

# Race remains a topic that's too hot to touch

This is Black History Month, so what better time to talk about race in America?

At least, you'd think so. But most non-minority columnists won't touch the issue. Racism and bigotry are so repulsive to sane people that the threat of being accused of either is enough to make you run frantically for the shelter of a safer topic. We'd rather write under the headline "Which breed of dog tastes best?" before we'd ever talk about race.

But as an outsider looking in, and as someone who wants to do the right thing, I'm worried. Very, very worried.

I'm worried because the ideal of America as a color-blind society, where race doesn't matter nearly as much as the content of your character, is simply not talked about any more. It's a relic of the '60s, a dead idea that only the most ignorant and foolhardy cling to.

It has been driven off stage by academics and intellectuals, both black and white, who wish instead to emphasize the separateness and distinctiveness of black culture. When combined with an enthusiasm for a bloated welfare state, monopoly schooling, and interest-group politics, the resulting mix is toxic. It is poison for the American body politic.

For example, it's now considered respectable to claim that black culture treats time differently, and that black kids should be treated differently from white kids if they are late to class.

One highly credentialed diversity "expert" profiled on Showtime actually adopts a German accent in his seminars when pointing at a black student who is pretending to have shown up late. The implication is clear: If you insist on punctuality, you're a Nazi.

Culture-centrism is bursting with bad ideas: Classrooms should have more group work in all subjects, because black culture is more collaborative. Whites only believe in the material world. The legacy of slavery is primarily responsible for black problems. America is racist and sexist. White males enjoy privileges in America simply because they are white and male, obtaining those privileges at the expense of blacks. The list goes on and on.

All these views are very easy to find in the literature, in seminars and academic conferences, even in a town as supposedly con-



OPINION

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There are so many things wrong with these ideas it would take a book to list them all. (Indeed, a few have, although they aren't exactly best sellers on the "race in America" circuit.) But what bothers me most is how much they contrast with the idea of America as a melting pot, a unified society, and yes, even a color-blind one, where it is your character and your ability that matter most.

If we continue this downward slide, it is but one small step into the abyss of abysmal black power

movements, those that embrace a mythology that is historically inaccurate, scientifically incorrect, and an embarrassment to thoughtful people everywhere. Visit [www.blackconsciousness.com](http://www.blackconsciousness.com) to get a hint of what we are at risk for. When I attended a national conference of skeptics and critical thinkers a couple of weeks ago, I counted two black faces out of more than 800 attendees. Am I worried? You bet I am.

Fortunately, there are African-American voices trying to stem the tide. Some are regularly featured on these pages. You might also recall Bill Cosby speaking out a few months ago, and how he was vilified for his efforts. There's only one thing tougher than being a minority, and that's being a minority among your peers.

But such people are exactly the ones who know best what is at stake. They are the ones fighting hardest to turn things around. They know that culture isn't everything, that certain values are universal, that freedom and responsibility matter, and that the dominant cultural view isn't always the correct one.

I learned last week of two such people who are bringing about radical positive change in their community. Sadly, you won't find Black History Month posters of them on the walls of school classrooms any time soon, despite their being people of extraordinary talent and accomplishment who happen to be African-American.

So for my next column during Black History Month, we'll learn more about who they are and why they matter. See you in two weeks.

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