

Racial fault lines paper essay sample



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California has more ethnic history than one would think or would have even known. Racial Fault Lines: The historical origins of white supremacy in California brings forth the ethnic conflicts that took place in California. Tomas Almaguer former dean of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University explains the struggles that took place through the different racial experiences of four “ non-white” groups; Mexicans, Indians, Chinese, and Japanese. The way the “ white” treated the power minorities resulted into America’s racial hierarchy we find in today. To the European Americans “ race and the racialization process in California became the central organizing principle of group life during the state’s formative period of development,” (Almaguer 7). The European American population took it upon themselves to create “ new society” in California (Almaguer 45). Part of this “ new society” was the Mexican population. The Mexican experience in nineteenth century “ Anglo California” differed significantly from other racialized groups (Almaguer 75).

The main problem between European Americans and Mexicans was mainly about land. (Almaguer 75). Though Mexicans were here before the U. S. annexation of California, European Americans came with opportunities and saw a chance to take their land. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 offered citizenship as well as other rights to Mexicans. This “ protected them from the discriminatory legislation”, since they were more prone to having their “ political and legal rights violated with impunity” (Almaguer 46). Mexicans were given land grants under the Treaty and the same “ political status” as the European Americans but they still did not recognize them as equal (Almaguer 73). Upper class Mexicans, known as the “ Rancho elite”

or the “ people of reason”, were more accepted because they had mixed “ European ancestry” but European Americans still did not respect them (Almaguer 46).

They were also lighter skinned and religiously very similar so they were considered “ half-civilized” (Almaguer 54). Since they had gained citizenship through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the rancho elite was able to politically challenge the Anglos (Almaguer 56). The “ rancho elite” were accepted as “ whites” and given all the advantages while working class Mexicans were considered “ greasers” and were not cut out for the “ new society” (Almaguer 48). Anglo Americans had no choice but to accept the rancho elite as citizens, but they still had negative opinions of them. They viewed the rancho elite as “ lazy” and with “ lack of personal discipline” (Almaguer 52). European Americans felt that Mexicans “ were not fully civilized” because their “ economy” of cattle raising had “ no direct cultivation” and that is one way they lost their land (Almaguer 51). Another way land was taken from the Mexican was through “ intermarriage between Anglo and Californio’s” were not prohibited and they happened regularly (Almaguer 58).

Most common would be the marriage between the daughter of a rancho elite man and a European American (Almaguer 58). These marriages provided “ strategic access to land held by the old elite” as “ part of the inheritances some Californio women brought to marriage” (Almaguer 59). In yet another way European Americans took the land of the rancho elite was by using the courtroom; although the rancho elite would win the fight in the courtroom, they would still end up giving up their land to their lawyers or <https://assignbuster.com/racial-fault-lines-paper-essay-sample/>

people who helped them pay off their legal fees (Almaguer 80). Following the relationship between European Americans and Mexicans, Almaguer then touches upon the relationships between European Americans and Indians. The Anglo considered Indians “ animals” (Almaguer 113). When Anglos encountered Indians, just a few “ recognized” them as human beings” because of the difference in cultures (Almaguer 108). The first and pivotal thing the Anglos noticed about the Indians was the different color of skin.

Indians “ sported tattooed bodies and scarred faces and wore little more than animal skins and grass shirts,” which was seen as uncivilized (Almaguer 107). Their skin color was their main disadvantage. Indians were referred to as ““ chocolate brown,’ ‘ dark mahogany,’ or simply as ‘ very dark’ or ‘ black’” (Almaguer 112). The color of their skin made them appear dirty. Because the Indians were not white, they were not considered human. Anglos saw the Indians as animalistic so they “ made up a completely different category of people” (Almaguer 112). Some Indian women “ tattooed their bodies, wore very scant clothing made of tule reed and deer skins, and pierced their noses and ears, while the men were either naked or wore short capes of woven rabbit skins and occasionally daubed themselves with mud to keep warm on cold days,” and it did not help reconstruct their image as civilized people (Almaguer 112).

Another way Indians were described was as “ monstrous heads, covered with a thick thatch of long black hair, and mounted on dwarfish bodies and distorted limbs, gave them a peculiarly inhuman and impish aspect” (Almaguer 112). The “ white” men did not accept the way Indians lived. Indians definitely did not look like Anglos and this caused the Anglos to other

them. Indians were very comfortable wearing minimal clothing that it brought negative connotation towards them. Even their diets were different. Indians ate animals, like insects, rodents, and reptiles; and also collected acorns, pine nuts, and wild berries.

Their “ dietary practices were beyond the pale of traditional culinary customs” in societies (Almaguer 107). There were many reasons as to why the Anglos treated the Indians in such an inhumane way. Their different traditions and way of life sparked more hatred towards them. European Americans were considered “ white” and therefore felt superior to anyone who was “ non-white”. Race became the key idea in everything from class status, to politics, and economic stability for different ethnic groups in California. Racial Fault Lines does a great job at underlining California’s history in the nineteenth century battle for land against ethnic minorities.