



Anaëlle Lodo

The persistence of race discrimination towards African-Americans in the twenty-first century

LODO Anaëlle. *The persistence of race discrimination towards African-Americans in the twenty-first century*, sous la direction de Christopher Jon DELOGU. - Lyon : Université Jean Moulin (Lyon 3), 2019.
Mémoire soutenu le 09/05/2019.



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Master LLCER - Etudes Anglophones

Année Universitaire 2018-2019

The Persistence of Race Discrimination Towards African-Americans in the Twenty-First Century

Sous la direction de Monsieur le Professeur des Universités

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Cover illustration: Brian Jones, “Growing up black in America: here’s my story of everyday racism,” *The Guardian*, 6 Jun. 2018, Online, 17 Apr. 2019

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jun/06/growing-up-black-in-america-racism-education>.

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Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my thesis supervisor Professor Christopher J. Delogu of the Faculté des Langues at the Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3. Professor Delogu has been constantly present and ready to help me at every stage of my research and writing. He steered me in the right direction whenever I needed it and invested countless hours in reading me and giving me feedback. I am forever indebted to him for the great interest he took in my subject and for all the articles and interesting information he shared with me all along.

I would also like to acknowledge Professor Steven Sarson of the Faculté des Langues at the Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 as the second reader of this thesis; I am grateful to him for his time and attention.

Finally, I must express my profound gratitude to my parents and to my friends for providing me with continuous encouragement and putting up with my stress-related crankiness through the process of researching and writing this thesis. I could not have done it without their support. Thank you.

Anaëlle Lodo.

Introduction

“You have been cast into a race in which the wind is always at your face and the hounds are always at your heels ... The plunder of black life was drilled into this country in its infancy and reinforced across its history, so that plunder has become an heirloom, an intelligence, a sentience, a default setting to which, likely to the end of our days, we must invariably return.” — Ta-Nehisi Coates¹

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. [...] and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”² The well-known introduction of the American Declaration of Independence, written almost two hundred years before, states that “all men are created equal, ... they are endowed with certain unalienable Rights.”³ The latter text was a cornerstone of the new American Republic and this memorable sentence had a lasting influence on both the United States and the rest of the world, as is clear in the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, those powerful claims have proven difficult to live up to. Equality (whether of rights or opportunities) is not an easy goal to achieve, neither for a country nor for the whole world. This is readily apparent to anyone who knows the basics of American history and is aware of the growing inequality in American society over the past decades.

¹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 1 edition (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015).

² United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) <<http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>>.

³ Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston, *Declaration of Independence* (4 Jul. 1776).

For many people, America is a land of opportunity, success, and freedom, which is commonly summarized as “the American dream.” The belief in this largely mythical construct is still very present in the collective imagination, and thus makes the country attractive to many immigrants. It’s commonly believed that every ordinary person can become “healthy, wealthy, and wise” in the first Western country to elect an African-American president. But even though the United States of America may still be admired in some quarters for its power, freedom, and entrepreneurship, the real-life situation is quite different, especially when one examines the question of so-called race relations. Anyone who knows American history is aware that the rise of American prosperity for many Americans has come at the cost of blood, oppression, hardships, and fights; and that some struggles are far from over. The discrepancy between, on the one hand, the reality of violence throughout American history, its current conflict-ridden situation, and ongoing concerns for the health of its civil society, and on the other the idealized version of America which many foreign people and many U.S. citizens as well fantasize about makes the issues of racialized relations and persistent discrimination interesting subjects to study.

I became interested in the conflict surrounding interracial relations in the United States when I started opening my eyes to the reality of it. Like most people, I first saw the election of Barack Obama as a sign that America was making progress and leaving its racist past behind. I believed that, in the twenty-first century, people were finally smart enough to realize that biological racism was completely wrong, both scientifically and morally. I thought that technological and scientific advances, along with internationalization and social progress in some areas meant that people would be more open to novelty, diversity, and progress, and would be more clear-sighted. I thought people were learning from the past, understanding the causality of

events, and seeing the wrongs that remained to be righted. But one day, I realized that I was in the wrong too when I stumbled upon news of the publication of a racist Dove ad campaign. I then started digging around, and the more I learned about racism in the US and the state of interracial relations, the more stunned, horrified, and baffled I became. I started wondering how such racist or discriminatory events can still be happening in our modern world? I did not understand how the American society could be so backward thinking and yet claim to be ahead of the rest of the world. I also did not understand how it was possible for the American people not to be more enraged with the problem. I soon realized that the American society was largely blind to its racism and discrimination problem, which explains the lack of reaction, and I decided that I had to write something that would shed light on the how and why of the situation and thereby contribute to the prevention of further ignorance. The problem is that most white people do not see and realize what is happening; and those who do know and see the discrimination do not care about it enough to eliminate it, or they may even have instigated it because it is in their interest to share in keeping control over the population. I want to believe that showing white racist people and the world what damage racism is doing will bring about remorse and empathy, and hopefully lead to positive change. This paper thus aims at bringing the issue of race and racism in the United States to the foreground to raise awareness.

Race, in the US and elsewhere, has long been a social construct based on pseudo-science. People believed in genetic and biological differences between peoples which would be reflected in their skin colors. Then, when science no longer supported this theory, race became a purely social and political construct. It is today difficult to define race and categorize people, because of the frequent changes of the qualifications attributed to each racial and ethnic category in the American Census for

example. Some categories are evolving from ethnicity to race, and people can in fact change how they identify themselves as many times as they want in their lifetime. One of the ways we can realize today that race is illogical, inconsistent, and a totally subjective construct, not a scientific one, is by trying to explain it to children, according to journalist Jenée Desmond-Harris. Indeed, trying to make sense of this group classification, justifying someone's belonging to one or the other category, is almost impossible as this "organizing of the people" does not make sense.⁴ The problem is that the difficulty in defining races, because of multiple and varying definitions, challenges the identification, evaluation, and evolution of racism in society. Racist people claim they do not see the people they oppress as belonging to a different race, thus taking the identification "racism" out of the equation. Racism can take different forms and it comes from different motivators and influences, which makes it hard to identify sometimes. Most people today, including the current American president, seem to think that having black friends (or claiming to) gives them immunity from being called out as racist. People can believe that knowing a few black people makes them understand their struggles and prevents them from having racist or discriminatory attitudes. However, knowing a black person does not mean knowing what being black is, and white people can still be influenced by racial prejudice or stereotypes when they do not have an important, honest, deep conversation with a black person to understand how racism plays out in a black person's life. This paper shows how insidious and covert racist attitudes can be, to the point that people do not realize they are being influenced by the racial frame anymore. Interracial relations can also lead white people to feel too comfortable with some

⁴ Jenée Desmond-Harris, "11 Ways Race Isn't Real," *Vox* 10 Oct. 2014, Online, 10 Nov. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/2014/10/10/6943461/race-social-construct-origins-census>.

black people and consequently behave inappropriately with others.⁵ Understanding and apprehending race is difficult and confusing today, which allows racism to keep spreading toxically into people's attitudes. Therefore, racial understanding needs to be achieved in order to start moving towards greater harmony and cooperation, and this seems to require a better understanding of racial discrimination, of its mechanisms and implications.

This document will focus on the status of African-American people in twenty-first century America, and I will try to answer the following questions along the way: what are the roots and origins of racial tensions and to what extent does America's past influence its present? How do American citizens deal with the "institutionalized" culture of racism today? How do race divisions show up in everyday life today? How is it that, after this country's previous human rights accomplishments, the US still experiences racial discrimination at a high rate? Can and will America move away from its historical racial ideology and let go of racial prejudices? From the tobacco fields of South Carolina, to the Black Lives Matter movement nationwide, this study will present the extent to which discrimination has transformed and evolved in American society over the centuries, how it has impacted the whole society, and what solutions are being or could be considered. This historical analysis will attempt to figure out why it took so long for America to abolish slavery, what allowed racial discrimination to live on, and indicate paths to ending today's racial discrimination.

The first part of this document looks at the American past, going through the main landmarks of race relations, and unfolding the history of racism since the settlement of the colonies. Going back in time to revisit the origins of the institution of slavery

⁵ John Eligon, "The 'Some of My Best Friends Are Black' Defense," *The New York Times*, 18 Feb. 2019, Online, 20 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/16/sunday-review/ralph-northam-blackface-friends.html>.

and reconsidering its influence on the shaping of the nation can help understand why racial discrimination is so deeply rooted in American society. Reviewing events chronologically and establishing causality between past events, ideas, and where we stand today also allows for a deeper understanding of the current racial situation. My argument is based on the premise that the past informs and influences the present, whether it is voluntarily used and summoned by the people, or it unconsciously seeps into the collective mind or the national ideology. In his speech “A More Perfect Union,” Barack Obama supported the idea that it is important to remember the past in order to understand the present and to see how prejudice and bias might still influence actions nowadays, even though the laws and the society seem to have evolved.⁶

The second part of this study will thus focus on the white racial frame, as researchers call it, which is the theoretical framework of race that emerged from America’s troubled past. The presentation of this psychological and unconscious frame clarifies some of the motives and reasons behind the many racist incidents still happening today and presented here. By looking at the inheritance of racism, and how it continues to spread in the society today, omnipresent but covert, I discredit any claim of post-racial society or colorblindness. Once people realize that behind their beliefs and attitudes lay two hundred years of oppression due to fear and need for control, it should open their eyes and prompt them to reconsider their reasons and justifications for such behaviors. The focus is here turned on the criminal justice system, one of the domains where institutional racism is causing the most damage to African American people and communities; but also on racialized media messaging, no doubt the main reason why institutional racism has survived for so long. Racial

⁶ Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union,” Democratic Party Presidential Nomination Speech, National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, 18 Mar. 2008.

profiling in the police force and the justice system takes a heavy toll on both black individuals and black communities. The arrest rates of young black people, and the death rates during arrests or in custody, are higher than for white people; and sentencing is harsher for blacks too. Despite statistics showing there is no discrepancy in crime rates between white and black people, the racial frame is blurring people's perception of reality and triggering unnecessary defensive attitudes. I will however challenge the all-powerfulness of the white racial frame as reactions and rebellions to racial injustice and inequality have been on the rise since 2014. People from all communities saw the ongoing influence of racism and decided to take the matter into their own hands, standing up to raise awareness and change some minds. It is as important to acknowledge the persistent issues of interracial contacts as it is to recognize and promote local and national actions led by citizens who are willing to move forward.

The third part presents possible options and solutions to move forward. Some are still theories, others have been tested, and most need to be implemented at the highest level to be impactful. Those solutions aim at solving the major economic, social, and psychological outcomes of past and current racial injustices which are presented here. Economic disadvantage resulting from centuries of slavery and oppression, coupled with social and geographical segregation have been driving a wedge between blacks and whites for long enough to create important and significant disparities between both communities. Access to housing, employment, and education, as well as wealth building and ownership, are dramatically different for African Americans and white Americans. This is where racial classes intersect with social classes. All the pressure to succeed and defeat the stereotypes, the financial insecurity, the lack of trust in others, and the threat of inequality of opportunity pile up to the point of having

consequences on the physical and psychological health of African Americans. This paper will present recent studies interested in the health impact of racial discrimination for black minorities, which prove that stress arising from their situation can cause hypertension (and related diseases), depression, or even psychological damage akin to post-traumatic stress disorder. This supports the idea that colorblindness cannot help society to move forward—as the incidence of the environment is essential to diagnoses—and overlooking these social factors would prevent clinicians from healing black people properly. Most of the solutions aimed at reducing racial bias require more empathy from many white people to foster understanding, acknowledgment, and recognition, which are at the heart of the process of change and could prompt America to move forward.

I would like to note that the United States counts several different minorities, all of which are still facing discrimination and its consequences to some extent. For the sake of clarity and length, this paper will focus only on African Americans, though it would be interesting in a further study to see whether the causes of discrimination and its effects differ from one minority to another, or simply to analyze the specific struggles faced by those other minorities and find adequate solutions for them too. It is also important to note that, within the African American community, not everybody is equal when it comes to discrimination. This paper focuses on the African American people and does not make a distinction for gender or age, though it is worth noting that African American women or young black men are the target of specific prejudice and harsh discriminatory practices. Intersectionality is the framework which analyses how class, race, age, gender, religion, etc. are interwoven, often multiplying the pain experienced, and how these cumulative factors negatively impact and marginalize minorities. For more on this subject, I recommend the writings of Kimberlé

Crenshaw, the African American woman who coined this term and first began exploring the specific oppression of women of color in America. Furthermore, once again with regard to length, this paper is not being exhaustive regarding the diversity of situations of African Americans. I am well aware that some African Americans left the segregated suburbs, found top jobs, and even made it to the Oval Office and the Supreme Court. But for this study, I am focusing on the average situation of African American citizens to expose the struggle of the majority, and thus some statements I make might be missing nuance and sound overly general. I apologize in advance for that and hope the references I provide will be enough to bring clarification and specific details to the reader.

I/ Historical Background of Racist Ideas

“The black-white rift stands at the very center of American history. It is the great challenge to which all our deepest aspirations to freedom must rise. If we forget that—if we forget the great stain of slavery that stands at the heart of our country, our history, our experiment—we forget who we are, and we make the great rift deeper and wider.” — Ken Burns¹

“We learn nothing because we remember nothing.” — Gore Vidal²

A. New Republic and Old Habits

1. Patterns of Colonization

In the seventeenth century, the first English colonists started to settle on the East coast of the future United States of America. From the beginning, the Northern and Southern regions distinguished themselves. Even though the first years were hard for both regions, once the British found out more about their environment, they started to develop distinct economies and industries in those two regions. These different economic systems resulted from the differences in climate and environment, and thus from the industry they could develop to adapt to it. On the one hand, the South developed an agricultural economy, centered on tobacco or rice plantations, which was very profitable but also labor intensive. On the other hand, the North had a smaller agricultural industry, and developed an economy built on textiles and ship building in the early years, which did not require so large a workforce and whose

¹ Ken Burns, “Mystic Chords of Memory,” University of Vermont, Burlington, 12 Sep. 1991.

² Gore Vidal, “State of the Union, 2004,” *The Nation* 26 Aug. 2004, Online, 02/04/2019
<https://www.thenation.com/article/state-union-2004/>.

tasks were more adapted to European workers, mostly indentured servants, but also ordinary citizens.³ The difference between their industries led to a strong discrepancy in labor demand and workforce systems, but also in economic and social systems.

In the early years after the establishment of the colonies, the workforce was provided by indentured servants. They were mostly young British people—and Irish people running away from religious persecution and famine—too poor to make a proper living in Great Britain and seeking out any opportunity for a better future; or they were convicts who got their death sentences commuted into deportation and forced labor. This form of servitude was based on a contract signed between an employer, the master, and an employee, the servant, which established the terms of the servitude. The contracts were usually for five to seven years, with no (or little) wage, but the payment of freedom dues at the end of the contract (if the servant survived) was meant to help him start a new life and maybe buy some land.

In the South, indentured servants worked mostly in the tobacco fields, but the climate and conditions of work were so harsh that they often did not survive until the end of their contract. In the early 1600s, African American slaves were not very common in Northern America as they were too expensive to attract the newly settled planters. In the North, indentured servants would also work in the fields under a better climate, or they would be house servants, so their survival chances were higher. It is worth noting that, in the North, there was a small population of free black men who worked under contracts as well, received the same treatment and had the same level of life as the white indentured servants. They even had civil and political rights until 1650.⁴ The changes in the work force composition and in the treatment of workers

³ Anne Garrait-Bourrier, *L'esclavage aux États-Unis : du déracinement à l'identité* (Paris: Ellipses, 2001) 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

started in the 1660s with the peak of demand in the Southern tobacco industry, which thus brought along the foundations of the slave system.

The tobacco industry was central to the Southern economy. The climate and the soil were ideal to cultivate this crop which was easy to grow, did not require much investment, and soon started to be exported to Europe. However, as the demand and the production grew, the white indentured servants and American Indian slaves could not supply enough labor anymore, and regularly died due to the harshness of the climate and of the work conditions. The Southern colonists already knew of the African workers and their abilities, but in the early years, black slaves were too expensive for their small budding industry. In the 1660s though, as the demand increased along with their capital, it became economically smarter for the planters to buy African slaves, which would survive longer than white indentured servants and could be owned for life.

In the seventeenth century, the British already used African slaves in their Caribbean colonies, for the sugar plantations, just as the other main European powers did. And when the British slave traders saw the interest of the tobacco planters in black slaves, they decided to expand their business to the British colonies of North America. The British Royal African Company was the first to seize the opportunity to occupy a new market in America and thus escape the harsh competition that it faced in the Caribbean.⁵ As the tobacco demand grew in Europe and made the African slave a necessary “tool” for the Southern economy, the slave trade exploded. It is important not to neglect the impact that the slave trade and the slave economy had on the Northern colonies as well. The New England colonies may have imported fewer slaves proportionally, but their economy also benefitted and relied on the slave trade

⁵ Ibid., 28.

with the South. The Northern colonies had the biggest ports; they were thus more fit for the importation of slaves. The Northern industry was also focused on ship building, which exploded with the need to transport more slaves between the African and the American coasts. Thus, though the two regions were not using and buying slaves at the same rate, they both enjoyed the benefits of this slave-based economy.

In the years following the slavery boom, the attitude of the planters towards their workforce gradually changed, as they realized it was indispensable to protect their main asset. They thus started to legislate on the status of the African slaves. The first slave codes, passed in 1690 and 1705, were laws which restrained the liberties of the African people and regulated slavery, depriving the African slaves of their rights and humanity, and turning them into properties.⁶ The economic growth and labor needs of the colonies thus established a system of slavery and laid the foundation for a racist ideology to grow from the late seventeenth century onwards.

2. Slavery in Numbers

Soon enough, the discrepancies between the North and the South crystalized around slavery. In the seventeenth century, the South counted 525,000 slaves, most of whom worked and died in the plantation fields.⁷ As early as the second half of the eighteenth century, the African and European ratio was up to two black men for about three whites. These numbers reveal how fast the institution of slavery advanced in the British colonies of southern North America, and how this could influence the development of the society differently than in the North. On the other hand, the North in the seventeenth century counted about 40,000 slaves, half of whom would gain

⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁷ Ibid., 53.

their freedom back after their time of service was over or when they could pay back what their masters paid for them.⁸ The percentage of African people stayed relatively low in the eighteenth century, with only one black person for thirty-five white people in the New England colonies. It is particularly striking to observe that the census data for the African-American slaves remain approximate, since the slave traders and masters did not care enough about them to keep precise and accurate accounts of their slaves.

Overall, there were twice as many slaves in the United States in 1810 as in 1770, because of the growth in tobacco demand. However, keeping alive a system of human exploitation of this magnitude required more than a mere economic drive for the whole society to support it. The colonists needed an ideological justification, scientific logic, or religious explanations to accept this system, which the masters soon provided.

3. Ideology and the Building of a Nation

At first, the link between the exploitation of African slaves and their color or race was weak. The British had some prejudice, but it was not yet concrete racism. The economic turn of the 1660s however changed the dominant mentality. In the eighteenth century, the social separation between poor whites and blacks turned color into a constituting part of the slaves' identity. The whites could get out of indentured servitude, while servitude became hereditary for blacks. Some religious theories also asserted that only people who were slaves by nature and by birth were enslaved, thus making racism both a result and an engine of slavery.⁹ The notion of racial inferiority

⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁹ Ibid., 40–43.

arrived at this time, when servitude became a question of color and race, as a means for the colonists to separate and protect themselves from the “savages.”¹⁰ These theories stemmed from the ethnocentrism and biological determinism that European intellectuals developed to justify imperialism and the oppression of native peoples. It evolved in the late eighteenth century into scientific racism, which categorized people into a race according to specific physical characteristics, and those different races were naturally hierarchized, for example by Kant with his “races of mankind” in 1775.¹¹

When the colonies won their independence, they attempted to establish a government to form a more united nation. To do so, they passed many pieces of legislation laying the foundations of the country, but barely even acknowledging slavery. The first official mention of slavery was in the Ordinance of 1787, to establish the limits of the right to own and reclaim people in the original states. The new states were back then free of slavery.¹² Two years later, the Constitution however recognized and protected this institution, though only in the original thirteen states, and kept the Ordinance’s restriction in the territories.¹³ But this recognition was, in Sherman’s words, “restrictive” and it should have served to enforce the limitations of slavery, not to support its extension, as the fundamental concept of this document is freedom.¹⁴ Problems emerged later, with the addition of new states into the union. They pushed for their right to own slaves and thus challenged the Constitution which did not have any provision for these new situations. According to Sherman, who

¹⁰ Ibid., 44.

¹¹ Joe R. Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014) 74.

¹² Henry Sherman, *Slavery in the United States: Its National Recognition and Relations, From the Establishment of the Confederacy to the Present Time*, 2nd ed. (Hartford: Hurlburt & Pond Publishers, 1860) 12.

¹³ Ibid., 20–24.

¹⁴ Ibid., 46–50.

wrote his book, *Slavery in the United States: Its National Recognition and Relations, From the Establishment Of the Confederacy to the Present Time*, in 1860—when abolitionists gained in importance with the support of Abraham Lincoln—any compact for the admission of new slave states was unconstitutional. First, there was no such limitless recognition of slavery in the Constitution, and second, those compacts were outside of the limits of the Constitution (geographically and symbolically).¹⁵ He thus argued that “all these compacts, so far as they relate to slavery, are void.”¹⁶ The extension of slavery in the US, if we are to believe Sherman’s interpretation of the Constitution, happened in spite of the Founding Fathers’ attempts at restricting it and their expectations to see slavery die out by itself. But, at the time of its foundation, the American nation could not withstand such a radical change in the living and working conditions of the planters and of the African-American workers. The newly founded Union was trying to find its place on the continental and international stage, and to expand westward. It thus needed all available workers at the lowest cost so as to build up its economic power.

In the late eighteenth century already, dissident voices came to be heard on the issue of slavery from some of the major intellectuals in the country. Thomas Jefferson was one of the first to present his ambiguous opinion on the status and treatment of slaves in American society. He was a strong advocate of the abolition of slavery, even though he often described African people as an inferior race, owned slaves himself, and didn’t free them after his death.¹⁷ Nonetheless, he tried to use his power as a political leader to draw attention to the slavery issue, even going as far as drafting a paragraph exposing his opposition to slavery in the Declaration of Independence,

¹⁵ Ibid., 130–140.

¹⁶ Ibid., 155.

¹⁷ Thomas Jefferson. “Query XIV: “Laws” The Administration of Justice and Description of The Laws?”, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785).

which the other state representatives finally cut out.¹⁸ Later, the drafting of a constitution to officially define and create the United States and its government appeared as a new opportunity to address the question of this institution.

Unfortunately, the influence of slaveholders was too strong and the slavery too essential to the new states, so the delegates in the Constitutional Convention only managed to negotiate a twenty-year deadline for the abolition of the slave trade, while slavery itself was only mentioned in relation to taxation and representation, and to fugitive slaves and their freedom.¹⁹

This questioning of the issue of slavery grew stronger with time and with the change in ideologies brought by the European Enlightenment scientific, political, and social principles. The divergence of opinions being presented and argued about across the colonies soon divided the society, leading to the deadliest war in the history of the US.²⁰

B. The Civil War: Progress and Stagnation

In the nineteenth century, the liberation of African slaves seemed to become more and more likely, after the North won the Civil War against the Southern States, and Abraham Lincoln's party passed abolitionist legislation, from the Emancipation Proclamation to the Thirteenth Amendment.²¹

¹⁸ Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston, *Declaration of Independence* (Philadelphia, 4 Jul. 1776).

¹⁹ Philadelphia Convention, *United States Constitution* (17 Sep. 1787); James Madison, "Notes on the Constitutional Convention" (Philadelphia, 1787).

²⁰ The number of casualties is estimated between 620,000 and 750,000 people dead, which is more than the total of military casualties from the other wars the US fought combined.

²¹ Vincent Freylin, "Et Abraham Lincoln signa l'abolition..." *Valeurs actuelles* 2 Aug. 2013, Online, 08 Mar. 2018 <http://www.valeursactuelles.com/histoire/et-abraham-lincoln-signa-labolition-38650>.

1. The Rise of Abolitionism

From the 1820s onwards, African-American voices started to make themselves heard and denounced the horror of the slaves' situation, in pamphlets, speeches, and books. With the industrial revolution in the North, employers needed fewer slaves, whereas the cotton agriculture was soaring in the South, thanks to the cotton gin invented in 1793, and so rose the need for slaves. This cotton boom was also encouraged and supported by the growth of the textile industry in the Northern colonies and in Great Britain. Once again, the economic and social differences widened the gap between the two regions, where the citizens lived from different industries and thus relied on a different workforce (even though the North indirectly benefitted from the Southern slaves and the cotton they grew).

In the North, the abolitionist ideas were first put forward by free African-Americans who used their education and freedom to share their own past experiences as enchained people in the South or report the lives of other slaves as their own. The bulk of such autobiographic books, called "slave narratives," started to be published in the 1820s. This genre kept growing, more narratives being published with each decade. They became an important part of the literature in the 1830s and 1840s, when they had a powerful impact on the white population which could read and find out about the (more or less) hidden horrors of the slave system.²² One of the most famous autobiographies is *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, which was published in 1845 and translated three years later into French, showing the reach of the interest for and concern about the American slavery system. Douglass (1818-1895) was born a slave, he escaped at twenty and then

²² In the US in the 1840s-50s, it is estimated that about 90% of the population could read. If taking the North and the South separately, the North had an approximate literacy rate of about 95%, while the South was only around 50%.

participated in abolitionist activities and later protested the first Jim Crow laws (1876-1964), while editing an influential black newspaper, *The North Star*, for sixteen years.²³

Free African-Americans organized themselves in groups, created newspapers, and wrote pamphlets. They defended their humanity and thus their right to have rights and to be free.²⁴ Northern white intellectuals soon joined in the movement and their influence and greater credibility allowed the abolitionist movement to spread its views and reach the white audience as well. William Lloyd Garrison, known to be the most radical antislavery advocate, created the newspaper *The Liberator* in 1831 to spread abolitionist ideas and to demand “immediate emancipation” of the slaves. One year later, he founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society and helped create the American Anti-Slavery Society.²⁵ William Henry Seward, governor of the state of New York and later Secretary of State under Lincoln, delivered a speech on the “irrepressible conflict” in the U.S. system of labor, highlighting the incoherence between the labor of freemen and the servile slave labor which both coexisted in American society at the time.²⁶ He summed up the doubts and questions of the abolitionist era with antislavery arguments. He denigrated the institution of slavery and the US in comparison to European countries which had abolished slavery already or, which “is a despotism” in the case of Russia.²⁷ Slavery was no longer acceptable

²³ Another known autobiography is *Twelve Years a Slave. Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnaped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation near the Red River, in Louisiana* published in 1853 and recently adapted into a movie.

