

## Race

*Race is an area in our lives subject to many fallacies, misunderstandings, sloppy analysis, and demagoguery. Some of the problem has to do with misleading terminology, such as labeling one group or another as a minority. When one uses the term "minority," there is an inference that somewhere out there is a majority, but in the United States we are a nation of minorities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2000 census, when people self-indentify, the largest ethnic group is German (15.2%), Irish (10.8%), African (8.8), and English (8.7) ancestry. Of the ninety-two ethnic groups listed, seventy-five make up less than 1 percent of our population.\**

*Another misleading term is racial segregation, when people assert that a school or neighborhood is segregated because the black population is "underrepresented" according to their numbers in the population. But blacks are also "underrepresented," according to their numbers in the U.S. population, in South Dakota, Montana, and Idaho. They are also "underrepresented" at hockey games, opera, and dressage performances. Based on those observations, would one also claim that those activities, like schools and neighborhoods, are also racially segregated? Because a particular activity is not racially heterogeneous does not mean it is segregated. A better test for segregation, say in the case of schools, is to determine whether a black living in a particular school district is free to attend its schools. Or, if a black wishes to live in South Dakota, Montana, or Idaho, whether he is free to do so. There is no reason whatsoever to expect that people will sort themselves proportionately across any activity.*

*Black Americans are often portrayed as a downtrodden, discriminated against people. In my opinion, this is an insult of major proportions. Black Americans have made some of the greatest gains, over some of the highest hurdles and in the shortest span of time, than any other racial group in the history of mankind. This unprecedented progress can*

\*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Ancestry: 2000, issued June 2004.

*be seen through several measures. If one were to total black earnings, and consider black Americans a separate nation, one would find that in 2005 black Americans earned \$644 billion, making them the world's sixteenth richest nation—that is, just behind Australia but ahead of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland. Black Americans are, and have been, chief executives of some of the world's largest and richest cities such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. It was a black American, General Colin Powell, appointed Joint Chief of Staff in October 1989, who headed the world's mightiest military and later became U.S. secretary of state, to be succeeded by Condoleezza Rice, another black American. Black Americans are among the world's most famous personalities and a few, among the richest. Most blacks are not poor but middle class.*

*On the eve of the Civil War, it is doubtful whether a slave or a slave owner would have believed these gains possible in less than a mere century and a half, if ever. As such, that progress speaks well not only of the sacrifices and intestinal fortitude of a people but of a nation in which these gains were possible.*

*None of this is to say that racial discrimination has been completely eliminated or that there are not major problems facing a large percentage of blacks—those 25 to 30 percent for whom these gains remain elusive. The policy-relevant question is, how much of those problems are a result of today's discrimination? As I argue in some of the columns in this section, racial discrimination cannot account for some of the most devastating problems that blacks confront, such a breakdown in the black family structure, high rates of illegitimacy, grossly fraudulent education, and unprecedented crime and social pathology in many black neighborhoods.*

*Many see the solution in the political arena or government programs of one kind or another. I see little evidence for such a position. For many blacks, their plight is the worst in the very cities where blacks have been mayors, city councilmen, chief of police, or superintendent of schools—cities such as Washington, D.C., Detroit, Philadelphia, Newark, and Baltimore. Trillions of dollars have been spent at the federal, state, and local levels of government on one poverty program or another. Most of what resulted is an unprecedented level of dependency. Neither blacks*

*nor any other American is poor in the historical sense of the term; the kind of material poverty seen in the past is nonexistent today. Today's poverty is poverty of the spirit, where, for the most part people, by their personal decisions, choose to be poor.*

*The columns in this section shed light on a number of racial issues and question assumptions that have taken on an axiomatic status and believed to be beyond question.*

## Regrets for Slavery

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*Wednesday, March 7, 2007*

Both chambers of the Commonwealth of Virginia's General Assembly passed a resolution saying government-sanctioned slavery "ranks as the most horrendous of all depredations of human rights and violations of our founding ideals in our nation's history; and . . . the abolition of slavery was followed by . . . systematic discrimination, enforced segregation, and other insidious institutions and practices toward Americans of African descent that were rooted in racism, racial bias, and racial misunderstanding." The General Assembly also expressed regret for the "exploitation of Native Americans."

Isn't that nice? I agree that slavery was an abomination, but I'm going to be even more generous than Virginia's General Assembly. I regret the murder of an estimated 61 million people whom the former USSR executed, slaughtered, starved, beat or tortured to death. I also regret the Chinese government's slaughter of 45 million Chinese; Hitler's slaughter of 6 million Jews; the Khmer Rouge's murder of 2 million Cambodians; the half a million Ugandans murdered by Idi Amin's death squads; the million Hutus and Tutsis murdered in Rwanda's genocidal bloodbath; and slavery that still exists in the Sudan and Mauritania.

All of these, and many more, are horrible injustices at least as horrible as the slavery that existed in the U.S. But after all the regrets and apologies for injustices, what comes next? Let's examine Virginia's statement of regret with an eye toward what it might mean.

I can personally relate to the Virginia General Assembly's declaration. My great-grandparents were slaves in the Virginia cities of Chase City and Newport News. The General Assembly's statement of regret for slavery means absolutely nothing to me. If anything, it's nothing less than a cheap insult and capitulation of white delegates to black hustlers. Possibly, the whites who voted in support of the declaration were mau-maued into it or they felt guilt over our history of slavery. In any case, they should know that their actions mean little

in dealing with the day-to-day plight of many black Virginians—which has nothing to do with slavery.

The U.S. murder rate is 5.6 people per 100,000 of the population. In the Commonwealth of Virginia's capital, Richmond, where the General Assembly meets, the murder rate is 43 people per 100,000 of the population making Richmond the city with the third-highest murder rate in the nation, according to a 2005 FBI report.

What about black education in Virginia? According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), black education is a disgrace. In 2003, 51 percent of black eighth-graders scored below basic; 49 percent at or above basic; of these, only 11 percent scored proficient. For black fourth-graders, the scores were 34, 66 and 13 percent, respectively. In 2002 in reading, 38 percent of black eighth-graders scored below basic, with 62 percent at or above basic and 15 percent scoring proficient. For fourth-graders, the scores were 53, 47 and 15 percent, respectively.

Below basic is the category the NAEP uses for students unable to display even partial mastery of knowledge and skills fundamental for proficient work at their grade level. Given this extreme academic incompetence, one shouldn't be surprised by the 2002 Virginia State Education Profile showing that the median combined SAT score for black students is a disgraceful 848 out of 1600, 210 points below the white median, and the white median is nothing to write home about.

The next time the Virginia General Assembly gets into an apologetic mood and wants to pass another resolution aimed at its black citizens, here are my suggestions: The Commonwealth of Virginia apologizes to its black citizens for not protecting them from criminals who prey upon them and make their lives a daily nightmare. The Commonwealth also apologizes for our government-sanctioned school system that delivers fraudulent education, thereby consigning many of its black citizens to the bottom rungs of the economic ladder.

## Do People Care?

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*Wednesday, July 4, 2007*

Back in the late 1960s, during graduate study at UCLA, I had a casual conversation with Professor Armen Alchian, one of my tenacious mentors. Professor Alchian is among the top 20th-century contributors to economic knowledge. During our graduate student/faculty coffee hour conversation, I was trying to impress Professor Alchian with my knowledge of type I and type II statistical errors.

I told him that my wife assumes that everybody is her friend until they prove differently. While such an assumption maximizes the number of friends that she will have, it also maximizes her chances of being betrayed. Unlike my wife, my assumption is everyone is my enemy until they prove they're a friend. That assumption minimizes my number of friends but minimizes the chances of betrayal.

Professor Alchian, donning a mischievous smile, asked, "Williams, have you considered a third alternative, namely, that people don't give a damn about you one way or another?" Initially, I felt a bit insulted, and our conversation didn't go much further. That was typical of Professor Alchian—to say something profound and maybe controversial, without much comment, and let you think about it.

