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Section 1: Introduction

The scene before us is all too familiar, black and white footage of young black children guarded closely by officers as crowds of white men, women, and children jeer as they attend their first day at an integrated school. One hesitates to imagine the carnage and violence that would no doubtedly occur should the officers leave or turn a blind eye. Yet, the children press on to a school in which they are not welcome to an environment that would rather close its doors permanently than let them in. For many of us, our education has told, us that this was a bygone era and that segregated schooling was over, a barbaric practice long left behind. Unfortunately, that is far from the truth, segregation in education continues to persist, more overtly than before. The days of blatant racist policy may have passed (not that some lawmakers have not tried to bring it back), but that does it has not meant that racism has been erased from the system. The foundations of our system are racist. For many this is a fact that is hard to fathom, that sentence alone would get many spluttering on about meritocracy and individual responsibility. However, this is just fact, and in order to change that it is time to take responsibility so that we can better understand it. The methods of controlling who could access education and who could not have played a powerful role in shaping who has access to capital and who does not. Due to slavery and the inception of race, race has become a potent factor in who has gained access to education and wealth and who has not. The relationship between race and education has a substantial

impact on socio-economic status, and thus the access to education and the laws around it are significant to understand the United States' capitalistic structure and changing it. The question I seek to answer is: What is the relationship between education/economic status and race? Why has the problem persisted despite the litany of research?

Section 2: Abstract

The problem this paper seeks to address is the relationship between capitalism, race, and education, as it perpetuates the cycle of inequality that affects millions. This paper primarily uses data from secondary sources, looked at through the lens of both content and discourse analysis. The results that I have found is a reassessment of how systems are structured and actively factoring race rather than the use of race-neutral addresses. Through examination of history, psychology, sociology, and statistics and examination of studies to come to its conclusion and to better understand the gravitate of the problem as well as why this problem has not been solved. The paper also seeks to promote an open dialogue about the relationship between race, education, and economic opportunity not from an individualistic lens (which often blames the individual for their circumstances), but rather a systemic one that takes into account the whole history, policy, and weight behind the situation people find themselves in.

Section 3: Lit. Review

There is a vast number of sources and research on my proposed topic. The works that I found all had their own unique angles of how they attacked the issue. From history, economics, psychology, and personal experience the following works all work to answer the two questions. What is the relationship between race, capitalism, and education? As well as why does this problem persist?

American history suggests that education has been used in a means to control, from who gets access to it, as well as what gets taught. This point is reiterate over the whole of Eric Foner's Give Me Liberty. The contribution of Give Me Liberty is an examination of the history of the United States, however its main contribution to the research, I'm participating in is its focus on education throughout U.S. history. He points out that education has been used as a tool, limiting it and expanding it to suit the goals and needs of the U.S. government. He focuses on how education has been used primarily with marginalized communities, for example, education concerning black Americans, natives, Asians, and women. He points out the differential treatment for example how education was intentionally limited to black Americans, whereas it was used as a tool for genocide in regard to natives and their culture. He points out times when education was expanded and limited to women, depending on what the government needed or wanted the social order to be and how white women in particular would leverage their racial status as a way to appeal to white men to get them on the side of feminist all in pursuit of expanding their rights. Educations history in America is sorted and varied, but for the scoop of this I will be focusing on education post Turners rebellion and in regards to the discourse that Foner discusses herein. The is also a variety in how educational prejudice was used geographically, Foner discusses the needs for segregation laws in the South, as due to slavery intertwining the lives of blacks and whites, versus the North which had already been segregated.

Gallagher's piece on colorblindness examines the lack of will for the general white populace to address matters of race. Their general contribution to my research is that they present an insight into why the issues of inequality continue to persist in American society, as they presents the common myth that many have come to believe that America is a meritocracy and rejects anything that threatens these narratives. They present evidence that color blindness is

essential for white people to retain their privilege and feel no guilt. Guilt is a high motivator in avoiding conversations in regard to race. The uses of phrase such as Black Lives Matter or invoking Malcolm X in anyway, creates an unease as it forces them to contend with uncomfortable facts of racial injustice and the fact that systematic injustice persist. The discourse around discussing inequality provides reasoning as to why there is a lack of will in regards to addressing racial inequality.

