

Black like me

Sociology, Racism



Racism between blacks and whites is something that has plagued the United States for a long time, and still does today. The autobiography, *Black Like Me* is about a man named John Howard Griffin. He is a middle-aged white southerner with a passionate commitment to social justice. Griffin undergoes a series of medical therapy to change the color of his skin so that he looks like a black man. As he travels throughout the south he realizes what it is like to be a black man in the racist south of 1956. Griffin wants to experience first hand the hardships and obstacles of being a black man in the United States. He changes the color of his skin and heads to New Orleans. Adele Jackson, the editor of a black oriented magazine called *Sepia*, offers to fund his trip in exchange for an article about his life as a black man. Griffin expects to be treated differently but is shocked to find out the extent of prejudice, hardship, and oppression he encounters. As he is walking through the poor streets of New Orleans he wonders how he is going to fit into the community. He knew he needed a contact. After scouting out the black section of New Orleans he meets Sterling Williams, a black man who shines shoes. Sterling helps Griffin get familiar to black society in the south. Griffin's experience as a black man frequently leaves him depressed, confused, and alone. One of the only comforts of this experience was how other blacks were extraordinarily generous and supportive of him. Griffin also finds that even in a world of social injustice, good people can exist and flourish. P. D. East, a construction worker from Alabama, and Sterling Williams, the shoe shiner are proof that even though racism can warp the human spirit, it cannot destroy the human capacity for love and kindness. John Howard Griffin did what most likely no white man has ever done; He put himself in

the shoes of a black man and walked the mile. In the end Griffin argues that love and tolerance are the only catalysts capable of changing society for the better. He is especially opposed to violence and the reactionary black supremacist movement characterized by Malcolm X, which he considers another form of racism, likely to end in more violence and more misunderstanding.