During the earlier years of my professional career, I gave Professor Alchian's question considerable thought and concluded that he was right. The most reliable assumption, in terms of the conduct of one's life, is to assume that generally people don't care about you one way or another. It's a mistake to assume everyone is a friend or everyone is an enemy, or people are out to help you, or people are out to hurt you.

Let's do a thought experiment applying this to issues of race. Listening to some people, one might think that white people are engaged in an ongoing secret conspiracy to undermine the welfare of black people. Evidence for those people is the large numbers of black men in prison, low black academic achievement and poverty. For some,

racism is the root cause of the high black illegitimacy rate and family breakdown.

Are white people obsessed with and engaged in a conspiracy against black people? I'm guessing no, and here's an experiment. Walk up to the average white person and ask: How many minutes today have you been thinking about a black person? If the person wasn't a Klansman or a gushing do-gooder, his answer would probably be zero minutes. If you asked him whether he's a part of a conspiracy to undermine the welfare of black people, he'd probably look at you as if you were crazy. By the same token, if you asked me: "Williams, how many minutes today have you been thinking about white people?" I'd probably say, "You'd have to break the time interval down into smaller units, like nanoseconds, for me to give an accurate answer." Because people don't care about you one way or another doesn't mean they wish you good will, ill will or no will.

If Professor Alchian's vision of how the world works is correct, what are its implications? A major implication is that one's destiny, for the most part, is in his hands. In other words, how you make it in this world, for the most part, depends more on what you do as opposed to whether people like or dislike you. In order to produce a successful life, one must find ways to please his fellow man. That is, find out what goods and services his fellow man values, and is willing to pay for, and then acquire the necessary skills and education to provide it. Whether your fellow man cares about you or not is largely irrelevant.

## Liberal Views, Black Victims

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*Wednesday, August 22, 2007*

Last year, among the nation's 10 largest cities, Philadelphia had the highest murder rate with 406 victims. This year could easily top last year's with 240 murders so far.

Other cities such as Baltimore, Detroit and Washington, D.C., with large black populations, experience the nation's highest rates of murder and violent crime. This high murder rate is, and has been, predominantly a black problem.

According to Bureau of Justice statistics, between 1976 and 2005, blacks, while 13 percent of the population, committed over 52 percent of the nation's homicides and were 46 percent of the homicide victims. Ninety-four percent of black homicide victims had a black person as their murderer.

Blacks are not only the major victims of homicide; blacks suffer high rates of all categories of serious violent crime, and another black is most often the perpetrator.

Liberals and their political allies say the problem is the easy accessibility of guns and greater gun control is the solution. That has to be nonsense. Guns do not commit crimes; people do.

Up through 1979, the FBI reported homicide arrests sorted by racial breakdowns that included Japanese. Between 1976 and 1978, 21 of 48,695 arrests for murder and non-negligent manslaughter were Japanese-Americans. That translates to an annual murder rate of 1 per 100,000 of the Japanese-American population. Would anyone advance the argument that the reason why homicide is virtually non-existent among Japanese-Americans is because they can't find guns?

The high victimization rate experienced by the overwhelmingly law-abiding black community is mostly the result of predators not having to pay a heavy enough price for their behavior. They benefit from all kinds of asinine excuses, such as poverty, racial discrimination and few employment opportunities.

During the 1940s and '50s, I grew up in North Philadelphia

where many of today's murders occur. It was a time when blacks were much poorer, there was far more racial discrimination, and fewer employment opportunities and other opportunities for upward socioeconomic mobility were available. There was nowhere near the level of crime and wanton destruction that exists today. Behavior accepted today wasn't accepted then by either black adults or policemen.

Police authorities often know who are the local criminals and drug lords and where crack houses are located; however, various legal technicalities hamper their ability to make arrests and raids. Law-abiding citizens are often afraid to assist police or testify against criminals for fear of retaliation that can include murder. The level of criminal activity not only puts residents in physical jeopardy but represents a heavy tax on people least able to bear it. That heavy tax includes higher prices for goods and services and fewer shopping opportunities because supermarkets and other large retailers are reluctant to bear the costs of doing business in high-crime areas.

So here's the question: Should black people accept government's dereliction of its first basic function, that of providing protection? My answer is no. One of our basic rights is the right to defend oneself against predators. If the government can't or won't protect people, people have a right to protect themselves.

You say, "Hey, Williams, you're not talking about vigilantism, are you?" Yes, I am. Webster's Dictionary defines vigilantism as: a volunteer committee organized to suppress and punish crime summarily as when the processes of law are viewed as inadequate.

Example: A number of years ago, Black Muslims began to patrol Mayfair, a drug-infested, gang-ridden Washington, D.C., housing project. The gangs and drug lords left, probably because the Black Muslims didn't feel obliged to issue Miranda warnings. Black men should set up neighborhood patrols, armed if necessary, and if politicians and police don't like it, they should do their jobs. No one should have to live in daily fear for their lives and safety.

## Insulting Blacks

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*Wednesday, September 12, 2007*

“I don’t feel no ways tired. I come too far from where I started from. Nobody told me that the road would be easy. I don’t believe He brought me this far,” drawled presidential aspirant Hillary Clinton, mimicking black voice to a black audience, at the First Baptist Church of Selma, Alabama. I’m wondering if Mrs. Clinton visits an Indian reservation she might cozy up to them saying, “How! Me not tired. Me come heap long way. Road mighty rough. Sky Spirit no bring me this far.” Or, seeking the Asian vote she might say, “I no wray tired. Come too far I started flum. Road berry clooked. Number one Dragon King take me far.”

The occasion of Mrs. Clinton’s speech was the 42nd anniversary of Bloody Sunday, on March 7, 1965, when 600 civil rights marchers were attacked by police with billy clubs, cattle prods and tear gas, one of the high points in the black civil rights struggle. Commemorating a key point in American history is one thing, but a white person mimicking black dialect is demeaning and insulting. And, if it buys her votes from those in attendance, not much flattering can be said about them.

Mrs. Clinton later explained her drawl, around black audiences, to a meeting of the National Association of Black Journalists, “I lived all those years in Arkansas, and, you know, I’m in this interracial marriage.” The interracial marriage bit has to do with the frequent reference to former President Clinton, by the Congressional Black Caucus and others, as the “first black president.”

Mrs. Clinton is not alone in demeaning talk to black people; she’s in good company with Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, who talk of “going from the outhouse to the White House” and “from disgrace to amazing grace” and other such nonsense. Neither Clinton nor Revs. Sharpton and Jackson address white audiences in that manner. Before a predominantly black audience, during his 2004 presidential bid, Sen. John Kerry said, in reference to so many blacks in prison, “That’s

unacceptable, but it's not their fault." I doubt whether Kerry would have told a white audience that jailed white people were faultless. Kerry probably holds whites responsible for their criminal behavior.

In 2004, NAACP President Kweisi Mfume said of President George Bush, "We have a president that's prepared to take us back to the days of Jim Crow segregation and dominance." During the 2000 presidential campaign, Rev. Jesse Jackson warned black audiences by telling them that a Bush win would turn the civil rights clock back to the days of Jim Crow. Now that Bush's two-term presidency is near its end, why wouldn't someone ask Jesse and Kweisi about the accuracy of their predictions?

Suppose some demagogue in 2000 told Jewish Americans that a Bush presidency would mean concentration camps, or told Japanese-Americans that his presidency would mean internment? Do you think such pronouncements would have been welcomed and applauded? I'm sure that had someone made such a stupid prediction to Jewish and Japanese-Americans, they would have had ridicule and scorn heaped upon them.

What does it say about blacks who can be taken in by pandering, alarmist nonsense from both whites and blacks as a means to get their votes? As a black man, I don't find the most obvious answer very flattering.

## Betrayal of the Civil Rights Struggle

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*Wednesday, October 3, 2007*

Five police “mini-stations” will be located in Detroit public schools this year primarily due to the merging of students from several high schools on the city’s west side. According to a Sept. 1 *Detroit Free Press* article, armed police officers will patrol the hallways in an effort to stem violence.

