

# CHAPTER 15 RACISM AND THE AFRICAN PEOPLE

## Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

- explain the meaning and origin of racism;
- explain racial discrimination in the USA;
- discuss racial discrimination in Europe and Asia;
- discuss apartheid in South Africa.

### 15.1 Meaning of Racism

Racism is the belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another. Under racism, a person's social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics. The major target of racism is that different races should remain segregated and apart from one another.

Racism can also be defined as the hatred of one person by another or the belief that another person is less than human because of skin colour, language, customs, place of birth or any other factor that reveals the basic nature of such persons. Racism has provoked wars, slavery, the formation of nations and legal codes.

### 15.2 Origin of Racist Ideas

To talk of the origin of racism is to discuss an institution or a phenomenon which is as old as the human society. In other words, racism is just part of human nature. John L Dawson, a member of the congress after the civil war insisted that racial prejudice should be implanted by providence for wise purposes.

Racism is a form of oppression that stems from discrimination against a group of people based on the idea that some inherited characteristics, such as skin colour and culture make them inferior to their oppressors. However, the concept of 'race' and racism are modern inventions. They arose and became part of the dominant ideology of society in the context of the African slave trade at the dawn of capitalism in the 1500s and 1600s.

### 15.3 Racism in the USA, Europe and Asia against Africa

Racism and ethnic discrimination in the United States has been a major issue since the colonial and the slave trade era. Legally sanctioned racism imposed a heavy burden on Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans and Latin Americans. European America (particularly Anglo Americans) were privileged by law in the matters of literacy, immigration, voting rights, citizenship, land acquisition and criminal proceeding over a period of time extending from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 1960s. Many non-protestant European immigrant groups particularly American Jews, Irish

Americans, Italian Americans as well as other immigrants from elsewhere suffered xenophobic, exclusion, and other forms of discrimination in American societies.

Major racial and ethnic structured institutions include slavery, Indian wars, native American reservations, segregation, residential schools (for Native Americans) and interment camps. Formal racial discrimination was largely banned in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century because it was perceived as socially unacceptable and morally repugnant.

Meanwhile, racial politics remain a major phenomena and historical racism continues to be reflected in socio-economic inequality, taking on more modern indirect forms of expression and most prevalently symbolic racism. Racial stratification continues to occur in employment, housing, education, lending and government.

Many people in the US continue to have some prejudice against other races. The US Human Rights Network, a network of scores of US civil rights and human rights organisations remarked that discrimination permeates all aspects of life in the US and extends to all communities of colour. Discrimination against African American, Latin Americans, and Muslims was widely acknowledged. Members of every major American ethnic minority have perceived racism in their dealing with other minority groups.

### Racism in Europe

The European society did not escape and neither did it absent itself from racism and racial discrimination. Their own took the form of anti-semitism. Modern anti-semitism dates back to 1870, whilst christian hostility towards the Jewish race or more popularly towards Jewish culture and traditions. Its origin is traced back to the 1870s when earlier sporadic outbreak of anti-Jewish feelings became a permanent phenomenon in the European society. In the writings of early anti-semitism, such as the German Wilhelm Marr or the Frenchman Ernest Renan, Jews were identified as a separate race. From their perspective, even if individuals converted from Judaism to Christianity or assimilated to current cultural values, they continued to be considered as Jewish. Throughout history, Jews have been made the scapegoats for economic and other misfortunes. But from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jews also became identified by conservative populist as the harbingers of progress, industrialisation and international capital which destroyed the values and livelihoods of an idealised rural peasant society.

One striking characteristics of modern anti-semitism especially before the World War II was its strength in countries, such as Poland and France, where conservatives linked to the Roman Catholic Church were united principally by anti-semitism in their opposition to economic and social change.

In France, this broad coalition of forces resistant to change came together as a result of the “Dreyfus Affair”. The Dreyfus Affair revealed the extent of how popular (as well as) official anti-semitism is.

In Russia, where the Jews had settled relatively, they began to be persecuted in large number (pogroms) with the support of officials eager to please the anti-semitic Tsars Alexander (III) and Nicholas II. Anti-semitism also spread to Germany and Austria, following a large number of Jews from Eastern Europe who relocated to Germany. It was German's third Reich under Hitler, that more than five million Jews were murdered in a gas chamber. This killing is referred to as holocaust in Germany.

#### **15.4 Apartheid and Racial Segregation in South Africa up to 1999**

South Africa is a multi-racial and multi-ethnic African society, with a large black population and a few white minority. The racial factors created room for unhealthy struggles between the majority black and the minority white who wanted to make life unbearable. This white minority government enacted "apartheid" which means "living apart" in 1948. Through this apartheid law, the government of South Africa succeeded in institutionalising racial discrimination in South Africa. The race laws touched every aspect of social life. Blacks were to obtain a "pass" before crossing to any territory occupied by the whites".

