

Challenge to the american social fabric: racial discrimination



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Racial Discrimination has been a persistent problem plaguing American society through all its history. In the United States, for much of the country's history, the important institutions were dominated by the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) community. As a result, all other immigrant groups were disadvantaged from the outset. (Takaki, 1993, p. 406) Even among whites, Eastern European ethnic groups and South European communities (the most prominent of which are the Italian Americans) were discriminated against. The challenges were all the more steep for immigrant groups of other races. This includes the Hispanics, African Americans and Asian Americans. A typical example of the potency of ideological racism is the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred Chinese immigrants from attaining citizenship. This legislation was prompted by the ideology of the dominant group, the WASPs, who believed in modeling American society on the basis of their traditional values and beliefs. (Takaki, 1993, p. 403)

Racism in America usually manifests through the policies of its major institutions. For example, before 1960s, black children were not allowed to register in schools exclusively meant for white children. This policy of segregation was backed by law, which stated that the two communities were "equal but separate". This is a classic instance of institutional discrimination based on race. There were also numerous other instances of institutional discrimination based on ethnicity, gender and even religion. Discrimination as a general concept is not so clearly defined, but is rather subcutaneous in its expression. For example, no one generally proclaims that they will not marry a member from another race. But glancing through demographic data suggests that instances of inter-racial marriage still remain quite low. It is as

if people are acting as per unstated rules. (Journal of Black Psychology, 1996, p. 145)

The law enforcement and prison system in the United States gives further clues to general discrimination. In mainstream media, the black American community is generally associated with narcotics drug trade and gangster culture. Irrespective of police officers, lawyers and judges claiming that they are not prejudiced against minority communities, the incarceration and conviction rate is disproportionately high for minority communities. For example, although blacks constitute 30 percent of all crack users, almost 80 percent of crack-related convictions are handed to blacks. The numbers of African-American men who get involved in homicide cases are also disproportionately high. (Takaki, 1993, p. 401)

This manner of discrimination is nothing new for the community, as their history in the United States is full of such injustices. For example, for nearly half of American history they were used as slaves and servants. Even as recently as the 1960s, they were being discriminated against in schools and the workplace. Black men who write and perform hip hop and rap might seem to be expressing their newfound freedom and recognition, but in reality they are only reinforcing negative stereotypes about their own community. It is true that hip hop artists such as Nelly and 50 cent have gained popularity and wealth through the success of their music. But these are exceptional cases and the majority of the African American community remains socially and economically backward. For example, more than 40 percent of black Americans do not have basic health insurance cover

because they cannot afford it. Representation of African Americans in <https://assignbuster.com/challenge-to-the-american-social-fabric-racial-discrimination/>

mainstream media and culture can be misleading, whereby projections of ultra-masculine, rich and powerful black artists and sportsmen hide dark realities. (Hurt, 2006)

In conclusion, while some palpable progress is made in terms of equitable civil rights for minority races in America, issues of racism and discrimination continue to persist. For example, less than 15 percent of elected representatives in the Congress are from minority communities, which is disproportionately low. The same is true in corporate America, where board rooms are comprised of less than 5 percent blacks. Some tendencies within the minority races themselves are contributing to the situation. For example, the successful members of minority communities, instead of fighting for the progress of their lot, are closing ranks with the powerful. By being co-opted in this way, leaders from minority communities are subverting their own progress. In the case of blacks, by glorifying violence and prison terms for blacks, the hip hop artists are undermining the efforts taken by social activists to address the disproportionate rates of incarceration and conviction against blacks. Such, tendencies, if left unchecked, will prove to be a resistance to further emancipation of blacks and other minorities in America. The election of Barack Obama to the highest office in the country should serve as an inspiration and encouragement for minority communities that they could inhabit a future freed from racism.

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