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Racial Attitudes in the United States as Perceived From the Outside

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Abstract

America, “the melting pot”, embraces many non-white citizens as well like Blacks, Indians, Asiatic people and Hispanics. The history of the nation includes bitter struggles for equality especially for Blacks, the major racial minority. With time great leaps in abolishment of segregation and later in reduction of discrimination were achieved. Ideally still many problems may wait to be solved. But under realistic circumstances, today’s overall situation represents an admirable understanding of and the establishment of a good social skill in living in harmony and peace all together.

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1. Introduction

— “I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
.....
I, too, am America” —
[Black Poet] *Langston Hughes*

When I was in high school we had an American English-teacher. One day a student said to him: “You do not have big problems to cope with as we have here in Turkey”. Our teacher displayed a knowing smile and replied: “Yes we do; above all we have the black and white problem, among others”.

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Being a very mixed country as far as racial and ethnical differences go, America indeed faces many related problems. While Blacks constitute the most populated racial minority; other non-Whites like Hispanics, Indian natives and Asiatic people also live there.

Consideration of such a problem as an outsider-scholar (who, nevertheless, had attended an American lyceé in Istanbul and later lived almost a year in that country and who has a fair knowledge of American literature) may have some shortcomings but also some extra advantages and insights, which a citizen may lack. It is said that somebody close enough to care about an issue and far enough to have a perspective view, evaluates that issue in an optimal manner.

After all, this is in the nature of sociology: “The sociological perspective provides a view of human behavior that enables us to see situations —and ourselves— in a special light. As a result, the familiar looks new to us, as if we were outsiders. The unequal and unjust treatment of Blacks [in America] was seen in a new light when an outsider (Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal) was assigned to study the situation” (Cosser et al., 1987: 15-16).

2. Some “Handy” Definitions

By formal definition, a race is a number of people sharing genetically inherited characteristics while an ethnic group is a number of people sharing a common origin or a separate subculture. [Despite theories of discarding old tribal allegiances with modernization] ethnic differences persist (abridged from Cosser et al., 1987: 252).

“Racism is the belief that members of an out-group who are distinguished by physical appearance and ancestry are innately inferior” (Bassis et al. 1982: 316). “Western racism developed slowly. The seeds of racism were planted early in the colonial period but did not take root until the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Bassis et al. 1982: 328). “Prejudice is a negative or hostile attitude toward an entire category of people and racism is one form of prejudice” (Bassis et al., 1982: 329).

As St.John and Heald-Moore (1996: 281) report it in their findings “the effect of the race of the strangers encountered is conditioned by racial prejudice” whereby a black stranger evokes more fear in a white with respect to another white stranger as far as victimization anxiety is concerned in public places.

However, if the encountered white is an armed figure of authority, say, a policeman, in that case the black man is afraid at the mere sight of his. Moreover, this fear of the black man is not paranoia; as a black psychiatrist, in a post-modern consideration, tried to explain, in repudiation of the white man’s science (or at least in questioning the science so far established by a white mentality)!

3. Black Americans (Afro-Americans)

“Approximately 26 million Blacks live in America. Currently almost one out of every three Blacks — as opposed to one out of eleven Whites — is poor (1) ” (with reference to 1981-dated figures of the Bureau of the Census, Schaefer &Lamm, 1983: 227).

“As many as 15 to 20 million Blacks may have come to this nation in chains as slaves. Black resistance to slavery included many slave revolts such as the rebellion led by Nat Turner (2) in Virginia ” (Schaefer & Lamm, 1983: 227).

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