

The Myth of "Systemic Racism"

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This paper is a contribution to the general discussion about racism in America, especially in light of the concept of "systemic racism". I grant permission for this paper to be disseminated by anyone who wishes to do so. My only request is that the paper is sent in its entirety.

Introduction:

The recent discussion and civil unrest after the death of George Floyd has been based on the concept of "systemic racism". The Democratic Party and its candidates, the mainstream media and, of course, the Black Lives Matter movement argue that America was founded on racism and that all society is still permeated by "systemic racism". The proponents of this view go so far as to say that denying the existence of "systemic racism" is itself racist.

Just as many Americans see no signs of "systemic racism" in our society. They feel no personal racial prejudice and point to civil rights legislation and court decisions that outlawed racial discrimination in government and the private economy. Although these Americans recognize that there are a few white supremacists in the country, their number is insignificant and they are especially rare in our law enforcement agencies. When a law enforcement officer is found to be racist, that officer is normally disciplined and removed from the force.

This paper will show that these opposing views result from fundamentally different definitions of the basic term "racism". While the general public understands "racism" in the traditional sense of the term, the political left applies a new definition of "racism" that has been developed by the academic world and activist organizations over the course of the last five decades. This new definition is the cornerstone of the concept of "systemic racism". This paper will further show that the new definition has no rational basis and leads to absurd results. The doctrine of "systemic racism" is then shown to be, in essence, nothing more than intellectual contortion intended to sow division in the United States of America while causing immeasurable harm specifically to the people who the political left supposedly wants to help.

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Traditional definition of "racism":

A discussion of definitions is probably the most boring way to start any paper, but understanding the definitions of the common words "racism", "racist" and "race" is essential to making sense of the discussion about "systemic racism".²

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines "**racism**" as follows:³

- 1:** a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race
- 2 a:** a doctrine or political program based on the assumption of racism and designed to execute its principles
- b:** a political or social system founded on racism
- 3:** racial prejudice or discrimination

The Webster online dictionary defines "**racist**" as follows:⁴

- Noun 1. Racist - a person with a prejudiced belief that one race is superior to others
Synonyms: racialist
- Adj. 1. Racist - based on racial intolerance; "racist remarks"
2. racist - discriminatory especially on the basis of race or religion
Synonyms: anti-Semite, anti-black, anti-Semitic

The main element in both definitions is "**race**". Although commonly used in the USA to distinguish only between large ethnic groups, e.g. "white", "black", "brown", "Asian" or between "people of color" and everyone else, the term "race" actually has a somewhat more complex meaning when used to refer to a group of people:⁵

- 2 a: a family, tribe, people, or nation belonging to the same stock
- b: a class or kind of people unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics

According to this definition, any group of people with virtually anything in common can be considered a "race". The commonalities do not have to be physical features such as skin tone. Culture, religion, geography and any other aspect or combination of aspects can be sufficient commonality for one group to view another as constituting a different "race". A "race" can be large and inclusive or very specific, depending on the criteria chosen to delineate "race".

² While conducting the research for this article, I found a similar analysis of the different definitions of "racism" in the article by B.J. Campbell "The Two Confusing Definitions of Racism" (26 August 2018) at <https://medium.com/handwaving-freakoutery/the-two-confusing-definitions-of-racism-2d685d3af845> .

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism>

⁴ <https://www.webster-dictionary.org/definition/racist>

⁵ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/race>; The word "race" has many meanings having nothing to do with ethnicity such as a competition for speed or a flowing body of water.

The broad meaning of the term "race" is exemplified in the statement attributed to Rosa Parks, "I believe there is only one race – the human race."⁶ Human beings obviously share common characteristics because all humans are members of the species *homo sapiens*. However, there are also countless subgroups of humans within the species. Many groups have common physical or cultural characteristics compared to other groups. Therefore, they can accordingly be referred to as separate "races" under the definition of "race". Recognizing the existence of separate "races" is no more immoral than recognizing the existence of anything else in the world. It is, indeed, impossible for anyone to avoid the conclusion that there are different groups of individuals who share certain physical characteristics.⁷

Merely recognizing that there are various races is not racism. The additional element in racism is "prejudice", i.e. making a judgment or having an opinion without "just grounds or before sufficient knowledge".⁸

The new definition of "racism":

The new definition of racism starts with the elements of "race" and "prejudice" but adds a third element "power". The new definition was developed in academia in the 1970s and is often reduced to the equation "prejudice + power = racism", whereby the element "prejudice" is understood to mean racial prejudice.⁹ This begs the question, what is meant by the term "power"?

