Transcript: Social Inequalities: Race and Ethnicity

>> Sociologists understand race as a socially constructed system of classification that relies on the assumption of biological difference. Similarly ethnicity is a system of classification which relies on a shared cultural identity.

Now what concerns sociologists is not just socially constructed difference but how people assign meaning to those difference as well as what those meanings are.

Race and ethnicity have been the basis of profound inequality for many years. And that inequality persists, which is why many sociologists regard the U.S. as a white supremacy state. While this can be a bitter pill to swallow especially for whites who might like to bask in the important achievements in the Civil Rights era, empirical observations continue to demonstrate that whites control and receive a disproportionate allocation of power and resources. But now that Americans have twice elected a Black president, isn't it possible that the U.S. has become a post-racial society?

>> Ah, I don't think it completely goes away. Obviously, you know, there's always an underlying you know, racism, you know, in voting and stuff like that. It's still there but... I don't know if you could even say it's less, it's just you know, it's a good step, I don't think you know, I don't think it will ever completely go away.

>> He did bring up about a change, I'm sure. He contributed to the factor of bringing in more tolerance.

>> Having someone in power that's not white, I think kind of levels the playing field a lot more and I think it gives a lot more opportunities to African Americans...

>> It would be nice if we lived in a post racial society. Unfortunately that's not the case. President Obama's symbolic victory during his election and his recent election definitely shows that progress has been made. I think no one would deny that. Unfortunately his election still hasn't altered the life experiences of minorities in this country. I mean there are few examples that we can draw upon.

First we could think about racial wage and equality. The fact that blacks in particular make 75 cent of every dollar that whites do, this means that two students graduate from college, from the same, same major, the same GPA, say they have the same letters of recommendation. One student who happens to make black will make 32.5 the other student will make 50 thousand dollars a year. This alone shows the differences by race.

We can also then think about education. When it comes to secondary education. And we simply have to look to the school system. The fact that Blacks and Latinos continuously go to underperforming schools, not only that they also live in neighborhoods that aren't up to par, on par to their white counterpart. In particular we could think about health disparities.

When we think about the fact that Blacks and Latinos are more likely, more likely to live in areas that are food deserts or have a lack of recreational facilities.

So for education, a large part of education comes down to school funding. And the promise that's given to our children is that they're going to have equal access to schools. Unfortunately this isn't the case.

So we put all of this together and what we actually see is that as much progress that has been made, and again Obama's election, I don't think anyone would take away from that, however his election simply hasn't translated into tangible outcomes.

And part of that is because his election is simply a symbolic gesture for racial change that hasn't translated into real changes in the lives of minorities in this country.

>> In order to conclude that the United States is truly post racial and is no longer a white supremacy state one would have to ignore the persistent wage gap between whites and people of color.

One would also have to ignore the disparities in education and health. However, because these disparities have persisted despite the historical election of Barack Obama as President of the United States, such a conclusion would be premature to say the least. [Music]