

DEI Input From Rams-of-Color

A Collection of Stories, Experiences, and Insights,
Detailing the Disparities in Rockford

November 2021

Compiled by Brady Smith, Class of 2022



Rockford Public Schools

Quality Community – Quality Schools
Together Building a Tradition of Excellence



Introduction & Background

The genesis of this initiative dates back to my introduction to the Rockford Public School district in August 2018. I, like many other students of color, was constantly subject to racially insensitive remarks and comments. It was something I sadly had to tolerate and laugh along with to make friends at the 10-12 building. The arrival of the Coronavirus in March 2020 only exacerbated the racist onslaught I faced within the school. A year later, in response to the Atlanta shooting (where six Asian Americans were killed), I wrote a letter to the district voicing my concerns. Concerns with no acknowledgment of MLK day. Concerns with a teaching staff showcasing two non-White teachers. Concerns with students telling me they were never taught anything about racism and cultural awareness at RPS.

To my knowledge, not much has gone on since March 2021. I, along with my mother and another concerned parent, had a meeting with district administration during the summer (which unexpectedly got rescheduled because they did not prioritize it in their schedule). The big update from that meeting was that a DEI presentation from the Cultural Intelligence Center would be given to teachers in August 2021. From my sources within the building, the presentation was weak, and the teachers not required to be in the auditorium (all non-core class staff) were enjoying their smartphones more. During the presentation, one of my teachers that I sent my March 2021 letter to was told by another teacher from the middle school, "Why are we doing this? Rockford does not have a problem with racism." The teacher I sent my letter to showed it to the middle school staff member, and it carried much more eye-opening weight than the presentation.

The power of storytelling, which resonated with the middle school teacher, is what Mr. Tom Hosford and I sought to utilize to improve district DEI practices. At the beginning of the 2021-22 school year, we met frequently. Our plan started as organizing formal meetings with students of color, but I was not confident in the efficacy of that approach. I believed students would be more open to sharing personal experiences if the process was informal, easily accessible, and came from a fellow student of color. The result from that night is what this document is all about. Looking back as a senior, I am fully aware that not everyone in Rockford is racist. However, RPS does very little to be proactively anti-racist and uplift their students of color. So, in the same way that my letter acted on that middle school teacher, I hope this can be a learning resource for our staff into our lives as Rams of Color as well.



Project Purpose

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT IS AS FOLLOWS:

1. To improve the district DEI practices by first acknowledging that there is a problem with normalized racism
2. To give teachers and the rest of staff, whose majority are overwhelmingly Caucasian, a greater comprehension of what THEIR students of color tolerate, so they can teach, represent, and empathize with ALL of their students more effectively
3. To create an easily accessible document for all of RPS (students, staff, administration, etc.) to utilize as a personal learning resource with more impact than random presentations/lectures
4. Most importantly, to create a public resource that shows current and future Rams of Color that they are not alone in their fight and feelings against racism, even though it sure does feel like it sometimes



Project Description

THE DESCRIPTION OF THIS PROJECT IS AS FOLLOWS:

1. Created a Google Form designed to collect stories, experiences, and insight from my fellow Rams of Color
2. November 2nd: Posted to my Instagram account, bradysmith35, directing people to my Google Form which was linked in my bio
3. Within 24 hours, the 72 individuals filled out the form, and the post was seen by 2550+ accounts. Currently, as of Nov. 9th, the form has reached 115 submissions, and the post has been seen by roughly 5,000 accounts
4. Compiled the responses into a cohesive document to be distributed to RPS and utilized by the district



Project Scope

The scope of the project entails:

- Refining this document into an effective final collection
- “Publishing” the final collection and placing it into every middle and high school classroom
- Submitting the feedback to the RPS DEI committee to direct improved future teacher DEI training regimens
- Directly distributing the collection to every staff member, particularly the teachers who work with students from grades 6-12 at RPS
- Potentially publishing the collection on the rockfordpublicschools.org website and creating an online forum for future stories to be immediately heard/addressed

** All of these goals, I hope, would be a prioritized collaborative effort WITH the RPS district*



Google Form Submission Guidelines

The following submission guidelines & requirements applied to this Google Form:

1. The target individuals for submissions were students of color who are currently or formerly enrolled during any of their K-12 education at a Rockford Public School (Includes Alumni and Students who transferred out of RPS)
 2. Individuals were asked, but not required, to submit their full names and emails to the form
 - a. 89% of individuals gave their personal information
 3. The form required an answer to a question asking them to submit their own stories, experiences, and insights with an unlimited response space
 - a. The responses to this question have been directly copied under the “Main Statements” category in this document
 - b. To respect their voices, revisions to their responses were strictly limited to distracting grammatical errors (remember, these were most likely typed on smartphones)
 - c. Specific names of staff were not expunged from the responses to highlight that even adult figures beloved by students of color in Rockford are contributors and stimulators to the harmful normalization of racist thinking
 4. An optional question asked for any additional comments or materials (photos, videos, etc) the individuals would like to share
 - a. While many of these responses don’t contain direct experiences, the feedback does provide many of the individuals’ personal stances on the topic
 - b. The responses to this question have been directly copied under the “Additional Comments” category in this document
 5. The final question inquired about the individuals’ interest in participating in an in-person focus group devoted to the same cause
 - a. This question was optional and intended more for current students-of-color within the 10-12 building, but it was not specified
 - b. This question was formulated in collaboration with the DEI committee/ Mr. Tom Hosford, to gain insight on the interest of students to contribute to the DEI cause by sharing/discussing thoughts, stories, and feedback in-person
- c. 95% of individuals responded:
- i. Yes- 34%
 - ii. No- 24%
 - iii. Maybe- 42.5%

Guide to the Student Response Divisions

THE RESPONSES WERE DIVIDED INTO FOUR DIVISIONS BASE ON UNIFYING CHARACTERISTICS THAT INFLUENCE THEIR OVERALL PERSPECTIVES:

Our Voices (Current Students of Color)

SOME OF THE MAIN POINTS TOUCHED ON BY THE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE CURRENTLY SUBJECT TO RPS GUIDANCE AND ARE LIVE ROLE MODELS FOR FUTURE STUDENTS OF COLOR INCLUDE:

- They feel underrepresented and overlooked compared to their Caucasian peers in the district
- They are afraid to speak out because past experience has shown them no improvement
- They feel treated as subhuman by normalized slurs/nicknames like the N-word, Chink, and Dora
- They feel misunderstood and alone in their struggles against persistent racism due to the lack of action/initiative by the district.
- They believe that the teachers contribute to the issue by making it seem acceptable to speak derogatory things about a certain race during class lessons, subsequently causing their fellow students to find it acceptable as well

Main Statements:

*“Most recently I had a teacher talking about a tattoo that one of his friends has, the tattoo had the N word in it and my teacher proceeded to use the word. It’s not just teachers it’s students too. also just had to report a video of a kid saying the N word and saying ‘go pick cotton in the field like you were made to n*gger go pick carrots n*gger’ The first outright racism I experienced at Rockford was a boy calling me around calling me the n word.”*

Additional Comments: None

Response #55

Student Racial/Ethnic Heritage: Asian American

Student Year of Graduation: 2022

Main Statements:

“I’ve been called names Ching chong, Chink, referred to as ‘Asian’. People would squint their eyes at me and say that I ate cats or dogs. this progressed through middle school and into like 10th grade at school. Outside of school when i’m with my dad(who is white) old white ladies give me dirty looks because they think i’m a sugar baby or something idk. one time a woman muttered something under her breath at me too and it made me feel really uncomfortable.”

Main Statements:

“people ask me if i only eat tamales. lots of people have asked me for help on their spanish homework since i’m fluent, but then make fun of speaking it like i do around my family, with an accent, like i should talk in spanish like they do or stoop down to their level of fluency. people have told me to go back to mexico, called me a border-jumper, and made fun of my family for coming to the usa. all of this, and i’ve only been at rhs for two months.”

Main Statements:

“I have literally been called the n word to my face multiple times. Not to mention people calling my hair ‘nappy’ or ‘notty.’ Teachers have treated me differently because of my skin color. Other students make jokes about skin tone when I’m around. I have been called a porch monkey, coon many other terms. Been told I look like every other black girl at school. People have said I don’t talk ‘black’ or ‘black enough.’ They have asked me for the n word pass. A white boy has came up to me with a white power card and shoved it in my face it was a literal card. People have Made many remarks about blm. Ive been called ‘niggy and niglet.’ Also been called Harriet Tubman. It’s so upsetting and no one cares about what WOC say about topics like this.The district doesn’t care about poc and prioritizes white people. So many girl cry white women tears and frame the black men at the freshman center. “

Main Statements:

“everyone always makes joke about the color of my skin or says things like ‘wow your so tan’ or ‘its winter you look tan still’ and when i say yeah i’m black, theres kinda like an awkward ‘oh’ kind of silence. i also get the ‘are you adopted?’ question or ‘i thought you were adopted.’ people look at us a little different when my dad isnt with us (my mom and sister). Someone asked if my mom and sister were my stepmom/stepsister and my dad brought something up about not looking like most people in rockford. do they not like me for me, or are they judging me off the color of my skin? even if they dont like you for who you actually are, these are still things we have to think about. Why should i have to feel different when we pass a cop car driving with my mom (whose white) vs driving with my dad (whose black). there are things i have to think about that dont even cross white people’s minds.”

