

Acknowledging our privilege

Maybe all these crazies that are haranguing us White Americans about our 'privilege' aren't so crazy after all. I'm not talking about the kind of privilege that is pigment-related, but rather one that it is infinitely more real and measurable - the privilege of living in a country where opportunity is the only 'color' that exists. We had a couple hundred years of pure White race emigration to the American colonies before we imported slaves from Africa, and during that time we made some great strides in creating an 'American' culture that built upon centuries of largely European culture that included education, commerce and civil laws.

The America our forebears built was accomplished by individuals' own toil and therefore cannot be deemed as success that was privilege-based. True, that much of that success could have come from investments made by privileged wealthy people, but that brings up a very important question: "Should we look at anything that was built by people with inherited money as a lesser success simply because the initial capital came from their ancestors?" Reasonable people should reject the notion that the rich owe the rest of us reparations because our ancestors weren't rich. Furthermore, demanding they (the landed gentry) bear the burden of original sin for having money that came to them through no fault of their own is preposterous.

Then things changed with the introduction of slavery, and with it came cheap labor and the means to maintain or increase the wealth of the well-heeled White landowners. No question that much of America was built on the backs of slaves for nearly two centuries, principally in the South, and that that profit was made because of White privilege. Not all White slave-holders treated their slaves badly, however, and not all profited equally from their slave-holding. Some plantations and farms failed while others succeeded. The Civil War and the subsequent emancipation proclamation took the means (slave-holding) from those who had made vast sums of money on the backs of others and gave the opportunity to millions of Black Americans.

Our country went from a land of systemic racism - not overnight mind you - and gradually set us on a path of a true meritocracy where a man's standing was not determined by the color of his skin. It took nearly another hundred years to move to the next plateau where the rights of the Black man were ensconced in the civil rights legislation of the late sixties. Reaching this plateau came at a high price for African-Americans who had protested both the overt and covert systemic racism that still plagued the America of the 19th and early 20th centuries. (Fortunately for all of us we succeeded in identifying and eliminating most of the so-called 'Jim Crow' laws that lingered on after reconstruction in 1877 all the way up to the 1950s.)

Racist laws gave way to fair laws that made opportunity equal and possible for all Americans but they couldn't erase the memories of the oppression of America's Blacks of the last two centuries nor could they cleanse all Americans' minds of racial bias or prejudice. That would take time. If there is any truth to the claims of systemic racism made by activists today, THAT truth has to reside in the *thoughts* and *attitudes* of some White Americans towards their Black co-citizens. If those thoughts do exist, they are largely un-measurable and will remain buried until revealed through new attempts to legislate new laws that will disadvantage America's minorities.

But what about attempts now being made to institute 'reverse racism' by practicing racism? I'm speaking of the attacks on America's current majority - the White population - from groups like Black Lives Matter and other organizations that view systemic racism as something that is indelible like a birthmark and is transferable from one generation to another? This perverse movement to segregate the races and give preferential treatment to one race over the other instead of integrate us all is reversing many of the gains made over the decades by the hundreds of thousands of civil rights activists and demeans the efforts of generations past to bring us together as one color-blind nation.

America isn't perfect. In fact, as a nation we are flawed like every other nation, but we have much to be proud of when it comes to civil rights and 'working on the problem' of racial justice. We can thump our chests and make a few mea culpas for past transgressions, but we must not, repeat not, wallow in those transgressions nor should we ignore the progress we've made when it comes to race relations. They are substantial and they have secured a transparent pathway for our minorities to walk if they choose to. And there's one of the problems...whether to choose to walk the path or to complain that no one is magically transporting us to the ultimate destination.

We can't hitchhike our way to racial harmony.

It takes a commitment and determination on the part of both majority and minority communities because racial harmony is not a one-way street. We must, simultaneously, see ourselves reflected in our rear-view mirror of history while looking ahead through the windshield of the vehicle of social change. That's the big, generalized picture in bold brush strokes, but how do we accomplish our goals of achieving racial understanding and comity? We need to start on the streets by imposing law and order. I realize that some will say, "typical Republican talking points," but without law and order (which is there to protect EVERYONE, be they Black or White or anything in between) we have no hope of taking the next critical steps. I'm not saying that we should call for disbanding BLM or similar groups, but we must make them obey our communities' laws. That goes for all the 'freelancers' and professional activists who move from town to town inciting violence. Then we need to call out all the free-loading 'race hustlers' who make their living from fomenting discord and taking advantage of tragedies like the occasional White-on-Black police shootings.

A third, powerful group is the media (social media, too). They must be held accountable for fanning the flames of disinformation and outright lies about the true state of our nation's racial situation. I'm not talking about censoring or muzzling them, but their lies cannot go unchallenged, and if the only remedy is to sue, then sue them we must. Individual suits, class-action suits, and even what some would call 'nuisance suits' must be on the table. Our schools, too, bear a large burden to level the playing field of debate on race. Unfortunately, they are not and are, instead, choosing to adopt 'critical race theory' and other destructive curricula into their syllabuses, to the detriment of our impressionable young people. Have they no shame or do they simply not care about the consequences of their actions? Either way, they are a powerful force that is busily shaping the national conscience and should not be exempt from scrutiny.

Finally, there is one group that must be taken to task...our elected leaders. It starts at the top, from the President on down. Joe Biden must not go scot-free and escape criticism when he repeatedly invokes the specter of 'systemic and institutional racism' in his public pronouncements and that goes for his Vice-President and Cabinet Members as well. Miscreants like certain off-the-wall zealot Senators and Congressional Representatives must also be called out for their rhetoric and support for violent protests like Congresswomen Maxine Waters and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

America is a country, an idea, a work in progress and an aspirational and inspirational land where anything is still possible. That is as true today as it was in pre-slavery days. We can be both 'America First' and 'Build back better' at the same time but only if we stop blaming ourselves for our past and pretending to be something we're not.

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