

## Racism is a Sin. But Why Is it the *Only* One?"

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Moral relativism is often used to describe the state of cultural values in contemporary America. This moral relativism took root in the 1960s, during the sexual revolution's crusade against the rules and mores of the past. Sexual permissiveness, casual drug use, and the rejection of traditional family duties helped erode many of the culturally accepted codes of individual behavior.

The rise of the self esteem movement in the 1990s constituted yet another attack on the legitimacy of traditional moral codes. Self-expression and self-fulfillment became the new guideposts of individual behavior. Moral rules were seen as injurious to the self. The notions of "sin" and "vice" were discredited as "unhealthy." There was no such thing as moral problems, just psychological ones. Right and wrong were not absolutes; everything was relative; it was up to the individual to determine for herself what was "appropriate."

Materialism has become the defining feature of the times. Not just materialism in the property sense, but materialism in the moral sense. The issues that get characterized as moral issues are those associated with materialistic and physical well-being. Teen smoking is tightly regulated, but teen sex is largely ignored. It is a crime to put a child into a car without a proper car seat, but there is no moral taboo against exposing that child to sexually graphic lyrics or video. Regular attendance at a health club is seen as a mark of individual well-being, but regular attendance at a church or synagogue is not. The therapeutic culture mandates full and open disclosure of one's emotions, and yet one's religious beliefs are expected to be kept quiet. A political candidate's college report cards can be analyzed, but not her moral beliefs. Vice is redefined as disease, and virtue as intolerance. Pornography is free speech, yet opposition to affirmative action is hate speech. Pre-natal health care is a moral issue, but abortion is not. Drug use and gang membership are social problems, not moral ones. Repression of one's emotions is wrong, and yet lying is . . . well, it depends.

Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb argues that the nation's problem is not that it has the wrong morality, but that it has no morality at all.<sup>1</sup> Through its moral relativism, American society is left with no standards other than law to govern sex, marriage, divorce, children, and crime. This devaluation of middle-class virtues like social order, self-discipline, and individual restraint, however, has caused American society to experience soaring rates of sexual harassment, divorce, domestic abuse, social rage, and cultural division.

The one exception to America's moral relativism involves race. Regarding charges of racial discrimination, there is no taboo on judgmentalism—no permissive, *laissez faire* attitude; no "whatever feels right to you" approach. The one sin in America against which every teacher, every politician, and every corporate marketing department can preach is racial discrimination. Indeed, it is a sin deserving of universal condemnation; but what is noteworthy about the current moral climate is that racial discrimination is the *only* such sin.

The nation's schools have been cleansed of any moral identity. Children are instructed on all the various forms of domestic arrangements that qualify as "families." They are taught safe-sex methods. They are told that prostitution is just a lifestyle choice. But never, under absolutely no circumstances, can they allow themselves to even passively acquiesce in an act of racial discrimination. They cannot draw pictures of Judeo-Christian symbols, but they can recreate the religious rituals of African tribes.

As the primary social sin, race often overshadows every other concern.<sup>2</sup> It renders irrelevant any other consideration. When a black student at a Connecticut high school was disciplined for wearing pants that hung so low as to expose his underwear, local civil rights leaders alleged racism, arguing that such pants were the preferred attire of African American males.<sup>3</sup> More seriously, in June 2004 the Los Angeles police were accused of beating a suspect whom they had just apprehended after a high-speed car chase and foot pursuit.<sup>4</sup> The incident revived memories of Rodney King, with the police being accused of racism. Never raised, however, was the issue of whether it is even reasonable for an auto theft suspect—after leading the police on a high-speed car chase through miles of city streets, then sprinting from his car after crashing it and throwing up his arms in surrender only after being surrounded by squads of police—to expect police officers who have rightly feared for their own safety to suddenly treat that suspect as if he were no more dangerous than a jay-walking elderly lady.

