

Breaking Down Prejudices: Racism in America: Past and Present

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... all Americans are the prisoners of racial prejudice.

Shirley Chisholm

“I have a dream that one day little black boys and girls will be holding hands with little white boys and girls.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr., I Have A Dream

Abstract

This article discusses racism as a form of prejudices which still frequently occurs in the United States despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other legislation. This research demonstrates that conditions for black Americans are improved over what they were several decades ago. However, they still experience discrimination in many ways, in terms of education, employment, health care, health insurance, career advancement, law, and access to a better social environment, etcetera.

The author addresses this topic because it is important to demonstrate that racism is a global problem that still continues to exist. This article discusses unfair behaviors of society toward black people and provides recommendations in order to break down racial prejudices.

Keywords: prejudice, race, racism

Introduction

Despite the fact that racial discrimination is offensive, it is difficult to fully prevent it from occurring. Indeed, racism is a modern, global and complex problem that needs a solution. The following article examines prejudice, including its basic forms and reasons, and racism in the United States beginning from slavery till the present. At the end of the article, the author provides some recommendations that could be used to weaken racism and provide liberty and justice for every member of society despite his or her color, ethnicity, language, nationality, religion or creed.

1. Determination of Prejudice

There is currently still a great deal intolerance rooted in deep and historical prejudices in society. Before delving into racial prejudices in the U.S., let us first define the meaning of the word prejudice. “The word prejudice refers to prejudgment: i.e. making a decision before becoming aware of the relevant facts of a case. In recent times, the word has come to be most often used to refer to preconceived, usually unfavorable judgments toward someone based on his/her gender, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race/ethnicity, language, nationality or other personal characteristics. It is a positive or negative evaluation of another person based on their group membership.” (Prejudice, n.d.) According to Andersen & Taylor (2011), the prejudiced person attitudes toward his or her group member will be positive, and attitudes toward nonmembers will be negative just because he or she is a stranger.

Thus, prejudice is one of the different stereotypes a society accepts as a self-evident and “prejudices operate automatically, without us even being aware of them.” (Scientific America, 2011) It is a template that a society attaches to individual un-

consciously because it looks plausible. Prejudice is an opinion or a setup about a group or individual that is formed and accepted without critical thinking, logic and common sense: we just accept a condition assumed by a society as an axiom. It can be an opinion that is imposed to us by some authority, by someone who is worthy to believe despite of real facts. One meaning of prejudice can be examined as superstition and the examples are the following: black cat is a symbol of evil (however in some countries a black cat can be a symbol of a good luck); if you broke a mirror – it is a bad sign, if you scatter salt – it leads to a quarrel. An example of racial prejudice (as it is a case of the following article) is the consideration that “blacks are silly but they have a sense of rhythm” and many other prejudices that will be examined in the article later. (Aronson, 1998)

Numerous researches have demonstrated show “that people who are more prejudiced are also more likely to use stereotypes and categorize others by race or ethnicity or by gender than those who are less prejudiced.” (Adorno et. Al. 1950; Jones 1997; Taylo et al. 2009 as cited in Andersen & Taylor, 2011)

Types of Prejudice

Today prejudices are widespread and there are different types of prejudice. We will shortly examine three types of prejudices which are the following: 1) sexism; 2) racism; 3) ageism. Racism will be examines in more details in further discussion.

Prejudice based on gender is called sexism. “The term sexism is generally linked to negative female sentiments that derive from the belief that females are worth less or less capable than males.” (Prejudice, n.d.) It is one of the widespread prejudices. One of the sources of sexism lies in the family. As

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an individual is born from the first his or her days baby receives “a message” from parents about how to behave in society in accordance with his or her gender; how the representatives of an opposite gender should behave. Thus, the perception about oneself and about the world is formed from the childhood on the basis of these and alike messages perception. The examples of sexism are the following: A man is a head, a woman is a neck, thus how a head wants to twirls; a man should be older than his wife; a woman should clean the house, prepare food, wash dishes and clothes, look after children; a man should make money and support his wife and children; a man should cover the expenses for a woman and many others. And despite on the great changes in society’s attitudes some of us still may have these kinds of prejudices. For instance let us take one of the above-mentioned prejudices and examine it: why should a man be older than his wife? Actually, these positions are the remnants from the past and one explanation to this prejudice may be a consideration that as older a man is as richer he is. In summary, gender prejudices (or in other words sexism) determines the role an individual plays in society.

