

RACE ISSUES IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

The main concern of this article is to investigate race issues in America. It seeks to put forward the hypothesis that blacks are treated equally in the United States especially after the election of a black President from African origins, Barack Obama. There is no doubt then that America is a democracy because during the election campaign, Hillary Clinton was about to be elected the first woman President in the nation's history. It is true that Obama won, but even if Hillary took the vote, it would have been another proof that democracy in America is not merely an ideal.

INTRODUCTION

In America, whether you are black, white, Asian, and/or Hispanic, you are indifferent. The majority of Americans if not all of them do not make individual distinctions between groups of people. Can we say that the long history of discrimination between "whites" and the people of color has finally ended in America? No one can deny that the blacks suffered great deal and that they were without rights since early colonial times. The main question concerns if blacks and other minorities receive equal treatment in the most "democratic" country in the world.

Race has become a serious issue in America as the nation grew larger and larger and as the population has become multiethnic. The people of color experienced a distinct treatment and even racism. Immigrants from all countries have come to America from Asia, Europe, Latin America, Mexico and India. In addition, hundreds of blacks left West Africa to the United States as slaves who have always considered slavery as "America's weird institution". The era of segregation, despite all the efforts, seems to be slightly felt today. The aim of this article is to uncover this resistant problem in America that has long existed because of the "color line"—an obstacle that separated between whites and the people of color.

In addition, this article deals with definitions of some key words like racism, discrimination and prejudice for better understanding of the issue at stake. W. E. B. Du Bois¹ stated that, I quote: "*the problem of the twenty first century is the problem of the color-line*". From here was the idea to tackle the issue of race to uncover the truth because many people claim that the blacks are still suffering and that the image presented by the media is nothing but a way to show that America is a lively democracy.

In the most heterogeneous nation in the world, intergroup relations are harmonious. In America, the educated elites and professionals are white while other minorities and people of color tried to improve their status in the last thirty years. Similarly, the WASP culture

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903 ; reprint with an introduction by John Edgar Wideman, New York, Vintage books/ Library of America, 1990),3

tries to reflect the white Americans who are heterosexual, centrist, secular, middle-class, and in good physical conditions. What is strange about the mainstream culture is that it gives little importance to minorities, to extremists, homosexuals, the poor, and the handicapped. As we have already seen in the first chapter, the pot did not include every one! The question that arises here is do blacks and other minority groups live like the whites in their own country America

Some scholars claim that blacks receive equal treatment today for they fill very high positions; they are mayors of major cities, university professors, doctors and so on, is not always true. Oprah, for instance, is a famous TV host admired by millions and who is a billionaire. However, one should not believe all what they see; after all it is the media!" They just hire black people into different jobs for the image of the nation. Where is the truth then? All this questions would be the focus of this article.

Race Relations in America

Race relations in America are classified in terms of paradigms (monoracial, biracial, multiracial) that went hand in hand with current debatable issues and the people who lived within a particular region. The monoracial paradigm in which the whites matter most in American life, described race relations in America from 1789 to 1954. Recently, many regions in America are still monoracial, where the whites represent the majority of the population. Yet, the whites refer to race only when they fill application forms and/or the census forms, but they rarely think they are white and very different even when they discuss about ethnicity and religion in America. Being a white or a black does not matter today like in the past, although America had always been a white-majority country at various points in its history².

Race became a nation-wide issue in the twentieth century especially after the migration of blacks from the South to the North and the North West. From 1910 to 1970, many blacks left Dixie to better regions; this phenomenon is "the Great Migration". In 1910, about 89 per cent of blacks were living in the Southern States and the District of Columbia. By 1940, the number of blacks in these areas dropped to 77 per cent and to 53 per cent in the seventies. Many factors pushed and/or pulled the blacks to migrate. The "pull factors" were the job opportunities and the huge prosperity in Western Northern and Midwest cities. The "push factors" were the racial hostility and the use of machines, which substituted man in cotton factories.

After the arrival of blacks in North Eastern, Western and Mid Western regions, race became debatable all over America³. The South became less black after the "Great Migration". For example, Mississippi a Southern state in which the blacks constituted a majority, but this changed after the Great Migration. Many race clashes occurred in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago. Other cities known as white-majority changed and took in many blacks such as Detroit and Milwaukee.

The second paradigm was the biracial paradigm based on black-and-white coexistence from 1954 to 1990. The 1990 census was the first in the nation's history in which the total

² . Barbara Flagg, « Was Blind, But Now I See: White Race Consciousness and the Requirement of Discriminatory Intent », Michigan Law Review (March 1993), 953-1017; Ian. E. Haney Lopez, *White By Law: the Legal Construction By Race*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 155-195

³ Leman, *The Promised Land*; passim.

of non-black (minorities) inhabitants increased faster than the African-Americans were⁴. However, this paradigm describes to a certain extent race relations and it is as a precise structure of reference from Detroit to Mississippi to the District of Columbia.

But the Americans are not very interested in the white-and-black conflicts, first because there are other growing groups such as the (Hispanics, Asian Americans, American Indians and other mixed-race people) that represent about 18 per cent of the whole population. These growing groups do not talk so much about black-and-white issues because most of the time it neglects them and their own issues. In addition, race issues need far more serious solutions than the ones suggested during sixties. The appearance of a multiracial society brought about new subjects for discussion like bilingual education, illegal immigration, which were not there three decades ago. Therefore the third paradigm of a multiracial society is, I believe, more accurate than the other two.

