

Institutional Racism and Social Inequality

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Introduction

The advent of social awareness has brought multiple topics to attention over the past decade; issues like racism, gender bias, false prejudices, and stereotypes have come into focus. These issues, while remaining present at the moment, are being sought to be solved by people all over the world, whether in terms of their individual or institutional efforts (Macedo and Gounari). However, racial prejudice or racism is very complex in terms of its nature and how it comes to appearing in various situations. Although racism is the spawn of underlying prejudices that people might hold within themselves, it has been so intricately woven into society and its institutions that it often produces itself quite subtly and goes unnoticed.

Racism And Society

The minds of people have been tweaked in such a way that certain faces, colours, voices, and accents are bound to be interpreted as appealing while others are looked down upon as inferior substances. Moreover, the recent right-wing ideas in the United States sparked racial prejudice not only against African American people but also against many others, such as Middle Eastern people, Asian Americans, Mexicans, and Muslims. Furthermore, the travel ban against Muslim immigrants only served to spark the implicit prejudices some held within themselves (Macedo and Gounari). It opened avenues for people to spew out hate speech, threaten, and also, at times, physically react toward Muslims aggressively.

Given that the term racism is now common because of circumstantial preference or perhaps because of general awareness of the morality of society, it has grown to become an entity on its own. Some would suggest it to be a form of discipline as well. Therefore, the issue now arises albeit very subtly in institutions of society where seemingly no harm is being done; however, despite this, racism still appears in the form of aggressiveness, which often causes mortal injury to people who fall victim to it.

The criminal justice system is one of the institutions that fall prey to this problem as well. The case of Freddie Gray, the man who died in police custody while his perpetrators were only suspended with pay, and the case of Christopher Alder, the man who died choking on his own vomit among officers who didn't pay any heed to him. The officers were, although charged, later acquitted on the judge's orders (Carver). These cases are only a few, among many others, that happened to people while they were suspects and under scrutiny by law. They depict the amount of hostility ingrained into people's minds regarding certain races, ethnicities, or religions.

Racism is also apparent in terms of the population of black people incarcerated in comparison with white people and the disproportionality that is present in all prisons. For example, there are approximately 3% of black people in all of Wales and England. However, their prison population is 12% of the total population. Moreover, in the United States, the overall population of black people is 12%. In comparison, the population occupying space in prison is 40% of all prison inmates and 42% of the people who are waiting for a death sentence (Marable).

There are arguments about the authenticity of the association of race made with the number of incarcerations, and some suggest that the reasons behind such disproportionality are, in fact, poverty and not racial discrimination as suggested otherwise. Sociologist William Wilbanks, for example, argued that the concept of racial prejudice being an underlying factor in the disproportionality of the criminal justice system is absurd and is a myth (Macedo and Gounari). He argued that the causes were, in fact, other inconsistencies such as poverty or the individual's previous record.

It is argued so because statistics suggest that the reason black people contribute heavily to crimes such as robbery, arson or theft is, in actuality, their poor background in terms of basic education, shelter, and finances. Since almost one-quarter of black people and Latinos live below the poverty (Carver), it is imminent that street crime rates will rise among this particular population.

Although overt behaviours are declining with time because of overall awareness among people, racism now exposes itself in tiny glimpses of covert or implicit behaviours that, although not intentional, are still alarmingly increasing at a gradual pace. The use of certain derogatory words is being curbed to bring awareness in the general population, such as the word '*negro*' or '*nigga*', which have previously been used spontaneously while referring to a black person, or '*muzi*' for Muslim. However, certain words are still held in association with certain races that are used to recognize them (Macedo and Gounari). For example, the word '*gang*' is another form of group, but in the criminal justice system, when a gang is being referred to, it means that the members of the group are all black.

Reportedly, the attitudes of police officers, in general, are sterner towards people of colour than the white population. Hence, black teenagers have reportedly been shot on point when being pulled over for a minor offence. It is the inculcated prejudice in the minds of the system and its people that now presents itself in the form of real-life hidden agendas. The police stops are the first platform that serves to raise these hidden prejudices (Marable). For example, a study at Stanford University concluded that the probability of African American and Hispanic drivers being stopped and searched is more than their white counterparts. This is the reason why African American men are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white men.

The second platform becomes the police searches, which also show a disparity between whites and people of colour. White people are more likely to be sent off with a warning compared to people of colour. The searches often are more thorough when a male of colour is the suspect. Another study at Stanford University concluded that police officers are likely to search black people if they have 5%

suspicion. Whether the driver has drugs or not, they are less likely to search white people even when they have 20% suspicion of the individual's state (Law). Moreover, people of colour are also more likely to endure the use of physical force during an arrest than white people. As mentioned before, the case of Freddie Gray was one of them.

The opinions of the African American and Hispanic people about the criminal justice system fall far from those of whites because of the unsteady relationship they have had for the past many centuries. Racism isn't the mindset of one generation but is the accumulation of several historical offenses committed against people of color and slavery is one strong and key example of them (Law). It is because of these perceptions that when given a chance, reverse discrimination presents itself among major black-populated regions.

Conclusion

Prejudice and racism have been a part of almost all societies and civilizations throughout history. Despite the fact that the world has flourished and progressed tremendously in the past few decades, in terms of both technological and social, hatred, prejudice, and racism still exist in today's society and are strongly entrenched in narrow-minded and old-fashioned values, customs, and traditions. Even though the problem of racism in the criminal justice system provides the use of unfair means against certain races, some still argue, referring to William Wilbanks's theory, that the underlying reasons for crime are entirely different from the presented issue. This often becomes a debate of sorts to come to a conclusion about the factual reasons behind such unfairness.

This topic is examined further in [Race Racism and Social Inequality in the United States](#).

Works Cited

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