

RACISM

*Today's Euphemism for
'Unequal' Self-Worth*

On Leveling the 'Playing Field' Within



ADAM ABRAHAM

RACISM: TODAY'S EUPHEMISM FOR 'UNEQUAL'
SELF-WORTH — On Leveling the 'Playing Field' Within
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“He who seeks or
demands equality
anywhere other than
within and of himself,
will never find it. Yet,
it is ever-present,
awaiting the choice.”

—Adam Abraham

SPECIAL DEDICATION

This essay is dedicated to every man, woman, and child who thinks that the power to enhance or hinder his or her life rests in the opinions or actions of someone else.

RACISM: TODAY'S EUPHEMISM FOR
'UNEQUAL' SELF-WORTH

ON LEVELING THE 'PLAYING FIELD' WITHIN

BY ADAM ABRAHAM

“Today, as it relates to recent equality initiatives, the racism rationale is oftentimes both hollow and specious. Fear and expectation of mass racial regression are no longer the real reason behind opponents’ arguments. It’s deeper, and sadder than that.”



A political storm rages over the rising public interest in what might be termed, “equality” initiatives. The first winds began blowing in 1996 when California voters passed Proposition 209. The law prohibited the state from “discriminating against, or granting preferential treatment to *any* individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting”. It prompted Jesse Jackson, who vehemently opposed the measure, to write, “We must act now to turn back the radical re-segregation of America!” (*Black News Today*, October 20,

1997.) He declared that the ramifications *will* have – not *may* have – “devastating effects” nationwide. He further went on to demand that President Clinton enforce federal laws that “guarantee equal access to all Americans!”

Today, an initiative that seeks to do what Mr. Jackson was demanding awaits the voice of the California electorate at the October 7 recall election. Proposition 54 is a bold step toward ensuring that the state does indeed guarantee equal access to all Californians. With certain exemptions, it will prohibit the state from collecting race data by eliminating the race and ethnicity boxes that have both served, and *disserved* us so well.

Mr. Jackson and supporters of his way of thinking would most likely not approve.

Opponents of equality initiatives are quick to predict dire consequences if they are adopted into law. When their arguments against the equal application of law are broken down, and the holes in their logic are exposed, there is one “failsafe” that opponents can, and often will fall back on: racism. At one time, simply uttering the word was enough to stop all conversation, cold. Today, as it relates to recent equality initiatives, the racism rationale is oftentimes both hollow and specious. Fear and expectation of mass racial regression are no longer the real reason behind opponents’ arguments. It’s deeper, and sadder than that.

Racism surely does exist in America. It *is* a problem for our country. However, it does not manifest nearly as much *in the form* that we are so obsessively “on guard” for, which is the racism of white people *against* black people. The most open and, from all appearances, socially acceptable “carriers” of what would normally be

thought of as racist attitudes and behavior, are black folk. While they often direct racist attitudes and behavior toward whites, "black-on-black" racism is more frequent and acceptable. But that's not the topper.

The most prevalent form of racism is *self*-racism, and it can be exhibited by anyone. It is the hardest to pin down because someone or something *else* is generally blamed as the cause of one's problem. In a self-racist's mind, someone else will have to change in order to affect a cure. The self-racist need do nothing. He doesn't see himself as needing to, or able to rise up and overcome "the problem". "If only that *other* person or system would change for *us!*" "If only *they* would allow *us* to be *us!*" "If only this (or that) law was shaded more in *our* favor!"

Racism is not smart. Never has been. When the racist is white, which the only ones that count are all assumed to be, we're quick to point out how buffoonish it is to be racist. White people are often accused of being closet, if not open racists, but blacks (1) can be racist with no accountability or consequence, or (2) can't be racists at all because they have no power. Therefore, since black folk often see themselves as *de facto* victims, they expect to get an "accountability waiver" for their racist beliefs. Then, when doors of opportunity actually open wide for them, the self-racist ones will elect not to enter. If they do enter, they tend to under-prepare, under-perform, under-achieve, blame someone else, and drop out... angry and resentful. However, the anger and resentment was present throughout the experience. Self-racism and dissatisfaction are constant companions, and go hand-in-hand.

Academic ‘Admixturing’

In this milieu we have diversity recruiters at major colleges seeking more participation by chronic (i.e., self-racist) under-achieving students who, if it were not for their skin tone and ethnicity, would be marginally acceptable academically. Looking askance at their lower than norm scores on entrance exams and lack of compensatory evidence of drive and determination, all manner of incentives, concessions, and guarantees are presented. Under these circumstances why should any student change their attitude, beliefs, or behavior with so many special *disincentives* in place for them?

