

Kenneth L. Waters*

The Myth of Reverse Racism (Or Can Black People Be Racists, Too?)

What's The Charge?

A man was on his way back to his office after his usual lunch break when he was accosted by a gun-wielding drifter. The mugger nervously proceeded to lift the victim's wallet from the inside pocket of his jacket. The victim, however, seized upon a heroic moment and lunged recklessly at his hijacker. After wrestling the crook to the ground and relieving him of his firearm, the man angrily took back his wallet. As they continued to tussle on the sidewalk the two were surrounded by two sets of police who pryed them apart and spirited them down to the station. They both were booked and held over for arraignment. After a moment of shock the victim cried out, "But why am I being arrested? What's the charge?" A burly desk sergeant replied "reverse robbery."

If the outcome of this fictional story strikes you as unfair or even ludicrous then you are closer to understanding my case for dismissing as nonsense the nowadays frequently heard charges of "reverse racism", "Black racism", and similar accusations. Is there really such a thing as "reverse" or, more specifically, "Black" racism? If not, then why not? What about the way Blacks feel toward "innocent" Whites? What about the way light-skinned Blacks feel toward

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dark-skinned Blacks and vice versa? What about the way Blacks feel toward each other regardless of skin tone? What about the way Blacks feel toward Asians, Jews, Hispanics, Pacific-Islanders, and Native Americans? What is the basis for the charge of "reverse" or "Black" racism? What about those situations where Blacks are the controlling majority and Whites are the minority?

Are Blacks being self-serving when they deny that they are racists? We shall address these questions, but first we must realize, as our introductory tale illustrates, that some things are irreversible, non-exchangeable, and non-transposable simply by reason of their historical, social, relational, and semantic character. Indeed, to speak of them as reversible, exchangeable, or transposable is to speak nonsense. Robbery, rape, and assault and battery are phenomena of this type, and so is racism which, by the way, has been known to inspire these other evils.

Some may object by saying that criminal behavior like robbery, rape, and assault and battery are acts carried out while racism is an attitude. They might maintain that actions and attitudes cannot be compared in this way. It is true that every analogy has its limits. This analogy between criminal behaviors and racism is no exception. For example, criminal behaviors are usually individual acts while racism is a corporate phenomenon with individual expressions. Still the analogy is useful and appropriate. A criminal behavior is more than an act. It is motive, purpose, and attitude as well. All of these aspects of crime are subject to debate in a court of law. Racism is more than an attitude. It is motive, purpose, and behavior as well. Like a criminal act, racism is unidirectional. Like crime, when racism is being executed, a historical and relational circumstance is established that cannot be reversed.

Arguably, it is possible for a person to rob or assault someone who has beforehand victimized that person in the same way. The

prior criminal act has been completed. An arrest was made, a penalty was paid, restitution was made, some time has passed, and now a new act of crime is committed—maybe for revenge, but it is still a new act of crime and not a reversal of what the other did. This is possible only because the prior act of crime has been completed and paid for and some time has passed. However, if that person was still in process of being victimized, then any action that person takes may be self-defense or resistance, but again, it would not be a reversal of the crime. The fact is that racism is likewise still being executed. There has never been a point where racism had ceased and some time had passed. A segment of the world's population has been continuously victimized by racism, and, as long as they are, they cannot be guilty of the same toward their victimizers.

A New Subterfuge

Some of the confusion could be avoided if conversants and pontificators would only remember to precede the word "racism" with the word "White." Actually, this omission is often intentional in order to obscure the ostensibly demonstrable fact that "White racism" is the only racism there is. Apparently a new strategy has emerged among Whites. One aspect of its novelty is the subtle way that Blacks and other people of color are included in the household of bigotry. My purpose is to pull the cover off of this subterfuge. Surely this has already been done by others. But since the myth of reverse/Black racism is achieving ascendancy in writ and media, our efforts to expose it must persist.

What Racism Is

Racism is the collective resolve to subjugate a people on the basis of distinctive physical characteristics such as skin color

and skin color especially. The collective aspect of racism is significant to its definition. Even when racism is an individual expression it is never disjoined from the global field or historical stream which feeds and receives from it. Individual racists may not always be conscious of their roots in an ideological field of global scope nor in a historical stream of generational length; nevertheless, there is always more to racism than the seemingly isolated incident that discloses it.

