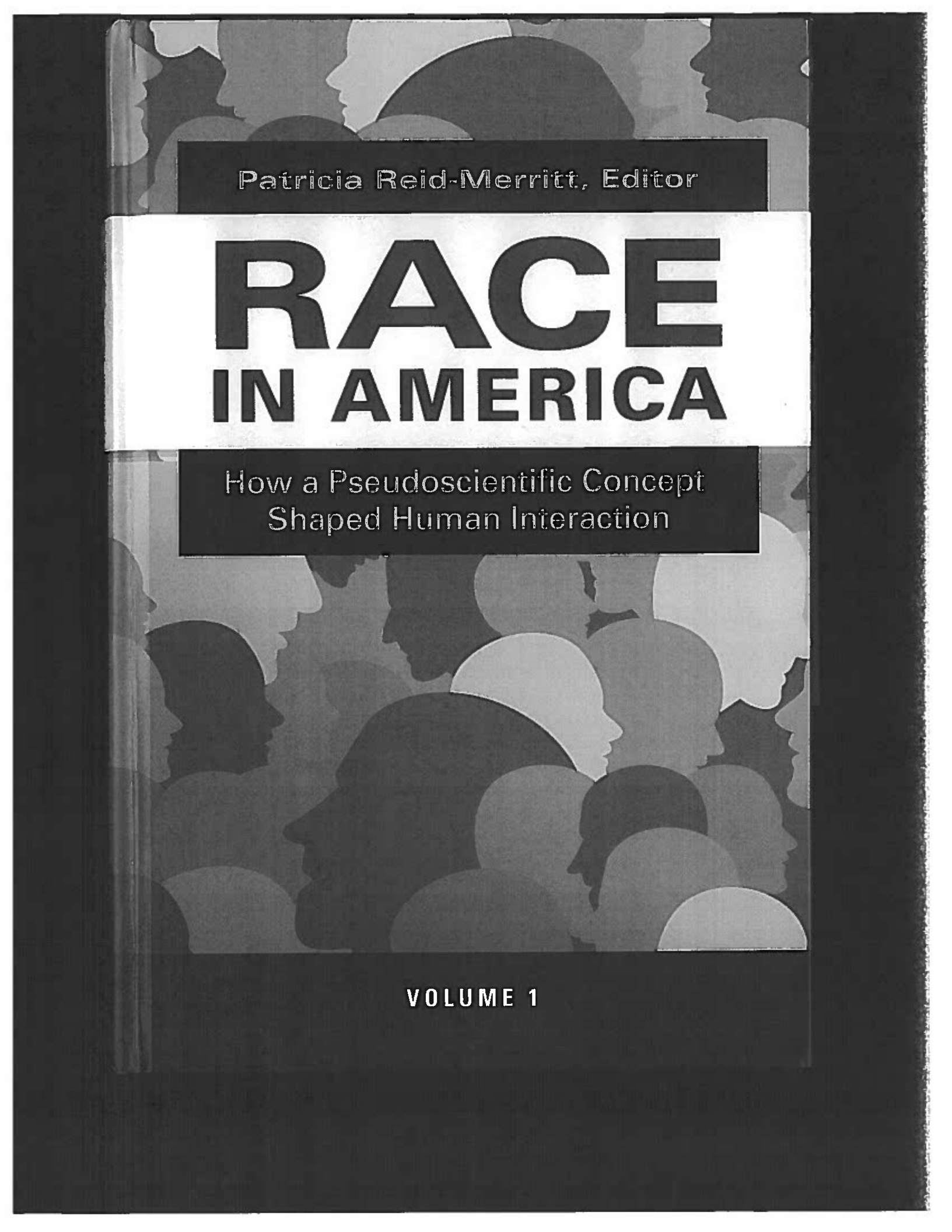




Patricia Reid-Merritt, Editor

RACE IN AMERICA

How a Pseudoscientific Concept
Shaped Human Interaction

VOLUME 1

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Chapter 7

Race and Social Identity in the Obama Age: A View from behind the Veil

Mark Christian

Notions about what is "race" have been pondered upon since at least the middle part of the 18th century, especially via Europe and North America.¹ Dorothy Roberts accurately describes the idea of race as a fatal invention that has had disturbing consequences for humankind.² In this sense, an individual deemed a "person of color" or cultural groups considered outside of the white ethnicity paradigm can encounter in the 21st century a myriad of racialized forms of racism. The social reality of race is akin to a cancer that has endured regardless of all the genuine efforts to eradicate it as a scar on the human landscape. This chapter will focus primarily on North America specifically in terms of its long historical nightmare pertaining to the vicissitudes of racialized oppression in relation to the African American experience. It is argued herein that one's social identity has been inextricably historically interwoven with race whether one rejects such nomenclature personally. In other words, not without much incongruity, a person of African American heritage has quite a degree of variance in phenotype, yet the social identity of this cultural group has been forged in the crucible of enslavement, segregation, and second-class citizenship dating back 1619 and coming up to the present day.

RACE IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

In this age of infomania whereby much of all knowledge exists at one's fingertips with the smartphone, it is surprising how dogged the notion of "race" actually is in both the psyche and social structure of U.S. society. There is something wrong, for example, when one considers that most of the menial jobs today are done by people of color; there is mass incarceration, with the majority being people of color; and unemployment is most often double for people of color compared to their white counterparts. We could go on, but the average reader knows that what is stated is a social fact backed up by volumes of statistical data from across the nation. Andrew Hacker in 1992 wrote about the United States being basically a two-nation state, hostile and unequal. He concluded poignantly in his study by looking to the future and asking a question of white America:

A huge racial chasm remains, and there are few signs that the coming century will see it closed. Almost one hundred and forty years after the ending of slavery, white America continues to ask of its black citizens an extra patience and perseverance that whites have never required of themselves. So the question for white Americans is essentially moral: is it right to impose on members of an entire race a lesser start in life and then expect from them a measure of resolution that has never been asked of your own race?³

Moving almost 20 years on from Hacker's gloomy but realistic perspective on the African American experience of multifaceted oppression/s, the contemporary journalist/writer Ta-Nehisi Coates's book *Between the World and Me* speaks to the continued assault on black life in the United States of America. Writing a message to his young son, Coates explains to him the reality of violence against those culturally deemed black in America and the human pitfalls in having a black body:

It is hard to face this. But all of our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body.⁴

One could possibly state that Coates is being a tad overdramatic in describing the contemporary African American experience. Yet, what he is describing is not the incidents of white racism in the odd incident among

crazy white racists. No, this is Coates relating to the police and certain case studies in the deaths of black men (and boys if we recall 12-year-old Tamir Rice, killed for playing with a toy gun in a Cleveland park on November 23, 2014). It is this information age of the smartphone and/or surveillance cameras that are recording the incidents more often and placing them into the realm of social media literally minutes or hours within the occurrences of police indiscretion in policing communities of color. This is what can be deemed a new age in collating, identifying, and highlighting the certainty of racialized discrimination. The fact that Coates's book is being lauded by the mainstream is paradoxical in the face of this ubiquitous affront on black life.

Continuing the conversation with his son in regard to the danger that black lives are facing presently, Coates states:

That was the week you learned that the killers of Michael Brown would go free. The men who had left his body in the street like some awesome declaration of their inviolable power would never be punished. It was not my expectation that anyone would ever be punished. But you were young and still believed. You stayed up till 11 p.m. that night, waiting for the announcement of an indictment, and when instead it was announced that there was none you said, "I've got to go," and you went into your room, and I heard you crying.⁵

In explaining the impact of racialized negative experiences on his son, Coates is also indirectly explaining the historical context that Hacker analyzed in the early 1990s. Yet we could go back to any decade since the inception of the American republic and highlight the evil of racism toward communities of color. Indeed, writers now have thousands of volumes of work to back up this social fact. What is needed here, in this chapter, is to acknowledge openly that "race" is an awful reality imbued with racial hierarchy. Moreover, "race" has openly privileged some groups over others; those groups emanating from white cultural heritages have gained what is deemed "white privilege" in today's academic parlance.⁶ This white privilege can be found in all areas of social life, from service-level occupations to academic employment in institutions of higher education.⁷

EDUCATION AND "RACE"

In terms of higher education, it is becoming more apparent that liberal arts colleges and universities leave much to be desired when it comes to the outcomes of racial parity. There is simply too much statistical data indicating that the diversity policies in place add up to little but lip service. Even if people of color actually gain employment as professors, there then is a battle for survival against the varied social forces that impede the

progress of the professors of color.⁸ What is disconcerting in relation to higher education is the idea that this is supposed to be an institution that espouses enlightenment to the human mind, but the reality of "race" knows no boundaries in the social world. In fact, higher education is a bastion of white supremacy, if one is to be candid.

