

# Systematic and Ambient Racism

Adult Forum, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Eggertsville

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## Systemic and Ambient Racism Defined

Expanding the “1619 Project” folder’s lead definition (blue page) a bit:

“What is systemic racism? [It is] ...ordinances and statutes [and customs that accord] one ethnic group certain rights and privileges [and treatments], while denying other groups [the same].”

Banaji, Fiske, and Massey, “Systemic racism: [...]” (2021, in folder) evince that “racial biases persist [in]

- (a) institutional structures,
- (b) societal structures,
- (c) individual mental structures,
- (d) everyday interaction patterns.”

I will call (c) and (d) *ambient* racism. Doing so connects better to AI and social media evidence I will present.

## How to Measure It?

- **Not** in units of people, but—
- —like how we measure temperature or air quality.

Certainly the racism rate was high in the past. How *prevalent* now? The rate of cheating in *online* chess is a numerically similar question. Is it:

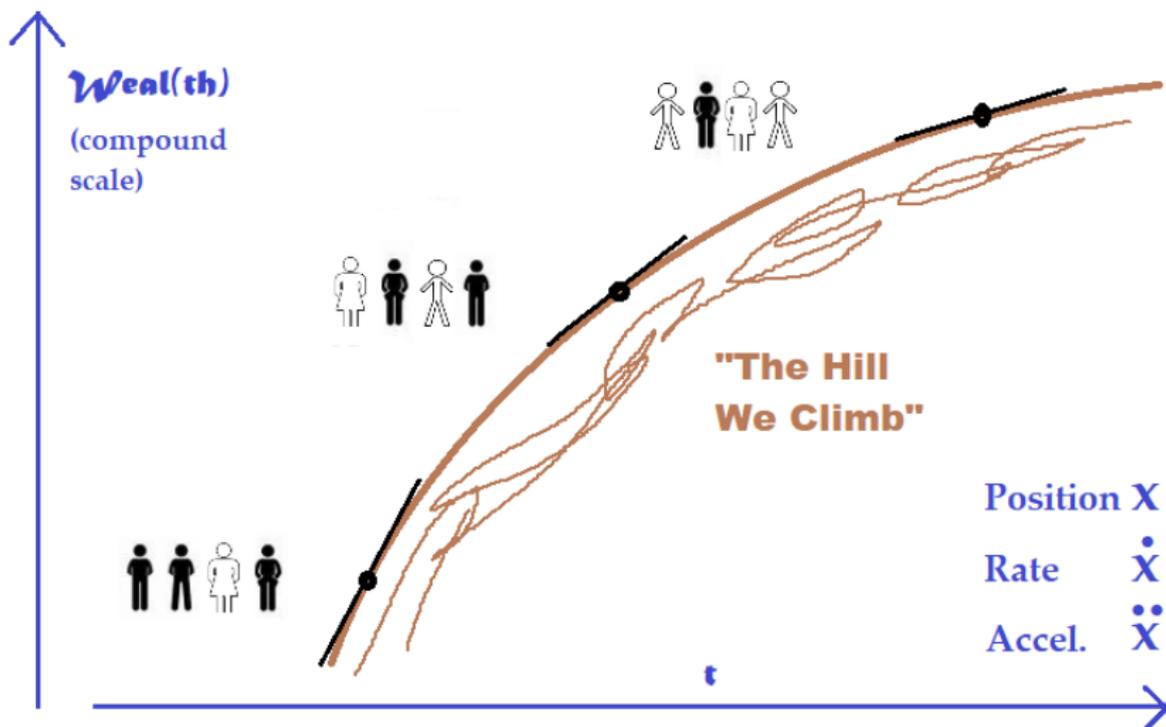
- *a trace?* Compare to having a **0.1%** cheating rate in Chess.com's "Titled Tuesday" tourneys ( $2 \times 500$  players per week).
- *tangible?* Compare to a **1%** rate. This may seem small but amounts to ten cheaters per week.
- *pervasive?* Say north of **10%**—as alleged by former world chess<sub>1</sub> champion Vladimir Kramnik.

