

Statistics in woke service?

cnav.news/2023/05/08/editorial/talk/statistics-woke-service/

By Terry A. Hurlbut

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You’ve heard the proverbs. “There are three kinds of lies: lies, d____d lies, and statistics.” “Figures don’t lie, but liars figure.” Two days ago, Twitter offered proof positive of both those maxims. It also offered further proof, in case we needed any, that the Ivy League is not what it once was. John Harvard – and separately, Elihu Yale – must be spinning in their graves to see what the institutions that bear their names have now become.

A statistics student passes off woke illogic for sound science

Meet Kareem Carr – whose [Twitter profile](#) belies his account title. He calls himself a “data scientist” but is really a student working on his Ph.D. at Harvard.

I tweet about data science: what it is, how to do it better, why it matters for the rest of society.

His profile at Harvard says he has become a consultant in data science at the Institute of Quantitative Social Science. If the thread he dropped yesterday is any indicator, Harvard has very low standards for making someone a consultant.

Fellow user End Wokeness became his target when he published this bar chart.

Perspective is everything pic.twitter.com/Xpvmr1CfHo

— End Wokeness (@EndWokeness) [May 5, 2023](#)

The title: “Interracial violent crime incidents in 2018.” It defines three groups – white, black and Hispanic. The United States Census defines the term *white* to include *not of Hispanic origin*. Hispanic origin trumps anything. The Bureau of Justice Statistics, the source of the

chart, no doubt uses the same definition as the Census.

That chart shows two things: that when members of one “race” attack another:

1. Whites are disproportionately the targets of such attacks by either of the other two groups, and
2. Whites do not attack others nearly as frequently as those others attack whites.

The numbers in the bar chart are *absolute* numbers, not *per capita* numbers. Whites still are a plurality if not “the majority,” so *per capita* numbers would show whites being even less offensive – and blacks and Hispanics being more.

Enter Kareem Carr, ready to give those other groups a “scientific” excuse. To do that, he manipulates statistics.

Two threads, showing how to manipulate statistics

Mr. Carr’s anchor tweet has a screencap of End Wokeness’ chart, and Elon Musk’s response to it. End Wokeness’ point was that the media focus on white-on-black crime though it is the *least frequent* category even in absolute terms. (Elon Musk, for his part, wonders why the media should have such a flawed focus.)

Herewith the thread:

This bar chart has attracted the attention of the richest man in the world. Let me walk you through how I would interpret it as a statistician (and a human).

pic.twitter.com/2FTpCjUZXP

— Kareem Carr | Data Scientist |  (@kareem_carr) [May 6, 2023](#)

I like to say Statistics is critical thinking with numbers.

As a statistician, I want these numbers to help me understand **why** things are happening and what I can do about it.

— Kareem Carr | Data Scientist |  (@kareem_carr) [May 6, 2023](#)

Now, I would suspect if the media did disproportionally focus on white-on-black crime, it would be because they have a good faith belief that the causal element in those particular incidents is anti-black racism.

— Kareem Carr | Data Scientist |  (@kareem_carr) [May 6, 2023](#)

Do we think that the primary cause of black-on-white crime in America is anti-white racism or is it vastly more likely that it's because Black Americans are disproportionately poor and White Americans are disproportionately rich?

— Kareem Carr | Data Scientist |  (@kareem_carr) [May 6, 2023](#)

The way the original bar chart tallies up crime by the race of the victim and of the perpetrator imposes a conclusion on the viewer that crime is primarily monocausal and that the single most important cause is race.

— Kareem Carr | Data Scientist |  (@kareem_carr) [May 6, 2023](#)

Framing all crime as a form of racial harm comes off as a white nationalist framing to me and this presentation of the data leads the viewer down a merry path to white nationalist solutions.

— Kareem Carr | Data Scientist |  (@kareem_carr) [May 6, 2023](#)

The numbers for incidents where the race of the perpetrator and the victim are the same are probably huge and that would make these numbers look minuscule which would undermine the implicit argument for racial grievance being made here.

— Kareem Carr | Data Scientist |  (@kareem_carr) [May 6, 2023](#)

Here are some good questions to ask when interpreting plots on social media:

- What is the causal question?
- Does this data provide an answer?
- Is any relevant data missing?
- What are they implying we could do about it?
- Is that consistent with your moral principles?

— Kareem Carr | Data Scientist |  (@kareem_carr) [May 6, 2023](#)

Of course he doesn't want answers to the questions he asks at the end. In his mind he knows the answer. Blacks attack whites because whites have all the money, and whites attack blacks because whites are racist. ([Here we go again](#): racist \equiv white.) Furthermore he bases his "moral principles" on envy – let him who has more, suffer more. A thief is an irregular wealth-redistribution agent, and a murderer is taking justifiable revenge.

None of these attitudes properly befits a scientist. We see here a shameless manipulation of statistics to serve a political end – and a projection on his targets.

Yesterday, another user answered Carr as he needed answering:

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Credentialed experts like this do not analyze data to find the truth.