Now turn to another type of prejudice which is called racism. Prejudice based on race is called racial prejudice (Andersen & Taylor, 2011) which in turn is a base of racism. Let us define the term race in order to better understand the concept racism. “Race is a group of people, joined by generality of origin, but differing by biological attributes: skin color, hair, and etcetera. There are three main racial groups – Mongoloid, Negroid and Evropeoid races.” (Race, n.d.) Thus, racism is a concept according to which races are different (different abilities, level of intelligence, talent, moral), races are not equal, thus one race is prevailing over another, and one race is better than another. (Racism, n.d.) Racial categories are assigned to people because of prevailing attitudes and social experience. (Andersen & Taylor, 2011) “Racism is the perception and treatment of a racial or ethnic group, or member of that group, as intellectually, socially, and culturally inferior to one’s own group. It is more than an attitude; it is institutionalized in society. Racism involves negative attitudes that are sometimes linked with negative behavior.” (Andersen & Taylor, 2011)

And the last type of prejudices which we are going to examine is discrimination over the age, or ageism. “Ageism or age discrimination is stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups because of their age. It is a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values used to justify age based prejudice, discrimination, and subordination”. Ageism is a negative discrimination against children, teenagers, people in their middle age and old people. (Ageism, n.d.) But mostly old people are suffering from ageism because of an opinion that old people are no longer of value. They are “not suitable for active ability to live.” (Prejudice, n.d.) Old people perceive information slowly; they move slowly, they may have problems with memory and the like. But these are actual prejudices because not only old people may be inflicted by the above-listed problems.

Reasons of Prejudice

Before examining of racism in the US let us first define the reasons of prejudice. According to Aronson (1998) there are four basic reasons of origin of prejudice: 1) economic or political competition or conflict; 2) forced out or displaced aggression; 3) personal requirements; and 4) conformity in the relation to social norms existence. The listed reasons are not mutually exclusive and may act simultaneously, including sev-

eral or all for those who hold racist views.

2. Racism in the United States

Historic Review

Problems with racism are anyway observed almost everywhere and the USA is not an exception. Slaves’ labor was widely employed here. Especially slavery was prevailing in South states. And just in the South of the United States slavery was related with racism. During the slavery Black population was deprived of the elementary rights. They were cruelly employed by planters: average life duration was 6-7 years. Black people were struggling for their freedom. As a result, slaves import was prohibited by law against of slavery in 1808 but, slave-trade was conducted illegally. (Blacks of the USA: A short historic sketch, n.d.; Abolitionism, n.d.)

However, after Abraham Lincoln’s assignation in 1865 Andrew Johnson came to the power. As a result of his policy so called black codes were introduced. According to these the freedoms of blacks were limited: They should not be allowed to carry a gun, should not marry whites, should not hold meetings and others limitations were introduced. (Black Codes (United States), n.d.) These limitations practically meant that blacks did not benefit from equal protection of the law as receive a granted them by the US Constitution. And Black codes along with other laws such as Apprentice law (according to which orphan teenagers or poor minor’s children were given to the whites as slaves), Vagrant law (according to which blacks who had no permanent job were claimed as tramp; they were imprisoned and moved to penal servitude, or were returned to planters), Jim Crow laws (a system of blacks isolation and segregation) were still limiting the rights of Blacks making their life painful and intolerable.

