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## Melancholia and the Racial Order: A Psychosocial Analysis of America's Enduring Racism

*Jeffrey Prager*

### **Introduction: The American racialized order and recursive inequality**

A distinctive feature of the US, since its inception, is a remarkably steady and persistent division between “whites” and “blacks.” This distinction was based on the premise of a natural, real and durable *racial* difference between Africans and Europeans. Still today, the *black/white* binary sustains systematic inequality between the two groups through a set of largely unconscious institutional practices, rules, values, mores, emotions, and beliefs systematically producing for each unequal opportunities, discrepant life-chances, and distinctive social outcomes. This pattern of inequality has sustained itself over time, remaining in place post-slavery, post-Jim Crow, post-desegregation, and post-Civil Rights reforms, and post-Obama.

And yet, while this inequality is treated by social scientists as a discrete social problem requiring various institutional responses to correct it, the constancy of the division over time suggests something quite different. The racialized division is not, in the first instance, a “social problem” amenable to repair. It is more intractable describing, I argue, a key organizing principle of American society there from the start: a legitimated social hierarchy through *racial* division. Lying mostly beneath conscious awareness and despite several profound challenges to it over the past two centuries, racial category remains a key determinant, largely resistant to change, of the American stratification system. It is characterized here as the *American racialized order*. The questions posed in this paper are (1) what *function* does racialized inequality serve, and (2) through what mechanisms is it maintained and reproduced over time? Why and how has *racial* demarcation, in other words, remained



1 a constant feature of American history, despite periodic moments chal-  
 2 lenging the depth and nature of inequality (though never the category  
 3 of race itself). I conclude, not with a set of prescriptions for inequality's  
 4 overcoming. Rather, based upon this new understanding of the nature  
 5 of the problem, informed by psychoanalytic ideas, I pose a new set of  
 6 questions to think about how best to overcome America's traumatic his-  
 7 tory of racially defined domination.

8 *Blacks* and *whites* for Americans serve, then and now, as a critical  
 9 *raison d'être*, a satisfactory explanation for the presence of inequality  
 10 *naturalized* through the lens of racial category. These particular catego-  
 11 ries, designated to specific individuals and groups, have no counterpart  
 12 outside American society. As the sociologist Michael Banton writes,  
 13 "The USA is exceptional in the extent to which *race* is a basis for social  
 14 categorization" (2013, p. 1003). As I will argue, it is "a product of domi-  
 15 nation" and reproduced, as Pierre Bourdieu might describe it, through  
 16 an "immense symbolic machine." "When thoughts and perceptions  
 17 are structured in accordance with the very structures of the relation of  
 18 domination that is imposed on them," Bourdieu writes, "[the domina-  
 19 tor's] acts of cognition are, inevitably, acts of *recognition*, submission"  
 20 (2001, p. 13).

21 Americans, throughout their history, have continually discussed  
 22 the following questions: to what extent has the condition of "blacks"  
 23 improved over time, in what ways and where has the gap between  
 24 *whites* and *blacks* narrowed, and what factors account for the continu-  
 25 ing inequality between these two *racial* groups? These, however, do not  
 26 illuminate the role that *race* plays as a **category** shaping American per-  
 27 ception of the world they inhabit. Further, these questions detract from  
 28 exploring racism's purpose, the *task* that racial inequality *accomplishes*  
 29 in American society.<sup>1</sup> The question, the obverse of the conventional  
 30 ones usually asked, is the more relevant: why, in America, through the  
 31 course of its history, has "race" continually served an important role  
 32 as regulator or stabilizer of inequality? Racialized categories originally  
 33 designed to secure domination for Europeans continue to serve this  
 34 first function, *viz.*, *the exclusion of a sector of the population from power,*  
 35 *authority, wealth and control.* Continued inequality by race—*whites* over  
 36 *blacks*—documents the pattern and persistence of an American hierar-  
 37 chy of domination thoroughly naturalized through categorical distinc-  
 38 tion. This inequality has been more or less continuous over time even  
 39 though *real*, that is, actual, material, "racial" differences play no role in  
 40 its reproduction. The questions that presume the possibility of gradual  
 41 improvements between *blacks* and *whites*, or predict the eventual

1 *overcoming* of racial inequality, what might be called the *humanistic fal-*  
2 *lacy* of inequality's elimination, distracts attention away from the built-  
3 in and possibly permanent relation of racialized inequality to America's  
4 unique system of stratification and hierarchy.

5 Independent of cultural construction, racial groups as discrete enti-  
6 ties do not exist.<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically, they exert a powerful effect, decisively  
7 shaping political, economic and social outcomes, i.e. *whites* as the ben-  
8 efitaries, *blacks* as the deprived, *thereby* reinforcing the perception of  
9 American racial reality. In fact, the presence of racial groups promotes  
10 an important sense of a solidaristic, inclusive society comprised of  
11 the *racially* dominant, revealed through the constant presence of an  
12 unequal racial and subordinate other.

13 Three features of contemporary American racialized reality, as a result  
14 of having asked the *wrong* questions, have been hidden from view. First,  
15 *black* and *white* is a *civil* designation indicating one's participation  
16 (and one's place) in American "civil society." The categories, in fact,  
17 possess no reality independent of civil society,<sup>3</sup> and carry with them  
18 no *essential* or irrefutable information of a person's ancestral past, past  
19 personal history, nor of personal capacities, propensities, values, and so  
20 forth, of the person identifying or being identified as *white* or *black*.<sup>4</sup>  
21 As designations generated within civil society and denoting difference,  
22 however, they are replete with powerful assumptions and projections  
23 by one to the other of the *essential* features and traits of the individual  
24 other. Simply put, one symbolically serves as the *anti-representation* of  
25 the other. Perceiving individuals *through* racial category, as Americans  
26 do, simultaneously locates the perceiver and the perceived in a tem-  
27 poral trajectory uniquely American. A contemporary encounter with a  
28 "racial other" necessarily includes the memory, inscribed in the physi-  
29 cal appearance of the person, of a distinctive and unequal past history.  
30 Each racialized interaction between individuals, in other words, is  
31 inescapably fraught with a uniquely American historical memory to be  
32 denied, acknowledged, refuted, ignored and so forth but, nonetheless,  
33 in some interpersonal sense always to be responded to.

34 Each American expresses a history that he or she cannot entirely  
35 possess (Caruth, 2002), a racially identifiable visage, always a possible  
36 trigger for a traumatic reminder that no one can fully contain. This  
37 *excess* possession interferes with *mutual recognition* of one human being  
38 to another, promoting instead an interaction between one (historically)  
39 dominant person and one (historically) subordinate one. It is a relation-  
40 ship, in the context of the story of America, to be presently negotiated  
41 against the backdrop of a thick, meaningful and racialized history.

1 The result is a structure of interaction reinforcing “symbolic domina-  
2 tion” and “symbolic force” (Bourdieu, 2001, pp. 37–38) and, in fact,  
3 continues to produce for the aggregate group of African-Americans *and*  
4 all those designated as *blacks* profoundly detrimental effects economi-  
5 cally, politically, educationally and in many other respects.<sup>5</sup> As these  
6 various forms of inequalities are reproduced, these racialized differences  
7 in outcome endure and generate the real, material conditions for rac-  
8 ist thought to persist and even thrive. The category generates its own  
9 confirmation in reality.

10 Second, *blacks* and *whites* participate in the same civil society and  
11 more or less share the racist conviction of the real and taken for granted  
12 differences that exist between the two groups. Those who identify  
13 themselves either as among the dominant or the subordinate typically  
14 understand differently the sources of those difference. Some may locate  
15 the source of difference more squarely on the shoulders of social factors,  
16 while others on natural differences to account for one’s own position  
17 in the hierarchy. Nevertheless, the entire civic population is involved  
18 in the reproduction of durable difference and subject to the same sys-  
19 tem of meaning and significance implied by it.<sup>6</sup> As I describe later, the  
20 potency of this binary *civil* designation of *white* and *black* in America  
21 closely parallels the binary of being male or female. Yet unlike “race,”  
22 gender identity is forged first largely in the crucible of *private*, family  
23 life and not in the public sphere.

24 What has gone largely unnoticed, at any given point in time, is the  
25 significant alteration of demographic composition of those perceived as  
26 *white* or *black*, despite the presumption of its unchanging and natural  
27 character, simply a “mirror of reality.” Racialized differences and their  
28 treatment as natural generate a perception by all at any point in time of  
29 the permanence (as trans-historical and trans-social) of the categories,  
30 and who among the social members are included, and where.

31 Thus, this third important feature of the American racialized reality:  
32 while the composition of those included as “white” and “black” has  
33 changed over the course of American history, the pattern of inequality  
34 expressed through the perception of racial difference remains constant.  
35 “Mere perceiving,” Erving Goffman writes, “is a much more active  
36 penetration of the world than at first might be thought . . . Observers  
37 actively project their frames of reference into the world immediately  
38 around them, and one fails to see their doing so only because events  
39 ordinarily confirm these projections, causing the assumptions to disap-  
40 pear into the smooth flow of activity.” (Goffman, 1986, pp. 38–39).  
41 Social scientists, policy makers, and the general public do not notice

1 that the principles by which ethnic or cultural groups are included has  
2 shifted. Through scientific and natural observation, the reality of racial  
3 difference is *found* as an objective fact despite its social construction.

