

# Continued Racial Inequality

By Natalie Perkins



Photo taken from article "The Tulsa Race Massacre" by I. Marc Carlson

When discussing racism in America, it is incredibly important to begin with discussing the concept of social dominance. According to Dr. Carlton Waterhouse, there are 3 main aspects which encompass the social dominance hierarchy. "An age system, gender system, and an arbitrary-set system" (Waterhouse, 2016, p. 12). Naturally, in the case of the United States, race is a main aspect of the arbitrary-set system. This flawed system began in the era preceding the Civil War. In this time, it was the belief of "African soulless sub-humanity" (Waterhouse, 2016, p. 14) which drove many Americans' justification of racism and slavery. Even if some slaves found their way to freedom, the fear of enslavement remained legitimate and eminent. For many one wrong move would land them in the same position they were in before. Many states which had slavery passed laws restricting free African Americans "from immigrating into their jurisdictions, subjecting violators to a substantial fine and enslavement" (Waterhouse, 2006, p.241). Other laws also had enslavement as a result of breaking it, causing African Americans to fear constantly for what might be to come.

After the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, many retained the belief that African Americans were lesser than white people. Especially during the Reconstruction era, it was incredibly difficult for previous slave owners to grapple with the fact that they were no longer able to abuse people. Tones of this still ring through today with ridiculous justifications of racism. Additionally, Dr. Waterhouse explains how a series of codes known as the Black Codes also affected the daily life of African Americans, and placed restrictions on their lives. Even though these were passed after the Civil War, because of these codes "white police officers had the authority to arrest and fine blacks as vagrants if they were not employed by a white person" (Waterhouse, 2006, p.243). Despite these being mainly employed in the south, these racist policies spread north, perpetuating the many negative assumptions made about African Americans. For example, in the north, African Americans were legally discriminated by "labor unions, employers, and private individuals" as well as in "employment, housing, and access to credit" (Waterhouse, 2006, p. 245).

Following the abolition of slavery, segregation was deemed constitutional under the 14 and 15th Amendments. Many believe that because those who were directly harmed by slavery and Jim Crow laws are dead and therefore everyone is equal. However, Waterhouse explains that it is much closer than we realize, as only one generation removed from those alive today "lived through open racial exclusion, mistreatment and discrimination at all levels of government and much of the private sector" (Waterhouse, 2009, p.167). It is wildly irresponsible to make the argument that no African American is still damaged by these laws, considering many of their grandparents were "denied educational, political, or economic opportunities" (Waterhouse, 2009, p.167). There was even a gap in those who were helped by *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 1965, and 1968. Many people were excluded from the relief offered from these acts due to age, and no alternative benefit was offered (Waterhouse, 2009, p.1967).

Dr. Waterhouse also discusses the unspeakable acts of violence committed during the Tulsa Race Riots in 1921. Nothing was done to repair the damage of property nor aid the families who lost loved ones. In 2004, survivors and family members pleaded for aid, but the court did nothing more than acknowledge that what had happened was unfortunate. (Waterhouse, 2006, p.211). Due to such a discrepancy between the protection of white and black people in America, "basing reparations on such an unstable and undependable legal system will likely produce undesirable and unsatisfactory results" (Waterhouse, 2006, p.212). For years after the 13-15th Amendments were passed, "In the South, all three of these amendments were effectively nullified through racially neutral state laws and private actions held beyond the reach of constitutional protections by the Supreme Court" (Waterhouse 2006, p.247). Dr. Waterhouse's work is about how African Americans continue to be unequal.



Photo taken from article "Celebrating New Orleans' Tricentennial with Ruby Bridges" by Hanna Bond

# References

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