During the 2005–06 school year, officials issued 39,318 disciplinary referrals and filed 5,500 crime reports, and that’s not including truancy and property damage. Uniformed and undercover police officers ride on city buses that transport students to and from school. As of last year, according to a June 2006 *USA Today* report, Detroit’s public school graduation rate is only 21.7 percent, the lowest among the nation’s 50 largest school districts.

During the 2003–04 school year, only 52 of the nation’s 92,000 public schools were labeled “persistently dangerous,” a designation under the No Child Left Behind Act entitling students to move to an alternate “safe” school. Philadelphia had 14 schools labeled as “persistently dangerous” and Baltimore had six. The level of violence in Philadelphia schools is so high that each high school is equipped with a walk-through metal detector, security cameras and a conveyor-belted X-ray machine that scans book bags and purses.

Philadelphia and Baltimore, like Detroit, have armed police to try to stem school violence. School violence, including assaults on teachers and staff, is not restricted to inner city schools but occurs also in suburban and rural schools. However, the bulk of the violence is at schools with large black populations.

One has to ask: What happened? I graduated from Benjamin Franklin High School in 1954. Franklin had just about the lowest academic rating of all Philadelphia high schools and probably the city’s lowest income students. But what goes on today in Philadelphia high schools would have been inconceivable back then. There were no policemen in or around the schools, there wasn’t wanton property

destruction, profanities weren't heard up and down the hallways, and the farthest thought from a student's mind was to curse or assault a teacher.

Much of what's seen today is a result of harebrained ideas and a tolerance for barbaric behavior. Kathleen Parker cited such an example in her May 16 syndicated column. The case concerned teacher Elizabeth Kandrac, who was routinely verbally abused by black students at Brentwood Middle School in North Charleston, S.C. A sample of the abusive language: white b----, white m-----f-----, white c---, white ho. Despite frequent complaints, school officials did nothing to stop the abuse. They told her this racially charged profanity was simply part of the students' culture, and if Kandrac couldn't handle the students' cursing, she was in the wrong school. Kandrac brought suit alleging a racially hostile work environment, and the school district settled out of court for \$200,000.

People with such a tolerant mindset are in effect saying that blacks are not to be held to civilized standards of conduct and academic expectations that might be enforced for others. That's a disgusting and debilitating notion. I guarantee you that years ago, such nonsense would not have been tolerated, and a person making excuses for barbaric behavior by black students would have been considered a lunatic.

What has been allowed in predominantly black schools is nothing less than a betrayal of the struggle paid with blood, sweat and tears by previous generations to make possible the educational opportunities so long denied blacks that are being routinely squandered today. Blacks who lived through that struggle and are no longer with us wouldn't have believed such a betrayal possible.

There's enough blame to go around for each to have his share: Students who are alien and hostile to the education process, parents who don't give a damn, and the education establishment and politicians who accommodate and excuse this tragedy of black education.

## Racial Hoaxes and the NAACP

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*Wednesday, December 12, 2007*

Last May, firefighters at a Baltimore, Md., fire station came under scrutiny for displaying a deer with an afro wig, gold tooth, gold chain and a cigarette hanging from its mouth.

Marvin “Doc” Cheatham, president of the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP, went ballistic, charging, “There is now and has been a culture of racism and white supremacy within the Baltimore City Fire Department.”

As it turns out, it was a black fireman who dressed up the critter. Cheatham refused to apologize for his accusations of fire department racism, maintaining “there is now and has been a culture of racism and white supremacy within the Baltimore City Fire Department.”

On Nov. 21, a hangman’s noose was found at the fire station with a note, “We can’t hang the cheaters, but we can hang the failures. No EMT-1, NO JOB.” The noose and note turned up on the heels of an investigation into allegations of cheating on the test that emergency medical technicians must take for certification.

Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon, a black, in a written statement said, “I am outraged by this deplorable act of hatred and intimidation. Threats and racial attacks are unacceptable anywhere, especially in a firehouse.” Doc Cheatham said, “We’re going to demand that this be handled as a hate crime. This thing really needs to end here in Baltimore city.” The incident prompted a federal investigation.

Last week, Donald Maynard, a black firefighter-paramedic, confessed to having placed the noose, note and drawing depicting a lynching on a bunk in the firehouse. City officials said Maynard was recently suspended, prior to his confession, from the department Friday for failing to meet requirements for advanced life-saving training. A spokesman for Mayor Dixon said there would be no criminal charges filed.

In response to Maynard’s confession, NAACP President Cheatham still blamed white racism, saying, “It really saddens us to hear

that evidently things have reached a stage that even an African-American does an injustice to himself and his own people as a result of a negative culture in that department.”

Doc Cheatham is a poster boy for demonstrating a much larger problem, namely that the once proud and useful NAACP has outlived that usefulness and has in some instances become an impediment to black progress. The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a black liberal-to-moderate Washington-based think-tank, reported that 88 percent of blacks favored educational choice plans. A Gallup Poll found 72 percent of blacks support school choice. The NAACP, acting as handmaidens for the teachers' unions, is solidly against school vouchers. A Gallup Poll shows 44 percent of blacks are for the death penalty and 49 percent against it, but the NAACP is solidly against it.

The major problems confronting a large segment of the black community have little or nothing to do with racism—problems such as unprecedented illegitimacy, family breakdown, fraudulent education, crime and rampant social pathology. If white people became angels tomorrow, it would do nothing to solve problems that can only be solved by blacks.

But I'm somewhat optimistic. More and more blacks are seeing through race hustlers such as Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson and Doc Cheatham. An even more optimistic note is the financial decline of the NAACP. Declining black support is good evidence that the civil rights struggle is over and won. That's not to say there are not major problems but they are not civil rights problems.

Today, most civil rights organizations get their financial support from white businesses and foundations caving in to intimidation or seeking to soothe feelings of guilt. For them, I have a cheaper alternative, “Proclamation of Amnesty and Pardon Granted to All Persons of European Descent,” available at [walterewilliams.com](http://walterewilliams.com).

## What's Discrimination?

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*Wednesday, September 6, 2006*

There's so much confusion and emotionalism about discrimination that I thought I'd take a stab at a dispassionate analysis. Discrimination is simply the act of choice. When we choose Bordeaux wine, we discriminate against Burgundy wine. When I married Mrs. Williams, I discriminated against other women. Even though I occasionally think about equal opportunity, Mrs. Williams demands continued discrimination.

You say, "Williams, such discrimination doesn't harm anyone." You're wrong. Discriminating in favor of Bordeaux wine reduces the value of resources held in Burgundy production. Discriminating in favor of Mrs. Williams harmed other women by reducing their opportunity set, assuming I'm a man other women would marry.

Our lives are spent discriminating for or against one thing or another. In other words, choice requires discrimination. When we modify the term with race, sex, height, weight or age, we merely specify the choice criteria.

Imagine how silly, not to mention impossible, life would be if discrimination were outlawed. Imagine engaging in just about any activity where we couldn't discriminate by race, sex, height, weight, age, mannerisms, college selection, looks or ability; it would turn into a carnival.

I've sometimes asked students if they believe in equal opportunity in employment. Invariably, they answer yes. Then I ask them, when they graduate, whether they plan to give every employer an equal opportunity to hire them. Most often they answer no; they plan to discriminate against certain employers. Then I ask them, if they're not going to give every employer an equal opportunity to hire them, what's fair about requiring an employer to give them an equal opportunity to be hired?

Sometimes students will argue that certain forms of discrimination are OK but it's racial discrimination that's truly offensive. That's

when I confess my own history of racial discrimination. In the late 1950s, whilst selecting a lifelong mate, even though white, Mexican, Indian, Chinese and Japanese women might have been just as qualified as a mate, I gave them no chance whatsoever. It appears that most Americans act identically by racially discriminating in setting up marriage contracts. According to the 1992 Census Bureau, only 2.2 percent of Americans are married to people other than their own race or ethnicity.

You say, "All right, Williams, discrimination in marriage doesn't have the impact on society that other forms of discrimination have." You're wrong again. When there is assortive (non-random) mate selection, it heightens whatever group differences exist in the population. For instance, higher IQ individuals tend toward mates with high IQs. High-income people tend to mate with other high-income people.