⁶ <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1146287>; This statement, of course, implies that different physical features between groups of people should not matter, because we are all finally members of the same species. The great civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s was built on this principle.

⁷ The television comedian Stephen Colbert famously made a joke out of the statement in 2014, "I am not a racist. I don't even see race ... not even my own," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMY08ygVdLA>, triggering quite a controversy at the time <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/04/01/297862152/in-cancelcolbert-a-firestorm-and-a-lost-opportunity>.

⁸ The Merriam-Webster definition of prejudice reads in entry 1, point 2 a (2), "an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge", <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prejudice>.

⁹ "Contrary to a dictionary definition, racism, as defined based on social science research and theory, is about much more than race-based prejudice—it exists when an imbalance in power and social status is generated by how we understand and act upon race." (Nicki Lisa Cole, Ph.D., *Defining Racism Beyond its Dictionary Meaning: A System of Power, Privilege, and Oppression*, published at ThoughtCo., last updated 14 July 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/racism-definition-3026511>. "But such an understanding ignores the real factor behind racism (as well as sexism) Power! Racism (and sexism) are not about color or gender; they are about Power!", Caleb Rosado Dept. of Urban Studies Eastern University Philadelphia, PA, "The Undergirding Factor is POWER, Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism, at <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/caleb/racism.html>.. Credit for first postulating that "racism" is more than the traditional definition and consists of (racial) prejudice *plus* power is general given to the 1970 book *Developing New Perspectives on Race* by the academic psychologist Patricia Bidol-Padva, see, William Voegeli, "Racism Revised, The way we hate now" in *Claremont Review of Books*, Fall 2018 at <https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/racism-revised/>.

The new definition uses the element "power" to refer to the actual ability of one ethnic group to impose its prejudice on other ethnic groups in society, be it by means of the law or other means.¹⁰ "When a racial group's collective prejudice is backed by the power of legal authority and institutional control, it is transformed into racism, a far-reaching system that functions independently from the intentions or self-images of individual actors."¹¹ The doctrine that "power" must be reflected in the definition of "racism" is now under consideration at the Merriam-Webster dictionary.¹²

The proponents of the new definition of "racism" necessarily divide society into different races, i.e. ethnic groups, or at least into "whites" and "people of color" (i.e. everyone who is not "white", also often referred to as "POC").¹³ It is axiomatic for the proponents of the new definition that the "white" race in the United States is the only race with the "power" to impose prejudices on POC.¹⁴ When the proponents of the new definition speak about one race having the power to control society to the exclusion of other races, this generality is attributed to all individuals in that race, with the result that all members of the race are considered to be "racists".¹⁵

¹⁰ "By **Power** we mean: the authority granted through social structures and conventions—possibly supported by force or the threat of force—and access to means of communications and resources, to reinforce racial prejudice, regardless of the falsity of the underlying prejudiced assumption. Basically, all power is relational, and the different relationships either reinforce or disrupt one another." Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, "Defining RACISM: The Power Factor" <http://www.aclrc.com/racism-and-power>; "Power in its essence is the capacity to act. Sociologically, power comes in two forms, as coercive and as choice. In its coercive form it is the capacity to act in a manner that influences the behavior of others even against their wishes. This is material power, the most prevalent and destructive form of power in society today, and appeals to the baser qualities of human beings, because of competition over scarce resources. Power as choice, on the other hand, is the capacity to act in a manner that influences the behavior of others without violating free moral choice. This is moral power, which appeals to the higher faculties of humankind. This type of power gives rise to true power. "True power is knowing that you can, but you don't." To practice this form of power is the height of self-control. Once one understands that racism at its core has to do with power, one will then recognize that at the root of racism lie two important elements, the material and moral basis of oppression." Caleb Rosado, *ibid.*, at <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/caleb/racism.html>.

