17. Racism

by Ayn Rand

Racism is the lowest, most crudely primitive form of collectivism. It is the notion of ascribing moral, social or political significance to a man's genetic lineage—the notion that a man's intellectual and characterological traits are produced and transmitted by his internal body chemistry. Which means, in practice, that a man is to be judged, not by his own character and actions, but by the characters and actions of a collective of ancestors.

Racism claims that the content of a man's mind (not his cognitive apparatus, but its *content*) is inherited; that a man's convictions, values and character are determined before he is born, by physical factors beyond his control. This is the caveman's version of the doctrine of innate ideas—or of inherited knowledge—which has been thoroughly refuted by philosophy and science. Racism is a doctrine of, by and for brutes. It is a barnyard or stock-farm version of collectivism, appropriate to a mentality that differentiates between various breeds of animals, but not between animals and men.

Like every form of determinism, racism invalidates the specific attribute which distinguishes man from all other living species: his rational faculty. Racism negates two aspects of man's life: reason and choice, or mind and morality, replacing them with chemical predestination.

The respectable family that supports worthless relatives or covers up their crimes in order to "protect the family name" (as if the moral stature of one man could be damaged by the actions of another)—the bum who boasts that his great-grandfather was an empire-builder, or the small-town spinster who boasts that her maternal great-uncle was a state senator and her third cousin gave a concert at Carnegie Hall (as if the achievements of one man could rub off on the mediocrity of another)—the parents who search genealogical trees in order to evaluate their prospective sons-in-law—the celebrity who starts his autobiography with a detailed account of his family history—all these are samples of racism, the atavistic manifestations of a doctrine whose full expression is the tribal warfare of prehistorical savages, the wholesale slaughter of Nazi Germany, the atrocities of today's so-called "newly emerging nations."

The theory that holds "good blood" or "bad blood" as a moral-intellectual criterion, can lead to nothing but torrents of blood in practice. Brute force is the only avenue of action open to men who regard themselves as mindless aggregates of chemicals.

Modern racists attempt to prove the superiority or inferiority of a given race by the historical achievements of some of its members. The frequent historical spectacle of a great innovator who, in his lifetime, is jeered, denounced, obstructed, persecuted by his countrymen, and then, a few years after his death, is enshrined in a national monument and hailed as a proof of the greatness of the German (or French or Italian or Cambodian) race—is as revolting a spectacle of collectivist expropriation, perpetrated by racists, as any expropriation of material wealth perpetrated by communists.

Just as there is no such thing as a collective or racial mind, so there is no such thing as a collective or racial achievement. There are only individual minds and individual achievements—and a *culture* is not the anonymous product of undifferentiated masses, but the sum of the intellectual achievements of individual men.

Even if it were proved—which it is not—that the incidence of men of potentially superior brain power is greater among the members of certain races than among the members of others, it would still tell us nothing about any given individual and it would be irrelevant to one's judgment of him. A genius is a genius, regardless of the number of morons who belong to the same race—and a moron is a moron, regardless of the number of geniuses who share his racial origin. It is hard to say which is the more outrageous injustice: the claim of Southern racists that a Negro genius should be treated as an inferior because his race has "produced" some brutes—or the claim of a German brute to the status of a superior because his race has "produced" Goethe, Schiller and Brahms.

These are not two different claims, of course, but two applications of the same basic premise. The question of whether one alleges the superiority or the inferiority of any given race is irrelevant; racism has only one psychological root: the racist's sense of his own inferiority.

Like every other form of collectivism, racism is a quest for the unearned. It is a quest for automatic knowledge—for an automatic evaluation of men's characters that bypasses the responsibility of exercising rational or moral judgment—and, above all, a quest for *an automatic self-esteem* (or pseudo-self-esteem).

To ascribe one's virtues to one's racial origin, is to confess that one has no knowledge of the process by which virtues are acquired and, most often, that one has failed to acquire them. The overwhelming majority of racists are men who have earned no sense of personal identity, who can claim no individual achievement or distinction, and who seek the illusion of a "tribal self-esteem" by alleging the inferiority of some other tribe. Observe the hysterical intensity of the Southern racists; observe also that racism is much

more prevalent among the poor white trash than among their intellectual betters.

