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### Racial Ideas Becoming Racial Reality

In order for a racial caste to exist, there must be a means of teaching those within the caste certain ideas to remain subject to its control. These ideas were not constructed overnight, but have been perfected over generations to most effectively integrate people of all races into their given racialized roles. History, community, and the distribution of power are aspects of everyday American life that has contributed in the formation of widely known racial ideas. American schooling, socialization, racial projects, and racial formation teach US citizens how to recognize and partake in the current race-based system of control and categorization.

Throughout history, there has always been a way for humans to categorize themselves into a hierarchy; people experienced discrimination for being an immigrant or non-Christian before the formation of the current racial hierarchy in America. It was not until European explorers traveled to the western world "...that the distinctions and categorizations fundamental to a racialized social structure, and to a discourse of race, began to appear" (Omi, Winant 61). Through the labeling of the native people as "savages" and disenfranchisement of non-whites, race became an identifier of status and an important part of American society. With this higher status, the European belief became common that they were destined to take land in America by divine right, resulting in America's expansion through genocide. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the transition took place from a religious to a scientific view of race and so did attempts at finding the scientific meaning of race. Paradoxically, America was known world wide as the land of

opportunity but continued in its practices of Native American genocide and slavery. To justify this, science was used to prove whites as a superior race in a natural system and provided a means to ignore the morality of American actions. This left the dehumanization of non-whites as an inferior race and proves “The question is not whether Lincoln truly meant ‘government of the people’ but what [America] has throughout history, taken the political term of people to actually mean” (Coates). White privilege was given to those willing to embrace this new idea of whiteness and “It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country” which leaves America with its current system of racism: a social concept as a way to differentiate between human beings (Johnson 17).

The US schooling system is meant to teach the basic subjects such as math and reading, but also manages to teach the basic concepts of race. If “... [black people] learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, [then] you would be liberating not only [black people], you’d be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history” (Baldwin 683). Not only are children of color robbed of the accomplishments of their ancestry but white children have a genuine, truthful education taken away from them. Selling non-whites short of their accomplishments and painting them as helpless victims, children are taught a history crafted by those who would benefit from a warped view of the past; the prioritization of white history subconsciously teaches Americans that all whites are a priority, which further contributes to a taught racialized mentality. The US system of education molds children at a young age to be familiar with and feed into the system of racial caste in America. James Baldwin presents the paradox of education stating, “...that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated” which does not result in a true education until one can question that education: the very education that fails to liberate all its students.

American socialization allows the average citizen to realize the importance of their race through several aspects of American culture and their daily life. The colored experience is realized through several trials during youth, and even Ta-Nehisi Coates explains his own childhood experiences:

“To be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world...The law did not protect us...I knew that my portion of the American galaxy, where bodies were enslaved by tenacious gravity, was black and that the other, liberated portion was not...the black body was never celebrated in movies, on television shows, or in the textbooks I’d seen as a child” (Coates).

Through American culture, Coates was taught his place that society gave him and that “...race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi, Winant 55). The experiences that race presents are significant because of its ability to influence a person’s life and symbolizes a common struggle with race as an indicator of that struggle. Predominantly white images on television, criminalization of colored people in the news, and safety differences between white neighborhoods to colored neighborhoods are all socializations that teach Americans the difference in what one experiences depending on their race. Alan Johnson explains the importance of American socialization as a key to keeping the racial caste structure alive by stating, “...[R]ace and all its categories have no significance outside systems of privilege and oppression in which they were created in the first place” (18). In order to keep a racialized system, a person living in that system must be taught the racial ideas of the time in order to keep them subject to the organization.

Racial projects as well as the distribution of power and privilege are large aspects of the racial socialization that helps one to understand the gravity and importance of racial ideas; if these ideas are held true, they can be highly influential with profound effects. A racial project is defined as “...simultaneously an interpretation...of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize

and redistribute resources along particular racial lines”, and comes in several forms, both racist and non-racist, including: colorblindness, mass incarceration, affirmative action, and racial identification (Omi, Winant 56). Although some racial projects are meant to help people of color they can still negatively effect them as well. The micro racial project of putting people into a racial category and expecting people to act out racial identities results in the institution of white privilege; the idea that births white privilege may be small but it results in a highly considerable system of privilege that demonstrates racial formation’s power to further oppress people of color. “‘White America’ is a syndicate arrayed to protect its exclusive power to dominate and control [the black population]” because the advantage of privilege also comes with the reluctance to give it up, even if it is acknowledged. The unearned entitlements, “...which are things all people *should* have...”, and conferred dominance, which “...[gives] one group power over another”, that are by-products of white privilege proves that the idea of race goes beyond its being a social construct because of the reality of its effects (Johnson 22-23).

The idea of race has transformed not only into the social idea known today but into a series of institutions based on racial ideas; teaching racial ideas in the US is one of America’s greatest traditions. To keep the social idea of racism alive and the hierarchy intact, Americans are socialized to understand the system and their place in the system through racial formation. “We define *racial formation* as the sociohistorical process by which categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” while racial formation also defines what race means (Omi, Winant 55). Racial formation gives way to racial projects, which can only be allowed if a genuine understanding of race is held by a nation. Racism is neither an essence nor illusion but the social construct has evolved through history resulting in the reality of race in its experiences and its effects.

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