Honky Questions – use these to start the intellectual juices flowing for your memoir!

1. Conley talks about how his mother often reminds him of how as a young child he wanted a baby sister so badly that he “kidnapped” a black girl from the neighborhood. His mother reminds him of this to suggest that he should be thankful that he has a sister. However, the take-away point for Conley is that he was not aware of race and racial difference during his early childhood. Why did Conley notice gender, but not racial differences as a small child?

What sorts of things about you or your family were you not aware of as a child (race, ethnicity or nationality, social class, gender differences, gender socialization, religion, urban/rural differences) that you now see as social factors that shaped how you have become what who you are today? When did you become aware?

2. As you read, take note of the rituals and actions inside the Conley household that don’t seem to “fit” with the neighborhood they live in. How are they like their neighbors? How are they different? Were you mostly like your neighbors while growing up? If not, how were you different? If so, was there a family in your neighborhood that didn’t fit? What made them misfits?

3. Did your parents have a lot of choice in where they and you lived? Explain.

4. Conley’s parents seemed to suffer from downward mobility (compared to the grandparent generation). Where your parents upwardly mobile, downwardly mobile, or about the same as your grandparents? If they were different, what influenced their mobility? Do you think you will be upwardly or downwardly mobile? Why?

5. What role, if any, does the background and education level of Mr. and Mrs. Conley play in their ability to secure advantages for their family? Is skin color the only factor that influences a person's socioeconomic status?

6. In what ways did the Conleys physical surroundings in the housing projects affect their lives? How do you think your physical surroundings have impacted your life or your outlook on the world?

7. Throughout the book, the Conleys whiteness helps them avoid or gets them out of difficult situations. For example, his mother breaks into the hospital lab to get test results and no one notices probably because she is white. Also, Dalton doesn’t get physically disciplined at school because he is white. Can you think of situations where you may have avoided or gotten out of difficult situations because of your race? Or, can you think of situations where you got into a difficult situation mostly because of your race?

8. Conley discusses some aspects of his lower-class city life that seem appealing. What are they? Did you experience these in your neighborhood? If not, are there some aspects of this life that you wish were part of your upbringing?