

An analysis of reasons behind racism and racial discrimination in the United States, from the historical, cultural, and social perspective

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Abstract. The research is to explore why racial discrimination still exists in contemporary American society. This phenomenon has been observed in its long history, but it remains unsolved in contemporary society. The research uses the case study method. Through the case study of the ethnic minority in America, the research hopes to reveal broader lessons of racial discrimination globally. As a result, this research has found several reasons from the perspectives of history, culture, and society. The research deepens our understanding of racial discrimination and racial inequality. Moreover, the research can be useful to the policymaking of governments to solve this problem.

Keywords: racial discrimination, the U.S., historical roots, social perspective, cultural perspective.

1. Introduction

The essay aims to address the research question that why racial discrimination still exists in contemporary American society. This research question is puzzling because there are big changes in people's attitudes towards different races in America. These changes have not been researched in detail. This question is also complex and unique since many people are suffering from this severe question. The essay will focus on the society of America. This country is chosen for various reasons. Firstly, racial discrimination is a unique case because U.S. society is a melting pot, including various races, which complicates this problem. Secondly, this case applies to other countries such as Europe, Australia, and Canada.

The research topic matters because the research deepens our understanding of racial discrimination and racial inequality. Secondly, it can be helpful for the policymaking of governments to solve this problem. The essay is divided into several sections. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, the detailed definition of racism is given. Section 3 explains the racism and racial inequality based on the historical perspective. After that, Section 4 and Section 5 illustrate the racism from the social perspective and cultural perspective respectively. Finally, conclusions are given in the last section.

2. Defining racism

To begin with, the first section will define what racism is. There are three different definitions which are racism, new racism, and Neo racism. Racism, argued by William, is a minority group from the society that is categorized as the inferior group by the dominant group in society, which further affects the distribution of resources in the entire society [1]. This definition is powerful since it provides a specific and deep meaning of how races are created and reveals the subsequent consequences of racial discrimination. Nevertheless, it suffers from weakness because it does not explain the causes of inferiority.

The second one is new racism claimed by Noon that racial discrimination is an apparent phenomenon in society, especially in the official document. [2] However, this lowers the realization of people towards racism.

The third one is called New racism. Frior states that racism is caused by the difference in the different cultural groups [3]. He further claims that if people from other cultural groups immigrate to another group, the native culture group will be contaminated, and therefore people are against

immigration. It is reasonable, on the ground, that it is more practical than the previous two statements and reveals immigration as a condition for the co-existence of different social groups in globalization and the potential conflicts in daily life habits and environment. On the contrary, it does have a disadvantage: This definition is too narrow to explain racism because it only focuses on immigration which is the one element within racism.

3. From the historical perspective

In this part, I will stress the role of history that affected racism in America society. I think the overall history can explain racism because racism is an evolutionary term that changes with history. Initially, people did have a clear view of what exactly racism is. Throughout history, many incidents that happened in society causes people to treat different people from different racial groups. Another reason is Abundant of cases could prove the existence of racism and the development of racism. For example, Rosa Parks was arrested because she refused to give a seat to a white passenger on the bus.

Nonetheless, Slavery also indicates racial discrimination in the past. People would have the class awareness towards their slaveries which are mostly consisted of black people. Therefore, people thought that all black people are inferior. According to Fuchs, slavery is a "class phenomenon", and slavery appeared much earlier than racism [4]. Some Europeans constructed the category of race and considered slavery of "imported Africans" as an inferior racial group. Moreover, racism which originated from slavery, also has the economic function of people who thought they have superiority. Later, slavery was abandoned in 1865. However, it did not mean that racism was disappeared consistently.

This is established because it provides concrete examples and cases in history to prove the existence of racism. On the contrary, it does have a limitation that people cannot distinguish whether it is authentic. People may exaggerate the cases to impress people. To overcome this limitation, we have to combine history with the current social situation. As a result, historical perspective is an essential element for people to better understand what racism is and the origin of racism. Still, it is also limited since it cannot be proved, so we have to consider the social perspectives.

4. From the social perspective

In this part, I will stress the role of social perspectives. First of all, racism is an abstract concept that needed to be understood in a real situation. Secondly, we can say the society is a huge social network representing the complex relationship between various people. To be honest, this is the core of racism.

