



# The downside of programs to end systemic racism

The Bethlehem Gadfly Community Engagement Initiative October 6, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts about the Community Engagement Initiative* 

As we saw from the previous post, Councilman Reynolds is on the agenda at City Council tonight to speak about the Community Engagement Initiative, which, as you know, Gadfly has been very excited about because of its (admittedly “audaciously ambitious”) goal of ending systemic racism.

Yay!

So Gadfly has had his antenna up for sources that would help him think about systemic racism, and he came across this Loyola article a few days ago **in a post**, and he made a note to come back to it.

Gadfly thinks it might relate to cautions Bud Hackett has been writing about in regard to actions that might result from the CEI.

The irony of trying to do good and doing the opposite.

Perhaps food for thought and comments from followers more knowledgeable in these matters than he.

*[Selections from Mario Loyola, “The New Segregationists.” National Review, August 20, 2020.](#)*

The Black Lives Matter movement, we are told, has heralded a “national reckoning” on race. Every example of racial disparities — from arrest rates to income inequality — is now proof of systemic racism, with guilt apportioned by social category, on a *cui bono* basis. That bodes ill for this reckoning, because many and perhaps most racial disparities today arise not from racial discrimination, but rather from the very policies that progressives are now insisting we need more of.

These disparate factions [of the BLM movement] have several important things in common. They want to help black people, and they think progressive policies will help. They also ignore how often those policies are the very cause of the systemic racism that they think they're fighting. And they increasingly support the frankly segregationist idea that discrimination on the basis of race is okay if it results in equity — the argument of the best-selling book *How to Be an Antiracist*. Most have only the best of intentions, but their tendency to imagine racism everywhere leaves them blind to all of the ways that progressive policies foment and entrench the very racial disparities they abhor.

Let's start with the disparities in arrest rates and police brutality. The disparities are not just real, but astonishing. According to reports from the New York Police Department, black men are arrested and prosecuted in about 60 to 70 percent of every category of violent crime, though they are just over 10 percent of the city's population. . . . It is indeed horrible that police in many cities spend most of their time chasing after suspects who are black.

Someone who is really interested in solving these problems might start by asking this question: Why are so many of our country's most crime-ridden neighborhoods black? High rates of crime and vagrancy are highly correlated with other social dysfunctions, such as dependency on welfare, low labor-force participation, and family breakdown. Of course, these are the very failures that conservatives have spent generations criticizing the welfare state for. Nicholas Eberstadt takes a hard look at those failures in his 2014 pamphlet *The Great Society at 50* and astutely notes that, if welfare policies are not the exclusive cause of the social dysfunctions of the Great Society, welfare is at the very least financing them.

This was all widely predicted at the dawn of the Great Society by, among others, one of Lyndon Johnson's assistant secretaries of labor, the future Democratic senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The 1965 Moynihan Report was particularly pessimistic in looking at the impact of welfare on families. Not only does welfare seek to protect women from having to depend on a husband, it in effect disincentivizes marriage. The report proved all too prophetic, as the proportion of black children born to unwed mothers has soared to 80 percent in the decades since.

The dysfunctions of the welfare state are well understood, at least among conservatives and some of the more courageous progressives. What is less well understood about welfare is perhaps its most reprehensible aspect: It replaced the state segregation laws of Jim Crow with an enormous federal program of segregation, albeit one that is indirect and unwitting.

Welfare benefits set the bait, luring the lowest-skilled part of the labor force away from jobs, forcing children into single-parent homes, and depriving millions of adults of the greatest vehicle of upward social mobility available to them: the workplace.

By virtually every measure of human welfare (except perhaps the government's official poverty rate), American society has made enormous gains since the 1960s, and that includes blacks. Though the main driver has been America's amazing economic growth over the last half century, the anti-poverty programs and — more important — the civil-rights movement have certainly contributed to a more equitable distribution of gains. Yet, as Thomas Sowell has pointed out, black household incomes rose more in the decades before the Great Society programs than they have since.

At the creation of these programs, Lyndon Johnson made clear that the purpose of welfare was “not to make the poor more secure in their poverty but to reach down and to help them lift themselves out of the ruts of poverty.” To the extent the Great Society was meant to enhance upward social mobility, it has not only abjectly failed, it has accomplished the opposite. In fact it pays to accomplish the opposite: The U.S. spends more per capita on social welfare than any country in the socialist paradise of Scandinavia, a solution that creates the very problem that it is supposed to solve.

Because families that depend on welfare tend to remain on it for generations, tend to live in government-sponsored affordable housing, and tend to stay out of the productive economy except as consumers, one little-noticed consequence of welfare is the long-term segregation of the poor. And because poor people tend to be disproportionately black, the chief victims of this insidious new segregation are black. If the civil-rights movement triumphed in ending many racist practices, including

the discrimination in housing that had kept blacks marginalized for generations, the new welfare programs often cut the other way.

It is a stark reminder of the dangers of judging policies by their intentions rather than their results. This is how Democrats, though perhaps with the best of intentions, keep blacks in a state of *political* dependency — dependent on the benevolence and charity of affluent whites who live somewhere else, a dark and shameful tradition that has survived in one form or another for more than 200 years.