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**What is Colorblindness**

To understand colorblindness, one must examine the struggles and backlashes occurring within the politically and economically oppressive American system. Colorblindness is the mechanisms of "racial codes and innuendos" used to maintain the coercive capitalist system through a scheme of "divide and conquer" (Taylor, 2016, p. 56). Colorblindness is systemic, institutional, and submerged, originating from older racial aversions like the *culture of poverty* in order to engage in open racial policy without directly saying it. From slavery in the 1600’s to colorblindness in the present, the Black liberation movement has resisted and mobilized against racism. Black liberation has directly and incessantly challenged racism, but each freedom struggle has been met with a backlash that works to institutionalize racism and move it further into hiding. Therefore, as each resistance stance is countered, opposition has further moved racism into the shadows. Resistance to and backlashes from racism interact in a cyclical pattern throughout history, where oppression persists, but it adapts and codes itself to be out of sight.

Colorblindness is a narrative used to sustain the economic and political engine that is capitalism. The larger issue goes beyond the issue of racism being bad, but resides in the reality that institutional racism is a crutch for American capitalism. A capitalist society built on the backs of black women and black men knows no other way than to oppress black people, which keeps money pouring into the wealthy people's pockets and provides for an economy that just keeps plugging away. The formation of race is a necessary practice prescribed to lower classes to keep them from banding together and resisting (Olson, 2004). Thus, the Black freedom struggle becomes about more than liberation for the black community. All the freedom struggles around the country, like the LGBT movement and the occupy movement, have sought refuge in the battle against institutional racism. Examining these cyclical applications of force within the larger context of capitalism is imperative to understanding the formation of colorblindness. Then, after examining the creation of colorblindness, we can see the negative impact it has had on the black community as well as society in its entirety. Finally, pin pointing ways to combat the racial codes, hidden racist ideologies, and bringing racism into plain sight is imperative to removing the blinders so Americans can see racism in its true light.

**The Origins**

The history of colorblindness is rooted in the veins that pulsate throughout the pillars of American idealism and what we call or think of as the pillars of Americanism. Colorblindness is a result of initial racial tensions developed to squash coalition building of working classes against wealthy elites. Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 was a time of extreme wealth inequality where all poor people were essentially an entire class of slaves. This event marked one of the first working class resistances against the wealthy. The movement was so overpowering that the elites had to turn to other ways of sustaining their elitist status. As a result, they turned to the enslavement of large swaths of individuals, the non-whites (Olson, 2004). In other words, the wealthy tactic of divide and conquer, which lasts for centuries, began with the suppression of Bacon’s Rebellion. This was the creation of a ‘racial society’, the original wages of whiteness (Olson, 2004). Blacks were thrown into slavery while different minorities such as Italians, Jews, and the Irish were all competing for the ‘white’ label. As this competition continued, Blacks were readily cognizant of the fact that they were considered the lowest on the totem pole until the Reconstruction era between 1865 and 1877. This brief “moment in the sun” as Dubois famously noted, marked a point in time where true, radical democracy took place (Taylor, 2016, p. 51). Following the Civil War, Black slaves took up arms to resist their wealthy white owners and forced the North, specifically president Lincoln, to join Blacks in *their own* emancipation efforts. In the south, Blacks joined society as equals. Blacks were elected into office, which represented the only moment in America’s history where real democracy took place. However, its demise occurred with the creation of the Ku Klux Klan and the use of terrorism to obliterate the racial grounds that were finally achieved. This moment of freedom Blacks experienced before being jolted back into slavery would become one cycle in the many political struggles around race known as the Jim Crow era, Black ghettos, and the carceral state, all of which play a critical role in the creation of colorblindness (Wacquant, 2002; Taylor, 2016; Olson, 2004; Dubois, 1992).