²⁴ Garrait-Bourrier, *L’esclavage aux États-Unis* 155.

²⁵ John L. Thomas, “William Lloyd Garrison | American editor, writer, and abolitionist,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 25 Jan. 2018, Online, 15 Mar. 2018 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Lloyd-Garrison>.

²⁶ William Henry Seward, “‘Irrepressible Conflict’ speech” (Rochester, 25 Oct. 1858).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

for the sensible men who could see all the conflicting aspects of this system with the society they were living in and trying to improve.²⁸

After a few decades of debating and the rising support for abolition in the North, the Southern states feared for the future of their slave society, and thus of their economy. In 1831, an educated African-American slave, Nat Turner, planned a slave rebellion which resulted in the death of fifty-one white people in Southampton County, Virginia. The Southern slaveowners, in fear, decided to harden the slave codes. These put an end to the slow movement of emancipation which had started in the South, and thus exacerbated the animosity between the supporters of abolition and the slaveholders.²⁹ In 1850, this division reached Congress. The addition of new states and territories to the Union revived the unresolved question of the extension of slavery to the West. The acceptance of the new state of California into the Union as a slave-free state raised fear in the supporters of slavery. Senator Henry Clay proposed a compromise to keep the balance between the free and slave states. California would be slave free, and the territories of New Mexico and Utah would make their own choice following the principle of popular sovereignty, while the Fugitive Slave Act forced free states to return runaway slaves to their masters. This Compromise seemed effective to settle dissension in the moment, but in the long run, it did not resolve all conflicts of interests and only postponed the secession of the Southern states. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln, a Republican in favor of abolition, ran for president and won, aggravating the tensions. Before his inauguration, seven Southern states decided to

²⁸ The influence of the Second Great Awakening, with the rise of religious movements in the early nineteenth century, was important at that time because it stimulated social activism, and thus the creation of abolitionist groups, thanks to its ideas of removing the evils of society before the second coming of the Christ.

See Michael McDonnell, "The Second Great Awakening and the Spirit of Reform (or Religion, Reform and Rum)," Lecture presented at the HSTY 1023 Emerging Giant: The Making of America, University of Sydney, 22 May 2017, for more details.

²⁹ Garrait-Bourrier, *L'esclavage aux États-Unis* 154; "Nat Turner - Black History" *HISTORY.com*, 2009, Online, 24 Mar. 2018 <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/nat-turner>.

leave the Union and seceded to protect their system of slavery. They formed the Confederate States of America and started a war against the Northern colonies that lasted for five years. When the North was about to win, in February 1865, Lincoln pushed for the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution to be passed through Congress. It finally abolished the institution of slavery in the recomposed union, after its ratification in December of the same year.

The secession of the South ensued from a strong sense of social and economic difference from the North. Slavery shaped every aspect of Southern life, and its economy remained mainly agricultural. This agrarian society had a lower density of population, was less urbanized, and less interested in industrial development than the North. The South also did not welcome as many immigrants as the North, with only thirteen percent of foreign born population in the South in 1860.³⁰ The two regions differed first in their religious convictions, the South being anti-reformist and rejecting the precepts of the Second Great Awakening, and second in their social structure, with the Southern predominance of patriarchalism and paternalism contrasting with Northern democratic tendencies, its individualism, and capitalism.³¹ Southerners strongly believed they achieved a high level of freedom, and helped African Americans live a better life, thanks to the system of slavery, which was for them a “positive good” and not a “necessary evil,” as the Founders once put it.³² Therefore, with the election of Lincoln and the spread of abolitionist ideas, the threat to their core identity convinced them to leave the Union from which they felt estranged already.

³⁰ Michael McDonnell, “The Old South,” lecture presented at the HSTY 1023 Emerging Giant: The Making of America, University of Sydney, 29 May 2016: 6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

³² *Ibid.*, 13–14.

2. Reconstruction and The Civil Rights

After the victory of the North and Lincoln's assassination, the Northern government at first pursued its abolitionist agenda and started the "Reconstruction era." It consisted in moving forward with the abolition of slavery, while reforming the union and rebuilding the South.

Opposition to abolition remained strong, even towards the end of the war, and Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865 because of his abolitionist stance.³³ Nonetheless, Lincoln had already freed many slaves with the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. He did not fear that conservative states, which stood by the North so far, would change sides, thanks to a recent Northern military win on the battlefield. And he pushed forward the idea that the Union needed more men to fight, that African-American slaves could become soldiers if they were free men, to convince undecided states of the necessity and righteousness of his Emancipation Proclamation. The situation of the then freed slaves however needed to be secured with binding legislation after the war, and it took two more years for this proclamation to be turned into an amendment. The Lincoln administration managed to pass the Thirteenth Amendment, legally abolishing slavery in the United States, through both houses of Congress in early 1865, which led to Lincoln's assassination by a Southerner a few months later. The ratification by the state legislatures took a few more months, and the amendment was officially ratified only in December 1865.³⁴

³³ Edwin M. Stanton, "President Lincoln Shot by an Assassin.; The Deed Done at Ford's Theatre Last Night. THE ACT OF A DESPERATE REBEL The President Still Alive at Last Accounts. No Hopes Entertained of His Recovery. Attempted Assassination of Secretary Seward. DETAILS OF THE DREADFUL TRAGEDY." *The New York Times* [New York, USA] 15 Apr. 1865.

³⁴ Garrait-Bourrier, *L'esclavage aux États-Unis* 167–168.

Congress took control of the Reconstruction after Lincoln's death, because of President Andrew Johnson's leniency towards the South. It created the Freedmen's Bureau, which had the mission of helping the newly freed African-Americans in their transition from slavery to freedom and into the society, to learn about their new rights and find work.³⁵ Despite some budget issues, the agency managed to build hospitals for African-Americans, to distribute food supplies, and also build schools and universities, all in order to support and educate the four million freed African-Americans.³⁶ In 1866, the Civil Rights Act granted the African-American slaves citizenship and rights by declaring:

That all persons born in the United States [...] are hereby declared to be citizens of the United States; and such citizens, of every race and colour, without regard to any previous condition of slavery or involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted,³⁷ shall have the same right, in every State and Territory in the United States, [...] as is enjoyed by white citizens.³⁸

It was voted along with the Fourteenth Amendment which forbade any violation of the principles of the law on civil rights, and, in 1867, the Reconstruction Act divided the South into five regions and put them under martial law to supervise political normalization and the emancipation of the slaves.³⁹ But all this legal and official progress did not always translate into actual better conditions for black people,

³⁵ Ibid., 171.

³⁶ "Freedmen's Bureau | American history," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (n.d.), Online, 9 Mar. 2018 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Freedmens-Bureau>.

³⁷ This clause allowed massive incarceration campaigns to begin during the Jim Crow era. These campaigns continue to trigger controversy today, and M. Alexander wrote a book in 2010, *The New Jim Crow*, denouncing their impact.

³⁸ US Congress, "The Civil Rights Act of 1866," *Teaching American History* (n.d.), Online, 16 Mar. 2018 <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-civil-rights-act-of-1866/>.

³⁹ Garrait-Bourrier, *L'esclavage aux États-Unis* 173.

especially in the South where much of the population would not accept all the legal changes or eliminate their racist behaviors.

3. Southern Pushback and The Jim Crow Laws

President Johnson succeeded President Lincoln, but his opinion on slavery was much more moderate. Though he claimed to be willing to continue Lincoln's citizenship projects, he soon strayed away from Lincoln's goals. He opposed Congress over the creation of the Freedmen's Bureau and closed his eyes on the persistent regime of discrimination and terror going on in the Southern states. The South was in a terrible situation, with its economy destroyed and its workforce freed, so the fate of the white Americans was uncertain too. The whites' situation became a more pressing concern for President Johnson than the question of the discrimination against the freed slaves and the regime of terror which was growing in the South. Though the economy was far better in the North thanks to industrial improvements and high employment rates, the economic reconstruction became the focus of attention in both regions and social politics was left aside, thus leading to many compromises across the whole country on the issue of the improvement of black lives.⁴⁰

Besides, the slave states, at the end of the war, saw the changes about to fall upon them and tried to anticipate the aftermath of the abolition of slavery. The Southerners were still opposed to the abolition of slavery, and more particularly to equality between whites and blacks, so they made sure to counter the effects of Reconstruction in any way they could. Before the passing of the Fourteenth Amendment, some of their state legislatures quietly passed new slave codes (called Black Codes) imposing

⁴⁰ Ibid.

taxes on African-Americans who would not work in agriculture, forbidding them to rent land, or to buy weapons.⁴¹ In 1896, the concept of “separate but equal” emerged from the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision, which asserted the constitutionality of racial segregation, as long as public facilities were of equal quality for both white and African Americans.⁴² It served as the starting point for the implementation of a segregation system which replaced the system of slavery, with the same white supremacist philosophy of humiliation, discrimination, and domination. The Jim Crow Laws, which strengthened the systemic discrimination against African-Americans, encompass all the laws enforcing racial segregation, passed from the end of the Reconstruction in 1877 up until the 1960s. They will become a fundamental and essential part of the American society, especially in the South.⁴³

This atmosphere of segregation and ongoing racism also helped racist groups prosper and spread across the colonies. The Ku Klux Klan, the most infamous and violent white supremacist group in the United States, was created in December 1865 and, though it was legally banned in 1871 by President Ulysses S. Grant, managed to survive in the shadows. Its survival until today is a clear indication of the persistence of racism in America. In 1915, the movie *The Birth of a Nation* gave a romanticized and heroic image of the KKK, while depicting black people as savages and cannibals, which revived the interest and support for this organization up until the Second World

⁴¹ Ibid., 174.

⁴² Brian Duignan, “Plessy v. Ferguson | Summary, Facts, & Significance” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 7 Feb. 2018, Online, 2 Apr. 2018 <https://www.britannica.com/event/Plessy-v-Ferguson-1896>.

⁴³ Omi and Winant argued that “The continuing persistence of racial ideology suggests that these racial myths and stereotypes cannot be exposed as such in the popular imagination. They are, we think, too essential, too integral, to the maintenance of the US social order. Of course, particular meanings, stereotypes and myths can change, but the presence of a system of racial meanings and stereotypes, of racial ideology, seems to be a permanent feature of US culture” in Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Race Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

War.⁴⁴ It will take another century after the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment for the United States to get out from the troubled post-Civil War period and make its way towards fundamental positive changes in the 1960s.

C. From the Civil Rights to Modern-Day Racism

1. The Counterculture and The Civil Rights Movement

With the economic depression of 1929, and the Second World War, followed by the boom of the consumer society, the American population faced many challenges and changes which impacted its culture, society, and politics in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1960s, more tensions resulting from the Vietnam War, the uneven access to the consumer society, the conservatism of the old white establishment, and a general spirit of restlessness agitated the revolutionary spirits of the young generation. Protest movements emerged and grew so big that they turned into a counterculture based on experimentation, the Hippie movement, and creativity (the Beat generation), with the objective of redefining society.⁴⁵ These social protests reached into every aspect of society, from environmentalism to women's rights and African-Americans' rights.

These sudden and major social and political changes also resulted from the Second World War, which witnessed the Americans join the battle against fascism on the European and Pacific fronts. This war had an influence on the African-American population in two ways. First, black units were created, and African-Americans went to battle side by side with white soldiers, earning their respect by distinguishing themselves and getting to experience some equality with the desegregation of the U.S.

⁴⁴ *The 13th*, Dir. Ava DuVernay, Perf. Michelle Alexander, Jelani Cobb, Documentary, Netflix, 2016 : 04"30-09"10.

⁴⁵ Rebecca E. Klatch, "The Counterculture, the New Left, and the New Right," *Qualitative Sociology* 17.3, 1994: 199–214.

armed forces in 1948. Second, they fought against fascism, against the idea that the white race is superior to others, which echoed in the African-American community and revived their hopes for the end of segregation and discrimination. But after the war ended, the soldiers came back home to find themselves still being discriminated against, ignored, and treated as inferior; while the whole African-American population felt the hypocrisy of the United States, which had fought against the oppression of subjugated people abroad but still oppressed its own minorities and women at home. The discontent of the black population grew bigger as its expectations of change and recognition, nurtured during the war, went unfulfilled. It gradually gave African-Americans the energy and the will to fight, which they used to launch the Double V Campaign (victory against racism at home, and victory against fascism abroad) which in turn energized the civil rights movement.

Thanks to the support of celebrities and influential figures, and backed by hundreds of largely anonymous community organizers, the Civil Rights Movement gained in importance and in recognition, rallied the population's opinion, and persuaded people of the need for change. Dr. Martin Luther King (01/15/1929 – 04/04/1968) and Malcolm X (05/19/1925 – 02/21/1965) are the main leading figures of this Movement. King called for a non-violent, legal, and social revolution.⁴⁶ In a speech in 1967, he declared “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”⁴⁷ This illustrates his will to promote a pacific movement to protest the usual violence of racism and discrimination with love. On the other hand, Malcolm X seemed sometimes to prefer violence as a means of action. He spread out a hate for White people which, according to his white (and even some black)

⁴⁶ “MLK’s Political Evolution Through the 1960s | Global Research,” *Premium Official News*, 2018, Online http://nouveau.europresse.com/Link/MOULINT_1/news-20180119-RVPR-rlpmn5127573.

⁴⁷ Martin Luther King Jr., “Where Do We Go from Here?” Annual Report, 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, GA, 16 Aug. 1967.

opponents, resembled reverse racism. After his conversion to the Nation of Islam, which combined Islamic concepts with black nationalism, Malcolm Little changed his last name to “X” and implicated himself in the organization of the movement at the time of its greatest development. He challenged King’s vision of integration by putting an emphasis on black identity and integrity before the need for civil rights, and by arguing that civil disobedience was the solution to achieve black independence. He also managed to change the terminology used to refer to African Americans at the time, rejecting the terms “negro” and “colored” and enforcing “black” and “Afro-American” instead. He provided the foundations for the Black Power movement born in the late 1960s.⁴⁸

The Civil Rights Movement managed to gain such magnitude that the government passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, recognizing the civil rights of every African-American and (theoretically⁴⁹) ending systemic discrimination. Lyndon B. Johnson made use of the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy to present this act as his legacy and sign it into law.⁵⁰ During his presidency, Johnson appeared to support antiracist efforts and pushed for the passing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, ensuring enfranchisement for all American citizens, disregarding their race or skin color.⁵¹

However, putting an end to a spirit of segregation that had been going on for two centuries was not easy, and new equality policies were hard to enforce. For example, fair employment was impossible to achieve as white people were to keep their

⁴⁸ Lawrence A. Mamiya, “Malcolm X | Biography, Nation of Islam, Assassination, & Facts,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 22 Mar. 2018, Online, 2 Apr. 2018 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Malcolm-X>.

⁴⁹ See Part II and III for explanations on how discrimination actually persisted.

⁵⁰ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York, USA: Nation Books, 2016) 383–384.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 390-392.

seniority, because taking it away was considered too unfair to hardworking whites. So, the previously discriminated black people had to compete with them for similar jobs, though they had never had the chance to build their own seniority.⁵² It appeared as if the Civil Rights Act brought on “racial progress and progression of racism at the same time.”⁵³

Stokely Carmichael, chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee spread the motto “Black Power” during the Mississippi March Against Fear in 1966, illustrating the wish of black people to exploit their political and economic power to a maximum.⁵⁴ But soon this concept divided the movement, because of the violence it entailed and of the underlying idea of anti-white racism, which opposed the ambition of fighting “racism of any color” of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).⁵⁵ The growth of the Black Panther Party (founded in 1966), which enforced a series of social support initiatives, such as the organization of medical services, of political education programs, and the providing of breakfast for children, but also planned sit-ins and other direct mediated actions, resulted from the impression of a failure to “loosen the stranglehold of police brutalizers.”⁵⁶ In 1967, the young black people were losing patience with humanist speeches and lobbying tactics which ‘achieved’ nothing quickly. They witnessed ongoing discrimination in the field of housing, employment, or even with interracial marriage (it was not until the *Loving v. Virginia* case, 1967, that laws prohibiting interracial marriage were finally banned in America), while many expected results now that the Jim Crow Laws had been suppressed. Conditions

⁵² Ibid., 385-386

⁵³ Ibid., 386

⁵⁴ Garrait-Bourrier, *L’esclavage aux États-Unis* 185–187.

⁵⁵ NAACP Vice President Robert Humphrey, cited in Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning* 398.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 397.

of life had not significantly improved for many black people still living in poverty, and segregation and police brutality were omnipresent. The tensions broke out in race riots. A portion of the African American community joined the hundred and thirty black rebellions which took place in a hundred and fifty cities across the United States during the “long, hot summer” of 1967, killed almost a hundred people, and caused lots of material damage.⁵⁷

A year later, two prominent figures used their media coverage to shed light on the cause (Figure 1). The two Olympic athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos performed the Black Power salute, on the podium at the Mexico Olympic Games of 1968, with a black glove on their raised hand and their head lowered, while the National Anthem was playing.⁵⁸ This act of defiance, four years after the adoption of the Civil Rights Act, was very symbolic as discrimination had not disappeared and African-Americans had to keep fighting for their rights, and for their lives.



Fig. 1: Tommie Smith and John Carlos Doing the Black Power Salute.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Kelly Gonsalves, “The ‘Long, Hot Summer of 1967’,” *The Week*, 2 Aug. 2017, Available: <https://theweek.com/captured/712838/long-hot-summer-1967>.

⁵⁸ Joseph M. Sheehan, “Olympics Ouster,” *The New York Times*, 16 Oct. 1968, Online, 9 Mar. 2018 http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/packages/html/sports/year_in_sports/10.16a.html?mcubz=1.

⁵⁹ Sheehan, “Olympics Ouster,” *The New York Times*, 1968.

2. From the 1970s to 2007: Stalled Progressivism and Blatant Racism

The 1968 presidential election saw the first African-American candidate, a woman from the Communist Party, Charlene Mitchell, face off against the Republican Richard Nixon.⁶⁰ Nixon used the “southern strategy” during his campaign, a strategy founded on racist appeal but hiding it by praising white people while mentioning neither *black* nor *white* people explicitly.⁶¹ He won the election. At the time of the Watergate scandal, in 1974, black activists were focusing on anti-prison activism and countering the (extra-zealous) law-and-order movement, after the imprisonment of many African-American activists. The anti-prison activists and their leader, Angela Davis (26/01/1944-), saw prison as “a creator of crime rather than a preventer,”⁶² an idea that is still accurate today. Thus the fact that Nixon did not serve any time for his misconduct foreshadowed the judicial inequalities between whites and blacks, elites and ordinary citizens.⁶³ On the other hand, some believed the growing black representation and use of black actors in the booming film industry (instead of white actors painting themselves black as used to be done) was important progress, an acknowledgment of African-American communities. But the portrayal of black people was still stereotyped, so much so that antiracists qualified this as “another form of cultural genocide.”⁶⁴

At the same time, the government enacted anti-discrimination programs in the employment field to remedy the inequality of work opportunities. This was accompanied by powerful activism and a strong economy, which led to a reduction of black poverty by 1973.⁶⁵ However, these so-called politics of affirmative action only

⁶⁰ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning* 409.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 410.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 417.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 418.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 414.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 417.

opened up new possibilities of employment for African-Americans who were already qualified for the jobs and did not really go “beyond equality of opportunity,” i.e. to correcting the origin of the problem, inequality in education.⁶⁶ Besides, the 1973 recession challenged the previous achievements and the growth of a black middle-class. As white people were also impacted by the socioeconomic crisis, they turned to black people and blamed them for their struggles. They argued that social welfare for poor black people was too expensive for the government, while the politics of affirmative action favored black people at the expense of whites.⁶⁷ The idea that black people profited from welfare stuck in the society’s collective conscience through time, and was revived any time whites would find themselves economically struggling.⁶⁸ The following Carter administration also reduced social and educational budgets to increase military spending and boost the economy, resulting in record inflation and unemployment rates, while Black poverty rates rose again, alongside inequality. By the end of the 1970s, the amalgam between race and class disparities, and the growth of racist ideas in society had weakened the antiracist movement.⁶⁹ This decade also witnessed the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, which tripled its national membership in reaction to the 1960s racial progress and carried on terrorist actions and lynching.⁷⁰ Police brutality also exacerbated, with a ratio of twenty-two black people killed for every white person killed by policemen.⁷¹

The next decade started with the election of Ronald Reagan, who targeted black people economically, similarly to Carter, cutting taxes for the rich, stopping social

⁶⁶ Feagin, *Racist America* 283–284.

⁶⁷ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning* 422–424.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 478.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 427-429.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 430.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

aids for middle- and lower-classes, and increasing the military budget.⁷² The Reagan years were paradoxical. On the one hand, antiracist bills, the Civil Rights Restoration Act and the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, were passed by the Congress despite Reagan's veto, and Reagan did sign an extension of the Voting Rights Act for twenty-five more years. On the other hand, this was followed by Reagan signing "with great pleasure" the most racist bill of the decade related to his War on Drugs, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act, prescribing lower tolerance and harsher sentencing for black dealers and users of crack than for white ones.⁷³ This was the beginning of an ongoing tradition of African-Americans' mass incarceration (the prison population increased due to harsher sentencing, not more crimes.)⁷⁴ The growth of national wealth detained by African Americans doubled between 1865 and 1990, which seemed to indicate social progress for black people and a decline in racism and discrimination. However, racists thus used the scarce middle-class or leadership position attainments of some black people to blame poor blacks for their situations and protest policies of affirmative action. They argued that it was the African-Americans' own fault and choices which lead them to poverty, not the outside social and historical forces of racism and discrimination, since some black people indeed managed to climb the social ladder.⁷⁵ This is the emerging of the racist notion of "personal responsibility."⁷⁶

The 1990s started with the Rodney King beating by four police officers in Los Angeles in 1991 and race riots following the acquittal of the officers in 1992.⁷⁷ President George H.W. Bush nominated Clarence Thomas, an African-American

⁷² Ibid., 431.

⁷³ Ibid., 435.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 433–435. Racial profiling further enforced with the *McCleskey v. Kemp* case, 442.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 444–445.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 457.

⁷⁷ C. N. N. Library, "Los Angeles Riots Fast Facts," *CNN*, 27 Mar. 2018, Online, 10 Nov. 2018 <https://www.cnn.com/2013/09/18/us/los-angeles-riots-fast-facts/index.html>.

jurist, to the Supreme Court, hoping a black man defending the achievements of the Civil Rights Act would appease tensions. But Anita Hill, an African-American woman and Thomas's former secretary, accused him of sexual harassment and gender discrimination.⁷⁸ Her testimony was disregarded, and Thomas was confirmed in his seat, underlining the prejudices against black women's sexuality and testimony. Black women, according to racist whites, had a loose sexual behavior which explained the high birth rates in poor black neighborhood. And this was a problem because it cost a lot in welfare benefits, so segregationists started advocating for sterilization policies or long-term contraceptives for African-American women. In 1990, Norplant, a contraceptive implant presenting serious health risks, was approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and advocated as the solution for lower class poverty and population growth.⁷⁹ Stereotypes were still strong and black feminists had a difficult time countering those insulting portrayals of black women, especially as sexist and sexualized images of black women circulated widely with the rise of black hip-hop and rap music. A black musical culture had been rising for a few years, with the growing diffusion of rap, Gangsta rap (Queen Latifah, Tupac Shakur), and Hip Hop music, attracting criticism from white racists while creating a sense of identity, unity, and belonging for stigmatized and marginalized black people.⁸⁰ Rappers and singers produced engaged albums and songs to denounce racism, discrimination, and the difficulties of being black in America. However, for some antiracist activists, the image of black people they showed "made Black people look bad."⁸¹

President Bill Clinton, in 1994, doubled down on crime by passing the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which created categories of new federal

⁷⁸ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning* 447–448.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 445.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 442–443.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 452.

crimes, funded the building of new prisons and the upgrading of police forces, while making three-time offenders candidates for life-long sentencing.⁸² The late 1990s were marked by the trial and the exoneration of black football player O.J. Simpson for his wife's and her friend's murders, which underlined the supposed "end of racism."⁸³ However, President Clinton's support for the idea of "personal responsibility" challenged this conclusion. He blamed black people for their own circumstances, discharging the government and welfare state from helping out by ignoring the weight of past and ongoing discrimination.⁸⁴ Soon, politics and segregationists found another way to avoid the race talk altogether. They put forward the colorblindness rhetoric, which silenced any discussion on race, by stating that ignoring the race problem would solve it, while talking about race was racist.⁸⁵ This was readily accepted as the idea of multiculturalism was growing in the U.S.

The turn of the millennium was filled with hope and, when President Clinton presented genetic research which proved that all humans were 99.9 percent the same thus challenging the very idea of human races, the future looked brighter to African-American communities.⁸⁶ But the 2000 election of President George W. Bush saw the illegal barring from the polls of thousands of African-American voters in Florida. In 2001, the terrorist attacks on September 11th, entailed a reviving of racist sentiments but also of colorblind theory, trying to erase racial divides to focus on national unity in a moment of crisis.⁸⁷ In 2003, affirmative action policies were consolidated for twenty-five more years by Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. It felt like a small victory. At the same time, the No Child Left Behind Act reinforced the

⁸² Ibid., 454.

