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Michael Johnson's story of racial hazing and resilience draws raves from readers

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Two months ago, Michael Johnson read the Rev. Alex Gee's

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Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County

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Driven to act: How I got through racial hazing and how what I learned can help Madison



There is no one solution and I don't have all the

answers, but I feel compelled to open my heart to help us move from conversation to action. [Read more](#)

story "**Justified Anger**" in the Cap Times.

That prompted him to recall, and for the first time, share publicly, his horrifying experience on the receiving end of a racially charged college "prank" in Minnesota in 1993. But Johnson didn't merely want to write about that episode.

Johnson's personal story, "**Driven to Act**," which was posted Wednesday and featured on the cover of this week's Cap Times, is an effort to help Madison move forward on race relations.

Based on the comments on the story and on his Facebook page, Johnson, CEO of Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, has touched a nerve. And the response has been overwhelming and positive.

Online commenter "MagnusP" writes: "It is easy for me to just say thank you, Mr. Johnson, but that, I think, is not what you want. Your suggestions are good ones, I find no reason for all of them not to be tried. I will do what I can follow them and I hope others will follow them as well."

Race is always a touchy subject, and it was highly conceivable that the comments on Johnson's story would become divisive and polarizing, as often happens with many stories, even those that do not touch on race.

But, in a pleasant surprise, almost all of the comments on the article were respectful and heartfelt — a rarity.

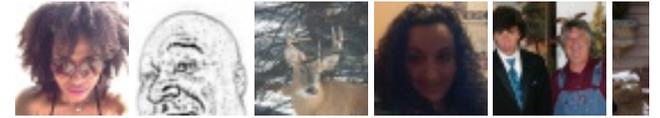
Online commenter "Voyageur" writes: "Thank you for so meaningfully sharing your experiences, reflections and recommendations. We can and must do better."



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On [Michael Johnson's Facebook page](#), dozens of people commented to him with words of praise and encouragement.

Tim Metcalfe, who, with Johnson and Will Green, dressed as homeless men [to find out what it is really like to be homeless](#) in Madison, wrote to Johnson.

"Tough read, Michael, this must have been difficult to pen, stirring up such deep emotional trauma. Your courage to forgive, your courage to move forward and become the agent of change that you are, inspires me. Thank you for sharing something so deeply personal, asking simply for us to have courage to move above the past and embrace our future."

Renee Greenland, who recently wrote [an op-ed for the Cap Times](#) on being a multiracial woman in Madison, wrote to Johnson after reading the [national news article](#) following the incident at the Minnesota college: "Yes, I had tears in my eyes and chills down my spine when I read it. I'm excited to see the tangible changes that will result from this growing movement for equality and prosperity for all members of the Madison, Wisconsin community!"

Johnson's story also prompted a woman to tell her story about race in the comments section.

"Rbaldah" writes: "As a white woman, very white natural red head woman, I have had a unique insight into racism. I married my black husband in 1973 when there were very few mixed couples in Madison. ... We were denied housing, had problems getting jobs, were judged to be less than nice decent women for our choice in partners. ... I had to fight for my children all through their school years. The teachers had a stereotype of black kids. Young black boys were ignored or considered trouble makers. ... This attitude that black or mixed children are less intelligent was prevalent in the Madison School system. ... I think we need to stop discussing. We need to take action. And that action is to get over it. People are people, good and bad in all nationalities. Race should be looked at the same way we look at someone that has different hair color than ours. We need to start at home. We need to walk the walk and teach our children we are all God's children regardless of race, national origin, religion or political beliefs. We are the human race."

Others, who didn't necessarily have a personal story to tell, did recognize that there is an

three position changes on defense in radio interview

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important issue here that needs to be addressed, and that all members of the community need to be involved.

HappyDays: "This is not about White Privilege — it is about people not knowing or understanding each other — it is about blame on both sides. I think most people are deep down really good humans who want to see all succeed — they just don't know how to make that happen — and when the arguments begin and blame is thrown around — people have a tendency to go to their own corners. I think that too is human nature. That is why I hate the terms "white guilt", "white privilege" — they are divisive and do nothing to get people working together. It makes that the starting point that half the people don't agree with."

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Tags Michael Johnson, Alex Gee

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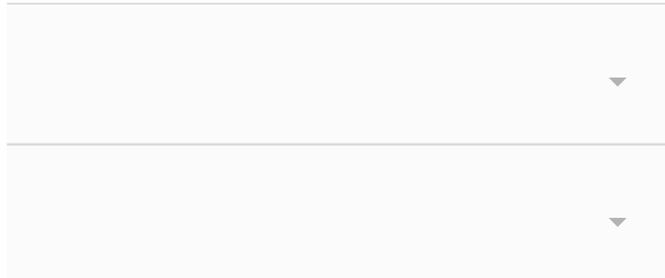
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