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## The Burden of Whiteness & The Misery of Antiracism, or How I Learned To Care About White People

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The Burden of Whiteness & The Misery of Antiracism,  
or How I Learned to Care about White People

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Adrian Sebastian Costa

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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**ABSTRACT**

Responding to the ever growing conversations surrounding racism, this essay argues for an examination of white people in the interest of further explicating the systemic hesitation surrounding the earnest confrontation of white supremacy. I do so by firstly diagnosing whiteness as an identity that is burdened by the sociopolitical responsibility of confronting the institutional legacy of white supremacy and redressing its material costs and practical harms against people of color. I continue this line of reasoning to argue that, although these infrastructural mechanisms have largely been vacated out of the legal and moral frameworks of society, that white supremacy has persisted amid the ephemeral dynamics of the contemporary, and because of this, continue to inspire tactics that comfortably situate white people alongside the anxiety of such a burden of whiteness. Only then do I call to question the antiracist vulgate in an attempt to understand the relative social and political danger that inhibits white people's focused and sincere engagement in matters of racial equity and justice. As a result, I argue that, in order to holistically address the problem of racism, that those dedicated to its dismantling must consider the emotional positions of white people, and to address the relative danger they face within the unforgiving retaliatory system of antiracism. In this way, I suggest that to truly confront the obstacles impeding white people from dutifully mobilizing against racism, that the emotional and psychological barriers inspired by this ephemeral racism must be sincerely and compassionately engaged with.

To My Mother,  
A scholar in her own rite.  
Thank you for showing me the knowledge of life,  
So that I can break the world and share the knowledge of it with you.

“Hi, white people.”  
 -Jackie Sibblies Drury, *Fairview*

“We've got to face the fact that some people say you fight fire best with fire,  
 but we say you put fire out best with water.  
 We say you don't fight racism with racism.  
 We're gonna fight racism with solidarity.”  
 -Fred Hampton

“How are we gonna make it out? Alive, yknow. Like with every thing of us.

I don't know. I'm not sure we were even there to begin with.  
 But we can build something new.

We're white, Rory.  
 Can we even do that?

We can try

I'm not doing that.

But if we don't, we die

I'm already dead!  
 We're already dead.  
 The world is out to get us. All of us, and I know you see it.  
 And I mean, fuck, the worst part about it  
 The worst part is, don't we deserve it  
 I mean, what are we even asking for,”  
 -Soldier 1 to Soldier 4, *WE'RE JUST SOLDIERS*  
 Adrian Costa

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To Everyone, who has had to bear with me as I tried to figure it all out.

And finally, to Adrian.

You have worked so hard. You have listened deeply, and loved furiously.  
Never stop being brave enough to speak truth,  
And always have the strength to find love in that truth.

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## INTRODUCTION

\_\_\_\_\_After the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the late spring of 2020, the world was thrown into ensuing chaos. For whatever reason, it flung the entire world into a deep state of reflection on the enduring legacy of racism that continued to perverse the contemporary, despite the fact that the unjustified murders of people of color at the hands of police had been unfortunately relevant for decades, even centuries. There were countless marches in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, organized both locally and on an international scale in countless countries across the world. It became expected of celebrities, politicians, and popular public figures to publicly address the ever mounting history of police brutality against people of color. Eventually, even large corporations could not be expected to evade the conversation on racial equity, as one could witness the likes of Fruit Gushers or Hot Pockets release statements committing to agendas that centered antiracist practices and procedures. Suffice it to say that this resurgence of political and social racial unrest paved the way towards a newfound resolve that shifted the largely accepted normative state of racial politics.

And here, at Bard, was no different. More specifically, these discussions started to surround the Theater & Performance Department, and despite an initial hesitation, I was eventually folded into these discussions as one of very few voices from students of color in the department, veterans and potential victims of the many infrastructural harms that stifled our emotional and educational development. These discussions began as informal spaces of commiseration as we attempted to align our experiences and to identify and diagnose the chronic symptom of racism in our institution. Eventually, however, as these lamentations turned into calls for action, and as we slowly began to implicate ourselves into the fabric of administrative



conversation surrounding antiracist practice, I found myself preaching alongside my peers of color to this community of mostly white theatre students, faculty, and administrators about the wrongful ways that they had lazily conscripted to a violent racism. We challenged the status quo, we criticized our peers and colleagues on their relative apathy in regards to their comfortable positionalities on race and racism, and we shared our immediate grievances with a community of students and faculty that had failed to recognize our fundamentally unique experience as students of color as nothing more than marginal. And it felt good to do that. It felt good to have been struggling to live, to breathe, to learn, and to make for so long and to finally have the opportunity to air out those grievances publicly and without challenge. It also felt good to know that, in a way, you were doing your white peers an invaluable service; that by virtue of explaining the direct and indirect ways that being a person of color had systematically defined my experience as a theatre student of color, that I was inviting my peers to witness a fundamentally different circumstance than them, and thus, would bring them into a more complete understanding of their roles in a system that punished students of color by virtue of their inconspicuousness. The best part about this fact was that, no matter what I could have said, no matter what logical connections I could have made to suggest that some inconsequential moment that had inspired frustration and inconvenience in me somehow was related to this complex and enduring legacy of racism in the department, that my white peers would just silently nod along, validating my reasonings and labeling my general frustration and malaise as wholly justified and deserving of remedial attention. And this reaction makes sense at first glance, being that by the relative ignorance of white folks, they could not hold me accountable to a frame of reference by which to measure the legitimacy of my claims and how to appropriately address the situations in regards to matters of racism. This impulse to agreeability, I would come to realize, was itself a symptom

of the larger apathy and uncertainty that plagued white people in matters of race. This was, ultimately, a defensive response that attempted to grapple with the mystery of racism that white people, unlike people of color, could not inherently and immediately understand.

And with the inevitably looming social confrontation of racism, this uncertainty was unsafe and unpredictable, because to live in the 21st century as a white person, in a world where black people are systemically persecuted by the state, to not have a thorough understanding of that system was to be the worst thing that a white person could be: a bigot. And the threat of being labeled as such a bigot, by those few students of color publically venting their frustrations and criticisms of a racist department, was ever present and potentially deeply debilitating. So much so that as these conversations around reforming the racist practices of the department continued, I eventually noticed a deep sense of fear and shame that I was inspiring in my fellow white peers; shame that they had failed to recognize the harm that they were enacting on their fellow peers of color, and a fear that they would come to bear the public scrutiny that they believed their actions deserved, as they had seen being done to others. This dynamic was not initially lost on me, as I had recognized that this threat of public shaming is what effectively motivated their engaged presence in these conversations, but I eventually had to admit to myself that a power like that would inevitably be abused, because I was human and just like my white peers, I had to come to terms with the limited extent of my understanding of the world and my very real propensity to make mistakes. In order to honor the altruism of the circumstances, I had to make the conscious effort to not let the frustration of being a student of color amid a sea of white peers motivate me to commit acts of unjustified cruelty as a way to seek penance for the pain that the department had caused me. And, honestly, I can't say that I fully succeeded in doing

so. Sometimes, in the heat of such a moment of power and authority, it felt validating to play God, and to deliver justice as I saw was fit.

This was about the same time I started writing this paper. This paper began as a project diagnosing the tenets of whiteness, as it had been largely understood, simply because I recognized the paradigm shifts around the conversations of racism as it contended with the complexity of the racial life of the world. I also felt like there had been such an incongruence with the ways that academia, media, and society oriented themselves around the question of race, always centered on the perspective of people of color as victims, as endurers of racial strife. Of course, this perspective is useful in understanding the felt experience of racism, but to me this one sided analysis lent itself to the omission of a holistic understanding about the lived dynamics of racism that white people endure, and how these circumstances pave the way for structures of racism to materially affect the livelihoods of people of color. I always knew that there was a story to how white people felt, and how they reconciled with the legacy of white supremacy laden with evil and death, but it was only until this past year did I really understand how dangerous, and miserable, living in that circumstance could be.

And, inevitably, this project became a way to orient myself as a person of color to that burden of whiteness. As a person of color, I have a vested interest in the fight against racism and the pursuit of the justified advancement of people of color, but now I wanted to pursue a newfound priority to maintain the integrity of white people as they too traverse the ever evolving complexity of the race question, and to meet these folks with sincere devotion to the upliftment of people of color amid the racism of the world, in good faith, appropriately recognizing the goodwill that they were attempting to pursue and honor the very real and very human possibility of mistakes and failure with people who are, just like I am, trying to figure it all out. With these

newfound priorities in mind, I begin this project with a diagnosis of whiteness, in order to reconcile the categorical shifts of racial identity, as a way to further prescribe the essential quality of whiteness as it exists as a burden of political and social responsibility. I expand on this notion of whiteness as burden and examine the legacy of white supremacy, as it mutates into a project of managing white emotions and positionality to the legacy of evil white supremacy inspires, in order to ultimately confront what I understand to be the misery of antiracism, and the relative threat of social anthropology that hinders white folks from systemically and sincerely confronting racism to their fullest capacity. Only then will I be able to begin to explore any imagination of reconciliatory action that could better situate the political life of white folks as we journey towards a world soon rid of racism. For it is only then, when we stand in brotherhood and mutual understanding with one another, can we lead each other to a future of love and camaraderie. It is only when we learn to care about one another, and it started when I learned to care about white people.

## CHAPTER 1

“From all available evidence no black man had ever set foot  
in this tiny Swiss village before I came.

I was told before arriving that I would probably be a "sight" for the village;  
I took this to mean that people of my complexion were rarely seen in Switzerland,  
and also that city people are always something of a "sight" outside of the city.

It did not occur to me-possibly because I am an American-  
that there could be people anywhere who had never seen a Negro.”<sup>1</sup>

Encounter, and then, supposedly, comprehension. This is the start of James Baldwin’s essay entitled *Stranger in the Village* in one of his most seminal autobiographical works, *Notes of a Native Son*. In this essay, Baldwin details his visit to an all white village in Switzerland, and on this journey, metaphorically relives the moment of first contact, the moment in which blackness and whiteness first perceived one another: “There is a great difference between being the first white man to be seen by Africans and being the first black man to be seen by whites. The white man takes the astonishment as tribute, for he arrives to conquer and convert the natives, whose inferiority in relation to himself is not even to be questioned, whereas I, without a thought of conquest, find myself among a people whose culture controls me, has even, in a sense, created me, people who have cost me more in anguish and rage than they will ever know, who yet do not even know of my existence. The astonishment with which I might have greeted them, should they have stumbled into my African village a few hundred years ago, might have rejoiced their

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<sup>1</sup> James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village” *Notes from a Native Son* pp 1

hearts. But the astonishment with which they greet me today can only poison mine”<sup>2</sup>. The experience of first contact, although both motivated by the same notion of naive curiosity that Baldwin himself surrenders as truth, is fundamentally divergent for white and black folks considering the legacy of white supremacy that tint the world in all its history, complexity, and modern machinations, “For this village, even were it incomparably more remote and incredibly more primitive, is the West, the West onto which I have been so strangely grafted. These people cannot be, from the point of view of power, strangers anywhere in the world; they have made the modern world, in effect, even if they do not know it. The most illiterate among them is related, in away that I am not, to Dante, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Aeschylus, Da Vinci, Rembrandt, and Racine; the cathedral at Chartres says something to them which it cannot say to me, as indeed would New York's Empire State Building, should anyone here ever see it. Out of their hymns and dances come Beethoven and Bach. Go back a few centuries and they are in their full glory-but I am in Africa, watching the conquerors arrive”<sup>3</sup>. Baldwin affixes this dyssynchronous racial experience by attaching the legacy of white supremacy as a hypervisible and distinctly tangible truth that centers all white culture and history as the masterful and sole creators of the modern world. For white people, There is no imminent danger, no fear that without constant focus and fortuitous declaration, that these swiss folks, and to an extent white people at large, would phase out of existence. They are constantly culturally surrounded, acknowledged, and affirmed, by a long and known history filled with acclaim as well as tragedy, and with an assurance of their continued ascension towards God.

In lieu of this, Baldwin points towards a legacy of white imperialism and exceptionalism, both products of white supremacy, that cast a sort of social and cultural safety net around the

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<sup>2</sup> James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village” *Notes from a Native Son* pp 13

<sup>3</sup> James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village” *Notes from a Native Son* pp 15

world for white people. And through white supremacy, collectively corroborating the lives and legacies of white people as conquerors, this safety net vouches for the deeds of white people, from atrocity to prodigy, and attests to the creation of the modern world in all its immaculate, delicate, and genius idiosyncrasy. On the contrary, black people, stripped of their history and dulled on their impact on the world, have no legacy that maintains their time on earth has been occupied with a substantial and meaningful existence. And it goes without saying that the expansive history and unmitigated success of white supremacy is to blame for the lack of historical memory of black people, and in fact, is one of its' many mechanisms for assuring its social and cultural power. In this manner, the experience of white people is informed by a dynamic of power that reinforces the centrality of whiteness in human society; whiteness does not necessitate further examination or critique because to be white was to exist in the purest and essential human condition, to live in the noble shadow of the modern world, whereas to live as a colored person was to occupy the space of the foreign, the other, and ultimately, that which is to be conquered. And because the project of whiteness has internalized practices of imperialist racial dominance, it maintains an informed superiority without retaining any thoughtful understanding of those its claims to preside over, despite the legacy of superiority being wholly predicated on the global project of racial subjugation that white supremacy has successfully pursued. Instead, white people inhabit a ignorant psychic space, squarely placed in the contemporary in spite of the history of the rise of white superiority, and naively unaware of this legacy of evil that has granted them the potential towards exceptionalism. Ultimately, Baldwin is left with an impression that speaks to the unambiguously felt experience of blackness in the face of whiteness, a perspective defined by a world crafted along the legacy of white people and their inherited acclaim: "Yet they move with an authority which I shall never have; and they regard me,

quite rightly, not only as a stranger in the village but as a suspect latecomer, bearing no credentials, to everything they have-however unconsciously-inherited"<sup>4</sup>. By virtue of imbuing itself with a justified sense of superiority, whiteness is absolved of confronting the other in sincere understanding and brotherhood, and in sabotaging the accreditation due to black people in the making of the world, the common mission of humanity, petitioning for cooperation, mutual respect and love is abandoned in the interest of maintaining the intimate conscience of white supremacy.

Now, this fact is disturbing considering the emboldened attitude by which whiteness assumes this superior role in the making of the modern world, but even more interestingly, what Baldwin is able to do is recontextualize our understanding of whiteness as a response to the abundant social and capital inheritance of whiteness in its continuing reverberations across the globe. He duly noted further in the essay that these swiss folks almost certainly have no connection to the violent enforcement of racial subjugation and its subsequent exploitation, saying "I say that the culture of these people controls me-but they can scarcely be held responsible for European culture. America comes out of Europe, but these people have never seen America, nor have most of them seen more of Europe than the hamlet at the foot of their mountain"<sup>5</sup>, and yet they continue to siphon of the benefaction of white supremacy, not necessarily in the objective material extractions of slavery or colonialism, but of the hubris dawned onto them by the emotional heritage of whiteness. This is a far cry from the many conceptions of the ways that scholars have articulated how white supremacy has asserted white privilege. Most contemporarily, Robin D'Angelo, in her book "White Fragility" defines whiteness as it refers to the "specific dimensions of racism that serve to elevate white people

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<sup>4</sup> James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" *Notes from a Native Son* pp 14

<sup>5</sup> James Baldwin, "Stranger in the Village" *Notes from a Native Son* pp 14



over people of color”, and further elaborates these dimensions as “encompassing economic, political, social, and cultural structures, actions, and beliefs that systematize and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources and power between white people and people of color”<sup>6</sup>.

However, what I believe D’Angelo’s fixation on structures and the mechanical material ‘elevation’ of whiteness leaves behind is a sincere understanding of the emotional and psychological benefits that continue to persist amid the deteriorating formalized infrastructure of white supremacy. In fact, this conception of whiteness and its ensuing supremacy have all but become obsolete and further burden us with a materialist understanding of white identity that fails to live up to the very lived disproportionate reality that Baldwin articulates. And at the center of our misunderstanding is the inconsistent allegorization of the identity of whiteness in exact relation to the rigid infrastructure that provides white supremacy its material benefits. The idea of white supremacy is, ultimately, a hallucination, an imagined projection that might inspire us to commit action with ensuing real life consequences, but what academics have largely failed to articulate is the image itself, its colors, patterns, and textures that tint our experience of race, the collective horror of racism, and the ensuing charge to confront this collective horror in the interest of rectifying justice, restituting harm, and pursuing racial equality. Without this understanding, we lose any sense of the more intimate space of emotion that racism has occupied and that has gone largely undisturbed. Now, this isn’t to say that these structural manifestations of white supremacy aren’t enduring or continuing to reinforce material differences between white and black folks, but that we must understand how white people feel like what it means to be white in order to capture the entire spectrum of white livelihood that we are attempting to channel when we diagnose what it means to be white. And in this understanding, we might be

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<sup>6</sup> Robin D’Angelo, “White Fragility”, *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, pp 56

able to gain a new perspective on the relative hesitance by which white people are unable to confront the moral and emotional frameworks that racism is maneuvering, and in doing so, further glean a more sincere understanding of the burden of excavating, identifying, and destroying racism for white people in the interest of pursuing life outside of the restricting tenets of race, and whiteness. Therefore, in channelling its historiographical and theoretical canon, I will argue that whiteness has mutated alongside the movement for racial equality into a burdened identity that inherits the anxieties of confronting the legacy of evil that white supremacy has left behind, and in doing so, further recontextualize the ensuing conflicts in continuing to remedy its damaging effects.