Struggling for human rights was continued. At last, as a result of a long struggling for rights and freedom slavery was officially canceled after the Civil War (1861-1865) in 1865 and three important well-known amendments were introduced into the United States Constitution. (13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments) However, despite the ratification of Amendments to the Constitution that had to granted blacks rights and freedoms, the promise of the government was not realized and many terroristic groups emerged on the scene. One of them is a well-known racist organization Ku Klux Klan that was organized in 1865, in Tennessee. Members of Ku Klux Klan mostly were killing blacks. Thus, we observe that black people are still discriminated and they do not share the same life benefits as white people do.

After the World War II discrimination of blacks was even more strengthened. Blacks again had to struggle for their human rights. Martin Luther King, the leader of African-American Civil Rights movement, was the one who continued the struggle against racism, discrimination and segregation by using peaceful methods. “I have a dream” is a well-known speech of Martin Luther King that he made in 1963 “in which he called for an end to racism in the United States.” (I have a Dream, n.d.) The following are the cutting text from the full speech:

“I have a dream that 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.” (Martin Luther King’s Speech: ‘I Have a Dream’ - The Full Text, 1963)

“And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring,

when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!" (Martin

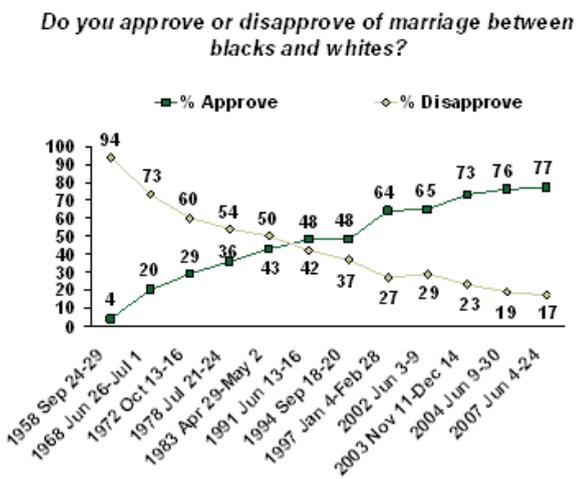
Luther King's Speech: 'I Have a Dream' - The Full Text, 1963)
 An essential progress in racism overcoming began in the 1960s, privately it is the Civil Rights Act of and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Racism Today

Despite the democracy which assumes freedom and equality racism is a painful subject which still exists in the United States. According to FinancialCall.com News (2007), 84 percent of blacks and 66 percent of whites consider racism a "very serious" or "somewhat serious" problem, and 51 percent of blacks and 26 percent of whites claim that they "been a victim of discrimination". Percentages were lower when people were asked if they knew anyone who was "racially biased" — only 31 percent of blacks and 21 percent of whites said they did. Only 12 percent of blacks and 13 percent of whites surveyed further admitted to being racially-biased themselves". A total of 328 blacks and 703 whites participation in the survey.

One needs to consider the statistics in examining the situation of racism in America today. One of essential indicators of racism in society is marriage between blacks and whites. If the number of interracial marriages increases then it is an indicator of the demise of racism. (Statistics on Racism, n.d.) The Graph 1 below shows "the increase in the number of people approving of interracial marriage and dating in the U.S." (Statistics on Racism, n.d.) But "still, it's mostly Asians and Hispanics, rather than whites, who marry someone from another race." (see Graph 2)

Graph 1. Interracial Marriage

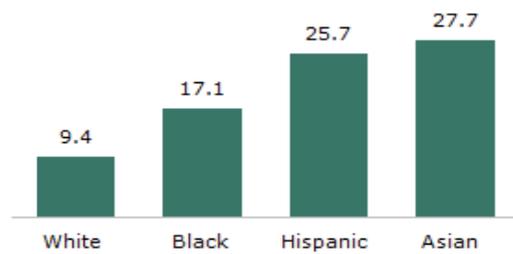


Source: Gallup News Service

Graph 2. Intermarriage Rates

Intermarriage Rates, by Race and Ethnicity, 2010

% of newlyweds married to someone of a different race/ethnicity



Note: Asians include Pacific Islanders. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2010 ACS Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample (IPUMS) files

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Source: Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends

Another indicator of racial bias is "public opinion on racial residential segregation/integration (see Figure 1). This indicator of racism – the willingness to live in the neighborhood of other races – is most likely related to the previous one: the less interracial marriage, the more residential segregation. And school segregation is the consequence of residential segregation" (Statistics on racism, n.d.).