The issue is not whether racism deserves to be treated as a serious wrong—it does—but whether it deserves to crowd out every other wrong. Ideally, discrimination claims should have a positive effect on social morality, strengthening society's moral character. But now that racism has transcended into the realm of the "subtle" and "subconscious," such claims have come to exert a suffocating influence on social morality. Even though discrimination constitutes the primary social sin, the fear of being accused of racism has actually inhibited society's exercise of moral judgment. Since "subtle" racism is without definition or boundaries, the majority racial group is never sure what acts may later lead to racism charges. This uncertainty has in turn led to a crisis of virtue, where the majority shies away from taking any moral stands, shrinking back into the safety of individual isolation. But once a society suspends moral or cultural standards for minorities, it eventually has to make those same suspensions for the wider society; because if moral values lose their legitimacy for one group, they lose their legitimacy for all. In a society committed to equality, a two-tiered system of moral values cannot exist for long.<sup>5</sup> Social norms are like water—they quickly level out to the lowest common level.<sup>6</sup>

Because of claims that racism pervades all aspects of society, nearly every type of moral standard applied to minorities eventually gets shifted to the racial category. However, this tends to diminish the independent weight of those standards, which in turn threatens the very existence

of them. As E.J. Dionne wrote in *Why Americans Hate Politics*, “over time, when people stop *saying* things publicly they stop *believing* them privately, and when they stop believing them, they will, over time, stop *acting* on them.”<sup>7</sup> The issue is whether a suspension of moral standards for racial minorities will, instead of somehow helping those minorities to succeed, cause a decline in the moral expectations for the larger culture. In September 2004, the Congressional Black Caucus hosted a charity concert to raise money for a college scholarship fund. The featured performer at this concert was R. Kelly, who had recently been indicted on fourteen counts of child pornography. But this did not seem to trouble the preeminent black political organization in the country. A representative of the group, responding to concerns about the moral message that CBC’s affiliation with R. Kelly might send, simply said that “we are confident that Kelly’s performance will help us to achieve our goal to educate the next generation of leaders.”<sup>8</sup> As it turned out, Kelly’s performance attracted 2,000 people, including many top legislators.

As the near-exclusive social sin, racism negates all other sins. The fact that a criminal defendant has been dealing drugs is not as heinous as the possibility that the arresting officer or prosecutor harbors racist attitudes. The fact that a suspect carried a gun and resisted arrest is not as important as the statistically disproportionate number of blacks arrested. When a corporation settles a racial discrimination suit, it frequently agrees to hold a series of diversity training seminars; but when a corporation settles a fraud suit, there is rarely any demand that the corporation hold a series of ethics seminars. When new teachers are hired for public school positions, they undergo lengthy diversity counseling sessions, but receive very little training on actual classroom-management techniques.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the best illustration of how race trumps everything else, even life and death concerns, can be seen in the federal government’s discrimination case against American Airlines —a case that reveals the paralysis into which racial politics has put the country. Alleging discrimination in the treatment of certain passengers after 9/11, the federal Transportation Department sued American Airlines, as well as United, Delta, and Continental. According to the government’s complaint, the refusal of American Airlines to let ten people (out of the 23 million passengers carried) board its planes over the last four months of 2001 constituted illegal discrimination. Typical of those ten was a man named Jehad Alshrafi. After being informed by a federal air marshal that Alshrafi’s name resembled one on a terror-watch list and that Alshrafi had been acting suspiciously at the gate, an American Airlines pilot refused to let Alshrafi board a November 3, 2001, flight out of Boston. As alleged by the government’s complaint, the only reason Ashrafi was denied boarding was because of racial or national origin discrimination, even though there were at least five other passengers of Arab descent who had been allowed to board.<sup>10</sup>

The four airlines sued by the government all settled, paying millions of dollars into a fund that would be spent on "sensitivity training." None of them even tried to fight the charges of discrimination, even though they had responsibility for protecting tens of millions of people after the worst terrorist attack in history, even though on three different occasions between 9/11 and the end of 2001 the government had warned of an imminent terror attack and told the airlines to be particularly vigilant, even though in the words of the 9/11 Commission this vigilance was supposed to be directed against “Islamic terrorism,” and even though a fairly obvious

requirement for being an Islamic terrorist is Islamic identity.

Not only has the constant assertion of discrimination charges blunted the imposition of moral expectations upon minorities, but the discrimination mindset so pervasive in society has actually turned traditional moral values into an agent of racism. Consequently, irresponsible and destructive behavior cannot be directly addressed without first traversing the almost uncrossable territory of racism. Even though one-third of black males will be imprisoned at some time in their lives, even though homicide is the leading cause of death for young black men, the only fault factor that can be discussed is racism.<sup>11</sup> Even though 68 percent of black children are born to single mothers, any talk of sexual morality or family duties is interpreted as racist.