First and Foremost, in our journey towards understanding and confronting the legacy of white supremacy, we are compelled to ultimately ask the question: What is whiteness. It seems like an intuitively understood concept, but the answer proves to be more complex the further it is delved into. Race, and its defining tenets, are seemingly rooted in genealogy, that is to say, race is a fact of one's biological constitution and an objective artifact of their ethnic and racial lineage. Presumably, the answer continues within the realm of the hard sciences, where the divides between genetically different enough groups justify some sort of separative distinction between those racial categories. There is a performative aspect to race, being that it is expected that these racial genealogical differences are phenomenologically present and physically distinguishable. For white people, this means that they have pale skin, and potentially what is understood to be aryan features, blue eyes and blond hair. This rigid understanding of race at closer inspection, however, proves to be a straw man that distracts from the very real social and political motivations of asserting the material existence of racial categories. For one, the argument that race exists as an objective genealogical phenomenon is simply unable to reconcile

with the truth about the history of human biology. In her book, *The History of White People*, Nell Irvin Painter points out that modern day biologists observe that all humans alive today “share the same small number of ancestors living two or three thousand years ago”, and in understanding racial category in this way, it frames arguments around the object existence of race as completely disjointed from the true reality of human genealogy: “These circumstances make nonsense of anybody’s pretensions to find a pure racial ancestry”<sup>7</sup>. Many trace back whiteness to its most essential form in the time of Ancient Greece, as it is what many consider to be the birthplace for much of what whiteness represents: modernity, intellectualism, and the truest essence of human virtuosity. Painter continues to challenge this conception by suggesting that, at the time, the Greeks were considered to be mixed race by virtue of the sheer number of different ethnic groups that were a part of Grecian society. In this way, Painter further points us towards understanding the real complexity of race relations at play during early European society, where even the notion of enslavement or inferiority that is assumed in the nineteenth century is not even considered, for “race narratives ignore early European slavery and the mixing it entailed, leading today’s reader’s to find the idea of white slavery far-fetched. But in the land we now call Europe, most slaves were white”<sup>8</sup>. Ultimately, we can gather from Painter that whiteness cannot be fully reconciled with insofar as it is understood as a genealogical phenomenon.

Moving away from the scientific tradition, some may argue that whiteness could be understood in the ethnic or cultural sense, an identity that is distinct, valuable, and anthropologically substantiated. This framework, however, also fails to provide a fully realized understanding of whiteness as it exists as an identity. Much of how whiteness enacts its superiority is by enveloping a wide variety of ethnic and cultural groups under the banner of

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<sup>7</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, ‘The History of White People’ pp 2

<sup>8</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, ‘The History of White People’ pp 33

whiteness, and in this singularity of identity understood as white, these newly minted racial groups are able to access the cache of privilege and individualism that white supremacist society allots: “White Americans are encouraged to invest in whiteness, to remain true to an identity that provides them with resources, power, and opportunity. This whiteness is, of course, a delusion, a scientific and cultural fiction that like all racial identities has no valid foundation in biology or anthropology”<sup>9</sup>. White people are enticed to buy into the amalgamation of whiteness, to shed their ethnic and cultural identities and assimilate into the uniformity of whiteness. What Lipsitz is able to remind us is that these racial distinctions are disjointed from any biological and anthropological sense, and in fact, construct artificial foundations rooted in science and culture. By buying into the fantasy of racial category in exchange for the distinct cultural and ethnic specificities of their ancestry, white people access and assert the powers and privileges that white centered society allows, and as a result, engage with and reinforce the tenets of white supremacy. This transaction of specific ethnic identity into a formalized investment in whiteness ultimately undermines the argument that whiteness is situated around any cultural identity or practice.

Lacking any scientific or anthropological standing, it is ultimately argued that whiteness itself may be considered a social project, immaterial in that it is born out of the exhalations of social order, but material in that they yield very real lived consequences. Which is to say that whiteness exists in the organizing social structures, a fantastical byproduct of humans, beholden to the contract of society, reconciling with one another in the face of the utter plurality and idiosyncrasy of human life. But if we are to consider whiteness as a product of the social plane, we must firstly posit that the entire concept of race was largely constructed along the social lines. And we can see this largely chronicled in Ian Haney-Lopez’s book, “White by Law” in which he examines the categorical shifts of whiteness in the budding litigatory and social structures of

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<sup>9</sup> George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness” pp 11

the early twentieth century United States to track the project of race as it developed among the legal frameworks of the modern world. He explains that because law exists as the tethering force of society, it continues to play a central role in the construction and enforcement of race and racial category in the United States, saying “It follows, then, that to say race is socially constructed is to conclude that race is at least partially legally produced”<sup>10</sup>. In this process, Haney Lopez is able to further examine the powers of law, being that by which any society is able to create, define, and initiate language into a common lexicon that is acknowledged and, ultimately, codified into the social fabric. And if this point is to be understood and accepted, we must understand race at the fundamental level being one that is legally defined, accepted, and eventually socially corroborated: “The prerequisite cases compellingly demonstrate that races are socially constructed. More importantly, they evidence the centrality of law in that construction”<sup>11</sup>. He continues to argue that in this social construction of race in law, there was a negative definition of whiteness, as a concept to be defined in the inverse against those that were *not* considered white, saying “First, the courts constructed the bounds of Whiteness by deciding on a case-by-case basis who was *not* white”<sup>12</sup>. Following this tradition, Haney Lopez charts the legislative journey of race as not a kinetic project to define a superior racial category, but an effort invested in the denial of peoples from the defined group of “whiteness”, and in functioning under a tradition of scarcity around whiteness, asserting its material benefits and inferred superiority in the legal framework.

Ultimately, white identity reinforces the material existence of race in order to purport itself as an eternal, objective organizer of humankind, therefore cementing white supremacy as an ideology that can enforce a racial social order. Haney Lopez explores the gatekeeping of

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<sup>10</sup>Ian Haney Lopez, “White by Law” pp 10

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, pp 9

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid*, pp 27

whiteness and its imbued privileges most explicitly in the seminal case of *United States v. Thind*<sup>13</sup>. In this case, Bhagat Singh Thind, an Indian Sikh man, was petitioning to be naturalized as an American citizen. At the time, the Naturalization Act of 1906 only allowed "free white persons" and "aliens of African nativity and persons of African descent" to become United States citizens by naturalization. In the proceedings, Thind never attempted to challenge the standing legal provisions, but instead, wanted to be naturalized under these racist parameters, arguing that, by virtue of his identity as an "Aryan", he fulfilled the requirement of being a "free white person". And, in an ethnological sense, this argument proved to have bearing, as both European and Indian lineage largely descended from the ethnolinguistic group of Eurasia known as the "Proto-Indo-Europeans"<sup>14</sup>. However, in the end, the Court ruled against Thind, claiming that the term "Aryan" was understood in the more linguistic sense, and did not correlate with any of the physical characteristics that could appropriately prove white racial origin<sup>15</sup>. In this way, the litigatory precedent that was being defined was not who was 'in', as in those who were allowed to be defined as being white people, but of those who were not. The legal systems were able to fashion categories it deemed as distinct racial groups, and from these distinctions, discriminately endowed material benefits onto individuals that it considered deserving, that of which it recognized as white. Therefore, *United States v. Thind* compellingly demonstrates that the notion of white supremacy sits at the core of the social construction of race, and to an extent, whiteness.

This conception, that the project of white supremacy sits at the heart of white identity, is largely corroborated by the legacy of academic conversation surrounding whiteness. This is because much of the conversation surrounding whiteness has been heralded by not white folks

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<sup>13</sup>*United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923)

<sup>14</sup>Anthony, David W.; Ringe, Don (1 January 2015). "The Indo-European Homeland from Linguistic and Archaeological Perspectives". *Annual Review of Linguistics*. 1 (1): 199–219

<sup>15</sup> Chi, S. & Robinson, E.M. (2012). "Voices of the Asian American and Pacific Islander Experience" (vol. 1). pp 341

themselves, but by black and brown intellectuals, and often in the context of describing a system of oppression that situates whiteness as the status quo. Whiteness, according to France Winddance and Charles Gallagher in their work “The Future of Whiteness: A Map of the Third Wave”<sup>16</sup>, has largely undergone three distinct shifts that academia has moved through as a means to situate itself in the larger context of critical race theory studies. The first wave was established by WEB DuBois himself in his seminal critique of whiteness and its frameworks of seeking and asserting power. This wave of understanding whiteness was set alongside the work of African-American scholars to articulate and deconstruct the mechanisms of white supremacy through the 19th century. These conceptions of whiteness were often initiated under the pretense of black thinkers who were deconstructing the political and rhetorical tactics of white supremacy, and therefore, much of what has framed the conversations of whiteness have been ones that were created by those not intimately familiar with its lived experience. As a result, the language that was designed to articulate whiteness was one that could only do so as it related to the project of white supremacy and its oppression of non-whites. These disparities would continue into what we understand to be the second wave of critical whiteness studies as scholars from a wide range of academic and social disciplines invested into the critical theory that WEB DuBois had brought forth, and expand upon understanding whiteness past its initial sociopolitical framework as a way of “challenging and making white supremacy and institutional racism visible”<sup>17</sup>. Historians began to trace back the epistemological foundations of whiteness and racial category, artists and writers contributed theoretical and empirical accounts of racism in the form of literature and media, and even critical legal scholars attempt to carve out the frameworks conscripted into whiteness as it was materially codified into legal society. No longer content with understanding

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<sup>16</sup> Twine, France Winddance, and Charles Gallagher. 2008. “The Future of Whiteness: A Map of the ‘Third Wave’.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31 (1): 4–24.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid*, pp 10

whiteness as it related to its structures of power, scholars in this wave attempted to describe a canon of self determination for whiteness that offered conceptual autonomy and definition<sup>18</sup>.

As we continue onto the third wave, Winddance and Gallagher, through their analysis of the canon of white racial theory, challenge us to confront the reinvention of white supremacy not so much as an exercise of oppression and white superiority, but of a consolidation of privileges and affects that, are a legacy of this violent racist past, but nonetheless are still desired to be retained. Winddance and Gallagher continue in articulating the third wave of critical white race theory as one that focuses on the contemporary position of whiteness, witnessing as the white supremacist frameworks slowly starts to recede from the sociopolitical landscape that were once weaponized to assert it's dominance, and instead framing it alongside the consequences of this legacy of racial hierarchy as one that continues to manage "Institutional arrangements; ideological beliefs and state practices that maintain white privilege"<sup>19</sup>. Winddance and Gallagher are contending with a world where the seemingly most essential quality of whiteness as it relates to it's supremacy is continuing to be examined and further deteriorated. In the face of this shifting dynamic of power, Winddance and Gallagher instead opt to occupy a more subtle sociopolitical space, one that accounts for the intimate lived experiences of whiteness that confronts "the nuanced and locally specific ways in which whiteness as a form of power is defined, deployed, performed, policed and reinvented"<sup>20</sup>. In the face of their analysis, and in our attempt to understand what constitutes whiteness, we are left to examine the lived experience of white people to try and uncover the connective tissue identifying the essential quality of whiteness in a world where the tenets of white supremacy are slowly but surely deteriorating.

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<sup>18</sup> Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. 1997. *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pp 5

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp 5



This newfound notion of white supremacy, one not in pursuit of some greater claim to racial superiority, but more so as a conduit for consolidating the privileges of an already existing system of white supremacy allows us to more accurately and sincerely diagnose the nuanced lived experience of whiteness. In occupying this more intimate socio political space, we are more acutely able to diagnose the driving mechanisms that white supremacy has fashioned or maintained to sustain its relevance in contemporary society. And Ashley Jardina, in her book "White Identity Politics", is able to offer us some quantitative data about white identity in relation to this legacy of white supremacy. In her work, Jardina found no strong association between having a strong cultural or genealogical sense of identity with having a strong white racial identity. In the same vein, she found no strong correlation between those who identified as white and those with a strong sense of white racial solidarity. This is ultimately to say that white people can identify as white without having to buy into the notions and ensuing mechanisms of white supremacy and white privilege. What she actually did discover was that a strong white racial identity finds positive associations to personality types, saying "The finding is, however, consistent with the notion that white racial solidarity is more likely to be embraced by individuals with a particular personality profile -- those who cling to tradition, who are less open to new experiences, who support hierarchy and authority, and who are resistant to interruptions of the status quo. Those who are lower in education, higher in authoritarianism, and with greater levels of SDO (Social Dominance Orientation) are inclined to possess such a worldview"<sup>21</sup>. The study concluded that white racial solidarity was higher in individuals who had personality types that highlighted a sense of traditionalism and authoritarianism; ideas that we observe reach their terminal ends in the political and rhetorical tactics of white nationalist groups. Furthermore, Jardina is able to field that all white people have an acute sense of the privilege that their white

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<sup>21</sup> Ashley Jardina, "White Identity Politics" pp 115

identity allows, saying “Whites with higher levels of racial solidarity also clearly recognize the privileges their group is afforded. They describe the social, political, and economic power of their group. They are proud of their groups accomplishments and support the idea of celebrating their race just as other racial and ethnic groups do. Many also recognize that if they were to have been born another race, their life may have been more difficult”<sup>22</sup>. Even more interestingly, she is able to reveal that white people, regardless of having a strong notion of white racial solidarity or rejecting the idea of white identity altogether, are devoted to maintaining the tradition of white privilege: “Yet, this recognition of privilege is not necessarily one that moves whites adopt more racially egalitarian views overall. Instead, these whites seem more interested in maintaining these advantages... [Those Whites who purport to reject a racial identity] also disregard the very real disadvantages faced by racial and ethnic minorities and to deny the privileges enjoyed by whites”<sup>23</sup>. Jardina’s work allows us to recognize white people’s propensity to recognize the undue advantages of whiteness and simultaneously be possessively invested in whiteness and its imbued privileges. Furthermore, the data also suggests that those who more strongly relate themselves to whiteness are prone to a traditionalism that conserves the structures of white privilege codified into the social fabric. What this allows us to understand is that, relative to the more felt experience of being white, is a tendency towards attributing feelings of traditionalism and authoritarianism, ideologies and methodologies that theoretically conserve the conduits of power and legitimacy for white supremacy.

And in understanding whiteness as a political phenomenon, we can track the etymological and conceptual shifts of whiteness as it relates to acting as a conduit for consolidating privilege and sociopolitical legitimacy. One of the most notable examples of these

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<sup>22</sup> Ashley Jardina, “White Identity Politics” pp 152

<sup>23</sup> Ashley Jardina, “White Identity Politics” pp 154

shifts was the folding in of Irish Americans into whiteness. We typically understand what preceded the order of racial discrimination was a sort of localized prejudice bred from domestic ethnic stereotypes, and this had been the case for Irish Americans during the 19th and 20th century. But with the project of racialization and antiblack racism, what surprisingly arises from anti-irish discriminations is an aligning of Irish Americans with the historical, social, and political circumstances of black identity: “My father and other Anglo-American men of his generation used to refer to Italians as ‘Guineas’. I never knew what a Guinea was until I was an adult and saw that it was a nineteenth-century word for Africa, and thus for Africans. What that means is that as recently as the 1950s Italians and Mediterraneans were seen as racially different from us white folks”<sup>24</sup>. This is startling to accept considering that what seemingly constitutes the distinctions between black and white racial categories, but being that Irish people majorly occupy the fairer skinned of the color spectrum of human morphology, it offers us a more intrinsic understanding of the tenets by which whiteness was being determined and assigned, which was ultimately as a signifier of power and social dominance. And this argument extends far beyond just the specific example of people from Irish ancestry, where groups like white presenting Jewish people ascend into whiteness as they continue to aggregate economic and social visibility and legitimacy: “This is because some groups, like the Jewish people were eventually considered white based on social conditions”<sup>25</sup>. Even for groups who clearly exist outside of the phenomenological boundaries of whiteness, we see historical examples of titles of whiteness being extended to groups as an assertion of their social value and a reward for committing to the project of white supremacy: “As another example, despite championing blue

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<sup>24</sup> Banks, Russell. 2008. *Dreaming Up America*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

<sup>25</sup> Anna Linder, “Defining Whiteness: Perspectives on Privilege” pp 2

eyes and blonde hair as the ideal, Adolf Hitler called the Japanese ‘honorary Aryans’ during WWII, for no reason other than their military allegiance to Germany”<sup>26</sup>.

