

White Racism in the Present Era

Tim Wise

I want to say, first of all, that it has been about six years since I was here on the campus of San Francisco State University. Last time I was here, it was not nearly as nice a gathering as this. It was to debate Dinesh D'Souza across campus. Although it went very well, because you can imagine a San Francisco State crowd is not nearly his crowd, I must say, it is far nicer to share a stage with Charlene and Manning and Betita than with Dinesh. Which isn't saying much. Not because of you, but because of him. But it is really an honor to be here.

Before I start, I want to thank Manning Marable in particular for giving me an idea that I have really been playing with for a long time. It was in his introduction. He was talking about how normally he doesn't stay on script. He goes around, he does a Coltrane or a Miles Davis thing and he loops around and comes back to a subject. I can't stick to a script at all--in fact, I have a hell of a time sticking to an outline. I don't even write a script. And, for the longest time, this linear, Eurocentric paradigm, within which we, as white folks, are raised, told me that that was lack of focus. Then pharmaceutical companies, operating under the same paradigm, tell me that's ADD. And, now, I understand it is neither. It is jazz. And, if I just had recognized that years ago, all of the trauma about sticking to a script would have left me and I wouldn't be sweating it so much.

I was asked to speak about white racism in the 21st century. And the first thing that came to mind when I saw that that was the topic I was supposed to address, is, that, although we recognize ways in which racism has transformed, or altered, or, I would say, adapted, as the history of this country has developed, it still brings to mind the old saying--I think it's a line from a song--"that everything old is new again."

So, the more things have changed or transformed, or transmogrified (I think is the big and fancy word for it), the more things have stayed the same. And that there is really a persistent--and growing--presence of very common, and older, forms of racism.

We talk about the "new" racism, the "modern" racism, "subtle" racism--all these terms that academics use. But, in reality, a lot of that stuff we're hearing now is not at all fancy or new or unique. It's very much the old racism from 100 or 150, even 200, years ago reemerging. And I'll talk about that a bit in a second.

White racism in the 21st century, is, at least at one level, exactly the same as it was in the 20th, the 19th, the 18th, and the latter part of the 17th century. And in what became the United States, that level is this: then as now, white racism is first and foremost a system. As with anything else that ends with the letters i-s-m, these things are systems, ways of organizing a society. I know most of us understand this, but it's worth always going over again that at the most basic, grammatical level, if I say "racism" and it ends with those three letters, then it's no different than if I say "capitalism" or "socialism" or "fascism" or "communism". And you know that the vast majority of people who use the term, whether in everyday talk, academic language, commentators on TV, radio, or just in your neighborhood, talking about racism, it's very rarely at that level that particularly white folks address the issue of racism. We tend to keep it at this very interpersonal level, where it becomes nothing more than a synonym for prejudice or

bigotry. And we know it's more than that. It is systemic. And that is one thing that has remained constant. So we at least need to understand that.

Not only do we need to understand that, we need to understand that system. And let's just name it. It's not enough to call it "racism", see, because that sounds very generic, right? Racism as some generic thing. It's not just that we have a system of racism; we have a very specific and "nameable" system of racism called "white supremacy." So let us just call it what it is, because if we are not specific about what we are saying, then we get sidetracked into all these discussions about folks who want to talk about somebody else's racism. But if we are clear that we are talking about a systemic reality and set of institutional relations, then we don't get sidetracked, because we called it "white supremacy" and we know who that means. So let's just call it what it is. Let's say "white supremacy in the 21st Century" and let's recognize that that is a system first. And from that system of unequal relations on the basis of race, which is usually defined by skin color and various visual cues that we have decided to make relevant in our culture, that that system of unequal relations on the basis of race then produces, generates and reproduces the ideology of racism which we then see manifested at an individual level.

So, the system comes first, and then, as a way to rationalize and to justify and to make that system OK, we develop racism as ideology. On the one hand we say we all are in this together and we all have equal opportunity and we all believe in democracy. To make that jibe with the reality of inequity though, we have to develop the ideology to make the system make sense.

