Discrimination

by

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10/26/2009

Preface:

As with most political controversies, a person tends to express their personal opinions; this issue was touched on in class. Since controversial views are the subject of this paper and the coinciding readings, it follows that I would express my own views and opinions, either intentionally or unintentionally, throughout this paper. This realization led me to choose a rather specific theme for this paper. I will express the same mentality that I have taken in many political conversations and in life in general. The theme of this paper will reflect the mentality “No one gives it to you. You have to take it” (Monahan), which will be both skeptical and pessimistic towards the readings. The reason for this mentality is simply to not only express my own republican ideals, but to question the precision of Aguirre and Turner’s work. This is not to say that they are correct or incorrect in some of the opinions and their conclusions drawn from research they have found, but merely to show that their method of addressing certain concepts is not as precise as a political controversy should require. Furthermore, in some cases it is necessary to “play the devil’s advocate” in order to open the topics up for a broader range of concepts and considerations regarding discrimination. As such, many rhetorical questions mentioned in this essay do not reflect on my own ideals and beliefs.

Introduction:

Aguirre and Turner’s work was been interesting and captivating. It describes discrimination from not only a present day political aspect, but also emphasizes the historical aspect. They have shown that history is an important factor in discrimination; discrimination of the past has greatly affected present day problems with discrimination.

Aguirre and Turner present an important model of institutional discrimination which describes in detail how people relate to each other ethnically. More specifically, they tend to focus on the negative aspects of how discrimination affects society; as a result, their model of ethnic relations describes how discrimination is fueled by threat and negative stereotypes, and how this leads to ethnic stratification.

We will use this model to discuss how it affects particular ethnic groups such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and finally White Americans. These ethnic groups will be analyzed to show how factors such as how a group is identifiable, resource shares, social identity, sense of threat, and many more factors explain the discrimination experienced by each ethnic group.

Next, we will use the analysis of each ethnic group to explain how the resources obtained by that group can affect our dominate sub-population, or the actors with power. This will show how the theme of the essay, “No one gives it to you. You have to take it” is particularly valuable because it allows us to show how these ethnic groups have made efforts to obtain power; in some cases these groups succeeded, and in other cases the groups are still struggling with discrimination rooted in American history.

Finally, this essay will discuss what factors contribute to the advancement of ethnic groups. In this case, the theme of the essay, being pessimistic and skeptical, is particularly valuable because it will help reinforce the obvious need for change in America, as well as outline some hardships of achieving that change. For example, egalitarian values are a positive solution to the advancement of ethnic groups, but may show to be ultimately impractical and impossible.

First, it would be important to define discrimination, as well as ethnic discrimination for the context of this essay. As Aguirre and Turner would define it, discrimination is a person, group, or sub-population denying some other person, group, or sub-population access to valued resources (pg6). For the sake of being precise, a sub-population is some subset of America’s population that is under study based on some characteristic of that population. For example, the sub-population being analyzed could be gays in San Francisco, or college students in Arizona, or Black people in the South. The last characteristic has a more precise term, ethnic discrimination. Ethnic discrimination is defined by Aguirre and Turner as a “members of a more powerful and dominate ethnic sub-population deny the members of another, less powerful and subordinate ethnic sub-population full access to valued resources” (pg 6).

This definition introduces some more interesting terminology. Subordinate sub-population is a population that submits to the will of a more powerful entity. This has an interesting correlation with our discussion of power; the ability to get A to do what B would not otherwise do. It is easy to align the two discussions and say that A is the acting entity with the power, and B is the subordinate sub-population. We will discuss the details of who exactly plays the roles of A and B later in the essay.

Finally, institutional discrimination is a common theme throughout Aguirre and Turner’s work. So, it is important to define institutional discrimination as they intended. Institutional discrimination exists when acts of discrimination are accepted by cultural values, beliefs, laws, and norms (pg 10). This is contrary to isolated acts of discrimination. This is an important distinction because isolated acts of discrimination are a result of similar attitudes as the ones we will discuss below, but are committed by individuals. For example, hate crimes fall in to a very different category (and are outside the scope of this essay) then racial profiling condoned by a police precinct. Other actors or institutions can commit institutional discrimination such as corporations, schools, or factories. In the cases that we are concerned with, institutional discrimination is performed as a matter of policy.

