



Written by [Walter E. Williams](#) on January 23, 2014

OK to Feel Sorry

At one time in our nation's history, blacks feeling sorry for whites was verboten. That was portrayed in Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This is a novel published in 1960 — and later made into a movie — about Depression-era racial relations in the Deep South. The novel's character Tom Robinson, a black man, portrayed in the movie by Brock Peters, is on trial, falsely accused of raping a white woman. The prosecuting attorney, while grilling Robinson, asks him why he spent so much time doing chores for the alleged rape victim when he had so much of his own work to do. After persistent prosecutorial haranguing, Robinson timidly admits that he felt sorry for her. That response elicits shock and dismay from the prosecutor and the courtroom: How dare a black man feel sorry for a white woman?!



As a result of the achievements of the civil rights movement, which gave black Americans full constitutional guarantees, I am free to feel sorry for guilty or timid white people. But there may be less of a need because of white people's response to former NBA player Dennis Rodman's bizarre interview from North Korea in which he claimed that North Korea's evil tyrant, Kim Jong Un, is his best friend. Rodman has since apologized for some of his remarks. But he's been a bit of catharsis. White liberals, both in and out of the media, made criticizing him nearly a national pastime. Even Sen. John McCain, who couldn't summon up the courage — nor would he allow his presidential campaign staff — to speak ill of Barack Obama's minister, Jeremiah Wright, told CNN's Piers Morgan in reference to Rodman: "I think he's an idiot. I think he's a person of not great intellect who doesn't understand that he really does provide propaganda for this very brutal, ruthless young man."

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The widespread and open criticism of Rodman shows that there's been considerable progress and that I don't have to feel as sorry for white people. But what about the weak media response to Rep. Henry C. Johnson, D-Ga., who, during a 2010 House Armed Services Committee hearing concerning U.S. military buildup on Guam, told Adm. Robert F. Willard, the then commander of U.S. Pacific Command, "My fear is that the whole island will become so overly populated that it will tip over and capsize"? Adm. Willard replied, with all sincerity, "We don't anticipate that." I'd pay serious money to know what the admiral and his white staff said about Johnson after they left the hearing room.

Then there's Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, who asked NASA scientists whether they could drive the Mars rover to where Neil Armstrong placed the American flag. Actually, Armstrong planted the flag on the moon in 1969. In 2010, Jackson Lee pointed out: "Today we have two Vietnams, side by side, North



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and South, exchanging and working. We may not agree with all that North Vietnam is doing, but they are living in peace.” The fact of business is that as a result of North Vietnam’s conquest, today it’s only one nation, Vietnam. Another Jackson Lee geographical observation was her reference to “countries like Europe.” But we shouldn’t be that critical of her, because President Obama also has referred to people from “countries like Europe.” Referring to “countries like Europe” is just as ill-informed as saying countries like Africa or countries like South America. Of course, they are continents.

Some might recall the field day the media and social commentators had with Vice President Dan Quayle and his misspelling of potato, some of which was quite ruthless. *Esquire* named Quayle among “The Dumbest Vice Presidential Picks of All Time.” That kind of field day wasn’t seen in mainstream media in the cases of Johnson, Jackson Lee and Obama. To have done so might have been deemed racist.

The bottom line is I’m glad the day has come when I can freely feel sorry for whites, who have to bite their tongue when it comes to criticism of blacks.

Walter E. Williams is a professor of economics at George Mason University. To find out more about Walter E. Williams and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.

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