Historically, racism has always risen or fallen with the rise or fall of collectivism. Collectivism holds that the individual has no rights, that his life and work belong to the group (to "society," to the tribe, the state, the nation) and that the group may sacrifice him at its own whim to its own interests. The only way to implement a doctrine of that kind is by means of brute force—and *statism* has always been the political corollary of collectivism.

The absolute state is merely an institutionalized form of gang-rule, regardless of which particular gang seizes power. And—since there is no rational justification for such rule, since none has ever been or can ever be offered—the mystique of racism is a crucial element in every variant of the absolute state. The relationship is reciprocal: statism rises out of prehistorical tribal warfare, out of the notion that the men of one tribe are the natural prey for the men of another—and establishes its own internal subcategories of racism, a system of castes determined by a man's birth, such as inherited titles of nobility or inherited serfdom.

The racism of Nazi Germany—where men had to fill questionnaires about their ancestry for generations back, in order to prove their *Aryan* descent—has its counterpart in Soviet Russia, where men had to fill similar questionnaires to show that their ancestors had owned no property and thus to prove their *proletarian* descent. The Soviet ideology rests on the notion that men can be conditioned to communism *genetically*—that is, that a few generations conditioned by dictatorship will transmit communist ideology to their descendants, who will be communists *at birth*. The persecution of racial minorities in Soviet Russia, according to the racial descent and whim of any given commissar, is a matter of record; anti-Semitism is particularly prevalent—only the official pogroms are now called "political purges."

There is only one antidote to racism: the philosophy of individualism and its politico-economic corollary, laissez-faire capitalism.

Individualism regards man—every man—as an independent, sovereign entity who possesses an inalienable right to his own life, a right derived from his nature as a rational being. Individualism holds that a civilized society, or any form of association, cooperation or peaceful coexistence among men, can be achieved only on the basis of the recognition of individual rights—and that a group, as such, has no rights other than the individual rights of its members. (See Chapters 12 and 13.)

It is not a man's ancestors or relatives or genes or body chemistry that count in a free market, but only one human attribute: productive ability. It is

by his own individual ability and ambition that capitalism judges a man and rewards him accordingly.

No political system can establish universal rationality by law (or by force). But capitalism is the only system that functions in a way which rewards rationality and penalizes all forms of irrationality, including racism.

A fully free, capitalist system has not yet existed anywhere. But what is enormously significant is the correlation of racism and political controls in the semifree economies of the nineteenth century. Racial and/or religious persecutions of minorities stood in inverse ratio to the degree of a country's freedom. Racism was strongest in the more controlled economies, such as Russia and Germany—and weakest in England, the then freest country of Europe.

It is capitalism that gave mankind its first steps toward freedom and a rational way of life. It is capitalism that broke through national and racial barriers, by means of free trade. It is capitalism that abolished serfdom and slavery in all the civilized countries of the world. It is the capitalist North that destroyed the slavery of the agrarian-feudal South in the United States.

Such was the trend of mankind for the brief span of some hundred and fifty years. The spectacular results and achievements of that trend need no restatement here.

The rise of collectivism reversed that trend.

When men began to be indoctrinated once more with the notion that the individual possesses no rights, that supremacy, moral authority and unlimited power belong to the group, and that a man has no significance outside his group—the inevitable consequence was that men began to gravitate toward some group or another, in self-protection, in bewilderment and in subconscious terror. The simplest collective to join, the easiest one to identify—particularly for people of limited intelligence—the least demanding form of "belonging" and of "togetherness" is: *race*.

It is thus that the theoreticians of collectivism, the "humanitarian" advocates of a "benevolent" absolute state, have led to the rebirth and the new, virulent growth of racism in the twentieth century.

In its great era of capitalism, the United States was the freest country on earth—and the best refutation of racist theories. Men of all races came here, some from obscure, culturally undistinguished countries, and accomplished feats of productive ability which would have remained stillborn in their control-ridden native lands. Men of racial groups that had been slaughtering one another for centuries, learned to live together in harmony and peaceful cooperation. America had been called "the melting pot," with good reason. But few people realized that America did not melt men into the gray

conformity of a collective: she united them by means of protecting their right to individuality.

The major victims of such race prejudice as did exist in America were the Negroes. It was a problem originated and perpetuated by the noncapitalist South, though not confined to its boundaries. The persecution of Negroes in the South was and is truly disgraceful. But in the rest of the country, so long as men were free, even that problem was slowly giving way under the pressure of enlightenment and of the white men's own economic interests.

