

Subtle racism exists, researcher says

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SAN ANTONIO—Racism still exists, even if people do not admit they are racist, a Duke University research professor told a Texas Baptist conference.

In the “post-Civil Rights era,” racist actions have become more subtle, but they continue to damage minorities, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva told the annual conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Christian Life Commission meeting

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Rather than observing rules that officially segregated neighborhoods, developers simply show some communities to certain types of people, Bonilla-Silva said. Though minorities can buy any car they want, they typically pay higher prices.

Racism can show itself as subtly as a salesperson in a clothing store repeatedly asking a non-Anglo if he needs help. This is not an act of kindness, but an effort to watch him, Bonilla-Silva said.

Up to 80 percent of jobs are gained through social networks, he noted. This often indicates people are not hired for their qualifications but for whom they know. Anglos tend to hire Anglos because their networks are made of mostly Anglos.

But Anglos argue that these actions are not racist, Bonilla-Silva believes. They find ways to rationalize their actions, pointing to statistics that indicate minorities are more likely to commit criminal acts. They say people of the same color simply want to live together.

Other people blame minorities for not becoming economically mobile, Bonilla-Silva continued. They note that Jews as a group are economically well off, but African-Americans as a whole are not. This generalization allows them to characterize ethnic groups as lazy and unmotivated. Anglos often use personal stories to back up their beliefs. These attitudes and actions may not be as easy to define as segregated restaurants and restrooms, but are every bit as harmful, Bonilla-Silva believes.

“At the heart of this ideology is a myth,” he said. “It is that racism has all but disappeared.”

The professor believes Christians should be at the forefront of starting a “second civil rights movement” that creates a large group of anti-racist Anglos who actively make people aware of their racist actions in an effort to stop them.

“We cannot continue being theoretically progressive,” he said. “We need to do a bit more than that.

“Religious people were central to the first civil rights movement. I believe they ought to be central to the new civil rights movement.”

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