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Racialisation in Post Racial Times in America

Introduction

The United States of America – a land of the free or a land of the doomed? The constant reminder of the American dream, a dream whereby equality of opportunity is accessible to any living American where all hopes and goals can be obtained – but is this truly achievable with the white dream crushers living amongst the blacks? This essay highlights four main institutions suffering from racism daily, dimming the light on that all-important American dream that ANYONE can supposedly achieve.

Racial inequality has fundamentally been implanted within American history. After the Civil War ended in 1865, the rebuilding of American society originally put African American's on an equal ground with whites in the South. However soon after, African Americans became oppressed throughout society based on the colour of their skin. For nearly sixty years the nation operated under the Plessey v. Ferguson doctrine of "separate but equal," in which separation was anything but equal. (Redlawsk, Tolbert, and Franko, 2010: 1). The fight for equality was tough, with all ethnicities across the states wanting an equal chance for the American Dream. As racial interaction began to increase as a result, African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians were becoming progressively segregated within cities. The greater the expansion of black urbanization, the more prevalent racial segregation and restriction was within cities. (Murji and Solomos, 2005: 91). Although vastly outnumbered by the coloured people of the world, whites used their power and technology ruthlessly to dominate the lives of nonwhites, particularly in America. (Ball, 1998). For this reason, the non-white citizens of America appeared to be living in an oppressed society, with the hope of escape and a need for change.

"The triumphalist approbation is, if we look beyond the mere appearances of race 'as we know it' in the United States, equal opportunities for all members of a society, regardless of race, would avail themselves." (Pinder, 2015).

Racial inequalities continue to be a major problem within America. However with society continuing at the current pace with the current attitudes, this recognition for reconciliation may be a far fetched future aspiration opposed to an easily reachable goal for the near future. Many issues are still arising within society, alongside problematic matters that have been concerning for many years in association with the continuation of racialisation. Some argue that race and racism are just as prevalent as ever, although our awareness of their presence is often suppressed. (Omi and Winant, 2015: 1). It becomes hard to imagine the daily struggles for the lives of African Americans growing up in a white-dominated society, with various aspects and organisations oppressing minorities in various ways.

The Myth of Barack Obama Creating a Post-Racial Society

Historically throughout America, the political stance for the lives of those racially discriminated has embarked upon a journey, with the continuation of hope and equality for those suffering. When the United States of America were founded in 1776, the majority of African Americans were enslaved. As such, they had no political rights – no right to vote and no right to political representation. (Omi and Winant, 2015: 6). For many years, African

Americans have experienced second-class citizenship with white domination persisting with the resistance to people of colour. The inability for African Americans to vote until the Voting Rights Act was introduced in 1965 meant their voices were left unheard. Their silence was filled with dependency for the white counterparts to realise their suffering and the need for change within a racialised society. Since this law was introduced, there appeared to be an enhancement for the equality of all races, there was no longer political barriers obstructing and differentiating American citizens based on the colour of their skin. All that was left was the racial hatred fuelled within White Americans in society oppressing, exploiting and violating African Americans.

