



OC HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

Listening Sessions

African American Listening Sessions Report 2013

OC Human Relations' mission is to foster mutual understanding among residents and eliminate prejudice, intolerance and discrimination in order to make Orange County a better place for ALL people to live, work and do business.



OC Human Relations

Building community by fostering respect, resolving conflict and pursuing equality



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“People of African descent have a curious relationship with America, in that they have invested hard work in helping to build this country, fight in its wars and defend its borders, educated themselves against considerable odds, and sought opportunities for employment, civic engagement, and safe and affordable residential accommodations.

Yet, there are too many places in this great country of ours, even right here in Orange County, where the promise of opportunity and privilege has been rescinded by acts of intolerance and prejudice. We are here to stand up and speak out against those today. And what is more hurtful and painful than the individual acts themselves is the climate of silence and perceived concurrence, where the voices of outrage are conspicuous by their absence...”

—Comments from Dr. Thomas Parham, December Listening Session, Irvine CA



Background

Since 1971, the Orange County Human Relations Commission has promoted the ideal that ALL people should live free of prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination. We believe that all people should be safe, valued, and included, and that our diversity should be realized as a source of strength for our community.

The OC Human Relations Commission has released annual hate crime reports since 1991. African Americans are consistently the most frequently targeted victims of hate crime in Orange County in spite of the fact that they represent only about 2% of the population.

In October 2012, an African American family headed by parents who are both law enforcement officers, reached out to the Commission and shared their story of being hounded by a series of hate crimes and incidents until they decided to move out of Yorba Linda. They had rocks thrown through their windows in the middle of the night, all eight tires on their two cars slashed, racial epithets yelled at their young adult son on his way to work, their first grader faced a group of kids saying he could not play because he was Black, and finally they had acid pellets shot into their garage door damaging their car’s paint and window. The Commission offered assistance and expressed feelings of

outrage that this family was subjected to such bigotry in Orange County.

Realizing that these hate crimes had not been documented in the annual hate crime report, the Commission convened a series of Listening Sessions to meet with African Americans to determine if others were experiencing similar incidents of hate and bigotry that were also not being reported to us. During the months of December 2012 to February 2013 we partnered with Christ Our Redeemer AME Church in Irvine, Friendship Baptist Church in Yorba Linda, and Second Baptist Church in Santa Ana to bring people together for the Listening Sessions.

Listening Sessions are one of the tools developed by OC Human Relations to learn about the diverse communities living in Orange County. These sessions involve visits to venues where various communities gather, to listen to their stories and better understand the experiences of these diverse groups.

The process concluded with a public forum in March held at the OC Human Relations Commission meeting, where members of the public were invited to share additional stories and give feedback on a draft of the report.

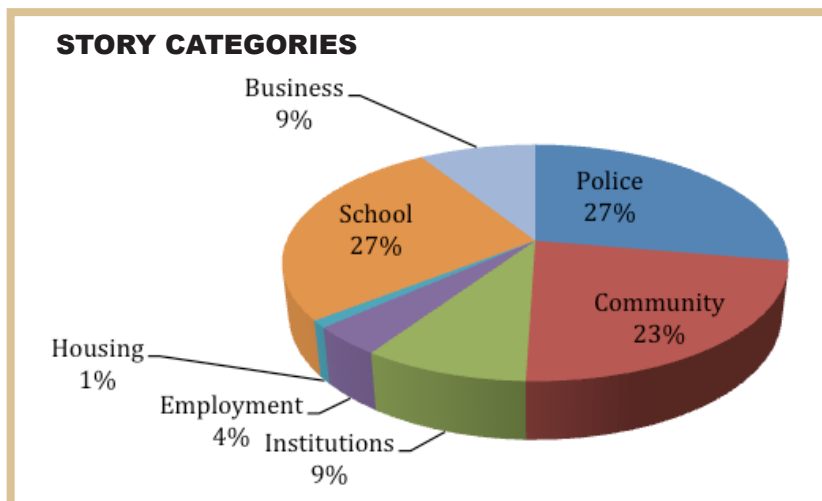
Findings

About 300 incidents were shared with OC Human Relations at the Listening Sessions; 145 of those were recent incidents, indicating the current experiences of African Americans in Orange County. The most common problems shared were:

1. Harassment by Law Enforcement
2. Prejudice/ Mistreatment in Schools
3. Employment and Housing Discrimination
4. Ignorance and Fear
5. Institutional Racism

These findings represent what was reported to OC Human Relations' staff and volunteers at the Listening Sessions in the limited amount of time allotted. The data does not represent the amount of discrimination that has been experienced over the lives of the individuals in attendance. Also, it should be noted that we asked for the most recent stories of discrimination from these individuals so that we could assess current problems in Orange County. Stories of prejudice and discrimination shared at Listening Sessions fall into the following categories:

- Twenty-seven percent of the 145 current reports involved harassment by law enforcement.
- Twenty-seven percent of the 145 current reports indicate that discrimination, harassment or violence occurs in schools.
- Twenty-three percent of the 145 current reports involve incidents of prejudice, discrimination and violence at the community level. These stories ranged from perceived slights and feelings of being excluded, to more serious harassment and violence.
- Twenty-three percent of the current reports have to do with prejudice in institutions, employment, businesses and housing which occurs in the form of slights, disparate treatment, stereotypic assumptions, covert as well as overt discrimination, racial profiling, harassment and, at times, violence.



In these Listening Sessions, Anthropology students from California State University, Los Angeles documented the experiential narratives of the community participants in which they related instances of racial abuse and profiling in Orange County. This data resulted in a total of 145 current incidents out of 300 incidents reported. The data was analyzed for the recurrent categories of discrimination such as racial profiling by law enforcement, the community, institutions, employment, housing, schools, and by businesses. Finally, this data was quantified using statistical spreadsheet software, resulting in the statistics and graphs presented in this report.

It is important to understand that although we have aimed to be as accurate as possible, our report suffers from some shortcomings. Several people in attendance at the Listening Sessions may not have been able to share their experiences or give feedback due to time constraints which may have left gaps in the data. An important note regarding these Listening Sessions is that each individual who chose to share a story was asked to provide only experiences which happened to them directly or to a close family

member, such as a child. Given these challenges in methodology, we believe that our report is nonetheless an excellent start of a conversation on the experiences of African Americans in Orange County.

In the African American community there appears to be a prevalence of silence with regards to racism, with a reticence to report hate crimes and hate incidents. Unfortunately, for many it has become part of their daily lives. OC Human Relations hopes that after learning of the first-hand experiences of individuals who shared their stories at our Listening Sessions, the information can be used to educate residents as well as to redouble preventative programs to eradicate racial profiling, bigotry and hate crime.

Examples of Stories from Listening Sessions

These stories were documented by OC Human Relations staff and volunteers during the Listening Sessions at Christ Our Redeemer AME Church, Friendship Baptist Church, and Second Baptist Church:

LAW ENFORCEMENT

African American Woman Sits in Police Station for Three Hours

Vivian was pulled over by the police in Anaheim while she was driving with an older woman. She made a right turn on red without stopping, so she was aware that she broke the law. After being pulled over, she was forced to get out of the car and sit on the curb. The police officer asked her if they could search the car and she said no, feeling it was her right. Following this, 10 police cars arrived; they impounded her car, and took her to the police station. They made her sit in the station for three hours before finally letting her go without charging her with any crime. She believes that this was punishment for not allowing them to search the car, even though she was within her rights.

Husband “Fit Description” of a Suspect

Theresa and her husband got pulled over by the police and taken to jail. The officers said they thought her husband fit the description of a suspect. They were ultimately released without charges. The wife also shared that her son gets pulled over by the police all the time, especially in White neighborhoods.

Accused on His way to Church

James was stopped by the police on his way to church, the officer accused him of running over his foot. James remained calm and denied the charges and was ultimately free to go after being detained.