4 Oddly enough, those included in this racialized binary corresponds  
5 only in the most imprecise way to actual phenotypical differences pos-  
6 sessed by various American ethnic groups. In the first place, the terms  
7 “white” and “black” belie the fact that no one, in terms of complexion,  
8 in actuality is either white or black. Skin tones, while wide-ranging with  
9 respect to pigmentation, do not extend to either of these extremes.  
10 Nonetheless, Americans perceive individuals categorically, and, unless  
11 made aware of it, believe they are “seeing” white and black people.  
12 The perception of whiteness implies, I suggest, an understanding of the  
13 group members place among the dominant group while blackness, in  
14 contrast, reflects membership among the subordinate. A notable feature  
15 of the American interaction order is that Americans feel seemingly com-  
16 pelled, if there is any uncertainty, to ask a person to self-identify his or  
17 racial membership; once it is established that an individual possesses  
18 a *black* lineage, even the lightest complexioned African-American, for  
19 example, is seen to be *black* and suitably located as possessing a history  
20 of ancestry belonging to the subordinate group. As Goffman suggests,  
21 the perception of whiteness and blackness implies “an active penetra-  
22 tion of the world” and, for those in American civil society, “naturally”  
23 need to locate individuals with respect to the hierarchical frame of race  
24 relevant to the US.

25 Three cases demonstrating the fluidity of membership: (i) Once  
26 considered as dangerous foreigners, dark-skinned and explicitly barred  
27 from equal participation among the dominant, Jews, Catholics, Irish,  
28 and Italians now identify themselves and are perceived by others as  
29 *white*.<sup>7</sup> Over time, new immigrants, following the trajectory of earlier  
30 immigrants, mark successful assimilation to American society by simi-  
31 larly succeeding in “becoming white.” (Roediger, 1991, 2005; Thandeka,  
32 1999; Loveman and Muniz, 2006).

33 (ii) Those immigrants, seemingly corresponding with those, like  
34 Filipinos and Mexican and Central American immigrants, who pos-  
35 sess fewer financial resources and arrive in the US with less human  
36 capital have found “becoming white” far more challenging. Those  
37 with fewer cultural and economic resources find it more difficult to be  
38 perceived as “white.” In each of the social institutions in which these  
39 immigrants come into contact, they tend to encounter more hostility  
40 and greater barriers to assimilation. The police, criminal justice system,  
41 health care services, and schools become site of considerable conflict,

1 often generating a strong oppositional culture. High gang-related  
2 participation by the young, social withdrawal and indigenous political  
3 critique, sometimes inflected through the language of race, his-  
4 torically more closely parallels the African-American experience and  
5 becomes responded to similarly. *La Raza* and *Aztlan*—assertions of racial  
6 difference—emerged as reactions to inequality and exclusion reflecting  
7 a strong identification with “black” inequality. As Edward Telles and  
8 Vilma Ortiz argue, the increased “racialization” of Mexican and Central  
9 American populations has been occurring (2008).

10 (iii) In similar fashion, eighteenth and nineteenth century America  
11 consisted of individuals possessing graduated “racial composition.”  
12 Distinctions were made and acted upon between full-blooded Africans,  
13 mulattoes, octoroons, high yellow, quadroons and so forth. These cate-  
14 gories of distinction have long since given way to what is now colloqui-  
15 ally referred to as the one-drop rule. Evidence of any blood connection  
16 to an African past necessarily denotes “being black.” The *black* side of  
17 the racial binary over the years, in sum, has become more inclusive,  
18 including any individual, or group of individuals, deemed *non-white*.  
19 Barack Obama, no less, is designated as *black* or *non-white*. This parallels  
20 the process by which those deemed to be *non-black* have increasingly  
21 become included as part of the *white* side. Inclusion and exclusion is a  
22 *negotiated* feature of the American racial order, increasingly dualistic,  
23 and the rules of who goes where has changed over time.

24 Fourth, the American racial order has had many challenges to the  
25 treatment accorded and opportunities afforded to *blacks*; yet none of  
26 these campaigns have challenged the *reality* of racial difference upon  
27 which racism is built. There have been times in American history  
28 when the rights of the subordinate have been significantly renegoti-  
29 ated and specific features of the hierarchical relationship between  
30 *blacks* and *whites* altered. Most dramatically, the passage of the 13th,  
31 14th and 15th Amendments to the US Constitution following the  
32 end of the Civil War; the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by  
33 the Supreme Court in 1954 declaring segregation by race unconstitu-  
34 tional in public schools; and the passage of the Civil and Voting Rights  
35 Acts in response to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s marking  
36 the end of Jim Crow legislation and mitigating against its continued  
37 practices. To be sure, these changes marked significant improvements  
38 for the lives of African-Americans and other *blacks* in America. Each  
39 of the political movements that propelled these changes were moti-  
40 vated to respond to racialized inequities and to challenge inequality  
41 by racial category in America. Still, the stability, cohesiveness and

1 distinctiveness of these “two separate societies—one white, one black”  
2 (US Government, 1968) remains impressive, and secure.

3 The *continuity* and *stability* of the racialized binary to organize, shape  
4 and effect social relations in the US is demonstrated in a number of  
5 ways. Nearly every indicator of inequality in America offers demonstra-  
6 tion of this phenomenon. I offer only a sample of available evidence  
7 documenting the persistence over time of inequality by racial inequal-  
8 ity. The ratio of black to white unemployment, for example, over the  
9 last 50 years has remained remarkably stable: in 1963, black unemploy-  
10 ment was 2.2 times greater than white unemployment; in 2012, it was  
11 2.1 times greater.<sup>8</sup> According to the Pew Research Center, over the past  
12 50 years, the rate of blacks living below the poverty line declined close  
13 to fourteen per cent (and rising), while the rate of whites living below  
14 the poverty line declined to five per cent (and rising more slowly). The  
15 rate for Hispanics closely parallels the black rate both in absolute num-  
16 bers and in change. Said differently, since 1963, the percentage of the  
17 black population living below the poverty line was on average about  
18 twenty per cent higher than whites. At best, the difference between  
19 groups narrowed (about thirteen per cent) the most in the year 2000,  
20 but now the gap appears to be widening once more, as a steeper climb of  
21 blacks living below the poverty line is occurring compared to the total  
22 population of blacks than it is for whites.<sup>9</sup> Similar striking parallels are  
23 provided with respect to average family wealth over the past 50 years,  
24 and real median household income.<sup>10</sup> The *rate* of inequality on all these  
25 measures, despite variation in absolute numbers, remains remarkably  
26 constant. It indicates no dramatic decline in the degree of inequality  
27 between whites and blacks. Finally, as another indicator of the stabil-  
28 ity of the racialized binary, incarceration rates for both black men and  
29 black women are dramatically increasing with respect to the percentage  
30 of the black population over the last 50 years and the ratio of black to  
31 white incarceration is significantly larger now than it was in 1960.<sup>11</sup>

32 Similarly, the nation is periodically confronted with an event or a  
33 series of events producing a dramatic division of attitude that can only  
34 be explained a result of the vigor of the racialized binary in shaping per-  
35 ception. The difference in opinion between *black* and *white* respondents  
36 describes the chasm in perception between those who identify as *white*  
37 or as *black*. Most dramatically, in recent memory, are two high-profile  
38 racially charged trials: O.J. Simpson’s murder charges against him and  
39 the George Zimmerman trial over the killing of Trayvon Martin (Hunt,  
40 1999). In these cases, the racialized context through which information  
41 is processed reveals again the strength and continued capacity of the

1 bifurcated world to define as, it has always done, American racial rela-  
 2 tions. Despite a common exposure to the U.S. media that covered both  
 3 cases extensively, the variation in opinion between *blacks* and *whites*  
 4 both toward Simpson and Zimmerman is almost breathtaking. In an  
 5 ABC News/Washington Post poll, eighty-six per cent of blacks disap-  
 6 proved of the verdict exonerating Zimmerman from murder, compared  
 7 to thirty-one per cent of whites. Similarly, thirty-three per cent of whites  
 8 believed the shooting death of Martin to be unjustified compared to  
 9 eighty-seven per cent of blacks.<sup>12</sup> No other conclusion can be drawn  
 10 other than the fact, in the US, facts involving its racialized reality, never  
 11 stands on its own. For those whose perception is shaped by their subor-  
 12 dination in America, the country continually violates the *social contract*  
 13 that it putatively honors. Civic identity as *white*, in contrast, implies  
 14 fundamental trust in the institutions of social control to uphold fairness  
 15 and justice as foundational to the American rule of law.

16 As these various examples demonstrate, racializing American ine-  
 17 quality is as American as apple pie. It is also uniquely American. The  
 18 continued invocation of racial difference *as if it is real* has long served  
 19 in the US as a principle mechanism of social, political, economic and  
 20 cultural exclusion for those determined to be *racially other*. The conclu-  
 21 sion, based upon the assertion that these *categories of classification* create  
 22 and reproduce the reality imagined by the distinction drawn, is a bold  
 23 one: Americans *perception* of racial difference—seeing persons as *white*  
 24 and *black*—**follows** rather than **precedes** these socially structured and  
 25 collectively imposed distinctions of dominance and subordination. The  
 26 appearance, the taken-for-granted, is that the history of racial difference  
 27 in America, a legacy of the institution of slavery, continues to *explain*  
 28 American inequality. In fact, *the belief* in racial difference, first enabling  
 29 the institution of slavery restricted to Africans and remaining more-or-  
 30 less unchanging since, serves as justification and acquiescence to the  
 31 on-going pattern of inequality by racial category.