For instance, Huber et al. illustrate an example in Southern California in which an African American boy was depressed because he could not figure out the math problems [5]. The reason behind this situation was not the boy himself but was the lack of sufficient resources, which enabled him to learn math fluently.

Also, Huber all gives another example of Malcolm X that he was suggested to be a carpenter instead of a lawyer under the condition of having a very good grade around 1964. Surprisingly, racial inequality is attributed to school education. Young students witness a lot of phenomena of treating people who have different colors and races differently, such as having all white teachers, having a disadvantaged campus environment, and even ignoring the existence of other races.

Besides, the teacher plays a role in causing the racial inequality: the headteacher criticized a Latin boy because he could not speak fluent English, which further caused him to think about, he was not part of American and had inferiority.

Moreover, the textbook cannot be ignored. In the textbook, black people are mentioned 24 times in American history related to slavery and civil rights instead of their devotion to American society.

This explanation is powerful because racism is happening on different occasions in society, such as in schools, companies, and public transportation. People need to explore more deeply each occasion

regarding how racism is represented and spread. Therefore, the impression of racism is depicted in a detailed way from the social perspective. Conversely, the social perspective overly stresses the education environment rather than the difference in various groups, which needed to be elaborate more in the cultural perspective.

5. From the cultural perspective

What is more, I will illustrate racism based on the cultural perspective. Having different cultures is the basis of the existence of racism and racial inequality. We can imagine a person who has a different culture enters a new country is incompatible with the new country. For example, various cultural orientations will strongly cause personality differences. Asian people will advocate more conservation lifestyles, but western people will have more courage to share their ideas and more outgoing.

According to Whaley and Noel, they defined culture is a "subjective culture" including perspectives, materials, and methods invented and utilized by a group of people [6]. Culture is an abstract thing we learned through people's lifetime, rather than a thing we were born with. A cultural perspective of racism leads us to understand racial identity, which means that people use biological features such as skin, color, and body shape to categorize people into diverse groups. Whaley and Noel argue that racial incompatibility is a conflict between two completely different cultures: dominant European American culture and marginalized culture such as African American culture.

Fordham and Ogbu define the "Black collective identity" from cultural anthropology as that people treat each other like family members although they are not related by "blood and marriage"[7]. Black people will deeply feel that the schools are forcing them to accept the dominant European American culture, making them feel isolated, creating discrimination since they embrace African American culture. To cope with this problem, they will pretend them as representatives of European American culture and abandon their authentic identity and culture. People who hold the European American culture will hold a stereotype towards black people that all the black people have lower academic achievements. By having this kind of stereotype, black people will unconsciously confirm this stereotype that further causes lower grades.

Steele and Aronson conducted an experiment [8]. They divide a group of Africans into two groups. For the first group, it was suggested the race was an important factor that impacts academic performance, while in the second group, it was an idea that was not suggested. This experiment showed that the African in the first group performed worse than the African in the second group, which proves the stereotype theory.

This cultural explanation makes sense because people need to understand various cultures since racism results from diverse cultures. Also, it stresses the importance of stereotype which is a part of the culture, and intensifies the cultural mechanism of racism. However, it suffers from the weakness that it does not clarify the systematic understanding of various cultures that it is difficult for people embracing different cultures to reach an agreement. If people need to overcome this problem, they must combine the cultural perspective with the social perspective. Hence, I argue that the cultural perspective is a powerful explanation, but still, we need to consider other perspectives and factors.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the essay firstly has defined what racism is. Then it has explained this phenomenon from the historical perspective. After that, the essay has explored the issue from a cultural perspective. Following that, analysis is conducted from the social perspective. By doing so, the essay managed to answer the research question from a relatively comprehensive combination of perspectives.

The essay has several limitations. Firstly, the analysis may be incomplete and has other reasons possibly. Secondly, the single case provides limited explanation and may not fully explain other cases, such as European society. Nevertheless, the significance of the essay can be revealed as follows. First of all, it effectively helps the governments make some policies so that racial discrimination can vanish.

Secondly, people can have a broader understanding of race and racial inequality. Ultimately, future studies can focus on an analysis of policies and explore how effective racial discrimination policies are.

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