



Written by [Larry Elder](#) on August 4, 2022

## Don't Confuse Sesame Place with Jim Crow

"Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" asked Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 5-year-old son six decades ago.

A Baltimore family recently filed a \$25 million class action racial discrimination lawsuit against Sesame Place, a Muppets-themed amusement park outside Philadelphia. A video showed a Muppet character named Rosita high-fiving white kids while appearing to blatantly ignore the extended hands of little black kids. Other black families said the same thing happened to their kids, too.

The park apologized. But this failed to appease the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who, in a letter accusing the park of "racist characters snubbing black kids," made several demands, including appointing blacks to its board of directors, that it spend money on black-owned businesses and require its workers to undergo sensitivity training.

There's a lot we don't know. Who was in the costumes? Were black kids intentionally mistreated? But let's assume that these black kids were, in fact, snubbed because of their race. How these kids deal with this slight will be entirely dictated by their parents. Does Rosita reflect "systemic racism," a microcosm of blacks' second-class status? Or do the parents teach their children to put this incident in perspective by instructing their kids that not everybody behaves properly, and that people like that win if you become bitter and view life through race-tinted glasses?

In April 1963, King, while in a Birmingham, Alabama jail following a minor traffic offense, wrote his famous letter in which he described the emotional toll of being second class, especially in the Jim Crow South. It read, in part: "When you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: 'Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?'"

*That* was a very different time, a world before a black president, a black female vice president, black secretaries of state, black U.S attorneys general, black governors, black Supreme Court members, a black secretary of defense, black U.N. ambassadors and black mayors of nearly every major city.

Philadelphia has had black mayors. In 1988, a black man became the city's first black Commissioner of the Philadelphia Police Department, a position currently held by a black woman. In 2006, a black man



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was the Republican candidate for governor of Pennsylvania. A black man is a Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor in the 2022 election. The Philadelphia superintendent of public schools is black. Pennsylvania's population is 11% black, and blacks make up 9% of the state legislators.

Not exactly the Jim Crow South.

Meanwhile, in 2021 Philadelphia had a record number of homicides, and this year is on track to exceed last year's number. Most of the perps and victims are black. While nationwide about 10% of American families have their kids in private school, a 2004 study by the Fordham Institute found that 44% of Philadelphia government schoolteachers with school-age kids put them in private schools.

Recent videos show a black toddler attempting to strike black Minneapolis police officers, with one little kid calling a black cop an "Oreo." A black 16-year-old with a criminal record who fought violently with an NYPD officer in a subway station was released in less than 24 hours. He asked the judge whether *he* could press charges against the cops. As for Baltimore, the hometown of the family that filed the lawsuit, 2017 tests show 13 public high schools in Baltimore where 0% of students were math proficient and another half-dozen where only 1% were math proficient.

Has Jesse Jackson said a *word* about any of this?

*Larry Elder is a best-selling author and nationally syndicated radio talk-show host. To find out more about Larry Elder, or become an "Elderado," visit [www.LarryElder.com](http://www.LarryElder.com). Follow Larry on Twitter @larryelder. To read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com).*

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