Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.
Not you?

The Polis

Member-only story

America is Very Much a Racist Country, Part Two: The Executive Branch

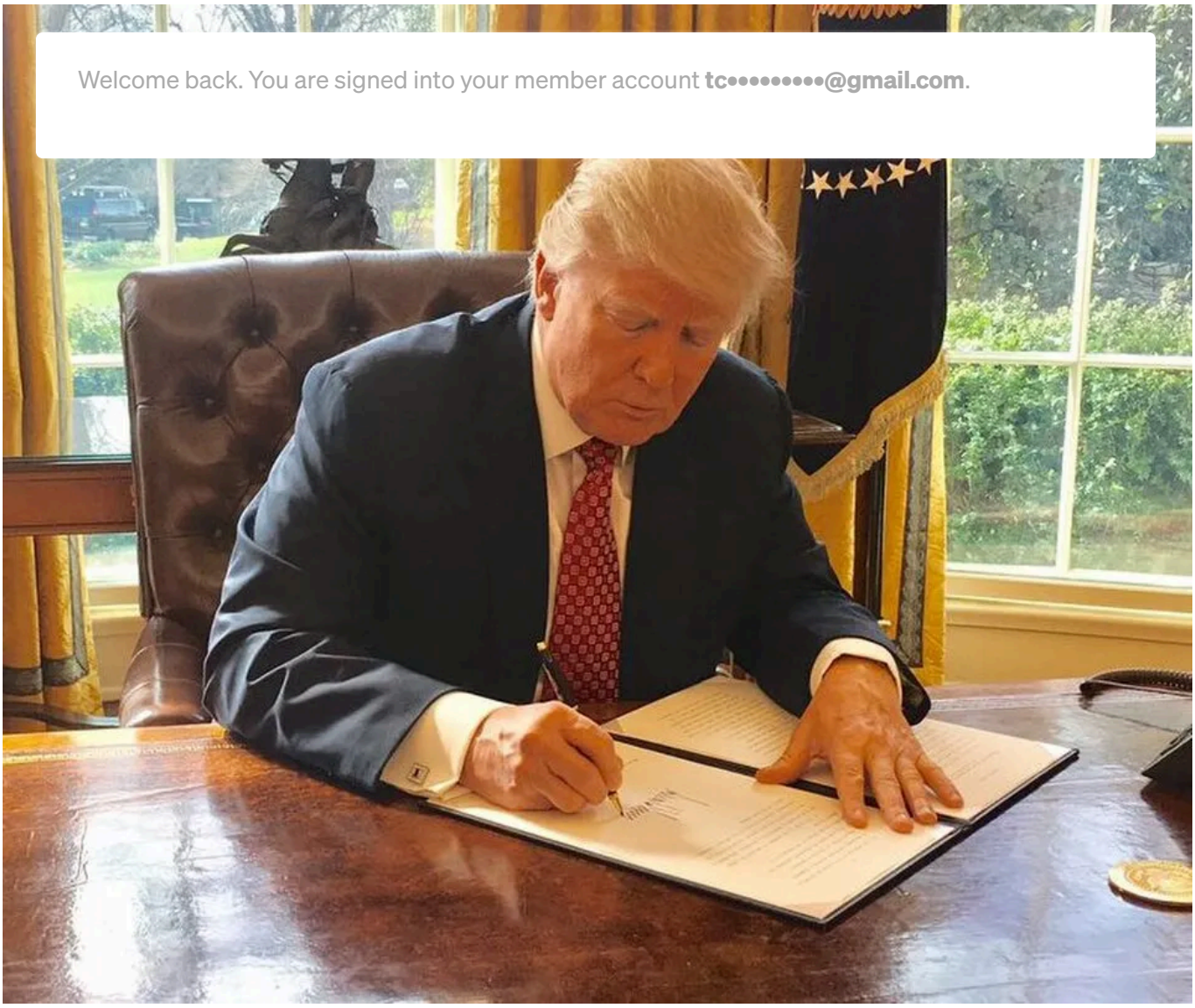
Tracing Two Centuries of Racialized Decision-Making in the Oval Office



William Spivey Follow 9 min read · 23 hours ago

622 5

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account **tc•••••••••@gmail.com**.