We have defined discrimination in detail, now we can apply these ideas to the behaviors and economic conditions of people. Using the term people as opposed to people-of-color is an important distinction that raises a few questions. Is white a color? Are white people subjected to the same discrimination as other ethnicities? As I stated earlier, it is important to be precise, because as we will see, white people have also been subjected to much of the same type of discrimination as other more commonly addressed ethnic groups, such as Blacks and Latinos.

Explanation and Application of Model:

The first subject of institutional discrimination to be analyzed is African Americans. Aguirre and Turner provide compelling data to show that African Americans are still suffering the consequences of centuries of discrimination. Discrimination towards blacks occurred in various ways. First, slavery played the largest role in present day hardships for blacks. We will find that slavery’s affect on how the public viewed black people still affects opportunity for African Americans in the work force today; this was a catalyst for widespread prejudice and discrimination. Education opportunities are still a large issue for African Americans, as well as job opportunities and present day discrimination from the institutions mentioned earlier.

Aguirre and Turner discuss the affect of education on the lifestyles and social identity of African American’s. They provide data describing the dropout rates of black high school students, and show averages of blacks in higher education. In this case, as well as many others throughout the work, they make the correlation that the amount of black education affects the job opportunities they have, which in turn affects the average income of black households.

To refer to the model of institutional discrimination; blacks are subjected to discrimination, which keeps them in inner cities where education is sub-par, and poor and dangerous living conditions promotes the number of dropouts in education (pg 105). There are still a few holes left in this model which prompt a couple questions. Is it not a problem with housing location, but rather a problem of crime control and educational funding? Those topics could be outside the scope of Aguirre and Turner’s work as it is focused on discrimination and not our government’s distribution of funds. However, it does pose an interesting aspect for potential advancements that could be made to combat the inequality between ethnic groups, as we will explore later.

Another important topic of analysis in Aguirre and Turner’s work is the idea of informal discrimination in the professional environment. They discuss data that suggests banks discriminate against African Americans when apply for loans. This is likely because of the common racial stereotype that “blacks are lazy and can’t hold jobs”. Unfortunately, there is evidence that ethnicity is a factor in obtaining a loan (pg 126), but perhaps banks base their loan applications off of statistical data as well.

One of the most conclusive studies described by Aguirre and Turner is a study done by the Urban Institution in Washington DC (pg 125). This study shows conclusively that more job applications are being accepted from white people then black people. This shows that many employers are still discriminating against African American workers.

Aguirre and Turner have shown many factors that explain the discrimination of African Americans. As it was just summarized, discrimination occurs from African Americans being identifiable because of their skin color. In the professional environment employers identified them and rejected a disproportionate number of African American’s job applications when they matched the qualifications of their white counterpart when competing for a limited resource; jobs. Education is also a resource that African Americans have an unequal opportunity to because of discrimination in the housing market. As a result, in many cases African Americans are still seen as inferior to whites (pg 135).

When data is collected pertaining to Asian Americans, it is often not specific to the different cultures that Asians originate from. Aguirre and Turner explain that although Asians are often praised as the “model minority”, they are subjected to more subtle forms of discrimination (pg 219). These discriminations stem from failure to recognize and appreciate the differences in many Asian cultures (pg 221).

Asians are often identifiable because of very obvious facial characteristics (pg 234) and their heaving foreign accents can hinder their opportunities in the professional environment (pg 227). Aguirre and Turner describe that Asians are subjected to just as much discrimination as other ethnic groups, and their ability to overcome discrimination actually contributes to the stereotype of being a “model minority” and “Asians are technical people with more education then white Americans”. This perception of Asians suggests that they do not go through the same social and economic problems as other populations (pg 235). Just because a stereotype does not sound negative doesn’t mean it can’t affect the ethnic group negatively.

