

White Americans still vastly overestimate racial progress, study finds

September 22 2020, by Mohamed Abdelfattah



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The discrepancy in perception among white Americans shows a far more optimistic view of the racial progress that has been made since the

1960s, according to a new study by Ivy Onyeador, a professor at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

In 1963, for every \$100 in wealth a white family had, the average Black family had around \$5. White Americans thought it was \$38.

Onyeador set out to see what interventions could correct this perception gap. She invited study participants to read articles about systemic racism and how it affects outcomes for Black Americans and other [racial minorities](#).

"We wanted participants to read about the persistence of racial discrimination in the United States so we could see whether that would improve their perception of [racial inequality](#) in the present," Onyeador said.

These discrimination reminders, however, didn't improve the accuracy of present-day racial [inequality](#) among white Americans.

Unexpectedly, reading about discrimination led participants to estimate more equality in the past.

"A number of factors might be at play," Onyeador said. "These include a belief in a just world, the myth of racial progress, and the [perception](#) created in the media and our national discourse of high-status Black individuals who may not reflect the economic condition of most Black Americans in the real world."

Robust policies to address racial inequality may, therefore, face obstacles since underestimates of the economic gap may make it difficult to garner support for large-scale initiatives designed to address these persistent disparities.

According to the most recent federal statistics, the median wealth held by Black families is one-tenth of the median wealth held by white families.

"It's not surprising to now see that policy proposals aimed directly at reducing racial economic inequality fall well short of generating the momentum needed for implementation," Onyeador said.

In the future, Onyeador's research will continue to examine how various groups reason about discrimination and disparities, identifying threats to social cohesion and designing interventions to increase people's understanding of inequality. She will also be looking at misperceptions of gender economic equality and the role race plays in shaping those misperceptions.

The study, "Disrupting Beliefs in Racial Progress: Reminders of Persistent Racism Alter Perceptions of Past, But Not Current, Racial Economic Equality," was published recently in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

More information: Ivuoma N. Onyeador et al. Disrupting Beliefs in Racial Progress: Reminders of Persistent Racism Alter Perceptions of Past, But Not Current, Racial Economic Equality, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0146167220942625](https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167220942625)

Provided by Northwestern University

Citation: White Americans still vastly overestimate racial progress, study finds (2020, September 22) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-09-white-americans-vastly-overestimate-racial.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.