



Racism in a 'Colourblind' Era

The social and political advances made by the US Civil Rights Movement have been well recorded and analysed over the past 50 years. The triumphs of key figures such as Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King are widely understood to have contributed to the US's current "post-racial" state, which has enabled black advancement in areas such as education, politics, and social justice. Barack Obama's presidential election in 2008, in particular, is often cited as proof that the US is no longer racially discriminatory. However, since the Civil Rights Movement, there have been many instances that have exposed the institutional racism that continues to permeate many segments of the US socio-political system. Because the brutal attack on Rodney King by LAPD officers in 1992 was filmed and circulated (both nationally and internationally) by the media, viewers were confronted with the reality of the persistence of racial prejudice in US law enforcement agencies, on television in their homes. In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, numerous black residents who were unable to leave their homes exposed the unequal distribution of wealth along racial lines in Louisiana (and much of the South) that persists to this day. Predominantly black residential areas such as the lower ninth ward suffered the greatest amount of flood damage, which lead speculators to assume that these neighbourhoods did not receive enough attention from flood prevention agencies specifically because they were overwhelmingly black.

The instigation of the blacklivesmatter movement following the deaths of black civilians, however, marks the most significant stand against racial inequality and police brutality following the Civil Rights Movement. Emerging after the death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012, the blacklivesmatter movement sparked a national and international enquiry into the myth of the US as a "post-racial" (and therefore post-discriminatory) nation. Demonstrations have since taken place across the US following the high-profile deaths of black civilians at the hands of police officers. In the UK, blacklivesmatter demonstrations have also taken place to both convey solidarity with the US movement and to highlight the racial discrimination and inequality that continues to take place in Britain.

Tasks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR5Df0m6R58>

1. When questioned about the similarities between the blacklivesmatter movement and the Civil Rights Movement one protestor argues that the goal of the Civil Rights Movement was black inclusion in public offices, educational institutions etc. and figures like Obama prove that this has been achieved. Yet the blacklivesmatter movement, he argues, specifically deals with the remnants of this achievement by highlighting the persistent social and political inequality that affects ordinary black Americans today. Discuss the differences that you see between the two movements in light of this argument.
2. What affect has the success of public black figures like Barack and Michelle Obama had on combatting prevalent black stereotypes?
3. To what extent is black separatism necessary in order to foster and empower a black identity?