Stopped Illegitimately by Law Enforcement

A middle-aged Black man – also an attorney – was stopped in his neighborhood. He believes it was an illegitimate stop. The officer pulled him over while he was turning into a shopping center. When he asked for an explanation of why he was pulled over, he was not given a valid reason for the stop. He reported that the officer was rude and condescending with a bad attitude. He complained and later got an apology from the mayor of the city.

Five Cruisers to Pull Over One Man

In 2002, Quincy was in Newport Beach at a flashing red stoplight where everyone had to stop and wait their turn. He saw a patrol car before he got to the red light, made a complete stop, and went through the light when it was his turn. By the time he was pulled over there were five police cars which is “obviously not the standard protocol for a traffic ticket.” Police made comments to him about “being bold and ready for...” he asked ready for what? The cops ended up taking him to the station and had the gang unit talk to him. He had already explained to the other police officer that he is a military vet, and a family man with a wife and a job. The entire day he was not allowed to call his wife to tell her where he was.

License Plate Light is NOT Out

In 2013, Chantal, a resident of Rancho Santa Margarita, was dozing at home with a headache at about 1:15am. She was waiting for her son to return from a trip to the ATM and drug store. Her son called agitated and scared to let her know that the police followed him from the store and pulled him over. He left the phone on so she could hear what was taking place. He asked why he was being pulled over and the deputy said his license plate light was out. The officer ordered him out of the car. Chantal’s son saw that the license plate light was NOT out, but was working fine. When this was pointed out the officer became agitated. The deputy asked why he was in Rancho Santa Margarita if he lived in Colton. He explained that he, his wife and their children were visiting.

SCHOOL

Threatened by High School Peer

Marilyn shared that her niece attends a local high school. While there, a group of White students told her niece that during Halloween they were going to dress as KKK and “lynch the Negroes.”

White Student Planned to Kill Black Girl

In 2012, a high school boy brought a gun to school because he wanted to “kill a Black girl.” The school stated that they handled it and contacted the parents of the students who were in the class with the boy who made the threat. After these incidents, a young African American woman reported that her parents took her younger sister out of school to be home schooled.

Student Sends Cyber Threats

T..... is a sophomore in high school. He reported that there was a White student at school who had tattoos, including horns tattooed on his forehead who was about 6’2” tall and had a shaved head. He posted on Facebook that he was going to shoot all of the Black kids at school. Posters appeared about this time at school saying, “We’ll find you if you hide in the shadows, don’t run.” When word got out about the White student, the Administration searched his backpack and found a gun. He was removed from school and has not been back.

Student Questioned by Coach

Dora’s daughter was asked by her basketball coach what she was doing in Fullerton, since people “like her” (referring to African Americans) get shot in Fullerton. She confronted the coach and the high school’s administration, resulting in the termination of the coach.

Not All Students Encouraged to Excel

A high school counselor named Howard encouraged students to seek college programs at their school. He told



students with different ethnicities to request a packet for a college program. An Asian student was given a packet, a Black student was told to get good grades and wasn't given a packet, a White student was given a packet, and a Hispanic student was not given a packet and told to review the qualifications.

EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING

Lower Pay for African Americans

Patrick shared that he is dealing with race issues at work. He is the most senior manager but receives 26% less pay than the others.

Different Race, Different Rate

When Kathy went looking for a new facility for a homeless shelter, she directed a White co-worker to inquire about housing at a particular facility who was told rent would be \$2800/month. When an African American co-worker went to follow up about the property, she was told the rent would be \$3200/month, a marked increase from the previous quote of \$2800.

Teacher Questioned by Students

Toya recently moved to Orange County from out of state and began a job as a teacher. Her new students reacted to her being African-American. They had questions about her family, her hair, and even asked how she affords to live there. She felt like the "ambassador for all African Americans," and added, "We need to start educating our youth early on about diversity so they are not shocked when they meet someone of a different color."