The whole image of the nation then has changed and will continue to change with the arrival of new waves of immigrants. The population is changing even the color of the country is changing and it is said that it is becoming darker. Racial debates affect the lives of Americans especially in the most heterogeneous cities. Probably, race is the most significant and debatable issue in American life. Observable differences of physical characteristics, which separate the races, are the most noteworthy features that shape intergroup relations. In addition to the social, cultural, economic and political factors, these biological factors strengthen the endless challenges for power, identification and resources that happen between, among and within American racial groups.

In the past, America was a white-dominated country but recently it has changed and the non-whites are becoming more and more visible. Consequently, race has appeared to be a major issue that influences American daily life. It is certainly a big challenge that America is experiencing to deal with diversity and to find solutions to groups' problems and tensions. Race relations are improving in America these last thirty years. This does not mean however, that tensions between various racial groups have completely vanished. However, America opened its doors to immigrants from different countries without constraints.

Categorizing by Race in America

Classifying by race created clashes in America because of many reasons. First, the number of multiracial children increased and second because large number of immigrants, who were visibly different, entered the country from the Caribbean, Arabia, and Latin America. The third reason is that some minority groups with different physical appearance who felt rejection by the whites may reject other multiracial groups for the same reasons. To me, every ethnic group should treat other groups as it wishes to be treated. Furthermore, though diversity is very important, but without exaggerating attention than it really deserves. However, why classifying people by race? What race is all about?

Race refers to a group of people who shares the same biological and genetic features. Although it refers to some distinct groups in the United States (we talk of racial relations for example), this concept is obsolete and is actually inappropriate to distinguish, in the

⁴. Peter Brimelow, *Alien Nation : Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996), 64.

twenty-first century, between human beings as no group can pretend to have conserved biological purity with members who share the same physical attributes because of intermarriage. As early as the nineteenth century, anthropologists have admitted that race could no longer answer issues of human difference and turned to a more realistic concept; the concept of culture.

Currently, observable differences are explained by two competing viewpoints: “the Out of Africa and Multiregional evolution theories”. The whole problem is about where today’s people are from and how they developed noticeable race differences. The theory of “Out of Africa” is about those who originated in Africa thousands of years ago. Later, they left Africa about 80,000 years ago because of population pressures, and went to all parts of the world. Those who opposed this theory said that visible biological differences are due to geographical regions and the necessary adaptation that gradually occurred after the arrival of various groups in different regions of the country.

Of course, human beings have different races, characteristics, colors of skin, and ethnicity because of the weather conditions as well as the geographical regions. Therefore, the various ethnic groups have various languages and religions that bring about observable differences. May be today, they are more observable than before simply because in the past people did not have as many means to travel like nowadays. In addition, because of the role the media plays which shows us as different.

Scientists based on physical features like have characterized human races: the appearance, the color of the eye, hair type, and color of skin. This characterization puzzled those scientists who wonder why race is used to classify human beings⁵. Before we can answer this question, let us first define this concept of race. Race is a social phenomenon that is widely related to social, cultural, political and historical context⁶. It received a great attention because of the meeting points of race with power and opportunity.

The biggest economy worldwide is the one with the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP); the American economy followed by the Chinese, Japanese, German, and then India. The United States of America has 4.6 per cent of the world’s population and represents 22.7 percent of GWP (Gross World Product). In America, the most prosperous group is that of the whites. They live in the most powerful nation worldwide and their incomes are very high. No explanation is available to clarify the great difference between people and countries. What is the relation with race? Are they successful and powerful just because they are white?

America remains the most powerful, richest and most important country in the world today. It has become powerful due to the contributions of various immigrant groups and because diversity is part of American daily life. In addition, American Brands and Products such as Coca Cola, Mickey Mouse, Mc Donald’s, and Levi’s control world

⁵. Stringer and Mc Kie, *African Exodus*, 64; Jared Diamond, “Race Without Color”, *Discover* 15 (November 1994): 83-89; David L. Wheeler, ‘A Growing Number of Scientists Reject the Concept of Race’, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 17, 1995, A9, A 15; Natalie Angier: “Do Races Differ? Not really, Genes Show”, *New York Times*, August, 22, 2000, at F1.

⁶. Haney Lopez, *White by Law, passim, especially 111-153*; Michael Omi and Howard Win ant, *Racial Formation in the United States: from the sixties to the nineties*, 2 nd edition. (New York: Routledge, 1994) particularly 53-76, Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: the Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)

market, thoughts, trade, and culture. Americans have always believed that they had a special mission, to save the world. After the beginning of the “American Century” in the forties, it became necessary that America would play an important role in world’s affairs. America fought against the USSR for power in different political spheres.

In the post-Cold War period, scholars believe that” the policeman of the world” should guarantee security and well-being for its people first and then for the rest of the world. Countries are either powerful countries like the United States, Japan, Germany or second world countries such as South Korea and third world countries like African countries. America spends huge sums of money to help the poorest countries all over the globe. In my opinion, her help is insufficient because global problems like joblessness, poverty and malnutrition and inadequate health care continue to exist especially in the African countries where millions are suffering and starving to death.

Native-born Americans really benefit from the richness and prosperity of this nation simply because they were born in America. Americans do not fear any rebellion and/or political threat. Price inflation is not a potential problem for Americans. Another prominent privilege is that Americans speak English that is the second language of most educated people in the world. The American currency is the most stable, the most changed and convertible. This currency is also dependable in exchanges between countries in trade, even by countries that use languages other than English. All these factors indicate the impact of American values, culture, American people and institutions on the rest of the world.

