



# Barack Obama and White Privilege

## There Is Black Privilege and White Privilege

Opinion by JOHN STOSSEL

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Complaints about racism still dominate media discussion of the disparity between black and white success. Comedian Chris Rock tells white audiences, "None of ya would change places with me! And I'm rich! That's how good it is to be white!"

I assumed that the success of Barack Obama, as well as thousands of other black Americans and dark-skinned immigrants -- many of whom thrive despite language problems -- demonstrates that America today is largely a color-blind meritocracy. But a [white campus lecturer, Tim Wise](#), gets tremendous applause from students by saying things like, "[W]hite supremacy and privilege continue to skew opportunities hundreds of years after they were set in place" and in America, "meritocracy is as close to a lie as you can come." His message is in demand -- he is invited to more than 80 speaking engagements a year.

But black writer Shelby Steele argues that whites do blacks no favors wringing their hands about white privilege.

"I grew up in segregation," Steele told me. "So I really know what racism is. I went to segregated school. I bow to no one in my knowledge of racism, which is one of the reasons why I say white privilege is not a problem."

Steele claims, "the real problem is black irresponsibility. ... Racism is about 18th on a list of problems that black America faces."

Whites' preoccupation with guilt and compensation such as affirmative action is actually a subtle form of racism, writes Steele in his book ["White Guilt"](#). "One of the things that is clear about white privilege, and so many of the arguments for diversity that pretend to be compensatory, is that they advantage whites. They make the argument that whites can solve [black people's] problems & The problem with that is & you reinforce white supremacy & And black dependency.

"White privilege is a disingenuous idea," he adds. In fact, now there is "minority privilege."

"If I'm a black high school student today, there are white American institutions, universities, hovering over me to offer me opportunities. Almost every institution has a diversity committee. Every country club now has a diversity committee. I've been asked to join so many clubs, I can't tell you & I don't have to even look for opportunities in many cases, they come right to me."

Steele's comments weren't well received by some "20/20" viewers:

"The majority of black people in America live in poverty and hopelessness & " "[T]he only difference is the

hatred blacks experience by a significant percentage of Americans including other African-Americans, such as Shelby Steele & "Steele is racist. He is not black but biracial passing himself off as black & " "If John Stossel is going to invite a racist point of view, he should be clearer by using David Duke."

Of course, there is still racism in America. At ABC News we've aired hidden-camera video showing sales clerks spying on black customers, cab drivers passing blacks to pick up whites and employers favoring white-sounding names.

Steele says those are minor problems.

"The fact is," he adds, "we got a raw deal in America. We got a much better deal now. But we can't access it unless we take ... responsibility for getting there ourselves."

He makes good points. White privilege does still exist, but Barack Obama's success is more evidence that it's not the whole story. There are plenty of people in America who want to vote for someone because he is black. Or female.

It's not politically correct to say that. Hillary Clinton supporter Geraldine Ferraro said she wouldn't have been nominated for vice president in 1984 were she not a woman and that Obama would not have been doing so well were he not black. "Could I have said ... his experience is what puts him there? No. Could I say because his stand on issues have distinguished him? No & If Obama were a white man, he would not be in this position. &He happens to be very lucky to be who he is. And the country is caught up in the concept."

For saying that, she was repeatedly called racist.

[Obama said](#), "Anybody who knows the history of this country & would not take too seriously the notion that this has been a huge advantage. But," he added, "I don't think it's disadvantaged either."

The heat got so intense, Ferraro had to resign from Clinton's finance committee, and [Clinton disavowed her remarks](#).

On "Good Morning America," my colleague Diane Sawyer asked Ferraro, "Sorry you said this?" Ferraro surprised me when she answered, "Absolutely not."

[She wouldn't back down](#): "Any time anybody does anything that in any way pulls this campaign down and says let's address reality and the problems we're facing in this world, you're accused of being racist, so you have to shut up. Racism works in two different directions. I really think they're attacking me because I'm white. How's that?"

There is black privilege -- and white privilege. It's time to stop complaining about past discrimination and to treat people as individuals, not as members of a certain race.

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