

# Racism



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On Racism The issues explored by the readings we've had for this week reminded me of an incident told by a friend who studies at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) of Singapore. It was a symposium wherein one of the government ministers was delivering a speech with regards to sustaining the economic performance of the country. In the open forum afterwards, one student expressed his frustration that he no longer feels the spark that invigorates his spirit and that he feels he no longer feels a sense of belongingness in his own country. It appeared that the student resented the steady influx of migrant workers, which his country actively encourages. Even with the thought the foreign workers are crucial in his country's economic well-being, the student still felt bothered and frustrated. What is more significant is that many students agreed with the fellow and his statement. The Singaporean experience is an excellent example of race relations. Its population is small and the dynamics of the relationship within its society is easily recognized because of it. Any conflict or significant development immediately comes to the surface. Today, more than a quarter of its population is composed of foreign residents, who, for their part, come from various countries and cultures. (Chong 2010, p. 145) By inviting all these peoples into the country, the Singaporean government is forcing them to live side by side each other in addition to living within the Singaporean community. The student's perspective at NTU told much about racial prejudice. As a citizen, he expects to be put above the rest, particularly in the governmental agenda. With the sizable number of foreigners, however, his economic and political influence in policy networks is threatened. This aggravates his personal racial biases. The result is unfortunate if we are to imagine how this student and similar Singaporeans would interact with other

nationalities. With the way they negatively perceive the foreigners presence, they increasingly feel the absurdities of life, punctuated by the idea that they suffer injustices in their very own country. It would be then easy to see how foreigners take away economic opportunities and political influence from them, making racist attitude perfectly justified and sensible. This assumption has been long realized in the British society with its history of anti-immigration. It is only after the 1980s wherein the British government actively encouraged diversity. Verbal abuse, harassment, and outright aggression against foreigners especially non-whites and Muslims are not uncommon in Britain. This attitude has been fostered by some institutional and legal policies adopted by the British government itself, such as the anti-immigration stance it continuously prefer in its immigration policies. According to Friedman (2006), the virulence of the aggression against outsiders is associated with the British imperial past, with its citizens still feeling superior and master of their colonial domains and colonized peoples. (p. 145). During the 1990s, the negative attitude has been tempered due to some governmental efforts to encourage multiculturalism. With the series of terrorist attacks that transpired after the year 2000, racial prejudice came back with a vengeance. Race riots still punctuate the British story today - a glaring consequence of its prejudice against other immigrant races. The experiences of the Singaporean and British societies underscore two important points. First is that racism could be an institutionalized phenomenon especially if it is supported by the government through its policies. Put in another way, it can be discouraged if the state takes a strong position against it. Secondly, racism is never a beneficial phenomenon for a community. If encouraged or left unchecked, such society would trudge on if

not under constant social conflict, with the permeation of disenchantment, resentment and apathy among its people. Because of this, it will never benefit from the positive results of plurality, which have been enjoyed by tolerant societies such as the United States. References Chong, T. (2010). Management of Success: Singapore Revisited. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Friedman, L. (2006). Fires were started. Wallflower Press.