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The Failure of the Colorblind Ideal

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The Failure of the Colorblind Ideal

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Introduction

We often hear people say things like “I don’t see color, I just see people” or sometimes we hear the phrase “We’re all just human”. These phrases are usually what colorblind advocates say. The concept of colorblindness suggests that racial differences should not be acknowledged, rather the individual is important. The concept emerged as a way of combating racial inequality, by suggesting that race should not be used to define a person’s character. Though on the surface this principle seems fine, there are many problems that occur by claiming that race should not matter. In this thesis I will argue that even though colorblindness isn’t a bad ideal considering the negative connotations race has had, it fails to be an adequate ideal for combating racial inequality because it fails to be genuine and it also allows the persistence of racial hierarchies and inequalities.

The first chapter of this thesis will explain why the colorblind principle is desirable because of people’s wish to separate from the negative stigma attached to race, but the chapter will also show how there are times where race must be acknowledged because of inequality of opportunity. To explore this issue further, I will refer to Martin Luther King Jr’s endorsement of colorblindness as well as his argument for the necessity of preferential treatment for blacks. King argued that since blacks were severely disadvantaged because of racial suppression, it is necessary for them to receive special benefits in order to have the same opportunity as whites. Frederick Douglass also suggested that blacks do need special assistance at times because they are disadvantaged. Lastly I will refer to an article by Bill Shaw that examines the necessity of racially conscious programs. Overall, this chapter will demonstrate how the acknowledgment of race is necessary because of the disadvantage blacks have in society.

Furthermore, the next chapter will explore the concept of white supremacy and show how this concept challenges the colorblind principle. White Supremacy has been heavily engrained into the very fabric of our political system and as a result whites innately have an advantage within society. Opponents of colorblindness argue that it fails to remedy this issue and in fact allows it to persist because one group is permitted to fully benefit from society, while other groups are made to normalize this inequality of racial advantages. To begin this chapter, I will refer to Charles Mills', *The Racial Contract*, in order to demonstrate the role race has played and continues to play within our society. Lastly this chapter will refer to a chapter by Zeus Leonardo's entitled "The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the discourse of white privilege" and explain why whites must assume responsibility for the history of white supremacy. Overall this chapter will demonstrate how the conditions of white supremacy make white privilege a reality and thus presents a problem for the concept of colorblindness.

Next, the third chapter will explore how colorblindness is strategically used during social interactions. Often when one is in a social environment, how they discuss the topic of race changes compared to if they were not in that environment. People tend to invoke strategic colorblindness in order to not be perceived as prejudice or offensive. In order to illustrate this point, I will review two articles. The first article is entitled "Seeing Race and Seeming Racist? Evaluating Strategic Colorblindness in Social Interaction" by Evan P. Apfelbaum and Samuel Sommer's. This article will demonstrate how whites' endorsement of colorblindness alters based on their social interactions and the prevalence of race. The next article, "Anything but Race: Avoiding Racial Discourse to Avoid Hurting You or Me", will expand on the notion of strategic colorblindness by

demonstrating how whites employ strategic colorblindness in order to not be offensive. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates how whites will endorse strategic colorblindness, which is the avoidance of racial discussion in social settings, for self-preservation and fear of hurting others. Overall, the purpose of this chapter for the thesis as a whole is to question how genuine the colorblind principle is because of how whites alter their support of it based off their social interactions.

The next chapter of this thesis will focus on how the prominence of race and racial issues challenge the principle of colorblindness. Though colorblindness did originate as an effort to confront racial inequality, opponents suggests that it fails to do so because rather than addressing these racial inequality, colorblindness allows them to persists by ignoring that they are there. In order to discuss this issue, I will first examine Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of*, and demonstrate how colorblindness has made us blind to the realities of race in our society and the emergence of a new caste system .The new caste system Alexander is referring to is the criminal justice system, which is composed primarily of African Americans and has become akin to the Jim Crow Era. I will also refer to Ronald Sundstrom's book, *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice*, and show how colorblindness is used to evade social issues. Overall, this chapter will explain how the colorblind ideal fails to meet its intended goal, because it evades clear discrimination and racial inequality.

Lastly, the final chapter of my thesis will compare multiculturalism to colorblindness. The chapter looks at the pros and the cons of both ideals in order to see if one is better than the other one. In this chapter I will look at Aneeta Rattan and Nalini

Ambady's article "Diversity ideologies and intergroup relations: An examination of colorblindness and multiculturalism", which demonstrates the origins of both racial ideals and questions whether either sufficiently combats the issue of racial inequality. I also refer to Patrick Shin's article "Diversity v. Colorblindness, to further examine which principle is better. The purpose of this chapter is to assess whether there is a better alternative to colorblindness or must a new ideal be created entirely.

Chapter 1

Colorblindness and Racially Conscious Programs

The concept of colorblindness originated in an effort to increase equality. It generally means that race should not be considered significant. Rather, the focus should be on the individual and not what their racial category is. Proponents of this colorblindness ideal normally suggest that in order to treat everyone equally racial distinctions should not be acknowledged. However, opponents of colorblindness generally contend that the concept fails to reach its intended goal of racial equality. Consequently, because of this division regarding the colorblind principle there is a great amount of contention surrounding racially conscious programs such as affirmative action. In this chapter, I will discuss why the colorblind principle is desirable because of people's wish to separate from the negative stigma attached to race, but it is not a reality because there are times where race should be perceived as important because of equality of opportunity.

To begin this chapter, I will discuss the historical context of colorblindness and how it became a legalized concept within the United States. The concept of colorblindness became a legal term through the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme court case (Rosen1). It originated in an effort to decrease racial inequality and oppose racial segregation. During the case, Justice Harlan dissented with the majority decision of Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court Case, which upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation in public facilities and argued that these facilities were separate, but equal (Rosen1). Harlan expressed his disapproval of the ruling and argued that the constitution is "color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens" (Rosen1).

Therefore the concept of colorblindness came about in an effort to combat racial oppression of blacks by suggesting that race should not matter. This notion of colorblindness stemmed from the fact that race was used as a factor to oppress blacks.

While Martin Luther King Jr. also advocated for colorblindness because he perceived the acknowledgment of race as negative because of his experience with racism and discrimination, he also argued that the acknowledgment of racial differences was necessary at times because it would leave blacks at a disadvantage. Mary Frances Berry highlights this point in her article, "Vindicating Martin Luther King Jr: The Road to Color- Blind Society, as she highlights how King's endorsement for colorblindness has often been inappropriately used to challenge racially conscious programs. To begin Berry sheds light on King's public endorsement of colorblindness by discussing his famous "I Have A Dream" speech, where he argues for the colorblind principle as a tool for combating racial inequality (Berry1). In this speech, he states that he would like to live in a world where people would "not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character"(Berry1). King's belief like most black civil rights advocates stems from a time where one's race was used as a tool for systemic suppression and took prevalence over all other factors of that person. As a result, colorblindness for Martin Luther King Jr. was a tool for legal refuge because of the stigma attached to the idea of race for blacks (Berry 2). The significance of this is to demonstrate why the concept of colorblindness is so appealing for blacks because of how race has historically been used. Overall King's endorsement of colorblindness shows that in principle the colorblind ideal has positive qualities especially for those who have been burdened by the historical prevalence of race.

However it is questionable whether the colorblind principle can actually be a reality, considering how much the concept of race has been entrenched within the framework of society. The deep- rooted nature of race is also heavily discussed within Berry's article about Martin Luther King, where she explains how King's support of colorblindness is incorrectly used to support anti- racially conscious programs such as affirmative action (Berry3). While King did endorse colorblindness, he also was aware that because of years of racial suppression the notion of race couldn't be completely disregarded. Specifically King demonstrates this awareness in his book, *Why we Can't Wait*, where he argued that his color-blind pronouncement was only one of his goals. He states,

“ it is impossible to create a formula for the future which does not take into account that our society has been doing something special to the Negro for hundreds of years. How then can he be absorbed into the mainstream of American life if we do not do something special for him now, in order to balance the equation and equip him to compete on an equal basis?”(Berry4).