Americans do not know the merits of being Americans until they leave their country, especially to a developing country. In these countries, second-class American visitors may experience bad conditions such as unpaved roads, the absence of electricity, and lack of communication means. However, these ordinary Americans are as rich foreigners when compared to people from developing countries like Vietnam. In these bad circumstances, the Americans learn to be thankful and proud that many people around the world would envy them and admire them because they were born on the American soil.

Nevertheless, this country appears with everyone living in good conditions. This is at least the image shown by the media. However, no one is sure whether everyone shares the Apple Pie equally or not! To be sure, the whites dominated the work place while the people of color did not have food to put on their family's tables. White supremacy was not only in the work place, in universities, schools and elsewhere too. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union tried to attack the United States with statement based on the unequal treatment of African Americans⁷. However, today, America is trying to show itself as a place that represents its population. To what extent does this nation represent minority groups?

Race Classification of Blacks and Indians

Since the first US census in 1790, the ten-year orientation of Americans has always required questions about race, although the American population has changed over the years. During the sixties and the seventies, the Federal government’s Civil-Rights

⁷ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000)

Foundation required racial and ethnic statistics. So American schema was designed which was described in a document called Statistical Policy Directive N° 15. This document is for de jure races: (white, black, Asian, Pacific Islander and American Indian) and two ethnic categories (Hispanic and non-Hispanic).

The next classes were the one put forward by the Office of Management and Budget, in the revised version of Statistical Policy Directive N° 15:

White: “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa”

Black or African American:”A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa”

Hispanic or Latino: “A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race”

Asian: “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian Subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam”

American Indian or Alaskan Native: “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment”.

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands”⁸

Hispanics are as a distinct group and so David Hollinger called the five other classes: “the ethno-racial pentagon”. The five ethno-racial groups that constitute a pentagon are the five major races”: whites, blacks, Hispanics, African Americans and American Indians. The new adjustment to the US government’s racial choices after the addition of Pacific Islander” does not constitute an ethno-racial hexagon. In fact, groups like Hawaiians, Samoans, Guamanians, Tongans, Fijians, and other groups are minority groups.

To be sure, problems of race go back to the first English contact with the blacks and Indians during the early European exploration. The English considered the blacks and Indians as barbarians, savages and inferior. However, they enslaved them and treated them in a very bad way, even worse; sometimes they were extremely unfair and cruel to them.

Like the Africans, the Indians also suffered great deal but their number did not exceed the one percent of the whole population, whereas African Americans constituted the largest minority. In fact, the Indians received a better treatment if compared to the blacks. This does not mean however that they were not any terrible and violent clashes against some Indian tribes. Some clashes marked history such as the Trial of Tears in 1830, the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864 and the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890.

When the whites took the Indians’ lands and properties, they started to consider them as “noble savages” because they had never been a threat to the white Americans. Great Indian soldiers such as Tecumseh had the respect of whites. They were brave and had the will to maintain their own ways of life. Novels and cowboys were popular in America and Europe, too.

⁸. Office of Management and Budget, “Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity”, Federal Register (October 30, 1997): 58782-58790.

In the postwar era, Native Americans remained a prominent part of the national legend. The Western in the fifties and sixties were more popular than the Wild West Shows. In these films, Native Americans appeared as bad character, loyal and subservient henchmen or anonymous additional characters added to create an “authentic” picture. In addition, in these films, Native Americans were most of the time the losers.

The black-white marriages were not very common in the United States in the past. It was something forbidden by law; however, slave-owners, male relatives and/or those strangers who came to the United States had sexually abused the African women. The children that resulted from these illegal relations whose skin was fairer, grew up as slaves, or joined schools reserved for the whites but considered as inferior to their white children. It was a way to avoid troubles and continue without obstacles. That is how the “one-drop” rule emerged. It classified the biracial children who resulted from the marriages between blacks and whites. This classification was as follows: mullatoes (part black in general), Quadroon (one-quarter black) and octoroons (one-eighth black)⁹. This rule was the “one-drop rule”.

White men also had sexual relationships with Indian women especially in regions where white females were rare. Although there were few laws to restrict these relations and/or marriages, the white men continued to marry Indian women and favored the mixed marriages. In fact, the children who were half-white and half-Indian appeared to be able to assimilate into a white community rather than any Indian one. Moreover, unions were formed which included blacks and American Indians mainly in the Southeast but the whites did not like such combinations. In the period prior to 1970, according to the US Bureau of the Census, “persons of mixed white and other parentage were usually classified with the other race. A person of mixed parentage other than white was usually classified by the race of his father, except that mixture of Negro and Indian were classified as Negroes unless the Indian stock was clearly predominant or unless the individual was accepted in the community in which he resided as an Indian”¹⁰

The “one-drop rule” was acceptable in the twenties; the size of mullatoes and pure blacks increased, creating a new color that was brown. Their race was a mixture of African, European and American Indian origins. The Census Bureau’s classification provided a new face to the black population. From 1850 to 1920, the nation counted the number of blacks in the country, but after 1920, they stopped classifying the blacks and therefore a new definition of blacks appeared. A black was a person with some African blood who was different physically from a white person¹¹.