Passed Up for Promotion

A Black man in his 30's shared that he is given twice the amount of work as other workers and is expected to do it all. Despite that he is passed over for promotions and is not taken as a serious candidate for other positions.

Sorry, the Rules Have Changed

Howard, a former employee, worked at a Tustin school as a Campus Supervisor. Summer hours were awarded through a bidding system at his campus. Each time he bid he was informed that the rules had changed and each time the same person was chosen, not Howard. One summer that same person was given two jobs for the eight-week summer period rather than Howard getting one of them.

Confederate Flag Flies in OC

One of the largest companies in Orange County raised a Confederate flag at their company headquarters. Kathy called to express her offense at such a symbol being displayed and the CEO was "shocked" at the reaction but agreed to take it down, and did remove the flag.

IGNORANCE AND FEAR

Mistaken for a Valet

Davien recounted an incident when a fellow patron at a local restaurant threw him his keys to park his car when he was standing in front of a restaurant. His friends told him to throw the keys in the bushes, but he handled it differently so as not to exacerbate the problem.

Slurs at the Check Out

Angie was at the grocery store when a customer tried to cut in front of her. When Angie did not let her cut in line the other customer called her a "bush lady."

Ignored Twice at a Department Store

Gloria was at Nordstrom. A store representative was passing out perfume samples. She gave a sample to the person in front of her and to the person in back of her but didn't give a sample to Gloria. She turned around and passed again; once again others were given samples, but not to Gloria. When approached, the employee acted like she didn't know what Gloria was talking about. Gloria told her, "We Black people also buy perfume" and asked for the store manager to report the incident.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Discouraged at the Bank

When Austin applied for a loan at a credit union, he told an employee he was there to pick up some paperwork and she asked for his identification. He was forced to show three forms of ID and was still told it wasn't enough. The employee said, 'I can't give you something without identifying you.' She helped other customers and asked Austin to step aside. He told her he needed that paperwork. She kept helping other customers and then when he asked her again, she wrote 'Black' on the application and she said that I had an attitude. Austin commented, "That hurt me. I didn't take the loan."

Classroom Seating Arrangement in Orange County

An African American father notices the sitting arrangement in his daughter's fifth grade class during back to school night. It was all Whites in the front, Asians second row, Arabic, Hispanic and then two Black students in the corner which included his daughter.

A Black Pastor Loses his Parishioners

There was a bible study group in Yorba Linda that was made up of mostly all White men. When they found out that the new pastor was African American, most of them stopped attending.

Recommendations:

1. **Report Hate Crimes and Incidents** that occur in the African American community, so they are documented and the seriousness of the problem can be assessed.
2. **Share the Stories** of the African American community with decision-makers to increase their understanding of the experiences of African Americans and create policies to help eliminate discrimination.
3. **Educate, Organize and Promote Multicultural Understanding** at elementary, middle and high schools. Collaborate with community organizations and the Department of Education.
4. **Promote City and County Programs and Resources** that assist African Americans when they are victims of hate crimes or incidents.
5. **Train and Involve Law Enforcement** to encourage positive engagement with diverse communities, with strict disciplinary procedures for misconduct.
6. **Educate the Public** through media by publishing articles and stories about African Americans' experiences. This can help to reduce the ignorance, stereotypes and resultant fear of their community.