Each of these institutions represent a stage in the transformation of racism. Racism moves from a phenomenon that is at first out in the open and then deliberately hidden in the shadows, all the while continuing its economic exploitation and political disenfranchisement. Most importantly the transformation of racism should not be mistaken as a continual progression of enlightenment over time, but a process of coercive pressures and the exercise of power wielded by the people that force change to occur. For example, slavery helped to politically fortify white elites by stripping Blacks of their rights and containing them to a physical space (Wacquant, 2002). Economically, slavery exploited Blacks through free labor. These systems of political containment and economic exploitation move further into the shadows over time. For example, the ending of slavery ended free labor and allowed Blacks freedom of movement. However, to combat these threats, wealthy elites used broad containment apparatuses such as legislation in the Jim Crow era and neighborhoods in the ghetto until mass incarceration created an even more effective mechanism that reverted to the same containment and exploitation experienced during slavery. Today mass incarceration plagues the United States.  Today we host one quarter of the entire prison population in the world (13th, 2016). Such an astonishing statistic reveals the systemic racism breathing in our society and how submerged racial prejudices persist as a result of the development of the ‘culture of poverty’ and ‘colorblindness’, which was bred in the 20th century racial struggles as racism hid in the shadows of American progress and American exceptionalism.

**Racism Transformed**

As racism infiltrated institutions, as it creeped towards the shadows, conceptualizations around *why* the Black community was bad was also transformed. The biographical racism that existed in slavery, segregation, and the hyper ghettoization of Blacks, moved to a “culture of poverty” in 1959 when Oscar Lewis, a liberal anthropologist, aided the continued racism and incessant marginalization of Blacks (Taylor, 2016). Lewis moved the discussion away from phenotype and turned towards Black’s familial life, their communities, and their behaviors as the root causes for their subhuman lifestyle. Lewis did this by identifying the shared traits of poor people of color all around the world by comparing “Mexican Villages” and “lower class Negroes” as if they were both apples, when it’s really like comparing apples to oranges (p. 36). In other words, instead of discriminating against Blacks because of their skin color, liberals spearheaded the fundamental defamation of Black culture through disparaging their behaviors and their lifestyles (Taylor, 2016). Degrading their culture was the first step in subversive dehumanization efforts that deliberately blamed Blacks for the misfortunes caused by institutional and societal pressures. Liberals in this sense operated underneath a narrative that claimed they weren’t racist while they paved the way for the introduction of colorblindness in the U.S., reinforced structural racism, and created a culture of blaming Blacks.

At this point, colorblindness manifested with the election of Richard Nixon. This was just 10 years after the passing of Civil Right Act, which marked a moment in history that for many signaled the end of racism. To produce this legislation many Black men and women made history by creating a force that could not be stopped through harnessing their collective power in an enormous struggle. However, it only took a short time before Nixon would start his political war on the Black community with the introduction of colorblindness. Nixon, and his administration, would piggyback off the narrative of a culture of poverty to restore order to the U.S. and discipline African Americans for “registering complaints” (Taylor, 2016, p.55). Nixon’s restoration of order through divide and conquer mirrored tactics used by wealthy elite centuries before. Taylor (2016) identifies this multipronged strategy as the expansion of the policing state, an ideological attack on African Americans, and the promotion of freedom and choices. First, Nixon portrayed the U.S. as a dangerous place ridden with crime and unruly riots, quickly allowing him to pass legislation like the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, the Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, and investing in the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). These acts and intelligence centers were used as an organized attack on the left and directly used to police Blacks (Taylor, 2016). Secondly, Nixon turned away from the crises in the cities that was coined as a problem by Lyndon Johnson. Nixon instead transitioned to a narrative that would wage an ideological war on the African American communities living in urban settings. Taylor (p. 70) notes that Nixon was “extracting the federal government from the responsibility of resolving” the issues in urban cities. Nixon would slash social programs while justifying it through a narrative that would qualify Blacks as undeserving of humanitarian aid because they were lazy, violent, inadequate and utterly reprehensible (Taylor, 2016). Third, Nixon exemplified the Republican philosophy of freedom and choices. Nixon identified the unequal distribution of wealth in the U.S. as an individual reflection of effort and choice rather than an institutional problem. This was due to Nixon’s framing the U.S. as a free and open society. One where anyone had the ability to be, do, or make anything of their life. In essence, Nixon and his administration revitalized the myth of the American Dream and fed it to people, telling them to pull themselves up and work hard if they wanted to improve their lives. Overall, Nixon blamed the black community for being criminalized and disenfranchised while he put them in prison, demonized them, and operated under the façade that racism didn’t exist anymore.

