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Part VIII

POLITICS AND
POLICY

34

ON POST-RACIALISM

Or, How Color-Blindness Rebranded Is Still Vicious

Ronald R. Sundstrom

Introduction

During the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, idealistic talk that America was on the verge of entering a post-racial age was at its apogee. A set of demographic changes was apparent in America and the nation was poised to elect its first African American president. The feeling that the United States was back on the trajectory of the arc of justice was electric, and faith in individualism, with its ties to the distant ideal of color-blindness, felt vindicated. Andrew Delbanco put it this way: “there was suddenly a sense that one could believe in a ‘post-racial’ future without being a dupe or a chump” (Delbanco 2008).

Post-racialism conveys the idea that we in significant part had somehow risen above race and racism and heralded the tipping point of a demographic and cultural trend. The nation’s racial habits, according to this view, have been destabilized by the browning of America; a shift resulting from the growth of the non-white population in the United States, along with increased patterns of immigration from Mexico and Latin America, the rise of multiracial or mixed-race identification, and higher rates of cross-racial or ethnic intimacies (Hoschild et al. 2011; Pew 2015). This is post-racialism as a description and what it intends to describe is a trend in demographics and self-conception. Alternatively, the idea of post-race is offered as a normative ideal that is a prescription for society’s racial ills, and what it prescribes is a guiding vision of transcendence from racial beliefs, categories, and habits (Hollinger 2008, 2011; Lind 1996). Post-racialism either as description or prescription is presented as an epoch-defining intervention, a movement that is happening *now*.

This good post-racialism was chased away by a train of racially charged conflicts, such as the protests after the killing of Oscar Grant by a Bay Area Rapid Transit police officer on New Year’s Day of 2009, and then the #BlackLivesMatter protests that spanned from September 2014 through January 2015. Critics of the post-racial idea and ideal pointed to these painful events, as well as to a standard array of sociological indicators, such as rates of incarceration and disparities in education and employment, that clearly

demonstrated that race still matters. Insisting otherwise in the face of these facts is to give a naïve version of post-racialism.

As stunning a counter-example as the protests were, a satisfactory response to post-racialism as an *ideal* requires more than pointing out the inaccuracy of the *idea* as a sociological and demographic trend. An adequate response, as Paul C. Taylor made clear, would identify what it gets right, but also answer how it is deficient as a normative ideal and how those deficiencies continue to taint the best-intentioned liberal post-racial ideals and activism (P.C. Taylor 2014). Responses to the ideal of post-racialism have not done that; instead they have concentrated on its deleterious consequences on civil rights law and social policy, and its use by naïve, cynical, or partisan political actors. It is accused of playing into the hands of white privilege, institutional racism, not confronting the real problems posed by implicit biases against non-whites, and justifying the reactionary political project of denying or neglecting the consequences of America's racial history that aims at limiting or repealing civil rights legislation. More is needed to fully respond to the post-racial, so I add two criticisms: post-racialism as a normative ideal depends on a pastiche of history that invites the problems outlined above and that it leads to the vice of disrespecting persons.

Types of Post-racialism and Their Relation to Color-Blindness

Commonsense seems to undermine the veracity of the post-racial trend, but before those objections are reviewed the variations of the idea as a trend should be considered. There have been several useful typologies of postracialism. The typology presented here follows Lawrence Bobo's (2011b) account, but also draws from those of Howard McGary (2012), Paul C. Taylor (2014), and Kathryn Gines (2014). This typology of postracialism holds (1) that the salience of black victimhood narratives is diminishing because of the decline in significant instances of explicit racism. Our society is post-racial, under this view, because it is post-racism. The other (2) has it that our society has become post-racial because of the demographic shifts outlined in section one.

This second claim may involve or not the previous claim of post-racism; however, post-racialism is distinct from post-racism. Advocates of post-racism believe we are in this new epoch but that many (usually people of color) still identify with racial categories out of bad faith and self-interest (D'Souza 1995). In contrast to that view, most Americans think that the nation is developing new racial habits, but that forms of racism based on historical forms of discrimination and domination persist to some degree (Cohen 2011). All the same, when the idea of post-racialism as a trend is paired with post-racism—this coupling was prevalent in contemporary US politics until disrupted by the killings of black men that inspired the #BlackLivesMatter movement—then it takes the form of a strategy, for example, a rhetorical tactic used to oppose the continuation of race-conscious social policy (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Barnes 2010).