⁸³ He was later convicted of their murders in a civil lawsuit. Ibid., 461.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 458, 464.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 467.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 474.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 477–478.

importance of standardized tests, no matter how discriminatory towards young black people they were, and the “No Excuses” movement advocated zero tolerance policies and punished black children more harshly than white ones for misbehaviors.⁸⁸ Even the rise in popularity of the Democratic Party Illinois Senator, the only African-American man in the Senate, Barack Obama, in 2004, did not tone down the racist theories undermining black intelligence and capacity for high achievements. He was described as an “extraordinary Negro,” and his political success was used by racists to proclaim the end of racism and discrimination.⁸⁹ However, the extreme disaster of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 once again brought discrimination talk to the foreground, as the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) delayed for three days the deployment troops to help the survivors, mainly African-Americans of a black neighborhood.⁹⁰ A symbolic advancement for the anti-discrimination cause would have been the public funeral oration of the negro word by the NAACP in 2007, a seemingly cultural and moral achievement for black people. But it somehow hid and undermined the similarly impactful race issues of personal responsibility, colorblindness, No Excuses, etc.⁹¹

At the end of the day, legally banning segregation did not erase historically racist prejudice and deeply ingrained social stereotypes. The back and forth movement of racial progress indicates that effectively fighting off racial discrimination is a long-term work, which requires constant effort and adapted strategies, and whose goal has remained out of reach so far.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 478–479.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 483.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 484–485.

⁹¹ Ibid., 488.

3. The Obama Era

As we have just seen, racism and discrimination were still sensitive issues in America in 2008. Barack Obama's candidacy to the United States presidency in 2008 raised new hopes in the African-American community, while reviving some racist sentiments. During his first presidential campaign, Obama faced a controversy that started with the controversial remarks about the 9/11 terrorist attacks of Reverend Wright, his former pastor at the Trinity United Church of Christ.⁹² Obama delivered a speech in Philadelphia on March 18, 2008 in which he managed to defend Rev. Wright and make a powerful statement about race relations in America that considered both America's past and his own personal experience. With this thirty-seven-minute speech, Obama underlined the problem with the structural racism embedded in the nation's ideology since its creation:

The fact is that the comments that have been made and the issues that have surfaced over the last few weeks reflect the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through—a part of our union that we have not yet made perfect. And if we walk away now, if we simply retreat into our respective corners, we will never be able to come together and solve challenges like health care or education or the need to find good jobs for every American.

Understanding this reality requires a reminder of how we arrived at this point. As William Faulkner once wrote, "The past isn't dead and buried. In fact, it isn't even past." We do not need to recite here the history of racial injustice in this country. But we do need to remind ourselves that so many of

⁹² Brian Ross and Rehab El-Buri, "Obama's Pastor: God Damn America," *ABC News*, 7 May 2008, Online, 13 Nov. 2018 <https://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/DemocraticDebate/story?id=4443788&page=1>.

the disparities that exist between the African-American community and the larger American community today can be traced to inequalities passed on from an earlier generation that suffered under the brutal legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.⁹³

This speech and the mere prospect of perhaps having an African-American man at the head of the country raised hopes for antiracists of bettering the lives of millions of African-Americans still discriminated against. His victory in November 2008 in itself challenged the American perspective on and stereotypes of African Americans, while the entrance of a black man through the front door of the White House (an edifice built in part by slaves) embodied a sort of “atonement for the original sin of slavery and the stain of segregation.”⁹⁴ His selection of two African-American attorneys general helped bring change and renewal to the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, while he also commuted the sentences of hundreds of prisoners to “reverse the rate of black incarceration” and his Affordable Health Care Act helped more black people get health insurance.⁹⁵ Though he started his years in office trying to be a “neutral arbiter” in race matters, he became more passionate and concerned about it towards the end of his second term, denouncing police brutality and supporting the black community of Charleston after the church shooting in 2015.⁹⁶ However, despite the improvements he made, the fact of being ruled by an African-American president revived racism and tensions between communities, and precipitated the emergence in

⁹³ Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union,” Democratic Party Presidential Nomination Speech, National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, 18 Mar. 2008.

⁹⁴ Nick Bryant, “Did Obama improve US race relations?” *BBC News*, 10 Jan. 2017, Online, 5 Apr. 2018 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38536668> ; Joseph Peniel, “Obama’s effort to heal racial divisions and uplift black America,” *The Washington Post*, 22 Apr. 2016, Online, 5 Apr. 2018 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/obama-legacy/racism-during-presidency.html>.

⁹⁵ Bryant, “Did Obama improve US race relations?”

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* See this shooting in more details in part II of this thesis.

the next elections of a conservative and xenophobic Republican candidate, Donald J. Trump.

Up until the summer of 2014, the situation of African-American people seemed to many casual observers to have improved, and the election of Barack Obama as president of the most powerful country in the world opened new progressive prospects for the future of American society. However, race tensions had been growing since at least 2009. First, many black people lost most of their wealth in the 2008 financial crisis, and Obama failed to rectify the drop in black homeownership rates, focusing on helping the banks instead.⁹⁷ Second, multiple police shootings or beatings of black people, and consequent protests, echoed the unrest of the 1960s and 1990s.⁹⁸ Racial conflict really intensified during Obama's second term, after the *Shelby v. Holder* Supreme Court decision in 2013. In a five to four decision, the court found unconstitutional the formula that designated which jurisdictions (because of their history of discrimination) were obliged to ask for clearance from higher instances to operate changes in their voting practices. It thus eliminated an important provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and in doing so rolled back, according to some, an important progressive achievement of the Civil Rights Movement.⁹⁹ It also opened the door to renewed legal discrimination through disenfranchisement. This issue of the Civil Rights era, the enfranchisement of people of color, was also challenged by the mass incarceration of black people, which Obama failed to reverse. Indeed, criminal charges lead to disenfranchisement in the US, whether it be for black or white people, but black people had (and still have, see Part II-B-2) higher chances of being charged and incarcerated, so they are more likely to be disenfranchised. As Michelle

⁹⁷ Derecka Purnell, "Why Does Obama Scold Black Boys?" *The New York Times*, 25 Feb. 2019, Online, 4 Apr. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/23/opinion/my-brothers-keeper-obama.html>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Peniel, "Obama's effort to heal racial divisions and uplift black America."

Alexander argues, “Millions of people of color are now saddled with criminal records and legally denied the very rights that were supposedly won in the Civil Rights Movement.”¹⁰⁰ A common criticism of Obama’s presidency is that he failed to act on this “American dilemma” and instead focused primarily on the LGBTQ campaign for equality.¹⁰¹ Though he reduced the gap in sentencing between crack or cocaine use with the 2010 Fair Sentencing Act, he kept funding drug enforcement, and he could not get the number of incarcerated people to drop meaningfully.¹⁰² All in all, the outcome of Obama’s presidency needs to be weighed carefully because

With regard to race, Obama’s historical significance is ensured; only his impact and legacy are up for debate. In retrospect, the burden of transforming America’s tortured racial history in two four-year presidential terms proved impossible...¹⁰³

Conclusion

Considering the unfolding of racist events and the evolution of racial beliefs and attitudes in the United States from its foundation up until the past few years opens the reader’s eyes to the complexity of the ideological grid underlining the American psyche. The decision the colonists made regarding their agricultural and industrial ventures determined their attitude towards their workforce. The need for cheap labor and resistant men coupled with the hardships of the work conditions restricted their choice, and the Caribbean slave traders were quick to seize the opportunity and

¹⁰⁰ Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow Symposium: Mass Incarceration: Causes, Consequences, and Exit Strategies,” *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* 9 (2011): 18.

¹⁰¹ Bryant, “Did Obama improve US race relations?”

¹⁰² Stuart Rodger, “Why Has Barack Obama Done So Little About America’s Most Racist Domestic Policy?” *openDemocracy*, 15 Oct. 2012, Online, 4 Apr. 2019

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/obamas-racist-policy/>.

¹⁰³ Peniel, “Obama’s effort to heal racial divisions and uplift black America.”

introduce the slave solution to the developing colonies. The implementation of the slave system, its success, and its benefits for both the North and the South required legal and ideological enforcement to maintain this exploitative system and support the economy. Despite the example European countries set by abolishing their slave systems early, the American nation has long struggled before making the ethical choice. The United States relied heavily on the sub-class of black slaves, and any change to the system threatened the economy and the social order. This explains the constant back and forth of policies concerning the emancipation and integration of black people and the pursuit of equality, since the eighteenth century. The perpetuation of the oppression and humiliation through time seems to have allowed the ideology of white superiority, and the prejudice of black inferiority and dangerousness, to permeate the white mind and thus the white institutions and the whole U.S. system, up until today. The difficulty to move on from segregation and discrimination, and the willingness to hide the truth behind colorblindness, show the importance of what I will now define as the white racial frame in the common American consciousness. The recent events I am presenting next, and how they can be related to the past prejudice implanted in white people's minds since the early days of colonial slavery also prove how racism and discriminatory practices are the result of a long history of abuse.

II/ Twenty-First Century Racism

“Racism is so universal in this country, so widespread, and deep-seated, that it is invisible because it is so normal.” — Shirley Chisholm¹

“People are people. The more afraid they get, the more stupid they get. Fear shrinks the brain.” — *The Walking Dead*²

A. Theoretical approach

1. Scientific Racism, Symbolic Racism, Systemic Racism

As I showed in the first part, racism in the U.S. has deep roots and was embedded in the fabric of the nation since its early days. It has overcome the egalitarian attempts of the late 1800s and 1900s, but to do so racist attitudes and beliefs had to evolve and change shape to adapt to social evolutions and popular beliefs.

The traditional definition of racism, according to Robert Entman, a professor of Media and Public Affairs and expert in communication, is “open bigotry” which despises and restricts interracial contact while refusing the equality of opportunity and equality of access to institutions for people of color.³ This rejection of the “other” was justified by scientific theories depicting black people as “naturally” inferior to whites. They were described as less intelligent and inherently lazy, often violent and dirty. Whites commonly represented African Americans as ape-like, to reinforce the negative prejudice of blacks as dangerous and a threat to society, and thus to justify their mistreatment.⁴ Despite the many actions of the 1960s to achieve equality and

¹ Shirley Chisholm, *Unbought and Unbossed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1970).

² “Forget,” *The Walking Dead*, dir. David Boyd, AMC, 8 Mar. 2015.

³ Robert M. Entman, “Blacks in the News: Television, Modern Racism and Cultural Change” *Journalism Quarterly*. 69.2 (1992): 342.

⁴ Feagin, *Racist America* 101.

acknowledge African Americans' humanity and rights, the resistance to change and to the policies of affirmative action prevented real progress in eliminating racial discrimination.⁵

The evolution of science and technologies brought about new discoveries and should have helped debunk racist theories. Scientific research and DNA mapping proved, if still needed, that African American people are as human as white people and are indeed genetically close to apes, exactly as white people are. In 2000, President Clinton announced the results of the first human genome survey, and officially declared all human beings to be more than "99.9 percent the same." Such scientific achievements placed African Americans on a biological equal footing with white Americans and this was meant to force the latter to modify their perception of black people and their approach to racial discrimination. Scientists proving that races were not genetically distinguishable should have been the beginning of a social revolution, because there is no biological difference to support claims of inferiority and superiority.⁶ The science was becoming supportive of the antiracism position, so racists had to adapt and renew their ideas. They used the remaining infinitesimal genetic difference to justify alleged differences in social behavior. Segregationists and racist scientists had indeed been disregarding scientific research and proofs of biological equality for decades already and they once more found ways to ignore or turn the results to their advantage. They used the millennium's discovery to justify the political and social race categories they advocated, by claiming that the remaining 0.1 percent genetic difference had to be related to race. Racist geneticists managed to produce research and confirm hypotheses that would maintain a rationale for white

⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁶ Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning* 474-475.

superiority.⁷ They also argued that intelligence had never been linked to genes, which allowed for the perpetuation of the blacks' intellectual inferiority theory and thus maintained the lower social place of black people. Though biological racism remains in the background of racism, social sciences have now become the leading source of racist theories. This scientific shift gave way to symbolic racism to emerge and replace traditional, open racism in American society.

Symbolic racism is defined as an anti-black affect coupled with an attachment to traditional (white) American values. There is thus a rejection of blacks moving up socially and pushing for change and equality, along with a denial of ongoing racial discrimination justifying the rejection of policies of affirmative action.⁸ This modern racism is more subtle and indirect than traditional racism used to be, as it needs to conform to new social expectations and norms. The evolution of public policy appeared to have had a positive impact on racist sentiments, but only the expression of such sentiments in fact declined a little, when people realized it had become inappropriate and impolite to express such ideas.⁹ Social unacceptability required racist attitudes to become covert and hidden—for this the Internet was a convenient tool that came along just in time.

This new form of subtle and covert racism can still be defined as systemic racism. As Feagin, a sociologist and social theorist specialized in racial issues, explains, systemic racism is about hierarchy and dominance, supported by the “development and maintenance of white privilege, economic wealth, and sociopolitical power over centuries.”¹⁰ It means that the system of racism is still relying on institutions created

⁷ Feagin, *Racist America* 89.

⁸ Christopher Tarman and David O. Sears, “The Conceptualization and Measurement of Symbolic Racism” *The Journal of Politics*. (2005): 733.

⁹ Entman, “Blacks in the News” 342.

¹⁰ Feagin, *Racist America* 14.

to perpetuate white privilege and power, by maintaining inequalities in resources.¹¹ This system survives today thanks to the principle of social reproduction, which ensures the reproduction of racial inequality by giving most control of political power and economic resources to whites, and to the principle of racist relation, which results in their retaining of ideological power.¹² Systemic racism has been causing divides between racial groups for centuries, and today its effects carry on and even widen the gap between whites and blacks. As a consequence of this evolution and adaptation of racist theories, racial inequalities remain an ongoing feature of US society.

No matter what types of racism survive in American society, their perpetuation is linked to the reproduction of pseudo-scientific theories claiming white superiority, which are reinforced and supported by the white racial frame enforcing the white people's racialized worldview.

2. The White Racial Frame

The racial frame was created by influential whites with the aim of rationalizing oppression by making white privileges and advantages morally right, while emphasizing the inferiority of people of color. This interpretive frame was created early in the history of the US, by the elite in politics, in the media and education fields, who have long been in control of the whole system and could thus impose their perspective on all the citizens.¹³ Whites have always been in control of most of the media companies and, until 2008, there had only been white people in ruling positions, which made it easier for them to impose their views and values on the whole society. Indeed, the white elite played an important role in the diffusion and

¹¹ Ibid., 9.

¹² Ibid., 19.

¹³ Ibid., 63–64.

perpetuation of this frame from one generation to the next. Besides, it is possible for the media to easily present racist stereotypes and manipulate the people because of their ignorance. Indeed, whether it be at school through textbooks or in the media, historical facts (or modern ones) are distorted and any information that could question the issues of racism or the undemocratic system is avoided.¹⁴ This allows for racist stereotypes and thus systemic racism to carry on by pervading white Americans minds, starting in the classroom. The racial frame is so embedded in the society that white people can exhibit negative racial attitudes without consciously realizing it, as they involuntarily absorbed white racial views from an early age. Besides, white people often believe in racial equality but reject the idea of government policies intervening to help blacks reach equality of opportunity, which results from a need to protect whites' group self-interest over blacks' group interest, and from an undocumented belief that the aim of equality has been reached already.

The stereotyping of black people stems from the generalization of bad behaviors. The individual attitudes of a few black people, when negative, are homogenized in white people's mind and applied to the whole African-American group, so these negative traits become characteristics of the black community and black people as a whole.¹⁵ However, positive achievements for black people are considered extraordinary and unique, and do not counterbalance the perception by whites of supposedly negative group attitudes. This affects the African Americans' quality of life and integration in the society as white people develop a fear of the group in its entirety, which supports a racially biased justice system and encourages segregation (developed later in Part II, B-2 and Part III). Also, the disadvantage of blacks before

¹⁴ Ibid., 82–83.

¹⁵ Entman, "Blacks in the News" 345.

the justice system complexifies their integration in the society by categorizing them as potential criminals. In turn, segregation limits contact between white and black people and this social isolation allows for racist stereotypes to live on, due to the lack of knowledge of the other which makes it impossible to counterbalance negative stereotypes with positive experiences.

The implication of the media in the negative portrayal of black people is crucial to the racist indoctrination of white people. Mary-Beth Oliver, a professor of Media Studies, reports that most of the American population get their information on crime and criminals from TV news shows.¹⁶ She gathered research and studies' results to show how the portrayal of black people in news affected white racial bias and attitudes. She found that forty-one percent of stories about African Americans are related to crime, and those stories talk about violent crimes at a higher rate than crime stories involving white suspects. The way the story is put together and presented, for example the picture of the black suspect chosen, the arrest video shown, the people interviewed, and the opinions on the crime or on the suspect's guilt, tend to emphasize the guilt of black people, compared to the compassionate presentation of stories about white suspects. But it also pictures African Americans as more threatening or violent in their attitudes. Those news stories often leave out the name of the black suspect (but not of the white ones), which encourages "homogenization of African Americans *per se* as criminal, rather than a specific individual who had been arrested."¹⁷ Though realistic media content has more impact on viewers, Oliver noted that crime shows also present impactful racial biases. Minorities, especially African Americans and Latino men, are more likely to be depicted as perpetrators of crimes while white men

¹⁶ Mary Beth Oliver, "African American Men as 'Criminal and Dangerous': Implications of Media Portrayals of Crime on the 'Criminalization' of African American Men" *Journal of African American Studies*. 7.2 (2003): 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

are often portrayed as victims or law enforcement characters.¹⁸ In addition, Dixon and Linz found that prejudicial pretrial publicity and news coverage impact the jurors' and even the judge's bias towards the defendant.¹⁹ These racial biases in turn can lead to harsher and longer sentencing from the jurors. The media are also more likely to turn their attention to black suspects when the victim is white.²⁰ This helps support and confirm the fearful white racial framing of blacks as dangerous criminals and it reinforces the perception of victimhood of white people. Entman underlined the fact that news channels and journalists did not always convey these stereotyped negative images consciously and they do not necessarily condone racism. It is the social pressure of audience's expectations, as well as the professional norms and the need to stay competitive which have led journalists to produce more and more prejudicial, conflictual, and dramatic news segments about black criminals.²¹ Psychological studies however showed that news stories trigger negative racial attitudes because viewers already hold racial stereotypes, and the images they are shown recalled those biased thoughts to the viewer's mind. The preexistence of this prejudicial structure of the "violent black man," once recalled to mind, can on its own influence later judgments, which means that whites will more easily and naturally think of black people as criminals in subsequent situations.²² In our modern society where technology, with TV and smartphones in particular, has become central to people's lives, it is easy to see how the reproduction of the white racial frame has been facilitated through the use of mainstream media and special-interest media alike.

¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹ Travis L. Dixon is a media studies scholar and has conducted extensive research on racial and religious stereotypes. Daniel Linz is a professor of psychology specialized in media, in connection with race and the law.

²⁰ Travis L. Dixon and Daniel Linz, "Television News, Prejudicial Pretrial Publicity, and the Depiction of Race" *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. 46.1 (2002): 114; 117.

²¹ Entman, "Blacks in the News" 345.

²² Oliver, "African American men as 'criminal and dangerous'" 9.

However, these biases and the racial framing are often denied by many whites, who consider that equality of opportunity has been reached. They use the visible success of some blacks to justify their denial of existing racial discrimination. For example, many news programs and TV shows are today presented by black journalists, which gives society the impression that blacks have the same opportunities as white people and can access high social positions if they work hard enough.²³ Once whites have thus established that racial discrimination does not exist anymore, political and social demands of African Americans appear to be unfounded and black people seem to be complaining for nothing, which reinforces stereotypes depicting blacks as lazy and welfare dependent. The racial frame supports such negative stereotypes, and it also reinforces them.²⁴ To understand how this negation of the blacks' suffering and unfair situation is possible, it is important to understand the concept of "social alexithymia" developed by Feagin. He explains that white people struggle to understand what black people have been through and to feel empathy for them. White people lack cross-racial empathy and they are unable (and unwilling) to see and ponder the racism they exert, directly and indirectly, on black people. As white people are at the center of the system, they feel entitled to decide and judge what is racist or not. Despite the obvious and questionable lack of objectivity thereof, whites thus manage to mask the subjective dimension of many actions and statements to hide their prejudice and protect their position.²⁵

To protect the system of white privileges, the white racial frame thus puts forward a supposedly colorblind perspective, undermining and disregarding allegations of racism and racial discrimination in the US society.

²³ Entman, "Blacks in the News" 347.

²⁴ Feagin, *Racist America* 83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 92–93.

3. The R Word & Social Acceptability

Today, many whites try to protect themselves and their white values and society from the perceived threat of multiculturalism. To do so, they have had to make sure that African Americans' claims for equality would not be met with concrete actions which could help them climb the social ladder or leave their segregated communities. In fact, racist white Americans need to deny or at least minimize the issue of racial discrimination to make believe that racism has disappeared from American society and politics. Only then can whites preserve the legitimacy of the status quo in the society. Besides, denial takes away any feeling of guilt from the white population and thus reinforces the continuance of systemic racism over time.²⁶ Some white people thus talk about not using the word racism anymore, because of its negative connotation, and replacing it with "racial conservatism" or the term "heritage," which is a code for white privilege.²⁷ Indeed, racism has become an insult and most people would willingly lie about their beliefs to avoid being stained with that word. Replacing the term racism by a euphemism such as "heritage" also allows white people to downplay their racist attitudes by obscuring the connection with old-fashioned racism, which has become socially undesirable. In turn, this would prevent the advance of talk on racialized issues and thus preserve the status quo (in favor of white people). Most white people displaying some sort of racist thinking also do not think of themselves as "racist" because their racial framing unconsciously biases their perception of people of color, and of themselves. President Trump himself claims not to be racist, in his case by playing with semantics. He asserted that minorities, like Mexicans and Muslims, are not defined as a race, which makes his derogatory

²⁶ Glenn Adams, Teceta Thomas Tormala, and Laurie T. O'Brien, "The Effect of Self-Affirmation on Perception of Racism" *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. 42.5 (2006): 618.

²⁷ Entman, "Blacks in the News" 343.

comments and overt prejudice at worst insensitive, but not racist.²⁸ He then claims that he is “the least racist person,” which he may truly believe. This illustrates how blind about their racial attitudes white people can be under the influence of the white racial frame. In many ways, today’s white racial frame attempts to understate its role and effects on society, as well as to negate the impact of racial discrimination to protect the whites’ position.

This theory of colorblindness assumes that the society and politics do not see race and skin color anymore, which would mean that everybody is on an equal footing. Many scientists and researchers have been advocating that the US turn into a post-racial society, following this perspective. However, proclamations alone do not change social realities. Encouragingly, surveys seem to have shown a decline in racist attitudes in recent years. However, this optimistic vision only serves to aggravate the problem, as it may hide the real truth and underestimate the persistence of racism. First, the accuracy of the surveys’ answers is questionable. In-depth interviews have proven that people are not less racist, but rather better at hiding it. Indeed, racist attitudes are now being frowned upon so people have learned to hide their true convictions when answering survey questions, or in everyday situations, in order to appear socially acceptable.²⁹ The reality of the racial tensions is thus hidden under a polite social mask of tolerance. Second, as explained above, these inaccurate survey answers give the impression that racism has disappeared and that black people complaining of discrimination and prejudice simply ought to work harder and make more efforts to achieve their goals, instead of blaming the society which “nurtures” them. However, disregarding the role and weight of racist attitudes and beliefs on

²⁸ German Lopez, “Donald Trump’s Long History of Racism, From the 1970s to 2018,” *Vox*, 25 Jul. 2016, Online, 8 Jan. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/2016/7/25/12270880/donald-trump-racism-history>.

²⁹ Feagin, *Racist America* 105.

social progress and personal success can be dangerous for the whole society. If people believe that racism is gone, there will be no reason to enforce social justice in housing, education, the criminal justice system, or the electoral system—since whites will simply deny there remains any race-related injustice in those areas. “Racism? What racism?” Furthermore, it will also be more difficult to enforce policies of affirmative action or any other anti-oppression programs, which will impact black people negatively and in turn will come back to hurt the whole society (higher unemployment rates, higher welfare costs, less skilled workers and researchers in the workforce, etc.). So, fake “colorblindness” is not a workable solution to racism, as it would only allow prejudice and discrimination to continue unchallenged. Neglecting problems does not make them go away nor does it make them less costly—the opposite is true.

Now that we understand how racist views, attitudes, and beliefs were created and are shaped and reproduced in the American society, it is time to turn to the impact and applications of the white racial frame and of systemic racism on African Americans, as well as their cost, both literal and metaphoric, for black people in America.

B. Racism in Power

1. Politics and White Supremacy

Elected in 2016 and inaugurated in January 2017, the current president of the United States is a willfully controversial figure, to say the least. Donald J. Trump is first and foremost a businessman, real estate developer, and TV host. His direct involvement in politics started around 2011 when he took the lead in the birtherism conspiracy theory. This crackpot theory claimed with no evidence that President Barack Obama, the first African American man in the Oval Office, was not an

American citizen (and thus not a legitimate president) because supposedly not born in the US.³⁰ The allegations became so widely believed that President Obama decided to release his birth certificate to prove he was born in Hawaii. Though Trump officially recognized the truth of Obama's American birthplace in 2016, he is still questioning it in private, despite the evidence.³¹ What prompted Trump to believe in this theory and support it is the same thing that decided voters to elect Trump to office: racial resentment.

