

The Secret Stigma of Segregation

During the 1960s, America was renegotiating its idea of what a “citizen” was. The Armed Forces had started the ball rolling during WWII. Hitler had taken the racial-purity argument of eugenics to the extreme, attempting to create a racially pure state. I discussed eugenics in my “Race and Genetic Diversity” post. To combat Hitler’s ideology, the U.S. army started producing propaganda films to recruit black troops. These films openly mocked Hitler’s racism, claiming that that wasn’t how America did things. The films lauded the accomplishments of black soldiers and explicitly brought them into the project of what an “American” was. And it really changed everything. From that point on, it became the special province of nonwhite Americans to prove their patriotism by joining the armed forces. When these black soldiers returned from the war in the late 1940s, their protests over the continued racism they endured by the late 1950s inspired Southern preachers to stage formal protests, which was the origin of the Civil Rights Movement.

<https://rediscovering-black-history.blogs.archives.gov/2015/10/01/rotw-teamwork-african-american-soldiers-during-world-war-ii/>

Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society was a plan to rectify those wrongs. But the goal was not to look at each case of discrimination individually, but to institute solutions that would give preferences to entire races of people to make up for the systemic racism of the past. This worked and it didn’t work. While many businesses agreed to integrate their work forces, some did it in the shadiest of ways. If the government determined that a business in a 60% black city only had a 20% black work force, they would force that business to increase the black work force. But some businessowners would just hire enough blacks to keep the feds off their backs, and then keep them all in low-level jobs. Or they would say that they were representing the population of the county, not the city, which might drive down the percentage of blacks to 20%. But most of them made the same claim: They personally weren’t racists and actually wanted to integrate, but if they did their customers would stop coming and their employees would quit. So it was a business decision. Martin Luther King soon realized that if everyone in the South was blaming everyone else for being racists, then were there any real racists out there? Yes, he concluded. Yes, there were.

This passing of the buck or, at least, this excusing of the heinousness of your crimes due to the fact that everybody else is doing it, IS IN FACT WHAT RACISM HAS ALWAYS BEEN. It has always been a phenomenon talked about by people in the abstract about other people. The few people who actually consciously adopt racism as a personal credo are often already marginalized socially, economically, emotionally, psychologically, or combinations of all four. Everyone else thinks it’s someone else that is

really “racist” and that that someone is a whole lot worse than they are. That’s what racism is. The Great Unaccountable. That’s what allows it to smolder in the tinders of our society until exigent circumstances allow it to blow up again.

The attempt to equalize society through forced integration has resulted in one of the dirty little secrets of our education system: oppositional personality. When low-income students first started getting bussed into schools with better resources, teachers largely assumed that these students were behind academically. While they might have been so far as the lessons, there were just as many smart poor kids being bussed as there were in the schools they were bussed to. But due to this presumption, many of them were put into remedial classes. Added to this is the phenomenon that these teachers were raised in a society where they were taught to believe (due to eugenics) that certain skin colors equated with inferior mental capacity, so many of them thought they were doing these kids a favor. And then something really insidious started happening. The lack of black and brown faces in these advanced classes eventually became a DISINCENTIVE for black and brown kids to do well. Many knew that if they excelled, they would be put into advanced classes where the kids, who were taught to believe (due to eugenics) that certain skin colors equate with inferior mental capacity, would often be slow to accept them socially. Instead, many decided to underachieve and be in remedial classes with their friends because they were, you know, KIDS. They would act like they didn’t want to be in the advanced classes anyway, and act out against the kids there, opposing them before they themselves could be rejected. This phenomenon is still wildly rampant in all sectors of public education because many nonminority teachers, while liberal, are still deathly afraid of their students. I’ve seen white teachers in black neighborhoods afraid to come out from behind their desks, and their students have told me that they KNEW they were afraid of them. It’s really sad because they're . . . you know . . . kids.