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Essentialism and race

Anti-racist activists, writers and speakers incorporate essentialist notion of race into their message which is based on the ideology that race does not exist on a physical or biological level. They claim that race is not the result of physical or biological makeup but it is the product of white supremacy. They associate racism with the theory of prejudice, which portray whites as dominant and superior. The argument claims that racial essentialism results in creation of distinct identities classified as dominant white and subordinated blacks, Latinos. The philosophy of essentialism entails the tendency of understanding social categories that results in the creation of fixed, uniform characteristics in inferior race. It is claimed the essentialist beliefs are linked to adverse outcomes that leads to the legitimization of the social hierarchies.

These activists promote negative assumptions and stereotypes about people of color and ethnic minorities in United States even as they argued against unequal treatment. This is because anti-racist activist over emphasize on the prevalence of race that encourage minorities such as blacks to fixate their minds on existing information and conventional mindsets. It represses creative thinking and critical approach among minority population who believe that they are victims of race and discrimination. Research reveals that, “an essentialist mindset would lead to a reluctance to consider alternative perspectives, resulting in a generalized closed-mindedness” (Tadmor). The argument claims that anti-racist activists don’t play a positive role because they evoke negative feelings which leads to closed-mindedness. Racial beliefs are deeply rooted in their minds that restrict their abilities and creative thinking.

Racial essentialism always contribute to the creation of negative and oppressive reality. The advocates of racial essentialism consider it as a product of cultural and social characteristics and disengage them from biological or physical perspectives. They emphasize on blaming white supremacists for developing such notions and criticize their role in establishment of unequal society. The role of whites remained devastating because they attempted to control other races by considering them as inferior and by assigning secondary statuses. Oppressed communities are more likely to experience negative impacts because they develop an attitude of linking their deprivation with racism. This to a larger extent free them of self responsibility towards their low socio-economic positions. Research reveals that “people are more or less passive carriers of their culture, whereby their attitudes, beliefs and achievements are supposed to reflect typical cultural patterns” (Yalcinkaya, Estrada-Villalta and Adams). This reflects that people are convinced to behave in the same way as they learn from culture. people of color reflect typical cultural patterns such as by exhibiting closed-mindedness towards racism. They are inclined to believe that white race is supreme because they have learned from their culture. They also develop the attitude of blaming whites for their miserable lives because their ancestors did the same. According to the philosophy of racial essentialism it is a non-realistic idea that promote negative feelings.

Anti-racist activists create a distinct reality by claiming that race is the only reason for low socio-economic status of non-whites. This provokes negative feelings and discourages these populations from changing their destiny. The argument claims that such beliefs undermine critical approach and efforts to work hard. Tadmor states, “essentialist viewpoint were less creative, solving significantly fewer of the word problems” (Tadmor). This also indicates that people of color are less likely to take challenges due to the fact that they have accepted race as the single reason behind their deprivations. They are not willing to work hard for improving their standards of living and continue to live in the existing state. Instead of encouraging deprived population to work hard they are motivated to criticize race and stand for their rights. Such attitudes eliminate the possibilities of changing their future and improving their lives.

Prominent black writers like W.E.B Du Bois took an essentialist approach for examining the racial realities in America. He was an anti-racist activist and through his writings he attempted to prove that race is not the result of any physical or biological differences by it is a social construct. He argued that social construct has worked throughout American history for promoting social inequality for the minority populations. There is no genetic reason behind race which indicates that it is a self-created philosophy which only worked to oppress blacks (Stubblefield). Du Bois in “The Souls of Black Folks” attempted to explain that all races are equal. Du Bois claimed, “the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt of other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack” (Zatavu). The text depicts the essentialist beliefs of the author because he has focused on proving that blacks were full of talents so they can be entitled as inferior race. The purpose of his writings was to show special side of black people, which makes them essentially capable and productive. His conception of racial identity was to treat all races equally and give them same opportunities of education. Through his racial essentialism ideology he also emphasized on promoting brotherhood. Compared to non-essentialists, anti-racist writers reject the prevalence of any physical difference between blacks and whites.

Fixed cultural patterns are promoted by racial essentialism that also shape psychological characteristics of people. The feelings created by this philosophy separate them from other racial groups. Cultural and biological form of racial essentialism relies on the idea that fixed and uniform essence that influence people of different races. Anti-racist beliefs on essentialism also convince white population to think about their superiority that often encourage them to treat blacks indifferently. Kendi states that, “Mather obsessed over maintaining the social hierarchies by convincing the lowly that God and nature had put them there, whether it applied to women, children, enslaved Africans, or poor people” (Kendi). Essentialism have focused on highlighting the history where blacks were enslaved not because of physical appearance but because of social construct. This make blacks realize the injustice suffered by their ancestors. This is a dominant reason for criticizing the essentialist beliefs of anti-racist activities. Argument also claims that such ideology instead of removing racial attitudes such ideology provoke whites and non-whites to establish firm beliefs (Stubblefield).

The central argument claims that anti-racist activists such as authors and sociologists adopt racial essentialist approach that promotes negative beliefs among people of color. This is because the idea of essentialism is based on the philosophy that racism is a social construct created for discriminating minority populations such as blacks and Latinos. These beliefs have played adverse role in the lives of blacks and other inferior races who believe that their low socio-economic statuses are due to racism. They have developed attitudes of blaming whites for their inferiority. The argument also states that essentialism emphasize on proving that racism is still existent in the society which undermine their efforts to change their reality and improve standards of living.

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