
Etceteras . . .

Double Standards, Double Talk, and Multiple Troubles

More and more people are claiming to be the victims of double standards—blacks and whites, women and men, liberals and conservatives, isolationists and internationalists, teenagers and adults, and new and old immigrants. Again and again, one hears the plaint, “If I had been a (member of that group), I would not have been excluded.” Or, conversely, “If they were (members of that group), they would have been punished for what they did.”

To Webster, *double standards* involve principles that are applied differently and more rigorously to one group of people or circumstances than to another. In the present legal environment, the implication is that no one should be discriminated against because of race, religion, ethnicity, age, sex, sexual preference, or disability.

Why should boys receive more school funding for sports than girls? Why are blacks subjected to more police searches and arrests than whites? Why can't gays serve in the military or the ministry as straights do? Why are American troops sent to Serbia and Iraq to protect human rights but not to China and Russia? Why should executives in private industry be fired for sexual misbehavior but not high military officers or the president of the United States? Why does Africa receive less foreign aid than the Middle East?

In other areas, too, claims and counterclaims abound. Mexicans and Haitians criticize immigration policies for favoring Cubans and Russians. Non-American Indians resent American Indians' receiving fishing and gambling-casino concessions denied them. Catholics, evangelical Christians, and Muslims claim that the media, Hollywood, and politicians never make pejorative statements about other religious groups as they do about them. Some white males argue that they, not blacks or women, are denied an even break in today's society.

To apply double standards is morally wrong. Religious and secular schools teach the Golden Rule: an individual should treat others as he or she would want to be treated. That means no double-dealing or double-talking and no privilege, patronage, or preferences for certain people. It also means having one law, rule, standard, or

norm for all citizens regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, age, sex, or sexual preference.

Such fairness is predicated on all individuals having certain universal and inalienable rights, the denial of which leads to xenophobia, slavery, tyranny, and chaos—and, more specifically, to racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Asianism, anti-Catholicism, sexism, and homophobia. That idea has fueled the modern search for social justice and the civil rights movement, in particular, which ended “separate but equal” drinking fountains, lunch counters, restaurants, athletic teams, military units, buses, polling booths, classrooms, hotels, and swimming pools, all of which were previously defended as legal and good for both the separators and the separated.

With the expansion of equal opportunities and rights, however, came a politics of identity and victimization. Instead of continuing to insist on the equality of all Americans, calls began to be made for differential treatment and proportional representation. Because the progress some people had originally hoped for had not come about, they demanded special, affirmative, compensatory, and remedial treatment.

To such people, affirmative action, set-asides, redistricting, jury nullification, and racial norming on tests are not examples of invidious double standards but long-overdue remedial steps “to level the playing field” as well as to reflect the multicultural character of America. Even at their worst, it is argued, these steps are mild compared to the racism and hypocrisy that minorities, particularly blacks, had to endure for centuries.

By so arguing, the proponents of the politics of victimization divert attention from the total reversal of their thinking, and they intimidate those who do not agree with them. Who wants to be labeled selfish or racist? What administrator or institution wants the negative publicity that attends denying or defying minority-group demands for “justice”? If the critics of double standards and affirmative action are themselves members of a minority group, they might be defamed as traitors to the group, as happened to Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

More extreme still are those who argue that until a totally bias-free and equal society comes about, double standards are needed. But, they say, such a dramatic change in society is not possible in the present racist, sexist, Eurocentric, white, meritocratic, capitalist society, whose institutions were designed to subjugate blacks, women, Hispanics, the poor, and, indeed, all Third World people. The holders of socioeconomic power created double standards in order to protect their positions of power, and they, not the victims of double standards, are the real menace to a democratic society and world.

The real solution to inequality, the argument goes, is therefore not to end double standards but to transcend them by restructuring society, replacing individual rights with group rights, establishing group proportionality at all levels of government and private enterprise, substituting group-conscious justice for blindfolded jus-

tice, and eliminating the economic gaps between various groups through a redistribution of wealth. For example, if women are 50 percent of the population, blacks 12 percent, and Hispanics 11 percent, then any lesser representation of those groups in a given area of public life is evidence of bigotry, and any disproportionate representation of whites is evidence of their privilege and power.

Such argumentation has also led to a number of troubling developments: a decline in the credibility of minority complaints of actual discrimination; an increase of tensions between minority groups regarding who is the greater victim and more deserving of government benefits; and a general decline of standards of achievement, particularly in colleges and universities, which have adopted lower SAT scores for entry, inflated grades, and instituted more courses graded only pass or fail.

In short, we are awash in double standards, double talk, and multiple troubles, a situation that confounds logic, weakens our historic ideal of equal justice, intensifies intergroup hostility, and undermines the principles of American democracy. People and politicians seem to have forgotten why America became a democracy, why individual rights came to be guaranteed in the Bill of Rights, and why turmoil and bloodshed exist in countries that have multiple standards of behavior and legal rights.

PHILIP PERLMUTTER

Correction:

The editor regrets that in the summer 2000 issue of the journal, volume V, number 1, p. 155, the date of death of Paul Heyne was incorrectly given as March 9, 2000. The correct date is April 9.

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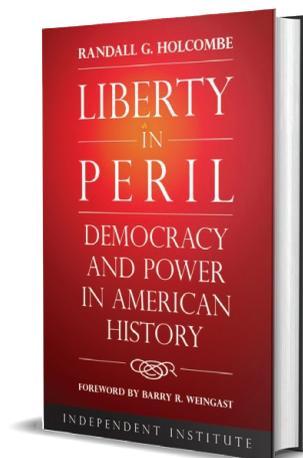
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