Another important indicator of racism is willingness of the population to vote for president of another race (see Figure 2) (Statistics of racism, n.d.).

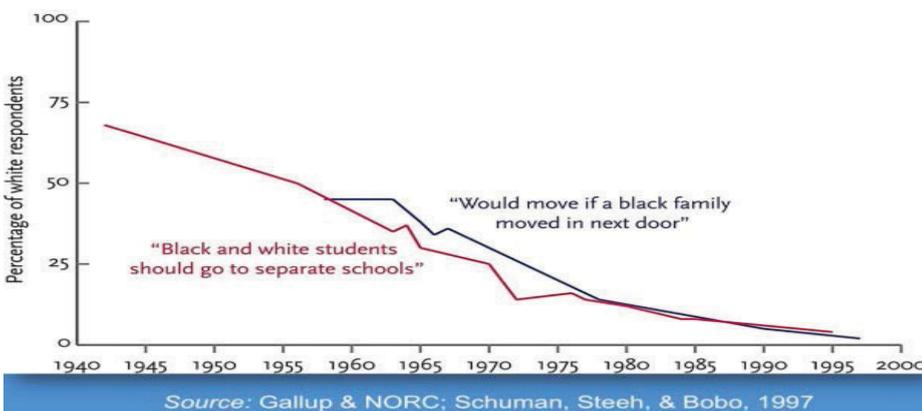


Figure 1. Racial residential segregation-integration

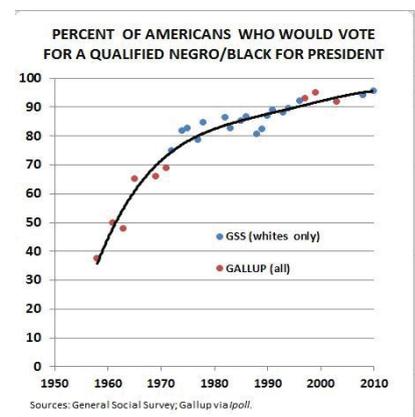


Figure 2.

One more important indicator of racism is incarceration statistics. As it is shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4, blacks represent 12.32 % of the total US population, and 43.93 % of them are imprisoned.