In this way, we can come to the understanding that whiteness derives its distinctiveness from its relationship to structures of privilege as opposed to outright violence or hatred, and the emotional, social, and psychological propensities to retain that power through social hierarchy, exclusionism, and the continuing legacy of white supremacy. This inevitably leads us to reconsider the academic tendency of understanding whiteness solely in the context of the non-white people who are victimized by a white supremacist system predicated off of their vindication. Of course, there is something to stand from studying and understanding the roles of nonwhite people in racism et large, but that is only one side of the coin. The fact of the matter is that we must be able to examine the conditions that coax whiteness into a space of possessive privilege and power. We see that Martin Luther King Jr. is able to diagnose this concern in one of his most notable works, “Letters from Birmingham Jail”. MLK writes in response to statements published in a local newspaper penned by the local white clergymen of the christian church condemning the movement’s nonviolent protests for civil rights as untimely. In the opening lines of his letters, MLK frames the momentum of the civil rights movement as one of the powerless responding to the actions and transgressions of the powerful, saying “It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city’s white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative”<sup>27</sup>. He cast the civil rights movement as a reaction towards the actions of a government and society that is invested in whiteness and its’ entitled exercise of power, pointing towards the fact of civil resistance and organization as an inevitable reaction to the inaction of the larger white community. In this way,

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<sup>26</sup> Stratman, George John. 1970. “Germany’s Diplomatic Relations with Japan 1933-1941.” Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers 2450: pp 147

<sup>27</sup>*Letters from Birmingham Jail*, pp 1

MLK offers up an opportunity to shift our methods of understanding the race question in America. He challenges our impulse to hyperfixate on the role of the oppressed in a system built by its oppressor. Instead of dictating the civil rights movement as an attempt to usurp and consolidate power for people of color, MLK hones in on an unavoidable fact that, for all intents and purposes, is simple to understand; communities that are marginalized seeking to reach social, political, fiscal, and emotional autonomy and dignity. What is to be examined, dissected, and criticized, he posits, is not the action of those being subjected to inferiority, but those who insist on their superiority: to examine and understand whiteness and its claim to its material benefits by way of white supremacy.

He continues to cast the inaction of white people as an inalienable aspect of the privileges that white supremacy bestows, at the detriment of the movements for racial equality for people of color. MLK argues this by drawing a parallel between the structure of power that enacts violence against people of color seeking justice, as dictated by the inevitable fight of freedom, and the apathy and assumed ignorance that allows the white clergymen of the christian church the privilege of leisure on matters of civil rights. Ultimately, MLK is diagnosing this right of apathy, of innocuousness, of tepid disapproval, of moderacy as a privilege, integrally foundational to the white power structure, to the point that he admits it complicates his mission to mobilizing white people against white supremacy in America, saying “I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your

methods of direct action'; who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time; and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection"<sup>28</sup>. What MLK is articulating here is what he describes as the 'negative' pursuit of freedom that white people employ when faced with the race question in America. White people with, as far as MLK can judge, upstanding moral and logical facilities, can recognize that the plight of black people in America is one that is justified, and claim to be focused on the perilous mission of setting right what has been set wrong, and yet, are unwilling to commit to the sacrifice of social progressive change. They instead opt to frame the conversation in terms of approach, to patronizingly set forth imagined deadlines for when freedom is to be realized, and they live alongside the myths of time and propriety, which is all to say, white people make excuses against facing the reality of the situation, in an effort to avoid considering its immediate material sacrifices and solutions. In this manner, we can understand the counteractive methodology of white people in the context of the civil rights movement as a concave approach to this fight that see to, as MLK describes, the absence of tension, because tension breeds disruption that threatens the resting state of white supremacy in society. In his analysis, we see whites' affinity towards traditionalism and social conservation most blatantly here, and ultimately, we can track the legacy of asserting white privilege, in this case the privilege of leisure and inaction, as the driving force behind fortifying white supremacy.

As a result, whiteness becomes a label that charges the individual with the burden of responding to the legacy of white supremacy, a deliberation of the call to action for racial justice against the immutable temptations of white apathy and comfortability. Ultimately, in

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<sup>28</sup>*Letters from Birmingham Jail*, pp 1

understanding and diagnosing whiteness, we must recognize that central to this synthesis of identity is contending with and positioning oneself in relation to the legacy of evil that white supremacy lays at the foundation of the normative reality of white people. And that is a really scary thing to do. With the forces of racial prejudice largely excommunicated out of the infrastructure of society, racism had moved long past its biological tenets, and instead, manifested in the more ambiguous ethical plane, the field in which we contend with the felt immaterial harm of racism, if and how it persists, and how to most acutely tend to those social wounds. For white people, excusing oneself from the race question was no longer an option, where ‘If a loss of ethnic identity has created a void among many [white people], and if identity politics has made whiteness a visible racial category, then the perception that being white is now a social liability’<sup>29</sup>. The social cost of ignoring race would eventually outweigh its relative benefit, and at this point, many white people would have to form politically correct and socially informed opinions regarding the positions of people of color in society, or suffer the consequences of being ostracized as amoral, incredulous deviants. But the deeply intimate task of confronting racism, for white people, is understood to be a herculean feat, by virtue of the overwhelming prerequisite conditions that need to be met in order to reconcile with the sheer depth of its influence. You need an unmitigated faith about the extent by which racism distorts your lived reality at the insurmountable, seemingly invisible expense of your peers of color, an affinity towards accounting for and appropriately articulating your cognitive and emotional grievances, and an unmovable resolve. Furthermore, you are asked to remain focused and vigilant, but also personable and sincere, to be visible advocates and quiet delegators, to speak and not speak, to be dedicated curators and curious practitioners of every thought susceptible to racial prejudice, but also chastised for not realizing the most mundane or intuitive notions of

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<sup>29</sup>Charles Gallagher, “Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror” pp 10

racial sensitivity. You are asked to be comfortable with being constantly uncomfortable, to commit to a lifelong battle with a spectre, a ghost of a vicious racist past, a monster you cannot and will never be able to see, a beast you thought, at least to some extent, had already died! And you must do all this, all of it, with the utmost decorum and social respectability, as your actions and arguments about race are expected to live in the public realm, susceptible to critique and the inevitable, and impending, threat of social death. This is the burden of whiteness. And this burden lives under the social pressures of a new form of tyranny infecting social politics. One that bridles with the radically different circumstances of civil rights activism and social justice, a legacy that we must contend with to wade through the methods of ethical sacrifice in the interest of pursuing absolute abolition and ideological harmony, for both white and nonwhite folks.

Now, to say that whiteness is defined by its access to power could potentially elicit backlash considering that there are white people who can hardly claim any sort of organized power, an example of this being the poor working class white people that many race theorist and intellectuals point towards when confronting the consequences of racial capitalism. It is important to recognize that although poor working class whites suffer under the pretenses of other socio political and economic systems, the wages of whiteness continue to invade and reinforce issues of racial and political inequality. Ultimately, the value of whiteness is an essential quality of all facets of life in America, and therefore, cannot be uniquely isolated or diminished in the context of other marginalized contexts: “Group interests are not monolithic, and aggregate figures can obscure serious differences within racial groups. All whites do not benefit from the possessive investment in whiteness in precisely the same ways; the experiences of members of minority are not interchangeable. But the possessive investment in whiteness always affects individual and collective life chances and opportunities. Even in cases where



minority groups secure political and economic power through collective mobilization, the terms and conditions of their collectivity and the logic of group solidarity are always influenced and intensified by the absolute value of whiteness in U.S. politics, economics, and culture.”<sup>30</sup> In that vein, I choose to define whiteness not necessarily as the singular manifestation of racial power and superiority, but instead, to be white is to stand in the legacy of the project of white supremacy, and to assume the privilege that whiteness allows. A privilege that is, ultimately, predicated on the subjugation and exploitation of the position of black people existing in a white supremacist society: “But the costs and cost-benefits of racial discrimination are not so neatly summarized. There are two other inter-connected political phenomena that emanate from the widely shared belief that whites are superior to blacks, that have served critically important stabilizing functions in the society. First, whites of widely varying socioeconomic status employ white supremacy as a catalyst to negotiate policy differences, often through the compromises that sacrifice the rights of blacks. Second, even those whites who lack wealth and power are sustained in their sense of racial superiority and thus rendered more willing to accept their lesser share, by an unspoken but no less certain property right in their ‘whiteness’”<sup>31</sup>.

We understand and recognize that race only exists explicitly in the parasocial context, and the broad compartmentalizations that racialization allows (Black, White, Other?) proves useless when trying to understand genetic history. At the same time, whiteness, at its most basic form, exists as a morphological phenomenon. It is phenomenological by nature, but it is the social and political context surrounding whiteness, and its relationship to others, that provides the foundation for us understanding and confronting the question of whiteness. That to be white is to exist on a multifaceted spectrum of personal and social dynamics, informed by your physical

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<sup>30</sup> George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness” pp 22

<sup>31</sup> Derrick Bell, “White Superiority in America: It’s Legal Legacy, It’s Economic Cost” pp 139

appearance, by your ethnicity, by your inheritance and family background, and by your immediate environment. And it is important to note that, just like any other race, whiteness functions on all of these dimensions; and that we must ultimately recognize the sheer difficulty conscripted into the concept of whiteness. And with prescribing specificity, complexity, and difference into the heart of what whiteness is, is to fundamentally undermine the directive by which the concept of whiteness was conceived. It was meant to group, and to generalize swaths of ethnic and geographic populations, in the interest of defining a genealogically superior class. And in this exchange, I think we can truly understand what underpins every experience of whiteness, a transmutation of the specific and particular into the general, the amalgamous, in exchange for supremacy and power. What this then becomes is not a relationship informed by specific dynamics between distinct ethnic groups, but a generalized population, and its relationship to power. And, therefore, if we want to define whiteness, we have to define it as it relates to a system of supremacy and power.

## CHAPTER 2

We ended the last chapter with a definition of whiteness as charge; the charge being that, by virtue of eating off of the fruit of white supremacy, those who are considered to be white, which is to say those that indulge these privileges, must respond to the evil that has laid out the path of white superiority before them. White people, in response to this burden, convince themselves they are making meaningful steps towards addressing racial inequality. In fact, most if not all relatively good willed white folks, prescribed to the moderate liberal notion of racial equality, will tell you that they have and are constantly responding to the calls of freedom by black folks with a similar, equally vivacious call for racial justice. But it is clear to many that if this were the case, the world would be a much different place. The fact of the matter is that the individual experience of whiteness is not aligning itself with the societal mechanisms of white supremacy. White people continue to assert their commitment to racial equality, despite the continued existence of racism and the inability to atone for its damaging effects. And even though we have articulated the experience of whiteness as a burden, it is impossible to ignore the fact that white supremacy continues to oppress society. This is because the institutional racism inspired by the project of white supremacy persists despite racism largely being excommunicated from its infrastructural roots, and this inequality of outcomes still achieves the goals of white supremacy in practice. But because it is materially invisible, it allows white people to situate themselves comfortably around the charge of whiteness to confront the inequality that racism inspires.

Now, that is not to say that inequality itself is a problem, but given the history of racism, this inequality leads to a conscious or subconscious imaginary of race that continues to pursue

the goals of white supremacy by degrading people of color and elevating the interest of white people. This imaginary is key in understanding how white supremacy begins to involve itself not in the material plane, but in the psyche of the individual in society. This imaginary allows racism, and therefore whiteness, to move away somewhat from asserting itself in the literal sense, but take a more nuanced approach by occupying the space of the subtextual, the unsaid, and the psychological. And in this transmutation, the task of addressing racism now necessitates an acute deconstruction and political criticism of the racism of the felt experience, and requires a systemic commitment to an internal work that seeks to expel racism from the mind. This understanding of racism is not one that begins with dismantling the material mechanisms of society, the economy, the government, etc., but ultimately argues that confronting racism as it relates to questions of power requires maneuvering the emotional plane, the felt experience of individuals, the affectual.

In this way, whiteness as burden becomes not only a political charge, or a mission invested solely in the question of power, but one that also derives from confronting the psychological, the emotional experience of whiteness. This notion, however, is diametrically opposed to the initial mission of whiteness as it was intended to be used and understood, and as a result, we can draw a distinction between whiteness as a social group category and white people as individuals, alive and human. Whiteness, as a status, is purely involved in notions of power and supremacy; it was born out of that intention, and continues to persist and pursue those sociopolitical goals. But people, people are so much more than amalgamations of power. They have distinct and psychologically substantiated beliefs and motivations, fears and obstacles. In this fashion, whiteness sits abjectly perpendicular to the natural complexity of human life; filled with nuance and difference. And so for both of these to exist alongside one another is completely

antithetical to the plurality of human life that we observe. And when we think through a racial lens, we think about people in relationship to their power, and those who are fairer skin, or have explicitly white skin, exist as white people because their proximity to the power structure of whiteness is unquestionable. But what largely gets left out of this analysis is the examination of the lived experience of whiteness as an emotional condition. To talk about feelings in the robust context of racial politics is to move away from the rationalist tradition of the Enlightenment and move towards the mood of the romantic and the ephemeral, a context that we have already designated as being completely antithetical to the sociopolitical goals of racialization. When we begin to examine the emotionality of whiteness, we can begin to understand the psychosocial mechanisms that continue to keep the structures of racism intact, and suggest to us that the solution to racism is one that is prepared to undergo collective confrontation of the individual lived experience.

It goes without saying that this is a dizzying demand, it's righteous intentions and theoretical consistencies do not preclude us from underestimating the sheer impracticality in this project; by virtue of its large scale application of the very intimate emotional labor of uprooting one's own internalized racial bias. The work of milling through one's psyche is a deeply personal and psychological pilgrimage, and deals with the work of the inner mind and soul, and is a directive that is almost impossible to measure, to consistently diagnose, and to attack collectively. In studying the history of white emotion around racial anxieties, we can see how these tactics that situate themselves around accounting for the burden of whiteness phase into the programming of white supremacy while still maintaining its material privileges. And, through this procedure, we are able to retroactively examine the political project of white supremacy as one that has shifted into the ephemeral, but that continues to play a negative and meaningful role

in society, and in order to address white supremacy in the contemporary, we need to confront the history of white peoples' emotions in the project of white supremacy in order to further glean an understanding of its origins, and to reverse engineer it's potential solutions.

Firstly, it is important to note in tracking the history of white supremacy that race is not an objective and primordial fact of the world. In fact, it was such a newfound concept that the idea of race did not precede anytime before the modern world was fully conceived<sup>32</sup>. Most political and social conflict existed in tribalistic contexts, squabbles between groups in immediate incidents that would breed specific prejudices directly related towards immediately discernible ethnic communities as opposed to a universal litmus test based on skin color or creed: "All in all, ethnic and color prejudice existed in the ancient world. Constructions of *races* -- White Europe, Black Africa, for instance -- did not, and therefore racist ideas did not"<sup>33</sup>. That is to say that although heuristic discriminatory practices were at play, and had been at play for millenia, the foundations for a system of racial hierarchy had not systematized and consolidated into a force of oppressive power that could organize into the tyranny that we have seen modern day racism be capable of. We can see this clearly when we look towards the history of the word 'Slave', a word that is, at least in the American context, one synonymous with the legacy of the enslavement and mass deportations of black people from Africa. The term 'Slave' was derived from the ethnic name for Slavs, which delineates the ethnic groups that speak slavic languages deriving from majorly central and eastern European countries. The term rose to prominence, ironically, during the early medieval period when Slavs were enslaved in sheer numbers by Moors from North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula<sup>34</sup>. Even more so, there have been countless authors and scholars that have denied the primordial existence of racial distinction, and posit that

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<sup>32</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, "The History of White People" pp 3

<sup>33</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, 'Stamped from the Beginning', pp 18

<sup>34</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, 'Stamped from the Beginning' pp 23

much of how racism manifests is a product of social construction and institutional reproduction: “Racism, as an ideological parasitism of the bioanthropological sciences (the “hard” sciences), has no scientific validity... The fundamental presupposition of such an ideological optimism resides in the belief that racism is essentially a *theory of races*, the latter *distinct* and *unequal*, defined in *biological terms* and in *eternal conflict* for the domination of the earth -- a conception as publicly inadmissible as it is refuted by science”<sup>35</sup>.

Instead, we must dissect and understand white racism as a set of ideological conditions that manipulate political, economic, and social infrastructure to materialize and enforce the oppression of people of color. We can see this idea illustrated clearly in the example of the Congressional Black Caucus, a coalition formed by black members of congress to pursue legislative actions or prerogatives that are relevant to the Black community. More specifically, when we examine the moment in which this caucus sent out a letter to hundreds of community leaders who had worked adjacent to the goals of its body, in the interest of soliciting opinion on what issues were most pressing to the black communities across America. In this letter, the caucus outlined over 35 points of interests, “including taxes, defense, immigration, agriculture, housing, banking, higher education, multimedia, transportation and infrastructure, women, seniors, nutrition, faith initiatives, civil rights, census, economic security, and emerging leaders”<sup>36</sup>. It is clear that the influence of institutional racism has crippled the entire spectrum of political and social life for black Americans, but this truth reveals itself to be no more relevant than in the disproportionate incarceration of black men, which was interestingly enough, omitted from the previous list. Regardless, none of the previous notions even come close to the amount of irreparable damage that the criminal justice system has enacted against the black community,

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<sup>35</sup> Pierre-Andre Taguieff, “The Force of Prejudice: On Racism and its Doubles” pp 2

<sup>36</sup> Congressional Black Caucus, <https://cbc.house.gov/> 2009

according to Michelle Alexander in her book, “The New Jim Crow”. In “The New Jim Crow”, Alexander offers a devastating critique of the legal system as a continuation of the legacy of slavery as it does not shed racial caste, but simply redesign it. In these searing accounts, Alexander offers up a stark image of the American prison system as one that is inherently invested in disenfranchising the black community, saying “In Germany, 93 people are in prison for every 100,000 adults and children. In the United States, the rate is roughly eight times that, or 750 per 100,000. The racial dimensions of mass incarceration is its most striking feature. No other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities. The United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. In Washington DC, our nation’s capital, it is estimated that three out of the four young black men (and nearly all those in the poorest neighborhoods) can expect to serve time in prison”<sup>37</sup>. Alexander makes it clear that these contemporary systems are direct descendants of the chattel slavery and continuing de facto marginalization of people of color, and furthermore, challenges us to identify and diagnose these structures as being enduring artifacts of the ongoing pursuit of white supremacy and black subjugation. And, in this manner, Alexander prompts us to look at the history of white supremacy and its’ initial creation of race and racism in order to glean a more robust understanding of how white supremacy consolidates its powers and privileges.