Today, that problem is growing worse—and so is every other form of racism. America has become race-conscious in a manner reminiscent of the worst days in the most backward countries of nineteenth-century Europe. The cause is the same: the growth of collectivism and statism.

In spite of the clamor for racial equality, propagated by the "liberals" in the past few decades, the Census Bureau reported recently that "[the Negro's] economic status relative to whites has not improved for nearly 20 years." It had been improving in the freer years of our "mixed economy"; it deteriorated with the progressive enlargement of the "liberals' " Welfare State.

The growth of racism in a "mixed economy" keeps step with the growth of government controls. A "mixed economy" disintegrates a country into an institutionalized civil war of pressure groups, each fighting for legislative favors and special privileges at the expense of one another.

The existence of such pressure groups and of their political lobbies is openly and cynically acknowledged today. The pretense at any political philosophy, any principles, ideals or long-range goals is fast disappearing from our scene—and it is all but admitted that this country is now floating without direction, at the mercy of a blind, short-range power game played by various statist gangs, each intent on getting hold of a legislative gun for any special advantage of the immediate moment.

In the absence of any coherent political philosophy, every economic group has been acting as its own destroyer, selling out its future for some momentary privilege. The policy of the businessmen has, for some time, been the most suicidal one in this respect. But it has been surpassed by the current policy of the Negro leaders.

So long as the Negro leaders were fighting against government-enforced discrimination—right, justice and morality were on their side. But that is not what they are fighting any longer. The confusions and contradictions surrounding the issue of racism have now reached an incredible climax.

It is time to clarify the principles involved.

The policy of the Southern states toward Negroes was and is a shameful contradiction of this country's basic principles. Racial discrimination, imposed and enforced by law, is so blatantly inexcusable an infringement of individual rights that the racist statutes of the South should have been declared unconstitutional long ago.

The Southern racists' claim of "states' rights" is a contradiction in terms: there can be no such thing as the "right" of some men to violate the rights of others. The constitutional concept of "states' rights" pertains to the division of power between local and national authorities, and serves to protect the states from the Federal government; it does not grant to a state government an unlimited, arbitrary power over its citizens or the privilege of abrogating the citizens' individual rights.

It is true that the Federal government has used the racial issue to enlarge its own power and to set a precedent of encroachment upon the legitimate rights of the states, in an unnecessary and unconstitutional manner. But this merely means that both governments are wrong; it does not excuse the policy of the Southern racists.

One of the worst contradictions, in this context, is the stand of many so-called "conservatives" (not confined exclusively to the South) who claim to be defenders of freedom, of capitalism, of property rights, of the Constitution, yet who advocate racism at the same time. They do not seem to possess enough concern with principles to realize that they are cutting the ground from under their own feet. Men who deny individual rights cannot claim, defend or uphold any rights whatsoever. It is such alleged champions of capitalism who are helping to discredit and destroy it.

The "liberals" are guilty of the same contradiction, but in a different form. They advocate the sacrifice of all individual rights to unlimited majority rule—yet posture as defenders of the rights of minorities. But the smallest minority on earth is the individual. Those who deny individual rights, cannot claim to be defenders of minorities.

This accumulation of contradictions, of shortsighted pragmatism, of cynical contempt for principles, of outrageous irrationality, has now reached its climax in the new demands of the Negro leaders.

Instead of fighting against racial discrimination, they are demanding that racial discrimination be legalized and enforced. Instead of fighting against racism, they are demanding the establishment of racial quotas. Instead of fighting for "color-blindness" in social and economic issues, they are proclaiming that "color-blindness" is evil and that "color" should be made a primary consideration. Instead of fighting for equal rights, they are demanding special race privileges.

They are demanding that racial quotas be established in regard to employment and that jobs be distributed on a racial basis, in proportion to the percentage of a given race among the local population. For instance, since Negroes constitute 25 per cent of the population of New York City, they demand 25 per cent of the jobs in a given establishment.

Racial quotas have been one of the worst evils of racist regimes. There were racial quotas in the universities of Czarist Russia, in the population of Russia's major cities, etc. One of the accusations against the racists in this country is that some schools practice a secret system of racial quotas. It was regarded as a victory for justice when employment questionnaires ceased to inquire about an applicant's race or religion.

Today, it is not an oppressor, but an oppressed minority group that is demanding the establishment of racial quotas. (!)