Under-achievers will continue to under-achieve as long as their self-racist beliefs persist. Society continues to tell them that it is okay. College admissions administrators would rather jury-rig the system and have special standards for self-racist students than set a common *high* standard that all properly motivated students can reach, hold firm to it, and apply it to *everyone*. They can still recruit black and Hispanic students, but tell them that they can compete on equal terms, and that places will be there for them when they demonstrate they want to attend college by meeting entrance standards. Then everyone, from family, teachers, friends, and community, must *raise* their standards, and encourage the students to do likewise.

The doors of opportunity that we close by harboring angry, stereotypical attitudes toward whites and others will stay that way, no matter how open they remain to “our kind”. Any link between our beliefs and resulting experience will always be easy to deny, especially when we don’t like the results. Nonetheless, it is in this incalculable zone, in one’s perception of *self*, where the very real problem of racism lies... as well as its solution.

Political Paradox: 'Fighters for Equality' Who Oppose Equality Measures

The vast majority of opponents to equality measures are “people of color”. The term is a euphemism referring to a group that predominantly includes persons of black and Hispanic ethnicity and culture. The rest of those who tend to oppose changing the current inequities in political and government practice are made up of well-meaning sympathizers and supporters, as well as the people who make a living from “servicing” their pain. Although he is considered a “person of color”, Mr. Jackson is more so a member of the last group. At the core of their dissidence is the lingering and persistent state of comparative *inequality* that can so easily and consistently be “drawn” along racial and ethnic lines.

From property ownership and income, to job status, technology awareness and use, and educational achievement, a disturbing “gap” appears so consistently along racial lines, that equality measure opponents tell anyone who will listen that it can't be time for the state to constitutionally “level the playing field” that, for so long, they've complained wasn't level.

Today activists argue to *maintain* the “advantage” in preferential hiring practices, lowered academic performance expectations, and other forms of participation guarantees, that their lagging groups appear to enjoy, unfair though it may be. These discriminatory measures are deemed necessary because people who are in the uncomfortable state of being chronically behind, are not “catching up” fast enough on their own. However, the problem cannot be laid entirely on “the system.” Today the system – federal government, state run agencies, etc. – contributes to the *status quo* only to the extent that it continues to divide Americans into subgroups,

then serves as an arbiter between them. Today, some Americans are still declaring themselves to be “un-equals”.

Taking the State Out of the Race Information Business

In doing away with race-related information gathering, Proposition 54 removes one contributory element to the problem: i.e., the state inappropriately being a facilitator rivalries between it citizens, on racial, ethnic, or cultural basis, for its services. But that would only be a beginning.

The disturbing gaps in racial and ethnic academic performance, prosperity, and crime levels, will not be solved by the passage of equalization laws. However, the journey to racial normalcy can begin there. This is a revolution that in fact, won't be televised, for it happens in a very private place, *between* the synapse responses of the brain, in the immeasurable dimensions of one's mind, heart, and soul.

Change will come quietly and without fanfare, through interaction and personal introspection, as each person gives up his or her racist ways, comes to terms with a grander sense of self in general, and in particular, *self-worth*.

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The Value of Self-Worth and Transits of Truth

The question of self-worth is not a problem unique to people of color. It is a normal human issue, born of the natural tendency to compare and contrast ourselves as well as to *compete* with other people. In making comparisons and seeing contrast, we come to conclusions about who we are, and our interests and capabilities. We make conclusions about our passions and fears, opportunities and danger, our friends, and enemies. These conclusions influence our willingness to compete, the pursuits we choose, and whether we think we can succeed at them. Our beliefs about our chances for success at what we do influences how real our commitment will be, how determined our effort, and how sincere our willingness to change our methods in order to actually reach the goal.

Once made, a conclusion can be hard to change, for we will have “invested” in it with our beliefs, which are formed from our “operating truths”. Yet, the truths that support our conclusions and beliefs about life and people may be subject to change. While at one time in our life a conclusion may actually have been true, it may also become untrue over time. How many people swore, years ago, that America would *never* elect a black or woman president? While it still hasn't happened, this conclusion is no longer considered unassailable. This truth has transited in time, and most Americans have indeed adjusted their beliefs to embrace it.