Main Statements:

“Being a mixed women in a mainly white school is a different time of alone. I end up being hurt by both parts of me. Friends of mine that are fully latinx call me ‘whitewashed’ or ‘not Mexican enough.’ Which hurts beyond words because I adore my Hispanic heritage and embrace it. On the other side I sit back and just let racist jokes fly right by me bc if I speak up ‘I’m a snowflake.’ I get asked ‘were you even born in America?’ Or snarky comments get whispered when I walk into a restaurant with my immigrant father. In fact, I tend to brush over the topic of being the daughter of and immigrant entirely because I know the feedback is still not accepted well. It feels I’m not welcomed I either community. I want to make a safe space for everyone of color so they don’t have to feel alone.”

Main Statements:

As a woman of color, I've noticed that it is very difficult to have the conversations we need to have with our peers at Rockford, especially with that fact that almost 90% of our school is white. There have been countless everyday conversations I've overheard between my white peers that are filled with a lot of insensitivity and ignorance, so I wish there could be more done to properly educate them more broadly. I've also noticed that when we read books dealing with racism that are required, white students do not take it seriously and in some cases even take it as a joke. This level of ignorance is extremely difficult to sit through and watch happen because it makes me feel that I am in an environment everyday where I am constantly misunderstood and alone in my struggle.

Main Statements:

"As soon as I got in the car with my driving instructor, he tried to guess my race. He said, 'you're Korean, right?' When I told him I was Vietnamese, he proceeded to tell me about how disgusting he thought Vietnamese food was and how he couldn't imagine eating that. I didn't even know what food he was talking about."

Main Statements:

"Growing up in Rockford I've dealt with too many racial incidents that I shouldn't have to be dealing with. Starting off in elementary school I was told that my family was all gonna get collected and sent back to Mexico. In middle school girls consistently called me Dora and one even pushed me and said 'move it Dora.' And one time me and my friend posted a snap chat and people were saying she should hang out with white people and not someone like me and recently having conversations with peers they still say out of line things even being in high school."

Additional Comments: None

Main Statements:

"Being referred to as a mutt, questions as of 'What are you', 'Your hair would be prettier straightened', Called the N-Word, and other instances of ignorant remarks from trump supporters."

Main Statements:

"I have found that in many social studies classes if Japan or somewhere in Asia makes a poor political decision or does something a teacher disagrees with they will not hesitate to pick apart and talk in a derogatory tone towards those political decisions. I find that behavior disrespectful as many of my relatives still do not live in the states and it feels like a personal attack when a teacher puts the whole country that my family is from in a collectively bad category and dismisses them. Many of these teachers don't know my ethnic background, but I think that they should always be more conscious that they really don't fully know anyone's and there is a level of professionalism when explaining a topic that should be upheld regardless of personal beliefs. I know that after these lessons people that know my ethnic background will make what they consider jokes to me about the poor ethical quality of Japanese/ and or Asian people. I think that because teachers make it seem ok in their lessons to talk derogatory about a certain race, then students also find it ok to make fun of certain races as well.

My sister is also made fun of for her eyes. I remember a specific day she was having a rough day at school and her classmates made fun of her "squinty eyes" and she didn't say anything, but later came home crying. I think that because many minorities may not want to show a reaction to words that might be hurtful this makes students/ classmates believe that it is ok to make fun of someone's physical appearance based off of their ethnic background.

I know that my grandma has also struggled with her job and her accent. Despite being extremely well at what she does she has a particular coworker that constantly repeats and makes fun of the way she speaks. My grandmother won't show it bothers her in person but she becomes very disheartened when talking about it to my family.

I believe that the way Rockford handles diversity has created a cycle of fear of standing up for racial discrimination. There is no encouragement to report actions of people racially harassing other classmates and teachers don't put a stop to it when they hear it in classrooms. It has become an accepted conversation throughout the school and racial 'joke' are just an everyday thing. With the majority of the population at Rockford being Caucasian it makes it harder for those who aren't to feel comfortable coming forward and speaking their concerns for a fear of someone finding out they said something and bullying them for standing up for themselves. There should also be a stress put on peers supporting peers. Overall, no matter someone's race, all students at Rockford should feel comfortable enough to stand up for one another and not allow racial bullying to be an everyday conversation and common topic among their peers."

Main Statements:

- 1. always getting made fun of because i'm a 'lighter' mixed person*
- 2. n word being thrown around*
- 3. (idk if this is like bad)- teachers CONSTANTLY getting me and this other mixed girl mixed up and we look nothing alike*
- 4. someone said to me 'how are u so small for being mixed usually people that r mixed/black are big'*
- 5. people asking me if they can say the N word/saying can they have the n word pass"*

Additional Comments:

"thank you for making this google doc and for spreading awareness about this issue. :)"

Response #4
Student Racial/Ethnic Heritage: Latin American
Student Year of Graduation: 2024

Main Statements:

"I had many issues with racism. From my old school and here at rockford and what they both have in common is that they don't do anything about racism. I was a freshman when this happened. My dad dropped me off to school that morning. I was walking ahead of these two white kids who were also walking to the freshman center. One of the them said 'did you hear home depot is accepting green cards now' he said it in a sarcastic way. His friend just laughed at his comment. I didnt say anything because i was afraid of something to happen to me. I told my 5th hour teacher about this and she told me she will report it to the school. I at least expected the school to call me down to office to ask me some questions about what happened but nothing."

Additional Comments:

"I always wanted to do something about this but never knew what to do. So if there is anything that I can help you with i will be more than happy too."

Main Statements:

"I think this happens to a lot of people but, at school, I'll be asked where I'm from. And I'll say Rockford because I grew up here. Even though im adopted from a different country doesn't mean that it's my first answer to that question. Then they go 'No, wheerrreee are yyyoooouuu from?' Meaning where I come from originally. Then I go Korea because I'm Asian-American, Korean-American. Then they go and ask "ohh are you from north or south Korea?' In a joking manner- and I just hate that- like they think it's funny that a whole country went to war on its self and got divided into two different countries where one of which people really suffer. And sometimes I get the stretching of the eyes from people. This one infuriates me so much , like shut the hell up"

Main Statements:

"In my time at rockford I had been harassed by being called Dora the explorer or a monkey by the hair on my arms, I had left this year as it had progressively gotten worse"

Main Statements:

"Being told to go back to my own country, asking when i am going to bomb the school (many people think i am middle eastern hence the racism towards middle eastern people), asking me why i don't wear a hijab (i am literally not middle eastern), people doing stereotypical 'indian dances' when i tell them what i am, constantly asking me if i am adopted, just to name a few, these all took place during my time at rockford."

Additional Comments:

"i really appreciate what you are doing! thank you :)"

Main Statements:

"When I first moved here during 8th grade, people would keep calling me 'nihao Kailan,' and would keep making the claim that everyone in Asia, including me, eats dogs. They would also keep asking me the same question of, 'since all Asians look the same, how do you identify each other?'"

Main Statements:

"Experiences like getting called sisters with another Asian makes you feel like your not seen, I've had this happen throughout my life at school."

Additional Comments: None

Main Statements:

"This was a troubling story since it was the first experience I had in public. My sister and I had gone to Meijer to pick up a few things for the next couple of days. In my mind, I went into the store by myself. When I walked in, I noticed a lady standing close to the door. I didn't pay attention until I started shopping. Throughout the aisle I kept seeing the lady, slowly following me closely behind. I thought to myself oh maybe she was just doing her job, but she still kept following me. I started to get nervous, so my first thought was quickly grab everything I need, and leave. When I got to the cash register getting ready to check out and leave I saw the same lady, this time standing extremely close. She was watching every little thing I was doing, making sure I wasn't going to steal, this is the first time I have been racially profiled that I have noticed."

Main Statements:

"In an engineering class at rockford there was a group of kids saying racist and sexist things, one of them was being especially racist as they were saying black people deserve to be killed by the cops because they are "violent people" they were also sharing how they believed George Floyd deserved to die. I was able to get them suspended because I recorded their conversation."

Additional Comments: None

Main Statements:

"I have had teachers call me a different students name when we looked nothing alike but we were both Asian. Other times I have been referred to as Asian like it was my name"

Main Statements:

"Back in 8th grade, this kid in my class would continuously call me the n word (since my dad is one of the few black parents in rockford), and my friend would laugh at it as a joke, and so would I but it really was an awful experience and left me hurt."

Response #53

*Submitted Anonymously

Student Racial/Ethnic Heritage: Latina

Student Year of Graduation: 2024

Main Statements:

"i used to go to rockford middle school and some caucasians in that school be throwin around that n- word like it ain't racist and they gotta right to say somthin like that. i had people done tell me go back to my country inma spick and woowoo. i used to be walking around and get called the n- word with a hard r. or tell me to find a job and make jokes about me being illegal. i only know that school is just racist and people be thinking they from the hood or something and grew up round that kinda lifestyle. but idk i jus feel like everybody there privileged and perfect."

Additional Comments: None

Main Statements:

"I've been told to cut my hair or else it would start to look like a black persons and continued to tell me that. I have also had someone's family member talk about how happy they were after our relationship ended because I was black."