Figure 3. US population by Race

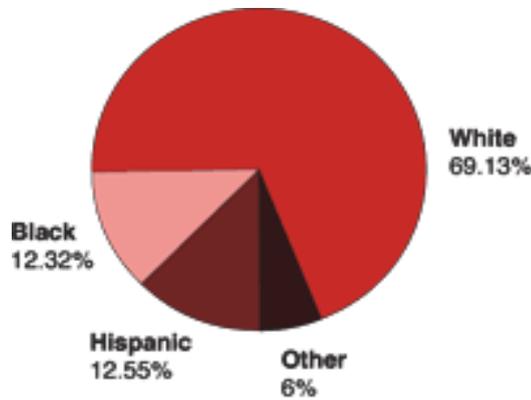
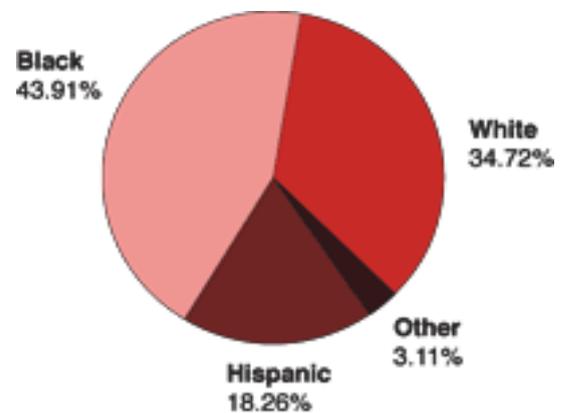
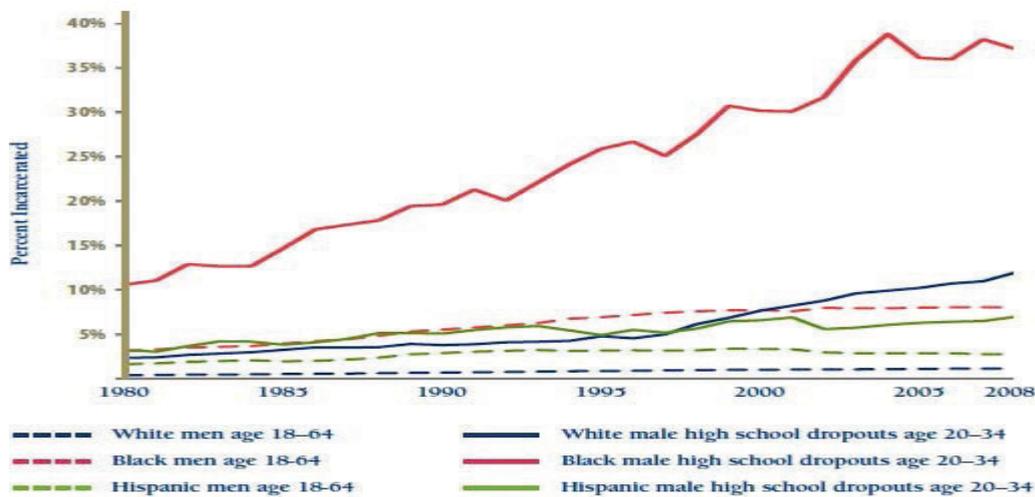


Figure 4. US inmates by Race



Source: Incarcerated America.

Figure 5. Incarceration rate in the USA Source: Jail and Jobs.



From Figure 5 it is observed that incarceration rate rises sharply, especially for blacks; “Approximately 12%-13% of the American population is African-American, but they make up 40.1% of the almost 2.1 million male inmates in jail or prison” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009 as cited in The Free Encyclopedia Wikipedia, n.d.). Studies show “that overall, more black males are in prison than are enrolled in colleges and universities. In 2000 there were 791,600 black men in prison and 603,032 enrolled in college versus 1980, when there were 143,000 black men in prison and 463,700 enrolled in college. In 2003, according to Justice Department figures, 193,000 black college-age men were in prison, while 532,000 black college-age men were attending college. On an average day in 1996, more Black male high school dropouts aged 20–35 were in custody than in paid employment; by 1999, over one-fifth of Black non-college men in their early 30’s had prison records.” (Statistics of incarcerated African-American Males, n.d.) According to The Tolerance, Equity and Awareness Movement (TEAM), “of 7,722 hate-crime incidents reported to the FBI in 2006, 2,640 were anti-black.” (FBI Uniform Crime Report as cited in TEAM, n.d.)

Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, told an audience at the Pasadena Branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, “More African-American men are in prison or jail, on probation or pa-

role than were enslaved in 1850, before the Civil War began.” (More Black men in prison today than enslaved in 1850, 2011)

Hate crime statistics: “This FBI statistic shows the distribution over the different types of hate crime in the U.S. in 2004. (See Figure 6) In 2004, these percentages cover 7,649 incidents involving 9,035 offenses directed at 9,528 victims. This covers the US only. Approximately 30% of the offenses involved the crime of intimidation, another 30% assaults, and 35% crimes against property (vandalism etc.). Most of the anti-race crimes were anti-black. Most of the anti-religious crimes were anti-Jewish. Most of the crimes based on sexual prejudice were anti-male homosexual. The anti-ethnicity crimes were mostly anti-Hispanic. Most offenders were white. In 2006 the data were very similar.” (Hate (1): Hate crime, 2008)