Two key notions:

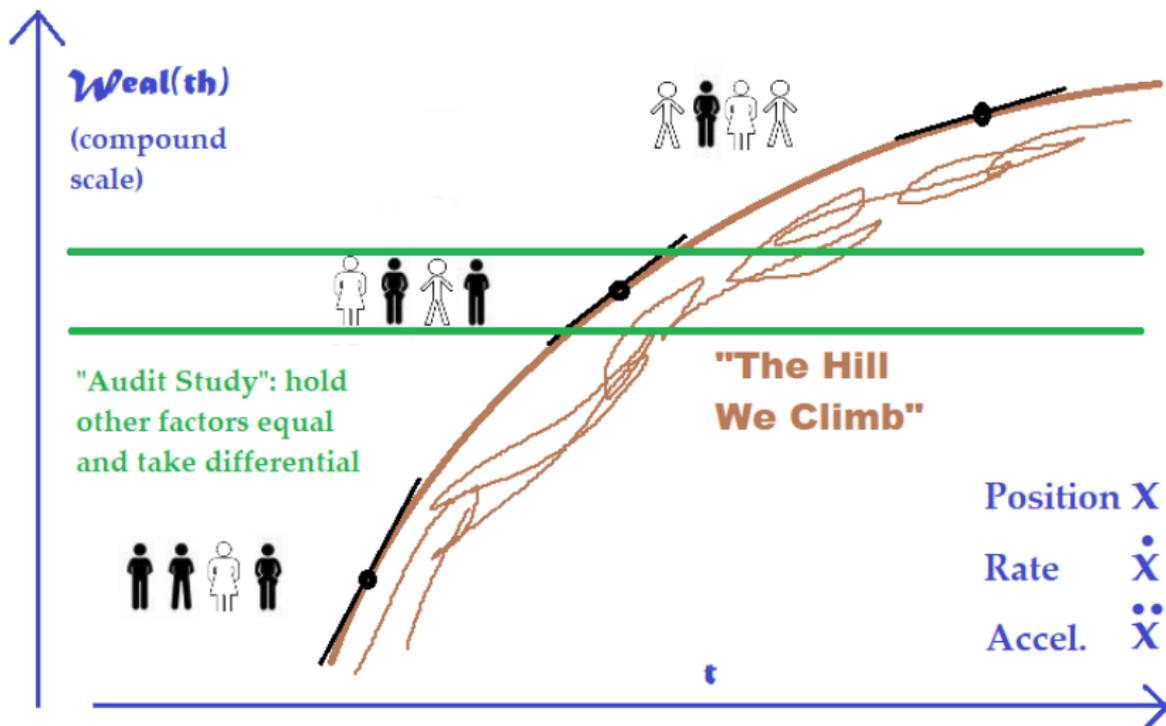
- Quantify impact on the **rate** of someone's progress in society...
- ...under **scientifically controlled** circumstances.

<sup>1</sup>Kramnik **said at least 25%** but meant the last 5 of 11 rounds:  $25 \times 5/11 = 11.4\%$ .