Some people believe that the “one-drop rule” still matters today. “A majority white person can self-identify, says Dominic Pulera, “as a black or American Indian and, in some cases Asian or Hispanic—and be considered a de jure racial minority in the United States—based

⁹ Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: 1980), 5-59; F. James Davis *Free Press, Who Is Black? One Nation’s Definition* (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 31-42; Kathy Russell and al, *the Color Complex, the Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 9-29; Christine B. Hickman, “the Devil and the Drop Rule: Racial Categories, African Americans, and the US census”, *Michigan Law Review* 95. (March 1997) 1161-1265.

¹⁰ US Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition, Part 1.3*

¹¹ Davis, *ibid*, 22, 42-80 ; Williamson, *ibid*, 61, 106, 108-109, 111-139.

on his or her fractionized amounts of non-white blood”. Some blacks may even have some European ancestry but they prefer to be identified as African Americans to show their pride and solidarity to their groups”¹².

The problem is that many American people identify themselves as non-whites in order to benefit from Affirmative Action programs. A Eurasian woman identified as white but she was Asian American in order to take advantage from the financial-aid programs. Therefore, many mixed-race people are trying to identify as non-whites in universities and elsewhere to receive special treatment.

The classification of blacks brought about interracial color segregation between African Americans. The majority of African American professors, doctors, teachers and businesspersons were not dark-skinned or half- black until the civil rights movement of the fifties and the sixties. African Americans used various terms to classify the blacks in the United States. “High Yellow” described mulattoes who imitated racial inequality of the whites and tried to differentiate from the blacks by behaving differently and by having other traditions and practices. One of these practices was the “blue-vein” test, in which only people with visible veins had access to particular social settings. Another was the “brown paper” bag test, in which only people whose color of skin was fairer than the color of brown paper bags were able to be part of some church congregations. These classifications were racist and they aggravated the situation between blacks and whites.

The outstanding figure, Marcus Garvey was the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) and struggled hard to claim for blacks’ rights. During the twenties, some African Americans considered those blacks with a dark skin as “black”, making some of their sisters and brothers with fair complexion to prove the things they say about their identity. During the late sixties, “blackness” became an ideology and a subject widely discussed among whites and Native Americans.

There was a similar interest to describe American Indians. Indians may be classified into three groups: those whose blood comes from an ancestry which belongs to one tribe, those who are physically Indians and whose heritage comes from more than a tribe, and/or biracial and multiracial Americans who categorize themselves with the Indians even though they have white , black or Asian blood. So who is an Indian? According to Dominic Pulera, a rare self-trained scholar, an Indian, I quote “*is dependent on a particular tribe’s membership policies regarding the granting, denial, revocation, and qualification of Indianness. The tribal imprimatur is necessary if one wants to receive tribal benefits, occupy tribal land, and participate in tribal programs*”¹³.

Racial exogamy is the beginning to stop classifying by races. Amalgamation, whether through marriage or any other relations between and among races, is acceptable in the United States of America. Getting married to someone whose race is different from yours

¹² . Dominic Pulera, *Visible Differences: Why Race Will Matter to Americans in the Twenty-First Century?*, The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2002, p.32-36

¹³ Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1942* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 42-293, Rogers Worthington, “Who Belongs to Tribe? Casino Raises Wealth Raisers the Stakes”, *Chicago Tribune* May Tribe Is at Odds Over Quarters; Fiction Wins Tribal Vote to Open Membership Rolls”, *Washington Post*, April 21, 1995, A3, David Foster, “Intermarriage Cloud of Indian Ancestry”, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 27, 1997, 13.

became commonplace especially among the youth. In fact, interracial marriage occurs between a white and a minority, not two people of color or various races.

The media has a deep influence in shaping people's opinion inside and outside America. The new image provided by the media in almost all the American movies is the role blacks play in the American society. We always see a white police officer working hand in hand with a black or Asian one. Apart from movies, other blacks such as the famous golfer "Tiger Woods" who is the first "Cablinasion" Asian, black, African American also add a positive image to the blacks living in America. Is the image of blacks' situation real or a play of the media? May be it is just fashionable today among youngsters to say that they have a black friend, an Asian and/or an Indian.

The blacks are becoming less visible simply because America is becoming more and more heterogeneous. The number of newcomers from Africa and the Middle East increased. In fact, most people coming from Africa and/or the Middle East are confused with the whites because they have a similar appearance with white Americans. However, even though many Arabs are highly skilled and professional, they are sometimes segregated and marginalized simply because they were ethnically different or because they were Muslims.¹⁴

The Color of the nation

Some ethnic groups and minorities did not appear in America's textbooks of the late twentieth century. Probably, unconsciously filmmakers and producers did not include various ethnic groups. Nowadays, however diversity in America is apparent at least in textbooks so that the children at school would see different faces while they are learning. Again, America has made a big effort to put forward curricula that reflects issues like bilingualism and multicultural education. In addition, it has tried to make all its inhabitants and citizens satisfied and never excluded.

However, how can every citizen be satisfied and this is the nation of millions especially with all the world issues like the war on Iraq? Can we say that not all the Iraqis living in America care about what is happening in their country? The same is true for the Japanese, is it possible that all the Japanese living in America today have forgotten what occurred in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945? These two questions may be the same as for the blacks can they forget the long history of black conflicts and racism, and live as if nothing has happened.