**The Effects of Colorblindness**

The origins of colorblindness have already revealed some of the many effects and problems that have been caused. Colorblindness helped divide and conquer the poor, it aided in the continuation of ‘Black faces in high places,’ and perhaps, most prominently, was a catalyst of mass incarceration, or what Michelle Alexander (2010) calls the new Jim Crow. Black oppression has been an incredible story of struggle. A struggle for ideals that reach beyond the social construction of race and target the larger capitalist machine that ravages the poor, brings them to their knees, and keeps them there permanently. Each freedom struggle, from Bacon’s Rebellion to the present day, is met with a backlash that intentionally pits disadvantaged people against each other, dividing and conquering them so that elites maintain the social, racial, and economic hierarchies intrinsic in American capitalism (Olson, 2004). Colorblindness was one of these backlashes. What is more, colorblindness continued the phenomenon of black faces in powerful positions who do little to change the systemic oppression against their own people. An example of this can be seen in the fatal police shootings of black males that occur in communities, both urban and rural, where whites and Blacks govern from powerful positions. This juxtaposition is highlighted in the shooting of Michael Brown, which occurred in the white suburbs of Ferguson, Missouri, and the shootings of Tamir Rice or Freddie Gray, which both occurred in predominantly Black cities largely operated by Black people themselves (Somashekhar et al., 2015). From mayors and police officers to our first Black president of the United States, it becomes abundantly clear that as Blacks are elevated to positions of political power in the U.S., they fall victim to the same narrative that endorsed structural racism for centuries before them (Taylor, 2016).

When Barack Obama took the stage in 2013 at Morehouse University for a commencement speech, it sent a message to young Black faces getting ready to brave the world, that they need not make excuses, that their circumstances were not as bad as other peoples, that even though they had faced the hardships and *some* discrimination, it “pale[ed] in comparison to the hardships previous generations [had] endured” (Taylor, 2016, p. 22). Obama told young Black graduates that nobody cares. The point here is that Blacks took a stand against institutional racism by electing the first Black president in response to the crushing conservative backlash of colorblindness and the dismantling of social welfare programs by the Reagan administration. To then have Obama let a pivotal moment like this slip through his fingers represents a travesty in this Everest of struggles. Sure, Obama did many things to help the Black community in other ways like pioneering healthcare and reducing unemployment, and yes being commander in chief for only eight years with an obstructionist Congress certainly does not help, but the fact of the matter is Obama succumbed to the same colorblind narrative blaming Blacks and telling blacks to overcome discrimination. Finally, a third effect of colorblindness has been mass incarceration. Nixon’s tactics of colorblindness and attempts to return to order only created more violence and unrest, however Clinton upped the ante of colorblind racism by turning to mass incarceration. Clinton expanded the prison system, policing structure, and criminalizing policies, all of which did not just adversely affect the Black community, but were overtly created *for* the Black community. Furthermore, Clinton’s dual process of framing Blacks as violent degenerates from the White House and increasing the policing apparatus on the ground made it clear that 21st century containment and exploitation of Blacks would occur in prisons (13th, 2016). This reflects the colorblind narrative that has plagued American society for decades.

**Conclusion**

In the end, the Black liberation movement has created a history of cyclical struggles for freedom. African Americans have coalesced and challenged the white elites, forcing change through grassroots mobilization efforts numerous times throughout American history. The Black freedom struggle has been a movement spread across generations, and felt by millions. African Americans have broken the shackles of slavery, disintegrated segregationist laws, pulled down the walls of the ghettos, and now they are squirming in the age of mass incarceration. Barely able to breath, Black Lives Matter has forcefully responded to the colorblind narrative and the age of mass incarceration. The movement today is yet another uprising in the cyclical struggle that is Black Liberation. While it is not an easy struggle, it is a necessary one. A country built on slavery and the ravaging of the poor through political containment and economic exploitation will continue to resort to these characteristics if capitalism to survive. Oppressive conservative agendas will continue to move into the shadows, continue to be masked by rosy language until overturned with sustained force. A system built on pillars of violence coded as American exceptionalism and the American Dream must be matched equally by forceful and sustained collectives to see it upended and overturned. This paper attempts to highlight the synonymous nature between race and capitalism, how racism is operationalized and used to maintain a paradigm that entrenches the wealthy at the expense of the working class.

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