Main Statements:

"Someone told me once that I would never be better than him because I was Asian and a women. I've been told that I was lying about being born in America I've been called yellow several different times People told me that I wasn't Asian and that I was actually Hawaiian"

Main Statements:

"being called n word, hearing people that shouldn't say the n word say it, not having enough background of what actually happened with black people in the past. ex: slavery doesn't go into as much detail to show how brutal it was, && mlk jr died in the hospital. not from being shot. just little things like that. lots of more have 100% happened but it's hard to remember them all at the moment."

Main Statements:

"Since Squid game is popular right now people ask 'are you from squid games' even though it's a different ethnicity they are just judging by if you're Asian. People will pull there eyes backs and say they are Chinese."

Main Statements:

"I was in a class and I was minding my own Business when I see this guy start to make racist comments and just being racist. I see it all over Rockford it also not just one minority it a lot of different ones that get discriminated at. Black, Asian and so many more. I think a big enough town we should realize problems and fix them."

Additional Comments:

"Thank you for doing this it means a lot for me personally and for a lot of others."

Main Statements:

"Being told that I'm to dumb to be Asian and made fun of for the way my face is and me being in certain places people look at me weirdly"

Main Statements:

"Teachers and students talk to you differently. They think that there are huge differences between myself and the rest of the school."

Additional Comments:

"Rockford has a lot of work to do. There is little acknowledgment about race in this city and school and that's not okay"

Alumni Perspective

- The desire to speak up while they were students was always present, but many of them either did not have the courage or already lost hope for RPS
- Racist jokes, microaggressions, and actions were so common to them that to cope, they had to get used to them or take part in them
- Looking back after graduating, it became clear to them that RPS failed to represent the real world, but they were not as cognizant of the poor conditions for POC during their time
- In college, many of them realized how inadmissible the accepted attitudes are at Rockford
- As shown by the detail in their accounts, many of them, overall, enjoyed their years at Rockford, but hurtful, racist comments that the culture allowed to perpetually bombard them remain associated with their perspective on RPS

Main Statements:

"I've dealt with racism since early elementary school, where kids would make fun of me for the lunch I packed because it wasn't the chicken tenders they use to see. It wouldn't be until freshman year of high school when I would be confident enough to bring packed food from home to school again.. I distinctly remember that nobody would pick me to be on their kickball team unless I spoke Chinese to them and translated what they said in Chinese. I remember I felt like a performing circus monkey the way kids treated me. Around middle school, I dealt with kids (jokingly) called me Chink and yellow, saying Ching Chong while pulling their eyes, and using the fact that I was asian to justify my good grades. I remember there was a book we were required to read in class that was essentially just a anti Chinese propaganda, and while the intent was to describe how bad the cultural revolution was, it also talked about how bad modern China was as well, and reinforced techno-orientalist ideals that essentially portrayed the Chinese as emotionless robots. In high school, I remember getting told that if someone would ever sleep with someone, they'd want to sleep with me first because it'd be like training wheels (because I'd have a small dick.) When I was in the school musical, the director had me paint my entire eyelids white because my eyes were too small for the audience, and that made my eyes seem bigger. I remember someone telling me that I was really attractive for an Asian person, and when I asked what she meant she told me 'it's because asian guys tend to look... you know', insinuating asian guys are ugly. I remember never feeling confident in myself because I always knew that I'd be the cultural 'other' in every situation."

Additional Comments:

"I remember me and my poc friend that I graduated with would talk the summer after high school about how Rockford was surprisingly not racist for its lack of poc representation. After we both went to college and experienced true diversity, we can both confidently say that Rockford is a terrible place to grow up in terms of representation as a poc. Even though I don't go there anymore, I appreciate you trying to make a difference."

Main Statements:

"I had a certain teacher for 10th grade English. The best example I have to share of my experiences with racism at Rockford took place during this class while reading of Mice and Men. This teacher felt that it was okay to say the n-word while reading the book aloud, and then proceeded to show a power point presentation on the history of the word. In classes prior to mine, this teacher asked the people of color in my class how they felt about the word, and if they were okay with them saying it. This teacher said the n-word a total of 11 times in my class, and me being a white passing person of color, this teacher did not ask me about my feelings toward the word. My mom met with this teacher at parent teacher conferences on a Thursday and told them that my father was black, and expressed that it was not okay to continue to use this word in class or at all. The teacher responded with 'I am not a racist,' even though no one accused them as such. This teacher did not go to school on Friday. The Monday after parent teacher conferences, this teacher told our class that they had a terrible meeting with a parent and that's why they were unable to attend class on Friday."

As a white passing person of color, I constantly had to prove to people that my dad was in fact, black. I had to show pictures of him to kids at Rockford to convince people that I am who I say I am."

Main Statements:

"The first day at school after Trump was elected president more than one person made a joke about me being sent back to Mexico. I am half white but all people at Rockford could see was the color of my skin. I grew up in Rockford with the same culture as my peers but they still didn't see me as one of them. I sacrificed my Mexican heritage to try and fit in better, but it made no difference in the end. Once in elementary school at Valley View my mom came in to class and later people came up to me saying, 'I didn't know you were adopted!' My mom is white so they just assumed I had to be adopted. When I tried telling them I wasn't adopted they didn't believe me, they just thought I was confused. Growing up in Rockford I was sheltered from other types of racial discrimination because there wasn't a lot of other people of color. When I went into stores I felt like they treated me like my Caucasian friends, but when I went to stores in Grand Rapids I could feel a difference in store managers' suspicion towards me. Now that I am at a more diverse school I am not treated as different which has made me realize how I was treated in Rockford and the GR area."

Additional Comments: None

Response #9
Student Racial/Ethnic Heritage: South Korean
Student Year of Graduation: 2021

Main Statements:

*"Unfortunately, there are too many to list, but here are some that have stuck with me forever:
-A student teacher walked up to me and said to me 'I don't remember your name, so I'm just going to call you Mulan.'
-A student asked me on MLK day how I felt about MLK day because I wasn't white, as if it was a bad thing.
-Being called various names like Ching Chong or other strings of words that 'sound Asian.'
-Being told I would never get married because no one would like me because of my race.
-A student pulling their eyes back and when I got offended, I got called 'too sensitive'
-Student asking if I ate my own dog.
-People jokingly asking me to do their math homework or getting told I did good in school because I'm Asian
- getting asked 'where are you actually from'
-People saying I'm actually a North Korean spy
-getting dirty looks from people during the beginning of Covid."*

Additional Comments:

"Just wanted to say I appreciate this so much, because I don't think racism towards Asians is addressed as much as it should be! I can honestly agree with you, because I felt so alone too. And in some sort of twisted way it's almost relieving to read these stories of what people have gone through and know that it's not just me. I've struggled with this for a long time and it really impacted my mental health. Thank you for bringing awareness to this. You rock!"

Main Statements:

"I was bullied a lot in middle school for being Mexican. Though I have Caucasian skin it did used to be little darker when I was younger. My dad who is 100% Mexican has skin that is several shades darker than mine. I was embarrassed to be picked up from school by him because everyone told me that I was adopted and that my dad was black. I tried to tell them he was Mexican and my mom was white but they had no interest in hearing that and continued to tell the school that I had a black dad (even if I did... what is wrong with that?). I was also bullied because my last name 'sounded weird.' I was pretty much the only Mexican kid in my grade out of the handful at the entire school. A lot of the kids put me down for having a Hispanic last name and it honestly made me hate my name. I hated being a 'Garcia' for a long time. It grew me to show less appreciation for my heritage and my family. It hurt my dad's feelings when I said I didn't like my last name because it was too different from all of the 'Smiths' and 'Johnsons' I went to school with. I eventually grew to adore my Hispanic heritage and find pride in my last name. The point is I was ridiculed by 80% of my classmates for three straight years just because my dad has darker skin and my last name is Garcia. This started happening to me over 9 years ago and it still looks like Rockford hasn't made any progress. Do better, Rams."

Main Statements:

"During the pandemic, the librarian made a comment about how if we were buying American flags to not buy them from China, and no one made a comment about how it was wrong until another Asian student's mom emailed the teacher. Also, kids in my class were being racist. I only heard one part, but my friend heard more from a few other students. I personally heard about the 'fourth wave of the China virus.' I've also been asked where I'm really from at work before. The girls tennis team one year had a match where people were saying Asian slurs to the other team despite having Asians on the team as well."

Main Statements:

"2014, there were only a few POC in the building but we all knew each other for safety reasons. While I attended RHS, I've never met a bigger school of racist and arrogant people in my life, including staff. One staff member, dressed up in a full native headdress and mocked my culture openly during class hours. I wanted to vomit. Countless times I would hear everything and anything said about the black students no matter what they were doing and even would hear the N word shouted. I'm glad to have moved on from that hell of a place."

Main Statements:

"I'm not sure how diverse Rockford has gotten, but when I was in high school there were only a handful of poc per grade. I was the only Palestinian Muslim so I have many stories of being discriminated against."

When I was a sophomore in 2015?? We went into lockdown for like a week straight because someone kept threatening to bomb the high school. We called that person the Rockford Bomber and the police couldn't figure out who it was. When the original threat was made, the police had to go in and search people's backpacks and I remember walking back into class and remembering that my backpack was the only one searched. After that we weren't allowed to carry our backpacks to class and we had to keep them in our lockers. Some of my friends began to make racist terrorist jokes towards me and began to blame me for having to put our backpacks in our lockers. Many of these jokes were made in front of teachers and no one said anything. People also called me the rockford bomber because I'm an Arab Muslim."

