

'Racism' Is a Matter of Definition

Discrimination is part of everyday life, and though it often carries a negative connotation, it is an essential practice. For example, we discriminate against the kinds of TV programs or people we don't like, between fact and fiction, and among activities of varying risk.

But discrimination is an act; before that, it is an opinion. Until recently the term "racism" (or sexism, or ageism) was associated with *acts* based on bigotry rather than merit. Systemic discrimination (e.g. racism) meant that those behaviors were widespread and baked into procedures or rules.

That has changed. The term "racism" no longer describes acts of discrimination. "Systemic racism" has become a general perception of phenomena, unburdened by the need to demonstrate rules or existing practices that institutionalize it; individual contributors to this overall pattern may not even be evident.

This could all pass without any great trauma, except that politicians, employers, and the media have refused to recognize the importance of *action* and instead are behaving as if the word "racism" carries the same import as it once did. This has ironically opened the door to true racism: taking action against others based purely on their imputed beliefs, or even their race.

Countless people have been treated much like the victims of the McCarthy anti-Communist witch hunts, losing their jobs and reputations based on the most meager—and sometimes, absent—evidence. A phrase subject to twisted interpretation may be enough. Just saying "blue lives matter" is contorted to mean that caring for law enforcement is a racist belief.

Persecuting people based on their beliefs or thoughts is fascistic and discriminatory at the most basic level. Yet, that is what far too many companies and institutions are doing.

Opportunity redistribution (also known as affirmative action) based on race has brought systemic racism into the mainstream. It is justified as reparations for past discrimination, regardless of whether the beneficiary or the victim of the redistribution has any connection to it.

The [Justice Department found](#) Yale University put in place rules in its admissions process that unambiguously discriminated in favor of blacks to the detriment of Asians and whites. Yale is by no means unique. Harvard University does something similar, but the courts were not persuaded that race was a sufficiently dispositive factor in admissions to cross the line.

Real-world systemic racism is also found in the public educational system, which supposedly exists mostly to serve students. Yet, teachers' unions contract with cities to deny accountability for its members, which would help ensure the delivery of an adequate education.

School choice should be a *cause célèbre* for the activists demanding an end to racial inequities. Yet they are nowhere to be seen or heard as the unions press to eliminate charter schools that demonstrably offer better futures for many students, mainly underprivileged minorities, especially blacks. By this institutionalized effort to limit access to private education, these unions are perpetuating the economic deprivation cycle endemic to minority communities. This form of systemic racism may have the most severe long-term effect of any type of discrimination.

The U.S. Constitution not only enshrines equality under the law, but in many places clearly states that opportunities are

to accrue to all individuals whenever possible, and the Declaration of Independence refers to the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” These documents do not refer to any duty of redistribution of opportunity or equal outcomes, but only to equality of opportunity and redress of direct grievances according to law. The founding documents and current body of law do not systematically and selectively deprive a race of opportunity. Only specific entities that do so can be systemically racist.

At an individual level, the epithet “racist” is being leveled at individuals based on innate characteristics rather than *any act of discrimination*. This is best described as “imputed racism” and should not carry much, if any, weight.

The charge may be leveled simply because a person is white and of European ancestry. Or because he grew up in a two-parent household that valued education and hard work. Or because she fared well in the genetic lottery when it comes to intelligence and an analytical nature, allowing her to be successful by virtue of achievement. Or because he wants to feel safe and secure. Or because she believes in rationality, objectivity, and facts, and is skeptical that there is such a thing as “my truth.” Every person (only whites, by the way) forced to attend a [“training” course](#) like that which was required of employees of the city of Seattle would have been harangued until he or she accepted being (faux) racist.

In fact, the Seattle “training” process is racist at its core because it assumes that skin color directly begets values. Seattle is not the only government or corporate entity using this racist approach to curry favor with activists. In the process, it is manifesting what the psychiatric literature calls “projection”—ascribing to another person feelings, thoughts, or attitudes present in oneself.

Black Lives Matter broadly and falsely imputes racism as a tool to force support of “racial justice.” If they really

cared about black lives surviving and thriving, they would win support by being focused on black-on-black crime and the public school system in the places with the largest black populations. In 2018 (the last year of comprehensive [FBI statistics](#)), almost 90 percent of the 2,925 homicides with black victims were perpetrated by black offenders. Given that most shooting victims survive, that means that well over 10,000 blacks were shot by others of the same race.

This number dwarfs the 19 police shootings of unarmed black suspects in 2019 (half of whom were violently attacking the officer at the time of the shooting), yet seemingly BLM exists to seek redress only for this tiniest fraction of the problem. How does defunding or reducing police presence show actual concern for black lives? (Such policies do exactly the opposite, of course.)

Perhaps the worst indictment of racial justice activism is its willingness to dismiss personal responsibility. They claim that prison populations not aligned with racial demographics constitute evidence of racism rather than of personal choice or circumstance. They deflect as racist the observation that most black children are born out of wedlock and live in one-parent households, which is why so many black youths lack the guidance to grow into productive citizens instead of seeing opportunity only in crime rather than in work and achievement. This kind of denial and suppression is fundamentally racist in its impact.

In the end, it is mostly the complicity of institutions and companies that indulge this imputed racism that perpetuates the distortion of race relations. They allow it to metastasize by punishing its targets regardless of justification, sometimes while supporting programs that reek of *bona fide* systemic racism. It is well past time for that to end. Get the definitions, and the accusations, right.

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