

“Systemic racism” based on unfortunate notion that humans lack free will

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing October 3, 2020

 Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder 

“The claim that any statistical difference between races or sexes in any arena proves the existence of systemic racism or systemic sexism is a flawed assertion.”

This Op-Ed is specifically about Lehigh County, but Gadfly is always looking for perspectives on the troubled concept of “systemic racism.”

Selections from James Largay and Paul Saunders, “Your View: Could Lehigh County’s justice system be a bastion of systemic racism?” Morning Call, October 3, 2020.

Lehigh County Controller Mark Pinsley’s op-ed — “[Lehigh] County’s proposed budget promotes systemic racism” — likely sought to provoke discussion of the county’s prison system and the district attorney’s office. Mr. Pinsley appears surprised to discover that the operation of government agencies may not satisfy his criteria for effectiveness and compassion.

Interpretations of systemic racism range from (1) believing the U.S. is a “whole system of oppression and power that produces racially disparate outcomes” rooted in capitalism to (2) “racist attitudes that allegedly persist subconsciously in our institutions and habits” [Gadfly finds this “New Segregationist” article to which the authors link to be very provocative and may come back to it.] Although we categorically reject (1), we fear that (2) exists to an unknown degree.

Mr. Pinsley makes two invalid accusations of systemic racism — with origins in collectivist thinking, as described in “Ominous Parallels” by Leonard Peikoff — against his employers, the taxpayers of Lehigh County. We find these two accusations to be based on the unfortunate notion that humans lack free will and their thoughts and actions follow an irrelevant “collective” characteristic, such as skin color or gender.

Collectivism effectively treats individual humans with minds, consciences, even souls, like the mindless physical matter of physics that makes no choices.

We believe the lowest and most morally reprehensible form of collectivist thinking is racism: treating human beings as if their skin color alone governs their thoughts and behavior. The leftist “identity politics” phenomenon that embodies such thinking dominates the racial debates corrupting our culture today.

The claim that any statistical difference between races or sexes in any arena proves the existence of systemic racism or systemic sexism is a flawed assertion. It relies on the collectivist notion that rejects the validity of the ideas of free will, individualism and free choice of behavior to be law-abiding or law-breaking.

First, Mr. Pinsley cites systemic racism to explain why poor inmates and poor families of inmates must pay for part of the cost of their incarceration with fees for inmates’ phone use and commissary purchases. Even though, whether white or black, all inmates face identical fee schedules, Mr. Pinsley concludes that certain groups pay more than other groups due to systemic racism, an illogical conclusion.

Second, Mr. Pinsley fabricates a racist agenda out of whole cloth in the district attorney’s office. He accuses Lehigh County taxpayers of systemic racism by providing prosecutors with more than twice the funding provided to public defenders, with disparate effects on different races.

Why should Lehigh County taxpayers punish themselves by increasing their own taxes to (1) pay for inmates’ prison fees and (2) subsidize expensive public defenders to keep potentially dangerous criminals at large?

Mr. Pinsley is correct to challenge management of Lehigh County government agencies. Finding things he objects to does not prove that the county’s budget priorities for its justice system promote systemic racism.