

Issue of institutional racism within universities



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Institutional racism— also known as systemic racism, can be defined or described as a form of racism expressed through the practices of social and political institutions. Cultural and institutional forms of racism are typically expressed in clandestine ways by schools, colleges and universities, businesses, and other bureaucratic establishments. The former type of racism occurs when White cultural biases and values are perceived as "superior" to the cultural norms and values of People of Color. Despite tremendous strides stemmed from civil rights legislation, racism remains one of the most pressing social issues in today's age. Unfortunately, no setting is shielded from racism as it is still alive and well— poisoning the minds and hearts of people to this day. One sect of observable institutional racial discrimination can be seen within universities throughout the nation. The system of higher education has clearly demonstrated, for many years, its inability to rectify disproportionate minority faculty-staff and student ratios, properly handle racial discrimination, and make college life inclusive and safe for all. This research paper focuses on documented racial tensions and discrimination noted throughout various colleges and universities within the country and concludes that universities are not immune to the destructive intolerance of minority staff and students. Additionally, it argues that all forms of higher education need to better account and punish racism acts committed within the institutions' domain.

It was not until 1954 when the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregation as an illegal act and proclaimed that all children— no matter one's race or ethnicity, integrate into the same schools as one another. The *Brown v. Board* ruling created

both political and social dilemmas for white advocates of racial segregation who argued the "separate but equal" fallacy (Derrick Bell 1). This xenophobic sentiment has been carried over for generations— and continues to be instilled to this day, skewing the progress of civil rights legislation out of fear of losing one's racial group "power." As an effect, universities and colleges provide platforms for racial discrimination and oppression as minority students suffer the consequences.

It would be foolish and ignorant to state that racism is a phenomenon of the past and is no longer prominent within our society. As seen throughout the country, colleges and universities still acclaim racist ideologies for they perpetuate systemic racial discrimination. By permitting the wrongdoings afflicted by majority students and faculty members against minority students and staff, the university in question sends out the unspoken message of tolerance— which speaks volumes. Hate crimes that occur campus and within the domain of university's affiliates remains the institutions' job to make sure those crimes are properly reported and punished. Yet, minority students are still unfortunately met with institutionalized oppression and racial discrimination. Annette Allen states that "FBI statistics from 1998 noted 250 reported incidents of hate crimes on college campuses... these numbers 'vastly underrepresents the real level' of hatred on campus, and estimate that crimes or bias incidents occur weekly" (Allen 612). This excerpt reveals the fact that university reports concerning hate crimes against minority students are greatly marginalized to portray a false façade consisting of a welcoming and inclusive school— when in fact more ugly truths lie underneath the surface. Talmadge Anderson reveals that:

It is not difficult to understand why educational institutions, especially higher education, have been and remain substantially resistant to widespread admission and employment of Blacks in academe. White universities and colleges have historically been the seedbed for the 'legitimization' of racial stereotypes and for the proliferation of racist-oriented scholarship. (Anderson 5)

Anderson's statement offers readers a deeper understanding of the pre-set racial prejudice that universities hold against "potential" minority students and faculty. This glaring truth further establishes the claim that universities and colleges are in fact one of the prominent sources of racial discrimination seen within campuses across the nation.

Institutional racism can be seen within many different factions of universities and colleges. It is the job of the university to provide a fair and equal opportunity for all applicants and students. However, this obligation does not disarm institutions from permitting racial discrimination and prejudice from occurring. Donald Deskins notes, "[acceptance rates] on the undergraduate level [shows that] Blacks, Native Americans, and nonresident aliens have declined since 1980" (Deskins 19). This excerpt proves that instead of equalizing the playing field for People of Color when applying to universities, the acceptance rates for the aforementioned minority groups have actually decreased solely because of their identity and the color of their skin. Deskins reveals to readers the fact that higher education institutions discriminate applicants based on their ethnicity and race, further establishing the claim that universities are not immune to racism and participate in the oppression of minority students. Harriet Eisenkraft notes, "in the early 20th century... a <https://assignbuster.com/issue-of-institutional-racism-within-universities/>

dean from a U. S. Ivy League university famously instructed: 'never admit more than five Jews, take only two Italian Catholics, and take no blacks at all,'" no matter what the pools of applicants. That level of discrimination has been discredited but "the practices that flow from it have not" (Eisenkraft pg 1). This statement by Eisenkraft reveals the frame of mind of some college institutions and how that destructive thought process still lingers and affects modern-day decisions when admitting applicants into their institutions. Higher education establishments have and continue to abide by racist ideologies and dispositions.

The college experiences of minority students contrast distinctly from that of their white peers due to racial aggressions and tensions. Although the opportunity for higher education for students of color has increased over the years, conflicts stemming from racial prejudices and discrimination still occurs on campuses all across the country. Bill Leach from Florida State University reveals that minority students have experienced racial discrimination on this campus which has affected their mental health and challenged the traditional college lifestyle ideal. Dr. Leach states, " frequently members of the majority community still cling to gross misperceptions of black students who are perceived to contribute... crime and other undesirable aspects of community life... the erroneous perception still creates problems for all black students" (Leach 5). The mentality which perceives black students as " dangerous" and so on and so forth creates a false stigma against minority students. This falsified narrative of black students further oppresses and demoralizes them—strengthening the claim that universities are not immune to racism. As students of color face

prejudice and acts of racial discrimination while on campus, the university and or college obtains the status of an establishment that follows institutionalized racist ideologies and practices. Michael D'Andrea reveals that within the university he used to work for, in 2000 a formal complaint was written to the dean of the College of Education regarding the various ways in which institutional racism continued to be perpetuated in the college where he worked at. The author pointed to the racial-ethnic disparities that existed among administrators, faculty members, students; the cultural-biased epistemology that dominated the courses taught at the COE; and the continued practice of using culturally biased tests as a major criteria for student admissions in various departments in the college. (D'Andrea 173)

D'Andrea's examination of institutional racism within his own place of work reveals a variety of ways of how colleges and universities perpetuate institutionalized racism. This recorded instance cannot be marginalized to a singular case of institutionalized racism within one particular university, rather, as a prime example of how other universities all across the country preserve racist ideologies and customs.

Higher education institutions provide a platform for systemic racial injustices against minority students. Although colleges and universities proclaim they are diverse and welcoming institutions, some establishments prove to be hiding behind their racist agendas. The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education accumulated shocking statistics that displayed data which proves Christian colleges have yet to seriously and or fully integrate black students into their establishments of higher education. An entire page is dedicated to this study within the journal detailing their findings— a median of merely 1% of black

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students were enrolled in these eighty-eight pulled universities across the nation (JBHE 45). These statistics expose how institutions of higher education promote racial discrimination and bigotry. Without the full integration of minority students in all universities, institutionalized racism will remain as a prominent social justice issue. Because universities reflect the values of its community and display a message to other communities and colleges, it is crucial for higher education institutions to promote the general welfare of all students and provide appropriate punishments to those who act discriminatorily. Edward Sankowski notes that " the symbolic role of the university as an intellectually or even morally authoritative institution gives it social influence... [it is] the role of the university in articulating or embodying a communities idea about political legitimacy and human rights" (Sankowski 231). Sankowski highlights the utmost importance of a universities social influence; when colleges and or universities acclaim to racist ideologies, it not only affects the morality of students of color— but the community as a whole. As Sankowski has stated, it is the moral obligation of the institution to promote human rights as a duty to its students and the surrounding community.

Works Cited

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