

Racism in martinsville, in



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Racism in My Hometown Denise Langdon 9/25/2011 Eth /125 The murder of Carol Jenkins in 1968 is largely accounted for giving Martinsville, Indiana the racist image it has today. Although this was not the first or last act of racist hate crimes in the town, this one stuck in the minds of many people. This woman was murdered by who was thought to have been a local resident, protected by police, and started a huge controversy about racism in this small town of 14, 000-20, 000 people. Racism is a problem that plagues each community but I think it is more prominent in smaller towns throughout America.

This is just one story about the troubles that one small town has gone through in its troubled past and present. The incidents that affirm the racist image of this town, and things the town has done to erase that negative image are plenty. The citizens of this town want nothing more than to shed this bad image and show people who this town welcomes people of all cultures and races with open arms. In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan activity was very strong and the first rally took place in 1923 right in the town square.

Thousands of people were members of the Klan in the 1920s, including women and children. They wanted to promote 100% Americanism ("Martinsville: A Pictorial History. Chapter 10" 2000-2001). Martinsville was dubbed a " sundown town" because while Blacks were allowed to work here, sometimes, during the day--it was known that they should not be caught here after dark. The town has been the alleged headquarters for the Ku Klux Klan and several other hate groups such as the CCC are present here. I have

heard stories from my parents about the horrible events that took place in this town when they were young.

There used to be a sign on the side of the highway that states this was a sundown town with the typical “ N___, don’t let the sun set on your back! ” signage letting people know what kind of town this was (E. Roth, Personal Communication). I have also heard that several African American people were hung on the town square in the 1960s (R Whitehair, Personal Communication), but I cannot find any news coverage or articles on the matter. Another terrible tragedy in Martinsville’s malicious history was the one I mentioned earlier, in the beginning of my paper.

Carol Jenkins was a young Black woman who was selling encyclopedias door-to-door on Morgan St. in Martinsville in 1968 (Rimer, 2002). Two men and a child stopped and the men attacked the woman, stabbing her with a screwdriver. I can only imagine what was going through that little girls mind as her father and his friend murdered this colored-woman for no reason. The girl recalled her father saying, “ She got what she deserved! ” The murder went unsolved for almost 40 years, until that same little girl came forward about what she had seen so many years ago.

She told the police about the events that took place that night and one key detail made her a credible witness; she had information about the murder that was not released to the public. I think that the funny thing about this story is, the man who murdered this Black woman in Martinsville, Indiana that set in stone the racist image of the town, was not even from

Martinsville. This man was just passing through when he got the urge to murder this woman, he did not know it but his actions stained this town.

Finally, just one more example of the horrific events to unravel in this town, a group of students from Indianapolis was visiting the Jimmy Nash City Park, and they had one Black student with them . The town's people showed up with shotguns and their loud mouths, running these people out of town. The stories of racist hate crimes go on and on depending on whom you talk to and where you look. I cannot find much about these stories on the Internet, but I just assume it is the information highway not giving all of the information on these small towns in USA.

Furthermore, there is even racism today; it comes all the way from the citizens of the town to the people who run this town. After the September 11, terrorist attack the Assistant Chief of Police Daniel E. Nail posted a letter in the newspaper using racial slang and degradation. Nail's exact words were, " It offends me when I have to give up prayer in school. Once again because it might offend Hadji Hindu or Buddy Buddha. " With words like these posted in the town's newspaper, I would think there should be some kind of reprimand or public apology.

I think that people were surprised when this man was not chided for his talk about other races and homosexual. Instead, neither the mayor nor the police chief thought a reprimand was necessary, just that different words should have been chosen (" New Controversy Latest Chapter for Martinsville and Its Racial Past. " 2001). Still yet again, in 1998 there was another racially motivated incident that students and citizens will deny that happened. A

basketball team coming from Bloomington, Indiana to Martinsville High school for a basketball game was welcomed with less than welcome banter.

Bloomington's players stated that the Martinsville students were hollering, "Here come the darkies!" Other obscenities were shouted aloud in a malicious manner, and one Martinsville player elbowed a Bloomington player in the stomach so hard he began vomiting and cries from the crowd could be heard, only these cries were sickening. "That nigger is spitting on our floors, get his ass out of here!" were the harsh words that onlookers shouted from the stands to the players and game officials. I cannot believe that people can be so mean to other people simply based on their skin color.

Anyway, Martinsville high school was punished and sporting events were banned at the high school for the next year ("Showing Martinsville in Indiana," 1997-2010). On the other hand, Martinsville, Indiana has strived to get rid of its negative image and preconceived notions that people may have. Before the mass occupation of the Ku Klux Klan and the racism that came over this town, there were African Americans who lived here. When the town was known for its Mineral Water and healing spas. Albert "Doc" Merritt was an African American man who lived here in the early 1900s to the late 1950s.

I guess he has seen it all! This man was prominent in the community, helping thousands of boys in his Boys Club. He was a porter and a Martinsville Sanitarium and served the children here for more than 40 years; often he would load the boys up and take them to a swimming hole for the day. Now in his honor, there is a gala dinner every year that has been arranged by P.

R. I. D. E. (People Respecting Individuality and Diversity in Everyone.) It is important for this town to highlight and support our black community members to get rid of the nasty stigma that has been placed on this town.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to come across many stories covering other races in Martinsville, Indiana but I suppose there just are not that many people who fall into the “ other race” category. This town is predominantly white and the media shows this off. I was talking to one of my friends, who is one of the few Black members of this community and he said that he feels like the media caters to the town’s White members in ways such that there is only country music played on the radios. I asked my friend a few questions about his time in this town and how he has been treated since living here.

His story is amazing to say the least with moments in which he wanted to leave because of the racial slurs spat at him in the street. He claims that the majority of the people here are “ just curious” (L. West, personal communication). Being one of the handful Black people in this town, I wanted to get his views and perceptions on this town and surprising enough to me, I think that we, the white people in town, have more of a preconceived notion about other Black people than they do about us. I think that was kind of eye opening.

Throughout the United States, there are hundreds of little towns just like mine, but I do not think the majority of those town’s reputations precede itself like this one. Martinsville, Indiana has been known throughout time as a “ sundown town” where “ different” people were not welcome and ran out of town. Not looking the same as the rest of the citizens is the only reason that

I can come up with. When I was reading about the stories about this town, I was appalled by the brazen attitudes of the citizens of this town toward outsiders.

One day, I hope that Martinsville will be able to get rid of the stigma that we are such a racist town, but I think that can only come with time and positive attitudes toward the situation. From murders to vulgar slander, this town has seen many faces of racism, but when does it all end? America is vastly diverse and little towns through America need to catch up to the times so that people are welcome everywhere no matter what your creed may be.

Martinsville: A pictorial History. Chapter 10 (2000-2001). Retrieved from <http://scican3.scican.net/MAPH/MAPHch13.tml> Rimer, S (2002). After Arrest, Town shamed by '68 Killing Seeks Renewal. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/17/us/after-arrest-town-shamed-by-68-killing-seeks-renewal.html> New Controversy Latest Chapter for Martinsville and its Racial Past (2001). Retrieved from http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=Nrc_AAAAIBA;sjid=AlcMAAAAIBA;pg=3415,1076044;dq=racism+in+martinsville+indiana;hl=en Showing Martinsville in Indiana (1997-2010). Retrieved from <http://sundown.afro.illinois.edu/sundowntownsshow.php?id=898>