

**Isms in the Twenty-first Century:
The Evolution of Systemic Discrimination**

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Abstract

Long have the concepts of racism, sexism, and classism existed in human history. However, their definitions and practice have evolved over time. Modernly, they are all considered forms of discrimination. Recently, these topics have been a source of discussion among many disciplines. This thesis serves to add to existing literature outlining the history of these forms of discrimination and how they presented themselves in early American society. All three forms manifested in different forms in early civilizations before being adopted in colonial America. This work also serves to outline how these forms of discrimination exist in present day America. While they persist in more subtle forms than the abrasive examples in early history, racism, sexism, and classism still exist in American communities. Additional focuses for this paper are the intersectional relationships among these variables and the significant impacts for American citizens. All three variables share overlap, and impacts are predominantly negative. Solutions and plans for combatting these issues and their overlap are outlined as presented by leading experts. A variety of educational plans and legislative actions are believed to be the key to solving these issues. Finally, what struggles or changes may be in America's near future are considered. As a Nation founded on protests and revolution, it is likely that activists will succeed in making change, or civil unrest will reach a breaking point as it has in the past.

Keywords: Racism, Sexism, Classism, Intersectionality, Discrimination

Isms in the Twenty-first Century: The Evolution of Systemic Discrimination

The first use of the word discrimination is documented as occurring in 1615 and was defined as being able to perceive a difference or discriminate between one thing and another (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a). With the passage of time, discrimination, though still used in various senses, has taken on a much more severe and negative connotation. Definitions that are more modern include discriminating categorically over individually and prejudicially treating one individual/group over others. Discrimination has presented itself in American history in a wide array of forms, most notably in the injustices wrought upon Black and brown Americans since the abolition of slavery and as recently as the maltreatment of the LGBTQ+ community.

What began as outright criminal acts against marginalized communities has now come to be known as modern forms of systemic discrimination. Some examples include the overrepresentation in the criminal justice system by people of color, the disproportionate amount of people of color living in poverty, the ever-existing wage gap between sexes as well as race, the wealth gap between the classes causing both corruption and destruction, the continuing battle for reproductive rights. All of these issues continue to compile because of one common denominator – discrimination. Discrimination is pulling at the seams of the United States and it is perpetuated by ignorance, injustice, and greed. If not addressed and unlearned, it will be this nation's end.

Discrimination as a subject of interest calls to many in a variety of professional fields. The sociologist aims to examine how discrimination occurs, its intersectionality with other social processes, and what the effects are for a social group experiencing discrimination. The psychologist may follow a similar focus, with additional research on what thought processes lead to the formation of discriminatory assumptions and behaviors. A doctor may see the effects of

discrimination in their underprivileged or disabled patients. A counselor must have the capacity to work with clients from diverse backgrounds and provide resources to those experiencing discrimination. A police officer should be educated and trained to be free from stereotypical thoughts, biases, and discriminatory reflexes when working in the field. Yet, with the many ways a discipline may evaluate or study discrimination, there is (hopefully) a common goal; discrimination, present today at a systemic level, must be dismantled and eradicated from American society.

The present concerns/conflicts with systemic discrimination revolve around what is being done to address the issues. While small steps have been made in certain areas (such as the Women's U.S. soccer team being awarded a salary matching that of the men's league) other regions of the country have seen little to no steps – at worst, places have seen their progress derailed and taken backward. Additionally, research on specific forms of systemic discrimination fails to thoroughly address the ways in which issues such as classism, sexism, and racism intersect. This is a necessary element in creating literature that not only calls out the failings of one system but also illustrates ways that other corrupted systems come into play. To illustrate, in order to dismantle the issues presented by widespread sexism, the fact that individuals experience sexism because of their race/class must also be addressed. This is true for any combination of the three variables as well; racism cannot be eradicated without addressing how sexism and classism affect people of color differently, and classism could not be overcome without evaluating how race and/or sex influence one's economic class. This thesis aims to explore the inner workings of systems that contribute to modern discrimination and create a clear image of what actions professionals recommend officials take to reconstruct better, more equal systems.

While much research proves the existence of issues such as classism, racism, and sexism on their own, most literature does not include the examination of intersectionality. I propose to research and construct a thorough composition that highlights the ways in which these variables exist today and have evolved over time to remain in place. I also aim to illustrate how the intersection of the three provides an unfortunately strong foundation for these forms of discrimination to remain a constant threat to marginalized groups. An equally important aspect of this work will be outlining what actions the governing bodies of America should take in order to work with leading researchers in solving these problems.

