**Life’s Race**

Excerpts from “Life’s Race: Some Thoughts From a Sociologist on Election Day Eve

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We -- all of us -- often use the metaphor of a race to describe life. Liberals sometimes say that some people are given a head start. But no, this is not true. We all start at the same time, at the same starting line. We all start at age 0 and work our way from there. But this is what is true: some people -- some children -- are born at the starting line without shoes, without warm-up pants, and without a nice bowl of pasta-carbs and a bed to sleep on the night before. Some of those children also have to be looking over their shoulder through the race, making sure no one is shooting at them. And anyone who has ever run track knows that looking over your shoulder, getting distracted from the goal, will inevitably hurt your time.

Here is what is also true. To get shoes, warm-up pants, a nice bed and a bowl of pasta-carbs the night before, you have to win a race. Winners are given prize money. But the children born without the shoes, without the warm-up pants, usually can't win, and they can't get any prize money because they are competing against children who do have those things. And those same children who win, then use that money to go buy themselves even better track spikes, better training gear, maybe even a personal trainer. Those children then come back, and they win again. The children who started without the shoes lose again. This happens over and over, and over and over. It happens until they all reach adulthood. The children who originally won have won so many times that everyone comes to think that they are very talented. Those who originally lost have lost so many times that everyone thinks that they just must be different, perhaps untalented, or even lazy. Those people are losing because they just aren't running hard enough, is what they'll say.

Sometimes, people point out that some children start out with no shoes. They point out that maybe we should try to make sure that everyone starts with shoes, warm-up pants, a nice bed, pasta-carbs the night before, and a lane to run in where they don't have to look over their shoulder, afraid of being shot. This often makes the winners uncomfortable, and they'll say, "No! We ran really hard! We didn't cheat! We ran so hard we can't imagine running any harder! We ran fair and square and we really won!"

Yes, that is true. They, the winners, really won, fair and square, and they ran their hearts out. They're probably winded right now and they probably rested over the weekend because they run their hearts out every single week. We all are winded, and we all run our hearts out every single week.

But here's what is also true. Having the race officials increase the prize money for the winners is not going to help those children who start the race without shoes to get shoes. The race is hard for everyone, and the winners are going to use the prize money to keep paying their trainers and to buy more spikes just so that they can keep up and keep winning.

Some winners might say, "But look! Here is a person who started with no shoes, and they eventually won!" Yes, there are some extraordinary individuals in this world who are just born extremely fast, and they will win no matter what kind of shoes they have. But not everyone is like that. Many of the winners are not like that, and they still can win. Why should we keep letting people start the race without shoes just because there are some outliers who defy the odds?

Other winners might say, "Well, you don't need to have the race officials ensure that everyone starts with shoes. A lot of winners are nice, and will help out the losers and give them shoes privately. That's how it should be done." That's a nice sentiment, and there are certainly lots of nice winners. It would be great if there were even more nice winners. But unfortunately, even if there were enough nice winners, some shoeless children might fall through the cracks. There is no way for a bunch of individual winners, donating individually, to ensure that everyone starts with shoes, warm-up pants, a nice bed, pasta-carbs the night before and a bullet-free lane to run in.

And individual winners with no medical training certainly can't provide healthcare to the losers when their feet bleed from running without shoes, or when they trip over a hurdle because they had no food in their stomachs to propel them along.

The race officials are the only ones who have the actual power to ensure that everyone who comes to the race starts with shoes, a full belly, a safe lane and proper healthcare when they fall.

This is the argument for strong state institutions (especially education and politics) that foster equal opportunity.