Also learning about middle eastern countries or Islam or wars pertaining the Middle East in history classes were awful. The books were very one sided and inaccurate and the way they portrayed the Middle East/ Islam was racist. There was also a general lack of knowledge about my religion at Rockford regarding Ramadan and religious holidays."

I definitely have more stories but I think these are the bigger ones."

Main Statements:

“Participated in a geography bee in middle school. One of my ‘friends’ pointed to me and made the announcement, ‘Ask her all the hard questions, she’s Chinese.’

My academic success was always credited to being Asian.

Been called ‘mellow yellow’ when I looked sad one day.

Had a ‘made in China’ sticker put on me.

Asked if I brought the coronavirus because I was born in Wuhan.

Played the violin which furthered racial stereotypes.

People noting how the other schools who had mostly Asian students were always better in orchestra competitions.

Have been referred to as ‘kinky chinky’

Someone said to me when I told them I like Chinese food, ‘Do you call it Chinese food or just food’

‘Chinese, Japanese, American knees’ chant

Had a teacher once say, ‘We don’t have any POC in here right now do we,’ (we were reading a book about slavery) and when I raised my hand they said, ‘I mean like actual POC, black people.’

Assuming that I knew of and was friends with every other Asian in the school.

Our racial education only consists of African Americans. There are no books read about Asian experience in America or anything like that.”

Additional Comments:

“It’s interesting because growing up, I’ve kind of just embraced some of the less offensive jokes and run with them especially if they came from close friends. However, I’m not sure if I was truly fine with them or it was more of a coping mechanism. I myself have made a lot of Chinese jokes about myself as sort of a ‘reclaiming’ these jokes and making them mine and I am very proud of my heritage, but this has started to make me think deeper about how I may be in denial and use these jokes as a coping mechanism against how I feel. Especially with the onset of the coronavirus and Asians are getting a lot more hate. Before it was easy to think, ‘Oh we have it pretty good, we weren’t enslaved like African Americans or subjected to mass genocide like the Jewish during the Holocaust,’ but it’s recognizing that just because other people may have had it worse, doesn’t make our experience any less valid. Just some thoughts this post has brought up. You’re doing a great job, keep it up!”

Main Statements:

“Cat dissection week. To many Rockford students taking Physiology, this week is a highly anticipated lab dedicated to putting all of the coursework we learned throughout the school year into action. But as the day grew closer, the feeling of dread settled deep in my stomach. My suspicions came true as the dissection started to come to a close. ‘Doesn’t this cat look like a chicken?’ One of my classmates asked. I stood frozen, scalpel in hand. ‘How can Chinese people eat cats? It’s disgusting.’ A voice snickered. As the topic caught fire inside the lab, I wanted to shout, ‘Not all Chinese people eat cats!’ But my voice caught in my throat. My classmates continued bantering, making Chinese people out as uncivilized and other-worldly. Nearing the end of class, I finally mustered up the courage and weakly said, ‘Not many Chinese people nowadays eat cats.’ However, I was cut off when someone announced to the class that ‘it says online that Chinese people still eat cats!’ This is the reality for many Asian Americans and this is NOT a unique experience. We face ignorant comments from not just teachers, but from our fellow classmates. I would like to suggest a solution that could have stopped or at least challenged some of my classmates’ beliefs: addressing it. If before the class the teacher announced that making generalization of an entire race would not be tolerated, I know that I would have felt relieved. Many people believe that by pretending discrimination isn’t there, it will eventually go away. The fact is that that’s not how discrimination works. Sitting back and being silent will not achieve social change. I ask Rockford Public Schools to acknowledge these stigmatizing beliefs and implicit biases that many people in our community still hold. Furthermore, I challenge Rockford Public Schools to create a plan on how to destigmatize and create a safer community for students of color. This could include, but is not limited to, informative assemblies, incorporating diversity into the curriculum, or adding a section in Developing Healthy Kids dedicated to addressing racism and discrimination. The most important thing is making sure that the people of color in our community are being heard and ensuring that Rockford Public Schools is a safe environment for all students. Then hopefully, I won’t have to worry about the next generation feeling the way I did during cat dissection week.”

Additional Comments: None

Response #96

Student Racial/Ethnic Heritage: Mexican and Finnish

Student Year of Graduation: 2010

Main Statements:

*“-being asked what country I was from and assumed to be an exchange student
-assuming I knew ‘Mexican’ and that’s why I was acting Spanish (I grew up with the Finnish language because the climate in America was the same as it is now; my dad did not want us to speak Spanish for fear of further discrimination)
-having nicknames associated with ethnicity
-being called ‘Pocahontas’ repeatedly by faculty in the hallway (I did not have a class with them which made it all the more random and hurtful)
-getting to ask why a racist joke was funny (pretty common but seeing their face change as they realized they weren’t telling it to a fellow white person)”*

Response #21
Student Racial/Ethnic Heritage: Vietnamese American
Student Year of Graduation: 2019

Main Statements:

“Here are some of my experiences at Rockford:

-My mom would work very hard every day to make me delicious food for lunch, and on occasion, she would make Vietnamese food. I remember countless times of people asking me what I was eating? But not in an innocent, curious way, but with a look of disdain. Other comments of why does it smell? And why does it look like that?

- I definitely got plenty of microaggressions about being Asian like getting the ‘where are you from?’ Question all the time. Jokes about dick size, being smart at math and school, having small eyes. And of course I laughed them off as jokes. I had to cope with those comments somehow. Or else I would come face to face with the extreme racism from my peers and teachers. And also because Rockford never taught us ANYTHING about racism, I was ignorant of the true nature of these comments and experiences.

- I remember a teacher talking to our class about how there is only one race, the human race. Color blind racism pushed as a narrative? At Rockford? Shocker. He is a nice teacher but there is some work there in terms of learning about the detrimental effects of this harmful narrative.

-There are definitely more moments of microaggressions that I personally experienced but I also heard about plenty of racist occurrences around Rockford. Like the incident with the girls tennis team a few years ago making racist gestures and remarks to their opponents who were Asian.

- Rockford is way behind on teaching about race and racism in America. They fail to teach history about people of color, there is no support for students of color, and they essentially ignore racism like it isn't a problem.”

Additional Comments:

“Thank you for stepping up to begin the work that should have been done a long time ago. Something I wish I had done in high school but was too afraid and ignorant to do.”

Additional Comments: None

Response #59
Student Racial/Ethnic Heritage: Chinese
Student Year of Graduation: 2021

Main Statements:

“In 7th grade, I was vulnerable and trying to fit in, just like any other middle schooler navigating life. A teacher at Rockford started pulling their eyes and saying ‘Ching Chong wing wong’ and making super racist remarks about Asians saying that their name was Ping. I was in awe that this was not a dream. Racism can come in many forms but this was literally so obvious. The kids looked at me dying laughing and were seeing if I was laughing along too. I was smiling but out of awkwardness and I didn't want to stand up and seem like I can't take a joke. But it was seriously embarrassing. When this teacher did this, kids saw that they thought it was funny, and it basically gave other kids the OK to also make those jokes. They saw that he was making the

whole class laugh, so later on I had other kids making those same racist jokes towards me because they saw the previous teacher make them to me, too. I just laughed along, I should have told them to stop, but at that age, you seriously don't want to be the outsider, and so I found myself being racist towards myself to get the approval from other people. This carried on until I was a junior in highschool. I honestly was the most racist person to myself, as it would make other people laugh and make me appear ‘cool’ like I can laugh at myself. I know now that it literally is not funny at all, and there are other ways to joke around without having race involved. I shouldn't of had to feel like I had to be racist towards myself to fit in and get approval from other students, but this event caused the spark.”

Main Statements:

“Being now 2 years removed from Rockford, it is eye opening to recall all of the unnecessary and ignorant racially charged things that had been said to me during all my 12 years there. This is the case because now, as an adult in college, I am mostly surrounded by a more diverse group of people who all see no place for such racial remarks, it's just not tolerated. Now don't get me wrong, I loved growing up in Rockford, but I think I share the same feelings as other people of color who went there when I say we had to ‘get used to’ the racial comments or jokes made about us, we were supposed to just brush them off our shoulders and go on with our day. I could probably write out a whole list of things said to me, but truly the only example of something that really got to me was when my classmates would attribute my athletic feats to me being black, beginning in middle school with things like ‘you made the team because you're black’, and continuing in high school with things like ‘I bet your good at this/that because you're black’. And in a school that highly values athletic ability I just think it's unfair to judge someone ability solely on their race and not by the work they put in. Even if these remarks were meant to be jokes and even if I simply ‘got used to it’ they shouldn't be said and I just want future kids of color in Rockford to not accept just ‘getting used to it.’”

Additional Comments:

“Hope your efforts can manifest some change in Rockford, no matter how minute.”

Main Statements:

“I've been mistaken many many times as a foreign exchange student even though i've lived in Rockford my whole life and went to Rockford Public schools my whole life, and my dad was even a teacher at one of the middle schools. The other time was when I was crossing the border to Canada on a school trip, I was the only person that they actually checked the ID of, and when I looked around I was the only Asian or person of color on that bus. Very upsetting and embarrassing.”

