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[Contents of Issue](#)

[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

**When Pools Reflect Race Relations  
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Recently, the Fairgrounds Park race riot of 1949 was acknowledged. The riot erupted when the City of St. Louis attempted to integrate the pool. For the occasion of the 60th anniversary, I interviewed civil rights activist Robert Gammon, one of the black kids who got the word that they could swim in the once segregated Fairground pool.

For years, African-American youth have passed the pool as they crossed the racial neighborhood boundaries. Occasionally, they would stop and watch the white kids - splashing, laughing - and wished they could take a dip in the coveted pool.

Gammon vividly remembers the day he and his buddies heard on the radio that the City had desegregated the pool and invited African-Americans to the public facility. Several unsuspecting black youth, trying to escape the summer heat, walked into what appeared in retrospect to be a racist ambush.

By the time Gammon and others finished their swim session, the pool was surrounded by a mob of angry whites. A white custodian corralled the black youth in a corner while their lockers were inspected to make sure they did not have any weapons. Once the inspection was complete and it was absolutely clear that the youth were unarmed, the police led them through a roped off path from the pool to the main street.

Along the way, the mob of men, women and children armed with bats, knives, bricks and clubs shouted racist epithets, threw objects and even spat at them. When the kids reached the main street, white city cops told the terrified youth they were now on their own. Gammon and his friends ran like the wind, unsuccessfully dodging some of the flying rocks and sticks being hurled at them from a violent crowd who dared them to return. The boys didn't stop running until they crossed the boundaries into the black neighborhood and their safety was assured.

All hell broke loose as white mobs paraded through Fairgrounds Park attacking black folks. It took nearly 400 police to quell the riots that day; sporadic attacks took place

for several days thereafter. There was nothing "Fair" about the grounds on that day.

Instead of condemning the racist incident, the mayor at the time immediately put a clamp on integration and closed Fairground Park pool. Although a federal judge ordered the pool to be integrated, by 1956 the pool was closed permanently because of a white boycott. Blacks were never allowed to swim in *that* pool ever again. A new pool was built on the same park grounds and opened to the growing black community around Fairground Park. White folks would rather destroy the pool than have blacks swim in it. A point scored for white supremacy.

That was then and this is now. Racial progress has evolved, right? My interview had barely seen the light of day before the news of Valley Swim Club's blatant poolside racism hit the airwaves and internet.

The Creative Steps Day Camp in Philly had contracted to use the pool during the summer for their mainly African American youth. When the excited black and brown kids showed up, there were greeted with a wave of racist hostility.

The youth were hurried out of the pool and told by attendants that minorities were not allowed. The traumatizing experience was punctuated by remarks from the club president, John Duesler in a statement: "There was concern that a lot of kids would change the complexion ... and the atmosphere of the club." More points for racism.

The Valley Swim Club must be put in the context of the white backlash since President Obama took office. Contrary to the pronouncement that the country would go "post-racial" with the first president of color, black folks have been catching hell on the job, in prisons, in the malls and even in our homes as scholar Dr. Henry Louis Gates found out the hard way. The Harvard professor was shackled like a serial killer and hauled off to jail for allegedly breaking into his own home.

Whether it is Jim Crow or James Crowism III, racism and its ugly manifestations must be checked whenever it raises its head. Those of us who understand the structure and purpose of racism must ratchet up the struggle.

Our children must be taught how to recognize its many faces and facets so they aren't beat down with the institutional stick and made to believe they are somehow unworthy of their human rights. Tyler Perry is sending the youth from the Creative Step to Disney World to "show them that they are just as good as anyone." People of color - even children - who face 21st Century forms of racism must be given the tools they need to navigate through this society. Along the way, they must contribute to the dismantling of racism. No more points for racism.

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[Contents of Issue](#)

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