



WHO ARE THE RACISTS: CONSERVATIVES OR LIBERALS?

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Hardly a day goes by that someone of prominence – a politician, a talk show host, an entertainer – doesn't call some conservative – or Conservatives generally – racist.

Here are typical examples:

The Chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Congressman Steve Israel: "To a significant extent, [conservatives] are animated by racism."

TV newscaster Ed Schultz: "This is what the Republican Party stands for. . . : racism."

Oprah Winfrey: "There's a level of disrespect for the office that occurs in some cases and maybe even many cases because [the President is] African American. There's no question about that."

To call someone a racist should be a very serious matter. A racist is a person who believes that one race is inherently superior or inferior to another. It's not intelligence or goodness that determines an individual's worth; it's his or her skin color.

To say that racism is foolish and stupid – not to mention evil – is to understate the case. But, according to many of their critics, conservatives are that stupid and that evil.

But, with few exceptions, conservatives are neither. So why is the charge even made? The answer is primarily political: to maintain black support for liberals and liberal policies.

To back up this charge, the accusers point to conservative policies.

So let's examine some conservative policies to see if they are, indeed, racist.

The longstanding conservative opposition to Affirmative Action is a good place to start.

It was Democratic President, John F. Kennedy, who first used the term "affirmative action" in 1961. But Affirmative Action, in the way we think of it now, wasn't implemented until 1970, during the Administration of a Republican President, Richard Nixon. The theory was that, because of historical discrimination, blacks were at a competitive disadvantage to other races and ethnicities. To erase that disadvantage, standards that most blacks presumably couldn't meet had to be lowered.

One could make the case that this policy had some utility when it was first put in place. But that was a long time ago. The conservative position is that blacks have repeatedly proven they can compete with anyone without the benefits – demeaning benefits, I might add – of lower

standards. There are countless examples of black success in every field at every level. The policy is no longer necessary.

But the conservative argument goes further. Study after study shows that, in the case of college admissions, Affirmative Action actually hurts many blacks. By lowering admissions standards for blacks (and some other minority students), colleges set many of these students up for failure. They get placed in schools for which they're not prepared. And high black dropout rates confirm this view. So does common sense. If white students with mediocre SAT scores were admitted to Ivy League schools, they, too, would be set up to fail.

Let's do the math: Conservatives believe that blacks and other minorities are every bit as capable as whites of succeeding as policemen, firemen, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, politicians, and college students. Yet, for this belief conservatives are called racist.

The irony, of course, is that those who accuse conservatives of being racist believe that blacks and other minorities are not as capable as whites of succeeding and therefore still need Affirmative Action, almost a half century after it was first implemented.

Let's look at another issue where this contrast between conservatives and those who accuse them of being racist is even more starkly drawn -- Voter ID.

Conservatives say that America should require that every voter present an ID when he or she votes, just as European countries do in order to help keep their elections honest. Are all these democracies racist? Of course not. Yet, the accusers say that conservatives who support Voter ID are racist.

Why do they say this? Because, they argue, it's really a ruse to prevent blacks and minorities from voting, since many of them just aren't capable of acquiring an ID. Can you get more condescending than that? Let's be real. You need an ID to drive, to fly, to buy a beer, even to purchase some cold medicines. Whites can do it, but blacks can't? Tell me who the racists are again?

One more example: it's conservatives who push for school vouchers, which would allow all parents, not just wealthy ones, to choose their children's school. It's the other side that doesn't trust minority parents to select an appropriate school for their children. Why aren't the people who compel black children to stay in terrible schools the racists?

At some point, maybe you'll start asking yourself, like I did: Who's really obsessed with race? And whose policies really hurt blacks and minorities?

Maybe it's not who you think it is.

I'm Derryck Green of Project 21 for Prager University.