Concerning the relations between Japan and America, many people think that they enjoy friendly relations. There are several bilateral relations between the two countries; they exchange products and items of culture. Americans largely know some Japanese brands such as Sony, Suzuki, Honda, Toyota, and Toshiba. The Americans also like Japanese pop culture like Karaoke, Hello Kitty. Similarly, in Japan, some businesspersons are trying to promote some American products and films. What is amazing is that even the movie Pearl Harbor was widely viewed by millions in Japan. The same is true for the blacks in America; the blacks are trying to live with the fact that slavery was a black point in the

¹⁴ . for background on these issues, see Samia El Badry, "the Arab-American Market", *American Demographics*, (January 1994):22-27, 30, Mehdi Bozorgmehr, Claudia Der Martirosian and Georges Sabagh, "Middle Easterners: A New Kind of Immigrant", in Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr, eds, *Ethnic Los Angeles*, (New York. Russell Sage Foundation, 1996) 345-378.

nation's history but the new generations accept to coexist with the whites and the best proof is the number of black-white marriages in the United States.

Europe was once the main supplier of immigrants until the nineties. Nowadays, immigrants whose ancestors are from Britain do not consider themselves as an ethnic group. Despite the fact that the Welsh and the Scottish have their own cultural practices, there is no English American identity by itself. The power of the WASP increased by the fact that many African Americans have English surnames, which helped the Anglo-Saxons identify and appear as Americans.

Years ago, questions about citizenship involved racial classification and it had racial regulations. The native-born white Americans have been US citizens since 1789. The blacks received citizenship later in 1868 while the other minorities like the American Indians became citizens in 1924. The Asians became citizens in 1952. In America, if a child is born on the American soil, even if his/her parents are without papers, he is an American citizen¹⁵. In addition, legal inhabitants of the nation who have been there for three to five years and/or more are entitled to apply for naturalization. In my opinion, it is easier in America than elsewhere to get the citizenship for the foreign-born Americans and this is a positive point in the United States of America, the land of the Rising Sun.

Although the United States of America is a predominantly Christian, Christianity is not the religion of the nation. Using figures, 59 per cent of Americans were Protestants, which are the main sources of black communities. The White-Anglo Saxon Protestants (WASP), composed of old-stock Americans mainly the English, dominated America for a long time. Gradually, other religious groups appeared like Irish Catholics, American Jews, which become stronger in the world of religion.

Liberal multiculturalists favor celebrations of non-western and non-European cultures. America is a nation ruled by "white" standards with the exclusion of minorities, women, homosexuals and everyone who is different from the white heterosexual men. Currently, the issue of "whiteness" is becoming very important, even universities and colleges now provide lectures about whiteness. Actually, scholars, academics and students have long observed whiteness because it is an overarching fact. They are trying to investigate about race in its biological, legal, cultural, political and economic context. The antiracists believe that by studying the white majority in America, they will enhance better understanding of "white privilege" and hence get rid of racism and endorse diversity.

Before we can talk deeply about racism, it is necessary to define it as an institution, which has long existed and would probably continue as long as there are visible differences. Racism or discrimination is a behavior used against some minority groups because they are powerless, without authority and/or because of their biological characteristics. Generally, minority groups are subordinate; they have less power and less protected supplies than do majority groups that are dominant and controlling. The problem is that the word minority has always been associated with numbers, which is not the case; it has to do with incomes, authority and power.

¹⁵ . Ian Henry Lopez, *ibid.*

The Social Construction of Race

“Never judge a book by its cover”, this is what classifying by race is all about. The proverb informs about those who give so much importance just to the shapes and colors of things. Why have Americans misinterpreted this proverb when they started classifying by race? What really matters beyond black and white, blue or green is that we are human beings. It is true that we cannot be homogeneous but this really gives a flavor to our lives.

If you ask a white person what he thinks about a black person and how s/he would like him to be, what would he say? Why those who abused the blacks and mistreated them did not think about other things apart from the physical features? Why have not they considered their intellectual, emotional, and social qualities? What skills did those blacks have? What language or languages do they speak? What are their cultures? How do they spend their free time? Finally, how do you feel about them?

When the white person answers these questions, s/he would be able to classify using dimensions other than race, according to their values or cultures for instance. If this person could not accept people into his/her own circle, community and/or country, s/he is racist. A racist then is someone who carries beliefs about categorical superiority and inferiority of socially defined groups assumed to share biological characteristics. Thus, the definition of blacks as African Americans is the first step toward more understanding and more trustworthiness for these groups.

Racists should learn to see other groups visibly different from them as groups with rich cultures and that they were born equal exactly like them. Therefore, it is high time to stop giving much importance to biological features, instead let us view others with an eye of respect. In my opinion, this is the only way in which the United States can come out of divisive troubles that may threaten its stability.

As part of the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties and seventies, political activists and antiracists artists and intellectuals of different cultural backgrounds came together to fight racism and segregation. To do this, they accepted the argument that human beings are biologically different, even if this idea was at the heart of racism and racial problems. To cure historical discrimination that included the blacks and other minorities, these reformers took in biological classification as legitimate. They believed that in order to achieve equity, there should be some race-based initiatives like affirmative action. This tactic appeared to be helpful in developing admission to privileges and sources by people of color.

However, this plan emphasized visible differences and stratification. It makes race the most important measure for the share and allocation of commodities, services, and value. In this case, paying attention only to the physical appearance and mainly to the color of skin is justified by those who think that success had to do with biological features rather than culture. Some people even believe that the whites had dominated all fields simply because they were whites. In my opinion, this is very wrong because if the whites had more power and privileges, it remains just insignificant and merely an exception. The Europeans are no more the dominant group in North America; there are some poor whites like other racially defined minorities. Their achievement to power and privilege is restricted and proscribed. Whiteness, it was said to be a positive feature, but it is by no means synonymous to natural economic, political and/or social superiority.