It's the same with education. To the extent there is a racial correlation between these characteristics, racial discrimination in mate selection exaggerates the differences in the society's intelligence and income distribution. There would be greater equality if there weren't this kind of discrimination in mate selection.

In other words, if high-IQ people were forced to select low-IQ mates, high-income people forced to select low-income mates, and highly educated people forced to select lowly educated mates, there would be greater social equality. While there would be greater social equality, the divorce rate would soar since gross dissimilarities would make for conflict.

Common sense suggests that not all discrimination should be eliminated, so the question is, what kind of discrimination should be permitted? I'm guessing the answer depends on one's values for freedom of association, keeping in mind freedom of association implies freedom not to associate.

## What's Prejudice?

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*Wednesday, September 20, 2006*

A fortnight ago, my column made a stab at applying dispassionate analysis to come up with an operational definition for discrimination. Basically, discrimination is the act of choice, and choice is a necessary fact of life. Now let's turn to prejudice, keeping in mind that for sound thinking, one should avoid confusing one phenomenon with another.

Prejudice is a useful term that's often misused. Its Latin root is *praejudicium*, meaning "an opinion or judgment formed . . . without due examination." Thus, we might define prejudicial acts as decision-making on the basis of incomplete information.

In a world of costly information, people seek to economize on information costs. Imagine heading off to work, you open your front door, only to be greeted by a full-grown tiger. The uninteresting prediction is the average person would slam the door or otherwise seek safety.

Why they do so is more interesting. It's unlikely that person's decision is based on any detailed information held about that particular tiger. More likely his decision is based on tiger folklore or how he's seen other tigers behave. He prejudices, or stereotypes, that tiger.

If a person didn't pre-judge tigers, he would seek more information prior to his decision. He might attempt to pet the tiger, talk to him and seek safety only if the tiger responded in a menacing fashion. The average person wouldn't choose that path, surmising that the expected cost of getting more information about the tiger is greater than the expected benefit and concluding, "All I need to know is he's a tiger, and he's probably like the rest of them." By observing this person's behavior, there's no way one can say unambiguously whether the person likes or dislikes tigers.

In the late 1990s, the Washington, D.C., taxi commissioner warned cabbies against going into low income black neighborhoods and picking up "dangerous looking" passengers whom she described

as young black males dressed a certain way. A few years ago, some St. Louis, Mo., pizza deliverers were complaining about delivering pizzas to black neighborhoods. Can one say anything unambiguous about cabbies' or pizza deliverers' likes or dislikes for blacks?

In the case of the taxi commissioner's warnings, the commissioner was black and so were most of the cabbies, and 75 to 85 percent of the complaining pizza deliverers were black. Are they racists? What about Rev. Jesse Jackson who once admitted that he is often relieved when the youths he hears walking along the street behind him turn out to be white, not black? Is he a racist?

As in the tiger example, the cabbies, pizza deliverers and Jackson are pre-judging. They are using a cheaply observed physical characteristic as an information proxy for a more costly to observe characteristic. The cheap-to-observe characteristic that a person is tall, female, Asian, black or white can indicate some probability of some other more costly to observe characteristic. In the minds of cabbies, pizza deliverers and Rev. Jackson, race was associated with a higher probability of being assaulted.

No one says that all young black males, not even a majority, pose a threat, but people are assigning probabilities. Such an assignment differs little from a physician, knowing that incidences of cardiovascular diseases are 30 percent higher among blacks than whites and prostate cancer is twice as high, giving his black patients more careful screening for these two diseases. Like the cabbies, pizza deliverers and Rev. Jackson, the physician is engaging in what some have called racial profiling—using race as an indicator of something else.

For analytical purposes, it's important to correctly identify behavior. Asserting that a particular behavior reflects racial likes and dislikes, which it could, when in fact it does not, is to mislead and confound whatever problem or issue one is addressing.

## Discrimination or Prejudice

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*Wednesday, September 27, 2006*

In recent weeks, I've offered operational definitions for some of the terms used in the discussion of race. The first was discrimination, which can be broadly defined as the act of choice. When one selects one activity, good or person, of necessity he must discriminate against an alternative activity, good or person.

The second term was prejudice, which can be seen as people making decisions on the basis of incomplete information. We could call it pre-judging or stereotyping. Information is costly. To gain more information requires the sacrifice of resources, be they time, money and perhaps one's life, so people seek information shortcuts.

Imagine an employer plans to hire 20 strong people to manually unload a ship. Fifty people show up for the job, and they all appear equal, except by sex. The employer has zero information about any other attribute, and he would like to hire the physically strongest people in the group. How might he select employees?

I'm guessing the average employer's first approximation would be to select the men in the group. He does so because he surmises that sex is highly correlated with physical strength. Of course, some of the women in the group could be just as strong, or stronger, than the men, but the employer is playing the odds.

This example produces an important observation. By observing the employer's behavior, can one conclude that he doesn't like women? The fact of the matter is that by observing his hiring choices, there is nothing unambiguous one can say about his preferences. To identify a behavior as preference indulgence when it's really an effort to economize on information costs is to misunderstand the behavior.

Some might argue that the employer should seek additional information before making a choice; however, expending the additional resources might not be worth it to him. That's similar to decisions one makes when shopping. One doesn't acquire all the price information possible when he's shopping for, say, shoes. At some point,

he concludes that further searching isn't worth the additional resources of time and money, even though he guesses that somewhere there might be a lower price.

What's a woman to do who has the physical strength to perform just as well unloading the ship as a man? One strategy is to provide what the employer views as reliable information about her strength. Another alternative is to offer her services at a lower wage. There's no better way to get people to experiment, and perhaps revise their expectations, than by lowering prices. That's why a new, previously unknown, supermarket, restaurant or other establishment might use sales to attract customers.

What would be some impediments to getting an employer to experiment and take risks that might ultimately revise his expectations? One would be legislation requiring the employer to pay everyone the same wage. Another would be legislation making it costly to fire a lousy worker. After all, if the employer's hunch didn't work out, he would have to bear the costs of discrimination suits, and possibly costly settlements, to get rid of the employee.

A few readers, in response to my discrimination discussion, said that my argument justifies the racial segregation of the past. To explain phenomena is not the same as justifying phenomena. You could fall off the roof of a tall building. I explain that your death is a result of the forces of gravity that caused you to accelerate at 32 feet per second and the sudden deceleration when you hit the ground. Wouldn't it be silly if someone accused me of trying to justify gravity and your death?

## Discrimination, Prejudice, and Preferences

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*Wednesday, October 4, 2007*

My previous columns have attempted to reduce confusion by suggesting operational definitions of discrimination and prejudice. Discrimination was defined as the act of choice, and prejudice was the act of decisionmaking on the basis of incomplete information. Good analytical thinking requires that we don't confuse one phenomenon with another.

The final behavioral phenomenon related to discussions of race is racial preference. We can think of preferences generally as likes and dislikes, and we all have them for many things. Some of us prefer Bordeaux wines to California wines, while others prefer the opposite. Some of us prefer jazz music while others prefer classical music. The list of differences in human preferences is endless.

There's no logically consistent argument that says to prefer one good, service or person is better, or more righteous, than another. Let's try it. Is my preference for California wines better, or more righteous, than your preference for Bordeaux? Is your preference to marry a white woman better, or more righteous, than my preference to marry a black woman? While we might like or dislike another's preferences, there are no analytical standards by which we can judge one set of preferences to be superior to another.

Preferences alone do not determine behavior. If we conducted a survey asking people which they prefer: filet mignon or chuck steak, Rolex watches or Timex, Rolls Royces or Dodge Neons, I'm guessing that filet mignon, Rolex and Rolls Royce would win hands down. Having found what people preferred the most, then watch what they actually do. You would find chuck steak outselling filet mignon, Timex watches outselling Rolex, and Dodge Neons outselling Rolls Royces any day of the week.

