INTRODUCTION

After the election of President Barack Obama in 2008, the issues of race and racism became more prominent, complex, and sensitive. The fact that the first black president was born of a white mother and a black African father triggered numerous publications and commentaries about his racial identity. Most whites who do not believe in interracial marriage were no doubt very embarrassed. Many liberals declared that we have now entered a post-racial era where the color of a man’s skin does not matter. At the same time many institutional leaders (churches, labor unions, schools, civic, and sports organizations) and even Attorney General Eric Holder have called for dialogues on race. There have been hundreds of scholarly meetings with discussion sessions focused on the problems of race and racism. These events and mountains of new publications on race provide general overall explorations of the topic, including statistics about the gaps in economic, educational, health, and social conditions between whites and minority groups.2

At the same time, experts have lauded the progress that has been made in race relations beyond the election of a black president. There have been individual advances in employment in businesses and government positions, in the educational field, in science, and even the fields of entertainment. That a large minority of white citizens (43%) voted for Obama is remarkable and suggests progress in eliminating racial thinking. But what does the fact that 57% of whites did not vote for Obama mean? There should be little doubt that most white Americans were opposed to electing a black president, regardless of his excellent personal qualities and his political philosophy. Obama’s moderate positions on racial matters, as expressed in his speeches and his writings, do not appear to have moderated the antagonism toward him. Like many well-meaning people on both the left and the right politically, Obama advocates for a “color-blind society” which appears to comfort most people who see this as anti-racist sentiment. But when friends and acquaintances declare, “I don’t notice your color, or your race” what does that mean?

Despite many assertions about the Obama era being “post-racial,” most experts agree that racism is still alive and well and general statistical information certainly seems to confirm this position. Statistics on income, education, employment, housing and health continue to show great disparities between whites and non-whites, especially blacks and Hispanics. What appears to be lacking in so many of these studies is the recognition and acknowledgment of the daily lived experiences of racism and the subtleties of the racial worldview as they impact on individuals. We can speak of race and racism as a “worldview” because the tenets of black inferiority and white superiority are so deeply imprinted in most Americans’ minds that they have become second nature. Racism is indeed a mind-set that is rarely openly articulated but is pervasive throughout our culture.

The beliefs and attitudes that are associated with the ideology of race are manifest in varying degrees and forms of behavior. On the one hand some behaviors are deliberate, harsh, brutal, and cruel; on the other hand are those that are unintended, subtle, mild, and/or derive from subconscious motives. Polls and various surveys of attitudes and beliefs published by researchers in the social sciences indicate that whites have very different perceptions and understandings of the social and economic conditions of minorities. Indeed, most whites know very little about the lives of minorities, especially blacks. This lack of knowledge may be one reason why many whites today deny that racism exists. The result is that not much progress is made in understanding and dealing with the full nature of racism in the United States, especially as it affects the majority of individuals on a daily basis.

Blacks and whites, even when they work together, don’t often get to know one another well. There are still many barriers to interaction among racial and ethnic groups. The most important is the fact of segregation, particularly residential segregation along with the notion that blacks are “different” kinds of people. For over 100 years after the Civil War, laws, customs, and practices throughout most of the country guaranteed that blacks and whites would not live in the same neighborhoods (except for servants), eat in the same restaurants, sleep in the same hotels, go to the same schools, worship in the same churches, or otherwise socialize together. Until the 1960s segregation was legal and characterized virtually all aspects of life. In contemporary times, following the Civil Rights pronouncements, integration in schools and employment has proceeded slowly so that many experts believe that little has changed. Segregation (or separation) is still a dominant element of our society and continues to reflect the preferences of racial thinking, despite some small changes. Segregation has resulted in the exaggeration of differences and the preservation of racial stereotypes in the popular mind. The consequence is that blacks and whites do not get to know one another well (although it can be argued that blacks know much more about the intimate lives of whites than vice versa).