Educated leaders of various colors who dominate the political, cultural and economic spheres divide socioeconomic partition. One of the results of superficially planned partition and classification is the construction of internal collaboration, faithfulness, and behaviors by individuals. This organization helps to distinguish and protect one group of people from another. Race is a parameter to distinguish between people, to protect some of them and make use of others. The racist Adolf Hitler used race to give reason for the extermination of Jews and Gypsies in an attempt to strengthen German nationalism. Afrocentrists rely on race and racial centrism to organize and unify the “Black Atlantic”, including the sons and grandsons of the slaves.

Racial differences are at the heart of discrimination and they strengthen stereotypes about the nature and the culture of social groups. Nevertheless, mainstreamers are able to understand today that race is not simply a matter of color; that it is no more between black and white but black and Asian, I Indian and white..., etc. In my opinion, race has not totally vanished but it is less important than in the past. The only way America can get through racial problems is by paying more attention to culture instead of race.

Race and Racism

After the classification of race as a social structure, it appeared as a dishonorable biological term. Like ethnicity, race is a matter of classes and classification and not merely a biological fact. Ethnic groups, including races, originate from differences recognized and perpetuated in some societies, instead of scientific categorization based on universal genes.

Members of various groups may be different and particular by others because they have different languages, religions, countries, histories, ancestors, and/or physical appearances. When a group shares biological traits like blood or genes, it is referred to as a *race*.

Fifty years ago the famous anthropologist Ruth Benedict observed that, I quote; '*in world History, those who have helped to build the same culture are not necessarily of one race, and those of the same race have not all participated in one culture. In scientific language, culture is not a function of race*' (Benedict 1940, chapter 2). Although there had been many scientific proofs, which contradicted the segregation of people based on race, discrimination continues today in America. Abolition and the Civil Right movement ended discrimination in behaviors but not in the minds of people. Americans are still hearing about the needs of the black race and the blame of the white race. The classification of human beings based on physical characteristics has been important in international and interpersonal relations for a long time. Unequal opportunity to employment, education excessively continues to affect the people of color and minorities.

We tend to give more importance to economic and/or political position more than personal qualities or values. Importance given to race often prevails over consideration of individual moral values. Parents may forbid any case of interracial marriage in the family. Youngsters of mixed unions may fight to establish and to emphasize an acceptable racial identity.

Racism rests on the belief that some groups are inferior by nature to others, and hence they must be submissive to other groups, to the superior groups to nature. In America, until the sixties, blacks were submissive and this was an institution supported by the government.

African Americans did not have any rights nor did they have the vote or jobs. They almost had no social life. Despite all attempts to say that racism exists in America, many people can assure through personal experience that it is less harsh than before. The antiracists reject the classification of human beings based on their physical appearance and they reject the superiority and inferiority of groups. Instead, they suggest abandoning the behavior based on one's physical characteristics and participate in activities to fight racism.

Legislations have played a prominent role in increasing social equality. Federal actions against racism including the Civil Right Act of the sixties which fought segregation in public places like in factories and schools, the Voting Right of 1965 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Affirmative Action is a set of policies put forward to raise the involvement of blacks and other minorities in places, which was under the control of the whites. These strategies though not yet totally accepted require employers to hire black workers and universities to accept black students and other minorities.

The Civil Rights movement and the black movement encouraged a second look of race as a concept and grouping. Such procedure has gone faster through the Afro centric orientation of many African Americans and the native movements of other minorities. Race and culture have been reclaimed, redefined and reexamined by minority leaders and their supporters. In these new rights, there was more justice, more privileges and freedom. The leaders tried to correct the injustices of the past by stating race as the basis for their unity, identity and strength. They used race as the basis for explaining segregation and organizing trust and unity. The united voice of these cultural founders of color announced "it is about race, everybody!" The table in the index is a proof that African Americans are represented in the American society and they fill high position and even successful.

Life Opportunities for blacks and whites

Some white children living in Saint Paul, in Minnesota would not think that their mother tongue and the language they learn at school are different from the English spoken by Americans who live outside the Midwest. In Saint Paul, native English speakers speak simple English, in which no accent is present. Probably, those kids living in Saint Paul do not even know how they speak English; they only learn about the way they speak when they meet someone from another region. Apart from that, in every region everyone believes that his accent is the best.

The introduction of radio and television helped the promotion and the advancement of a homogeneous kind of American English. Although this accent less English was homogeneous, dialects like Southern Regional English remain resilient. As far as someone remains in Saint Paul, for example, s/he will not experience any differences in accent, nor will s/he suffer from any accent discrimination. However, if s/he leaves Saint Paul to another area in order to study or get a job, s/he may face regional prejudice simply because of the use of a different accent.

During the twentieth century, white residents of Saint Paul developed a homogeneous accent, as the European new comers and their descendents assimilated into the English-speaking culture. Consequently, the majority of whites in Saint Paul speak English as their first language. Even in the past, there had been few people speaking a foreign accent. In

addition, few newcomers have entered the region of Saint Paul and this clearly shows that the region remains largely homogeneous.

Of course, even within the white people, speaking English in Saint Paul, there are different levels of proficiency. These linguistic differences are generally due to socioeconomic status. Most of the time, skilled people speak better English whereas the uneducated people's speech is non standard and informal. Nonetheless, the white residents of Saint Paul generally have no regional dialect.