This quote suggests that in some degree race should be taken into account because of the years of systematic inequality it has infringed upon blacks. King's quote shows how race cannot be simply disregarded; despite how much it has negatively impacted the lives of blacks and how desirable it may appear. This is why Berry argues that King cannot be used to suggest that racially conscious programs are wrong because while on one hand King does endorse colorblindness, he also argues that blacks need preferential treatment because they have been severely disadvantaged (Berry4). The concept of race

must persist in the future because it is unfair to establish a formula of the future that rejects the acknowledgment of race, but does not take the past years of racial oppression into account. Furthermore, Martin Luther King Jr. argued that it is unrealistic to think that certain groups are not entitled to preferential treatment and compensation. Specifically, he discusses black people in his book. He argues that when the issue of compensatory or preferential treatment for blacks is raised people are taken aback by the notion. They assert that blacks should be granted equality but no preferential treatment. King asserts that on the surface this appears to be just, but in reality blacks cannot be granted equality without addressing the years of racial oppression they have endured. He states “For it is obvious that if a man is entered at the starting line in a race three hundred years after another man, the first would have to perform some impossible feat in order to catch up with his fellow runner”(Berry4). Therefore, this suggests that racially conscious programs are necessary because they allow blacks to be on equal standing with whites that have historically had the advantage for centuries. Ultimately, King’s statements suggest that colorblindness is not sufficient enough to combat racial inequality because it doesn’t deal with the reality that because of the historical prevalence of race, blacks in particular do not have an equal opportunity as whites. Thus even though King endorses colorblindness, he believes blacks should receive preferential treatment because they do not have the same equality of opportunity.

Likewise, advocates of anti- racially conscious programs refer to Frederick Douglass as well to convey their disapproval towards programs like affirmative action. Though the concept of colorblindness became legalized through Plessy v. Ferguson, Douglass’s advocacy of it decades before demonstrates how the desire to live in a world

where race was viewed as irrelevant to one's character existed well before that time. Because of Douglass's desire he adamantly argued against the idea of preferential treatment for blacks. He conveyed his disapproval of preferential treatment in his speech "What the Black Man Wants", (Douglass1). In his speech, he states, "What shall we do with the Negro?" I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us!"(Douglass1). Douglas asserts that blacks should not receive any assistance or preferential treatment. Douglass also argues that blacks should be allowed the freedom to fail or not. He asserts, "And if the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone!"(Douglass1). Douglass's adamant refusal of preferential treatment for blacks conveys that he like Martin Luther King is tired of the historically prevalence race has had for the black man. Because of Douglass's experience of growing up in slavery and being perpetually treated as inferior due to his race, he rejects preferential treatment for blacks. He wants to demonstrate that black men can stand on their own feet because historically they have been denied that right. In general, Douglass's disapproval of preferential treatment illuminates the problem many anti- racially conscious advocates have with programs like affirmative action because they suggests that it perpetuates racial division and conveys that blacks need assistance.

However, Ron Sundstrom explains in his book, *The Browning of America and The Evasion of Social Justice*, that opponents of affirmative action don't acknowledge Douglass's full argument. They only acknowledge a part of his assertions about preferential treatment of blacks (Sundstrom12). They fail to understand that Douglass's

opinion of preferential treatment ran deeper than simply this self-made man cliché that people purported. He also recognized that there were times where blacks needed extra assistance in order for them to have an equal standing. This is exemplified during Douglass's defense of the Bureau of Refuges, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, which was commissioned to care for emancipated slaves (Sundstrom17). Sundstrom argues that Douglass knew that the Fourteenth Amendment, and its promise of equal protection, could only be ensured if "special efforts" were used to "guard" and "advance" the interests of African Americans as a class of people (Sundstrom17). Therefore this suggests that Douglass does recognize that there are some cases where blacks do need preferential treatment because they lack equal opportunity. Taking all of Douglass's assertions into account, it appears as if it is idealistic to disregard racial differences because of the negative impact race has had on blacks, however it appears unfair to suggest that racial differences should not be acknowledge at all because blacks have been severely disadvantage by it and lack the same opportunity as whites. Thus, because of this disadvantage preferential treatment may be necessary so that they can have an equal opportunity.

Furthermore, in Bill Shaw's article he illuminates on the problem with opponents of racially conscious programs such as affirmative action. First, he defines affirmative action as "a public or private program designed to equalize hiring and admissions opportunities for historically disadvantaged groups by taking into consideration those very characteristics which have been used to deny them equal treatment"(Shaw763). Consequently, because affirmative action is concerned with race, it is clear it would face scrutiny considering that the colorblind principle argues that race should be irrelevant.

Opponents of affirmative action adhere to this colorblind principle and argue “all governmental distinctions based on race should be presumed illegal unless the distinctions pass the stringent requirements of strict scrutiny” (Shaw763). Thus because opponents of affirmative action feel that racial distinctions should not matter, they believe that giving certain groups like blacks preferential treatment is unfair and creates unnecessary racial tension.

However proponents of affirmative action argue that with the exception of malign racial distinctions, which purport negative stereotypes and perceptions of a person on the basis of race, racial differences should be acknowledged in order to give everyone an equal opportunity. Proponents contend “in order to get beyond racism, we must first take race into account”(Shaw763). This quote suggests proponents feel that racial tensions are there regardless of if the opponents acknowledge it or not. Rather than creating racial tension, proponents feel that by acknowledging these racial differences they are really dealing with the issues head on. Also proponents of affirmative action argue “in order to treat some people equally, we must treat them differently”(Shaw764). This suggests that everyone therefore does not have the same equal opportunity, since the only way for them to be equal is for some groups to be considered different. Thus, proponents of affirmative action suggest that it is an important to acknowledge race in order to really deal with racial tensions and give everyone an equal opportunity.

Moreover, Proponents have given various arguments refuting the claims made by the colorblind advocates. First proponents of affirmative action argue that it is obvious that our culture has never considered race as irrelevant to employment or admission practices. They assert that colorblind advocates neglect to acknowledge this social reality.

Proponents argue “ by stripping the historical context from our employment practices with the demand for race- and gender- blind laws, favor a policy that will tolerate the effects of past discrimination for years to come”(Shaw764). Additionally, proponents of affirmative action also argue that colorblind advocates ignore the present unjust social order and the right for groups to have some remedies. They question “if the social order which subjected groups on the basis of race is unjust, why is it unjust to redefine that social order to fashion group remedies for group injuries?”(Shaw764). They argue that ignoring racial difference is the same as ignoring that there has been a social practice that has allowed for a racial hierarchy and white privilege.

Proponents of affirmative action assert that it is obvious that social practices have worked to benefit white males, who they argue have “attained and maintain an unfair advantage at the expense of blacks”(Shaw765). Because of this unfair advantage that whites have had over blacks and the collective injury they have given them, blacks are entitled to group remedies. To disregard this injury would be morally wrong. They argue that, disregarding this collective injury is “morally speaking... the most hideous aspect of injustices of human history: those carried out systematically and directed toward whole groups of men and women as groups”(Shaw765). Shaw’s piece shows that because blacks have been disadvantaged for years and have received such a collective wound because of race, it is unfair to abruptly say that race doesn’t matter now, when whites have had centuries of advantages because of their race.

To conclude, this chapter examines why colorblindness is desirable because of the negative connotations of race, but it appears as if there are times where it is important to acknowledge racial differences so that blacks aren’t left at a severe disadvantage. One

of the problems with colorblindness is that it fails to fully acknowledge this disadvantage. Consequently because this disadvantage exists, racially conscious programs are necessary in order to give blacks equality of opportunity. In the next chapters, I will discuss the other problems with the colorblind principle.

Chapter 2

How White Supremacy Challenges the Goal of Colorblindness

One of the primary arguments against the colorblind ideology is that we exist in a world of racial hierarchy. Specifically opponents of colorblindness generally assert that we live in a society where white privilege is still a potent issue. They contend that the colorblind ideology fails to remedy this issue and in fact allows it to persist because one group is permitted to fully benefit from society, while other groups are made to normalize this inequality of racial advantages. In this chapter, I will explore how the conditions of white supremacy make white privilege a reality and therefore challenge the legitimacy of colorblindness.

The purpose of Mill's book, *The Racial Contract* is to show how our political system is made on the basis of what he refers to as a racial contract, where a contract exists exclusively amongst whites. The racial contract is essentially a political, moral and epistemological contract between only whites. It restricts the possession of the natural freedom and equality to white men alone (Mills 19). This restriction allows white men to have an advantage over other groups. White supremacy makes up the framework of our political system according to Mills. He states "we live in a world that has been fundamentally shaped for the past five hundred years by the realities of European domination and the gradual consolidation of global white supremacy"(Mills 20). Though white supremacy is heavily engrained within our political system, it is rarely discussed. This discussion rarely occurs according to Mill in order to maintain the racial inequality within our political structure (Mills 21). Overall, the significance of Mill's book is that it highlights how deeply embedded white supremacy is in our society. Because whites have

systematically and historically been allowed to dominate, to suddenly argue that race should not matter is rather implausible. By not acknowledging race and the implications of how race has shaped our political system, colorblindness helps to maintain white supremacy and racial inequality.