Racial resentment is the uncomfortable feeling that one traditional American value (i.e. white privilege) is in danger because of black people who are pressing for the preeminence of another American value, namely "all men are created equal."³² Studies have shown that many white people voted for Trump not on the grounds of partisanship or economic anxiety but because of white vulnerability, the feeling that whites are losing their status as the privileged majority, which in turn triggers racial resentment about status-loss.³³ The recent outbreak in white vulnerability may be the result of multiple factors. First, having a black president in power for eight years intensified racial anxiety among some whites. Second, the demographic growth of the black and brown populations in the US, and the slow but improving integration of black people in society appear as a threat to a certain white society. Third, the economy is still fragile ten years after the Great Recession and salaries for many are

³⁰ It is interesting to note how the place of birth of a president becomes a problem when this president is black, but it did not raise any eyebrows when white candidates John McCain and Ted Cruz, who are respectively born in Panama and Canada, campaigned for the presidency.

³¹ German Lopez, "Trump is still reportedly pushing his racist 'birther' conspiracy theory about Obama," *Vox*, 29 Nov. 2017, Online, 13 Feb. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/11/29/16713664/trump-obama-birth-certificate>.

³² Matthew Fowler, Vladimir E. Medenica, and Cathy J. Cohen, "Why 41 percent of white millennials voted for Trump," *The Washington Post*, 15 Dec. 2017, Online, 8 Jan. 2019 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/12/15/racial-resentment-is-why-41-percent-of-white-millennials-voted-for-trump-in-2016/>.

³³ German Lopez, "The past year of research has made it very clear: Trump won because of racial resentment," *Vox*, 15 Dec. 2017, Online, 8 Jan. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/12/15/16781222/trump-racism-economic-anxiety-study>.

still stagnant despite sharply lower unemployment rates. Fourth, the US does not enjoy the same imperial dominance around the world given the rise of important trading blocs in Europe, Asia, South America, and even Africa. The combined effect is that white people may fear that they would end up in competition with more and more “black,” “brown,” and “yellow” people in the future.³⁴ Studies claim that these four elements combined triggered defensive reactions from white people facing multiculturalism, and Trump was standing ready to turn their fear and resentment to his advantage, while claiming he was aiming to “make America great again.”³⁵ As he started his campaign in 2015, Trump made his first racist comment as a candidate by calling Mexican people “rapists” and criminals, and this was only the beginning. In 2016, he quixotically tried to win the black vote by telling black voters “You’re living in poverty, your schools are no good, you have no jobs, 58 percent of your youth is unemployed. What the hell do you have to lose?”³⁶ He later commented on Haitian immigrants saying that all 15,000 of them (who were legally admitted to the US) had AIDS and that Nigerian immigrants would never “go back to their huts” once they experienced life in the United States.³⁷ He aggravated the situation by rejecting the immigration of people from what he termed “shithole” countries in Africa. He explained that he would rather welcome people from Norway, or Asian immigrants, the implicit meaning being that they would at least be white, or inject large amounts

³⁴ Michael Tesler, “Economic Anxiety Isn’t Driving Racial Resentment. Racial Resentment Is Driving Economic Anxiety.” *The Washington Post*, 22 Aug. 2016, Online, 8 Jan. 2019 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/08/22/economic-anxiety-isnt-driving-racial-resentment-racial-resentment-is-driving-economic-anxiety/>.

³⁵ German Lopez, “How Trump both stokes and obscures his supporters’ racial resentment,” *Vox*, 31 Aug. 2017, Online, 8 Jan. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/8/31/16226488/trump-identity-politics-racism>.

³⁶ German Lopez, “Donald Trump’s long history of racism, from the 1970s to 2018,” *Vox*, 25 Jul. 2016, Online, 8 Jan. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/2016/7/25/12270880/donald-trump-racism-history>.

³⁷ David Leonhardt and Ian Prasad Philbrick, “Donald Trump’s Racism: The Definitive List,” *The New York Times*, 15 Jan. 2018, Online, 4 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/01/15/opinion/leonhardt-trump-racist.html>.

of money into the economy.³⁸ These are only some examples in recent years of the kind of inflammatory statements the president of the United States has made about people of color. He has also targeted a wide variety of minorities, with a preference for Mexicans lately. Trump and his unapologetic, disrespectful, and incendiary statements about people of color emerged just in time to offer white people an alternative to the end of racial discrimination, and counter their fear of an upcoming equality of opportunity and a more level playing field on which they might fear for their ability to compete any longer without their white advantage.

Trump's racism did not start with his presidential campaign, just as white people's racism did not wait for him to affect the American society. Trump has been known during his whole career for making inappropriate comments regarding race (or gender) and displaying racist attitudes towards black Americans and other people of color while doing business.³⁹ Complaints were filed against his real estate company for discrimination at a time when housing discrimination was still common and legal. However, he continued his malpractice after the Fair Housing Act was passed and, in 1973, the government sued Trump for housing discrimination in New York City. Trump settled the matter by signing a consent agreement, which did not constitute an acknowledgment of guilt, he specified, but supposedly forced him to stop his discriminatory practices.⁴⁰ His father, Fred Trump, practiced the same discriminatory policies when he was in charge of the business, only it took place before the Civil Rights movement, so it drew less media attention. But what should be most striking

³⁸ Josh Dawsey, "Trump Derides Protections for Immigrants From 'Shithole' Countries," *The Washington Post*, 12 Jan. 2018, Online https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-attacks-protections-for-immigrants-from-shithole-countries-in-oval-office-meeting/2018/01/11/bfc0725c-f711-11e7-91af-31ac729add94_story.html?utm_term=.46a35ba2580f.

³⁹ German Lopez, "Donald Trump's long history of racism"

⁴⁰ Jonathan Mahler and Steve Eder, "'No Vacancies' for Blacks: How Donald Trump Got His Start, and Was First Accused of Bias," *The New York Times*, 20 Jan. 2018, Online, 13 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/28/us/politics/donald-trump-housing-race.html>.

about the Trump family is Fred Trump's affiliation to the Ku Klux Klan, which resurfaced in 2015 when the *New York Times* dug up an old article about his being arrested (then discharged) during a KKK protest in New York in 1927. Donald Trump denied that his father had any relation to the Klan, was ever present at this protest, or was even arrested, again despite overwhelming evidence.⁴¹ The familial history should have been a warning sign, but what happened during Trump's campaign and presidency ought to have been a concrete stop to his political career.

A week before Super Tuesday (March 1st, 2016), David Duke, the former KKK Grand Wizard, made a statement which was interpreted as an endorsement for Trump's candidacy. When Trump was questioned about this, and consequently about white supremacist groups, he did not disavow Duke immediately, neither did he disavow those groups, saying he would need information and research to decide what to think or do about them.⁴² It is an understandable dilemma for someone like Trump who, during his campaign, used to retweet messages from white supremacists and other neo-Nazis.⁴³ In August 2017, a "Unite the Right" rally ended tragically in Charlottesville, Virginia. After two days of tensions between white nationalists and supremacists, and counter protesters, as the police tried to disperse the crowd, a far-right affiliated rallygoer drove his car into a group of dispersing counter protesters,

⁴¹ Philip Bump, "In 1927, Donald Trump's father was arrested after a Klan riot in Queens," *The Washington Post*, 29 Feb. 2016, Online, 13 Feb. 2019 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/02/28/in-1927-donald-trumps-father-was-arrested-after-a-klan-riot-in-queens/>.

⁴² Jenna Johnson, "Trump declines to assess white supremacy groups, including KKK, without first doing research," *The Washington Post*, 28 Feb. 2016, Online https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/02/28/trump-declines-to-assess-white-supremacy-groups-including-kkk-without-first-doing-research/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6a3b7dfba411#comments.

⁴³ David Neiwert and Sarah Posner, "The chilling story of how Trump took hate groups mainstream," *Mother Jones*, 14 Oct. 2016, Online, 14 Feb. 2019 <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/10/donald-trump-hate-groups-neo-nazi-white-supremacist-racism/>.

killed a protester, Heather Heyer, and injured nineteen others.⁴⁴ Donald Trump's comment in reaction to the events was that there were "fine people on both sides" and violence came from "many sides." His statement caused outrage, as he not only refused to condemn the violence from the neo-Nazis and alt-right groups specifically, but he also equated racist people with people protesting racism, trying to put blame on "both sides."⁴⁵ The way Trump then switched position multiple times, depending on whether he listened to his staff's advice or not, one time condemning neo-Nazis and the KKK, before defending their right to defend their "heritage," displayed his ambiguous relation to alt-right movements. In turn, these movements felt they might have gained official support in the White House. Indeed, Trump's ambiguous statements even led David Duke to thank him for his honesty about 'alt-left' groups and their attitude in Charlottesville. Moreover, the events led Trump to comment on the removal of Confederate statues. In a tweet, he mourned the loss of the American heritage and history, of beautiful monuments, and compared Confederate commanders with the Founding Fathers.⁴⁶ Trump's refusal to disavow once and for all white supremacists and racist groups, and his tendency to subtly defend them, is a confusing attitude for the population, blurring the limit between what is morally acceptable and even praiseworthy (openness to considering all sides, the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, due process, etc.) and what is utterly wrong (denying the criminality of blatant violent actions by the alt-right). This is dangerous because it

⁴⁴ Heim, Joe, "Recounting a day of rage, hate, violence and death" *The Washington Post*, 14 Aug. 2017, Online, 29 Nov. 2017 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/local/charlottesville-timeline/>.

⁴⁵ Glenn Thrush and Maggie Haberman, "Trump Gives White Supremacists an Unequivocal Boost," *The New York Times*, 20 Jan. 2018, Online, 14 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/us/politics/trump-charlottesville-white-nationalists.html>.

⁴⁶ David Nakamura, "Trump Mourns Loss of 'Beautiful Statues and Monuments' in Wake of Charlottesville Rally Over Robert E. Lee Statue," *The Washington Post*, 17 Aug. 2017, Online, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/08/17/trump-mourns-loss-of-beautiful-statues-and-monuments-in-wake-of-charlottesville-rally-over-robert-e-lee-statue/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a7f26747346d.

can lead to a normalization of racist attitudes and violence. It also implicitly empowers those groups and their actions by offering them support and protection at the highest level of the nation. The American people need to be given a clear line on how and why racism is always wrong if they want to work on evolving together towards a more egalitarian society.

However, Trump cannot be blamed for it all. Racist thoughts and actions have been present in American society since the foundation of the country. White discontent at the presence and integration of people of color in society in the past decades has grown in reaction to demographic changes. Trump did not raise racism back from the grave, but he has given it a megaphone it did not have before. Racial resentment had already been boiling underneath, and it had oozed before, only it was not expressed in offending tweets and racist statements that could spread worldwide in seconds.

Racism was displayed in the most brutal way at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, an historical black church in Charleston on June 17th, 2015, and reminded whites and blacks of the racial reality of US society. Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old white supremacist, decided to join in the Bible study group taking place at the AME church. He sat with the black congregants for almost one hour before opening fire on the people inside the church, killing nine, and leaving five survivors. What led him to engage in this mass shooting is the same kind of racial resentment which helped Trump gain in popularity. Roof explained to one of the victims that “I have to do this, because you’re raping our women and y’all taking over the world.”⁴⁷ As he felt whites were losing ground to a growing population of blacks, and blacks

⁴⁷ Jelani Cobb, “Inside the Trial of Dylann Roof,” *The New Yorker*, 30 Jan. 2017, Online, 14 Jan. 2019 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/02/06/inside-the-trial-of-dylann-roof>.

were a danger to traditional American values, Roof felt this was the only way he could open people's eyes and trigger a race war to protect white America. A parallel can be drawn between his motivations and Trump's rhetoric today about protecting the country from immigrants from "shithole" countries and characterizing black people as lazy and untrustworthy.⁴⁸ Trump is thus giving a voice to the thousands or millions of white Americans, who, just like Roof did, feel some anguish at seeing their society evolve towards assimilation and multiculturalism. For many white Americans, being able to express this racial resentment and feeling understood by a prominent public figure played a big role in electing Donald Trump.⁴⁹

Racism and racial resentment are today central to American politics, and the visibility of such racialized attitudes in the highest office of the nation emboldened white supremacists, neo-Nazis, alt-right, and other nativist or racist groups, who dare to make themselves heard again. The question is now to figure out whether such thoughts from the dominant groups have an impact on the everyday life of African-Americans or not. And if it does, how does this manifest itself in today's so-called "colorblind" American society?

2. Race and Criminality

In the US, the racial beliefs of whites about blacks tend to have a real impact on black communities. Racial attitudes have become part of the system and prejudice rules in some domains, for example in the police and justice system. However, discrimination is supposed to have been banned by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which implies that racial views should not be tolerated anymore but should be

⁴⁸ Leonhardt and Philbrick, "Donald Trump's Racism."

⁴⁹ Lopez, "How Trump Both Stokes and Obscures His Supporters' Racial Resentment."

punished if weighing on the system. We will see here how these racialized attitudes work to reinforce and support each other in the supposedly blind and fair justice system.

The most common expression of racial discrimination in the criminal justice system is the racial profiling by the police. The idea that blacks are criminals has been implanted in the American mind for a long time and still today this image is being spread and hammered in the popular conscience through the media, as explained above. Police officers are unconsciously more suspicious of black people, and more cautious when apprehending them. Studies, and the tragic real-life events presented later, have shown that black men are perceived as more physically impressive than they are, often older as well, and thus more susceptible to be engaging in criminal activities. This stereotyping of dangerous black people dates back to the nineteenth century and is linked to the comparison made between African Americans and apes at the time. The image is still alive enough to frighten police officers into firing at unarmed black men and children.⁵⁰ It does not always end with shootings, but the perspective many whites have on blacks' physical characteristics nevertheless influences the police decision to stop and frisk, or interview someone, or not.

The Fourteenth Amendment states that every citizen is entitled to “the equal protection of the laws,” and the laws stipulate that police officers cannot arrest and search people without probable cause, i.e. an objective reason for suspecting any kind of criminal activity on the part of the citizen targeted. In real life, Feagin explains that “The white framing of certain people of color as especially criminal can result in differential policing, unfair but deadly punishments for similar crimes, and false

⁵⁰ Brent Staples, “The Racist Trope That Won’t Die,” *The New York Times*, 21 Jun. 2018, Online, 7 Jan. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/17/opinion/roseanne-racism-blacks-apes.html>.

convictions of the innocent for major crimes.”⁵¹ Because of this prejudice, black people are statistically more likely to be stopped and frisked than whites, even though for some minor offenses like marijuana possession, the percentage of offenders of white color is similar to, or even higher than that of black people. A *New York Times* article by Benjamin Mueller, Robert Gebeloff and Sahil Chinoy, respectively a journalist, a data reporter, and a graphic designer, presented statistics about marijuana possession and arrest rates in New York, which prove the police racial bias. It explains that in between neighborhoods with the same rate of complaint calls about marijuana, the neighborhood with a majority of black people has a higher arrest rate than the white neighborhood. But the discrimination goes further than just arrests made after complaints. In some neighborhoods, people can smoke in the street without worrying about being arrested, while in others the police will stop people if they smell marijuana. It is also more likely that people smoking outside will be arrested in predominantly black neighborhoods because of the more important police presence. Despite a recent drop in arrest rates, the proportion of black and Hispanic people arrested has remained the same, about 87% of those arrested.⁵² Another article reports that stop and frisk policies are in overuse in some neighborhoods of New York City, in part because the young and inexperienced officers assigned to this task are not able to differentiate “one young man in low-hanging jeans concealing a weapon from another young man wearing similar clothes on his way to school,” which can be pinned once more on the stereotyping of young black men as potential criminals.⁵³

⁵¹ Feagin, *Racist America* 161.

⁵² Benjamin Mueller, Robert Gebeloff, and Sahil Chinoy, “Surest Way to Face Marijuana Charges in New York: Be Black or Hispanic,” *The New York Times*, 13 May 2018, Online, 7 Jan. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/13/nyregion/marijuana-arrests-nyc-race.html>.

⁵³ Ray Rivera, Al Baker, and Janet Roberts, “Over 4 Years, Nearly 52,000 Police Stops in a Few Brooklyn Blocks,” *The New York Times*, 11 Jul. 2010, Online, 14 Jan. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/12/nyregion/12frisk.html>.

Though President Obama tried to fix the system and passed the Fair Sentencing Act in 2010 to eliminate discriminatory sentencing in crack cocaine cases, things have yet to change as blacks make up eighty-two percent of those arrested for use of crack cocaine.⁵⁴

The consequences of this high arrest rate for black people is that many black people face violence during their arrest or custody, and then have to face a judge and a jury, mostly composed of white people, to be sentenced. Black people also face another kind of discrimination during arrests, as they are more likely than whites, for the same crime, to be met with excessive or unnecessary use of force from the police forces. The rate of excessive use of force is almost three times as high for African Americans than for other groups.⁵⁵ The study did not analyze the reasons that drive the police officers to follow this pattern, but the 2018 movie *The Hate U Give* (T.H.U.G.), by George Tillman Jr., offers some insightful analysis of the thought process of police officers in the field, and how the pressure of the racial frame plays on their decision-making while apprehending black suspects.⁵⁶ The film also shows the terrible consequences these racial views can have for black people. Picturing blacks as necessarily criminal and dangerous people “up to no good” puts policemen (white or black) in a defensive position, which can quickly escalate and end in tragedy (see part II-C-1).

Once black people have been arrested, they wait in custody until a bail bond is set and someone pays it to be able to go home while waiting for a court hearing. Bails are set by the court to ensure a defendant who is released will show up to his/her

⁵⁴ Feagin, *Racist America* 160.

⁵⁵ Timothy Williams, “Study Supports Suspicion That Police Are More Likely to Use Force on Blacks,” *The New York Times*, 7 Jul. 2016, Online, 5 Apr. 2018
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/us/study-supports-suspicion-that-police-use-of-force-is-more-likely-for-blacks.html>.

⁵⁶ *The Hate U Give*, dir. George Tillman Jr., Drama (Twentieth Century Fox, 2019) 1'34"30-1'36"33.

hearings. A recent study has found that judges tend to set higher bail amounts for black people than for whites, even though African Americans have a lower risk of flight than whites, which is a factor in the calculation of the bail amount.⁵⁷

However, the major issue that stems from high arrest rates for African Americans is the issue of mass incarceration, and what it entails. In America today, one in three black men is expected to do prison time, while that rate drops to one in seventeen for white men. Over forty percent of the US carceral population is made up of black men, when they represent only 6.5 percent of the US population in general.⁵⁸ The overrepresentation of black people is due to a higher arrest rate as we have seen, but it is also the result of harsher sentencing, which in turn is partly explained by racial discrimination in jury selection and racial bias in the judges, jurors, and prosecutors. Since the 1970s and Reagan's drug sentencing laws, black people have been condemned more often and more harshly than whites for the same offenses. This reinforced the image of black people as dangerous and criminals, as many black people got a criminal record for drug related offenses that should have only gotten them a warning, or at least shorter, less heavy, sentences.⁵⁹ Judges tend to condemn black people with longer or harsher sentences because most of them are old white men who have fully integrated the white racial frame, but also because of the case, often race-based, presented by the mostly white prosecuting attorneys. They fail to identify with and feel compassion for people out of their group, and they view black people as a threat to the interests of the white group, as they transgress traditional values and are more likely to commit crimes (and reoffend). According to Feagin,

⁵⁷ Ian Ayres and Joel Waldfogel, "A Market Test for Race Discrimination in Bail Setting" *Stanford Law Review*. 46.5 (1994): 993–994.

⁵⁸ *The 13th*, dir. Ava DuVernay, Documentary (Netflix, 2016) 1'23"00.

⁵⁹ Alan Blinder and Jennifer Medina, "He Was Sentenced to Life for Selling Crack. Now Congress Wants to Reconsider." *The New York Times*, 28 Dec. 2018, Online, 4 Feb. 2019
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/20/us/sentencing-reform-crack.html>.

these exacerbated punitive judgments stem in part from the news depiction of blacks in general, and black criminals in particular.⁶⁰ These negative images of African Americans displayed in the media also impact the jurors before and during a trial (see part II, A-2). Juries are picked randomly, but then attorneys can challenge a certain number of potential jurors, which means blocking them from becoming jurors for the designated trial, without giving a reason. When the accused is a black person, the prosecutor will make sure to block as many people of color as possible, to prevent in-group empathy. In response, defense attorneys remove more white jurors than black. In the end, the racial bias involved in jury selection results in a low percentage of African American jurors sitting in juries. It is impossible for the accused to get a fair judgment because the jury does not represent a cross-section of the community, as the Sixth Amendment stipulates it should.⁶¹ As explained before, whites are more punitive of black defendants because of negative stereotyping, and they represent a majority in juries (and among federal judges). This has repercussions on the sentencing in general, and on the application of the death penalty especially. As Feagin explains, “many of those in control of the criminal justice system often value the lives of white Americans more highly than the lives of other Americans.”⁶² So they either punish more harshly (with longer sentences) those whose victim(s) is (are) white, or they don’t hesitate to sentence to death nonwhite people, for a crime for which they would have let a white person off with a life sentence or less. This racial bias has been found to be coupled with a geographical bias, Southern states being more likely to sentence people to death.⁶³

⁶⁰ Feagin, *Racist America* 117.

⁶¹ Ronald Wright, “Yes, Jury Selection Is as Racist as You Think. Now We Have Proof.” *The New York Times*, 7 Dec. 2018, Online, 14 Jan. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/04/opinion/juries-racism-discrimination-prosecutors.html>.

⁶² Feagin, *Racist America* 160.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 161.

The criminalization and mass incarceration of African Americans has another side effect. It strips them of their voting rights and excludes them from political and social life. Though every citizen in the United States is legally entitled to vote, provided that he/she is over eighteen years old and a US citizen, criminals and ex-criminals lose this right in some states. Indeed, felony disenfranchisement still exists in many states, to varying degrees (until felons have completed their sentences, after parole or probation, for a few more years after that, depending on the crime committed, etc.).⁶⁴ This turns out to be a particularly discriminatory policy when one considers that the US today incarcerates black people en masse, as the numbers cited earlier displayed. As Michelle Alexander, a civil rights lawyer and advocate, puts it in her best-selling book *The New Jim Crow*, in 2010, racial discrimination is illegal but discrimination against criminals is not, so “we use our criminal justice system to label people of color ‘criminals’ and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind.”⁶⁵ Besides, in recent years white officials (essentially from the Republican party) have been using a variety of controversial strategies to prevent minorities from voting. One of the most common techniques is racial gerrymandering, which consists in redrawing district lines to weaken the vote of some groups. It can also be a non-racial but partisan technique, though partisanship often crosses the racial line.⁶⁶ Toughening voter identification rules has also been used lately. For the mid-term elections of 2018, the governor of Georgia, Brian Kemp, who was running for his reelection against Democrat Stacy Abrams, used a voter suppression technique specifically

⁶⁴ Jacey Fortin, “Can Felons Vote? It Depends on the State,” *The New York Times*, 7 Nov. 2018, Online, 26 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/21/us/felony-voting-rights-law.html>.

⁶⁵ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, 1 edition. (New York: The New Press, 2010) 2.

⁶⁶ Maggie Astor and K. K. Rebecca Lai, “What’s Stronger Than a Blue Wave? Gerrymandered Districts,” *The New York Times*, 29 Nov. 2018, Online, 26 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/29/us/politics/north-carolina-gerrymandering.html>.

targeted at the black minority. The voter registration applications had to match exactly, to the letter, the information other federal agencies have on the people (no nicknames allowed, no hyphen added or suppressed, etc.). This put over fifty thousand applications on hold, seventy percent of which concerned African Americans.⁶⁷ Other voter restriction programs have used intimidation with messages targeted at black people aiming to scare them regarding proper registration information in order to deter them from voting (threats of being charged for improper registration information, for example, were used).⁶⁸

All those techniques used by white Americans to keep African Americans under control by labelling them as criminals result from some whites' beliefs that they have to protect the "white innocence" in US society, which appears to be endangered because of the racial frame which depicts black people as threatening and dangerous. Since the 1960s and the end of legal segregation, most of these practices have been declared illegal, and have become covert, implicit, and subtle. But researchers have been working on unearthing them in order to open people's eyes about the reality of living in America "while black" nowadays. The justice system is only one of the many institutions that perpetuate systemic racism towards black people, and the following parts will show how racial discrimination keeps creeping into the American society and how it impacts black communities today, but also how black people have been fighting back so far, and what more could be done.

⁶⁷ "Georgia's Voter Registration Shadiness" *The Daily Show With Trevor Noah*, 19 Oct. 2018, Online, 14 Jan. 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoliWJAPEOM>.

⁶⁸ Feagin, *Racist America* 152–153.

C. Discrimination and Opposition

1. White Fear and Violence

As I explained in the previous part, white people have feared African Americans because of the negative stereotypes which picture them as criminals, and because they fear their differences in culture, skin color, and traditions would stain and change the white society and its traditions. This fear has long been a powerful motivator that makes whites act unreasonably to keep African Americans out of their society.

In the past few years, there has been a surge of stories about white people calling the police on black people for illegitimate reasons, revealing the impact of the racial frame on the whole society. In May 2018, a white woman in Oakland called the police because two black men were having a barbecue in a park. Despite being told by various passers-by that this is indeed a BBQ designated area and that they are thus allowed to be here, the woman insisted on the fact that a charcoal grill is not allowed because of the risk of injuries. She stood by the place for two hours before the police arrived and talked to both parties. Her attitude and intervention sparked outrage and social networks were quick to react, calling her out as racist.⁶⁹ In another story, a black student dared falling asleep in the common room of her dorm on the Yale campus, so a white student called the campus police about her. Four officers came and the young black girl had to justify her identity and her belonging in this building and on campus. She later reported that the white student had already made a similar call about a black friend of hers, for standing somewhere, waiting, “while black.”⁷⁰ About a month later, another white woman made the news headlines by calling, or

⁶⁹ “‘BBQ Becky’ Photoshopped Into Black History,” *BBC News*, 18 May 2018, Online, 16 Feb. 2019 <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44167760>.

