There is a growing popular discourse in the U.S. that race no longer matters. Sometimes this discourse describes the U.S as a post-racial society and sometimes as a colorblind society. This discourse is supported by public opinion which perceives racism and racial inequality as vestiges of the past. Conventional wisdom then is that the race of a person will not significantly influence the opportunities and life chances of that person. This colorblind discourse is justified by the success of the Civil Rights Movement, affirmative action policies, the emergence of a black middle class, and the election of Barrack Obama as President. This paper argues that race continues to be a significant factor in determining the opportunity and life chances of people and that "colorblindness" serves as an ideology which masks the reality of racial inequality in U.S. society.

Colorblindness as an ideology serves to justify continuing racial oppression in the U.S. Colorblind ideology is the transformation of overtly racist beliefs of biological or cultural inferiority into covert attitudes and practices. Traditional biological theories of race argue that race is based on physical or genetic traits. Assimilation theories legitimize racial hierarchy on the basis of cultural characteristics. And colorblind racism often relies upon principles of neo-liberalism to covertly justify racial stratification. These neo-liberalist criteria include notions of individualism, meritocracy, work ethic, and equal opportunity. These criteria are used to justify the privileges and limitation of social resources to different racial groups. Ideas of moral equilibrium in the market place through "healthy" competition serve currently as the language for justifying the racial gap (inequality in wealth, income, jobs, health and illness, etc.). The neo-liberal rhetoric conceals the ideological debt of colorblindness to traditional beliefs about races as "naturally" inferior because of biological or cultural factors.

Contrary to colorblind ideology, race scholars assert that not only do the effects of historical racial oppression continue today, but that the current social order continues to reflect and reproduce racial inequality. Race scholars call this institutionalized racism and argue that all of our social institutions reinforce the racial gap. Racial hierarchy influences and reproduces the racial inequality in our economic, political, social and ideological life. These social institutions rely on placing people into racial categories, and developing a scale of stratification from those racial classifications (Bonilla-Silva: 2008).

It may seem unlikely that color-blindness or biological and cultural perspectives of race are able to prevail in popular discourse despite overwhelming social research. However, race scholars provide an explanation for this paradox. The theory of racial formation, an approach to race as embedded structurally, uses the concept of hegemony to explain this phenomenon. The term hegemony captures the notion that the ideas, beliefs and values of the dominant or elite groups will imprint on common or popular perceptions and discourse in a society (Omi & Winant: 2005: 67). These elite groups do not necessarily have to directly or forcefully impose these beliefs to make people accept them. Hegemonic values run throughout various social institutions by

translating abstract beliefs into lived practices of everyday life. Individuals internalize these ideas through this process of socialization. Therefore, the values of a dominant group seem normal in popular perceptions. This theory of racial formation explains why theories that have been refuted such as sociobiology and assimilation continue to exercise such a powerful influence on racial beliefs in the U.S. [This next section of the paper will describe and analyze sociobiology, assimilation, and color-blind ideology as the underlying popular discourse on race]

Sociobiology theory explains race as a natural phenomenon determined biologically. Graves says that sociobiology theory has three major assumptions about race: that genetically determined race categories exist, genetically determined racial characteristics exist, and that there is a natural hierarchy among these genetic groupings (2004: xxix). Genetically determined categories refer to the claims that homogenous racial groups naturally exist through the heredity of DNA in human genes. From this point, sociobiology assumes that there are generalizable characteristics for all members of a given racial group. These common characteristics, according to sociobiology, fall along genetic lines, such as degrees of intelligence, physical strength, and morality. The claim then from the sociobiologicall perspective is that some races are more intelligent, stronger and more moral. However, as Graves points out, these genetic lines are valued differently, intelligence and morality being more valued, physical strength less valued. This system of valuation creates a hierarchy of races with the white race at the top because, according to the theory, it is characterized by the valued genetic lines, intelligence and morality.