Moreover the discussion of the racial contract is elucidated within Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana's collection of essays, entitled "Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance". In their essays they look at how an epistemology of ignorance connects with issues of race. The epistemology of ignorance is an examination of the complex phenomena of ignorance, which has as its aim identifying different forms of ignorance, examining how they are produced and sustained, and what role they play in knowledge practices (Sullivan and Tuana1). For Mills the epistemology of ignorance is purposeful and supports racism because the act of not knowing allows whites to maintain their privilege within society (Sullivan and Tuana2). Because whites do not 'understand' the racist world in which they live in they are able to fully benefit from the racial hierarchy. These observations of the epistemology of ignorance and white supremacy raise questions about whether the colorblind principle actually achieves its goal of combating racial inequality (Sullivan and Tuana2). According to Mills, by not acknowledging white supremacy and the role race plays in our political system whether from ignorance or purposefulness, it allows racial inequality and white privilege to endure into the future (Sullivan and Tuana2).

Similarly Zeus Leonardo's chapter, "The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the discourse of white privilege", examines the notion of white supremacy or white racial domination. To begin with he distinguishes between white privilege and white

supremacy. White privilege is essentially a result of white supremacy and is the notion that white subjects accrue advantages by virtue of being white. Sometimes whites may be unaware of their advantage in society. James Scheurich illustrates this advantage by comparing being white to walking down the street with money being put into your pant pocket without your knowledge (Leonardo 139). This metaphor is symptomatic of the utter sense of oblivion that many whites engender towards their privilege (Leonardo, 139).

However, though whites may be unaware of their racial privilege sometimes it is problematic to downplay their sometimes-conscious understanding of their racial privilege (Leonardo, 139). Sometimes whites are fully aware of their advantage and take resources from people of color all over the world, appropriate their labor and construct policies that deny minorities' full participation in society (Leonardo, 139). Furthermore this notion of innocence of whiteness within the theme of racial privilege often obscures the subject of domination or the agent of actions. It essentially absolves the agent of any responsibility because the situation is described as happening without the knowledge of whites (Leonardo, 2004). The notion of racial privilege "begins to take on an image of domination without agents" (Leonardo, 2004). The study of white privilege conjures up images of domination happening behind the backs of whites, and obfuscates the historical process of domination in exchange for a state of dominance (Leonardo 141).

In addition, Leonardo references Peggy McIntosh who is well known for her work in the whiteness studies and her essay concerning white privilege, in order to expound on the conceptualization of racial privilege. McIntosh argues that she had to come to grips with the privilege she receives in virtue of her race (Leonardo 141). She

expressed to a white audience at the 2001 NAME, National Association of Multicultural Education, workshop that coming to terms with white privilege is ‘not about blame, shame or guilt regarding actions and atrocities committed by other whites (Leonardo142). Rather, it is about understanding that one has gained advantages in virtue of simple being white. It’s also the acknowledgment that whites have benefitted from this racism and white supremacy (Leonardo142). Often whites have difficulty understanding their advantage in society. However whites as a racial group secure supremacy in almost all facets of social life by not acknowledging their racial privilege. In fact this lack of acknowledgment is even encouraged by their educators as they often attempt to advise their white students to avoid feeling guilt because of their racial privilege (Leonardo142). Educators do this in order to diminish this paralyzing sentiment for historical racial injustices such as slavery, discrimination and colonialism. They also do this because they believe that feeling a sense of guilt will not be potentially beneficial to anyone. This sense of guilt arguably blocks critical reflection because whites are concerned with not appearing racist. Leonardo argues “many whites subvert a structural study of racism with personalistic concerns over how they are perceived as individuals” (Leonardo142). This essentially means that by learning about their privilege, many whites become overly concerned with not appearing racist because of their feelings of guilt.

However Leonardo suggests that this is not a useful way of approaching this issue. Whites don’t have to fear appearing racists; just because they accept that they have received advantages in virtue of their race. He argues that “looking racists has very little to do with whites’ unearned advantages and more to do with white treatment of racial minorities” (Leonardo140). Instead of fearing being seen as racist and personalizing

racism whites should try to aim at understanding the structural origins of race in interracial relations. He argues that white people have been able to develop discourses of anti-racism in the face of unearned advantages. Despite whites of today not being participants of the atrocities of slavery, they still have to acknowledge and understand how they have benefitted from these atrocities (Leonardo141). If whites of today do not acknowledge or understand that they have benefitted as a result of the suppression of blacks, they are a part of perpetuating racial inequality. Therefore, Leonardo urges whites to accept their role in the oppression of blacks.

However this acceptance is difficult because whites of today are not taught to view themselves as an oppressor. Specifically, In McIntosh essay she asserts that her educators taught her to ignore her privilege. McIntosh suggests that her school intended for her to remain oblivious about her racial advantages. She contends that “[m]y schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor... I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will” (Leonardo143). Also McIntosh suggests that this teaching also influenced her conception of racism. She argues that she was taught to perceive racism as being something individualistic. She states that she never saw it as being “in invisible system conferring racial dominance on my group from birth” (Leonardo143). In general because whites are sometimes unaware of the advantage they receive just in virtue of their race, they are unable to see role race plays in our political system. The principle of colorblindness will only allow whites to remain in this state of ignorance and perpetuate their racial advantage.

At this point Leonardo becomes slightly critical of McIntosh's essay. He recognizes her attempt at appropriating racial analysis for her own life by openly acknowledging her own privilege, but in some regard he believes that she fails to do so. He argues that her narrative in some sense obscures some of the real processes of racial domination (Leonardo, 143). Leonardo argues in her essay she expresses a passive tone. He argues, "white racist teachings, life lessons, and values are depicted as actions done or passed on to a white subject" (Leonardo, 144). This once again portrays this image of the innocence of whiteness, which Leonardo contends is the problem with some of discourse of white privilege. He also argues that the passage coincides with McIntosh's need to strip whites of any feelings of personal blame for racism (Leonardo, 144).

However, Leonardo essentially wants whites to accept some personal blame. Otherwise he argues that white domination will never be settled. He contends that it instead will be constantly reestablished and reconstructed by whites from all walks of life. He states that the problem of dominion is "the domain of average, tolerant people, of lovers of diversity and of believers in justice"(Leonardo, 144). He argues that if racism was only by people of the past than it wouldn't be such a formidable problem for today. He also argues that if we view racism as simply a problem for bad whites than "bad whites today either outnumber 'good whites' or overpower them. He question who fits into this vague concept of 'bad whites' (Leonardo, 144).

Likewise, Leonardo believes that whites must take some responsibility in the problem of racial domination. He argues that white persons generally declare that racism is about 'other whites' (Leonardo, 144). He argues that this is a general alibi that creates the racist as always being synonymous with the other. Considering this notion than

racism becomes a small issue. In fact it becomes something that is highly undermined because it becomes an issue for the 'other' or 'bad whites'. He argues that we "live in a condition where racism thrives absent of racist (Leonardo144). He urges people to see that racism is not just an aspect that can be placed on others, there has to be some self-reflection of this issue. In general whites must come to understand that they recreate their own racial supremacy despite whatever intentions they may personally have (Leonardo 144).

Furthermore, Leonardo asserts that schools do not properly discuss this notion of white domination. He argues that one of the features that critical educators face is this notion of white investment (Leonardo145). He argues that the forces of racial amnesia threaten both whites and non-white students. Whites do not forge counter-hegemonic racial understandings because they benefit from them. In fact their lives depend on a certain development. Particularly, he asserts that they develop colorblind strategies that maintain their supremacy as a group (Leonardo145). He argues that state sponsored curriculum fails to properly encourage students from all racial backgrounds to critique white domination. Schools teach white students to naturalize their unearned advantages but their willingness to ascend to this rhetoric comes from the understanding that they benefit from it (Leonardo145).

Ultimately, Leonardo's purpose for his chapter is to express the notion that white domination is the responsibility of all white subjects because they are dependent on it to maintain their own sense of humanity (Leonardo145). He believes that white subjects spend a lot of time blaming the 'other', rather than accepting their own role. It is not solely the case that whites are taught to normalize their racial privilege, they are willing

accept it because it is beneficial to them (Leonardo145). They fully endorse this colorblind discourse because it allows them to maintain their dominant positions within society. Whites must assume responsibility for the history of white supremacy.