### 33 American melancholia: Acquiescence, misrecognition, and 34 collective devitalization

36 A remarkable feature of American civil society is its long-standing  
 37 *tolerance* for racialized inequality. This is a corollary to recognizing its  
 38 persistence throughout the course of American history. Even as inequal-  
 39 ity has been strongly challenged and increasingly overcome for other  
 40 subject classes in America—women, in particular, but also religious  
 41 minorities, gays and lesbians, those from non-European national and

1 linguistic backgrounds, members of American society, for all intents and  
 2 purposes, have *always* been more-or-less reconciled to these various pat-  
 3 terns of racial difference. The stability of inequality by racial category  
 4 in nearly all institutional spheres is one demonstration of this national  
 5 acquiescence, the routinization of *de facto* different treatments accorded  
 6 *whites* and *blacks*, especially by various institutions of social control,  
 7 and the relative quiescence of active challenges to the racialized *status*  
 8 *quo* by subject members (and their advocates) are further demonstra-  
 9 tions of this form of acceptance. Racially-encoded myths are almost uni-  
 10 versally accepted *as if* they are true, what Foucault might call ironically  
 11 as a “*true* discourse of power and domination” (Foucault, [1978] 1900,  
 12 p. 69, my emphasis). Inequality is so long-standing and accepted as  
 13 taken-for-granted, rather than promoting outrage, the racialized order  
 14 itself is reinforced. The inequalities generated by the categorical distinc-  
 15 tion serve as evidence for the *real* differences existing between *whites*  
 16 and *blacks*. The stability of the racialized order both contributes to the  
 17 stability of American culture and society **and** promotes acquiescence to  
 18 the way things are.

19 Melancholia, as Freud defined it, is a psychological condition when  
 20 individuals suffer from an oftentimes vague, ill-defined sense of loss  
 21 that lingers over time (Freud, [1917] 1954). Here, I identify American  
 22 civil society as beset with *racialized melancholia*, a result of the univer-  
 23 sally held conviction in the reality of racialized difference and wide-  
 24 spread belief in the inequalities generated. Unlike societies in which  
 25 the past is mourned, American society, I argue, can best be described as  
 26 a collectivity largely unable to either identify or mourn its loss and, as  
 27 a result, developed a melancholic relation to it. It is constituted by an  
 28 (largely) unconscious conviction that racialized division, inherited from  
 29 the past, constitutes a permanent feature of American life.

30 Melancholia, as it is used here, describes, first, the subjective experi-  
 31 ence of those who live within the American racial order. It describes a  
 32 particular psychic structure common to nearly all those socialized as  
 33 participants in the nation. Racialized melancholia is especially resist-  
 34 ant to change because of its insistence that common membership in  
 35 the social order is *naturally* split by racial difference. Thus, the reifi-  
 36 cation of the category assumes the form of a personal characteristic  
 37 “possessed” by the observable person, persons who act and are acted  
 38 upon as if racial difference is real. Indeed, sometimes when that char-  
 39 acteristic cannot be easily discerned, one feels compelled to establish it  
 40 through a direct question: *what* are you? The need to establish race is  
 41 almost as compelling as it is to establish, as first order of business, the

1 gender of an infant boy or girl. In that sense, American society creates  
 2 an unhealthy, or pathological, psyche, one that is convinced of the  
 3 reality of its own collectively generated perception, and as a result one  
 4 extremely difficult to undo. The result is far greater in-the-present *toler-*  
 5 *ance* or *legitimacy* for racialized inequality than otherwise would be the  
 6 case. Melancholia produces (more-or-less) paralysis of Americans to act  
 7 differently toward one another than those dictated by their deeply held,  
 8 typically implicit, largely unconscious belief in its reality. Melancholic  
 9 racial orders are those where the promise of assimilation, to quote  
 10 Martin Luther King, Jr. in which individuals will be judged “not be the  
 11 color of their skin but by the content of their character,” has failed sig-  
 12 nificantly and systematically.

13 What will be described is the uniqueness of melancholic subjectivity  
 14 in America, a product largely of a society that simultaneously asserts the  
 15 equality of all humankind while insisting, as well, on the truthfulness of  
 16 its categorization of its own members by race. Gunnar Myrdal, in 1944,  
 17 describes the “American Dilemma” as the conflict between American  
 18 liberal ideals and the actual plight of African-Americans (1944). In con-  
 19 trast, the rendering here of the American dilemma is defined through  
 20 the concept of *racial melancholia*: In the US, melancholy powerfully  
 21 captures the subjective, or feeling state, both of “whites” (whose  
 22 “Dilemma” Myrdal was **only** addressing) **and** “blacks,” especially in  
 23 their institutional and interpersonal interactions between one another.  
 24 “Blacks” and “whites” have an intertwined history, where existence and  
 25 identification of each marks a **common** American past and, therefore,  
 26 who are inextricably linked culturally and affectively. It has gener-  
 27 ated nearly impossible relationships, or painfully self-conscious ones,  
 28 between those who identify themselves or are identified as dominant  
 29 and those who see themselves or are seen by others as subordinate.  
 30 Typically covert and *de facto*, racism continues to structure interpersonal  
 31 and institutional relationships. What, in fact, is nothing more than a  
 32 broadly-cast civil category imposed on one’s own sense of self, none-  
 33 theless easily overwhelms the capacity of two individuals to interact  
 34 independently of the inherent domination and subordination implied  
 35 by the category. The “American dilemma” might be reformulated as a  
 36 cognitive conflict between liberal ideals and the commonly held con-  
 37 viction by *all* social members that racial difference and inequality in  
 38 America expresses real, or essential, differences between peoples.

39 Racial melancholia also can be described from the perspective of an  
 40 American political structure built upon two essential racialized features:  
 41 a) **an institutional denial** of the past and a **forgetting** of the history

1 of slavery of Africans as foundational to the construction of American  
 2 society and b) a **suppression** of the fact that this history of oppression  
 3 was legitimated through a narrative of racial difference insisting upon  
 4 the sub-human characteristics of Africans as well as Native Americans.  
 5 This particular defensive relation to the country's past, its racialized  
 6 form of denying, forgetting and suppressing, forecloses the possibil-  
 7 ity of a future where relations between "whites" and "blacks" can be  
 8 anything significantly different than they are now: America is premised  
 9 upon the permanent and uneasy encounter between dominant *whites*  
 10 and the *black* other, while *blacks* remain ever-alert to being singled out  
 11 as other. The result is a social system in which both institutional and  
 12 interpersonal mechanisms are in place to promote American life as  
 13 lived *eternally in the present*. In contrast with an acknowledgement of  
 14 the contribution played by the past in the present, history now is either  
 15 romanticized or demonized—or romanticized by some and demonized  
 16 by others. But either way, it serves to reinforce the categories of mel-  
 17 ancholic resignation in the present: Racialized inequality is simply a  
 18 feature of the US. Described here is a social and political system, from  
 19 its beginning, organized defensively through denial and suppression.

20 In *Melancholy and Society*, the sociologist Wolf Lepeneis describes  
 21 certain societies as melancholic when political energy and will is strate-  
 22 gically employed restrictively in order for a particular past not to  
 23 overwhelm its functioning in the present. He describes this as a "**sur-**  
 24 **plus of order**" (Lepeneis, 1992). In the American case, the restrictive  
 25 use of the past might be seen to be a case of a "**surplus of racialized**  
 26 **order.**" Both as subjective experience and as socio-political structure,  
 27 racialized melancholia and the surplus of racialized order generate what  
 28 will be characterized as a defensive and protective stance toward other  
 29 Americans who, as a result live eternally in the present. In-the-moment  
 30 self-protectiveness, in fact, serves as unconscious warning, or signal,  
 31 that current inter-racial interaction places in danger (or threatens to  
 32 make conscious the unconscious) the repression of the nation's racial-  
 33 ized and oppressive past. In the present, it insures a societal incapacity  
 34 to recognize the "other" to be like oneself. Misrecognition, and defen-  
 35 sive forms of self-protection from the harm induced by "not being seen"  
 36 define the nature of inter-racialism and racism in America. In its self-  
 37 protectiveness and self-absorption, it detracts from richer, more robust  
 38 imaginings of the future for the nation as a whole and ways enthusiasti-  
 39 cally to imagine ones place in it.<sup>13</sup>

40 Melancholia for the individual suffering it, as Freud describes, gener-  
 41 ates a poorer and emptier "ego" (Freud, [1917] 1954). Unable to detach

1 affect (for Freud, libido) from an ill-defined lost object, the melan-  
 2 cholic does not feel the freedom to move freely and affectively in the  
 3 present. Instead, unable to be rid of his or her emotional attachment  
 4 to *a something that cannot be clearly identified*, he or she lives nostalgically.  
 5 Features of a melancholic society parallel Freud's description of  
 6 the suffering individual. Unable to emotionally detach itself from the  
 7 past—because of denial, suppression, and forgetting—the entire society  
 8 structures itself, institutionally and interpersonally, to continue to relive  
 9 its past, or, said differently, to live *in the past as if* it were the present.  
 10 Because these categories of perception were generated collectively, they  
 11 are products of American civil society (i.e., not nature), their reproduc-  
 12 tion is insured over time. Melancholia is a product of the collectivity.  
 13 Though racism is carried by those individuals who have become part  
 14 of American society, its elimination depends on a change of collective  
 15 perception, a removal of the emotional attachment all Americans hold  
 16 (if only implicitly) to the conviction of racialized difference *as if* it is real  
 17 and racialized inequality *as if* these differences account for it. It requires  
 18 a **civil remembering** of its exploitative past, an acknowledgment of the  
 19 damages that resulted for all those who participated as well as of its on-  
 20 going legacy, and the price the nation has paid—its devitalization—as a  
 21 result of efforts to defensively deny these original harms. Only a result  
 22 of collective remembering and acknowledgement, I argue, will the pat-  
 23 tern of domination instituted through racialized demarcation between  
 24 human beings cease to be reproduced. Only then will the compulsive  
 25 repetition of the pattern be broken.<sup>14</sup>

26  
 27 **The American child and the racialized traumatic rupture:**  
 28 **The transmission of racism across generations**

29 As Freud describes in his wonderfully rich essay "Mourning and  
 30 Melancholia," the melancholic never binds his or her sense of loss, it  
 31 remains an open wound though it is a loss so deep it oftentimes cannot  
 32 be specified because it always remains unconscious. "The distinguish-  
 33 ing mental features of melancholia are . . . in some way related to an  
 34 object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinc-  
 35 tion to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is  
 36 unconscious." (Freud, [1917] 1954, pp. 244–245). The idealized lost  
 37 object is introjected, that is, becomes part of one's self, and serves, in  
 38 its perfected and internalized guise, as an agent of self-criticism and  
 39 harsh judgment. Whereas in mourning, Freud suggests, loss is eventu-  
 40 ally internalized into one's self, as ego, and therefore does not stand in  
 41 super-ego judgment over ego. "In mourning, it is the world which has

1 become poor and empty," Freud writes, "in melancholia it is the ego  
2 itself" (p. 246). The unconscious lost union becomes forever a shadow  
3 over the self that promotes, in individuals who suffer it, an incapacity  
4 to be fully and presently alive.