Research Questions

The following questions will be the broad starting points for research into racism, sexism, and classism. They will also outline how they began to work in tandem to create the systemic issue of discrimination today.

Where do the roots of these forms of discrimination begin?

This is an important starting point as the specific origins of a variable may include research on places outside of American society. For instance, the roots of economic classism may include brief research on ancient civilization's class systems and then on the systems that presented themselves when early colonizers arrived in North America.

In what ways do these forms of discrimination persist today and how do they intersect?

As mentioned previously, discrimination had ugly beginnings as outright crimes against humanity, such as the brutal massacre of Indigenous people and the treatment of African Americans. With the development of civil rights movements and steps toward equality, discrimination mutated into less obvious forms in order to remain alive. Today, racism persists in a flawed criminal justice system and the racist ideologies of bigots. Classism exists in the

monumental wealth gap that leaves millions in poverty while the ‘one percent’ enjoy unlimited luxury. Sexism presents itself in the form of wage disparity and harassment. It can also be seen in the way individuals must fight tooth and nail for autonomy in certain regions of the states. Of course, this only touches the tip of the iceberg for each of these issues. Furthermore, these variables all overlap with one another, which exponentially affects those with more than one marginalized identity. In answering this question, I desire to outline how these issues continue to affect marginalized communities today,

What are the most significant impacts of the persistence of these forms of intersecting discrimination?

This question will bring light to research that has been done on these variables, illustrating the ways in which each issue purports discrimination with tangible proof. For instance, research on sexism provides statistics about wage gaps and can be broken down even further to illustrate how the issue of race intersects with sexism. This section will also be important in addressing the widespread problem of discrimination; it is not simply hate-fueled crimes, wage gaps, and the wealthy skipping their taxes. It is misrepresentation or underrepresentation in the media, limited opportunities/access to education, and poor medical care.

How can these issues be addressed?

What kinds of programs or ideas do experts propose the country act on in order to right these wrongs? This question will allow for an evaluation of ways these issues can be addressed, and what experts of various disciplines have to say on the matter.

What can the nation expect if these issues are not adequately addressed?

Likewise, what would happen if these systems of oppression were eradicated? These questions are rather self-explanatory but will provide necessary information on what next steps need to be taken in addressing discrimination. This will also provide groundwork for a well-rounded conclusion to the piece.

To summarize, classism, racism, and sexism, are all forms of discrimination that persist today due to the ways in which they are interconnected and support each other. It is essential to understand how this network came to exist and how its intersectionality makes it difficult to combat. Nevertheless, with recommendations and educated decision-making, the American government can and should take certain steps to create a truly equal nation.

Introducing Main Points

Due to the broadness of these forms of discrimination – racism, classism, and sexism – in order to adequately address these research questions, it is necessary to follow their progression from beginning to end. Therefore, first, the history of these ideologies needs to be examined. Race, as a term, was not widely used until roughly the sixteenth century (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). Even then, the term has taken on different meanings up to the modern age. It has been used to divide those with varying colors of skin, speculated biological differences, and different geographical origins, but is modernly thought of as a social construct. Sexism has been around since the beginnings of humankind but has worn different names and occurred in various ways. Classism has also existed since ancient civilizations and has been influenced by several intersecting issues such as racism in America and sexism regarding economic inequality. With the history of these ideas/practices discussed, the evolution, implications, potential solutions, and future outcomes can be explored. Thanks to the intersectionality of these issues, they have evolved to be an interconnected series of problems that affect marginalized citizens in drastic

ways. However, many experts have come forward with solutions and research that can reduce and ideally eliminate these ideologies. There are limited outcomes should these issues continue to persist – and one is much favorable than the other. America will be safer, more economically stable, and free should its officials implement legislation that combats these discriminatory practices. If steps are not taken to address these injustices, it can be speculated that in the coming years civil unrest will reach a breaking point.

Discrimination's Roots

Origins and Emergence in America: Racism, Sexism and Classism

Since the beginning of time, humans have carried the same capacity for evil as they have kindness. As civilizations developed and built strong communities together, they battled surrounding societies for resources, land, and wealth. Eyewitness records tell of war as far back in human history as 1479 BCE, and archaeological discoveries reveal solid proof of warfare from before 10,000 BCE (Mark, 2009). With advancements in technology, weaponry, transportation, and clear records of battles, wars, etc., along came the history of pillaging, slavery, and other atrocities committed by humankind.