It is common belief that Asians are not only after white American jobs, but also jobs of Latinos and African Americans. However, they are confronted with the same obstacle that many ethnic groups face, that is “the glass ceiling” or “bamboo ceiling”. They are able to get a foot in the door, but they can only go so far in their profession. Much of the discrimination against Asians obtaining higher managerial positions is rooted in their identifiable foreign accent (pg 241). This prompts the question, how much of work done in a managerial position requires a good ability to communicate to co-workers? Is this discrimination justified, or are things like speech therapy an adequate solution for communication issues?

Aguirre and Turner attribute much of the ethnic discrimination against Arabs and Arab looking people to the events of 9/11 as well as some past historical events (pg 267). Arabs are identifiable primarily by their darker skin color, as well as by their religious practices, and language when spoken in public (pg 279). Like the other ethnic groups that are identified, Arabs are subject to many negative beliefs that have created stereotypes.

Arabs are stereotyped as being prone to violence, and are believed to be “jealous of the affluence of the West” (pg 280). There are other common stereotypes that Arabs are subjected to such as, “they support terrorism” or are “oppressive to women”. Visual expression in media has largely contributed to the widespread beliefs (pg 281). Institutions such as newspapers portray Arabs with such stereotypes and as a result, Arabs develop fear, wariness, and emotional reactions towards how they will be treated in public (pg 285).

Aguirre and Turner also discuss political and religious discrimination towards Arabs. The primary basis for discrimination against Arabs is a result of the events on 9/11. The Patriot Act was created to justify the invasion of Arabs privacy and the harassing of selected Arabs (pg 286). Many people view Arabs religion as extremist, and respond to those fears with violence against religious establishments (pg 187).

White Americans has been subjected to similar discrimination as Asians, Aguirre and Turner admits that it was easy for white immigrants to assimilate with the occupying Anglo-Saxons. However, they face the same lack of cultural recognition as many Europeans come from vastly differing cultures and histories.

Many stereotypes towards Irish immigrants stemmed from providing cheap labor to the economy. Aguirre and Turner discuss the Irish were stereotyped and discriminated against almost as severely as black Americans, being described as immoral, unintelligent, and temperamental (pg 79). The Irish were able to overcome much discrimination by unionizing. In politics Irish Americans were subjected to the stereotype of their involvement in corrupt big-city political machines, but in present day politics the primary issue is the Irish Catholic view of abortion (pg 80).

Italian Americans faced similar discrimination as Irish Americans as they were viewed as inferior intellectually and morally (pg 83). Italian Americans are underrepresented in politics and were subjected to the widely known “mafia” stereotype. Italians still suffer from the stereotypes in the media such as “The Fonz” being a character who is an oversexed womanizer (pg 84). These discriminations have negatively affected the dropout rate in education for Italian Americans, as well as their role in politics as they had distrust towards government (pg 85).

Jewish Americans were subject to much discrimination stemming from their religious beliefs. There is a lot of hostility towards Jewish Americans because of their part in the crucifixion of Christ. Groups such as the Ku Klux Klan formed and committed hate crimes towards Jews (pg 91). Jewish Americans have been politically active but are underrepresented in high manager positions (pg 93).

Most white immigrants have been subjected to discrimination on the basis of their religion. Anglo-Saxon culture was made up of Protestants, and other forms of Christianity were not well accepted.

Implications for Ethnic Group Advancement:

According to Aguirre and Turner less than 2 percent of public offices are held by African Americans (pg 128). This poses a significant obstacle for African Americans to affect the distribution of power, and in turn other resources such as money and education. However, African American influence is not trivial. There are many blacks in offices such as city mayor and state legislature positions; approximately 300 mayor positions as occupied by African Americans (pg 127). This is an important gain for African Americans, but unfortunately, it will not greatly affect national politics (pg 128). The elitist perspective would suggest that African Americans are in a constant struggle for power and wealth resources. A part of this struggle is a public display of protests and riots against potential decisions made by the people with power (American government) which in itself gives them power over other ethnic groups.