5 Freud, later in his writings, as well as many psychoanalysts and social  
6 theorists today, move away from his original assertion that melancholia  
7 is necessarily a pathological condition. Rather, he, and others, recog-  
8 nizes this as part of the human condition. Judith Butler, for example,  
9 writing in *Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification*, suggests that hetero-  
10 sexuality, because of the cultural potency of homosexual prohibition,  
11 "requires" the foreswearing of overt sexualized love for the same-sex  
12 parent. This loss of love cannot be overcome, Butler asserts. It generates  
13 instead a diffuse, unconscious, melancholic attachment to a connec-  
14 tion now "necessarily" broken, though unconsciously preserved (Butler,  
15 1997). This follows upon Freud's (*The Ego and the Id*) own later revision  
16 in which he suggests that the lost wholeness once felt, in the effort to  
17 preserve it, generates *identification* with that object. Butler describes  
18 this process as a "melancholic identification" with the lost object. This  
19 identification, a boy with his mother, for example, inscribes on the boy  
20 a "gendered character," in which he "melancholically" incorporates his  
21 mother as part of himself; he preserves his connection to her by taking  
22 her inside of him. Dangerous to his "masculinity," these "feminine"  
23 features need to be repudiated. As Butler writes, "the desire for the  
24 feminine is marked by that repudiation: he wants the woman he would  
25 never be. He wouldn't be caught dead being her: therefore he wants  
26 her" (p. 137). Desire, both for Freud and Butler, expresses this mel-  
27 ancholic rupture, the brokenness of the world, and the desire for reunion.  
28 Men, for women, typically make their world whole; women, for men,  
29 theirs. They are each "primary others" for one another, and help repair  
30 each other's world.

31 The family, for Freud and for Butler, serves as the crucible through  
32 which heterosexual identity occurs, the suppression of sexual ambiva-  
33 lences, and the re-directed striving for wholeness fundamental to one's  
34 core sense-of-being. But other challenges productive of self-formation  
35 happen too outside the family context, within various settings in civil  
36 society. Identification and identity acquisition continue to be driven by  
37 other kinds of tears in the experience of wholeness, as children experi-  
38 ence the loss (sometimes traumatically) of the sense of security and one-  
39 ness or wholeness they had once felt in their relationship to mother and  
40 father. Perhaps less fundamental than sexual and gender identity but  
41 nonetheless required for a person to operate meaningfully in this world,

1 these largely unconscious psychic acquisitions are navigated outside of  
2 the family, in civil society, and in the context of the broader social and  
3 cultural institutional life. These identities influence a person's position-  
4 ing and participation in the larger society and culture.

5 The novelist Michael Chabon poignantly captures the universal expe-  
6 rience of a child coming-to-terms with his or her (the) imperfect world.  
7 He writes, "the world is so big, so complicated, so replete with marvels  
8 and surprises that it takes years for most people to begin to notice that  
9 it is, also, irretrievably broken. We call this period of research 'child-  
10 hood.'" (2013, p. 23). But brokenness, as in the discovery of human  
11 mortality, is a condition every human being must reckon with. He  
12 continues:

13  
14 There follows a program of renewed inquiry, often involuntary, into  
15 the nature and effects of mortality, entropy, heartbreak, violence,  
16 failure, cowardice, duplicity, cruelty, and grief; the researcher learns  
17 their histories, and their bitter lessons, by heart. Along the way, he or  
18 she discovers that the world has been broken for as long as anyone  
19 can remember, and struggles to reconcile this fact with the ache of  
20 cosmic nostalgia that arises, from time to time, in the researcher's  
21 heart: an intimation of vanished glory, of lost wholeness, a memory  
22 of the world unbroken. We call the moment at which this ache arises  
23 'adolescence.' The feeling haunts people all their lives. (p. 23)

24  
25 American children—once they are exposed to the media, to school,  
26 to religious institutions, and to other voluntary or secondary asso-  
27 ciations—find themselves confronted with the reality of *blacks* and  
28 *whites*, a socio-cultural construction enhanced and made real by the  
29 elaboration of unique histories for each group, epic tales of triumph  
30 and tragedy discrete for each, and separate social experiences currently  
31 distinguishing one people from the other. It is the necessary stuff of  
32 identity-formation. Racial difference in America is civil society's coun-  
33 terpart to sexual difference as discovered and navigated in the family.  
34 Because race in America has always been so affectively fraught (replete  
35 with feelings of fear, guilt, anger, danger, etc.), a child's encounter with  
36 it likely is the first traumatic encounter outside the family with broken-  
37 ness.<sup>15</sup> Racial "instruction" typically precedes awareness of phenotype,  
38 the pedagogy of distinction: the inculcation by adults to achieve this  
39 culturally designated perception of racial difference overwhelms the  
40 capacity of the child to take-in the "facts," digest them and come to  
41 feel they are their own. There are many different motivations by adults

1 to teach their children about racial difference that include a humani-  
2 tarian one (describing the evils of slavery and the achievement of civil  
3 rights for all), a protective one (to prepare the child for the reality of  
4 discrimination and danger because of the *perception* of difference and  
5 individuals willingness to act on it), or a racist one (to demarcate good  
6 people from bad ones). Nonetheless, the imposition of racial difference  
7 on children's perception is a near ubiquitous feature of socialization in  
8 America and constitutes for the children a traumatic rupture in their  
9 world of wholeness. From then on, race serves a continual and irrepa-  
10 rable trigger for the brokenness of the world: a source of fear, danger  
11 and distinction. This is the reason why encounters between *whites* and  
12 *blacks* can often be so emotionally fraught, full of affective excess. The  
13 reality of racial difference reminds all those who subscribe to it of the  
14 world's imperfection.

15 Racism, the conviction of the immutable difference between people  
16 who vary (at best) only phenotypically, serves as a first line of defense  
17 against the trauma of loss—a loss defended against by the reassuring  
18 presence of a non-incorporable other. *Grief* over the loss of wholeness  
19 transposes itself to *grievance*.<sup>16</sup> Just as the boy defends against knowing  
20 his internalized mother through various expressions of hypermasculin-  
21 ity and desire for the girl, racial otherness is its civil counterpart. It is a  
22 defense against the wish for unbrokenness, the wish that “the affliction  
23 had never existed.” (Abraham and Torok, 1994, p. 134).

24 The incontrovertible American belief in two kinds of people—*whites*  
25 and *blacks*—possesses its potency because of its efficacy as a way **not**  
26 **to know**. It constitutes a grievance that may express itself in many  
27 different ways, sometimes dependent on one's place in the racialized  
28 American hierarchy. It operates so individuals might not re-experience  
29 the pain of early separation and loss, life's imperfection, and the long-  
30 ing to return. Typically invoked first in the social world beyond the  
31 family, racism fends off the childish wish for wholeness. The American  
32 belief in the reality of racialized difference and one's identification with  
33 one **or** the other *race* is necessarily melancholic, as Freud defines it.  
34 Individual differentiation—autonomy, activity, and private pleasures as  
35 an adult—are pursued while simultaneously (unconsciously) yearning,  
36 “aching,” for reunion, for a reconnection with a once simpler, safer,  
37 and singular world. Melancholics, according to Freud, “suffer from their  
38 reminiscences:” they can feel guilty for their role in breaking the world  
39 (exerting harm on others) because of their aspirations for independence  
40 or they might be self-critical for their nostalgic yearning for that simpler  
41 time as they necessarily grow-up and individuate.

1 In the US, the racialized other also becomes an important recepta-  
2 cle of projection, a splitting of those undesirable traits or attributes  
3 now both physically and materially located *in* someone else.<sup>17</sup> “They”  
4 serve as the site of projections of elements seeking suppression within  
5 oneself. Jessica Benjamin in her book *The Bonds of Love* characterizes  
6 differences putatively possessed by men and women in patriarchal soci-  
7 ety. She refers to Simone de Beauvoir’s insight: “that woman functions  
8 as man’s primary other, his opposite—playing nature to his reason,  
9 immanence to his transcendence, primordial oneness to his individu-  
10 ated separateness, and object to his subject” (1988, p. 7).<sup>18</sup> In the US, a  
11 similar bifurcated distinction operates with respect to racialized differ-  
12 ence, a civil counterpart that, like gender, has been challenged through  
13 political critique and institutional reform but, nonetheless, persists  
14 as a central organizing principle distinguishing one from the other,  
15 as all members—men and women, “blacks” and “whites”—in various  
16 degrees seek to rid themselves of the coercive features inherent in these  
17 categorical distinctions. Splits between mind and body, reason and pas-  
18 sion, self-sacrifice and indulgence, individualized transcendence and  
19 collective immanence, masculinity and femininity, at various times  
20 throughout American history have been viewed through this distinctive  
21 racialized prism. In every case, *blacks* have been cast, like women, as car-  
22 riers for those qualities that the aspiring man came to believe dangerous  
23 in his striving to be masculine, self-confident, and successful (see Prager,  
24 1995). It is how Winthrop Jordan described the inner world of *white* rac-  
25 ists of a much earlier period of American history as “anxious aggressors”  
26 (Winthrop, 1968). *Blacks*, like women, are hardly immune from inter-  
27 nalizing the symbolic representations imposed by the system of domi-  
28 nation and, over the years to a greater or lesser degree, have tended to  
29 succumb to or to self-consciously resist the collective stereotypes. They  
30 may resist their typification, attempt to counteract it, challenge it. But,  
31 nonetheless, the meanings behind the category (more-or-less) remain.