Historically, white-skinned people of European descent have been the only collective to execute the racist resolve with degrees of consistency and success. Conversely, dark-skinned people of African descent have received the full force of this resolve as the primary though not exclusive targets of unprovoked Caucasian fury.

The word "unprovoked" introduces us to a series of traits that makes racism exclusive to its originators, and not only that, but also non-convertible, that is to say, irreversible, inexchangeable, and non-transposable. Racism is unprovoked, except by a people's passive, unassuming presence upon the planet. More specifically, racism is characterized historically by a proactive posture, an aggressive spirit, and a predator-like singleness of purpose.

In the past the racist resolve to subjugate Black people has meant physical captivity and bondage, radical curtailment of freedom, thoroughgoing divestiture of culture and personhood, psychological deprivation, mental crippling, and spiritual evisceration. Our subjugation continues in a modern legacy of social and economic disadvantage, political and educational regress, community and family fragmentation, and mental and emotional breakdown. We have inherited the persistent reality of a society engineered to preserve the status of Whites at the expense of others. Blacks are the most prominent exhibits of this historical travesty only because the physical characteristics that elicit the ire of the White collective are more pronounced in us than in any other people. Racism in its most fundamental sense has always been, is now, and will

always be White people's victimization of Black people.

It's Too Late

It is easy to ignore the lessons of history. To do so is necessary in order to posit a phrase like "Black" or "reverse" racism. One cannot be sure whether the term "Black racism" is equivalent to "reverse racism" in the minds of those who conjure up the phrases. Sometimes the term "Black racism" seems to shift from being synonymous with "reverse racism" against Whites to a peculiar racism that Blacks alone show, either toward themselves or toward other peoples of color. Otherwise, they seem sometimes to be used interchangeably, although from a purely semantic view, the term "reverse racism" is more general and therefore, more usable when other people of color besides Blacks are deemed guilty of racism toward Whites.

In any case, the term "reverse racism" does not appear adequate for all its uses. "Exchanged" or "transposed" racism may be better phrases. "Converted" racism may be offered has a catchall term for all preceding instances. However, the pursuit of this issue would be moot since all of these terms are ahistorical, insubstantial, and illogical. This is because regardless of which term is used, the idea is that Whites have now become the victims of racism or that people other than Whites are now capable and guilty of racism.

Since "reverse racism" appears to be in more familiar usage I shall address this term first with the proviso that what is said about reverse racism applies to all the other racial misnomers. It is too late in the day for reverse racism to be possible.

For there to be reverse racism, Whites would first have to be absolved of all guilt for their ancestors' crimes against Black people. Such absolution could only be enabled by redress of all ills, correction of all wrongs, appropriate reparation for all damages, and Black people's collective pronouncement of forgiveness. Secondly,

there must be a radical shift in the balance of power so that Black people become the ones with the military and industrial might sufficient to seize and maintain control over the world's shrinking resources. Thirdly, there must have ensued a change of heart among Black people resulting in a collective resolve to subjugate White people on the basis of their whiteness. Fourthly, this resolve must be an unprovoked, proactive, aggressive, singularly purposeful program replete with an ideology of racial superiority. Fifthly, this program of racial subjugation must be executed with notable consistency and success over the course of time.

Only when these conditions have been met could Black people be properly called racists. Since meeting the first of these conditions has not begun and there is virtually no impetus toward any of the others, and since the desire to subjugate White people does not even exist in the corporate psyches of Black folks, it is an incalculably enormous unlikelihood that the world will ever see such a thing as reverse/Black racism. To reverse racism is to reverse both history and a global network of social relationships. As such, it is a historical and sociological impossibility. We hope that ending racism is not impossible, but to "turn the tables" so that Whites are the ones on the receiving end of racism is not achievable, especially at this late date.

If Not Racism, What Then?