Racism charges have stymied the nation's attempt to deal with illegal immigration as a national security threat. As the 9/11 Commission found, "the challenge for national security in an age of terrorism is to prevent the very few people who may pose overwhelming risks from entering or remaining in the United States undetected." Yet nearly all attempts to curtail illegal immigration into America have been met with accusations of racial discrimination. Civil rights activists portray as racist anyone who supports secure borders, enforced immigration laws, and penalties imposed on people who break those laws. Falling under the umbrella of acts accused of being racist are: a proposal to add 2,000 new border patrol agents, an expansion of illegal alien detention facility space, an increase in the number of foreign airports with counterterrorist passenger screening programs, a toughening of the penalties for using false identification documents, a reduction in the bureaucratic delays that allow illegal aliens who obtained fraudulent visas to remain in the country even after their visas have been revoked, and a requirement that asylum-seekers tied to terrorist organizations provide credible proof of their "persecution."<sup>12</sup>

The suspension of moral judgment on any issue in which race is involved has even occurred within the African American community. The Rev. Eugene Rivers, the leader of a group of African American ministers who counsel disadvantaged youth, thinks the real inner-city problem is "a moral crisis among the weakest social classes."<sup>13</sup> The "anything-goes sexual morality of the sixties had a disastrous impact on poor blacks," Rivers states, "since it undermined the family life that nurtures the attitudes and habits that lead to success." As Robert Hampton writes, "sexual abuse, physical child abuse, and family violence are arguably among the most serious social problems in the black community."<sup>14</sup> Spousal abuse occurs approximately four times as often among blacks than among whites, and the AIDS rate among blacks is three times higher than among the general U.S. population.<sup>15</sup> Comedian Bill Cosby said the 50 percent high school dropout rate among inner-city African American males is a scandal that "is not all about what [white] people are doing to us."<sup>16</sup>

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Aside from their unintended effect on society's moral engagement, discrimination charges have had an impact on America's institutional integrity. If asserted frequently enough, they can taint entire social institutions. The public school system is accused of racism in its performance standards. A university is called racist because of its faculty hiring practices. Racism is imputed

to the courts in their handling of minority defendants. A government home-loan agency is accused of discriminating among mortgage applicants. The police are criticized for racial profiling, and hospitals are said to give sub-standard treatment to minorities. But when enough institutions are tainted, all of society's institutions become morally suspect. And when all social institutions lose their public respect, they lose their authority. And when social institutions lack authority, the vital machinery of society breaks down. As William Galston argues, "every society is weakened by the diminution of its members' belief in its legitimacy."<sup>17</sup> As Heather Mac Donald notes, "surely the cops would get more support from the community if their moral authority were not constantly under siege."<sup>18</sup>

If every institution in America is completely infected with the racism virus, then perhaps there is no remedial action possible. Perhaps all that can be done is to scrap everything and start over. Perhaps the only way to save society is to destroy it. On the other hand, if society and its institutions are not so irrevocably imbued with racism, then they are being unfairly and perhaps irreparably damaged by the taint of racism.

Because of its moral role, religion is a social institution much affected by the climate of racism charges. Ironically, the more a religion espouses traditional values, the more racially suspect it has become. Traditional moral values have somehow become associated with racist attitudes. The religiously devout, especially evangelical Christians, are often categorically accused of harboring racist beliefs and opinions. Indeed, the only praise given to religious organizations seems to be when they engage in the fight against racism. Compare, for instance, the universal praise given to the Rev. Martin Luther King's "Our God Is Marching On" speech, in which he called for electing legislators who "walk humbly with thy God," with the deafening criticism given to religious leaders who speak out on such issues as abortion and individual virtue.

The role of race in determining the public image of religion can also be seen in the ways that African American churches are treated differently from predominately white churches. When politicians appear at black churches to whip up political support, or when black leaders use their churches to hold political fundraisers, the efforts are praised as valuable civic activism. But when similar functions occur at white churches, they are condemned as violating the separation of church and state. Similarly, whenever the media cites Pat Robertson or Jerry Falwell, they are inevitably identified according to their religious affiliation; but whenever Rev. Jesse Jackson or Rev. Al Sharpton are cited, they are identified as political leaders.