¹¹ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 2018, p. 20, at https://www.google.com/books/edition/White_Fragility/ZfQ3DwAAQBAJ?hl=en&qbpv=1&printsec=frontcover .

¹² "Merriam-Webster Revises 'Racism' Entry After Missouri Woman Asks for Changes", New York Times, 10 June 2020, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/us/merriam-webster-racism-definition.html> .

¹³ E. Tammy Kim, "The Perils of 'People of Color' ", The New Yorker, 29 July 2020 at <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-activism/the-perils-of-people-of-color>.

¹⁴ "White people in North America live in a society that is deeply separate and unequal by race, and white people are the beneficiaries of that separation and inequality. ... Given how seldom we experience racial discomfort **in a society we dominate** ..." (emphasis added), Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility* 2018, p. 1 *ibid.* at footnote 11.

¹⁵ "A racist is one who is both privileged and socialized on the basis of race by a white supremacist (racist) system. The term applies to all white people (i.e., people of European descent) living in the United States, regardless of class, gender, religion, culture or sexuality. By this definition, people of color cannot be racists, because as peoples within the U.S. system, they do not have the power to back up their prejudices, hostilities or acts of discrimination. (This does not deny the existence of such prejudices, hostilities, acts of rage or discrimination.)" "Definitions and Descriptions of Racism", University of Iowa Wiki service, at <https://wiki.uiowa.edu/download/attachments/31756797/Racism+-Definitions+.pdf>.

Consequences of the two definitions

"Racist" is one of the most emotionally laden accusations that can be made against a person in today's American society, and indeed throughout western civilization. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution generally allows public expression of racist sentiments and protects such racist speech from government sanction.¹⁶ Although the law does not punish racist speech in America, our society is quick to fire employees and otherwise punish expressions of racism or even statements and actions that possibly imply a potential racist bent (so-called "cancel culture"). Other countries are more restrictive and subject racist speech to criminal penalties.¹⁷ In light of the serious consequences for anyone accused of racism, great care should be taken before making such an accusation. The results of the two definitions of "racism" on the analysis of "systemic racism" and government policy deserve closer scrutiny.

1. Individual or collective guilt?

Just as it would be unconstitutional to find members of a group collectively guilty of a crime when individual members of the group have nothing to do with the crime, the guilt of being a "racist" should only be ascribed to individuals and not to all members of a large ethnic group. The difference between individual guilt and collective guilt characterizes the difference between the two definitions of racism.

The **traditional definition** provides a reasonable basis for accusing an individual of a moral failing when that person expresses racial prejudice. The principle expressed in the Golden Rule is a foundational moral principle.¹⁸ No individual wishes to be judged on the basis of race rather than on the basis of character. A person who engages in racially prejudiced acts violates this fundamental moral principle. The still current dictionary definition of "racist" as a noun specifically refers to an individual "person". The current dictionary definition of "racism" refers to "a belief". Although one or more individuals can have a racist "belief", attributing a racist belief to someone merely because they are a member of an ethnic group even though that individual does not share the belief is irrational. The view that all members of an ethnic group have racist beliefs because they belong to a specific ethnic group is itself "racist" under the traditional definition.

¹⁶ See, E.A. Gjelten, "Does the First Amendment Protect Hate Speech?", updated 22 March 2019, available at <https://www.lawyers.com/legal-info/criminal/does-the-first-amendment-protect-hate-speech.html>.

¹⁷ For example, making anti-Muslim comments has been charged as a crime of making "malicious comments" in Great Britain (Man charged with making 'racist or anti-religious' Facebook comments about British soldier's death", Daily Mail, 24 May 2013 at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2330180/Woolwich-attacks-Man-charged-making-racist-anti-religious-Facebook-comments-British-soldier-s-death.html>). The German Criminal Code (*Strafgesetzbuch*) in § 130 punishes the incitement of hatred against racial groups (https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_stgb/englisch_stgb.html#p1333).

