

The avid reality of social racism in the 1960s essay sample



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In Martin Luther King, Jr. 's speech entitled ' I Have a Dream', which was addressed during ' The March on Washington' on August 28, 1963, he quoted the following lines: " I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (King 1963). The environment was extremely, powerfully heavy and taut when it comes to skin color and issues surrounding ' race'. His speech mirrored acts of segregation and discrimination that crippled the African-American societies of America.

Yet, it is significant to ask first, what did ' social racism' really mean in the 1960s? What did it mean to be black (or white) in a society where social ranking is distributed unevenly, discriminatingly against the darker shades of skin color and race? Has the environment changed any better? Main Body In Brent Staples' article, seen in the Harper's Magazine in December 1986 entitled ' Black Men and Public Space', he described vividly what it really meant to be a black American way back in the 1960s.

Written rhetorically, Staples wrote how his first victim to frighten by his skin color was actually a white woman: My first victim was a woman—white, well-dressed, probably in her late twenties. I came upon her late one evening on a deserted street in Hyde Park, a relatively affluent neighborhood in an otherwise mean, impoverished section in Chicago. As I swung onto the avenue behind her, there seemed to be a discreet, uninflamatory distance between us. (Staples 19)

From here it is evident that the environment during the ' 60s is composed of two sides: the more affluent section of the neighborhood and the more

impoverished section of the neighborhood. Sometimes the more impoverished section comprise only a portion of the more affluent section (which is better than if it was the other way around), so that it was easier for the victims to run and hide... although there are certain cases when it was tremendously hard and tricky.

This led to bitter circumstances like what Staples described: “ At dark, shadowy intersections, I could cross in front of a car stopped at a traffic light and elicit the thunk, thunk, thunk, thunk of a driver... hammering down the door locks” (Staples 20). Thus, to keep from those terrible disasters, victims (most usually the women) end up running from whoever was behind them that had the color of dark brown or black. Public space appeared to be crucial for somebody who wants to be free from the gates of mischief.

Being an avid nightwalker, Staples encountered a hundred times the danger of being at death’s door for being perceived as a dangerous folk from an unknown ghetto: [B]eing perceived as dangerous is a hazard in itself. I only needed to turn a corner into a dicey situation, or crowd some frightened, armed person in a foyer somewhere, or make an errant move after being pulled over by a policeman. Where fear and weapons meet—and they often do in urban America—there is always the possibility of death. (Staples 19-20) He was being perceived as a danger and a hazard—troublemakers that are pushed out by policemen, doormen, and cabdrivers.

Staples experienced being docked with “ an enormous red Doberman pinscher” (20) that was held by the jewelry store proprietor who, for sure, had mistaken him to be a thief and a robber, as based by the color of his

skin. This is not the worst, however. There are times when they were being mistaken as killers, such as the case of a black male journalist who went to Waukegan, Illinois for a story about a murderer who was said to have been born there (20). These and others define social racism back in the '60s.

This was what Martin Luther King, Jr. meant when he declared the following lines, in a speech that presented the reality of how blacks were being misrepresented: " We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence" (King, 1963). The feelings of exile and shame were chained with guilt and precaution, for it was true that the 1960s era directly linked social racism to physical violence; yet physical violence was most prominent among the black males of the suburban spots of the black societies of America.

The use of racial stereotypes can be accounted for mistaken identities as well as racial discrimination and segregation that put a huge gap between the black and the white societies. Social racism centered on driving away danger and predicament by driving away the very source of danger and predicament, which is simply all the black men of the society. Conclusion The fight for racial justice and freedom boomed its peak in the 1960s, when people were ultimately judged by the color of their skin and not by their moral conduct.

Crippled by the African-American societies of America, social racism defined skin color to be the major basis of social ranking in the streets, in the neighborhoods, in businesses, and especially in the darker corners of the

city. However, some forty-five years later, social racism has taken a different form. John Dovidio and Samuel Gaertner have defined aversive racism as “the inherent contradiction that exists when the denial of personal prejudice co-exists with underlying unconscious negative feelings and beliefs” (2005).

The negative feelings of discrimination and segregation are said to have been rooted in the ‘adaptive, psychological processes’ of the human brain. Because human beings tend to like those that are similar to their identity, it appears that social racism cannot be totally destroyed, especially with multiculturalism spreading along the coasts of America. It only takes a different form, a different belief, trend, and position; but, all the same, it will always remain there even so.