In conclusion it is important that these notion of white supremacy and white domination be properly understood. The epistemology of ignorance in relation to white supremacy and the lack of understanding that we're in a racist world, allows one group of people to fully benefit from society and normalize their unearned advantages. It is only by fully acknowledging this white domination and one's own role in it, that whites will be able to comprehend the problem with the colorblind principle. Colorblindness is not innately bad and it does have good intentions. However it fails to be fully permissible in a state where white supremacy and domination are defining characteristics of the past and the continuing present. In the next chapter, I will continue to show the problems with colorblindness as a racial ideology by exploring its strategic nature.

Chapter 3

Strategic Nature of Colorblindness

This chapter will explore how people use race and demonstrate how their use of race alters based on their environment. Also this chapter will show how there is a strong tendency for language about race and race relations to change based on anxiety and fear of judgment. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates how whites will often invoke strategic colorblindness, which is the avoidance of racial discussion in social settings, for self-preservation and fear of hurting others.

The strategic nature of colorblindness is demonstrated in Evan P. Apfelbaum and Samuel Sommer's article "Seeing Race and Seeming Racist? Evaluating Strategic Colorblindness in Social Interaction". The article begins by describing the author's uncomfortable experience at an engagement party. While talking with a one of the guests at the party, the author describes the engaged couple as being unique because of their different racial backgrounds. The soon to be bride was from the south and black, while her future groom was a white man from New England (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton918). The guest appeared shocked that the author referred to the couple as being unique because of their racial difference. The guest's reaction to the author's use of race made him question whether or not race was seen as some sort of taboo, in which people shouldn't discuss. Ultimately the engagement party signifies that talking about race or even acknowledging racial differences can lead people to feel uneasy and anxious (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton918). This anecdote illustrates how people struggle to confront the topic of race in social settings.

Individuals struggle with the internal conflict of how best to manage interactions when race is a potentially relevant topic. The authors assert, “efforts to talk about race, like race- relevant interactions more generally, are fraught with the risks of misunderstanding and social sanction” (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton and 918). This suggests that people are cautious about discussing race in social interactions. When one is placed in “the ambiguous and often threatening context of race relevant social interaction, one approach many whites adopt is strategic colorblindness” (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton 918). Strategic colorblindness is an avoidance of talking about race or even acknowledging racial difference in an effort to avoid the appearance of bias (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 918). The observation that people adapt strategic colorblindness as an effort to avoid negative appearances raises questions about how genuine the principle of colorblindness is because if one chooses to avoid discussing race because they’re simply concerned about appearances than they honestly don’t believe race should be seen as unimportant. Rather they only see the acknowledgement of race as a problem because they’re concerned about how others will feel about their use of race in interactions.

Likewise research indicates that in general people do think that race is an important factor, even if they claim they don’t. While research shows that whites in particular do categorize others on the basis of race, they claim an inability to do so during social interactions (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton919). For example when the author’s engaged in a photograph identification task with a Black partner, the white participants were hesitant to mention race out of fear that they would appear prejudice. This incident suggests that there is some evidence that Whites have a tendency to employ

colorblindness because they are concerned with their appearance and other's perception of them.

The authors suggest that these findings raise three important theological questions about the use of colorblindness and its validity (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton918). The first question it raises is what the antecedents of strategic colorblindness are. Another question they raise is the mechanisms by which efforts to be colorblind negatively impact nonverbal behavior. Finally the authors propose that this raises important question about the consequences of whether avoiding race during social interactions or strategic colorblindness is always negative or are there some pros to not acknowledging race during social interactions (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton918).

Moreover the authors explore these questions, by conducting four studies involving a dyadic task focused on the use of colorblindness in social interactions. The first study explores the degree in which the tendency towards colorblindness was susceptible to general social pressure and associated with concerns of self-preservation. In this study, participants were randomly assigned partners to interact with (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton920). Each couple examined an array of photos that vary according to gender, race, marital status, city and background color of the photo. One person was assigned the role of questioner, while the other was assigned the role of answerer (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton920). The questioner's goal was to ask the fewest yes or no questions to their partner in order for them to correctly identify the target photograph.

Although the goal was to ask the fewest questions, the results found that questioners purposely refuse to mention certain things that would allow them to ask

fewer questions. In particular, results showed that although asking about race was an easy way to choose the target photo, many participants were reluctant to even mention race, despite knowing that their performance would suffer because of it (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton 2012). Whites especially were hesitant about using race to identify the photo when their partner was Black. This behavior suggests that whites' acknowledgement of race was highly susceptible to pressures. Also the results showed that this was most evident with individuals, who were most concerned with their own self-preservation and not appearing as if they were prejudiced (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton 2012). This evidence suggests that whites do exact strategic colorblindness when under pressures. The authors suggest that though this avoidance of discussing race may be with good intention, this colorblindness can have various negative social consequences and actually be counterproductive. This is to say that, white participants' avoidance of race was for the most part perceived negatively in social interactions with other races (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton 2012).

Likewise the next study focused on how white's avoidance of race can negatively impact blacks' perception of them. Essentially the same photo identification experiment was used to show these results. However after the photo identification task participants were instructed to do an individual based computer task, where they were alone in a laboratory to complete a brief measure of their anxiety experienced in the interaction (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton 2012). The results of both phases of this study showed that participants asked about race less frequently when interacting with a black partner versus a White partner even though the authors argue that race was relevant to the interaction objective (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton 2012). The results of this study

were consistent with the notion that one reason whites employ colorblindness is that they are concerned with how others will perceive them. This use of colorblindness as a tool to avoid negative perceptions conveys that the colorblind principle isn't genuine because whites endorsement of colorblindness changes based on their social environment.

Additionally, the next two studies examined white and black observer's impressions of the colorblind behavior in the first two studies. In the third study, the authors look at the negative consequences of strategic colorblindness and the difference between black and whites' perception of the appropriateness of acknowledging race in social interactions (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton⁹²⁴). In order to better access these concerns authors ask both the black and white observers to evaluate the colorblind behavior of white actors, where race was clearly a relevant factor. Whites avoidance of race during interracial interactions led to negative interpersonal perceptions from the Black observers (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton⁹²⁴). In fact some of these observers argue that this colorblind behavior was actually indicative of greater racial prejudice. On the other hand, White observers perceived this colorblind behavior to be positive in social interactions and perceived those whites that acknowledge race as being more prejudice than those who refrained from doing so. These results suggests that there is clearly a disconnect between how Whites perceive the acknowledgment of race and how blacks perceive this when race is clearly relevant (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton⁹²⁴).

Lastly the fourth study examines the contextual relevance of race, as it relates to impressions of colorblind behavior (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton⁹²⁴). The authors employed the same methodology that they did in the preceding study, and access the observers' attitudes towards colorblind behavior. However in this particular study, race

was not instructed to the group to be a central feature. The results also showed that when race is not clearly relevant neither Whites nor Blacks viewed colorblind behavior as being negative (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton 2014). It also shows that unlike the first two studies that strategic colorblindness is not inherently a bad thing and may be adaptive in some contexts. The study demonstrates that the relevance of race during interactions influences the perceptions of colorblindness, particularly for Black observers (Apfelbaum, Sommers, and Norton 2014). Ultimately, the various studies identified several factors that impact the practice and perception of a colorblind approach in social interactions.

Similarly in the journal article, “Anything but Race: Avoiding Racial Discourse to Avoid Hurting You or Me”, authors discuss how Whites employ strategic colorblindness in order to not offend blacks in particular. Race is amongst many topics that people choose to avoid, because of the controversy surrounding it (Goff et al., 2014). The discussion of race is especially uncomfortable for whites, who mainly wish to avoid the topic out of fear of being insensitive. However the authors propose that this strategic colorblindness, which they also define as the avoidance of discussion of race, is even more insensitive to blacks. The authors raise the question of why would individuals believe employing colorblindness would protect them from accusations (Goff et al., 2014).

In order to better address this question, the authors propose that we must first understand how whites perceive the effects of colorblindness on non-whites. The authors point out that there are essentially two primary perceptions of colorblindness. The first perception that people tend to assent to is the notion that colorblindness is a procedural ideology, which means that it is designed to enhance hierarchies (Goff et al., 2014). The

second common perception of colorblindness is that it is a distributive ideology, which is essentially an egalitarian principle, such as what was argued by many of the civil rights advocates like Martin Luther King. The authors question whether strategic colorblindness could be a response to this egalitarian principle. Also the authors question whether strategic colorblindness stems from concerns about self or concerns about others (Goff et al., 335).