32 And the racialized counterpart to the boy’s “desire for the girl?” For  
33 American racism, the unconscious impulse becomes expressed, on the  
34 one hand, through an affectively laden desire (as American history has  
35 documented) to exclude, to partition, to separate, to not see, to castrate,  
36 to defile, to lynch, to protect, to repress. On the other hand and more  
37 commonly now especially among those attempting to combat racism,  
38 a countervailing impulse has grown to promote inclusion, to celebrate  
39 diversity, to romanticize, and to establish interpersonal contact by *race*.  
40 Still, in either form, the racialized category is preserved and the sense of  
41 otherness maintained. This characterization is not intended to diminish

1 the efficacy of substantial challenges to a racialized order made over  
2 the course of American history, and the “declining significance of race”  
3 in many different aspects of American social and cultural life (Wilson,  
4 1978). But racialized domination nonetheless prevails as a structural  
5 and structuring feature of the nation. Otherwise, various efforts to  
6 account for racialized difference would not remain such a prominent  
7 feature of early childhood socialization. Said differently, the broken-  
8 ness of the world prevails and appears as an omnipresent feature of life  
9 today. The melancholic is unable to mourn, as Freud argues, to ever  
10 overcome his or her reminiscences. Therefore, the memory of the pain-  
11 ful past is never disabled. Racism and racialized inequality is preserved  
12 as a reminder of (and defense against) the world’s brokenness.

#### 13 **A case example**

14 Over the past few years, the New York City police and criminal justice  
15 system have confronted their own racialized conundrum, seeking to  
16 develop a policy of police practice to reduce crime rates in the city. In  
17 April 2012, a New York Times columnist, Michael Powell, wrote a col-  
18 umn entitled “Former Skeptic Now Embraces Divisive Tactic” (2012).  
19 It was about New York’s police chief who was once a strong critic of  
20 a police practice of stopping and frisking thousands of men. Yet upon  
21 returning as New York’s police commissioner himself, he resumed the  
22 same tactics he had once criticized. When out of the office he had been  
23 encouraging what he had called “community policing” where uni-  
24 formed police fostered a program in which local communities policed  
25 themselves, yet now he reverted back to a policy in which police were  
26 far more intrusive in specific neighborhoods. In 2011, the columnist  
27 reports, his officers stopped nearly 685,000 New Yorkers, nearly a seven-  
28 fold increase from when he took office. Eighty-eight per cent of them  
29 were completely innocent of any wrongdoing. A vast majority of those  
30 stopped, it comes as no surprise, were *black* or Latino young men.

31 Powell discusses the hidden injuries of race a result of public policy—  
32 though arguably effective in cutting the crime rate down in New York  
33 City—whose targets are breathtakingly imprecise. Less than two per  
34 cent of the stops led to the recovery of a weapon and, the columnist  
35 writes, “The unbridled use of stops leaves a deep bruise of unfairness,  
36 particularly around the issue of race.” When Powell polls his two *white*  
37 sons, nineteen and twenty-four years of age, who had spent their ado-  
38 lescent years traveling to various corners of New York City, they report  
39 never having been stopped by the police. But he also interviews eight  
40 *black* male students enrolled in a local community college. All together,  
41

1 he reports, they had been stopped ninety-two times and, he notes,  
2 each “spoke with surprisingly little rancor.” One 19-year-old, who  
3 wants a career in theater arts, was forced to take off his sneakers in the  
4 subway, commenting how he never saw whites being asked to do the  
5 same. Another 18-year-old, the son of a police detective and a doctor,  
6 was forced out of his parents’ SUV one afternoon and forced to take a  
7 Breathalyzer followed by both he and his car being searched. A third, a  
8 19-year-old, described by the columnist as “sweet and soft-spoken with  
9 a neat goatee” told of a van driving up on the sidewalk, a man jumped  
10 out yelling “I’m a cop, get down on the sidewalk.” When the young  
11 man feared that he might be being robbed asked to see the cop’s badge,  
12 the officer responded by putting his shoe to his face and pressing it  
13 to the pavement. While not angry in recounting the story, he speaks  
14 mainly of his humiliation at lying on the sidewalk where white young  
15 people stood and gawked.

16 In this same column, Powell provided a description of the police-  
17 chief’s encounter with a City Councilwoman who nearly pleaded with  
18 him to adopt a less hostile approach to policing. “Their needs to be  
19 prevention and deeper community-based tactics and strategy,” she said.  
20 The police chief’s eyes narrowed, “yeah,” he shot back at her, “what is  
21 that?” The columnist concludes by writing: “a particular melancholy  
22 attends to the public official who can imagine nothing better than the  
23 flawed present.” Since then, these New York City police practices were  
24 challenged in court and the “stop and frisk” policy deemed improper  
25 because of “racial profiling.” Nonetheless, the logic behind racialized  
26 practices of coercion remain; even the fact that, aside from the fact it  
27 constitutes an infringement of individual liberties, it is known to pro-  
28 duce (at least in the short run) a more orderly, controlled, disciplined  
29 society.

30 The columnist is right to refer to the accompanying emotional affect  
31 to be a melancholic one. It serves as an emotionally rich description  
32 of this racialized stand-off when all of the participants embody seem-  
33 ingly a hopelessness toward a better future, a resignation—much like  
34 the feelings held by the young men interviewed at the community  
35 college—that little basis exists to imagine anything, at least concern-  
36 ing one’s place in the racialized order—different than that which exists  
37 today. Typically, indignation is only a response for the uninitiated, and  
38 careful instructions in the family, in schools, in the media are provided  
39 on how best to learn to best accommodate to racialized domination. Or,  
40 indignation might assume the role of a sentimental humanism insuf-  
41 ficiently woven into the fabric of interpersonal and institutional life. It

1 is always possible for expressions of anger and rage to break-through, or  
2 for moments of intensive anti-racist impulses to occur. Those moments  
3 have been well documented in American history. American society has  
4 been witness to both forms of resistance at the institutional (macro)  
5 and interpersonal (micro) level of social engagement. But in racialized  
6 melancholic societies, indignation mostly gives way to a more passive  
7 acceptance of a racist society-in-action.

8 For these young African-American and Latino men, police harassment  
9 may more likely unconsciously evoke a reminder of the safe, secure,  
10 and whole world of their early childhood lost now and replaced by  
11 misrecognition and suspicion. For the likely more jaded police officers  
12 with more life experience under their belts, the stop-and-frisk encounter  
13 perhaps unconsciously captures the tarnished and dangerous world of  
14 now that will always be. For the former, rage and indignation threatens  
15 to burst forth, and for the latter, conscience and morality may be in  
16 more jeopardy of breaking through.

17 In other words, the brokenness of the world is likely to be experienced  
18 differently by those being threatened by or victimized by racism as com-  
19 pared to those who resort to racist practices in the everyday world in  
20 which they operate. The difference in social location, of course, contrib-  
21 utes decisively to distinctively different renderings of the social reality  
22 to which both sides are exposed. *Blacks* and *whites*, as a result, draw pro-  
23 foundly different conclusions about how the world works, the amount  
24 of good-will that operates on the other side, the degree to which the  
25 subjugated population has made gains over the years, the likelihood of  
26 continued advances in the decline of social inequalities, and so forth.  
27 But for both sides, the fractured world of self and other constitutes the  
28 dominant experience that requires a potent, and humanly numbing  
29 defense. Is it possible for the police ever to imagine these young men as  
30 their sons? Similarly, is it imaginable that these men might ever imagine  
31 the police as possibly their fathers? Racialized difference makes both  
32 next to impossible. And so it goes.

33 Melancholy, while evoking stillness and resignation in the present, as  
34 the columnist implies, references the past and extends into the future.  
35 It expresses more than stasis, more than eternal recurrence. It is a *pre-*  
36 *sentist* sentiment that effectively closes off a vital connection both to  
37 one's own and to a collective past—the experience of loss—as well as to  
38 future possibility and a desired reunion. The presence of racialized oth-  
39 ers serves as a painful reminder, an unconscious trigger, of the trauma  
40 of distinction from a once undifferentiated past. In America, a result of  
41 the experience of racialized difference, it is a past prematurely shattered.

1 The past, instead of being mourned and integrated within oneself,  
 2 becomes repressed and nearly impossible to access. This helps account  
 3 for the emotional intensity accompanying the danger or anxiety often  
 4 felt when experiencing the racialized other. For both groups, the expe-  
 5 rience of racialized difference and its traumatic origin overwhelms at  
 6 times Americans' most basic capacity to literally perceive individuals  
 7 compared to others of the same *race*.

8 In sum, racial melancholia is subjectively devitalizing. In the interest  
 9 of warding off past trauma, it promotes a hyper-individualism or self-  
 10 concern that effectively stunts the drive for loving, erotic attachment  
 11 to the world beyond the self. The twentieth-century French philoso-  
 12 pher Georges Bataille writes, human beings by nature struggle with the  
 13 experience of discontinuity: "we are discontinuous beings, individuals  
 14 who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure,  
 15 but we yearn for our lost continuity." (Bataille, 1986, p. 15). Eroticism, AQ1  
 16 Bataille argues, is a natural, omnipresent response to the difficulty  
 17 with which it is to bear our own (fractured) individuality.<sup>19</sup> The desire  
 18 for erotic attachment, whether directly through love relationships or  
 19 indirectly in sublimated form, constitutes the quest to undo, or reverse  
 20 the sense of isolation. From this vantage point, social life constitutes the  
 21 quest to undo, or dissolve, separateness. But melancholia inhibits  
 22 the quest. It places (certain) others off-limits. Racial melancholia con-  
 23 solidates this inhibition around the constant reminder of the presence  
 24 of the other, with whom one is unable to dissolve. As Kristeva writes,  
 25 melancholia or depression expresses the power of one's defense "against  
 26 the anguish prompted by the erotic object." (p. 20).