And when we look back towards history, we observe that the project of white supremacy began with the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade and the racialized commodification of African peoples. Stephanie Smallwood is able to chronicle this phenomenon distinctly in her work, “Saltwater Slavery”. With the discovery of the new world and all of its abundance of resources, the opportunity to extract these newfound goods proved to be too enticing to the European

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<sup>37</sup> Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow” pp 8



dynasties of the time. These fantasies of endless wealth were quickly tempered by the reality that the raw resources of the Americas, material like gold and a wide variety of new crops, needed to be toiled with and extracted; mined, planted, and tended to. Likewise, the discovery of the new world formally introduced and further oriented European conquistadors to the vast spectrum of human life existing on the earth, including the dark skinned peoples of Africa. The impression, for European colonialists, was that these civilizations paled in comparison to the modernity and advancement that ruled the European world, completely disregarding the complex political, social, and fiscal accomplishments of these worlds in organizing their societies. Regardless, through this experience of first contact, European conquistadors started to build a collective superiority complex against the colored peoples of what it prescribed the 'New World', and in the wake of this dire need for labor in the Americas, began to justify the methodical capture and enslavement of these lesser people. As a result, the world was thrust into a complex interconnected system of imperialist extraction and colonial expansion, wholly dependent on the labor that Europeans were able to siphon from the capture and enslavement of people of Africa. Enslaved peoples themselves became a commodity, a resource that eventually centralized itself among the budding network of trade. The consequential explosion of the market economy with the commodification of slavery created a demand that further incentivized Europeans travelers to alter and exploit the economic and political structures of West Africa in order to meet this newfound demand for cheap and reliable labor. And in the interest of efficiency and collective greed, European slavers quantified the process of slavery, removing the humanity of enslaved peoples by way of the middle passage. Smallwood lays this foundation for us and continues to distinguish the process of commodification that enslaved peoples underwent as they were charted across the Atlantic Ocean from the experience of relatively normative migration, saying "In

place of the networks that link origins and departures, and transform the emigrant into an immigrant, for African captives in the Atlantic system reverberated the traumatic echo of commodification"<sup>38</sup>. Here, Smallwood is able to point at the economically and politically motivated tactics of commodification, as it transformed these distinct ethnic communities into objects of trade. Unlike their enslaved counterparts, migrants were able to freely choose when and where to relocate, and had a distinctive sense of self determination and spatial autonomy. They also were able to maintain a legitimate sense of identity that carried ethnic, social, cultural, and political substance brought with them to their newfound homes. The connection to a culture, a land, and the connective tissue of ancestry, as Smallwater is able to articulate, was severed for these African slaves and, therefore, systemically disrupted the transmutative process of the migrant's journey. Even more so, the already existing socio-political circumstances of the varying communities that made up the newly enslaved African people's had been largely ignored, and this all culminated in the trade becoming an experience that stripped any distinction from the multiplicity of differing cultural and ethnic African communities, in an effort to frame the African peoples as a predictable and understandable resource.

And in the face of such effacing and systemic terror, the commodification of slavery during the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade mutated into a coping mechanism for white society as it focused on divorcing the human element from the market of labor. Smallwood continues her analysis of the middle passage by examining the accounting documentation of slavers during the time, and in this way, can observe how the lives of black people became subjects of a market that enumerated their worth and only concerned itself with their lives insofar as it affected the bottom line. By undergoing this process of compartmentalization, the business of slaving became one no different from other forms of trade, and white slavers were able to divorce the industry of

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<sup>38</sup> Stephanie Smallwood, "Saltwater Slavery" pp 18

slavery with one that dealt in human cargo. The black human life became comparable to goods, and ultimately, utilized in furthering the wealth and interest of white people: "People, tobacco, gold, and gunpowder, all mutually exchangeable against one another, were able to pass smoothly across transactional lines that separated one account from another"<sup>39</sup>. These enslaved African peoples were ultimately reduced to quantitative notes and valued to the extent of their utility as modes of labor for the sake of the capitalist interest of the white man. In this way, the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade, although bringing immense riches to the European continent under the guise of white superiority, was inseparable from the collective horror of the sheer humanitarian cost of their capitalist project. This is not to say that there wasn't a general sense of banality in regards to the evil of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade, an apathy that enabled the process to continue and thrive, but the fact of slavery was ultimately seen as a barbaric and unseemly procedure, and at best, was the subject of popular and mixed conversations around its ethical and moral complexities. We are able to fully conceptualize the extent of the horror around the violence that was exercised during this period with the accounts of Michel-guillaume-Jean de Crevecoeur in his *Letters from an American Farmer of 1782*. In these letters, the famed french diplomat traveled throughout the Americas in search of the essential American quality that typified the population, and on his travels, he duly noted his shock at the callousness that the rich slaveholders held while committing horrible acts of violence in the name of their social arrangements: "Never could I rest in peace; my sleep would be perpetually disturbed by a retrospect of the frauds committed in Africa in order to entrap them, frauds surpassing them in enormity everything which a common mind can possibly conceive... Can it be possible that the force of custom should ever make me deaf to all these reflections, and as insensible to the injustice of that [slave] trade, and to [slaves'] miseries, as the rich inhabitants of this town seem

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<sup>39</sup> Stephanie Smallwood, "Saltwater Slavery" pp 84

to be”<sup>40</sup>. There was a multiplicity of global conversations around the system of chattel slavery, with no consensus regarding its vicious practices and their place in proper white society. Regardless of this fact, the slave trade continued to thrive<sup>41</sup>. The mass enslavement and commodification of African peoples was done for the sake of utility, that much is true, but even more subliminally, it was a way to compartmentalize the collective guilt around the ethical dilemma of slavery. Inevitably, the project of slavery had to assert itself amid the moral ambiguity of its situation by confronting the crippling theoretical anxieties of white people amid the perceived cruelty of the slave trade.

The efforts to morally justify the practice of slavery culminated in the subsequent construction of race and racism by coding racial prejudice along imagined racial lines into the legal and moral frameworks of society in an effort to justify white supremacy as apart of the natural racial order. These definitive compartmentalizations came from a predisposition to view the world in hierarchical frameworks, stemming from a tradition of puritanism that asserted not only that there substantial difference in groups, but that these differences lended themselves towards a natural social order that, coincidentally, favored white society: “In studying Aristotle’s philosophy, Puritans learned rationales for human hierarchy, and they began to believe that some groups were superior to other groups”<sup>42</sup>. The attempt to justify this divine social order began, ironically, with the sciences, as there was an initial attempt to find empirical differences between Black and White people, distinguishing them as distinctly unique groups within the human race. We see this most clearly with the example of Isaac Newton, the founder of modern physics, in one of his most eminent works, *Optiks*, which translated his study of the physics of light to the question of racial difference in the human race. Newton’s scientific discovery that white light

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<sup>40</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, ‘The History of White People’ pp 109

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp 111

<sup>42</sup> Ibram X Kendi, “Stamped from the Beginning” pp 19

existed as the ‘essential’ color was quickly grafted onto the question of skin color in an attempt to scientifically justify the false notion that whiteness itself was the normative state of humanity: “*Whiteness* is produced by the Convention of all Colors... In one of the foundational books of the upcoming European intellectual renaissance, Newton imaged ‘perfect whiteness... Black skin, he maintained, was an ‘ugly’ deformity of normal Whiteness. The physics of light, Boyle argued, showed that Whiteness was ‘the chiefest color’. He claimed to have ignored his personal ‘opinions’ and ‘clearly and faithfully’ presented the truth, as his Royal society deeded”<sup>43</sup>. These efforts would not only be limited in the scientific realm, as the courts would also grapple with race as it started manifesting in the mechanisms of society and litigation. More specifically, the Supreme Court would ratify racial distinction into the legal meter, justifying it by virtue of it being ‘common knowledge’, so much so that it would undermine the integrity of the sciences in the interest of upholding these racial categories in the legal sense: “Science’s inability to confirm through empirical evidence the popular racial beliefs that held Syrians and Asiam Indians to be non-Whites should have led courts to question whether race was a natural phenomenon. So deeply held was this belief, however, that instead of re-examining the nature of race, the courts began to disparage science”<sup>44</sup>. Fundamentally, we can see the construction of white supremacy as a project that was designed, in part, to assert the proprietary wealth of white people through the exploitation of people of color, to consolidate power within the identity of whiteness, and to manage the ethical anxieties of white people in the face of the horror of chattel slavery. These were the founding tenets by which whiteness was crafted alongside.

But, the fact of the matter is, this is not how race and white supremacy are functioning in the contemporary. It is not controversial to say that the movement for racial progress has come a

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<sup>43</sup> Ibram X Kendi, “Stamped from the Beginning” pp 45

<sup>44</sup> Ian Haney Lopez, “White By Law” pp 7

long way in pursuing the rights and liberties of black people since the end of slavery<sup>45</sup>. This is not to say that the project of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade did not lack in stripping any sort of humanity or collective identity for black people, but as our understanding of race has evolved, the grip of racial hierarchy has continued to loosen as the passage of time slowly confronts and heals the wounds of imperialism and racial subjugation. As a result, our understanding about the rigid structures of race and racial category have slowly given way to a more intimate recognition of the inherent plurality of blackness, both in the content and character of black folks as well as understanding the different permutations of blackness that people exist in. Very recently, for example, much of what has entered popular conversation is the recognition that those hailing from the Dominican Republic, a small Caribbean island off of the coast of Florida and Cuba, are considered black<sup>46</sup>. Now, the history of the slave trade does support this fact, with the first African slaves being shipped into the Dominican Republic as early as 1503<sup>47</sup>, but regardless, before the newly formed social consensus about blackness and the reconciliation of the history of the Dominican Republic as it relates to the African diaspora, Dominican people were functionally only considered to be what we understand as Caribbean or Latinx, not as a group with such an intimate relationship to blackness that it is effectively comparable to other ethnic groups also racially defined as black. Now, to say this does not mean that these terms are mutually exclusive, many have recognized that there exists latin black folks as well as caribbean white folks, and, at first glance, this seems completely within the paradigmatic rules of what and who is considered to be black; there was always space to understand blackness as part of a larger spectrum, and it had been largely accepted that minimal deviations in skin tone and color could

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<sup>45</sup> Michelle Alexander, "The New Jim Crow" pp 17

<sup>46</sup> Contributors, et al. "Blackness Is Not a Monolith." *The On Being Project*, 29 Jan. 2019, [onbeing.org/blog/jeffrey-bissoy-blackness-is-not-a-monolith/](http://onbeing.org/blog/jeffrey-bissoy-blackness-is-not-a-monolith/).

<sup>47</sup> Moya Pons, Frank (2010). "Evolución de la población dominicana". In Frank Moya Pons (ed.). *Historia de la República Dominicana [History of the Dominican Republic]* (in Spanish). 2. Santo Domingo: CSIC Press. pp. 50–52. ISBN 978-84-00-09240-5. Retrieved 14 July 2017.

be marginal enough to not justify any further partition in considering who was and was not black. However, this shift lends itself more to understanding the political and social ramifications of racial category because, now, when we are talking about black people, we are also talking about the Dominican Republic, whomst are majorly descended from the enslaved African people who inhabited the land, and yet, occupy almost all parts of the color spectrum. And this, consequently, complicates the canon of racism, insofar as it loses grip on the hard and fast biology usually presumed onto racial categories, and theoretically gives way to a more nuanced understanding of the lived experience of race in the contemporary. It encourages us to take pause and begin to reflect and criticize our already existing notions of blackness and who is understood to be black. And when we remember that these rhetorical and political shifts are happening everyday, they continue to remind us that race is a socially constructed phenomenon that itself frames the political, cultural, and historical truths that we recognize ourselves existing in and within a part of the larger canon of our lineage. Ultimately, we can understand that blackness is itself a constantly evolving concept that changes with history and circumstance, that it is not a rigid and concrete concept.

The theoretical shifts of blackness exist in stark contrast to the intentions of the project of racialization as an effort that pursued white superiority through consolidation and enforcement of distinct racial identities. The project of white supremacy, understanding its capabilities to manufacture social categories, co opted identity as a means of materializing the framework of racial identity and its subsequent white supremacist hierarchy onto society. Being that the construction of identity is central to the mechanisms of white supremacy, I believe it is important we first articulate what it means to identify with a group. Alcoff allows us to firstly confront the question of identity and to that extent whiteness, as a concept born out of history: “Social

categories of identity are not simply foisted on us from above, dependent on state recognition, but organically produced out of such historical events”<sup>48</sup>. That is to say that it is seemingly impossible to manufacture identity in the artificial sense, and instead, identity is a product of the desire to retain a sort of collective group memory and consciousness in regards to specific historical events and traumas. Identity is, therefore, understood as it relates to a history or account of marginalization that required a parasocial framework in order to think about how and why a group is formed, who did that group entail, and ultimately, the collective account of the group. We can see this phenomenon play out really clearly when we look at examples of racial and ethnic communities confronting and resisting against issues of colonialism and occupation. Identity, in this context, is born out of the collision of colonial history with that of the understanding of those being invaded, and that these identities are shaped by politics and society: “Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past”<sup>49</sup>. As a result, we should not understand identities as merely discursive or linguistic constructions that cover materially instantiated differences, “but as a meaningful (or meaning laden) organization of the phenomenologically accessible material world. A simpler way of saying this is that identities are not mere talk but an aspect of our material environment”<sup>50</sup>. Race is understood to be a conceptual maneuver that positions racial groups to history, and presumably, a legacy that has largely asserted the superiority of whites with material social, political, and fiscal advantages. And these histories are important to the creation of identity in that it calls upon these past narratives into the future, by way of ancestral lineage, in order to elicit or call upon the contemporary consequences of these past political and social circumstances. For black people, this has manifested as what we consider blackness to

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<sup>48</sup> Linda Martin Alcoff, “The Future of Whiteness” pp 58

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” 1990 pp 225

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, pp 49



mean today, in all its complexity, and an identity that largely correlates to the sociopolitical canon of the civil rights movement where, much like the civilizations victim to imperialism, oppression is confronted and overturned, and there is a positive stride towards ascertaining political and social autonomy.

But, when white people are faced with the same challenge of confronting and reconstructing their identity, there is virtually no consensus or vested interest in reforming whiteness from its white supremacist origins. When considering race and racism, history has typically hyper fixated on the roles and reactions of colored peoples in response to a society devoted to their oppression. But because of the dynamic descending from the history of American slavery, white people have often been able to escape any sort of understanding or recognition about their engaged role as agents of race. Much of this assumed superiority is predicated on emphasizing the role of black peoples to be the subjects of examination and imposition. In particular, during the period of American slavery, white slaveowners were deeply committed to employing tactics that distinguished whites as subjects to be served and blacks as objects to serve; an example of this being in the autobiographical work by Sallie Bingham, a wealthy aristocrat born into a newspaper dynasty entitled *Passion and Prejudice*, where she accounts that “Blacks, I realized, were simply invisible to most white people, except as a pair of hands offering a drink on a silver tray”<sup>51</sup>. In the interest of further divorcing enslaved black people from their humanity, white slave owners imagined themselves as invulnerable to black observation and scrutiny. White aversion to black observation has its historical ties to the early years of exploration and discovery of the New World had escalated concerns over the status quo social order, Elizabethan thinkers like George Best used “Africans as ‘social mirrors’” to manifest the unsavory of “hypersexuality, greed, and lack of discipline -- the Devil’s

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<sup>51</sup> Sallie Bingham, *Passion and Prejudice* pp 132

machinations” that threatened the integrity of the white European man, for “Normalizing the negative behavior in faraway African people allowed writers to de-normalize negative behavior in White people, to denormalize what they witnessed during intense appraisals of self and nation”<sup>52</sup>. The project of white supremacy has often busied itself with controlling and limiting the critical gaze of the black people that were serving them. Instead, white thought leaders were able to cast colored people as subjects of critical observation, further subjugating black people by defining them against the personal anxieties and prejudices of proper white society, all the while assuming an intimate knowledge of black people without sincerely considering the tenets of black livelihood.

