

# Running head: poverty, racism and oppression 2

Sociology, Racism



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Running head: POVERTY, RACISM AND OPPRESSION 2 Poverty, Racism, and Oppression: The Three Amigos In the U. S there have been systems in place that have kept poverty, racism and oppression alive for centuries. Some of these systems function at macro levels while others function at micro levels. Nonetheless, since poverty, racism and oppression work interdependently to accomplish their collective goals, they have been collectively called 'The Three Amigos'. In each section, examples will be briefly unpacked that illustrate how each Amigo strengthens certain parties while other parties continue to weaken with no hope for change. Fear of Public Authority In the Haitian culture we are trained it is not polite to maintain eye contact with an elder during correction. As a child my parents received welfare benefits while growing up. A notion gets instilled to do whatever they say; hand in paperwork on time and to have a fear of “ the man” or “ the office”. Phrases like “ they told me” almost gave the Department of Social Services a god-like status. Total compliance was expected. Poverty and the oppression that accompanies this fear of public authority ingrains certain levels of unwavering, yet unwanted obedience. This poverty mentality spills over into every area of life and thinking, thus dominating our world view and fearing going against the grain. This thinking doesn't perpetuate changes and reforms necessary to conflict with social injustices. The result is a continuation of oppression; the 'ride the back of the bus' mentality. The Oppression of the Black Man Robbins, Chatterjee & Canada (2006) defines conflict as “ a clash or struggle between opposing forces; power as the ability to control and influence collective decisions and actions; minority as groups with limited access to power even when they are the numerical

majority" (p. 65). These are not hard definitions to understand, conceptualize and apply to everyday societal norms. For example, the oppression of the black man and how they freed themselves can be compared to how a circus elephant gets trained or "broken in". The elephant trainer takes a young elephant, Running head: POVERTY, RACISM AND OPPRESSION 3 drives a stake in the ground and wraps a chain around its neck. The young elephant screams, struggles and attempts to free itself to no avail. The elephant, over time, loses hope and the fight for freedom dissipates. The older the elephant becomes, the less it struggles, even though the conditions worsen. The trainer knowingly will remove the chains and gradually attach ropes that an older, stronger elephant can easily snap, yet doesn't. What element of the elephant is imprisoned? The mind! The body is able to break the bonds yet the mind cannot think outside of the captivity. The conflict is racism, as a whole: its ideology and how it opposes social justice; just as the young elephant struggles to break free. The power is the enactment of racist laws and biases that started and kept blacks under control; just as the chains are the powers that keep the elephant enslaved. The minority is the black race as a whole. Blacks have always been a numerical majority yet have limited access to power; just as the elephants outnumber the trainers. Lastly, blacks have experienced change: some slow, some rapid and revolutionary. The elimination of the Jim Crowe Laws, race riots of the 1960's, red-lining and affirmative action (Title 9) are some radical agents of change African Americans have lived through; just as we see once in a while how a full-grown male elephant breaks the bonds off its neck and escapes the zoo!

Interdependency In 1981, what started as a conflict between upper

management and union workers resulted in a crippling blow to New York City's logistics of daily activities. The 1981 Garbage Strike affected tourism, restaurants and had many other negative affects. Rat infestation soared and other health issues arose. This Garbage Strike clearly demonstrated how interdependent the relationships between the bourgeoisie and the poor exist. It outlines how the poor were "unemployed and idle" yet; "others depend on them to comply with the norms of civil life" (Pivens 2007, p. 5). The power the poor held over the affluent was not "based on resources, things or attributes, but rooted in the social and cooperative relations in which people are enmeshed by virtue of group life" (Pivens 2007, p. 5). The interdependent power that both exercise over one another is the choice to withdraw from Running head: POVERTY, RACISM AND OPPRESSION 4 their social dependance. Globalization. Globalization has changed the way power is structured in America. It has allowed the powerful to exercise more power and the poor to be controlled even more. Globalization has been very effective in eliminating the middle class. Unfortunately, more middle class migrate to the poor side instead of going to the rich side. Multinational corporations have been given a carte-blanche to outsource entire sections of their business in the name of saving pennies per product. This conflict, in theory, is supposed to equalize the global market opportunity. In reality, since the onset of globalization, migrant workers have taken the place of the middle class workers and in the process have saved employers billions of dollars. Globalization has also given multinational corporations political power. A multinational corporation may not have the ability to put in power an elected official, but they can certainly threaten to remove their entire

sector and move elsewhere if the official will not agree to certain economic benefits for that company. Massey describes the effects of globalization in the U. S as " the material resources that were created were distributed much more unequally than before, bringing about an abrupt end to four decades of egalitarian capitalism" (Massey 2007, p. 31). Institutional racism. Another social conflict that deals tacitly with class is the battles faced in *The Children in Room E4*. Here is another case of the phrase 'white flight' in action. Eaton points that " investigations, though, eventually confirmed that real estate agents steered blacks in (Blue Hills) and encouraged whites to move away, pointing them to nearby developing suburbs such as Glastonbury, South Windsor, and Simsbury" (Eaton 2007, p. 39). This lines up with the statistics Eaton states that " During the 1990's, Americas largest cities lost about 2. 3 million white residents" (Eaton 2007, p. 52). Unfortunately, racism and how it sustained deep dividing lines among whites and blacks is still alive.

Weaknesses present in this book are the social inequalities that governments, banks, insurance companies, and small businesses have followed to further keep segregation of races and resources intact. On both sides of the fence, both blacks and whites see the problem; yet one continues to enjoy Running head: POVERTY, RACISM AND OPPRESSION 5 the benefits while the other continues to stay oppressed. One of the strengths is years of study, uncovering racist policies and being at a place where we can openly admit racial policies have existed for years. Conclusion Although sarcasm was used to vilify poverty, racism and oppression, these Three Amigos have, in a weird way, kept the classes segregated and has given the classes a level of autonomy and identity. The Three Amigos also serve as a

buffer to our society that helps maintain the title of a capitalistic society and not a socialist society. This clearly demonstrates the strengths of Conflict Theory. The strengths of Systems Theory is also exemplified as each subsystem of The Three Amigos works toward attaining like-minded goals using different objectives. The beauty and irony is how both Conflict Theory and Systems Theory can be used to study the past and present; looking at victories and defeats, yet can serve as models for the future

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