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Intro to Sociology

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Response to Race, the Power of Illusion, The House We Live In

Over the course of history, the United States has been known to be a “melting pot” of cultures from all around the world, creating a heavily diverse society of people. Those who were born outside the United States may find it to be a land of opportunity or a place of freedom from an oppressive country they are living in. However, the catch to “opportunity” is the perceived race of an individual. When people immigrate over to the US, they are categorized by their physical attributes, given or restricted certain rights, and judged on how they affect society as a whole. This brings about inequality, as people have limitations put on them due to what they were born as, giving almost no choice to the matter.

Many years ago, people from England had come over to colonize the United States of America. As they had arrived, however, they found out that North America was already inhabited by Native Americans. This, in turn, created the first difference of perceived race in the US, which brought inequality to those who were not classified as white. The result was the beginning of the elitist views of Caucasian people in the colonies, making white settlers the more “civil” and “powerful” people. For some time, white people were the dominating “race” of North America, ruling over any who were different. When others came from different countries, they were categorized underneath the Caucasian race, which were English people with white skin at the time. Groups from Ireland and western Europe had come over and weren’t initially categorized as white, even though they indeed had the same skin color. This is the case for every other race as it comes into America: being categorized by what they look like or where they are from, either assimilating to one race or becoming their own. Once someone is categorized, it brings about certain privileges and restrictions that belong to specific races.

As an individual of a minority group in the US, they are “systematically denied the same access to power and resources available to society’s dominant groups though they are not necessarily fewer in number than the dominant groups.” (Ferris & Stein, 2014, p. 221). Although there are still privileges given, it is hard to try to get into a good standing financially and socially when these limitations are put on people. For example, a person who is white may be able to get a job a lot easier than someone who may be Hispanic or African American, getting a lesser job or not at all due to their perceived race. As shown in the movie, immigrants that came over to the United States were either given lower jobs or no jobs at all. Most people from other countries were put in factories, working long, labor-intensive hours for minimal pay and benefits. Even though this seems like a practice that is out of date, it is still very prominent in today’s society. People are still trying to push more for equal rights and privileges so that everyone has a fair chance not only fiscally, but socially. Referring back to the example about the job, even though there is a push for a more progressive workplace and work ethic, employers are wanting to pick potential employees that are similar to them. This is so they can make more of a connection than that with someone of another race. Compared to how things used to be, our society has come a long way, even if it is still not as equal as it should be in the workplace as well as in our social structure.

With all of these differences in classifications and privileges, society has been shaped and molded into quite a diverse “melting pot” in the United States with all sorts of levels that people rise or fall to as a result. Because people are labelled according to what they look like, it brings about all sorts of prejudices and assumptions that influence the way that people with varying races interact with each other and with themselves. Some may feel like they are above each other, creating discrimination and racism, while others may be victims of this. Ever since the beginning of the US, “races” were very strict in their roles and had to follow a certain way of life that restricted a large amount of them from even becoming citizens. To this day, there is still inequalities in our society, even amongst people who are white, but many are trying to push against institutionalized discrimination which is, “discrimination carried out systematically by institutions (political, economic, educational, and others) that affect all members of a group who come into contact with it.” (Ferris & Stein, 2014, p. 223). Many try to protest, petition, and take legal action to push these more progressive ideals, taking a new direction for our society. For example, lots of supporters of the rights for African Americans have been protesting acts of police brutality in the movement of “Black Lives Matter.” The protests that come out of the movement are meant to spread awareness of the actions of police officers that are morally questionable due to racial implications.

Our society is fluctuating every day with change being implemented into our everyday lives and routines. There are conservatives that are trying to keep the old ways going as we continue as a nation, but many have had quite enough. A great deal of rights activists has been pushing for years to get a more equal America, trying to move away from the institutionalized racism that comes with conservative points of views. Since the newer generations are thinking this way, this could possibly lead to a complete turnaround to how people think about politics, policies, and the creation of new institutionalized ideals. With this, we as a society can act more progressively, creating a more equal community in our nation for the years to come.

# References

Ferris, K., & Stein, J. (2014). *The Real World.* Canada: W. W. Norton.