Unless an individual remains conscious of the dynamics and changes in their environment and relationships over the course of his or her life, outmoded “truths” will remain fully operational in their mind, coloring their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors... and sense of self-worth. Outmoded truths can influence what we apply

our best attention and energies to, and what we consider unimportant, often with grave consequences.

When High Hopes and Low Expectations Meet

We see the consequences of outmoded truths operating in too many black children today. An inordinate number wants to grow up to become glamour professionals such as doctors, lawyers, professional athletes, and entertainers. They want to drive the best cars, and be admitted to, and graduate from the *best* colleges and universities. This is all pretty normal. However, they've been told that they are still holding the short end of the stick, and that they are disadvantaged, and that because they don't have as much money as people of another color, they'll have a harder time, and *need* more help. Children don't argue with such points when adults consistently give them the same message. They dutifully embrace, and then live these very unsatisfying "truths" as their lives.

There's nothing wrong with wanting the best. The problem is setting children up to *expect* to need breaks and concessions due to their race. If they don't get them, their already fragile hopes are dashed. However, if a child's hopes are indeed fragile, he or she won't get far even with racial breaks and concessions. That's what is happening now. The odds will favor those who do not expect to get racial concessions in life because they believe in, and rely on self. They do not define their lives by the presence or absence of an external advantage. We don't have to look to Asian cultures for examples of this principle. Secretary of State Colin Powell and J. Bruce Llewellyn, CEO of Philadelphia Coca Cola Bottling Company, the largest "black-owned" business in America, are both offspring of Jamaican parents. They were both taught to be the best *humans* they can be.

In a *Wall Street Journal* article, Mr. Llewellyn said, “The first business I ever owned was a liquor store. It taught me to watch the books, pay everybody on time and not to think of yourself as a black businessman. I’m a businessman, that’s all.”

The odds are against those who expect preferential treatment simply due to their racial/ethnic background while not expecting to demonstrate a level of academic or professional worthiness that is equal to that of others — even though they did meet performance standards — who were unfairly displaced.

Diversity Chefs Stir the Melting Pot

Then there are the students from predominantly black and Hispanic families, who are recruited for the “diversity dividend” that they are believed to add to major colleges. Their best interests are not being served by the present approach. There was great hope that this might be changed, in 2003, with two cases that were brought before the U.S. Supreme Court involving the admissions practices at the University of Michigan undergraduate and law schools. The cases were important beyond Ann Arbor, because many major universities give varying levels of “extra credit” to prospective students in order to reach diversity goals, which are not to be confused with racial quotas.

In the end, the High Court put a fig leaf on the emperor of race, stating, in *Grutter v. Bollinger* that a student’s race remains a compelling factor for consideration in the admission process. Here’s a bulletin. Going to a race-neutral policy, whether we’re speaking of government or university admissions, will not make “races” disappear. Being “color-blind” does not mean that everyone turns into the same shade of gray. Everyone will still be who and what he or

she is. However, they will be treated with the same level of respect, and given equal access to quality resources. With unbiased policies and systems in place, each student or job applicant will have to decide to reveal and exercise *the best* of “who they are.” Right now, that is the missing element, as the light of hope is often dimmed in many black and Hispanic students before they ever learn what a college is.

By the time black and Hispanic under-achievers do learn about college, they have already become “comfortable” with a very different, academically incongruent, way of living. When the college recruiters come wooing, they beckon these socially disaffected students to enter an alien world. With little preparation for the social and academic environment they are entering, they become so prone to clustering on campus that ethnicity specific mixers, events, homecomings, and graduation ceremonies have become the latest racist trend. Even if white students want to “mix and mingle” with them, they can’t if their gestures of friendship are not accepted. From the sales of “hip-hop” and “rap” music by impressionable white kids, and jazz among adults, it’s pretty clear that there’s a genuine interest in connecting with ethnic cultures.

Voluntary self-segregation is not exactly the great “melting pot” that everyone envisioned. Yet, no one who supports this diversity approach sees anything wrong with it. Neither the parents of these students, nor their primary and secondary school teachers have taught them to see otherwise. School administrators, desperate to have black and brown faces on campus to justify their own diversity bragging rights, put on glad faces, and console themselves that their campuses have better “representation.” Don’t ask them about scholastic achievement.