From a standpoint in the 21st century, despite racial inequality continuing to persist, there appeared to be some form of light at the end of a long and dark tunnel. Barack Obama began receiving national attention when he acted as a keynote speaker at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. An almost universally acclaimed speech immediately catapulted him from a little-known state politician to America's newest hope for a post-racial future. (Tesler and Sears, 2010: 1). Obama admittedly expressed that he couldn't help but "view the American experience through the lens of a black man of mixed heritage, forever mindful of how generations of people who looked like me were subjugated and stigmatized, and the subtle and not so subtle ways that race and class continue to shape our lives." (Obama, 2006: 10). Never before had a black man offered so much hope for change amongst the American communities that had been bitterly divided by race and partisanship since its inception. (Clayton, 2010: xiv). During Obama's time of running for the president post, it was questioned if America as a country was ready to elect an African-American president considering its racist past. This was proved so with his strategy that won the Democratic candidacy, then the presidency. Ironically, in 1993, George Clinton urged the people of America to "paint the White House black." (Clinton, 1993). Fifteen years down the line, Clinton's fantasy became a reality when Barack Obama was elected and rose to power on 20th January 2008, gaining the title of the first black President of the United States of America. The immediate wake of Obama's victory engaged the notion that the United States was now a 'post-racial' society, a term widely accepted by the people of America. (Omi and Winant, 2015: 1). The concept of a black man earning the highest possible post within the conservative country through the election of the American people provided a means of proof to signify the advancement and the move beyond race, excluding the racial discriminatory attitudes and segregations that were so prominent once upon a time. Fritz and Stone (2009) questioned if we could "turn to a new political leadership that is no longer the monopoly of white men...in the midst of a double crisis at home and abroad" (2009: 1083). The first black president in America created a huge sense of accomplishment that the country was evolving into a colour blind society. Previous white U.S. presidents Lincoln and Kennedy lost their lives at least in part because they fought for equality for blacks. (Redlawsk, Tolbert, and Franko, 2010: 1). Therefore, the idea of an African-American representing the country provided numerous people optimism that racial inequality would exile, fixing what many felt was a "broken nation" through "race reconciliation." (Clayton, 2010: xiv). African Americans became much more likely than ever before to feel that they have an agency due to Obama breaking through a glass ceiling and also a collective psychological racial barrier. (Teasley and Ikard, 2009: 418). But was this all too good to be true?

In the face of reality, the election of a black man for American presidency was never going to simply eradicate all racial inequalities and hatred. Although this was a huge step forward in racial terms, there is still a "glaring ideological disconnect between the desire and reality of a race-free society." (Teasley and Ikard, 2009: 411). African American citizens still believe there is some imbalance treating towards those of colour. It is important not to lose sight of the country's glaring racial inequities (Tesler and Sears, 2010: 3) and continue to exterminate the racial issues and work towards a harmonious, race free American society. Omi and Winant (2015) suggest that race still remains a fundamental category of (dis)empowerment in

the United States. It appears that as a nation, America is unable to challenge or address the significance of race in individual lives as well as the attitudes, policies and practices that sustain racial attitudes.

The presumption of moving into a post-racial world, despite warnings from President Obama that the most difficult part was yet to come proved to be true with the backlash that personified in the context of the supporters of Donald Trump. Through Trump's current campaign for the President role, his outrageous quotes on what he aims to do if he becomes President have titled him as a racist. For example, he has suggested that Hispanic and Latino immigrants constitute a criminal class who want to rape and murder white women while stealing the jobs of "real" Americans. Trump advocates violating the civil rights of Muslim Americans by putting them on a federal enemies list. Trump uses social media to circulate white supremacist talking points about "black crime." Trump uses eliminationist rhetoric to gin up violence against "illegal immigrants" and "Muslims" who may be "terrorists." (Devega, 2016). If Trump's campaigns lead him to become the President, this will be accompanied with the fear of consequences for non-white citizens of America. Barack Obama brought about hope for change and equality within the United States of America, the election of Trump would be a case of one step forward and two steps back – something definitely not required for racial equality.

Racial Profiling within the American Police Force

Within the United States of America, an elite police force operates to provide the safety and reassurance of American citizens by abiding by the law and ensuring all citizens act in accordance with the law with consequences if not. While the criminal justice system is explicitly based on the premise and promise of equality before the law, the administration of criminal law – whether by the officer on the beat, the legislature, or the Supreme Court – it is in fact predicated on the exploitation of inequality. (Cole, 1999: 5).

