

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Favorable Restrictions

Mia Morales · Wednesday, February 24th, 2021

“For too long politicians told most of us that what’s wrong with America is the rest of us. Them. Them the minorities. Them the liberals. Them, them, them. But there is no them; there’s only us” (Bill Clinton, n.d.). This “us against them” mindset is the very basis of institutional racism. First used in Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton’s book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* in 1967, institutional racism, often used interchangeably with systemic racism, refers to “the systemic distribution of resources, power, and opportunity in our society to the benefit of people who are white and the exclusion of people of color” (Definition & Analysis, n.d.). Unfortunately for people of color institutional racism is embedded within the American experience. These favorable restrictions started with slavery and have since contributed to failing educational systems, lack of job opportunities, and the ongoing income disparity. Institutional racism is like pee in a pool; it ruins a good time and makes some people want to leave.

✘ The roots of institutional racism are deeply settled within the ways of slavery, Black Codes, and Jim Crow laws; all of which were legal. During the 17th and 18th centuries people like Oluale Kossola (Cudjo Lewis), Redoshi (Sally Smith), and Àbáké (Matilda McCrear), whom were some of the last slaves to arrive on the Clotilda, had been forcibly removed from their homes in Africa, stripped of their names and cultures, to serve as plantation workers for white families. Slaves were typically used to cultivate cotton, tobacco, sugar cane, rice, and indigo (History.com, 2009). To ensure their dependency, slave owners forbid slaves from learning to read and write, as well as controlling their movements with chains and other torture devices. Fast forward to 1865, post-Civil War, the fear of white supremacy coming to an end paved the way for Black Codes. Former Confederate states created Black Codes which were “designed to replace the social controls of slavery that had been removed by the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution” (Britannica, 2019). These local and state laws dictated traveling, place of residency, when and where they were allowed to work, and compensation amount. In several states, these laws even included annual labor contracts. If these newly freed slaves were unwilling to sign the contract they could be arrested, fined, and forced to work for free (History.com, 2010). Black Codes eventually evolved into Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws were paraded as “separate but equal”, but it never really was. These racial segregation laws separated white people from all other races by dividing transportation seating, creating separate mental wards at hospitals, outlawing interracial marriage, etc. Like many other states an Alabama law stated that “No person or corporation shall require any white female nurse to nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which negro men are placed” (Jim Crow laws, n.d.). From slavery to Jim Crow laws, such deliberate handiwork was done to ensure African Americans remained oppressed and kept power in the hands of white people.

With power in the hands of white people, they controlled everything, even education. The largest contributor to the lack of proper educational resources for people of color was redlining. The term comes from the literal outlining of neighborhoods where people of color resided, on maps with red ink. When it came to applying for personal and/or home loans or offering investment opportunities, banks and mortgage lenders would turn down those living within the redlined area, because it was seen as too high of a risk. With no loans to help build businesses and increase home value, the lack of wealth in these areas meant less taxes for local schools. This meant a smaller budget for supplies, less class variability, such as AP classes, and limited access to qualified teachers. Beginning in the 1930's and lasting almost 40 years, until it was banned in 1968, the effects of redlining still exist in the educational systems for people of color today. In 2016 EdBuild, an organization created to help fix public school funding, found that despite serving the same amount of students, white school districts get \$23 billion more in funding. "For every student enrolled, the average nonwhite school district receives \$2,226 less than a white school district" (23 Billion, n.d.). This is an example of resource distribution. By ensuring that the educational systems serving people of color are under-funded, this makes it easier to keep people of color uneducated and dependent upon their white counterparts. These families often struggle to provide a proper education for their children which will help prepare them for the endless job opportunities that await due to the limited resources at their disposal.

Every day the list of job requirements continues to lengthen, with many employers seeking out applicants with several years of experience and preferably a college degree. For example, NOIZZ, a children's clothing boutique in Sherman Oaks, CA prefers applicants that have a Bachelor's degree (Indeed.com, 2020). Let's be honest, preferring applicants that have a bachelor's degree in order to work retail is ridiculous. When employers list that as a preference it deters many from applying, many of whom are people of color. This in turn keeps the majority of these people working underpaid positions doing labor-intensive work (cue historical slavery clip). Based on a 2016 United States Census Bureau Survey, non-profit organization EdTrust, reported that only 14% of Black adults, aged 25 to 64, attained a bachelor's degree in comparison to the 23.7% of White adults (Nichols & Schak, 2017). For many people of color obtaining a college degree is mainly a financial struggle. According to a 2014 article featured in The Guardian, about 50% of black students graduate with over \$25,000 in loan debt. This form of institutional racism keeps people of color in metaphorical chains by only allowing them to get so far and out of spaces where white people feel they do not belong. Another way people of color miss out on job opportunities is based on their outward appearance. People of color, especially black women, have often been told that their hair is unprofessional or unkempt. In 2010 Catastrophe Management Solutions offered Chasity Jones a customer service representative position. Even though Chasity accepted the position, in order to officially be hired she was asked to cut off her locs because "they tend to get messy" (Griffin, 2019). Upon refusal to cut her hair, the company revoked their job offer. These job opportunity deterrents keep people of color earning low incomes while white people continue to increase their wealth. In a 2019 Federal Survey it was stated that "the typical White family has eight times the wealth of the typical Black family and five times the wealth of the typical Hispanic family" (Bhutta, 2019). There is no rational explanation for the stark differences in these wage gaps that are solely based on ethnic groups. Gatekeeping possible opportunities to wealth and wealth itself is selfish and greedy.



Those that denounce the existence of institutional racism benefit from its continuation, while "people of color in the U.S. share the common experience of being targeted and oppressed by

racism” (Rogers & Bowman). White people have been gatekeeping resources, power, and opportunities for far too long. While institutional racism seems to be America’s favorite tradition, it is our country’s worst habit. In order for us to move forward as a nation we need to agree that it is an issue, and find a solution. Until we decide to ditch these favorable restrictions, failing educational systems, lack of job opportunities, and the income disparity will continue to be a detriment to us all.

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