

Nick Murray

Professor Miller

African American History

12 May 2023

### Black History at USD

I had the incredible opportunity to listen and talk to the very respected and accomplished, Derrick R. Brooks, about life in America for black men. Derrick Brooks serves as a professor for Tennessee Knoxville, but has worked at many prestigious institutions such as the University of Cincinnati, University of Louisville, University of Chicago, as well as the District of Columbia. He has written 4 books and has authored or coauthored over 50 books. He has over 26 media appearances, 8 international conference presentations about black men and women living in America. Derrick Brooks graduated from the University of Chicago, majoring in African and African American studies and completed his PHD from Loyola College. He also played football and ran track at the University of Chicago. The main topic of his presentation was about black men and more importantly the black man experience. This topic was very interesting and was very personal to me because I was able to relate to what Professor Brooks was saying and I was able to connect his topic with many topics we have discussed in class.

Professor Brooks began his presentation by talking about his experiences as being a black man in college. He talked about the adversity and struggles he has faced by trying to reach his goals. He brought up extremely detailed experiences of him growing up in Chicago and more importantly how he was able to overcome the hardships he has faced. Professor Brooks was the first person in his family to attend college and graduate. He was able to give his family hope that it can be done regardless of what you have to overcome. Professor Brooks grew up in extremely

segregated communities while living in Chicago. Once he got to college he was opened up to many forms of integration while also playing sports. Professor Brooks' story on growing up in marginalized communities, reminded me of what we learned in class about the new Jim Crow. The new Jim Crow was a concept about how black people were still being oppressed and systematically segregated. *Freedom on My Mind* reads, "it is a system of racialized social control that maintains the racial hierarchy and locks a huge percentage of the African American community out of the mainstream society and economy." (1741). Being a young black man in America I have experienced some form of the new Jim Crow throughout my young life. I have grown up in very segregated and marginalized communities where the crime rate was high. I felt a personal connection to what Professor Brooks was saying because I have lived that and experienced that.

Professor Brooks, then discussed his experience with sports at the University of Chicago. This was also very relatable because I play football here at the University of San Diego. He explained how sports gave him knowledge and experience about the real world, but it was not his identity. Professor Brooks was able to use sports to get to where he is at now, but he was not just an athlete. He broke down how black men are stereotyped to love sports and to be good at sports and that is it. Nothing more to a black man than to play a sport. He explained how not to fit the stereotype and that there is so much more to black men than the prejudices we face everyday. I really enjoyed this part of the presentation because of the way he used the common stereotypes that black men face on a day to day basis and more importantly how to break those stereotypes. It made me do a little bit of reflecting on myself and think to myself, "do I break these common stereotypes that society has put on me?" We discussed fighting racial stereotypes in pop culture and this fits really well to what Professor Brooks was saying. Stereotypes are ingrained in our

society and we must break these stereotypes to form a different way of thinking and how people view a certain particular group.

Professor Brooks then went on to talk about the education system for black men versus white men and how we are still being affected by America's racist history in the education system. Professor Brooks described the history of redlining and old segregated laws that did not allow for black people to go to school with white people. Historically, redlining and restrictive covenants have seriously undermined black economic advancement by preventing blacks from building up equity in their homes and benefiting from gains in the real estate market that have allowed white homeowners to develop wealth. This relates to the education system because schools in marginalized communities that were created by redlining do not generate enough wealth because of their area's income. This ultimately leads to underpaid teachers, not enough supplies, and outdated school supplies. However, in majority white communities where the schools are in better neighborhoods where the area's income is higher they have better access to school supplies, better teachers, and more things to help teach these young kids. An article from Brookings says, "Americans often forget that as late as the 1960s most African-American, Latino, and Native American students were educated in wholly segregated schools funded at rates many times lower than those serving whites and were excluded from many higher education institutions entirely." This relates to the historical context of what Professor Brooks was pointing out. To get a good education while being black in America is hard because we do not get an advantage in our public schooling system like white people mainly because of historical racism that allowed for white people to have an advantage over black people. Professor Brooks said that success to black boys in education is just completing it because of all the hardships we had to overcome just to get there. While Professor Brooks was explaining this

concept of education it made his own personal experiences while dealing with segregated communities much more impressive because he had to overcome a lot of disadvantages because he was black.

Professor Brooks dove deep into the topic of stereotypes and how black men are viewed in society. He said that we need to change and fix the schooling system rather than try to “fix” black men and boys. He said that society is so worried about trying to change black men rather than educate these kids that are naive and ignorant to racist problems. I believe that to be true because racism and stereotypes are taught and if they can be taught then we can teach how to not stereotype and not be prejudiced towards one another. He had a slide that talked about “fixing” black men and what society is worried about and assume what a black man is. He said our society is way too worried and focused on the negative stereotypes that black men have. They associate our hairstyle, the way we talk, and the way we dress as not proper and “hood”. Professor Brooks believes that it is because the lack of education and understanding of black men cause society to have a negative connotation of what a black man is. He explains how society uses stereotypes from a historically racist culture to judge black men before they talk to them. We recently talked about black America in the 21st century and how we are still fighting to break those stereotypes. Professor Brooks challenges us to reframe the narrative about black boys and men.

As Professor Brooks concluded his presentation on the black man experience he made sure to include the progress that has been made in understanding black people and black culture, but the battle is not won and there is still a lot of work to be done. I really enjoyed this presentation as a whole because of how deeply he talked about his own experiences and how I

could relate to it because I am a young black man. The biggest takeaway that I gained from Professor Brooks was to break the stereotypes and reframe the narrative of what a black man is.

## Work Cited

Darling-Hammond, Linda. "Unequal Opportunity: Race and Education." *Brookings*, 28

July 2016, [www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/unequal-opportunity-race-and-education/).

White, Deborah G., et al. *Freedom on My Mind: A History of African Americans, with*

*Documents*. Bedford/St. Martins, 2021.