



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on March 22, 2016

Black and White, Left and Right

Much is made of the fact that liberals and conservatives see racial issues differently, which they do. But these differences have too often been seen as simply those on the right being racist and those on the left not.

You can cherry-pick the evidence to reach that conclusion. But you can also cherry-pick the evidence to reach the opposite conclusion.

During the heyday of the Progressive movement in the early 20th century, people on the left were in the forefront of those promoting doctrines of innate, genetic inferiority of not only blacks but also of people from Eastern Europe and Southern Europe, as compared to people from Western Europe.



Liberals today tend to either glide over the undeniable racism of Progressive President Woodrow Wilson or else treat it as an anomaly of some sort. But racism on the left at that time was not an anomaly, either for President Wilson or for numerous other stalwarts of the Progressive movement.

An influential 1916 best-seller, *The Passing of the Great Race* — celebrating Nordic Europeans — was written by Madison Grant, a staunch activist for Progressive causes such as endangered species, municipal reform, conservation and the creation of national parks.

He was a member of an exclusive social club founded by Republican Progressive Theodore Roosevelt, and Grant and Franklin D. Roosevelt became friends in the 1920s, addressing one another in letters as “My dear Frank” and “My dear Madison.” Grant’s book was translated into German, and Adolf Hitler called it his Bible.

Progressives spearheaded the eugenics movement, dedicated to reducing the reproduction of supposedly “inferior” individuals and races. The eugenics movement spawned Planned Parenthood, among other groups. In academia, there were 376 courses devoted to eugenics in 1920.

Progressive intellectuals who crusaded against the admission of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Southern Europe, branding them as genetically inferior, included many prominent academic scholars — such as heads of such scholarly organizations as the American Economic Association and the American Sociological Association.

Southern segregationists who railed against blacks were often also Progressives who railed against Wall Street. Back in those days, blacks voted for Republicans as automatically as they vote for Democrats today.

Where the Democrats’ President Woodrow Wilson introduced racial segregation into those government agencies in Washington where it did not exist at the time, Republican President Calvin Coolidge’s wife invited the wives of black Congressmen to the White House. As late as 1957, civil rights legislation was



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sponsored in Congress by Republicans and opposed by Democrats.

Later, when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was sponsored by Democrats, a higher percentage of Congressional Republicans voted for it than did Congressional Democrats. Revisionist histories tell a different story. But, as Casey Stengel used to say, "You could look it up" — in the *Congressional Record*, in this case.

Conservatives who took part in the civil rights marches, or who were otherwise for equal rights for blacks, have not made nearly as much noise about it as liberals do. The first time I saw a white professor, at a white university, with a black secretary, it was Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago in 1960 — four years before the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

She was still his secretary when he died in 2006. But, in all those years, I never once heard Professor Friedman mention, in public or in private, that he had a black secretary. By all accounts, she was an outstanding secretary, and that was what mattered.

The biggest difference between the left and right today, when it comes to racial issues, is that liberals tend to take the side of those blacks who are doing the wrong things — hoodlums the left depicts as martyrs, while the right defends those blacks more likely to be the victims of those hoodlums.

Rudolph Giuliani, when he was the Republican mayor of New York, probably saved more black lives than any other human being, by promoting aggressive policing against hoodlums, which brought the murder rate down to a fraction of what it was before.

A lot depends on whether you judge by ringing words or judge by actual consequences.

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