

Systemic Racism and Sloppy Data



Revolution in Our Lifetime, Emory Douglas, 1969

As the culture wars heat up, a large point of contention is over Critical Race Theory (CRT). One large cause of the conflict is that there is not one commonly used definition of CRT resulting in argumentative contention. According to the theorists, CRT has five pillars from which it is built and each pillar is considered a truth.

1. *There are disparities between racial groups and any disparity is because of racism.*
2. *Racism benefits white people.*
3. *Racism is not just individual racism but institutional racism that has been built into our institutions because of the implicit biases the majority white population has against people of color.*
4. *Race is a social construct, created by the majority racial group (whites) to help give the dominant group more power.*
5. *Therefore, society needs to see and acknowledge racial categories because people of minority races will have different experiences and perspectives. This pillar is the launchpad for activism which CRT promotes.*

Pillar one is the foundation on which CRT is built and posits that racism is the genesis of disparities, and because disparities are everywhere, systemic racism or white supremacy is everywhere (pillar three). The argument that society is systemically racist is dependent on the first pillar and is an absolutist argument, meaning it's a zero sum argument. Either all systems in society are racist or the argument falls apart.

What does "systemic" mean? Can one know if an institution is 40 percent racist or 80 percent racist? For racism to be "systemic," it must be in all spaces and in every institution which is why systemic racism doesn't refer to individual racism within an institution, it refers to the racial inequities within an institution. How does one judge *if* or *why* an institution has racial inequities? [Ibram X. Kendi](#) states in his book, *Stamped from the Beginning*, "racial

discrimination is the *sole* cause of racial disparities in this country and the world at large.” For Kendi, the threshold of systemic racism is that there are disparities between races in institutions, which is the outcome of racism. Disparities are his proof of the “systemic” abundance of racism. If systemic racism isn’t the *SOLE* cause of racial disparities, as will be shown, then how does one judge what “systemic” means? The term would be meaningless so “systemic” must be absolute or the sole and only cause.

Can there be some institutions that are racist and some not? At what point is a society considered not systemically racist? These questions are too nuanced for critical race theorists therefore they rely on the “data” to show disparities between racial groups.

The data consists of measurable differences in life outcomes between racial groups, called disparate data, and neglects to consider the reasons for the outcomes. For example, I could say that our prison system is sexist towards men because disparate data shows that men are greatly overrepresented in the prison population compared to women, but I would be neglecting the reason for the disparity. Likewise, if black Americans have lower incomes compared to white Americans, for critical race theorists and their supporters, the data provides clear evidence of racism but neglects nuance.

The systemic racist claim usually uses data from measuring the disparities in life outcomes between blacks and whites in four areas: (1) the wealth gap, (2) the education gap, (3) the mass incarceration/crime gap, and (4) the policing gap which asserts that police are bias against black civilians. If one can show that there are other reasons for racial disparities besides racism and that said reasons are large factors for disparities in these areas of life outcomes, then the absolutist claim of systemic racism carries little weight and is reduced to an ideological talking point instead of a meaningful point of debate.

One cannot prove that every disparity that exists between races is not due to some racism. Some disparities may be caused by racism. That's beside the point. The point is that if one can reveal that variables other than racism can cause racial disparities in society's largest institutions which create the largest racial disparities, then how can one claim that racism is in all institutions and is therefore systemic? The absolutist and zero-sum claim made by CRT would be in question. If systemic racism is in question, the CRT house of cards falls. The CRT balloon cannot maintain its integrity with even one hole. Likewise, racism cannot be considered systemic if it isn't in every system in every institution of society causing every disparity between races.

The Wealth Gap

The wealth gap exists when comparing the median income of whites (\$68,000) to blacks (\$46,000) and is said to be the result and proof of racism. It would also seem logical that if the system was indeed racist and if America suffered from systemic racism, then all income by other minority racial groups should be lower than whites. As of 2019, Asians were the highest earning group making \$87K per year while whites made \$65K. In fact, in 2019, when controlling for ethnicity, Indian Americans made the most (\$135K) and Taiwanese Americans, Chinese Americans, Filipino, Pakistani, Iranian, Vietnamese, Korean, Indian, Lebanese, and Japanese Americans all made more than whites while Cuban Americans, West Indian black Americans and Nigerian Americans are very close to whites and earn more than the average American. There is no reason why a systemically racist system would allow this. This is a disparity but in favor of minorities.