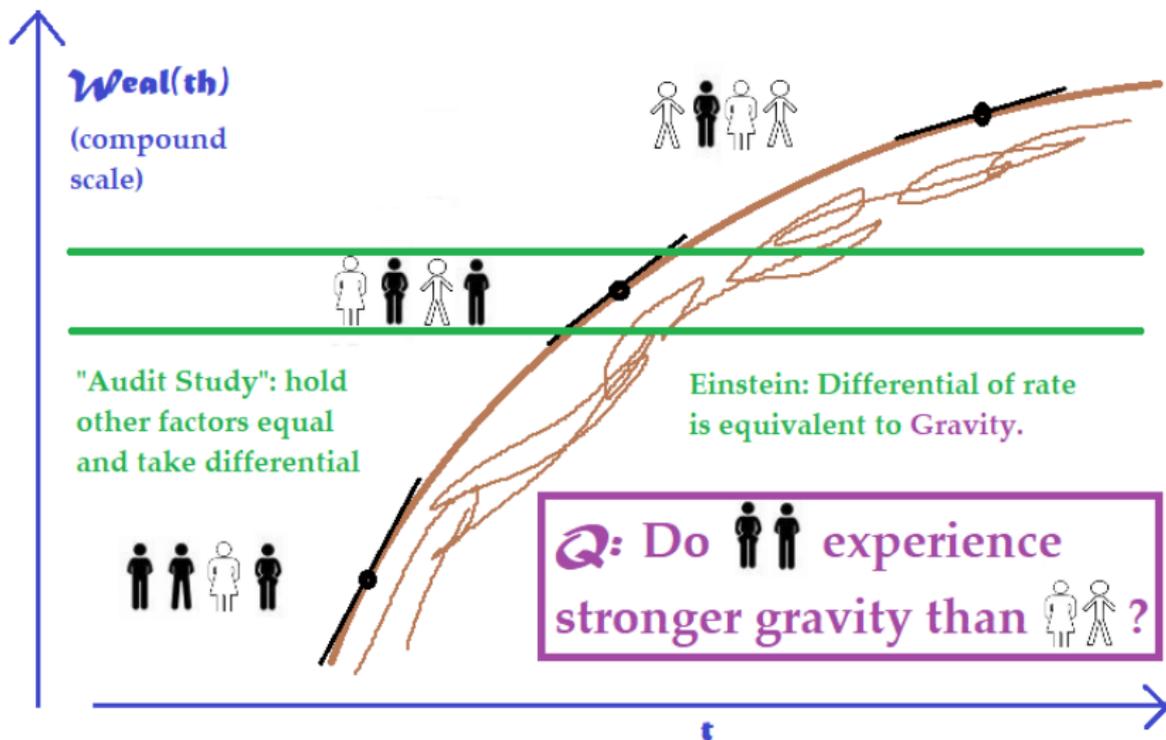
# Scientific Setting I



# Scientific Setting II



# Scientific Setting III



## (Not-So-) Old Example: Fair Housing

- My mother was an Auditor for the Fair Housing Council of Northern NJ in the 1960s.
- Pose as an apartment applicant...
- ...with the same life and financial specs as a black applicant.
- Whites used to win such apartments at overwhelming rates.
- Express national studies in 1977, 1989, 2000, and 2012, reviewed in Oh and Yinger (2015).
- Marked discrimination in 1977, but 80% lower by 2012.
- Recent scorecard shows landlords winning majority of cases; many of their losses are judged more by inadvertence than policy.

## More-Recent Example: Résumé Callback Studies

- **Landmark 2003 NBER study** found that job applications with distinctively A-A names like Jamal and Lakisha received **50%** fewer callbacks than identical CVs with White names.
- Also found significant differential in rate from higher-quality résumés.
- **Larger-scale 2021 study** (led by U. Chicago and U.C. Berkeley) found **10%** dropoff.
- Lowest one-fifth of Fortune 500 companies collectively had **25%** dropoff. **2024 review**.
- **Reproduced** by Bowdoin economist on smaller scale in 2023.
- **Oct. 2024 study**: carries thru to AI-based filters. **Also this**.

## Example 3: Wealth-of-Upbringing Studies

- [2018 study](#) by Harvard, NBER, and the US Census Bureau found enormous racial disparity in those growing up in equal-income households.
- [2018 NYT article](#), with visualizations.
- Complication: gap vastly affects boys *but not girls*.
- [Studies continued](#) thru present.
- [Papers, slides, and data](#).
- Extensive statistical rigorization.

# Taking Stock (by curr. state $x$ , rate $\dot{x}$ , and accel. $\ddot{x}$ )

Robert F. Smith, [11 examples of systemic racism](#) (first five also [here](#)):

- 1 Racial Disparities in Criminal Justice ( $x, \dot{x}$ )
- 2 Education Inequities ( $x, \dot{x}$ )
- 3 Housing Discrimination ( $\ddot{x}$ )
- 4 Employment Discrimination (Smith gives  $x$ ; we've seen  $\ddot{x}$ )
- 5 Healthcare Disparities ( $x$ )
- 6 Environmental Racism (e.g., Flint MI) ( $x, \dot{x}$ )
- 7 Racial Profiling and Policing ( $x, \dot{x}, \ddot{x}$ )
- 8 Voter Suppression ( $\dot{x}, \ddot{x}$ )
- 9 Media Representation and Stereotypes ( $x, \dot{x}$ )
- 10 Wealth (Smith gives only  $x$ ; we've seen  $\ddot{x}$  for opportunity)
- 11 Immigration Policies and Xenophobia ( $x, \dot{x}$ )