Religion seems to attract public acclaim not when it performs any of its various charity functions, but only when it espouses the racially correct position. Just as President Clinton embraced the black community during his impeachment crisis, religious organizations preach the racism message whenever they wish to rehabilitate their public image or seek redemption for prior sins. Even for religion, the one way to attain social redemption for whatever other wrongs may have once been committed is to confess the one universal sin: racism. In the wake of all the publicity regarding the sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic Church, for instance, Archbishop Harry Flynn released a pastoral letter stating that organized religion has often fostered attitudes of racial superiority.<sup>19</sup> Black leaders praised Flynn's actions, saying that "the Catholic Church has been silent too long" (even though more than twenty years earlier the Catholic bishops of the United States had issued a similar pastoral letter on racism, and even though the first diocesan

pastoral letter condemning racism was published in 1956 by the archbishop of New Orleans, who later excommunicated several prominent segregationists for refusing to follow the church's teaching that racism was wrong).

Bishop Flynn's evidence of racism amounted in large part to anecdotal stories of past instances, including a birthday party as a child when he did not want to invite an African-American girl. But are these portrayals of past racism truly indicative of what Flynn describes as present institutional racism in the Catholic Church?<sup>20</sup> Flynn then goes on to repeat the racism-by-statistics argument: that just because parishes tend to be somewhat culturally and racially homogenous, that just because parishes reflect the demographics of their surrounding neighborhoods, that just because blacks do not make up a significant portion of Catholic parish membership, then the Catholic Church is a perpetrator of racism. In an indictment of all religion, Bishop Flynn writes that "ten o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours in American society."<sup>21</sup> But in his attempt to attain some social redemption for the recent sins of the Catholic Church, Bishop Flynn has universally tainted all religious institutions.

Another social institution that has been particularly discredited by charges of racial discrimination is the institution at the heart of American democracy – the electoral institution and its voting system. The 2004 presidential campaign was inundated with accusations that African-American voters were being systematically disenfranchised by a discriminatory voting system. Jesse Jackson likened the Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell to the infamous racist Bull Connor, just because Blackwell (an African American) defended ballot rules that had been unanimously and bipartisanly adopted—rules that prohibited election workers from giving ballots to voters who were not at their correct polling place.

In the weeks leading up to the election, the media reported that nearly every battleground state was being hit with a barrage of lawsuits claiming that the enforcement of antifraud voting rules amounted to racial discrimination. Prior to the election, nine lawsuits had already been filed in Florida accusing state officials of conspiring to disenfranchise minority voters. Similar lawsuits in Ohio and Michigan sought to ease the longstanding rules regarding provisional ballots, claiming that such rules were intended to suppress the minority vote.<sup>22</sup>

As it turned out, a record number of voters participated in the 2004 election. There were long lines at the polls, but none of the predicted chaos and disenfranchisement. Yet even though no complaints of widespread voter discrimination were voiced after the election, all the previous denigration of every election law and procedure could not help but to erode public confidence in the voting process. The repeated attacks on America's electoral institution had such a damaging effect that for months preceding the 2004 election the nation's news outlets were filled with stories of people fearing that their votes would not be counted. But perhaps the most real and damaging effect of the rash of discrimination charges lies in how those charges led to a lax enforcement of voting rules, which in turn contributed to widespread voter registration fraud.

In Florida, the ACLU filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of a state law that required the posting of a list of "voter rights and responsibilities" in every voting station. Among the responsibilities listed was the requirement to bring proper identification to the polling place. The

ACLU claimed that this requirement was racially discriminatory.<sup>23</sup> In Iowa, the attorney general ruled that individuals showing up at the wrong voting place would still be permitted to cast a ballot, even if poll workers were unable to verify that the person was eligible to vote. And across the country on Election Day, armies of lawyers stood guard at polling places, ready to make harassment accusations against election officials who asked voters for proof of citizenship.

But lost amidst all the charges of voter discrimination is the very sanctity of the voting process. Lost are the issues of why the election process cannot be protected from people who have no right to vote or who have failed to comply with the minimal requirements of voting. Lost is the corrosive effect that voter fraud can have on the perceived legitimacy of democratic elections. Indeed, if illegally cast votes ended up determining the outcome of an election, those illegal ballots would have effectively disenfranchised legally cast votes.

Every four years, the country is reminded by celebrities doing public service advertisements that voting is one of the most important duties and privileges possessed by a free people. Voting is the very pillar of democracy, the messages proclaim. And the fact that it is an activity performed relatively infrequently—for most people, once every four years—only heightens its importance.