Furthermore, the authors assert that both the concern with being perceived as prejudice and concerns with how categorization affects non-whites will influence the use of strategic colorblindness (Goff et al., 335). The presence of both of these concerns may be sufficient to cause whites to have spontaneous colorblind utterances or full endorsement of strategic colorblindness, which suggests they will avoid using the topic of race altogether in social interactions. The authors argue that whether whites in particular are motivated by concerns about self or concerns from others, they are still avoiding discussing race out of discomfort and fear (Goff et al., 335).

Moreover the authors focus on present research, which provides greater insight to this notion of strategic colorblindness. The present research augments literature surrounding strategic colorblindness by exploring two important topics. First the research examines how integrating stereotype threat, which is the concern with conforming to or being evaluated in terms of a negative stereotype about one's group, affects the use of strategic colorblindness (Goff et al., 336). Research suggests that whites can and do experience stereotype threat about appearing prejudice. Second the research examines spontaneous strategic colorblindness in naturalistic conversations about race by looking

at actual group conversations about race and examining the prevalence of comments that communicated colorblindness (Goff et al., 336).

The authors examine two studies about strategic colorblindness in order to clarify the motivations for whites to use strategic colorblindness in social interactions. The first study examines real world conversations about race to determine whether or not individuals spontaneously engage in strategic colorblindness when other races are present compare to when they are interacting with members of their same race (Goff et al., 336). The study identifies the language Whites use when discussing race in interracial and same- race groups differs as well, if this language actually suggests strategic colorblindness, which the authors argue is an avoidance of discussion of race out of discomfort and fear. The authors observed group conversations and focused on the number of comments that conveyed something about race (Goff et al., 336).

In the article there are three types of comments discussing how people regard the use of race in social interactions. The first type suggested that recognition of race is negative. For instance during the study, a participant comments suggested that he or she possessed a negative conception of race. He or she said “[r]eally why does it even matter? We shouldn't even care whether someone is Black or White or Pink or Purple or whatever. Paying attention to it makes its even worse” (Goff et al., 336). The commenter suggests that race shouldn't even be regarded as an important aspect of who someone is. The acknowledgment of race according to them is a negative thing because it creates an unnecessary division amongst people.

On the other hand, some other participants expressed discomfort with categorizing people in general. An example of this is when a participant said during

discussion “like which one is it? Black or African American or what? It seems like it’s just easier not to do the label thing at all, right?” (Goff et al., 336). In this case labels are perceived as inconvenient and excessive. Also some participants felt that this categorization was problematic because they felt that it hurts those who are categorized. An example of this perspective on race is that one of the participants said during discussion that “if you care that much about their race, you don't see them as a person” (Goff et al., 336). This perspective suggests that acknowledgement of race is not only excessive, it’s rather insensitive to the person that holds membership to that race. Ultimately, each of these categories of comments about race fit into the broad spectrum of strategic colorblindness (Goff et al., 336).

The results of study one indicate that Whites are particularly cautious about discussing race with people of different races. The study shows that Whites paid more attention to race as being something negative when they interacted with mixed race groups, rather than same- race groups (Goff et al., 336). Whites were also more likely to state that they were uncomfortable labeling others during discussions in mixed- race groups. Lastly, Whites were more likely to make the assertion that these labels and categories are hurtful to the people who are being categorized, while in groups with other races (Goff et al., 336). The authors also point out that these results differed from the black participants who remained pretty consistent in both mixed and same race groups. These results suggest that whites do employ more strategic colorblindness in the presence of other groups (Goff et al., 336). Thus the authors argue that this suggests that both concerns for self and others prompt the use of strategic colorblindness.

Furthermore the second study, examines the reliance on strategic colorblindness when whites are concerned with whether they and concerns with hurting other races are present. Participants measure their anxiety about possibly being perceived as a racist (Goff et al., 336). The authors also developed a strategic colorblindness scale, where they measured participants' beliefs about the value of enacting colorblindness. They measured how strongly whites believed that racial categorization has negative consequences. The responses varied, but for the most part participants were strongly opposed to racial categorization. One participant argues that “[s]eeing people in terms of race is a significant hindrance to racial harmony” (Goff et al., 336). This particular response suggest that this participant believes that categorization of people is negative because they perceive the acknowledgement of race to only be divisive. The authors receive a range of other responses that were either ambivalent towards racial categorization or strongly oppose to it (Goff et al., 337).

Additionally, the second study focused on interracial interactions and how strategic colorblindness is employed. White students converse with Black university students about race and race relations during the study. However before they did this, participants' prior racial attitudes had to be evaluated. Participants were given a scale that measured whether they had prejudice towards Blacks (Goff et al., 337). They were then given false results so that half of the participants were informed that they were highly prejudice, while others were informed that they weren't prejudice. Participants were also given a preliminary packet where one third of the participants were informed that racial categorizations are rare and hurtful to those who are categorized. The second portion of participants was informed that racial categorization was common and had few serious

detrimental effects. The last portion of participants was told that people in certain environments tend to have similar political perspectives (Goff et al., 337).

Consequently these prior instructions influenced how white participants perceived the acknowledgement of racial categories. The results showed that participants, who were informed that there were high costs to racial categorization employed strategic colorblindness to avoid this cost (Goff et al., 337). Also those who were concerned with appearing prejudice also employed strategic colorblindness uniformly, that is to say they employed strategic colorblindness even when they were told it had no cost to non-Whites.

On the other hand, those who were informed that there were minimal costs to racial categorization and were not concerned with appearing prejudice discuss race openly (Goff et al., 337). This avoidance of race, when the participants were informed about the high costs shows that strategic colorblindness also is the worry that acknowledging race may hurt someone.

Ultimately, research shows that Whites' use strategic colorblindness in order to avoid appearing prejudice and because they're concerned with how their use of race will affect others. Those who believe that discussing race is hurtful, inconvenient or unimportant will enact strategic colorblindness because of their perception over the acknowledgment of race. Personally, this use of strategic colorblindness is one of the reasons why colorblindness seems to be a flawed ideology. The strategic nature of colorblindness suggests that it's not a genuine ideology. Rather than it being a theory where race is truly seen as an unimportant factor, it is a theory where people choose not to see race as an important factor out of convenience.

Chapter 4

Colorblindness Allows For the Evasion of Racial Issues

One of the most prominent arguments against colorblindness is that race is still a very prominent and hot topic of today. Opponents argue that there is still clear racial inequality and discrimination present and thus the notion that race should not be perceived as important, arguably maintains this system of inequality. Colorblindness is also a way to evade dealing with the current racial issues of today. In this chapter, the prominence of race and racial issues will be explored. Ultimately, this chapter will examine how colorblindness doesn't sufficiently fulfill its goal of combating racial inequality, rather it allows racial issues and inequality to persist.

In Michelle Alexander's, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, she discusses how the election of President Obama strengthened the assertion that the nation was "beyond race" and that all race issues have been conquered. She begins her book by sharing an anecdote about Jarvis Cotton who like his father and grandfather has been denied the right to participate in our electoral democracy (Alexander1). Cotton's great grandfather was denied the right to vote due to his status as a slave and was even beat to death by the Ku Klux Klan for attempting to vote. His father was also denied the right to vote because of poll taxes and literary exams. Considering the fact that the president of the United States is black, one would only assume that racism is just a thing of the past. It's just a sad and unfortunate time in the nation's history (Alexander1). However Alexander argues that this is an incorrect judgment, because there is still a racial caste system that exists that denies black men the right to

vote. Jarvius Cotton cannot vote because he like many black men in the United States is considered a criminal.

This story illustrates how in many respects, things of the past have not change. Specifically, things have not changed since the collapse of the Jim Crow era, where laws were created to systematically suppress the rights of blacks (Alexander27). She argues that presently we exist in an era of colorblindness, where it is no longer socially permissible to discuss race explicitly as a justification for discrimination, exclusion and social contempt (Alexander27). Alexander asserts that rather than rely on race, we rely on our criminal justice system to label people of color in particular as “criminals” and then engage in all the practices of the Jim Crow Era to keep them in positions of inferiority, where they are confined to the margins of mainstream society and denied access to the mainstream economy (Alexander27).

Similar to how African Americans were discriminated against through Jim Crow laws, these old forms of discrimination are present with the legal discrimination of criminals. Once one is labeled with the title of felon they experience, employment discrimination, housing, denial of educational opportunity, denial of the right to vote, denial of food stamps and many other things are legally denied for those who are criminals (Alexander 27). Alexander compares the denied rights of criminals to the denied rights of black men at the height of the Jim Crow Era. Ultimately, we have not ended the racial caste in America. Rather we have redesigned it through the criminal justice system.

