



Opinion Article

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A Critical Race Perspective of the Opioid and Crack Epidemics: How Race and Racism Influence(d) Policy

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Racism-Centered Legislation

Although President Nixon is primarily credited for the successful implementation of the Southern strategy, it was Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater who first wielded it in 1964 [1]. The intention was to turn the South which was solidly Democratic into a bedlam of Republicanism [1,2]. The decision to spin our democracy on its head would prove disastrous for African Americans in southern states as well as the north. The opposition to the Brown v. Board decision was convincing enough to move southern whites from Democrats to Republicans [2]. What was most certainly known about politics in the south is that race and ethnicity always overshadowed economic class distinctions [2]. Essentially, poor white people much like their wealthier counterparts also hated African Americans enough to compromise their own economic standing to punch down on them. This ideology still penetrates the core of who America pretends not to be. It is the willful ignorance of those who refuse to acknowledge the very present impact of anti-Black racism in how local and national governments are run. We are witnessing this today as white parents and their children are centered in what is or is not allowed to be taught in schools via the anti-CRT bans. Race is and has always been tantamount to who is or is not considered truly American and patriotic.

The Southern strategy was also effectively executed by Reagan and both George H.W. Bush and his son George W. Bush [2]. The opposition of school desegregation has always been as contentious as we see it today. The truth of the matter is that if whiteness is not centered and kept as the status-quo, white people will always revolt. DEI initiatives that do not seek to formally and intentionally

address and disrupt this practice only further perpetuate anti-racist racism. This means using all of the cool lingo made famous by true disrupters to “appear” aware, while simultaneously actively working against disruption.

How the “race” was won

Domestic issues are typically defined by Presidents, which is who Americans look to for guidance on delineating domestic policy [3,4]. As the person who occupies the oval office you are tasked with being not only a salesperson of policy but a spokesperson for America [3]. The War on Drugs is a perfect example of how policy and metaphor are inextricably linked, according to Elwood [3]. The War on Drugs allowed for Reagan and his administration to launch a direct attack on African Americans who were caught in between misuse and distribution. Whereas white people who were as connected to cocaine during that era navigated the drug trade and usage rather unscathed. Denial of this very public factual occurrence only further enforces how white supremacy and racism criminalizes Blackness and excuses whiteness on all counts. Non-Americans and obtuse Americans saw the crack epidemic and immediately began to form anti-Black perspectives about persons who needed help and intervention. Instead of finding ways to assist African Americans who were in desperate need of appropriate medical care. The government took the opportunity to incarcerate and criminalize an entire generation of African Americans without due course. It was also during this time period where imagery and discourse about African Americans being violent took hold in mainstream media.

The opioid epidemic on the other hand found Americans displaying empathy toward those affected by it. This is largely because the most widely known misusers of opioids are white suburbanites. Race and class have always been the “get out of jail free card” for affluent white people. When white people are found to be heavily engaged in drugs, we see the criminal justice system handling them with care. Providing them with opportunities for outpatient care or rehab instead of lengthy prison sentences or extensive jail time. If African Americans were provided these same resources and extensions of grace, mass incarceration and the political landscape would look differently.

White Manning and Counter-Storytelling

I posit in my own definition of white manning that white men allow themselves to take up space with their own assumptions and perspectives even when they are woefully ill-prepared to engage [5]. The assumption of whiteness as correct has created a narrative that allows for white people to feel emboldened to tell our stories as experts. Whether they are writing books about “trap feminist theology” or telling stories about the Black family, white people are always and completely out-of-bounds in this regard. White privilege is what allows for white people to completely miss the mark of when they should be exiting stage left—even liberal leaning white people. Our stories are intended to be told wholly and completely by us because they are nuanced and heartfelt. Regardless of where your degree was earned if you are not African American you should be quick to pass the mic when asked to provide opinion or perspective on our lived experience. As indicated by Solórzano and Yozzo [6], critical race researchers and educators acknowledge that institutions often operate in ways that are contradictory, with their potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing also with their potential to empower and emancipate. The United States government has always been uniquely positioned to release African Americans as well as other marginalized communities from the shackles of oppression. However, in its desire to keep white

supremacy as the ruling authority it pretends to be unaware of its never-ending harm. From Nixon to Trump the dog-whistling of white supremacy is what keeps racialized differences as the core policy making decision. Pretending that educators, scholars, and well-read politicians acknowledging the ever-present existence of it [white supremacy] is the line in the sand, is simply a tool of distraction. White supremacy and racism have always been the root causes of political, health, and national security issues. Teaching and telling this truth should not ever be controversial [7].

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Conflict of Interest

No Conflict of Interest.

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