None of the celebrities in their public service messages would equate voting with such mundane, everyday activities as, say, driving a car. Yet, there is the expectation that voting is something that should require very little effort or advanced planning. To obtain a drivers' license, one must pass a written exam and then a road test; one must submit all the correct forms in a timely fashion and to the correct governmental office; one must provide all the requested information and pay the mandated fee. However, when it comes to issues involving minority voting, little consideration is given to the individual's duty to perform a few minimal requirements. If minority voters fail to register to vote and then are denied the right to cast a ballot on Election Day, this denial is given a purely racial interpretation. If a minority voter shows up late to a polling place and is denied entrance, this denial is seen as racial disenfranchisement.

Beyond the impact on social institutions, the indiscriminate levying of discrimination charges is wearing down society's confidence in its moral capacity. When society is repeatedly accused of being inherently racist, and hence inherently immoral, people lose confidence in their individual and collective ability to do good. With discrimination as the only gauge to morality, this loss of confidence in turn drives society into a moral emptiness. It suspends moral judgment, making both society and the individual afraid to enforce moral standards. Sexual promiscuity becomes a value-free activity, since to criticize it might be seen as a back-door way of criticizing a racial minority. A similar stance is taken toward the raw, sexist, violent, degrading lyrics of certain types of rap music. No moral judgement can be made because of the fear of being tagged with discrimination.

This resistance to judgment is not just confined to the problematic behavior of youths, it also occurs at the highest levels of American society. After Mary Frances Berry refused to step down as chair of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, in defiance of the law, it was further revealed that the commission itself had been violating the law for years, by failing to conduct any independent audits of itself. Because of its status as a civil rights organization combating racism, the commission had been allowed to escape accountability to various government mandates and

rules.<sup>24</sup>

Moral values require judgment, which is diametrically opposed to the notion of indiscriminate tolerance—a notion fostered by current racial politics. Also contributing to a repression of moral judgement is the cult of victimhood, which likewise has roots in the discrimination mindset. Under this cult, innocence is conferred by victimhood. While the traditional sense of virtue was based on some ideal of perfectability, the contemporary sense of virtue is based on sin—or more precisely, on the victims of certain sins such as discrimination.

The moral and cultural dilemmas posed by America's racial attitudes were predicted by Daniel Patrick Moynihan.<sup>25</sup> Citing the increasing erosion of the black family, he demonstrated what happens when a society begins suspending the moral and cultural standards by which it judges. Afraid of appearing racist, society (in Moynihan's famous term) "defines deviancy down"—a process by which pathological behavior such as high crime rates and illegitimacy become socially acceptable. As Moynihan warned in 1965, "a community that allows a large number of young men to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority...asks for and gets chaos." Indeed, that is what has happened. Whereas in 1960 78 percent of all black families were headed by married couples, that figure has now been cut in half. However, by criticizing black culture, Moynihan was branded a racist.<sup>26</sup>

The cultural problems outlined by Moynihan four decades ago are no longer just African American problems; they have spilled over into the rest of the culture and are now national problems. Since 1965, crime rates in society at large have risen faster than crime rates within the black community. This is also true for illegitimacy and teen pregnancy. For instance, the white illegitimacy rate today is approximately the same as the African American rate in 1965.<sup>27</sup>

As Charles Krauthammer argues, the cultural tendency to "define deviancy down" has actually caused a moral inversion, in which traditional institutions such as heterosexual courtship and the family are treated as deviant settings for sexual abuse and domestic violence.<sup>28</sup> In a state of moral inversion, the normal becomes the abnormal, and vice versa. Social demoralization is a direct result of the denial of moral and civilizational norms, according to the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb.<sup>29</sup>

When society operates in a moral void, it is often difficult to see the larger moral aspects of any issue. This is apparent with stem cell research, in which the larger moral issue of whether such research involves tampering with human life has virtually been ignored. Indeed, the social vocabulary reflects an incapacity or hesitancy toward moral vision. Instead of words like 'right' or "wrong," we have less precise and judgmental words, like "appropriate" and "inappropriate" — words that once applied to wearing brown shoes in public after 6 p.m.

The growing moral vacuum is also reflected by society's acceptance of hypocrisy on the part of its leaders. Politicians refuse to grant poor people the right to send their children to private schools, even as those same politicians send their own children to elite private schools. They preach energy conservation, even as they travel in private jets and limousines. They preach social compassion and responsibility to the poor, and yet give a mere pittance of their annual

income to charities doing just such work.