Claims of post-racialism and color-blindness as a trend, as is apparent even from a cursory review of current sociological studies, suffer from a lack of consistent evidence. Such claims are hopelessly naïve and willfully ignore evidence of the role of race in the United States. The United States did not quit its old racial habits and emerge anew after Obama's election (Bobo 2011a, 2011b, King and Smith 2011; Gooding-Williams and Mills 2014). Racial and ethnic lines across our communities persevere, yet post-racialism appeals to a broad audience of Americans exhausted by race talk (Hutchinson

2009). Exhaustion does some work in explaining the popularity of post-racialism and color-blindness, but the appeal of these ideas also points to their status as ideals for how we should act and whom we ought to become as individuals and a people. This is why Bobo counts (3) recent color-blind rhetoric as a third version of post-racialism (cf. McGary 2012; Gines 2014).

Color-blindness has similar descriptive and prescriptive branches, but as with post-racialism its status as an ideal is independent of its truth as a descriptive claim. The ideal of color-blindness has been offered in many versions, but two are commonly encountered. The first type is narrow and concerns whether race or ethnicity should play any role in the formation and administration of law and public policy. The other type is more ambitious since it asserts that race and ethnicity are morally irrelevant social identities and should make no moral, social, political, or legal difference in a person's life (Sundstrom 2008: 37–64). This is the normative core of color-blindness.

So as not to be naïve, the best proponents of the ideal of color-blindness affirm that the value of equal moral standing of individuals *qua* individuals is best realized in ethical decision-making, and related law and public policy, by being sensitive to race. Color-conscious law and public policy can identify, limit, and prevent ethnic and racial discrimination; it can ensure equal access to opportunity; address economic and social disparities due to past racial discrimination; and encourage individuals from all groups to participate in the political, economic, and cultural life of the nation (Boxill 1992; Dworkin 2000). This moral and political point is an extension of political theorist Amy Gutmann's view that "What's right about color-consciousness . . . is also the partial truth of color-blindness: all human beings regardless of their color should be treated as free and equal beings, worthy of the same set of basic liberties and opportunities" (Gutmann 1996: 112–113).

In contrast to older forms of color-blindness, Bobo claims that something like the more ambitious version of color-blindness with its future orientation is at the heart of post-racialism, that it "is intended to signal a hopeful trajectory for events and social trends, not an accomplished fact of social life" (Bobo 2011b: 13). This claim is exemplified by the arguments of David Hollinger, one of the most prominent proponents of post-racialism, who insists that it is distinct from color-blindness, which he calls "abstract" and associates with erroneous descriptive claims or policy debates (Hollinger 2011: 176). Nevertheless, the bad associations aside, color-blindness can and has been asserted as an ideal—this then is not a distinction that holds up. Post-racialism, however, does mark the period after President Obama's election, which is the focal point for current discussions about color-blindness and post-racialism; so, post-racialism is, in a sense, a re-branding of color-blindness in an age especially attuned to the craft of brand design that is fond of tagging as "innovative" or "disruptive" ideas with the prefix "post."

The moral core of color-blindness, and by extension, post-racialism, as stated above is the robust claim that holds that ethnic and racial categories are irrelevant moral characteristics and should have no role in moral decision-making. This position is sometimes tied to the idea of racial eliminativism, which is the idea that the idea of race is nonsensical, that "races" do not exist, and that we should eliminate race-talk in our language and from our practices in all spheres of life. Post-racialism, however, as a trend or ideal is distinct from questions about whether there is any "there" there when it comes to race or whether we are obliged to abandon or conserve the use of those distinctions.

Nevertheless, the ontological debates about racial categories and identifications affect the position of the parties in the debate over post-racialism.

Howard McGary, therefore, (2012) considers the (4) ontological position of racial eliminativism to be a form of post-racialism because the skepticism about racial identifications inherent in eliminativism conceptually legitimize post-racial trends and the ideal. This makes sense since post-racialism in the long-term will aid eliminativist goals, but insofar as eliminativism stands in for the ontological claim that race is not real, then post-racialism is distinct from it because one could hold that racial identifications are in some sense real (for example as social categories or even have some distant genetic basis) yet support post-racialism.

Post-racialism, with its conceptual ancestry in color-blindness, is most interesting and defensible as a prescriptive normative ideal. It is untouched by the relative weaknesses of its descriptive forms, and its proponents do not take seriously rebuttals that rely on pointing out the errors of the descriptive claims (P.C. Taylor 2014). David Hollinger laid out a clear version of this ideal in his reaction to President Obama's election. He wrote:

At the center of that challenge is a gradually spreading uncertainty about the significance of color lines, especially the significance of blackness itself. Blackness is the pivotal concept in the intellectual and administrative apparatus used in the United States for dealing with ethnoracial distinctions. Doubts about its basic meaning, boundaries, and social role affected ideas about whiteness, and all other color-coded identities. These uncertainties make it easier to contemplate a possible future in which the ethnoracial categories central to identity politics would be more matters of choice than ascription; in which mobilization by ethnoracial groups would be more a strategic option than a presumed destiny attendant upon mere membership in a group; and in which economic inequalities would be confronted head-on, instead of through the medium of ethnorace.