⁷⁰ Cleve R. Wootson Jr., “A Black Yale Student Fell Asleep in her Dorm’s Common Room. A White Student Called Police.” *The Washington Post*, 11 May 2018 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2018/05/10/a-black-yale-student-fell-asleep-in-her-dorms-common-room-a-white-student-called-police/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.08487b6aa34d.

pretending to call (as she claims), the police on an eight-year-old black girl selling bottled water. She argued that unlicensed stands are illegal, and she was disturbed by the noise it made, which is why she threatened the child (and her mother) with calling the police. Once again, the Internet roared, as lemonade or water stands are the epitome of white suburban life, but as soon as a black child does it, the legality of it is brought under question.⁷¹ Those are just a few examples of the discriminatory behaviors black people still have to face today, and as a *Washington Post* article reported, white people seem to be done hiding their racist attitudes today and do not mind acting on it, which is correlated by the list of about twenty more similar racist incidents the article compiled.⁷²

Fortunately, other events made the headlines and entailed positive reactions by drawing attention to the gravity of the situation. In April 2018, two black men walked into a Starbucks café in Philadelphia and sat without ordering, after asking about the bathroom and being denied access to it. An employee asked them to leave, and when the men refused, he called the police. Officers soon arrived, talked to the men for a few minutes and then arrested them, handcuffing the two men to exit the premises. The two men had been waiting for a third one (white) to start a business meeting, which is why they had not ordered anything yet and simply sat waiting. The police officers justified the arrest on the ground of trespassing, but the company, Starbucks,

⁷¹ “Woman ‘Calls Police’ on Child Selling Water,” *BBC News*, 25 Jun. 2018, Online, 16 Feb. 2019 <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44601668>.

⁷² Wootson Jr., “A Black Yale Student Fell Asleep in her Dorm’s Common Room. A White Student Called Police.” See also: Conor Friedersdorf, “Man Arrested While Picking Up His Kids: ‘The Problem Is I’m Black,’” *The Atlantic*, 29 Aug. 2014, Online, 30 Oct. 2017 <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/08/the-problem-is-im-black/379357/>. ; Llywellyn Bird, “Police Detain Michigan Man on Thanksgiving for ‘Walking with Hands in Pockets’,” *Pontiac Tribune*, 28 Nov. 2014, Online, 18 Feb. 2019 <https://pontiactribune.com/2014/11/police-detain-man-for-walking-with-hands-in-pockets/>.

did not press charges and the two men were soon released.⁷³ This incident had a wider impact than the previous ones exposed, probably because of the fame of the coffee store chain where it happened, and because of the reaction of the Starbucks CEO, Howard Schultz. He has a long story of trying to support social justice with his company and was prompt to apologize for the Philadelphia incident. He soon made changes to the stores' policies to allow people to sit inside even though they would not order anything, and he swiftly designed anti-bias training. Thousands of stores closed one day in May and almost two hundred thousand employees attended this paid training.⁷⁴ These public incidents are the symptoms of a racist-ridden society which does not seek to hide anymore. Despite the traumatic dimension for the victims, they all had some positive impact on the society as a whole, as they brought discussions of racial discrimination and equality to the forefront, prompting debates in the news, at the heads of companies, in the police, and in politics. Unfortunately, the perception of African Americans as dangerous, because of the media, which prompts those defensive reflexes, can also lead to more offensive acts, and the outcome can be much more tragic as soon as guns are involved.⁷⁵

Some interracial contacts lately have indeed ended with the killing of African Americans, mostly males, by white men, generally police officers. In every one of these instances, the black men appeared threatening to the officers who fired defensively, they claim. But the investigations show that the black men were often unarmed or adopted an unthreatening behavior. This suggests that the racial framing

⁷³ Matt Stevens, "Starbucks C.E.O. Apologizes After Arrests of 2 Black Men," *The New York Times*, 8 Jun. 2018, Online, 16 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/15/us/starbucks-philadelphia-black-men-arrest.html>.

⁷⁴ Tiffany Hsu, "Howard Schultz at Starbucks: Coffee, Activism and Controversy," *The New York Times*, 6 Dec. 2018, Online, 16 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/04/business/howard-schultz-at-starbucks.html>.

⁷⁵ Oliver, "African American men as 'criminal and dangerous'" 4.

pervading the white American mind prompted white men to react out of an institutionalized fear. The number of cases of police killings of black men is too high for each to be recounted and detailed in this study. For the sake of clarity and length, I will here focus only on a few of the controversial police shootings of black men since 2014. In July 2014, Eric Garner was choked to death. He was unarmed and did not oppose resistance to the police officers, but he was a big man, so they nevertheless used excessive force and a chokehold to subdue him, leading to his death. The officers were not indicted.⁷⁶ A month later, Michael Brown Jr. was shot six times by Officer Darren Wilson, inside his police car. Officer Wilson was let go thanks to his claim of self-defense, as Brown supposedly fought to reach for Wilson's gun. The rapid succession of incidents triggered a movement of outrage and revolt among the black community. The new movement of advocating for social justice for African Americans and denouncing police brutality, Black Lives Matter, emerged in the wake of these killings (cf. next subpart). Probably the most troubling case is that of Tamir Rice's shooting. The 12-year-old was playing in front of a recreation center with a toy gun in November 2014 when officers looking for a suspected armed man arrived on scene and Officer Timothy Loehman shot young Rice. The officer was fired but again not indicted.⁷⁷ The shooting of this child embodies the problem with the dehumanization of black people and their comparison to apes which combines with the impression that black boys are less "childlike" than white boys. Because of this, black children are more likely than white ones to face and live harsh experiences that should only be experienced by adults (if even).⁷⁸ According to the list compiled by

⁷⁶ Josh Hafner, "Police Killings of Black Men in the U.S. and What Happened to the Officers," *USA Today*, 30 Mar. 2018, Online, 18 Feb. 2019 <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2018/03/29/police-killings-black-men-us-and-what-happened-officers/469467002/>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Carmen M. Culotta et al., "The Essence of Innocence: Consequences of Dehumanizing Black Children" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 106.4 (2014): 526–527.

USA Today, most officers involved in fatal shootings of African Americans have not been charged or sentenced, one of the only exceptions concerning the Walter Scott case. In 2015, a routine traffic stop escalated and resulted in the killing of Walter L. Scott, who tried to run from the police officer, supposedly fought with him and tried to grab the officer's Taser before running again, at which point Officer Michael Slager shot him six times in the back.⁷⁹ Officer Slager pleaded guilty, but the jury nevertheless struggled to agree on the categorization of the crime. In the end, Slager was sentenced to twenty years in prison for murder. Studies have shown that proportionately to the population ratio, black men are two and half times more likely than whites to be shot and killed by police officers. Though some people defend these officers by blaming black people's attitudes or high crime statistics in black communities, the *Washington Post* published a study proving that unarmed black men were five times more likely to be shot than unarmed white men and concluded when calculating for threat level that black men "are no more likely to be posing an imminent lethal threat to the officers at the moment they are killed than white Americans fatally shot by police." Other studies also prove that there is no correlation between the crime rate in an area and the likelihood of fatal shootings.⁸⁰

The police racial bias is increasing tensions between the white and black communities. The issue of the criminalization of black people results in numerous unjustified shootings, which in turn lead to a loss of trust from African Americans in the authorities. Lack of trust in the authorities could incite defensive behaviors from

⁷⁹ Alan Blinder, "Michael Slager, Officer in Walter Scott Shooting, Gets 20-Year Sentence," *The New York Times*, 20 Jan. 2018, Online, 18 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/07/us/michael-slager-sentence-walter-scott.html>.

⁸⁰ Wesley Lowery, "Aren't More White People Than Black People Killed by Police? Yes, But No." *The Washington Post*, 11 Jul. 2016, Online https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/07/11/arent-more-white-people-than-black-people-killed-by-police-yes-but-no/?utm_term=.249ef5e3428f.

the citizens, here black people in particular, as they will more likely run to avoid confrontation or arrest, which is in turn considered to be a suspect behavior by white police officers. It forms a vicious circle of misunderstanding and distrust between the white authorities and the black citizens, which can explain the violence ensuing from interracial contacts. The case of Antwon Rose in 2018 underlines this explanation. In his poetry he expressed fear and distrust in the police and justice system. It is likely that these feelings and his confusion concerning the police's intentions have prompted seventeen-year-old Antwon to flee when Officer Michael Rosfeld stopped the car he was in and arrested the driver. Prejudice prompted the police officer to draw his gun and shoot at the running unarmed teenager, whose instinct was to run from the white and biased figure of authority.⁸¹

However unfair and illegitimate the shootings were, the white justice system seems to have most of the time sided with the white shooters, agreeing to their claims of self-defense, even when evidence indicated otherwise. These shootings have had the only silver lining of having drawn attention to the endemic racial bias in American police forces, reviving social justice sentiments across the country, and questioning the training of police forces.⁸²

2. Fighting Back and Social Movements

The Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) started with a Facebook post by Alicia Garza, an African American queer woman, who expressed her distress following the acquittal of George Zimmerman, the white neighborhood watchman who killed

⁸¹ A. T. McWilliams, "What Antwon Rose's Poetry Tells Us About Being Black in America," *The New Yorker*, 4 Jul. 2018, Online, 7 Jan. 2019 <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/what-antwon-roses-poetry-tells-us-about-being-black-in-america>.

⁸² Charles M. Blow, "Stephon Clark: Rhythms of Tragedy," *The New York Times*, 1 Apr. 2018, Online, 5 Apr. 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/01/opinion/stephon-clark-tragedy.html>.

Trayvon Martin, yet another unarmed black teenager. The expression she used was relayed on Facebook and Twitter and turned into a hashtag to allow people to share their stories. It then became a slogan during the protests after the death of Michael Brown Jr. and the acquittal of Officer Darren Wilson, who shot the unarmed young black man. It spread all over the social networks and celebrities came to use and repeat “#BlackLivesMatter,” showing their support for the cause of fighting police brutality. It even reached the political sphere, with campaigning Hillary Clinton tweeting it in 2016 and President Obama expressing his support as well. Some TV shows also reused the phrase, showing the global outreach of the movement and support for the fight for justice of African Americans. This new civil rights movement, which counts 26 chapters across the US today, was “fuelled by grief and fury, by righteous rage against injustice and institutionalised racism and by frustration at the endemic brutality of the state against those it deems unworthy.”⁸³ The movement however struggled to secure support among politicians during the 2016 campaign because politicians refused to make race a central issue of their program. The movement grew controversial with some white people defending the fact that “all lives matter,” and black lives should not have more value than the others. Many politicians thus hesitated to endorse BLM and used instead all lives matter slogan or other derivations to show their support while remaining neutral on the race issue.⁸⁴ The organization of BLM was very different from the 1960s civil rights movement. BLM organized without a single, charismatic leader but rather with local structures, to

⁸³ Elizabeth Day, “#BlackLivesMatter: the Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement,” *The Guardian*, 19 Jul. 2015, Online, 9 Mar. 2018 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement>.

⁸⁴ Janell Ross, “Why Black Lives Matter Keeps Tripping Up Politicians — of Both Parties,” *The Washington Post*, 28 Jun. 2015, Online https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/07/28/why-black-lives-matter-keeps-tripping-up-politicians-of-both-parties/?utm_term=.0f6ca1b79868.

avoid diverting the focus on representative leaders and keep it on the problems at hand.⁸⁵ The phrase and the movement have become so prominent that it turned into the Movement for Black Lives Coalition, gathering hundreds of different organizations and associations for racial and social justice across the country, including the BLM organization, the Black Youth Project 100, the Dream Defenders, etc.

The BLM movement tried to make itself heard during the 2016 campaign by disrupting candidate speeches and using their platform to draw attention to their fight. They also took more common actions, like stopping Black Friday sales or blocking train stations. The movement also faced internal divisions, with some young activists rejecting the support and intervention of figures from the 1960s Civil Rights movement, while some 1960s figures criticized the new techniques and strategies of protest, as well as the decentralized grassroots organization. The strategy of action of the movement got mitigated responses and drew a lot of criticisms. The American people were not really engaging with the movement at first. The common feeling was that BLM was not talking about and fighting for real issues in African Americans' lives, and it was in fact distracting the attention from the real problems, the economic disadvantage and inequality of opportunity. Also, the US has had a long history of disapproving of civil rights protesters and demonstrations, which impeded its growth at first.⁸⁶ The movement created a racial divide in the population, as it is harder for many white people to see and acknowledge the problems black people face every day. They perceive the movement as a disruption of the status quo, which, in their view,

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Day, "#BlackLivesMatter: the Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement."

⁸⁶ Elahe Izadi, "Black Lives Matter and America's Long History of Resisting Civil Rights Protesters," *The Washington Post*, 19 Apr. 2016, Online https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/04/19/black-lives-matters-and-americas-long-history-of-resisting-civil-rights-protesters/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a467cf1c55de.

does not require any change.⁸⁷ Conservative whites even rejected BLM as it feels like reverse discrimination, or anti-white racism for them. Rand Paul, a Republican Senator, said “I think they should change their name, maybe—if they were All Lives Matter, or Innocent Lives Matter,” suggesting that BLM wants to put black people first, when in fact they fight to reach the same level of respect, rights, and opportunity as whites. The issue of the BLM’s choice of stage to diffuse their message also contributed to the white rejection of the movement, as Senator Paul explained, “commandeering the microphone, and bullying people, and pushing people out of the way, I think really isn't a way to get their message across... they need to go somewhere else, and they need to rent their own microphone.”⁸⁸ The BLM movement nevertheless advocated for peaceful actions and using legal pathways to reach their goal, which earned them support from the Democratic National Committee (DNC). The DNC signed a resolution of solidarity with BLM, which prompted criticism from conservatives, but gave the BLM coalition the opportunity to engage in concrete actions.⁸⁹

After five years, BLM has had a positive impact for the American society on a political, social, as well as on a legal level. According to Jeremy Sawyer, a developmental psychologist, and Anup Gampa, a psychology student, who conducted together a study measuring implicit and explicit racial attitudes before and during the BLM campaign, “Social struggle may change attitudes, thereby promoting further protest activity, which in turn would further transform attitudes.” By that, they mean that actions undertaken by BLM and the way they raised awareness impacted people’s

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ David Weigel and Katie Zezima, “Cruz leads a GOP backlash to ‘Black Lives Matter’ rhetoric,” *The Washington Post*, 1 Sep. 2015, Online https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/09/01/cruz-leads-a-gop-backlash-to-black-lives-matter-rhetoric/?utm_term=.49810d0dea43.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

racial attitudes. The results of the study indicate decreasing implicit racial bias in white and in black people after the start of BLM.⁹⁰ On a political level, the organization's actions got them involved in the prosecutors' elections business, where they managed to weigh in and avoid the re-election of corrupt prosecutors, like those who let police officers walk free after shooting black people. Their association with the Democrats allowed them to add issues of criminal justice reform to their national platform. And they supported black reformers running for local office, for example helping Chokwe Lumumba, the Mayor of Jackson, Mississippi, get elected.⁹¹ The BLM coalition also worked on and supported the release of many reports on police corruption, and other race-related data which had not been studied nor made public yet. The movement advocated and favored a new form of social mobilization, thanks to its use of the Internet and social networks as a "mass mobilization device." It revolutionized the fight for social justice with the "mediated mobilization" and indeed led the way for the following social movements, such as #MeToo, to develop similarly using digital communication. Today, the BLM movement is less present in the media, in the era of Trump's foolishness and never-ending catastrophes, but it is however still very active and impactful, mainly working on the local level.

In the end, "the BLM movement has succeeded in transforming how Americans talk about, think about, and organize for freedom."⁹² It offers a good example of the importance of the Internet and the social media in bringing current issues into the spotlight and arousing consciousness. The growth and spread of such movements, as well as the diffusion of new ideas, is made easier nowadays in an interconnected

⁹⁰ Jeremy Sawyer and Anup Gampa, "Implicit and Explicit Racial Attitudes Changed During Black Lives Matter" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 44.7 (2018): 1039–1059.

⁹¹ Frank Leon Roberts, "How Black Lives Matter Changed the Way Americans Fight for Freedom," *American Civil Liberties Union*, 13 Jul. 2018, Online, 18 Feb. 2019 <https://www.aclu.org/blog/racial-justice/race-and-criminal-justice/how-black-lives-matter-changed-way-americans-fight>.

⁹² Ibid.

world. The aim of the BLM social activism and of its public actions is to challenge the ongoing culture of racism surviving in the American mind, and it seems to have successfully raised awareness about racist attitudes and to have slowly modified some old attitudes.

3. The Culture of Racism in the Internet Age

The Internet and the prominence of social networks today encourage and facilitate the propagation of ideas, opinions, and information. This is a great tool, as I explained above, for spreading anti-discrimination and social justice discourses. It also helped, in the case of the BLM hashtag, to connect the dots between isolated incidents all over the country and thus reveal the structural problem of systemic racial discrimination towards African Americans.⁹³ But social media was only the beginning. Social networks helped attract attention to the race issue, gathered people, pushed the movement to the forefront, and helped the movement develop and move into politics and the whole society, to have a concrete impact.⁹⁴

However, social media also allow racism and prejudice to spread just as fast. Researchers suggest that “the anonymous, spontaneous, disinhibited, and impersonal nature of online interaction will increase the likelihood that prejudice will be expressed more overtly.”⁹⁵ The interconnection can have both a positive and a negative influence, hence the need to be careful regarding online content. Take the social network Gab, for example. It has become well-known in recent years and made the headlines because of its freedom of speech which allowed white supremacists to

⁹³ Elizabeth Day, “#BlackLivesMatter: the Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement.”

⁹⁴ Caroline Simon, “Black Lives Matter Movement and Social Media After Five Years,” *USA Today*, 15 Jul. 2018, Online, 18 Feb. 2019 <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/07/12/black-lives-matter-movement-and-social-media-after-five-years/778779002/>.

⁹⁵ Brendesha M. Tynes et al., “Online Racial Discrimination and Psychological Adjustment Among Adolescents” *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 43.6 (2008): 568.

share hateful, racist ideas, and ultimately produced a mass shooter.⁹⁶ Twitter, the mainstream network of microblogging, is the social media which helped the BLM hashtag spread and gain traction, but it is also Trump's preferred mode of expression and of diffusion of fake and prejudiced facts. Indeed, Trump has been regularly posting false statements on Twitter since the beginning of his campaign (and even before), deceiving people about the state of the country, the statistics concerning crime rates, the societal impact of policies, etc.⁹⁷ The role of social networks in spreading or fighting racial discrimination seems to be rather ambivalent.

In 2017, both Nivea and Dove issued new ads for body products, but the design and message conveyed by those ads were soon called out to be racist. In the Dove case, Twitter users first saw the problem and exposed the company by tweeting still-frames of the controversial ad. Three women subsequently remove their T-shirt, and the first black woman turns into a white woman, which in turn becomes an Asian woman, supposedly after using the body wash advertised.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Chris Graham, "What is Gab? Social Media Site Used by Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooting Suspect 'Being Forced Offline'," *The Telegraph*, 28 Oct. 2018, Online, 19 Feb. 2019 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2018/10/28/gab-social-media-site-used-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting-suspect/>.

⁹⁷ Glen Kessler et al., "Tracking All of President Trump's False or Misleading Claims," *The Washington Post*, 30 Oct. 2018, Online, 9 Nov. 2018 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/politics/trump-claims-database/>.

⁹⁸ Maggie Astor, "Dove Drops an Ad Accused of Racism," *The New York Times*, 20 Jan. 2018, Online, 6 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/08/business/dove-ad-racist.html>.



Fig. 2: 2017 Dove Ad Campaign⁹⁹

Nivea, on the other hand, advertised a skin cream on Facebook, by showing a photograph of a black woman with the slogan “for visibly fairer skin.”¹⁰⁰ Twitter users once again denounced the racism behind the underlining idea that having a lighter, whiter skin is better and black women should and would want that.



Fig. 3: 2017 Nivea Ad Campaign¹⁰¹

Both companies apologized for the insensitive adverts and deleted them following the Internet backlash. It however raised questions regarding their system of decision making, their marketing designers, and their beliefs, as people wondered how the

⁹⁹ Rebecca Stewart, “Will Dove’s ‘Pepsi Moment’ Affect the Brand in the Long Term?” *The Drum*, 12 Oct. 2017, Online, 19 Feb. 2019 <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2017/10/12/will-dove-s-pepsi-moment-affect-the-brand-the-long-term>.

¹⁰⁰ Chloe Kerr, “Nivea Faces Backlash for Racist Ad for ‘Lighter Skin’,” *New York Post*, 18 Oct. 2017, Online, 6 Feb. 2019 <https://nypost.com/2017/10/18/nivea-faces-backlash-for-racist-ad-for-lighter-skin/>.

¹⁰¹ Dylan Parker and Guin Wright, “Nivea: Gendered and Raced Care of the Self,” 16 Apr. 2018, Online, 19 Feb. 2019 <https://blogs.reed.edu/anth344-spring2018-group03/>.

racist undertones could not have been noticed by anyone before the publication of the ads. It sparked further outrage as Twitter users recalled other campaigns from both companies having already flirted with political correctness before. Nivea had released an ad with the slogan “White is purity,” advocating for its invisible deodorant for black and white clothes.¹⁰² In 2011, Dove had published an ad showing three women lining up in front of “before/after” panels, a black woman being in front of the “before” one and seemingly getting lighter as the last woman standing before the “after” panel is white. Internet users were quick to make a parallel between the recent Dove ad and the old one, both making the underlying assumption that the products could “whiten” women, whiter being better.¹⁰³ The channels of social media allowed for the issue to spread and gain momentum, enough for the traditional media to take over the debate each time and thus bring the issue of race and racial framing into the spotlight.¹⁰⁴ The Internet gives racists the possibility to share and spread their hateful ideas, with the risk that it could influence and permeate weak and impressionable minds. But it also gives more visibility to social issues which could otherwise remain hidden, thus raising debates to be acknowledged by the whole society.

Celebrities and their endorsement of social causes also work to shed light on important social matters, offering a platform and giving a voice to social advocates. Many actors over the years have embraced various social causes, and, in 2016, football players, under the lead of Colin Kaepernick, started protesting police brutality, in the wake of multiple police shootings of black men and of the BLM movement rising. Kaepernick, an African-American player, started kneeling during

¹⁰² Amie Tsang, “Nivea Pulls ‘White Is Purity’ Ad After Online Uproar,” *The New York Times*, 20 Jan. 2018, Online, 6 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/04/business/media/nivea-ad-online-uproar-racism.html>.

¹⁰³ Astor, “Dove Drops an Ad Accused of Racism.”

¹⁰⁴ Roland S. Martin, “Dove Apologizes for Racist Facebook Ad,” *News One Now*, 9 Oct. 2017, Online, 6 Feb. 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44WnUuiY2N4>.

the national anthem before the start of the game. His gesture was similar in intent to the raised fists of the African American runners John Carlos and Tommie Smith on the podium at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico. Other NFL players, including white American ones, in turn adopted the same gesture in support of Kaepernick's action, of the fight against police brutality, and more widely against the systemic racism prevalent in the US. Celebrities often dare taking controversial stances and starting actions because of the protection offered by their public status. However, disturbing the status quo is not always without consequences even for them. Trump disapproved of the NFL protests, arguing that it disrespected the anthem, and consequently the country and the military. He used his influence to get the players to stop their protest by pressuring the NFL team owners. Colin Kaepernick refused to stop, and after being benched, he was fired. He has, as of now, been unable to find a new team willing to hire him.¹⁰⁵ Though Trump and the conservatives tried to blur the real objective of the NFL protest by focusing on patriotism, some people understood the real meaning of his gesture. His political engagement made him the new face of the controversial Nike campaign ad stating "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything." The speed at which the campaign propagated across social media helped revive attention to Kaepernick's fight and America's social problem, after it was silenced by NFL's policies and punishments.¹⁰⁶ The fame of the NFL players who took a knee, and of other athletes who joined the Nike campaign, allowed for the racial justice issue to spread and reach a wider population, both white and

¹⁰⁵ Ben McGrath, "Kaepernick, Trump, and the N.F.L. in the Eyes of a Player Who Protested During the National Anthem Fifty Years Ago," *The New Yorker*, 7 Sep. 2018, Online, 14 Jan. 2019 <https://www.newyorker.com/sports/sporting-scene/were-all-sleepwalking-the-original-nfl-dissident-on-kaepernick-trump-and-the-fate-of-the-league>.

¹⁰⁶ Kevin Draper and Ken Belson, "Colin Kaepernick's Nike Campaign Keeps N.F.L. Anthem Kneeling in Spotlight," *The New York Times*, 1 Nov. 2018, Online, 7 Jan. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/03/sports/kaepernick-nike.html>.

black. Indeed, American football games are highly watched on TV in the United States and thus offer a great platform to raise awareness on important matters such as police violence and inequality.



