

# The Immorality of Racism

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## ABSTRACT

This case study of an archival object questions the morality of racism. The archive is an educational flyer created by the SNCC that explains a sickle cell anemia genocide against African Americans in the United States. The increasing death rate due to the illness was tied to the government neglecting to educate the public on the mentioned disease that was severely affecting the Black community. Racism is analyzed through the perspective of philosopher Immanuel Kant. The concept of racism is put through Kant's Contradiction in Conception morality test, and fails. Racism also violates Kant's moral obligation to treat individuals with dignity and respect. Therefore, racism is morally impermissible and the U.S. government was wrong for neglecting the healthcare needs of the African American community.

## BACKGROUND

This archival object is a flyer created by the Student National Coordinated Committee (SNCC), and is titled "Sickle Cell Anemia Genocide". The flyer includes two images; a healthy red blood cell and a red blood cell affected by sickle cell disease. The SNCC explains that sickle cell anemia is a hereditary disease in African Americans and is identifiable because, "the whites of that brother or sister's eyes may be slightly yellow". Next, they define genocide as "the mass murder of a people through neglect or direct destruction of any national racial group or causing serious bodily harm to the members of that particular group". The SNCC concludes that since there is a lack of education provided about sickle cell anemia, the U.S. government is neglecting the health of their African American population, and is responsible for the large death rate from sickle cell disease. Following the definition given on the flyer, the SNCC accuses the U.S. for launching a genocide on the Black community by neglecting their health and causing serious harm to their racial group.

## MORAL ISSUE

The flyer mentions genocidal actions against African Americans from the United States government. The moral issue that arises from this archival object is racism. Racism is the direct treatment of another race differently than others due to a prejudice that one race is superior to the other. In this case study it is argued that the United States is being racist towards the Black community since they are directly treating their race differently than others.

## MORALLY RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Below are factors that were noted during the case study that helped decipher the nature of the flyer and the moral issue that was presented.

- ❖ The images printed on the flyer (sickle cell anemia was not common knowledge since pictures were included to explain the disease)
- ❖ The writing style (the sentence structure was colloquial and referred to the reader as a member of the Black community)
- ❖ SNCC's definition of genocide (the definition given criminalizes the United States)

The audience directly impacted by this flier is the Black community.

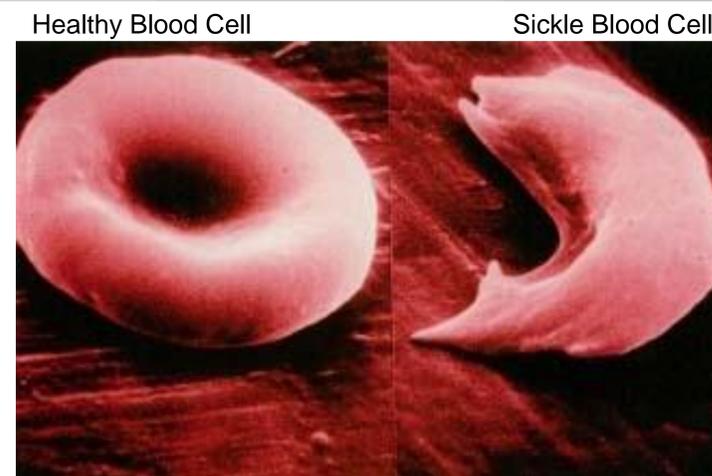
## RELEVANT MORAL VALUES

The moral issue of racism was analyzed through the perspective of Immanuel Kant. In Kantian ethics, racism is impermissible because it cannot be made universal law. The concept of racism was put through the Contradiction in Conception test, as seen below in table 1. By universalizing racism, the concept of racism changes and therefore it fails the test.

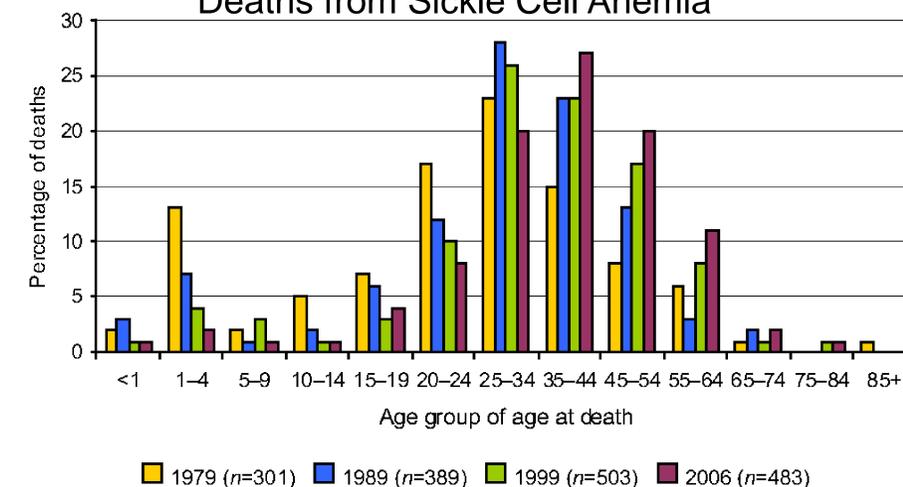
Another issue Kantian ethics would pose against racism is that it disrespects the dignity of humanity. A person's presence alone is enough of a reason to treat them with dignity. Being racist to another individual is only treating them as a means. Kant explains to treat someone as a means *and* an end. To treat someone as an end is to give them respect and dignity (dignity being the treatment of someone's plans and goals as equal importance to your own). One cannot treat someone's plans and goals as equal to their own if they are being racist and discriminatory.

Table #1: Contradiction in Conception test

A: Concept	Universalize the moral issue, racism
B: Process	Due to A, living a life of being treated with racial prejudice (racism) is equal to a life of being treated without racial prejudice (racism)
C: Result	Following A and B, the concept of racism changes because the definition now is that being racist = not being racist



## Deaths from Sickle Cell Anemia



## SUMMARY

- ❖ Racism is morally impermissible and unjustified according to Kantian ethics.
- ❖ Every individual ought to be treated equally, with dignity, as a means, *and* as an end.
- ❖ The healthcare neglect of the African American community from the United States was morally impermissible and unjustified because it was an act of racism.

## REFERENCES

- University of Texas at San Antonio, special collections, SNCC, "Sickle Cell Anemia Genocide"
- Pic 1: <http://www.humanillnesses.com/original/Se-Sy/Sickle-cell-Anemia.htm>
- Pic 2: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Population-estimates-of-sickle-cell-disease-in-the-Hassell/1a13722d1627a656d43fcc963fbc2172d8137dd>