(Hollinger 2008: 1033)

Hollinger's ideas echo Delbanco's (2008), and both proclaim the race-less value of universal individualism and the new credibility of post-racialism. Key here are the ideas that (1) there is a challenge to racial practices exemplified in the president's election that has spread uncertainty about our practices, (2) these uncertainties have made it easier to imagine a future beyond race and ethnicity, (3) where ethnic and racial ascriptions are loosened and become more voluntaristic, and which (4) make it easier to confront economic inequalities. For those who agree with Hollinger and Delbanco, President Obama's election further loosened the grip that race has on us.

The Post-racial Trend Energizes the Ideal

Post-racial ideals depend on the assumption that there are post-racial trends and they will affect how our future society will organize itself. But the trend does not have to be true for true believers to hold onto the ideal. I leave the analysis of the empirical validity of the post-racial trend for social scientists to hash out and for another venue (Sundstrom, forthcoming). Yet, what should be recognized are the strong conceptual

ties between post-racialism as trend and idea. The ideal cannot be cleanly dealt with by criticizing the trend, but the former is energized and depends on its plausibility because of the latter. The post-racial ideal is not a view from nowhere; its descriptive elements—with all its weaknesses—intersects with the prescriptive. It is encouraged by shifts in racial attitudes and practices: the rise of the mixed-race movement and pride in mixed-race identity; the demographic growth of interracial marriages and aggressive assertions of the social legitimacy and vitality of interracial families and friendships; and demographic growth of immigrants and trans-national families (Jones and Bullock 2012; P. Taylor 2014). The United States of America is changing—social networks and boundaries are shifting—and the post-racial ideal is emerging from this change (Hochschild et al. 2011).

As a general trend, the demographic changes motivating the post-racial idea are impressive, but there are specific differences between groups that should give us pause. There are regional and group differences among those who claim more than one race, and similar differences show up in rates of ethnic and racial intermarriage (Fishman et al. 2008; Lofquist 2012; Taylor et al. 2012; Jones and Bullock 2012). Additionally there are significant differences in attitudes among Millennials about post-racialism. While white youth tend to think that society is at or in near a post-racial moment, black youth remain deeply unconvinced (Cohen 2011: 198). If the national changes hinted at above can be fairly called post-racial, then post-racialism as such is a minor note and does not describe the lives or practices of most Americans, especially among black Americans (Bobo 2011b).

It is possible that whites and blacks are behind the post-racial curve, but it is more likely, especially among blacks, that they do not see enough change in American racial practices to encourage the uptake of post-racialism. While attitudes and some practices are breaking up, significant patterns of racial disparity and discrimination have not changed enough to justify calling our age post-racial (Cole 1999; Alexander 2010; Bobo 2011b; King and Smith 2011). As Hochschild et al. (2011) show, the persistence of these disparities, along with instances of individual and systemic discrimination, is a drag against the post-racial trend, and their entrenchment means that post-racialism is not a universal trend.

Instrumental and Ideological Objections Against the Post-racial Ideal

Leaving behind the trend, let us consider the soundness of the post-racial ideal. The first three objections against the ideal that follow address how such rhetoric is employed and its practical consequences; as such, they are instrumental objections, so they do not touch the core of the post-racial ideal, yet they lengthen the shadow of suspicion over post-racialism that the criticisms of the post-racial trend initially cast. A fourth objection questions the very idea of color-blindness, and the fifth objection claims that post-racialism is an ideology implicitly skewed toward racial injustice.

The first criticism is instrumental and asserts that talk of post-racialism as both trend and ideal encourages the proponents of color-blind law and policy and those who seek to continue the rollbacks on civil rights advances. Color-blindness as a policy position is a key tool and goal in the long-running American conservative political project focused on rolling back civil rights gains, as well as the related gains of the New Deal, preserving white privileges, and delegitimizing the very idea of the liberal welfare state

and its social programs; often the color-blindness that is referenced in such tactics is the naïve or cynical sort, rather than the ideal based in justice and the moral equality of persons and democratic equality of citizens (Steinberg 1995; Haney-López 2006). Now post-racialism as trend and ideal adds another arrow in their quiver—an arrow that has been repeatedly shot, such as in the recent weakening of the Voting Rights Act. The idea that the application of law and public policy in the United States, even after *Brown vs. Board of Education* or the passage of the Voting Rights Act, has been color-blind is patently false. Society is not color-blind, so to insist on color-blindness is to not fully address past racial wrongs and to leave vulnerable populations open to the damaging forms of color-consciousness that the proponents of color-blindness dream that the nation has put behind it. Color-blindness is a hustle that brings easy relief and feelings of righteousness to those who are troubled with racial exhaustion; and for those who suffer from the effects of racial bias and oppression it is a setup with catastrophic consequences. Therefore, according to the advocates of color-consciousness, society must be sensitive to race to adequately detect and address discrimination based on skin-color, ethnicity, and race.

