

Is the United States a Racist Nation?

by Phillip W. Weiss

Officially, the United States is not a racist nation. Nowhere does the United States Constitution limit or deny legal rights to anyone based on race or ethnicity. Yet, in the United States today, the status of race relations is a far from settled matter. In 1896, in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the United States Supreme Court affirmed, by a seven to one majority, the constitutionality of laws designed to achieve racial segregation. Fifty-eight years later in 1954, in the case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the same Supreme Court, albeit with different justices, ruled, in a unanimous decision, that the segregation of a public school system violated the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment of the United States Constitution and therefore was unconstitutional.¹ Thus, the same judicial body adjudicating the same issue governed by the same constitutional amendment arrived at two different conclusions. This is indicative of the confusion that surrounds the question of race.

Racial segregation still exists in the United States today. According to a published report, scores of colleges in the United States have segregated spaces for blacks. A 2019 National Association of Scholars' study stated, "About 46 percent (80 colleges out of 173 surveyed) segregate student orientation

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¹ Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

programs; 43 percent (75 colleges out of the total) offer segregated residential arrangements; and 72 percent (125 colleges out of the total) segregate graduation ceremonies.” According to another published report, a prominent Russian politician has called on the United States to employ racial segregation as a solution to the race problem. According to this report,

Nationalist politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia in the State Duma, or parliament, argued that the United States should resort to racial segregation, splitting up into “Black” and “White” states. Zhirinovsky is known for being outrageous. But, far from being ridiculed, his obscenely racist suggestion garnered coverage in the Kremlin-controlled state media, as well as support from a fellow parliamentarian.²

At the United Nations, both Russia and China have accused the United States of condoning racism. According to a published report,

Russia's envoy accused the United States of ignoring racism for decades, and derided a "calamitous state of human rights" in the U.S. China's representative said his country was “saddened and shocked” by Floyd's death, saying it wasn't an isolated case and one that exposed “chronic and deep-rooted racial discrimination” in the United States.³

Thus, despite the *Brown* decision outlawing racial segregation, college campuses are opting for racial segregation, at least one major Russian politician is publicly advocating racial segregation as a legitimate method to solve America's race problem, and powerful nations are questioning the commitment of the United States to human rights. Is the United States, then, a racist nation?

² <https://www.dailywire.com/news/seattle-autonomous-zone-creates-black-only-segregated-area>

³ <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-06-17/us-admits-flaws-as-un-human-rights-body-set-to-debate-racism>

Since the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, race relations in the United States have been in turmoil. Some have directly accused the United States of being a racist nation that does not afford persons of color fair treatment. The passage of laws that outlaw racial discrimination seems to have had little if any effect on easing the anger or cynicism over perceived racial injustice or improving relations between the races. Indeed, despite these laws the United States has become MORE SEGREGATED. In the United States in 2010, blacks comprised 12.3 percent of the population. However, in 2017, 58 percent of black students were enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools with at least 75 percent minority enrollment; the figure was 60 percent for Hispanic students. In 2010, the populations of ten cities in the United States with 100,000 or more populations were at least 55.4 percent black; the population of Detroit, Michigan, alone was 82.7 percent black. These statistics give cause to consider whether current laws governing race relations need to be revised. Current demographic trends seem to suggest that present policies governing race relations are not working and could be making the situation worse.

However, if race relations in the United States are deteriorating and the American people hopelessly racist, then how can we explain the election of Barack Obama, the reverence paid to Michael Jordan, the cheers directed to Willie Mays, the honors bestowed upon Jackie Robinson, and the homage paid to Mohammed Ali, all black men who earned and commanded the respect and adulation of the ENTIRE nation? How can we explain President Truman's decision to desegregate the armed forces in 1947, President Eisenhower's decision to

order troops to Arkansas in 1959 to enforce an order to desegregate, President Lyndon Johnson's support for civil rights, the sadness and grief of an ENTIRE nation at the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the numerous acts of friendship people of all races extend to each other? How can we explain the actions of all the persons of color who defended this nation during time of war and whose remains are buried with honor at military and civilian cemeteries throughout the country? How can we explain how white AND black persons fought to end slavery and preserved the union? How can we explain President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address? How can we explain the accolades afforded to Jesse Owens? How can we explain how the United States allied itself with the Soviet Union and not Nazi Germany during World War Two? How can we explain all of that and still conclude that the country is racist? Yes, race relations are still a far from settled problem. There is room for improvement. Incidents still occur that appall the nation and give cause to question the very principles upon which our nation is founded. It is at those moments when the character of the American people is put to the test. Today we are living through one those moments. As we, as one nation, continue to work through this latest crisis, let our actions and decisions be guided by those lofty words contained in the pledge of allegiance: "One nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."⁴

Sources:

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⁴ Original text of the Pledge of Allegiance: "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." <https://www.reference.com/world-view/words-pledge-allegiance-e536ecbdd961b3e0>

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