Additional Comments: None

Main Statements:

“Going to Rockford I experienced racism first hand. By students and “friends” and teachers who used micro aggressions. Like oh ‘I can’t see you in the dark’ ‘or what do you know about this time and subject’ students Used the ‘N’ word, and teachers who let the hard R be displayed in books with the Uncomfortability of black students. Teachers who told us colored students we couldn’t write on subjects of black lives, or even about our lives. Getting poor grades from these teachers when you’re an A+ student. Going to the principals about the grades you were given on such a topic and them not doing anything about it besides saying that’s the teachers way of grading. A teacher not allowing you into student council for your skin color. Today my brother is a sophomore at Rockford and tells me that a teacher sent him and a Mexican to the office for hiding their friends pencil box, and the white kid involved didn’t get into trouble. I remember in this teacher’s class reading the N word during book. I always felt uncomfortable being in class being the only colored girl, and asked questions like I know our history because I’m colored. I experienced this not only at the high school but the middle school as well. I never felt that I fit in. I always straightened my hair to look like the girls around me. I experienced not being able to date white boys due to their dads being racist or later in life finding out my friends parents were racist. Rockford is scary.”

Main Statements:

“Freshmen year science class. The teacher was out sick and one of the special ed teachers was subbing, she handed out homework at some point and said ‘do your homework dont be lazy like mexicans’ i looked around like what did this woman just say and thinking holy crap i was not the only one who heard that. My 100% hispanic spanish speaking father being a former migrant worker, stormed down to the admin office immediately after i told him what had happened. And big shocker the teacher denied the entire thing and said i must have heard her wrong and that she would never say such a thing. The teacher was not reprimanded and my family and i were disgusted. I am so grateful people are finally speaking up! THANK YOU!”

Main Statements:

*“Track and field: only a good sprinter because I am African
Middle school: go back to your country (this kid did apologize but still stands)
High school: A teacher screaming at me for asking questions in math class ‘you’re going to end up just like your brother’ who had been a troubled kid over 10 years prior to me attending Rockford.
Elementary: physical altercation: being pushed down during mileage club, choked by my sweatshirt, and told ‘no black people allowed in my school.’ I was in 3rd grade.
‘Pretty for a black girl’
That I was a good seamstress because ‘my people’ have been doing it for years
I’m surprised you get along with that cop, your people hate them.
Lastly kid wearing confederate flag OUTFIT. Like t-shirt, belt, and matching socks. Going on Twitter and flipping off camera whilst I over hear him say ‘fuck niggers’ same day I got in trouble for an off the shoulder shirt cause ‘dress code’ but he was not sent home or told to change.”*

Main Statements:

“I was a secondary student at Rockford during both the 2016 and 2020 elections. I can recall walking the halls of MIDDLE SCHOOL having kids yell ‘build a wall’ at me. This was frustrating for many reasons a few being that I am indeed the daughter of an immigrant and because most people didn’t know the weight their words held. When 2020 rolled around I lived in fear of more racist insults and the pressure of having to deal with so many differing opinions. Not to mention I was labeled as a ‘drug dealer’ for so much of school simply because I was Hispanic even though I hadn’t so much as ever even touched a drug that wasn’t ibuprofen.”

Additional Comments:

“This initiative needs to go further than just books in a classroom (though it’s a good idea). Teachers and students need to be educated on racism and how it is affecting people currently. Whether that’s a class or yearly seminars that people must attend to broaden their perspective, that is what I hope to see this school work towards.”

Main Statements:

“My time at rockford was filled with racial slights i do not believe i was ever harassed due to my race however for those less comically gifted stereotypes are easy to joke about, in my case i was presented with many asian stereotype jokes over the course of my education. I never cared that much while in school because when you’re raised under that environment you don’t question it however once i left i realized how uneducated the general community of rockford is when comes to different cultures and the topics that are fair for open discussion and those that should be spoken about with sensitivity, empathy, and attention to detail. I recall the worst example of any racially based offense was when my teacher continually referred to me as ‘Chopsticks’ and only stopped when i had told them that the name made me incredibly uncomfortable.”

Main Statements:

“There are a lot of things I could say about my experience but I’ll just share the ones that stick out to me the most. Micro aggressions is a very common theme at Rockford and one I can remember is I had a teacher- and i was always called out for talking and even got moved bc of it; but the white students who were talking, didn’t get moved. He also told my parents that ‘the black women was coming out of me’ bc I was being ‘sassy.’ Another instance is when I got box braids which is a black hairstyle, someone on my track team told me that ‘im officially black now bc I have braids.’ Honestly I could go on and on and on but the last one I would like to share is when a white classmate who I thought was my friend, said the n word with the hard R in front of me, I was too scared to really do anything back them bc of how normalized it was.”

Main Statements:

"I remember being followed by security all high school during passing time, lunch, and class time. It was so weird. I'd ask my black friends and they had the same thing. But then only a few of the white friends had this issue. Specifically the few that were known to be around us. Maybe it was our group. Maybe it was because of us. Nobody knows."

Main Statements:

*"I am a child of Asian immigrants - I was raised speaking a second language and lived with the culture. Rockford is clearly a non-diverse school and nearly all of the other Asians at this school are adopted. I would get questions such as, 'How old were you when you were adopted?' While this does not seem racist, this follows the stereotype that all Asians are adopted from China when I am in fact not Chinese whatsoever. I used to have adopted Chinese friends and they were good friends, however being raised in a white community they followed the racist comments towards Asians. They would make jokes about 'eating dogs' or call themselves 'ling ling' but this would make it seem acceptable for white people to make these jokes. As a child I was bullied for speaking a second language because it wasn't English. There was an incident before senior year when a girl from Rockford posted a racist post on her Instagram spam account and a bunch of students from the school agreed with her and made racist comments such as, 'Those Ching Chong Chinese f*cks' or 'I'm about to eat my dog.' As a 100% Asian I felt endangered to go back to Rockford. The principal probably received at least 100 emails about this because it was spread all over social media. The administration did in fact call the parents of the students who were commenting racist things, but they did not do anything further. I never felt comfortable at Rockford. People would think I was related to other Asians. Now that I am in college I feel a lot more comfortable on a diverse campus because I actually feel as if I belong. And for the ignorant students who believed white was the only race, I hope they learn that this world is so much more beautiful than that. When I first stepped foot into Rockford people acted as if I was the first diverse student they have ever met. I hope one day Rockford changes this mindset, because I would NEVER recommend diverse families to go to Rockford because it is NOT a safe place for anyone who isn't white."*

Main Statements:

"One time the teacher who I had for 3 months thought I was a Chinese exchange student and announced it to the entire class, in which they all laughed...except me"

Main Statements:

"I have grown up being a minority at whatever school I attended. At a predominantly African American school I wasn't black enough, and at a predominantly Caucasian school I wasn't white enough. However, the caucasian school treated me far worse due to the sheer number of racist events. There is a major difference between not being able to fit into a group properly and being openly mocked and discriminated against due to the color of my skin. If the lights get turned off, where did he go? If I abbreviated something, its slang. A few examples to further drive home the point. I had people telling me that my heritage wasn't enough to validate the color of my skin because I faced no financial adversity. That I as a mixed person am a special commodity and dated purely for racial stereotypes and my racial uniqueness rather than for the contents of my character. It had enveloped my life and made me see the world in white and black. The segregation this school faces runs deeper than what's perceived. If you so much as look different at that school then you are labeled and picked on for the rest of your time. It made me so confused on what I am and who would accept me for the longest time and it took me moving a thousand miles away to see that the world is a million shades of grey and I'm not just a minority. That I am a human like the others around me and that tolerance is not acceptance. I am a graduating member of I made it and I refuse to be an echoing voice in the hallways screaming out my pain."

Main Statements:

"I have had so many experiences with this, unfortunately. So I'll make a list of a few:

- 1. For starters, no one saw me as being mixed. Though my mom is white, I am only considered black...and everyone would point that out at any chance possible as if I didn't know.*
- 2. I hated being black in February. Black history month made it impossible to celebrate black joy when everyone looks AT you when the teacher talks about slaves. I was asked to comment on many situations BECAUSE I was black..even tho I was only 15years old.*
- 3. A teacher asked the students what their favorite food was and when it got to me I said pasta. He then asked 'oh not fried chicken?'*
- 4. I endured constant racist comments from a particular friend of mine's dad. He constantly asked me racist comments about fried chicken, watermelon, and other ridiculous stereotypes.*
- 5. Every time I would dance/go to a dance I was always talked about being the best dancer...you know, because I'm black.*
- 6. The infamous 'you're pretty for a black girl' and 'you don't act black' comments.*
- 7. Getting asked if other people could say the N word around me.*
- 8. Spring break comes around and I was the go-to to check and see how tan they got.*

These are just a very small amount."

Additional Comments:

"Overall, I had a great experience at Rockford. Once high school is over everything changes. I've forgiven many things and I know people were ignorant. I'm not mad. It was different back when I graduated but I am proud of you for standing up and advocating for people. You're an amazing soul."

Main Statements:

"I am adopted from China. I have not had any racial insults personally to me because I graduated from RPS before Covid-19 happened. I want to help represent people of color that got have gone to RPS. I am lucky to have not had racial issues to me. I might have taken things as jokes and I just don't remember them. I would love to give an example to help. I once was asked if I was a foreign exchange student just because I was sitting alone in a library.

Every time I go into a class for the first time I will check to see if I'm the only Asian student in there.

Because of all the Asian hate I have been scared to go out alone because I'm not sure of what people think of me because I am Asian.

