

Understanding Racism and the Role of Identity Politics in Anti-Racism Movements in America

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Abstract:- The matter of racism is a complex issue concerning various humanities problems such as inequality in human rights, unfair treatment and unequal access to material resources. This dilemma has existed in various multicultural communities, for example America, where racial diversity is directly proportional to racist crime, which is among the highest in the world. According to The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, the number of hate crimes with racial or ethnic-related motivation accounts for 60 percent of incidents occurred in 2020 in America. The fight against racial injustice is a challenging battle that demands long-term involvement and systematic change, starting from both the advocates and the community. Therefore, strategic goals and methods are essential to providing effective campaigns against racial discrimination. In this case, advocates and leaders must be aware of the challenges that lead to the ineffectiveness of current anti-racism movements and increase the quality of those advocating campaigns. Using qualitative methods, this research study seeks to answer that problem through the investigation of the origin and definition of racism with the aim of further understanding the issue and defining the cause of ethnic inequality. Moreover, analysis of different types of racism and colour-blind theories is also provided, which helps determine the outcome and long-term strategy for improved campaign organization. Combating against racism is a complex process that can only be influential if campaign leaders, politicians and activists come up with a productive and sustainable strategy that can oversee the ultimate goal of promoting race equality.

Keywords:- Racism, Combating, Anti-racism, Movements, Identity, Politics, Equality.

I. INTRODUCTION

This research paper analyzes different causes of racism thus determining the most effective and strategic approaches to fighting against racial injustice. Starting from investigating various types of racism and identifying the challenges of current anti-racism work, foundational insight and contextual understanding about the matter can be provided, thus improving the quality of anti-racism movements.

The general objective of this research is to determine the effective strategies and goals that can be applied in anti-racism movements:

The specific research objectives consist of:

- To define racism and the context in which racism occurs;
- To analyze the challenges and obstacles that current anti-racism movements encounter;
- To suggest solutions that can improve the effectiveness and minimize the adverse effects of anti-racism campaigns.

According to Stokely and Charles (1967), institutional racism is the most impactful and systematic type of racial injustice which represents itself in the implementation of policies that disregard ethnic equality. Bonilla Silva (2001, 2003) stated that racism can take even more subtle form which is colour-blind racism, resulting in racist actions being more complicated and ambiguous to recognize.

The result could be summarized that racial discrimination represents itself in various ways. As racism can appear to be subtle and implicit, identifying and combating racism is gradually transforming into a more complicated and challenging process. In that case, it is important to determine the ultimate goals and priority that guide anti-racism movements, which is concentrating on solving institutional racism with a combination of systematic and appropriate approaches.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ A European Primitive Approach to Ethnic Difference

The Bible played a major role in shaping the intellectual perception of the Euro-American population, including the matter of ethnic difference. In some chapters, it did mention the differences of man but maintained that humans were made alike as people derived from the same origin. The phrase “made of one blood” stated by the author of Acts 17:26 reinforced the belief that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Perry, 2007).

Notions about this matter also appeared in European classical literature during the first few centuries of the Christian Era (C.E.). It held a strong belief that even though humans were made different in colours, movements or shapes, there was always an underlying sameness in our beings. Fictional tales described people in various parts of the world with three heads, cloven hooves, tails, or one eye in the middle of their chests. Despite this peculiar appearance, all the writing persisted that humans all shared mutual attributes, which is called common humanity. Namely, in the fifth century C.E, **Augustine**, a renowned theologian and prolific writer, argued that:

“Whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in colour, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part, or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast.” (Perry, 2007).

➤ Definition of Racism

Carmichael and Hamilton (1967), the authors of *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* viewed racism as ‘the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of subordinating a racial group and maintaining control over that group’ (Stokely and Charles, 1967).

