



“Racism and Discrimination Reflect Lack of Respect”

Racism, and discrimination that flows from it, remains a core issue in the American discourse. The recent Sherrod Affair highlights and extends the torment that engulfs the accusers and the accused. The discourse is ever more painful because it is absent at least two key components that might clarify the conversation and motivate actions to reduce racism and discrimination.

The first missing component is a concise definition of racism. A good working definition will enable both sides to convey their meanings more precisely. We propose to define racism as “The power to impose one’s perverse will on others.”

There is nothing especially illuminating about that definition. The important insight, and the second missing component in the discourse, is to recognize the word “power” in the definition, and then to link the use of that power in a perverse way to “lack of respect.”

It is not just that one has power to discriminate, but that one exercises that power because there is no respect for the affected party.

Why lack of respect? Because those discriminated against have no education? Have no legal, civil, or political rights? Have insufficient population to organize a formidable force? No! Not at all. We know this to be true because Black Americans possess all of these characteristics, yet racism and discrimination persist.

A partial, yet very important, explanation for racists’ lack of respect for Black Americans is our historical failure to physically secure our own freedom and to establish an independent presence in this country.

A related, broader, and weightier explanation is that racists discriminate because they know that those on whom they impose their perverse will have insufficient economic power to stop them. It’s as simple as that. We all know that, even (especially) in the U.S., if one has sufficient resources, one can start and/or stop anything. In a capitalist (market) economy, everything has a price. If the price is affordable, it can be purchased—up to and including halting discrimination.

Who doesn’t get this? Most Black political leaders don’t because they don’t focus exclusively on Black economic empowerment. They mainly address the need for education, health, housing, and jobs in a way that creates more economic opportunities for non-Blacks than for Blacks, and they increase Black Americans’ dependence on a racist system.

Most Black religious leaders don't get it because they turn the people's vision toward an esoteric, not practical, solution—heaven. Moreover, many preachers take from Black people and spend foolishly the very resources that could help empower Black America.

Most Black educators don't get it because they are more concerned with conforming to scholarly paradigms than they are with unleashing the entrepreneurial spirit and independent thinking of our youth. Please be careful to not misconstrue the latter statement to mean that excellent entrepreneurs can develop without proper training.

Who gets the link between stopping racism and economic power? Most Black entrepreneurs do. That is not to say that they are perfect. It is true that some Black entrepreneurs exploit Black Americans—selling products to us that we should not consume. We can address that problem, however, by adjusting our appetites. Black entrepreneurs are wise enough to adapt to our changing demands. Although we recognize a need for improved alignment of Black entrepreneurs' and Black Americans' interests, it is critical that we continue to support Black entrepreneurs. Through them we produce economic power and independence with which to fight racism.

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, in 2002 (the most recently available year for which detailed enterprises-by-race data are available), there were 94.5 thousand employing Black firms in the U.S. (8.0 average number of employees). For the same year, there were 5.6 million employing White firms (19.9 average number of employees). That is, there were 2.6 employing Black firms for every thousand Black Americans, and 28.8 employing White firms for every thousand White Americans. No question about it, we have much catching up to do.

Would significantly increased Black entrepreneurship stop all discrimination? Absolutely not! However, it would certainly reduce discrimination substantially because job, housing, and health discrimination would be reduced, as would discrimination in education.

We cannot lose with a properly planned and balanced expansion of entrepreneurship. Even if we are unable to turn the tide completely on racism in the U.S., we can choose to use the wealth that we produce through increased Black entrepreneurship to relocate to a new environment where less racism and discrimination are guaranteed.

If Black Americans work diligently and intensively for two generations to expand and deepen our entrepreneurship, we will reduce racism and discrimination substantially, expand our wealth, buttress our stay-or-leave option, and we will ensure our survival.

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