

Dr. Dale A. Kates Student Scholarship Essay

I am an African-American male. I live in Shaker Heights, Ohio and I recently graduated from Shaker Heights High School. A problem in my community is racism. During my four years at the Shaker Heights High there have been four major racist incidents.

One of my first experiences occurred around the time President Donald Trump won the election. An Asian female student at my high school made a racist comment about black people in a group chat. She stated, "the Black Lives Matter needs to stop because all black people are lazy and don't take advantage of their opportunities". This message was sent in a private group chat, became viral when shared on social media. I know that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, however; this statement truly hurt me. The girl who made the statement and I were friends. We have been in the same math classes all four years at the high school (all Honors and Advanced Placement courses, this year being A.P. Calculus). There have been various times I've helped her understand math concepts in class and with her homework. So I couldn't fathom how she could say all black people are "lazy". It is not in my character to hold grudges, but to this day the girl and I have not spoken to each other and I really don't see how we can salvage our friendship.

There was a study done on tardiness and race at my high school. The results were that for every twenty-five black students who were given a tardy slip, one white student was given a tardy slip. These results were slanted. The majority of students at my school are white. When the school administrators/faculty really began to investigate, they checked security cameras. They realized that both white and black students were equally late. When the white students were late they were less likely to be given a tardy pass. There were times when I was late to my first period A.P. English Literature class due to illness, doctor's/dentist appointment, etc. When I would arrive to class, my teacher would tell me to get a late pass. Though, when my fellow white classmate was late, my teacher wouldn't say anything to them.

I've also had experiences with the police. A few years ago, I was walking home from the high school with my younger sister. We were coming from track practice. For the most part our walk was peaceful and typical. In order to get to my house, you had to turn a corner, take a straightaway, a second turn, then another straightaway. To get onto the sidewalk of the first straightaway my sister and I had to run through the street. This is something we had to do every day to get home. However, today when two odd things happened: before we made the first turn there is an empty Shaker Police car parked and when we made the second turn, I heard the loud sirens and saw the police driving extremely fast around the corner. The policeman quickly stopped and exited the vehicle. He told me to freeze and I felt my heart beating super fast. The officer told me that I committed a crime of jaywalking. He began to ask me questions like where I was coming from, where did I live, my parents' information, etc. I was very hesitant to respond as I never had a personal encounter with the police. I had only seen bad police encounters on television, such as on "Cops" or "First 48". My father always told me to be respectful but say I need my attorney present and I plead the Fifth Amendment. Not to mention my younger sister is right next to me gawking at the whole situation. I gave the officer my information he wanted and he eventually left. I believe that I was stereotyped because I was walking through the suburb as a young black male.

Everyday my sister and I walked the same route, and we never see police, but the one time we do, I get

pulled over. I would be okay with being pulled over if I was actually jaywalking on purpose. The way the street was designed it was impossible not to. On top of all that I think that the policeman was astonished that I talked respectfully, knew my rights, and was not the average thug. During this time, there were gang members walking through shaker neighborhoods and breaking into homes. I can see the fact why the police were being concerned. But they cannot deem a person as dangerous or target a certain group because of how they look. They can do it but it is just not moral.

This past winter my friend and neighbor was stereotyped as well. He happens to be a young black male. He was shoveling snow for money in different neighborhoods in Shaker Heights. The Shaker Heights Policeman pulled him over and detained him. They did not believe that he was a Shaker Heights student and "had any business around here (the nice neighborhoods of Shaker)". He showed the officers his school I.D. and driver's license but the officers were still suspicious. He was later finally allowed to go home after his parents picked him up from the area. This situation is sad because citizens of a community should be able to go anywhere in their community and also make money doing a good deed. Again, I personally know the victim. We've grown up together. During the winter time everyone, especially teens want to earn as much extra money as possible to buy Christmas Gifts. In Cleveland, the weather gets extremely in climate in the winter. I can guarantee if my white friends were going to different neighborhoods to shovel snow for money, no one would even question them.

