

The American Dream in the Media

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Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2020

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:142:023831>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-11-27**



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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i
njemačkog jezika i književnosti

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Američki san u medijima

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

Osijek, 2020.

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Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

Osijek, 2020.

J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
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German Language and Literature

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The American Dream in The Media

Bachelor's Thesis

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Bachelor's Thesis

Scientific area: Humanities

Scientific field: Literature

Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: Dr Jadranka Zlomislić, Assistant Professor

Osijek, 2020

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U Osijeku, 16.9.2020.

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Abstract

Many African Americans in the United States today have a negative view of the country's racial progress. Despite their significant contributions in the settling and development of the country African Americans still have not achieved equal citizen's rights as guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. The present study has shown that through decades of hardships and inequality, African Americans have not been given an equal opportunity to work towards achieving the American Dream which states that every American citizen is equally entitled to safety, happiness, freedom and success. This paper focuses on the portrayal of African Americans in all types of media and highlights the negative consequences of media misinterpretations and distortions. The present troubling racial unrest in the United States makes evident that significant changes are needed for true progress to be made. The negative legacy of slavery lingers but so does the positive legacy of Martin Luther King Jr, whose faith in the ideals of justice, hope, equality and his methods of peaceful protests could inspire the African Americans and the White Americans to work together towards social justice. The power of the media is especially visible today in the footage of people of all skin colours, genders, religions, sexual orientation, and ethnicities coming together to protest against injustice. Perhaps this new growing awareness will bring positive changes in the perception of African Americans and their values and result in the United States living up to its creed.

Keywords: slavery, racial discrimination, inequality, African Americans

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We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

—US 1776

Introduction

African Americans have been present ever since the early beginnings of the United States of America and have participated in the exploration, settlement, and development of the country. Many were brought by white European settlers to serve as slaves while some were free; some were born in the United States while others were born in Africa. Although they have made a significant contribution in the building of the nation, their struggle for true freedom and equality continues. The paper aims to explore the experiences of African Americans from America's battle for independence, the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement all up to the present day struggles against racial discrimination. The paper highlights the fact that despite all their efforts, African Americans still haven't achieved their “unalienable rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" promised by the Declaration of Independence” (Quigley) which the government is supposed to protect. Because of the continued racial injustice against African Americans, the American Dream, the idea that anyone can succeed through hard work, has remained one of the most enduring and misleading myths in America.

The first section of the paper presents the contribution of African Americans to the key historical events in American History with a special focus on their role in the American Revolution, the Cotton Industry, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement. The second section highlights how various types of media have impacted the portrayal of African Americans through the decades. The third and final section shines a light on the continuing struggle for racial equality by taking a closer look at the present troubling racial situation in the United States.

1. Key Moments in the African American History in the USA

Ever since coming to the continent, African Americans have been looked down upon. They have been traded as slaves, belittled and not seen as fellow human beings. To put an end to this racial injustice and gain acceptance as equal citizens with lawful rights African Americans have made significant contributions to the United States of America, in particular to the Revolutionary War, the Cotton Industry, the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement. However, despite all their efforts they still have not attained economic, educational or social equality and too many African Americans are still living in impoverished and segregated neighborhoods. The struggle of African Americans continues as they wait in the hope for America to live up to its true creed.

1.1 The American Revolution

During the Revolutionary War, according to Edward Ayres, “thousands of black Americans had become involved in the war” and were loyal to the side that offered the best prospect of freedom. “By the 1760s, however, as the colonists began to speak out against British tyranny, more Americans pointed out the obvious contradiction between advocating liberty and owning slaves” (Ayres). Abigail Adams, the wife and close advisor of the second President of the United States and the mother of the sixth President of the United States, wrote the following in 1774: “it always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have” (Ayres). The prospect of freedom was awaited by the enslaved African Americans: “At the time of the American Revolution, slaves made up at least 25 percent of the population of North Carolina. In actual numbers, blacks totalled perhaps seventy thousand but no more than 5 percent of them were free” (Crow). Most slaves lived and worked on plantations, planting and harvesting crops. Those who lived in towns were working or as servants for their owners or at trades, but only skilled slaves worked as carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths or wheelwrights (Crow).

