Racism: UPSC Notes

Racism is a prejudice, discrimination exhibited by a large group of people against people from different race or ethnicity, due to differences in their physical appearances. Apartheid which was practised in South Africa is an example of racism. Racism has played a role in genocides such as the Holocaust, Armenian Genocide etc.

Aspirants would find this topic very helpful in the IAS Exam.

Overview of Racism

Racism is a belief that propagates the belief that a certain group of humans possess traits such as physical appearance which makes them superior to the rest in their eyes. This sense of superiority will manifest in the form of discrimination, prejudice or antagonism to those of different race or ethnicity. Modern variants of racism are often based on social perceptions, or biological differences between peoples. These views can take the form of social actions, practices or beliefs, or political systems in which different races are ranked as inherently superior or inferior to each other.

Political systems of racism can be seen in the system of apartheid, which was in place in South Africa or the Jim Crow Laws in the United States. This system may include social aspects such as nativism, xenophobia, otherness, segregation, hierarchical ranking, and supremacism.

Origins of Racism

Racism is a relatively modern concept which came about in the age of European imperialism, the subsequent growth of capitalism and the Atlantic Slave Trade, the latter being a major factor in the rise of racism. It was also a major force behind racial segregation especially in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and South Africa under apartheid.

Racism in the 21st century does exist in other parts of the world. Anti-racism campaigns have to some extent eradicated certain manifestations of it, but in a globalised technologically dependent world, it would take years for such a social evil to be completely eliminated, but chances are that it may not be eradicated completely.

When did the European Union Ban Racism?

European Union explicitly banned racism in 2001, in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Article 21 of the charter bans discrimination on the basis of race, genetic features, color, language, nationality etc.

What is Scientific Racism?

It is a form of racism that came into existence in the early 19th century. It tried to create a racial classification of humans. Polygenist Christoph Meiners claimed only white race as beautiful and the rest as ugly. Scientific racism started losing its popularity in the 20th century. Anders Retzius demonstrated neither Europeans nor others belong to one pure race.

What is the Difference Between Xenophobia and Racism?

Xenophobia and Racism mostly overlap, but the stark difference is racism is discrimination based on physical characteristics whereas xenophobia is discrimination based on the perception that someone is foreign or originating from another community or nation. The word Xenophobia originates from the Greek word Xeno.