In Saint Paul or any other area in the United States, linguistic differences exist side by side with observable differences. Similar to Minneapolis, Saint Paul is currently heterogeneous. As it was estimated by the newest census, whites represent 64 percent, Asian 12.3 percent, African Americans with 11.4 percent, Latinos 7.9 percent, multiracial 3.1 percent and native Americans 1 percent. There are many Latinos living in Saint Paul region. As a matter of fact, more than 4/10 students in Saint Paul public schools speak a language other than English since their childhood¹⁶.

Those who are proficient in the English language are more willingly to get a good job in Saint Paul and elsewhere in the United States, even the newcomers to the nation. In addition, black vernacular English is widely used in Saint Paul, where there are hundreds of poor working-class people using informal English. Yet, many of African American people living in Saint Paul speak Standard English and some of them are proficient. Currently, the city is marked with the linguistic diversity that clearly reveals the homogeneity of Saint Paul city.

When they speak, Americans define themselves; they talk about their social class, their level of education and if or not they learned their English from a native speaker. To a certain extent, the linguistic characteristics are very important. Accent discrimination is obviously illegal; no one can discriminate the English used for example by an employer simply because s/he does not like a particular accent. If a firm hires only English speakers whose accent is similar to the one spoken by native-born inhabitants of Twin Cities, nobody would apply for such jobs.

Yet, for simple jobs all over the United States, especially ones that require employees to communicate, any type of regional or foreign accent is similar to an impediment-ungrammatical language. Consequently, many Americans from the South or the Northeast started going to speech coaches and special schools to avoid anything that might lessen their progress. To sum up, the native-born inhabitants of Saint Paul are beneficial in the sense that their English is accent less by nature.

The very important question posed in this chapter is does every group benefit from the welfare or the "Apple Pie" equally? Of course, the answer is not as simple as it seems and any example may remain merely an exception. To be sure, there are many black Americans who are very successful like Oprah Winfrey; this woman is about to be the first black woman billionaire in the American history. In my opinion, the black Americans started to benefit from the American dream but it would be vague to say that Oprah made it out of poverty but other African Americans did not. The gap between Oprah and the

¹⁶ . Sandra Stotsky, *Losing Our Language : How Multicultural Classroom Instruction Is Undermining Our Children's Ability to Read, Write, and Reason* (New York: Free Press, 1999)

poor people living in the ghettos today is very wide and shows that the black people live in different socioeconomic settings.

The majority of African Americans are sons of slaves and even when slavery ended, they continued to suffer from what remained from discrimination. It is true that racism in the United States almost disappeared but it took a long time and movements like the Civil Right Movement to arrive to what we see in today's America. In 1896, the Supreme Court made a decision known as the *Plessy vs. Ferguson*; it is about the doctrine of "Separate but Equal", which brought about segregation by law between blacks and whites in the South until the Court decision made in 1954¹⁷. During the five decades that followed, the program of second-class citizenship for blacks or "Jim Crow" which meant the creation of segregated schools, theatres, hotels and other public accommodations.

The Civil Right Movements of the fifties and the sixties put an end to de jure discrimination. During the Truman government, discrimination in the armed forces ended. Also among the white educated elites, there had been better understanding of blacks in America. However, during the mid fifties, the racial regime, which occurred after Reconstruction, had not changed almost everywhere.

To be sure, in the North, real segregation or racism could hardly appear. African Americans had good positions and could vote like the whites. However, discrimination was apparent in public schools, restaurants, hotels ...etc. Gradually, discrimination started to affect housing, salaries, education and health of blacks in the northern areas.

The situation in the South was unbearable. The segregation which was called "Separate but Equal" was still there and developing; in buses, schools, public places and in every aspect of daily life. The law segregated the blacks and the whites; black children went to segregated schools. In addition, blacks had their own buses, streetcars, trains, and in waiting rooms, even churches were discriminated as if they carried a dangerous virus or an epidemic.

There had been several attempts to end these laws, which segregated the whites and the blacks. However, in the case of the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) the Supreme Court stated that the places may be kept separate but equal. After the end of the Second World War, and exactly in the fifties, the black facilities were inferior compared to the whites.

In addition, there had been important issues of voting. In fact, in the 15th amendment of the U.S. constitution, blacks' exclusion from the vote is illegal. However, in the South, African Americans could not vote. The result of Jim Crow and the lack of civil rights was a system that existed in the south that made derision of American democracy.

Despite the fact that the non-Southern white Americans supported the efforts to end discrimination, they did not support Affirmative Action policies and social welfare programs that helped many African Americans and minorities in the sixties and the years which came after.

The crucial question when dealing with black and white issues is how we can then define equality and equal opportunity before we can tell whether every ethnic group benefit from

¹⁷ *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, 163 US. 537 (1896) ; *Brown vs. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954)

the welfare or not. Equality is not a fact in the American society and the government is making big efforts to control it. Many Americans treat people differently according to their race, clothing styles, and possession. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream that one-day blacks could be free. He believed that all men were created equal. One ideal of American Democracy was expressed in King's words by, "I have a dream that one day my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today." King's meaning of that was people must value others based on their values not their physical appearance. In my opinion, Martin would have been so glad if he were alive today to see, not only mixed black-white schools and universities, but also a black president from African origins.

