

Digging Deeper Into the Question of Racism in America

Does “systemic racism” still exist in America? If by systemic racism, we mean Jim Crow laws or legalized slavery or enforced segregation, the answer is obviously not. If by systemic racism, we mean that black Americans still do not enjoy total equality with white Americans, then the answer would be yes. And I believe I can demonstrate that thesis with one simple question.

But before I pose the question and before some of you write me off as a guilt-ridden white man, know that I am anything but that.

First, I love and appreciate America, despite our many obvious flaws. Having traveled outside the USA about 200 times, I recognize how uniquely blessed our country is.

Second, I believe we do have some deep and lasting Christian roots as a nation, despite the many un-Christian practices and policies in our history. And I believe these Christian roots are a key to our national, historic success.

Third, I do not believe we should be making reparations today for slavery, nor do I believe that a fair-minded white American should feel responsible for the sins of the slaveowners and segregationists of the past.

Fourth, I believe that racism exists on all sides, and I reject the idea that you can only be racist when you are part of the ruling majority. Racism is a condition of the heart, and everyone can fall prey to it.

Having said that, I do believe that, while the term “systemic racism” may not fully apply to America today, the term “system unfairness” certainly does apply.

Allow me to explain.

In response to my article "Some Honest Questions About Race Relations in America," in which I wrote about the shooting of Ahmaud Arberry, a commenter on my website posted: "When people may ask 'what did the Black guy do'? As opposed to 'why was the black man's life taken' ... it may be because of the high criminality statistics of Blacks. Especially Black males. The statistics are horrible. Black on White Crime far exceeds White on Black crime in almost every area of criminal prosecution such as armed robbery, rape, murder. The state of Maryland has 75% Black incarceration! 1 in 4 Death row inmates are Black. And [then] you incredulously wonder why people are asking 'What did the Black guy do'??"

In other words, it's no wonder that two white men shot and killed an unarmed black man jogging through their neighborhood. Those blacks, especially black men, are really dangerous. After all, statistics do not lie.

And certainly, the statistics are troubling. (I haven't posed my simple question yet, but I'm almost there. Please be patient.)

A Pew Research poll released in April 2019 pointed out that, despite a decrease in the number of blacks imprisoned in America, "At the end of 2017, federal and state prisons in the United States held about 475,900 inmates who were black and 436,500 who were white—a difference of 39,400."

Yet there are roughly five white Americans for every black American, meaning that, all things being equal, there would be 436,500 whites in prison and 87,300 blacks. Why the extreme discrepancy, one that was even worse 10 years ago?

According to a December 2019 report, "Black people account for about 12% of the U.S. population, but occupy only 3.2% of the senior leadership roles at large companies in the U.S. and just 0.8% of all Fortune 500 CEO positions, according to the

analysis by the Center for Talent Innovation, a workplace think tank in New York City.” Why?

We could go down the line, from crime rates to median incomes of families and more, and the discrepancy between white Americans and black Americans remains the same. (To repeat: I write this without feeling guilt. I’m simply getting to an important point.)

So, when it comes to median incomes, in 2018, white American families averaged \$70,642; black American families averaged \$41,361. (Interestingly, Asian American families averaged over \$80,000 per year.) How then do we explain this disparity?

For me, it boils down to one question: Do you believe blacks are inherently inferior to whites (or Asians or others)? Do you believe they are, by nature, not as smart, or more prone to violence, lazier or more promiscuous?

If your answer is no (and I surely hope it is no; otherwise, you are a racist), then there’s only one other answer: Something is wrong with our system (or, put another way, we have still not fully recovered from our racist past).

This doesn’t mean the vast majority of whites are trying to keep blacks down. Or are inherently racist. Or want to maintain “white supremacy.” (I’m sure some do; I’m contending the vast majority don’t.)

I’m simply saying that when our black friends speak of systemic racism (or, at the least, systemic injustice), they’re not making it up. Their life experience informs them.

Unfortunately, the race baiters and the extremists in groups like Black Lives Matter often obscure our vision, as do the social theorists pushing their theories of intersectionality. It’s easy to react against their positions, many of which are equally destructive.

And I understand the argument that, in some cases, there is a reason policemen (of all colors and ethnicities) are quick to profile a young black male as a potential crime suspect.

The question is, why is that young black male more likely to be a criminal? Why was his family life so broken? Why did he have so many odds to overcome growing up in the inner city?

In the end, we are each responsible for the decisions we make, and none of us can blame "society" for our choices. If I end up in jail for a crime I committed, I bear the guilt for that crime.

But it's also true that we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves and to pursue justice and care for the poor and the oppressed.

What, then, can we do, working together as one, to help bring true equality to our nation, with justice and dignity for all? It starts with listening, with respect, to one another. Then, with understanding, taking positive steps to bring about lasting change.

Are you in?