

# ‘Whites not wanted’ is what Dalhousie evidently considers ‘progressive’

If it really wanted to be clear, the university could simply say 'no whites need apply' rather than asking for 'racially visible' candidates

Dalhousie University in Halifax says its search for a new senior administrator will be restricted to "racially visible" and Indigenous candidates.*Darren Pittman/CP*

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Dalhousie University is looking for a new dean of students but says it is interested only in someone who is “racially visible.” Perhaps I’ll apply. I’ve taught at university all my life and I’m racially visible — in the sense that my race is visible: I’m white.

But I’m guessing that’s not what they mean by “racially visible.” What they surely mean is “non-white.” Or maybe “non-white” and also “non-Asian,” since there’s now anxiety in some circles that people of Asian ancestry are over-represented in parts of society, especially the parts that pay well for lots of brain power.

There is the same lack of clarity with “visible minority,” the logical opposite of which is “invisible minority.” There are such things as invisible minorities — chess players, vegans, gays — though increasingly many now choose to make themselves visible by their dress, behaviour or lapel pins. But again, the real, intended meaning of “visible minority” is “non-white.”

## Why hide behind an indirect, euphemistic, invented categorization?

It's a strange thing about identity progressivism: If the cause is so just, the need so compelling and the case for it so clear, why is the language so mealy-mouthed? If you don't want a white person for your dean of students, and you think that's a perfectly reasonable position to take, indeed the only reasonable position to take, why not just say "This job is only open to people who are not white"? Why hide behind an indirect, euphemistic, invented categorization?

While we're on the subject of imprecise language, the pervasive use of the term "inappropriate" in the #MeToo movement's discussion of sexual misconduct also strikes me as, well, inappropriate. "Inappropriate" is so delicate, like what Emily Post would have said if you chose the wrong spoon for your lobster bisque. Much of the behaviour being discussed is far beyond "inappropriate." It's disgusting, repellent, sleazy, lecherous, predatory, not to mention, in many cases, illegal. On the other hand, some of the other behaviour being described seems merely annoying, irritating, bothersome, in poor taste, and so on. When someone is accused of "inappropriate behaviour" how are we to know if he is an actual rapist or merely a teller of off-colour jokes in mixed company? I say "merely" to suggest, not that telling off-colour jokes in mixed or indeed any company is something one should do, but that, despite the forced metaphors of gender ideologues, doing so is not comparable to actual rape.

## People are being excluded from consideration because of the colour of their skin

Of course, if Dalhousie really wanted to be clear and non-delicate in its language, it could say "No whites need apply." Even progressives understand, however,

that the historical parallels this phrase brings to mind would not be helpful. But that's the point: What's happening is exactly what happened when signs of that sort were observed. People are being excluded from consideration because of the colour of their skin.

Why race-based hiring is a bad idea should not need explaining. Dalhousie will not get its best possible dean of students. It will get its best possible dean of students who is not white. He or she may be one and the same person but, if so, a racially open competition would find that person, too. That is especially true in universities, and I expect many businesses as well, where these days diversity and inclusiveness are administrative preoccupations.

There is also the harm done to qualified white people, who in the name of inclusion are now to face exclusion. It may well be true that white people before them, maybe even their own relatives, practiced discrimination against non-whites. But punishing them for wrongs they had no part in is excessively rough justice.

There are two ways to respond to racism and discrimination. One is to work hard to make society non-racist and non-discriminatory so that people will be judged "by the content of their character" not the colour of their skin. We will never be colour-blind. Those of us with sight will always see what a person's colour is. But we can behave as if we didn't see.

The other strategy is to institutionalize racism by assigning people to their races (a concept that 50 years ago progressive thought considered backward and itself racist) and then to make judgments about them, including decisions about what jobs they can hold and maybe how much they can earn — if pay equity enthusiasts start legislating against more than male-female group differences.

Progressives are supposed to be idealistic. After so much progress has in fact been made, it is a strange, sad surrender for them to opt for strategy two, which accepts that racial considerations must be decisive in human relations.

As an economist, I'm bound to concede my own interest, even if my days in the labour market are numbered: Rules that bar whites from consideration will hurt me. But won't they hurt of all of us in the long run?