Slavery is arguably an integral aspect to understanding racism in America, and it has a unique history. In one of the earliest known civilizations, Mesopotamia, slavery was an economic means to an end. Labor was needed for society to thrive, and owning slaves was a status symbol among citizens (Bartash, 2020). Slavery continued to thrive and expand into Egyptian, Greek, and then Roman civilizations (The History Press, 2021).

The treatment of slaves shifted in Rome, as it is recorded that freed Roman slaves could attain citizenship (Kleijwegt, 2009). However, Rome also saw a shift in what duties slaves were given. Roman culture revolved much around sport or entertainment and slaves were subjected to

competing against one another or filling brothels. As Rome declined, it is unclear what happened to many of these slaves; historians theorize the markets crashed and slaves were left to fend for themselves (The History Press, 2021).

Although, slavery was still prevalent in the age of the Anglo-Saxons, especially after the rise of the Vikings. Vikings often raped slaves and records indicate that pregnant slaves were sold for higher prices at markets (Raffield, 2019). In early Britain, as much as ten percent of the population were classified as slaves after William the Conqueror came to rule in 1066 (The History Press, 2021).

Slavery saw shifts yet again, though, as Britain abolitionists called for the end of mass enslavement (Drescher, 1987). As 'traditional' slavery began to dwindle, what is known as 'serfdom' arose in Europe. These individuals were not treated as property because they had rights, but were still bound to a lord and their land (Razi, 2007). With the spread of the 'Black Death', servants negotiated for their freedom and wages, which introduced landlords (The History Press, 2021).

Later, in 1492, with Columbus and other explorers discovering lands inhabited by native peoples, a key change happened to the practice of slavery. Slavery was fueled by racist ideologies that other groups of people were biologically or inherently different from others and were below them as well. Justifying their actions with the racist narrative that Indigenous people were savages and animalistic, millions of Indigenous peoples were enslaved or massacred from the 1400s through the 1800s (Tinker & Freeland, 2008).

In the colonial era of North America, indentured servitude took its place as another method of enslaving desperate individuals. Prisoners, migrants, and others would enter a contract with their landlord, and after fulfilling their years-long obligation, they would be free

(Donoghue, 2013). Indentured servitude occurred until the 19th century, alongside what would become the most well-known occurrence of slavery, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which began in early 1500 (Borucki, Eltis, & Wheat, 2015).

Again, slavery in this instance was justified by racism - Africans were thought to be below Europeans and early colonials. During its lifetime, it is estimated that millions of native Africans were transported across the Atlantic Ocean to become slaves in foreign lands, including Europe and the Spanish Americas (Borucki, Eltis, & Wheat, 2015). African slaves were shackled to their transports, died from diseases, were beaten, and worked until they were lost to exhaustion and starvation (Radburn & Eltis, 2019). Women were raped and sold; their children were taken from them.

Even after the 1865 abolishment of slavery, Africans, African Americans, and Black American citizens experienced brutal racism at the hands of their white peers. It is debated among many scholars, which came first, slavery or racism? It is a question that will likely continue to be debated in academic disciplines for years to come. However, it is undeniable that racism in American history was made much worse by the practice of slavery.

Racism thrived in the eras following the abolishment of slavery. Segregation, Jim Crow laws, the KKK, lynching, and white supremacy wrought terror on Black and Brown communities still healing from the tortures of slavery. Through two world wars, racism thrived, and it affected other races as well. In 1942, President Roosevelt signed an executive order, which resulted in the relocation of Japanese or Japanese-descended persons to internment camps, justified by the tension between the United States and Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor (Aitken & Aitken, 2011). The conditions of these camps were shoddy, and scholars on the subject claim that concentration camps are a more apt description of these sites.

Farther along in American history, following the attack on the World Trade Center, the FBI reported that hate crimes against Arab and Muslim Americans increased by a monumental percentage, almost 1600 (Alsultany, 2013). Citizens reported workplace harassment, physical assaults, death threats, and discrimination in certain establishments simply for appearing to be Muslim or Arab (Alsultany, 2013). Unfortunately, there were even murder cases that occurred because of racism and paranoia towards Muslim and Arab peoples (Alsultany, 2013).