According to Camara (2002), the global definition of racism is considered as: “Racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on phenotype (“race”), that: unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, undermines the realization of the full potential of the whole society through the waste of human resources”

Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton supposed that there were two types of racism: individual and institutional. However, to their opinion, the first type was rather redundant, and the second form was much more essential, as racism only “originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society”. 30 years later, a thorough definition of institutional racism was introduced by a British judge who conducted the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. He stated that :

Institutional Racism is made up of the consistent failure of the government in providing fair treatment due to their colour, culture or ethnic origin. Prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping are possible consequences of institutional racism that disadvantage ethnic minority people. These attitudes and behaviors can perpetuate a system of discrimination (Banton, 2018).

“Institutionalized racism manifests itself both in material conditions and in access to power. In the case of material conditions, examples include differential access to quality education, sound housing, gainful employment, appropriate medical facilities, and a clean environment. Regarding access to power, examples include differential access to information (including one's own history), resources (including wealth and organizational infrastructure), and voice (including voting rights, representation in government, and control of the media” (Camara, 2002).

➤ History of the Word “Racism”

Benedict (1940), was the first sociologist who put the concept of racism into her book “Race: Science and Politics” (New York: Modern Age, 1940). Since the notions of the anthropology of race were misleading at that time, she defined the term “racism” in her book as “the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority”

➤ Types of Policies that Promote Race Injustice

There are four common groups of policies that perpetuate institutional racism:

Policies that permit segregation of resources and risks. These include policies that mandate public resources that allow segregation or unfair treatment towards different groups of people based on ethnicity and race, including but not limited to residential resources, public education, or health care, etc.

The second type is policies that create inherited group disadvantage (or advantage). This leads to the lack of social security for children, limits in reparations for historical injustice.

The third type includes policies that favour the differential valuation of human life by race, which results in curriculum policies that teach certain histories and not others.

Lastly, policies that limit self-determination. These include policies that “affect representation on school boards, policies that result in disproportionate incarceration and subsequent disenfranchisement, and “majority rules” as the only mode of decision-making when there is a fixed minority” (Camara, 2002).

➤ *Color-Blind Racism and Unintentional Reproduction of Race Barriers*

According to Bonilla Silva (2001, 2003), "color-blind racism" is what scholars consider as the denial of racial privilege. The fundamentals of colour-blind racism are based on the ground of fundamental equality in all racial groups, in terms of rights and experiences, and that anti-racism programs only reinforce racial divisions (Andersen 2001). This perspective promotes an understanding of whiteness that assumes its content is like that of any other racial group and that racism is now largely a thing of the past. (Hughey, 2007)

Color-blind racism explained the continued second-class status of African Americans as a natural occasion, an inherent phenomenon without appearing traditionally "racist." These arguments mask anti-black racism and support fallacies that race no longer matters. (Hughey, 2007)

The perception of color-blind theories, which ensures that everyone is treated equally regardless of race, permits disparities. This is an attempt to remedy the continued social and economic deprivation of blacks and other minority group members. This version of equality ignores the context in which the problem of inequality has existed in this country, thus allows the discrimination in the opportunities and advantages available to people of different races, and ultimately endangers our democratic institutions (Wright, 1980).

➤ *The Impact of Identity Politics on Political Movements*

The power of identity politics is that it promotes the urge for civil fights and generates political aspirations, whether it is racial or nationalistic quarters. When one feels that their identity is not respected or acknowledged, the act of articulation and identification is likely to happen. The slogan of "Black Lives Matter" also function likewise, when it concentrates on a group of ethnicity and reflects the demand to signify that ethnic group. This generates a transition of unclear feelings or motives to a collective passion in articulating and signifying one representative group (Gielen, 2020).

Karl Max (1974), explained this matter as the transformation of *Klasse an sich* (class-in-the-making) to *Klasse fur sich* (class-for-itself), in the area of class revolutions, that *Klasse an sich* can only liberate from unpleasant circumstances by first recognizing and expressing its own identity.

➤ *Drawbacks of Identity Politics*

Much as clarifying the fundamental difference in race and defining the **discrimination** is essential to achieve balance and equality, there exist risks of conservative drawbacks. As the significance of one's identity be solidified, it can be misinterpreted into "our-own-people-first" perception. In that case, collective communities can turn into gated communities and antiracist can transform into racist antiracist. The line between such scenarios can be very thin and antiracism

advocates can cross the line and repeat the behaviours of the enemies they are fighting against (Gielen, 2020).