To fully understand behavior, we must go beyond preferences and take restrictions on choice into account, namely income and prices. That fact is very relevant to issues of race. Let's look at it. During

South Africa's apartheid era, white labor unions that would never have a black as a member were the major supporters of minimum wages for blacks. Their stated intention was to protect white workers from competition with low-wage black workers.

Gert Beetge, secretary of the Building Workers' Union, said, "There's no job reservation left in the building industry, and in the circumstances, I support the rate for the job [minimum wages] as the second best way of protecting our white artisans."

In the U.S., the Davis-Bacon Act of 1931 (still on the books), a super minimum wage law, was enacted to protect unionized white construction workers from competition with black workers. The support ran along the lines of Alabama Rep. Clayton Allgood's testimony: "That contractor has cheap colored labor that he transports, and he puts them in cabins, and it is labor of that sort that is in competition with white labor throughout the country" (Congressional Record, 1931, page 6513).

What minimum wage laws do is lower the cost of, and hence subsidize, racial preference indulgence. After all, if an employer must pay the same wage no matter whom he hires, the cost of discriminating in favor of the people he prefers is cheaper. This is a general principle. If filet mignon sold for \$9 a pound and chuck steak \$4, the cost of discriminating in favor of filet mignon is \$5 a pound, the price difference. But if a law mandating a minimum price for chuck steak were on the books, say, \$7 a pound, it would lower the cost of discrimination against chuck steak.

Minimum or maximum prices are one of the most effective ways to encourage people to indulge their preferences, be they racial or any other preference. In general, any kind of economic regulation that restricts peaceable, voluntary exchange has the capacity to lower the costs of preference indulgence. Decent people should be against such regulations.

## How Much Does Politics Count?

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*Wednesday, November 15, 2006*

Blacks and Hispanics, especially blacks, are the most politically loyal people in the nation. It's often preached and taken as gospel that the only way black people can progress is through racial politics and government programs, but how true is that? Let's look at it.

In 1940, poverty among black families was 87 percent and fell to 47 percent by 1960. Would someone tell me what anti-poverty program or civil-rights legislation accounted for this economic advance that exceeded any other 20-year interval? A significant chunk of that progress occurred through migration from rural areas in the South to big Northern cities. Between 1960 and 1980, black poverty fell roughly 17 percent and fell one percent during the '70s. Might this have been a continuation of a trend starting much earlier, or was it a miracle of the civil-rights movement or President Johnson's War on Poverty?

Dr. Thomas Sowell's research points out that in various skilled trades, the incomes of blacks relative to whites more than doubled between 1936 and 1959. What's more, the rise of blacks in professional and other high-level occupations was greater during the five years preceding the Civil Rights Act of 1964 than the five years afterward.

In 1940, 86 percent of black children were born inside marriage, and the illegitimacy rate among blacks was about 15 percent. Today, 31 percent of black children are born inside marriage, and the illegitimacy rate hovers around 70 percent.

In the mid-1960s, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan sounded the alarm for the breakdown in the black family in his book *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. At that time, black illegitimacy was 26 percent. Moynihan said, "[A]t the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of the Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family." He added, "The steady expansion of welfare programs can be

taken as a measure of the steady disintegration of the Negro family structure over the past generation in the United States.”

Moynihan’s observations were greeted with charges of racism and blaming the victim. If one accepts that a weak family structure has devastating effects on well-being, pray tell us what solutions can be found by electing Republicans or Democrats to the Congress, Senate or White House. By the way, today’s growing illegitimacy among whites is what it was among blacks in the 1960s.

Another significant problem for black Americans, independent of whether there are Democratic or Republican congressmen, senators or president, is the level of crime in many black neighborhoods. It’s a level of crime unimaginable to most Americans and unimaginable to blacks of yesteryear. In 2005, the nationwide murder rate, per 100,000 of the population, was 5.6. Cities with large black populations had much higher murder rates, such as: Gary, Ind. (58), Richmond, Va. (43), Detroit (39), and Washington, D.C. (35).

According to Justice Department figures, blacks were six times more likely than whites to be homicide victims, and 94 percent of black victims were murdered by blacks. Again, pray tell us what solutions will be found by electing Republicans or Democrats to the Congress, Senate or White House.

Homicide is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the level of crime in many black neighborhoods. The overwhelmingly law-abiding residents of these neighborhoods live their lives in fear of assault and battery, rape, robbery and various forms of intimidation. High crime not only turns many neighborhoods into economic wastelands, but they cause the most stable members of those neighborhoods to be the first to leave. The solutions to the major problems that confront many black people won’t be found in the political arena, especially not in Washington or state capitols.

## Racial Profiling

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*Wednesday, December 20, 2006*

Charges of racial, religious and ethnic profiling swirl in the wake of US Airways' removal of six imams. According to police reports, the men made anti-American statements, were praying and chanting "Allah," refused the pilot's requests to disembark for additional screening and asked for seat-belt extensions for no obvious reason. Three of the men had no checked baggage and only one-way tickets.

According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), five of the men have retained lawyers and are probably going to bring a discrimination lawsuit against US Airways.

Racial profiling controversy is nothing new. For a number of years, black Americans have made charges of racial profiling by police and store personnel who might give them extra scrutiny. Clever phrases have emerged, such as "driving while black" and now "flying while Muslim," but they don't help much in terms of understanding. Let's apply some economic analysis to the issue.

God, or some other omniscient being, would never racially profile. Why? Since He is all-knowing, He'd know who is and is not a terrorist or a criminal. We humans are not all-knowing. While a god would have perfect and complete information about everything, we humans have less than perfect and incomplete information. That means we must use substitutes such as guesses and hunches for certain kinds of information. It turns out that some physical attributes are highly correlated with other attributes that are less easily, or more costly, observed.

Let's look at a few, and the associated "profiling," that cause little or no controversy. Mortality rates for cardiovascular diseases were approximately 30 percent higher among black adults than among white adults. The Pima Indians of Arizona have the world's highest known diabetes rates. Prostate cancer is nearly twice as common among black men as white men. Would anyone bring racial profiling charges against a doctor who routinely ordered more frequent blood tests and

prostate screening among his black patients and more glucose tolerance tests for his Pima Indian patients? Of course, God wouldn't have to do that because He'd know for sure which patient was more prone to cardiovascular disease, prostate cancer and diabetes.

It is clear, whether we like it or not, or want to say it or not, that there is a strong correlation between terrorist acts and being a Muslim, and being black and high rates of crime. That means if one is trying to deter terrorism and in some cases capture a criminal, he would expend greater investigatory resources on Muslims and blacks. A law-abiding Muslim who's given extra airport screening or a black who's stopped by the police is perfectly justified in being angry, but with whom should he be angry? I think a Muslim should be angry with those who've made terrorism and Muslim synonymous and blacks angry with those who've made blacks and crime synonymous. The latter is my response to the insulting sounds of car doors locking sometimes when I'm crossing a street in downtown Washington, D.C., or when taxi drivers pass me by.

It would be a serious misallocation of resources if airport security intensively screened everyone. After all, intensively screening someone who had a near zero probability of being a terrorist, such as an 80-year-old woman using a walker, would not only be a waste but it would take resources away from screening a person with a much higher probability of being a terrorist.

You say, "Williams, are you justifying religious and racial profiling?" No. I'm not justifying anything any more than I'd try to justify Einstein's special law of relativity. I'm trying to explain a phenomenon. By the way, I think some of the airport screening is grossly stupid, but I'm at peace with the Transportation Security Administration. They have their rules, and I have mine. One of mine is to minimize my association with idiocy. Thus, I no longer fly commercial.

## Victimhood: Rhetoric or Reality

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*Wednesday, June 8, 2005*

If you listened to the rhetoric of black politicians and civil rights leaders, dating back to the Reagan years, you would have been convinced that surely by now black Americans would be back on the plantation. According to them, President Reagan, and later Presidents Bush I and II, would turn back the clock on civil rights. They'd appoint "new racists" dressed in three-piece suits to act through the courts and administrative agencies to reverse black civil rights and economic gains. We can now recognize this rhetoric as the political equivalent of the "rope-a-dope."

