need or desire to have African American Studies, Asian American Studies, etc. as majors or as part of the curriculum at Clarion University? How can you tell?
15. From talking to students of color, do you feel that the community outside of the college is welcoming to them or hostile?
16. What types of improvements could be made so that Students of Color were better served at this college? Do you think these things are likely to happen? Why or why not? In what time period? Do you think that white students, professors, and administration here would agree with you?
17. How aware of race do you think white students and faculty on this campus are? In what ways; are they critical of their white privilege or more racist?
18. Do you think that it would be helpful if they were more aware of their white privilege and/or white racism?
19. What are some ways that they could be made more aware of their privilege and potential racism? Do you think these are likely to happen? Why/why not?
20. How do you think Clarion University helps to teach white people to be white, i.e. less aware of or receptive to the needs of POC, inadvertently racist, or blatantly racist? How do you think that it makes white people more aware of the needs of POC and less racist or anti-racist? Why do you think this is?

These were used to interview the respective Chair of each department listed.

Clarion University

- Obtain a course catalogue
- Try to get info on # of people in each major
- Try to get info on # of people from Pa, or northwestern Pa

Sociology department interview

1. What topics are taught in the sociology department here?
2. What classes, or topics seem to be of most interest to students?
3. How much are is the topic of race researched and taught in the department.
4. Are there any professors or students doing research on critical whiteness?
5. How prevalent is the topic of critical whiteness?
6. Have you heard much about the discipline of Comparative American studies?
7. Is there a department here or is there talk here about Comparative American Studies departments at other institutions that you know of?
8. What prominent issues on race are being researched by students or professors in the department now?

Education department interview

1. Does the education department have classes on the topic of race relations? What are they like?
2. Does the education department have classes on multicultural teaching? What are they like?
3. How much priority is put on teaching about race issues in the education department?
4. Do you think there is a need to teach about race issues in the education department? Why or why not?
5. Do you know if there is anything being taught about topics like: white teachers and monitoring racism in the classroom, or institutional racism in schools?

Multicultural resource center (or the like)

1. What types of resources do you offer?
2. What populations do you service?
3. What populations utilize your services the most?
4. Do you feel like there are problems with race relations here? What? Why do you say that?
5. Are there any student support groups or safe spaces for people of color on campus?
6. Are there any anti-racist groups on campus? What? What role do they play? How prominent are they?
7. Are there any groups on campus who talk critically about whiteness?
8. Do you think there is a need for more support of people of color?