

The Problem Is Systemic Victimhood, Not Systemic Racism

I was a sheltered white girl working my way through my teen years, when circumstances suddenly threw me into regular contact with minority children and families in inner city Minneapolis. Although it was a bit of a culture shock and sometimes difficult, I quickly grew to love the time I spent teaching, talking with, and growing to love the kids from a range of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

I've learned a lot of things over the more than 20 years spent with these children and their families. But one thing I've learned especially is that racism comes in more flavors than simply white against black.

It's a little hard to know how exactly to term one version of this, but the best way I can think of is to call it "black-on-black racism." This kind of racism came to my attention in the form of a single mother with several children. She was doing her best to get her life together, raising her children to be upstanding citizens, trying to live her own life in a morally upright way, holding down a job, and trying to climb the ladder of success. Yet in return for her efforts her fellow blacks accused her of "being white."

Although I'm sure those comments hurt her greatly, this woman disregarded them and pressed on, trying to overcome her difficulties and get ahead in the world. Yet I've seen others who have had similar comments thrown at them give up, preferring to run with the crowd than be ostracized by their own community.

I am not the only person to have noticed this trend. Scholar and author Anthony Esolen highlights a similar scenario in

the [February issue of *Chronicles*](#), writing:

It is bad to be a young black man reading and enjoying Shakespeare, meeting the sneers of his black classmates, who call him 'white' inside. It is worse to be that fellow who could and should be in love with learning, having his heart cut out by the contempt, and courting indifference instead of interest, and failure instead of triumph. It is worst of all to be those who do this to him, confirming themselves in their own incapacity.

Esolen goes on to call this "a self-perpetuating and self-destructive falsehood" in which "blacks, encouraged to look upon whites as inveterate enemies, begin to dress, talk, and act in antisocial ways." Such behavior "keep[s] racism burning."

That behavior, Esolen says, is pure cruelty. "Cruelty it is, because of what it does to those who think they have nothing to offer the world that is finer than their victimhood."

One might easily, and truthfully, respond that blacks were horribly wronged through slavery. But does this give them a reason to wallow in their victimhood? More importantly, does it give blacks justification for pulling their fellow blacks down, trying to keep them in the life of victimhood and oppression forever? I don't see how that could possibly be the case. As Esolen writes:

Because blacks were enslaved 150 years ago, if your skin is dark now, even if you are not a descendant of those slaves, you get points as a 'victim,' regardless of whether your own poor decisions drag on you like a ball and chain. John Calhoun didn't push the cocaine your way. Jefferson Davis didn't get your girlfriend pregnant. Robert E. Lee didn't tempt you to play video games when you should have been reading books.

We live in a time when accusations of racism are blasted in our faces and attempts to correct systemic racism exist at

nearly every level of society, from the [Biden administration](#), to [Big Tech](#), to [higher education](#). But do these ostensible attempts to correct the wrongs of the past and root out today's racism only exacerbate the problem by teaching people that victimhood is good? And in encouraging the victim mentality, do we discourage responsibility, growth, and personal success for those trying to break free from a life of victimhood?

Maybe we're focusing on the wrong thing. From what I've seen in the past, perhaps a focus on rooting out systemic victimhood—for all races—is the first step to stopping the systemic racism that allegedly plagues our society.

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