



No, whites do not face discrimination en masse today

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November 13, 2017

A recent poll conducted by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Harvard's School of Public Health found that a majority of white Americans, 55 percent, feel there is discrimination against them in today's world. Smaller percentages are able to pinpoint a specific example where they were personally discriminated against, for instance, when applying to jobs or being considered for promotions.

The idea of anti-white discrimination is not just untrue, it is spectacularly wrong. Whites are overrepresented in pretty much every area of life – government, media, academia, and the corporate world are all filled with white people. There are some professions where minorities have more representation, such as professional sports, but these are extreme and rare exceptions to the rule. It's tempting to chalk the belief in white discrimination up to the grievance politics of political correctness in the last several decades, but this anti-white fear goes much deeper than that. This belief in anti-white discrimination runs deep in American history.

Emily Ekins, a research fellow and pollster at the Cato Institute, recently released an extensive report on the state of free speech and political expression. There are many telling things about the report: For one, about 58 percent of people feel that political correctness prevents them from expressing their beliefs. Along this same line, 73 percent of Republicans have felt the need to self-censor.

This fear on the part of conservatives is fed by a sense that conservative opinions, particularly those of straight, white men, are being marginalized on college campuses. It's no secret that college campuses are overwhelmingly liberal, as roughly nine percent of faculty members identify as either conservative or very conservative. There have been some egregious cases of academic malfeasance at places like Middlebury College and University of California, Berkeley, among others. This doesn't mean there is an actual bias against straight, white men, but given man's propensity for tribalism, it can definitely feed the perception of one.

But this charge of reverse discrimination has deep roots in American history – it goes beyond the left-behind feeling of white voters that fed the popularity of Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Fears of black domination or forced equality have fed white opposition to racial progress over the past 150 years.

Resistance to Reconstruction in the aftermath of the Civil War was rooted in the "racist folklore of reverse discrimination," according to Ibram Kendi, author of *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. Even President Andrew Johnson vetoed the

Civil Rights Act of 1866 on the grounds that providing equal opportunity to black people would somehow lead discrimination against whites.

One-hundred years later, opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was driven by fear that African-Americans would be given preferential treatment at the expense of white Americans. In the early years of the Kennedy administration, one of the major civil rights debates focused on whether victims of discrimination deserved reparations. This informed the debate over the Civil Rights Act, as supporters soothed opponents' fears of quotas and other types of preferential treatment, assuring them that the bill merely sought to eliminate discrimination against minorities, not attempt to set past injustices right.

The case for reparations is still a long way from being a mainstream position in American politics, even though The Atlantic's Ta Nehisi-Coates wrote an impassioned and epic argument in favor of them in 2014, which has paved the way for a conversation about it. While life for minorities is certainly better today than it was in the 1950s, progress has been idling by slowly, and we cannot pretend that the playing field is currently level. There is still a significant wealth gap between white Americans and African-Americans that can be directly tied to housing discrimination in the 20th century. A group of sociologists recently found that since 1989 whites receive on average 36 percent more callbacks from job applications than African-Americans.

Conservatives often argue that racial inequities present today cannot be attributed to discrimination. This ignores more than a century of discriminatory policy in housing, policing, and education at the federal and state level. As economic historian Robert Higgs highlights in his book *Competition and Coercion: Blacks in the American Economy, 1865-1914*, assuming that black wealth in 1865 was one-fourth that of white wealth, erasing the racial wealth gap in 50 years would have required black income per capita to increase tenfold — a growth rate of 5 percent annually compounded. This is unlikely growth even in favorable conditions, let alone conditions of omnipresent discrimination that lasted for decades afterward. White wealth was also not stagnating in these times.

The success of Donald Trump has crystallized the idea that working-class whites have felt marginalized and forgotten over the last several decades by policymakers. But this feeling of discrimination against whites is a phenomenon with deep roots in the ugliest side of American history. This is not to suggest that those white people who report feeling discriminated against today are in any way on the same moral plane as whites in Reconstruction or in Jim Crow. But it does minimize the suffering of those people who had to live in fear of being murdered by an angry mob.