

Name: *Diya Sewpersad*
Grade: *11*
School: *Arena Park Secondary School*
Theme: *Racism*

*Nobody is Born a Racist...
So Where Does it Come From?*

Racism is one of the most prevalent and divisive issues in our society. It is the belief in the superiority or inferiority of certain racial or ethnic groups, leading to discrimination and prejudice. But if nobody is born a racist, then where does it come from? This essay aims to explore the origins of racism, examining various factors that contribute to its development and perpetuation. By analyzing historical events, psychological influences, and societal conditioning, we can gain a deeper understanding of how racism takes root and shapes individuals and communities.

To comprehend the origins of racism, we must first delve into history. Centuries of colonization, slavery, and imperialism have contributed to the conceptualization of racial hierarchies. The transatlantic slave trade, for instance, dehumanized African people and established an enduring legacy of racial prejudice. These historical injustices not only fostered an imbalance of power but also provided a framework for racial stereotypes and discrimination to thrive and persist.

While history sets the stage, individual psychology also plays a critical role in the development of racism. Humans are social beings, and our brains are wired to categorize others based on various characteristics. This innate tendency, known as "ingroup-outgroup bias," can lay the groundwork for prejudice and discrimination. When people grow up in homogeneous environments or have limited exposure to diversity, their perception of others outside their group becomes skewed. This bias may lead to the perception of different racial or ethnic groups as "the other," fostering a sense of superiority or fear.

Furthermore, research suggests that individuals may develop racist attitudes as a result of their upbringing and socialization. Children absorb information from their surroundings, including the attitudes of parents, family members, and peers. If exposed to discriminatory beliefs and behaviors, they may internalize these prejudices as normal and acceptable. Therefore,

upbringing and early social influences significantly contribute to the development of racist attitudes and behaviors.

Beyond individual psychology, society at large perpetuates racism through various mechanisms. Cultural norms, media representations, and institutional biases all contribute to the perpetuation of racial discrimination. For example, the media often portrays certain racial or ethnic groups in a negative light, reinforcing negative stereotypes and fostering societal divisions. This constant exposure to biased information influences the way individuals perceive different races, perpetuating systemic racism.

Institutions and systems are another essential component of racism. Educational institutions, employment practices, and criminal justice systems can all exhibit biases that disadvantage certain racial groups. These systematic disparities further solidify racist beliefs, as individuals witness unequal treatment and outcomes based on race. Consequently, individuals may conform to these established norms and perpetuate the cycle of racism, both consciously and unconsciously.

While understanding the origins of racism is crucial, it is equally important to explore ways to combat it. Education is central to dismantling racist attitudes and promoting inclusivity. By incorporating diverse curricula, teaching accurate history, and fostering open discussions, schools can challenge stereotypes and foster empathy and understanding. Moreover, education, both formal and informal, has a profound impact on an individual's view of race. Educational institutions can either perpetuate or challenge societal prejudices. A well-known education reformer once said, "Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire." When education emphasizes diversity, inclusion, and equality, it can ignite a fire within individuals to reject racism and embrace tolerance. On the other hand, a lack of adequate education or the propagation of biased narratives can fuel racist ideologies.

Media also has a significant role to play in combating racism. By actively promoting diverse representation and eliminating harmful stereotypes, the media can contribute to a more inclusive society. Similarly, policies and legislation that address systemic biases and provide equal opportunities for all can dismantle institutional racism.

It's not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognise, accept and celebrate those differences. We all have different personalities and opinions but we all go through the same emotions, our heart beats the same and we have the same color blood that runs in our veins. Why are we being judged based on something that is far away from who we are? Our skin shade cannot define our abilities and strengths. We belong in a world where confidence should be louder than insecurities not to live in fear where this aggravational world is the definition of permanent scars.

Racism is a reality that so many of us grow up learning and experiencing the consequences of. We all hope that someday we will have a chance to acknowledge our judgments and mistakes that will not affect us anymore deeply.

In the words of Desmond Tutu, "Racism is a weapon of mass destruction, whether overt or covert." This astute observation captures the true essence of racism and highlights its destructive nature. It is crucial to uncover the sources from which such destructive ideologies spring forth.

Back in the 1948 apartheid era, where it all started the separation of racial groups in many countries where people lived in tears of despair and skies were gray. Some races were superior to others. The aim of grouping races was to enforce segregation and control over the non-white population, while privileging the white minority. This allowed the government to maintain political power, economic dominance, and social control over the country.

Apartheid also exacerbated racial tensions and contributed to a culture of fear, mistrust, and violence. The government employed a divide-and-rule strategy, pitting different racial groups against each other to maintain control. This fueled animosity and conflicts, leading to widespread unrest and protests against the regime.

Apartheid led to the forced removal and displacement of millions of Black Africans from their homes and communities. Families were torn apart, and entire communities were uprooted, causing trauma and loss. The destruction of neighborhoods and cultural heritage further deepened the psychological and emotional scars that persist to this day.

The groupings of races in the apartheid era were based on the notion of racial superiority and the preservation of white minority rule. The apartheid regime employed a system of racial classification called "Bantu Education Act", which assigned individuals into racial categories based on physical features, ancestry, and cultural practices. These racial classifications determined a person's legal status, access to resources, and social standing.

Apartheid had profound and lasting effects on South Africa. It created deep racial divides, perpetuated inequality and oppression, and left a legacy of trauma and division. However, the end of apartheid marked a turning point, paving the way for reconciliation and the pursuit of a more inclusive and equal South Africa but up to this day in modern society we still face the effects that apartheid had although its long back but even the past cannot be erased.

Lastly, fostering empathy and promoting interpersonal relationships across racial lines is integral to challenging racism. Engaging in meaningful dialogue and actively seeking out diverse perspectives can challenge biased beliefs and reduce the fear or ignorance that fuels racism. Racism is not inherent; it is learned and perpetuated through historical, psychological, and societal influences. Understanding the roots of racism can help us develop effective strategies to combat it. By educating ourselves, challenging stereotypes, and actively promoting inclusivity, we can work towards a society where nobody is judged or discriminated against based on the color of their skin. It is only through collective effort that we can eradicate the entrenched systemic biases that perpetuate racism and create a world where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

We want equality! Our skin color is not a weapon nor a crime. Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter. Say no to racism and help build a support system rather than recreating the oppressive system. We want freedom from those judgments. A change can never be too late so join hands and refocus our thoughts towards this concern.