

Shelby Steele: “Blacks have never been less oppressed than they are today”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing December 30, 2020

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



“Shelby Steele believes that the use of victimization is the greatest hindrance for black Americans. In his view, white Americans see blacks as victims to ease their guilty conscience, and blacks attempt to turn their status as victims into a kind of currency that will purchase nothing of real or lasting value.”

Gadfly believes in systemic racism, believes in the need for individuals and institutions and entities to be anti-racist.

Not everybody does, of course.

And a sometime but passionate follower believes the blog needs a counter voice, suggesting prominent Black conservative Shelby Steele.

Happy to oblige.

Gadfly asks you to listen (there is video on two of the links) to Shelby Steele.

selections from Shelby Steele, “The American Dream is very much alive.” Fox Business Network, April 2, 2019.

“The American Dream is still very much alive . . . We are a free society essentially . . . based a good deal on individual initiative, effort, responsibility . . . These are the kinds of things that give you a very good



chance . . . of succeeding in a free society . . . [interviewer: You hear it all the time that somebody can be held back by their race, or their gender, or ethnicity . . . no?] . . . We live in a new age . . . I grew up in segregation . . . I know what it means to grow up in a society totally organized against your aspirations as an individual . . . I know what that’s like . . . That does not exist any longer . . . It’s not absolutely perfectly gone, but it is largely gone . . . So that today, no matter who you are, what your race is, your color, your ethnicity, etc., you can do pretty much what you want to do, what you want to work hard enough to really want to do . . . I don’t know any place in the world that offers more opportunity, more freedom, than this society . . . We convince ourselves , for all sorts of other reasons, that that’s not true . . . but as a Black American I can certainly tell you that one of the most important things I have ever understood in my life is that I am free . . . That was not the case when I grew up . . . That freedom is a very rare gift, and we need to appreciate it is the answer to all of our problems.”

selections from Charles Creitz, “Shelby Steele: Claims of ‘systemic racism’ are ‘expanding the territory of entitlement’.” Fox News, June 7, 2020.

“In order to pursue power as they [radical Blacks] do, you need victims . . . George Floyd is the archetypal victim . . . And the whole incident, his murder, is sort of a metaphor for the civil rights agenda, the grievance agenda . . . complete innocent . . . tortured to death . . . well, Wow . . . the

excitement that triggers on the left in America . . . It validates their claims that America is a wretched country . . . that they must get recourse for what's going on . . . It feeds this old model of operation that we've developed . . . that America is guilty of racism, guilty of this sin and has been for four centuries . . . and minorities are victims who are entitled . . . And so when people start to talk about systemic racism built into the system, what they are really doing is expanding the territory of entitlement . . . We want more, we want more, we want society to give us more . . . Society is responsible for us because racism is so systemic . . . That's a corruption . . . The truth of the matter is Blacks have never been less oppressed than they are today . . . Opportunity is around every corner . . . Why don't you take some responsibility . . . Why don't you take more responsibility . . . If we had the nerve, the courage, to look at Black people . . . and say 'You're not carrying your own weight . . . Are you making things happen for yourself? . . . Or are you saying I'm a victim, I'm owed.'

selections from Shelby Steele, "The Inauthenticity Behind Black Lives Matter." Wall Street Journal, November 22, 2020.

Insisting on the prevalence of "systemic racism" is a way of defending a victim-focused racial identity.

Even today, almost 60 years beyond the Civil Rights Act, groups like Black Lives Matter, along with a vast grievance industry, use America's insecure moral authority around race as an opportunity to assert themselves.

Both [whites and Blacks] need blacks to be victims. Whites need blacks they can save to prove their innocence of racism. Blacks must put themselves forward as victims the better to make their case for entitlements.

This is a corruption because it makes black suffering into a moral power to be wielded, rather than a condition to be overcome. This is the power that blacks discovered in the '60s. It gained us a War on Poverty, affirmative action, school busing, public housing and so on. But it also seduced us into turning our identity into a virtual cult of victimization—as if our persecution was our eternal flame, the deepest truth of who we are, a tragic fate we trade on.

Yet there is an elephant in the room. It is simply that we blacks aren't much victimized any more. Today we are free to build a life that won't be stunted by racial persecution. Today we are far more likely to encounter racial preferences than racial discrimination. Moreover, we live in a society that generally shows us goodwill—a society that has isolated racism as its most unforgivable sin.

Thus, for many blacks today—especially the young—there is a feeling of inauthenticity, that one is only thinly black because one isn't racially persecuted. “Systemic racism” is a term that tries to recover authenticity for a less and less convincing black identity. This racism is really more compensatory than systemic. It was invented to make up for the increasing absence of the real thing.

We don't have to fight for freedom so much any more. We have to do something more difficult—fully accept that we are free.

Steele points to Burgess Owens, Herschel Walker, Daniel Cameron, Tim Scott — speakers at the Republican National Convention — as examples of Blacks who have succeeded, defying the existence of a systemic racism ceiling.





to be continued . . .

The Bethlehem Gadfly