That is some of what Betita was talking about and the way that system was developed, and then that system did a number on folks' attitudes, particularly in the so-called white community, those of European descent, and that's how we got where we are. So it does a number on that mindset, on that ideology, but it begins as a system. And the number that it does on our minds, as white folks in particular in this culture, manifests in two particular ways that I want to discuss briefly:

One is the form of white racism that we might properly refer to as denial, which really is its own form of racism. Because if I say to you as a person of color that what you think happened to you really didn't happen to you; that you were pulled over only because your taillight was out; that the reason that you didn't get the job is because your resume was inferior; that the reason that you didn't score as well on the SAT isn't because of racism, but because you didn't study hard enough; that I know your reality better than YOU know your reality, then I have just committed a white supremacist act.

So, first and foremost, denial is racism. And if you looked at the Gallup poll on race relations that came out, I think in 2001, it found that 70% of my so-called brothers and sisters in the white community, say that people of color, particularly black folks, have fully equal opportunity in all walks of life and their communities as white folks do. 80% said black folks had equal educational opportunity, and equal housing opportunity. I would point out, just to give you a sense of the degree of delusion with which we are working, that, if you go back even to 1962, where white folks were asked that same question, "Do you believe that blacks have fully equal educational opportunity" just eight years after Brown and at least 10 years before any of the Southern states

did any of that all due deliberate speed stuff that they were told to do, and, even at that time, you had 65-70% of white folks who said black folks had equal opportunity in education, even then.

Now, today, hardly any white folks would say it because it's easy, with 40 years in the grave, in retrospect, to say, "Oh yeah, it was tough, back in the day." But, you go back to the day and you then ask white folks then and they say, "The thirties, they were a bitch." But the 60's, we've got it all together. Now, my guess is if they were doing these polls in the 30's they would have said, "Now the 1890's, oh my god those were tough."

And I have looked at the papers from the 1890's in Tennessee where I'm from and all throughout the South, and you know what they were saying then? "Black and white folks, we all get along just fine down here."

So, the denial has a long pedigree. It's nothing new. And it's not just that white folks aren't capable of understanding reality. We're smart folk. The problem is that the system of inequality has kept us apart, not by accident, but by a design that decided who could live where, who could not, who could work where, who could not, and so, if white folks don't know any people of color, cause they're not living around us, if their children don't go to school with our children, then how would we know?

So even with the denial, we can make fun of it, but let us be clear it has a systemic root. And that root is the separation and the isolation--the dissimilarity index that Charlene talked about earlier with regard to housing--and that didn't come about by accident. So let's get off that bumper sticker you see on the cars: the sticker that says "Shit happens." I know that a white person invented that sticker because only a white person could think shit just happens. See, shit does not just happen. Shit gets done.

Now Betita told me I was the comic entertainment for today, so I have to live up to that responsibility.

Shit doesn't happen; shit gets done. By people, to people. If you're a person of color you know that, if you're a woman of any color you know that, if you're poor of any race you know that. So we know it wasn't a person of color; it was not a working class or poor person who came up with that sticker, nor would it be folks like that who are locked into the greatest level of denial, because at some level you understand what it's like not to have privilege on one axis or another, whether it's class or gender or sexual orientation or language ability or status or disability of some form. At least you understand at some level what I'm talking about.

The system of white supremacy also produces rationalizations for those inequalities that we do see. And this is an important second aspect. It's not just that we deny the inequalities, but increasingly we have folks who don't deny them. They simply try to explain them away as the result of rationality. And this is dangerous. This is what happened in the middle of the 1800's when the Abolition movement began to gain strength. It became increasingly important for slave owners, and those defending that system to really justify their racism in a way that they hadn't had to 50 years before.

You didn't have to explain that African peoples were inferior when virtually the entire white community was behind you on that and had been for 100 years. But now as the Abolition movement gained strength, you'd better do some rationalizing. So you see some of the most vicious commentary about African

peoples, about Mexican peoples, about indigenous peoples in that period between the 1840's and the 1880's. Not so much in the 1700's, when slavery was taken for granted; you didn't have to go out of your way to justify the system when everybody agreed with you. But now you started to see breaks in that system and you had to come up with renewed defenses.