There are yet numerous instances where individual Blacks or groups of Blacks have physically and verbally assaulted White people, simply because they were white. The assault upon trucker Reginald Denny and other Whites in the wake of the Los Angeles uprising of 1992 is a case in point. Furthermore, some Black people's private conversation about Whites are replete with derogatory remarks that range from the scathing to the scurrilous. Blacks

commonly deploy their own set of caricatures and racial epithets when referring to Whites. Whites have experienced ostracization at the hands of Blacks. Whites who work closely with Blacks have been intentionally excluded from Black gatherings of various types. Many Black people are incensed at the sight of White people, especially when they enter Black communities. Black parents have discouraged and prevented the association of their children with White children. Some Black parents have been infuriated by the prospect of marriage between their child and a White person. Black people have publicly and privately disdained interracial dating and marriage. In short, Black people have appeared to treat White people the way White people have treated them.

There are times when complaining Whites conveniently forget that the way Blacks respond to them is the way that Whites themselves have modelled racism, but this is another issue. The question is this: "Is this behavior we have outlined racist?" Our answer, of course, is "no". What is it then? The answer is simple enough. It is anger, or better yet, rage. What Whites frequently call Black racism is in actuality Black rage.

The features of Black rage were expertly delineated by psychiatrists William H. Grier and Price M. Cobb in 1968.¹ They are the ones who should probably be credited for the term. Unfortunately, works such as theirs seem to be briefly remembered if consulted at all.

Even if Whites ignore the experts the differences between White racism and Black rage are significant enough to make their confusion or equation untenable. Racism is proactive, rage is reactive. Racism is offensive, rage is defensive. Racism is ideological, rage is emotional. Racism creates a victim, rage is the response

¹William H. Grier and Price M. Cobb. *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, 1968. New Edition, 1980).

to a victimizer. Racism is deductive, that is, it descends from general ideas to specific applications. Rage is inductive, that is, it ascends from specific experiences to general feelings. The negative response of Black people to White people in all of its shapes and manifestations is best characterized by the word "rage." Given the history of Black-White relationships in the global community and the continuing experience of Black people everywhere, only the most obtuse will disagree that Black rage against White people is justified. I am saying that rage, not violence, is justified. Violence can only be justified as a last resort for the preservation of the personal or corporate self. Otherwise, there is no excuse for indiscriminate, unprovoked violence against individual Whites, just as there is no excuse for indiscriminate, unprovoked violence against individual Blacks. Nevertheless, Black people have a right to be angry with White people as a whole for both their overt and covert support of the racist agenda.

Another Arena

Whites who concede to the above argument will still try to dilute their guilt by accusing Blacks of racism in other social arenas. Take, for example, the historic and resurgent conflict between darker-skinned Blacks and lighter-skinned Blacks. As producer Spike Lee demonstrates in his movie, *School Daze*, there exists a mutual hostility between some darker-skinned and lighter-skinned Blacks. Some have taken this as evidence of an internecine racism. Sometimes, however, the question of skin-tone is disregarded altogether. Blacks are simply said to be racist toward other Blacks. We are all familiar with Blacks, both dark-skinned and light-skinned, castigating or degrading other Blacks whose skin tone is virtually the same as theirs. Are these exchanges of antipathy indications of Black-on-Black racism? Again, our answer is "no." What is it

then? It is rage turned inward or more simply, "self-hate."

It is easy to understand why self-hate would be confused with racism, especially when the more complete terms "Black self-hate" and "White racism" are not used. After all, Black self-hate is a product of White racism. Black self-hate sometimes acts and sounds like White racism, and the objects of Black self-hate and White racism are the same, namely, Black people. But the differences are significant enough to demand a distinction. Racism is antipathy toward people of differing physical-cultural characteristics simply because they are different. Self-hate is antipathy toward people of similar physical-cultural characteristics simply because they are similar to oneself. Black people have learned from White people how to hate themselves. Therefore, it matters not whether the Blacks some Blacks see are of darker, lighter, or equivalent skin tone, they still see "black" and "black" is what they have been taught to hate.

In this regard, William H. Grier and Price M. Cobb allude to a problem of terminology that is relevant to our discussion: "It seems inaccurate to apply the term "racial prejudice" both to Negroes' (sic) feelings about white people and to their feelings about themselves."² Grier and Cobb are here acknowledging the difficulty of applying the same label to the tendency of Blacks to "idolize" Whites on the one hand, and debase themselves on the other. These are two sides of the same coin, but Grier and Cobb are correct in suspecting a problem with calling them by the same name. Still they seem to acquiesce to this and other errors. They even go so far as to refer to self-hating Blacks as "black racists."³ It should be reiterated and stressed that their term "black racists" indeed means Blacks who hate Blacks and not Blacks who hate

²*Ibid.*, p.190.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 191, 192.