Sean Spicer, White House Press Secretary @ twitter, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

A few days ago, I started writing a story about the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) finally destroying the Voting Rights Act of 1965 with the Louisiana v. Callais decision. Before I finished this story, it evolved into three parts, beginning with a focus on the Supreme Court's racist history.

America is Very Much a Racist Country, Part 1: The Supreme Court | by William Spivey | The Polis | May, 2026 | Medium

Parts Two and Three were to focus on the Executive Branch and the Congress. Before I started those, I got sidetracked on a piece comparing

current Chief Justice John Roberts to Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, who gave us

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

John Roberts Sees Black People As Having No Rights He's Bound to Respect | by William Spivey | AfroSapiophile | May, 2026 | Medium

I'm back on track with Part Two on America's racism. Part Three will soon follow, but another topic may break out before its release.

We first have to define the Executive Branch. Many people think of it only in terms of the President, but it goes much deeper.

The Executive Branch is one of the three branches of the federal government, alongside:

- The Legislative Branch (Congress)
- the Judicial Branch (the courts)

Its core function is executing the laws passed by Congress.

Who Leads the Executive Branch

1. The President

The President is the head of state, head of government, and Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Key powers include:

- signing or vetoing laws
- issuing executive orders

- directing federal agencies

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

-
- appointing judges, ambassadors, and Cabinet members

2. The Vice President

The Vice President:

- supports the President
- serves as President of the Senate
- becomes President if the President dies, resigns, or is removed

3. The Cabinet

The Cabinet consists of the heads of the major federal departments, such as:

- Defense
- State
- Justice
- Treasury
- Homeland Security
- Education
- Health and Human Services

They advise the President and run the federal bureaucracy.

The Executive Branch oversees:

• **National security**

M

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account **tc•••••••••@gmail.com**.

• **Law enforcement**

FBI, DEA, ATF, U.S. Marshals, and the Department of Justice.

• **Immigration**

Border Patrol, ICE, USCIS.

• **Public health**

CDC, FDA, NIH.

• **Economic policy**

Treasury, Commerce, Labor, and IRS.

• **Social programs**

Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid.

• **Regulation**

Environmental protection, workplace safety, consumer protection, transportation safety, and more.

It is the largest Branch of government, employing millions of people.

Not for the purpose of disparaging the current administration (yet), but when you think of the Executive Branch, don't think of just Donald Trump, but consider Stephen Miller, Todd Blanche, Marco Rubio, Kash Patel, and recent departees Pam Bondi and Kristi Noem. All of them are/were part of the Executive Branch, as well as the millions employed to run the government. Think of the President, Vice President, and political appointees

as visitors for up to eight years while the rest of the Executive Branch is re

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

Br

President's attitudes.

The premise of this story is that the Executive Branch is inherently racist. To make that case, we have to go back to America's founding and its earliest Executive Branches.

When George Washington took office in 1789, the Executive Branch was almost unrecognizable compared to the massive federal apparatus we know today. It was tiny, experimental, and built from scratch. Washington wasn't just the first president. He was the architect of the Executive Branch.

When Washington took office, the Constitution had established the executive Branch, but much of the machinery did not yet exist.

There were only three executive departments:

- Department of State (foreign affairs)
- Department of War (military)
- Department of the Treasury (finances)

No Justice Department, no FBI, no IRS, no Homeland Security, no Cabinet bureaucracy.

The entire federal workforce was a few dozen people.

The Constitution never mentions a "Cabinet." Washington created it by ne

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

His first Cabinet included:

- Thomas Jefferson — Secretary of State
- Alexander Hamilton — Secretary of the Treasury
- Henry Knox — Secretary of War
- Edmund Randolph — Attorney General (a part-time role at the time)

This group set the precedent for presidential advisory councils.

