

Perspective

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I am who I am: Identity politics in America today

President Biden recently vowed to appoint a “Black woman” to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Critics argue he’s putting identity politics over qualifications, and that by limiting his search to a Black woman, the President is engaging in both gender bias and racial discrimination.

Defenders argue demographic diversity on the court has precedent and is a positive. And even if it is discrimination, it’s positive discrimination (discrimination that favors minority culture over majority culture) which is necessary to redress the ill effects of negative discrimination (discrimination of minority culture by majority culture).

But cynics argue it’s just politics. They point to the South Carolina primary of 2020 when Biden’s struggling campaign for President was circling the drain. He desperately needed a South Carolina victory.

Aware that Blacks constituted a major part of the Democratic vote in South Carolina, he boldly announced: “I’m looking forward to making sure there’s a Black woman on the Supreme Court...” It worked. He got Representative James Clyburn’s endorsement and 61% of the Black vote. The

I’m just sayin’

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victory turned the tide and led to his Presidency.

This illustrates that much in America today depends upon what someone’s race, class and gender is: e.g., government benefits; college admissions, school curriculum, even appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Unfortunately, this progressive mania for identity politics appears to be harming our nation’s social/cultural cohesion, feeding divisive instincts for tribalism, be it ethnic, gender and class clustering, racial siloing, and other subculture formations that feed our need for belonging. Simply being an American doesn’t seem to be enough today.

Looking at race, it refers to biological characteristics we’re born with, things we have no control over, such as skin color. The U.S. Census Bureau lists six race choices: White; Black; American Indian or Alaska Na-

tive; Asian; Pacific Islander like Hawaiian; other.

The government uses this racial data to enforce civil rights laws, ensure fair housing, protect voting rights, provide access to credit, etc. All of these programs assume their racial data is reliable and valuable. Many experts say it’s not.

One census critic said, “The race question is incoherent because race is incoherent.” The reality, he argues, is that the race options “no longer reflect realities on the ground.” He points to generations of immigrants who’ve edged toward assimilation and to increasingly mixed race people.

A “landmark” study of human diversity conducted by Stanford scientists (based upon the new data produced by the Human Genome Project, which discovered

“all races share 99.99+% of the same genetic material”)

found “race is not so much biological as it is a social construct, an identity which is assigned based on rules made by society. While partially based on physical similarities within groups, race does not have an inherent physical or biological meaning.”

A good example of racial categories being “incoherent” is our own Vice-President, Kamala Harris. She’s both Black (her father was Jamaican) and Asian (her mother’s from India). Harris has self-described her racial identity variously as “Black; South Asian; Indian-American; African-American; and Jamaican-American.”

If we crawl down her ancestral tree a little more, we find that Harris’s father, Donald Harris, claims to be descended from the infamous Jamaican slaveowner, Hamilton Brown. Hamilton Brown was Irish, so let’s add Irish—or “white”—to her complicated racial mix.

When first elected to the U.S. Senate, Harris was called both the “second African-American woman and first South Asian-American Senator in history.” But, during the recent presidential primary race, Harris was criticized by some blacks as “not being black enough,” and, also, by some

Asians as “not being Indian enough.” (Such is the passion, purity and exclusivity of identity politics today.)

Exasperated by this racial fixation, Harris told the Washington Post in 2019 that when she entered politics, she felt pressure to define herself: “When I first ran for office that was one of the things that I struggled with, which is that you are forced through that process to define yourself in a way that you fit neatly into the compartment that other people have created,” Harris told the Post. “My point was: I am who I am. I’m good with it. You might need to figure it out, but I’m fine with it,” she said.

(“I am who I am” is a wonderful quote. As quotes go, it is right up there with “it is what it is.”)

VP Harris’s race status begs the question of what percentage of racial DNA is required to declare your race? Well, that depends.

Senator Elizabeth Warren infamously claimed she was of native American ancestry (Cherokee) going so far as to list her race in 1986 as an “American Indian.”

Later challenged to back up her claim with a DNA test, Warren took one. It showed there was some tiny amount of

Native American ancestry, which experts calculated as 1/1,024th Native American.

Tribal leaders responded that to be considered a Cherokee, you needed a “blood quantum” of at least 6.25%. But that’s the Eastern Band of Cherokee. Cherokee Nation requires one to be a lineal descendant. Failing all Cherokee entry standards, Warren apologized to the Cherokee people for her false claims.

There are around 500 Native American tribes in America. Their requirement to be enrolled as a member is all over the place. To be enrolled as a member of the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, (and 18 other tribes) you need to be at least 12.5% in blood. The Sac and Fox Nation tribe (and 7 others) requires 6.25% blood quantum. The Kialagee Tribal Town (and six other tribes) requires 50% blood quantum. The Cheyenne (and 17 other tribes) requires at least a 25% blood quantum.