The second criticism is also instrumental and contends that the political right has narrowly applied color-blindness to American life. As an ideal, it has largely been implemented in law and public policies. The proponents of color-blindness, following Justice Harlan's view that while the law "regards man as man," have been silent and even hostile to the application of color-blindness in other spheres of the lives of citizens, in particular the social and private spheres of individuals. Contrary to Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of color-blindness—a vision that applied to the private as well as public life—the typical supporters of color-blindness in law and public policy have even defended the right of individuals to discriminate in their private and social lives. Furthermore, they have defended the right of the state to engage in some forms of color-conscious racial profiling in domestic policing and monitoring against international terrorism and, of course, migration. Thus, the proponents of color-consciousness see in color-blindness a double-hypocrisy: first, color-blindness ignores the social-historical role of race in the United States, and second, it leaves the private and social sphere of individuals untouched as a vector of explicit racism or implicit bias. Post-racialism, as trend and ideal, plays right into this double play.

The third instrumental objection against the post-racial ideal is how it supports the American vice of evading discussions about racial injustice. There are accusations of racism, largely personal and having to do with an idiotic, lascivious, or vicious comment by some influential somebody, and references to our racial divisions among old- and new-media pundits, but what has been missing—except in times of crisis—are discussions of serious racial disparities. This is a symptom of racial exhaustion but also what Charles Mills so memorably described as an epistemology of ignorance about race in America (Mills 1997, 2007). Our presumptions about racial inferiority and superiority, cultural development, and justice, in turn justifies racial injustice and the disparities that come with it—the classic paternalistic defenses of slavery, dispossession and displacement, colonialism, and Jim Crow segregation as being good for the American Indians, blacks, natives, so on are prime examples of racial epistemologies of ignorance in action. These epistemological stances have shifted through time to focus on, for example, the threat immigration from Mexico, Central and south America, or have recycled old accusations—they are lazy, disease-ridden, and criminal—and combined

to form accusatory labels, such as the welfare queen, illegal, or thug, which are used as ammunition against color-conscious programs, and accompanied arguments that color-consciousness was unfair and unjust and that the disparities are the fault of those that suffered them.

Representations of the post-racial trend and ideal encourages contemporary epistemologies of ignorance about race because the suggestive statistics offered in its support confirm the belief that race no longer matters, and the ideal does so because it encourages the application of naïve forms of color-blindness, a form that does not address racial disparity. Moreover, given the demographic shifts of the browning of America, this leads to more than an epistemology of ignorance in the service of retaining white privilege and ignorance, it serves as succor for those of us on the beneficial side of post-racialism. What post-racialism offers is not just a “white-washing”—an obscuring or hiding of injustice in the service of white privilege—it also offers a “color-washing” of those disparities. The increase in diversity in the United States lulls the nation into thinking that our racial conflicts have largely dissipated and controversial color-conscious policies are no longer needed or justified (Sundstrom 2008).

Related to the instrumental objections and leading to the ideological one, is the fourth, and conceptual, criticism that rejects the possibility of a race-less perspective in the first place. This objection is registered here because it is frequently referred to in the discussion as a trump card; that is, color-blindness in a world where skin color, ethnicity, and race matter in many different aspects in lives of the citizens and residents of the United States is an artificial, forced, and illusory perspective—it is truly a view from nowhere. This is a point as much about the foundations of human experience and knowledge as it is about practical interactions with the world. Individuals cannot take on a race-less, or for that matter a gender-less, perspective, especially on matters involving those social identities. We live in and through our bodies and minds interacting with other people (Alcoff 2006). To this I would add, it would require thinking and feeling independently from our minds, with our associated emotions, explicit and implicit attitudes, and thought processes that have been formed by our social environments. To be color-blind we would have to get out of ourselves. And just as that is presently impossible, so is post-racialism.

As much as this conceptual objection rightfully warns us against false universal perspectives, the objection is hyperbolic in that it overstates our conceptual limits to ridiculous effect—potentially ending in solipsism—and the goal of the color-blind and post-racial ideal, which can be framed as a practical and reasonable ideal. The accusation that being color-blind or taking on a race-less perspective is impossible is vulnerable to the retort that color-blindness, as applied to race, need not be literal. Policy can and has been implemented in a manner that approximates the ideal of color-blindness. Justice, or even the administration of government institutions on all levels, has not been color-blind but that is the goal (Cole 1999; Alexander 2010). Although this objection applies a necessary break to the excesses of color-blindness, it is not definitive, and so the fifth objection deserves the most attention.

