Racism Study Cheapens Once-Powerful Epithet

The recent report on “racism” in American youth (Study: Youth Harbor Racist Views, Jan. 26, 1998) demonstrates that this once-powerful epithet has been so cheapened as to be all but meaningless. We are told by sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva that the following are evidence of racism: statements by whites that “we should have our rights preserved because we are all equal”; any opposition to busing for racial balance, no matter what the reason for the opposition; approval of interracial marriage that is coupled with any concern for the children; the statement that “you should have the best person for the job, regardless of color”; and a belief that the discrimination faced by blacks “is due to a small number of prejudiced white individuals.” These views, he says, reveal “a hidden reservoir of racial animosity and suspicion” showing that we are faced with a pernicious new “color-blind” racism.

Bonilla-Silva draws an inference of racism based upon white responses apparently without even attempting to measure the views of blacks. Yet polls routinely show that a majority of blacks would agree with the statement that “you should have the best person for the job, regardless of color” and in many polls a majority of blacks oppose busing. No rational person would say that these blacks are necessarily racist, and Bonilla-Silva misuses the term when he accuses whites of racism for holding views widely shared by blacks.

Bonilla-Silva’s conclusions tells us more about his own political beliefs than they do about racism among whites. Perhaps the most productive step we could take toward racial harmony is to quit paying attention to sociologists like him who label as racist anything that they disagree with.

Apparently, under Bonilla-Silva’s view the only way a white could avoid being labeled a racist is to enthusiastically support affirmative action and busing for racial balance and to admit that all whites are racists. Whoops, that wouldn’t work either.

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