During that time, it was punishable by death for African Americans to oppose the government. One such example is the case of Nathaniel Turner, an enslaved man who was allowed to be given lessons in writing, reading and religion which allowed him to think for himself and be a leader of the enslaved (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica). He led a slave revolt against the institution of slavery and failed. The rebellion resulted in a massacre. Over the course of two days, together with 75 other slaves with whom he shared the same ideology and hatred towards slavery, he ended the lives of 60 white men. Many innocent lives were lost in the

onslaught on both sides. After Turner and his companions were captured, they were tried and hanged. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica) At the end of the war, around 5,000 blacks expressed their intentions to sail from Charleston with the British army because of their unwillingness to return to their daily life of hard work and undergo the brutal punishments by their former masters (Crow). Boston King, a black Baptist preacher, said: “This dreadful rumour [re-enslavement] filled us with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our old masters, coming from Virginia, North-Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New-York, or even dragging them out of their beds” (Crow). In the end, thousands of slaves who helped the cause in the war were granted freedom by the British.

1.2 The Cotton Industry

In the years after the Revolutionary War, slavery was most exercised in the rural South. The soil was exhausted in the fields where tobacco, the most profitable crop, was grown and products such as rice and indigo were no longer as profitable. Therefore, the landowners turned to cotton, and this impacted the need for slave labour. As the mechanization technology of weaving and spinning revolutionized the textile industry, there was an increased demand for cotton which led to an increase of enslaved African Americans. The spinning machines “spun the material into long threads which enabled it to be woven on hand- and foot-powered machines called looms” (“Cotton Textile Industry”). The invention of the cotton gin enabled to pick seeds out of cotton quicker than the enslaved people could by hand, so profit and demand for workers grew substantially. This led to the construction of cotton mills which served as large warehouses equipped with cotton gins. The workplace was considered dangerous and due to the cramped nature of the mills, children and women were required to operate the machinery. The working conditions were appalling, and many workers would get sick because of the large amount of dust particles generated by the gin. This proved a problem which was neglected as faster production of cotton enabled the plantation owners to achieve great wealth. According to Aiken, “By the early twentieth century in continental North America the plantation had evolved well beyond the simple colonial model to a more economically and technologically sophisticated factory stage that utilized new motorized machinery and required even greater economies of scale” (4).

Many slaveholders feared a new rebellion might break out so they called for the government to take preventive measures which led to “the Fugitive Slave Acts . . . a pair of federal laws that allowed for the capture and return of runaway enslaved people within the territory of the United States” (History.com Editors, “Fugitive Slave Acts”). It is important to note that these laws “levied even harsher punishments for interfering in” the capture of slaves

(History.com Editors, “Fugitive Slave Acts”). The country could not progress or evolve were it not for the hard work of slaves. The cotton industry helped shape the country into what it is today.

1.3 The Civil War

The conflicts between North and South intensified over time and resulted in war. President Abraham Lincoln opposed slavery and as the first Republican president of the United States he knew “the Civil War at its outset was not a war to abolish slavery” (History.com Editors, “Black History Milestones: Timeline”). One of his famous quotes regarding slavery and freedom invited people to think about what is right and wrong such as:

In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free – honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just – a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless. (“Annual Message to Congress”)

Lincoln first and foremost wanted to preserve the Union and justified his decision as a wartime measure. As such, he did not go so far as to free enslaved people in the border states that were loyal to the union, which angered most abolitionists. The total number of killed in the Civil War was 620,000 making it the most dreadful conflict in American history (Cohen).

Newly-freed slaves rejoiced after the Reconstruction period especially because of the 13th Amendment which states: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (U.S. Const. sec. 3). After many obstacles, African Americans made progress towards achieving freedom which was an enormous milestone for the African American population.