A variable which greatly affects the wealth gap is the median ages of each racial group. If group A is older than group B, then group A has more time to collect earnings because one's wealth accumulation and job experience generally lead to larger pay increases with age. The median age for whites is

43, for Hispanics/Latinos it is 30, for Black Americans it is 34 and for Asians it is 37. For blacks, the median age is lower than for whites so whites have had almost a decade to make more money when data is retrieved and thus reveals the poor integrity of the systemic racism argument.

When controlling for the same job, with the same experience, the same level of education, and the same working hours, there is no evidence that blacks get paid less than whites. The largest variables that predict whether or not a person will likely experience poverty, regardless of race, is having a stable two parent home, teen pregnancy, and level of education. [For example](#), 41% of children born to single mothers grow up in poverty, compared to 8% of married couples. According to Kentucky State University professor [Wilfred Reilly](#), the poverty rate among two-parent black households is 7%, 11% for whites, and it is 22% for whites raised in a single-parent household. The poverty rate for married blacks is lower than for married whites. This seems counterintuitive to a systematically racist society. Having two parents in a household more accurately predicts poverty than race and blacks have a higher single motherhood rate than whites.

What contributes to the difference in single motherhood? That is a very complicated question but, for those who simplistically say "RACISM," [remember](#) that when black families had a high two parent household rate (75 percent) in the 19th century during slavery and even one generation after slavery, discrimination was still legal, and yet the black marriage rate was higher than the white marriage rate. Up until the 1960's, the differences in the black/white marriage rate for males was never greater than five percent which should dispel the "racism is causing single motherhood" myth.

Education

Academics point to disparities in education (test scores, grades, and graduation rates) between blacks and whites to

prove systemic racism. Overall, black students have lower test scores, lower grades, and lower graduation rates than whites creating the narrative that the educational system is systemically racist. However, [in 2015](#), the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that, among multiracial and white high school students, there is no test score gap. According to CRT, multi-racial people are considered minorities because bias towards them is based on skin color, yet the stat above seems to contradict CRT's narrative. How would a white teacher know if someone was multi-racial or just racially black? How would "racist tests" advantage multi-racial students and not black or Hispanic students?

Furthermore, many other racial groups do better educationally than whites. A 2021 [UConn study](#) found that Asians have higher grade point averages, test scores, and math and reading scores than non-Asian groups. Asians also study more by at least one hour a day, than non-Asians. This is attributed to a greater work ethic, cultural attitudes towards education, habits, and academic focus within their Asian community and family. Asian students spend more time studying than black students by a factor of three and Asians study a third more time than white students. White students spend almost twice as much time studying than black students. As a teacher who has observed these trends, these disparities have profound impacts on grades and academic futures for students.

In 2008, Nigerian Americans and Nigerian immigrants became the most educated group in the U.S. [Nigerians](#) are less than one percent of the black population in the United States, but at Harvard Business School, Nigerians are 25 percent of the student body. Sixty-one percent of Nigerians over the age of 25 have a graduate degree compared to 32 percent of the U.S. born population. Nigerian Americans do very well in this country. They have fled their home country which has far more poverty and less opportunity than ours, and they have integrated into an unfamiliar country in which, if systemic

racism did exist, it would stand to reason that this group would be doing worse than they are. If racial disparities are due to systemic racism, and since there are disparities between black racial groups, how would a racist system know the difference between a Nigerian American and a Black American?

Mass Incarceration/Crime Gap

Some justify systemic racism through the numbers of mass incarceration. In 2021 blacks are 13 percent of the population yet they are 38.3 percent of incarcerated inmates. Whites are 57.8 percent of incarcerated inmates but 76 percent of the general population. Thus, activists loudly state that blacks are overrepresented which is yet another display of systemic racism.

However, one should control for variables other than race. Inmates in state prisons are 87 percent of all incarcerated inmates (taking into account all prison systems) and [the majority](#) of inmates in state prisons—53 percent—are in for violent crime (which debunks Michelle Alexander's claim in the book *The New Jim Crow* that mass incarceration is drug related and targets blacks). Drug offenders represent only 16 percent of inmates in state prisons and many of those convicted were charged with other crimes in addition to possession and/or distribution of drugs or were charged with higher crimes and pled down to possession and/or distribution. Violent crime, not drug crime, is the most represented category of crime in prisons.

