

Colin, Winchester

ENG 101-016

Dr. Cooke

11/20/2016

“A Journey Through the Exhibit of Racial Discrimination Towards African-Americans: A problem never solved in the United States”

“Well, the colored man's gonna be all right. He got through slavery, and he'll get through whatever else the white man put on him.” This quote struck us. It made us realize how racial discrimination has burdened the United States' history.

In just our first glance at this exhibit titled, “Racial Discrimination Towards African-Americans: A problem never solved in the United States,” we began to start critically thinking about the problem of racial discrimination. We had to use a computer to click on the link leading to an online pdf version of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* by August Wilson. Initially, we were frustrated we were not able to look at a physical copy of the play. We felt this way because sometimes it is easy to perceive texts in a different way on a computer than in person. The character list of the play was the first thing our eyes saw. We then began to scroll down through the play and felt overwhelmed by how long of a play it was. The text of the pdf gave us a feeling that the play was of an older setting because of the look of it. We realized we were right when we learned it was based in the 1950s. We were surprised there were not more characters because of how long the play was. We still felt interested in reading the play due to the unique names of some of

the characters like “Sturdyvant” and “Slow Drag.” We first realized racial discrimination was going to be a big issue in the play when we read, “Sturdyvant is visible in the control booth. Pre-occupied with money, he is insensitive to black performers and prefers to deal with them at arm’s length.” When we read these words we felt discomfited by the fact that black performers would be discriminated against for no reason.

However, as we began to read through the play we became less frustrated and more amazed at how much racial discrimination black musicians faced during the 1950s. We experienced strong feelings of anger while reading about how the musicians in the play were held back from reaching their potential solely because of the color of their skin. When we read over the words, “Well, the colored man’s gonna be all right. He got through slavery, and he’ll get through whatever else the white man put on him,” we experienced displeasure. We realized African-Americans were put through terrible discrimination repeatedly in history for no reason. As we concluded our viewing of the play we were curious as to why the author would focus so intently on the issues of racial discrimination in the play. We exited out of the play on the computer and proceeded to the next part of the exhibit.

The next piece of the exhibit was titled, “*An Interview with August Wilson.*” The others were Bonnie Lyons and August Wilson. We clicked on the link on the computer to open the on-line pdf of the interview. We felt slightly annoyed we had to go through another piece of the exhibit that was presented to us online. However, after being pleased with how much we learned from the first part of the exhibit we felt more open towards looking at the interview.

When we clicked on the link a similar looking pdf to the the *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* pdf popped up. We initially looked at it and thought the look of the text also gave the interview

an older feel, similar to *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. We began by reading the title, "An interview with August Wilson Conducted by Bonnie Lyons." We then read down to the start. The interview started with giving a background on August Wilson and talking about his childhood. We were pleased to read this because we were anxious to learn more about August Wilson. We felt like the interview was a perfect transition from August Wilson's play because it sparked an interest to us in learning more about him.

As we read about Wilson's childhood we began to understand why he had focused so much on the racial discrimination black musicians faced during the 1950s in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. When we read, "He was raised by his mother on The Hill, a black ghetto of Pittsburgh, quit school at fifteen, and then split his days between the streets and the public library, where he particularly explore the section marked "Negro," we realized Wilson's life most likely revolved around the study of racial discrimination towards African-Americans. We felt extremely interested to learn more about his interest in the subject.

After we finished reading about Wilson's childhood we came across an image of him. The picture was black and white and he was pictured folding his hands together looking straight into the camera. There was no negative space around the picture and we were able to look at it from top to bottom. We felt pleased there were no distractions around the picture and that it was very straight forward. Underneath the picture there was a caption titled: "August Wilson." When we initially saw the picture our first thought was that it was in black and white to resemble the struggle African-Americans faced during history against the white community. We viewed Wilson's facial expression as serious and it seemed to us that he was in deep thought. We thought to ourselves that he was most likely thinking about issues related to racial discrimination.

We went on to scroll down through the questions asked by Bonnie Lyons and the answers provided by August Wilson. In particular one subject Wilson talked about jumped out to me. He compared the life of a black garbage man to that of a rich white man's. It interested us and made us want to read further into the interview. August Wilson specifically says, "White people find out that the content of this black garbageman's life is very similar to their own, that he is affected by the same things-love, honor, beauty, betrayal, and duty." We felt like we discovered something we had never known before after reading this. This was one of the most important lines to us in the entire interview. It made us come to the realization that African-Americans have been discriminated all throughout history by whites, yet both races face similar problems. We began to wonder if African-Americans were still facing similar racial discrimination in present-day because of the color of their skin.

We then scrolled down the page of the exhibit on the computer to view the next piece. It was a picture of an African-American man being held against the trunk of a car by three white police officers. Our eyes were first drawn to the African-American man's face in the picture. His face expressed pain and suffering. We immediately thought the man's face expressed innocence. We began to feel angered thinking about the ongoing police brutality African-Americans have faced in the United States in recent years. This picture seemed to perfectly depict the racial discrimination African-Americans have faced from police officers.

After looking at the man and his face of suffering my eyes shifted to look at the faces of the three police officers. Their faces gave me a feeling that they thought they were of higher status than the African American man they were holding down. We felt this way because the police

officers were standing above the man who was pressed against the trunk of the car below them. We felt extreme feelings of anger towards the police officers in the picture.

