



Profiting from Discrimination: □ White Benefits, Black Losses

The prominent Harvard law professor, Derrick Bell, once concluded that a major function of antiBlack [discrimination](#) is "to facilitate the exploitation of Black labor, to deny us access to benefits and opportunities that otherwise would be available, and to blame all the manifestations of exclusion-bred despair on the asserted inferiority of the victims. [Ra](#)

[cial discrimination](#)

in employment often involves an exploitative relationship that enables

[White](#)

employers to take more of the value of the labor of workers of color than of comparable White workers. Today, as in the past, some employers pay Black workers less because they are Black. They do this directly, or they do it by segregating Black workers into certain job categories and setting the pay for these categories lower than for predominantly White job classifications. The Marxist tradition has accented their way in which capitalist employers routinely take part of the value or workers' labor for their own purposes -- thus not paying workers for the full value of that work. Similarly, in numerous situations White employers have the power, because of subtly or blatantly institutionalized

[discrimination](#)

, to take additional value from the labor of

[Black workers](#)

and other workers of color, such as in the form of paying lower wages.

Researchers at the Urban Institute have estimated that Black workers today lose more than \$120 billion

in wages each year because of the overt and

[subtle employment discrimination](#)

they face, dollars that substantially remain in employers' hands. Employers benefit from lower

wages they sometimes pay to Black workers for the same work as White workers, as well as from the job divisions they have created between workers that reduce cross-racial worker organization. These divisions include job tracking and job segregation. Thus, today a majority of Black men still are employed in unskilled, semi-skilled, service, or other relatively low-paid blue-collar jobs or in professional and managerial jobs disproportionately servicing Black clients or consumers; or they are unemployed or in part-time employment. Bureau of Labor Statistics data indicate that substantially fewer Black men than White men aged 20 and older have jobs (62 percent versus 72 percent), with a Black male unemployment rate more than twice that for White men. In addition, Black women tend to be concentrated in service jobs, other unskilled blue-collar jobs, professional and managerial jobs substantially oriented to Black clients or consumers, or moderate-wage clerical jobs. They often face serious unemployment and underemployment problems as well.

Even when politicians and media analysts describe the economy as "very good," a great many workers are unemployed or are underemployed in low-wage or part-time jobs. If the U.S. economy turns sour, as it periodically does, Black workers typically face even worse conditions than White workers. When no longer needed, many less-skilled Black workers are often utilized as a "reserve Army" of workers -- in a condition of painful poverty and unemployment, or unfairly in the prison -- industrial complex -- until they may be needed again. As a result of these recurring job barriers and lesser job opportunities Black workers frequently have less work experience and less stable employment careers than Whites.

Persisting Racial Barriers in Business

Some mainstream media and economic analysts have suggested that the solution to Black employment problems is more "Black enterprise," that is the development of more small businesses in the so-called free market system. This often uninformed approach has not only ignored the fact that African Americans are already *more likely* to seek to be entrepreneurs than Whites, but also typically disregarded the structural barriers faced by African Americans and many other Americans of color in creating new businesses.

Entrepreneurship efforts by Black Americans and other Americans of color are often met by the stern realities access to the necessary economic resources. Unjust impoverishment of Black Americans in the past continues as unjust impoverishment for their descendants in the present. Much research has shown how difficult it has been for African Americans to build up much in the way of family assets and resources because of centuries of far-reaching slavery, legal segregation, and informal discrimination in the present. Until the late 1960s, government-sanctioned slavery and Jim Crow segregation generally kept African Americans out

of lucrative business sectors serving White consumers and communities. This extensive racial oppression has kept their descendants today from inheriting the economic resources necessary (for example, substantial home equities) to develop a significant share of business in the economy under present-day conditions of official desegregation. Until relatively recently in this country's 400-year history, African Americans were forced by blatant discrimination and overt segregation into a major economic detour away from the usually more profitable business opportunities outside their communities.