A recent sociological study aptly titled *The Racial Order* gives an example of the dilemma encountered by professors of color. What is important to note too is that this research comes from the minds of two Ivy League scholars, one of Turkish American heritage and the other of Euro-American origin. These scholars offer a rather bold theoretical analysis of "race." The overall problem with this well-intentioned research is that it is largely in abstract form and analyzed within the paradigm of Eurocentric sociological discourse. If they intended to find a novel way to comprehend the racialized order, then it would be incumbent upon them to consider scholars outside the "sociological norm." Clearly, however, this is not to be expected, because this would be heresy in the American sociological tradition. One has to pay homage to all who have come before and within the discipline of "white sociology," and the key black pioneer sociologist, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), is usually overlooked. Emirbrayer and Desmond acknowledge Du Bois but not to the extent that he should have been in their study. The point here is that there can never be a positive outcome in "race" analysis that empowers communities of color if, in the process, white supremacy is implicitly upheld via the analytical paradigm employed.

Not to dismiss Emirbrayer and Desmond entirely, they do acknowledge some key areas of interpersonal and institutional racial discrimination that is worthy of citation. Here the authors explain the experience of the invisible white privilege that is rampant within higher education:

Consider as well the dilemmas faced by professors of color working in majority-white universities. A nonwhite professor who is the only person of color on her faculty often faces unique pressures from the student body, her colleagues, her administration, and members of the surrounding community. On the one hand she is often sought out by students of color who ask her for guidance and advice on a whole host of matters, some related to their studies, some not. Although the faculty member primarily was hired to conduct and publish research, these requests are difficult to ignore, especially when her university administration actively encourages her to mentor students of color and to serve on "diversity committees" or to consult with the admissions board.⁹

Emirbrayer and Desmond explain further that professors of color often deal with a heavy burden of workload and are also expected to publish at

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the same rate as their less "taxed" white counterparts. This is "race" in motion or imbued institutional racism; it is also the reality of what is frequently deemed ingrained "racial battle fatigue," whereby the professor of color has to work harder than her or his white counterpart and still be judged by the white normative gauge for success in academia. There are many black scholars who do not succeed in college and university settings because of this unfair situation. The inequity lies in so many areas: lack of administrative support, senior colleagues making life difficult, being isolated, and of course working beyond a reasonable amount of committee work. In short, this is an example of "race" at work in society. If one's social identity connects to a community of color, then it will impact one's social experience in terms of numerous and varied institutional barriers within the university structure. Social identity is crucial to one's racialized heritage because the "group collective" is imposed on the individual whether the individual wants to be identified with the group or not. Most often the so-called race of an individual is the determining factor in her or his social identity.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

Interestingly, Emirbrayer and Desmond merely touch on what W. E. B. Du Bois termed "double consciousness."¹⁰ This is unfortunate, because it is a concept at the heart of "race" and social identity. As Du Bois contended, the very idea of a person having to live two lives (a double self), have two souls, two ideals, often competing psychologically for prominence, is a form of social insanity. Yet most people of color survive daily in "the white man's world" on this very premise. According to Du Bois, the average African American (or person of color) lives two lives in one dark body in order to eke out a social existence that allows for bread and livelihood. Writing in the early part of the 20th century, Du Bois explains in moving prose his idea of double consciousness in relation to what African Americans endured:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at ones's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹¹

Few have no choice but to develop a double consciousness, because to survive under white racial domination is something that comes with the social order of the United States. The social inequalities abound in

statistics across the breadth of the nation that emanates: mass incarceration among people of color, lower pay rates, underemployment or no employment, wealth disparities beyond reasonableness, and poor education attainment across the nation's urban areas. Moreover, material poverty, combined with spiritual poverty, is increasingly creating criminal activity and internalized racism that breeds self-hatred and black-on-black killings that are unutterably sad in comprehension and veracity.¹²