Don't get me wrong, Shaker Heights, Ohio is a wonderful place to live. Shaker Heights School District, especially the High School has provided once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. I was taught how to play the violin in the fifth grade (Shaker requires all fifth graders to choose an instrument). During my sophomore year in high school, I played as a part of the Shaker Heights Choir and Orchestra on the Europe tour. We performed and toured Salzburg, Budapest, and Vienna for the entire spring break 2015. This past March, I was fortunate enough to play as a part of the Shaker Heights Chamber Orchestra at the National Orchestra Cup. This competition held at the Lincoln Center in New York City. Only ten high school orchestras were privately selected to participate. The Shaker Heights Chamber Orchestra and I placed third in the entire nation. Academically, Shaker has exposed to higher education at a very early age. At elementary school, I was taught the I.B. (International Baccalaureate) learner traits, such as being open-minded, a risk-taker, caring, an inquirer, and more. In high school I was able to push myself by taking and excelling in Honors and Advanced Placement Courses. Not to mention Shaker's numerous clubs/extracurricular activities. I've been playing sports: basketball, football, and track. I've been a part of clubs: Public Speaking, Mano en Mano (Volunteer group), Israeli Culture Club, and Business Club, just to name a few. Shaker has diversified me.

No community is perfect. I think in order to make Shaker Heights Community one of the best in the nation, we have to address racism. Very few times do people actually blatantly do racist things or make blatant racist comments. Instead there seems to be an invisible force field and unwritten rules separating whites from blacks and vice versa. I think in order to break this mental strong-hold, my community must create more support groups and have more open discussions.

I'm involved in a program at my school called the Minority Achievement Committee, also known as M.A.C. Scholars. This program was designed to close the achievement gap, and inspire the African American male students to achieve academic excellence (there also is a M.A.C. Sister Scholars Program for African American females). We do our best to break the negative stereotypes that black males can only be athletes, rappers, or drug dealers. As an upperclassman, I explain to the incoming freshmen and sophomores the importance of an education in our world today, great study habits, not being afraid to be a unique leader. I personally know the struggle of being called "lame" and a "nerd" by my black peers.

I also experienced being looked upon as incompetent and inferior by my white peers because I was the only black person or one of a few black people in my A.P. classes. My school needs to put more emphasis on making the accomplishments of everyone, especially the minority black males and females. Young black males are dying every day. Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Mike Brown, Philando Castille, the list literally goes on. By recognizing the students in M.A.C. Scholars more, more of the youth will be motivated to succeed in the classroom and can lead to America having more black doctors, lawyers, dentists, and well-rounded individuals.

Another option is having open discussion night with the Shaker Police Department. The High School recently created a club where students with meet members of the police and school faculty to discuss ongoing issues in the community. However, I feel that less people join the club because this generation of teens believe anything to do with the police is "uncool" and will label anyone who does work with the police a "snitch" or a "rat". Instead of joining a club, I think they're should be anin person no signup required open discussion between community members and the police. Or the police department should set up a free hotline at least once a month. By doing so, community members can be transparent about their feelings which will allow the police to see their perspective and vice versa. For example, I want to talk to the Shaker Heights Police officer who pulled me over. I him to know how I felt about that situation and whether or not he was stereotyping and a racist. If we create this system both citizens and officers will be held accountable for the actions.

As the great Martin Luther King Jr. said best, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase". I know the process of addressing racism can be scary. It has been the elephant in the room for a long time. If the members of our community put in a small effort to try to change and view everyone's viewpoints, we will become more sensitive to other community member's feelings. When we are aware of everyone's feelings and thoughts, we will be able to better come up with solutions, which will significantly impact our community for the better. Our first step can be testing out the open hotline/discussion night with community members and police. This allows the both parties to get feedback and constructive criticism. From here we can make adjustments and new strategies. Anything worth doing is worth doing badly until getting right. Solving the racism issue is definitely worth trying to fix, therefore we must struggle through it.

I love Shaker Heights. This is city that raised me. I am proud to say that I'm a product of my environment, with a cumulative GPA of a 3.982. This fall, I will be attending Ohio University, as an legacy bobcat (my mother graduated from O.U. as well). I plan on majoring in International Business and minoring in Computer Science. No matter what avenue/journey I take in life, I have confidence that Shaker has prepared me for it. I just want help the members of Shaker succeed as much as they have helped me.