



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on April 24, 2012

Who Is “Racist”?

An amazing proportion of the media has given us a painful demonstration of the thinking — and lack of thinking — that prevailed back in the days of the old Jim Crow South, where complexion counted more than facts in determining how people were treated.

One of the first things presented in the media was a transcript of a conversation between George Zimmerman and a police dispatcher. The last line in most of the transcripts shown on TV was that of the police dispatcher telling Zimmerman not to continue following Trayvon Martin.



That became the basis of many media criticisms of Zimmerman for continuing to follow him. Only later did I see a transcript of that conversation on the Sean Hannity program that included Zimmerman’s reply to the police dispatcher: “O.K.”

That reply removed the only basis for assuming that Zimmerman did in fact continue to follow Trayvon Martin. At this point, neither I nor the people who assumed that he continued to follow the teenager have any basis in fact for believing that he did or didn’t.

Why was that reply edited out by so many in the media? Because too many people in the media see their role as filtering and slanting the news to fit their own vision of the world. The issue is not one of being “fair” to “both sides” but, more fundamentally, of being honest with their audience.

NBC News carried the editing even further, removing one of the police dispatcher’s questions, to which Zimmerman was responding, in order to feed the vision of Zimmerman as a racist.

In the same vein were the repeated references to Zimmerman as a “white Hispanic.” Zimmerman is half-white. So is Barack Obama. But does anyone refer to Obama as a “white African”?

All these verbal games grow out of the notion that complexion tells you who is to be blamed and who is not. It is a dangerous game because race is no game. If the tragic history of the old Jim Crow South in this country is not enough to show that, the history of racial and ethnic tragedies is written in blood in countries around the world. Millions have lost their lives because they looked different, talked differently or belonged to a different religion.

In the midst of the Florida tragedy, there was a book published with the unwieldy title, “No Matter What ... They’ll Call This Book Racist.” Obviously it was written well before the shooting in Florida, but its message — that there is rampant hypocrisy and irrationality in public discussions of race — could not have been better timed.

Author Harry Stein, a self-described “reformed white liberal,” raised by parents who were even further left, exposes the illogic and outright fraudulence that lies behind so much of what is said about race in the media, in politics and in our educational institutions.



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He asks a very fundamental question: “Why, even after the Duke University rape fiasco, does the media continue to give credence to every charge of racism?”

Harry Stein credits Shelby Steele’s book *White Guilt* with opening his eyes to one of the sources of many counterproductive things said and done about race today — namely, guilt about what was done to blacks and other minorities in the past.

Let us talk sense, like adults. Nothing that is done to George Zimmerman — justly or unjustly — will unlynch a single black man who was tortured and killed in the Jim Crow South for a crime he didn’t commit.

Letting hoodlums get away with hoodlumism today does not undo a single injustice of the past. It is not even a favor to the hoodlums, for many of whom hoodlumism is just the first step on a path that leads to the penitentiary, and maybe to the execution chamber.

Winston Churchill said, “If the past sits in judgment on the present, the future will be lost.” He wasn’t talking about racial issues, but what he said applies especially where race is involved.

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