Blacks become victims of stop-and-frisk programs run by New York Police Department (NYDP). Stop-and-frisk program is “the practice by which an NYPD officer initiates a stop of an individual on the street allegedly based on so-called reasonable suspicion of criminal activity.” (Center for Constitutional Rights. NYPD Stop-and-Frisk Statistics 2009 and 2010 as cited in Racism still exists, n.d.) There were 685,724 stops in 2011, and of these 53% were Black (9% were White) The number of stops increases every year. For example, there were about 97,000 stops in 2002, but by 2006 there were more than 506,000. The most frequent reason (more than 50%) for stops

Bias-motivated Offenses 2004

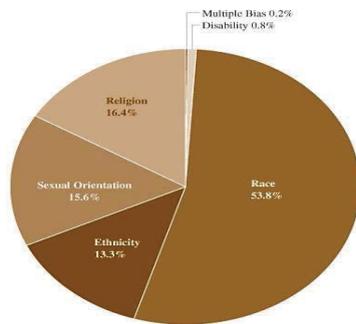


Figure 6. Hate crime statistics
Source: Hate crime.

was “furtive movements”, which is too vague to clearly indicate the suspected criminal activity. (Massey, & Denton, 1993; Kimble, 2007 as cited in Racism still exists, n.d.)

Unfair Sentencing: African Americans receive much longer sentences than whites. “Until as recently as 2011 the prison sentence for 5 grams of crack (amount for a poor user) was 5 years, the same sentence for 500 grams of cocaine (major drug dealer). Although the Obama Administration modified the crack law in 2010, the ratio is still an intolerable 18 to 1”. Approximately the same situation is with death penalty: black defendants who kill whites are sentenced to death “almost three times more often than white defendants.” (Team Afro on Sun, 2012)

Another research conducted by Applied Research Center on Race and Recession in May 2009 reveals the following:

- “People of color have been relegated to precarious, low-wage work—or no work—at disproportionate rates. Black, Latino, Asian and American Indian communities face barriers to employment, including discrimination in hires and promotions, unfair criminal background checks and the lack of protections for immigrant workers. As a result, communities of color on the whole, relative to whites, face higher rates of poverty, are less likely to have healthcare and consistently face recessionary levels of unemployment and underemployment.

- Because people of color have less income and less wealth, they have less to fall back on in hard times, and yet the safety net for poor families has been eroded over the past dozen years. The compounding effects of lower wages, diminishing wealth and a decayed social safety net leave families of color with little hope and a growing possibility of falling into desperate times.

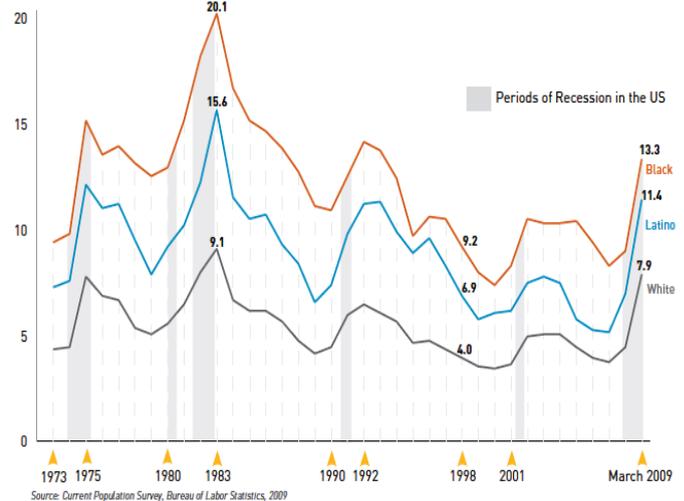
- The cumulative effects of historic and current housing discrimination—including restrictive racial covenants, redlining and neighborhood segregation—have left people of color with less equity and access to credit, making them vulnerable to disproportionate rates of predatory lending and foreclosure. Communities of color were saddled with predatory subprime loans at very high rates. Many were sold subprime loans when they could have qualified for prime loans. The foreclosure epidemic has plagued communities of color and caused a loss of wealth that will have lasting generational effects. Disproportionate rates of foreclosure compound the deep and growing racial wealth divide.” (Applied Research Center, 2009)

