



# IS AMERICA RACIST?

## LARRY ELDER

Is racism still a major problem in America? President Barack Obama certainly thinks so. He said that racism is “in our DNA.” Really? If racism is in our DNA, doesn’t that mean it’s immutable, unchangeable?

But America has changed – and dramatically so. In 1960, 60% of Americans said they would never vote for a black president. Almost 50 years later, the black man who said racism is in America’s DNA was elected president, and four years later re-elected. That’s only the most obvious example of racial progress. There are many others.

Take inter-racial marriage. As William H. Frey of the Brookings Institution wrote, “Sociologists have traditionally viewed multiracial marriage as a benchmark for the ultimate stage of assimilation of a particular group into society.” Black-white marriages were still illegal in 16 states until 1967. And a 1958 Gallup poll found that only 4% of Americans approved of black-white marriages. Today that number is 87%. In 1960, of all marriages by blacks, only 1.7 percent were black-white. Today, it’s 12 percent and rising.

Now what about “racial profiling” and abuse of blacks by police? Doesn’t that prove that racism remains a major problem? In the summer of 2014, Ferguson, Missouri became ground zero for this accusation when a white policeman shot and killed an unarmed black teenager. While a Department of Justice investigation of the incident cleared the officer of any wrongdoing, it did accuse the city’s police department of racial bias.

But what was the Justice Department report’s most headline grabbing stat? The gap between the percentage of blacks living in Ferguson – 67% – and the percentage of those stopped by police for traffic violation who are black – 85%. An 18 point discrepancy.

Racism, right? Not so fast.

Blacks comprise 25% of New York City, but account for 55% of those stopped for traffic offenses – a 30-point discrepancy, far bigger than that of Ferguson. Why isn’t the NYPD, a department that is now majority minority, considered even more institutionally racist than the Ferguson PD? The answer is you cannot have an honest discussion about police conduct without an honest discussion of black crime.

Though blacks are 13% of the population, they commit 50% of the nation’s homicides, and almost always the victim is another black person, just as most white homicides are against other whites. In 2012, according to the Center for Disease Control, police killed 123 blacks, while, by the way, killing over twice that many whites. But that same year blacks killed over

6,000 people – again, mostly other blacks.

What about traffic stops? Unlike when responding to dispatch calls, police officers exercise more discretion when it comes to traffic stops. Therefore “racist” cops can have a field day when it comes to traffic stops, right?

Actually, no.

The National Institute of Justice is the research agency of the Department of Justice. In 2013, the National Institute of Justice published a study called “Race, Trust and Police Legitimacy.” Three out of four black drivers admitted that they were stopped by the police for a “legitimate reason.” Blacks, compared to whites, were on average more likely to commit speeding and other traffic offenses. The Institute wrote, “Seatbelt usage is chronically lower among black drivers. If a law enforcement agency aggressively enforces seatbelt violations, police will stop more black drivers.”

The NIJ’s conclusion? These numerical disparities result from “differences in offending” -- in other words, not because of racism.

Similarly, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration also found that blacks violate traffic laws at higher rates than whites -- in every offense, whether it’s driving without a license, not wearing a seat belt, not using a child safety seat or speeding.

Is there still racism in America? Of course, there is. But racism is not in America’s DNA. Recent history and a lot of research and data prove it.

As liberal Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson said, America, “is now the least racist white-majority society in the world; has a better record of legal protections of minorities than any other society, white or black; offers more opportunities to a greater number of black persons than any other society, including all of those of Africa.”

Patterson, by the way, is black.

I’m Larry Elder for