Whiteness has also avoided diagnosis by drawing on this white centered epistemological legacy by centralizing whiteness as the normative racial identity, thereby rendering any further critical racial analysis seemingly obsolete and futile. White supremacy has always been centered in the construction of the American racial context, for example, where values like freedom and right to property, rights inalienable from the American zeitgeist, were written into the social and cultural genetic coding of the American identity along the lines of those who were and were not white, and because of this, equated the American experience with a white experience: “This conception of American identity was crafted deliberately and can be traced to the very founding of the nation [where] in 1790, when the US congress passed the first law concerning the granting of national citizenship, it limited naturalization to immigrants who were ‘free white persons’ of good character”<sup>53</sup>. Whiteness and its subsequent affectations are never called into question, or beholden to any critical academic or sociopolitical gaze that enable the continuation of the oppressive tactics of white supremacy: “the unmarked category against which difference is

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<sup>52</sup> Ibram X Kendi, “Stamped from the Beginning” pp 32

<sup>53</sup> Ashley Jardina, “White Identity Politics” pp 119

constructed, whiteness never has to speak its' name , never has to acknowledge its' role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations"<sup>54</sup>. Suffice it to say that there seems to be a very tangible difference between the ways that blackness and whiteness has been perceived, dissected, and ultimately confronted in relation to the legacy of racism. Much has been written in history about the experience of nonwhite people living in America, and the concept of race has been and is continuously undergoing evolving phases of understanding and usage. Much of the initial work of dismantling systems of oppression is about identifying those invisible structures in order to create language to talk about them and build a common and specific conception of where and how the systems of racism exist. With that being said, historically, much of the search for understanding in matters of race are often expected to be burdened by black people. This is because the question of race is largely understood as one that black people are more duly invested in, and therefore, we are almost always compelled to frame questions of race in the experiences and rhetorical frameworks of the marginalized. However, this methodology often precludes us from thinking holistically about the social and political dynamics of racism as they play out, not for those who are subject to its consequences, but also to those who are privy to its benefits.

In particular, there is an absence of critical socio political discourse around a collective understanding of whiteness that does implicate its relationship to white supremacy, but does not center it in its analysis. And in understanding the adaptivity of blackness, we can understand the project of whiteness as one that also lends itself to sociopolitical reinterpretation and change. More specifically, we can understand that whiteness adapts its political and social identity in response to the shifting tenets of identity for people of color, these shifts often occurring in a consolidation of power and self determination for these marginalized groups. Ultimately, this

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<sup>54</sup>George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness" pp 1

reflexive relationship emphasizes the relationship that whiteness exists and is understood through its relationship of superiority of other marginalized racial groups: “The framework of theories like social identity theory and group position theory certainly makes this inference. They suggest that demands on the part of non-whites ought to threaten whites’ status, increasing the salience of white group identity or consciousness and its subsequent relevance in political decision making. Some scholarship does, at least implicitly, make this claim”<sup>55</sup>. Whiteness, in the same vein, drew contrast and superiority from defining itself against the grain of blackness. Unlike slavery in the New World, the status of being enslaved was not absolute, as individuals could buy their freedom and this freedom could extend towards their children. That is to say, the burden of servitude was one that did not succeed through genealogical or ethnic lines. And although this was initially similar in the New World, slavery became a tool to leverage social control for whites anxious about the rebellion of its enslaved peoples, and this pre modern conception of enslavement turned into slavery distinguished by one’s race. And this ‘racial slavery’ drew conceptual distinctions grounded in race, where whiteness existed as free and blackness as enslaved. And because the concept of race was designed to distinguish the African slaves between those white European folks domineering over them, it often found itself defined against a spectrum that spans between the morphological distinctions of those on the color line, with both white and black at opposite ends of this racial spectrum. Eventually, different associations and implicit biases started to attach themselves along the color line that presupposed the racial inferiority of blackness, but more importantly, emphasized the sacred purity of whiteness. This is most notably understood in the example of the one drop rule, a rule that ruled that if you had at least one drop of black blood, that is to say that your life is a result of interracial mixing however far behind,

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<sup>55</sup> Ashley Jardina, “White Identity Politics” pp 29

that you were considered to be black, and therefore, racially subjugated<sup>56</sup>. The anxiety surrounding the one drop rule is rooted in the obsessive fixation between the rigid differences between white and black folks, and suggesting that what was essential to whiteness is endangered when existing with blackness: “The metaphor is one of purity and contamination: White is unblemished and pure, so one drop of ancestral Black blood renders one Black. Black is a contaminant that overwhelms white ancestry”<sup>57</sup>.

In a similar fashion to the conceptual shift of blackness, however, racism itself also moves from a biological perspective and adopts a more socially constructionist approach. Responding to the relatively robust mutations of blackness, racism had itself accommodated the shifting understandings of race as they continued to complexify with the inclusion and redefining of its racial tenets. In response to these shifting tenets, racism moves into a framework that positively affirms races, which have now collected socio political significance and visibility, particularly in addressing the ghost of systemic racism. This is explored most succinctly in Etienne Balibar’s work, in which he aligns with a differentialist approach to racism, and diagnoses a newfound anxiety to lean into the imagined cultural and ethnic distinctions of racial groups, deriving from the legacy of racialization as a tactic working towards white supremacy. Balibar ordains these individuals, those relying on the imagined distinctions of race, as ‘Neo-Racists’, as they have shed their biological essentialists arguments and corroborated the anthropological discourse surrounding race, defending it as socially relevant and culturally significant, saying “the new racists now speak of the need to protect socially constructed racial differences; but instead of aboriginal or minority cultures, they now speak of protecting

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<sup>56</sup> Winant, Howard. 2001. “White Racial Projects.” In *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, edited by Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. pp 43

<sup>57</sup> Neil Gotanda, “A Critique of ‘Our Constitution is Color-Blind’” pp 27

racialized cultures like ‘American Culture,’ ‘French Culture,’ ‘Christian Culture,’ and even ‘White Culture’ from the creeping conformity of cosmopolitanism”<sup>58</sup>.

This new affirmation of racial category amid the categorical shift of racism is a manifestation of the anxiety of racism transmuting into this immaterial plane, and in a desperate bid to receive any sort of reconciliatory compensation, delivers an undeserved and unsatisfying racial justice. And, to a certain extent, we can sympathize with the progressive or reformist intentions of this linguistic maneuver, insofar as it seeks to retain categorical boundaries in order to maintain a sense of self actualized identity for marginalized communities, and continue to consolidate power as a fully realized, linguistically acknowledged racial group. In order to communicate, commiserate, and consolidate with folks in said communities, they must have a shared language and understanding in order to collectively define historically contingent systems of meaning. But these systems reinforce the foundation of racial distinction, and often surrender ethical grounds to the racist ideology that it claims to combat: “If racism simply celebrates difference, the new racists can argue for racial pride and racial preference by adopting much of the language of liberal anti-racism, the language of diversity. That is the foundation for the new distinction between white supremacy and white nationalism; the latter is a formation of the new racism; it calls for the defense of white national culture in the name of cultural diversity”<sup>59</sup>. The fact of the matter is that these lexical definitions were granted to us from a racist tradition invested in the project of white supremacy and to affirm and employ these categorical identities in the dismantling of racism undermines the remedial efforts that antiracism is alleging to pursue. In the same vein, antiracist tactics are encouraged to indubitably adopt racial distinction as an inseparable quality of race politics, and attach it as a simple fact of race relations and

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<sup>58</sup> Etienne Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” pp 7

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, pp 2

conversation. In relying on these socially constructed racial parameters, antiracism adopts the particularist mannerisms of its predecessor, a neo racism that is no longer mandated under white supremacy, but is claiming to pursue reparatory action against a particularly egotistical and selfish neo racism: “It may be that a history of anti-Black racism justified affirmative action. But why should the poorest whites suffer when they too are disadvantaged and discriminated against. Hillbillies and working class whites also have claims to special racial preferences. So do women, Muslims, and Jews who were excluded from business culture for centuries. Once one race makes a claim for special privileges, every race will lodge its claim. If one group has a Supreme Court seat, a guaranteed gerrymandered voting district, and a school, shouldn’t all groups? The anti-racist logic leads to a view of the world that is fully racialized. That is why so many on the right can now argue that anti-racism is what causes racism”<sup>60</sup>. Ultimately, the ethical enactment of this framework is singularly predicated on reinforcing racial distinctions as a way of categorically decomposing the inherent pluralism of humanity, in the interest of partitioning material restitution towards marginalized communities. This mathematical operation fails to deliver a sincere justice as it disregards the immaterial costs of racism, or artificially converts these losses into material wealth, in order to avoid reconciling with the uniquely lived experience under racism and destroying the sheer complexity of the race question in the contemporary: “The logical conclusion of the new racism means if you want to avoid racism, you need to give each race and each collective its own domain. The traditional boundary for race claims is the nation-state. This leads to the claims for French national identity against Muslims, Jews, and immigrants. It leads to the Hungarian attacks on refugees. And it leads to Donald Trump’s rhetoric of ‘Make America Great again’”<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, pp 11

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, pp 13

In the same vein, we can see once again that the legacy of white superiority continues to inspire tactics that orient whiteness around the race question in the modern day as we concern ourselves with questions of racial equity and consequence. Whiteness, in the interest of maintaining its superiority, exists as a reciprocal force undergoing change in response to the self-determined categorical shifts of blackness in the interest of maintaining its racial autonomy and asserting its superiority. Whiteness has been confronted with the challenge of time as the paradigms about who is included and excluded in its tenets are defined and redefined. But I most notably want to recognize that the force driving change for these respective concepts are one's that are attached to different histories that within them entail differing dynamics of power. Blackness attempts to contend with the consequences of a removed peoples, reconciling with the violence of black chattel slavery and the resulting African diaspora, but whiteness contends with a legacy that asserts its superiority and attempts to materialize benefits based off of a long and extensive history of white supremacy, deriving off of a precedent that has been socially constructed, and therefore, not divinely ordained or necessary. The anxieties that are inevitably bred out of this noble lie of race and white superiority begin to culminate and materialize in the real world through the frameworks of a society invested in the tenets of white supremacy, and furthermore, highlights the driving motivations of distinguishing whiteness as an essential and superior racial group. So, considering all of this, considering that whiteness evolves against the borders of blackness to situate itself around its structures of supremacy that reinforce ancient systems of social, economic, and political power, how can we understand it to exist as a category of identity. If whiteness is just an assertion of power, as is defined by its propensity to shift in the interest of maintaining that power, how can we consider it as a legitimate categorical label.



Therefore, we can understand whiteness was born out of a necessity to distinguish itself as a superior counterpart to the rest of the racialized world; and in this way, it is imperative to understand that this supremacy, this access to privilege is inherent within any construction of whiteness. It goes without saying that as a result of the centuries of marginalizations against nonwhite communities, white dominance has produced countless institutions and structures of power that elevate opportunities for whites over those of their nonwhite counterparts. These benefits are plentiful, infect every aspect of social, political, and intimate life, and even codified into the ‘normal’ or expected mechanisms of the social fabric. This concept is most famously explored by WEB DuBois in his work, “Black Reconstruction”, where he describes an account of whiteness amid the US regime of racial capitalism and prescribing unto whiteness a sort of unbenounced, psychic compensation that is paid and even expected for folks, by virtue of their whiteness: “It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent on their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them. White schoolhouses were the best in the community, and conspicuously placed, and they cost anywhere from twice to ten times as much per capita as the colored schools. The newspapers specialized on news that flattered the poor whites and almost utterly ignored the Negro except in crime and ridicule”<sup>62</sup>. What DuBois points towards is that

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<sup>62</sup> Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. *Black Reconstruction in America : an Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*. New York :Oxford University Press, 2007.

conscripted into the identity of whiteness is a valuable status of social power bound to the legacy of white supremacy and privilege that it affords them. In the face of a capitalist system that otherwise exploits the poor working class, both white and nonwhite, of the material wealth that their labor produces, whites are compensated by way of this psychic wage that rewards white people through socially valuable commodities that function similarly to the material benefits of monetary payment. And this distinction, this access to compensatory whiteness, draws a distinct and yet conceptually consistent understanding of not only the physical presentation of white skin, but the sociopolitical consequences that whiteness affords: “A distinction should be made between white skin -- the common pigmentation we associate with those we call white -- and whiteness... whiteness is more than an appearance; it is a system of privileges accorded to those with white skin”<sup>63</sup>. Following in the legacy of DuBois, we see many of the tactics of white supremacy mutate as they come to confront the challenges of maintaining this invisible wage in a world increasingly intolerant of white supremacy. Even with white folks who are invested in the movement of racial progress and recognize the tenets of white privilege, as we have already observed, are slow to deliver swift and decisive action around acknowledging those inherent benefits and dismantling those systems of power. But this ultimately begs the question: How do you contend with this desire to maintain white privilege while also contending with the moral imperative of confronting the damage dealt by white supremacy.

The white liberal project, in response to this intimidating cry for racial justice, assumes a moral and intellectual superiority that further removes them from implicating them in the question of race and undermines the vested interest and accountability of white people responsibly confronting racism. Since the civil rights movement, the struggle for political and

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<sup>63</sup> E. Lâ Demirtürk, The Making and Unmaking Of Whiteness: Richard Wright’ *Rite of Passage*, *MELUS*, Volume 26, Issue 2, June 2001, Pages 83–94, <https://doi-org.ezprox.bard.edu/10.2307/3185519>

social rights for black Americans has been thrust into the center of the American consciousness, and therefore, demanded some sort of sociopolitical maneuvering by white folks to orient themselves towards the newfound goals and priorities of these mobilizing communities. One of these political maneuvers was the redefining of racism itself. Inundated with countless images of the Ku Klux Klan committing acts of violence and intimidation to undermine the civil rights movement, larger white society defined the tenets of racism along its most extreme forms, diagnosing racism as singular, malicious, and almost always explicitly violent: “The whittling down of racism to sheet wearing goons allowed a cloud of racial innocence to cover many whites who, although ‘resentful of black progress’ and determined to ensure that racial inequality remained untouched, could see and project themselves as the ‘kind of upstanding white citizen[s]’ who were ‘positively outraged at the tactics of the Ku Klux Klan’... The focus on the Klan also helped to designate racism as an individual aberration rather than something systemic, institutional, and pervasive”<sup>64</sup>. This, ultimately, coaxed much of proper white society, most of whom were seemingly invested in socially progressive ideals, into a lethargic racial integrity that would prefer to compartmentalize their apathetic conscription towards a government that was predicated on the exploitation of these marginalized communities. These phenomena did not spring out of thin air, but in fact, are a consequence of the tactics of white supremacy during the period of American slavery. Being a weapon by their own design, it makes sense why whiteness would not subject itself to the confining tenets of racialization. The concept of race in the white imagination is one that inherently connotes a denial of the specificity that all human beings exist in. The simplicity of racialization offers no space for understanding the robust individuality of humanity, and stands directly in conflict with the white liberal fantasy of equality across racial groups. That is to say that even the concept of being racialized, or collectively and ubiquitously

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<sup>64</sup> Carol Anderson, “White Rage” pp 100

understood by racial category, is to be denied any sense of plurality or identity. Instead, white people become agents who exist outside of the realm of race and adopt a sense of objectivity and rationalism when confronting race that still maintains the integrity of the mystery of whiteness. And because whiteness has assumed this space of all knowing superiority, white people instead opt into engaging with the race question as intellectual political actors. In the same vein, whiteness as a sociopolitical concept has largely escaped academic, political, and social scrutiny, most uniquely noted by Everett C. Hughes in his article, “The Study of Ethnic Relations”, in which he comments on social scientists’ tendency to examine people of color as if “to study ethnic relations as if one had to know only one party to them”<sup>65</sup>. This tendency to omit discussion of whiteness from academic and political discourse surrounding race further positions whiteness and white people within a racial vacuum that prevents any critical reflection on their intimate roles in the social and political mechanisms of racism.

In the same vein, liberal white thinkers oftentimes resisted entertaining conversations about civil rights in a more socially or politically forthright context, instead opting to push these deliberations into pseudo academic spaces. This is because white people, by virtue of being exempt from having their own prescribed racial understanding, are instead branded as the only agents capable of assuming the role of objective observers of racism. As a result, these deliberations are pushed into intellectual contexts that authenticate the social and political dissection of racism by white people, or those who have no intimate and lived understanding of the nuance that racism functions within. bell hooks explores this phenomenon very explicitly in her work entitled “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination”. In it hooks draws on her experience in the classroom in order to diagnose how white ignorance to the black human condition is a tactic that distinguishes the norm from the disparate: “Their amazement that black

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<sup>65</sup> Hughes, Everett C. 1948. “The Study of Ethnic Relations.” *Dalhousie Review* 27(4): 477–85.

people watch white people with a critical ‘ethnographic’ gaze, is itself an expression of racism. Often their rage erupts because they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal belief in a universal subjectivity (we are all just people) that they think will make racism disappear. They have a deep emotional investment in the myth of ‘sameness’, even as their actions reflect the primacy of whiteness as a sign informing who they are and how they think. Many of them are shocked that black people think critically about whiteness because racist thinking perpetuates the fantasy that the Other who is subjugated, who is subhuman, lacks the ability to comprehend, to understand, to see the working of the powerful. Even though the majority of these students politically consider themselves liberals and anti racist, they too unwittingly invest in the sense of whiteness as mystery”<sup>66</sup>. What hooks points towards in this anecdote is the history of white supremacy casting whiteness as rational observer and blackness as subject to be observed, studied, and pathologized. Through her analysis of white ignorance, we are able to track the legacy of this white supremacist framework as it has mutated in situating itself along the consolidation in power and legitimacy for the civil rights movement. In response to the growing movement for racial equality, this tradition of white people escaping critical racial analysis attempts to create a psychic distance from racism, only willing to engage with it as it exists as a conceptual or intellectual dilemma, and not a lived and personally indicting concern for white people. The consequence of pushing these points of conversation into a pseudo-intellectual context, for hooks, is that it inevitably lends itself to a sort of abstraction that is harder to translate into tangible political change or personal responsibility. The apathy that intellectualism affords white people is a comfortable enough position that it disengages any questions of racial guilt without sincerely divesting from any comparable mechanisms of white supremacy. This complexifies our understanding of the legacy of white supremacy insofar as it

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<sup>66</sup> bell hooks, “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination” pp 4

begs the question, of why; why do white people feel the need to maintain an intellectually disjointed, cognitively dissonant ‘no man’s land’ that fails to provide any substantial deconstruction of whiteness as it relates to this newfound state of racial dynamics. Ultimately, hooks allows us to recognize the relatively comfortable space of the white intellectual to remain effectively unbothered with the empty notion of their own role as an agent of race. In the same breath, however, these white intellectuals pursue a sort of logical superiority, as to be separated from the emotional or personal facilities usually motivating conversations around the integral harms of racism. In this way, we can truly underpin the psychological maneuvers that white intellectuals are employing to situate themselves most comfortably in conversations of race. They are emotionally uninterested in the conversation, by virtue of not being directly implicated in the consequences of the enduring legacy of racism, of having ‘no skin in the game’. In the same vein, they also have a vested interest in feigning a commitment to confronting and defeating racism, and some might even sincerely believe that they are willing to engage in the struggle for racial equality. Despite this fact, white intellectuals are situated in a way where they can occupy the role of objective argumentator, in that it divorces them completely from the emotional context of racism and that grants them the most theoretical flexibility, the ability to claim a sort of objective logicism that bears no capacity to be held responsible for the arguments that it explores. This is the most favorable position of white people, in that it maintains the safety of white intellectuals and disengages a thoughtful reflection that is needed to deconstruct the role of white people in the continuing legacy of white supremacy.