I worked at a restaurant and a person asked me if I knew Chinese. People assume that we know the language but if we were adopted into a white family we weren't able to get that opportunity to learn the language.

In 2017 the Rockford marching band performed a show called Tao. I was asked multiple times about my opinion on how we were representing the Asian culture with it. I personally like that show but I know that maybe some other people thought that it was weird that a white school was representing an Asian culture. During that show there might've been 4 to 5 Asian students in the band and everyone else was mostly white or a few colored students."

Main Statements:

"I'll provide a quick summary because I can promise that there was so much more that happened. I can't count on one hand the amount of times I have been called the n word, or had people ask me if they can have a 'pass' to say it. I've been asked why I don't talk 'black' or like I am from 'the hood.' I have heard countless people say slurs that discriminate against racial groups outside of mine, and it makes me feel just as uncomfortable and sick inside. I've had people refer to me as their 'black friend' instead of just their friend. But what did I hear more than anything?? 'You're pretty for a black girl.' I still have no clue what that means. My heart goes out to the students of color that are much darker than I am, or that didn't have many friends; I can't even begin to imagine the type of experiences they were forced to go through. If this administration truly wants each and every one of their students to feel comfortable enough to succeed in their own skin, they would absolutely not sweep this issue under the rug."

Main Statements:

"In middle school some people would tease me about building the wall and to go work their fields and to go back to Mexico when I was legit born here and so was my dad and even. one of my friends made jokes about my dad doing landscaping and stuff and just think that everyone in Rockford needs to learn more about other cultures and get out of their bubble and actually learn and respect other cultures instead of stereotyping because they have never been around those people because Rockford is predominantly white."

Main Statements:

"Students telling me to go back to my country , this is American land. A teacher looked at me one time and said 'The Germans wouldn't like you.'"

Main Statements:

"Experiences I've had have had to do with the teachers and their subtle comments and grading. Such as, normally you were able to choose any topic for an essay but if you choose a topic on racism or black lives or immigration or anything having to do with defending a different race there would be a terrible score with no explanation. We write these papers cause it relates to our lives and the teachers think were attacking them and if they don't like the topic they don't like you or the paper and don't understand. I would have people read and criticize it and even help me fix it and the same grade would be given back. I just thought I was bad at writing until I went to college and did the normal I usually do expecting a c or lower cause that's all I would get and I received A's. There would be multiple instances where I or a friend would get brought into something that had nothing to do with us which I believe was subjecting. Just a lot of subtle remarks and comments a lot of English teachers made to make us uncomfortable is what I noticed the most and tip toeing around the topic of racism."

Main Statements:

*"-Anything that I accomplished academically, or even once I made something unrelated to school and decorated it nicely because I enjoyed it, was because I was Asian. 'Of course that was *insert name* *insert grade, object, etc that was high quality* it's because they're Asian.'*
- Had jokes made about how I won't be getting dinner because I got a grade less than an A. Not all family dynamics fit into the stereotype, shockingly.
- I can't remember the exact words said, but I remember it was something insensitive about Asians. The two guys were walking and I distinctly remember one of them looking back and seeing me and saying 'dude shut up they're right there' like it made it better to say it as long as I didn't hear.'

Additional Comments:

"I'm glad you're doing this and I think it's very important. I don't usually talk about this because there aren't many people who understand why the moments are so damaging. It really takes away from our individual identity to try to turn it into 'oh that makes sense because of your race.' We don't talk about current events regarding race or about damaging ideas and stereotypes at all. Thank you for this."

Main Statements:

"Cousins were bullied and teased on a daily basis, but they were always at fault whenever they spoke out or defended themselves. Since the day they moved here, they were harassed, called racial slurs like spic (with the assumption that they were Mexican) and these fools would spit on their lockers. Outcasted, made to feel like we weren't welcome or that we don't belong there is how it was like going to rockford schools.

**I was accused of stealing money and a cellphone, when I had my own source of income and my own cellphone. When they had no proof they turned into finding anything that could incriminate me. We were always made to be the bad guys or someone to put blame on for anything bad.*

In each situation, it eventually escalated into physical altercations because of being tired of getting harassed all day, everyday and no one there to hear our side, care about us or actually address the root problem. Eventually, you push people to snap. And that's what happened. We were told that we should seek anger management and basically, we were the problem. These bullies would play victim and use their white privilege and get away with everything. All we wanted to do was mind our own business, go to school to get a great education, make friends, be like any other normal high schooler, but not easy if you're brown or different than the typical rockford resident. The color blindness excuse is often used to justify acts of racism or discrimination. That it's just a joke. Lack of diversity and inclusion, education, cultural awareness or promoting of acceptance is to blame. Things improved once we realized not all of Michigan was this ignorant, just certain bubbles. Rockford is definitely in a bubble and not all, but majority are racist and ignorant."

Main Statements:

"I never received racial discrimination, but I was always aware that I made up the very small percentage of minority students at Rockford. I definitely wish they had more efforts to embrace diversity and promote different cultures / ethnicities. I feel that many students and staff were often indifferent to acts of racism that happened, such as students flying the confederate flag on the back of their trucks, which isn't okay in my opinion. I wish there was make awareness of things like that and overall recognition of minorities at Rockford."

Main Statements:

"For me it all started in elementary school. People would pull their eyes back and "pretend" they were Asian. I would also have people 'flipping me off' with their pinky. I grew numb to these when in reality these are micro aggressions that continue the cycle of racism and stereotyping. Rockford did an awful job at addressing racism and how it's continuing to be a problem."

Main Statements:

"Specifically at Rockford, there was always the overwhelming sense of entitlement. People would ask "why is there a black history month and no white history month?" There was always a swastika etched into something, normally interior bathrooms but I found a new one what seemed like weekly. Other students would make statements like "well you're not REALLY black..." or "you're not one of THOSE black people..." those comments were made just about daily.

I encountered so jokes made on the base of race so often that it became normalized."

Main Statements:

*"- Generally being the token Asian of classes, sports teams, etc.
- In elementary school kids once showed me a picture of a gorilla and told me I had the same nose
- Constant Asian jokes"*

Main Statements:

"I remember in my history class my senior year one of my teachers when we were introducing our names to each other on the first day of class and he asked a girl if she was from here because she was a person of color. He was clearly uncomfortable when she said she is from here and then asked the Caucasian guy after her where she was from to make it seem better. I think it wasn't right of him to assume that she wasn't from here because of the color of her skin and her name and teachers need to be more careful about situations like these."

Main Statements:

"A lot of the examples listed by Brady are what I have experienced as well going through the Rockford school system. I have confided in a teacher about it and they brushed it off and completely invalidated my feelings."

Main Statements:

"I've had a lot of experience of discrimination from the Coronavirus to sports. Jokes have been made to me that oh I should be good at ping pong because I'm Asian or I should be really good at math because I'm Asian. Also when I played hockey I have been told Asians don't play hockey or how can you see the puck when your eyes are closed, or players would make squinting eye jokes or tell me to go back to China."

Additional Comments:

"Being adopted at an older age people expect me to be fluent in Chinese or know everything about China so they try to say things in Chinese to see if I know what they're trying to say but they don't listen that I don't know any Chinese anymore."

Main Statements:

"Too many white kids, many of them have never had a meaningful interaction with really anyone much less other races. Martin Luther King day should be celebrated as a day off of school, having to many crackas is a dumb fucking excuse."

Main Statements:

"This happened to my little brother not me but in 2016 right after trump got elected one of his classmates told him to "go back to Mexico" even though we aren't Mexican. I know trump really fueled hatred towards hispanic people and immigrants at this time so it was hard to be around all the trump supporters in Rockford coming from a family of hispanic immigrants. A sixth grader wouldn't just say that, they were definitely reflecting the views of their parents which makes it even worse."

Main Statements:

"There is a huge racist culture at Rockford high school and although it's not always explicit, students of color definitely notice how students and staff treat them differently. There is a lot of work to be done and it starts at home with these kids parents who share the same sentiments. I never experienced anything really bad, just a lot of micro aggressions towards myself and how I saw black kids who go there handled by a lot of administrators was really discriminatory in my opinion. Also, the way students are treated who are from out of the country and English is their second or third language is also very racist."

Main Statements:

"Driving down the highway being boxed in by cars, some older guy was just giving us the middle finger and laughing at us for more than a few miles straight."

Main Statements:

"As an Asian American at Rockford you are bombarded with casual banter every day to the point where I just accepted it and deemed it as normal. It wasn't until I went away to college where I saw being treated the way I was treated was filled with micro-aggressions. I do not believe a lot of the comments were filled with malice, it's just an ignorance that what they're saying is offensive."

Main Statements:

"Followed in the halls by security during passing time, class time, and lunch."

Main Statements:

"I remember when I was hanging out with my older sister and one of her friends that I hadn't met yet and they would start a conversation with my sister and they stop to ask who I am and I have to explain that I am my older sister's little sister. After they hear the news they would look at me and my sister and say 'no you're not' or 'are you really?!' Sometimes they would say both and my sister and I would have to say 'yes we are biological sisters, we share the same father who is a black man and mother who is a white woman.' So even though my sister looks biracial, I look white so people think we are just really close friends. So even though I too am biracial, when moments like this happen it makes me feel somewhat disconnected from the other half of who I am."

Main Statements:

"Lots of students and teachers discredited my academic achievement due to my race, making me feel like it wasn't because of the work I put in but instead was simply given to me due to being Asian. Also being called on whenever there were any conversations about race or diversity even if I wasn't raising my hand because I was one of (if not the only) people of color in the class."

