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# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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## Combustible conversations: Racism

by Dr. Nicholas Mitchell



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There are few pop culture conversations more volatile than the one around racism. One poorly worded sentence can result in social ostracism. Racism doesn't allow for a neutral space where one can philosophically engage from the safety of abstract thought. We all have skin in the game, so to speak. Many people would rather avoid these conversations all together; but, if race relations are to improve, these conversations are necessary. One of the main stumbling blocks in conversations about racism is a lack of understanding about what racism actually is and how it manifests as a cultural phenomenon beyond mere personal prejudice.

### JSRI Future Activities

#### August 30

Fr. Fred Kammer will celebrate the Eucharist and will preach at the tenth anniversary observance of the founding of Cristo Rey Jesuit College Prep in Houston.

#### September 17

Fr. Kammer will participate as vice-chair at the Jesuit Volunteer Corps board meeting in Baltimore.

#### September 18

Fr. Kammer will be the opening speaker for the Statewide Staff Training Conference of Legal Services Alabama in Montgomery.



Loyola students attend a talk on racism by Tim Wise, sponsored by the Black Student Union.

### JSRI Recent Activities

#### July 21

Times-Picayune columnist Jarvis DeBerry quoted a JustSouth Quarterly article

Taken as a whole, racism has three manifestations[1]. The first manifestation is "interpersonal racism" which includes slurs, gestures, or an animus held by an individual.[2] This is what comes to mind for most people when they hear the word racism. Can a person of color be interpersonally racist against a white person? Absolutely. Can that interpersonal racism against a white person become dehumanizing? Absolutely.

by Dr. Sue Weishar in his [July 21 column](#).

### July 25

Dr. Weishar was a guest speaker at a CLE workshop for members of the New Orleans Federal Bar Association, held at the U.S. District Court Eastern District of Louisiana.

### August 1

Fr. Kammer welcomed 200-plus Jesuit Volunteers at the first combined national orientation at Loyola Chicago.

### August 6

Dr. Nicholas Mitchell attended a meeting of the Unanimous Jury Coalition.

### August 6

Dr. Weishar presented information on the growth of immigration detention in the U.S. and alternatives to detention for a [national webinar](#) hosted by Justice for Immigrants/USSCB.

### August 10

Summer intern Melinda Davis, senior at the University of Notre Dame, completed her work on various research projects.

### August 14

Dr. Ali Bustamante and Dr. Sue Weishar met with leaders of Solitary Watch at JSRI to discuss plans for a report on solitary confinement in Louisiana.

### August 22

Fr. Kammer addressed the Honors Ignatian Colloquium on who St. Ignatius was and why it matters.

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The second manifestation of racism is “institutional racism” which includes racist practices, policies, and laws enforced by the institutions people routinely interact with.[3] When people assert that the criminal justice system has a bias against black defendants or how schools are quick to suspend black and brown children for mild infractions, they are talking about institutional racism. In cases where racism has been written into the policies of a particular institution, the presence of interpersonal racists is not required to carry out an institutionally racist action.

The macro-level form of racism is that of “systemic racism” (sometimes called structural) which is the societal-level impact of mass institutional racism.[4] Jim Crow is the most concise example of this; but it also includes modern race-based disparities in income, wealth, access to education and healthcare, as well as access to secure adequate representation in a court of law. So what connects these manifestations of racism? Power. Power is what is required for an individual to take their own interpersonal racism, enshrine it in the laws and policies of institutions, and create a systemic racist impact on a targeted community. What is commonly called “white privilege” is an example of benefits granted by systemic racism to the favored class in power. Can people of color be institutionally and systemically racist? No, because they lack the required power to do so. In short, people of color cannot oppress white people in the United States.

Ultimately, race relations discourse always ends up on the topic of who is responsible. Responsibility is a serious moral matter and necessitates the recognition of inconvenient truths. Privilege is bestowed upon birth and without consent. In this way, no one is guilty of creating the pre-existing racist systems that grant them privilege. Yet, when one becomes aware of the current state of affairs and their own privilege, a choice must be made for which one is responsible. One can: a) support the status quo that preserves privilege thereby becoming guilty of its perpetuation; or b) assume a neutral position thereby becoming complicit in the perpetuation of privilege; or c) support the creation of policies that undermine and remove the lingering effects of white supremacist policies thereby practicing and embracing social justice. The choice is ultimately an individual one.

[1] Lawrence, K., & Keleher, T. (2004). Structural racism. In *Race and Public Policy Conference, Berkeley*. Retrieved from <http://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/Definitions%20of%20Racism.pdf>; *Race and Social Justice Initiative, Government of Seattle, Types of Racial Inequity*. Retrieved from <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/RSJI/Defining-racism.pdf>; 857-863.

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid

[4] Ibid

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans. Please send feedback to [jsri@loyno.edu](mailto:jsri@loyno.edu)

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