In the face of all these socio political structures of white supremacy, and despite any popular consensus on the state of whiteness by white authors, many black thinkers offered academic frameworks in order to diagnose and, ultimately, prescribe collective remedial social

action. The leading compendium detailing the process of racializing and stigmatizing blackness in the American infrastructure is none other than Ibram X. Kendi's book, "Stamped from the Beginning". Kendi, in his work, chronicles the development of racist ideation that would eventually culminate into the overwhelming suprastructures of racial prejudice. Kendi builds upon this legacy by inverting the typical understanding of the way in which racial discrimination is codified into the American political landscape, where typically one would understand that racial discrimination is an effect of racist ideas bred from ignorance and hatred, Kendi inverts this equation, claiming that "Racial discrimination → racist ideas → ignorance/hate: this is the causal relationship driving America's history of race relations. Their own ideas usually did not dictate the decisions of the most powerful Americans when they instituted, defended, and tolerated discriminatory practices that affected millions of black lives"<sup>67</sup>. At the heart of Kendi's argument is this idea; that the lived experience of hatred and ignorance for black people is not what served as the catalyst for the construction of white supremacy, but that Black People by virtue of being 'stamped from the beginning' -- othered -- is therefore what designed racist ideas and effectually inspired sincere hatred for Black People. Inverting the typically understood canon of the development of institutional racism, as Kendi does, aligns itself with the ideas of Haney Lopez, insofar as that race itself, much like whiteness, was crafted in a process of consolidating power, or oppression, towards the deserving racial groups. As a result, there is a continuation of the artificial construction of race and racism, aimed towards reinforcing white supremacy in its legal and social mechanisms. Ultimately, this inversion helps pave the way towards redefining our understanding of the flux of racism, how these mechanisms are realized, and where these ideas of hatred are encouraged in pursuing racist ends. But, as we have already observed, racism had shifted into a more subversive enforcement as it abandoned the literal infrastructure of

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<sup>67</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, 'Stamped from the Beginning', pp 9

government and society to pursue its prejudiced goals. If this is the case, we can understand the labor in Kendi's work is a need to reconcile with the slowly effacing direct presence of racism, and yet the looming feeling that veils and distorts the landscape of the world, drenching it in a racist hue. Similarly, what many contemporary writers attempt to achieve is an articulation of the state of racism as it shifts into this ethereal plane; there is an acknowledgement that even though whiteness has changed and explicit racism is few and far in between, our society is still predicated on this legacy of racialization, and the noxious effects of that racist history continue to mutate the present. For Kendi, drawing from the example we explained above, racism begins with an unjust discrimination that needs to be justified and policies that are designed to morally and legally do so after the fact. As a result, Kendi continues, anytime there is inequality, it is unjustified, regardless of whether or not it details an explicit racist agenda, by virtue of the entirety of modern society descending from this legacy of racial hierarchy. Kendi keenly touches upon this when he expands upon the impact of the civil rights movement, saying "Racist intentions - not policies - became covert after the 1960s"<sup>68</sup>. Kendi prompts us to revise our understanding of the history of racial progress, one that decenters the very personal phenomenons of hate and specific racial resentment, but instead, attaches the labor of building racial prejudice to the political and legal structures that ultimately encouraged racist attitudes. Kendi focuses on the tangible political and social policy that survived past the civil rights movement and localizes the inherent struggle of racism as one that looks towards these enduring structures in order to fully confront and defeat racism. But what Kendi chiefly offers us is a recognition that the lived experience of racism, and to an extent of white supremacy, had to integrate itself into the social and personal realm, oftentimes in clandestine ways that veiled its true racist intentions and origins, as a way to escape the newfound social cost attached to the now

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<sup>68</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, 'Stamped from the Beginning', pp 8



taboo outward violence of the ‘old’ racism. Racism adopted and infected the social sphere, occupying the space of nuance and misinterpretation in order to subvert its receding control of the racist policies that were being dismantled with the advent of the civil rights movement. Following suit, whiteness, inherently attached to its racist practices and conceptions, had to pivot from the space of politics and policy, into existing and enforcing its prejudice in much more complex planes of human life and society: In love, in sex, in friendship, in space, and in felt experience. Kendi continues this understanding towards the end of his introduction to his book by saying, “But if there is anything I have learned during my research, it’s that the principal producers and defenders of racist ideas will not join us. And no logic or fact or history book can change them, because logic and facts and scholarship have little to do with why they are expressing racist ideas in the first place”<sup>69</sup>. Despite his thorough understanding of the historical and political circumstances that brought forth the organized institutional oppression of black people, Kendi ultimately surrenders that to reach this ‘post-racial’ utopia, there is something about the lived experience of racism that needs to be confronted, the performance of superiority and oppression, of the felt psychological and individual life, one that is not dictated by science or reason or history or logic. And in response to this shift, Kendi posits a distinct and surprisingly clear solution to confronting the social impulses of racism codified into the fabric of American society, saying “That is what it truly means to think as an antiracist: to think there is nothing wrong with Black People, to think that racial groups are equal”<sup>70</sup>. This moment is where I depart from Kendi. The surprising simplicity of this directive speaks to Kendi’s aversion to fully reconcile with the sheer psychological complexity of the situation at hand. There are plenty of white folks who believe that there is nothing inherently wrong with black people, even an entire

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<sup>69</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, ‘Stamped from the Beginning’, pp 11

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, pp 11

casual social philosophy about removing the subject of race as a factor of consideration entirely, and yet, these white folks continue to act in bad faith when it comes to the task of confronting and dissolving the harmful effects of racism. Kendi's solution is too easy, and ultimately, I think there is a hesitancy on his part to acknowledge the boundary along which he is building this argument around inequality, one that is trying to reconcile with the ambiguity of this ephemeral racism. In fact, the entire composition of Kendi's *Stamped From the Beginning* is an argument about the absolute presence of racism in the contemporary by hyper fixating on the construction of policies and institutions. But, as we witness the continued decay of these institutions, what we are left with is the *feelings* that these structures inspired, that Kendi describes, as the residue of white hatred.

And in order to confront the lingering effects of this racist hatred, we need to concede that racism is about feelings, and sincerely considering the feelings of white people around the conversation of racism. Only then are we able to properly diagnose the socio psychological conditions that continue to enable racism to persist. This is a difficult argument to make, as it is largely criticized by those who accept and reject the notion that there is a looming presence of racism today. For those who recognize the palpability of a racist tradition in the contemporary are hesitant to comply with the notion that racism today involves itself largely in the emotional plane; being that the earth of the heart is an uneven ground, it is politically and socially infertile. To surrender that there is a racism that imposes itself in the subjective is to mystify its tactics as rhetorical and metaphorical, and has the danger of suggesting its consequences are any less material and relevant. Those who are skeptical of this continuing racist legacy argue that the de-institutionalization of racism has somewhat divorced the conversation around confronting racism and prejudice, in that they are not as syllogistically congruent in their motivations and

practical applications. They will point to the gradual upward social and fiscal mobility of people of color in the contemporary, and there is an understanding that to talk about strife in the context of race is to do a disservice to the essential quality of inequality today, because it moves away from the heart of the problem, or at the very least, no longer stands immediately alongside it. But this impression, much like Kendi, seeks to escape the real complexity that racism is existing in now.

But where does this leave white people? This answer seems to be relatively simple compared to the lived reality of racial hierarchy and prejudice. Kendi's answer lies definitively in an egalitarian humanist understanding, one that claims the essential equity within all human beings, and that the expedition to assert some essential difference between peoples is futile, because we are all fundamentally equal. Anything beyond that is just a manifestation of some sort of social or emotional corruption imposed on us by an already withstanding, morally corrupt, and fundamentally distorted racist social order. Kendi diverts our attention to the introspective, localizing the problem in the psychology of individuals, in order to condemn our ethnocentric heuristic impulses as the source of racial bias. And this denouncement is a process that must be undergone by those 'principal producers' of racist ideas: by white people. As the mechanics and arbiters of this racist system, white people must willingly and enthusiastically engage in a process of material and psychological repatriation, in service of justly reaccrediting the communities that white supremacist society has damaged. Kendi's understanding, therefore, relocates the burden of addressing and recovering reparatory action in lieu of racism's destruction to white people, an opinion that runs counter to the historical and political reality surrounding the actual agents of change articulating demands for racial justice and responsible for delivering the civil rights movement. We don't largely consider the race question one that

must be confronted by white people. Instead, we imagine black and brown thought leaders and political figureheads rising out of their oppression in order to usher their communities into the promised land of equity and freedom.

The racial dilemma has almost always been famously approached by those suffering under its oppression, that is, until a French reporter asked Richard Wright, author and black thought leader, “for his views about the ‘Negro Problem’ in America. The author replied, ‘There isn’t a Negro problem; there is only a white problem’”<sup>71</sup>. And I believe this is the consequence that Kendi is attempting to confront. Although there is no essential difference between different racial groups, the lived socio political experience of whiteness, what Peggy McIntosh describes as “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks”<sup>72</sup>, has created a meaningful system of exploitation that asserts the privileges afforded to whites, at the expense of these marginalized communities. White privilege disrupts the natural equity of all human life, and manipulates the manmade social order to materialize the delusion of white supremacy, oftentimes to the detriment of larger society. This is simply a fact of living in modern society. And this fact is not lost on white people, where in a study focusing on white consciousness about white privilege, more than 50 percent of white subjects involved expressed the sentiment that to be white is to be afforded privileges that would not be otherwise available and, in the same vein, showing remorse for receiving these undue benefits<sup>73</sup>. Kendi’s claim, assumedly, challenges white folks to confront these invisible privileges, and dismantle them, in order to fully realize the natural state of equity humans exist in. But, the fact of the matter is that most white people will, per Kendi’s instructions, claim to

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<sup>71</sup> Raphael Tardon, “Richard Wright Tells Us: The White Problem in the United States”, *Action*, October 24, 1946.

<sup>72</sup> McIntosh, P. (2003). *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack*. In S. Plous (Ed.), *Understanding prejudice and discrimination* (p. 191–196). McGraw-Hill.

<sup>73</sup> Ashley Jardina, “White Identity Politics” pg. 131

already hold black people in equal regards. And this claim seems to hold some validity, with a majority of white people not ascribing to the most barbaric belief that black people are biologically inferior to whites<sup>74</sup>. They may claim to have already confronted and eliminated their own racist assumptions, and even moreso, claim to have sacrificed time, energy, and livelihood in the name of racial justice. If we are to continue to adhere to Kendi's words, how can we reconcile with this inconsistency, the assertion that white people have shed their bigotry and are extending intention and compassion towards these marginalized communities. And, unless we are ready to assert that there is a widespread psychic dissonance surrounding white people and their confrontational tactics around racism, we must contend with the contradicting notions between the perceived amicability and camaraderie that white people are allegedly exercising, and the continued lived experience of racism for black people.

A possible explanation to this question reveals itself when we observe that, despite the fact that they concurrently recognize these benefits to be unfairly granted to them, white people consider their privileges as proprietary, or that there is something normative or expected about white privilege. Although many white people recognize the social, economic, and political power of their racial group, and concede their lives may have been more difficult if they were born into a different racial group, there is a substantial resistance against adopting more racially egalitarian views and, in fact, instead opting to maintaining these advantages<sup>75</sup>. And any attempt to enforce policies that encourage a distribution of power, feel like an affect or targeted attack against white people because it threatens the structure of white supremacy that afford these privileges: "People who have grown up with arrangements in which their group regularly receives special social esteem as well as more material benefits, arrangements that seem so familiar as to be virtually

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<sup>74</sup> Ashley Jardina, "White Identity Politics" pg. 14

<sup>75</sup> Ashley Jardina, "White Identity Politics" pg. 152

natural, are always likely to find changes in those arrangements disquieting. Predictably, they will look for reasons to confine and condemn them. Our fellow white Americans, we firmly believe, are not people any more inherently prone to racism, selfishness, or evil than any other group in this or any other society. Their attachments to familiar ways are perfectly normal and human, and in many regards such attachments can rightly be cherished. But in American society, whites happen to be the group who have the upper hand; and so many of their understandable attachments to the status quo, often accompanied by genuine good will towards others, nonetheless have always worked against overcoming real and severe injustices”<sup>76</sup>.

All of this effectively disrupts and corrupts any attempt in confronting the legacy of evil enveloping white people. The relationship between white consciousness, white guilt, and white racial resentment sit at the center of our conundrum; white consciousness as the awareness of one’s identity as white, and how by virtue of being white, you are afforded material and immaterial privileges, white guilt being the shame that you attach to these privileges that you are recognizing as underserved, and white racial resentment, or the feeling that these privileges are deserved and a suspicious pessimism towards other racial groups supposed crusades for justice and equality. An inability to touch the truth of the matter, of the circumstance and consequence of racial strife in America, build and justify these falsified realities, and white people are ultimately left with the choice of whether or not to recognize these fallacies, to recognize their sources, and to engage against them, or not: “Many white identifiers recognize that their group has certain advantages, they are happy to have such advantages, and they have no desire to relinquish them. At the same time, we can see that there is some slight tendency among white identifiers to feel guilty about these benefits. This analysis provides further evidence that white

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<sup>76</sup> Klinkner, Philip A., and Rogers M. Smith. *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*. University of Chicago Press, 2002. pp 10

identity and racial animus are distinct attitudes and, in this case, pull whites in opposite directions. White identifiers recognize their group's advantages and may want to protect their group's privileges, but recognize - and even feel slightly guilty - that they have some group privileges. Whites high on racial resentment, however, wholly reject any sense of racial guilt"<sup>77</sup>. Now, we can discuss which specific social, political, and psychological circumstances predispose white folks to either accept or deny the validity of the race question, but regardless, this is the obstacle white folks must contend with in order to fully reconcile with white supremacy in society. This process, of moving from the comfortable confines of white supremacy into the harsh light of the truth of racism in America, draws deep parallels between the process that Roger Berkowitz describes in his work, "Public Education: The Challenge of Educational Authority in a world without Authority". In this essay, Berkowitz draws from the memoir of Richard Rodriguez, entitled *The Hunger of Memory: the Education of Richard Rodriguez*, and his experience as a student attending an english speaking public school coming from a spanish speaking household. The linguistic divide between his home and his life at public school became an allegory for what he saw as underpinning the goal of education; to draw those out of the privacy and comfort of their homes and into the robust domain of public life. And this educational process, necessary to any adolescent experience, was the publicly condoned hazing that turned adolescents, those who are unfairly compelled to subject themselves to the law of the land, and grow into consenting and law abiding citizens who understand and willingly consent to the contract of society: "In arguing that education is about leading young people into a public world, *The Hunger of Memory* is a political book. Students must learn English not because of its superiority, but because it is the ticket of admission to the public world of citizenship. Even more than math and science, learning the public language guides young people into a public world

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<sup>77</sup> Ashley Jardina, "White Identity Politics" pg. 136

which enables them to transition from private to public life, from wardship to citizenship”<sup>78</sup>. In the same way, white people are tasked with striving towards not only understanding their world, but wading through the worlds of people of color, taking in the ugly and imposing architecture of racism, tracing the ugly pillars back to the heart of white supremacy and realizing that this infrastructure, built through the core of this world, is what heaves the white world into the shining, blissful light of heaven.