1.4 The Civil Rights Movement

Having acquired freedom, African Americans still experienced racial discrimination and could not enjoy their rights as it was written in the 13th Amendment and Declaration of Independence. Therefore, an organized effort by African Americans was established to fight against racial injustice. “The Civil Rights Movement is an umbrella term for the many varieties of activism that sought to secure full political, social, and economic rights for African Americans in the period from 1946 to 1968” (“Introduction to the Civil Rights Movement”). During the

movement, many organizations were created for the purpose of fighting segregation and discrimination. Some of the most impactful ones are: “the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)” (Krause). Together with like-minded individuals they successfully achieved “the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965” which was a big step in social equality (“Introduction to the Civil Rights Movement”).

One of the most recognizable leaders of the movement was Martin Luther King whose famous speech inspired African Americans and gave them hope that they would one day achieve their dream of freedom and racial justice. King said: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character” (History.com Editors, “I Have a Dream’ Speech”) King emerged as the most prominent figure with his speech being one of the most defining moments in the Civil Rights Movement. Another important figure who addressed the problem of racism globally was Malcolm Little, also known as Malcolm X. His speech “*Not just an American problem, but a world problem*” was directed at other colonial powers such as England and France who were siding with racists by giving a negative image of African Americans in their media. He encouraged his listeners to organize themselves as the people have in France and England, to fight for their rights (Little).

2. The Impact of the Media on the Portrayal of African Americans through the Decades

The various types of media have been playing a major role in society by spreading news or entertaining the audience, but it is also a powerful and influential means in forming people's beliefs and views about someone or something. From time to time, there is bound to be a controversial story with no real evidence to back it up, but it will nevertheless assert an opinion which the audience will in most cases accept. One such instance is the portrayal of African Americans through the decades around which people formed a strong opinion.

2.1 Print Media

Books are still a popular print media and one of the most impactful books on equality, social justice and racial discrimination is *The Souls of Black Folk* written by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903 in which he states: “[t]he problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (16). He suggests that the question of ethnicity and discrimination will not be solved on short notice and that it is going to take a lot of effort. Another famous quotation can be found in the first chapter, titled “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” in which Dr. Du Bois stated:

[T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (8-9)

Du Bois points out that being African American is like a burden which was, and still is present in today's society (6) which from today's standpoint still rings true.

Another powerful book on race issues is *Racial Equality in America* (1976) by John Hope Franklin, which criticizes the Declaration of Independence: “[I]t seems unfortunate that the Declaration of Independence, in its final form, said nothing at all about the widespread practice of trading inhuman flesh and holding human beings in perpetual bondage” (14). He spites the Revolutionary leaders who had no consideration for human freedom and solidarity to the Founding Fathers, who in their good-hearted intentions failed to live up to their promise of

equality stated in the United States Constitution: “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America” (U.S. Const. pmb.). Even Thomas Jefferson, who was one of the Founding Fathers and contributed to society, did not live up to the promises of the Constitution. He was a slaveholder and continued to enslave African Americans for economic purposes.

According to Molefi Kete Asante, deep-rooted prejudice against all races is, and will always be present. There will always be new ways to harm or belittle minorities until one end meets extermination (151-152). It was because of the fact that Jefferson and many of his contemporaries shared the same opinion that not only enslaved African Americans, but also treated free African Americans with disdain for being inferior.

Print media include printed documents that report on the concept of the superiority of whites and inferiority of blacks throughout history. Discrimination was enforced by laws and customs which enabled slavery to continue until “[t]he Thirteenth Amendment officially outlawed slavery and went into effect in 1865” (Introduction to the Civil Rights Movement). In 1857, the court case *Dred Scott v. John F.A. Sandford* proved to be a big obstacle for the African American minority (Urofsky). John Emerson of Missouri, who served in the U.S. military at that time, took his slave Dred Scott from a slave state to a free territory and then again returned him to a slave state (Urofsky). After Emerson’s death, Scott tried unsuccessfully to buy his freedom from Emerson’s widow and then ended being the property of Mrs. Emerson’s brother John F.A. Sandford (Urofsky). Scott sued for his freedom and the whole process took years and many court decisions all the way to the Supreme Court (Urofsky). Although a state court granted Scott his freedom the other court decisions ruled that the state citizenship of African Americans had nothing to do with national citizenship so that a slave who resided in a free state was not entitled to his freedom and that all African Americans were not and could never be free citizens of the United States (Urofsky). In the infamous court decision Chief Justice Taney asked:

Can a negro, whose ancestors were imported into this country, and sold as slaves, become a member of the political community formed and brought into existence by the Constitution of the United States, and as such become entitled to all the rights, and privileges, and immunities, guaranteed by that instrument to the citizen? (Howard 9)

Another example of great figures who had a great impact and set obstacles for African Americans to overcome were Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. In the Lincoln-Douglas debates both stated they opposed African Americans as socially equal. Douglas stated: “I am

opposed to negro equality. I repeat that this nation is a white people—a people composed of European descendants—a people that have established this government for themselves and their posterity...” (First Debate) Although Lincoln opposed slavery and emancipated the slaves he stated:

I am not, nor have ever been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races – that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people, . . . and inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together, there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any man, am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white man. (O’Reilly 43)

In the *Civil Rights Cases* of 1883 the decision of “Supreme Court justice Joseph P. Bradley set the narrowest possible limits to the federal role in defining and enforcing the recently won rights of black citizens in a society where these rights were already under daily attack from white racists” (Scott). The above-mentioned decision, like many others, proves that African Americans had to continually fight even for the civil rights granted by the United States Constitution.

2.2 Broadcasting Media

Of the different types of broadcasting media, television has had a big impact on the topic of racism. According to Thackara, the media must accept responsibility for outputting content which reflects that the society is influenced by the colonial past (109). Through broadcasts involving African Americans, viewers get the idea that this particular minority consists of bad citizens such as: “muggers, scroungers, illegal immigrants, dope-crazed, any variety of misfit” and “[e]ven blacks who are successful or famous remain black, first of all” (109). Although it has become socially unacceptable to address African Americans as inferior to white people, there is still the practice of racial discrimination on a subtle level which is called “modern” racism (Entman 332). According to Entman, there are 3 components of modern racism: The first is the “anti-black affect” which emphasizes hostility and animosity towards African Americans through crimes in local television news. The stereotype leads people to believe that African Americans are mostly criminals. The second component of modern racism is neglecting the political demands of the African American minority. It is believed some of the local television’s constructions work against African Americans. Lastly, the third component is the belief that almost all racism is nonexistent in the 21st century and that African Americans have no obstacles

in succeeding (332-333). The notion that racism has ended might be a good way to overcome the systemic old-fashion racism.

Video footage is also a powerful broadcasting tool that has been spreading information across the world about the organization Black Lives Matter since it was founded in 2013. Its purpose is to inspire people to join the movement to fight for freedom, liberation and justice. In a recent incident, George Floyd was killed by the police in the process of arresting and the incident would have gone unnoticed if it had not been for the videos that testified to the brutal truth. The whole event rallied the whole world to demand justice for the man who did not resist arrest. According to the footage, Floyd was lying face down claiming he could not breathe, which the police ignored. Soon after, people around the world started protesting against police brutality and racism (NME). This shows that even in 2020 the question of equality falls short.

The broadcasting of speeches is also important to raise the public's awareness of injustice such as the wage gap between white and African American workers. A speech that discussed this form of racial inequality brings to mind King's powerful speech *I've Been to the Mountaintop* which he held in Memphis in 1968 to confirm his faith in the ideals of justice, equality and hope for all (Jones). He calls African Americans to stand united and use peaceful means of protest against discrimination and fight for social justice. It is important to note that in 2020, almost 56 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, there are still differences in earnings between white people and those of color. Aside from the wage gap, another factor that greatly influences economic disparity is the opportunity gap.

Broadcasting has many forms and through the decades music has had a significant impact. In fact, the early beginnings of African American music heritage stem from Africa. Traces of its particular styles and rhythm are carried over to all genres of music and much of the music that is known today would not be the same if it were not for African American influence. Regardless of this fact, the whole music industry seems to be divided into stereotypes. For example, the term R&B was coined to replace "race music." People seem to assign genres to particular races: rock and roll, popular music and country is considered white music, while hip-hop and R&B are seen as black music. If an African American artist would produce music of the genre they are not associated with, they would be criticized and discriminated against, whereas a white artist would only benefit from commercials (Leight).