Washington's Executive Branch:

- enforced the Fugitive Slave Clause
- used federal marshals to capture and return enslaved people
- protected the interests of slaveholding elites
- included a president who personally used federal power to pursue his personal slaves who escaped (Oney Judge, Harry Washington). Technically, Oney Judge belonged to Martha Washington, but you get the point.

The early Executive Branch was not racially neutral — it was built to protect slavery as a national institution. Of the first twelve presidents, ten were slaveowners at some point, and so were most early Supreme Court Justices, Executive Branch Members, and members of Congress. This should come as no surprise because America, after all, was a racist country.

You might look at the names of Cabinet Members and say, "These are

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

Ar

W n

Adams. James Madison and James Monroe were once Secretaries of State who later became Presidents. Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren both were Secretaries of State. I submit that the offices cannot have been non-racist if the individuals who held them were.

Jefferson is credited with ending the International Slave Trade, which he did on the first day permitted by the Constitution, January 1, 1808. The reason he did it was to eliminate foreign competition and enhance the value of domestic-bred enslaved people. Especially in states like Maryland, Delaware, and his own Virginia. With the widespread use of the cotton gin, the demand for enslaved people was increasing and was only met by the forced breeding and rape of slaves.

The Profitability of Slavery: Based on Forced Breeding and Rape | by William Spivey | The Polis | Medium

John Marshall owned enslaved people, and his Supreme Court decisions consistently protected slavery.

Marshall's Court issued several rulings that strengthened the legal infrastructure of slavery. He upheld the rights of slaveholders and enforced the Fugitive Slave Clause. He treated enslaved people as property, not persons. Marshall wrote that slavery was "contrary to the law of nature," but still upheld the property claims of slave traders because U.S. law recognized slavery. Marshall was careful not to provoke Southern states or challenge the institution directly.

James Madison owned more than 100 enslaved people at Montpelier and

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

ne t

or

Madison supported the Three-Fifths Compromise and supported the 20-year protection of the international slave trade (until 1808). As president, he enforced the Fugitive Slave Clause. Madison's administration used federal marshals to capture escaped enslaved people, return them to slaveholders, and prosecute those who helped fugitives. I give you Executive Branch racism in action.

Madison believed Black and white people could not coexist as equals. He served as a leader in the American Colonization Society (ACS), which sought to deport free Black Americans to Africa. This was a deeply racist ideology rooted in maintaining a white republic.

James Monroe was a lifelong enslaver. Monroe owned dozens of enslaved people and sold enslaved families to pay personal debts. He never freed the people he enslaved.

As governor of Virginia, Monroe deployed the militia during the Gabriel's Rebellion panic and approved the execution of dozens of enslaved people. He expanded state surveillance of Black communities. Madison used state power to maintain slavery.

As president, he enforced the Fugitive Slave Clause. Like Madison's, Monroe's administration:

- used federal marshals to capture fugitives

- protected slaveholders' property claims

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

- He signed the Missouri Compromise, which expanded slavery westward

Monroe believed free Black people were a "danger" to the slave system and should be removed from the country. Liberia's capital, Monrovia, is named after him.

Henry Clay served as president of the ACS, which sought to deport free Black Americans to Africa. His stated beliefs:

- Black and white people could not live together as equals
- Free Black people were a "dangerous" class
- The U.S. should remain a white republic

Even by early 19th-century standards, Clay's views were highly racist.

Martin Van Buren's greatest political achievement was the creation of the modern Democratic Party, which was explicitly designed to:

- unite Northern and Southern whites
- Protect slavery from federal interference,
- keep abolitionists politically isolated

He believed the Union depended on appeasing slaveholders.

These are some examples of past Cabinet members, a few who went on to be

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

th e a racist nation. They have convinced themselves that there was some magic moment or era when things changed, and America stopped being racist. I search American history for such a moment or period and find that change, at best, was only temporary.