Presently, racism in America evokes thoughts of police brutality, Black Lives Matter, the war on drugs, a corrupt justice system, and Asian American violence throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. These issues arose due to the persistence of racism and if left unchecked, it will continue to divide the country and potentially lead to devastating consequences.

The beginnings of sexism, like that of racism, can be traced back as far as oppression itself. Evident in the recurring poor treatment of women, the roles they have been confined to, and the rights many women lacked until recent decades, sexism has been ingrained into human society for centuries. However, it has not always been an integral system to human societies. There is important research that discusses early hunter-gatherer societies that predate modern patriarchal living. It is in their history that the potential for modern forms of sexism blossomed. Early on in these communities, there was not as large a power gap between men and women due to a lack of patrilocality. Patrilocality is the societal expectation that when a couple marries, the woman will move in with her husband's family (Landmann, Seitz, & Steiner, 2018). In hunter-gatherer societies, many women chose to stay in their childhood communities, or sometimes the couple would move away from both families. Inevitably, there was a shift away from the practices of hunter-gatherer societies when agriculture entered the world.

According to one study, communities producing food were more likely to adopt patrilocality and have higher rates of female migrants, while women in hunter-gatherer societies remained in their homeland (Destro-Bisol, 2004). Due to patrilocality, men of the same family lived near one another, and resources were passed along the male lineage, giving them an advantage and more power. This practice, arguably, constructed the foundation for the patriarchy that still stands today. This practice was widely adopted across the world, especially in early Europe and in America's first colonies.

Other early forms of sexism included confining women to the role of homemaker, banning them from participation in government, education, and the workforce, poor healthcare, and much more. Sexism can be seen as the cause for the lack of a consistent record of women's history in historical writings (Rosen, 1971). It also contributed to the erasure or devaluing of female contributions to humanity. For example, few know the name of Rosalind Franklin. Yet many in scientific disciplines have heard of James Watson and Francis Crick, the men associated with the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA. However, it was Franklin's x-ray images that led to the discovery, which were taken and shared with the two men without her permission (Rapoport, 2002).

Sexism contributed to the delaying of woman's suffrage – women could not vote in America until 1920 (Mintz, 2007). Further, women could not own land until the 1860s, could not have a personal bank account until the 1960s, and were not independent credit holders until 1974. This only scratches the surface of what sexism has been in history. It also took shape in the media, criticizing women's bodies and attempting to convince them to be 'better wives.' It was present in societal ignorance toward marital dissatisfaction and domestic abuse. Overall, sexism in America is a broad subject and is intertwined with the country's history. Now, sexism persists

in modern America in other, more subtle, ways. Objectification, workplace inequality, body shaming, and restriction of bodily autonomy are just some of the current issues relating to sexism.

Class systems arrived in America in the same way that any other practice or ideology did – it was inherited from one country, who inherited it from another country, who inherited it from a historical society, who inherited it from ancient civilizations. Humankind has always depended on a type of hierarchy, no matter how subtle its structure. In ancient civilizations, division of labor and jobs kept communities running. In more advanced civilizations, job roles, gender roles, economics, and classes were introduced that separated groups of citizens from one another. For instance, an individual with a valued occupational skill, a strong family, and wealth in the form of land, possessions, currency, or enslaved people.

To illustrate, class became a prominent dynamic of society in ancient Egypt, where educated individuals made up the highest class (Mendoza, 2017). Literacy meant that one could work as a scribe, which was considered a highly valuable and desired position, and avoid a life of hard labor with those who could not afford education (Mendoza, 2017). Further, in ancient Greece, male citizens made up the highest class, with women, children, slaves, and non-citizens situated below them. Further, male citizens were split into more specific categories based on their wealth, property, lineage, and occupation (Cartwright, May 2018). Later on in history, specific laws enforced class distinctions. For instance, in 1510 the parliament of Henry VIII passed a sumptuary law prohibiting individuals under certain ranks (such as lord or knight) from using certain materials in their clothing, thus creating clear distinction among classes (Hooper, 1915). This classification of people by rank and wealth was widely used for centuries.