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that the film genre, especially documentaries, in the hands of good writers and producers can help viewers better understand iconic moments in history. One such Emmy Award-winning series titled *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* explores what it means to be a part of the African American minority, depicting different

religious and social perspectives, impoverished childhoods and modest lifestyles (Gates). The series spans around five hundred years as Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr takes viewers on the journey, visiting historic sites, engaging in debates with famous historians and interviews individuals who are connected to eyewitnesses (Bennet). The series depicts most of the tragedies, controversies and triumphs regarding the African American community. Another successful movie which is based on a real event during the 1950s and 1960s is *The Banker*, a story that follows Bernard Garrett, an African American from the South who aspired to improve conditions for black Americans and achieve economic freedom (Clark). The article “The Black Businessman Who Built an Empire Despite Jim Crow Oppression” explains the film’s storyline: After coming to California in the pursuit for happiness he began working hard with his own cleaning service and later collecting wastepaper which would earn him enough money to buy property in Los Angeles. Later he met a white real estate investor going by the name Mr. Barker who would give him a small loan to complete his project and rent out the building to African Americans who needed better housing. After Garrett paid back his debts, he formed a partnership with Barker in investing in such apartments and renting them out. Garrett had to stay in the shadows and let Barker be the negotiator due to the huge income which at that time was forbidden for African Americans. Many years passed and Garrett became one of the wealthiest African Americans. Ultimately, he helped and created many opportunities for African Americans, who were denied loans by banks, segregated or impoverished (Clark).

2.3 Internet Media

The Internet has become the most popular place to publish news and talk about the contemporary situation. It has many advantages, for example the news is uploaded as soon as it happens. One of the negative aspects is a type of racism, called cyber-racism. Even the founders of the World Wide Web have shared their opinions that they have created a technology that can inflict great harm. People can exercise manipulation, spread hate speech, and even fake news (Bliuc). According to a research of ten years of cyber racism, “racist groups are active on different communication channels to individuals” such as: blogs, forums, chat rooms and commentary and gaming websites. Although white people make up the majority of cyber-bullies, it does work both ways (Bliuc).

As mentioned earlier, the Internet offers current information, such as the following online survey that reveals the discrepancy in salaries between whites and African Americans. The article “Racial Wage Gap for Men” discusses the wage gap based on an online salary survey where 1.8 million profile samples were collected and analyzed between January 2017 and

February 2019. For consistency, the survey was limited to people who at least had a bachelor's degree. Two different measures were used: the first is the controlled racial wage gap, which compares earnings between white people and people of color based on same jobs and qualifications. The second is the uncontrolled racial wage gap which simply compares the income for each group without considering job title or years of experience. The sample shows that:

African American men have the largest uncontrolled pay gap relative to white men. They earn \$0.87 for every dollar a white man earns” and “[t]he controlled wage gap for black men is \$0.98 for every dollar a white man with the same qualifications makes. To put that in perspective, the median salary of a white man in our sample is \$72,900; the controlled median pay for black or African American men is thus \$71,500. This suggests a \$1,400 difference in pay that is likely attributable to race. (“Racial Wage Gap for Men”)

The survey shows that America is still not a place where everyone gets an equal opportunity to pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

3. The Present Racial Situation in the United States

3.1 Political Issues

The article “Race in America 2019 reports on the opinions obtained through a poll on the present state of race relations. The following information was given: After the election of the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump, people believe that America has taken a turn for the worse. More than 150 years after the passage of the 13th amendment 71% of the African American citizens that took part in a survey believe that relations regarding race are bad. Even 56% of white population thinks the same and 49% claim it is President Trump’s fault, while 73% of African Americans believe that Trump’s presidency has made the situation worse. On the question whether the legacy of slavery affected the position of black people in today’s society a great deal, 63% of all adults agreed. Another important question was whether the country has gone far lengths in giving blacks equal rights with whites, to which only 38% of white people said yes, whereas 78% of black people answered affirmative (Horowitz).