As my colleague Tom Sowell pointed out in a recent column, "Liberals, Race and History," if the Democratic party's share of the black vote ever fell to even 70 percent, it's not likely that the Democrats would ever win the White House or Congress again. The strategy liberal Democrats have chosen, to prevent loss of the black vote, is to keep blacks paranoid and in a constant state of fear. But is it fear of racists, or being driven back to the plantation, that should be a top priority for blacks? Let's look at it.

Only 30 to 40 percent of black males graduate from high school. Many of those who do graduate emerge with reading and math skills of a white seventh- or eighth-grader. This is true in cities where a black is mayor, a black is superintendent of schools and the majority of principals and teachers are black. It's also true in cities where the per pupil education expenditures are among the highest in the nation.

Across the U.S., black males represent up to 70 percent of prison populations. Are they in prison for crimes against whites? To the contrary, their victims are primarily other blacks. Department of Justice statistics for 2001 show that in nearly 80 percent of violent crimes against blacks, both the victim and the perpetrator were the same race. In other words, it's not Reaganites, Bush supporters, right-wing ideologues or the Klan causing blacks to live in fear of their lives and property and making their neighborhoods economic wastelands.

What about the decline of the black family? In 1960, only 28 percent of black females between the ages of 15 and 44 were never married. Today, it's 56 percent. In 1940, the illegitimacy rate among blacks was 19 percent, in 1960, 22 percent, and today, it's 70 percent. Some argue that the state of the black family is the result of the legacy of slavery, discrimination and poverty. That has to be nonsense. A study of 1880 family structure in Philadelphia shows that three-quarters of black families were nuclear families, comprised of two parents and children. In New York City in 1925, 85 percent of kin-related black households had two parents. In fact, according to Herbert Gutman in *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: 1750–1925*, “Five in six children under the age of 6 lived with both parents.” Therefore, if one argues that what we see today is a result of a legacy of slavery, discrimination and poverty, what's the explanation for stronger black families at a time much closer to slavery—a time of much greater discrimination and of much greater poverty? I think that a good part of the answer is there were no welfare and Great Society programs.

Since black politicians and the civil rights establishment preach victimhood to blacks, I'd prefer that they be more explicit when they appear in public fora. Were they to be so, saying racists are responsible for black illegitimacy, blacks preying on other blacks and black family breakdown, their victimhood message would be revealed as idiotic. But being so explicit is not as far-fetched as one might think. In a campaign speech before a predominantly black audience, in reference to so many blacks in prison, presidential candidate John Kerry said, “That's unacceptable, but it's not their fault.”

## Betrayal of the Struggle

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*Wednesday, December 14, 2005*

Last month, when Rosa Parks was laid to rest in Detroit, her eulogy contained well-deserved praise for her brave defiance of segregation laws that led to the 1955 Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott and later the 1956 Supreme Court ruling that banned public transportation segregation. The passing and remembrance of her generation of blacks, who made sacrifices to deliver today's opportunities, might also be an occasion for condemnation of what's no less than a gross betrayal of that generation's struggle.

Having lived just about one-third of our nation's existence, I know, as well as experienced, the uglier parts of our history. During the '30s, '40s and '50s, civil rights progress meant yearly black lynchings were down to single digits, as opposed to 50 or more in previous decades. In 1954, when I graduated from Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin High School, rare was the opportunity for a black student to go off to college. While segregation was mostly in the South, it nonetheless existed in northern cities. There were entire Philadelphia neighborhoods where, regardless of socioeconomic status, blacks could not rent or buy. There were business establishments, including movie theaters and restaurants, where black patronage was not welcomed.

While not every vestige of racial discrimination has been eliminated, it is nowhere near the barrier it was yesteryear, but you'd think discrimination is everywhere listening to some of today's black politicians and civil rights leaders. One wonders what those blacks, who lived during the era of gross discrimination and are now deceased, would think about so much of today's behavior, rhetoric and excuses.

What would they think about black neighborhoods, once thriving economic centers that have been turned into economic wastelands by a level of criminal activity previously unknown? During my youth, walking through some of Philadelphia's predominantly white neighborhoods, one felt a sense of relief as we approached a black neigh-

borhood. Today, it might be the other way around. What would they think about predominantly black schools where violence and intimidation are the order of the day, with police cars outside and metal detectors inside? What would they think about black students who seek academic excellence being mocked, intimidated and assaulted by their peers for “acting white”?

By any assessment, black Americans have made the greatest progress, over some of the highest hurdles and in the shortest span of time than any other racial group in the history of mankind. If one added the earnings of black Americans and thought of us as a nation, we'd be the 14th richest nation. Black Americans have held some of the nation's highest positions, such as secretaries of State, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services and Education; chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and mayors of some of our largest cities. Blacks are some of the world's most famous personalities, and a few blacks rank among the world's richest people. In 1865, neither a slave nor a slave owner would have believed these gains possible in a little over a century, if ever. As such, it not only speaks well of the determination and intestinal fortitude of a people, but also of a nation in which such gains were possible.

For a large segment of the black community, these gains remain elusive. The gains will remain elusive so long as black civil rights and political leadership blame and focus their energies on discrimination. While discrimination exists, the relevant question is how much of what we see can be explained by it. A 70 percent illegitimacy rate, 60 percent of black children raised in female-headed households, high crime and poor school performance have devastating consequences. This level of pathology cannot be attributed to discrimination, considering that much of it was absent in earlier times when there was far more discrimination, greater poverty and fewer opportunities.

It's time that black people hold fellow blacks accountable for squandering opportunities won at a high cost by our ancestors. Failing to do so makes all blacks complicit in the betrayal.

## Racial Profiling

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*Wednesday, April 26, 2004*

What is racial profiling and is it racist? We can think of profiling as using cheap-to-observe characteristics as indicators or proxies for more-costly-to-observe characteristics. A person's physical characteristics, such as race, sex and height, are cheap to observe and they might be correlated with some other characteristic that's more costly to observe such as disease, strength and abilities.

Profiling examples abound. Just knowing that one person is 6'9" allows one to predict that he's a better basketball player than a 4'9" person. That might be called height profiling. While height is not a perfect indicator of basketball proficiency there is a strong association. Similarly, just by knowing the sex or age of an individual allows one to make predictions about unobserved characteristics such as weight lifting ability, running and reflex speed, and eyesight and hearing acuity because they are correlated with sex and age.

What about using race or ethnicity as proxies for some unobserved characteristic? Some racial and ethnic groups have a higher incidence of mortality from various diseases than the national average. In 1998, mortality rates for cardiovascular diseases were approximately 30 percent higher among black adults than among white adults. Cervical cancer rates were almost five times higher among Vietnamese women in the U.S. than among white women. The Pima Indians of Arizona have the highest known diabetes rates in the world. Prostate cancer is nearly twice as common among black men as white men. Would one condemn a medical practitioner for advising greater screening and monitoring of black males for cardiovascular disease and prostate cancer, or greater screening and monitoring for cervical cancer among Vietnamese-American females, and the same for diabetes among Pima Indians? It surely would be racial profiling—using race as an indicator of a higher probability of some other characteristic.

You might say that's different but using racial profiling as a proxy

for potential criminal behavior is indeed racist. Just as race and ethnicity are not perfect indicators of the risk of certain diseases neither is race a perfect indicator of criminal activity but there associations and people act on those associations.

A Washington, D.C. taxicab commissioner, who is black, issued a safety advisory urging D.C.'s 6,800 cabbies to refuse to pick up "dangerous looking" passengers. She described "dangerous looking" as a "young black guy . . . with shirttail hanging down longer than his coat, baggy pants, unlaced tennis shoes." By no stretch of imagination does every young black person pose a threat to taxi drivers but in Washington, D.C. and other cities there's a strong correlation between race and robbery/murder threat. We seriously misunderstand the motives of a taxi driver who passes up a black customer if we use racism as the sole explanation for his behavior. It might be racism but it might just as easily and more probably be a fear of robbery, murder or being taken to a dangerous neighborhood. There're other examples and greater detail of this phenomena in my recent *Cornell Law and Public Policy Journal* article "Discrimination: The Law vs. Morality" at [www.walterewilliams.com](http://www.walterewilliams.com) under "recent articles."