III. DISCUSSION

➤ *Ethnic Difference and the Origin of Racism*

Even though it is generally assumed that the root causes of racism lie in the difference of ethnic, races or colours, the reason behind race inequality actually derives from the continuation of unfair policies and the governmental system that allows such policies to be implemented. The idea of racism didn't naturally occur but was enforced and passed on generations by a government, thus made racism repeated itself several times in history (Perry, 2007).

There has always been a underlying sameness in our being and human nature is to connect to each other. The difference in colours wouldn't be a problem if it was not implied as a standard to divide resources and provide opportunities unfairly (Perry, 2007).

➤ *Racism has Become Systematic and Institutionalized*

Racist actions can happen anywhere and anytime in our surroundings which may include racist words, disrespectful remarks or shaming statements about race (Stokely and Charles, 1967).

However, those were just the surface of the problem. Racism continued throughout history and still existed now was because of the institutionalization of racism that was permitted by the government in charge. Institutionalized racism represents itself in unequal access to material conditions such as quality education, welfare and medical facilities. Consistent policies that ignore race equality and promote injustice are also considered as a part of systematic racism (Banton, 2018).

The impact of these systematic actions is enormous. Not only does it perpetuate the notion of racism in the public, but it also normalizes racism into the society. When racism is made common knowledge and acceptable, it wouldn't appear to be unusual because people start to perceive it as an ordinary event (Banton, 2018).

Institutionalized racism limit the development and life standards of people coming from specific races in a long-term period. In health care and public service, they are discriminated in terms of considerate treatment and that may cause dangers and problems to their health or life expectancy. In education, they have less opportunities and that will create barriers in mindset and future career development. Social welfare are sometimes not distributed equally and that leads to limited access to the rights and social benefits that the people deserve as any citizen of a country. All of these are allowed to continue due to the lack of regard of race equality coming from policy-makers and political system in charge. The problem hence becomes more complex to handle and changes are more difficult to

implement. Should changes be made, they should start first in the mind of leaders and governors, and demand a systematic change in order to face institutionalized racism (Camara, 2002).

➤ *Color-Blind Theories Reproduce Racism*

According to Bonilla Silva (2001, 2003), racism can become more subtle when it changes its representation, one of them including color-blind racism. It starts from the belief that there was fundamentally no inequality or discrimination among race and racism was just a thing of the past.

Color-blind racism ignores the fact that inequality already existed and denies racial privilege. Pretending like racism never existed doesn't mean that there was no sign of racism in the community, and this approach merely solve the problem but rather dolging or averting it. Even worse, it can be used as excuses against certain ethnic minorities rights and movements (Wright, 1980).

These subtle and indiscreet forms reproduce racism without appearing traditionally racist. They should be taken into consideration and analyzed thoroughly or else the root of racism will remain untouched (Hughey, 2007).

➤ *Redefining the Priorities in Combating Racism*

Much as protecting and advocating for racial rights is essential, it can be ineffective or turn out to be counterproductive if inconsiderate methods are taken. The most impactful form of racism is institutionalized racism, so the priority in combating against injustice should be addressing the policies and system that allow unfairness regarding race and ethnic. This is not a simple and effortless goal but rather a sophisticated one that require strategic and systematic approach. That process and movements should be planned and evaluated thoroughly, political movements should have insight in the origins of racism and the perpetuation of racism within the society, thus figuring out solutions to create a widespread impact in the system or a change in policies that have long-term prospects (Hughey, 2007).

Anti-racism campaigns that lack specific goals or strategies can cause more problems rather than preventing them. One obvious consequence is that those campaigns focus on the wrong priority and may lead to confusion among the advocates. Instead of concentrating on changing policies on a big scale, the advocates might get too fixated on the symptoms of racism such as daily language, individual behaviors and viewpoints (Gielen, 2020).