The double consciousness that Du Bois explained has some nuance to it because it is not simply the African American surviving in the white man's world, so to speak. Since that would simply imply that all African Americans (tracing their roots from enslavement and other more recent 20th- and 21st-century migrants from African Caribbean, the African continent, Central and South America, and Europe) share a static cultural heritage that interacts with the white world. Moreover, individuals have different personalities based on their social backgrounds, working-class or middle-class values, sexuality, political frame of reference, and many other attributes. Along with the human attributes there is one's talent and inner drive to compete. Not all individuals have both the talent and the drive to compete in a racist culture. This could be deemed the "personal" aspect of individuality and social identity. On the other hand, there is the manner in which an African American links with his or her community. Being connected to one's "race" and social identity in terms of "community" can determine one's level of consciousness and commitment to the progress of the social group one is connected with. In short, the "personal" and the "community" aspects require careful analysis in regard to the evaluation of double consciousness. Indeed, there are many who seemingly belong to one "race" and social identity in a phenotypical sense (and there are blurred lines here too) but do not act or acknowledge that they want any connection whatsoever with the social identity of black cultural groups.

To use an example for brevity here, Clarence Thomas is a dark-skinned African American and a Supreme Court justice. He has occupied this prestigious position for over a quarter of a century. Yet he has never voted once in favor of the empowerment of voting, education, or civil rights in regard to his "race" and social identity. In the Du Bois sense, Thomas is not struggling in one dark body to be both African American and American; he has, it seems, decided to shed all ties to African American heritage and struggle as a Supreme Court justice. His voting record on issues that would empower his "race" and his community speaks for itself, because he has consistently voted against any form of affirmative action in favor of cultural minorities. He has, in African American parlance, played the game for "whitey" and without a drop of concern, it should be added. To be sure Thomas is no Thurgood Marshall, as the latter would be comfortably deemed fully connected and concerned with his "race" and his social identity.

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Two African American scholars, Asante and Hall in a powerful book titled *Rooming in the Master's House*, depict Clarence Thomas as an archetypal "House Negro" in modern times. This is how they explain the term:

As in the case of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, one's class origin or regional origin does not always dictate one's political philosophy, but rather it is one's understanding of American history and one's experiences as a human being. House Negroes today operate in style, opinion, vision, and expertise according to the cultural norms of the conservative white community. Many make their living with white "think tanks" advocating political policies that counter the welfare of the African American community. . . . They are sometimes a talented but misdirected lot, whose political aspirations ignore racism and the enslavement, seeing them as irrelevant to the life opportunities and state of African Americans today.¹³

The term "House Negro" was used by Malcolm X (1925–1965) in his depiction of the antebellum South. The house Negro lived in the master's house and took care of the master, while his counterpart, the "field Negro," lived in the huts provided by the plantation and worked from "can't see in morning, till can't see at night."¹⁴ The field Negro ate the worst kind of food and wore the worst kind of clothes, and he hated the master. So the contrast is very obvious: the house Negro is compliant and obsequious to the master and white supremacy, whereas the field Negro is defiant, rebellious, and a seeker of freedom. Asante and Hall employ the term "House Negro" to explain the historical links between those who work in deference to white power and those who have no time for self-denial and the enslavement of the soul. This also explains how "race" and social identity are not easy to nail down or conceptualize; all individuals and social groups are a mixed bag of humanity.

Moreover, the example of Clarence Thomas is not explained to disparage him but only to show that double consciousness is more complex than what is ordinarily explained. There are individuals of color who strive only to be accepted into the white world of social identity. Not all African Americans struggle to be accepted in both worlds, and this should be added to the discussion on "race" and social identity as it pertains to African Americans and other communities of color. The human condition is far too complex to assign any individual to a box, yet Thomas cannot be deemed a person who is at home in the "race" that he has been socially designated to, and he unfortunately is not alone. There are many who strive to be accepted into mainstream white cultural norms possibly due to the material benefit of "success." Playing down one's "race" and social identity has been one of the key elements, as we have come to understand with President Barack Obama during his tenure in office.

