

Helping Our Fellow Man

Foreign nations and ideologies have often been able to use America's history of racial discrimination against it. During the early 20th Century, Communist leaders often recruited African Americans by ridiculing America's hiring practices, promising black people that since the Bolshevik Party didn't recognize race amongst its workers, there was no racism in Communist countries. During WWII, Japan used the argument that since America had been excluding both Japanese and Chinese people from immigrating to the US for years, all Asian nations should stand in solidarity against Western racism.

After the war and into the 1960s, many institutions were erected in order to safeguard the rights of people of color in America. But in order to do this they needed to make sure that everyone always wrote down what race the people they helped were, so they could make sure they were only helping minorities. This reinforced America's relationship with recording race as a category of separation. And all of the policies implemented during LBJ's Great Society rewarded people solely based on their race, in order to make up for the systematic racial oppression of the past. This posed a problem for many civil rights leaders. Most of them believed in the principle of liberalism, which held that no individual's rights should be less important than a group's rights—which means that any law meant to help black people still shouldn't impede individual rights. But that's what the Great Society did. In essence, early policies to correct racial problems used racism to solve them.

That's why affirmative action policies went insolvent in the 1980s and 1990s—the generation brought up after the 1960s had been taught that racism was bad and started protesting the fact that these policies were race-based. This is the crux of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' "equivalence principle," the notion that any piece of legislation designed to help people based on race is just as evil as a piece of legislation designed to hurt people based on race. They're both equally bad. Since then, legislators have been struggling to come up with programs that address past racial discrimination but don't use race as the determining factor. It is sort of impossible, but they're trying.

However, many also argue that the holocaust of slavery and the Native American genocide continue to affect black and American Indian communities in ways out of proportion to America's other two predominant racial minorities—Asians and Latinos. If so, does this mean that programs to help the underrepresented and the poor should specifically target those races? Or, rather, does it mean that race should be completely taken out of the equation when determining government aid, but that it should be a person's present socio-economic circumstances that determine if they receive it? Or should the government categorically stop recognizing disadvantaged people and presume everyone is starting from the same vantage point and access to resources? These are questions to consider as we continue to determine America's relationship with socialist practices.