There cannot be a call to moral action if there is no sound belief in a society's moral capacity. America, for instance, will be unable to take any action on illegal immigration if because of fears of racism charges it doubts its moral authority on that issue. And even though an army of political activists call health care a moral issue, there seems no moral imperative to solving this problem; nor is there any moral direction on how to proceed. Lacking confidence in its overall moral capacity, society is helpless to approach health care as a moral issue. Furthermore, whatever confidence does exist has been increasingly eroded by all the accusations of discrimination involving medical treatment delivered to racial minorities.

There is a similar lack of moral energy in the fight against school violence. One and a half million incidents of violence at public schools occurred during the 1999-2000 school year alone.<sup>30</sup> The cause of this violence is often attributed to discrimination and racism. During the 1950s, however, there were single-parent households and poverty and societal discrimination, and yet today's levels of violence would have been unimaginable then. But the violence is tolerated now because to act against it is to risk discrimination charges. So what remains are unsafe schools breeding brutality and indifference, rather than intellectual development and emotional maturity. Indeed, the dismantling of moral codes has been most destructive to minorities. The black illegitimacy rate, for instance, shot up to its present high level only after the 1960s, with its advent of moral relativism and minority exemption from prevailing social norms.<sup>31</sup>

Relativism has proved to be a corrosive influence even toward the issue of racial discrimination. In many ways, racism no longer resonates within the larger moral arena envisioned by Dr. Martin Luther King, who relied on such sources as the Bible for his moral case against segregation. Instead, racial issues today simply reverberate inside a shell of haphazard and ever-changing rules, which in turn have stemmed from an unfocused and unprioritized dictatorship of discrimination concerns. Such rules have resulted in a holding by New Jersey's Division on Civil Rights that nightclubs offering drink discounts on "ladies' nights" amounts to an unlawful form of discrimination.<sup>32</sup> They have also mandated that a black radio announcer be forced to publicly apologize for simply drawing an off-the-cuff analogy between the football replay in NFL games to video replays of the infamous Rodney King beating.<sup>33</sup>

Instead of clear moral principles shaping the racial attitudes of the majority culture, guilt has become the guiding factor. But as Shelby Steele notes, "white guilt is best understood as a vacuum of moral authority," where whites "feel no authority to speak or judge and where they sense a great risk of being seen as racist."<sup>34</sup> In this "cult of grief," whites are motivated only by a desire to somehow participate in the victimization process. Even when whites feel blameless, Steele argues, they defer to blacks on any moral question involving race, "retreating in sober self-reflection if not outright apology."<sup>35</sup>

Driven not so much by any overarching moral imperative as by an instinctive urge to avoid guilt, the majority is attracted to racial policies promising the appearance of redemption, even if those policies offer no real substantive benefit to racial minorities.<sup>36</sup> This preoccupation with guilt and with reviving a sense of racial innocence, according to Steele, is nowhere more evident than in

America's universities:

At some of America's most elite universities, administrators have granted concessions in response to black student demands that all but sanction racial separatism on campus—black "theme" dorms, black students unions, black yearbooks, homecoming dances, and so on. I don't believe administrators sincerely believe in these separatist concessions. Most of them are liberals who see racial separatism as wrong. But black student demands pull them into the paradigm of self-preoccupied white guilt whereby they seek a quick redemption by offering special entitlements that go beyond fairness. In this black students become invisible to them. Though blacks have the lowest grade point average of any group in American universities, administrators never sit down with them and "demand" in kind that they bring their grades up to par. The paradigm of white guilt makes the real problems of black students secondary to the need for white redemption. It also cuts these administrators off from their own values, which would most certainly discourage racial separatism and encourage higher black performance. Lastly, it makes for escapist policies...What demonstrates more than anything the degree to which university administrators (and faculties) have been subdued by this paradigm is their refusal to lead black students, to tell them what they honestly think, to insist that they perform at a higher level, and to ask them to integrate themselves fully into campus life.<sup>37</sup>

A pervasive yet undefined guilt, which accompanies pervasive yet undefined charges of racism, has imposed upon the majority culture a feeling of helplessness, which then further reinforces a moral retreat. But guilt and the shallow desire for the mere appearance of innocence are no substitutes for morality.