Figure 7 shows unemployment by race for the period of 1973 – 2009, and it is shown that peaks of unemployment happen during recession in economy. Unemployment rate is the

highest for Blacks in any period of economic time.

Figure 7. Employment and racism.
Source: Applied Research Center.

Unemployment by Race, 1973-2009

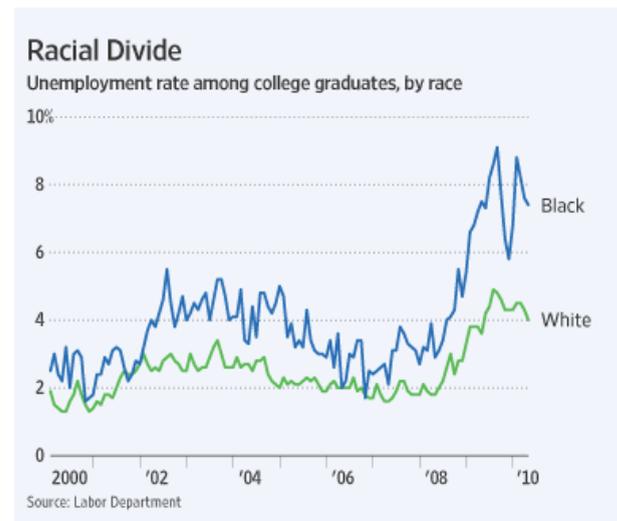


Source: Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009

*Note: Unemployment rates are taken from seasonally-adjusted monthly data for March of each year. Unfortunately, the Census doesn't collect or provide data disaggregated by nationality and/or ethnicity for Asians and American Indian, at this time.

Graph 3. Racial Divide

Source: Statistics on Racism.



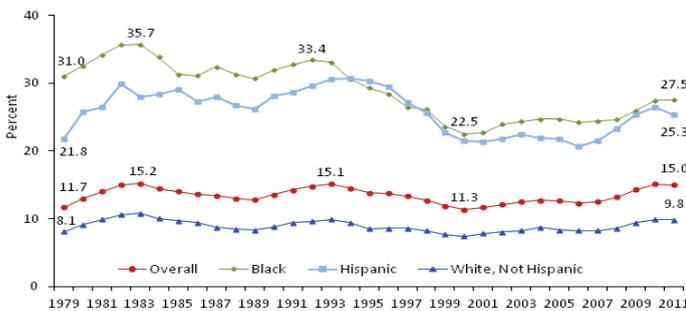
Mean Household Income for whites in 2005 was \$65,317 compared to blacks – \$40,685 only; with difference of \$24,632 (see Table 1); income is unevenly distributed. Therefore, black people cannot afford normal life conditions: access to health insurance; education; housing etcetera. Black people suffer from unemployment and hunger; if blacks are employed they receive lower salary than whites which have different consequences like making them unable to buy health insurance, which is important for each member of society. Lack of health insurance can deteriorate individual’s health conditions in case of illness or worst, in difficult situation can lead to earlier death. Low salary means low quality food, low living conditions, low standard of living, limited access to educational institutions etcetera which makes Black people in inferior position to whites. The consequences of racism may not be predictable.

Figure 8 depicts poverty rates for the period from 1979 to 2011. Based on information depicted in Table 1 and Figure 8

Graph 3. Racial Divide
Source: Statistics on Racism.

Ethnic Category	Mean Household Income
Asian alone	\$76,747
White alone	\$65,317
Hispanic or Latino	\$45,871
Black	\$40,685

Figure 8. Poverty Rates of All Persons by Race and Ethnicity, 1979-2011



we can make a conclusion that there are sharp income and poverty inequality: Blacks are in unbeneficial position compared to whites.