Beyond being a delusion or merely misapplied as a political tool, Sumi Cho (2009) and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and David Dietrich (2011) argue that the rhetoric of post-racialism is itself an ideology or part of a larger color-blind ideology that intends to minimize racism and justify the end of color-conscious civil rights policies. This is the fifth and most serious objection since it turns the very idea of post-racialism as an ideal on its

head; it asserts that post-racialism is part of a system that seeks to diminish recognition for the presence and enduring effects of personal and systemic racism, preserve white privilege and the systemic racism that support those privileges, roll back civil rights gains, and de-legitimize racial identity as a progressive organizational focus. It builds off of earlier arguments that color-blindness is an ideology that preserves white privilege and non-white racial oppression (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Haney-López 2006).

The central features of color-blind racism, according to Bonilla-Silva, are abstract liberalism, cultural racism, minimization of racism, and naturalization; these features interact and serve as “frames” by which those committed to color-blind ideology understand racial identifications and politics (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011: 192). The first “frame,” abstract liberalism is understood to involve disembodied and otherwise decontextualized principles of classical liberalism or (loosely) deontological ethical principles, such as individual rights, personhood, or equality, or even rationality to argue against race-sensitive law and public policy. For example, consider Chief Justice Roberts’s assertion in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* (551 US 701) that “the way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” His view, as with liberal ideals naïvely applied, are unhinged from the practical exigencies of rectifying or curtailing ethnic and injustice. The second frame, cultural racism holds that the problem with the group in question is not their biological inferiority, but their culturally embedded habits, practices, and customs; for example, the old American habit of blaming poor people of color for their own social, political, and economic disparities. The minimization of racism, the third frame, follows from the first two frames, because if society’s basic social structures and political culture is fair, and if the fault lies with the cultural practices of the group, then race and racism does not matter. The final frame, naturalization, holds that ethnic and race-based biases and preferences, as long as they happen in the private or social spheres (e.g., in the bedroom, home, clubhouse, church), are somehow natural and should not be subject to social engineering (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Obviously, this frame is in tension with the presumptive race-neutrality of the other frames, but post-racialism as ideology strives for justification of racially self-interested action and not conceptual consistency. This ideology is especially punishing, because it entrenches and solidifies racial disparities and domination, and provides, as its critics point out, intellectual cover for injustice and balm for our social guilt.

A Liberal Defense of the Post-racial Ideal Against the Ideological Objection

Color-blindness has been used as a tool in political strategies to roll back the Civil Rights advances, and it has been used by ideological warriors, committed to preserving white racial and class privileges. Hollinger’s version of the post-racial ideal, however, explicitly disavows naïve or cynical applications of color-blind policy; the core of it concerns the loosening of racial identification and ascription, which track demographic trends and attitudes, therefore the first four objections deliver only glancing blows to serious versions of post-racialism (Hollinger 2008, 2011). Let us then turn to the fifth objection.

A full response to the ideological objection begins with admitting that the post-racial ideal is a historically aware, non-naïve liberal ideal. It is consistent with the values of personal autonomy, liberty, and toleration at the heart of liberal political theories, and is

ideological in the sense that it promotes and is underwritten by those and other related values (e.g., civil rights, democratic rule by consent, civic participation, and political transparency), but it is not necessarily committed to the follies of what Bonilla-Silva labels “abstract liberalism”—a false universalism, or a particularism that pretends to be universal—nor is it committed to cultural racism, the minimization of racism, or what he terms “naturalization.”

The value of personal autonomy, in particular, evident in Hollinger’s and Delbanco’s defense of post-racialism, is at the heart of the post-racial ideal, because the implication is that individuals will have greater personal autonomy as they are freed from sometimes unwelcome ascribed racial scripts that limit their behavior and their life chances. This position certainly has ramifications for debates over the conservation of ethnic and racial identifications, but it does not necessarily serve the interests of color-blind ideology (for example, the loosening of racial scripts assaults the biases and assumptions that often come with racial ascriptions—persons with *X*-identifications do not or should not participate in *Y*-activities, and should be prevented from doing so), which is often hypocritically silent about race-sensitive mores in the private sphere. Certainly, the ethnic and racial loosening implication of the post-racial ideal has been used for ideological purposes, but other related ideals have been used as grist for the reactionary mill. Frederick Douglass’s liberal, civic republican and Christian arguments for abolition, Martin Luther King Jr.’s evocation of the dream of liberty from racial oppression and racial unity, and even Malcolm X’s emphasis on self-help are used to argue against color-conscious policies, but such misinterpretations do not justify scorning the original ideas. Furthermore the complaint against “new” or “liberal” racism, as for racism in general, concerns how what is morally and rightfully *due* to individuals and communities is denied; what is new in “new racism” is the use of sub-text, coding, or dog-whistle strategies to effect those denials and to ignore explicit racism or implicit bias (Haney-López 2014). At the center, then, of the objection to racism are the liberal assumptions of personhood, individual rights, moral and personal autonomy, non-domination, and equal justice and civic belonging, and that social goods are due to individuals regardless of their ethnic or racial identifications, gender, class, sexuality, or level of ability—all of this is affirmed by the first implication of the post-racial ideal.