We can understand the relative position of white people, having to sacrifice the conditional safety and comfort of their normative emotional and material states, to disrupt their perceived realities, the only physical world they know, to cast aside the mirage of white propriety in order to step into the robust and unforgiving truth of their livelihood, and to commit to a life of atonement. Unfortunately, the beautiful nightmare that racism provides presupposes a skewed determinability around which racial groups are able to ascertain levels of social visibility and political legitimacy; And this standard fundamentally distorts any sense by which white people are able to measure their respective development on the issues of racial progress. This interpolation of the harsh truth of racism and its continuing legacy keep white people in a sort of racial vacuum, robbed of any sense of understanding regarding their relative position to the past challenges of their ancestors in confronting racism, those enduring, internalized racist traditions, and the psychic space they need to strive towards to be able to seek proper justice and equality for black people. On the contrary, those more skeptical of the enduring legacy of racism, there is a general understanding that racism has been largely confronted, and yet, the ambiguous demands for racial justice and equality endure. The continued insistence that the dilemma of racial strife has not been already accounted for, is a nagging social habit that breeds frustration,

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<sup>78</sup> Roger Berkowitz, “Public Education: The Challenge of Educational Authority in a world without Authority” pp 2



distrust, and eventually, a lack of faith in the project of equality that the movement for racial progress champions. As a result, the supportive beams of mutual trust and goodwill which made an intersectional investment in racial equality are thought of as suspect, distrust is bred, and the altruistic intentions of the crusade of racial progress is brought into question: “[Politicians like Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan] did not promote biological racism; they did not promise a return to segregation; they did not imply that blacks were second-class citizens or that they should be treated differently than anyone else. Their message was subtle, rather than blatant; it was that blacks should behave themselves. They should take quiet advantage of the ample opportunities provided them. Government had been too generous, had given blacks too much, and blacks, for their part, had accepted these gifts all too readily”<sup>79</sup>. There is an acknowledgement that white judgement has shed its essentialist argument, and there is no call to return to the initial tenants of racial division as justified by social darwinism before the success of the civil rights movement. Instead, what occurs is a passive suspicion, predicated on a belief that the story of racial progress has met its conclusive finish, and that these continued calls for racial equity and reparative action are motivated by notions of selfishness, greed, and unearned, state mandated self actualization. And, in spite of these white grievances, these opportunities, these gifts were granted to the black community, the impression is that black people continue to act in haste, in spite and in entitled tantrum, not only disgracing the respectability and decorum that befits such a generous offer, but demanding more undeserved political and social expediency. It is a judgement that sees black people as overstepping and over exaggerating their wounds in the interest of consolidating their own forms of power that could, potentially, rival and even undermine the rights and liberties of whiteness. This suspicion, regardless of whether or not they are valid concerns, offer up an opportunity for racism to infect the moral sphere and

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<sup>79</sup> Donald Kinder and Lynn Sanders, “Divided by Color” pp 105

continue to undermine the goal of collectivizing human society in the interest of equality and justice for all: “Racial caste systems do not require racial hostility or overt bigotry to thrive. They need only racial indifference, as Martin Luther King Jr. warned more than forty-five years ago”<sup>80</sup>.

Ultimately, The race question has become predicated on this system of resentment and misunderstanding, of abusive generalization, and an imposing dominion over the experience of the other. Confusion and misinterpretation has led to conflict. Conflict has become abuse, and abuse has justified good intentions giving way to the worst tyrannical impulses, turning towards a mission of domination as opposed to mutual love and forgiveness. In this way, what was supposed to be an armistice, a cooperative project seeking justice and reconciliation became a mission to assert supremacy, with distinct yet equally destructive tactics. And this resentment, for white people, stems from a fundamental misunderstanding about the critical sources of racial strife for black people after the civil rights movement. Whites saw the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as they have witnessed every notable contemporary moment of black exceptionalism since then, as a monolith of racial progress, a shining example, a resounding conclusion to the battle for equal rights for black people. The structures of racism, however, largely shifted into more subversive spaces that were not dictated by the hard and fast machinations of government and law, but of society, of the intimate. This shift has allowed racism to mystify its legacy and continued influence, but even more so, breed contempt and suspicion across racial lines, taking advantage of good intended white folks and their relative ignorance about the machinations of racist consequences. This is the contemporary obstacle confronting the goals of racial equality in America. There is ultimately an inability to have good faith in one another, to stand in solidarity with one another against racism, simply because we continue to respond to the trauma of racism.

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<sup>80</sup> Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow” pp 17

Therefore, whiteness exists as a condition of power, a privilege, by design, that is only afforded to the few who satisfy a cumulation of physiological and hereditary requirements that tie them to the unique eugenic legacy of white supremacy. Whiteness, unlike its racial counterparts, cannot be distinguished apart from its relationship to white supremacy. Whiteness, as an identity, finds it difficult to retain any sense of cultural or ethnological distinction, and if it does, these qualities remain secondary to its primary function which is to pursue racial dominance. To understand whiteness only as an identity is to relieve the project of white supremacy of any accountability of its consolidation of power and privilege through its racist tactics. In this way, too, whiteness must be understood as it relates to racism. Because whiteness is defined against the superiority it perpetuates through the institutionalized practice of racial prejudice and white supremacy, understanding the rhetorical and sociopolitical modes of racism is vital to begin to confront the potential future of whiteness in addressing its legacy. We can understand that whiteness justifies the ends of white supremacy through racist means, but we must also reconcile with the mutual or reciprocal dynamic of racism. Racism is, at its most essential, prejudice that is engendered, initiated, and executed on the basis of one's membership in a particular racial or ethnic group. If we accept this definition of racism, we must concede that racism has the potential to be directed in the mutually confining tenets of racial category. Of course, we mustn't ignore that society has been materially constructed upon the specific variety of white racism, or racism initiated towards pursuing the goals of white supremacy, but we must entertain the entire spectrum of possibility of racism, in the interest of fully realizing the extent to which race can be employed as a mechanism to stereotype, antagonize, and ultimately to systematically marginalize any racial group. This is not an argument about reverse racism, it is however important to recognize it as a symptom of the larger potentially harmful mechanisms

that reverse racism is trying to articulate. Much like there is a very lived feeling, a gnawing, impending, and pessimistic nuisance that hangs over the heads of all people of color that we call the misery of racism, we also have to recognize the anxiety, endemic largely to white folks, that demands their collective work and attention. What I am talking about is the collective efforts and ideologies built in response to racism, devoted to the fundamental disruption of racism and all of its machinations. And what I fear is the ultimate exercise of this collectivized power to enforce a tyranny abusing the moral directives of confronting racial prejudice, in order to justify the newfound social order; one that is ruled by the tyranny of the oppressed. Ultimately, we must confront racism, as well as its inverse, in order to understand how White People can maneuver the challenge of confronting white supremacy without giving into the impending tyranny of antiracism.

### CHAPTER 3

No other work articulates and confronts the antiracist social phenomenon more succinctly than Pierre-Andre Taguieff's "The Force of Prejudice", in which Taguieff describes the antinomical relationship between racism and its' antithetical manifestation, understood as antiracism, as it has been built to oppose the social and political consequences of the former. Taguieff, interestingly, inaugurates racism not as a moralistic judgement on ethical values, but as an ideology, a doctrine with a fixed system of beliefs and practices that conceptually organize the social order. Racism, unlike it's contemporary counterparts like sexism or homophobia, is an acute construction of the philosophy that organizes around designating overly simplified conceptions onto human groups, and organizing society based on these preconceived notions: "*Racism* designates, from the moment the word first appears in the French language (1925), a stigmatized doctrinal ensemble, a sum of positions and propositions presumed to be blameworthy, attributed solely to the hereditary enemy, the German. *Racism* is one of the names of what is commonly and violently rejected, in the inventory of possible ideologies. The word *racism* designates the ideology of the adversary, of an adversary, in any case of an individual or collective actor opposed to the subject who, as speaker, uses it"<sup>81</sup>. In this way, racism is the name of the ideology of the opposing force, regressively different and based, inherently antagonizing the morally sound and righteous goals, beliefs, and practices of the subject; it is an ideology that organizes around stripping the humanity of others and hyper moralizing your own. Taguieff continues to characterize the modes of racism as descending from largely two distinct ideological traditions which he calls Heterophobia and Heterophilia. Heterophobia describes racism as the absolute negation of difference, in that it disavows any idealized sense of pluralism, particularly

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<sup>81</sup> Pierre-Andre Taguieff, "The Force of Prejudice: On Racism and its Doubles" pp 11

as it attempts to conceptualize the resting state of humanity. This notion mutates into bigotry when the ideals hyperfixate on the relationship between what it considers to be this essential state of humanity and those that are derivatives of this essential state, denoting a pejorative understanding of their difference from this essential group. This framework ultimately devolves into eugenic solutions that either aim to engulf these different races, formalizing them into their desired essential qualities, or of violently effacing them as to deny the fact of their existence, by way of apartheid, genocide, etc. Applied to racism, this framework identifies the motivating forces behind a racism of assimilation against a racism of segregation, where “In the first, one aims to make someone similar to oneself, in the second to preserve the fact of difference by the rejection of that which differs -- two distinct strategies of resolving the conflicts termed ethnic or racial”<sup>82</sup>. Heterophilia, on the contrary, describes racism as the absolute affirmation of difference, in that it essentializes the phenomenon of distinction in the human race, regardless of whether or not these differences are biologically verifiable or socially constructed. This is where the most typically understood form of racism exists, as it condenses characteristics of a peoples and projects these attributes as unmovable truths across an entire racial identity. This tradition descends from a zoological anthropology that emphasized categorical distinctions between the ‘races’ of human beings in order to articulate an irreducible core of those groups it understood as distinct races. The particularly destructive quality of heterophilic racism is its occupation of the scientific realm, defining its tenets alongside arguments conscripted into the tradition of social darwinism, where “essentialism, when it appeals to a kind of scientific legitimation, becomes a naturalism or an integral biologism: human groups are assigned the status of *natural groups*”<sup>83</sup>. This psychosomatic maneuver is, ultimately, an attempt to accept the naturalization of racial

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, pp 21

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, pp 23

groups and to legitimate and reinforce the tenets of social division. This equation sits at the core of racist thought, in that it relies on a difference presupposed by an inherent biology that further justifies social hierarchy and the institutionalization of oppression for marginalized groups. In this manner, racism constructs itself as a comprehensive conceptual framework of the world, taking advantage of ideology to enforce a social hierarchy that is organized along the lines of racial division: “Racism-as-ideology may essentially be broken down into two aspects. In the first place, given as a conception of the world or a metaphysics of history claiming to state the truth of what is (or of what is important to man), it may be defined as a *racial theory*. In the second place, posed as an ideal, oriented towards the future, a project of social recasting on a racial basis, racism is a system of values, norms, and imperatives; it is then blended with a morality and a politics”<sup>84</sup>.

Taguieff then continues by inverting this line of reasoning, diagnosing antiracism as also employing the tactics of the racism it claims to disavow. In the same way that racism also functions as an ideology, Taguieff too also characterizes antiracism as a set of ideological beliefs that assert a conceptual framework to organizing society. As opposed to advocating for a solution to the regular question of how to structure society, antiracism stands as the shining beacon needed to absolve society of its’ most upending and elusive threat; that of racism: “the militant committed to the struggle against racism at the heart of a specific organization or in relation to it -- any enunciator who, taking lexicological or encyclopedic distance with respect to what she names *racism*, either is content to refuse to assume the theses she describes, takes a reproving stance towards *racism*, or, stigmatizing racist actors and behaviors, declares herself an enemy of *racism*”<sup>85</sup>. The ideology of antiracism is constructed to diametrically oppose and denounce the

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, pp 12

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, pp 32

tenets of racisms, its ideological and social effects, its modes of practice and production, and its philosophical consequences. So much so, that the term has even adopted a sort of militancy, an unbridled, organized rage and focus to destroy any material and immaterial sense of racism in all its symbolic forms. This mission is, however, complexified by Taguieff who follows the tradition of biologizing race into the antiracist vulgate. Because of the social construction of its predecessor, Antiracism fails to effectively assert any stable ethical ground or material urgency insofar as it relates to the immediate and objective fact of the world. In response to this chasm of scientific fallibility, antiracism employs its' most corrosive tactics in order to legitimate its political goals, and justify its ethical misgivings. This response to its' factual insecurity and, more surreptitiously, its fear of the subjectivity of nuance, leads antiracism into maintaining a state of astute objectivity and precision that is just not possible in the context of its rhetorical and socio psychological goals. But the antiracists have political goals, practical deadlines and foreseeable consequences that must be reached and acquired, and in order to reach these goals, practices the sophism of abusive generalization, which appears "in the form of the sophism of the accident, which especially consists of moving from what is relatively true to what is absolutely true in order to form the conclusion"<sup>86</sup>. In this way, antiracism, as did racism during its' history of consolidation, gives way to the logical fallacies of mis truths and manipulates the metaphysics of racism in the socio psychological context, corroborating the tactics of fallacy and misinterpretation in the name of the altruistic goal of defeating racism: "The half-truths of common sense thereby simply become truths; the all-purpose explanations that are converted, by the accommodating echo of the text, into scientific truths... At that point the debate could only stop, for want of a theoretical legitimacy for the positions termed 'racist': antiracism placed itself

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, pp 59



before racism as the authority of science in the face of perverse and archaic deliria”<sup>87</sup>. Antiracism attaches itself to a mythologized biology, much like its predecessor, as a way to objectively justify the relentless crusade that it aims at the mechanisms of racism and its agents. This scientification of antiracist doctrine is unfulfilled when confronted with the pseudo mythical reality of racism as it exists within the infrastructure of society, psychology, and history. This problematizes the mission of the antiracist, insofar as it requires the promise of a precise solution, of a future in which equality is within grasp, but cannot contend with the obscurity of racism: “Antiracism is above all and essentially a war machine in the everyday sky of ideologies; racism is an *obscure notion*, a poorly constructed term for schematizing without precision an indeterminate reality. Now, the polemical machine of antiracism functions insofar as it allows one to believe that racism is something well defined, or at least quite definable... Antiracism derives its permanence and its power, its force of evidence as much as its incoercible vigor, from the fact that it is rooted in this rationalist tradition, lives by this paradoxical tradition of antitradition: the spirit of unlimited free examination, the reign of immoderate critical reason. But it has made the latter the setting of a new dogmatism with hegemonic claims, the spiritual alibi of a doctrine as closed as it is summary: *a new obscurantism*”<sup>88</sup>.

As a result, what has manifested at the core of antiracist thought and action is a deep sense of skepticism around the sincerity of folks claiming to pursue antiracist traditions and practices. Central to the historical imaginary of the antiracist is the idea that man’s natural state is to be surrounded by prejudicial, or compartmentalized thought. This is to say that it is assumed that everyone is capable and culpable of engaging in creating and enforcing, whether conscious or otherwise, prejudicial beliefs and inflicting undeserving harm and presupposition. We can

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, pp 50, 2

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, pp 9-10

ultimately understand this to mean that anyone has the capacity to muddle through the unsanctimonious mud of prejudice, predicated on the centralization of individuals and their categorically recognized identities and respective ethnocentric convictions, a fact that inherently undermines the very social project that antiracism is manufacturing. This tradition of naturalizing prejudice is recognized both as an extension of Darwinian and Rousseauian thought, insofar as it prescribes to an ethnocentric notion that centralizes the subject in society, and therefore, approximates against oneself in order to draw social, cultural, ethnic, political, and morphological categories, distinctions, and deviations. Therefore, the anxiety around insecurely confronting racism has given way to a thematization of the primitive instinct to entertain hatred and prejudice, where for ethical antiracism, “The central prescription is to favor in man the dominance of the angelic portion over the beastly portion. Albert Memmi bases antiracist morality on a Manichaean conception of human nature: ‘Humans being what they are , the job can and should be undertaken. People are both angels and beasts; the angel must be assisted in prevailing over the beast’<sup>89</sup>. Angelicize man and/or denature him: this is the antiracist task. For racism is postulated as the most natural and spontaneous behavior in the human world, while also the least human of human behaviors. And for the same reasons: racism is both the most natural and the least human behavior because it is the way of ease, of greatest comfort; in short, the behavior ‘ready at hand’<sup>90</sup>. Employing the methodology of both Rousseau and Darwin, the journey of the antiracist is divinely ordained as pulling humanity out of the uncultured throes of prejudice and hatred, and to lift them into the light of equity and brotherhood: “The antiracist dream par excellence is that of a human world absolutely ‘denatured’, denaturalized, a world of pure culture from which ‘unfriendly’ or polemical drives, tendencies, desires, and passions have

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, pp 163

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, pp 58

disappeared completely giving way to the peaceful forms of the social bond: mutual aid and solidarity, dialogue and mutual understanding, friendship for all”<sup>91</sup>. The antiracist is framed as the arbiter of humanity, of engaging in the most human faculties of empathy and love, and is emboldened, entitled to commandeering that change in his fellow man in the name of the altruistic goals of antiracism. This thought, however, terrorizes the antiracist, who has to practice a constant suspicion of any and all forms of racism, as it seeps into the infrastructure of human decency and infects all, even those upholding the highest regard and thoughtful attention to the tenets of equity and inclusion, and the possibility of entertaining good faith, understanding, and mutual trust for the antiracist is a palpable, and yet unattainable goal: “This pessimism, linked to a conception of racism as a fateful attitude or behavior, results in the corruption of the principle of antiracist wakefulness or vigilance in permanent guilt, in generalized suspicion, as much with respect to oneself as to others. One’s neighbor is the potential racist: suspicion establishes a nightmare world by making racism into a destiny that, in the best of cases, is a matter of individual therapeutics. (The irresponsible victims, those sick persons incapable of controlling their racist drives as normal subjects do, must go to see someone)”<sup>92</sup>. The connotation of sickness is particularly telling, as it pathologizes racist impulses as a matter that is abnormal to acceptable social behavior, regardless of the method, intention, and context of said racist transgression. It elects to distance itself from the normalcy of these actions, normal in the sense that they are permissible and understandable mistakes; and it robs any sincere understanding that people in good faith have the potential to enact racial harm or trauma, reinforce racist infrastructures or stereotypes, and make mistakes. In this manner, antiracism divisively essentializes racist

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, pp 56

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, pp 47

mannerisms, casting people as incorrigible agents of violence forever corrupted by and devoted to the structures of white supremacy.