Furthermore, race has appeared to play a major role in shaping citizens' attitudes and experiences with the police in the United States... Whites and blacks tend to perceive the criminal justice system in America in strikingly different terms. (Weitzer and Tuch, 2006: 5). These differences, despite how obvious they may be, get denied and justified by the police officers that they are simply doing their job and preventing criminals, creating a safer community. There have been strong suggestions of racial discrimination towards African American citizens by the police force with police misconduct being a serious problem in America, although it is impossible to know its precise magnitude. (Weitzer and Tuch, 2006: 25). All we know as researchers and bystanders is merely the tip of the iceberg, with much more racial discrimination occurring behind the scenes. Overall, whites are much more satisfied with the police than any other groups (Weitzer and Tuch, 2006: 6), which could suggest that due to African American youths experiencing more police contacts than white youths (Brunson and Miller, 2006: 533), they are unhappy with the services or experience problems and feel that they are racially discriminated against.

For many years, whites not only have been the dominant race of the police officers in the society but also they have maintained full control of policing agencies. White Americans have continued to use their monopoly of police power to coerce and control the communities of African Americans and other Americans of colour. (Bolton and Feagin, 2004: 2). Racial inequalities concerning the American police are usually placed around the concept of a white police force and an African American community. As black police officers in historically white police agencies are a relatively new reality in U.S society, (Bolton and Feagin, 2004: 1-2), it may be presumed that the introduction of black police officers would help reduce the racial discrimination. However, this is not necessarily the case, as white officers still dominate. Despite the number of black officers increasing becoming more vocal in many

police agencies across the United States, strangely enough, both white researchers and public commentators have generally ignored them and their impact. As have other successful African Americans, they have become in this regard an invisible 'racial other.'" (Bolton and Feagin, 2004: vi). Race has appeared to become a natural characteristic that enforces oppression and sets out to be a disadvantage for the unfavourable race. African Americans are placed at the lower end of the hierarchal scale within America, regardless of their status, and treated as second-class citizens with the police force presupposing and expecting criminal behaviour to arise most likely from black American citizens.

The Police work within American has been called 'dirty work.' (Weitzer and Tuch, 2006: 4). This 'dirty work' consists of racial profiling and stereotyping criminals based on their race. Racial profiling is a scheme in which "officials target racial minorities in criminal investigations in an attempt to increase the likelihood of uncovering illegal activity." (Welch, 2007: 277). Over time, racial profiling has seemingly become institutionalised as a systemic part of law enforcement culture. Many law enforcement officers view this procedure as a valid process for curtailing crime and criminal behaviour, even while officially considered improper. (Wilson, Wilson, and Thou: 2015: 483). It is important to note that racial profiling is not a case of a few bad apples or rogue cops. It is a systematic strategy, often rationalised by a false belief that racial minorities are more criminal and more likely to use illegal drugs than White people. Some police officers defend racial profiling, maintaining that it is based on probabilities. (Barlow and Barlow, 2002). By specifically targeting racial subgroups, presuming that they are criminal, in some instances it is likely that they will reveal criminal behaviour. However, if this same process was applied to white American citizens, the same scenario may apply – when looking for criminals, it is likely to be found, white American's do not get targeted as much, hence why they appear less criminal in official statistics. Furthermore, the constructs of media attention and coverage of crime have also provided added fodder to the general public's perceptions of African American's as criminals, with a disproportionate amount of media coverage being devoted to crimes for which African American's are more likely than others to be arrested, further demonizing them and reinforcing the perceptions of African American's as nothing more than violent criminals (Chiricos & Eschholz, 2002; Gerbner, 2003; Young, 1985 as cited in Wilson, Wilson and Thou, 2015: 485). This provides fuel for American police officers, believing that they will find crimes associated with African Americans more so than white Americans. Proven so, black men are often stopped, questioned, and even arrested by police because of their race. A poll conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion indicated that 60% of Americans aged 18 and older believe that the practice of racial profiling is widespread. (Barlow and Barlow, 2002: 335). The obvious racial disparities in the criminal justice system are evidential in the overrepresentation of ethnic minorities, for example in mid-2007 black males constituted around 12.5 percent of the population, they comprised 38.9 percent of the number of people in U.S. prisons and jails. Black males are therefore 6.5 more likely to be incarcerated than white, non-Hispanic males. (Diène, 2009).