And that's what's happening now. See, the challenges to the system that both Manning and Betita talked about provoke this kind of backlash that we are seeing that allow something like the Bell Curve, science discredited a century ago, to become a best seller in 1994. And that's not new racism. That is the old racism. Relying on studies that are a hundred, and seventy and eighty years old. There's nothing new about it. But folks go out and buy it. And they say, "That's an interesting statistical analysis, wouldn't you say?"

Nothing interesting about it, any more than craniometry was interesting. "You got a bigger head, I can put more sand in your head," you must be smarter. That's how the early race scientists proved that Black people were inferior. Now, that's not interesting. That's just damn stupid and a waste of money. Somebody had to fund that research. Of course the Bradley Foundation funded it--talking about the Bell Curve now; the same folks that are leading the fight for vouchers, because they "love" Black children, want to make sure they get a good education. Then they turn around and fund a guy writing a book that says, "There's nothin' you can do for Black children. Write 'em off." Now, there's a little bit of a contradiction between these two things. We're doing vouchers because we want to help Black children get a good education; then we're doing this book under the table here that says, "Forget 'em, write 'em off, they're nothing but criminals and single mothers and poor folks anyway."

Those are rationalizations. Dinesh D'Souza who I debated here six years ago says what? He says, "Well, maybe it's not genes, OK, maybe Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein are wrong. Maybe it's not DNA, but it's that Black culture that's defective. It's Black and Latino culture that's got something wrong with it."

He even says in the book: "Black folks need to act white." And he should know.

So Dinesh comes up with this phrase: "rational discrimination." Yes, there's inequality, but it's "rational." Why is there disparity in the income? Well, because Black folks mostly live in the South, and there's more poverty in the South, so that naturally the income is lower.

Now, is it a coincidence that Black folks disproportionately live in the South, first of all? That's not unrelated to the history of racism. But he acts like it's some independent variable.

Or he says, "Black folks on average don't have the same years of education as white folks, and that's why they make less money." Same for Latinos. Is that unrelated to the history of racism?

Then he says--and Thomas Sowell says this too, a lot of these folks do; people of color who white folks parade around and they pay a lot of money to do the work for us. They go around and say, "Well, Black folks have seven years less average age than the white community. And we know older folks generally make more than younger folks, so if you just control for age, there's no disparity."

Well, number one, if I had time I could do the whole

statistical analysis to show you it's not true for whites and blacks actually in the workforce, where age might effect average incomes. But the larger question is, why is the average age for Black and Latino folks less than the average age for whites? It might have something to do with the lesser life expectancy and that might have something to do with racism, so all this stuff which we claim to be independent variables are all about racism, too. But these are rationalizations. So when you hear about racial profiling you have folks on the right who try to rationalize it. Inglewood police beating somebody down, throwing them on a hood, they'd rationalize it. And they say, "They HAVE to do this. They have to profile because, you know, Black folks have a higher aggregate crime rate." That's what they say.

Let's break this down for just a second. Number one, if it is true that some crimes are disproportionately committed by people of color and folks of low income, the question is still why that is? Number two, to even make that argument you have to ignore the crimes of the state, not run by people of color; you have to ignore the crimes of the corporate class, not run by people of color. We know that 56,000 people die a year from occupational disease and illness and hazardous work force conditions, not being run and implemented by people of color, versus 12,000 murdered on the street, and not all of them by people of color. So if we really want to talk about death and destruction, we need to understand that we need to be pulling over every white man in a Lexus because we should presume him to be a corporate criminal. But we don't do it.

See, we apply that statistical logic with discrimination. So, I can go to Washington State where there's a white male serial killer on the loose every day in a month, and I will never be pulled over because I fit the description, even though I usually do. But then people will say that when men of color, and increasingly women of color, somehow, and of course men and women who are Arab, perceived as Arab, perceived as Muslim, are pulled over on generalized suspicion, we call it rational. But it's not

rational. And, of course, profiling's mostly done for drugs. And it definitely ain't rational there, because, if you look at any government data--now you paid for the data, you might as well look at it--if you look at any of the government data, you find that white folks are more likely to use drugs, more likely to have drugs on them, just as likely to sell drugs. In fact a Department of Justice--this didn't make the news, cause they don't make a big deal, don't send out press releases when reports like this one come out--report came out last year found Black males twice as likely to be stopped and searched in their vehicles for drugs, even though white males when searched were twice as likely to have drugs on them.