Whites.

Still, the term is unfortunate in that it only continues the confusion. Since it is clear that Grier and Cobb mean "Black self-hatred" when they speak of "Black racism" they should have simply used this former phrase.⁴ One could even draw upon Greek derivatives to coin a term for self-hate, like "misoegotism" (miso=hate + ego=self). In any case, there are ways to avoid even the unintentional confusion of self-hatred with racism.

Still Other Arenas

A knottier problem lies in the area of Black response to other global ethnic groups (I prefer this term to "ethnic minority" and "non-White"), i.e., Asians, Hispanics, Pacific-Islanders, Native Americans. In recent times, for example, in Los Angeles, we have seen instances of "Black rage" against Korean merchants who set up shop in the Black community and then engage in what are perceived to be exploitive business practices. There have been instances of manifest Korean disregard for the personhood of the Black people with whom they interact. The Black community feels invaded by a Korean presence that profits from the community, but returns little or nothing to it. Undoubtedly, there is a great deal of misunderstanding on both sides between Koreans and Blacks. Much can be resolved through dialogue and the search for common ground. Nevertheless, it is still the word "rage" not "racism" that explains a large measure of the Black community's negative response to Koreans (and to other Asian immigrants).

The word "rage" also explains Black response to the Jewish presence in America, a presence that some black people have often experienced as exploitive, hostile, and racist. It has become

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 198.

fashionable to label angry Blacks who castigate Jews as "anti-Semites." Although anti-Semitism is a real problem in the global community and should be addressed with the utmost seriousness, the term is inappropriate in application to Black people. Blacks do not respond in anger to the "Jewishness" of Jews but to their "Whiteness". Blacks and Jews of European descent have historically shared in the struggle for equity and justice, yet they have not shared equally in the fruits of that struggle. A lion's share of those benefits have been taken by the Jews. Furthermore, Jews of European descent have found it too easy to identify with other Whites and forget the Blacks who were once their allies. As far as many Blacks are concerned, Jews of European descent are just another group of White people who have abused them.

Furthermore, there is a large segment of the Black community whose anger toward Jews is exacerbated by Israeli mistreatment or, at least, the perceived mistreatment, of Palestinian neighbors. This is particularly true of Islamic Blacks who identify with their Arab fellow-Muslims in their struggle for a homeland. This identification is made stronger by growing awareness of a historical affinity between African and Arab culture. Certainly, Israel's perception of a threat from some of her Palestinian neighbors has a basis in reality. Arabs and other Palestinians are not entirely guiltless in the creation of the volatile state of affairs. Israel has legitimate concerns for the security of her borders. The threat of anti-Semitism is indeed real.

Some "Black Muslims" and others are not altogether fair and objective in their assessment of the situation. But it is the nature of the Black response to the Jewish presence that is at issue here. When we look at the history of Black-Jewish relationships and even, as some scholars are doing, at ancient Talmudic teachings

concerning Black people, there is ample justification for negative feelings apart from anti-Semitism.⁵ While the ill-timed remarks of Jesse Jackson during the 1988 presidential campaign represents the subdued anger that many Black Americans have over their betrayal and exploitation by Jews, the verbal excoriations of a Louis Farrakhan represents the added outrage over the international situation involving Jews and Arab-Muslims, as well as a deep resentment over insulting passages found in ancient Jewish texts. In either case, this is rage—not racism, and certainly not anti-Semitism.

