Chapter 6

Victimization, Cultural Imperatives, and Empowerment of People of Color in the United States

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ABSTRACT

The high incidence of violent crimes in the United States of America, which include mass shootings, hate crimes, Islam bashing, murders, extortion, crimes against women and children, and white supremacist crimes, witnessed in last few years is a cause for great concern. The land of liberty is lately seeing increasing victimization of deprived or socially unempowered groups. This chapter looks at such victimization and the cultural supremacy that is giving rise to ethnic strife among people. It is argued that robust and well-evolved policies will reduce crime and empower marginalized groups, a majority of whom are women and children. The empowerment—social, cultural, economic, and political—and recognition of the challenge of victimization is the only solution. There is a need to recognize the egalitarian impulses for a better policy formulation devoid of prejudice to craft a secure future for the victims.

INTRODUCTION

Victimhood is a socially constructed concept and has a complex nature. There exist multiple understandings of victimhood constructed around various categories and types of victims, applied in varying situations. Therefore, it is vital to understand victimhood in a particular context. Victimhood should be understood both in the broader context of culture, class, and other sociopolitical factors and objective realities of the victims. “Social reality of victimization is a conflation of subjective and objective measures” (Findlay, 2009, p. 188). The indifference of privileged sectors to the misery of the rest is striking in the United States.
States, as also elsewhere in the world. Victims of discrimination in the United States, particularly people of color and immigrants suffer from loss of civil, political and socio-economic rights. Scholars have demonstrated that minorities, especially the Blacks and Latinos, are more likely to be violently victimized than the Whites (Catalano, 2006; Rand, 2009). However, the literature on the variations of the extant of victimization across gender, race and ethnicity, and the causes of disparities is scarce (Lauritsen & White, 2001). A lot of literature has documented the effects of the white supremacist movement as “one of the most enduring political subcultures in American history” (Simi, Blee, Demichele, & Windisch, 2017, p. 1). The modern world is racially organized. This white supremacist culture is deep-rooted hate and violence against ‘others.’ Many scholars argue that whites do engage in everyday racism against people of color (Essed, 1990; Feagin, 2001; Feagin, 2014).

From Du Bois to Fanon, the use of ‘white’ in a racialized sense has a long history. Charles Mills’ theory is an account of the generation of white supremacy. However, the approach does not explain the way whiteness functions and maintain the system of white supremacy. People of color are vulnerable and at-risk when faced with constant racialization. They are victims of hate crimes, discrimination and oppression at the hands of the people with privilege. There have been efforts to document the hate crimes and the effects on victims (e.g., Hate Crimes Statistics Act, 1990), however, very little is known about people’s perceptions and attitudes about these crimes. Crimes that are motivated by hate include words or actions intended to harm or intimidate an individual because of his or her perceived membership in or association with a particular group (Herek, 1989; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).

Therefore, the goal of this paper is to assess the depth of victimization and cultural supremacy that is giving rise to ethnic strife among people. By exploring these dynamics and recognizing the challenge of victimization, I argue for robust and well-evolved policies that reduce crime and empower marginalized groups.

BACKGROUND

Being White

‘Whiteness’ is a color-blind ideology that makes whites refuse the reality of racism. It is socially constructed and bears the markers required for demarcation. The usual marker is the color of the skin, which shapes the perceptions and a person’s worldview. The lived experience of the people of color is therefore not an individual’s own but something given and determined by society. The definition of whiteness has changed over time and determined by people in power. In the 20th century, people from Eastern Europe were considered “non-white” and treated as people of color. Once they gain power and privilege, they include nationality in the whiteness (Johnson, 2006, p. 18), depicting the tendency of privileged whites to discriminate.

As Reskin (2003) clarifies, “Whiteness is a potential resource for all whites that others (who perceive their whiteness) confer and even impose on them (us) whether or not they (we) seek it. Even whites who abdicate racial privilege can readily reclaim it at the moment they cease to reject it actively. The automaticity of unconscious race stereotypes and in-group favoritism make complete abdication all but impossible. To paraphrase Thomas Wolfe on home, whiteness is where you can always go and where
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