However, the blacks in southern Africa, with the help and assistance of few African states, used the OAU and the United Nations to put pressure on the white minority government to relax this obnoxious race law and embrace peace. In fact, apartheid served to maintain the political and economic supremacy of the white minority which comprised less than 20 percent of the total population. By keeping other races apart, poor and uneducated, the system was designed to prevent them from developing a sense of solidarity and demand the same rights and benefits which the whites enjoyed from South African's natural wealth and indigenisation. The enactment of apartheid was made possible through the 1950 Population Registration Act, which made compulsory the carrying of a pass to identify the racial group of each holders. In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act was the first of a series of acts designed to create separate and distinct areas in which Blacks would live separately without intruding into white neighbourhoods.

Apartheid itself did not come to an end until 1993, after a referendum in the previous year in which  $\frac{2}{3}$  of white South Africans approved its abolition. This was caused by a combination of the protest of the Black majority led by ANC (African National Congress), international isolation and the burden of vast security apparatus on the resources of a white minority whose relative size was declining. In 1996, the truth and reconciliation commission was established to deal with the moral and social effects of apartheid. The abolition of apartheid created opportunities for a democratic elections to be conducted. Through this process, Nelson Mandela, a member of the African National Congress (ANC) and a freedom fighter who spent 27 years of his youthful life in jail for the emancipation and self determination of his people won the election and became the first democratically elected president of South Africa.

## 15.5 Africa's Response to Racism

African's all over the world, have shown their strong and total condemnation of racism and racial discrimination. In fact, the fight against racial discrimination and the emancipation of the blacks anywhere in the world started since the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century when the black American's started forming a common body that could unite them and give them the needed opportunity to demand their rights. Men like Marcus Gawe, WEB Du Bois, must be remembered for their foresight in forming the PAN Africanism. Indeed Africans in their various regional organisation (AU) and sub-regional organisation have always condemned with one voice issues of racial discrimination anywhere it occurs in the world.

### Summary

- Racism is the hatred of one person by another or the belief that another person is less than human because of skin colour, language, customs, place of birth or any factor that supposedly reveals the basic nature of such persons.
- Racial discrimination is part of human phenomenon and so its as old as the human society.
- Race questions exists in America, Europe and Asia.
- Race questions in Europe took the dimensions of anti-semitics.
- Apartheid means living apart. It is the official white minority government policy aimed at pushing the black majority groups, while fronting the minority white for the enjoyment of all the good resources of South Africa.
- Africa's have always condemned issues of race and the discriminations involved.

### Objective Questions

1. In what year was Apartheid officially enacted in South Africa?
  - 1948
  - 1952
  - 1962
  - 1951
2. Apartheid refers to \_\_\_\_\_ dominate government in South Africa.
  - Nigeria
  - white minority
  - colour (India)
  - none
3. The domination and control of both political and economic fortunes of South Africa was gained through \_\_\_\_\_.
  - creating political parties
  - enacting good law

- C. adoption of apartheid policy as official government policy  
D. all of the above
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is a political party in Southern Africa that fought apartheid to a standstill.  
A. ANC  
B. GNPP  
C. MPLA  
D. NPN
5. The first truly democratically elected president of South Africa is \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. De Klek  
B. Zume  
C. Nelson Mandela  
D. None of the above
6. The human treatment channelled to the Jews in Europe is \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. anti-semitism  
B. apartheid  
C. none of the above  
D. all of the above
7. Africans, anywhere in the world try to fight and condemn racism because \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. they are the most vulnerable to racial discrimination  
B. they are the people who know everything about race  
C. they want to demonstrate their wisdom  
D. none of the above
8. Pan Africanism is a movement formed by the Africans in the diaspora in order to \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. fight racial discrimination against blacks  
B. create a time to see most influential Africans.  
C. show the world that blacks can also form an association  
D. none of the above
9. The truth and reconciliation mission was formed in \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. 1996  
B. 1993  
C. 1951  
D. none of the above
10. The referendum which gave effect to the dissolution of apartheid was held in what year?  
A. 1992  
B. 1953

- C. 1951
- D. 1982

### **Essay Questions**

1. What do you understand by racism?
2. Define the term “apartheid”.
3. What is anti-semitism?
4. Using South Africa as an example, what are the socio-political and economic implications of racism?
5. Racism and racial discrimination equally exists in the USA.