Fig. 4: Colin Kaepernick's Nike Campaign Ad.¹⁰⁷

However, one must remain careful about accepting and welcoming anything a celebrity believes in, says, or fights for. It is important to think, question, and hold popular figures accountable for their statements, even though they are famous and powerful. The reason is that fame does not necessarily equal wisdom or knowledge, and passion for a cause or belonging to a community does not give authority over a topic or an issue. Kanye West, a famous African-American rapper, recently found an interest in politics and created a controversy. He expressed his support for Trump and raised doubt about his potential candidacy for president in 2020. But he also made a few controversial tweets and statements about racism and slavery. He called slavery “a trend” and “victimization [is] a disease” as he argued that black people complain

¹⁰⁷ Jane Coaston, “Nike Reignited the Kaepernick Controversy in Naming Him the Face of ‘Just Do It’,” *Vox*, 4 Sep. 2018, Online, 20 Feb. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/2018/9/4/17818162/nike-kaepernick-controversy-face-of-just-do-it>.

too much about racism.¹⁰⁸ During an interview with *TMZ*, he said that slavery, as it had been around for four hundred years, “sounded like a choice.”¹⁰⁹ It is dangerous for influential figures to make reckless comments as people give them credibility and might believe them. This unsensitive comment sparked outrage among his fans and the larger population, and fortunately was not left unchallenged. Therefore, the advantage of the commitment of celebrities to social causes and their access to popular platform to make their voices heard is to be considered with care. It can do good to raise awareness, but the population needs to remain critical of every claim it is presented with to avoid misinformation. Sports and music, especially hip-hop, rap or jazz, are the main cultural fields where African Americans have gained in presence and in influence over the years.¹¹⁰ In recent years, black actors and TV personalities have been on the rise and engaged in social fights against racial inequalities as well.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to turn the spotlight on current issues of social justice and inequality. The core of the problem is the negative views and beliefs of white people regarding black Americans, which in turn lead to racialized behaviors and racial discrimination. As explained before, these negative views are created and spread in part by the traditional media and today by the social media. But, in the twentieth century, white people have also used the movie industry to spread their perception of black people. Two of the most emblematic movies of the misrepresentation of black people and the perpetuation of prejudice are *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939). The first portrayed African Americans

¹⁰⁸ “Kanye West Ignites a Debate About Racism,” *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, 26 Apr. 2018, Online, 22 Jan. 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLMFf94KMDI>.

¹⁰⁹ Jack Shepherd, “Kanye West Talks Trump and TMZ Slavery Comments in New Interview,” *The Independent*, 25 Jun. 2018, Online, 20 Feb. 2019 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/kanye-west-donald-trump-slavery-choice-interview-album-ye-tmz-sunken-place-a8415806.html>.

¹¹⁰ For more about black influence through music, see Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* 442–443; 452–455.

as dangerous savages, cannibals and rapists. The second glorified slavery and the Confederate states, stereotyping black women as docile, happy servants, and depicting slave owners as the protectors and helpers of black people. The intention of the first was to glorify white nationalists and incite fear about black people, while the second was being naïve and insensitive about the brutality of slavery. For a long time, black characters were confined to supporting roles and they always appeared to be needing white men to “save the day.” Fortunately, it would appear as if there has recently been a shift in the producers’ vision of black people, as well as a shift in the goal of producing movies picturing African Americans.

The 2018 blockbuster adapted from the Marvel Comics Universe, *Black Panther*, presents an almost exclusively black cast, except for the bad guys who are white. It pictures a black superhero and king of an African nation with better technological and scientific achievements than any developed Western country. Though the adaptation of this character into a movie had been considered since the 1990s, the project was not started before 2016 and the introduction of the Black Panther character into the Marvel cinematic universe. The movie received plenty of positive criticism and shattered the box office records of previous Marvel movies. It manages to be entertaining while making strong political statements about the way Western countries tend to undermine African countries and about the fight against oppressors. It obviously faced some negative reviews as well, about the image of Africa it conveyed. But on balance the movie seems to have opened the door to a more positive imagery of black Americans and more engaged movies. In the past two years, to name only a few, Spike Lee, the engaged producer and screenplay writer, produced the Academy-Award winning *BlacKkKlansman*, which tells the true story of a black police officer infiltrating the KKK in the 1970s while falling in love with a Black

Panther activist. Officer Stallworth is the instigator and the brain of the undercover operation, and he lends his name to a fellow officer, who is white, to be his face when meeting up with Klan members.¹¹¹ George Tillman Jr. entitled his movie *The Hate U Give*, after Tupac's philosophical lesson T.H.U.G.L.I.F.E., claiming that "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody," to denounce and expose police brutality and the white racial framing of African Americans. Barry Jenkins released *If Beale Street Could Talk*, an adaptation of a James Baldwin's novel and a poignant criticism of the American justice system and of the trauma of its racial bias (in the past and still today).¹¹² Black people went from being stigmatized characters in the background of white movies to leading characters embracing their blackness and fighting for it in black productions. The movie industry evolved and stopped dehumanizing black people, giving them a powerful voice.

TV series have also championed black leading characters and superheroes, with the respected though troubled African American lawyer, portrayed by African American actress Viola Davis, in *How to Get Away with Murder*; the powerful, talented and troublesome Lyons family in *Empire*, portraying a young African American and homosexual character (and actor); the DC black superhero in *Black Lightning* or the Netflix unbreakable superhero *Luke Cage*. The portrayals are not always entirely flattering and positive, to preserve the drama and the authenticity, but the inclination seems to be towards a more accurate and respectful portrayal of black people in fictions. Black superheroes did exist before the 2016-2018 surge, but they had always been restrained to the accomplice's role (War Machine in Iron Man,

¹¹¹ "Spike Lee - 'BlacKkKlansman' and Fighting the Rise of Racism in the Trump Era," *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, 17 Aug. 2018, Online, 7 Jan. 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8a2mzU07Uw>.

¹¹² "Barry Jenkins - Acknowledging Trauma in 'If Beale Street Could Talk'," *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, 15 Jan. 2019, Online, 22 Jan. 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpDNVr0oIBE>.

Storm in X-Men, etc.) until now. We must see a step towards diversity and inclusiveness which was brought along by the progress in racial equality of the time and the growing acknowledgment of racial injustice, following the BLM revolution and Trump's election. As Cress Williams, the *Black Lightning* actor, puts it "I think what happened in our society revealed that we weren't as far along as we thought, so people are really hungry to move it along, to evolve us faster. And a lot of art comes out of that."¹¹³

Conclusion

Racial biases and attitudes are still very much present at the core of American society. Since the turn of the century, racism and bigotry have become, on the one hand, more covert, hidden and subtle because of changes in policies and social pressure. This had some people claim that the American society is now colorblind and there is no more racial discrimination which could justify special treatment of minorities, here African Americans in particular. However, having a black president and more black people in high and visible positions does not make for a post-racial society. African Americans still face discrimination in their everyday life. The most serious threat to their quality of life and to their life in general is the racial biases of the justice system and in American policing. Because of the negative prejudice and criminal stereotypes embedded in the American mind, African Americans are more likely to be arrested than whites, and to face violence or to be shot in the process. They are more likely to be negatively depicted in the news and to consequently face longer and harsher sentencing from judges and juries. This is not the only domain in

¹¹³ Steve Rose, "From Black Panther to Black Lightning: Black Superheroes Are Go!" *The Observer (UK)*, 2018 http://nouveau.europresse.com/Link/MOULINT_1/news-20180120-FOBV-045.

which black people face discrimination, but this is one of the main causes of unemployment, housing and education discrimination. The white racial framing of threatening and socially inadequate black people creates ground for the social exclusion presented in the next part. As in the 1960s, the social pressure and disadvantages faced by black people today have triggered counter actions when black communities reached their breaking point after multiple shootings of black people. And as the society has evolved along with the technologies and techniques, the anti-oppression and anti-discrimination movements adapted to it. Social media and celebrities have been instrumental in bringing the social justice fights to the frontline, now that racist attitudes are being hidden or expressed semi-privately on social media. The spread and gathering of ideas and people are today much faster, easier, and impactful. The Internet allows for more people to be made aware of the current problems and of the resistance actions undertaken, which encourages indignation and mobilization. Racism has evolved with the social expectations, and so did its opposition. However, the effects of racism on African Americans are in some ways consistent, as persistent economic disadvantage still leads to social and geographical segregation today. But discrimination also has non-material implications, which is why the next part will also look at the impacts of a racialized society on the physical and psychological health of black people.

III/ Implications and Solutions

“The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression.” —

W.E.B. Du Bois¹

“How can there be peace without people understanding each other; and how can this be if they don't know each other?” —

Lester B. Pearson²

A. Society and Opportunity

1. Wealth Disadvantage

The white racial framing of black people presented above existed in the US since the beginning, though it was not theorized and therefore not as visible early on. The negative beliefs about black people were necessary to justify and support the horrors of slavery and the oppression of Jim Crow. Though both systems have in turn been legally banned, their consequences, and those of the white racial frame, can still be felt in the black community.

Centuries of servitude, of being treated as property and a source of free labor, means that black people were not paid for their work and could not possess anything as they were themselves possessions. Even after slavery ended and they acquired the status and the rights of a person, they remained exploited under Jim Crow, a system of subordination that prevented most of them from earning enough money to build wealth and pass it on to the next generation. Systemic racism has persistently made it harder for African Americans to access resources, get a job, earn money, and

¹ W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt) Du Bois, *John Brown* (Philadelphia, G. W. Jacobs & company, 1909), Online <http://archive.org/details/johnbrown00dubo>.

² Lester B. Pearson, *The Four Faces of Peace and the International Outlook*, 1 edition. (Dodd, Mead, 1964).

accumulate capital. Because of the long history of racism in America, there is today a wealth inheritance imbalance between white and black people.³ Whites have been building up fortunes, businesses, saving money, and buying houses for centuries. Thanks to this white privilege, i.e. “advantages and benefits inherited by each generation of ‘whites’ in the social structure and processes of U.S. society,” most white people today start in life with some money or assets already to help get them through education, and they can then keep building up on that with their well-paid job.⁴ Studies show that

differences in inherited wealth or intergenerational transfers is the most likely [...] to account for the wealth differences between Black and White households. [...] attributes of wealth associated with race (e.g., discrimination and its influence on income and thereby on wealth accretion) play a prominent role in explaining these disparities.⁵

Today, “the racial wealth gap is three times larger than the racial income gap. [...] In 2010, whites on average had six times the wealth of blacks and Hispanics.”⁶ The gap between the wealthiest families and the middle-wealth ones increased in the past decades, while the lowest-wealth families did not gather any wealth, but instead fell into debt. Black people’s wealth nowadays consists mostly of retirement accounts, which have been hit harshly by the Great Recession of 2007-2009, aggravating the disparities with white people. A 2000 survey

³ Feagin, *Racist America* 172; 218. For this paper, I use wealth in the sense of “net personal wealth (or net worth) [which] is the level of wealth (or worth) after all debts have been removed from gross personal wealth (U.S. Census Bureau 1990)” as defined in Jessica Gordon Nembhard, *Wealth Accumulation and Communities of Color in the United States: Current Issues*, Ed. Ngina Chiteji (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2006) 24, Online, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/jmlyon-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3414785>.

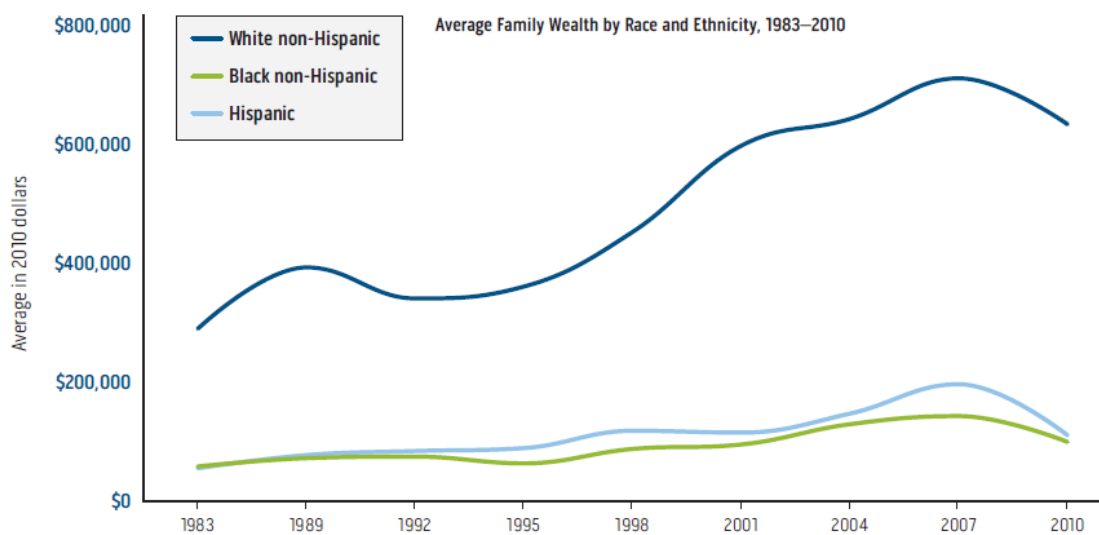
⁴ Feagin, *Racist America* 207.

⁵ Gordon Nembhard, *Wealth Accumulation and Communities of Color in the United States* 49.

⁶ Signe-Mary McKernan et al., “Less Than Equal: Racial Disparities in Wealth Accumulation,” *Urban Institute* (2013): 1-2.

reports 29 percent of Black households and 28 percent of Hispanic-origin households have zero or negative net worth. These shares are more than double the 11 percent of White non-Hispanic households and the 13 percent of White households that are similarly without assets.⁷

The economic consequences of this lack of wealth is that African Americans have a much lower median household income than white people today and they are three times more likely than whites to face poverty, the rate being twenty-seven percent for blacks versus nine percent for white people.⁸



Source: Authors' tabulations of the 1983, 1989, 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, and 2010 Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF).
Notes: All values are presented in 2010 dollars, and data are weighted using SCF weights.

Fig. 5: The Racial Wealth Gap Is Not Improving⁹

According to Signe-Mary McKernan et al, wealth is needed to have opportunities.¹⁰ Indeed, higher education is expensive but required to get employed and make a living, and employment requires social capital, i.e. relationships and networks to be hired in attractive jobs, and both material and social capital are

⁷ Gordon Nembhard, *Wealth Accumulation and Communities of Color in the United States* 35.

⁸ Feagin, *Racist America* 216–217.

⁹ McKernan et al., “Less Than Equal: Racial Disparities in Wealth Accumulation” 3.

¹⁰ McKernan is an expert in wealth building and poverty. She is also the Vice-President of the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population.

required when starting a business.¹¹ Indeed, material or economic wealth is not the only type of wealth black Americans have been deprived of and still lack today. Being in control of the system, and thus of the job markets for centuries, white people have been able to create and use social networks to find work or start businesses. Once more, white privilege has created an imbalance in capital, here in social capital. Black people do not have the same possibility to rely on relations and networks to avoid market competition. They need to put forward their qualifications, experiences, and skills, but they are still put at a disadvantage because of the color of their skin and the prejudice attached to it. This social capital imbalance results in “unequal opportunity,” as it is harder for blacks to find better paying jobs, which in turn impedes their opportunity to build wealth.¹²

This inherited economic disadvantage is the consequence of centuries of discriminatory practices faced by black people. Feagin talked about the “unjust enrichment” of whites and the “unjust impoverishment” of African Americans over time.¹³ This lack of wealth is perpetuated by discrimination in the employment market, and it has also turned into a source of discrimination itself, along with the racial beliefs of whites, on the housing market.

2. Segregation

The generally low wealth of African Americans, over the years, has mostly stood in the way of their getting permanent and decent housing. And this was made even more difficult by the barriers they face regarding hiring and employment, which is needed to find and fund proper housing.¹⁴ This disadvantage on the housing market

¹¹ McKernan et al., “Less Than Equal: Racial Disparities in Wealth Accumulation” 1.

¹² Feagin, *Racist America* 183.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

can be traced back to the Reconstruction Era, when black people were promised “forty acres and a mule” to settle and start their free life, but it did not happen for most of them because of Jim Crow. Besides, the gap in housing between whites and blacks was widened by the policies implemented after the Second World War that gave white veterans easy access to housing while leaving black veterans to figure it out on their own in a segregated and discriminatory society.

Nowadays, black people deal with the repercussions of past discrimination and face new barriers. The real-estate industry is rigged with discrimination, from the real-estate agents, to the banks and insurance companies¹⁵ Banks make it harder for black people to be approved for a loan, because of the idea that they are poor and lazy and will not be able to pay it back, so they harden the terms to make sure that only those they consider to be hardworking and trustworthy blacks can get it. Besides, if and when African Americans are approved for a loan, the interest rates will probably be higher for them than for whites, once more impeding their accessing homeownership.¹⁶ The law still allows landlords to discriminate on the grounds of the source of income (SOI) to choose their tenants. They thus use this to refuse to rent to voucher holders, which is racially biased considering the inequality of wages between blacks and whites and the likelihood of blacks to be voucher holders.¹⁷ Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) aim at favorizing mobility and support “poverty deconcentration,” but landlords still have means to discriminate, which is one more barrier discouraging voucher holders from aiming for their desirable neighborhood and instead makes them settle for what they know they can access, namely low-

¹⁵ Ibid., 173–174.

¹⁶ Gordon Nembhard, *Wealth Accumulation and Communities of Color in the United States* 61.

¹⁷ J. Rosie Tighe, Megan E. Hatch, and Joseph Mead, “Source of Income Discrimination and Fair Housing Policy,” *Journal of Planning Literature* 32.1 (2017): 6; 9.

income neighborhoods with a black majority (which defeats the original purpose).¹⁸ Discrimination will also happen in the rental market, as African Americans and other minorities have less chances to get an appointment with a real-estate agent and to be shown units, even though some are available. This lengthens and increases the cost of the search for a house for black people and could also discourage them and force them to settle for less to avoid the hurdle of discriminatory practices.¹⁹

The urban landscape has changed since the late twentieth century because of demographic growth and industry changes. The population in the city centers grew and whites left the cities to settle into suburban areas. This flight to the suburbs (although slower and even reversing in many metropolitan areas) created segregated city centers, as black people and other minorities could not afford to move in the new then desirable suburbs. Besides, the employers and jobs eventually followed the white population, companies decentralized and settled in the outskirts of cities, leaving the centers with fewer “good” jobs.²⁰ Though this segregation has been declining slowly since the 1990s in some metropolitan areas, surveys show that whites still live in majority in neighborhoods with a low minority representation while black people live in a neighborhood with a high minority representation.²¹ All in all, “Americans tend to live in neighborhoods largely populated by people of similar racial or ethnic backgrounds” and neighborhoods with high-income households are mostly white, while neighborhoods reporting low incomes are largely populated by minorities.²² The difference in environments impacts the wealth of the residents as much as the

¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹ Margery Austin Turner et al., U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Housing Discrimination Against Racial and Ethnic Minorities 2012* (Washington, D.C., June 2013) 39–40.

²⁰ Feagin, *Racist America* 178.

²¹ John R. Logan and Brian Stults, *The Persistence of Segregation in the Metropolis: New Findings from the 2010 Census* (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2011) 3; 6.

²² Joseph Carroll, “Who Are the People in Your Neighborhood?” *Gallup Poll*, Jul. 2005, Online, 4 Feb. 2019 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/17293/Who-People-Your-Neighborhood.aspx>.

wealth of the people impacts their access to different neighborhoods. The low income, high minority neighborhoods are often the only option for black people to settle in because “the large and persistent racial/ethnic disparities in wealth [may] contribute to residential stratification.”²³ Living in low income neighborhoods, sometimes with high insecurity, environmental hazards, and often in small, substandard houses means that African Americans do not gain much wealth from their low-value possession.²⁴ Indeed, the “housing value in areas in which Whites live generally increase more rapidly than in areas in which Blacks live, in the dual real estate markets maintained in most places in the United States.”²⁵

Moreover, these neighborhoods often offer poor quality services, resulting in educational disadvantages for minorities, which in turn will penalize them on the employment market and perpetuate the cycle of low income, low wealth, substandard housing, etc.²⁶ Political economist Jessica Gordon Nembhard supports the idea that the geographical location of a house is essential to “ensure high-quality schools, reliable services, stable residents, controlled crime, increased housing values and home equity, and greater life chances for families” as well.²⁷ The poverty of these neighborhoods and the racial residential segregation do not affect only targeted minorities, but it is detrimental to the whole population. The economic growth is indeed hurt by the separation of workers and skills, as high-skilled workers need low-skilled workers to maintain or enhance their productivity, and low-skilled workers need high-skilled workers to hire them or pay for their services, but the distance between segregated neighborhoods “inhibits skill complementarity” by increasing

²³ Gordon Nembhard, *Wealth Accumulation and Communities of Color in the United States* 268.

²⁴ Feagin, *Racist America* 175.

²⁵ Gordon Nembhard, *Wealth Accumulation and Communities of Color in the United States* 60.

²⁶ Feagin, *Racist America* 170; 192.

²⁷ Gordon Nembhard, *Wealth Accumulation and Communities of Color in the United States* 10. See the following subpart for more on the schooling issue.

commuting times and costs.²⁸ This economic disadvantage is coupled with a negative social impact, as children grow up in segregated communities. They do not experience many interracial contacts at a young age, which prevents them from countering racial bias, that the families, as the first socializer, could have transmitted to the children.²⁹ This is where the choice of school comes into consideration. Diversity in schools could help children form their own experiences and opinions of different people thanks to interracial contact at a young age, but white parents in white, high-income neighborhoods choose higher quality private or public schools in their neighborhood over poorer quality public school in minority neighborhoods, while black parents often cannot afford to send their children to private or public schools in white neighborhoods.³⁰ And busing children to cross-town schools to engineer diversity was experimented with in the 1970s, but also widely resisted, sometimes on both sides. Also, schools in low-income neighborhoods have smaller budgets and less experienced teachers (because they are paid less than ones with seniority), which affects the quality of teaching. Today, seventy-five percent of black students attend a school with a majority of people of color.³¹ Social and mental isolation enables systemic racism to be passed down from one generation to the next, white communities being the most segregated, which is why diversity programs are important today but also difficult to implement.³²

To fight off the housing segregation and thus diminish its negative outcomes on society, policies and income development programs have been implemented to protect

²⁸ Huiping Li, Harrison Campbell, and Steven Fernandez, "Residential Segregation, Spatial Mismatch and Economic Growth across US Metropolitan Areas," *Urban Studies* 50.13 (2013): 3.

²⁹ Feagin, *Racist America* 135; 137–138.

³⁰ Allison Roda and Amy Stuart Wells, "School Choice Policies and Racial Segregation: Where White Parents' Good Intentions, Anxiety, and Privilege Collide," *American Journal of Education* 119.2 (2013): 263–264.

³¹ Feagin, *Racist America* 192.

³² *Ibid.*, 137; Roda and Wells, "School Choice Policies and Racial Segregation" 288.

HCV holders or expand school choices, though on a low scale for now. The implementation of these programs is a clear indication that housing desegregation is a central issue to “enhance families’ economic opportunities,” whether it be employment or educational achievement.³³

3. Lack of Equality of Opportunity

The term “underclass” or “undercaste,” coined by Michelle Alexander, refers to the category of people who are excluded from mainstream society and thus are “no longer in reach of the mythical ladder of opportunity.”³⁴ The issues of wealth and segregation I have just presented both result from and cause other racial disparities, the most impactful ones being inequalities of access to education and employment, but also discriminatory practices once in school or employed.

As noted, not all families in the US have access to the same schools and thus to the same quality of education. In the US, the budget of a school is based on local property tax revenues, so it can vary greatly between low-income and high-income neighborhoods.³⁵ A low budget means that the school will have less material (textbooks, computers, etc.) and probably less experienced teachers, but also fewer activities, whether educational or extra-curricular. The quality of education in these schools is generally inferior to that of public schools with experienced, well-paid teachers and up-to-date materials, or even to private schools which set up near or in high-income neighborhoods. Blacks who are more likely to live in low-income neighborhoods are therefore disadvantaged when it comes to education, not only

³³ Tighe, Hatch, and Mead, “Source of Income Discrimination and Fair Housing Policy” 4.

³⁴ Michelle Alexander, “The Newest Jim Crow,” *The New York Times*, 11 Nov. 2018, Online, 26 Feb. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/08/opinion/sunday/criminal-justice-reforms-race-technology.html>.

³⁵ I am indebted to Pr. Christopher J. Delogu for this information.

financially but also sociologically as their choice of a school is less informed than that of middle-class whites.³⁶ As for higher education, tuition fees in the US are generally high. Once more, black people are at a higher risk of having low incomes and not much wealth or assets, so it is harder for them than for white people to pay for college. Besides, black people are also disadvantaged by the selective tests required to get accepted. These tests were created in the early twentieth century, when Jim Crow and segregation were common law, so they were designed specifically to demonstrate white superiority and make African Americans fail, to keep them out of “white” universities.³⁷ The tests have been changed over the years but some believe they are still biased in favor of white middle-class experience. Studies have also shown that negative stereotypes, whether they have been internalized or even if it is only the threat of being stereotyped, can affect intellectual performance. The inferiority threat hypothesis argues that a prolonged exposure to negative images can lead to underutilization of one’s ability and then blaming others for one’s troubles or failures, thus creating a victim’s identity.³⁸ On the other hand, the stereotype threat hypothesis assumes (and an experiment proves) that when black people are presented with a test evaluating their ability, their awareness of the risk of being negatively stereotyped creates “the self-threatening predicament that their performance could prove the stereotype self-characteristic.”³⁹ In other words, in those situations when intelligence is assessed and blacks could find themselves in competition with whites, their attention, instead of being focused on the task at hand, is diverted by the concern

³⁶ Stephen Conway, “The Reproduction of Exclusion and Disadvantage: Symbolic Violence and Social Class Inequalities in ‘Parental Choice’ of Secondary Education,” *Sociological Research Online* 2.4 (1997): 1–14.

³⁷ Feagin, *Racist America* 195.

³⁸ Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, “Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69.5 (1995): 797–798.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 806; 808.

“with the significance of one’s performance in light of a devaluating stereotype.”⁴⁰

These economic, social, and psychological pressures weigh on the ability of African Americans to access education, but also to succeed when they get into school.

Discrimination is also present in the classroom or on campus. American universities have had a long history of white culture and privilege which is still present and important on some campuses. In recent years, numerous racist incidents have been recorded on college and university campuses. The case of the white girl calling the police on a black girl for sleeping in a common room, cited earlier, is a good example. But more symbolically violent incidents also occurred. It ranged from racist graffiti, to racial profiling by campus security, hate emails, and even “ghetto” or blackface parties, where whites dress up in costumes mocking and stereotyping African Americans.⁴¹ The impact of these actions and the atmosphere of blatant racism can be devastating for black people, psychologically and academically speaking, diverting their focus and attention from their studies and igniting the processes of stereotype threat and inferiority anxiety explained above. At the primary or high school level, the discrimination is more insidious, sometimes unconscious. One study found that black children are discriminated against based on their names. Among brothers and sisters of the same families, so coming from the same background and education, children with ethnic- or black-sounding names have lower test scores than their siblings with white-sounding names. The study thus argues that these children, because of their names, are presumed by their teachers not to be able to do well and are thus given less attention.⁴² Their chances of succeeding in life, getting into college, and obtaining a well-paid job are lower from a young age

⁴⁰ Ibid., 798.

