

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

York College

2019

The State of White Supremacy in America: It Is Time to Stand Together

Remi Alapo
CUNY York College

David Rockefeller
Institute for Peace and Leadership, Inc.

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/yc_pubs/257

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

The State of White Supremacy in America: It Is Time to Stand Together

Remi Alapo and David Rockefeller

Institute for Peace and Leadership, Inc., New York, USA

The United States has numerous social-cultural issues affecting its population. One of these problems is white supremacy. This concept refers to a racist perception that white persons are naturally superior to individuals of other races and should thus dominate them. While white supremacy in previous centuries galvanized a lot of support among white people, the concept is now regarded vicious by white, African American, Latino as well as other races. The modern American society is structured under cultural sensitiveness, racial equality, and religious tolerance. Unlike the years of slavery or reconstruction, all citizens in the United States are afforded equal rights irrespective of their cultural identities. Nevertheless, white supremacist notions persist in a nation that prides itself for its democratic model, cultural diversity, religious tolerance and socioeconomic transcendence. The state of white supremacy is that America can be manifested by violence, imperialistic tendencies, discrimination in the society, unfair immigration policies, poor political leadership, and the deplorable role of the media. With the growing number of atrocities being committed around the United States by both members of identified and non-identified white supremacist group, it is time to address this issue together. This paper, is a constructive discussion venting the many ills of racial discrimination in every aspect that affects minorities at all spheres of the society and the deplorable state of white supremacy in America.

Keywords: discrimination, hate crime, human rights, immigration, racial disparities, racial justice, racism, reparations, stereotype, superiority complex, US imperialism, white fragility, visible minorities, white supremacy, xenophobia

History of White Supremacy in the U.S.

White supremacy in the world can be traced back to ideological notions of scientific racism in the 1600s (Grosfoguel, 2013). During this time, English settlers were establishing colonial settlements in the Americas. As a result, the earliest instance of white supremacy arose due to the confrontations between European settlers and the Native American population present in the “new world”. In addition, European settlers identified numerous differences with black people who suffered centuries of slavery under white people. Slavery can therefore be regarded as the most significant emblem of white supremacy in the United States. Ironically, notions of white supremacy perpetuated through the American Civil War as well as the subsequent Reconstruction Era. After centuries of enforcing their superiority over black people, flagitious persons could

Remi Alapo (Ph.D.) and David Rockefeller, Institute for Peace and Leadership, Inc., Brooklyn, New York, USA.

We thank J. Acosta, G. Rodriguez and C. Payano, Bronx Community College (CUNY), Bronx, New York, USA who contributed to the content of the discussion paper.

not comprehend sharing equal rights with the African American population. As such, the struggle by white supremacists to maintain their dominance can be emblemized by the violence in the Jim Crow Era, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and minor groups such as American Nazis and other villainous racist groups in later years. For instance, the Jewish annihilation at the hands of fascists was directly resultant from concepts of white supremacy (Pitcavage, 2015, p. 3).

White supremacy is an ideology whose earliest incarnations arose in the early 1800s as a reaction by white Southerners to the emerging abolitionist movement. Over time, it evolved into a number of different forms, including religious ideologies, at times absorbing inspiration from abroad. However, generally speaking, white supremacists of whatever sort adhere to at least one of the following beliefs: 1) whites should be dominant over people of other backgrounds; 2) by themselves in a whites-only society; 3) white people have their own “culture” that is superior to other cultures; and 4) white people are genetically superior to other people. (Pitcavage, 2015. p. 3)

Today, racism is still a tremendous flagellum in our society, in which one of its principal victims are black men. However, the main problem is that this is based on the history of this nation—a nation grounded on structural racism. According to Coates (2015), “Americans believe in the reality of ‘race’ as a defined, indubitable feature of the natural world. Racism—the need to ascribe bone-deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them—inevitably follows from this inalterable condition”. Coates explored the roots of racism in his work, and found the origin of it in context where black bodies were shamed, minimized, and liquidated as inferior. For example, at the time, there was a lot of segregation in the South under Jim Crow. There were laws that did not allow whites and blacks to live or interact together—meaning separate, but not equal. For example, children were separated in schools, people were separated in restaurants, and also had to give up their seats when a white person got on the bus. In addition, if any black person tried to drink water from the same water fountain as a white person, that black person could be lynched. Furthermore, Coates found that racism’s root, specifically, in our society is one in which many white people in the past believed that they were superior and that black people were inferior. That is why Coates says, “...genealogy and physiognomy so much as one of hierarchy”. It means, the pigment of darkness of those who are blacks, they are worthless of those who are whiteness, and those differences determine who has the power in our society instead of people’s intelligence.

