

# Essay on the little things

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



“ I never learned hate at home, or shame. I had to go to school for that[,]”(Gregory, “ Shame”) are the first and sharpest words of Dick Gregory’s memory. From the very beginning, Gregory advises that the pessimism to crowd him had little to do with his family compared to the influence of other people. In a clean, A-and-B structure, he delineates that he didn’t inherit negativity from his natural surroundings. As in, that he didn’t judge himself or others by the attitudes of his home. No, he required the “ hate” and the “ shame” from the guidance of the outside world. He acquired and met these new aspects of himself in what was supposed to be the safest place for his mind to discover and be explored: “ school”. Gregory had to voluntarily “ go”, travel, renew his guilt, and imploded trauma, amongst strangers and under the roof of a mental institution of higher learning. But the result is not a tragedy; it is a deed of overcoming expectations. The Helene Tucker in “ Shame” represents unfulfilled gains. She is the attractive, appealing, mainstream ambitions of life—what Gregory explains as “ everybody’s got a Helene Tucker” (Gregory, “ Shame”). She’s not a person but an object that is to be impressed no matter how the means and no matter how unreasonable. In fact, the Helene never asks anything from Gregory, Gregory simply gives and gives just to be paid with her smile, acknowledgment. But despite Gregory’s sacrifices, self-caused illness, and the looming reality of poverty, his obtaining the desire of the Helene Tucker is a failure. Instead, she lives on in his adult memory as a nugget of scorn, or the travelling “ shame” for Dick Gregory. In a fit of being the very best person not only for the Helene but of the whole class, and unexpectedly for “[black] people” (Gregory, “ Shame”), was the

day Gregory's untested pride was annihilated. Hate was installed from Gregory's teacher unsympathetically reminding him that he couldn't be like the Helene. A Helene Tucker is complete with admiration, both parents, and a lighter complexion while Gregory was the opposite. He was wanting. He has a mother, he's fidgety, and "pregnant" (Gregory, "Shame") with whatever others didn't like. Psychologist David Coon, in describing the moral compass being most sensitive and definitive during adolescence (Coon and Mitterer 117), would say Dick Gregory's compass descended significantly. That Gregory's naïve and self-prescribed "dignity and justice [of] postconventional morals" (Coon and Mitterer 118) deflated, accepting the authority and rules of other, "conventional morals" (Coon and Mitterer 118). Gregory knew he was less of a person on that that day of annihilation. His anger and rebellion was his resistance to those convenient morals. It was bitterly cemented as the tormenting moment of the unobtainable Helene looking back at him with eyes of sympathetic pity. At the moment Gregory tried all he impossibly could, the Helene Tucker could do nothing for him. Though "Shame" is the single, broad stroke title of Gregory's essay, a revealing name would have been "Little Things". For the unwitnessed and sacrificial deeds seven-year old Gregory did for Helene, he is compensated and rewarded later in life for well-loved antics. But they mean little to Gregory, those performances of greatness. As an adult, the rebellion and self-hate in him is outweighed but there is now no room for his dignity. It's still in repair. It is still feeding on what Gregory called "a kind of numbness" (Gregory "Shame") since he was defeated as an ambitious child. What remains is a second-win to earn his self-respect that is well-missed.

Dick Gregory provides his own doppelganger in "Shame" in the form of a tired man. The binary narrative provides the Wino who illustrates what exactly could have become of Gregory. The Wino represents the living anger and the end of hope because "they don't hurt anyone but themselves" (Gregory "Shame"), a mindset—or a level—that the author himself had managed without providing actual text. The Wino is shame though he has none. When the Wino is asked for payment, to give back for what he's taken, the Wino does even both to check his person. Because shame cannot contribute to profitable ends. This character embodying the visible sulking of the mind, cannot support himself. Instead, the Wino commits himself to a long-lasting surrender. Hurting himself as Gregory did as a child, denying evidence and pushing away from facts. The difference between the author and the Wino is that the Wino's shame is complete whereas Gregory's is long-faded and in shambles for him to seek as eternally precious. As an adult, Gregory has grown comfortably incomplete, but he's a full person because it. He's successful, employed and with a family, but the memory of having been shamed haunts him.

The purpose of "Shame" is to show how the weakest emotions, anger and hate, can affect the mind. Though they can be powerfully felt at one time or another, they simmer, and the stronger, slow-burning feelings like shame are what burns on, comes back, and recurs. Dick Gregory first learned the symptoms of shame as a child when he could not receive sympathy, then relearned the lesson when he could only give on command as an adult. Gregory provides himself as an example of a person can be content with his own shambles but insecure with everything he's achieved.

## **Works Cited**

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