

## Critique

To disagree with the author's central theme that institutional racism is the principal deterrent to social, economic, and political equality of the races in America would be to ignore centuries of American history in which racial minorities have been oppressed and denied equality of rights and opportunities. Even further, one must agree with the author's argument that institutional racism is merely the manifestation of "beliefs held so tenaciously that they guide behavior spontaneously by excluding any process which call them into question," while simultaneously purporting to be open to the individual, irrespective of race, gender or age.

While these characteristics of institutional racism are easily identified, identification of appropriate strategies to fight systemic discrimination is somewhat more difficult. Specifically, Deloria's contention that minorities mistakenly use "well-reasoned arguments and analogies" as a weapon against institutional racism must be challenged. When injustice visits itself upon a people their options are either to write, speak, or do. Any and all of these are legitimate weapons, and all of these have been utilized in the struggle for racial justice, even in our recent past. The protest marches, sit-ins, and the boycotts of the early sixties represent most clearly the activist, doing phase of the struggle. Yet, even during that phase "well-reasoned arguments and analogies" were used. Few can forget the "I Have A Dream" speech of the late Dr. Martin Luther King.

It would be folly, then, to ignore the importance of a well turned phrase in the continuing struggle for justice and equality, particularly in a country where the written word has been relied upon so heavily. I refer, of course, to such documents as Thomas Paine's "Common Sense," The Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, and many other writings that have altered the course of American history.

While I refer to documents such as the Declaration of Independence to support my argument that well reasoned arguments are legitimate weapons for fighting institutional racism, I realize at the same time that its existence lends

credence to the author's contention that institutional racism permits western civilization to profess adherence to one set of values and goals while failing to live up to the same. It well illustrates "the obvious gap between credal statements and actual performance." Even so, the credal statement must not be ignored in the fight against institutional racism. As stated by Judge A. Leon Higginbotham of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process*:

If the authors of the Declaration of Independence had said "all white men are created equal" or even "all white men who own property . . ." they would have more honestly conveyed the general consensus of things. But when they declared, as they did, that "all men are created equal" without introducing any qualifications, they created a document that put moral demands on all Americans who would ever quote it.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while Deloria has been perceptive in isolating characteristics of institutional racism, there was less perception in analyzing the strategies for bringing about desired change. Racial minorities are imbued with western philosophical beliefs, i.e., we are products of this civilization. Our values, beliefs, and traditions are rooted in the American experience. To propose to change this country's institutions by refusing to participate in the national life or by subverting its philosophical base is to ask that we strike at our selves. For us to achieve racial justice through unified efforts we require a more distant enemy.

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#### Note

<sup>1</sup>A. Leon Higginbotham. *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).