The white supremacist movement has a number of different components, including 1) neo-Nazis; 2) racist skinheads; 3) “traditional” white supremacists; 4) Christian Identity adherents; and 5) white supremacist prison gangs. The prison gangs are growing in size, while the other four sub-movements are stagnant or in decline. In addition, there are a growing number of Odinists, or white supremacist Norse pagans. There are also “intellectual” white supremacists who seek to provide an intellectual veneer or justification for white supremacist concepts. (Pitcavage, 2015. p. 1)

In the South, white people lynched black people in different ways, one of them is by hanging in trees. In the song “Strange Fruit” a poem written by Abel Meeropol, and Billy Holiday sings, “About the time of Jim Crow segregation in the South there were Black bodies swingin’ in the southern breeze. Strange fruit hangin’ from the poplar trees.” It is a strange fruit because the scent of magnolias tree is supposed to smell sweet and fresh, in contrary, the black people bodies in the trees made them smell of burned flesh (Sturges, 2017). “After Dred Scott, Plessy is probably the most notorious decision involving race in the history of the United States Supreme Court. It is the case identified with the principle of “separate but equal”—the theory that segregation is not per se discrimination. Plessy is the decision the Supreme Court had to overturn, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, in 1954, to declare that school segregation violated the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment” (Menand, 2019).

The State of White Supremacy in America

The state of white supremacy in America can further be analyzed through an exploration of imperialism, immigration, and discrimination. First, the establishment of empires is almost always based on white supremacy. The United States, unlike European powers such as the United Kingdom and France, was not as vigorous in establishing an empire during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Nonetheless, the U.S. at some point had claim to territories in Hawaii, Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and the Panama Canal Zone (Rao, 2012). The most significant form of American imperialism, however, is the economic, cultural, and military influence that the United States has had particularly after the Second World War. After establishing itself as a superpower, the U.S. strived to extend its influence over less developed nations in different parts of the world. Most of these countries required financial assistance from the U.S. while America imposed its political system, capitalistic ideologies, and American culture. Also noteworthy is the impact that Hollywood has had in helping spread concepts of white supremacy. Most films portray the U.S. as superior to other nations in nearly all ways. This way, the state of white supremacy in America is maintained, mostly through the media. “The most common public perception of white supremacy today is based on Hollywood’s version of the Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s, in which white supremacists fought to maintain white dominance in the South or in America as a whole” (Pitcavage, 2015, p. 3).

America’s immigration policies are also emblematic of the white supremacy in the country. The United States has established different strategies and legislations to control which persons immigrate into the country. For example, the Green Card Lottery was founded to provide 55,000 permanent resident cards to lucky winners of the lottery (Green Card, 2019). The entire lottery is based on the construct that America is the ultimate dream residential place for everybody. In spite of racial diversity in the United States, the country remains predominantly white and a lottery such as this exhibits the ideas of white supremacy underlying the entire project. Alternatively, the current immigration policies under President Trump showcase the state of white supremacy in America. In the past few months, the U.S. government has implemented a Family Detention Policy for immigrants without necessary paperwork for admittance past U.S. borders. Pitcavage posited that Today’s white supremacists, who seemed to have decreased in number, lost the battle long ago and have become increasingly marginalized by society and government alike. In recent months, white supremacists are making a resurgence in support of a racist agenda under the current Trump administration as the president’s ambitious but unpopular proposal to build a wall over the entire Mexican border represents America’s perception of superiority over their relatively weaker neighbors (Chisti & Pierce, 2018).

Why It Is Time to Stand Together

Individuals belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups are often discriminated against in their places of work as well as in their neighborhoods. African American and Hispanic communities, for instance, have perpetually protested their poor representation in employment and in government (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). “Anti-Semitism is also important for the majority of white supremacists, most of whom actually believe that Jews constitute a race of their own—a race with parasitic and evil roots” (Pitcavage, 2015, p. 3). This implies that some employers and powers in the government perceive white employees more capable than African Americans, or other racial and ethnic groups. Also essential is the aspect of stigmatization and stereotyping. It is true that white supremacy ideas are centrally tied to race and skin color. However, there are numerous other

cultural identities that are inseparable from race. Impeccable examples of these identities are religious beliefs. White supremacy therefore involves imposition of dominance over people from religious or ethnic backgrounds by regarding them as inferior. Xenophobia is exemplary of how notions of white supremacy extend beyond race (Wistrich, 2013). In extreme cases, white supremacy may be founded on socioeconomic systems. For instance, some Americans regarded communists inferior due to their dysfunctional economic system. Such people were loathed, discriminated against, and often subjected to violence by vicious white supremacists. The Jewish annihilation at the hands of fascists was directly resultant from concepts of white supremacy (Pitcavage, 2015, p. 3).

This topic should be of interest to all as it can help in explaining different forms of discrimination in the American society, which are too numerous for a country that is a “model of democracy”. Another issue with the state of white supremacy in America is in light of the current immigration policies under the Trump administration. Many immigrants have been told to “go back” to where they came from, while others who may have overstayed their visas are being picked up left to right, sometimes right in front of their children and loved one in the most vicious acts. The deplorable state of white supremacy in America has enlisted neighbors reporting their neighbors to immigrants to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Many Muslims including those from other cultural backgrounds are tormented and bullied on a daily bases. Arrest rates for minor crimes in many communities of color continue to soar regardless of whether or not these crimes are comparable or less in statistics to the types of crimes committed by white Americans.