This pertains to Bonilla-Silva’s frame of abstract liberalism; certainly liberalism in the abstract and the applied is implicated in the history of racism. Charles Mills and Carole Pateman have forcefully argued that the foundational social contract theories includes gender and racial contracts that have built in the domination of women and non-white, non-Europeans into the terms of the contract (Pateman 1988; Mills 1997; Pateman and Mills 2007). The components of liberalism, however, have been some of the principal tools in the enduring effort of moral and political suasion and physical struggle over domination. As Amy Gutmann recognized, color-blindness and color-consciousness are methods that meet in the middle. Thus, we can dismiss facile associations of the post-racial ideal with equally facile objections against abstract liberalism, racial progress, race-neutral universalism, silly applications of moral equivalence between uses of race, and so on. When one takes a liberal position that does not mean they are ipso facto implicated in color-blind racism.

Another aspect of Hollinger’s post-racial ideal is its assertion that class is more important than race at our present historical juncture, and thus that economic inequalities should be confronted head-on instead of through the proxy of race; this implication

does assume that race is not necessarily central to understanding and responding to the economic and political inequalities that track race, and that focusing on race may even be an obstacle for dealing with those disparities (Michaels 2006; Cashin 2014). This view comes close to what the critics accuse of doing: it minimizes racism. However, it only falls prey to this problem if it is applied naïvely. On particular issues, the centrality of race, and how closely some inequality tracks race is an empirical issue, so interested parties should act accordingly. There may be particular issues that deserve wholly or largely a class-based (or gender- or sexuality-based) approach, because that targets those most effected, and not—as the critics of post-racialism assert—because this is most the politically palatable approach.

Even so, economic inequalities intersect with ethnicity and race. Taking any one of these variables out of the analysis would miss crucial facts about how those inequalities play out on the ground. What is more, taking wealth as an indicator that grapples with inequality head-on, it is apparent that to understand how race matters, we need to see how race works within class (Kochar et al. 2011; McKernan et al. 2013; Shapiro et al. 2013). Therefore, Hollinger's post-racial ideal is too closely associated with his view of post-racial trends, and can lead to what Bonilla-Silva calls the minimization of racism. To recover from this fumble, a stronger version of the ideal adjusts, but does not drop, the second implication: some disparities, indeed, must be confronted head-on via class, gender, sexuality, or place, but that does not mean intersectionality or the relevance of race is denied.

All in all, none of the criticisms of post-racialism as an ideology fully touch the core message of serious post-racialism; even Hollinger's sloppy assertion that race obscures dealing with inequality head-on does not directly undermine the core idea. The ideal expresses the hope that ethnic and racial identification will become more voluntarily rather—along with the scripts that come with them—imposed on individuals and communities. Anthony Appiah, although he has not espoused post-racialism, has articulated the aims that smart post-racialists most identify with; he argues that we should take individual autonomy seriously, recognize the limiting power of the ascription of identifications (what most call identities), while recognizing their value and use in beating back domination, and move to loosen their hold over individuals' lives. He advocates for the position that lives be “not too tightly scripted,” and “not too constrained by the demands and expectations of others (Appiah 1996, 2005). Appiah advocates that society help to increase the autonomy of individuals from the constraints of identity ascriptions—he calls this “soul making”—and lead its citizens to consider such identifications as voluntary and recreational, and that their identities and interests are complex, multifarious, and they cut across groups. These are the fruits of the universal individualism that Hollinger and Delbanco celebrated after Obama's 2008 election, and this vision, as well as Appiah's analysis of racial ascriptions, were inspired by John Stuart Mill's vision of individual liberty and experiments with living (Mill 1977).

Instead of being ideologically at odds with racial justice, this vision is emphatically affirmed by critics of post-racialism like Cathy Cohen; for example, when she approvingly quotes John A. Powell's claim that “equal membership in the political community” requires “expanding the choices that people have to lead lives they value” (Cohen 2010: 233; Powell 2004: 969). This entails supporting the development of their capabilities and giving them equal access to resources and opportunities, which ultimately should, Cohen and Powell hope, lead to “an environment in which people can develop

their potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests” (Cohen 2010: 233; powell 2004: 969).