Furthermore, the book discusses how the criminal justice system has essentially become akin to a racial caste system currently existing in the United States. She expressed that if Barack Obama had took office in the past, she would have been overjoyed about the nation's triumph over racial caste (Alexander27). She would have been elated that there was finally racial justice in America, but her elation over Obama's election is tempered by a more sobering notion. On election night, she expressed that she was excited that her sons would know a world in which a black man could be president (Alexander28). However she also was confronted by the mass incarceration of black men in this country.

Likewise, the criminal justice system has a problem of racial bias, much in the same way that all major institutions in our society have. Alexander contends that as a lawyer she is well aware of the ways in which racial stereotyping can permeate subjective decision making processes at all levels of an organization (Alexander28). However the criminal justice system wasn't just like every other institution that held an explicit racial bias, it was a well-disguised system of racialized social control that functions in a manner strikingly similar to Jim Crow (Alexander29).

Moreover, this system is greatly overlooked and discussed in the public. Despite the fact that prisons and jails are filled with primarily African American men, mass incarceration tends to be categorized as a criminal justice issue as opposed to a racial justice issue (Alexander29). The severity of this issue is also greatly undermined. Mass incarceration is the most damaging manifestation of the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement. The popular narrative of today, that emphasizes the death of slavery and Jim Crow and instead celebrates the "triumph over race" in the nation because of the election

of Barack Obama, is dangerously misguided (Alexander28). The colorblind public consensus, which is the belief that the acknowledgment of race should no longer be important, appears to prevail in America today and has blinded us to the realities of race in our society and facilitated the emergence of a new caste system (Alexander29).

Therefore this colorblind consensus is actually perpetuating racial inequality because it is making people blind to the racism and racial oppressions that still exists today. Thus, this suggests that we must acknowledge these racial issues because otherwise they are only allowed to persist in the future.

Additionally the discussion over racial caste system in America is rare because people avoid discussing race and racial issues. This is partially due to the fact that we are ashamed of our racial history. She also contends that what is completely missed in the rare public debates today is the plight of African Americans for social mobility (Alexander46). A large percentage of African Americans are not free to move up at all and lack opportunity to attend schools or are plagued by poverty (Alexander46). Also she argues that the current system of control permanently locks a huge percentage of the African American community out of mainstream society and economy. Alexander argues that this system operates through the criminal justice institution, which she argues to act as more like a caste system than a system of crime control. Ultimately she argues that like Jim Crow, mass incarceration operates as a tightly network system of laws, policies, customs and institutions that collectively ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race (Alexander46).

Likewise, Alexander acknowledges that her assertions may be challenged by those who question how this racial caste system could exist when most Americans

oppose race discrimination and endorse colorblindness. Colorblindness has allowed this new system of Jim Crow to operate properly and be perpetuated in our society because colorblindness allows people to normalize this issue, rather than recognize that it is a racially oppressive entity (Alexander46). Alexander argues that colorblindness is a deeply flawed principle. Our collective blindness causes us to be blind to things that are discriminatory. For instance this discrimination is indicated by the fact that so many black men are rounded up for drug crimes, while white men who commit the same act are largely ignored (Alexander47). She also argues that our blindness also prevents us from seeing the racial and structural divisions that persists in society such as the unequal schools, jobless ghettos, and the segregated public discourse (Alexander47). This commitment to colorblindness extends beyond individuals to institutions and social arrangements. Therefore we have become blind not so much to race, but to the existence of a racial caste system in America. Because we are blind to this racial caste system, we allow it to be perpetuated.

Additionally, Alexander argues that African Americans have become essentially “crucified by conscientious blindness”, because she asserts that there is an indifference to the plight of the Black man. She argues that the indifference to the plight of other races has supported institutions of slavery and Jim Crow (Alexander47). She argues that Martin Luther King Jr. was aware of the consequences of indifference in specific contexts as well. King stated, “One of the great tragedies of man’s long trek along the highway of history has been the limiting of neighborly concern to tribe, race, class or nation”(Alexander47). He argued that the consequence of possessing this attitude of indifference “is that one does not really mind what happens to the people outside his

group” (Alexander47). Thus Alexander argues that racial indifference and blindness are racially hostile and form the study foundation for all racial caste systems.

Likewise the theory of colorblindness suggests that we can never associate race with something good. The colorblindness ideal is premised on the notion that we, as a society, can never be trusted to positively view race (Alexander434). It suggests that we can never be trusted to see race while treating each other fairly or with genuine compassion. A commitment to color consciousness places faith in our capacity as humans to value racial difference (Alexander 434). It doesn't suggest that racial difference is an innately bad thing. Rather it purposes that we show care and concern for others, while being cognizant of race and racial differences.

However Alexander asserts that the uncomfortable truth is that we do view race and racial differences as significant. She argues that even if the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow and mass incarceration were completely overcome, we would remain a nation where there are a multitude of races (Alexander435). It is also a world where there is extraordinary racial and ethnic inequality. The author argues that this fact cannot be ignored. She asserts that people should not be concerned about not reaching a colorblind society. Rather they should be concerned with the possibility that society simply chooses not to care (Alexander435).

Likewise the colorblind society will only lead us to be blind to injustice and the suffering of others. It will lead us to deny our public agencies the resources, data, tools that we need to solve the problem (Alexander435). It will also cause us to refuse to celebrate what is beautiful about our distinct cultures and histories. She says that all of these things are cause for greater concern, than the possibility that we may never reach a

perfect racial equality through colorblindness (Alexander435). Ultimately she argues that seeing race is not the problem, rather refusing to care for the people we see is the problem. She argues that we should not hope for a colorblind society, rather we should desire for a world in which we can see each other fully, learn from each other and do what we can to respond to each other with love.

Similarly in Ronald Sundstrom's book, *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice*, he also argues how colorblindness is used as an evasion of social issues. Specifically, in Sundstrom's book he focuses on how popular conceptions of the browning of America support naive conceptions of color blindness, threaten progressive color-conscious policies, and thus aid in the evasion of righting past racial wrongs (Sundstrom11). He looks at the debate over colorblindness and then points out several aspects he finds problematic with colorblindness. However, he points out that he is not condemning all conceptions of colorblindness. He asserts that there are some positive conceptions of colorblindness that are worth considering (Sundstrom40). He suggest that the notion of colorblindness that is reflected in liberal forms of color consciousness are worth serious reconsideration because they point to reasonable, moral, political and social ideals. Rather, Sundstrom condemns the notion of colorblindness that suggests that we should no longer care about race, yet were still in a racially charged society (Sundstrom40).

Furthermore, Sundstrom argues that there are many objections to the notion of colorblindness that he is referring to. Opponents of colorblindness have focused largely on the proposition that the United States is not yet done with the idea of race. They suggest that this notion of colorblindness proposes a somewhat cruel irony that after

creating, maintaining, and enforcing racial categories for hundreds of years in the service of white power, it declares itself finished with the idea of race (Sundstrom43). This ‘cold turkey’ approach to bring a world where race should be unimportant, offers no “prescriptions about racism, the lingering effects of racial oppression, and the need for distributive justice to rectify past racial harms” (Sundstrom43). This notion of colorblindness leaves communities of color vulnerable to discrimination and leaves injustice unresolved.

Likewise opponents of colorblindness assert that it is an evasion of the reality because they argue that colorblindness is a myth. They have sought to expose this myth of all domains of colorblindness that have been asserted. They have also sought to prove that racial categories and identities are present in the social world and have tremendous effects, and thus cannot simply be argued to lack significance (Sundstrom44). They argue that ignoring the fact that race is a dominant organizing principle of American society and to stop using the word, will not change the fact that our practices and the divisions and disparities occur because of race (Sundstrom44). Thus opponents of colorblindness argue that to account for the role of race in society and to work to rectify past racial harms, individuals and institutions cannot simply stop the use of racial categories in governance, law, public policy, social science, and community organizing for the ends of social justice. They argue that this would ultimately result in disastrous consequences for the United States and would only exacerbate its failure to meet its goal of racial equality.

Additionally, Sundstrom discusses some of the motivation for why people have such a strong attachment to this colorblind ideology. One of the chief motivations for colorblindness is a growing awareness that the idea of race is illegitimate, morally

irrelevant and dangerous category (Sundstrom45). It is generally a belief that is paired with the general idea that racial identity should not function as a qualification in the spheres of the market, employment or political service (Sundstrom45). Also people are strongly attached to this theory because they view the acknowledgement of race to be negative for a variety of reasons. Sundstrom states “Race is deemed an illegitimate human category for a variety of well-known and valid reasons, and it is for those reasons, in part, that the people of the United States continue to return to it as a basic ethical ideal” (Sundstrom45). However, considering how much race has been embedded into our society, it is something that we have to deal with. It is something that is a reality of our society and colorblindness arguably allows issues of race to continue.