3 See Richard Morin, “A Distorted Image of Minorities,” The Washington Post, Oct. 8, 1995. Also http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6WJB-4XMD5589-2k_user-10k_coverDate=03%2F23%2F2010&zhh=16h98%315%383k_edoc-3k_klm-high&_org-search&org-origin-searchb_zone=edl_list_item&cdi-6874&sort-refst-18k&docanchor=view-c&ct-852k_act-C0000%20218k_version-1k_urlVersion-10k_userid-16kmen5-ea16d818fd8171cf01b7%4d8e8%4c&searchtyp e-a

The racial worldview is a mindset that is deeply entrenched in American culture and reaches out tenaciously to grasp new immigrants. It is learned by everyone who grows up in American society but does not have to be directly taught. It is absorbed simply through the course of daily interactions and experiences from the media, journals, TV, movies, advertisements, and religious and educational institutions. It conveys the image that whites are dominant and superior; they have the power, they have the knowledge and they are in control. It is critical to the widespread myths of our American culture, especially our fabricated histories, and augments the sense of racial essentialism with which we view others.

Historical Background

The racial worldview is an ideology about human differences that emerged during the era of slavery and continued to grow and strengthen during the 19th and 20th centuries. It holds that all human beings belong to distinct “races”; that different races are (or should be) biogenetically exclusive and socially separated; that races have different lifestyles and cultures; and that races are unequal physically, morally, and intellectually. Consequently, different races have unequal social statuses, power, and resources. The lowest status races, such as blacks (and to an increasing degree today some Hispanics), are considered unimportant and deserve no consideration or attention from high status whites. Such attitudes were solidified and legitimated in law and in court decisions such as the Dred Scott case (1857) in which Chief Justice Roger B. Taney opined that blacks “were beings of an inferior order” and “unfit to associate with the white race.” He added that ("the negro") “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (in Bell 1980, 6). The white public took this to heart. A widespread pattern of behavior appeared that encouraged treating blacks with hatred, contempt, and/or indifference, and such treatment became, and continues to be, powerful manifestations of the racial stratification system.

Perhaps the most tragic aspect of America’s history, aside from slavery, has been the pervasive, powerful, and appalling effort to thwart the intellectual development of black Americans. It was not just poor schools and barely-educated teachers, frayed second-hand books, or no books at all, along with few other amenities. As Eugene Robinson noted in his recent book, Disintegration, the “official policy in the South was to keep blacks uneducated and dependent on white landowners for employment or subsistence” (2010, 89). Black and white historians have examined this policy and revealed in great detail the tactics used by white society to prevent, and/or avoid, educating its black citizens.5

As a consequence, when blacks began migrating north in search of jobs and opportunities between the two world wars, most were hindered by their lack of education, specifically their inability to read and write well. These disadvantages were passed on to their children, many of whom later succumbed to the hedonistic attractions of urban life. The urban culture of

poverty and hopelessness that soon developed in northern cities, compounded by overt and deliberate racism, dampened the ambitions of too many blacks. It was, and still is, an enormous struggle for black families to move out of the ghettos with their poor schools and increasing crime. Whites who move out of poverty know that they have the tremendous advantage of white privilege. Numerous studies have shown that undereducated whites are more likely to be hired by employers than even educated blacks.

The coming of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s threatened the racial status system and the hierarchy. Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson signed executive orders promoting equal opportunities and requiring companies that did business with the government to hire minorities. Congress began to strike down laws that allowed discrimination against individuals on the basis of race. Even President Richard M. Nixon promoted the establishment of goals, time-tables, and quotas for businesses to comply with government directives. Affirmative action policies appeared widespread with the objective of repairing the inequities between blacks and whites.6

During the 1960s and 70s (the Civil Rights and Affirmative Action era), colleges and universities around the country made a great display of trying to hire minority faculty and staff and increase their numbers of minority students. Many thought this was a positive good and eagerly heralded the value of inclusiveness that this portended. By 2007, virtually all such institutions could claim some degree of success.

