

Systematic and Ambient Racism

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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:

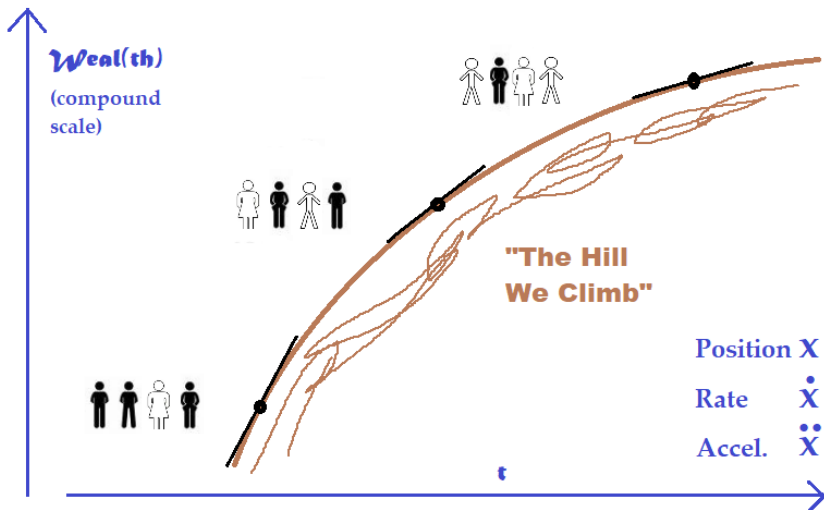
- *a trace?* Compare to having a **0.1%** cheating rate in Chess.com's "Titled Tuesday" tourneys (2×500 players per week).
- *tangible?* Compare to a **1%** rate. This may seem small but amounts to ten cheaters per week.
- *pervasive?* Say north of **10%**—as alleged by former world chess₁ champion Vladimir Kramnik.

Two key notions:

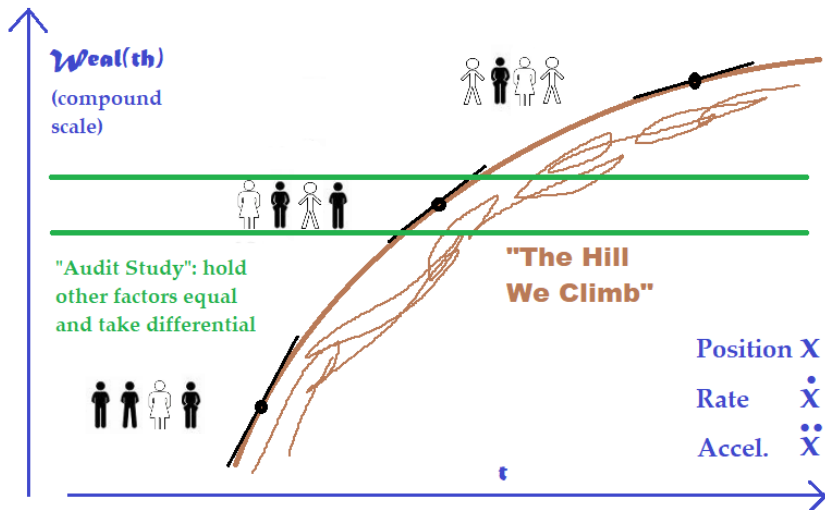
- Quantify impact on the **rate** of someone's progress in society...
- ...under **scientifically controlled** circumstances.

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

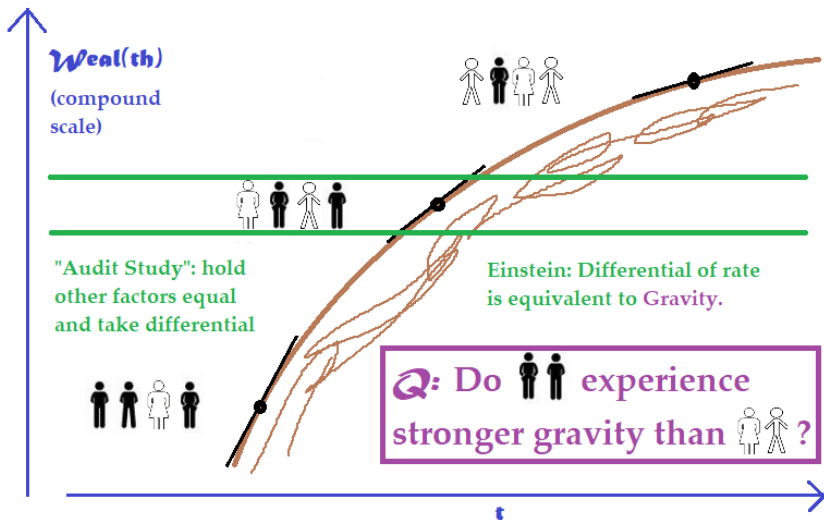
Scientific Setting I



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 **al 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...)