¹⁸ "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The Golden Rule", Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <https://iep.utm.edu/goldrule/>.

The individualist nature of the traditional definition forms the basis of Dr. Martin Luther King's perhaps most quoted statement:

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."¹⁹

The **new definition** rejects the individualist approach and instead attributes racism collectively to the majority race that supposedly controls the "system". The new definition cannot serve as a basis for an accusation of personal moral fault because virtually no individual can satisfy the element of "power" in the new definition. The new definition can only ascribe collective moral failing to the ethnic group that supposedly has the "power". From there it is only a short step to individualizing the collective guilt and attributing "racism" to every individual in the controlling ethnic group. This is readily apparent in the case of popular authors such as Robin DiAngelo (White Fragility) and others who attribute collective guilt merely on the basis of race.²⁰ This idea has found its way into academia:

"The term [racist] applies to all white people (i.e., people of European descent) living in the United States, regardless of class, gender, religion, culture or sexuality."²¹

2. Are racists and racism stupid?

The element of "prejudice" (i.e. making a judgment without or having an opinion without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge) in the **traditional definition** of racism unavoidably leads to the conclusion that racism is "stupid". The online Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "stupid" as follows:²²

- 1 a: given to unintelligent decisions or acts : acting in an unintelligent or careless manner
- b: lacking intelligence or reason
- ...
- 3 : marked by or resulting from unreasoned thinking or acting.

A racist is defined as having a "prejudiced belief", i.e. a belief developed before reviewing the facts. There is, of course, no factual basis to believe that an individual's "traits and capacities" are determined by their race. Acting contrary to or in ignorance of

¹⁹ The "I have a dream" speech on 28 August 1963 in Washington, D.C., full text at <https://www.aol.com/article/news/2017/01/16/dr-martin-luther-kings-i-have-a-dream-speech-full-text/21655947/>.

²⁰ "Racism comes out of our pores as white people. It's the way we are." Robin DiAngelo in an interview on Michigan Radio in 2015, three years before her book *White Fragility* was published in 2018, quoted in "Why all white people are racist, but can't handle being called racist: the theory of white fragility", Dustin Dwyer, 15 March 2015, at <https://stateofopportunity.michiganradio.org/post/why-all-white-people-are-racist-cant-handle-being-called-racist-theory-white-fragility> .

²¹ *Ibid.* Footnote 15.

²² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stupid> .

the relevant facts clearly is "unintelligent or careless" and certainly "unreasoned". The term "stupid" aptly applies to "racism" and "racists" under the traditional definition.

The **new definition** of racism does not lead to a judgment that racism and racists are "stupid". Although the new definition refers to "prejudice" in the pseudo-mathematical formula "prejudice + power = racism", the element of power necessitates a collective approach because "power" is the presumed ability of one ethnic group (i.e. whites) to control other ethnic groups. Ascribing "stupid" to an individual makes sense if that person displays racial prejudice, but stating that the supposedly dominant race is stupid and judging all members of that race to be stupid is just as flawed as collective guilt.

3. Only in the United States of America and changes over time?

The **traditional definition** readily applies not just to individuals in the USA, but throughout the world and throughout history. Nazis were blatantly racist. Indeed, racism was a cornerstone of Nazi ideology. Supporters of apartheid in South Africa were blatantly racist. The Armenian Genocide in the early twentieth century was the result of racism. The Rwandan genocide in 1994, when the Hutus slaughter Tutsis is a more recent example. Human history has countless other examples.²³

The **new definition** makes "power" the determinative element. The logical consequence of the new definition is that people cannot be racists unless the ethnic group they belong to has "power". This leads to absurd results. Nazis would not have been racist until Hitler seized power in 1933 because they had no power until then. Did Nazis who survived World War II stop being racists when Germany was defeated in 1945? Did the supporters of apartheid cease being racists when power changed in South Africa from the white minority to the black majority or when Robert Mugabe took control in Zimbabwe? The imperial Japanese forces were certainly racist under the new definition during the "Rape of Nanking" at the end of 1937, where prejudice and power combined in one of the most infamous massacres in the 20th century. Did the Japanese military leaders responsible for the slaughter, such as the commander General Iwane Matsui, who ordered the massacre,²⁴ stop being racists when Japan surrendered at the end of World War II? Did the Hutus stop being racists when they were driven from power?