Aguirre and Turner recognize that Asian Americans are relatively absent from political positions. They attribute to a portion of Asian American absence from political influence to the lack of bilingual election materials (pg 245). An attempt made to solve the language issues a 5 percent requirement of minority presence in a district’s voting population in order for multilingual voting materials to be made available. A pluralist view would suggest that the Asian American population simply doesn’t have enough numbers, and are too widespread, to contribute to the political system of America. However, Aguirre and Turner also discuss the presence of “China Town” (pg 229), where larger populations of Asian Americans can be found. This would suggest that, even where the Asian population is higher such as in a district of California that consists of 42 percent Asians, other discriminatory practices are at play.

Aguirre and Turner explain that in early Arab immigration history Arabs were not politically active because they eventually intended to return back to their homeland. However, in present day politics they are considered the most likely minority to donate to political campaigns and are engaged in American politics (pg 291). The pluralist perspective might suggest that Arab Americans have used their long acquired financial capital to influence the resource of political power. In other words, they gain political power by being active and contributing the political campaigns despite being subjected to much discrimination and educational, religious, and economic hardships in the past.

White Americans have played a large role in American politics. Although, for many subpopulations, their role started with very little activity, their ability to assimilate with Anglo-Saxons allowed for them to gain political power. As mentioned above, the primary issue affecting an Irish Catholic American in politics is their stance on charged issues such as abortion (pg 81). Italian Americans have had a long foothold in local governments which would contribute to their ability to gain higher positions in office (pg 85). Jewish Americans have had a long history of political activism. The elitist perspective would show that white American’s primary resource is their influence in the political system, this gives them a lot of power to control the distribution of other resources, especially those provided by government such as education.

Contributions to Ethnic Group Advancement:

Aguirre and Turner suggest that educational vouchers could be distributed to promote the attendance of blacks in better and private schools. However, there are repercussions of going to a school outside of standard zoning such as cost of driving children to school (pg 131). On the other hand, high school dropouts are much higher for African Americans, which pose a few issues. Such as, why aren’t parents teaching their children the importance of education? And, why should the rest of America have to pay taxes to support these vouchers when African American kids are dropping out? There is really no excuse for not taking advantage of the current public school system.

The concept of “affirmative action” is also discussed as a solution to combat unequal job opportunities for blacks. However, this sometimes shows to be counterproductive to the cause of ethnic egalitarianism. This is a sensitive and controversial subject for whites as they feel they are being subjected to “reverse-discrimination” which is the discrimination against another ethnic group as a result of providing unequal rights to a minority ethnic group (pg 118).

A completely different attitude emits from the Asian American ethnic group. Most of the Asian American population subscribes to the “model minority” myth (pg 255). This economic optimism may give them an upper hand when seeking out careers and participating in American society. However, they are still subject to both institutional as well as isolated discrimination which contributes to being “politically passive” (pg 255). An elitist perspective might view this as the Asian American population deciding that education and entrepreneurship in America is their most valuable resource instead of political power, in turn affecting politics whenever they can, but obtaining the resource of financial capital the primary goal.

The white American has the advantage of not being very physically identifiable. This gives them the advantage of assimilating with the Anglo-Saxon core (pg 74). Because they were so easily assimilated, the focus of prejudiced attacks shifted to other immigrants. The initial prejudiced beliefs about white Americans were quickly dissolved.

Conclusion:

The rates of immigration and birthrates are affecting the proportion of ethnic groups in America (pg 298); this is an unsettling fact for some people. The need for being ethnically compassionate towards other groups is growing. We have discussed many of the discriminatory conditions towards certain ethnic groups. Hopefully, with this understanding we can achieve a greater understanding of the problems with discrimination. Using stereotypes and acting in a hostile way towards a particular ethnic group can cause escalation of hostility and negative relations with other ethnic groups. We should accept that no society has ever successfully integrated all of its ethnic sub-populations (pg 315). Therefore, it is important to be compassionate to all ethnic cultures as some ethnic groups celebrate the diversity of their culture.