Ultimately, both books demonstrate that colorblindness is challenged by the prominence of racial issues today. Rather than combating these issues, colorblindness evades them by treating them as if they aren’t there. Personally, while colorblindness appears to be a nice ideal, it doesn’t seem plausible to suggest that race can abruptly lose its significance. My assertion is that we live in a society that is extremely racially charged and the notion that now race shouldn’t be important appears strange. Thus, my critique of colorblindness is that it fails to meet its intended goal, because it evades clear discrimination and racial inequality.

Chapter 5

Multiculturalism vs. Colorblindness

People often argue that colorblindness is not the best way of combating racial inequality. The colorblind ideology suggests that equality among groups is best gained by, downplaying group distinctions and treating people as unique individuals. This ideology often is confronted by the theory of multiculturalism, which argues that group memberships must not only be acknowledged but also valued in order to attain equality and diversity. In this chapter, I will discuss the pros and cons of these two ideals and explain why both fail to sufficiently combat the issue of racial inequality.

Aneeta Rattan and Nalini Ambady's in their article, "Diversity ideologies and intergroup relations: An examination of colorblindness and multiculturalism", focus on these two diversity ideologies or people's beliefs and practices regarding diversity. They highlight their importance and impact on core issues related to intergroup conflict, such as stereotypes, prejudice, attitudes towards inequality, interracial interactions and disparate outcomes between minority and majority members (Rattan and Ambady12). The article focuses on colorblindness and multiculturalism, two ideologies for incorporating and advocating diversity and those they argue have gained prominence in society. (Rattan and Ambady12).

The article begins by explaining the origins of colorblindness as a diversity ideology. As previously stated colorblindness originated in efforts to increase equality (Rattan and Ambady13). This ideology was strongly endorsed by many African Americans in the civil rights era in particular and the authors argue that it represented at the time the notion of equal treatment across racial groups. It was an organizing principle

that was heavily endorsed in an effort to increase equality between African Americans and Whites in American society (Rattan and Ambady13). People still heavily endorse this notion of colorblindness today. However some people do not assent to this understanding of colorblindness and argue that rather than reducing intergroup inequality, it actually maintains it (Rattan and Ambady13).

Similarly, the aim of multiculturalism is also to address the divisiveness associated with group membership. However it does so by focusing on positive consequences of group memberships for both the individual and society (Rattan and Ambady13). Multiculturalism is a diversity ideology or the belief that group identities should be valued. The notion of multiculturalism arose as a response to the common notion of America as a big melting pot, in which all groups are expected to conform to a unitary cultural ideal (Rattan and Ambady13). Proponents of multiculturalism suggest that ignoring group membership does a disservice to those who actually value their group membership and race. Advocates of multiculturalism find it problematic that colorblindness implies that group membership only has negative consequences (Rattan and Ambady13). Therefore, multiculturalism argues that divisions between individuals must be acknowledged and valued as meaningful sources of identity and culture and attempts to diminish the value of these groups, such as with colorblindness, are problematic because they only maintain the divisiveness between racial groups. The authors question whether either one of these ideologies actually meet their intended goal of combating racial inequality.

Next the article examines who supports colorblindness versus multiculturalism and the rationale for supported either diversity ideology. The authors argue that typically

whites tend to endorse colorblindness more frequently than other races because they believe that it will lead to positive intergroup relations (Rattan and Ambady13). In fact research demonstrates that white children learn quite early to employ colorblind behavior in social interactions. During an experiment, children ranging from eight to eleven were asked to play to guess the appropriate person on the photos. The results indicated that children eight to nine were rarely hesitant to mention race, while the older children avoided mentioning race entirely (Rattan and Ambady13). As shown in chapter three, white adults have the same tendency as the older children, as they employ the same colorblind behavior during race- relevant interactions in order to avoid being perceived as prejudice.

Conversely, minority group members are less likely to endorse colorblindness and instead often follow the principles of multiculturalism because they feel that it is more likely to lead to positive intergroup relations. The authors reference Verkuyten, who explored this issue in the Netherlands, with the Dutch, who are representative of the majority and the Turkish, who are the minority group (Rattan and Ambady13). Although the Turkish minority group endorsed multiculturalism to a greater degree than did the Dutch majority group, the endorsement had positive effects on both groups. For the Turkish group, multiculturalism was associated with higher ethnic identification and more positive evaluations of themselves (Rattan and Ambady14). Also among the Dutch majority, the endorsement of multiculturalism was associated with more positive evaluations of the Turkish people (Rattan and Ambady14). However there was far less ethnic identification. Specifically, among the minority group, multiculturalism was associated with positive feelings about their group membership. Among the Dutch

multiculturalism was associated with feeling positively toward other racial groups. Also Multiculturalism is also associated with positive self-esteem among both majority and minority group members who strongly value their group membership.

Furthermore, the article compares the effectiveness of both of these diversity ideologies and demonstrates how both have flaws. As noted before, both colorblindness and multiculturalism share the same overarching goal of trying to address the divisiveness of group membership (Rattan and Ambady14). Colorblindness addresses this issue by suggesting that the acknowledgment of group membership isn't important and instead the importance should be placed on the individual. However, multiculturalism proposes that group membership should be valued and acknowledged (Rattan and Ambady15). Colorblindness can be effective at reducing intergroup prejudice, but achieving a state of complete colorblindness is unlikely or implausible because race is one of the fastest dimensions on which people categorize others (Rattan and Ambady15). This suggests that colorblindness is impossible, rather they question whether believing colorblindness and acting accordingly is effective in reducing inequality between different groups (Rattan and Ambady15).

Consequently in order to explore this issue better, the article shows a study where white participants' respond to both diversity ideologies. The research primarily discusses people's endorsement of stereotypes and prejudices. The study found that both ideologies were effective at reducing people's prejudice towards other groups. The results from the study showed that participants who ascribed to the multicultural ideal, viewed other racial groups as being more distinct from them (Rattan and Ambady15). However the group participants who exhibited colorblind behavior viewed the other racial groups as being

more similar to them and were less likely to stereotype them. These results suggests that colorblindness may be more effective as an racial ideology at achieving less stereotyping and greater perceptions of similarity between various racial groups than multiculturalism (Rattan and Ambady15). While multiculturalism can lead to both more acknowledgment of difference, such as lower perceived similarities between racial groups and greater use of stereotype, it also achieves its ideal of reducing inequality between different groups. Thus, both diversity ideologies appear to be effective in their own way (Rattan and Ambady15).

However further studies have shown that the effectiveness of both ideologies also depends on whether there is conflict between different racial groups. When intergroup conflict was high, whites that agreed to the colorblind ideology suppressed their prejudice and negative attitudes and experienced these emotions far longer than those who agreed to a multicultural ideology (Rattan and Ambady15). On the other hand, those who followed the multicultural ideology had a tendency when confronted with conflict or threat between other races, to express this prejudice right over the threat induction and shortly resolve this prejudice quickly (Rattan and Ambady15).

Furthermore, the article poses the question of whether people are even aware of their own prejudice or racial bias. In order to explore this question, the authors examine how these diversity ideologies affect children, who the authors argue are still learning about what constitutes bias. In the study, children listened to a story in which the teacher taught a colorblind or multicultural lesson and then showed various vignettes where children enacted inequitable behavior towards another child (Rattan and Ambady15). Children who learned about the colorblindness ideology were less likely to view both

ambiguous and blatantly race biased events as discrimination, as compared to children that received the multicultural lesson. Thus the research suggests that the colorblind ideology can lead children to fail to recognize discrimination when it happens (Rattan and Ambady17). This failure can also be attributed to adults who follow the colorblind ideology as well.

Likewise, the heart of all this research is to understand whether colorblindness and multiculturalism effectively reduce stereotyping and prejudice, which represent negative intergroup relations (Rattan and Ambady17). If we return to the research, it suggests that the colorblind ideology presents several problems. First the research suggests that, the colorblind ideology can lead to more expression of racial bias and prejudice. It also can lead to failure to recognize discriminatory acts (Rattan and Ambady16). However multiculturalism also has its share of problems as well, research suggests that whites that follow the multicultural ideology are more likely to stereotype other groups. The authors point out that this research however, only discusses how whites are affected by these diversity ideologies (Rattan and Ambady16).

Additionally, the exposure to colorblind versus multicultural ideology affects majority group member's interactions with minority group members (Rattan and Ambady16). They argue that a multicultural ideology led to more positive comments being directed at other racial groups than did a colorblind approach. On the other hand, the colorblind ideology led to more negative intergroup interactions (Rattan and Ambady17). Also the authors examine another study that explores the notion of other focus versus self- focus. The study argues that the greater focus on acknowledging the

other was endemic of whites, who exhibited more warmth and were less disturbed by cultural differences.