⁴¹ Feagin, *Racist America* 196–197.

⁴² Ibid., 194.

because of the negative stereotypes the white racial frame associated with blacks and consequently black-sounding names. Educational achievement for black people is impaired due to economic, psychological, and social factors, all of which result from the history of white dominance and black inferiority in the US, and from the white racial frame of negative beliefs and stereotypes created by whites to protect their privileges. This early-life disadvantage has great consequences for the rest of their lives, as a high educational level is today often necessary to have a chance on the employment market.

Discrimination against black people on the employment market can be partly explained by all the discriminatory practices African Americans face during their school years and at university. However, the gap between white and black people graduating from high school has been closing in recent years. But there has been no consequential and significant change in the employment of black people. The unemployment rate for African Americans is four percentage points higher than that of white people (respectively, 7.5 percent and 3.8 percent).⁴³ Discrimination is thus still operating, not only in colleges as seen previously, but also in job markets.⁴⁴ The hiring process is not as colorblind as the white society likes to pretend. African Americans can again face discrimination based on their names. They are less likely to be called for an interview by an employer if they have an ethnic-sounding name, because of the negative stereotypes attached to it.⁴⁵ Black people do not benefit from or have access to the hiring social networks that many whites have been building and keeping up for decades. As I explained above, they tend to lack socio-racial capital

⁴³ US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2017 : BLS Reports* (Washington D.C., Aug. 2018), Online, 3 Feb. 2019 <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/2017/home.htm>.

⁴⁴ Feagin, *Racist America* 195.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

because of their long exclusion from society which kept them “often segregated away from critical social networks that are essential to finding good jobs.”⁴⁶ As a consequence, the proportion of African American in employment is only 57.6 percent, which is the second lowest rate (after Native Americans).⁴⁷ Another cause of unemployment or underemployment of black people is the spatial mismatch, due to housing and geographical segregation. The decentralization of jobs, following the suburban exodus of white, qualified people makes it harder for inner-city inhabitants, i.e. minorities, to access good-paying jobs, even though they are qualified enough. The distance, travel time and poor public transit, combined with a low rate of car ownership among low-skilled blacks, are physical barriers to their accessing jobs. This separation of low- and high-skilled workers, as explained earlier, has a repercussion on the productivity and income of all workers, which in turn affects negatively the economic growth of segregated metropolitan areas.⁴⁸ The globalization and outsourcing of low-skilled, manufacturing jobs also impacted the unemployment rate of black workers in the US, as the manufacturing industry employed a majority of black people.⁴⁹ As for an alternative solution to hiring discrimination and segregation, African Americans cannot turn to starting their own business, because they generally lack both the financial resources (or support from banks) and the social networks to do so. When they manage to start a business anyways, it is harder for them to get customers and contracts, because the racial framing assumes that black people (as individuals) are not trustworthy and do not have the leadership skills necessary to run a business.⁵⁰ The negative prejudice and stereotypes of white people towards blacks

⁴⁶ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁷ US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity*, 2017 2.

⁴⁸ Li, Campbell, and Fernandez, “Residential Segregation, Spatial Mismatch and Economic Growth across US Metropolitan Areas” 13–15.

⁴⁹ Feagin, *Racist America* 179.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 191.

are barriers to accessing good-paying, life-sustaining jobs. And they keep negatively impacting their careers and life once they are in a job as well.

Many white Americans think that they are better qualified, as a group, than any of the minorities living in the country. Centuries of messaging an ideology of exceptionalism and superiority have permeated the national conscience and keep influencing the beliefs and attitudes of white people towards black citizens. This idea of “rational discrimination” suggests that whites are the best, and it is thus logical that they get hired instead of less intelligent, less skilled black people. It does not strike the supporters of this theory that this is doubtfully true when considering black and white people on an individual level.⁵¹ The racial framing once again has an influential part to play in the overall consideration of black people on the employment market. African Americans are mainly depicted in the news as violent, dangerous criminals, often lazy and untrustworthy people who blame others for their situation and like to play the victim, which is how they are then believed to be in the collective mind.⁵² White people are thus more reluctant to hire African Americans and trust them with responsibilities in a job. Consequently, black people are one of the least likely (of the race groups) to participate in the labor force, with a participation rate of only 62.3 percent.⁵³ Besides, once in employment, the situation does not necessarily become easier as black people are still discriminated against. They are often discriminated against regarding job affectation, because of the stereotypes of laziness, untrustworthiness, and non-leadership material. They are also not offered the same advancement opportunities or promotions as their white colleagues.⁵⁴ Black people are almost systematically paid less than white people in the same job, as the

⁵¹ Ibid., 181.

⁵² Ibid., 178.

⁵³ US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity, 2017 2*.

⁵⁴ Feagin, *Racist America* 185; 187.

employers tend to fit African Americans in different categories on the salary grid to save on their wages. This represents a loss of about \$120 billion in wages for black people each year, money which is kept by the (mostly white) employers.⁵⁵ The employers are not the only ones responsible for the discrimination in the workplace, since white co-workers can also establish a climate of racial abuse with racial threats or slurs, and the exclusion of the black employees from the group dynamic. All of these practices make it more difficult for African Americans to find a job and, when they find one, to keep it. It causes a lower employment rate among black people, a higher turnover rate, often underemployment, lower incomes, and more risks of work-related health issues, because of the stress linked to the lack of stability of their situation, the discriminatory behaviors, and the economic difficulties it brings about.⁵⁶

The wealth gap between white and African Americans is maintained today through negative stereotypes, leading to poorer education and underemployment or unemployment of black people. The initial gap in land access, dating back to the settlement of the colonies, and the system of slavery supporting it, caused income inequalities which turned into disadvantage in housing access and thus less wealth available for better quality education, leading to less qualified and less paid jobs, which leads back to income inequalities; and there goes the vicious circle of oppression and segregation. In other words, “the cross-generational transmission of these great inequalities [in life chances] remains critical to the continuing reproduction of that racial oppression.”⁵⁷ The exclusion from access to economic and social resources have long-term effects on African American families, and not only material consequences.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., 189.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 186; 189.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 209.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 220.

B. Individual and Group Impacts

Discrimination and segregation have had concrete and visible consequences on the living conditions, integration and well-being of African Americans over the centuries. However, the material, social, and economic disadvantages are not the only consequences of racial discrimination faced by black people. These disadvantages can in turn have repercussions on their physical and psychological health. It is thus important to understand the psychology behind the actions of the white people, who are the instigators and perpetrators of this system, to see how it can affect African Americans' health, but also how the system of oppression is hurting the white society along with minorities. This part focuses on the psychological background of the racialized American system, and its costs for both blacks and whites.

1. White (In)Security

The system of oppression of black people, as explained in part I, was created at the end of the seventeenth century when the system of slavery expanded, and the black population grew drastically. It was implemented by influential white people as they feared for themselves, for their security and liberty, because black people could have rebelled and overwhelmed them. The justification for the perpetuation of segregation and discrimination today is very similar to the original motives. When it will go unnoticed or unchallenged, white Americans keep African Americans excluded from society, so that they are less likely to be confronted with those individuals that they do not trust and perceive as dangerous and threatening. This fear of the other has been nurtured and maintained through the years thanks to the white racial framing shared by the media and deep-rooted in many white people's minds. Today, demographic changes and predictions have aroused a new fear among whites,

that of becoming a minority.⁵⁹ Estimates suggest that, in the next decades, black people and other minorities will make up a majority of the US population. Many white Americans thus feel more urgently than ever the need to keep blacks and minorities under control as long as possible, and to do so they cut them off from education, power, and opportunities. The white racial frame is a way for whites to resist their loss of power and the possible capacity of black people to organize and participate as coequals in America's democratic experiment.⁶⁰ This perceived threat triggers anger, anxiety, and fear in white people, causing them to react defensively with discriminatory attitudes and practices. Feagin also attributes this reaction to another emotion: empathy towards the in-group. This psychological predisposition attributes more value to members of the group people belong to than to people of other racial groups. Therefore, white people believe their lives and well-being, which depend on their dominance of the system, matter more than the lives and well-being of other racial groups.⁶¹ This helps them justify for themselves and feel comfortable with the unjust treatment of black people and other minorities. This empathy towards the in-group entails a lack of sensitivity towards the out-group, meaning that white people lack understanding of (or interest for) black people and their struggle, as they do not know or care to know what others unlike themselves are going through. Whites consequently isolate themselves, either deliberately or without thinking about it, to be protected from other groups that they do not know, do not understand, and often fear to varying extents. This separation causes impaired communication skills when it comes to speaking with "outsiders," which is and will continue to be a handicap for

⁵⁹ Ibid., 269.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 271.

⁶¹ Ibid., 270.

whites in a society becoming more diverse, but also for the US nation, as international relations, politics, and trade are expanding in the current era of globalization.⁶²

The persistence of the system of discrimination is also due to the ongoing colorblind perspective put forward by many white people. They refuse (not always consciously) to acknowledge discriminatory behaviors or complicity in perpetuating them. Some whites really do not see the racist attitudes or behaviors they wield. A study about the perception of racism explains that whites are less likely than blacks to perceive instances of racism because they need to protect their legitimacy, the status quo, and their blind belief in a just world.⁶³ Whites also consider their white privileges as normal so the discrimination goes unnoticed (whereas racism never becomes normal to those being discriminated against). But when a self-affirmation manipulation is introduced, i.e. the white participants have to affirm an important personal value, they are more likely to perceive and acknowledge instances of racism. Adams et al. conclude that “the opportunity to affirm an important aspect of the self reduces this defensive motivation and allows Whites to perceive a greater role for societal racism toward target groups than they would otherwise report.”⁶⁴

The protection of the world whites know, and thus ignoring what is going on in the society to resist change, are the psychological and social foundations of the discriminatory system today. The authors of this study posit that encouraging perception of discrimination with this method (or any other) would allow most white people to realize the unfairness and imbalance of the US system and lead them to change their behaviors. Though this might be part of a solution, knowledge cannot

⁶² Joe R. Feagin, “The Future of US Society in an Era of Racism, Group Segregation and Demographic Revolution,” *Sociology for the Twenty-First Century: Continuities and Cutting Edges* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago: J. Abu-Lughod, 1999) 209.

⁶³ Adams, Tormala, and O’Brien, “The Effect of Self-Affirmation on Perception of Racism” 618.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 623.

change people on its own. I would like to argue that for racist whites to alter their behavior, they would need to find a personal interest or benefit in these changes. Therefore, it is important to expose the costs that racial discrimination of black people have on white people.

Racial segregation is still in effect at every level of the society today. Indeed, rich whites figure they are superior to rich blacks, and poor whites make sure to dissociate themselves from poor blacks to feel better about their situation. Though this separation may help disadvantaged whites feel better about their situation, on a psychological level, and tolerate better their less than ideal living conditions, it has been a social and economic disaster for poor whites, poor blacks, and all the US society. The lack of unity and organization between poor or low-skilled white and black workers has prevented them from gaining enough strength, power, and momentum to stand up to their wealthy employers, ask for better conditions of work, and consequently of living. Their condition as less powerful and less wealthy was thus perpetuated because of racial segregation.⁶⁵ The system of slavery, though abolished in 1865, still has repercussions today, but not just on blacks. The society and system which allowed slavery to thrive was authoritarian, with one-party politics, and a domination of the elite which took no interest in the lesser men (whether they were white or black). The elite ruling in the past did not care about helping the poor and disadvantaged, thus they did not provide many public services. This is still consequential today, as Southern states are on average poorer than Northern states (where slavery was less deeply rooted in the fabric of society and abolished earlier on) and they have weaker schooling systems, public health programs, public

⁶⁵ Feagin, *Racist America* 230.

transportation, and other welfare programs.⁶⁶ The economy is also impacted by the ongoing geographical segregation of white and black workers, as noted earlier. But the impediment of the metropolitan economic growth is not the only financial cost white people have to deal with. The housing prices are going up in suburban areas and other white neighborhoods, with the result that most blacks cannot get in for all the familiar reasons: lower incomes, lower savings, lower access to credit, etc. The price of peace of mind of the white people (and the consequence of racial segregation) is an increase in the costs of homeownership for everybody, as excluding blacks results in higher prices impacting both white and black people. The geographical isolation of many whites in the suburbs results in long-distance commuting which is expensive in gas or public transport, but also in time for them, and generates more car pollution impacting the whole society.⁶⁷ This separation also requires building new neighborhoods and expanding infrastructures like transportation, sewage, water, etc. This has an important cost for the US society since public construction works are paid for, often reluctantly, by tax money.⁶⁸

All in all, white insecurity regarding ethnic diversity and social mixing has not only been a burden for black people. The white society has been disadvantaged and hurt, both materially and psychologically, by the centuries-old struggle by racist whites for security through the isolation, segregation, and exclusion of African Americans from mainstream society. Though realizing how discrimination hurts them might make white people react and change, the impact of racial discrimination on black people's health and well-being should be acknowledged and act as a motivator as well.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 231.

2. Black Health

The discriminatory practices persisting in US society do not only have the material consequences presented above. The institutionalized racism has had and keeps having consequences on the physical and mental health of the African Americans facing segregation, humiliation, and oppression. The physical and mental health of black people has been hurt by two effects of racial discrimination: the restricted access to health care and health services due to their economic disadvantage and skin color, and the stress linked to expectations of unfair treatment and anticipation of the consequences. This subpart highlights the different consequences of those stress factors, first on physical health and then on mental health.

Stress has long been known to negatively impact health for anybody, but recent studies have been focusing mainly on the health of African Americans and on the stress resulting from racist incidents, whether overt or covert, verbal or physical. Race-based stress can cause a variety of conditions such as stress diabetes, heart and stomach conditions, chronic fatigue, back pain, headaches, insomnia, and most commonly hypertension.⁶⁹ This elevated blood pressure in turn can cause different health problems, one of them being adverse birth outcomes. Researchers argue that “chronic hypervigilance in anticipation of unfair treatment could damage multiple organ systems and immune defenses, thereby producing poor birth outcomes.”⁷⁰ Racism, as a psychosocial stressor affects health through hypertension and other stress-related diseases, but also triggers unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as smoking or drinking alcohol which can negatively impact the pregnancy and child

⁶⁹ Clifford L. Broman, Roya Mavaddat, and Shu-Yao Hsu, “The Experience and Consequences of Perceived Racial Discrimination: A Study of African Americans,” *Journal of Black Psychology* 26.2 (2000): 168.

⁷⁰ Amani Nuru-Jeter et al., “‘It’s the Skin You’re In’: African-American Women Talk About Their Experiences of Racism. An Exploratory Study to Develop Measures of Racism for Birth Outcome Studies,” *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 13.1 (2008): 36.

development. Low birth weight or pre-term delivery are three times more likely for African American women than for white women. Coupled with restricted access to pre- and post-natal care, the infant death rate for African Americans is twice that of whites. The pre-term delivery and unhealthy coping mechanisms, as well as the hypertension, can also affect the baby's health, causing developmental deficits (either educational or cognitive) and increasing risks of cardiovascular diseases or diabetes in adulthood.⁷¹ Another study linked stress and breast cancer in African American women. Stress affects immune functions and can cause an increase in endogenous hormones, both of which have been linked to an increased risk of breast cancer.⁷² Besides, when black people get health care, their skin color and the white racial frame become a factor in pain evaluation and diagnosis. Because of the stereotypes of victimization and of robustness (dating back from slavery) of African Americans, their pain is underestimated, and diagnoses are biased.⁷³ Therefore, the combined negative impacts of stress on physical health and the restricted access to good health care create a disadvantage for African Americans regarding their longevity. Though the gap has shrunk since the eras of slavery or Jim Crow, black people are still dying younger on average than white people.⁷⁴

As for the psychological health of black people, what most researchers agree on is that discriminatory events can have long-term effects and last a lifetime in African Americans' minds. The micro-aggressions of racism can have traumatic effects, even though they are more covert, hidden, and less confrontational for targeted people than overt racial harassment. It is not just the events, their severity, or intensity that

⁷¹ Ibid., 30.

⁷² Teletia. R. Taylor et al., "Racial Discrimination and Breast Cancer Incidence in US Black Women: The Black Women's Health Study," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 166.1 (2007): 51–52.

⁷³ Feagin, *Racist America* 202.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 227.

impacts black people, but their repetition over the course of a lifetime and the triggering of memories linked to past traumatic racist events each time a new micro-aggression happens, which creates situations of continuing fear, anger, and anxiety.⁷⁵ The exposure to prejudice (punctual or repeated) has been proven to affect the feelings of prejudiced group members, raising their hostility towards outgroup members, i.e. the individuals who express prejudice, but also towards the outgroup in general. It also triggers anxiety regarding future cross-group interactions, which causes stress and the physical consequences presented above.⁷⁶

As racial discrimination has taken different shapes with time, it is interesting to have a look at the new form of online discrimination and its repercussions. Young generations are very much interconnected and social networks are today important vectors of discriminatory speeches and attitudes. People might think that the impact of racialized attitudes is lessened because of the physical and metaphorical distance between the perpetrator of discrimination and the people targeted, or because online discrimination is often targeted at a whole racial or ethnic group and not at an individual. However, studies have shown that online, as well as offline, discrimination can have negative effects on psychological adjustment. The stress occurring in reaction to these events can lead to anxiety or depression.⁷⁷ The dehumanization of black people by racist whites can cause black people to feel anxiety and worry, but it can also go as far as triggering depression, anger, and rage, which in turn can lead to inner turmoil, emotional withdrawal, and physical problems.⁷⁸ The depression can

⁷⁵ Ruth Thompson-Miller and Joe R. Feagin, "Continuing Injuries of Racism: Counseling in a Racist Context," *The Counseling Psychologist* 35.1 (2007): 108.

⁷⁶ Linda R. Tropp, "The Psychological Impact of Prejudice: Implications for Intergroup Contact," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 6.2 (2003): 143–144.

⁷⁷ Tynes et al., "Online Racial Discrimination and Psychological Adjustment Among Adolescents" 568.

⁷⁸ Feagin, *Racist America* 223; 225.

also result, according to a study on perceived racial discrimination, when African Americans realize that “particular outcomes are irrelevant to given causes.”

Researchers call this the learned helplessness hypothesis, i.e. the expectation that the outcomes of an individual’s actions are out of his control and out of touch with his actions, because of racialized attitudes and barriers set up by institutionalized racism, thus causing helplessness spikes.⁷⁹

Another impact of racism on mental health has been debated in recent decades. Social researchers argue that stress linked to racist incidents could be compared to post-traumatic stress and the symptoms developing as consequences of racist incidents should thus be treated accordingly. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo, both professors of psychology, draw parallels between the effects of racist incidents and traumatic events, such as rape and domestic violence, to prove that racism can lead to traumatic stress, and thus “resolve the discrepancy between the criteria of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) and the specific dynamics of racist incident-based trauma.”⁸⁰ Robert T. Carter, a professor of psychology and education, on the other hand, argues that it is too difficult to categorize this new form of trauma in the already existing framework, because PTSD does not take into account non-physical aggressions, which are an important part of racism. He thus advocates for the use of the new category of “race-based traumatic stress,” “to recognize and assess race-based experiences that does not rely on physical danger.”⁸¹ Both however agree to recognize that the effects of racism are similar to those of PTSD, the symptoms being pain, depression, anxiety, avoidance or numbing, etc. One study focuses on a specific

⁷⁹ Broman, Mavaddat, and Hsu, “The Experience and Consequences of Perceived Racial Discrimination” 168–169.

⁸⁰ Thema Bryant-Davis and Carlota Ocampo, “Racist Incident–Based Trauma,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 33.4 (2005): 486.

⁸¹ Robert T. Carter, “Racism and Psychological and Emotional Injury: Recognizing and Assessing Race-Based Traumatic Stress,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 35.1 (2007): 33.

symptom of trauma, arguing that racial discrimination could elicit trauma-related negative outcomes for mental health, here dissociation specifically.⁸² The study concludes that racism is responsible for traumatic stress responses, but these responses are not unavoidable, as “the use of avoidant or passive coping strategies may render an individual more vulnerable to negative mental health outcomes including posttraumatic stress and dissociative symptoms.”⁸³ Indeed, the way each person responds to racist incidents makes the probability of experiencing dissociation vary. Active coping strategies thus allow the target of discrimination to avoid dissociation, by talking or doing something about it, while passive coping strategies, i.e. keeping it for oneself, increase the risk of dissociation to protect oneself.

Researchers in social science nevertheless agree to recognize that racist

events may arouse immediate or delayed PTSD and related symptoms in the experiencing person if the event serves as a catalyst for recalling previous personal memories or identity-group histories of threats to life or psychological integrity.⁸⁴

As a consequence, African Americans are expected to create an important repertoire of psyche-saving measures (or coping strategies) to counter racist actions and all of these potential psychological effects.⁸⁵ Still today, mental health professionals are not trained to put aside their racial bias or most importantly to consider consequences of racist incidents as race-based traumatic stress symptoms, leaving black people to deal with psychological adjustment on their own.

⁸² Lillian Polanco-Roman, Ashley Danies, and Deidre M. Anglin, “Racial Discrimination As Race-Based Trauma, Coping Strategies and Dissociative Symptoms Among Emerging Adults,” *Psychological trauma : theory, research, practice and policy* 8.5 (2016): 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁴ Janet E. Helms, Guerda Nicolas, and Carlton E. Green, “Racism and Ethnoviolence As Trauma: Enhancing Professional and Research Training,” *Traumatology* 18.1 (2012): 65.

⁸⁵ Feagin, *Racist America* 224.

3. Black Sense of Identity

In order to fight those overwhelming psychological outcomes, a strong sense of racial identity, of belonging, and racial socialization are important to help individuals turn to more active coping strategies and thus not to face psychological consequences alone.⁸⁶ However, the actions of white people put African Americans aside, which can make them feel like aliens and outcast, hurting their sense of belonging in the society. This exclusion makes it difficult for individuals to identify with other people, a culture, and thus to create a sense of self.⁸⁷ Besides, the discriminatory practices of white people can damage the self-esteem of black people, and their self-confidence. The actual experiences of discrimination, but also the recurring stereotype threats, as seen earlier, create anxiety and can harm the process of identity building. They might try to fit in the boxes they are put in by the white racial frame because they do not see any other options. Black people thus end up internalizing the negative judgments expressed by the dominant group which lowers their self-esteem by creating negative self-consciousness.⁸⁸ The struggle of black people to find themselves, their real identity, as they are framed by the whites' view of what it means to be black, causes some of the psychological issues discussed above. Also, African Americans more often lack control over their environment, their life, their choices, etc. because of the control of whites over the political and social system. This powerlessness, combined with the rejection from the dominant group, also impedes the building of one's self-esteem. Fortunately, observations show that groups subjected to prejudice find ways

⁸⁶ Polanco-Roman, Danies, and Anglin, "Racial Discrimination As Race-Based Trauma, Coping Strategies and Dissociative Symptoms Among Emerging Adults" 10.

⁸⁷ Feagin, *Racist America* 223.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 224; Steele and Aronson, "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans."

to cope with this situation and protect their self-esteem most of the time. In order to protect themselves, victims of discrimination will divert blame and attribute failure to the situation, the society, or anything that will not harm valued parts of the self and thus their self-esteem.⁸⁹ On the other hand, it is this attitude which fuels the white racial framing of blacks acting like victims and not taking responsibility for their failures.

The perception of the racial framing, of the racialized attitudes attached to it, and of the institutionalized racism ruling over their lives is more acute in the target group, as explained above. This realization of what they are up against, linked to the learned helplessness hypothesis, impacts the sense of control of black people. The perception of rejection and of being a victim, and the lack of sense of purpose, create negative mental health outcomes, as feelings of rejection, exclusion, and alienation can generate anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem, and lower level of general life satisfaction, or can even be predictive of suicide.⁹⁰ This explains why researchers such as Bryant-Davis and Carter have recently called for a recognition of racist incidents as causing race-based traumatic stress, in order for professionals to be trained accordingly and thus improve psychological counseling and treating, which is needed for black people facing psychological adjustment.⁹¹ Their perception of their racialized environment also requires from them a vigilant, cautious, and defensive approach to life and society in order to survive. The energy African Americans use to deal with the hostility of white people and protect themselves psychologically is

⁸⁹ Nyla. R. Branscombe, Michael Thomas Schmitt, and Richard Harvey, "Perceiving Pervasive Discrimination Among African Americans: Implications for Group Identification and Well-Being," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77.1 (1999): 135–136.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 137; Adams, Tormala, and O'Brien, "The Effect of Self-Affirmation on Perception of Racism" 617.