27 Melancholia does not only distort one's relation to the past and per-  
 28 ceptions in the present. It interferes with a capacity to imagine and act  
 29 toward a future different than now. Preoccupied in this racist society  
 30 with protecting oneself from identification with the other or experienc-  
 31 ing guilt for harboring hostile, rageful, aggressive feelings to negate  
 32 identification, it is impossible to imagine a different humane future  
 33 world for ourselves defined by full participation with all others in the  
 34 same world of which we are a part. Warding off the results of a trauma-  
 35 zed past, the present comes to be seen as forever the way things are.

36 In a non-melancholic world, individuals are guided by hopes and  
 37 expectations for the future, the American psychoanalyst Hans Loewald  
 38 writes, imagining the recapturing of a lost past. Personal behavior typi-  
 39 cally is unconsciously guided by this goal in mind. As he writes, "to be at  
 40 one with one's environment and to be guided by ethical, evaluative judg-  
 41 ments about one's own behavior (our superego) are different expressions

1 of the same phenomenon . . . we can say that the future state of perfec-  
 2 tion, which is the viewpoint of the superego by which we measure, love  
 3 and hate, judge ourselves and deal with ourselves recaptures the past state  
 4 of perfection that we are said to remember dimly or carry in us as our  
 5 heritage and of which we think we see signs and traces in the child's inno-  
 6 cence when he is at one with himself and his environment." (Loewald,  
 7 [1962] 2000, p. 50). Yet in racialized America, people are not "one with  
 8 their environment." The defense against identification with the other  
 9 generates a kind of hunker-down mentality by all participants—to isolate,  
 10 to retreat, to disengage from the larger social collectivity.

11 Racial melancholia is the discomfoting experience of an eternally  
 12 divided world, one in which no alternative can be imagined except for  
 13 our separateness, or estrangement, from others. It is a society necessar-  
 14 ily preoccupied with eternally living in the now. Racial melancholia  
 15 is synonymous with a common and constricted psyche: it defines an  
 16 intersubjective universe in which, for all parties involved, individuals  
 17 live **with resignation** more or less exclusively in a psychic present. The  
 18 traumatic moment of differentiation is relived over and over *as if* it was  
 19 happening now.

### 21 **The surplus racialized order: Is psychic change possible?**

22  
 23 Jean-Paul Sartre in a famous short book entitled *Anti-Semitism and Jew*  
 24 makes the startling (and controversial) assertion: the Jew did not create  
 25 anti-Semitism but the anti-Semite created the Jew (1965). "If the Jew did  
 26 not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him." (p. 13).<sup>20</sup> This work, pub-  
 27 lished in French in 1946 just following the end of World War II, heralded  
 28 an entirely new direction to understanding the nature and function  
 29 of racialized discourse. First, it identified the inextricable relationship  
 30 between Jew and anti-Semite—the continuous connection between  
 31 them that results, by virtue of their co-existence, in their co-creation.  
 32 The divisions between them effectively become passed from one genera-  
 33 tion to the next, and anti-Semitism continues to thrive. Second, Sartre's  
 34 work shifted the focus of anti-Semitism away from a set of feelings or  
 35 opinions, lodged in an individual to a focus instead on the relationship  
 36 between these two groups. The production of anti-Semitism is a social  
 37 production not an expression of individualized preferences or aversions.  
 38 Sartre's work is part of a whole corpus of brilliant work authored in  
 39 France around the same time that shifted the question of race and racism  
 40 away from descriptions of either its *natural* occurrence in human beings  
 41 or from what Freud referred to as "the narcissism of minor differences."

1 (Freud, [1929] 1965, p. 114). In this new formulation, racism is societally  
 2 created, a ubiquitous feature of certain social systems, constructed within  
 3 a given social matrix and organized a result of racialized thinking. It is  
 4 not inherent to human beings, either as a human proclivity to discrimi-  
 5 nate by race or as a presumption of inherent differences between racial  
 6 groups. Moreover, Sartre's essay expresses his insistence that each indi-  
 7 vidual is forced to choose how best to live in a racially unequal society.

8 *Anti-Semite and Jew* was written only shortly before one of Sartre's stu-  
 9 dents, Albert Memmi, wrote his remarkable *The Colonizer and Colonized*.  
 10 A Tunisian Jew, writing in the same kind of simple, direct language as  
 11 Sartre's, Memmi described the seemingly inextricable and destructive  
 12 relations between the various social actors in a colonized society: the  
 13 colonized, the colonizer who accepts, and the colonizer who refuses.  
 14 His point is that in colonial society there is no place to stand where  
 15 one can feel non-complicit in the system or morally non-culpable. At  
 16 least compared to Sartre, Memmi presented a far bleaker picture of the  
 17 possibilities of breaking through to create systemic change because in  
 18 a colonial society, Memmi argued, everyone was either a colonizer or  
 19 colonized ([1957] 1965). And Frantz Fanon, a West-Indian, French-  
 20 trained psychoanalyst, also deeply influenced by Sartre published *The*  
 21 *Wretched of the Earth*, *Black Skin, White Masks* and other writings that  
 22 emphasized the psychological damage inflicted on the colonized as a  
 23 result of colonial domination ([1952] 1967; [1961] 1968). Sartre wrote  
 24 the Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* and restates a central thesis of  
 25 Fanon's; namely, colonial rule dehumanizes individuals subjected to it  
 26 (Sartre, [1961] 1968). For Fanon, violent acts to overthrow colonialism  
 27 were not only politically necessary for political independence but also  
 28 required for the colonized to regain his or her humanity. Psychological  
 29 emancipation can only occur, Fanon argues, through cathartic violent  
 30 purging. Psychic wholeness can only be restored through violent acts.

31 Sartre, Memmi and Fanon recognize that social analysis cannot be  
 32 distinguished from the psychological, and that race has no reality  
 33 except as an intersubjective phenomenon. For Fanon, for example, the  
 34 colonized's embrace of violence is a prerequisite for political acts of lib-  
 35 eration because the necessary counter-reaction by oppressors enlarges  
 36 the pool of colonized now prepared to engage in violence. Locked into a  
 37 system of dehumanizers and dehumanized, restoration of one's human-  
 38 ity is only possible by the dehumanized engaging in efforts to destroy  
 39 the dehumanizers.

40 Racialized melancholic social orders are not colonial societies, as  
 41 Tunisia and Algeria once were, and the conclusions drawn by Fanon and

1 others concerning the role of violence in political liberation and psychic  
 2 emancipation are not wholesale applicable in the US. Nonetheless, the  
 3 form of psychosocial analysis done by Fanon and Sartre apply no less  
 4 to the US. It is impossible to identify structures of social domination  
 5 without simultaneously describing the psychic life of those who live  
 6 within it. The racist mind expresses the order and *vice versa*. Moreover,  
 7 Fanon especially emphasizes the irreducible relationship between social  
 8 and psychic change: failure to transform racialized structures of percep-  
 9 tion, the racist mind, means an inability to upend this social structure  
 10 of domination. In the racially melancholic American society, the mis-  
 11 recognition of the racial other means, too, a defensive denial of the  
 12 attributes of the other in oneself. Domination is carried forward, at the  
 13 same time, institutionally *and* psychically.

14 Different from colonized societies, a racially melancholic one generates  
 15 its own specific obstacles to psychic change for overcoming racialized  
 16 domination. Thinking of the possibilities for psychic change, the follow-  
 17 ing three questions concerning civil policies and practices present them-  
 18 selves. First, what strategies might be engaged to disable the symbolic and  
 19 narrative identifications of Americans as **either** *whites* or as *blacks*. This is  
 20 a special challenge because these two groups understand their origins as  
 21 distinctively different: one group as historically linked to the story of the  
 22 dominant first-immigrant Europeans while the other to the subordinate  
 23 slave-African. Second, what actions or strategies might be possible to lift  
 24 from the racialized self the shadow of the internalized object of loss—the  
 25 racialized other—now powerfully constricting thought, imagination, and  
 26 behavior of Americans? How to remove the powerful defenses erected to  
 27 deny the humanity of the racialized other? Third, how to activate a sense  
 28 of erotic potentiality, of disarming defensive energy promoting insularity  
 29 from the other and direct it instead to pursue the utopian possibility of  
 30 the ideal of reunion—a naturalized, post-racialized (though **not** a cultur-  
 31 ally uniform, post-ethnicized) world? Stated differently, how to liberate  
 32 the collective psyche from compulsive repetition, and to disturb the  
 33 impulse to reproduce the past in the present?

34  
 35 **Overcoming the racialized binary, letting the past go,  
 36 making new friends**

37  
 38 **Analyzing the American psyche**

39 In psychoanalytic treatment, “solutions” to individual problems are  
 40 indistinguishable from the work of making the unconscious conscious,  
 41

1 or making explicit certain bedrock assumptions implicitly guiding one's  
2 life despite the fact that they have not stood the test of time, that is,  
3 they have caused trouble. The analyst does not suggest steps or solu-  
4 tions to overcome the internal conflicts that have produced various  
5 unwanted symptoms. Only the analysand can do that, a result of these  
6 conflicts emerging in clearer and deeper self-understanding through  
7 the analytic relationship. The analysand (with the analyst) overcomes  
8 conflicts by better seeing their ongoing function in thought and action  
9 in the present, though their origin usually derives from past efforts as  
10 a child to overcome anxieties, insecurities, and unfulfilled needs and  
11 desires. In the same spirit of "cure," I, here, provide no set of practices  
12 or policies to overcome racialized difference and inequality in America.  
13 Yet by summarizing the insights offered thus far and by posing the fur-  
14 ther questions they raise, inspired by psychoanalysis, racial melancholy  
15 is properly named and its mechanisms for repetition better under-  
16 stood. The description of the phenomenon points the way toward its  
17 overcoming.

