

Inequality Series 2: Racial Inequality **by Ece Hasgül**

For the second article of our inequality series, we will be covering racial inequality and we will try to handle topics such as its history, how it got legitimized through time, and what it is and what it is not.

First of all, let's try to see what race is: It is a category of people sharing the same biological traits and is an important concept of identity. Even though today we know that "race" as the concept has little to do with the natural or biological qualities, this is how this idea was created and legitimized by the European scholars in the 15th century. J. A. de Gobineau, the man who is known as the father of racism today, in his *Essay On The Inequality Of The Human Races*, introduced a race theory that basically put people in one of the three categories: Caucasian, Negroid, and Mongoloid. Yes, the physical qualities were evident while creating these racial demographics, however, it is not as scientific nor innocent as it may sound. These three demographics each were identified by different features that stereotyped people. Caucasian whites were said to be the most intelligent and the ones with the highest morality, while the other two were seen as stupid, in need of help, barbaric, and not civilized. This theory was accepted gladly by the many people in power at the time, and also focus on the superiority of Aryans was very prominent.

When Europeans sailed to the Americas, they needed immense manpower to handle the treasures there. As Europe's population was not at the numbers that could handle such migration, slaves from Africa were bought and sent to the ships with human smuggling or with the use of violence. These people believed and justified their unacceptable slavery and actions by claiming they brought civilization and humanity to the communities. They saw themselves as superior in intelligence and morality and heroes and the saviors of the people. In the transaction of black slaves to the Americas, many died because of famine in those ships, and this alone is just a tiny bit of how European civilization developed at the expense of other lives.

As can be seen, this ideology and the belief of whites being superior to others were embedded in people's minds and inevitably led to the racial inequalities experienced today. Race, as it first comes to our minds may be implicitly or explicitly, is a social construct that people use to justify inequality and keep the status quo. It is severely tied with the power patterns in society and we learn how to demonstrate it. For example, when the USA declared its independence from Great Britain, none of the Founding Fathers tried to abolish slavery, although the help of the blacks in this fight couldn't be turned a black eye. Only around 100 years later when it was officially abolished by the 13th Amendment, and inequalities and prejudices were persistent to exist. There were still laws restricting the lives of black people. One step was gone

but many others were still prominent reminding who has the power in the society and who is oppressed.

Although the focus until now was on the inequalities experienced by Black people, because of its history, Black people are not the only group that faces racial discrimination. Latinos, Middle Easterns, Southeast Asians, and other minorities live with these inequalities that are deep-seated in state and private institutions and discriminated against systematically. Ethnicity and race are similar in the sense that they categorize people. The difference comes from the fact ethnicity is about the cultural practices and way of living of communities that have a history. Since ethnic groups have distinct lifestyles, this also puts people into categories and leads to prejudices and inequalities among different communities within the society. Ethnicity and race are two different things, but they are used as a tool to keep the social, economic, and power hierarchy in the same way, so the line that sets them apart is not really clear and maybe non-existent as some would say.

Racial inequality refers to how people are treated differently just because of their racial identity. The most known ones today are how few People of Color there are in higher offices, companies, and generally in powerful positions. Even though there are laws that prohibit discrimination among the candidates for the jobs because of their identities, there are candidates who are not hired for the jobs because they have “Black sounding names” or they have an authentic ethnic name that indicates their identity. These groups of minorities have less access to many services, such as health and education, in terms of both quantity and quality. And because of the conditions that they have, how they are discriminated against in the hiring process, and not being able to get the higher positions regardless of their equivalent merits to their white counterparts; minorities are unable to generate generational wealth, which only perpetuates the situation and doesn't allow mobility.

For years, minorities work hard to make their voice heard and to be treated equally while others get their rights without the need to fight. As the source of the problem is the ideology of inequality in general, one being superior to the other, the problem is rooted in everyday life and minds as well as institutions. However, the concept “race” is learned with the demonstrations we see, so, there is hope for progress as the mindset changes. While the severe inequality continues to exist, there is no argument that there were some rights gained from the fights, and even though this is in itself unfortunate and unfair.