PRESIDENT OBAMA AND THE NEBULOUS POSTRACIAL VICTORY

"Race" and social identity have been a long historical nightmare, particularly for African Americans. Regardless of one's class position and employment status, there is really no escaping the ugliness of racialized discrimination. The civil rights movement of the 1950s-1970s claimed certain victories; however, it could be argued that since the 1980s there has been a decline in progressive changes. Yes, there is tokenism, the odd example of black success. This certainly can be claimed in relation to the election of President Obama in 2008 and his reelection in 2012; without the votes of whites across the nation, he would not have been elected. Therefore, this is progress in terms of racialized thinking. His election was a symbol of hope. Yet historians will come to view this period as one not filled with much progress collectively for African Americans. This is the irony of the "victory" in having the first acknowledged black president; it has been only symbolic. The "race" factor too was deliberately undermined by Obama and his advisers. His social identity that linked him undisputedly to the African American experience was purposefully subdued in order to promote him being a "president of all Americans," not just one social group. One could ask, "Why has no other president been held accountable in such a way that President Obama has been due to his group affiliation and social identity?" The answer is quite obvious. Obama has had to tread so carefully due to his "race" that it has been an albatross around his neck. He has had to show distance between himself and African Americans like no white president before him had to with their social identities and racial heritage. This is rather illuminating when considered in the parlance of "race" and social identity because it reveals the issue of social power that is ingrained in the politics of social groups. With Obama coming from a historical out-group, he had to show the powerful in-group distinct signs of objectivity and distance from African Americans when operating as president.

In this sense, some commentators have been heavily critical of President Obama and his administration. Notably, Cornel West, a black scholar with a strong voice in African American cultural affairs and academia, has consistently expressed views that dismiss Obama as a sellout to his people and therefore his social identity. West explains his position in an edited volume of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches and writings, *The Radical King*. In a rather mean-spirited manner, West explains the outset and development of his relationship with Obama in this manner:

I shall never forget the first question I asked Barack Obama when he called to solicit my support: "What is the relation of your presidential policies to the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.?" He replied—in hours

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of dialogue—that the relation was strong. And I agreed to lend critical support. After sixty-five events, from Iowa to Ohio, in 2008, I knew that most of his advisers were not part of the King legacy. And Obama's betrayal of what the radical King stands for became undeniable.¹⁵

Cornel West really sets up President Obama as a man who was expected to work under the umbrella of Dr. King's mission and vision for America. Clearly, West has been disappointed beyond reasonableness because the critical assault is almost personal in tone and incantation. Crucially, West has held Obama accountable to his "race" and social identity because the deep-rooted relationship between African American liberation and politics has had tremendous impact on communities of color. There is no room for compromise; West expected Obama to fall in line with King's notion of a beloved community, free of racism, war, and poverty. This is high price to expect any president to deliver, but to provide such a mammoth expectation at the time of the Great Recession of 2008–2015 (and arguably still in progress) is a tad overly ambitious.

If one considers the financial crisis alone, the Obama administration has at the very least stabilized the nation and provided a foundation for growth. However, this is not to suggest that one cannot be critical of the president, for he has often distanced himself from crucial social issues hurting African Americans and other communities of color. It has not been until his last years in office (2014–2016) that he has attempted to deal with mass incarceration and police brutality against communities of color, and this has been a carefully orchestrated exercise. Therefore, West and others are correct to state that there could have been much more association with President Obama's "race" and social identity. But pragmatically, it is folly to suggest that he would have gained much running as an openly racialized candidate who would speak only for his social group. Even though many white presidents have been openly racist in policy orientation since the dawn of the republic, had Obama been openly for progressive policy to aid his community, he would not have been successful in his run for the presidency—this is not rocket science. Nor is it an apology for President Obama; it is merely a reality check to show how "race" impacts politics in North America.