What about Jews and Israel? Jews have been victims of ethnic hatred for millennia. Jews are still minorities in all countries of the world except Israel, where they constitute the majority. Upon applying the new definition of racism, Jews cannot be racist except in Israel, and in that country all Jews, as the ethnic group in power in that nation, would be racists under the new definition.

²³ A large list can be found Wikipedia here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genocides_in_history.

²⁴ Matsui was executed for war crimes in 1948.

4. Can members of an ethnic minority be racists?

Anyone can be considered a racist under the **traditional definition** if they have racial prejudice. Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Black Muslim faith for more than 30 years, is notorious for his countless statements against Jews and other white people.²⁵ "White people are potential human beings...they haven't evolved yet,"²⁶ is a blatantly racist statement under the traditional definition. Such displays of racial prejudice are commonly referred to be "reverse racism". The position taken by many in academia, according to which all "whites" are inherently racist is an example of "reverse racism" under the traditional definition.

Under the **new definition**, Louis Farrakhan's statement is only considered to be an expression of racial prejudice but not racism because he is black and, therefore, supposedly cannot be a "racist". The proponents of the new definition simply deny that "reverse racism" exists.²⁷

5. Situational context and "systemic racism"

Civil rights legislation and case law effectively eliminated all racial discrimination in the American legal system and commercial dealings between private parties more than two generations ago. The impact of historic discrimination could not be quickly eliminated by just rendering racial discrimination illegal, and the War on Poverty, various welfare programs, bussing and affirmative action and countless other initiatives were implemented to alleviate the effects of past discrimination. Racism under the **traditional definition** ceased to exist in the American legal and socio-economic system when prejudiced conduct was outlawed.

However, there were still major differences between ethnic groups in the United States in various respects such as average family income, incarceration rates, health, etc. which continue up to the present day. The **new definition** has been developed and nurtured in American academia for the last 50 years as a tool to address the fact of continuing socio-economic differences between "whites" and "blacks" or "people of color", especially because the consequence of the individualist approach under the traditional definition of racism is that individuals have been primarily responsible for their own successes and failures after race-based discrimination was effectively eliminated.

²⁵ "Farrakhan: In his own words" at <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/reports/nation-of-islam-farrakhan-in-his-own-words>.

²⁶ Ibid., footnote 20.

²⁷ "REVERSE RACISM: A term created and used by white people to deny their white privilege. Those in denial use the term reverse racism to refer to hostile behavior by people of color toward whites, and to affirmative action policies, which allegedly give 'preferential treatment' to people of color over whites. In the U.S., there is no such thing as "reverse racism." Lawrence and L. Keleher, "Structural Racism", paper prepared for the Race and Public Policy Conference 2004 at <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Definitions-of%20Racism.pdf> .

The proponents of the **new definition** have identified the amorphous concept of "power" as an overarching element to explain the continuing social-economic differences between ethnic groups. The new definition is also the cornerstone for the concept of **systemic racism** (also referred to as "institutionalized racism"). "Systemic racism" expressly relates to the general situation in which black Americans live in this country. "*Systemic racism* is about everyday experience."²⁸ One of the main fathers of the concept of "systemic racism" Joe R. Feagin defines "systemic racism" in his foundational work Racist America as follows:

"Systemic racism includes the complex array of antiblack [*sic*] practices, the unjustly gained political-economic power of whites, the continuing economic and other resource inequalities along racial lines, and the white racist ideologies and attitudes created to maintain and rationalize white privilege and power. *Systemic* here means that the core racist realities are manifested in [...] each major part of U.S. society — the economy, politics, education, religion, the family—reflects the fundamental reality of systemic racism."²⁹