Some point to the Civil War and the end of enslavement in 1865. Unfortunately, America did its best to replicate enslavement, with the Black Codes that immediately followed the Civil War. Then came Reconstruction, but those gains were erased by the Compromise of 1877, which led to a century of Jim Crow laws. The Civil Rights Movement came in the 1960s. It took 60 years, but the gains from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 have been all but erased by the Supreme Court. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 never had any teeth. When a current member of the Executive Branch refused to rent to Black renters, he twice reached settlements with the Justice Department (also part of the Executive Branch) while making few changes and never admitting guilt. He wasn't a member of the Executive Branch then, but now he oversees compliance with the law.

I've given a historical overview, now let's look at the present. I'm not claiming what is obvious, that America and the Executive Branch were once racist, but that it's still true. Woodrow Wilson was the first President to try to make the Executive Branch white again. Within weeks of taking office on March 4, 1913, Wilson's Cabinet secretaries, all Southern segregationists, began implementing policies that re-segregated previously integrated federal workplaces.

Donald Trump's multiple documented actions, patterns, and personnel de

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

wi

reducing Black representation, weakening civil-rights enforcement, or sidelining Black leadership within the federal government. Trump appointed fewer Black Cabinet secretaries than any modern president.

Trump attempted to eliminate or weaken offices that protect Black civil rights. The DOJ Civil Rights Division seems only interested in protecting the rights of white people. Multiple budget proposals reduced funding for:

- voting-rights enforcement
- police-misconduct investigations
- housing discrimination cases

The DOJ under Trump stopped negotiating or enforcing consent decrees with police departments accused of racial discrimination. Trump is attempting to eliminate the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule, designed to combat segregation; HUD under Trump dismantled it. These actions disproportionately affected Black communities and reduced the influence of Black civil-rights leadership inside government.

Trump's appointments to the federal judiciary dramatically reduced Black representation.

During his first term, no Black judges were appointed to the U.S. Courts of Appeals. Only 2 Black district judges out of more than 200 appointments. This is the lowest share of Black judicial appointments of any president in modern history. Judges serve for life, so this has long-term effects on

representation, thus far in his second term, Trump has appointed zero Black ju

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

Civil-rights groups and former federal officials have noted Trump's comments about Black lawmakers, Black cities, and Black immigrants. He called African and Central American nations "shithole countries."

Trump's current term includes efforts to eliminate DEI programs across the federal government. Executive actions and agency directives have targeted:

- diversity offices
- DEI training
- affirmative-action-related programs
- civil-rights compliance units

These offices have historically employed and elevated Black professionals. Removing them reduces Black leadership pipelines.

It's safe to say that the Executive Branch has done little to eradicate racism since George Washington. I haven't forgotten that America once had a Black President, Barack Obama, who served two consecutive terms. His election was met with the whitelash that gave us Donald Trump. Obama may have been the head of the Executive Branch, but he had little power to make dramatic changes across the millions of people within it. Would that the same could have been said of Donald Trump, but he and Elon Musk took a chainsaw to the Executive Branch and employed new people like Darren Beattie, who spoke of the need for "competent white men."

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account tc•••••••••@gmail.com.

[“Competent White Men Must Be in Charge” | by William Spivey | Medium]

I’m now two-thirds finished with my three-part essay. If you aren’t convinced yet about America being a racist country. There’s still Congress, which at different points in time has worked to suppress racism. Alas, those times are over.

Next: America is Very Much a Racist Country, Part Three: The Congress

History Politics Money Culture Life



Published in The Polis

32K followers · Last published 13 hours ago

Following

Writing on politics, policy, and anything else related.



Written by William Spivey

53K followers · 26K following

Follow

I write about politics, history, education, and race. Follow me at williamfspivey.com and support me at https://ko-fi.com/williamfspivey0680

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account **tc•••••••••@gmail.com**.

Welcome back. You are signed into your member account **tc•••••••••@gmail.com**.