

## LET'S ELIMINATE "MINORITIES"

When I publish my dictionary I will leave out the word "minorities". That will not be a popular thing to do, for there are lots of people who like the word and will undoubtedly continue to use it. When I do eliminate the word from my dictionary I will be in a clear "minority".

I have no say as to what goes into any dictionary, and I don't anticipate requests for advice from any publishers, but I can control my own vocabulary usage, I will no longer use the word "minorities" to refer to racial groups in this country. There are several reasons.

First, there are a number of my friends who are offended by a word which has an accumulated meaning which is tainted with images and concepts of inferiority. Here are some examples of that prejudice.

In logic the "minor premise is the lesser or secondary one".

In sports we designate as "minor" leagues those which are deemed not as good as the "majors"; to call a player a "minor leaguer" is to diminish that player's status.

When we name periods of life, we reserve the term "minor" to apply to those who have not attained a legal age, who are assumed not to be as responsible as persons over the designated age. Minors are still legally treated as children. Add to that the history of ways in which society stripped black people of their adulthood, particularly referring to black men as "boys" and there is a powerful image of deprivation.

In playing cards the "minor" suit is the one which has lesser scoring possibility.

In numbers the "minority" is less than half, the smaller number, and in a society where bigness is valued, that which is smaller is often de-valued.

In music the word is more neutral; even there a "minor" note which is simply a half tone between whole tones might carry for some meaning of being "half" and therefore not "complete".

The accumulated weight given to the word leaves "minority" heavily burdened with negatives. It is doubtful that many people can apply the word "minority" to racial groups in this country and be free from those deeply enculturated assumptions which accompany the word. The word is often heard as offensive by those whom it labels. Since I don't like to offend people, there goes that word!

A second reason for eliminating the word "minorities" from my vocabulary is that its meaning has diminished as more and more people claim to be "minorities". There was a time when the word was used almost exclusively to refer to groups which were either small in number and/or oppressed groups; in everyday use here in the United States of America that most often meant racial groups. After the attention given to "racial minorities" in the Civil Rights movement and in Congressional debates, more and more people began to claim the status of "minorities". Gay people were defined as "minorities" both because of their numbers and their oppression. Women cannot claim to be a "minority" by numbers, but certainly by their oppression they qualify. Handicapped persons, older citizens, and white ethnic groups began to claim "minority" status, and all have just claim to that word in some sense. Stretching the word to the logical conclusion of its meaning everyone becomes a minority of some sort, and then the word begins to lose meaning. It loses meaning especially as it becomes applied to any group which is oppressed, because it seems to imply that all oppressions are the same.

All groups have not suffered oppression in the same way; racial groups have been especially singled out for harsh forms of oppression in this country.

Not all "minorities" have been enslaved and lynched as have blacks.

Not all "minorities" have had land and rights stolen from them as have Native Americans.

Not all "minorities" have been the object of fluctuating immigration and border rules as have Chinese and Mexican people.

Not all "minorities" have been born as citizens, as have Puerto Ricans, migrated to the mainland and then been treated as foreigners.

Not all "minorities" have been put behind fences as Japanese Americans were during World War II.

Not all "minorities" have been subjected to the consistent and long-standing discrimination of anti-Semitism.

There are distinctions which are blurred when we begin to refer to all groups as "minorities" in the same way in which we refer to racial "minorities". Since I think it crucial to keep those distinctions clear, there goes that word in reference to racial groups!

A third reason for eliminating the word "minority" when referring to racial groups, comes from an expanding word view. The groups to which we in the United States of American have traditionally referred as "racial minorities" clearly represent a majority in the world. Those of us who are white are the numerical minority. Designating people of color as "minorities" obscures this fact. To forget that people of color are a majority in the world and that whites are the minority is to operate in the context of a myth which we can no longer afford. The term "minority" when applied to racial groups in this country contributes to a misunderstanding because it encourages a way of thinking which denies the world reality. The reality is a world made up largely of people of color.

So I have eliminated the word "minority" in referring to racial groups. If you have read carefully you have already understood what I will substitute. I will refer to racial "minorities" as people of color. (And that is not the same as the old term, "colored people"! ) I will do so because it more accurately designates what I mean, it avoids a word loaded with negative connotation, it refers to a wide range of racial groups, it includes a recognition of the uniqueness of racial groups, and it avoids the illusion that whites are the majority of people in the world.

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