Main Statements:

"I was a transfer to Rockford from EGR at started my sophomore year. People didn't talk to me because they thought I was an 'exchange student' or they thought I didn't 'speak English or understand it.' It didn't really phase me I could have cared less seeing as I really did look like the exchange student from Spain, I took it with a grain of salt and more of a compliment. That was my sophomore year but there's a bigger problem than so called "racism" at Rockford and that's bullying. And my story is one that need to be heard."

The Not So Pleasant Opposition

These are the opposing responses and private messages I have received since publicizing the form on November 2nd. These responses should emphasize the concerns expressed by myself and the other 115 students of color who filled out the Google Form. It is likely that these responses represent a large portion of the 5,000+ people who saw my Instagram post. I want to highlight a specific story that encapsulates the purpose of this initiative. The day after I posted, a friend informed me of an individual (Caucasian Male) who was very much in the opposition group. However, like many of them, he did not actually read into what I wrote. In other words, he saw "DEI" and felt threatened. Later that day, I got an update that the individual actually agreed with what I wrote and no longer felt so opposed/threatened. This is my hope. The indisputable nature of testimonies that come from friends and peers resonates and motivates change. It is much more effective than half-hearted reminders to be inclusive, but even those are extremely rare within the Rockford Public School district.

Supportive Caucasian Input

- As Rams with White skin, they do not have personal experiences dealing with racism like their colored peers
- Racial comments run rampant and unchecked in their schools
- They are accustomed to watching their teacher allow racist sentiments to become acceptable
- They recognize an obvious need for more open discussion on racism
- They feel like the environment cultivated by the district does not include, represent, or prepare them for the beautiful world outside the "Rockford Bubble"

* Note: All of the Racial/Ethnic Heritage responses below were Caucasian/White

Main Statements:

"Even though I am not a person of color myself, I have grown up listening and watching this happen to many people. My cousin who goes to Forrest Hills was born in China then adopted by my aunt and uncle. When she was younger there wasn't much to happen but by the time she got to middle school many people were making jokes about her. Many people said that she 'eats dogs' and she was 'not the same as everyone else' this hurt when she told me she was in pain. She got bullied because she did not look like everyone else. Many people do not realize that even if someone is a different race doesn't mean they're a bad person, we are all the same. One of my other friends who goes to Rockford (I don't want to give out their name because I don't know if they are comfortable with me sharing this with their name) I have been friends with them since elementary school. On the bus together, kids in our grade and class would tell 'don't eat my dog' and many other things like that. They would mock her by saying she's Chinese, when she is Vietnamese. And one more situation happened on my team. One of my teammates who is white went up to a girl who is Asian and said 'what type of Asian are you' this could've been a different intention but that just proves that we do not talk more often about these situations on how to ask which ethnicity someone is. I believe we need to be more open about everything with this topic and share more."

Main Statements:

"As a white male growing up in Rockford I was not held accountable for the way I perceived people who were different than me. I think back to the way I thought and my preconceived opinions of people who were unlike me and am ashamed of myself."

There were minimal checks in place to call out harmful behavior by students, including myself. I would not consider myself to be a bully, but the things I said and joked about were not okay."

I think that there needs to be far more discussion at Rockford around diversity in order to bring the community forward. The majority of the student body at Rockford looks at DEI as a joke."

Main Statements:

"Me and my boyfriend are an interracial couple and I have received many dirty looks and rude comments whenever I am in downtown Rockford with him. I have had Police officers follow us around way more often when he is in the car with me and some even will follow so closely it is uncomfortable. I also work at a restaurant in Rockford with him and people would call and threaten him (I am a manager there) and would ask me to fire him or write him up even though he was obeying all traffic laws and being respectful while driving past their house. I do not experience any of the racism first hand but it breaks my heart to see my boyfriend go through all of this and I know it is very upsetting for both of us."

Main Statements:

"I grew up downtown Grand Rapids my whole life and I started hanging around Rockford kids when I hit middle school and I was instantly able to see the difference between the two areas and what my friends had been exposed to (aka, only other Caucasian people in the little bubble of Rockford). Much more racism/prejudice and stereotypes and the most common line I heard there is 'oh they are just jokes I'm not actually racist.'"

Additional Comments:

"Wish people would stop being so ignorant and I wish the school that breeds athletes and talented students can take a moment and recognize their lack of diversity and small town ignorance of other cultures. Everyone deserves to be included and treated fairly and especially at a school that is majority Caucasian it's important to focus on the diversity."

Main Statements:

"A lot of boys saying the N-word, that are white. They post it on their stories and scream it at football games. It makes me as well as many others extremely uncomfortable, and i do not find it funny. I've also heard of teachers being rude to one of my friends that is Asian. There is one other Asian boy in his class and she always calls him by that boy's name. She says they 'look the exact same.' Which, if you knew these boys, they truly look nothing alike. Also, not to bring politics into it, but a lot of people have all lives matter, and blues lives matter bracelets on. It feels as an attack to Black Lives Matter, but that also just might be me"

Main Statements:

"As myself I am white I have not experienced racism towards myself, because that's not a thing, but constantly i do hear racial slurs come out of so many students' mouths. Whether it be at school events or school itself, it's said way too much. I've heard teachers call covid-19 the 'china virus.' I hear racist jokes constantly and it never stops."

Additional Comments:

"Our administration needs to do better. Holding people accountable needs to happen, especially role models such as teachers. As a administration that's mainly white too, I'd like to see more diversity in our teachers as we'll."

Main Statements:

*"While I am not of color, I'm actually part of the most common race here at Rockford. I don't deal with racism on the daily, I don't have comments thrown at me about where I'm from, in fact I've never once been asked where my family was from. While I've never personally experienced racism I have been present for countless actions, but one in particular stood out. My Sophomore I had a 'BLM' sweatshirt on. Never once did I start any sort of argument, I kept to myself mostly in that class anyways because of the people who were with me. As I'm sitting in my desk silently doing my work from behind me I hear 'He deserved to die *laughing*', 'Yeah. Neck boy got what he deserved.' 'Livin on the streets don't look so bad now huh?' 'I can't breathe. I can't breathe.' 'Kiss my ass.'"*

Main Statements:

"One of the few black students while I was going there was my cousin. he's biracial but obviously not many people knew that, they saw black and that's all. he was pulled over for driving 'past curfew' in rockford despite being over 17 (when curfew ends), his dad was pulled over in rockford driving to one of his football games with no cause other than looking out of place. this happened so many times my grandma has started pulling over to watch any time she sees the cops pull a poc over in rockford, just to make sure they're safe."

I heard a story recently from a friend who graduated the same year as my cousin about a party. mostly rockford students, obviously drugs involved, and a black student got beat to bits just for showing up. I have reason to believe it was my cousin, though I'm sure he'd never admit to it. I didn't pay much attention to the other people around me because I didn't feel like I could do anything about it but any time I had a class with an Asian kid I would hear several of the jokes mentioned in your post, usually the high test scores, and any time those test scores were low it was 'fake Asian' or other things like that.

one of my few friends in school was one of probably 3 black kids in my year and she was so sweet but I heard how quiet she went any time people started arguing about race. in government class that was a lot.

kind of different but I get a lot of holocaust jokes. my family wasn't a part of that, we weren't even in Russia anymore at that point but it doesn't make me feel good. being required to watch videos of the holocaust was pretty traumatic, and so was never hearing any word of the pogroms, which were the same thing but in Russia and they lasted longer. I hate feeling lucky that so few people knew I was a jew in high school but I know it would have been worse if they had."

Additional Comments:

"Thank you for doing this. I hope they listen to you. my friends tried to do something similar with anti-lgbt stuff while I was there and it just got us laughed at but this seems like it could work. I'd like to help if you need anything, pretty good at editing and organization if any of that is needed."

Main Statements:

"I have not experienced any racial discrimination of any kind towards myself (scientifically it's not possible for any white person to be racially discriminated against. We learned this in our diversity training here at Michigan State University). It wasn't until I got out of Rockford that I realized how much of a bubble I had lived in and been living in. There were inappropriate things I was saying and doing that I never realized weren't appropriate out in the real world and it was a rude awakening. Of course I never intentionally meant to hurt anyone or anything, but once I began educating myself, (MSU has helped a lot by enforcing diversity training) I finally was able to open my eyes."

Additional Comments:

"People from Rockford need to wake up and see the world. Meet other people and respect other cultures."

Main Statements:

"People said the n word left and right and so did a few teachers. Teachers called covid the 'Chinese virus' and the 'Wuhan bat virus' and said how thankful they were we don't eat wild animals. One teacher said the me too movement was all made up and fake and women were being too dramatic and looking for attention. Said it was a 'very scary time to be a man.'"

Main Statements:

"I myself have not experienced racial discrimination in Rockford as I am White but I did, however, have a class my junior year with a incident involving race. The class was a history class and we were learning about Jim Crow laws and Malcom X etc. on history of racial inequality in the US. We were reading a old news paper on a story of a young black boy who was killed because of his race. The newspaper contained the N-word multiple times and we were supposed to read the document one at a time to the class. The teacher made a speech beforehand telling us we needed to/had to say the word when we came across it to 'feel the true gravity of the word.' Me and other students in the class were very uncomfortable with this rule and eventually told the front office and got the teacher to not require that anymore, at least not to our class. Although this seemed resolved, in class another white student openly spoke to other students about how he enjoyed saying it, did not see an issue with saying it, and was happy and excited for the opportunity. This student's words faced no repercussions from the teacher and made me and other students very uncomfortable knowing that these racist thoughts and words were just able to exist in the school. The same teacher also would single out the one darker skin person in the class to ask questions about the topic of racial inequality just because of their skin color."