The Blurred Line

Rage, however, does not explain all of the negative responses that Blacks have had toward other global ethnic groups, particularly toward Asians, Hispanics, Pacific-Islanders, and Native Americans. Rage only explains those cases where any of these groups have emulated White people in their treatment of Black people. Otherwise, there have been instances where our responses to these people have been quite shameful and uncalled for, particularly in light of the fact that these people share with us many of the same experiences of White racism. Sometimes Black people can be heard making derogatory and demeaning remarks about other ethnic groups. Sometimes Blacks can be heard using racial slurs and epithets about these people. Sometimes Blacks are guilty of demeaning and unjustified behavior toward them. Black people have been known to treat other ethnics the way White people have treated Black people. Is this to be understood as Black racism? No. Once again, we are dealing with self-hatred, but with an important qualification. When we speak of Black-on-Black antipathy we are

⁵See Charles B. Copher, "The Black Presence in the Old Testament," in Cain Hope Felder, (ed.), *Stony The Road We Trod* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), pp. 146-164.

speaking specifically of "reflexive" self-hate. Some hate those aspects of their own blackness that other Blacks "mirror" or "reflect" back at them. But when we speak of Black antipathy toward other ethnic groups we are speaking more precisely of "projective" self-hate. When self-hating Blacks see some Asians, Hispanics, Pacific-Islanders, and Native Americans they still see socially and economically disadvantaged ethnic groups. In other words, they still see themselves even though it is not a mirror image.

Since these Blacks have learned to hate themselves, they project that hatred upon any other group that resembles them, even if it is only a socio-economic resemblance. Self-hating Black people will hate others who are poor and not White, regardless of whether or not they are also Black. Admittedly, there is a blurred line between "reflexive" and "projective" self-hatred, but the distinction is a useful one for interpreting the various levels of conflict within oppressed communities.

Understandable Confusion

It is easy to see how racism and self-hate can be confused with each other, especially when people do not use awkward but specific terms like "White racism," "Black self-hate," "reflexive self-hate," and "projective self-hate." After all, racism is self-hatred. More specifically, White racism is White projective self-hatred. There is evidence that some Whites hate their whiteness and that such people are at times insanely jealous of the rich colorfulness of Black people. This jealousy only adds fuel to their self-hatred. These Whites have learned to cope with this compounded self-hatred by projecting it upon Black people. We are indebted to psychiatrist Frances Cress Welsing for her seminal insights into the phenomenon of White self-hate and color-envy. Her primary concern remains to demonstrate the roots of White racism in

White people's fear of genetic annihilation through interbreeding, but her subsidiary discussions about White self-hatred and color-envy are among the valuable offerings she makes along the way.

"The Whites," Welsing explains, "desiring to have skin color but unable to attain it, claimed (consciously or unconsciously) that skin color was disgusting to them, and began attributing negative qualities to color—especially to blackness."⁶ There are also forms of White reflexive self-hate, i.e., White-on-White antipathy, that we could explore, but this would take us too far afield. I am only interested in showing here that while there is a definite relationship between racism and self-hate, there are important distinctions to be made when speaking about Blacks and Whites. White self-hate is a cause of White racism; Black self-hate is an effect of White racism.

As the primary targets of racism, Black people cannot be racist. To say otherwise would be like accusing the bullseye of hitting the arrow. It would be reminiscent of the street corner joke, told in various ways, of the man found guilty of assaulting a mugger's fist with his head.

When Whites accuse Blacks of being racist it is a specious attempt to assuage their own guilt by projecting it upon the very people they have victimized. For Whites to call Blacks racist is in itself an act of racism, quite apart from the fact that it is also a pernicious lie.

The Need For Clarity

Nevertheless, the practice of accusing Black people of "racism too" has become vogue among Whites...and some Blacks as well. A nationally televised talk show once featured educator-author Jawanza

⁶Frances Cress Welsing, *The Isis Papers* (Chicago: The Third World Press, 1991), p. 5.

Kunjufu and psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint on the same program. In the course of discussion, Kunjufu remarked that "Blacks cannot be racists." Poussaint, however, disagreed and said "Blacks can be racist." Apparently, Kunjufu chose not to challenge his Black brother in front of a national audience of White people and kept his silence. Nevertheless, Poussaint's comments were disappointing, particularly, in a national forum. They illustrate the need for clarity on the issue of racism, especially among highly visible Blacks. More recently, on July 13, 1992, Barbara Jordan, the former congresswoman from Texas, referred to "Black racism" in her address to the National Democratic Convention in New York City. This proved that even the most erudite and highly respected among us can be confused about the nature of racism.