⁹¹ Thema Bryant-Davis and Carlota Ocampo, "The Trauma of Racism: Implications for Counseling, Research, and Education," *The Counseling Psychologist* 33.4 (2005): 575–576, Online, 4 Feb. 2019 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234699838_The_Trauma_of_Racism_Implications_for_Counseling_Research_and_Education.

energy that is lost and will not be put into their families, their communities, themselves, and their well-being. They thus lose a lot of energy fighting their way through a hostile society, which can prevent them from building something else or fighting to change this situation.⁹²

An important part of the energy of black people is also spent trying to learn about white society and adopting some of its required attitudes and characteristics. They adapt and become bi-cultural, which can be both helpful and harmful. Biculturality can hurt the process of identity building because black people can find themselves torn between two worlds. But it also gives them the knowledge they need to create and set up an assertive counter-framing or adapted anti-discrimination responses; they develop useful and empowering abilities which help them survive.⁹³ For example, most blacks have an ambiguous relation with the police. They are grateful for the protection, just like any citizen, but they know that they are privileged targets of racial profiling and violence, so they also live in fear of the police, as they fear for their safety and their freedom. Even if they learn all the codes, they cannot live as whites and are still left in the margin of white society. They would, on the other hand, risk being excluded from the black community if they were to try and fit in among white people. On the bright side, the segregation of African Americans into separate neighborhoods allows them to be with other black people who face the same challenges in society and can thus support each other. The perception of prejudice increases identification with the group, as people find strength in the unity of the community in the face of adversity. The building of communities, or group identification, is positively related to well-being, as it helps individuals with their

⁹² Thompson-Miller and Feagin, "Continuing Injuries of Racism" 111.

⁹³ Feagin, *Racist America* 273.

sense of self. Those communities are not only defined geographically, as today the Internet helps young or isolated people build online communities. It also allows for engagement in counter-framing discourses and strategies against white racism, without the danger of protesting in the street and with the efficiency due to the rapid connectivity. The sense of community and of belonging thus gives individuals a sense of identity, people to whom they can relate, but also a sense of purpose, something they want to protect and fight for.⁹⁴ Though this can be impeded by a lack of energy, as noted earlier, knowing they are not alone is sometimes enough to fight off negative psychological outcomes.

Despite what the colorblind perspective of many white people suggests, racial discrimination is still very much alive in the American society, and the barriers and obstacles standing in the way of African Americans have major health impacts. To make progress, it is essential to make white people acknowledge the costs and consequences of a racialized society, for the people and minorities discriminated against, but also for white people and the society in general. Acknowledgment and recognition of past and present racial discrimination is the goal society should aim for in order to evolve and apprehend the upcoming demographic change towards a non-white majority in the US population.

C. The Path to Change

Changing the mentality of a whole society is no easy task. Such an enterprise requires time, willingness, and openness from the population. The US has had a hard time moving on from its old ideologies on race. Asking a majority of the population to reject beliefs they have held for centuries requires strategy, tactfulness, and patience.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 202.

There is no perfect solution that will solve these problems quickly or easily, but I can highlight here some techniques and approaches that could help change people's mentalities and behaviors, and thereby slowly evolve towards reducing racial prejudice and ending discrimination in American society.

1. Education and Diversity

This paper adheres to the commonly held notion that ideas and beliefs are partly inherited from the collective past, but the personal history of people also influences their ideology. The white racial frame and other social attitudes are adopted at a young age, since they are inherited first from parents, who are the first socializers, and then from teachers and other children at school, as the second instance of socialization. Therefore, I think that education could be the main medium of attitudinal change, especially if some changes are made to the schooling system and education programs.

The early socialization of children and their tendency to learn through imitation and reproduction of behaviors and attitudes leads to an early development of implicit race-based attitudes. Researchers have determined that, by the age of six, children have already developed a preference for their in-group, which will remain stable through time though they will learn to hide it, so that their explicit attitudes match the social expectations of colorblindness.⁹⁵ Parents are in part responsible for transmitting their racial frame to their children, but the society also influences the learning and socialization process. Housing segregation, and consequently school segregation, prevents white and black children from interacting and getting to know each other,

⁹⁵ Andrew Scott Baron and Mahzarin R. Banaji, "The Development of Implicit Attitudes: Evidence of Race Evaluations from Ages 6 and 10 and Adulthood," *Psychological Science* 17.1 (2006): 53–58.

and thus from overcoming the stereotypes and prejudice white children might hear at home. Diversity in school is thus very important to impede the spread of the white racial frame and to raise more open-minded generations. Today, the school choice system is governed by colorblind policies. Though it might sound proactive and promising, acting blind and ignoring the problem of racial segregation in schools only ends up aggravating it. Race-conscious and desegregation-oriented policies are required to correct the racial imbalance in schools. A study has shown that even some high-income, white parents express a desire to put their children in racially diverse schools, because they see the society changing and they realize that “attending racially and socioeconomically diverse schools benefits all students, [...] and tends to result in higher academic achievement and attainment and foster other short- and long-term social benefits.” Unfortunately, such diverse schools are lacking and colorblind policies leave black people with no other choice but to go to the public schools in their neighborhood, despite their being segregated.⁹⁶ Thus, new school-choice policies must focus on creating racially diverse schools, first by taking down attendance boundaries to make sure to counteract the persistent housing segregation.

Even if children were to go to racially diverse schools, the way history is taught and the voluntary omission of the history of racial discrimination have a negative impact on racial attitudes. The sociologist and historian James W. Loewen, in his book *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, calls for investing in changing the curricula and changing the way history is taught because ignorance about the past hurts the present society.⁹⁷ Feagin agrees and calls for the implementation of courses on racism and stereotyping to educate white people to the reality of the white racial frame.⁹⁸ Indeed,

⁹⁶ Roda and Wells, “School Choice Policies and Racial Segregation” 287.

⁹⁷ James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York, USA: The New Press, 1994) 310–312.

⁹⁸ Feagin, *Racist America* 289.

many people do not know much about the history of the US in general, or about the causes, significance, and impact of racism, segregation, and discrimination through time, though this is required to understand what is happening today. According to Loewen, history textbooks are filled with errors, omissions, and distortions which lead students to form wrong opinions about the past, about slavery for example. Because the system, and the mostly white textbook writers, want to hide the ugly truth of the American past, history courses are filled with fake and nationalist information intending to create patriotism. Students learn and believe that slavery saved African people from savagery and that slaves were happy and grateful, or they think Nazi-related images are only funny, because they ignore their historical significance.⁹⁹ So, white students learn that black people (along with other minorities) have no reason to complain or be mad at the American society, which becomes a burden for children of those social groups which have not yet achieved socioeconomic success, because it blames them for their failure, instead of blaming the system.¹⁰⁰ Textbooks present history by listing facts, terms, and dates, and not using any primary sources nor trying to connect events, to express causation. Thus, “students exit history textbooks without having developed the ability to think coherently about social Life.”¹⁰¹ The lack of causality and the implied idea that the US keeps getting better automatically—due to the patriotic analysis of history put forward—“destroys the impulse to change things—to become an activist,” but Loewen signals that people have to exert their powers of citizenship because progress will not happen without the “efforts of

⁹⁹ Nicholas Confessore, “For Whites Sensing Decline, Donald Trump Unleashes Words of Resistance,” *The New York Times*, 20 Jan. 2018, Online, 14 Feb. 2019
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/us/politics/donald-trump-white-identity.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* 3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

dedicated people.”¹⁰² Research proves that teaching white children about racism helps affect their racial attitudes. Lessons about racial discrimination triggers remorse and valuing of racial fairness, which encourages children to develop counter-stereotyping attitudes, and motivates racial tolerance. Education to racism promotes more positive views of African Americans among white children, which in turn can lead to major prejudice reduction, as “children who understand racial differences to be the result of racial discrimination (rather than biological factors) may be more likely to endorse counterstereotypic beliefs about African Americans than their peers.”¹⁰³ Indeed, in order to change something, one must know how it works, how it was built, and why. Therefore, reshaping the system requires knowledge of its functioning. Teachers should also be trained to reduce their own racial bias, whether it be towards history or towards minority children, and to try and learn innovative teaching techniques which would not rely on “lying textbooks” and would make history more appealing to students.¹⁰⁴ The remodeling of the school curricula, through the addition of courses on racism and discrimination, the modernizing of history courses and textbooks, and better training of history teachers seem to be essential changes required for society to progress towards racial equality.

All in all, more attention should be given to education and the education system. More financial investment is required from the states to close the gap between low-income neighborhood schools and high-income ones, and thus give the similar

¹⁰² Sean Illing, “The Biggest Lie We Still Teach in American History Classes,” *Vox*, 1 Aug. 2018, Online, 3 Feb. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/conversations/2018/8/1/17602596/american-history-james-loewen-howard-zinn>.

¹⁰³ Julie M. Hughes, Rebecca S. Bigler, and Sheri R. Levy, “Consequences of Learning about Historical Racism Among European American and African American Children,” *Child Development* 78.6 (2007): 1691.

¹⁰⁴ Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* 309.

opportunity to succeed to white and black children.¹⁰⁵ A review of state budgets showed that in 2008, some states heavily invested in their corrections budget while the education budget barely increased. The state governments need to realize the importance of education for the future of the society and thus grant more money to education compared to incarceration, if the United States hopes to reverse the cycle of mass incarceration of African Americans by giving alternative opportunities and outcomes to disadvantaged young minorities.¹⁰⁶

Education, if the government helps accordingly, will play a major role in the formation of future prejudice-free generations and in the progress of American society towards integration and harmony. However, the current generation of prejudiced white adults will not be affected by changes in schools, so other strategies of prejudice reduction must be invented and implemented.

2. Communication and Acknowledgment

The journalist Erika Smith said, “To truly root out racism, Americans must call it out in all of its forms.”¹⁰⁷ I also believe the acknowledgment of racialized attitudes, discriminatory practices, and racist incidents would act as a motivator of change. Lifting the veil of ignorance and colorblindness white people have lived with for centuries would allow them to see the problem. Once they realize what the problem is,

¹⁰⁵ Erica L. Green, “LeBron James Opened a School That Was Considered an Experiment. It’s Showing Promise.” *The New York Times*, 12 Apr. 2019, Online, 14 Apr. 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/12/education/lebron-james-school-ohio.html>.

This New York Times piece is about a segregated school with low success rates which was remodeled and heavily founded by LeBron James’s Foundation. Its improvements drastically changed the students’ motivation, the parents’ implication, and the school presents encouraging results so far, which could possibly make it an inspiring model to work towards equality of opportunity in education.

¹⁰⁶ Manning Marable, “Incarceration vs. Education: Reproducing Racism and Poverty in America,” *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 15.2 (2008): 59–61.

¹⁰⁷ Erika D. Smith, “Watch Out, Racists. Your Time’s Up, Too.” *The Sacramento Bee (CA)* [Sacramento, CA] 19 Jan. 2018, Online http://nouveau.europresse.com/Link/MOULINT_1/news-20180119-NKSA-030.

it will be much easier to think of adequate solutions in order to fix it. The recognition of racial discrimination is essential to solve the problem of school segregation discussed above, but it could also help in other domains by allowing the creation of renewed interracial dialogue.

The mental health consequences of discrimination on African Americans presented earlier often appear unrelated to racism for many white people. The white colorblind perspective rejects the concept of race as meaningful and impactful today, which allows them to deny the social reality and to consequently blame victims of racism for their situation. However, this ignorance and downplaying of the problem does not help treating black people better. Bryant-Davis argues that exploring the concepts of race and racism would shed light on the victims and their situation, but also on the perpetrators and on the passive benefiter of this system. Indeed, “understanding these experiences is the foundation for appropriate prevention and intervention in the area of racial oppression.”¹⁰⁸ Further research is thus needed to prove that racism is still happening, and to show to what extent and how it impacts people (both black and white), in order for the white society to see the negative consequences it has and accept the truth. Acknowledging the hurt of the racial trauma would in turn improve psychological counseling and treatment as physicians and clinicians would know more about it and be better trained regarding race-related trauma.¹⁰⁹

Acknowledging the hurt of others, whether it be through education or other forms of diversity training, can help prejudiced white people work on their feelings to feel more sympathy, empathy, or autopathy towards black people.¹¹⁰ By calling out racism

¹⁰⁸ Bryant-Davis and Ocampo, “The Trauma of Racism” 577.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 576; Thompson-Miller and Feagin, “Continuing Injuries of Racism” 114.

¹¹⁰ Autopathy, according to Feagin, occurs when whites intentionally put themselves in the world of the oppressed and feels the hurt of the racist conditions personally and more directly. Feagin, *Racist America* 289.

and creating situations where white people can experience the discrimination black people face every day, white people can understand the hardships of black people and feel for them. Empathy, though it might not work with everybody, is a good way to make changes at the individual level. People can thus come to stand up to other racists and to the whole system of racial hierarchy, often first individually and then joining organizations or groups fighting for racial justice and equality.¹¹¹ Combining the education solution and the idea of feeling for the other, history or social science classes could do courses on the pattern of unjust enrichment of whites, but with a focus on the past of white students' families. This would make the racial system more relatable to them and could consequently arouse compassion.¹¹²

Racist white people also need to learn about and recognize black people as unique individuals, to see each distinct person instead of a vast group. Stereotypes come from a poor ability to differentiate among other-race faces and people. This blurred perception leads to generalization, i.e. all members of a race are undifferentiated, which creates such prejudiced beliefs as “all black people are criminals.” Thus, teaching white people to better individuate other-race faces and acknowledge the individuality of African Americans reduces implicit racial biases.¹¹³ It could for example have an impact on the racial profiling by white police officers, helping them see individuals as unique, and not only as a part of a “criminal” group, and consequently remove the automatic “threat” identification.¹¹⁴

Another way to renew contact between white and black people, and to facilitate understanding of and sympathy for the other, is to reinstate a dialogue. African

¹¹¹ Ibid., 288–289.

¹¹² Ibid., 290.

¹¹³ Sophie Lebrecht et al., “Perceptual Other-Race Training Reduces Implicit Racial Bias,” *PLoS ONE* 4.1 (2009): 3.

¹¹⁴ Feagin, *Racist America* 292.

Americans and white Americans need to be able to communicate in order to understand each other's hardships, feel for each other, and to build trust. Therefore, ending housing and school segregation is important, as cohabitation and everyday contact in informal settings would help break stereotypes by allowing people to get to know each other better. A study has shown that engaging in an open conversation with prejudiced people can help reduce those prejudices in the long-term. The study was focused on homophobic and transgender prejudice, but the researchers posit that all prejudice works similarly and the technique could be applied to any type of bias. By letting people speak and engage with their real-life experiences of prejudice and acknowledge those of others, the researchers lead white people to realize by themselves their "common humanity" with the prejudiced group, which is more effective, in terms of persuasion and changing minds, than throwing statistics or arbitrary facts at them. Educating people to their own prejudice through conversation has had positive results so far, though it is a time-consuming procedure which would be hard to implement on a large scale. This technique also requires prejudiced people to be willing to discuss and to listen, as voluntariness and open-mindedness are key to the positive outcome of the dialogue. Thus, it cannot be imposed on every and any prejudiced citizen. Thanks to this paper, researchers proved that "humans can learn to better understand one another," using a mix of acknowledgment of the other's plight, communication, and feelings of empathy.¹¹⁵ This is where literature and especially memoirs of black people are helpful to build empathy by sharing everyday experiences and feelings. Some people might not be receptive to this, no solution is a

¹¹⁵ Brian Resnick, "These Scientists Can Prove It's Possible to Reduce Prejudice," *Vox*, 7 Apr. 2016, Online, 8 Jan. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/2016/4/7/11380974/reduce-prejudice-science-transgender>.; German Lopez, "Research Says There Are Ways to Reduce Racial Bias. Calling People Racist Isn't One of Them." *Vox*, 15 Nov. 2016, Online, 8 Jan. 2019 <https://www.vox.com/identities/2016/11/15/13595508/racism-research-study-trump>.

sure fix, but given present tensions, I believe any available strategy would be worth experimenting.

Conclusion

The consequences of racial discrimination might not be as cruel and gruesome as they were in the eighteenth century, but they are still insidious and greatly disadvantaging for a growing part of the US population. The economic, material, and health costs of the whites' discriminatory practices are reinforcing one another, making it hard for black people, or researchers, to find a single perfect solution or coping mechanism to fight discrimination off. The strategies of social change presented here are mixing techniques that can be implemented either at the individual or at the institutional level, as interventions at both levels are required to achieve any change. However, in order to implement new and efficient enforcement strategies, white conservative leaders at the head of the major political and legal institutions would have to be replaced by more democratic and liberal leaders, who would support racial change. Indeed, laws regarding racial inclusion and equality already exist since the 1960s and progress seemed already possible then, but most civil rights laws and policies are not being enforced properly.¹¹⁶ Regardless of the solution(s) preferred, a supportive and open-minded government is needed if society hopes to move towards racial equality. Feagin underlines that durable and efficient changes would require some form of renewal or replacement of the Constitution to set anti-discrimination in stone at the constitutional level and avoid going backwards with every new conservative president.¹¹⁷ Regardless of the growing body of research in favor of and

¹¹⁶ Feagin, *Racist America* 267.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 297–299.

the social support for racial equality, the United States still has a long way to go and many efforts to make to accept or embrace its racial diversity.

Conclusion

“Prejudice is the child of ignorance.” — William Hazlitt¹

“Ignorance and prejudice are the handmaidens of propaganda.

Our mission, therefore, is to confront ignorance with

knowledge, bigotry with tolerance, and isolation with the

outstretched hand of generosity. Racism can, will, and must be

defeated.” — Kofi Annan²

The United States has developed and protected racist ideas and theories since the country’s founding. Over time those prejudices became resistant to change and were allowed to persist, and they remain an important feature of American society today. Indeed, contemporary American society is still living in the past in certain ways, even though it ought to be preparing for the future. Two hundred years of white domination and black slavery allowed the white elite to design and implement a self-flattering racial frame. This frame depicts black people as poor, weak, and uneducated savages, and gives the American European colonists the good role as the saviors of the African people. The racist whites used science and religion, depending on what could serve their interest the most, to justify the segregation, oppression, and exploitation of black people, and thus protect the growing economy of the young colonies and then the newly born United States. Despite the example later set by European countries and the international pressure to change their workforce system with the spread of the abolition of slavery in the early nineteenth century, the US refused to take such steps,

¹ William Hazlitt, *Sketches and Essays* (London : Oxford University Press, H. Frowde, 1912) 56, Online, 17 Apr. 2019 <http://archive.org/details/sketchesessays00hazl>.

² Kofi Annan, cited in Tahir Habib Cheema, “Ignorance and prejudice: learning from Kofi Annan,” *The Express Tribune*, 21 Aug. 2018, Online, 10 Mar. 2019 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1785660/6-ignorance-prejudice-learning-kofi-annan/>.

not only because of their slave economy but also because the southern states were psychologically attached to their system and could not imagine surviving without slaves or living equally with free blacks. The social and economic discrepancies between the North and the South, due to the slavery issue, led to the Civil War. The pressure for abolition grew in the US, and the South estimated it would be better off on its own than without its slaves. Thus, it seceded after the election of abolitionist President Abraham Lincoln. The victory of the North forced the southern states to follow through with the abolition process. Slavery was thus abolished in 1865, but it was really only replaced in the South by new practices of discrimination and segregation under the Jim Crow Laws. This legal system of oppression lasted for a hundred years and it was not until after World War II that the collective conscience was aroused by the Civil Rights Movement and a will for progressive change was established, though often grudgingly. The atmosphere of social rebellion and the fight for social justice opened the way to progressive policies. The Civil Rights Act, passed in 1964, finally banned discrimination of any kind though in practice it persisted in many areas from housing to education and employment. 1964 marked the official end of segregation and discrimination, and it was reinforced by the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Fair Housing Act of 1967.

However, both the political class and the civil society were not quite ready to welcome and acknowledge black people as co-equals. Indeed, the white racial frame depicting black people as inferior, dumb, dangerous, and overall unequal was so deeply imbedded in the fabric of the nation that white people were still uneasy with accepting being equal to African Americans, and thus were unwilling to facilitate desegregation or stop discriminating. Laws only work if they are enforced, and the new civil rights laws were often ignored or underenforced. Racist whites realized they

had to adapt to the new society and its colorblind, anti-discrimination expectations. They thus found new covert and subtle ways to circumvent the law and maintain the racial gap between whites and blacks. Indeed, the situation of black people from the 1960s to the 2010s did not change significantly in practice, with each conservative president impeding racial progress in his own way. Though many whites optimistically interpreted the election of the first African American president in 2008 as a sign that the US had become a post-racial society, most observers know that discrimination and segregation have persisted. The purportedly colorblind attitude adopted by politicians and the society, coupled with the success of some black politicians, athletes, intellectuals, and entertainers, allow people to claim that the US is not racist anymore, and that the difficulties black people and communities face now are their own fault. Colorblindness helps many white people divert blame onto black people and their presumed laziness. However, research studies and everyday racist events, from wary attitudes to unjustified shootings, prove that the American mind has not changed as much as many would like to believe, and that many white people are still under the influence of the white racial frame—though often unconsciously or in ways only dimly acknowledged.

Nowadays, African Americans still have to deal with a wide array of racial discrimination and its consequences. They are also putting up with the consequences of past discrimination, which often serves to reinforce present-day struggles. This paper has presented the main types of discrimination still ongoing and their most common consequences to challenge the current colorblind perspective and open people's eyes to the reality of contemporary discrimination. All these discriminatory practices and their effects are entangled, reinforcing one another in a vicious circle of racism which makes it harder for black people to fight back, and difficult for the

whole society to combat their effects and find efficient solutions to stop them. The historical system of slavery and the persistent discrimination created a pattern of unjust enrichment of white people and unjust impoverishment of black people. The economic disadvantage is linked to a lack of social capital among African Americans and discrimination in employment. The higher unemployment and underemployment rates of black people, as well as their lack of stability and promotion once in a job are the causes of unequal access to housing and education, which, coupled with economic disadvantage, lead to segregation. The inequality of opportunity in education stands at the center of this system. Less education or lower quality education leads to lesser paid jobs, lower homeownership rates, and lower wealth averages. This means that the racial discrimination faced by past generations have repercussions through time and still hurt their children and grandchildren today. The lack of education sometimes, but more often the lack of opportunities in general (and feeling that deprivation daily), can stand in the way of success for some black people. The stress, low self-esteem, and other adverse psychological outcomes of race-based traumatic experiences have important costs, financial and social, for both the black communities and the American society as a whole. This has resulted today in important sociopsychological and physical health discrepancies between whites and blacks. The overall segregation of black people has also been an impediment to the economic growth of many metropolitan areas in the US, as it separates two complementary workforces, but also because it excludes, via warehousing in prisons operating at enormous cost, the talent and energy of millions of people on the sole ground of their skin color.

Another form of discrimination used by whites in power to exclude and segregate black people even more is this warehousing, better known as the mass incarceration of African Americans. The white racial frame stereotypes black people as dangerous and

threatening individuals, which triggers defensive responses in white people. The mass incarceration of black people is linked to the omnipresence of racial discriminations in arrest rates and in the classification of offenses, resulting in longer sentencing. As a result, fifty-nine percent of the state prison population is black.³ More importantly, the justice system and mass incarceration have been used, since Reagan's presidency, as a means of legalizing discrimination by using felony charges, even for minor offenses, to label African Americans as felons. This categorization then disenfranchises them from voting, denies them public benefits, and allows discrimination against them in housing and employment. All in all, the interconnection of these discriminatory practices and their negative consequences takes a significant toll on the African American communities, and on the American society. As Feagin underlined, the US will soon find itself handicapped (or possibly disregarded) on the international stage, if it does not start respecting its minorities and acknowledging the equality of people of color from any country in this century of globalization and international exchanges.⁴

This document has argued that finding a way out of persistent racial discrimination would require better education and reliable information supported by fair policies, to acknowledge the issue at stake and be able to implement the appropriate solutions. Many white racist people could change their mind about their fellow black citizens if they knew why and how they are disadvantaged (and have been for so long), and if they were made to feel for them and understand what they are going through. Feelings of empathy are what make human beings humane, but the white racial frame developed (supposedly) logical and rational justifications for

³ David Cole, "The Truth About Our Prison Crisis," *The New York Review of Books*, 22 Jun. 2017, Online, 18 Mar. 2018 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/06/22/truth-about-our-prison-crisis/>.

⁴ Feagin, "The Future of US Society in an Era of Racism, Group Segregation and Demographic Revolution."

oppressing black people and blaming them for their situation. This “blame the victim” technique then overrides feelings of compassion and understanding. Educating people about the painful history of racial discrimination and oppression of the country, and doing so without blaming or shaming, could trigger more empathetic feelings and interracial harmony. The American society needs to realize that the past still has an influence on the present and considering the two separately prevents them from fully understanding and knowing their society, their country, and themselves, and thus impedes personal as well as national growth. Communication is key for people to understand one another, and this can only happen if white and black people get to know each other better and are willing to change their perspective on society and how it should be. The defense of equal rights to dignity and opportunity, in schools, housing, and employment, require support from the government as mediator and implementor of more just policies. Many actions can be undertaken on the individual and local level through associations and organizations fighting for social justice and equality at the local level. However, efficient and durable change needs to be recognized, accepted, and supported at the constitutional level as well, in order to survive partisanship in the Oval Office and to prevent people from being manipulated into abandoning the fight—by, for example leading them to assume that they won and all is good, or drawing attention to another issue supposedly more urgent or important. The white racist elite being mostly in charge of the media and the institutions, a president supportive of racial justice and equality is essential to clear out the old conservative racial frame and steer the country towards dignity and acceptance for all. Regional efforts are good but setting an example of social and racial justice at the national level is better.

In the end, Americans are over three hundred and fifty million fallible humans from diverse backgrounds, living day to day in increasingly unequal and highly competitive circumstances, and with varied and often divergent life goals. But a central tenant of the American creed is that improvement is possible, the future can be better than the past. As such, all the complex, unresolved emotional, social, economic, and political challenges the US faces today and has faced at each step of its history do explain why racial prejudice, inequality, and discrimination are still major issues in American society, and will likely remain so for decades to come if people are unwilling to change themselves and their relationships with each other. The question now is whether America is ready to open its eyes and face the ugly truth in order to try and set things on a better path, or if instead most white people prefer to protect their fragile self-esteem, their dubious privileges, and the shaky status quo by carrying on with persistent and subtle but no less effective racism. The latter path will probably hurt them significantly and fairly soon as the demographical growth indicates that white people will be a statistical minority in the near future. The 2020 presidential election will be a good indicator of the evolution of the American mentality and will give some answers as to the changes that can be expected in years to come.

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