18 No different than the patient's challenge when seeking treatment, the  
19 undoing more than 200 years of America's implicit patterns of related-  
20 ness based upon the delusion of race difference is no small task. Psychic  
21 change takes time and energy; an effort largely devoted to reversing  
22 inscribed and embodied ways of being and thinking. Similarly, the US'  
23 negation and undoing of deeply structured and embedded racist pat-  
24 terns of thought and action is a process not an event. In the first place,  
25 the nature of the problem needs to be properly identified. Racial melan-  
26 cholia, as has been argued, confuses the present for the past and resigns  
27 itself to it. In racially melancholic societies, the present, in fact, is being  
28 lived *as if* it were the past. Loss of a sense of one's wholeness and dis-  
29 continuity with others both in the past and presently weigh upon its  
30 members without resolution. *Whites* see themselves as the unencum-  
31 bered inheritors of America's past great achievements, enabling them to  
32 freely embrace the American dream and act putatively *freely* in today's  
33 world: they *are* the world. *Black* presence, however, for whites, serves as  
34 a contemporary impediment to the full realization of their dream, as  
35 freedom's inhibition. *Blacks*, in contrast, necessarily tie themselves to  
36 America's past and understand their linkage to an exploitative history  
37 still yet to be overcome. For them, *white* disregard still represents the  
38 principal culprit in *black* underachievement and *grievance* as the vehicle  
39 best designed to combat it. Significantly, neither group understands  
40 their relationship to the racialized category, no different than in earlier  
41

1 American history, as a powerful contributor to its perpetuation and to  
2 radicalized patterns of domination.

3 Racism, that is, adherence to the meaningfulness of the radicalized  
4 category, in America serves as a (perverse) social resource. It becomes a  
5 comforting defense, shared by *whites* and *blacks* alike, to the experience  
6 of the brokenness, fragility, and precariousness generated in American  
7 society, and its attendant anxieties, insecurities, unfulfilled needs, and  
8 desires. It enables social members to project onto racialized others an  
9 elaborate set of assumptions, connected to a historical narrative that is  
10 some combination of imposed and chosen. One's own relation to that  
11 narrative reinforces, perhaps justifies, the experience of discontinuity.  
12 Both the narrative and the framing of the experience of the other as  
13 a result of the narrative become critical ways for individuals to locate  
14 themselves in every social interaction, organized around hierarchy/def-  
15 erence, inside/outside, etc. in the contemporary racialized order.

16 This bedrock conviction of the reality of racial difference is accounted  
17 for from another vantage point as well. Racialized difference represents  
18 a denial and repudiation of a **common** historical past of American  
19 destructiveness, violence, appropriation, and usurpation, enabling mis-  
20 recognition that the legacy for **all** Americans today is premised on this  
21 history. Naming the perpetrators as *white* and the victims as *black*, while  
22 in one sense obviously true, also promotes denial of a *universal* con-  
23 temporary complicity in the spoils of America's exploitative past. Denial,  
24 thereby, reinforces the impulse to continue to racialize, and therefore  
25 depersonalize and objectify American history. All Americans, today, in  
26 some sense, are the beneficiaries of the nation's history of accumula-  
27 tion, exploitation, and appropriation (including, of course, toward  
28 the Native American); the nation is richer and more providing to all  
29 as a result. In fact, while many Americans may be able to trace their  
30 ancestry back to a slave past, or a master past, many more only sym-  
31 bologically identify with one side or the other. Presumptions or fantasies  
32 of the racial other, and the binary division, express a particular, socially  
33 legitimated, mechanism by which to deal with a desire so intense  
34 that it might otherwise break the order. This is the human desire for  
35 reunion, or wholeness, what Michael Chabon calls "cosmic nostalgia"  
36 (Chabon, 2013, p. 23). It is the converse of brokenness. The presence of  
37 the racial other makes desire more "orderly," more contained and, from  
38 the perspective of the social system itself, more containable. The nation  
39 is resigned to the non-occurrence of even the desire for wholeness'  
40 return. The persistent presence of the racial other serves to suppress  
41 desire for reunion; it makes impossible any wish to become whole, to be

1 victorious, to achieve it all. By dividing the world racially, desire is sup-  
2 pressed and only unconsciously realized in the other. The “symptom”  
3 is melancholia, the unnamed, unconscious longing for a non-specific  
4 lost object (wholeness, innocence) continuing to haunt the present, is  
5 shared by nearly all members of the nation.

6 The perdurance and resilience of the American surplus racialized order  
7 remains. At least since the end of the Jim Crow period, culminating in  
8 the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision declaring a  
9 policy of “separate but unequal” an unacceptable national standard, sub-  
10 stantial sectors of the population have articulated the goal of eliminating  
11 racial difference entirely, implementing instead a “color-blind” approach  
12 to law and policy. Nonetheless, melancholic resignation, acquiescence to  
13 a conviction of racial difference and largely accepting an eternal present,  
14 describes the American steady-state, and the often returned-to racialized  
15 equilibrium. The “pathological” feature of these attempts at conflict  
16 resolution reveals itself as flawed along three different axes.

17 First, the defensive strategy of forgetting the past has not succeeded.  
18 America’s exploitative history does not disappear even when one dis-  
19 owns it, as someone engaged in magical thinking might hope. Not  
20 fully acknowledging or repudiating the exploitative past generative of  
21 today’s ongoing racialized patterns of domination and subordination,  
22 in fact, domination is preserved in place and its continued radioactiv-  
23 ity insured. Each racialized encounter today serves as a new invoca-  
24 tion of patterns of relating instituted long ago. Without remembering  
25 the past as past to which the entire population is connected, it is  
26 not possible to experience “carriers from the past,” that is, racially  
27 perceived others, without triggering remembrances working to be  
28 repressed.

29 Thus the following question: how might one live in the **present** as  
30 present, relegating the **past** to its proper place, acknowledging it as  
31 the site upon which our lives have been built but no more? Stated dif-  
32 ferently, how might one “disable memory” so it does not determine  
33 one’s lived-experience in the present and, thereby, foreclose imaginary  
34 possibilities for the future? Within this framework, issues of apology,  
35 forgiveness, reconciliation and reparations require reopening for debate  
36 and discussion (see Brooks, 1999, 2004). How significant is it that the  
37 US Government refuses to apologize for the institution of slavery? How  
38 do we explain the presence of a Holocaust Museum on the Capitol Mall,  
39 and not a museum to the history of American slavery?

40 Second, how might one’s **ancestors** be honored and respected, while,  
41 at the same time, insuring that one remains unencumbered by a guilty

1 conscience because of his or her own “modern” or contemporary search  
 2 for freedom? This issue especially bedevils (though not exclusively)  
 3 those who identify with previously dominated others, where opportu-  
 4 nities available today may be experienced, in part, as acts of betrayal to  
 5 those who came before. Yet an over-identification with parents, grand-  
 6 parents, and great-grandparents can easily generate a transformation of  
 7 ancestors into **ghosts**, haunting decisions and actions in today’s world  
 8 (Loewald, [1962] 2000). In other words, how to overcome feelings that  
 9 one is the carrier of one’s predecessors’ desires, overwhelming one’s own  
 10 life and the nation’s challenge to determine what rightfully are one’s  
 11 own present-day desires? How to lift the shadow of the internalized  
 12 object? How to feel simultaneously the inheritor’s of the legacy of one’s  
 13 ancestors bequeathed to the present, and to express its meaning freely in  
 14 a new world characterized by new and previously unimagined possibili-  
 15 ties? To what useful or productive end is the discourse to young African-  
 16 Americans, often championed by other young African-Americans, of  
 17 promoting “acting Black”; how stifling the imposition of informal  
 18 sanctions against “forgetting one’s community” as a challenge to the  
 19 American racialized order?

20 This third set of psychoanalytically inspired questions, perhaps, is  
 21 the most challenging. Melancholic resignation, while describing large  
 22 blocs of historical time in America, does not always dominate. Various  
 23 intense and productive challenges to the racialized order have occurred,  
 24 and important adjustments have been made. Nonetheless, each of those  
 25 historical moments has given way to a renewed stasis. The basic features  
 26 of the racialized order return despite significant modifications. Still  
 27 racialized domination and subjugation remains. Melancholia ultimately  
 28 triumphs, and the structure of racial inequality prevails.