Today, how well Black businesspeople succeed depends substantially on certain distinctive costs of doing business, some of which are closely linked to past [discrimination](#) they or their ancestors have suffered. Not only are members of a racially subordinated group like African Americans likely to have less in the way of socioeconomic assets because of past and present discrimination, but they often lack access to important "good old boy" networks or to the business knowledge necessary to compete effectively with more privileged Whites.

[...] *Links with Other Antioppression Efforts*

Ultimately, a truly robust democracy is impossible without an elimination of major types of human oppression. Significant destruction of systemic [racism](#), once begun, is likely to be corrosive of other types of oppression. In this relatively short book, even as I have tried to dig deeply into one major type of oppression, I have periodically discussed, albeit too briefly, connections between racist, class, and gender oppressions. Numerous scholars and activists have noted interconnections between these types of oppression. Sandra Harding has argued that "We should think of [race](#), class and gender as interlocking; one cannot dislodge one piece without disturbing the others. Not only racist structures, but capitalistic, sexist, heterosexist, ageist, and bureaucratic-authoritarian arrangements will have to be dismantled in this country if the lives of individuals and the functioning of communities are to be truly democratic and rid of antihuman oppression.

[...]

Labor movements, many inspired by Marxist class analysis, have brought improvements to the lives of workers in numerous countries. Labor progressives have long argued that a full-fledged economic democracy is a requisite step in destroying the class structures of economic oppression.

[...] *Conclusion*

The eradication of [systemic racism](#) requires more than removing a few racial inequalities. Steps in the direction of removing discrimination and inequalities are very important and improve people's lives. However, a substantial reduction in, or full eradication of, [systemic racism](#) will require uprooting and replacing the existing hierarchy of racialized power and privilege. A developed antiracist strategy will need to move beyond reforms in current institutions to complete elimination of existing systems of racialized power.

[...] Why should Whites support major changes in the racist system? One reason is general but essential: Whites have a moral obligation to take action, as individuals and as a group, to overturn the oppressive and systemic racism they and their ancestors have created, and make meaningful the liberty-and-justice framing of society they often loudly proclaim. Indeed, the activist-scholar [Paulo Freire](#) has argued that not only are those who are oppressed significantly dehumanized, but also those doing the oppression have dehumanized *themselves* and blocked a society's path to social justice and greater humanization of all.

There are also practical, small-scale benefits for Whites as individuals. One study of 50 White students found that interracial interactions were especially difficult for those with strong prejudices. Interactions with people of other racial groups resulted in very prejudices Whites being more likely than other Whites to perform poorly on color/word-matching tasks. Educational efforts that break down an individual's racist framing and its prejudices may give him or her better interactive skills in interracial interactions in an ever-diversifying United States.

There are significant group advantages. Systemic racism has created major [racial inequalities](#) in education and job skills, which affect not only those racially subordinated but the country as a whole. Brookings Institution analysts have noted that racial disparities in educational attainment do not just affect certain Americans of color, but greatly threaten the country's "future economic growth, as well as the broader promise of upward mobility in American society." In a situation where highly educated workers are badly needed, society benefits when more gain strong "human capital." Some years ago, the brilliant social scientist, [W.E.B. Du Bois](#), argued that systems of oppression that exclude some people miss out on "vast stores" of human wisdom. When Americans of color are oppressed in this country's institutions and Whites within them often suffer significantly if unknowingly. Excluding Americans of color has meant excluding much knowledge, creativity, and understanding from society generally. A society that ignores great stores of human knowledge and ability irresponsibly risks its future. This problem can regularly be seen in White policymakers' often poor decisions on many domestic issues as well as in their frequently poor decisions about U.S. foreign policy, as ill-advised military invasions overseas.

Racist America

Written by Dr. Joe Feagin PhD
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This excerpt above is from the masterpiece Racist America (released in 2014) available on amazon.com, .co.uk and .ca

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About the author: Dr. Joe Feagin lives in the U.S. He is the author of more than 60 books and 200 research articles. He received a nomination for a Pulitzer Prize for Ghetto Revolts

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