NEXT STEPS FOR OC HUMAN RELATIONS

GOALS	STRATEGY
1. Distribute information gathered at the Listening Sessions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Distribute to 34 cities, 28 school districts, the OC Board of Supervisors and the houses of worship that hosted the Listening Sessions. b. Share on OC Human Relations website and social media outlets as well as public media.
2. Provide outreach and presentations to inform and educate African Americans and all Orange County residents about how to report hate crimes and incidents.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> c. OC Human Relations will provide 12 Hate Crime presentations across the county in schools, houses of worship and any other requesting organizations.
3. Create opportunities for OC neighbors of all backgrounds to interact in small groups and breakdown any barriers or misperceptions about other faiths, ethnicities and differences in general.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> d. OC Human Relations will offer facilitation training and curriculum to up to 30 neighborhood leaders to host small gatherings of their neighbors. e. OC Human Relations will seek to partner with community agencies to take the Listening Sessions to different cities and engage diverse community members.
4. Conduct advocacy trainings to ensure that African Americans and all Orange County residents know their rights within the school system.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> f. OC Human Relations will provide trainings to parent groups about student and parent rights in school as requested.
5. Increase opportunities for meaningful interaction between the police and community, including on-going training of officers about working in diverse communities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> g. OC Human Relations will organize and facilitate forums and dialogues between community and local law enforcement as needed. h. OC Human Relations will provide diversity training at the police academy. i. OC Human Relations will explore the possibility of offering advanced human relations training for local police departments.

African American History in California

by Dr. ChorSwang Ngin, Professor of Anthropology, OC Human Relations Board Member

The history of African Americans in California began long before the vast region was acquired by the United States. Africans were present in the Mexico territories by the sixteenth century, so by the time the Spaniards began their expeditions along the Pacific Coast, they employed many of these Africans and their descendants. "Serving in various capacities, free men of African ancestry helped establish California's missions and pueblos. They constituted 25 percent of Juan Bautista de Anza's 1775 expedition to San Francisco, and more than 50 percent of the colony established at Los Angeles in 1781." After the initial settlement of the California region, many free African Americans had their own small businesses and many led very prosperous lives. But all that changed when California became a part of the United States of America. "Delegates to California's 1849 constitutional convention drafted a charter that created a non-slave state, yet they severely proscribed the civil rights of free persons of color. After admission to the Union, the California Legislature, in its first sessions, enacted further proscriptions in order to disenfranchise Black citizens. Black people had no right to: 1) testify in court against a White person; 2) receive a public education; 3) homestead public lands; or 4) vote." Some schools still tried to admit Black children alongside White children, but an amendment to the school segregation bill in 1860 allowed superintendents the power to censure schools and remove their funding if they went against the ban.

Institutionalized racism slowly began to crop up starting around the 1870's and "continued in effect for more than six decades, dramatically limiting access by Black people to local resources such as housing, employment, education, and public accommodations." Blacks tried to circumvent these restrictions by following the lead of Asian Americans who created their own Chinatowns, with goods and services catering to their neighborhood clientele. However, the residential restrictions, city ordinances and "real estate covenants" that caused the creation and overcrowding of the Black ghettos also hindered their ability to maintain adequate patronage, not to mention adequate storefront retail space.

African Americans were also an integral part of the California Gold Rush. Many of the areas surrounding the gold rush towns of the north had names with very racial overtones, areas like "Negro Bar and Negro Flat." African Americans often pooled their resources to stake a claim of their own, some even formed their own very successful large scale mining companies. An African American named Frederick Coleman discovered gold in a creek near the city of Julian in 1869. "Thousands swarmed to the area as news of the discovery spread, radically changing the quiet settlement that had originally been established by Blacks and Indians. A town government was installed, and the place was renamed to commemorate the Julian brothers, Mike and Webb, former Confederate soldiers."

In the early portion of the twentieth century, African Americans in Orange County experienced extreme forms

of racial discrimination. Most of the restaurants in Orange County refused to serve Blacks, many of the movie theaters had separate seating for all individuals of color, and clothing stores would not allow Blacks to try on clothing before purchasing it. The limitations placed on African Americans in the community were not just limited to where they could be, but also when they could be there. In the 1930's many towns in the area were known as "sundown towns," meaning that the African Americans knew they were not to be seen within the city limits after nightfall. "There is no record of any law, ordinance, or resolution to this effect... but it was 'common knowledge' that it was not legal for Blacks to stay after dark." But one of the more interesting aspects of African American life in Orange County in those early years is reflected in what was not segregated. Every person in Orange County had free access to all of the beaches and parks. African Americans were allowed to have jobs as life guards in Newport Beach and "Irvine Park was a favorite place for all races to celebrate occasions or simply have picnics." The local sports teams were not segregated, nor were there any restrictions on where these games could be held.

