

Ideological racism vs prejudice



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Ideological Racism vs Prejudice: How does "ideological racism" differ from prejudice? Which concept is more sociological? Why? How does discrimination differ from discrimination? Which is more sociological? Why? In your essay, please draw on the reading.

Ideological racism is a concept that is more entrenched into the fabric of society. In whichever society ideological racism thrives, one can expect its manifestation in the policy frameworks of leading institutions. Ideological racism is usually associated with the majority community's discriminatory attitude toward the minority communities. In the case of 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. 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 modelling American society on the basis of their traditional values and beliefs.

Prejudice, when compared with ideological racism, is relatively unstructured. Prejudice is largely an expression at the individual level, as opposed to ideological racism which is clearly defined and recognized by the entire society. Since prejudice can differ from one individual to the other, and since it does not lend itself to easy definitions, it is tough to study it sociologically.

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Ideological racism, by virtue of being part of mainstream discourse, as well as being well-documented, gives the sociologist a lot of factual and statistical material to conduct his/her analysis. Seen in this way, ideological racism can be said to be more sociological.

Similar logic can be applied in differentiating between institutional discrimination and other forms of discrimination. Institutional discrimination is the blatant expression of prejudiced attitudes and beliefs, which is often backed by legislation. 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 remains quite low. It is as if people are acting as per unstated rules. The law enforcement and prison system in the United States gives further clues to general discrimination. 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. Again, due to elements of subjective judgement and differences between individuals, other forms of discrimination are not conducive to sociological study - they are more suited to psychological enquiry. Institutional discrimination on the other hand offer the sociologist

sufficient factual and statistical data to synthesize, analyse and possibly arrive at a theory.