



First Things

Race ... again

Race, racial politics, and racism, Americans are again being told regularly, are at the center of our culture and politics. Although the three terms are often thrown together, even treated as all names for the same thing, they are, of course, absolutely different. "Race," as defined by my refreshingly incorrect Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition, Unabridged (published 1937) is: "a division of mankind possessing constant traits, transmissible by descent, sufficient to characterize it as a distinct human type; a permanent variety of the *genus Homo*." "Race politics" is an aspect of humanity's ongoing competition over political power. It takes many forms, some sincerely engaged in, others extending to the rankest extremes of cynicism. Since we all hear about this topic all day long on every talk and "news" show, and, I have no doubt, my readers are amply prepared to supply all they need to know on the topic, I will say no more about it here, except to point out, that race politics is its own topic, not the same as either race or racism.

Racism, which is 'way too often treated as meaning virtually the same thing as "race," is a form of evil. The distinction is crucial. For instance, USDA Official Shirley Sherrod, the object of so much in-

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terest not so long ago, was accused of displaying some sort of "racism" for saying such things as that she would allow a white former to be helped by people "of his own kind." This, of course, is not racism. Sherrod was merely registering a common sense, obvious awareness that races, in fact, as the Dictionary says, possess "constant traits." To call that racism is to feign ignorance; to hide known truths from ourselves, that is, to defy our responsibility to honesty. If I say "black people tend to vote for Democrats" or "it is moronic to call a fifth-generation American with black skin an 'African-American,'" I am stating facts, or perhaps opinions, about race, but saying nothing racist.

The crux of our concern, of course, is not race or awareness of racial traits, but the evil of racism. But here again, the topic is awash in foolishness and confusion. Our proper concern is with evil in any form, not racism alone or even especially. Like all evils, racism is resorted to only after the indulgence of pessimistic rationalizing. As Saul Alinsky puts it in *Rules for Radicals*, "He who sacrifices the mass good for his personal conscience has a peculiar conception of 'personal salvation'; he doesn't care enough for people to 'be corrupted' for them." The Alinsky rationalization (most frequently on display in our country

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in the anti-rule-of-law, "activist" rulings of liberal judges; for instance, for abortion), stands love on its head. It becomes necessary to "corrupt ourselves" to serve the people, as though keeping the great commandments of our civilization to love God and our neighbor is really a disservice to them. If we can't see the good love will do, we may safely conclude — indeed, Alinsky insists we must conclude — that we are actually harming them. Our will, not Thine, be done.

But history (along with more or less everything else) repeatedly contradicts this notion. "How many divisions has the pope?" asked a cynical Joseph Stalin, who did not live to see his hideous empire destroyed by a pope motivated and operating according to the law of love. And Napoleon is reported to have said he would worry about the Pope when he saw the "rifles drop from his soldiers' hands." He saw it: in the blasting Russian winter.

The evil in America is not peculiarly racism. Would that it were so simple as that. It is the human race's penchant for failing the law of love. It is the bogus notion that it is somehow good to "corrupt ourselves" for the good of the people. Once permit that, and we have loosed upon ourselves all the furies of hell, including murderous racism.

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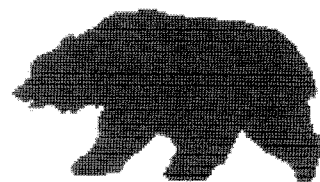
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