There is a reluctance to address racial issues in the modern day and emphasis on color-blind narratives. Ijeoma Oluo's book tackles this issue, as well as the complexities of race in this country through a more personal lens. Taken from the author's own experiences interspersed with data and facts its is a compelling personal narrative that contributes to one the economic differences in regards to race, as well as the social and political consequences, it also examines the reasons for inaction in regards to this issue. Her first chapter points to a conversation she had with a white friend of hers who believed the democratic part was catering too much to minorities and that was the reasoning behind their loss in 2016. Despite the fact that she aptly points out how this untrue, but meets him on his own terms and focusing on that statement. Her friend believed the democratic party needed to cater more to poorer whites rather than minorities and by doing that it would improve the situation for all. She then points out, that minorities and whites are not poor for the same reasons and that catering to poor whites would not improve the situation for minorities. This discussion she uses as an introduction to her work, points out the fallacy behind the racial neutral methods of attacking race based issues and demonstrates the reason why it is important to directly address race.

Caste by Isabelle Wilkerson proposes that racial system in American is not a class system, but rather a caste system, which means that no matter ones accomplishments they are

locked into the racial status they are assigned at birth regardless of their accomplishments. She provides historical data as well as comparisons to other caste systems and personal experiences that she has encountered as well as experiences from other prominent figures. This work compelling in how it answers the why it persist, that suggest that if race was caste not a class system, in means upward mobility does not truly exist in such a system.

There is a unique brutality to the American system of capitalism that holds its origins in slavery. *Slavery's Capitalism* proposes that the brutal institution shares responsibility for crafting the unique brutality of American capitalism. The book is a series of essays that seek to examine the peculiar institution to discover the origins of the American capitalistic system, in relation to my research which helps to understand the foundations of the capitalistic system and how it came to be. It also provides insight into how deeply linked financial institutions and capital go hand and hand with the institution and combining it with Foner's analysis and presentation of Reconstruction paints a picture of the evolving need for the foundation of capitalism to replace the formerly enslaved workforce.

The backlash to progress made in efforts for equality could be seen as the white majority seeking to keep their elevated status. *Ranks and Rivals: A Theory of Competition* contributes to this argument by focusing on the position on which competition is inherent to society, people compare their social standing to others. The ultimate goal is to be in an upward position, and people feel threatened by social climbing, this suggests that there is a legitimate psychological fear in regards to upward mobility. "Moreover, individuals also compare themselves with others who are in a worse position if they are threatened by a potential upward comparison (Garcia et al., 2006). Thus, competitiveness is one manifestation of the social comparison process (Garcia et al., 2013)." The resistance to upward mobility and a desire to preserve and advance one's

position is a compelling case as to why the efforts for equality have been unsuccessful. It is against the nature of the societal structure that we've set up and the psychology of the people who wish to maintain and advance their own positions.

In regards to preservation and advancement, *Contested Democracy: Freedom, Race, and Power in American History*, is a series of essays that focuses on America's selective obsession with freedom and how it has been used in regard to political power. Relevant to this essay in particular are the sections about law and order, and how that has been weaponized to stop the fight for equality. These essays focus particularly on history as many of the writers are historians by trade and seek to actively examine if America is truly what it claims to be as the land of the free. The general consensus of the authors is no, that this claim of freedom has been weaponized to keep power structures as they are.

All in all the data I found was varied in its results and the conclusion as well. Which that is understandable as it is an ongoing issue and continues to evolve and change. This has left me with several further questions and theories to explore. Especially in regards to more psychological research.

Section 4: Contribution

My contribution is to explore what to do as it seems though there is a litany of research the problem persists, which means there must be a lack of some sort, whether it be will make change or misunderstanding and that is what my research aims to discover. It also combines the research of a variety of different fields to take into account the main different angles that affect and limit individuals' choices and directives. The purpose of this is all to come to a consensus as to why and how to better attack this societal problem as both an individual and society. Oftentimes, research either is hyper-individualistic or to collective-focused, my hope is to find a

balance between the two, and remind the reader of their personal agency as well as point out the macro-level issues that constrain it.

Section 5: Methodology

I will be using content analysis and a lot of reading and note-taking on the subject matter to hypothesize as well as gain a general understanding of the issue as well as how to address it and answer the question of what is the problem and how to solve it. I will also listen to various podcasts and discussions to see if they provide any additional insight.