Moreover, inappropriate approaches to anti-racism activism can also be dangerous. Stressing too much on racial difference can cause the "our-own-people-first" misinterpretation or extreme reactions towards minor symptoms that only address the surface of racism issues. This may end up creating more barriers and discrimination among races and anti-racism can become racist anti-racism. Therefore, it is vital that anti-racism campaign leaders keep sight of what really matters: influencing the race conscious system and preventing institutionalized racism (Gielen, 2020).

➤ *Policies Regarding Race Equality*

There should be more campaigns and policies that promote race equality and prevent racism. Regarding this matter, there can be two types of policies:

Firstly, policies that address equal segregation of public resources regardless of race or ethnic, including campaigns that detect and minimize acts of unfair treatment or distribution of resources in public health care, security, and social welfare. (Camara, 2020).

Secondly, educational policies or media campaigns that raise awareness about institutionalized racism or educating young generations about diversity and cultural understanding. Educational campaigns can contribute to spreading knowledge about solidarity instead of discrimination, teaching students about diverse cultures and guide them to respect others regardless of colours. (Camara, 2020).

IV. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this paper was based on qualitative research. Accumulation of scholarly articles, textbooks, and research papers adds up data and formulates the foundational context of this research project.

This research included a literature review and further analytical discussions on the matter of racism. Insight about the historical background and context in which racism occurred as well as the advantages and drawbacks of current anti-racism movements were provided. There was also given information about institutional racism and policies that perpetuate racism, color-blind theories that unintentionally reproduces racism, and the role of identity politics in the political movements for racial rights.

The hypothesis stated that among all types, systematic and institutionalized racism is the most complicated and influential form of racism that promotes injustice among ethnic groups. However, there had not been sufficient methods or political campaigns that effectively combated institutionalized racism. Some current anti-racism approaches even had a possibility of worsening the problem and ended up not being able to solve systematic racism thoroughly. Insightful understanding of racism and objective analysis of recent movements can help create more productive and impactful policies that prevent institutionalized racism.

The theoretical framework in this study is based on definition of racism, institutionalized racism and the impact of previous anti-racism movements. Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) explained the definition of institutionalized racism and emphasized the effect of race-conscious policies on perpetuating ethnic injustice. Camara (2002) further analyzed and defined four types of policies that institutionalize racism. Bonilla Silva (2001, 2003) examined the drawbacks of color-blind theories whereas Gielen (2020) evaluated the identity politics approach in fighting against racism.

V. CONCLUSION

Objective 1 stated: to define racism and the context in which racism occurs. Racism consists of two types: individual and institutional racism. Even though individual racism is more visible and racist remarks are more recognizable, it is institutional racism that perpetuates race inequality and normalize racism into the society by executing policies that promote the unfair treatment in public sectors, unequal segregation of resources or access to material resources.

In that case, racial discrimination occurs not only in the scope of an individual but also in a more impactful scale, deriving from the disregard of ethnic equality in the mindset of policy makers or politics leaders. As racism becomes more systematic and institutionalized, combating racism and promoting race equality is turning into a more complex and challenging process.

Objective 2 stated: to analyze the challenges and obstacles that current anti-racism movements encounter. Anti-racism campaigns are facing the dilemma of lacking specific goals or strategies, which can cause more problems rather than preventing them. Advocating campaigns that focus on the wrong priority may lead to confusion among the advocates, making them get too fixated on the symptoms of racism such as daily language, individual behaviors and viewpoints instead of concentrating on solving systematic racism. Moreover, stressing too much on racial difference can cause the “our-own-people-first” misinterpretation and gated communities that may end up creating more barriers and discrimination among races.

Objective 3 stated: to suggest solutions that can improve the effectiveness and minimize the adverse effects of anti-racism campaigns. It is essential that anti-racism campaigns recognize the most influential form of racism is institutional racism, thus defining the first and foremost priority as addressing the policies and system that allow unfairness regarding race and ethnic. Once the ultimate goal and the priority has been identified thoroughly, campaign leaders can proceed to coming up with effective strategies and appropriate approaches for campaign organizations.

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