Among domestic extremist movements active in the United States, white supremacists are by far the most violent, committing about 83% of the extremist-related murders in the United States in the past 10 years and being involved in about 52% of the shootouts between extremists and police. White supremacists also regularly engage in a variety of terrorist plots, acts and conspiracies. However, white supremacists also have a high degree of involvement with traditional forms of criminal activity as well as ideologically based criminal activity. Most of the murders committed by white supremacists are done for non-ideological reasons. However, even if such murders are ignored, white supremacists still commit the most lethal violence of any domestic extremist movement in the United States. (Pitcavage, 2015, p. 1)

The deplorable state of white supremacy in the United States is therefore very frustrating giving the current state of affairs in the country that needs constructive venting and not violence. In spite of social changes pertaining to cultural diversity, religious and ethnic tolerance and inclusiveness, there seems to be a faction of people who seem deeply rooted in their erroneous beliefs that the white race is superior to other races. It is time to stand together in addressing many of these ill atrocities in the name of white supremacy. White supremacy therefore jeopardizes the honor of the nation as well as the future of the U.S. Another reason that this topic is of interest in the light of reparations hearings in Congress is because the existence of white supremacy in America is reflective of the kind of leadership we have, one that is grounded on institutional racism—regardless of the increase in number of minority legislators in recent elections. American Presidents in the past have supported white supremacy as a ploy to gain them support with the dominant white population (Serwer, 2019). This, however, is inexplicable in the current, enlightened population. White supremacy has been proven to increase violence and promote hate crimes. As the United States is a “democracy”, it also is of concern that citizens vote into office those who affiliate with white supremacist groups to lead this nation. The integrity of the entire population is therefore called to question. In addition, white supremacy causes tension with neighbors and the international community therefore imperiling current and future U.S. relations. In spite of America’s immense wealth, communities of color cannot stand alone in denouncing white supremacy. Both minority groups and

whites will need to address the ills of white supremacy and the escalating violence, and hate crimes across the nation together.

Conclusion

This paper has established a constructive discussion about the state of white supremacy in America which is being demonstrated by violence, imperialistic tendencies, discrimination in the society, poor political leadership, and the deplorable role of the media. Since slavery, violence has been a tool that white supremacists use in announcing their superiority, denying racial and ethnic minorities the dignity of Civil Rights. In addition, America continues its efforts to establish an empire despite being plighted by racial discrimination and poor leadership within its borders. In light of the current immigration policies, many immigrants have been told to “go back” to where they came from or neighbors reporting immigrants to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Many Muslims and those from other racial and cultural backgrounds are tormented and bullied on a daily bases. With the increase in burning and shootings in many places of worship, police brutality and arrest rates for minor crimes in many communities of color continue that continue to soar regardless of whether or not these crimes are comparable or less in statistics to the types of crimes committed by white Americans, it is time to stand together in addressing the deplorable state of white supremacy in America. This topic should be of interest to everyone as it can help in explaining different forms of discrimination and how they can be addressed in many parts of the American society. Unless these issues are addressed collectively, the state of white supremacy in America is likely to persist.

References

- Coates, T. N. (2015). *Between the world and me*. Spiegel & Grau.
- Chisti, M., & Pierce, S. (Sept. 2018). Trump administration’s new indefinite family detention policy: Deterrence not guaranteed. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/trump-administration-new-indefinite-family-detention-policy>
- Green Card. (2019). *What is the green card lottery?* Retrieved from <https://www.green-card.com/what-is-the-green-card-lottery/>
- Grosfoguel, R. (2013). The structure of knowledge in westernized universities: Epistemic racism/sexism and the four genocides/epistemicides of the long 16th century. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-knowledge*, 11(1), 8.
- Menand, L. (January 28, 2019). The Supreme Court case that enshrined white supremacy in law. How Plessy v. Ferguson shaped the history of racial discrimination in America. *American Chronicles*, February 4, 2019 Issue.
- Pager, D., & Shepherd, H. (2008). The sociology of discrimination: Racial discrimination in employment, housing, credit. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 181-209.
- Pitcavage, M. (Jul. 2015). With hate in their hearts. The state of white supremacy in the United States. Anti-defamation league (ADL). New York, New York.
- Rao, B. V. (2012). *World history from early times to AD 2000*. Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
- Serwer, A. (2019). The president’s pursuit of white power. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/01/trump-embraces-white-supremacy/579745/>
- Sturges, F. (Nov. 2017). Billy Holiday. Strange Fruits. The First Unmuted Cry against Racism. Financial Times Limited. Retrieved from <https://ig.ft.com/life-of-a-song/strange-fruit.html>
- Wistrich, R. S. (2013). *Demonizing the other: Antisemitism, racism and xenophobia*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.