However, the pressure to include blacks increasingly in the body politic, for blacks to achieve educational goals, to gain access to better jobs, and to run for political offices triggered a massive backlash on the part of those whites who wanted to retain the status quo. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who had been an advisor to President Johnson, was among the first to suggest that the government should take a new approach to the problems of race and racism. This was “benign neglect” under which the government should take a step back away from dealing with the problems of race and let them sort themselves out.

Affirmative Action

The appearance of affirmative action programs, whether privately initiated or established by government, as a legal and policy strategy to bring about changes to benefit minorities, became hotly debated. Legal challenges to the new policies and practices promoted by the U.S. government reflected the increasing strength of this backlash. In the late 1970s, opponents of affirmative action began to argue that these policies reflected “reverse discrimination” and this violated the Fourteenth Amendment rights of whites, as in the case of University of California v. Bakke (1978). The Supreme Court ruled that indeed Bakke had been discriminated against when he was not admitted to the university’s medical school while some minorities with lower entrance exam scores were. This case prompted challenges to other affirmative action programs

6 It was President John F. Kennedy who used the term “affirmative action” when he signed Executive Order 10925 which required private companies who contract to do work for the government to hire minority employees.
many of which failed. But such challenges continued on into the 1980s and 90s, especially under President Ronald Reagan who was adamantly opposed to affirmative action. Later court cases have generally supported some forms of affirmative action, but they have also imposed restrictions on such programs, chipping away at the objectives of affirmative action. White Americans, for the most part, let it be known that they oppose any plans that give preferences to blacks.

In 1996, the people of California voted to ban existing state government affirmative action programs, but this led to new controversies over how the state could meet federal government requirements. Proposition 209 was incorporated into the state constitution with the wording:

The State shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.

Proposition 209 was opposed by those favoring affirmative action programs and policies as it seemed to contradict the objectives of the federal government executive orders. It appears to ban the use of affirmative action practices of promoting preferences, while at the same time the state must meet standards of nondiscrimination set by the federal and state governments. In 2010, the California Supreme Court upheld Proposition 209 and set a requirement that in order to approve affirmative action plans and policies, the state must show that they were established “to address intentional discrimination” in the past and that preferences were necessary to “rectify” the discrimination.

The requirement to “prove discrimination in the past” is a widespread position now employed by many other institutions with the purpose of delaying or avoiding making changes that benefit low status races. As its critics claim, it is virtually impossible to prove relevant instances of past discrimination. As each new case comes to the attention of the courts, it entails expensive litigation, much lost time, and complex negotiations. The debate over affirmative action policies thus waxes and wanes in the public eye, and the controversies go on and on.

Scholars who look at contemporary manifestations of racism have observed that the forms of racism have changed since the 1960s. Before that decade, most instances of racism were overt, direct and unambiguous. The rules for keeping the races separate were well-known; employment was directed at maintaining blacks and other low status races in the lowest paid and dirtiest jobs. There were very few positions in academia occupied by blacks and Hispanics. Virtually everyone subscribed to the ideology of equal rights and equal opportunities during and after the Civil Rights Era. But the policies and practices of discrimination in government, in the private sector, in health care, in schools, in religion, and other sectors of our society continued to provide benefits to, and advantages for, whites (Jones 1997). And these whites seemed unaware of the degree of discrimination that blacks and Hispanics were subjected to.

---

7. See Jones 1997; Sue 2003, 2007

8. While there were very few blacks teaching in white institutions before 1960, there has been a great increase in the number of all minorities in these positions. The Chronicle of Higher Education published a major study in September, 2007, which included a table showing the numbers of minority professors in 1,300 colleges. Virtually all had some minority professors; only a handful had no blacks at all.
**Implicit Racism**