In another part of the education spectrum, historically black colleges face extinction by not offering diverse, well-rounded, high quality educational programs that welcome *all* students regardless of color, while honoring, but not resting on race-related laurels. In a way of speaking, they take a measure of pride in maintaining a more monochromatic racial environment. If administrators of a “historically white” college ever thought of creating a similar place, there would be hell to pay. Racism is not smart, for *anyone*, especially on a college campus. If students at a predominantly white college or university would benefit from diversity, and if that college is a healthier place, then students at a predominantly black college or university would benefit from diversity too.

‘Bad Ass’ and ‘Pregfare’

There are far too many young black men, academically disinterested and unmotivated, and with no cultivated skills, who are herding themselves out of school and into the life of the *bad ass*. They enter gangs, drug dealing and trafficking, robbery, assault, vandalism, and murder, and wind up in our overflowing prisons, or in graves. “Status” for them is in being the best *thug* they can be.

There are far too many young black women, also academically disinterested and unmotivated, and with no cultivated skills, who are herding themselves into teen pregnancies, drug dependency, prostitution and the sex industry, or a miserable welfare life. Their dreams aren’t even unrequited, because they have no worthwhile dreams in the first place. They have not been encouraged to dream worthwhile dreams that *they* can turn into reality in their lifetimes.

Many who aimed higher than these groups still find themselves among the vast under-employed, even though unprecedented opportuni-

ties often go wanting for interested and willing people with the right knowledge and skills. Contrary to what social scientists would say, it's not about discrimination and race. It is about self-worth.

Setting One's Self-Worth to 'Equal'

When self-worth is firmly set in one's mind and heart to *equal*, preferential treatment would not be expected. *Equal* self-worth would oblige one to only require *equal* opportunity and access, and an equal chance to demonstrate one's worthiness to assume and carry out a task or responsibility. Equality is the principle that made the civil rights movement a moral one, for it did not seek to take anything away from those who had full use of their freedom. It only sought to extend said fullness to *all* citizens by removing the racist institutional support systems. The support systems have yet to be removed.

Before the civil rights movement, opportunity and access was anything but "equal" for black people. The tables were eventually turned, and the roles of "privilege" were reversed. But for many, self-worth did not change. Even with the "advantage," the majority of the victims of that day and time still see themselves as victims.

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It's All In How We See Ourselves

People who don't see themselves as equals to others where it counts – neither superior *nor* inferior – will not experience a satisfying change in the quality of their life. This truth will persist irrespective of how much money, property, or how many college degrees we have versus someone else. Quality of life is a matter of how much health, joy, peace, love, and satisfaction we're experiencing each moment of every day. The latter items are available to all, whether they are billionaires, or homeless. Exemplifying the best qualities of life can turn a dire life into one that is sublime.

Equal self-worth obliges individuals to set goals and apply him or herself to the *best* of their ability, unconditionally. Instead of “herding” into certain fields – that don't require higher academic knowledge or skills – simply because other blacks have proven successful, equal self-worth would stimulate their interest in other fields such as physics, mathematics, astronomy, and invention. It would also motivate them to *enter* said fields. Being “the only speck on the page” would not be an issue as long as one's own genuine interest was behind the choice.

Equal self-worth would motivate an individual to *respect*, meet and exceed *all* standards of entry, just like motivated people of other groups who have already done so. A person with equal self-worth would not be satisfied being perceived as unable to perform to standard. The only true way to prove their worthiness is to have a common standard.

Here's an interesting thought: suppose Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe were only required to run 95 meters against the competition and be credited with 100 meter dash in 1936 because they were black?

Equal treatment works for everyone. They would not be so quick to assume that someone else's success came at the expense of their own potential. They would create options, and know that they have many ways to get where they want to go in life. But you won't hear many equality measure opponents arguing this point-of-view.

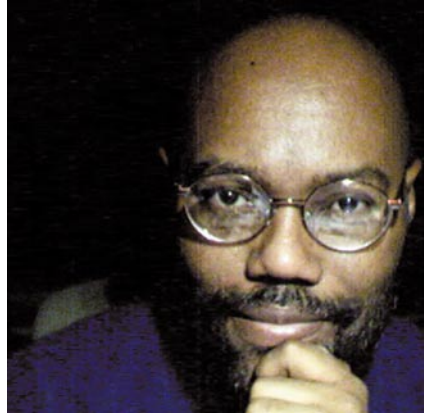
No one can ever know how *equal* another person's self-worth is. We can only know our own. In fact, we can tell others that our self-worth is already equal, and not even believe it ourselves. The real indicator that equal self-worth is indeed active is the presence of passion, belief in a personal dream, and a willingness and determination to pursue the dream, irrespective of the obstacles that we *will* encounter.

