

Racial injustice in America

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Abstract

This blog delves into the enduring impact of historical racism on the Black community in America, particularly focusing on wealth, education, income inequality, and systemic issues like police brutality and judicial bias. It traces the roots of economic disparities to the exploitation of Black slaves and highlights the persistent discrimination in housing, education, and employment. The exploration underscores how discriminatory practices, such as redlining and subprime loans, have hindered Black Americans' wealth accumulation and access to quality education. The analysis extends to the workplace, revealing disparities in hiring, promotions, and workplace harassment based on race. The blog also addresses the longstanding issue of police brutality, its psychological and societal repercussions, and the racial biases ingrained in the judicial system. Despite progress, the examination contends that racial injustice remains a pervasive issue, urging society to confront and actively combat systemic racism for a more equitable future. The conclusion emphasises the need for collective efforts, education, and policy changes to dismantle the complex web of racial inequality that persists in America.

Keywords: wealth, income, racial injustice, discrimination, education, racism, America, judicial system, police brutality, slavery, employment.

Date of Submission: 27.03.2023

Date of Acceptance: 27.11.2023

Introduction

Racism is the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioural traits corresponding to inherited attributes, and can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another (Ghani, 2008). These beliefs, born from ignorance and conflict, have been passed down from generation to

generation throughout human history. The Black community has been subject to severe racial oppression throughout America's history, dating back to slavery in the 1600s, and although people have become much more accepting of other races in recent years, the residuals of slavery can still be observed in today's society. There are large income and wealth disparities between White and Black households; furthermore, African Americans have less access to education. Additionally, there is blatant discrimination in both the workplace and the legal system. This blog will shed light on these issues and conclude with some possible solutions.

Wealth, education, and income inequality

Slaves spent 246 years creating wealth for their white owners. After the end of the American Civil War, President Lincoln signed legislation that would give slaves land and allow them to begin climbing the socioeconomic ladder. However, weeks after the bill was passed, Lincoln was murdered, and his successor, Andrew Johnson, nullified the bill meaning the land that was given to African Americans was seized. Black people were forced back into exploitive manual labour as seeking employment outside of agriculture faced significant racism and violence (Royster, 2003). Now fast forward to the present day, and we still see the residues of slavery. Black Americans are effectively 246 years behind as they spent that time building wealth for their owners and once freed, they were left with nothing. This is reflected clearly in wealth, education, and income.

The median wealth of white households in 2013 was \$141,900, while for black households it was only \$11,000 (Kochhar, R. and Fry, R., 2014). Homeownership is a key driver of wealth accumulation and due to discriminatory laws generations of black families have not been able to become homeowners (Feagin, J.R., 1999). The Federal Housing Administration would not insure mortgages in neighbourhoods they found too risky, and race played a significant role when calculating risk. This meant that when black families moved into a neighbourhood, the value of surrounding houses plummeted, incentivising real estate agents to discriminate. It was not until 1968 (only 55 years ago at the time of writing) that housing discrimination was outlawed, but the discrimination did not end there. Real estate agents would not show black families' houses in white areas, and even if African Americans had a good credit score, they were likely to be given subprime loans, which are loans with high-interest rates that become increasingly expensive over time. The subprime loans, and the fact that in 2007 home equity made up 71% of total wealth for black

homeowners compared to 51% for white homeowners, meant that the black community was disproportionately affected by the 2008 housing crash (Burd-Sharps, 2015).

Where you live can profoundly impact the opportunities and resources available to future generations. In the United States, public schools are primarily funded by local property taxes and, as a result, schools in lower-income areas tend to be significantly underfunded. This has led to a long-standing issue of inadequate education for students in low-income areas, many of whom are Black. Historically, racial segregation has played a considerable role in this issue. Segregated schools were established as early as 1849, forcing black children into underfunded schools. While segregation in schools was legally ended in 1954, the legacy of segregation persisted.