A Historical and Realist Objection Against the Post-racial Ideal

The values at the heart of the post-racial ideal are worthy and they harmonize with the American narrative of racial progress, so the idea of a time and place that is post-racial seems reasonable and credible utopia. Delbanco and Holligner affirm this vision because race no longer seems like an insurmountable obstacle to progress. However, the narrative of American progress on racial issues, and the time and place it imagines, are the key weaknesses of the post-racial ideal. Together these two elements (time and place) serve a political mnemonic that the post-racial ideal leans on for conceptual support; without them, the ideal loses its feasibility and reasonableness (P.C. Taylor 2014).

Post-racialism marks the rupture with racialism, or the time of traditional racial practices, and serves to convince us to work toward ending racial practices in the present and to fulfill a post-racial future. The ideal offers us, according to Taylor, a pragmatic and prophetic opening through which we can escape the hold that racial practices have over us. Post-racialism is pragmatic insofar as it is a reasonable response to demographic trends and is responsive to the need for, at least temporary, color-consciousness, and it is prophetic because it summons a new world that it discerns in the pattern of American history, particularly in the African American civil rights movement (P.C. Taylor 2014: 18). The grand narrative of the American Civil Rights movement, in its typical post-1964 form, emphasizes the overcoming of the divisions of racial identifications as much as it emphasizes addressing serious racial injustices. It has an abiding hold on many white liberals and conservatives.

The grand Civil Rights narrative started off as a critical history that was meant to free Americans from the previous monumental narrative of the founding of America that was innocent of racial wrongs. In turn the critical narrative that challenged the old with its own key events, for example Martin Luther King Jr.’s protest in Birmingham and the crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma became set pieces in standard tales of the arc of American history. The critical history, in the hands of commentators and politicians interested in telling a national narrative, became a historical pastiche (Jameson 1991: 17).

Pastiche, maybe, but it is pastiche with an invigorating purpose. In Nietzsche’s early view in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (1980), what historian William Hardy McNeil labeled as “mythistory” is addressed. As Nietzsche delineated, monumental histories emerge from the fragments left over from the destructive work of critical history, and they serve as the basis and model for activity and striving, which monumental histories inspire and fortify. Thus, we see in the American political traditions celebrations of the usual cast of characters—Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt—but when it comes to imaginings of national unity, courage, and moral foresight, none is more prominent than Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. These “profiles of courage” and civic virtue serve as models for moral and political formation. Further, a big part of the enabling and ennobling power of monumental history is the role of ignoring and forgetting in its formation of its invigorating monuments—they must capture what we deem as the essential message or moment and leave off the rest as dross.

But whose history will be kept in the dark so that others may live? The selective use of forgetting is at the core of Taylor's complaint against how the grand narrative obscures relevant details that run counter to the story of the myth. A significant fallout of this grand narrative, however, is the view that African Americans—the trouble started with the black Muslims of Chicago and the Black Panthers of Oakland—and other groups that followed the lead of the Black Power movements (e.g., feminist, Latino/Hispanic, Asian American, and the LGBT movement) broke away from the genius of the trajectory in their turn to identity politics (Glazer and Moynihan 1970; Michaels 2006). This view, in turn, obscures relevant details that run counter to the story of the myth; for example, the role of community organizing that was explicitly color-conscious and drew on the rising rhetoric of black power, or of the role of an under-appreciated diverse movement, especially of women, and the depth and persistence of racial disparities. President Obama drew on this narrative in his few speeches about race; notably in his pre-election March 18 "speech on race" and his first inaugural address. However, he expressed less enchantment for mythistory in other addresses. In some cases, Obama spoke of racism being in the country's "DNA," even though he still defended the basic idea that there has been progress on racial justice. America's mythistory of racial progress undermines the social and political strategies used to produce the myth in the first place.

The prophecy of a time and place in America without race lacks credibility, especially for those who suffer from racial oppression, because it is not feasible and is based on a deeply biased reading of history. Some variants of cognitive framing have implications for understanding the political meaning and role of historical narrative (Tenbrunsel and Messick 2004; Wohl et al. 2006; Bazerman and Tenbrunsel 2011). This is where the historical objection converges with Derrick Bell's view of "racial realism" (Bell 1992: 92 and 101); specifically his criticism of jurisprudence that "reifies" and "deifies" legal ideals, forgetting that they are in fact abstract ideals that are either not or imperfectly applied in the present non-ideal world, and regarding them with moral absolutism that offers their proponents an appearance of moral purity while preserving the effects, and enabling the continuation, of racial injustice. All the other objections against the post-racial trend and ideal converge on this realism that is awake to the hard truths of American history: America is not post-racial, post-racial trends are not general, the ideal is an instrument for rolling back civil rights advances and ignoring disparities, a post-racial perspective—as with a color-blind one—is impractical, and whether intentionally or implicitly it has served the purposes of a racially dominating ideology.

