

JOURNALISM JOINS THE SOCIAL JUSTICE CRUSADE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on how politics has made its way into journalism:

The Associated Press' new "style book" goes beyond trendy: It has joined the social justice crusade. By referring to white people in the lowercase, and black people in the uppercase—"white" and "Black"—AP is wearing its politics on its sleeve. Others, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, have already followed suit. CNN and Fox News, however, have decided to capitalize white as well.

It's the reasoning that matters most. According to AP, "white people in general have much less shared history and culture." The *New York Times* agrees, saying, "White doesn't represent a shared culture and history in the way Black does."

The journalists should leave sociology to us sociologists.

It is certainly true that white people do not have a shared culture and history—the experiences of the Irish and the Germans are very different. It is also true that no white person thinks of himself as a white person: his identity is rooted in his ethnicity, not his race. But contrary to what the journalists think, blacks also have no shared culture and history.

There are black Puerto Ricans and blond Puerto Ricans. Those from the West Indies may be black, but this racial term has no meaning. In Africa, no one identifies as a black man any more than the Italians think of themselves as white people. Moreover, those who live in Italy identify on the basis of their region, not their ethnicity. Africans identify on the basis of their tribe or clan, and in some cases by their nationality; they do not identify on the basis of their race.

In the United States, there were free blacks and slave blacks. Some free blacks owned black slaves. It is silly to maintain that these black people have a shared history and culture.

Asians have no shared history or culture, either. Not only are there huge differences between the Chinese and the Vietnamese (they have been at war with each other dating back to 111 B.C.), within China distinctions are drawn between the Han and the Hakka; regional identities are also crucial. So should we use upper or lowercase to refer to these “people of color” (another meaningless term)?

Mexicans consider themselves Mexicans, not Hispanics, just as Chileans consider themselves Chileans. Spaniards are very particular about being known as Spaniards, and do not take kindly to being lumped in with Latinos, a term that is more generic than behaviorally meaningful.

There are Japanese Jews and Argentinean Jews. There are Sephardic Jews and Ashkenazic Jews. Are Jews a race? No. Are they an ethnic group? Only in the sense that they have, what sociologist Milton Gordon called, “a shared sense of peoplehood.”

Colin Powell is often called African American, yet his parents immigrated from Jamaica. Susan Rice’s maternal grandparents also came from Jamaica. Barack Obama’s father was African but his mother was white. Why is he called African American? In nations such as Israel, a person’s identity is determined by the mother. That would make him a white man. Kamala Harris’ mother is Tamil Indian and her father is from Jamaica, so why does her Wikipedia page say she is “the second African American woman” to serve in the U.S. Senate? She clearly is not.

The media can do whatever they want, but they should not expect us to respect their reasoning. The games they are playing are rooted in politics, not linguistics.