While it was not until roughly the 1800s that a more modern version of ‘class’ was widely used, there were some in early world history who understood the potential consequences of class distinctions. One such individual was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau, an activist during the French Revolution, opposed placing value on private properties. He felt that inequalities did not benefit society, but rather harmed them by creating overly wealthy groups and poor groups of citizens (Conley, 2017). However, during the later years of the Enlightenment period, others viewed inequality as a necessary element in functioning societies (Conley, 2017). Individuals such as Adam Ferguson and John Millar believed inequality arose when production rates were higher and more efficient. This allowed people to have surplus stores of resources that in turn allowed them to be wealthier; believed that this was not a negative outcome, as a surplus of resources would be necessary to sustain growing populations (Conley, 2017).

Ultimately, the latter of these philosophies on the impacts of classes would survive through the Enlightenment, and private property became an important resource and marker of wealth during the colonial period. In the first American colonies, class was subjectively separated in to the upper, middle, and poor classes; however, in some areas classes differed due to the forms of currency used, rates of inflation, and value of property. For instance, in Colonial Massachusetts, five forms of currency were used, resulting in class differences varying in accuracy among different geographical locations (Daniels, 1973). After the revolutionary war, and during the next two centuries of American history, class shifted because of the development of a capitalist economy (Middleton & Smith, 2006). Leaving behind the emphasis on private capital and local agriculture and markets, America’s wealthy went commercial pursuing global markets and monopolies, as well as higher amounts of stored wealth (Middleton & Smith, 2006).

It was as this shift occurred that the more modern definition of class truly arose. While in history class was referred to as rank or title, it was now a much more complex label involving ones finances, assets, property, relationships, and group affiliations. Beginning in the 1900s, important contributions to one's class included what their occupation was, their life trajectory, what they used their wealth for, and how much wealth one had (Lareau & Conley, 2008). Fast-forward to the 1970s, and other aspects such as geographic location, reputation, and consumption behaviors became applicable to one's class label as well (Lareau & Conley, 2008).

This consistent development of class systems throughout history inevitably led to the issue of classism, especially in capitalist societies like the United States. Classism is modernly defined as discrimination based on someone's class through beliefs, behaviors, or practices that perpetuate class inequality (Shor, Cattaneo, & Alexander, 2019). Historically, classism can be seen in the restrictions lower classes faced while higher classes had more rights and more freedoms. It began to encompass more issues as class itself grew as a conceptual label. For example, as more aspects of someone's identity, such as gender, began to affect their class, certain attitudes or practices towards those individuals began to affect their life. For many years, women in American history were thought of as below male citizens, and so they constituted their own lower class in society. Likewise, after the abolishment of slavery, Black citizens in America, while free and protected under the law, were viewed as second-class citizens. Laws like that of Jim Crow segregation kept them from enjoying the same lifestyle as their white counterparts (Burch, 2014). Recent issues pertaining to classism include the wealth gap in the American population, wage disparities, billionaires and their businesses, generational wealth/poverty, homelessness, access to healthcare, and others involving overlap into the issues of racism and sexism.

Modern Discrimination and its Intersectional Aspects

Racism

While the United States no longer sanctions the egregious examples of racism exhibited in its past, racism has still evolved and changed to remain in many American communities and minds. Most prominently, experts argue that racism is evident in the criminal justice system, and have conducted research related to police brutality and incarceration. First, racism is evident in the abundant instances of profiling and brutality by police against people of color. Criminology researchers have found that people of color are more likely to be involved in traffic stops and searches than white individuals are (Cox, Marchionna, & Fitch, 2017). Further, when these stops turn into arrests, people of color are more likely to have force used against them during the arrest (Cox, Marchionna, & Fitch, 2017). Unfortunately, in recent decades, use of force against Black Americans specifically has reached a disproportionate rate and resulted in dozens of tragedies. For example, in 2020, George Floyd was taken into custody on the suspicion that he had purchased goods with counterfeit money. Within seventeen minutes, Floyd was unresponsive due to police officer Derek Chauvin's excessive use of force (Hill et al., 2020). Other victims of police brutality include Duante Wright, Andre Hill, Manuel Ellis, Rayshard Brooks, Breonna Taylor, Atatiana Jefferson, Stephon Clark, Botham Jean, Philando Castile, Eric Garner, and hundreds of others (Chughtai, 2021). Additionally, people of color are over represented in United States jails and prisons. One research organization found that Black individuals are incarcerated by state prisons more than five times as often as their white peers are (Neubauer & Fradella, 2019). Contributing to this issue is discrimination and racist-fueled biases when it comes to sentencing. Black offenders are more likely to receive harsh, long sentences in comparison to their white counterparts, sometimes even if the offense is the same (Neubauer & Fradella, 2019).