Additionally the authors argue that another meaningful way of assessing whether these diversity ideologies achieve their goal of benefitting intergroup relations is to explore how they affect minority group members (Rattan and Ambady17). The research has shown that colorblindness reduces anxiety among minorities and makes them believe their group is viewed more positively but this only holds true in theory. The authors argue that in actual interactions between white employees and their minority co-workers, the more colorblind an ideology, the less engaged minority coworkers felt with their white employees at the workplace. However white employees that exhibited multiculturalism, had more engagement from their minority co-workers (Rattan and Ambady17). This particular incident may suggest that a colorblind ideology leads to relatively negative outcomes for minorities in interactions. The authors point out however that this may be depended upon the level of minority representation in the workplace.

Ultimately, the goal of both multiculturalism and colorblindness is to improve intergroup interactions, reduce prejudice and benefit intergroup equality. However, both of these ideologies have potentially negative consequences and may in some context fail to do what their intended goal is. Colorblindness generally leads to less stereotyping but greater prejudice (Rattan and Ambady17). Also in terms of inequality, colorblindness can simultaneously be used to confront racial inequality as well as maintain it. Also when minority group members face interactions involving colorblindness, they perceive more bias and exhibit less workplace engagement (Rattan and Ambady17).

Multiculturalism however, has its own share of problems. Research generally shows that Multiculturalism leads to more stereotyping and less prejudice than colorblindness. In terms of inequality, multiculturalism can serve as a hierarchy-attenuating, but it can threaten whites who feel as if they have somehow become excluded, which may lead them to feel an even greater preference for inequality (Rattan and Ambady18). Thus, the authors suggest that there is not enough research to argue that either of these beliefs will necessarily reduce intergroup inequality. Therefore they urge researchers to continue to explore these ideologies in greater detail (Rattan and Ambady18).

Proponents of colorblindness may question why racial diversity should be valued. In Patrick Shin “Diversity v. Colorblindness”, he evaluates the value of diversity. He begins his law review by questioning why racial diversity has positive value (Shin1175). He poses the question of does racial diversity always have value, or does its value depend on the existence of other conditions? Then he poses the question of whether diversity is intrinsic or extrinsically valuable. The author argues that to say that a thing is intrinsically valuable means that its goodness does not depend on external conditions. Therefore, a thing is intrinsically valuable if it has value in itself.

Furthermore the author suggests that if racial diversity has intrinsic value, we should always have reason to want to know a group of people’s racial background, whatever the circumstances. However, he suggests that it is implausible for us to value racial diversity in every circumstance (Shin1175). He suggest that under some conditions, it would seem at best a matter of indifference about one’s racial diversity. Shin proposes an example where racial diversity isn't valuable. He suggests if a band of

violent criminals walks into a bank and takes everyone inside hostage. Is it necessarily a good thing that the hostage group be racially diverse as opposed to homogeneous? The authors question should we care about what racial background the hostages are (Shin1175).

In this particular example, we have no reason to care about the hostage or criminal group's racial composition. He argues that the only thing we care about is that the hostages are a group of people suffering various wrongs at the hands of their captors (Shin1176). The author uses this example just to point out that there are conditions where one's race is simply not prevalent (Shin1176). Thus, this example suggests that we cannot say that racial differences are valuable, in and of itself, whenever and wherever it appears, nor that we always have reason to promote it or bring it about. Thus the value of racial diversity is therefore extrinsic, in that it depends upon the particular conditions and circumstances in which it is present (Shin1176).

Likewise, critics may suggest that this hostage scenario cannot be supported by any general claims about the nature of the value of diversity, because both the hostages and the criminal are not groups that are worth caring about in the first place (Shin1176). They suggest that one doesn't care about the racial diversity of hostages and criminal enterprises because those groups are themselves devoid of value. The author questions whether racial diversity is only important if it is a group of people that is intrinsically valued (Shin1176). Shin argues that assuming that is the case, the need for the qualification proves that the importance of racial diversity is contingent on the conditions under which it obtains (Shin1177). The author uses this example to question whether

there is any reason to care about a group's racial diversity may depend at least in part on the nature of the group itself.

Additionally, the article shows the ways in which racial diversity does appear to be relevant and of significance. The article argues that diversity should be particularly valued in basic institutional organization of our society such as within employment, education and governance (Shin1178). He asserts that he believes that racial diversity should characterize these institutions rather than racial homogeneity (Shin1178). Shin argues that the presence of racial diversity in the groups that populate these settings is generally a good thing, something to be glad for when it is present and something to be worried about when it is not. Thus, Shin argues that there is some context in which racial diversity is important. He argues that within these contexts we care about racial distinctions when there is a broader social concern (Shin1178).

In conclusion this article suggests that neither of these diversity ideologies fully achieves its goal. Both colorblindness and multiculturalism have good and bad qualities to them. In some aspect, race should not matter, but there are also times were race should be regarded as important. The comparison between these two suggests that in some way there is a need for a new principle that combines both of these principles. Overall this chapter connects to my overall thesis because it points out both the good and bad qualities of colorblindness and leads the reader to further investigate ways in which these ideals can be strengthened.

Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates how colorblindness fails to adequately combat racial inequity because it fails to be genuine and it also allows the persistence of racial hierarchies and inequalities. On the surface colorblindness appears to be a great ideal, but it has a lot of problems with it. Also those who support colorblindness argue that it promotes equality. The general principle here seems to be that if we want people to be equal, we all have to be treated the same. However, sameness is not synonymous with being equal. Alternatively, sometimes “in order to treat some people equally, we must treat them differently” (Shaw764). Therefore after centuries of racial oppression of blacks, it is not realistic to think that by abruptly claiming that race should not matter that blacks have the equal opportunity

To begin with, chapter one discussed why the concept of colorblindness is desirable, but it also showed how there are times where race should be acknowledged because of inequality of opportunity. One of the problems with colorblindness is that it fails to fully acknowledge this disadvantage Blacks have because they have been systematically oppressed for centuries. Martin Luther King illustrates this point well with his analogy of a runner, who has entered a race three hundred years after his competitor (Berry 4.). Consequently because this disadvantage exists, racially conscious programs are necessary to giving blacks an equality of opportunity. The purpose of this chapter was to inform the reader about why colorblindness is such an attractive principle, but it comes in conflict with the notion that there are times where race should be acknowledge because otherwise it isn't fair.

Next, chapter two highlighted the significance of race and white supremacy within the framework of our political structure. In this chapter, I examined how the conditions of white supremacy make white privilege a reality and therefore challenge the legitimacy of colorblindness. The chapter also shows how because we live in a racially charged society, where whites have systematically had the advantage, the colorblind ideology fails to remedy this issue and in fact allows it to persist. The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate how the notion of white supremacy challenges colorblindness because it suggests that it is not realistic to suddenly say that race shouldn't matter "after creating, maintaining, and enforcing racial categories for hundreds of years in the service of white power, it declares itself finished with the idea of race" (Sundstrom43).

The third chapter discussed how colorblindness was strategically used in social interactions. It showed how the discussion of race alters depending on one's social interactions. The research shown in the chapter demonstrated that Whites' use strategic colorblindness in order to avoid appearing prejudiced and because they are concerned with how their use of race will affect others. The aim of this chapter was to show how the endorsement of colorblindness is not always genuine because sometimes people choose not to see race as an important factor out of convenience.

Furthermore, the fourth chapter provided information on how colorblindness allows racial inequality to persist. The chapter demonstrated how colorblindness is also a way to evade dealing with the current racial issues of today such as discrimination and racial inequality. It also shows how the colorblind principle leads us to be blind to injustice and the suffering of others because these things become normalized. The

purpose of this chapter was to show how colorblindness doesn't sufficiently fulfill its goal of combating racial inequality.

Lastly, the final chapter draws a comparison between multiculturalism and colorblindness. Both multiculturalism and colorblindness aim to combat racial inequality. Colorblindness argues that in order to achieve equality, race shouldn't be looked at as important. While multiculturalism argues for the exact opposite, by asserting that racial differences should be embraced. The chapter revealed the pros and cons of these two ideals. Ultimately, neither one of these ideals completely tackle the issue of racial inequality. However if these ideals are somehow combined, then this would be a better way of combating these racial problems. This chapter ultimately served to excess how colorblindness to an alternative ideal. Overall, it suggests that some median should be established between the two ideals.

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