Assimilation theory is different from sociobiology theory in that it argues that racial differences are a result of cultural factors and it understands racial categories in terms of ethnicities. However, assimilation theory, like sociobiology theory, creates a hierarchy, but one that is based on culture. Again the white race, or ethnic group, is at the top. According to this theory, white culture is superior to other cultures because of its values, beliefs and norms: individualism, work ethic, and meritocracy. This understanding of race also places the burden of adaptation on the ethnic group assumed to be inferior. Ronald Takaki demonstrates this in *A Different Mirror* when he explains how white leaders consistently forced Native Americans to assimilate to white culture. Takaki argues that the various allotment acts were not only means of stealing land from Native Americans but were means of socializing them into the values of the dominant white society, values such as individualism, the work ethic and ownership of private property.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva in *The New Racism* (2008) argues that this new racial ideology, color blindness, reshapes the beliefs and practices of Jim Crow into socially acceptable institutional mechanisms (2008: 2). Color-blindness disavows openly racist language and behavior, making them taboo. However, according to Bonilla-Silva, color-blindness piggybacks on the assumptions of biological determinism or cultural inferiority. Therefore, the language may not express overt racism, but may take the form of more subtle or indirect types of articulations. For example, Bonilla-Silva writes, "Instead of relying on name calling (niggers, Spics, Chinks), color-blind racism otherizes softly ("these people are human, too") (2008:3)".

And Bonilla-Silva argues that these articulations can take the form of so called neoliberal principles. These principles include the values of individualism, meritocracy, work ethic, and equal opportunity. The assumption underlying these principles is that all individuals regardless of their race start on a level playing field. This is the invisible hand: the market as a self-regulating system that is unbiased and meritocratic. Life chances on the level playing field of the self-regulating market will be determined by hard work, and consequently upward mobility is possible for everyone. Social status from this point of view is achieved not ascribed. Failure within this neutral system is not determined by racial categorization, but by lack of individual effort. According to Bonilla-Silva, the legitimation of racial inequality through the "color-blind" market denies historical and structurally embedded discrimination. Deidre Royster (2003) in her study on the disparities between black and white workers found that white workers used the idea of the invisible hand as a explanation for the racial gap in employment. (6). As Bonilla-Silva states, "By framing race-related issues in the language of liberalism, whites can appear 'reasonable' and even 'moral', while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de-facto racial inequality (2008: 28)".

Most proponents of color-blindness adhere to whiteness as superior, even if in simply the common sense understanding. In contrast, most blacks live with a constant awareness of the role race in their lives. Valerie Moore (2003) in her participant observation study of largely race based children's summer day camps witnesses the prevalence of race-centered discussion in only the camps of black children. When describing the topic of race in the different camps she writes:

> There seemed to be varying commitments to color-blind and color-aware dynamics in the camp settings. In the predominantly white camp, whiteness was barely mentioned, and discussion about race were infrequent. Consequently, race relations of power were infrequently discussed. In contrast, race was a common topic of conversation at the predominantly black camps. For example, their discussion invoking the history of the U.S. race relations and of power and disparities between whites and people of color made all campers aware of the alternative way whiteness was marked and defined (2003: 518).

Similarly, Russell Robinson (2008) argues that blacks and whites have distinct perceptual frameworks, what he calls "perceptual segregation". He labels the white framework as "color-blindness perspective" and the black framework as "pervasive prejudice perspective". Robinson demonstrates that people socialize into different racialized pools of knowledge (2008: 1100). For example, blacks grow up instilled with racial consciousness. This racial awareness is necessary for the survival of blacks in situations dominated by whites, which are most institutions in the U.S. In contrast, whites grow up with no significant discussion about race. When race is discussed, the focus is on the absence of overt discrimination. And, he concludes, there is an underlying fear of racial consciousness among whites. [TRANS]

Race scholars argue that racial inequality exists at the structural level, institutional racism. This theoretical paradigm includes Michael Omi and Howard Winant's racial formation theory (2005) and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's racialized social system theory (2008). In contrast to sociobiology and assimilation perspective, racial formation theory makes the point that race is not static or essential, but complex and always shifting in meaning (2005: 55). Racial formation theory places race at the center of human experience. It views the meaning of race as always shifting in historical, political and economic social systems. This perspective conceptualizes the effect of hegemony on understanding race as common sense (2008: 60). This common sense understanding of race is what the paper has been calling color blind ideology.