In other words, one who has equal self-worth is equal to the task that he or she has adopted in mind, which defines and represents their idea of a wonderful and desirable life to live. If we are not taking conscious, active steps at creating that life, then our self-worth is not set on equal, and we'll have an entire arsenal of plausible excuses available to assuage our restless mind and spirit. It's time to get real with ourselves and with each other. We can live with a government that treats us as equal citizens, if we see, and treat ourselves as such, each day. ✓

A Breath of 'Fresh Thought!'

Author Profile: Adam Abraham

Adam Abraham's essays speak quietly, but carry *big* meaning. The Chicago-native's works have appeared on the Internet (www.interracialvoice.com) and several print newspapers, without much fanfare. But that distinction will be short-lived



because, if you're looking to make real changes in your life, his perception challenging words of encouragement and wisdom will tend to stay on your mind.

While change is a subject we all know something about, the quest toward *conscious* change is what drives Adam. Transformation is the central theme of his writings. He presents a persuasive, though not yet widely popular, case for the notion that:

- each human being is the “creator” of his or her reality,
- that there are *universal* “laws” that govern the real quality of our lives, and
- that said laws apply to everyone, *equally*.

What is not “equal,” is our awareness and understanding.

The good news, according to Adam, is that the power of understanding and *positive* change, is available to *all* who sincerely seek it.

This message is currently being brought home to a growing reading audience through two books that are currently, or soon to be available.

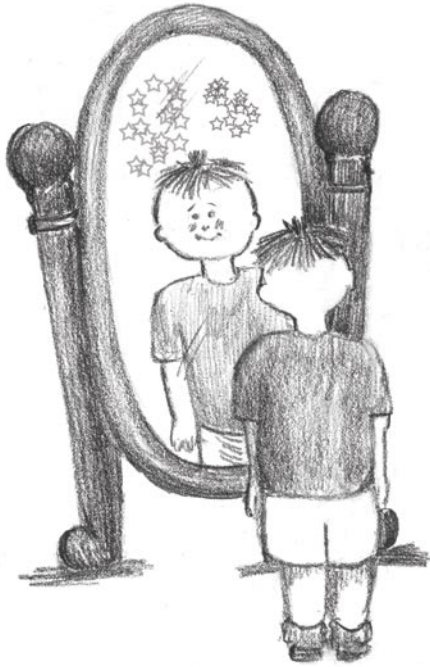
I Am My Body, NOT! (ISBN 0970020910 \$19.95 available now) introduces youngsters ages 4-12, to the workings of the human body, while delivering the “Zen-esque” message that we are not our physical form. Beyond the biology, the book instills character, hope, honor, and vision to still developing minds. It also affirms, in a manner that respects the wide range of religious beliefs, an existence that continues after the death of the body.

A Freed Man: An Emancipation Proclamation (ISBN 0970020902 \$17.95 available on special order) exhorts readers to dream wonderfully, else suffer the consequences of a life *under-lived*. This 304-page work examines the individual and collective psychology behind many major social events, including:

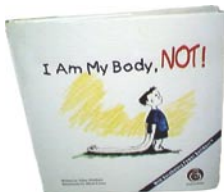
- Contrasting approaches of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Power movement
- Oklahoma City Bombing
- Capitalism and democracy
- Rodney King Beating
- The true meaning of wealth, and how to gain it
- The tragedy of September 11, 2001

National distribution and book tours are still in the works for Abraham, who is also the books’ publisher. For now, Adam Abraham’s fresh thoughts are available online at www.phaelos.com.

Discover the Magic of Being *You*



Phaelos Books invites you to take an active role in the growth of a phenomenon... *you!* Purchase your copy of *I Am My Body, NOT!* by Adam Abraham. Make it a gift to a child you love... *gift* it to a school... stock it in the library... help youngsters believe in their personal magic... and change *history*.



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P.O. Box 900056 | San Diego, CA 92190-0056 | info@phaelos.com

“It doesn’t matter how anyone else sees us, and how many check boxes are used by someone else to count us, if each individual doesn’t see and *treat* him or herself as *equal* to any and all other people — first, last, and always. This can only be achieved with practice, each day, each moment, and each choice that we make.”

—Adam Abraham