The element "systemic" in the term "systemic racism" is, in effect, identical with the element "power" in the new definition of racism. The inherent link between the term "systemic racism" and the new definition of "racism" as well as the incompatibility with the traditional definition are readily apparent in Feagin's immediately following paragraph:

"There is a tendency on the part of many Americans, especially white Americans, to see racism as an individual matter, as something only outspoken white bigots engage in. Yet racism is much more than [*sic*] an individual matter. It is both individual and systemic. Indeed, systemic racism is perpetuated by a broad social reproduction process that generates not only recurring patterns of discrimination within institutions and by individuals but also an alienating racist relationship – on the one hand, the racially oppressed, and on the other hand, the racial oppressors. [...] It is part of the nature of being positioned as "white" to be an oppressor, and it is part of the nature of being positioned as "black" to resist oppression."³⁰

"Systemic racism" does not presently exist when the **traditional definition** of "racism" is applied. Racial prejudice (i.e. "racism" in the traditional sense) can only be systemic if (i) the system is designed to reflect racial bias, which has not been the case since the civil rights legislation in the 1960s,³¹ or if (ii) the system is controlled by individuals who act with racial bias, which is also not the case in modern America unless the political, economic and cultural elites are considered to be racially prejudiced.

²⁸ Feagin, Joe R., Racist America, 2001, p. 4, available online at <https://books.google.com/books?id=vwHxti-rSYgC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 6

³⁰ Ibid., p. 6

³¹ Case law has countered even implicit bias in laws and regulations as well as business practice under the concept of "disparate impact" (see e.g. *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 401 U.S. 424 (1974), available at <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/401/424>).

6. What does racism look like in reality?

Racism in the **traditional definition** is relatively easy to identify and sanction. Use of racial epithets or racial bias when dealing with others directly affects the victims of such conduct; they then easily recognize the racist act and the person committing the act.

"**Systemic racism**" is much harder to identify because acts by individuals are not relevant. "Systemic racism" is instead identified on the basis of general socio-economic differences between races, i.e. a collectivist approach. The American justice system is considered by the proponents of the new definition to be one major area of "systemic racism" since virtually all crime statistics show that blacks are much more likely to become involved with the American criminal justice system for numerous reasons.³² Financial differences, such as home ownership, the wealth gap and unemployment rates are also considered to be signs of systemic racism.³³ Even the higher death rate among black Americans from the Wuhan virus (COVID-19) is viewed as an example of "systemic racism".³⁴

High crime rates, poverty, poor school performance etc. used to be called "social problems". Under the **new definition** of "racism", social problems are now identical with "systemic racism". The result after considering the collective attribution of fault under the new definition is the following syllogism:

- Proposition 1: "Whites" bear the guilt for systemic racism.
- Proposition 2: "Systemic racism is identical to social problems.
- Conclusion 3: Therefore, "whites" bear the guilt for social problems.

Since the doctrine of "systemic racism" ascribes collective fault, it necessarily results in broad condemnation of the entire system and the majority ethnic group that supposedly controls the system. At the same time, this line of argument distracts from the root causes of various social problems while implying that the black community can do

³² Bill Quigley, "Fourteen Examples of Systemic Racism in the US Criminal Justice System", published at the site "Common Dreams" on 26 July 2010, available at <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2010/07/26/fourteen-examples-systemic-racism-us-criminal-justice-system>

³³ Angela Hanks, Danyelle Solomon, Christian Weller, "Systemic Inequality – How America's Structural Racism Helped Create the Black-White Wealth Gap", 21 February 2018, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2018/02/21/447051/systematic-inequality/>.

³⁴ "Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 27/7), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>.

nothing to address social problems until the system is replaced. This syllogism also provides an excuse for criminal activity such as looting.³⁵

7. Consequences of the different definitions for social policy and legislation

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s reflected the **traditional definition** of racism and resulted in civil rights legislation and aggressive enforcement of these laws. Racial discrimination in the traditional sense is rare and immediately sanctioned in both American culture as well as law. The way to alleviate socio-economic differences between ethnic groups is considered to be a long-term process in which individuals earn their way up the socio-economic ladder with hard work and by making good decisions (e.g. deciding to work hard in school, not joining criminal gangs, not taking illegal drugs, etc.).