The Roots of Confusion

It appears that the confusion began during the Black revolution of the late '50s and early '60s. This was the time, especially in 1959, when the Nation of Islam, the so-called "Black Muslims", captured public attention. Malcolm X, national minister of the Nation of Islam and firebrand apostle of Black pride and self-determination, struck fear into the hearts of White people everywhere with his relentless, angry, and uncompromising indictment of White society. Reaction to his message and that of the Nation of Islam as a whole was swift. The White media became the forum for a host of charges leveled against the Muslims, among which was the charge of "Black racism."

Malcolm X, of course, ably and eloquently exposed the hypocrisy of these charges, but not before a set of new misnomers, "Black racism" and "reverse racism," were injected into the Ameri-

⁷The *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, as told to Alex Haley (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992 paperback edition), pp. 238-240.

can wordstream.⁷ A little later during this period, Stokely Carmichael (now known as Kwame Toure) of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, in an angry speech, shoved the term "Black Power" into the public consciousness. When Whites heard this slogan they again responded with fear and the counter-charge of "Black racism."

Theologian James Cone, writing in 1969, was among those who debunked White people's effort to discredit this expression of Black self-determination. "Black racism is a myth created by whites to ease their guilt feelings" wrote Cone. "While it is true that Blacks do hate whites, Black hatred is not racism."⁸ After citing Stokely Carmichael's own defense against the charge of racism, Cone summarized: "Black power then is not Black racism or Black hatred....Black power is an affirmation of the humanity of Blacks in spite of White racism."⁹

There has since been few serious attempts by Whites to promote the myth of Black racism. However, we were still due for further confusion on related issues. In 1977, Allan Bakke, a White man, attempted to enroll in the medical school of the University of California at Davis and was denied admission. At the time, the university was operating in accord with Affirmative Action policies and had reserved sixteen spaces for "ethnic minority" students. In this context, Bakke and his supporters saw his rejection as evidence of "reverse discrimination" and touted this as the reason for his suit against the university. The case touched a nerve in Black and White America. In 1978, when the Supreme Court ordered that Bakke be admitted to the school, the idea of "reverse discrimination" gained even more legitimacy in the minds of some people.

According to the eminent scholar, C. Eric Lincoln "...Allan

⁸James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), p. 15.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 16.

Bakke's moral support came from an unsilent majority who interpreted any remediation of the black estate to be a de facto encroachment upon established white prerogatives, and a threat to other established norms which are even more sacrosanct."¹⁰

"Reverse racism" and "reverse discrimination" are not the same thing, although they sleep in the same conceptual bedroom. Also, it is quite a leap from these terms to the more specific term "Black racism." Nevertheless, the predisposed mind easily equates these terms, using them interchangeably when, in an argument fueled by the need for self-justification, one term may appear more convenient than another. Furthermore, the need for self-justification provides a seedbed for further accusation and unclarity. In this regard, the outbursts of a Malcolm X or a Louis Farrakhan, or the piqued asides of a Jesse Jackson and numerous other African Americans, will not be seen as the expressions of rage they are, but as further proof that the unicorn called Black racism (or reverse racism) really exists.

Regardless of which term one fancies, each ignores both the facts of history and the dynamics of White-dominated society. Still, it seems that some Whites, especially those in the media, along with some Blacks, will persist in employing the myth of Black/reverse racism. In that case, we must persist in squelching both terms.

Prejudice Plus Power?

A notable event occurred in September 1987 when the United Methodist Church convened the Convocation on Racism in Louisville, Kentucky. Perhaps, the most enduring legacy of that

¹⁰C. Eric Lincoln, *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), p. 207.

gathering will be its definition of racism as "prejudice plus power." Obviously, it is a catchy predicate owing to its pithy and alliterative character. Observedly, it has the advantage of memorability and poignancy in debate and discussion. Commendably, it locates the responsibility for racism among those in a society who monopolize, or at least, dominate economic, industrial, political, and ordnance resources. The definition, nevertheless, is vulnerable to serious misunderstanding (as are most statements). There are those, for example, who have taken it to imply that racism against Whites is possible in situations where Whites are a numerical minority and without measurable influence in society. Nigeria, Mozambique, Madagascar, and other African countries are often cited in this respect as potential environments for racism against Whites.