A problematic and enduring consequence of segregated schooling is the racial disparity in inadequate education. In 2020, 51.6% of college students were White, whereas only 12.5% of students identified as Black (Hanson, 2023). Furthermore, the graduation rate for Black students in 2020 stood at 56.6%, which was lower than the graduation rate of 62.9% for White college students (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). These statistics show that the Black population has reduced access to higher education due to their socioeconomic positions.

Poor education in Black communities has had a profoundly negative effect on household income. In 2021, the median income for White households in the United States was \$84,110, while for Black households it was only \$52,080 (Statista, 2022). Alongside workplace discrimination, this is a substantial proponent of racial socioeconomic disadvantage. In instances where Black and White workers have similar education and experience, Black applicants are less likely to be hired (Pager, 2009), and when they are, they earn less for the same job in comparison to their White counterparts (Black, 2006). Furthermore, Bailey devised a skin colour scale that indicates the darker the tone of one's skin, the lower the earning potential (Bailey, 2014). To make matters worse, as shown by Pager's work, Black individuals are less likely to be promoted and more liable to experience workplace harassment and discrimination (Pager, 2008).

Police brutality

From the brutal beatdowns during the Civil Rights movement to the more recent shooting of 12-year-old Tamir Rice in November 2014 and the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, police brutality is a historically charged issue for the Black community. Indeed, studies have shown that

Black people are 2.8 times more likely to be met with lethal force despite being unarmed than White people (Njoku, 2021). Moreover, a staggering 45% of Black individuals reported that they had been stopped and searched by police for no discernible reason on a fairly recurrent basis, compared to just 11.5% of White participants. Additionally, in a 2004 study 30% of Black people surveyed stated that officers used insulting language against them, while only 8% of White individuals in the study reported experiencing similar treatment (Weitzer, 2004). This data highlights the stark differences in the experiences of Black and White individuals regarding police interactions, resulting in a rift between the police and the Black community; this only worsens concerns around a systemic racial divide.

The impact of police brutality on Black communities is not limited to physical harm. The trauma and loss experienced by families and communities can lead to increased rates of mental health issues and the propagation of poverty (Bor, 2018). Additionally, it leads to mistrust and fear of law enforcement making it difficult for people to report crimes or seek help from police when needed. It also perpetuates systemic racism and reinforces the notion that Black people are inherently dangerous and in need of constant surveillance and control (Dr Alexandra Cox, 2023). Efforts have been made to address police brutalities and racial profiling, such as body cameras and training programs, but it has had little to no effect. A possible explanation for this outcome is that officers do not face strict enough prosecution for offences (Lopez, 2016).

America's judicial system has also been shown to be flawed, 87% of Black people and 61% of White people said the U.S. criminal justice system treats Black people less fairly (Horowitz 2019). This results in African Americans being more likely to be convicted and undergo lengthier prison sentences. Indeed, African American adults are 5.9 times more likely to be incarcerated than White persons and, in turn, are more likely to be denied bail or have a higher bond set (Report to the United Nations, 2018). A higher bail is especially cruel as, on average, Black people have less wealth and income, largely due to systemic racism.

Conclusion

The legacy of slavery, segregation, and discrimination has led to significant wealth, education, and income inequality. Despite the improvements we have seen in recent years, racial injustice against the Black community is still prevalent in America today. The wealth disparity between Black and White households remains prominent, and discrimination in the workplace, as showcased by the studies conducted by Bailey (2014), Pager et al. (2009), and Pager and Sherpherd (2008), illustrates that skin colour has a direct effect on earning potential and the way one is treated by employers. Additionally, police brutality and an implicitly biased judicial system continue to be major issues for the Black community. It is crucial that society acknowledges these issues and takes active steps to combat systemic racism in all its forms by working together to create a more just and equitable society for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or background. This will require not only continued education and awareness, but also action from individuals and policymakers to overcome this complex issue and work towards a better future.

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