Now that's not just racism, that's just stupid law enforcement. So, it's not rational, but we have people rationalizing it, and we need to be able to break that down. It's not just denial of the inequalities that we know are there but some others don't, it's also the rationalizing of those that we do acknowledge.

This system of white supremacy has created a sense of entitlement in the white community that we rarely talk about. A sense of entitlement that goes along with the material advantages and privileges that white supremacy offers. So not only does whiteness become a form of property, as Cheryl Harris and others have told us, and analyzed and explained so well. It also gives the person who receives the benefits of that system a stake in maintaining that property. And this is very, very critical for us in this room to talk about as we move to eliminate, not only institutionalized white supremacy, but a class system. Because if we're going to forge anti-racist efforts in the 21st century and create white allies following leadership of color--which is critical--then it's not going to be enough to say let's just focus on our common class interests. We can't go down that road. That is sort of the left equivalent of the nice mushy liberals who say, "Why can't we just focus on what unites us, instead of what divides us?"

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Well, fool, because racism is what divides you, and that's why we can't ignore it. That is a way to NOT talk about racism and we on the left definitely don't want to fall into that. So we can't say, "Well, let's just talk about our common class interests."

That's what folks said to me when I was involved in anti David Duke work 1991-92 in Louisiana. My first job right out of college, which was damn nice to have that as the first thing you do out of college. And, people would say that. We would go and talk to these working class white folks about their common class interests. Explain to them that there's a surplus pool of labor that drives down the wages of their entire working class. And I just looked at folk and I said, "Look, I'm not disagreeing with that analysis, but damn! You have to recognize that white folks have white skin as property, right now. And, if we're going to go to folks and simply ask them to relinquish the property they already have for the property they WOULD have if they got it together with their Black and Brown brothers and sisters, that is to say got together, organized together, boosted the wages of the working class. Now you're offering something way off down here, in exchange for something I already have as a white person. That's a hard sell. Right? You're asking me to give up something that I know what it's like and it's tangible to me for something that you swear is going to happen down the line. So, if we get it together, organize, the wages will go up, you know.

And I was always troubled by it, number one because it was swapping the tangible for the intangible, but also because there is something unbecoming about socialists trying to appeal to the bottom line of someone's pocketbook interest. So, even if it were true, that we all ought to get it together so as to boost the wages, people are not merely material animals. They are that, but they also exist culturally within neighborhoods and communities and families, and white supremacy is embedded in all of those structures. So, even if you are able to convince people on a class basis that they have a reason to organize, and we should do that, I'm not saying don't do that. But it can't be enough, because ultimately there are all these other aspects of white supremacy, both material and psychological that are embedded, and if we don't deal with those, we're only going to get half of what we're actually looking to get.

Instead of saying, we have to end the class system so as to end racism, let us be clear. If we do not challenge and end racism-especially at the institutional level-we're not going to end the class system. And it is exactly that direction that we have to look at.

We have to demonstrate that to create white allies, the thing that whites need to understand is not just that they'd be better off in the absence of racism materially, because working class wages--and even middle class wages--would tend to go up and living standards would improve. It is also that we must convince and make clear to white folks that the thing we have now--white privilege--carries a cost. And that cost NOW is too great to bear. Not only that it could be better 10 years down the line, or 15, if we got it together and ended the class system or class exploitation, but that, indeed that the cost of white supremacy, even today is too great. And not only in material ways. I think, I was in Iowa not long ago, speaking at a conference on

white privilege, and one of the things that came up was that Iowa, like many states, has gone on a spree of building prisons, right? Both as a way to create jobs and as a way to deal with this increasing fear of, let's be clear, Black and Brown bodies, and bodies that are poor. And, so even in Iowa, which is like the second whitest state in the country, this prison building binge was justified and rationalized 'cause of some folks in Des Moines who were looked at as threatening. And migrant labor, looked at as threatening.