Similarly, racialized social system explains that economic, political, social, and ideological realms of life rely on placing people into racial categories, and developing a hierarchy of inferiority and superiority on those constructs (Bonilla-Silva: 2008). Ideology was already discussed in the example of whiteness.

This section of the paper will provide evidence of structurally rooted racial inequality in wealth, in hiring practices, in state policy, and in housing and education. This evidence of structurally rooted racial inequality demonstrates the centrality of race in the opportunities and life chances of individuals in the U.S.

Racial inequality is highly significant in the economy. Economic inequality is best exemplified through the black white binary. The wealth gap between blacks and whites is one of the most obvious structural inequalities. According to ? . . . Wealth is a more important factor than income when analyzing racial inequality. This is because wealth in itself offers stability and security and by using wealth as an indicator in the blackwhite binary, one avoids conflating race with class. The research of Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro (2006) provide evidence on the importance of wealth as variable in analyzing racial disparity and argue because of this aruge against the conflation of class and race.

Oliver and Shapiro use an empirical analysis to show how racial inequality remains a fundamental characteristic in shaping life chances, through research on wealth disparities. Their study is a response to claims of economic progress for blacks through research on income, occupations, and education. Studies, like William Julius Wilson's, that focus on these economic indicators miss the crucial element of wealth, according to Oliver and Shapiro (2006: 12). In analyzing wealth holdings, Oliver and Shapiro show the historical affect of racial oppression on black economic conditions. This lack of wealth hinges on economic instability and institutional limitations of financial security shown in the lack of power to gain any significant form of inherited wealth as a group (2006: 8). Oliver and Shapiro write, "We argue that, materially, whites and blacks constitute two nations (2006:7)".

The research of Devah Pager and Lincoln Quillian (2004) demonstrate the prevalence of racial discrimination in hiring practices within the work force. Pager and Quillian compare employer

attitudes to their actual hiring practices and behaviors. This study uses a phone survey then audits the actual employers that respond. They particularly look at the likelihood of hiring blacks over white ex-convicts. These scholars find that regardless of survey response that indicated race as irrelevant, the same employers hiring practices demonstrated racial discrimination. The majority of respondents chose to hire white ex-convicts over blacks without criminal records. Therefore showing that race still matters in the work force. [TRANS]

The state has historically reinforced racial inequality and continues to do so today. In 1896 the U.S. Supreme Court in Plessy v Ferguson upheld racial segregation in all public institutions. The G.I. Bill in 1944 excluded blacks from the widespread government program that assisted upward mobility of white WWII soldiers (Katznelson: 2005). Despite the landmark passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 politics still shape racial inequality. The recent Supreme Court decision on affirmative action ruled it unconstitutional because it was discrimination based on race. The practice of winner-take all and majority rule in the electoral process reinforces racial inequality in the U.S. Majority rule is the process by which fifty-one percent of a voting population can determine the policies for all citizens. Lani Guinier in her book *Tyranny of the Majority* (1994) argues that in a heterogeneous society, such as the U.S., the majority-rules-all method of democracy results in the suppression of the less powerful minority groups to a state of "permanent loser". This position of permanent loser in the political system is shown in the continuing history of black oppression. She writes:

> In the end, I do not believe that democracy should encourage rule by the powerful-even a powerful majority. Instead, the ideal of democracy promises a fair discussion among self-defined equals about how to achieve common aspirations. To redeem that promise, we need to put the idea of taking turns and disaggregating the majority at the center of our conception of representation. Particularly, as we move into the twenty-first century a more highly diversified citizenry, it is essential that we consider ways in which voting and representational systems succeed or fail at encouraging Madisonian Majorities (6).

