



The Five Chapters in the Story of Racism

We are Writing Chapter Five Now

Stories are the Foundations of Societies

The story of racism has five chapters. Four chapters have been written. We are writing the fifth chapter now. The first four chapters have dramatically advantaged Whites and disadvantaged Blacks (a win/lose).

Unlike the first four chapters, chapter five will dramatically disadvantage Whites as well as Blacks (a lose/lose) unless we close our racial gaps and create a win/win. There will be no win/lose in chapter five. It's either a win/win or a lose/lose. And success depends on committed sustained White action.

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#1

Stories Matter

*Everything follows the story – laws, policies, perspectives,
values, actions, expectations – everything*

“Story” doesn't sound very powerful, but laws and policies rely on a story for their legitimacy. Stories are the foundation on which they are built. Stories teach and guide and

reinforce values and perspectives and beliefs and behaviors. And then the laws and policies and values and perspectives and behaviors reinforce the story.

“We live in the story and the story lives in us.”

The fundamental story behind racism has always been that “Blacks are inferior” and slavery – and now racism – is justified. The stories are told in the media, in religious settings, in the educational systems, and are even embedded in businesses and social organizations. They become part of – and reflected in – the institutions and processes of our communities.

#2

Our History – The Four Win/Lose Chapters of Racism

The story of race in the US for the last 500 years has had a similar win/lose character – White people win and Black people lose

Chapter One: Pre-US – the basis for the European slave trade. Blacks are inferior and therefore slavery is OK. This was woven into political, economic, religious, and literary life.

Chapter Two: Slavery – the basis for the southern economy. The Southern economy simply couldn't survive without slavery and slavery was supported by the same dynamics as chapter one.

Chapter Three: Jim Crow – post-slavery control. The same story and belief system continued and Jim Crow laws and policies replaced slavery.

Chapter Four: Post Civil Rights legislation – things change, and they don't change. National legislation dismantled Jim Crow laws and policies, but the story continued and progress has been slow, halting, and uneven.

The plots and subplots change, but the first four chapters were driven primarily by the economic interests of Whites, while the fourth chapter has an increasingly powerful political/psychological driver. The political/psychological driver of chapter four revolves around issues of identity, place, and influence.

The first three chapters of the story dramatically advantaged Whites and disadvantaged Blacks. The fourth chapter of racism, since the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s, also benefited Whites economically, but to a lesser degree and it often didn't feel like an advantage.

It also, for the first time, provided some advantages for Black people, which was new and added a psychological factor for White people that was unsettling. Although a lot changed, the main indicators of well-being for Black people have not improved significantly and have, in some cases, regressed. Chapter four has not been a win for Black people. That has

not, however, lessened the sense of unease for many Whites and that has, in fact, increased significantly in chapter five.

The emerging sense of threat or disadvantage of Whites in chapter five is partly due to general economic forces that undermine a sense of well-being, but it is significantly enhanced by the political/psychological anxiety, which heightens the sense of disadvantage. That political/psychological anxiety is caused by a number of factors, for example the fear of loss of control or advantage and the loss of identity of America as a White country. That identity issue is far bigger than people give it credit for. This shift began in chapter four, but it is a defining quality of chapter five – so far.

#3

Chapter Five – We are Authoring Current Reality

*Chapter 5 will either advantage both Whites and Blacks (win/win)
or it will disadvantage both groups (lose/lose)*

The fifth chapter is profoundly different because it will either advantage both Whites and Blacks or disadvantage both. Chapter five will either be a win-win or a lose-lose. There will be no win/lose for Whites and Blacks. That is profoundly different than the first four chapters where it was a win for Whites and a lose for Blacks.

For a win/win, chapter five will need to be the chapter that closes the gap between Whites and Blacks and undermines the deep belief that Blacks are inferior. And that will have to be reflected in a systemic redesign across American life – because “every organization and community is perfectly designed to get the outcomes it gets.” We either counter the basic belief that Blacks are inferior and redesign – or we all lose.

If chapter five is passively/reactively written, it will simply be an extension of chapter four, it will actually disadvantage Whites and will do so at a rapidly accelerating rate. That is because a white America will have no chance of maintaining its power globally and will be incompetent to deal with any existential crisis, such as global warming and its natural social, economic, and military consequences.

