

When did you realize your race mattered?

A QUESTION ASKED OF
CATHOLIC CHARITIES STAFF
MEMBERS

When as a child around 8 years old, everyone at school at Thanksgiving would dress up as pilgrims or Indians - but as an indigenous person, I realized that races could be reduced to costumes and that the real history of racism wasn't being addressed at all.

When I was in college and learned more about the LatinX community. You never know how valuable you are until you start to understand your culture and race.



When I was a kid growing up in the south, I noticed my mom who was dark skinned received different treatment on certain occasions.

Always

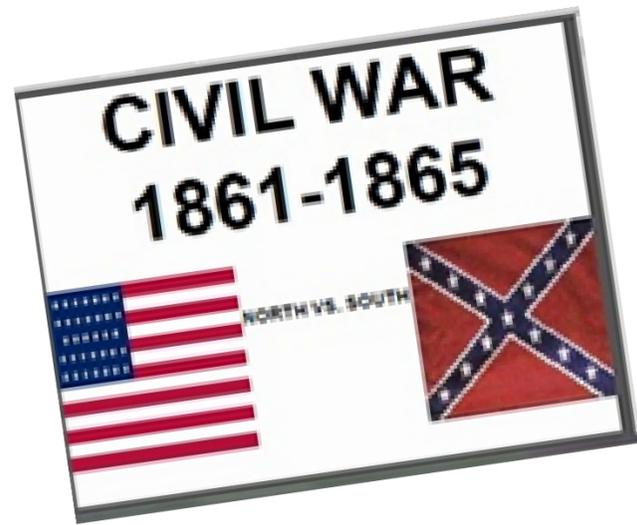


as a teenager

When I traveled
to another
country and got
positive
attention and
clear favoritism
for my white
skin.

In the fifth grade I was asked what race I identified with.
When I said I was Mexican I was told that I should answer Spanish
instead.

I learned that race in general mattered in elementary school, when a Black girl in my class struggled with a class project while learning about the Civil War. But I didn't think about my own race, let alone consider whether or not it mattered, until I applied for college. Suddenly people I didn't know cared about "what" I was. When I was admitted, I tried to join race-based/ethnic student groups, thinking that it must be important, but I never really felt like I fit in there so I dropped out in favor of interest-based groups.



Growing up in a very small town there were two "Races" white on one side of the tracks and "Spanish" on the other side. That is as close to a race division as I knew. It wasn't a bad experience. Maybe that is why I am naive about the race issue. The white folks were usually the more educated and above middle class. The white folks held the better jobs.

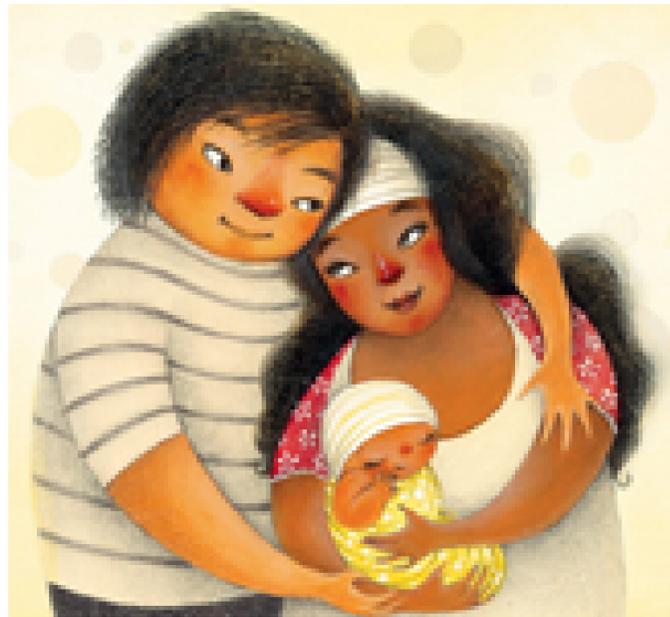
Nothing new there.

I first realized my race mattered when I was in middle/high school. It was at this time that I started engaging in material that really highlighted racial disparities and when teachers and friends talked about race more openly. I also became more involved within the community in Albuquerque at this time and could see the distinct differences in the city that were built off of systemic racism. Since then, I've realized how much of a privilege it's been for me to learn and think about these issues in school and at an older age than to have the lived experiences of racism.



Through history in 1400 hundred 1492. When Spanish, Europeans, or took over America when I was in elementary school.

In 1971, my oldest sister had a date to the senior prom. Her date, Marcus, knocked at the door. My father opened the door, saw he was black and slammed it in his face. My Mom screamed profanity at him, my sister cried hysterically and I was so confused why my loving father was a racist.



BABYMOON BY HAYLEY BARRETT
& JUANITA MARTINEX-NEAL

When I had my 1st daughter because I wanted her to know where she came from her heritage the things that I grew up doing I wanted her to know that she should be proud to be who she is.



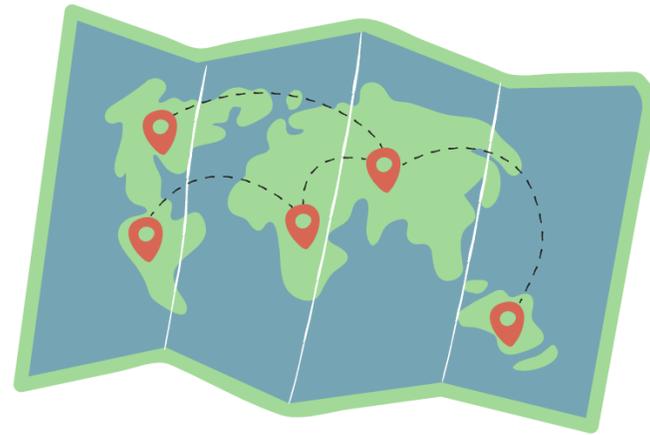
I realized at the age of 7.
I was in an all white class and used a brown crayon to color in my picture. I had usually used a peach crayon. When I used the brown crayon, several of my classmates became upset. My teacher stepped in and advocated for me explaining that I had a right to use this crayon and that we are all special and different colors.



**After finishing my high school and decided to
start working.
I realized race mattered.**

I think I misunderstood race until I was in high school, when I began to realize how centered white students and parents were in my educational system. As a child, I remember being taught the "colorblind" narrative, that it "doesn't matter if you're Black white, orange, or purple." I think that because of that way of thinking about it, I and my classmates didn't have the tools to identify how race influenced our experience in the world, and we felt like talking about race was bad or impolite so avoided any discussion of it for most of my upbringing.

I grew up in Cuba, in Matanzas, a province that during the Spanish colonial period had included many sugar cane plantation staffed by slaves of African descent. While the patterns of racism there differed much from the ones here, it was also present. The official version in the decades of my childhood was that racism had been eliminated from the country by the Cuban Revolution. However, from an early age (maybe elementary school years), I remember, many non-black Cubans using this phrase: "I am not a racist, but..."



Actually, I felt that my race mattered throughout my life. All my immediate family were Mexican I was proud to have those roots and for that reason I became a bi-lingual teacher in San Diego.

When I moved overseas, particularly to a developing/third world country, and folks would stare, run up at random and pet my hair, make comments to me about my skin, face, looks, etc. It wasn't necessarily a negative experience. But it did give me some perspective on how, across the globe, a person is noticed by their race.