Prior to industrialization in the 1960s, the most troublesome aspect of African American life in Orange County was not necessarily about finding housing, it was about the lack of adequate jobs. "Orange County's employment was primarily based on agriculture and Blacks simply were not hired for these jobs, because of the availability of better qualified and/or less expensive Mexican, White, and Asian labor." Those who had jobs were hired on as menial labor, doing things like janitorial and domestic household work, but there were some independent African American-owned businesses such as barber shops and restaurants. At the same time, there was a sharp rise in the number of African Americans working at the El Toro and Tustin Marine bases, yet Blacks remained less than one-half of a percent of the Orange County population, and the majority of that population was located in the Santa Ana "ghettos."

Once industrialization took hold, African Americans began to flock to Orange County, and not only to Santa Ana, but throughout the surrounding suburbs. "As more Black people came to live in the county their numbers ignited the fears and prejudices of the majority of White citizens resulting in an increased number of cases of racial discrimination." Local chapters of civil rights groups like the NAACP and the ACLU aided incoming African American citizens with legal help to fight against landlords using California Proposition 14, which negated federal fair housing laws, to racially profile individuals to keep them in the ghettos. But this did not deter those families who felt that the good schools and crime-free neighborhoods were worth the trouble. As the influx continued, so too did the instances of racial profiling, particularly among law enforcement agencies. It was this dramatic increase in reports of racial profiling that led to the creation of the Orange County Human Relations Commission.

— Janice S. Lewis and Eleanor M. Ramsey. "Black Americans in California," in *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California*. California Department of Parks and Recreation, 1988.

— Robert Johnson and Charlene Riggins. "Black History in Orange County" from *A Different Shade of Orange: Voices of Orange County, California, Black Pioneers*. 2009.

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LISTENING SESSIONS PARTICIPANTS

Community Members: participants numbered about 300 at the three sessions and came from the following cities: Irvine, Rancho Santa Margarita, Costa Mesa, Tustin, Los Angeles, Fountain Valley, Santa Ana, San Dimas, Laguna Niguel, Hollywood, Anaheim, Monrovia, La Crescenta, Brea, Laguna Hills, Orange, Long Beach, Pasadena, San Juan Capistrano, Fullerton, Corona del Mar, Yorba Linda, Placentia, Walnut, West Covina, Mission Viejo and Corona.

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Staff: Rusty Kennedy, Barbara Hunt, Alison Edwards, Joyce Sanchez, Seema Bhakta, James Armendaris, Juan Villavicencio, Eric Lam, Kathy Shimizu, Edgar Medina, and Don Han.

Collaborators: Christ Our Redeemer Church, Irvine; Friendship Baptist Church, Yorba Linda; Second Baptist Church, Santa Ana, 100 Black Men, NAACP and various other groups and churches.

Volunteers: JoAnna Wilson, Michael Angotti, Monique Azzara, Anna Benavides, Alisa Carithers, Michelle Dragoo, Javier Espinoza Barajas, Carly Good, Annamarie Hand, Sumiya Mahmud, Sarinea Meserkhani, Arpan Roy, Sharon Stamps, Gregory Urban, Pei-Ti Wen, and Eric Chang.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Orange County Human Relations Commission (OCHRC) would like to thank all of the collaborators, volunteers and especially the participants that made the Listening Sessions a success by sharing their stories. Though we were not able to incorporate all the stories we heard in this report; we hope that by illustrating the recurring themes through stories that this summary will give some insight into the African American experience in Orange County.

OCHRC appreciates the collaboration of Professor ChorSwang Ngin and her Anthropology students from California State University, Los Angeles, who helped write the report, facilitate sessions, and contributed photos as a model of academic/community partnership.

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OC Human Relations

Building community by fostering respect, resolving conflict and pursuing equality

*Listening Sessions,
a project of OC Human
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