Even more recently, racism affected Asian Americans heavily in the wake of the covid-19 pandemic. According to AAPI Equity Alliance, over 9,000 reports of hate incidents occurred between early 2020 and mid 2021 (2021). While many of these reports included verbal harassment and social shunning, there were a number of incidents involving a physical altercation. One man, Kylam Nguyen, was left with his jaw fractured on both sides and his left collarbone broken after an individual assaulted him and then exclaimed, ‘Coronavirus get the f--- out of here’ (Han, 2020). Nguyen is a Vietnamese American, not Chinese. Racist attacks such as these continued throughout the pandemic and were likely encouraged by official’s consistent use of terms such as the ‘Chinavirus’ in reference to the coronavirus. These two prominent examples illustrate how racism persists in America today, and without appropriate action, racism will continue to manifest in other areas of society.

Sexism

Though the United States has made significant progress toward gender equality, many researchers outline the forms of sexism existing today. For one, there are still significant disparities between the wages of men and women in America. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that the median earnings of fulltime male workers was higher than that of women (2021). However, researchers explain that these differences could be due to the type of occupations that women choose in comparison to men, but the data also show disparities among men and women in the same roles (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Another example of modern sexism is the topic of sexual harassment and assault, specifically in the military. It is estimated that as many as 2,500 incidents of sexual harassment and assault occurred in the year of 2020 in the army, and hundreds more likely went unreported (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2022). Women in military services face challenges due to sexist attitudes

and a power imbalance between themselves and higher-ranking male officers who use this privilege to do harm. One woman, Specialist Vanessa Guillen of the United States Army, reported being sexually harassed by her superiors, and was murdered by a fellow soldier soon after who also had allegations of sexual harassment against him (Diaz, Cramer, & Morales, 2021). Most recently, sexism has resulted in a large-scale rollback on reproductive rights, affecting mainly women/persons with a uterus and supported by mainly men. In an internationally covered case, the United States Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* on June 24, 2022 (*Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 2022). *Roe v. Wade* protected people's right to get an abortion for close to fifty years. Now that protection has been stripped from American citizens as supporters of the decision argued that abortion was never a constitutional right. This decision triggered abortion bans in several states and some officials have gone as far to argue against the legality of contraception rights. This is concerning as contraceptives can prevent unwanted pregnancies that in some states can no longer be legally aborted. Many activists and professionals are identifying these cases and debates as a war on women and autonomy. It is seen as an issue of sexism as all present laws pertaining to unwanted pregnancies and abortion place no blame or responsibility on that of men who contribute to unwanted pregnancies. Women across the country are also calling out the sexism of these decisions as women who seek an abortion may face up to 15 years in prison, while men convicted of rape have gotten off with minimal sentences in the past (Spitzer, 2022). In summary, there are several ways in which sexism is present in modern American society, and some forms have the potential to be extremely detrimental.

Classism

Key issues relating to modern classism include wealth disparity among Americans and corporate greed. According to a report in 2019, just three families owned more wealth than the bottom half of the country (Kertscher, 2019). This creates disproportionate inequality in not only economics, but also opportunities related to education, healthcare, and influence. Individuals with greater incomes have more choice when it comes to institutions of learning, so they will receive a higher quality of schooling that an individual bordering the poverty line cannot afford. Similarly, those in the ‘one percent’ of the country do not have to worry about having access to things like food, housing, and healthcare because their enormous wealth. Further, corporate greed exacerbates the issue of classism because of the desire to have more control over American capital. For instance, during the pandemic millions of people were forced into poverty, yet the wealth of billionaires increased considerably (Therault & Leclerq, 2022). Many activists point out that a system of tax breaks, unfair wage policies, and legal loopholes have kept the one percent wealthy while the average American lives paycheck to paycheck. This divide is arguably costing more than money however; the gap between the poor and the rich is accountable for thousands of deaths each year.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality occurs between racism, sexism, and classism in a number of ways. For one, it was Black women that recognized that their fight against inequality included racism and sexism who created the concept of intersectionality (Bose, 2012). From there, it grew to encompass Black women’s struggles against classism as well, and intersectionality developed into a term referring to people facing more than one form of oppression (Bose, 2012). Modern research discusses a variety of interactions among these variables and can be used to construct a clear picture of intersectionality. For one, there are economic and educational disparities among