They interpret data through a "woke" lens and explain it in a manner that feels intuitive to woke people, thus removing the cognitive dissonance so the woke can continue ignoring the holes in their ideology <https://t.co/advkwl7b74>

— Wokal Distance (@wokal_distance) [May 7, 2023](#)

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Here Kareem interprets data about media focus on crime statistics through the lens of the woke worldview which says it is reasonable to think blacks commit crimes whites because blacks are poor(pic 1), white commit crimes against blacks because whites are racist (pic 2) <pic.twitter.com/2t0irT5ldQ>

— Wokal Distance (@wokal_distance) [May 7, 2023](#)

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So Kareem gives an interpretation through the lens of wokeness and says "of course the media focus on white-on-black crime...those people are racists. Blacks who commit crimes against whites aren't racist, they're just poor!"

And that's important because....

— Wokal Distance (@wokal_distance) [May 7, 2023](#)

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He is trying to make wokeness look correct (or at least not wrong) by using tenets of woke ideology to interpret data that contradicts wokeness in a way that resolves cognitive dissonance.

That's the project he's got going here.

— Wokal Distance (@wokal_distance) [May 7, 2023](#)

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He is a prophet for his hermeneutical tribe, interpreting the scriptures (the data) for the faithful so they can see the truth of wokeness.

— Wokal Distance (@wokal_distance) [May 7, 2023](#)

In reaction, Michael Nayna, whom “Wokal Distance” quoted for the concept *hermeneutical tribe*, left this:

The evergreen meme. pic.twitter.com/lc7gWlmhZ6

— Michael Nayna (@MikeNayna) [May 7, 2023](#)

Two other users left this insightful dialog:

What’s frustrating about the $2+2=5$ thing is that it’s basically lying about what symbols mean.

It’s slight-of-hand taking advantage of people who don’t know better. I say this as an aspiring engineer type who has been average through calculus II.

Carr is a grifter.

— Rob (@TKidshaleen) [May 7, 2023](#)

No wokie believes they’re a grifter, just as no Marxist believes Marxism is the problem.

— Rob (@TKidshaleen) [May 7, 2023](#)

(Note: VIGRE stands for Vertical Integration of Research and Education in the Mathematical Sciences. It’s a scholarship program to encourage more Americans to take math.)

One other person commented, as we have, on the apparently low academic standards at Harvard. Why else, he seems to ask, would Harvard even think to reward *this person* with a Ph.D.?

It’s like he’s being gifted a Harvard PhD, because his analysis is just a bunch of sophist gobbledygook with no basis in numbers. It’s laughable.

— Coach Choon (@eastmainst6263) [May 7, 2023](#)

These two users described a further consequence:

Worse he’s credentialed by Harvard, a trusted elite institution used as a shield to give him the presumption of credibility. He’s further amplified by media and journals that share the hermeneutic. It sounds like a conspiracy to normies, and what he says makes people feel good.

— John E. Fallout (@atomicMAD) [May 7, 2023](#)

Only so many will be able to cash out the gravitas of the institution.

I thought it'd take a generation, eliminating admission tests and this stuff will speed it up. I already see STEM moving into managing business, hiring can't trust other credentials to measure intelligence.

— John E. Fallout (@atomicMAD) [May 7, 2023](#)

Analysis

Are data missing from the original Justice Statistics graph? Yes. Again, we see no denominators, so the problems of interracial crime and violence might be better in some ways – and worse in others – than that graph represents. Nor do we see any *same-race* crime numbers that would allow a comparison – the *one* valuable question Carr asks. Furthermore we see only a single snapshot. Where are the data that would show a trend? Any law-enforcement officer knows that criminals attack those closest to them. Common street crime, which these statistics are supposed to measure, is an opportunistic phenomenon. No one goes *out of their way* to attack someone of a different race.

Or they didn't. Are they doing it now? Again, it would help to know *where* these incidents are happening, to see where the perpetrators are finding their opportunities.

The problem is: *no one else seems to be asking these questions*. Kareem Carr asks only *one* of them – but the legacy media *are not asking any* of them. Instead they're drumming up resentment – as *CNAV* noted yesterday.

Your editor *lived* with statistics – in medical school and as a Fellow in Medical Information Science. The fallacies in Carr's presentation are truly cringeworthy – and so are the gaping holes in legacy media coverage.

The real problem

Once again, we have lies, d____d lies, and statistics. But it's too facile to suggest, as one user did, that Mr. Carr exemplifies the Dunning-Kreuger Effect. David Dunning and Justin Kreuger, writing from Cornell University in 1999, described how those who know the least think they know the most – and those with the least intellectual ability simply cannot recognize their own incompetence.

That can explain ignorance, and blithe overconfidence, but it *cannot* explain malice. Kareem Carr deliberately and *maliciously* misuses statistics to make the moral case for punishing whites. Whether for the irregular fine system we call *theft*, or for the equally irregular summary execution we call *murder*, he offers the same excuse.

That does not mean that all who are not white, even remotely conceive of making the same excuse. Nor can we forget that many whites also offer the excuses Carr offers. Race isn't the problem; ideology is. Or, it's one problem. The other problem are institutions of higher learning who lower their standards and allow such thinking to pass muster.

Happily, Twitter has gotten better than it was. Time was when Twitter would not have *allowed* anyone to dispute Carr. That time has passed, and for that *CNAV* is grateful.