The above-mentioned survey proves that the current situation in America is far from ideal. The situation applies to all minorities, not only African Americans. Furthermore, most adults claim that African Americans are treated less fairly by the police and in the criminal justice system. (Horowitz) As previously mentioned, George Floyd’s brutal death has made the social and politic situation much worse, with people protesting and rioting in demand for equality.

3.2 Systemic Racism

According to Sir William Macpherson, the term systemic racism is:

The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (49)

In today’s society it is much more difficult to notice discrimination because it is less perceptible as opposed to discrimination experienced during slavery and the years of the Civil Rights Movement.

3.2.1 Education

Every public school worldwide requires resources to operate. The way schools receive funding is determined from state to state, but it is usually a combination of corporate, income and sales taxes including fees which all amount to 48% of the budget distributed to elementary and secondary schools, 44% from local districts from local property taxes and the remaining percentage is covered by the federal government's education budget (Park).

From the early 2000s up until today, there have been opposing views on opportunity and education between African Americans and whites. The public policy arena has had numerous attacks and suggestions to take action in higher education and employment section. Americans who think racial discrimination has been eliminated see affirmative action as an unfair advantage over them, while minorities, such as African Americans who experience discrimination on a daily basis see this as a means to protect their opportunity at success (Hammond). The U.S. education system is among the most unequal in the world. Minorities do not have equal access to educational funds, extracurricular activities, modern equipment, and skillful teachers which impacts their learning opportunity. New teachers who do not meet certification standards are assigned to teach students who are at a disadvantage. On the other hand, first-class teachers are assigned to wealthy schools (Hammond). Thus, students receive an education based on their social status which translates into the wage gap mentioned earlier.

3.2.2 The Labor Market

Dina Gerdeman reports on research conducted in 2016 dealing with job applications. The findings were as follows: African Americans and Asians who did not include references to their race and social status were twice as likely to receive a job interview than those who revealed their background. In another study researchers created job applications and sent them to 1,600 entry-level jobs which were posted on job search websites in 16 metropolitan areas of the United States. The study showed that 25% of black candidates were called back for job interviews, whereas only 10% got called when they left their ethnic background in the application. The results proved that discrimination still exists in the area of the labor market. The qualifications between races were almost identical (Gerdeman).

During the coronavirus pandemic in 2019 the unemployment rate increased for all ethnic minorities, especially for African Americans. Over the period of more than 10 years the biggest unemployment rate had been during the years from 2009 until 2011, but the number keeps growing in 2020 which has a big impact on the economy and minorities (see fig. 1) (Gal).

