

Lawrence's (1990) primary contention is that regulating racist speech is necessary for societal betterment. He proposes that this can be achieved while maintaining freedom of speech. Lawrence substantiates his opinion with two varying justifications.

Lawrence makes the compelling claim that racist speech should be regulated because it perpetuates harm and impedes meaningful discourse. In reference to the fighting words doctrine, Lawrence proposes that whilst racist speech may not invoke instantaneous violence in most situations, he elaborates on the various circumstantial and societal factors that inhibit adequate responses from victims and prevent progression to intellectual discourse. Nevertheless, it shares the same preemptive nature and injurious impact on the receiving parties, thereby subject to restriction under the doctrine.

Lawrence underscores the immediacy of injury dealt to victims that deprives any chance of intermediary reflection or responsive speech. Instead of initiating conversations, racist speech invokes defensive psychological reactions from its captive audience, temporarily immobilizing their ability to respond — an effect that Lawrence proposes is the very aim of assaulters.

Racial slurs demean individuals rather than foster meaningful dialogue (Croom, 2013). Lawrence's viewpoint aligns with Croom's analysis that the inherent function of racial slurs is to vilify and harass vulnerable individuals, precluding any potential for constructive discourse. If racist speech were truly intent on fostering understanding, it would be communicated respectfully to facilitate meaningful discussion. Instead, racist speech typically demeans and excludes, undermining the very principles of free expression it purports to exercise (West, 2012). By conveying stereotypical and dehumanizing messages, individuals are stripped of their dignity and agency, isolating them from equal societal participation and making true democratic dialogue impossible.

As such, Lawrence's contention proves convincing — that the malicious agenda to injure minorities frames racist speech as undeserving of protection under the First Amendment, necessitating regulation to end the perpetuation of societal disharmony.

Moreover, Lawrence opines that the hierarchical structure of modern society silences the voice of minority groups which eliminates opportunities for further discussion. Lawrence elaborates that the epithet behind racial insults has been ingrained within societal beliefs, while the pervasiveness of racist speech is exacerbated by the establishment of social classes. As such, victims in lower echelons are rendered powerless to react to assailants of higher social statuses.

Although the historical baggage of racist speech may never be forgotten, minorities today are empowered to confront it. Our modern societal landscape entails that racist discourse is met with resolute resistance rather than passive submission. Social activism and political amendments have created avenues for marginalized communities to oppose racial prejudice efficaciously (Johnson & Brown, 2020).

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives in the United States lifted restrictions on diversity training, demonstrating the government's acknowledgment of systemic racism. Through this reform, comprehensive training equips minorities with the tools to counteract racism and reduce workplace mistreatment (Society of Women Engineers, 2021).

Also, large-scale movements have empowered minorities to combat racism and enact change by expressing their beliefs on the global stage. The #MeToo Movement shed light on the unique challenges faced by women of color, challenging entrenched power dynamics and amplifying marginalized voices, a powerful testament that minorities are proactively confronting injustices from those in higher societal echelons (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Chaudhuri, 2021).

This combined effort has monumentally narrowed the gap in the societal hierarchy and eroded power imbalance. No longer are vulnerable groups oppressed or forced into submission as modern society provides structural support that enables minorities to oppose racism.

Hence, his negligence towards the evolving power dynamics that has empowered minority groups to confront the prejudices of the past, diminishes the coherence of Lawrence's viewpoint towards the necessity of regulation in abolishing hierarchical oppression and promoting critical conversations.

References

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