This particular demand was too much even for the "liberals." Many of them denounced it—properly—with shocked indignation.

Wrote *The N. Y. Times* (July 23, 1963): "The demonstrators are following a truly vicious principle in playing the 'numbers game.' A demand that 25 per cent (or any other percentage) of jobs be given to Negroes (or any other group) is wrong for one basic reason: it calls for a 'quota system,' which is in itself discriminatory. ... This newspaper has long fought a religious quota in respect to judgeships; we equally oppose a racial quota in respect to jobs from the most elevated to the most menial."

As if the blatant racism of such a demand were not enough, some Negro leaders went still farther. Whitney M. Young Jr., executive director of the National Urban League, made the following statement (*N. Y. Times*, August 1):

"The white leadership must be honest enough to grant that throughout our history there has existed a special privileged class of citizens who received preferred treatment. That class was white. Now we're saying this: If two men, one Negro and one white, are equally qualified for a job, hire the Negro."

Consider the implications of that statement. It does not merely demand special privileges on racial grounds—it demands that white men be penalized *for the sins of their ancestors*. It demands that a white laborer be refused a job because his grandfather may have practiced racial discrimination. But perhaps his grandfather had *not* practiced it. Or perhaps his grandfather had not even lived in this country. Since these questions are not to be considered, it means that that white laborer is to be charged with *collective racial guilt*, the guilt consisting merely of the color of his skin.

But *that* is the principle of the worst Southern racist who charges all Negroes with collective racial guilt for any crime committed by an individual Negro, and who treats them all as inferiors on the ground that their ancestors were savages.

The only comment one can make about demands of that kind, is: "By what right?—By what code?—By what standard?"

That absurdly evil policy is destroying the moral base of the Negroes' fight. Their case rested on the principle of individual rights. If they demand the violation of the rights of others, they negate and forfeit their own. Then the same answer applies to them as to the Southern racists: there can be no such thing as the "right" of some men to violate the rights of others.

Yet the entire policy of the Negro leaders is now moving in that direction. For instance, the demand for racial quotas in schools, with the proposal that hundreds of children, white and Negro, be forced to attend school in distant neighborhoods—for the purpose of "racial balance." Again, this is pure racism. As opponents of this demand have pointed out, to assign children to certain schools by reason of their race, is equally evil whether one does it for purposes of segregation or integration. And the mere idea of using children as pawns in a political game should outrage all parents, of any race, creed or color.

The "civil rights" bill, now under consideration in Congress, is another example of a gross infringement of individual rights. It is proper to forbid all discrimination in government-owned facilities and establishments: the government has no right to discriminate against any citizens. And by the very same principle, the government has no right to discriminate *for* some citizens at the expense of others. It has no right to violate the right of private property by forbidding discrimination in privately owned establishments.

No man, neither Negro nor white, has any claim to the property of another man. A man's rights are not violated by a private individual's refusal to deal with him. Racism is an evil, irrational and morally contemptible doctrine—but doctrines cannot be forbidden or prescribed by law. Just as we have to protect a communist's freedom of speech, even though his doctrines are evil, so we have to protect a racist's right to the use and disposal of his own property. Private racism is not a legal, but a moral issue—and can be fought only by private means, such as economic boycott or social ostracism.

Needless to say, if that "civil rights" bill is passed, it will be the worst breach of property rights in the sorry record of American history in respect to that subject.[6]

[6] "The bill was passed in 1964, including the sections that violate property rights.

It is an ironic demonstration of the philosophical insanity and the consequently suicidal trend of our age, that the men who need the protection of individual rights most urgently—the Negroes—are now in the vanguard of the destruction of these rights.

A word of warning: do not become victims of the same racists by succumbing to racism; do not hold against all Negroes the disgraceful irrationality of some of their leaders. No group has any proper intellectual leadership today or any proper representation.

In conclusion, I shall quote from an astonishing editorial in *The N. Y. Times* of August 4—astonishing because ideas of this nature are not typical of our age:

"But the question must be not whether a group recognizable in color, features or culture has its rights as a group. No, the question is whether any American individual, regardless of color, features or culture, is deprived of his rights as an American. If the individual has all the rights and privileges due him under the laws and the Constitution, we need not worry about groups and masses—those do not, in fact, exist, except as figures of speech."

(September 1963)