

Racism and the System:

How Prejudice Can Become Foundation in Modern Society

By: Nixelyno Gabriel Soetanto

Chapter 1: Society and Definition

The general public's view regarding racism is quite simplistic. When people think of racism, they generally imagine the use of racial slurs, racially motivated violence, or preferential treatment of one race compared to others. Although still an existing problem, one can argue that racial discrimination, on the individual level, is decreasing. However, what people generally don't know is the existence of a less visible type of racism. Systemic racism, or institutional racism, as defined by Britannica, is a set of policies employed by legal institutions to racially discriminate against their citizens. Systemic racism is often invisible and more devastating, which is why it is important to understand its intricacies and complexity.

Chapter 2: Universality

Systemic racism can take many forms, including restricting freedom of movement, voting rights, healthcare access, financial freedom, and employment opportunities. According to Banaji et al. (2021), all forms of systemic racism share key traits. Since it is rooted in national policies, its discriminatory nature is embedded in a country's legal system through laws that disproportionately harm certain groups. Systemic racism also reinforces societal prejudice, stemming from cultures already rooted in bias. Discriminatory acts at the individual level are often driven by segregation-based policies. Finally, unlike in a healthy democracy, systemic racism is difficult to reform. It often suppresses the voting rights of those it targets, limiting legal momentum for change, as the voting-eligible majority may hold prejudiced views themselves.

Chapter 3: Written and Unwritten

Systemic racism can be categorized as either written or unwritten. Written systemic racism includes laws explicitly designed to discriminate, such as those in colonial empires. For example, in the Portuguese Empire, European settlers had full citizenship, while native populations were deemed second-class "Portuguese subjects" under the *Estatuto de Indigenas*,

lacking full rights unless they became "assimilated," according to Miguel Cardina (2025). Unwritten systemic racism involves policies that disproportionately impact certain racial groups without explicitly naming them. In the U.S., for instance, Black Americans were affected by "redlining," where the *Home Owners' Loan Corporation* rated neighborhoods from "hazardous" to "safe", often marking Black neighborhoods as risky, which discouraged investment and perpetuated housing discrimination.

Chapter 4: Adaptation of Prejudice

While both forms of systemic racism are harmful, unwritten systemic racism can be more damaging due to its subtlety, making it harder to identify and reform. Without explicit language, discriminatory intent can be denied, allowing racism to adapt to shifting social and political climates. In the U.S., even after slavery ended and civil rights laws were passed, systemic racism persisted in new forms. One example is property-tax-based school funding. According to Nate Luce (2023), since schools rely on local property taxes, lower-income communities, often Black due to historical marginalization, receive less funding. This issue was reinforced by a 1973 Supreme Court ruling that education is not a constitutional right. Combined with redlining, this underfunding contributes to poor educational outcomes, higher crime rates, and ongoing poverty, showing how systemic racism continues to affect Black communities today.

Chapter 5: Analysis

Although it is important to recognise that individual racism and prejudice acts must be prevented, this is not enough to abolish discrimination in our societies. Undoubtedly, the use of racial slurs, race-motivated attacks, and other discriminatory acts must be stopped. However, it is arguably more important for us to look beyond the individual level. Recognising that laws can and have disproportionately affected marginalised communities is just as important, if not more so. As demonstrated by the United States and many other countries in history, discrimination does not only occur individually. We must be able to analyse what keeps communities poor and keeps people from gaining upward mobility. We must be able to recognise these issues and be able to educate people and future generations as to the harm they cause. Perhaps then, we are able to truly achieve an equal society.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In conclusion, while individual acts of racism are harmful and must be addressed, they represent only the most visible aspects of a much deeper and more pervasive issue. Systemic racism, embedded within laws and institutions, continues to disadvantage marginalised communities in ways that are often hidden and difficult to challenge. Whether through explicitly discriminatory legislation or seemingly neutral policies that disproportionately harm certain racial groups, systemic racism prolongs inequality across generations. Understanding and confronting these structures is essential for creating meaningful change. Only by acknowledging the full complexity of racism, both individual and institutional, can society begin to dismantle the barriers to true equality and justice.

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