Needless to say the law-abiding black person who's refused a taxi ride, pizza delivery, or pulled over by the police is justifiably annoyed and offended. The rightful recipients of his anger should be those blacks who've made black synonymous with high crime and not the taxi driver or pizza deliverer who might fear for his life or the policeman trying to do his job.

God would never do profiling of any sort because God is omniscient. We humans lack that quality and must depend upon sometimes crude substitutes for finding out things.

By the way, attempting to explain profiling doesn't require one to take a position for or against it any more than attempting to explain gravity requires one to be for or against gravity.

## Price Discrimination

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*June 14, 2004*

Suppose you saw a fat, old, ugly cigar-smoking man married to a beautiful young lady, what prediction would you make about the man's income? If you're like most, you'd predict that this guy has a lot of money. In effect that fat, old, ugly cigar-smoking man is telling the woman, "I can't compete for your hand on the basis of a guy like Williams so I'm going to offset my handicaps by offering you a higher price." In the name of fairness, should that kind of discrimination be banned—namely beautiful women treating ugly old men differently from handsome young men.

Airlines typically charge half-fare for children and surely they can't justify that practice by saying that it costs twice as much to fly an adult from New York to Los Angeles. Airlines also charge business travelers higher prices than those charged tourists. Again, they can't justify the price difference by saying it costs more to fly businessmen than it costs to fly tourists. What should be done about this kind of discrimination?

Amtrak charges lower fares to senior citizens than it charges younger people and it's not because it costs less to haul older people than younger people. Amtrak is not alone with this kind of age discrimination; it's rife. Theaters do it; drugstores do it; some supermarkets do it; and some taxicab companies do it. There are numerous instances where people are charged different prices based upon some physical or behavioral characteristic.

Should price discrimination be outlawed? Yes, according to the reasoning of George Washington University law professor John F. Banzhaf. He's the lawyer who led the attack on tobacco companies and fast food chains saying they were responsible respectively for tobacco-related diseases and obesity. A recent addition to Professor Banzhaf's agenda is to outlaw ladies' night saying, "Different prices for men and women constitute illegal gender-based discrimination, and perpetrators can be sued not only for monetary damages, but in

many cases also for attorney fees and punitive damages.” He boasts that ladies’ nights have been ruled illegal in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Pennsylvania, and recently New Jersey.

It’s fruitless to attempt to convince Professor Banzhaf that price discrimination is a benign, standard and routine pricing technique; it’s even practiced by his legal profession. Professor Banzhaf’s true agenda is tyrannical control of our lives. Here’s my question to you. Once Banzhaf finishes getting ladies’ night outlawed in the other 40 states, do you think he’ll be finished? I wouldn’t bet the rent money on it. The reasoning Banzhaf uses in attacking night club practice of charging ladies cheaper prices is also applicable to: airlines charging children and tourists cheaper prices than adults and businessmen, businesses and other entities charging seniors cheaper prices than younger people, and theaters charging cheaper matinee prices than evening prices. I wouldn’t be surprised that if Banzhaf succeeded outlawing price discrimination in these areas he’d move on to bring a class action suit on behalf of fat, old, ugly men against beautiful women. You say, “Williams, that’s preposterous!” Think again; tyrants have an endless agenda. When the cigarette Nazis said they didn’t care about what people did to their own lungs; they only cared about the health effects on others—secondhand smoke. I said that’s a smoke screen to conceal their true agenda. In California there’s a movement to outlaw smoking on beaches, many outdoor stadiums have banned smoking, there have been attempts to ban smoking on streets and parks. I’d like to see the health study pointing to the deaths and injuries stemming from secondhand smoke outdoors.

The bottom line here isn’t ladies’ night or smoking. It’s how we Americans are allowing tyrants to attack our liberties. If we allow them to continue, once we wake up we won’t have enough freedom to stop them from turning us into a nation of serfs.

## Three Cheers for the Cos

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May 31, 2004

May 17th saw several gatherings commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court's school desegregation decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. But the event held in Washington, D.C.'s Constitution Hall will be the one to be remembered because of Bill Cosby's remarks that won him scathing criticism from some in the black community.

For years I've argued that most of today's problems many black Americans face have little or nothing to do with racial discrimination. For the most part, the most devastating problems encountered by a large segment of the black community are self-inflicted. Bill Cosby mentioned several of them such as black parents who'll buy their children expensive clothing rather than something educational, poor language spoken by many children and adults, and criminals who prey on the overwhelmingly law-abiding residents of black neighborhoods. After Cosby's remarks some in the audience laughed and applauded but, according to the *Washington Post*, the black "leadership" in attendance, the head of the NAACP, the head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the president of Howard University were "stone-faced."

In a recent column, my colleague Thomas Sowell explained, "Bill Cosby and the black 'leadership' represent two long-standing differences about how to deal with the problems of the black community. The 'leaders' are concerned with protecting the image of blacks, while Cosby is trying to protect the future of blacks, especially those of the younger generation."

Bill Cosby and I differ in age by one year—I'm older. We both spent part of our youth, in the 40s and 50s, growing up in North Philadelphia's Richard Allen Housing project. Being poor then was different from being poor now. My sister and I were rare among Richard Allen's residents. Our parents were separated but nearly every other kid lived in a two-parent household. Black teen pregnancy was

relatively rare and just a tiny fraction of today's. During those days, many residents rarely locked their doors until the last person came home. Hot summer nights saw many people fearlessly sleeping in their yards or on their balconies.

Today, less than 40 percent of black children live in two-parent families, compared to 70 and 80 percent in earlier periods. Illegitimacy, at 70 percent, is unprecedented in black history. Between 1976 and 2000, over 50 percent of all homicides in the U.S. were committed by blacks and 94 percent of the time the victim was black. These are devastating problems but are they caused by racism and will spending resources fighting racial discrimination solve them? Don't give me any of that legacy-of-slavery nonsense unless you can explain why all of these problems were not worse during the late 19th and early 20th centuries at a time when blacks were much closer to slavery, much poorer, faced more discrimination and had fewer opportunities.

With all the opportunities available today, unavailable when Cosby and I were youngsters, black youngsters who dedicate themselves to academic excellence are attacked both verbally and sometimes physically for "acting white," being "Oreos" and "brainiacs." California Berkeley Professor John McWhorter says that, "Insidious anti-intellectualism is the prime culprit in the school-performance gap between whites and blacks, which cuts across class and income lines." He adds that the rap music culture "retards black success by the reinforcement of hindering stereotypes and by teaching young blacks that a thuggish adversarial stance is the properly authentic response to a presumptively racist society."

In at least two important ways black America is a study of contrasts. By any measure, as a group black Americans have made the greatest gains, over some of the highest hurdles, in the shortest span of time, than any other racial group in human history. At the same time for a large segment of the black community these gains are elusive and will remain so under the current civil rights vision. Bill Cosby's bold comments might be what's necessary to get an honest and fruitful discussion going within the black community, and for that we all owe him thanks.

## A Usable Black History

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*August 20, 2001*

Professor John McWhorter, linguistics professor at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, has written a compelling essay in *City Journal* (Summer 2001) titled "Toward a Usable Black History." Last year, he wrote *Losing The Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* arguing there's a culture of black anti-intellectualism, impeding academic excellence, resulting from an ideology of victimization and separatism. The pursuit of academic excellence is seen as "acting white" and as such amounts to racial betrayal. In his *City Journal* article, McWhorter says that while it would be folly not to teach the history of the injustices of slavery, Jim Crow and gross racial discrimination, "but a history of only horrors cannot inspire."

Professor McWhorter says, "When 'Learn your history' means 'Don't get fooled by superficial changes', and 'Today's New York City Street Crimes Unit can't be distinguished from yesterday's Bull Connor', and our aggrieved despair over our sense of disinclusion from the national fabric remains as sharp as ever. Could any people find inner peace when taught to think of their own society as their enemy?"