If we are to understand racism as the universal resting state of human nature, the essentialization of racist evil onto humanity polemicalizes, and ultimately undermines, the antiracists' goals. Racism, in its contemporary form, conceals itself within the vaguity of the socio psychological sphere, a domain that can never be directly confronted through political or collectivized means. In this way, the job of the antiracists also becomes obscure, with work that mutates into labor that attempts to grapple with the noxious tentacles of systemic racism, for this ideological mercenary, “the philosophy of suspicion is the only possible philosophy: an accomplished nihilist, this hunter of ideological premiums has the goal of piercing the secrets, bringing into the full light of day, before everyone’s eyes, latent veiled racism, what is implicit about racism. This is the postulate of antiracist conviction of the militant decoder: racism is all the more real and harmful when it is imperceptible, when it is a matter of the unsaid, when it is nested in the depths of shameful, the one presumed reason of the unsayable”<sup>93</sup>. Although the act of reaching towards the psychic space to pull immutable truths about the material costs of racism is emphasized in the methodology of antiracism, working in this subliminal space ultimately problematizes the goals of the antiracist, insofar as the target of its focus is impermeable, elusive, and fleeting. Confronting a racism that exists in this subliminal manner requires decisive action and critical thought to identify, materialize, and remedy its sites of impact, but this process is emotionally draining and politically debilitating, and offers no certain material results. It also further irritates the suspicious insecurities of antiracists as they have casted the world as universally racist and dangerous. Antiracism grows weary of the work of the heart, and tortured by this pessimism, loses the capacity to engage the emotional facilities of

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, pp 43

compassion and humility that, I hope go without saying, are essential to the restorative work of confronting racism. The intangibility of the state of racism coupled with this philosophy of suspicion frustrates the antiracist whom, burdened with the countless political failures that radical progressivism entails, succumbs to the myth of the absolutization of the evil of racism onto humanity, and gives way to a militant and unforgiving moral superiority complex:

“Marginalized people are made to feel disempowered every day. The feeling of impotence builds up over time as leftist attempts to make the world more fair do not succeed. The result is resentment. Political goals seem unreachable, so they’re replaced with hypermoralism”<sup>94</sup>.

Instead, the antiracists opt to confront this chronic suspicion and malignant racism with a swift and relentless process that feigns the acquisition of justice and peace, but instead inspires fear, resentment, pain, and tyranny. In its nightmare realm of pessimism, the antiracist sees no other option but to confront the systemic and multiplicitous legacy of racism by publicly denouncing accusants and socially killing them, with no remorse or due process: “Thus, ‘racists’, in the world marked by Auschwitz, play the role of the new witches: they incarnate the new type of heretics to be hated absolutely, required by democratic consensus. It is necessary that an enemy who incarnates absolute evil be positioned outside the consensual circle so that the latter may legitimate itself”<sup>95</sup>. The antiracist vulgate separates any sense of humanity from the respondents of accusations of racism, singularly focusing on them as targets of resentment and social persecution, by virtue of the extent of their condemnable actions. It argues that these enemies are unfit to engage within a community invested in commonality and mutual love between humanity, and demands that they be removed from society for the sake of the greater well being of the collective group. Antiracism ensures this fate by democratizing the

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<sup>94</sup> Natalie Wynn (@ContraPoints), Twitter 03/28/21

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, pp 43

condemnation of accusants, invoking them to the rule of public opinion, as a way to enforce their social isolation, but to more importantly, present this social persecution as a democratic process. In presenting itself in this manner, it reaffirms its assumed moral superiority by claiming to undergo a just and unfettered pseudo litigatory process, inducting logical and well minded individuals into a collective that are articulating and enforcing the moral and social conscience of the group. And, to an extent, there is a precedent in rallying behind those individuals, in this case the antiracists, who are claiming harm and decrying racism and all its destructive effects. The perceived victims of racist harm are relieved of any judgement or impartial assessment, as by virtue of claiming this harm are divinely ordained, understood as individuals impervious to any criticism or sincere retort: “The racized is by definition not responsible, and here there is a risk that she is understood to be irresponsible. The affective disposition that such analyses both presuppose and confirm, or reinforce, is compassion, whether the latter becomes sympathy and active pity or empathy moved by guilt with respect to the victims... the racized group, as such, is the object of an unconditional positive valorization, and it tends to be idealized and sublimated (the purity of absolute innocence)”<sup>96</sup>. Those who are not subjected to the throes of racism, with the most golden of intentions, by virtue of their naivety on the nature of racism and its lived consequences, often defer to the moral and social analytical understanding of the antiracists as a way of pursuing the justice that they recognize as duly deserved. They choose to indubitably throw their proverbial weight behind the antiracists, assuming their moral and intellectual superiority, as a way of eluding any sincere attempt to dissect and study the mechanisms of racism, and its capability in distorting the image of society. These permitted logical fallacies often embolden the moral imperative of tracking down, denouncing, and driving out the illicit force of racism, which ultimately builds a tradition that glorifies the witch hunt, and enables the

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, pp 43

implicit coercion that it enacts onto its subjects, understanding that those who protest or demand due process for these accussants are subjected to this suspicion, and are likely vulnerable to the same social punishment. A sort of democratic film is presupposed onto this process of moral abdication that justify this social disavowment, without acknowledging the looming threat of social death that extorts consent through tyrannical means under the guise of enthusiastic approval.

And building atop this moral framework, ethical antiracism presents itself as a procedure dismantling the legacy of white supremacy, but instead enacts a moral aristocracy that justifies a neo racist social order. We can observe this phenomenon most vividly when we adopt the example of Claude Levi-Strauss as he advances to us a distinction between two types of society: “Those which practice cannibalism -- that is, which regard the absorption of certain individuals possessing dangerous powers as the only means of neutralizing those powers and even of turning them to advantage -- and those which, like our own society, adopt what might be called the practice of *anthropomy* (from the Greek *emein*, to vomit); faced with the same problem, the latter type of society has chosen the opposite solution, which consists in ejecting dangerous individuals from the social body and keeping them temporarily or permanently in isolation, away from all contact with their fellows, in establishments especially intended for this purpose. Most of the societies which we call primitive would regard this custom with profound horror; it would make us, in their eyes, guilty of that same barbarity of which we are inclined to accuse them because of their symmetrically opposite behaviour”<sup>97</sup>. In this allegory, civilizations are distinguished along the question of how their society confronts the ethical and practical dilemma of civil and moral wrongdoing. For some, those of which Strauss makes a point to distinguish as largely understood to be primitive, there is a process of anthropophagy, which roughly translates to the art of eating

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<sup>97</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Atheneum, 1974) 387-88

human flesh. The sentiment of cannibalism, in this context, is a restitutive process that recognizes the collective responsibility of a community of remediating harm through an inward facing procedure, of literally consuming and ingesting the individual in the hopes of cleansing them of this wrongdoing. The sociological implications of this practice are vast, in that it integrates a communally supported incubatory space that prioritizes restorative ends, so much so that it necessitates the community to stake their physical bodies in this process of sacralization. On the contrary, in our own society, we engage in what Strauss calls the practice of anthropemy. This tradition opts instead to remove problemed individuals from the social body, either as a precautionary or punitive measure. This process of social expulsion bears immediate satisfaction in that it removes the source of the problem or discomfort, and is morally permissible or even justified as ethically imperative, but as Strauss keenly notes in his work, is a custom that would be met with horror. For Strauss and Taguieff, the consequence of this logic recognizes the spectrum of reconciliatory tactics that organized societies can employ, and one that can be applied to a racist tradition, but in this analysis we use this framework to chart the antiracists tradition of social anthropemy, or what is largely understood to be ‘cancel culture’. In aligning the antiracists tradition with the latter, those found culpable of racist atrocity are exercised out of society; isolated, publicly shamed, and stripped of any good conscience. The implication is that those who are unable to control the beastly impulse of prejudice are deemed unworthy of participating in proper society and are to be expelled and dimunitated. The world is a suspicious place full of sin and deception, and the impulse to engage in the most human instinct, that of prejudice, is to give into the impulses that dominate a world of viciousness and animality. Therefore, it is necessary for the noble antiracist to practice discretion, to discriminate against those who can reach the blissful light and free themselves from their vile racist impulses. And



those who are deemed unable, unwilling, or incorrigible, the project becomes not of restitution, but of exile: “To be antiracist is to the contrary to opt for the difficult way, to choose respect for others, which is the ‘essence of morality’. At stake is ‘our honor as humans’. Ethical aristocracy is thus shrouded in well conceived antiracism: if the racist is the first to come, the commoner of humanity is barely human, the antiracist is the nobility of humanity, the salt of the human earth. The implicit conclusion of such a self-grounding argument is never stated, and with good reason: for antiracism presupposes a hierarchical conception of the human world, with the superior beings (the individuals endowed with a higher degree of humanity) represented by the antiracists, and the inferior beings by the racists, endowed with the least humanity, close to the animal kingdom. Hence antiracism implies an internal contradiction: it presupposes an inegalitarian doctrine of humanity, which ends up contradicting the proclaimed inegalitarian ideals”<sup>98</sup>.

In this way, the tyranny of antiracism and the rhetorical maneuvers of these neo racist movements have, ultimately, polemicized white people’s role in addressing and confronting racism, imposing a new and dangerous tyranny of respectability politics. Again, Taguieff is able to offer us an understanding about this methodology as it is grounded in the crusade of the antiracist, one is content to indulge the myth of harm, or transgression, and of absolute evil onto the racist as a means of confronting the pessimistic reality of a world far from its utopian antiracist future, and as a result, “[Antiracism] may deploy its social effects (limited to the prohibition of the explicit speech of ‘racists’) only by remaining blind to the racistoid presuppositions and constructions of its discourse of denunciation... For, being content with fictionalizing the Other, even the *racist* Other, one is condemned to miss him: to not know him at all, to never reach him except in forms filtered by uncriticized preconceptions”<sup>99</sup>. The antiracist

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, pp 58

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, pp 34

overextends his knowledge on the alleged racist without due process or remorse, assured by the presence of evil that they have conscripted into all of humanity, and fails to reproach the accuser with any sense of decency and humility. The failure to fully contend with the racistoid sounds eerily similar to George S. Schuyler's charge against white people, in which Southern whites, culpable to the harshness and deviancy of racism, would overestimate their understanding of black people, saying "If the Southern white, as is his wont, can with any justification trumpet to the world that he knows the Negro, the African American can with equal or greater truth claim to have the inside information on the cracker. Knocking him so intimately, the black brother has no illusions about either his intelligence, his industry, his efficiency, his honor, or his morals. The blacks haven't been working with and for the white folks all these decades and centuries for nothing. While the average Nordic knows nothing of how Negroes actually live and what they actually think, the Negroes know the Nordic immediately"<sup>100</sup>. In the same vein, the antiracists' vulgar programming, on the basis of identity, justified in the sciences, and enforced under a political and social tyranny, draws direct parallels alongside the legacy of racism, and through this analysis, we can formulate a newfound understanding for what the future of antiracism holds for our collective futures: a tyranny not invested in white supremacy and material wealth, but engaged in a social economy of oppression, functioning under the pretenses of harm and offense, and the noise of constant gagging as we expel goodwill individuals out of our social body, with no recourse or remorse. The tyranny of antiracism has no tolerance for individuals who are unaware or unoriented around its mission, and therefore, simply opts to cast these individuals as ignorant imbeciles, unable and unwilling to internalize the urgency of the mission of the antiracists' goals. Ultimately, there is no alternative action, no hope; and those most susceptible to this punishment are white folks, and almost always, white folks with the

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<sup>100</sup> George S. Schuyler "Our White Folks" pg. 74

most focus and attention towards confronting and dismantling the legacy of white supremacy before them. White people have no way to situate themselves against the pessimism of the antiracist movement, and ultimately leads to an inconsolable position, and to, eventually, more confusion, more frustration, more resentment, and more hatred. This is the misery of antiracism, in that it offers no peace, for anybody.

## CONCLUSION

The question inevitably is, what do we do about it ?

Well, I can offer a couple of premature solutions. Firstly, I must suggest that we begin to divorce ourselves from a notion that the project of racial equity is one that is rooted in the objectivism of the sciences and through the logical facilities of the enlightenment. I believe this is an extension of the anxiety that led both racist and antiracist traditions towards the sciences, and then the academics, in ratifying their preferred notions of racial understanding. Of course, there is something to be said about the work of the author, the scientist, and the philosopher in that they are arbiters of truth and objective reality descending from the legacy of the modern break. It is important to note, however, that the Enlightenment, with all of its propensity towards rational thought, did nothing to hinder the project of racialization from materializing just a couple centuries later. Suffice it to say, what the Enlightenment indubiously rejects is the faculties of the heart, one that reckons with the sentimentality of man, as a mechanism for maneuvering the rugged and unforgiving landscape of racial strife. Logic and reason, obviously useful to our means, are products of a strictly European tradition, one that is devoid of any notion of pseudo spiritualism that I have come to hold as invaluablely truthful and guiding in the question of race. Ironically, I am petitioning less so for a rationalization of the tenets of race and more so an embrace of its subjectivity and our agency within that subjectivity in our individual lives to speak with candor and compassion. We have been able, in the past pages, to touch upon this notion but I want to emphasize that there is a strict emotionality guiding peoples' orientations to racism and its effects, and I hope it has become clear that the objectivization of the journey of

selfless actualization is only going to hinder our ability to fully reconcile with the impact of racism on all senses of the world, material and otherwise. Facts are facts by virtue of being true, that is correct, but facts are not the only thing that matters when it comes to race. It is, primarily, about feelings; feelings of love, hate, resentment, anger, frustration, pride, joy, despair, and pity. These are the notions that drive people, we must understand them and uplift them.

In the youtube series, “The Alt Right Playbook”, Ian Danskin explores the rhetorical and political tactics that the alt right use to consolidate power over the internet, and legitimize their white nationalist practices. More specifically, in the video submission, “How To Radicalize a Normie”, Danskin explores the virtual pipeline that delivers susceptible and impressionable young men into the folds of white supremacy culture on the internet, in the interest of subversively pushing them towards more and more forms of radical conservatism and white nationalism. In this specific section of his series, Danskin explores the condition of how a former nazi sympathizer can safely and effectively reform their ideological and psychological frameworks, underlying that what this process necessitates is sympathy, space, forgiveness, and sincere human connection: “Before he can do the work of disentangling himself, and facing the guilt of what he’s believed and maybe done, he has to know there’s somewhere for him on the other end of it. That the Right hasn’t ruined him. They’ve told him all of history is groups fighting each other over status, and, without his clan, he’ll be an exile. He needs a better story... In a perfect world, people who care about Gabe could build for him - to use a therapy term - a holding space. Someplace private - physical or digital - where Gabe can work out his feelings, where he is both encouraged and expected to be better but is not, in the moment, judged. That comes later. It is delicate and time-consuming work that should not be done in public, but we find these beliefs, built up over the course of months or years, tend to fall away very quickly with

a shift of environment. Change Gabe's surroundings and you change Gabe"<sup>101</sup>. Much like what Danskin is articulating here for white nationalists, I too am advocating for this remedial solution on a grander scale. I want to suggest that we, and by we I mean people of color, collectively embrace the power of forgiveness and compassion in order to build a more incubatory space of love and understanding for our white counterparts. This is, I believe, the most burdensome of the requests. Forgiveness is a difficult thing to advocate for, especially in regards to addressing the systemic harm that racism has perpetuated against people of color, and frankly, I cannot imagine how a project like this is to be worked through in a public and socially adjudicated manner. By nature of the work, it is deeply personal, psychological, and immediate to every individual, and it is only by the marginal changes in folks that occur over time, by virtue of just happenstance, do I believe that we are moving towards something like this. Regardless, I do believe that people of color need to systemically practice forgiveness as a means of curating an environment safe to the development and understanding of white people on their journey towards racial progressivism, but for the emotional and psychological well being of people of color. To harbor this much hate, the legacies of pain and labor, and to look up at your fellow man and hold resentment and judgement, physically wears the body, and I believe robs more black people of their livelihoods that any human project is capable of doing.

Finally, I want to suggest that we center love in the project of dismantling racism, because it is the only human force powerful enough to reclaim the gap that would be left behind in its wake. Love exists in all human beings, exists immutably within the soul, and derives its power from the collective recognition that it seeks to infect, to attach, and to guide us towards a more thorough understanding of ourselves and our fellow human beings. I know, cheesy right?

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<sup>101</sup> Ian Danskin, "How To Radicalize A Normie" *The Alt Right Playbook* (2019)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P55t6eryY3g&ab\\_channel=InnuendoStudios](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P55t6eryY3g&ab_channel=InnuendoStudios)

But it is true. For MLK said it best when he said “Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood”<sup>102</sup>.

That is our mission. To learn how to love each other.

And it started for me when I learned to care about white people.

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<sup>102</sup> *Letters from Birmingham Jail*, pg 4

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