Beyond the structure of the state, patterns of racial discrimination also prevail in everyday social life. This is demonstrated by the pervasiveness of the racial lines drawn in housing and education. Massey and Denton (1998) write about the prevalence of racial segregation in the U.S. These authors point out the lack of attention to the significance of black segregation since the passing of the Fair Housing Act in 1968. Massey and Denton contend that the institution of racial segregation is a crucial feature in the perpetuation of racial inequality.

The rise of extreme homogeneity of black neighborhoods traces back to the effects of the Great Depression and WWII. These events eliminated the white residual population of urban centers through the collapse of the industrial economy and the rise of suburbanization. Massey and Denton show the perpetuation of the isolation of black results from racist attitudes, private

behaviors and institutional practices. These authors argue that segregation reflects racism more than classism. They refute Wilson's claim that race is less significant than class in determining the life chances of blacks. White prejudice and discrimination significantly constrain blacks in the housing market. Massey and Denton show that whites accept open housing in principle, but not in practice. Also, according to Massey and Denton, this residential segregation facilitates a concentration of poverty in black communities. The creation of the underclass deprives black's access to good, services, and resources.

Angel Harris's article "Optimism in the Face of Despair: Black-White Differences in Beliefs About School as a Means for Upward Mobility (2008)" evaluates how beliefs about education as an institution that promotes upward social mobility affects outcomes of students. Harris's theoretical foundation distinguishes between two types of beliefs: value of schooling and perceived barriers despite schooling. Value of schooling refers to belief that schooling can improve life chances of a person. The concept of perceived barriers is the perception that obstacles exist in access to upward mobility, regardless of educational achievement. The data for this study is a longitudinal data set from the Maryland Adolescence Development In Context Study. The findings of this study shows that black students believe in both types of perception more that white students. In addition, belief in the value of schooling positively affects educational performance, over perceptions of barriers. This means that the blacks' beliefs in barriers do not negatively affect their performance in schools.

As Joseph Graves's states, "Most Americans still believe in the concept of race the way they believe in the law of gravity. They believe in it without even knowing what it is they believe (2004:xxv)."

A hegemonic understanding of race takes the form of common sense. And common sense about race is color blindness, but color blindness requires a framework of whiteness, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious. In the case of race, hegemonic normativity in the U.S. uses "whiteness" as a paragon (Omi and Winant: 2005: 66). This means that whiteness epitomizes goodness and correctness, or more crudely put, white makes right. This understanding of race seems intuitive. In the racial order, races not considered "white" look up to whiteness as desirable because it symbolizes privilege (Bonilla-Silva: 2008). In the racial hierarchy of the U.S., the two prominent "in-between" racial categories are Asians and Latinos. Both of them as racial groups act in accordance with the white framework as superior and desirable.

In a study of Asian Americans as a model minority Rosalind Chou and Joe Feagin (2008) show that Asians internalize white normativity. Asians adhere to negative stereotypes about blacks, Latinos, as well as recent Asian immigrants. Chou and Feagin write, "Asian American conformity to white folkways and framing usually involves internalizing racism (2008:156)". Edward Murguia and Tyrone Forman (2003) in their study "Shades of Whiteness" demonstrate

that similar to Asians, Latinos show a commitment to the white framework. For example, numerous Mexican-Americans, as well as the U.S. census, use of the label "Hispanic". This category signifies a desirable connection with white European heritage. Murguia and Forman explain how Latinos reinforce whiteness, " We argue that the shared immigrant ideology of Latinos and Asians may translate into distaste for blacks, whom they perceive as not embracing the achievement ideology (2003: 75)".

This ideological standpoint of whiteness presumes any other racial category as inferior. The privilege and superiority of whiteness in the social order is contingent on the oppression of other races. As George Liptz demonstrates, "Whiteness emerged as a relevant category in U.S. life and culture largely as a result of slavery and segregation Native American policy and immigration restrictions, conquest and colonialism (1998: 99)". In the context of adherence to whiteness, people commonly understand race as naturally hierarchical. Despite scientific evidence against such perceptions, the overwhelming influence of hegemony reinforces biological determinism and cultural inferiority perspectives so that they remain widespread today even under the guise of color-blindness.