Main Statements:

"My friend (Chinese) was told that she was 'supposed' to be good at using chopsticks because she was Asian. She then was proceeded to be told that 'of course she loves sushi, she's Asian.' She did not grow up eating sushi as she was raised in the foster homes in China."

Main Statements:

"Students at rockford saying racial slurs and making 'jokes' and teachers overhearing/watching and doing absolutely nothing. I've seen this happen throughout all 4 years here."

Main Statements:

"I've seen someone get called the n word (hard R) a couple times"

Main Statements:

"I don't have any like certain instances I just know that it's very very common here to hear the n word from white boys and other racial discriminatory words just said in the halls that you can just over hear and they never have consequences for any of it"

Main Statements:

"I'm white, so I've never experienced racism. I have heard the n word around the halls when I was in school at rockford, and no doubt do the mostly white staff hold some racist opinions. Rockford does not teach its students about how bad racism and slavery and how minorities have been treated throughout history the way all these privileged rich white kids need to be taught about it. Rockford needs to step its game up when teaching students and protecting students from discrimination."

Main Statements:

"I have not personally faced any discrimination, but the lack of education related to discrimination, how it plays a role in the lives of students who are not white in Rockford creates an environment that lacks inclusivity and shows no incentive to improve rockford's culture. Rockford is a bubble with very little diversity, and it is the communities and schools job to teach students how racism and discrimination still plays a role in the lives of peers of a different race and in other communities. By not educating on these topics, Rockford is promoting a community that fails to see how discrimination and racism still plays a role in our world and it leaves students blinded. It is Rockford's job to educate students on these topics and to create an environment that feels inclusive to all"

Main Statements:

"I seen a kid in my 5th out literally make a kkk mask and put it on his face. I was talking to him today about it and he said he doesn't regret it. He did not face any trouble for this act."

Main Statements:

"They made fun of my best friend calling her maid just because she's from the Philippines"

Main Statements:

"Within my personal experiences of this issue, I have personally never experienced any racism, but I am beginning to understand that racism has been an issue for a long time. There is racism in our society with the labels that we assume from people that have succumbed from as early as the Middle Ages. In one of my current classes, we try to both educate and understand the underlying issue to how we can understand what occurred in the past and how we can grow as people into looking past stereotypes as well as learning to care for each other. Looking back on my secondary education at Rockford, I wished that there were more open conversations in class to discuss these issues and how we can better educate ourselves on these issues and move forward in a broken society."

Main Statements:

"I have not personally experienced racism at RHS however I have heard stories of other students who have. This is something that MUST be discussed and brought to attention. RHS should do better, needs to do better."

Main Statements:

"I have not had any racial discrimination at Rockford. I will keep an eye out though for other students being racially discriminated or mistreated because of skin color"

Main Statements:

"Being a student at Rockford High School I have seen acts of racism happen in front of my eyes. Kids in my classes constantly are making racist jokes and I just can't understand how someone is supposed to find a joke about your race funny. It's to the point where it's so bad and something needs to be done. I have a ton of friends of varying race and they have told me their own experiences and it's beyond ridiculous. All I have to say is that their needs to be something done about this and it"

Main Statements:

"As a white individual who has white privilege, I was fortunate enough to not experience any discrimination, but I saw friends who did. There were many stereotypes about black students having to play sports and be expected to be athletic. Rockford school board also does little to try and create a diverse environment. As educators and administrators, it is their job to recruit students of color and try to make Rockford a more diverse, realistic place."

Main Statements:

"As a white, texan, who has attended Rockford I can definitely acknowledge a problem and would love to help solve it"

Additional Comments:

"Just let me know how I can help make a difference, if you have a plan in place I'd love to here it"

Main Statements:

"My friend experienced quite a bit of discrimination, though they are not my stories to tell. I did see a couple events when it occurred, though."

Closing Remarks

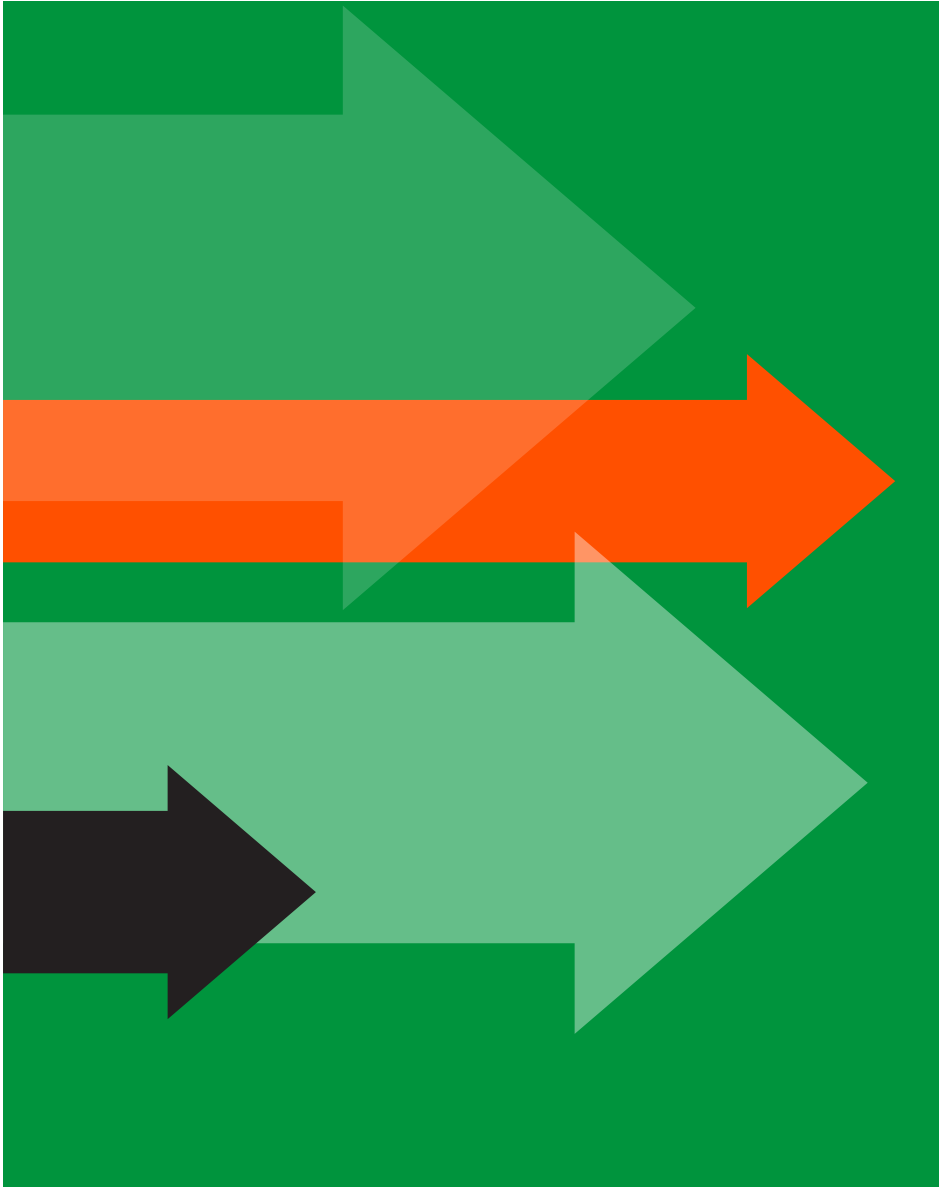
"If Rockford can be so academically, athletically, and artistically advanced, then why can't they also be great at addressing and stopping racism?" Had Rockford proactively fought against normalizing racial suppression of their students of color, this document would not have been created. I acknowledge that having an overwhelmingly Caucasian population, like Rockford has, makes the ignorant culture not entirely unexpected. It will require an arduous battle to reverse it. I, like many of my peers, believe that most of the racist comments that hurt us are not "filled with malice." They are fueled by ignorance. This lengthy document that I, a Chinese student, put together for you is intended to battle that ignorance.

I hope the responses from the current students-of-color can resonate with you as you enter the buildings you share with them. I hope the responses from alumni can open your eyes to the burden on students of color that disappears when they graduate. I hope the opposition can show you why POC at Rockford do not speak up and ultimately do not show up. I hope the responses from our Caucasian peers can highlight that the consequences of a culturally ignorant and insensitive school district affect all of us.

Above all, I hope the responses that were not recorded hold the most weight. The responses that were not recorded because they felt scared. The responses that were not recorded because they felt hopeless. The responses that were not recorded because they got "used to it." The responses that were not recorded because they became a part of it to fit into this environment. Most importantly, the responses that were not recorded by the future students-of-color. I hope that by spreading this document to staff and students at RPS, we can take steps to ensure that there will never be another document like this filled with those future responses.



Issued by:
Brady Smith
b.j.smith2441@gmail.com
616.498.7717



Rockford Public Schools

Quality Community – Quality Schools
Together Building a Tradition of Excellence