And so it goes, this sometimes surreal issue of racial identity.

I was a little tempted to unstack my own ancestral woodpile with a DNA test before writing this article. Not now, because, you know, it is what it is. Turns out I am who I am.

mike carroll

I’m not fine with the fine print

When I sign a contract, I actually read the contract first. I didn’t always do that, but it takes getting burned just once to figure out that the other party does not have your best interest at heart.

And the fine print? It’s not fine as in “fine and dandy.”

A recent example of a horrible contract involved a copier lease. In business, you can’t be without a copier, and in my business, a basic model will not do. My \$60 home printer will make copies, but I run a print shop, so I need a high-speed laser printer capable of handling large paper stock as well as envelopes. Such printers generally cost upwards of \$10,000.

The first thing I noticed was that the lease agreement states that if I don’t renew the lease, I must crate and ship the printer

Ramblin’ Man

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anywhere in the world that the vendor chooses. If they want to send the printer to China to be refurbished, that would be at my expense.

The second thing that stood out was possible litigation. The contract required me to agree to arbitration with an arbitrator selected by the vendor, and if a lawsuit resulted, it must be filed in Iowa. Apparently, that’s where the vendor’s supplier is

based, so they want the home court advantage.

Can you imagine the expense for a small business to have to file a suit in another state? It would be cheaper and easier to renew the contract, which is what they want.

I didn’t sign the contract. Instead, I went to the bank and borrowed the money to buy two printers outright. The five-year loan was cheaper than the

five-year lease; so, as long as the printers last at least five years, I’ll be money ahead.

I learned my lesson when I canceled a contract for satellite TV after my one-year commitment was over. I wrote “cancel” on the invoice and mailed it in.

I didn’t hear anything for three months. Then I got a call from the company telling me I was three months in arrears.

I explained how I had canceled the service, but they use a third party for processing payments, and apparently, there’s no mechanism in place for the other company to inform the first company that a subscription was canceled.

The rep told me that the contract, which I had not read thoroughly, explained that you can’t cancel in writing. You have to call them to cancel.

I had never heard of such a

thing. It seems to me that putting it in writing would be the way to go.

The rep then said that I could appeal my billing by writing to the company.

Can’t I call someone? I asked. Better yet, we’re on the phone now. Can’t I just tell you that I want to appeal?

No, she said. Appeals have to be in writing.

Let me get this straight, I said. I can’t cancel in writing; I have to call. But I can’t call to appeal; I have to write.

She said, you don’t have to be a smart-aleck about it.

I said, and your company doesn’t have to have an onerous contract, but here we are.

That’s when the phone line went dead. Or maybe she hung up on me.

She hadn’t given me the address where I could mail my

appeal. So I did what I do best: nothing. I never heard from them again, but I’m sure my name is on a list somewhere.

The point is, when you sign an agreement where money is exchanging hands, the party that writes the contract is working in their best interest, not yours. It’s your money. You don’t have to agree to terms that are bad for you. You can look for alternatives that are fair.

If more people would object to unfavorable terms, the companies selling these products eventually would have to improve their terms.

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PUZZLES

CLUES ACROSS

1. _ de Mornay, actress
8. Surrenders
13. Omission
14. The white poplar
15. They become butterflies
19. Used to chop

20. Select
21. Volcanic craters
22. Consumer price index
23. Utilize
24. “True Blood” actress Paquin
25. Got up
26. Sank in

30. Retail
31. Giants
32. Most bald
33. Changes color
34. Unit of loudness
35. Undresses
38. Fathers
39. Learned skill
40. Remove qualification
44. Covered with frost
45. Speak up
46. Nowhere to be found
47. Part of surgery (abbr.)
48. Type of wrap
49. Church seating
50. Mathematical figure
51. College football conference
55. Turkish officer title
57. Organized body of knowledge
58. Smooth and glossy
59. Left

CLUES DOWN

1. Get back
2. Pass or go by
3. Having a sharp taste
4. Midway between east and southeast
5. Cairo Regional Airport
6. Peace officer
7. Brings to life
8. Automotive vehicles
9. One point south of due east
10. Football position
11. Goes by
12. Most attractive
16. Road divisions
17. Not the sea
18. Small, faint constellation
22. Cabbage
25. Least frequent
27. Change slightly
28. A country in NE Africa
29. Metric units of measure
30. More coherent
32. Make uninteresting
34. Nausea
35. Institution of Oceanography
36. Of little value
37. Hindu model of the ideal man
38. Biblical exclamation
40. You throw it at a board
41. Be about to happen
42. Brutal
43. Opened one’s mouth widely
45. 19th letter of Greek alphabet
48. Saturate
51. The woman
52. Someone who is highly skilled
53. A way to launch an attack on
54. Where golfers begin
56. Atomic number 58

SUDOKU

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