A Disruptive Defense of the Post-racial Ideal

Post-racialism need not wither in the face of the historical-realist objection; it has access to a harsher defense than the liberal response. It is one that is motivated by a Nietzschean view of monumental history, is not bothered by the critiques of the monumental history that post-racialism depends upon, and refuses to take into consideration the concerns of the opposition. It challenges historiographical objections by refusing responsibility for the old precisely because it seeks to make the new. This response sees the post-racial trend and ideal as explicitly creatively destructive. It sees post-racialism as going beyond, over, and setting aside old racial practices. Dialogue and participation are not its central values; instead it taps into the churning forces of modernity for justification of change, and it takes inspiration in the heroic emergence of the new from

disruption. An example is Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1983) view of race and the "fate" of those used and oppressed for the sake of historical progress.

There is more than a little bit of arrogant, self-pleasing cruelty in this presumptively transcendent stance. It speaks from the position of the assumed victor, the one that can ride out the churn of history and emerge in a new epoch. There are few if any who accept this sort of adventurism, but some do (Hill 2013). Post-racialism as an ideal may be an ideology in this case, but not one of racial subterfuge and domination, but a self-overcoming one that is attempting to shift the social paradigm. The post-racial ideal is again evoked and the nation is invited to move toward the future. What the destination of this movement is, is unknown and anxiety is to be expected.

Post-racialism is Vicious

The disruptive version of the post-racial ideal departs from the liberal post-racial ideal. As with the liberal version, it does not assume that society is now post-racial, but it has a skewed relation with the moral ideal at its core—of equal dignity and treatment regardless of racial identification—because the disruptive version allows that the perspectives and interests of those not on board with its prophetic vision be left aside. This means that the disruptive post-racial ideal shares the practical weaknesses of the liberal post-racial ideal version. But while that critique might give the reasonable holder of the liberal post-racial ideal pause, the disruptive version is not stopped, because its proponents may be willing to embrace the loss that would accompany its realization. Some people would lose in its view, but those who do not allow themselves to be transformed in its light would be seen as regressive and conceptually left behind as we move to create a post-racial world.

Thrilling stuff—but it is easy to be thrilled because it is assumed to be someone else's pain. It should not be surprising then that those who hold the life forms the position seeks to abandon fight back. This brings up another objection against both the liberal and disruptive versions of post-racial ideal: they are vicious. They disrespect the moral status of those whose lives would be made worse by the implementation of policy guided by post-racial ideals, because it would add to conditions of deprivation and domination by ignoring those conditions or the social dynamics, instruments, and institutions that create and maintain those conditions. The liberal post-racial ideal in particular is therefore led into a contradiction its reasonable proponents must attend to. If the post-racial ideal takes the moral equality of individuals seriously, then it should not dismiss the means by which ethnic and racial discrimination is understood and addressed. Otherwise, the ideal would not be reasonable and could not possibly attract the support of those suffering from such injustice. If, however, the post-racial ideal includes a call to ignore and forget those left behind, then this disruptive version is not just misguided, it is vicious. It disrespects persons who suffer ethnic and racial discrimination and oppression, by ignoring the non-ideal conditions that plagues their lives, and fails to give them equal regard.

This gets to the sharp feelings that critics of both color-blindness and post-racialism have about those ideas. They are vicious in their disregard for the effected persons and the challenges they face in their present places and times. Michelle Alexander, the legal scholar, offered one of the best succinct statements of this ethical failure:

Colorblindness has inspired callousness. When people say, "I don't care if he's black," what they're really saying is that they're not willing to view his

experience in racial terms. . . . Not caring about a person's race is presented as some kind of virtue, as if it will lead us to act in fair and nondiscriminatory way. In fact, not caring can be a form of cruelty.

(Alexander 2011: 7)

Color-blindness and the post-racialism that builds off it are not virtuous positions; they are positions one stakes out that lead to ignoring morally relevant features of social life. Even in the face of mass violence they can prevent those who are naïvely or ideologically committed to them from seeing the bloody truth. Witness the politicians and pundits, like Senator Lindsey Graham, who after the killings at Emanuel A.M.E. Church stumbled in his attempts to explain the tragedy in a way that his white conservative base would find appealing by saying that the murder had been targeting Christians. He shamelessly refused to recognize the innocent dead as black and the victims of racial violence. Only after being rebuked on social media did he acknowledge the victims and their church as being targeted because they were black while still warping his sympathetic words for political ends by calling the murderer a “racial jihadist” (Parker 2015). Such are the evasions of color-blindness and the moral failure of post-racialism that we have a moral imperative to reject the latter, and to apply the former judiciously in the service of preventing or rectifying racism and distributive injustice.

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