During the latter part of the 20th century, certain trends in scholarship shifted toward more in-depth study of race and racism. In psychology, some scholars turned to the study of implicit or unconscious racism. Dr. Mahzarin Banaji, at Harvard University, Dr. Anthony Greenwald and their colleagues developed tests designed to measure unconscious bias in their subjects even when these subjects claimed not to be biased. The tests, called Implicit Association Tests, can be taken anonymously on Harvard University’s website and several other university websites. So far over 2 million people have taken the tests. Analyses of thousands of the tests show that 88 percent of white people had a pro-white or anti-black implicit bias. More recent tests show that more than two thirds of non-Arab, non-Muslim volunteers exhibited implicit bias against Arab Muslims. Most shocking of all, the tests revealed that nearly half of the tested African Americans exhibited preferences for whites and some degree of anti-black bias. Such tests, modified and adapted for different purposes and circumstances, have transformed the way researchers deal with the phenomenon of prejudice. Scholars who have themselves taken the test have been shocked by the revelations of their own unconscious prejudices.

Although researchers have interpreted the findings of these tests as evidence of deeply held personal values, such tests clearly also reflect the dominance of racial ideology in the wider culture. Regardless of one’s personal feelings in any given circumstance, virtually everyone is aware of the low socioeconomic status of blacks and the stereotypes associated with blackness in our culture. Some of the outcomes of the tests may only be reflections of this uncomfortable reality. Those who interpret or evaluate the results of these tests are thus cautious about the findings. The tests also reveal that positive attitudes are associated with certain famous black individuals, such as Colin Powell and Bill Cosby, even when other items on the test are negative. Still there is no doubt that the implicit bias tests have unearthed troubling realities with regard to attitudes toward blacks and other low-status minorities.

**Microaggressions**

Another group of psychologists have concentrated on the discovery of the impact of microaggressions in the interactions between whites and minorities, particularly blacks who occupy the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Psychologist Derald Wing Sue and his collaborators have defined microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.” Sue and his colleagues note that microaggressions can take a multiplicity of forms, and they are often invisible, or seemingly so. The perpetrators may appear to be unaware of their actions and, when confronted, always deny that they are intentional. Racial microaggressions occur, for instance, when people of color are ignored in...
stores, when whites are given preference over a person of color in many situations, when blacks are followed in stores, when a black woman or man is mistaken for a servant, when a black applicant is assumed to be unintelligent or incompetent, when an Asian person is assumed to be foreign-born, or unable to speak good English.

Racial microaggressions are so numerous in everyday life that psychologists have attempted to establish taxonomies of the different types of microaggressions and to assess their differing impacts (Sue et al 2007). Some forms of microaggressions occur in an impersonal way as when a recent television documentary about the conquest of South and Central American territories totally omits Africans, portraying only the actions of the Spanish and Indians. Spanish and other historians themselves have observed openly and frequently that the conquest of the Americas could not have occurred without Africans. To leave out the African involvement in settling the New World is an egregious form of racism, devaluing the Africans and their roles. And it is a major and unforgivable distortion of history. It tells students and others who have no corrective source for their information that Africans were, and are, unimportant in world affairs.

The functions and purpose of microaggressions are always negative and have deleterious consequences for their victims; they are to put and keep black Americans and other people of color “in their place.” Microaggressions are put-downs, intentional or not. As we shall see in the chapters to follow, they constitute the core of the racial realities in our educational institutions. If we ever have dialogues on racism, these are the kinds of realities that we MUST talk about.

Increasingly, psychologists have also turned to the study of race-related stress. They have begun to examine the clinical significance of racism and its relationship to the psychological well-being of African Americans who experience it as a chronic stressor in their daily lives (Utsey 1998). The research and findings of these psychologists and other scholars have provided us with the tools to identify and deal with racism if we only had the will to do so.

Minorities in the Academy

It is in this context that we have to examine the situation of blacks and other visible minorities in universities, whether as students or as professors or staff. The world of academia has not been exempt from these processes and their consequences. In fact, much of the litigation and controversies over affirmative action have emanated from universities. One would think that highly educated personnel in colleges and universities would reflect enlightened thinking on race. Moreover, conservative pundits and many media spokespeople have promoted the myth that colleges and universities are hotbeds of left-wing thinkers who are the ones most likely to embrace minorities and “diversity.” But minority faculty, who have the most direct and closest interaction with faculty of all social and political philosophies, know better. African Americans, especially
sensitive to the many subtle slights and insults that reflect the racial worldview, can usually recognize bigotry when it appears among their white associates.