However, despite racial profiling appearing to be a major problem within America by disproportionately targeting African-Americans in criminal regards, nothing drastic appears to be changing. After years of condemning the practice of racial profiling as one that violated civil rights, commentators began to accept and even advocate the practice as a necessary tactic to fight

terrorism. Public opinion polls reflected a sudden approval of racial profiling as a sacrifice of civil liberties in order to achieve greater security. (Ramirez, Hoopes, and Quinlan, 2003: 1195). It has reached a peak with the presumption that "talking about crime is talking about race" (Barlow, 1998, p. 151 as cited in Welch, 2007: 276). African Americans may be no more criminal than white Americans, but nevertheless, it continues to appear in this manner whilst the concept of racial profiling continues to be a gateway for criminals within the American police force.

The racial disparities within the education system

All citizens of America are entitled to a free education. Even immigrants are entitled to some constitutionally-protected rights regardless of their immigration status. In *Plyler v. Doe*, the Supreme Court established that denying free public education to children on the basis of immigration status is unlawful. (Diène, 2009). As a result, all children within America have a right to education. However, it is what occurs within the education system that appears to be the issue. With regular testing to monitor the children's progress within the school, the frequently reoccurring problem arises each time – the achievement gap.

The achievement gap is one of the most talked about issues within the topic of United States of America's education system. The term refers to the disparities in standardised test scores between Black and White, Latina/o and White, and recent immigrant and White students. (Ladson-Billings, 2006: 3). Since the Coleman Report in the 1960's, which recognised that racial inequality within the classroom appeared to affect educational outcomes, much more attention has focused on this underlying issue. (Coleman, 1966). Understanding racial variation in educational attainment is important as the United States of America becomes ever more so diverse. The achievement gap between white and blacks is longstanding and has received considerable empirical attention and theoretical discussion. (Jencks, 1992, Miller, 1995, Jencks and Phillips 1998 as cited in Kao and Thompson, 2003: 419). According to the National Governors' Association, the achievement gap is "a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts. This is one of the most pressing education policy challenges that states currently face." (2005). Even when we compare African Americans and Latinos with incomes comparable to those of Whites, there is still an achievement gap as measured by standardised testing. (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2011, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 2006). The concept of a gap in achievement based on the colour of the skin creates major problems within society. Not only does the inequality prove to exist within schools, but also in the outside environment and life beyond the classroom for example in future careers. Reducing the achievement gap is probably both necessary and sufficient for substantially reducing racial inequality in educational attainment and earnings. Changes in education and earning would in turn help reduce racial differences in crime, health, and family structure, although we do not know how large these effects would be. (Jencks and Phillips, 1998: 5). Furthermore, eliminating racial differences in test performance would also allow colleges, professional schools, and employers to phase out the racial preferences that have caused so much political trouble over the past generations, with the incentive that if selective colleges could archive racial diversity without making race an explicit factor in the admission decisions, blacks would do better in college and whites would nurse fewer political grudges. (Jencks and Phillips, 1998). It is important to note and consider the knock-on effects and consequences of the inequalities produced within schools that appear to be associated with racial minority students.

Educational achievement and attainment in American society have well-established links to life outcomes, such as enhanced life satisfaction and wellbeing. (Chavous et al., 2003: 1076). However, when considering African Americans within the education system, there is relatively little achievement motivation research focusing on African American youth and how ethnic group membership and group beliefs may influence achievement beliefs and behaviors. (Graham, 1994 as cited in Chavous et al., 2003: 1077). From this perspective, African American youth who recognise societal inequity in economic and social mobility for their group may come to feel that education will have little usefulness for future life and occupational pursuits (e.g., Felice, 1981; Ford, 1992; Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Mickelson, 1990; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992; Taylor, Castern, Flickenger, Roberts, & Fulmore, 1994 as cited in Chavous et al., 2003: 1077). As a result, this racial minority group as a whole may not see the necessity to

achieve well within their education life and lack effort within their performances, subsequently meaning lower grades and a possible explanation for the achievement gap.