The **new definition** places blame on a "system" supposedly controlled by the dominant ethnic group. Failure to prosper is explained with "systemic racism" and not individual mistakes. Fundamental rules for individual success, such as "self-reliance", the "nuclear family", "emphasis on the scientific method", "Protestant work ethic", "Be polite", etc. have been besmirched as "White Culture".³⁶ The new definition of racism especially enables the proponents of "systemic racism" to avoid having to look at more complex explanations for socio-economic differences. Instead, blame is placed on the "system". Aggression is directed towards representatives of the system, such as law enforcement personnel. The symbols of the "system" such as the flag and statues of historic figures are dishonored and vandalized.

The new definition also leads to demands for solutions that superficially treat the symptoms of social problems. For example, the demand for reparations is intended to address the wealth gap by simply transferring money from "whites" to black Americans. The suggestion for dealing with higher incarceration rates is to simply release black prisoners and gut the justice system. These demands and other common demands in the Black Lives Matter movement involve creating equal socio-economic results for black

³⁵ "I don't care if somebody decides to loot a Gucci or a Macy's or a Nike store because that makes sure that person eats. That makes sure that person has clothes. That is reparations. Anything they want to take, take it because these businesses have insurance." Statement by Ariel Atkins, quoted by The Chicago Tribune" in the article "Reparations are about economic stability, not a looted pair of \$120 Nikes" by Dahleen Glanton, 17 August 2020.

³⁶ The National Museum of African American History & Culture, part of the Smithsonian, published a chart listing these and other "Aspects of White Culture" (available at <https://www.newsweek.com/smithsonian-race-guidelines-rational-thinking-hard-work-are-white-values-1518333>). The Smithsonian subsequently took down this document on the website and apologized for have said that hard work and rational thought are white culture (<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article244309587.html>).

and white Americans by edict without attending to the underlying causes of the differences.³⁷

Such superficial solutions can be as mundane as the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule adopted in the Obama administration under which local zoning laws, for example, would have to permit the construction of low cost apartments in neighborhoods otherwise zoned for single family residences for the purpose of evening out demographic differences between neighborhoods.³⁸ This rule is a logical consequence of the new definition because it is intended to counter the fact that economic differences naturally result in a greater percentage of ethnic minorities living in apartment buildings and housing, while "whites" tend to live in neighborhoods zoned for single family dwellings without addressing the underlying economic reasons for people living in different neighborhoods. This rule is completely contrary to the traditional view which finds no systemic racism in single family neighborhoods so long as there is no discrimination against potential home owners based on race.³⁹

The differences between the traditional definition of racism and the new definition developed in academia are perhaps most easily seen in criminal law and policy. For example, 6,380 black Americans were arrested in 2018 for "murder and nonnegligent [sic] manslaughter" while 5,280 whites (including Hispanics) were arrested in 2018 for the same offense.⁴⁰ Black Americans constitute only 13.4% of the population while whites (without Hispanics) amount to 60.1% (76.3% with Hispanics who are also considered to be white).⁴¹ This means that blacks are arrested for criminal homicide at a roughly five times greater rate.

The traditional definition of racism provides no explanation for these statistics since there is no indication that arrests of blacks are based on racial prejudice. The causes for the different rates, when considering the **traditional definition**, must be found elsewhere, e.g. in socio-economic and cultural causes, such as the gangster sub-culture, poverty,

³⁷ A list of demands published in 2016 which is still generally current is available at <https://twitter.com/katrinarogers/status/760146416089956352/photo/1> . The BLM movement is very decentralized, so different local organizations have different demands, for example, BLM Chicago's demands are available at <https://www.blacklivesmatterchicago.com/10-demands-of-blmchi/>; BLM Seattle's somewhat different demands are available at <https://blacklivesseattle.org/our-demands/>.

³⁸ A comprehensive description of the rule and its history is available in the Federal Register at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/01/14/2020-00234/affirmatively-furthering-fair-housing>.

