

Post-Racial? NC State Expert Weighs In On the Current State of Race Relations

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Many pundits professed the dawn of a “post-racial” era following the election of Barack Obama as the first African-American president.

But race and interracial relations still stir deep emotions in the public and in the press. Evidence includes the recent furor over President Carter’s recent comments suggesting race is contributing to criticism of Obama’s presidential platform, and national debate stemming from the recent incident involving Harvard professor Dr. Henry Louis Gates and Cambridge, Mass., police. Dr. Rupert Nacoste, of North Carolina State University, has made a lifelong study of interracial dynamics, and can contribute historical context and key insights into the current state of race relations.

Nacoste, a professor of psychology at NC State, says “we are not in a post-racial era, we are in the midst of a period of interracial transition.” The Civil Rights era was a period of interracial transition that dealt with race relations at the institutional level, resulting in far-reaching legislative initiatives aimed at issues such as voting rights and desegregation. Nacoste says the current period of transition is revolving around individuals rather than institutions, and addresses how people are dealing with race in their interpersonal relationships.

Nacoste says that issues being grappled with in this current transition period include, “How and why does the presence of race influence the ways in which people try to interact with each other; what social

mistakes arise from these interactions; and how can these interracial interactions be improved? Stereotypes still do real damage, and that is something needs to be addressed.”

For example, Nacoste says that research shows that “confronting a person in a polite way when they use racial stereotypes or slurs results in that person being less likely to use that stereotype again. We let stereotypes live by not speaking up - each of us has the power to influence another person. By speaking up during that interaction moment, each of us can create a quiet revolution against the stereotypes we still carry around.”

Provided by NC State

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