Most of the faculty who write about their experiences in this study are or were in anthropology departments or programs. Given the nature of anthropology, a field that has been ostensibly devoted to the understanding of other peoples and cultures, and some of whose forebears held antiracist positions, most people would assume that modern day anthropologists would tend to be political and social liberals. Indeed, there was a time when anthropologists were renowned for their antiracist positions.11 It was believed that they had an understanding and tolerance for human differences that exceeded that of most scholars. They often put up with rough living and uncomfortable circumstances to live with “primitive people” and learn about their cultures. In the Margaret Mead era field researchers were often fascinated with the exotic, the bizarre, and the just plain strange customs of little known peoples. Today, this is no longer the case; many researchers no longer go into non-Western societies, but aim their activities at local venues such as factories and ethnic enclaves in large communities or peasant communities in the throes of developing.

Some recent observers have suggested that white students of anthropology today often come from cultural and family backgrounds that make them more prone to recognizing and relating negatively to human differences, both physical and cultural. They subscribe to the racial worldview unconsciously, as do other white Americans. When (and if) they do field research outside of the Western world, they must deal with problems of overcoming their discomfort with people who differ from themselves and whom our culture has designated inferior. In some cases it is very likely that students who are encouraged to do field work in areas occupied by “racialized” populations, such as in Africa and parts of South America, find that their beliefs about racial differences are exacerbated and even strengthened by interaction with such “primitive” peoples.

Many young people who go into anthropology these days appear to be “status seekers.” Rather than seeking careers, and degrees, in the more traditional fields, medicine, law, biological sciences, business, etc. they have selected a field that appears to be rather nebulous in the public eye and where the competition does not appear to be very great. A white professor of considerable accomplishments once said (referring to some graduate students) “even mediocrity can get you a Ph.D. these days.” This does not automatically render such students prone to racism, but does suggest a reason for their indifference to racism.

This collection of experiences by minority scholars in white universities reveals not only the many acts of racism that they experience, but also how they react to and deal with racial incidents. It allows readers to comprehend some of the wide range of circumstances that blacks and other minority scholars must cope with on a daily basis, but knowledge of which almost never reach their white colleagues. Each of these stories portrays a world of microaggressions little recognized by those who are

11. Under the influence of Franz Boas, a substantial number of anthropologists and other scholars gained fame as liberal advocates of human equality. Ruth Benedict’s book Race, Science and Politics (1940, 1947) was widely read, and an anti-racist pamphlet that she authored with Gene Weltfish was distributed in high schools throughout the country.
not minorities. But these stories need to be told, and the white establishment particularly needs to read and know about them.

We are not the first, nor will we be the last to publish on racism in academia. It will continue to be a topic of often agonizing discussion. This collection starts with a comprehensive exploration of the literature by Faye Harrison who has done so much to bring the topic of racism to anthropology. A brilliant anthropologist, she has received little recognition by her (white) peers. Her introduction to the literature on racism is a must read by anyone who proclaims to have an interest in combating or reducing racism in higher education. This essay is followed by those of individual scholars who recount their personal stories of insult and injury. We note the shameful ways in which they have been treated and often wonder how they survived.

Audrey Smedley and Janis Faye Hutchinson

February 2012
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bell, Derrick A. Jr.

Bush, Melanie E L.

Dovidio, John F. and Samuel L. Gaertner (eds).

Essed, P.

Hale, Grace Elizabeth

Hutchinson, Janice

Allan G. Johnson

Jones, James M.

Kincheloe, Joe L., Shirley R. Steinbert, Nelson Rodriguez, and Ronald E. Chennault, eds.

Kovel, Joel

Lipsitz, George

Eugene Robinson

Roediger, David O.

Sears, David O.

Sue, Derald Wing

Utsey, S. O.