But the irony is that there ain't enough Black and Brown folk in Iowa yet to fill up those jails with only Black and Brown folk. But they built them, and you know, it's like the ball field in that movie: you build it, they will come. And so if you build the jail and you have to fill that jail and you don't have enough Black and Brown folk to fill that jail then some white folk will be filling it. And so now we can make it clear to white people, particularly those who are working class or middle class, whatever we define that to be, that there is a real harm that comes from white privilege. Oh yes, we may have the privilege of ignoring racism against Black and Brown people, we may have the privilege of remaining ignorant and not worrying about it, but if the effect on them is to actually implement structures and policies that actually do harm to us, not merely in our pocketbook, but destroying our own families and communities, then we have a real cost that we can make visible. If, in the state of California, you build 26 new prisons over a 15 to 20 year period and only one new four-year college campus it is not only Black and Brown folks who lose, it is also white folks who now don't have a place to sit in that college, so they have to go blame affirmative action for that, because the Martinez child or the Rodriguez child or some Black child from South Central is presumed to have taken that slot. So there's common interest beyond merely the surplus labor argument that we make on an economic level.

But there's even a deeper reason than that, much deeper than that. I never understood the cost of "whiteness" until I watched my grandfather die. My grandfather on my father's side, the son of an immigrant from Russia, a Russian Jew who came here in 1910, that would be my great grandfather, who came here and, like so many of us in the Jewish community, and the Irish community, the Italian community, various so-called white ethnic communities, the cost, or, as Baldwin would have said, the "price of our ticket" to become white and take advantage of and to be accepted into this fraternity of whiteness, was to relinquish all of the things, or as many as possible, that we could in order to be accepted. That meant talking differently, losing the accent, changing the way that you danced and dressed and ate and prayed, changing all the things that had kept your family together through the pogroms in Russia as with my family.

Or through a famine in Ireland. Or through any of the other challenges that these so-called white ethnics had; you had to give all that up to become something you weren't. White. Because you weren't white, 'till you got here. And then you get here, and you're made clear that whiteness is the thing to be and this is the club to belong to and, like my great grandfather, you know it was a serious carrot...that carrot and the stick, that was a serious carrot; he didn't see the stick coming. The stick was that he would have to relinquish all of those things that actually made him who he was, which meant that he couldn't teach his children about that, which meant that they couldn't teach their children about

that, which means my father couldn't teach me about that, and I watched my grandfather before he died, trying to conjure up some memory handed down by his dad; some tale, some fable, of what it meant to be a Jew, an immigrant, a Russian-American, somebody who had lived in Pale of Settlement to which Jews were restricted by the czars, and he had not a single story to share. Because the cost of having had that story would have been to hold on to that heritage, and the cost of whiteness was to lose that heritage. He used to joke as a child that my family name is not "Wise"; that won't probably shock you. It wasn't even Weiss. It was something like Shuckleman or Shickleman or Sheckman or Schuckman-- the point being, we don't know.

As a child I used to joke because this was the family legend- that I was named for the Wise Potato Chips. When my great grandfather landed on Ellis Island they pointed up at a bulletin board in Manhattan for Wise Potato Chips, which were, indeed, a delicacy even then, and said, "Look here, that's your new name." And my great grandfather, not knowing any better, not seeing how deep this really was, thought "Hey that's wonderful: you come to the new world, and you get a new name." But you see what it took me years to recognize was that even if I was related to the Wise Potato Chip folks, I was not cut in on that wealth. So it wasn't doing me any good. But more importantly than that, that name was a slave name, not in the same sense as African peoples were given slave names--my great grandfather was not literally owned--but he had to sell himself to this system of white supremacy and that was what he got in return. And I'm here to tell you some 90 years later the cost was too damn much.

Until we get clear on what we lose as the people we really are, be it German, Italian, Irish, English, Scottish, Russian, Polish, Greek--whatever it is that those of us who get to be white now had to give up--that is infinitely more precious than what we have gained. And until we understand that we have lost something, until we understand that we are victims of our own doing, to be sure, of this system of white supremacy, we're not going to become real allies because we will not see what's in it for us. See, when you talk about white privilege, a lot of folks go around the country and do that--I do that. And let's say I do my job well, and I've proven to every white person in the room that there is this thing called white privilege. A lot of people of color come up to me and say, "Tim, that's a really good speech you gave. And it looks like the white folks bought it. Now let me ask you this: if they all realize they have privilege, why in the hell would they want to give that up?"

