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# 50 Years Later

By **CHARLES M. BLOW**

As we approach the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, I have a gnawing in my gut, an uneasy sense of society and its racial reality.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech keeps ringing in my head, an aching, idyllic, rhetorical masterpiece that envisions a future free of discrimination and filled with harmony and equality. But I wonder whether the day he imagined will ever come and whether many Americans have quietly abandoned King's dream as a vision that can't — or shouldn't — exist in reality.

I'm absolutely convinced that enormous steps have been made in race relations. That's not debatable. Most laws that explicitly codified discrimination have been stricken from the books. Overt, articulated racial animus has become more socially unacceptable. And diversity has become a cause to be championed in many quarters, even if efforts to achieve it have taken some hits of late.

But my worry is that we have hit a ceiling of sorts. As we get closer to a society where explicit bias is virtually eradicated, we no longer have the stomach to deal with the more sinister issues of implicit biases and of structural and systematic racial inequality.

I worry that centuries of majority privilege and minority disenfranchisement are being overlooked in puddle-deep discussions about race and inequality, personal responsibility and societal inhibitors.

I wonder if we, as a society of increasing diversity but also drastic inequality, even agree on what constitutes equality. When we hear that word, do we think of equal opportunity, or equal treatment under the law, or equal outcomes, or some combination of those factors?

And I worry that there is a distinct and ever-more-vocal weariness — and in some cases, outright hostility — about the continued focus on racial equality.

In this topsy-turvy world, those who even deign to raise the issue of racial inequality can be quickly dismissed as race-baiters or, worse, as actual racists. It's the willful-ignorance-is-bliss approach to dismissing undesirable discussion.

In this moment, blacks and whites see the racial progress so differently that it feels as if we are living in two separate Americas.

According to a Pew Research Center [poll](#) released Thursday, nearly twice as many blacks as whites say that blacks are treated less fairly by the police. More than twice as many blacks as whites say that blacks are treated less fairly by the courts. And about three times as many blacks as whites say that blacks are treated less fairly than whites at work, in stores or restaurants, in public schools and by the health care system.

In fact, a 2011 [study](#) by researchers at Tufts University and Harvard Business School found, “Whites believe that they have replaced blacks as the primary victims of racial discrimination in contemporary America.”

And in these divergent realities, we appear to be resegregating — moving in the opposite direction of King’s dream.

The Great Migration — in which millions of African-Americans in the 20th century, in two waves, left the rural South for big cities in the North, Midwest and West Coast — seems to have become a failed experiment, with many blacks reversing those migratory patterns and either moving back to the South or out of the cities.

As USA Today [reported](#) in 2011:

“2010 census data released so far this year show that 20 of the 25 cities that have at least 250,000 people and a 20 percent black population either lost more blacks or gained fewer in the past decade than during the 1990s. The declines happened in some traditional black strongholds: Chicago, Oakland, Atlanta, Cleveland and St. Louis.”

In addition, a Reuters/Ipsos [poll](#) released this month found that “about 40 percent of white Americans and about 25 percent of nonwhite Americans are surrounded exclusively by friends of their own race.”

Furthermore, there is some evidence that our schools are becoming more segregated, not less. A [study](#) this year by Dana Thompson Dorsey of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that “students are more racially segregated in schools today than they were in the late 1960s and prior to the enforcement of court-ordered desegregation in school districts across the country.”

I want to celebrate our progress, but I’m too disturbed by the setbacks.

I had hoped to write a hopeful, uplifting column to mark this anniversary. I wanted to be happily lost in The Dream. Instead, I must face this dawning reality.

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