

A Black President Doesn't Mean Racism is gone in America

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Racial inequality remains problematic in the US. People of color continue to experience disproportionately high rates of poverty, unemployment, police profiling, repressive incarceration and school segregation.

According to a new Civil Rights report, "Reviving the Goal of an Integrated Society: A 21st Century Challenge," by Gary Orfield, schools in the US are currently 44% non-white, and minorities are rapidly emerging as the majority of public school students. Latinos and Blacks are the two largest minority groups. However, Black and Latino students attend schools more segregated today than during the civil rights era. Over fifty years after the US Supreme Court case: Brown VS Board of Education, schools remain separate and not equal. Orfield's study shows that public schools in the Western states, including California, suffer from the most severe segregation in the US, rather than schools in the southern states as many people believe.

This new form of segregation is primarily based on how urban areas are geographically organized—as Cornel West so passionately describes— into vanilla suburbs and chocolate cities.

Schools remain highly unequal, both in terms of money, and qualified teachers and curriculum. Unequal education leads to diminished access to colleges and future jobs. Non-white schools are segregated by poverty as well as race. These "chocolate" low-income public schools are where most of the nation's drop-outs occur, leading to large numbers of virtually unemployable young people of color struggling to survive in a troubled economy.

Diminished opportunity for students of color invariably creates greater privileges for whites. White privilege is a concept that is challenging for many whites to accept. Whites like to think of themselves as hard working individuals whose achievements are due to deserved personal efforts. In many cases this is partly true; hard work in college often pays off in many ways. Nonetheless many whites find it difficult to accept that geographically and structurally based racism remains a significant barrier for many students of color. Whites often say racism is in the past, and we need not think about it today. Yet, inequality stares at us daily from the barrios, ghettos, and from behind prisons walls. Inequality continues in privileged universities as well.

An example of white privilege is how Sonoma State University (SSU) has recently achieved the status of having the whitest and likely richest student population of any public university in the California. Research shows, that beginning in the early 1990s, the SSU administration

specifically sought to market the campus as a public ivy institution—offering an Ivy-League experience at a state college price. Part of this public ivy packaging was to advertise SSU as being in a destination wine country location with high physical and cultural amenities. These marketing efforts were principally designed to attract upper-income students to a *Falcon Crest*-like campus.

To achieve the desired outcome of becoming a wine-country public ivy, SSU's administration implemented special admissions screening processes that used higher SAT-GPA indexes than the rest of the California State University (CSU) system. According to Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres in *The Miner's Canary*, high SAT scores correlate directly to both race and income with little relationship to actual success in college.

SSU also conducted recruitment at predominately white upper-income public and private high schools throughout the west coast and Hawaii. Consequently, SSU freshmen students with family incomes over \$150,000 have increased by 59 percent since 1994 and freshmen students from families with incomes below \$50,000 declined by 21 percent (2007 dollars). The campus remained over three-quarters white during this fifteen-year period, while the rest of the CSU campuses significantly increased ethnic diversity.

We are at a time in society when a majority of the population has elected a black President of the United States. This presidency is a hugely symbolic achievement for race relations in the US. We must not, however, ignore the continuing disadvantages for people of color and the resulting advantages gained by whites. Institutional policies and *de facto* segregation contribute to continuing inequalities that require ongoing review, discussion and redress. Efforts against racism must continue if we are to truly attain the civil rights goal of equal opportunity for all.

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