racial groups, such as those due to white privilege, that contribute to health differences (Blacksher & Valles, 2021). Further, racism overlaps with class when it comes to economic stability; one study found that in periods of nationwide recession, Black workers are more likely to lose their jobs or lose hours (Chattopadhyay & Bianchi, 2021). Racism overlaps with sexism as seen when the average earnings of full-time working Black women are compared to white men in a similar position (Frye, 2022). Race also overlaps with sexism when it comes to violence and victimization. To illustrate, women of color are at a higher risk for intimate partner violence than their white counterparts (West, 2004). Furthermore, the previously highlighted wage gap faced by women of all races contributes to the overlap between sexism and classism. Overall, there is a plethora of evidence speaking to the existence of racism, sexism, and classism today. Just as abundant are the examples of how these variables intersect to create compounding issues of oppression for already marginalized peoples.

Significant Impacts

The impacts of discrimination in these three forms and their intersectionality are far reaching and involve several disciplines. While some impacts were discussed to outline how these forms of discrimination persist, there are still further examples that detail how discrimination contributes to negative outcomes for minorities. For instance, racism negatively influences the health of people of color as race-based altercations create stress and psychological trauma for victims (Okazaki, 2009). Further, racism as an ideology creates barriers between people of color and their peers. One study found that racist attitudes on predominantly white college campuses led majority of Black students to feel unsafe and out of place at school (Beamon, 2014). Additionally, the intersectionality of racism and classism has contributed to generational economic instability. One expert in urban policy outlines that redlining as an aspect

of segregation has kept people of color systematically in poorer neighborhoods, leading to systemic financial and racial inequalities (Fullilove, 2017). As discussed prior, sexism predominantly affects economic stability and healthcare. As one healthcare researcher points out, women are continuously less likely than men are to receive the desired or necessary level of care by medical practitioners (Homan, 2019). Further, research illustrates that as women are exposed to different forms of sexism it is more likely that they will develop adverse health conditions (Homan, 2019). Finally, classism's most serious impacts are the widespread rates of poverty and homelessness in the U.S. According to available data, the poverty rate saw an incline for the first time after five consecutive years of decline in 2020 (United States Census Bureau, 2022). Additionally, the total number of Americans in poverty reached 37 million people during the year 2020 (United States Census Bureau, 2022). Similarly, the homeless population is on the rise as well, despite making significant progress since the early 2010s (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2021). To expand further, the impact of intersectionality between racism, sexism, and classism can be seen in the data concerning homelessness, as risk for homelessness has been linked to gender and race (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2021). Altogether, racism, sexism, and classism present a variety of serious issues for American citizens, and their overlap wreaks serious consequences on those with intersecting marginalized identities.

Fighting Discrimination

Given the discussed impacts and ongoing issues related to these forms of discrimination in modern America, it is no surprise that time and research have been devoted to combatting these problems. Experts in a multitude of disciplines have conducted research and studies in their respective fields in order to present a wide range of solutions to these systemic issues. Their

research, programs, activism, and ideas have the potential to make America a safer nation as well as one with a higher level of equality.

Research related to addressing and eliminating the issue of racism has been ongoing for decades now, and as a result, some extremely promising proposals have emerged. These works have primarily been related to education, criminal justice, sociology, healthcare, and government policy. For example, Critical race theory (CRT) draws on all these disciplines to evaluate how people of color face disparities. Educators have been invested in teaching CRT in schools, and seven states have responded with a ban on the inclusion of this theory in classroom lessons. What is the significance of this? To answer this question, it is necessary to first define critical race theory and the proposed benefits it brings to schools in America. CRT, at its roots, is a means for providing insights and promoting 'antiracist' education (Stovall, 2005). It is regarded also as a form of protest, giving voice to Black individuals, by introducing their lived experiences and histories to their peers within an educational setting. Others note CRT to be a powerful method of addressing ideologies such as colorblindness that contribute to inequalities for Black and Brown Americans (Blessett & Gaynor, 2021). With CRT now defined, it is seemingly counterintuitive to ban it from the classroom; this is only contributing to the issue of racism, not fighting against it. Should America aspire to become a country with true justice for all, it would be wise for legislators to be multiculturally competent and devote resources to giving students a more fulfilling education. Such an education would not cater to the opinions of white, male, politicians, but would instead create culturally aware minds that work together to remove systemic oppression from their communities. Other solutions presented by advocates include comprehensive police reform in order to reduce the issue of profiling and biases, and

funding minority communities to reduce disparities among racial groups with fewer opportunities.