The words "without measurable influence in society" must be stressed to distinguish these situations from South Africa where Whites are the minority but yet hold the reins of power. The implication or belief that Whites can become victims of racism in majority Black and Black-dominated social situations is, nevertheless, an illusion. Those who hold such a belief have failed to recognize both the global scope and historic effects of White racism. Even in countries where Black people are "in power," the debilitating presence of worldwide racism is felt at every level of government and society, although all persons may not be aware of what they are experiencing. The tragedy of war and starvation in Ethiopia and Somalia result more from historical, social, and political realities within the great worldhouse than from natural phenomena, and the roots of these realities in global racism have been frequently exposed. Black people in Black countries, whose eyes are open to the interconnection between White racism and the collapse of their societies, naturally become subject to rage against the White collective, and particularly against any White people in their midst. Again, such rage is not racism. White people in all-

Black and Black-dominated countries may, in fact, have a variety of negative social experiences, but it is because, regardless of how well-intentioned they are, they wear the face of a global enemy.

Rage is an inevitable effect of White racism. If it is not turned outward toward Whites it will be turned inward as self-hate. Perhaps, the most tragic example to date of widespread self-hate among Black people is Somalia before the American-led deployment of U.N. troops in December 1992. Admittedly, it seems reductionist to attribute the atrocities of Somalis against Somalis to "Black reflexive self-hate." Regardless of how it appears, this conclusion, upon analysis of the Somali situation, is inescapable.

Finally, the understanding that racism is "prejudice plus power" may overlook the fact that even "prejudice" is not the same across the racial board. The prejudice of the oppressed against the oppressor is certainly different from that of oppressor against the oppressed. The former prejudice is reactive and defensive; the latter is proactive and offensive. The former would not exist if not for the latter. This, of course, is the same relationship we have identified between rage and racism. Therefore, for anyone to say "Well, everybody is prejudiced," is not only to beg the question, but to gloss over the truth about prejudice. When Whites make this statement it is usually another attempt to evade responsibility, but when Blacks make this statement it is evidence of the extent to which we have been programmed to sabotage our own liberation.

There can simply be no allowance for confusion on the meaning of racism. To misapply the label of racism as some are doing today is as dangerous as misdiagnosing a case of pneumonia as asthma. Improper diagnosis precludes proper treatment and cure. The consequences are disastrous. Ultimately, the United Methodist definition of racism is useful and should be promoted. We simply should be prepared to defend it against misinterpretation.

A Bigger Problem

I finally address the accusations that undoubtedly will be made against the position of this essay. No, this has not been an exercise in the self-absolution of Blacks. We are not trying here to hide our guilt or evade responsibility as some Whites are doing today. By refusing to accept the subterfuge of being called racists, we are not trying to cover our own shortcomings. On the contrary, we admit that we as Black people face a problem of our own that may be more serious and damaging than White racism. That is the problem of Black self-hatred. To be sure, White racism is dangerous, but Black self-hatred may be even more threatening to the future of Black people.

Lest some Whites take these admissions as an excuse for smugness or further evasion of responsibility for racial injustice, let us be reminded that Black self-hate is a by-product of White racism. White racism is ultimately the chief cause of Black people's plight and problems. Nevertheless, in the past we as Black people have succeeded in insulating ourselves from the effects of White racism because we taught ourselves and our children self-love and self-respect. Only after integration, when we gave our children into the hands of White teachers, was that insulation lost. Today it is Black self-hatred (a major effect of white-controlled education), that is eating away the core of our existence. Black self-hatred is proving to be worst than its progenitor, White racism. Black-on-Black crime, homicide, drug trafficking, drug use and abuse, alcoholism, truancy, juvenile delinquency, mental disorders, child abuse, spouse abuse, gang violence, family breakdown, marital break-up, teen-aged pregnancy, rape, suicide, chronic unemployment, poverty—and a host of other pathologies in the Black community can be attributed in part, directly or indirectly, to self-hate. It is, therefore,

no nest of comfort for the world to know that we cannot be racists. We have a malady that may be much worst. We have become self-haters.

We must continue our fight against White racism. We cannot permit ourselves to be distracted from that fight by the red herring of the "Black/reverse racism" myth. But we have a challenge today that may be even more urgent than that of overcoming White racism. That challenge is to get our people to love themselves again. When we are able to love ourselves again, the Jericho walls of racism, and all its effects, will inevitably crumble before the sheer force of our collective personality.

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