³⁹ "Seeking Suburban Votes, Trump to Repeal Rule Combating Racial Bias in Housing", Danielle Kurtzleben at NPR, 21 July 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/07/21/893471887/seeking-suburban-votes-trump-targets-rule-to-combat-racial-bias-in-housing> . The headline illustrates the difference between the traditional and new definitions. Under the traditional definition there is no "racial bias" if the decision about who lives in the neighborhood results from the ability of the individual to pay for a home. Under the new definition, the mere fact of different ethnic mixes between high income and low income neighborhoods is an expression of "systemic racism".

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Estimated number of arrests by offense and race, 2018, All Ages, https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/ucr.asp?table_in=2 .

⁴¹ United States Census Bureau Quick Facts at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219> .

poor education, growing up in homes without a father, etc.. Under the **new definition**, the cause is necessarily attributed to "systemic racism". Therefore, policies to lower the homicide rate among black Americans by addressing the causes of the high homicide rate will be determined differently, depending on the definition that is applied. Policies reflecting the traditional definition will address socio-economic factors and culture, while policies reflecting the new definition will confront the "system" as the source of "systemic racism".

The "advantage" of the new definition and the related concept of "systemic racism" compared to the traditional definition is that the new definition makes it a lot easier to place blame for socio-economic differences while absolving the individual of personal responsibility. The **new definition** just blames the existing legal and social system, cries "racism" and rails against the "system". For example, if there is a high crime rate in a black neighborhood which results in increased police contact with the local population, the analysis under "systemic racism" will challenge the justice system and call for such actions as defunding the police. The result is what we see now in major American cities in which crime is exploding and the police are retreating.

Proponents of the **traditional definition** look to the underlying socio-economic causes and, for example, strengthen police presence in high crime neighborhoods. The approach under the traditional definition is accordingly directed towards addressing specific problems rather than ranting against the "system" and trying to tear it down.

Conclusion

"Systemic racism" is an example of sophistry promulgated by well-paid academics as an essentially simplistic means of explaining socio-economic differences among racial groups in the USA. The concept of "systemic racism" and the new definition of the term "racism" are tailored to the political situation in the USA and lead to absurd results when applied to history and other nations. "Systemic racism" is based on a definition of racism that downplays or even eliminates the aspect of individual racial prejudice and instead uses a collectivist approach to ascribe collective guilt ("All whites are racist.") and collective innocence ("Blacks cannot be racist."). The concept of "systemic racism" categorizes people as "oppressors" (all white Americans) and those who "resist oppression" (all people of color, especially black Americans). This divides the country and easily leads to violence directed against the "system". Finally, the concept of "systemic racism" leads to simplistic public policies that focus on treating the symptoms (e.g. releasing incarcerated blacks) rather than cause (e.g. combatting criminal gangs and encouraging the local community to snitch on criminals).

The academic world has used intellectual sleight-of-hand to create the new definition of racism and the concept of "systemic racism". America now has a cadre of thousands of ethnic studies instructors in our institutions of higher learning and diversity specialists in our business and governmental institutions who operate on the basis of the new definition.

Some individuals such as Robin DiAngelo, the author of White Fragility, charge high fees when they peddle the concept of "systemic racism" to corporations and other audiences, in effect, selling dispensation.⁴² The term "race hustler" comes to mind.

The concept of "systemic racism" recently triggered major riots in American cities following the death of George Floyd. The rioters and the protestors giving them cover are convinced that they are combatting the evils of "racism" by attacking the "system", i.e. their own country and fellow Americans. Innocent people have lost their businesses and even their lives in the riots. Law and order has almost completely broken down in many American cities. The new definition of racism and the concept of "systemic racism" have been used to justify destroying our country. The resulting damage to peace and prosperity is completely unacceptable. It is time to relegate the concept of "systemic racism" to the repository of obsolete academic doctrines. Finally, it is time for all Americans to address social problems such as rising crime rates honestly and with resolve without having to bear a cross of collective guilt.

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⁴² Robin DiAngelo's "Keynote Speaker Fee" is \$30,000 - \$40,000 (<https://www.bigspeak.com/speakers/diangelo-r/>).