Solutions to the issues presented by systemic sexism have followed similar routes to those addressing racism: experts have compiled resources, studies, and potential policies that aim to solve problems like sexist biases, the wage gap, and struggles for autonomy. One extremely creative project run by two high schoolers in New York aimed to reduce stigma around menstruation and sexist attitudes toward women in tech fields. Andrea Gonzales and Sophie Houser created a video game together with tampons as the main weapon. They created their project after attending a technology camp about coding and hope that their game will reduce sexist attitudes towards periods and female gamers (Dockterman, 2014). Another solution involves legislation protecting women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, many are calling that abortion rights as well as other reproductive services like contraception be codified into protected law. President Joe Biden himself has stated that it is essential to codify it into law, and has made comments in support of making exceptions to senate filibuster rules to ensure its passing (Franck, 2022).

To address the issue of discriminatory classism, economists believe some solutions include progressive taxation, raising the minimum wage, and creating more educational opportunities. A progressive tax policy would mean that higher incomes would be taxed at a higher rate, relieving some of the national tax burden from the country's poor (Siripurapu & Speier, 2022). Additionally, a progressive taxation policy would hold billionaires accountable for paying their share based on their large amounts of wealth. Officials state that taxation of assets and inherited wealth would decrease inequality as well (Siripurapu & Speier, 2022). Further, raising the minimum wage will address issues of classism because better wages provides

households with the ability to pay for housing, food, and services that support the economy (Siripurapu & Speier, 2022). Finally, investing in education, training, and programs ensures that more citizens meet qualifications for obtaining and retaining an occupation (Siripurapu & Speier, 2022).

Potential Outcomes

The United States is a nation with a longstanding history of revolution through activism, protest, riots, and civil unrest. Its very inception followed the battle for independence during the American Revolution. Since its beginnings, American citizens have participated in a number of historical movements in order to promote change. Some examples include protests for labor rights, women's rights, anti-war activism, and the civil rights movement. At present, racism, sexism, and classism have citizens calling for government-backed change. These newer movements include the Black Lives Matter movement, activist organizations for reproductive rights, and calls for action against America's ultra-wealthy. It has been established that racism, sexism, and classism have a tangible, traceable history. It has been determined by researchers that these forms of discrimination are present in modern America and impact citizens in a variety of ways. Researchers have also worked to produce a vast list of solutions to combat and erase these issues from modern society. Thus, what can America expect for the coming years? While there are dozens of specific outcomes, broadly there are only two, as realistically there are only two choices in the wake of the aforementioned information. American government officials can either face the facts of racism, sexism, and classism in order to create a better country for its inhabitants or it will only continue to foster inequity and civil unrest. Some believe that without properly addressing discrimination, the human race as a whole could be facing drastic consequences. One writer suggests that according to psychological and sociological research,

failure to address discriminatory attitudes could mean higher levels of tension and lower rates of cooperation in the wake of global disasters (Oliver, 2020). Regardless of how the nation chooses to get there, it is clearly in the United States' best interest to address these forms of discrimination sooner rather than later.

Conclusion

Historically, racism, sexism, and classism have presented themselves in a variety of forms and practices. From ancient Mesopotamia to modern day America, they have affected the marginalized in rather significant ways. Presently, they exist in systemic and institutionalized forms that intersect and affect citizens with more than one minority identity more seriously. The impacts of these modes of discrimination encompass a variety of areas including education, health, and economic stability. There are a variety of solutions presented by scholars that would assist in the deconstructing of these problematic systems; however, it is necessary also that they are backed by government officials. Should the nation not address the harmful results of racism, classism and sexism in their present forms, America could be facing consequences including but not limited to civil unrest, recession, and hardship in the wake of international struggle. Further literature and research in this area would benefit from including further aspects of intersectionality, such as how LGBTQIA+ issues and ableism interact with issues of racism, sexism, and classism. Other areas for future study include discrimination on a global scale, comparing solutions implemented in other countries to combat discrimination, and activism around the world.

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