

## #blatantracism: 4th of July Edition - La Chelle Gardner Watkins in Saint Helena Island, SC

My family and I, (6 adults and 3 kids), entered the pool, on Harbor Island, to enjoy the sun and cool off before heading to the beach. We simply walked in. We weren't turned up, the kids weren't wild and running to the pool all out of control- we literally walked in. We were guilty of being a Black Family rollin' in deep. We, like everyone else there were looking for a good time with family and a fun way to cool down. Never mind the 13 degrees between all of us- Masters Degrees and Ph.D. included, we were . . . a group of "BLACKS"

Upon our entry, the woman sitting next to the chairs we set up said to the person to whom she was speaking on the phone- "Oh, Wow!", looking irritated and overwhelmed- she quickly gathered her things and went to the opposite side of the pool. Once we got settled and headed into the pool, there was an obvious and immediate mass exodus of ALL the swimmers. Shortly thereafter, a woman with a couple kids in tow arrived. She entered the pool through one gate, observed the crowd, (my family and I, a couple from Ohio- with whom we bonded, and one other woman), kept walking ... right out of the other gate.

IT WAS PAINFULLY OBVIOUS.

So much to the point I asked my cousin, "Did that just happen?" The (white) couple who was still chilling by the pool, sitting to the other side of us, heard me and they both had a look of irritation. "Yes, and it's disgusting, I'm so sorry that that just happened, the wife said. "Unbelievable", added the husband.

I honestly felt like we were on an episode of "What Would You Do?" and John Quiñones was gonna roll up on us at any minute.

When we hit the beach, IT HAPPENED AGAIN. We set up, the kids started digging and making their sandcastles. The couple, who sat quite a distance away from us, felt it necessary to give us more privacy and increase the distance between us and moved farther away.

The funny thing is, I was born and raised here. From 1977-1995 when I lived home, I can't recall ever actually experiencing an act so blatant. So I'll count it a blessing that- I am a rarity in that my upbringing in the South isn't filled with accounts of racism and discrimination; openly, that is.