

The Objective Standard

Reason, Egoism, and Capitalism

Smith College President Says “All Lives Matter”; Racist Left Goes Ballistic

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Wishing to show solidarity with students protesting the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, Smith College President Kathleen McCartney sent an email to students stating, “All Lives Matter,” as Chris Lindahl [reports](#) for the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*. McCartney further urged everyone on campus to “work for equality and justice.”

Various students proceeded to criticize McCartney for her phrasing. Her sin? She said “all lives matter” rather than “black lives matter.” As Lindahl summarizes, among the complaints from students was, “while all lives matter, it is not the value of all lives that is being called into question, it is specifically black lives.”

But that criticism makes no sense; conceptually, “all lives” encompasses “black lives.” The complaint against McCartney boils down to the fact that she did not use specifically racial language in calling for equal justice.

Nevertheless, McCartney quickly capitulated. Lindahl reports:

McCartney sent a second email expressing regret that she was unaware the phrase “all lives matter” was used by some on social media as a counter to the “#BlackLivesMatter” movement protesting the grand jury decisions not to indict police officers in the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner.

Aside from the fact that McCartney clearly did not intend to refer to other social media campaigns, it remains the case that “all lives matter” and that white police officers too deserve equal justice under the law. That saying as much is today deemed controversial in some quarters points to the racism of the left.

The presumption that a white police officer is always in the wrong, whereas any black man the officer confronts is always in the right, is racist, pure and simple. It is just as racist as the presumption that a white police officer is always in the right and that a black man he confronts is always in the wrong. Clearly, justice demands that individuals in a given case be judged by their actions, not by the color of their skin.

Regarding the two cases in question, in my estimation, [video](#) of Garner's death clearly shows police officers using excessive force. That they used such force in the case of a man allegedly [selling cigarettes](#) illegally—as Garner is accused of doing—is unconscionable. If the officers in question should have been criminally charged—and I think they should have been—it is not because they are white and Garner is black, it is because they violated Garner's rights by using excessive force. The facts in Brown's case are less clear, but Brown apparently attempted to take the officer's gun and, according to at least some witnesses, charged the officer. Absent compelling evidence that an officer acted wrongly, he should not be charged; all people, regardless of the color of their skin, properly are presumed innocent until proven guilty under criminal law. (Requiring officers to wear body cameras would help more clearly establish the facts in such cases, but that's a topic for another day.)

Regarding the [claim](#) of one Smith College student that only black lives “are being targeted for police brutality,” that is simply false. As a matter of raw numbers, from 1999 to 2011, “2,151 whites died by being shot by police compared to 1,130 blacks,” the *Tampa Bay Times* [reports](#). Most of these cases involved perpetrators endangering the officers in question, and in such cases the police response was justified. The fact that blacks statistically are more likely than whites (relative to overall populations) to be killed by police officers does not indicate widespread racism; as the *Times* reports, blacks statistically are also far more likely to have a felony conviction. The notion that such matters can be evaluated by some sort of racial quota system is, again, flagrantly racist.

It is also not true that cases of police abuse involve only black victims. The Cato Institute's [PoliceMisconduct.net](#) tells the stories of victims of all races. The *fundamental* problem in this context is not that white police officers sometimes violate the rights of black people; it is that some police officers (of whatever race) sometimes violate the rights of some *individuals* (of whatever race).

Throughout much of America's history, many of the worst police abuses were indeed racially motivated, and today a small fraction of officers continue to violate people's rights out of racial bigotry. But the solution to such problems is not to presume white officers guilty and the black men they confront blameless, nor to focus only on black victims of police abuse; rather, the solution is to demand justice for each *individual*, as judged by the relevant *facts* of a given case. Because all lives matter.