As [FBI statistics](#) show, blacks are more likely to commit violent crime than other groups. In 2017, although blacks were 13 percent of the population, they made up 53 percent of homicides arrests, 28.7 percent of rape arrests, and 33.5 percent of aggravated assault arrests. Black Americans are not only overrepresented in prisons but they also account for the largest share of violent crime compared to other group.

One may be tempted to think that black crime is singled out by law enforcement which would account for the higher numbers of crime committed. However, most crime is intraracial, meaning the offender and the victim are of the same race. The high rate of violent crime offenders in the black community correlates to the high rates of black victims. There is a similar correlation between white crime rates and victims. Also, remember the median ages of groups. As noted above, the black median age is a decade younger than the white median age and crime is disproportionately committed by young men. In addition, most incarcerated males were raised with one parent or no parent. As a group, black young men are more likely to be raised in a one parent environment. According to [Wilfred Reilly](#), poor fatherless males account for almost all blue-collar crime. According to Reilly, after adjusting for fatherhood variables and basic income, the differences in offending between blacks and whites disappears.

The Policing Gap

After reading the data above, one would conclude that Black Americans are more likely to come in contact with police. If there is more crime in a community, there will be more victims leading to more police contacts and more proactive policing within those communities. Despite this, there is a growing narrative that police target and shoot blacks more than any other group. Activists call it an epidemic. According to the Washington Post database on police violence, in 2020 there were 459 whites shot by police and 244 blacks. In 2019 there were 14 unarmed black people shot and killed by police and 25 white.

Activists will still claim that black people are over represented in police shootings by 78 percent when controlling for the fact that Blacks are 13 percent of the population. However, one should control for crime rates and for the circumstances involved in the event. A July 2016 [study](#) by a Harvard economics professor Roland Fryer examined thousands of

incidents and controlled for variables such as officer and suspect demographics, the characteristics of the encounters, and the presence or absence of a weapon, and concluded “that police were no more likely to shoot non-whites than whites after factoring in extenuating circumstances.” Fryer, who is black, states that “blacks are 27.4 percent less likely to be shot at by police relative to non-black, non-Hispanics.”

Fryer did find that police were 18 percent more likely to push or shove black suspects but that statistic does not take into account controlling for the situation, prior police contacts by the suspect, suspect behavior, or high crime areas.

In general, police use deadly force in .0003 percent of arrests. If you are a black male between the age of 25-29 you are far more likely to die in a traffic accident than from a police shooting. If there is not systemic racism in police use of deadly force, as shown above, might there also be other variables that contribute to police encounters with minorities? And if police shootings and contacts are correlated with crime rates, why do black men have higher crime rates to begin with? Again that is a complex question with many other contributing variables other than racism.

“But what about George Floyd? That never happens to a white person.” Wrong. In 2016 Toney Timpa, a white man, suffering from mental health issues called the police for help. Upon his escalating behavior Timpa was taken to the ground with a knee on his neck for 13 minutes, 5 more minutes than Floyd. Timpa yelled “you’re going to kill me” and screamed for his mom. Timpa died on the ground while being restrained but unlike the Floyd case, charges against the officers involved were dropped. For every outrage one sees on the news between a black man and a police officer, there was one with a white man that was never reported by the news.

Systemic racism believers may say, “but what about x? There is racism there and you can’t prove otherwise.” That is beside

the point and one doesn't need to prove that racism doesn't exist nor is anyone trying to do so. The systemic racism claim is an absolutist claim, and all one needs to do, as was done above, is point to some of the largest disparities between racial groups within the largest institutions in society and show how many other variables other than racism contribute to those racial disparities. If one can do that, then racism isn't systemic but rather sporadic and its frequency cannot be determined in any meaningful way, thus making the term "systemic" obsolete. Any other contributing variables in any range of occurrence undermines CRT's absolute claims. If the first pillar of CRT can be so quickly undermined using widely available data, and tools which CRT uses cannot be relied upon, then the integrity of the house of systemic racism that the tools built is in question, as it should be.