Instead, a better, more usable history would be one that gives greater emphasis to black successes in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. That kind of history inspires instead of breeding victimhood. McWhorter says today's education chaos is not business-as-usual but something entirely new. From the late 1800s to 1950, some black schools were models of academic achievement. Black students at Washington's Dunbar High School often outscored white students as early as 1899. Schools such as Frederick Douglas (Baltimore), Booker T. Washington (Atlanta), P.S. 91 (Brooklyn), McDonough 35 (New Orleans) and others operated at a similar level of excellence. These excelling students weren't solely members of the black elite; most had parents who were manual laborers, domestic servants, porters and maintenance men.

Professor McWhorter says that instead of “romanticizing failure” in black communities young people should be taught that successful economic communities can be had. Chicago’s “Bronzeville” is a handy example. After 1875, blacks occupied a three by 15 block enclave on the South Side. During the early 1900s, Bronzeville was home to several black newspapers and 731 business establishments by 1917 in 61 lines of work. The Binga Bank opened in 1908 by its founder Jesse Binga who started out with a wagon selling coal and oil. By 1929, Bronzeville blacks had amassed \$100 million in real estate holdings.

Chicago wasn’t the only city where blacks established a significant business presence. Other cities would include New York, Philadelphia, Durham, Atlanta and Washington D.C., and Tulsa’s Greenwood district that was destroyed by rioting whites.

Keep in mind when blacks established business successes such as those in Bronzeville and Durham it was accomplished in a harsh racial environment. No one can attribute their successes to SBA minority loans, business set asides, affirmative action and measures deemed indispensable by today’s race experts. It was accomplished through hard work, sacrifice and, as my father used to say, coming early and staying late.

Ignoring or downplaying black achievement promotes the victim attitude where people believe that in order for them to be successful somebody else must perform some benevolent act. The bottom line indisputable fact of business is that black Americans have made the greatest gains, over some of the highest hurdles, in the shortest span of time than any other racial group in mankind’s history. That speaks well of the intestinal fortitude of a people and it also speaks well of a nation in which such gains were possible. Today’s whining and portrayal of black people as a victim class amounts to an unspeakable betrayal of the sacrifices and the successes of our ancestors.

## Does Political Power Mean Economic Power?

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*April 7, 2003*

Much of the '60s and '70s civil rights rhetoric was that black political power was necessary for economic power. In 1967, Clevelanders heeded Malcolm X's infamous "The Ballot or the Bullet" speech with the election of Carl B. Stokes who became the nation's first black big city mayor. As of 1999, blacks were mayors of 29 major cities; that includes Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, San Francisco, St. Louis and Washington, D.C. In some of these cities, blacks are also city councilmen, superintendents of schools and chiefs of police. That this is a major achievement is without question and a fine commentary on America's racial progress, especially when we consider the fact that blacks are mayors in cities where blacks are a small minority such as: Des Moines, Denver, Houston, San Francisco and Dallas. By no means does it demean black political achievement to ask a more important question: What does black political power mean for the lives of ordinary black people? In other words, is political power a necessary condition for economic power? Let's look around.

Japanese and Chinese-Americans faced gross discrimination in our country, but when's the last time you heard of them worrying about how many congressmen they have or going into a tizzy worrying whether a Reagan or Bush presidency would mean the end of their handouts? By the way, Japanese and Chinese-Americans have median family incomes higher than white Americans, and in the case of Chinese-Americans 58 percent higher. Other discriminated-against minorities in America who've eschewed the political arena are: Koreans, Arabs, and Armenians.

For the ordinary person, what's more important: economic power or political power? I think it nearly goes without saying that economic power empowers the individual; it gives him the power of self-determination. Political power empowers, and even enriches, the political elite; for them getting out their constituent vote is the be all and end all. This observation has nothing to do with race. Economic power

empowers people of any race and political power empowers the political elite of any race.

While black politicians have preached that political power is a means to gain economic power, whether it has done so is a testable proposition. We only have to examine the socioeconomic status of black Americans in cities where blacks hold considerable political power, cities such as Washington, D.C., Newark, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, Memphis and others. What we'll find in those cities are grossly inferior education, welfare dependency for much of the population, unsafe neighborhoods and citizens, both black and white, who can't wait for the first opportunity to get out.

Let me be clear. I am not stating a causal link between black political power and the living conditions and the welfare of many of its citizens in these cities. It's simply an argument that the expectation that political power will translate into economic power for the ordinary citizen is apt to be disappointing. But there're some political steps that black politicians can take that can create an environment for economic power.

Crime exacts a huge cost on people least able to bear it. High crime makes everything worth less whether it's houses or businesses. Among other things it means fewer neighborhood consumer choices and neighborhood employment. Black politicians should develop a ruthless zero tolerance anti-crime policy. Rotten education in these cities where blacks hold dominant political power needs to be addressed but that's more difficult. Black politicians are beholden to and serve the interests of the powerful teachers' unions and not the voters who elect them to office. Otherwise they wouldn't begin to tolerate the near systematic destruction of learning opportunities for generations of black children. A solution is to break the education monopoly through educational vouchers.

## Stifling Black Students

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*February 14, 2002*

Racial preferences, quotas, affirmative action in university admission practices have lost political and increasingly legal support. As a result states such as California, Texas and Florida have implemented a substitute practice called “percentage plans” as a means for determining who will be admitted to their flagship universities. In Texas, students in the top 10 percent of their high school class, based on grade point averages (GPA) alone, not SAT scores, are guaranteed admission; in California, it’s soon to be 12.5 percent and Florida it’s 20 percent. The percentage plan applies to all high schools whether it’s a school where a student with an A average might achieve a 1300 or 1400 score on the SAT, or a school where A students might not be able to achieve 800 or 900 SAT score.

Let’s ignore the inequities and resources misallocation that arises from the possibility that a B student at one school who might achieve a SAT score of 1100 is denied admission while his A average counterpart at another school can’t score 900 is admitted. Instead, let’s ask whether the policy serves the best interests of black students. From the evidence that I see, civil rights leaders, white liberals and college administrators seem to be more concerned with black student enrollment rates and the heck with whether they graduate. Black students are simply tools to keep government agencies, black politicians and civil rights organizations off their backs or to make them feel good. You say, “What’s the evidence, Williams?” Nationally, only 35 percent of black freshmen, compared to 60 percent of white freshmen graduate; moreover, those who do graduate have grade point averages considerably lower than their white peers. I might add that the white graduation rate is nothing to write home about.

University of San Diego law professor Gail Heriot sheds a bit of light on this issue in her article “The Politics of Admissions in California,” *Academic Questions* (Fall 2001). California’s Proposition 209 ended racial admissions quotas. As a result minority student admis-

sions at UC Berkeley, California's flagship university, fell. What went unnoticed in all the hand wringing was that at less prestigious, but respectable, California universities minority enrollment posted impressive gains. Black students were simply being admitted to universities where their academic credentials were more in line with their fellow students. For example, at UC San Diego, in the year before Proposition 209's implementation, only one black freshman had a GPA of 3.5 or better—a single black honor student in a class of 3,268—in contrast to 20 percent of white students with a 3.5 GPA.

Was this because there were no black students capable of doing honors work at UC San Diego? Certainly not. Those who might have been on the honors list at UC San Diego had been recruited, and became failures at California's flagship universities: Berkeley, and UCLA. Proposition 209 has changed UC San Diego; no longer are black honor students a rarity. In 1998, a full 20 percent of black freshman could boast of a 3.5 GPA.

Black students, and for that matter any student, will perform better, have greater graduation chances not to mention pride and self-worth by attending a university where his skills are closer to that of his peers. It's somewhat analogous to putting a young, inexperienced boxer in the ring with Lennox Lewis. That boxer might have the potential to be a world champion but he's going to have his brains beaten and his career ended before he learns how to even bob and weave. You say, "But what about diversity and multiculturalism at the nation's elite universities?" In my book, that's their problem.