Section 6: Results

The results I have found are that the problem is one that is baked into the system and is intentional by design. I also have found that it is cyclical in nature in order to advance one needs a high-quality education and in order to do that one needs wealth and so Black Americans are trapped in a cycle. Though we've known this for years, there is a general lack of will from the public as well as those in power. For the public, it would be uncomfortable to address and will challenge the comfortable notions of American freedom and meritocracy. For those in power, it would be antithetical to their interest as it would push them to relinquish their power and privileged positions.

Section 7: Discussion

Since the year 2000, the number of black Americans to hold a bachelor's degree has doubled from three million to nearly seven million; yet as many more black Americans educate themselves, they still find themselves to be locked out of equity (Tamir). In the land of "equal opportunity", why is it that as many blacks try to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps", the wealth gap has expanded? The average median household savings for black families in the year 2023 is 24,000, and the average for white families is 189,000, this is astonishing (Irving, Rand

Review). This means on average have nearly eight times more wealth than black families. The fact that these numbers continue to climb is proof enough that there is a systematic issue. If it is not a lack of will, there is something deeper.

Let's start with education as a whole: for decades, educators have been tasked with closing the achievement gap between Black/Hispanic students and white students. The blame has often been thrown at individual teachers and school districts, yet evidence to the contrary has been available for decades. Prominent reporters such as Nicole Hannah Jones have remarked on this and Stanford itself released an article to the World Economic Forum demonstrating that it is not the fault of the individuals, but rather one of socio-economic status, while Stanford ignores the blatant lack of funding and quality of schools, it mentions several other systemic issues, such as excessive discipline for children of color, the lack of preschool and extracurricular activities as these cost money, and school segregation and state policies. As of 2020, Stanford notes, that black students are two grades behind white students (World Economic Forum). One might ask why is this relevant, and how does this affect wealth? The answer is, that it is common knowledge that to be successful in this economy, a college degree is required. While more black Americans are achieving such a status they do so at a disadvantage, put into place systematically. In order to receive a good education one needs wealth, yet to gain wealth you need a good education. So when the difference in wealth is so wide, it creates a self-perpetuating cycle in which the gap continues to widen.

So why if we know and understand this does it continue to persist? Just based on the data alone, there is a clear problem and there are a multitude of solutions that have been pushed over the years, yet the gap continues to widen. This is where there is a clear lack of will. Gallagher presents in their work, "Color-Blind Privilege: The Social and Political Functions of Erasing the

Color Line in Post-Race America”, that there is resistance amongst white individuals to acknowledge the issues in the first place. He states:

Starting with the deeply held belief that America is now a meritocracy, whites are able to imagine that the material success they enjoy relative to racial minorities is a function only of individual hard work, determination, thrift and investments in education. The color-blind perspective removes from personal thought and public discussion any taint or suggestion of white supremacy or white guilt while legitimating the existing social, political and economic arrangements which privilege whites(Gallagher,2).

While there is overwhelming data and research, this of course challenges the predominant narrative. It essentially places a focus on systematic issues and brings white supremacy into the discussion, something that the white majority loathed to speak on. It takes away personal achievement, when the systematic structures are pointed out, and creates a sense of discomfort. Colorblindness creates a cushion so that reality and discomfort do not need to be addressed and the issue thus can be researched for decades, and thousands of answers put forth, yet still the gap widens.

Furthermore, there is a racial caste system in the United States. The book, *Caste* by Isabelle Wilkerson, presents the idea that since Englishmen began their conquest of the Americas a racial caste was developed. She states,

With little further use for the original inhabitants, the colonist began to exile them from their ancestral lands and from the emerging caste system. This left Africans firmly at the bottom, and, by the late 1600s Africans were not merely slaves; they were hostages subjected to unspeakable tortures that their captors documented without remorse (Wilkerson, 43).

This is where Wilkerson believes the regulation, of what would become African Americans, to the bottom of the caste system. Finding that natives would succumb to old-world viruses and white workers' ability to flee and retreat into the populace, African slaves could not do the same. Their appearance differentiated them and they had immunity to old-world viruses. So the peculiar system was born and has haunted our nation ever since. She goes further to extend this

to how black lives are devalued, stating, “In describing a train wreck, for instance, newspapers would report, ‘two men and two women were killed and four Negroes’”(Wilkerson, 54). I present all this evidence to state, that in general black people and their lives are systematically devalued, and so when discussing why nothing has happened it is clear that there is a lack of care for the plights of black individuals that is baked into the system.