The answer to the question of "is America indeed built upon equal opportunity and for equality in general" is yes. Americans must bear in mind that they are still a baby country in progress compared to a kingdom like England they are still developing. They are trying to develop those opportunities every year. The real assumption is that diversity will follow equality making people equal, and society will be less separated and more diverse. To be sure, as prejudices, hatred, and obstacles to political and other activity decreased, people on both sides will be more willing to come together with those of different races. At least, equality should be the primary focus, with diversity being a secondary objective.

The Conclusion

So far, this article dealt with one of the most controversial issues in the United States, race relations. America is more willingly able to undertake bigger power to include every citizen in this country; every one can share the welfare if s/he works hard to achieve the American Dream.

Throughout the country and especially in the South, efforts to seek racial reconciliation share three aims: to get beyond the black past and show feelings of grudge and/or establish interracial amity, and to help more Americans be part of the American Dream. These events show clearly that racial problems in America remain of central importance.

The topic of race continues to rise hundreds of questions even within American ordinary people daily lives. No one can deny that there had been a long history of hostility, hatred, prejudice and anger but most Americans today are trying to make up for the past mistakes, clear stereotypes and promote communication between racial entities in this nation.

Yet, slavery was such a black past for a powerful country like the United States. Of course, many Americans believe, even the whites who once were racist, that freedom is a God-given right of every human being and that God created all humans equal. Then, how comes some people continue speaking about racism? Americans can come out of divisive colour problems only if they understand that they have to accept and appreciate various colours, religions, languages and cultures that are great and amazing features.

Of course, America is trying to reimburse for those whose parents and grandparents were slaves. Slaves served in wars but also worked hard in lands and farms; they made endless contributions in the development of the US economy. Advocates of reimbursement do not agree on the way they would repair for the mistakes of the past and how much would be the budget to "clean" or at least lessen the dishonour and troubles of slavery.

This trial to repair for slavery started to gain huge support by African-Americans in the nineties especially after the payment of \$ 20,000 to those Japanese Americans who survived during World War II. However, what I find surprising is that there is no formal apology made by the government to the sons and grandsons of slaves. Still, Affirmative Action repaired for blacks and they are the first remembered in any event.

Despite the big troubles and the uncertainty that the nation still faces discrimination and racism, America remains united. Americans united faster since World War II, getting over ethnic, racial, religious and socioeconomic boundaries. In my opinion, America has avoided its dilemmas by believing in mottos like “United, We Stand, Divided We Fall”, “In God We Trust” and “Out of Many One”

Looking toward the future, even if the whites became a minority in America, they are not going to be powerless. White-dominated states like New Mexico and California and cosmopolitan cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles are a good example. In this case, the power is shared. In order to keep its stability, power in the United States should be divided between the dominant groups and the racial and ethnic minorities.

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Appendix

Table1.1 Some Facts about African Americans

Population

In 2000, there were about 35.5 million American, 12.3 percent of the US population.

US population

In 2000, 54 percent of all African Americans lived in the South (versus 33 percent of whites), 18 percent in the Northeast, 19 percent in the Midwest, and 8 percent in the West. The nation’s African-American population is young, with an estimated median age of 30, five years younger than the median for the US population as a whole.

The African-American population is expected to grow more than twice as fast as the white population between 1995 and 2020, reaching 45.1 million. After 2016, more African-Americans than non-Hispanic whites would be added to the U.S. population each year.

Business

Between 1987 and 1997, the number of businesses owned by African Americans almost doubled, growing from 242,165 to 823,499.

Between 1987 and 1992 receipt for black-owned firms rose 63 percent, compared with 67 percent for the United States as a whole.

Education

In 2000, 78 percent of African American aged 25 and over had a high school diploma, versus 51 percent in 1980 (and 88 percent for whites in 2000).

In 2000, 16.5 percent of African Americans and 25 and over had a college degree or higher; versus 8 percent in 1980. (The corresponding figures for whites were 28 percent in 2000, compared with 18 percent in 1980)

Marriage and family

In 1980, 45 percent of African American women 15 years old and over were married. By 2000, the percentage had dropped to 30.5 percent. The corresponding figures for African Americans men were 49 and 38.5 percent.

Considering the percentage of families headed by women, with no husband present, the 2000 figure was 44 percent for African Americans, versus 13 percent for non-Hispanic whites.

In 1998, the typical African American family consisted of 3.4 members, larger than the average of 3.0 members of non-Hispanic white families but smaller than the average of 3.9 members for Hispanic families.

Occupation and earnings

African-American women, age 16 and over, were more likely than white women to participate in the labor force (64 percent versus 61 percent). For men the reverse was true, with 68 percent participation by African Americans and 74 percent by whites.

In 2000, the proportion of African American men in managerial and professional jobs was 18 percent, versus 32 percent for white men. African American men were twice as likely as white men to work in service occupations (19 percent versus 9 percent).

For women in 2000, 25 percent of African American women, versus 35 percent of white women, worked in managerial and professional occupations.

Income and poverty

Median household income of African Americans increased from \$30,439 in 2000, the highest ever, in terms of real income. The 2000 figure for non-Hispanic whites was \$45,856. Half (51 percent) of African-American married couple families had incomes of \$ 50,000 or more, compared with 60 percent of non-Hispanic whites.

Between 1993 and 2000, poverty rates dropped for African Americans (from 33 percent to 22 percent) and for whites (from 12 percent to 8 percent)¹⁸

¹⁸ Source: Collins 1996; and U. S. census 2002.