29 Why have these efforts not yielded the elimination of a racialized  
 30 order, only its amelioration? How to avoid **repeating compulsively**  
 31 the struggle for racial emancipation by employing strategies of trans-  
 32 formation that ultimately fail? How to prevent a politics of change that  
 33 do not repeat past dead-ends? How to avoid the invocation of a new  
 34 “emancipatory struggle” initiated by *blacks*, supported by some *whites*  
 35 that, in the end, don’t simply quiet again with the establishment of  
 36 racialized inequality? From the perspective of melancholia, the question  
 37 might be posed in the following way: how to activate the possibility  
 38 again of erotic possibility by moving toward the elimination of every-  
 39 day reminders of the brokenness of the American world? How might it  
 40 be insured that modified laws, a result of these emancipatory struggles,  
 41 not be invoked in the future on behalf of *all* individuals, once again

1 failing to address the specific effects of on-going *black* inequality? As  
2 I have suggested, by organizing around the racialized categories them-  
3 selves serve to reproduce the divisions in spite of whatever ameliorative  
4 measures might be achieved? Might new categories of association and  
5 affiliation help undermine the reality of racialized differences and pat-  
6 terns of subordination?  
7

8 **The question is mistrust not race difference. The answer is**  
9 **new and stronger friendship circles**  
10

11 This article has focused on the invidious nature of racial distinction  
12 and defensive purposes that racial categorization continues to serve in  
13 a melancholic society. In fact, the human anxiety generated because  
14 of loss, disappointment, and discontinuity with others and the racial-  
15 ized defenses against knowing it might also be described as a crisis  
16 of trust: racial categorization as a defensive palliative to the anxieties  
17 of profound mistrust. The experience of basic mistrust between one  
18 another and the brokenness of the world describe in different language  
19 the same experience. Differentiation, separation, and loss are profound  
20 human emotions and in an ideal social world we might expect that, at  
21 each stage in a person's development, necessary resources are provided  
22 by various social institutions to reassure the person that the painful  
23 process of individuation from one's past and from one's ancestors is  
24 recognized and accommodated. Provisions are provided in early schools  
25 to reassure children upon their first separations from home that they  
26 are safe and their caregivers will return. Even in the first job, provi-  
27 sion is typically made to the un-ease of a new worker at being able to  
28 perform competently from the beginning. A safety net for catastrophic  
29 events, when possible, are provided should it be needed—though,  
30 here, certain modern societies are much more providing than others.  
31 Empathic understanding, in short, of the experience of the other is typi-  
32 cally employed in various social settings. Provisions are made available  
33 to ease the burden of psychic challenges faced by others. But in those  
34 societies where there is a surplus of racial order, racism and melancholia  
35 represents not the providing of appropriate reassurance but rather an  
36 internalized defensive response brutally denying the anxiety of separa-  
37 tion and individuation. The shameful national response to the New  
38 Orleans *black* poor in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina constitutes,  
39 I believe, a real but also symbolic expression of the capacity of the civil  
40 society to treat the racial other as profoundly different, less worthy of  
41 compassion and empathy.

1 In an important book by Danielle Allen, entitled *Talking to Strangers,*  
2 *Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education,* the author  
3 notes that, at least in most modern societies, one of the first lessons  
4 taught to children is “don’t talk to strangers” (2004). Don’t trust the  
5 world, in other words, because it is a dangerous place. To be by your-  
6 self has built-in dangers located in the world outside of you. Using a  
7 different vocabulary and a different frame of reference than employed  
8 here, Allen is describing the same melancholic world, what she calls  
9 a world with “insufficient citizenly practices.” Feeling the unsafety of  
10 the world leads to retreat and resignation, Allen argues that since the  
11 *Brown decision,* political obligation to others, a feature of democratic  
12 politics, has emerged as central to contemporary understanding of poli-  
13 tics. It implies a democratic responsibility to *not* be resigned and not  
14 to retreat into one’s private world. Yet the institutional and ideological  
15 frameworks still are not in place to fully implement this more assertive  
16 conception of the good citizen.

17 “Don’t talk to strangers,” remains a directive firmly lodged in the  
18 American psyche, despite the 1954 Supreme Court ruling that instructs  
19 citizens to play a more active and empathic role in the polity. Allen  
20 insists that citizenship requires the ongoing work of political friendship:  
21 a sense of obligation and responsibility to fellow citizens, not unlike  
22 those we feel toward personal friends. Importantly, she insists, this new  
23 directive includes obligation to understand why some might not trust  
24 others; just as one might try to imagine why a friend might be mad or  
25 harbor a grudge toward oneself at any given time. To feel oneself safe to  
26 talk to strangers in the public sphere, at least metaphorically, implies a  
27 community of trust, of citizenly trust, and of mutual understanding. It  
28 means the possibility of feeling oneself more complete in the presence  
29 of others. The answer that the question of racial melancholia poses is  
30 to describe and implement the social conditions—the necessary soci-  
31 etal provisions—that enable political friendships—erotized others—to  
32 develop across lines that historically have not been crossed.

33

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 7 Hunt and Robert Hill for their comments, suggestions and encouragement.

## 8 Notes

- 9
- 10 1. On the economic features describing the durability of racial inequality, see  
 11 Brown, 2013.
  - 12 2. The constructed and situational character of racial category is firmly estab-  
 13 lished in the sociological literature, principally a result of the influence of  
 14 Michael Omi and Howard Winant's book *Racial Formation in the United States,  
 15 From the 1960s to the 1990s*. See also HoSang et al., 2012.
  - 16 3. It is true, of course, that these categories are often potent sources of identifi-  
 17 cation, pride, love, hate and other strong personal, "private" emotions. They  
 18 are affectively charged, reflecting powerful psychic density. Still, the origin  
 19 of the distinctions by race originates not in the private sphere of family but  
 20 in the public sphere where these distinctions are made to matter. Racial dif-  
 21 ference is a project of the American public sphere.
  - 22 4. The American racialized order I describe is *not* coincident with what Americans  
 23 otherwise refer to as the US' "minority groups" or "ethnic groups." Ethnic  
 24 groups are understood as possessing shared cultural characteristics, typically  
 25 located with a specific national homeland, and a common language. Racial  
 26 groups are defined as sharing common biological characteristics.
  - 27 5. The intersubjective character of racial identity made here was anticipated  
 28 in an important article published in 1958 by Herbert Blumer, one of the  
 29 founders of symbolic interactionism. Blumer writes, "To fail to see that racial  
 30 prejudice is a matter (a) of the racial identification made of oneself and of  
 31 others, and (b) of the way in which the identified groups are conceived in  
 32 relation to each other, is to miss what is logically and actually basic." The  
 33 insights of Blumer's article, especially concerning intersubjectivity and  
 34 the intergroup dynamics of racial identity, have largely been lost to social  
 35 scientific studies of Ethnic and Race Relations. For two notable exceptions,  
 36 see Bobo, 1999, and Bobo and Hutchings, 1996. For another intersubjective  
 37 perspective, both building upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu, are Wacquant,  
 38 1997, and Brubaker, 2004, especially Chapter 2, pp. 28–63. Wacquant, for  
 39 example, says of the category race, the "continual barter between folk and  
 40 analytical notions, the uncontrolled conflation of social and sociological  
 41 understandings of 'race' is "intrinsic to the category. From its inception, the  
 collective fiction labeled 'race' . . . has always mixed science with common  
 sense and traded on the complicity between them." (pp. 222–223).
  6. A recent study measured empathy toward individuals experiencing pain. The  
 researcher, Silverstein, 2013, describes a "racial empathy gap," summarizing  
 findings demonstrating that blacks are believed to possess a higher tolerance  
 for pain than whites. Especially significant, black respondents shared with

- 1 whites the view that blacks had a higher threshold for pain than whites. All  
 2 respondents, in short, concurred that there was a difference between the two  
 3 groups with respect to the experience of something as human as pain. This  
 4 framework of expectations and expected orientations toward the world, pen-  
 5 etrating to the most basic of human qualities and understood through the  
 6 lens of racial difference, describes the racial categories' coercive and defining  
 7 power for all Americans. For further evidence on the distinction between the  
 8 "white" body and the "black," see also Pollock, 2012, Metz, 2009, Feldman,  
 9 2010, Koenig, 2010.
- 10 7. See, for example, Brodtkin, 1998; also Fields, 2001; Ignatiev, 1995; Jacobson,  
 11 1998.
  - 12 8. Economic Policy Institute, "Ratio of Black to White Unemployment Rate,  
 13 1963–2012"
  - 14 9. Pew Research Center, "Poverty Race by Race and Ethnicity, Percent below the  
 15 Poverty Line, 1963–2011."
  - 16 10. Pew Research Center, "Average Family Wealth by Race and Ethnicity, 1983–  
 17 2010"; Pew Research Center, "Real Median Household Income by Race and  
 18 Hispanic Origin: 1967 to 2010".
  - 19 11. Pew Research Center, "Incarceration Rates, 1960–2010, Inmates per 100,000  
 20 Residents" 2011.
  - 21 12. ABC/Washington Post Poll, "Reaction to the Zimmerman Verdict," "Views of  
 22 Trayvon Martin's Shooting," 2013.
  - 23 13. See, Gilroy, 2006, who makes a similar argument concerning the failure of  
 24 the British to acknowledge their exercise of colonial violence against various  
 25 subject peoples around the world.
  - 26 14. These themes will be returned to in the conclusion.
  - 27 15. It is possible to understand racism's persistence as a result of the transmis-  
 28 sion of traumatic encounters with racialized others onto the next genera-  
 29 tion. See, my Prager, 2003.
  - 30 16. See Cheng, 2001, p. 3, who writes, "The transformation from grief to griev-  
 31 ance, from suffering injury to speaking out against that injury, has always  
 32 provoked profound questions about the meaning of hurt and its impact."  
 33 Grievance, as it is being used here, is the active, egocentric form of protest, a  
 34 defensive and agentic way-of-being and speaking intended to deny or over-  
 35 come brokenness.
  - 36 17. See Cheng's (2001, p. 108) discussion of the opening scene of Ralph Ellison's  
 37 *The Invisible Man* for the potent role that projection plays and how, in one  
 38 interaction, different projections may operate at the same time.
  - 39 18. See Riley, 2003, for a comparable analysis of the role the category of women  
 40 in creating a reified conception of difference.
  - 41 19. Kristeva, 1992, captures it most powerfully, and even more dramatically,  
 from a Freudian vantage point when she writes, "The child king becomes  
 irredeemably sad before uttering his first words; this is because he has been  
 irrevocably, desperately separated from the mother, a loss that causes him to  
 try to find her again, along with other objects of love, first in the imagina-  
 tion, then in words."  
 20. On the anti-Semite, "he has chosen to find his being entirely outside himself,  
 never to look within, to be nothing save the fear he inspires in others. What  
 he flees even more than Reason is his intimate awareness of himself." (p. 21)

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