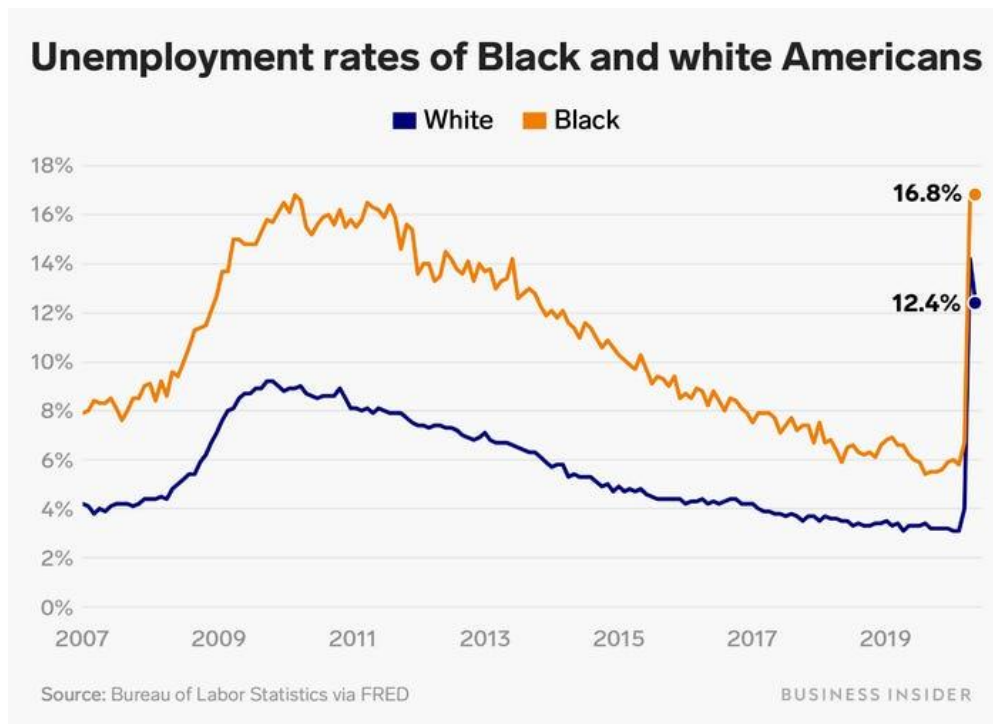


Fig. 1. Unemployment rates of African and white Americans

(Gal, Shayanne. “26 simple charts to show friends and family who aren't convinced racism is still a problem in America.” *Insider Inc.* 8 July 2020, <https://i.insider.com/5edeaba5988ee33ad45c3a65?width=700&format=jpeg&auto=webp>. Accessed 4 September 2020.)

3.2.3 The Incarceration Rate

In the field of criminal justice, studies have found that African Americans tend to be imprisoned more than any other race. Across the United States, the imprisonment of African Americans amounted to 592 per 100,000 of the population, whereas the number of white people that were confined amounted to 187 (Duffin). According to a report by the United States Sentencing Commission, on average, male African American offenders receive 19.1% longer sentences than white male offenders with similar crimes committed (“Demographic Differences in Sentencing”). This study shows that prejudice and stereotypes largely influence decisions in all areas of society.

3.2.4 Representatives in Government

While the 116th Congress which came into session in 2018 is represented as the most diverse than ever, many see this as a step towards social equality with the Congress consisting of people of color, LGBTQ and members of different generations such as: Silent, Baby Boomer,

Gen X and Millennials (Gal et al.). According to Gal et al., “Only 57 of the current 535 voting members are Black.”

3.3 Future Challenges

Ever since the beginning of America there have been certain stereotypes which proved a great obstacle for African Americans to overcome. The most difficult part is that there is no single person to blame. The whole concept of racism is based on history and how African Americans were treated. To overcome those obstacles based on prejudice, the society should unite and take action against the current situation by taking a closer look at one’s own bias, by being aware of one’s own prejudice and to recognize that the consequences of slavery and Jim Crow Laws are still affecting access and opportunity for African Americans. An example would be creating equal opportunities for everyone without considering their ethnic background by changing public school funding so that every school can provide the best education and that everyone receives an equal opportunity at success. Another example is employers not evaluating employees by racial and social background but hiring the most suited person for the job. The most recent recorded violence directed at the African American community members has impacted on the African Americans to unite and take a stand against injustice. Moreover, the footage of the violence has raised the awareness of many white citizens who are examining their “white privilege” and educating themselves to use their voices for the good of those who continue to be wronged. The power of the media is evident as we witness people of all skin colors, genders, religions, sexual orientation and ethnicities coming together to protest against injustice.

Conclusion

African Americans have had to tread a difficult path since the creation of the United States. Despite their significant role in the settling and development of the country African Americans still haven't achieved equal citizen's rights as guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. By contributing to American society in various ways from the beginning struggles of America's battle for independence, the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement and the more recent wars they have earned the right to live the American Dream. However, because of the continuing racial injustice and discrimination, the American Dream, has remained for African Americans one of the most enduring and misleading myths in America. This study highlights how various types of media have impacted the portrayal of African Americans through the decades. While some media depict the past and present difficulties of African Americans other media offer distorted representations that lead to negative consequences. So much can be done to ensure African Americans a better quality of life and equal opportunities. Martin Luther King Jr. believed in the ideals of justice, equality and hope and his peaceful methods were the key to achieve them. African Americans believe in his legacy and have persevered in the hope that in the near future American society will change their perspective and live up to the true meaning of the creed.

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