

Event: Screening of PBS documentary "American Denial"
2/24/15

On Feb. 24th, I watched a documentary called "American Denial" on the non-profit TV channel PBS (Public Broadcasting Service). The documentary dealt with the topic of race and racial discrimination in the United States. It starts off by talking about a landmark study on this subject by the Swedish researcher Gunnar Myrdal, entitled "The American Dilemma", which he published in 1944. In the first half the documentary analyzes depicts Myrdal's journey conducting this study and discusses all the major discriminations that mainly African Americans had to go through at that time. In the second half, it makes the point that even though many things, such as segregation, have changed racism is still a major problem.

The key messages that I took away from this documentary are manifold but I would like to mention two ideas that stuck with me. The first thing that I found interesting and remarkable is Myrdal's distinction between the social values that people believe in and the values according to which they live. Myrdal found that there is a discrepancy between those two values which can be very stark. Yet, the subjects in question were not aware of it which indicates it is subconscious. A powerful example of this is Myrdal's question to white people if segregation in the 1940's is similar to the Anti-Semitism in Germany. The people asked strongly disagreed and pointed out that this behavior violates the American Creed in different ways yet they failed to see that not everyone was equal in their own country as well.

The second idea that I took to heart from this documentary, is the well explained downward spiral of communities of color due to racial discrimination. The effects may be split into tangible and psychological consequences both of which have severe repercussions. An example for the former type of consequence is the higher police enforcement for people of color which results in many colored men being incarcerated. This in turn destabilized their communities through a lack of income and consequently poverty as well as stress on mothers in respect to child care. A psychological consequence from discrimination is the statistically proven underperformance of children of color due to a distorted self-image that portrays them as bad, useless etc.

My stance on the racial problems and race discrimination in the US has been buttressed by this documentary. From my own experience, I have noted some of the issues pointed already beforehand, however the film did a good job looking at the issue of discrimination from different angles. Ultimately, through empathizing with the individuals displayed, I believe I have become more aware of some of my own biases and am given tools to change things in the future.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

24.191 Ethics in Your Life: Being, Thinking, Doing (or Not?)
Spring 2015

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.