Some organizations also pointed out that the rise of segregation also has an impact on the quality of education received by students belonging to minorities. (Diène, 2009). The percentage of black students in predominantly minority schools, which was 77 percent in 1968 and decreased to 63 percent in 1988, had surged to 73 percent in 2005. (Diène, 2009). This expresses concern that the increase of black students in minority schools could result in a lower standard of teaching and the influence of “racialised integration” (Small, 1994: 2) amongst students.

The struggle of employment to the struggle within employment

In the last 50 years, the labour market as a whole has changed dramatically in terms of segregation and discrimination based on race. Within today's society, laws and regulations have been put in place for the equal treating of all American citizens in terms of employment, regardless of the colour of their skin. Racism and prejudice and treating an individual differently, as a result, are socially and lawfully unacceptable.

The labour market of black men has changed dramatically within the past fifty years in America. Labour market discrimination used to have a major impact directly affecting the wages of black men in comparison to their white counterparts. Up to around 1960, black men earned as little as 60 percent as much as equally productive white men. Their earnings increased to roughly 85 to 90 percent in the 1970's to those of white men, 94 percent by 1980 and it was not until the late 1980's that black men reached virtual parity with whites in terms of equal pay. (Burstein, 1998: xxxvii). The unequal pay towards black women was seen as a heightened form of discrimination – not only did the average black women earn less because of her race but also due to her gender. Living in the 21st-century world today, it appears that white men have experienced a backlash of their previous unlawful treatment and discrimination towards African Americans. Traditionally, many white men were the beneficiaries of labour market discrimination – by discrimination against women and minorities, white men could guarantee themselves the best jobs with the best pay. However, as times have changed and the Equal Employment Opportunity law was introduced, many white men have now come to see themselves as the victims of ‘reverse’ discrimination as they feel the Equal Employment Opportunity law has enforced employers to give preferential treatment to ethnic minorities and women. (Burstein, 1998). Equal Employment Opportunity legislation was the product of a vast, long-term social movement against discrimination, a movement seeking equal treatment not only in employment but in education, public accommodation, government politics and other areas as well. (Burstein, 1998: xxv). This allowed a gateway for racial minorities to seek a career without the fear of discrimination and a supposedly equal chance at getting a job as their white counterparts.

Moreover, white men who cannot condone and accept black men as equal counterparts within the workplace may turn to bullying as a form of resentment. White men are less likely to have bad jobs than are women of any race or ethnicity or men of colour. (Kalleberg et al., 2000: 261). This could explain why they feel angry towards black citizens for taking up higher paid jobs, that previously only white men dominated. As white laws and norms no longer condone overtly racist behaviours, the ‘modern’ workplace provides ample opportunity for subtle, even unconscious manifestations of racism, including neglect, incivility, humor, ostracism, inequitable treatment, and other forms of ‘micro-aggression’ and ‘micro-inequities.’ (Pierce, 1970; Rowe, 1990 as cited in Fox and Stallworth, 2005). Blatant racism has been replaced with a more subtle form of racism that reflects adherence to such traditional American values as individualism rather than open bigotry. (Brief et al., 1997: 59). This can have a knock on consequences, affecting the work morale and overall general feeling of the individual,