## Sentiment Analysis, Data, and AI

- **Sentiment Analysis** quantifies opinions from social media.
- E.g., more effective for finding car defects than dealer reports.
- Book *Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, and What the Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are*, by Seth Stephens-Davidowitz. Thesis: Formal survey responses are inconsistent with opinions from the same populations mined on social media.
- Paper on Obama and N-word (2014, no Trump).
- Book *Weapons of Math Destruction*, by Cathy O’Neill. Thesis: Mathematical models, including those now used in AI, fossilize biases in data from remote history and skewed prior sources.
- Basic point: **we** supply the training data on the Internet, so it **bakes in** whatever racism and sexism we show.
- **Algorithmic Fairness**, a major offshoot of my field, combats this.

## Examples and Field Tests (added parts in [...])

- Article, “[How our data encodes systematic racism](#)” in Dec. 2020.
- Example from article: “Google Image search results for ‘healthy skin’ show only light-skinned women.”
- Try it now in mid-2025. What do we see? [With Google search, Blacks arguably overrepresented, 35–40%. But for East and South Asians, almost none. And why so few men?]
- Try search “Sentiment analysis racism Twitter X”. [Results [here](#).]
- The mechanism thus explained applies also for sexism. [Example](#).
- Recent case where Elon Musk’s AI called “Grok” [went unhinged](#).
- I was not able to (re-)produce similar examples involving racism for the presentation.
- It is a fair selection principle to take *prominent* blogs and X and Facebook threads and tally *what people say in comments to them*.

## Two Interesting Test Cases: How Much Racism?

- **Tradwife** Facebook and Instagram pages. [The latter makes a single scroll of the images used on Facebook.]
- Despite long Black ‘traditional marriage’ history—and **revival**—this site is certainly not inclusive—except maybe bottom right of **this**?
- How many items like **this**, **this**, **this**, **this**, **this**, **this** (see comments), and **this** amount to pandering racism? [Ooh, I missed **this**—and see its comments! And **this**. I did show **this** and its comment.]
- **Added**: Note comment by **mrsnicolemichelle** **here**: “Whoa! Didn’t know this account was racist. I’m a Christian conservative housewife and I’m trying to convince people this space isn’t racist. But I was terribly wrong.” Also see comments **here**, **here**, and **here**.
- Second example: **FischerKing** on X. Referenced prominently by Ross Douthat **here** and Musk **here**. (Nvm. Bobby F.’s **own racism**.)
- Comments recently **here**, and earlier **here** and **here**, have wide range.

## What Others Say and Do

- Now let's consider what authorities in those camps *say* and *do*.
- Rod Dreher touched off a new **kerfuffle** about the “woke right” last week. See also his “**racist right**” quote from 2021.
- Most telling indirect indicator: **successful market research**.
- Exactly what Joe Biden meant by “dog whistle as big as a foghorn” in 2020. As for 2024, see **this** or **this**.
- Puts into context the *actions* recorded in the last section of the 1619 Project folder. DOGE staffer racism is **not just one**.
- New example: **de-naming a ship for Harvey Milk** is one thing, but why **say** Harriet Tubman and Thurgood Marshall et al. are next?
- Their ads, their pandering, and their excess actions, already allege racism in their supporters more primarily than anything we can do.

## Conclusions and Postscript on 'Woke'

- The hard numbers indicate that African-Americans experience **at least 10% stronger gravity**.
- The sentiment numbers and field examples reinforce this conclusion.
- Implies at least 10% harder effort needed to gain same returns.
- In chess, **I can prove** that the “Kramnik 10+0” level **is wrong**.
- But with real-life racism, **the situation is quite the opposite**.

In Q&A, a question was asked about “woke.” Its proper definition is:

Awake to the persistence of systemic racism and the daily compromises thereby imposed.

The appropriation of this word as a smear is a *fundamental uncharity*. I said so directly to friends of Princeton's Robert George at May 2023 Princeton Reunions, a week before Donald Trump **called out** exactly the sense of intellectual laziness I meant. Then came **this**. (Now, Dreher...)