See, if you do your job badly, you don't even convince folks, so then they don't get busy doing the work. If you do your job well, you convince them they got this thing called white privilege and they go, "Well, damn, now if I got this thing called 'white privilege' then I got to maintain that." Because our culture doesn't tell us to give up our privileges. Our culture tells us: "count your blessings," don't give them away.

Our parents don't tell us....they tell us to be grateful for what we have, not be grateful and then get rid of it because it's this horrible thing that taints you. That's not what our parents say. So, we have to allow white folks to understand that their stake in this is immediate, and it is personal, and it is spiritual, and it is cultural, and it is deeper than material goods, although that is part of it, because indeed we will be better off in a system of equity and democracy, we will be better off without a class system, but

unless we go deeper than that, we will never be able to create that critical mass of white allies that we need in order to eliminate this system of white supremacy.

And that cultural component is only one piece. There are many others that I haven't the time to go into. If you've read some of my articles about school shootings, the Columbine shootings in particular, you will know that the argument I was putting forth there was that this system of privilege, race and class combined in places like Littleton and places like Santee and places like Springfield had actually created this false sense of security for white people, particularly of some means, who were able to say to themselves, "As long as I'm not in San Diego, as long as I'm not in Denver, as long as I'm not in North Portland, I'm OK, because THOSE people are over there. And we didn't think this was going to happen in OUR neighborhood."

You let down your guard to the danger that's building 35 bombs in your basement. You haven't talked to your child in two weeks. So, that, too, is an example of how white privilege, by encapsulating us, and allowing us to live and remain in this cycle of denial, actually doesn't serve us very well. Because we let our guard down to the dangers that are real, while we pay all that attention worrying about the dangers that aren't even anywhere near us, dangers that aren't even in our neighborhood, because we've made damn sure that they wouldn't be. But then we find out we got all this dysfunction in the attic and in the basement and in our children's rooms. And I'm not trying to suggest that most young white people are mass murderers or shooters, most are not. The schools actually of this country for white, Black or otherwise, are safer than most neighborhoods and most homes. More violence is done to kids by their own parents than done by their peers, be they white, Black, Asian, indigenous, or anything else. But let us be clear that if all those shootings had gone down in communities of color the analysis would have been different. Now don't get me wrong, there are shootings that happen in communities of color, but I'm talking MASS murder. I'm talking, take a gun and kill every damn thing with a heartbeat; I'm saying, kill not only your girlfriend but every damn kid that was at her slumber party last month. That kind of mass violence and mayhem is a control issue, it is a domination and rage issue...Let me ask you, what people in a society are more likely to act out in a way that is about domination and control? The people who were told that they were never going to be in control anyway, or the folks who always thought that they would be? And then one little thing happens: their girlfriend dumps them, they get a bad grade, they get teased in school. I'm not trying to say that being teased isn't serious, but, let's be honest. It doesn't compare to facing racism, sexism, homophobia and heterosexism or violence--institutional violence--in that school, but people of color by virtue of being oppressed in this nation have to build up coping skills, just to get through the week. But those of us in the privileged group don't have to build up the same skills and then we're unprepared for some stuff when it comes our way. And then we act out in crazy ways.

I'm going to close with a quote from James Baldwin, because it makes the point as well as I could. This is what he said about this and it applies to the kind of rage dysfunction we see in some of these white communities with mass murder, child sexual molestation, drug and alcohol abuse, self mutilation, suicide, all of these control pathologies, all of which predominate in white

places. Here is what Baldwin said that was relevant to this issue:

"People who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are. That man who is forced each day to snatch his manhood, his identity, out of the fires of human cruelty that rages to destroy it, knows, if he survives the effort-and even if he doesn't-something about himself and human life that no school on earth can teach. He achieves his own authority, and that is unshakable. This is because, in order to save his life, he is forced to look beneath appearances, to take nothing for granted, to hear the meaning behind the words, if one is continually surviving the worst that life can bring one eventually ceases to be controlled by a fear of what life can bring."