belittling them to a point of worthlessness or leaving the job to escape the bullying. As a result, this could partly explain the reason for the higher rates of unemployment within African Americans. Some may be frightened of the discrimination they may face within a white-dominated workforce, or some may not be able to handle the favoritism and bias treating towards what appears to be the preferred race. Furthermore, African Americans have had significantly higher rates of industrial job losses than whites in recent decades, and research reveals that both U.S. based and foreign companies explicitly use the racial composition of areas in their decision-making process regarding where to locate new plants. (Williams, 1999: 179). A Wall Street Journal analysis of over 35,000 U.S. companies that report to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found that blacks were the only racial group that experienced a net job loss during the 1990–1991 economic downturn. African Americans had a net job loss of 59,000 jobs, compared with net gains of 71,100 for whites. (Williams, 1999: 179). It was argued that these job losses did not reflect individual discrimination but rather were the result of the restructuring, relocation, and downsizing. In many cases, they reflected the movement of employment facilities to suburban, rural, and southern areas where the proportion of blacks in the labour force was low. (Williams, 1999: 179). However, this explanation for the reason of moving does not appear as an equal treating to all races as it seems to disproportionately target and disadvantage African Americans in this apparent equal and race-free society.

Some argue that market forces are central and suggest that ‘if you have the skills, there is no difference.’ In the explanation of African Americans suffering from lower paid jobs or higher unemployment, they may simply not have the skills required for the available jobs – not a product of racialisation within employment as some may suggest. (Moss and Tilly, 2001: 3). In most jobs today, there is a requirement to be computer literate with modern technology, which could step up the competitiveness. Negative racial stereotypes of African Americans may appear to play a role and prejudge the race as being less advantaged, perhaps not having access to a computer whilst growing up to learn the basic school due to the presupposed judgment that most African Americans cannot afford commodities as such. It appears that some businesses are slow to hire or promote people of colour, and quick to fire them, because of managers’ stereotypes and biases. (Moss and Tilly, 2001: 3). It is clear that despite living in the supposed race-free society, racial inequalities do still exist. Racial judgments appear hard to eradicate for some and the notion of ‘everyone is equal’ is still too good to be true in all aspects of American society.

Conclusion

This essay highlights the continuing scrutiny, stereotypes and stigmas attached to the black citizens within America. These damaged perceptions of African American citizens prolong the suffering and unequal treating, despite the concept of living in an equal and harmonious society. The four main institutions suffering from racism in past times have continued to carry out discrete racial discrimination. African Americans persistently lead a life as second-class citizens, subordinate to the white domination. Despite the introduction of many laws in an attempt to abolish racism, institutions and organisations find ways to subtly target and discriminate against black Americans.

In the light of the election of Barack Obama, the first black president, the representation of a black American as an influential leader provided and installed hope within African Americans that has been needed for many years. There had been a long need for change but as Obama’s time in power comes to an end, the foreseeable future with the large possibility of Donald Trump taking over America worries and sickens many ethnic minorities for their safety and right to equality. This is a clear indication through the voters of Trump how racist America still truly is.

The not so secretive racial profiling within the American police force that disproportionately targets African Americans leads us to the belief that the institution as a whole is working towards the aim of less African American citizens on the streets of America in the attempt of putting as many as possible behind bars. They publicly denounce blacks for 'playing the race card,' for demanding the maintenance of unnecessary and diverse race-based programmes, such as affirmative action, and for crying 'racism' whenever they are criticised by whites. (Bonilla-Silva, 2003: 1). However, research does suggest that with an insight to police force objectives, it is motivated by race.

The education system knowingly or unknowingly limits the achievements of some African Americans even through the minor courses such as the typical white American ancestor history. From a young age, this can portray the idolised American as white, making non-white Americans feel less worthy and less attentive towards their education, in turn limiting the jobs they can achieve with little qualifications.

There has been an advancement in the aspect of jobs for African Americans. They have come a long way from slaves to high posts within businesses, however not many have been this successful and still face bullying and belittling within the work environment.

Overall, this case study does indicate that America as a whole still has a long way to go before they overturn the idea of a racialised society. The ultimate goal is for all to be colour blind and for every American citizen to be treated as an equal but this will only be achieved if all American citizens work and contribute to this underlying aim.

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