The last part of the picture that caught our attention were the words “NYPD Police” pictured on the back of a police officer’s jacket in the background of the picture. This triggered our minds to a large conclusion and made us realize something terrible. Seeing the words “NYPD” made us realize that racial discrimination is still a huge problem in America. It made us realize innocent African-American civilians are being discriminated against, even in our biggest cities, solely for the color of their skin.

We then thought back to the past two parts of the exhibit I analyzed. We realized the issues regarding racial discrimination in *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* and *An Interview with August Wilson* were issues that are still going on in the United States today. We thought about how the black musicians were discriminated against in the jazz industry by whites. We realized this same problem is happening between African-Americans and white police officers in present-day. We made a strong connection within the exhibit. The exhibit made the connection clear: racial discrimination has not improved and is still alive today. We experienced more feelings of anger and frustration realizing that racial discrimination issues are still alive in present-day. We felt feelings of embarrassment that our so called “superpower” of a country was still struggling to eliminate racial discrimination. We were overwhelmed by our realization and felt obligated to try to take steps to eliminate racial discrimination in the United States ourselves.

We then scrolled down the exhibit to view the next piece. We experienced feelings of happiness when we saw the photo. Our eyes were immediately drawn to the face of Martin Luther King Jr. One of the first thing that popped out to us about the image was that it was in

black and white. We felt pleased to see a black and white image from past history. It gave us a feeling of simplicity about the picture. Martin Luther King Jr's smiling face made me temporarily forget about all the racial discrimination my mind was consumed in.

However as our eyes shifted away from his face and into the background of the image thoughts surrounding racial discrimination returned into our heads. We saw thousands of people lined up behind Martin Luther King Jr. We realized we were looking at the famous picture of the March on Washington. We looked into the first few rows of peoples standing behind Dr. King and saw both white and black people together. We felt happy to see this. After uncovering so much about racial discrimination between whites and blacks in the exhibit, we simply wanted to see the two races stand together. This photograph fulfilled our wish and we were relieved to finally see both blacks and whites standing together for one cause.

However, after just examining the last photo that displayed present-day police brutality, we was reminded of the truth. When we registered this we felt sad. We found ourselves scrolling back up to the previous picture and looking at it again. We then scrolled back down to the picture of March on Washington. We realized both pictures represented African Americans fighting for civil rights. We again felt angry realizing the United States is fighting this same huge problem over 60 years after the March on Washington.

This conclusion again reinforced the strength of the exhibit to us. The purpose of the exhibit was to prove racial discrimination is still a significant issue in the United States. At this point of the exhibit, we had made this connection many different times. However, after analyzing the picture of March on Washington, our conclusion had become concrete. We felt accomplished

to have uncovered something so powerful through the viewing of an exhibit. We were filled with feelings of excitement to uncover the last piece of the exhibit.

As we scrolled down to the last part of the exhibit we came across a YouTube link. We felt disappointed to see there was no virtual image for us to look at and analyze. However, we remembered how much we had taken away and learned from the exhibit so far. This made us open the link on the computer with a little more excitement. As soon as we opened the video and it began to play we were immediately fascinated. The video started by comparing objects that are black and white next to each other. These objects were as simple as a black printer standing next to a white printer. However, they stood for a much deeper meaning in my mind. It resembled to us all the conflict we had learned about in the exhibit so far between whites and African-Americans. It again made us saddened thinking about the fact that African-Americans are still facing racial discrimination in the United States today.

As we continued on through the video we were given examples how racial discrimination is still alive in the United States. One of the most interesting statistics that stuck out to us was that “black people are charged roughly seven hundred more dollars on average when buying cars than white people.” When our eyes read across this statistic, the words on the screen seemed to jump out at us. We felt extremely angered when reading this statistic. We used to believe we lived in a country where everyone was treated equally. However, at this point in the exhibit we knew African-Americans were being racially discriminated against. The statistic was presented in white letters with a black background. This popped out to us and made us realize it was a metaphor for how African-Americans are being treated. The white letters stand on top of the black background which signifies the letters being above the background. Similarly, black people

in our country are routinely being discriminated against by whites. When white people discriminate against blacks, they think they are above them just like the white letters are above the black background. After thinking through this connection we felt saddened and frustrated.

As we watched the rest of the video and learned more shocking, awful statistics about the discrimination towards black people we began to feel an overwhelming urge to try to fix this problem. At the end of the video there was a message saying, "sign the pledge to fight back." We read these words and felt a sense of hope. We knew we were going to be able to fight this problem with others who cared about the issue just as much as we did. We proceeded down the YouTube page to a link where we could sign the pledge. We signed the pledge in the link provided. When we were signing it we felt positively about the fact that we were doing something to attend to this awful problem. The video was complete and our viewing of the exhibit was over. We began to come to an important conclusion.

As we sat back in our chairs staring at the end of the exhibit, we realized we had just read through something that would change us forever. Before viewing this exhibit, we had no idea racial discrimination was still alive in America. We did not know black people were suffering and actively being treated poorly solely because of their skin color. We felt very moved. We knew we were going to do everything we could to change the problem going forward. We began to think of ways in which we could do this. We thought about possibly making an online blog about this issue, or talking to my friends and family about it. We felt an incredible amount of pain for all the people who had suffered from racial discrimination. We knew in this moment it was our job to stop the problem of racial discrimination in America once and for all.