So why focus on inequality in education? Education has long been used as a tool of control. Historically, the lack of access to education has been a method to control and ensure a docile workforce of blacks, whereas education was used as a tool for genocide in the case of native populations. In the 1830s, it was made illegal to teach slaves to read and write, though some learned in spite of this around ninety percent were illiterate (Foner, 401). Nat Turner’s rebellion was part of the catalyst that resulted in the tightening of the law around slaves. Education was believed to be part of the blame for the rebellion, as Nat Turner, had been highly educated. In fact, following the civil war, the greatest triumph of Reconstruction was the expanded access to education. They started a free public education system, which was immediately attacked once the Redeemers took over. Foner states,

State budgets were slashed, taxes, especially on landed property, reduced, and public facilities like hospitals and asylums closed. Hardest hit were the new public school systems. Louisiana spent so little on education that it became the only state in the Union in which the percentage of whites unable to read and write actually increased between 1880 and 1900. Black schools, however, suffered the most, as the gap between expenditures for black and white pupils widened steadily. “What I want here is Negroes who can make cotton,” declared one planter, “and they don’t need education to help them make cotton” (Foner, 648).

The targeting of education, specifically free and public education was a tool used to force blacks into poor-paying and disadvantageous agreements such as sharecropping and ensure the former slave owner retained their workforce and the class system. This is why access to education has always been particularly important for Black Americans as it was a means for advancement.

Education and its access have been used as a tool to ensure the caste system remains. It also explains the current cyclical nature of the problem, as the status quo is designed this way to ensure that blacks remain a source of cheap labor to be exploited.

There is also another way that black people are forced into this role of cheap labor, the school-to-prison pipeline. I referenced earlier the Stanford research that mentioned the fact that black students in general are subject to more disciplinary action in school. This is not an accident, in fact, this is something Oluo herself references stating,

Black students make up only 16 percent of our school populations, and yet 31 percent of students who are suspended and 40 percent of students who are expelled are black. Black students are 3.5 times more likely to be suspended than white students. Seventy percent of students who are arrested in school and referred to law enforcement are black. In the 2011–2012 school year alone, 92,000 students were arrested.

One might wonder, what is the purpose of taking black students out of the classroom or imprisoning them? Prison is the only exception for slavery in the constitution and there is no mistaking that, when breaking down the statistics, similar to when black people faced vagrancy laws following Reconstruction, the school-to-prison pipeline is another way to extract free labor from blacks. The nature of this problem is baked into the system. Since the inception of slavery, the nation's goal has been to extract cheap labor from the black population. Education is a tool used to ensure that this remains the status quo. Black Americans are relegated to low-paying positions, criminalized, and locked up so their labor can be exploited. One does not even have to look far to see this as at pretty much every educational level, no matter how highly educated Black Americans are they make less than whites (Emmons & Ricketts).

There has also been a backlash to any movements to directly address these issues or legislation directly aimed at racial inequality. While that's not entirely shocking a psychological study may provide answers as to why. *Ranks and Rivals: A Theory of Competition*, proposes, "Moreover, individuals also compare themselves with others who are in a worse position if they

are threatened by a potential upward comparison. Thus, competitiveness is one manifestation of the social comparison process” (Garcia & Gonzalez). The resistance to upward mobility and a desire to preserve and advance one's position is a compelling case as to why the efforts for equality have been unsuccessful. The reuse stance is there because it is against nature for people to want to give up advantages and privileges. The constant comparison and competitive nature of the American capitalistic structure requires for people to be on the bottom and those in the middle or on top, quite like their positions.

Section 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

The structure of our society and the American system has been designed to perpetuate a cyclical process in which black Americans are locked out of progress and upward mobility. The reason this problem has not been addressed is not only that it's an intentional part of the system, but that there is a general lack of will from the white public to address the subject of race or racial inequality is uncomfortable. It also goes against the psychological desire to maintain a position of power and oppose those who seek upward advancement. Further recommendations would be to encourage an open dialogue and to seek ways to emphasize these issues to the public and encourage discomfort so that change can occur.

Section 9: Work Cited

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