*“Whites will still have an advantage over Blacks, but it will just be
having better seats on the Titanic.”*

We have two choices for how chapter five is written and we “can’t not choose.” We will either passively continue down the path of chapter four and decline – or we will rise to the challenge and reflect American greatness and strengthen the American experiment.

There is One “Win/Lose” Scenario

The only possible win-lose for the fifth chapter will be a win for America’s enemies and a lose for America if racism is not successfully countered.

America Wins and its Enemies Lose. If the fifth chapter sees racism countered, if it sees Blacks dramatically expand the middle class and enrich the economy, and if it sees America freeing its focus from racism and focusing on the other critical issues it faces, then it will be a win for America and a lose for America's enemies.

America Loses and its Enemies Win. America's enemies are counting on the difficulty, complexity and long history of racism combined with the polarization of America to be too much for America to overcome. We have over 500 years of history and the integration of racism into all parts of our communities to overcome and that is an extraordinary human challenge.

We are the Authors

We are challenged to somehow get beyond blame or guilt for the first four chapters and take responsibility for writing chapter five. And that means committing to an intimidating journey into a great deal of unknown where the answers/solutions are unclear, and the outcomes are certainly not guaranteed. There is no credible roadmap, so we will need to do our best and "learn the way", creating new "bests" as we go.

The American Experiment is just that – an ongoing living experiment. It is not a "done deal." Chapter five will either dramatically undermine or strengthen that experiment. The odds of America winning are long, but that's where America's greatness will be called for and tested - and strengthened. So, how the fifth chapter turns out is in the hands of White America - now.

#4

America's Greatness – Called for and Tested in Chapter Five

American Greatness is based on our willingness now to "rise to the occasion & take on the big challenges – like climate change, maintaining a healthy democracy, renewing rural America – and racism

America's greatness isn't grounded in never having made mistakes. It was grounded in its founding, and then in the willingness to keep confronting our mistakes and gaps and keep relentlessly moving toward the fulfillment of the American vision/promise. Now it's up to us to reinforce and model American greatness.

America's founders had the courage to put forth a worthy vision and fully commit to sustained action to bring it into being. The vision had flaws, but it was an extraordinary step in self-governance and the nobility and efficacy of individuals. That was the first foundation block of American Greatness.

The second foundation block was Americans' willingness to keep working at making that dream a reality for all Americans. It's been a mixed success, but the key is the perseverance despite frustrations and setbacks and major crises, like the depression or WWII.

Now it's our turn. It's our turn to find the courage to persevere and confront our fears and uncertainties in service of achieving the expanded founding vision.

It's our turn to take on the big tough issues we face – climate change, maintaining the health of rural America, protecting American democracy in the face of growing authoritarian rule in the world – and racism.

Racism is a fundamental truth about the American experiment. We can either take it on as a challenge that calls for our best and gives us a chance to showcase America's greatness – or we can say “no” to the challenge – and showcase America's decline.

Ten Topics Upon Which Our Success Depends

There are topics, but these ten are central to our ability to write a successful chapter five and model American Greatness in countering racism.

1. Racism is a human issue, not just an American issue – individuals, organizations, communities and nations need to be exceptional to deal with it.
2. We must focus on the power of responsibility vs. blame or guilt that diminishes.
3. We must focus on “more” – more GDP generated, an expanded middle class, energy and resources redeployed to productive ends vs. dealing with the downsides of racism - an increased ability to compete globally. It's not a closed pie – not a zero-sum game.
4. We will have to draw on significant courage to face the unknown and move ahead quickly without knowing exactly what the path will look like, what will be required or what the new reality will be.
5. We will need to persevere, be flexibly relentless, and “learn the way” because there is no recipe and there is a great deal of unknown.
6. Closing the gaps in some areas will mean at least leveling the playing field. In many key areas, however, it will require going beyond just leveling the playing field to close the gaps in a reasonable period of time.
7. The democratic process and institutions need to be protected in the face of the current atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Our processes and institutions hold us together and provide the leverage for achieving the American dream.
8. *“Every organization and community is perfectly designed to produce the outcomes it gets”* – So, actions will need to be taken on the individual, group and systemic levels – particularly the systemic.
9. Whites still hold the greatest power, so need to take the initiative.
10. We will need to act individually and collectively and with a sense of purpose, power and capability, and accountability.