Note: Hispanic includes persons of all races. White, not Hispanic include any Hispanic persons. Black or African-American includes Hispanic persons and starting in 2002 includes black or African-American reporting multiple race categories

Source: ASPE Issue Brief, 2012

At the end of article the author cites Jack Dovidio, a professor of psychology at Yale University, who studies racism for 30 years. He states that “Racism doesn’t disappear because laws change. Consciously, we all endorse egalitarian values because that’s the American way. But we’ve grown up in a society where historically blacks have not been treated equal. Racial stereotypes that are perpetuated in the media are less favorable of blacks than whites. Our culture has had a racist tradition embedded in it. But the effects are nonetheless damaging and they foster miscommunication and mistrust. Human beings have a natural tendency to categorize people as either ‘like you,’ or ‘not like you.’ Cross-culturally, you find that if you categorize somebody as in your group, you like them better than somebody not in your group. In America, race is one of those critical dimensions that are an automatic categorization. Racism also makes some people “feel more secure, and people are motivated to maintain their status, resources, and control. The feelings and beliefs that underlie subtle racism are hypothesized to be rooted in normal ways of thinking, embedded in history, culture, and institutional policies.” (University of Connecticut, 2005)

Discussion about racism and its consequences can be continued “infinitely”: there are so many topics to be examined. Racism is not the problem of the US only; racism is a global problem. Society has to find a solution for this painful problem as soon as possible. As racism is a type of prejudice, every individual should “switch on” their minds because as more

vulnerable is one’s consciousness the quicker and the stronger racism’s influence is.

Can racial prejudices disappear? According to Myers, prejudices are endured. However, taking into consideration history, not so many years have passed since Blacks begin to experience human rights and freedom; changes are great. Compared to the past, nowadays attitudes towards Blacks are much better and tolerant than it was some decades ago. Studies with Black children and dolls – black and wide color dolls – show that nowadays children begin to prefer a black color doll to white color doll. It is a sign of better and tolerate attitude to Blacks; blacks become more self-confident, they feel positive change in society toward themselves. A vivid example of decrease of racism is presidential elections in US where Barak Obama won the elections for the second time.

Recommendations

Analyzing the facts it is possible to conclude that racial prejudices and consequences may not be stopped. However, the governments should collaborate together and find the ways which will decrease racism: toughening the laws and legislative measures, introduction of special programs and policies, holding conferences etcetera. The governments should develop and introduce the programs for every individual member of society at any age that would cultivate and bring up in people the sense of tolerance and justice, human keenness and kindness, the sense of mutual respect and morals. Another important moment is that the governments should impose a strict control over the programs that are undertaken to combat racism.

Conclusion

The article discusses racism as a type of prejudices. Prejudice is an attitude and concepts formed by individual or a group before examining “real facts” and which hinders many in accepting the truth. Behavior and world outlook of people whose views are based on racism are unfair and humiliating. Prejudices are a part of human’s consciousness. It is obvious that what people think and how people think influences one’s behaviors in future because feelings and emotions, believes and life settings are interrelated. The studies of prejudices are important for society in order to find sufficient ways to break down prejudices and to decrease discrimination.

As statistical data shows whites have superior position rather than blacks have in every category: education, employment, health insurance and health care, wage, law, human rights etcetera. The struggle against racism and racial discrimination continues for several decades but still blacks are victims of racial discrimination and prejudices. United Nations Independent Expert on Minority Issues Gay McDougall said that “racism is that “unique” feeling that is experienced without exception by every African-American beyond limits of Africa. They are subjected to racism and systematic discrimination independently of country of origin, social-economic conditions, gender, age or level of education.” (United Nations Human Rights, 2011)

Still there is no efficient solution for existent problem of racism and racial discrimination making this topic as a subject for the further research.