If racial attitudes define social virtue, then the ambiguous nature of the former will effectively torpedo the pursuit of the latter. Vice thrives on ignorance and ambiguity; virtue requires knowledge and certainty. The sinner can neither repent nor reform if she does not know the true nature of the sin. If people are constantly condemned as sinners, they will eventually become sinners. A constant imputing of guilt can make even the innocent act in a way that eventually warrants that guilt. If a person is continually accused of committing undefined crimes, that person will probably give up the futile attempt of trying to prove his innocence—he'll simply end up settling into a life of crime. When there is no realistic chance of redemption, then what is to motivate a wrongdoer to reform?

The quest for virtue is a quest that all of society, and every person within society, should be rewarded in pursuing. A democracy depends on citizens trying to be virtuous, and that attempt will only take place if citizens actually believe that virtue is possible. Without that possibility, individuals will give up on virtue and slide into lifestyles of hedonistic narcissism and self-absorption.

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There are no longer the seven deadly sins—just one sin: discrimination. All other values or virtues are secondary. But this has left society so devoid of public morality that, for example,

there is no audience backlash against celebrities who commit morally repulsive acts. As long as those celebrities preach against discrimination, they need not worry about their moral behavior or any public reaction to it. Since race confers absolute moral virtue, the "correct" attitudes on race essentially enables one to do anything he or she wants regarding any other area of moral behavior. But this one-sin-only focus does not and cannot fulfill the broader function of teaching society how to be more moral or virtuous. Moreover, there is reason to doubt that the current "racial correctness" can even achieve its most elemental objectives. A survey by Stanley Rothman and Seymour Martin Lipset shows that the more racial diversity is emphasized on a college campus, the less enthusiastic students are about the quality of education at that campus. Furthermore, Rothman and Lipset found that such diversity-focused schools actually experienced more reports of discrimination, not less.<sup>38</sup>

As the authors of *The Federalist Papers* explained over 200 years ago, a democracy requires a higher degree of virtue in its citizens than any other form of government.<sup>39</sup> In the words of William Galson, a democracy "cannot be wholly indifferent to the character of its citizens," since the viability of democratic society "depends on its ability to engender a virtuous citizenry."<sup>40</sup> A democracy also depends on a certain level of civility and trust among its citizens. Once destroyed, this trust and civility cannot be imposed by legal dictates. Discrimination charges, rightly so, must seek justice. But this pursuit is not a cost-free one. If conducted carelessly, it can undermine such necessary democratic traits as trust and civility.

Under the anti-discrimination mindset, the sole focus is on freeing people from outside constraints, rather than on strengthening civic virtue or the social institutions of moral education. With anti-discrimination as the primary component of public morality, the litany of rights tends to eclipse any dialogue of duties or public discussion about virtue.<sup>41</sup> In this climate, all the self-restraint values have fallen victim to self-liberation concerns. According to Robert Wuthnow, "the language of sacrifice has dropped out of our vocabulary" because of all the emphasis on self-fulfillment.<sup>42</sup>

Racial justice, in the broader context, is not just about quotas or government programs or even entitlement claims of minority groups. It is about a wider morality – a society's duties to justice, fairness, equality and civility. Consequently, this broader context requires a firmly-held code of moral values, not just a collection of rules on discrimination. Yet it is the primacy and ambiguity of these assorted rules that are chipping away at society's moral values.

**Notes**

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- <sup>1</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Virtues* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).
- <sup>2</sup> Race can even supersede obedience of the law. For instance, it has been revealed by insiders that for years colleges have used an illegal quota system in their admissions of minority students. John McWhorter, "The Campus Diversity Fraud," *City Journal*, Winter 2002.
- <sup>3</sup> Stephen L. Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals and the Etiquette of Democracy*, p. 67. (New York: Perseus Publishing, 1998)
- <sup>4</sup> Nick Madigan, "Los Angeles Moves to Ease Tensions After Tape Captures Police Beating of Black Suspect," *New York Times*, June 25, 2004, A15.
- <sup>5</sup> Christopher Lasch criticized the idea that "respect for cultural diversity forbids us to impose the standards of privileged groups on the victims of oppression." Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), pp. 84-85.
- <sup>6</sup> For instance, white, upper-class youths attracted to the ability of black youths to rebel against social rules have increasingly adopted the anti-social mentality of the black, urban under-class. These whites find rap music appealing "because of its rebellious and anti-establishment themes." D'Souza, *The End of Racism*, p. 511.
- <sup>7</sup> Dionne, *Why Americans*, p. 20.
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