

America's Undercover Racism

Almost 250 years of slavery and another 100 years of legalized subordination created definitive differences between whites and the minority races within the United States of America (Wilkins 4). White Americans are better off in a vast number of areas that include income, wealth, job opportunities, housing opportunities and even incarceration rates. Vast improvements in many of these areas have occurred gradually but lots of improvements are still left for true equality. Within many of this country's formal and informal institutions exists continuing discrimination and the addition of continuing racist behaviors and attitudes contribute to the continuing disparities between races in America. It appears that time has skewed the simple fact that 350 years created large inequalities caused by differential treatment between races and now it is our responsibility to fix them.

The United States of America was founded on a basis of freedom from tyranny while at the same time allowing slavery. After the abolition of slavery there still were countless ways that blacks were discriminated against through laws and prejudices. Over these same decades white Americans were able to live freely, become educated and accumulate wealth over the course of generations. The 1964 Civil Rights Act eliminated many of the laws that allowed continued discrimination against African Americans. At this point African Americans were still far disadvantaged from whites because of the wealth that was passed from generation to generation by the whites. These decades created extreme differences that would take lots of effort from everyone to reverse. A sweeping new government policy called affirmative action was created to overcome this human damage and to ensure continued progress toward equality (Kotz 1).

Since the inception of affirmative action, “government statistics show that blacks have narrowed the gap, but continue to lag significantly behind whites in employment, income, education and access to health care” (Morin 1). Unfortunately, while this is the truth, ignorance prevails among many white Americans in that majorities believe that the average black American is faring about as well or better then the average white American. This incorrect belief has fueled many white American’s opposition to the affirmative action programs that are striving to correct these inequalities.

These continued inequalities can be partly contributed to the policies practiced by institutions in America. Some of these informal institutions include the labor market and housing market. “Compared to whites, African Americans are twice as likely to be unemployed and earn nearly 25 percent less when they are employed” (Council of Economic Advisers, 1998). Within the labor market studies have proven that African Americans face differential treatment when applying for jobs. One study tested this by sending equivalent resumes to employers with the only difference being the name (white or black sounding). This study found that just by changing the name on the resume they received 50% less callbacks for the black sounding name. The results imply that employers use race as a factor when reviewing resumes (Bertrand 997).

Using a similar method the Housing Discrimination Study found that discrimination has decreased but still persists in the housing market of large metropolitan areas across the country (Turner 3). The study found this by pairing similar people (one white and one black) and sending them to housing units to inquire about the availability of the advertised housing units. Due to this inequity black Americans face increased

costs in searching for a house, barriers in choosing a house and continued racial and ethnic segregation (Turner 1).

While improvements are still needed in the informal institutions within America, there is also a lot of improvement needed in the formal institutions. Throughout this country's history discrimination has been inherit in a wide variety of formal institutions. After the emancipation proclamation the south had Jim Crow laws and after the 1964 Civil Rights Act discrimination was not eliminated, only downsized and hidden. Even after World War II the G.I. Bill tended to benefit the white veterans disproportionately more than the black veterans (Kotz 2).

Today, as politicians earn more votes by cracking down on crime, blacks are almost five times more likely than whites to be in jail (U.S. Department of Justice). The laws slant towards incarceration of black Americans. The '100 to 1' law punishes people in possession of only 5 grams of crack cocaine (used by poor, often black communities) to serve a mandatory 5 year sentence. To receive the same sentence while carrying the more privileged drug of choice (mainly used by white Americans), powder cocaine, a person would need to possess in access of 100 grams. This shows how laws have contributed to the fact that black Americans are 14% of the nations illegal drug user but at the same time make up 74% of the people in America that serve time for drug possession (Markus).

While everything seems hopeless it can be comforting to remember that today's world is much better than it was before. However, American's cannot be too comforted by that fact, but instead they should use it as motivation to continue the trend and eliminate the inequalities. Throughout my life I feel that my parents have done just that,

they have raised me in a colorblind setting. It also helps that my father himself is an immigrant to the United States. During the course of my life thus far I have encountered many times that people use stereotypes and ignorance in their racist endeavors. At the same time, I always believed African Americans to be equals and now understand how they should be equals but are not quite there yet. I have always felt a large desire to promote equality in America but have been clueless about how to. Now I feel my best chance will be to openly confront racism wherever I see it and to thereby create an open discussion about it.

Cites

Council of Economic Advisers. *Changing America: Indicators of social and economic well-being by race and Hispanic origin*. September 1998,
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