



Implicit Racial Bias: The American Child Welfare System and African American Families

Andy Huynh

Faculty Sponsor: Professor Shelley Grant
Jacksonville University, Jacksonville, FL, USA



Introduction:

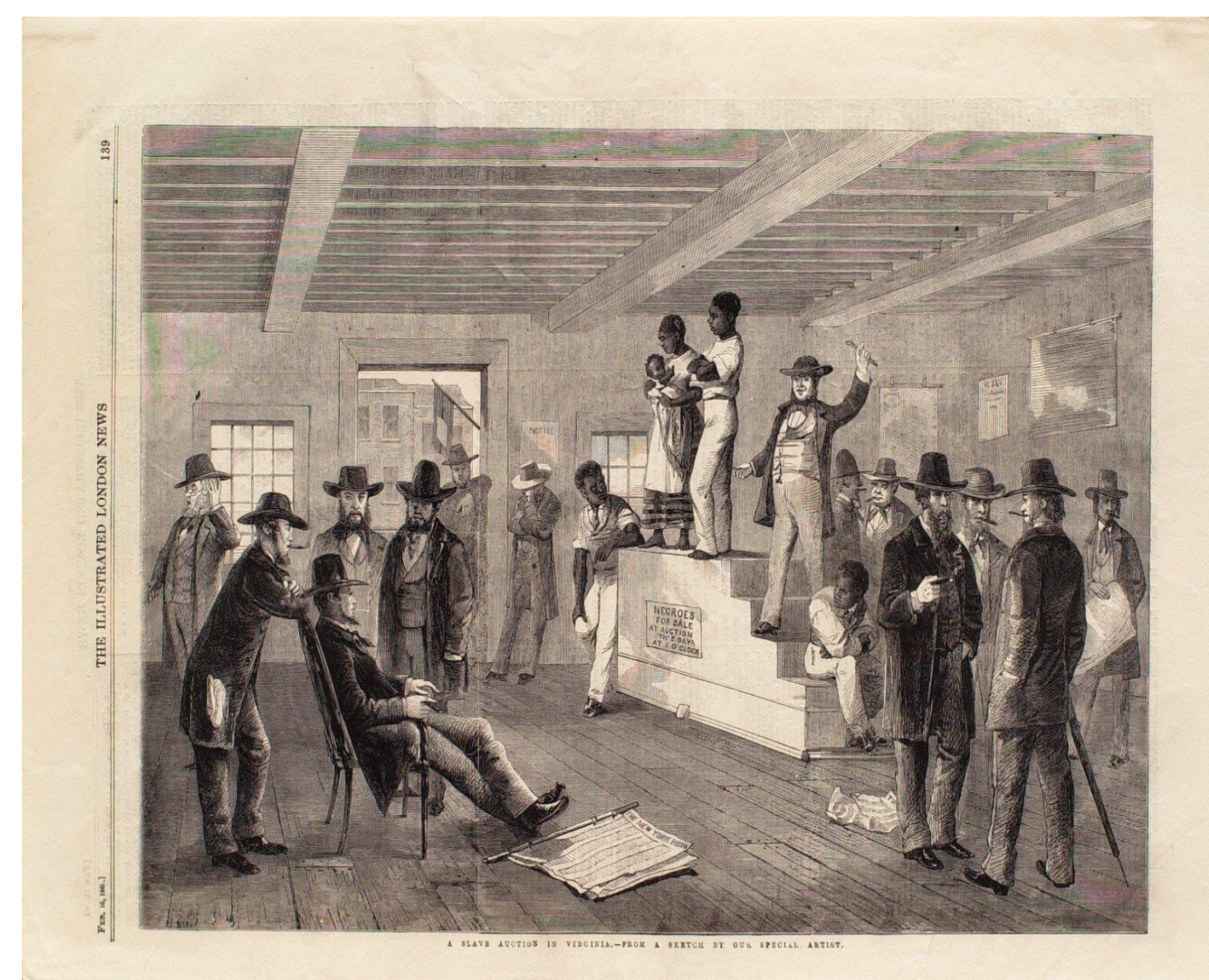
The American child welfare system can be defined as “a group of services designed to promote the well-being of children by ensuring safety, achieving permanency, and strengthening families” (How Child Welfare System Works, 2020) However, despite the institutional purpose, implicit racial bias formulate discriminatory assumptions that results in racial inequity within the system. For Deborah, a single Black mother, the American child welfare system denies the privilege of respect and autonomy, labeling Deborah as an individual incapable of raising her children (Merritt et al., 2022). The frustration with the current child welfare system reflects the antagonistic sentiment of African American families regarding the involvement of the institution.

History of the American Child Welfare System:

The American child welfare system traditionally excluded African American families. Organizations established to provide child welfare services demonstrated explicit racial discrimination. The stride towards racial inclusion within the American child welfare system occurred during the 1950s as a result of the Civil Rights movement. The welfare expansion of the 1970s introduced legislative policies that attempted to address the concerns associated with the American child welfare system. However, the welfare expansion resulted in the disproportionate inclusion of African-American families as implicit racial bias that formulated discriminatory assumptions marginalized the over-represented demographic (Smith & Devore, 2004).

Research Errors that Resulted in Disparity:

- Previous research studies' definition and operationalization of implicit bias results in racial inequity within the American child welfare system (Boyd, 2022).
- The ahistorical approach to discrimination, disparity, and disproportionality fails to address historical factors that affect the current system (Boyd, 2022).
- Counterproductive frames of the American child welfare system negate the role of implicit bias in assessment and treatment (Boyd, 2022).
- The emphasis on factors such as poverty negates the role of race in disparity within the welfare system (Boyd et al., 2021).
- The reliance on NIS (National Incidence Study) of Abuse and Neglect fails to account for the bias present in evidence generation and interpretation that further marginalized African American families (Boyd et al., 2021).
- The conclusions arrived from quantitative statistical model sources cannot assert the notion that racial disparity is not the product of implicit racial bias (Boyd et al., 2021).



Unknown. (1861). *A Slave Auction in Virginia* [Wood Engraving] . Clark Art Institute, 1955.



March on Washington [Image]. Encyclopædia Britannica.

Current Research Regarding Implicit Racial Bias:

- The presence of implicit racial bias in family assessments regarding the omission of subject matters related to race, ethnicity, and cultural history formulate destructive welfare decisions that have negative consequences (Rodgers & Hanna, 2022).
- Implicit racial bias perpetuates through the practice of uniform mandate reporting that results in disproportionate inclusion within the child welfare system (Itzkowitz & Olson, 2022).
- The presence of implicit racial bias results in cognitive dissonance in which the “We treat everybody the same” sentiment enforced discrepancy in assessment, treatment, and service (Gourdine, 2019).

Conclusions:

Implicit racial bias is a systemic issue within the American child welfare system. The formal institution was established on discriminatory principles that resulted in racial disparity and disproportionality. While explicit racial bias is difficult to deconstruct, implicit racial bias can be altered through the introduction of information. An emphasis on evidence-based education is imperative in achieving racial equity within the system.

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