So, for those who face oppression and injustice, coping skills allow one to not be afraid any more. And those skills that you must develop in order to survive allow one to go forward and to know exactly who you are. But those who are privileged and those who receive advantages, both material and psychological, we haven't a clue who we are, and we better get clear on it, or this mess is not going to ever, ever change.

---- *Tim Wise is a lecturer and author, and Director of the Association for White Anti-Racist Education (AWARE) in Nashville, Tennessee.*

Immigration, Race, and Racism

Lillian Galedo

The history of America is a history of immigration. Immigration is an amazing lens through which to view not only our own history, but also the history of the world. It provides insight into the uneven development of nations; of the legacy of slavery and colonialism which is at the root of underdevelopment and dislocation; the push and pull factors that prompted our ancestors' decisions to come to the US. Immigration is also a reflection of the inescapable truth that the planet is ever evolving into one global (capitalist) economy with one global workforce.

Immigration has been a tool of "nation building" by the US since pre-revolutionary times. It provides insight into who we define Americans to be and by examining our immigration policies, exposes the racist edge that has been at play in nation building for hundreds of years.

Except for African slavery and the Mexican presence in the Southwest, the masses of immigrants came to the US in three major waves of immigration, each covering approximately 50-year periods.

Before the Civil War, open borders were operative until the first great wave of immigration from 1840-1880s. 26 million immigrants came mainly from Europe - England, Ireland and Jews from Germany.

The second great wave began in the late 1880s. This period saw a vast increase in the diversity of immigrants coming to the US. These were immigrants from Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. These sending countries comprised more than 40% of immigrants between 1890 and 1920. During the 1910's Canadians were the fourth largest group and by the 1920s Mexicans

were the fourth largest immigrating group.

With this diversity we began to see the rise of organized anti-immigrant policies and legislation. Successive waves of immigrants were viewed as less capable than their predecessors, less hard working, less able to learn "American ways", and less able to assimilate. These attitudes produced the first restrictionist measures resulting eventually in the 1921 Quota Act, which essentially limited immigration to Europeans.

The third wave of immigration began in 1965 with the repeal of the Quota Act and the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which equalized immigration from all countries. From the 1960s to the present, 20.1 million people have immigrated to the US as permanent residents. Asians and Latin Americans made up 84% of immigrants since 1965. According to the 2000 census, 85% of the foreign-born population are from Mexico, Central and South America, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. These immigrants however, still only constitute 10.3% of the total US population.

From the post-civil war period to the 1920s the US moved from virtually unrestricted immigration to the most severe limits in the country's two hundred-year history. Historically, restrictions in immigration policy have been directly correlated to race. The first restrictions - soon after the Civil War - were on Africans who had been brought to the US as slaves. The Naturalization Act of 1790 prohibited citizenship of "non-whites", setting a racist precedent for future anti-immigrant laws. The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 established lengthy residency requirements prior to application for citizenship, placed restrictions on which ethnic groups could apply for citizenship, and permitted the President to order the deportation of all immigrants judged as "dangerous" to national security.

In 1875, Asians were the first group to be restricted through legislation that excluded criminals, prostitutes, and contract laborers from Asia. In practice, this law deterred few immigrants, because it could not be enforced. In 1882, Congress passed legislation specifically aimed at barring Chinese laborers, while allowing the entry of Chinese students, teachers, merchants, and "tourists". This law was also weakly enforced, particularly for European and Mexican contract laborers.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the exclusion of Japanese and by 1917 legislation was passed which excluded all immigration from Asia. In 1920 the US border patrol was established, which then precipitated the designation of immigrants who were now "illegal" or "undocumented", a misdemeanor with penalties.

The Quota Act of 1921 restricted immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, Asia and other parts of the world in favor of immigration from England, Germany, and Scandinavia. From 1921-1933, over 300,000 Mexicans, including those who were US citizens, were repatriated to Mexico.

The Cable Act of 1922 and the Tydings-McDuffy Act of 1934 denied citizenship to immigrants based on their ethnicity and aimed at denying enfranchisement for non-whites. The Tydings-McDuffy Act in 1935 also limited immigration from the Philippines to 50 persons annually, and barred them from citizenship and relief under the New Deal.

The Alien Registration Act of 1940 required registration and fingerprinting of aliens, criminalized speech against the US government, and increased the grounds for deportation by