West has issues that appear to be subjective; his ego seems to have taken over his comprehension of how white supremacy operates in mainstream politics. To put the beloved community content at Obama's feet is unrealistic and not cool. In his scathing response to those who openly supported the president, and we are speaking of the likes of Al Sharpton, Michael Eric Dyson, and Melissa Harris-Perry, West writes:

Sadly, the damage done by the Obama apologists—often for money, access, and status—is immeasurable and nearly unforgivable. For

the first time in American history, black citizens are the most pro-war in American society. Black churches are among the weakest in prison ministry—even given the disproportionately high percentage of black prisoners. Black schools are under attack from profiteering enterprises. Forty percent of black children live in poverty. Aside from a few exceptions, black musicians are more and more marginal in popular culture. Black deaths, especially among young people, are out of control. In other words, the Obama apologists who hide and conceal Wall Street crimes, imperial crimes, new Jim Crow crimes, and surveillance lies in order to protect the first black president have much to account for. And a health-care bill—a bonanza for big insurance and drug companies alongside access to new consumers—falls far short of the mark.¹⁶

For West to suggest that the Obama administration and his supporters are responsible for all that is listed above is rather illusory in criticism. Black churches, of which West belongs to as much as the current leader of the nation, have nothing to do with Obama's role as president, nor do the deaths of young black people and the other issues he lists. Why? Because these varied social issues were long in place decades prior to President Obama taking office in January 2009. The Wall Street crisis, yes; West is correct here, and Obama could have dealt with the white-collar criminals more efficaciously in favor of the Main Street victims of massive financial fraud. But Congress is made up of lawyers just like the majority of Wall Street, and it is nearly impossible to make change even if you are the president, but West knows this and more; his beef with Obama is personal, not based on professional analysis of white supremacy in politics.

However, could President Obama have been more effective on issues relating to his "race" and social identity as it relates to African Americans and communities of color? Of course, but he has been repeatedly blocked by Congress in his efforts to be progressive in his policies. To suggest that this is because he does not like being black or that he is a sellout is not being educated on the power structure and political framework in which he operates.

What is useful in reading between the lines of Cornel West is that the issue of "race" and social identity is seemingly paramount to his own identity structure. Yet one could be just as critical of him and ask, "As a man of color in the Ivy League, what have you done for African American and black Latino working-class students to enhance their empowerment at Harvard and Princeton, for example?" If he answered the question honestly, he would probably say, "Not much, I've only been able to be an example to those black students wanting to know that it is possible to get where I am in the Ivy League." Rightly so; those of us not in the Ivy League as black scholars would not put the entire experiences of black students on

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Cornel West. Crucially, he too could be criticized if one was to be mean-spirited in the approach to his elite position in the higher-education system as an African American male of privilege and status.

"Race" and social identity in context of the African American experience, and the experiences other communities of color, is pretty complex, and one cannot make one person from a defined social group the panacea for all. The office of president is a high position, but it is limited in terms of what the holder can actually achieve for his or her group due to the political reality of checks and balances. If we consider this scenario in relation to all other areas of life in the United States of America, then it is easy to comprehend the enormity of the struggle faced by persons of color. Whoever makes it is in a sense accountable to all those belonging to the social group he or she emanates from. The case study of President Obama will occupy the pens of historians and commentators for many years ahead because it is such a unique time in history, and that in itself has created such expectation. The hatred toward the sitting president should be considered within the historical context of white racism as well. To suggest that it has nothing to do with his "race" or social identity (there has been such opposition to him) is just not being realistic. Young people do not occupy the House of Representatives and the Senate chamber; it is largely middle-aged and beyond white males who control the power structure.

"Race" is part of this climate of hatred toward President Obama, and this trickles down to all areas of society. It cannot be ignored as a social fact that the Tea Party, Donald Trump, and others have consistently undermined Obama; his "race" has been an underlying factor in this, but rarely is this explicitly articulated. Yet white supremacy is as relevant here as anything else when one considers the enmity toward Obama. As many African Americans would suggest, if "they hate him, then they hate us." And how many of the Tea Party will be candid enough to state openly that they detest Obama because of his "race" and social identity? Few, if any, racists will express overt racism in the 21st century, but it is something creeping back into mainstream politics.¹⁷

Endeavoring to explain the irony of individual "race" success over rampant social inequality based on "race" and social identity, Emirbrayer and Desmond write:

Barack Obama was elected president in a country that imprisons more of its citizens than any other, the incarceration rate of poor black men soaring high above the national average. Astounding racial progress has been documented at the individual level (consider that, merely forty years ago, a near majority of Americans favored a ban on interracial marriage), while, at the social level, racial inequality remains entrenched (consider the degree to which our

cities remain starkly segregated). . . . And as more African Americans ascend the socioeconomic ladder, making significant inroads in business, politics, science, and art, millions more slip further into despair. . . . Much overt racism still exists, while a new racism of today is more intangible, invisible, and insidious. This quieter, more subtle racism is often described as the emblematic form of racial domination in our age.¹⁸

The sociological analysis above is spot on target. Regardless of individuals attaining high-end success by the thousands, it is the millions who still remain in poverty and hopelessness that bear the brunt of discrimination. Racism today is more covert than overt in its form, as stated above. But more than this, racism tends to be ingrained in all areas of society, not simply against poverty-riddled communities of color. For example, in places where one would hope that things are improving, such as in the area of education, they are not improving and could actually be regressing.

The election and tenure of President Obama have not improved the overall experience of communities of color. This is because the problems associated with "race" and social identity run deep into all spheres of society. No matter what profession one chooses to go into, there is the specter of racism waiting to "greet" a person of color in the workplace. Study after study indicates the insuperability of racialized discrimination.¹⁹ Like the bed bug, racism seems to find a way to survive no matter what antidote is found to exterminate it from the human landscape. It is hard to list anything from the 1980s that the government has done to openly tackle the poverty, criminality, and deprivation in inner cities. This too is a form of institutional racism that has operated throughout the last few decades; we could deem it simply "neglect" of hardship.

JIM CROW AND JANE CROW HAVE GOT TO GO!

Indeed, Michael Tillotson offers a sobering account of racialized domination in his book *Invisible Jim Crow*. He argues forcefully that there has been little progress in the quality of life indicators for African Americans stretching back to the 1980s and the presidency of Ronald Reagan. In fact, social indicators for African Americans since the 1980s have deteriorated, especially in regard to mass incarceration. Empirical data provides evidence of a collective disadvantage being socially identified as African American in the 21st century.²⁰ Therefore, it is somewhat misleading to see success in the limited tokenism found in the upper echelon of American society. Perhaps that is the problem; there are "signs of success" that leave the uncritical mind with the idea of progress in society. Or maybe it is a good thing to see racialized advancement, especially for young children. Yet how can limited tokens of individual success be good if it is only to act as a mirage? To be

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The current the way "racism" has been racist terminology, terms such social identity. Contemporary majority of sc tory of racism psyche of massacre of unarmed historical African. The killer was Roof was born those he perceived identity than day, and only planning an a that fateful day cause of white of the United blood of thousands centuries via segregation, a

Therefore, marry with the past discrimination violence, and and the era of there have been discussed earlier, not progress decade of the social identity, trically intertwined that it is African American is a major one

sure, tokenism can actually be detrimental to the longevity in social improvement toward racial parity. Basically, when all is considered, the fact that one's "race" and social identity are still massive impediments to attaining social upward mobility for communities of color speaks to the need for greater awareness on behalf of the cultural institutions that are designed to encourage human diversity and respect for humanity.

The current state of affairs does not provide much hope for improving the way "race" operates in discriminatory forms, because the word "racism" has been identified as a nasty word. With this comes a euphemistic racist terminology that obscures the reality of social inequality. For example, terms such as "ghetto" and "urban culture" refer to African American social identity, but it is not ordinarily deemed racist to refer to such terms. Contemporary racism is more subtle; this is an accepted fact among the majority of scholars who study "race" and racism. Yet the underlying history of racism cannot be forgotten or minimized because it still is in the psyche of many, and we can testify to this fact by the June 17, 2015, massacre of unarmed African American Bible study school attendees at the historical African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The killer was an avid white supremacist but only 21 years old. Dylann Roof was born in 1994, not 1894, and his hate runs deep into his psyche for those he perceives, African Americans, as from another "race" and social identity than his. There were 12 persons in the Bible study that sunny June day, and only 3 came out of that horror alive. It is said that Roof had been planning an assault on the African American community for months up to that fateful day. He was a young white man bent on meting out death in the cause of white supremacy. His social identity is wrapped up in the history of the United States. The history of hatred is well documented, and the blood of thousands, particularly persons of African heritage, has bled over centuries via a social identity that was scorched in the kiln of enslavement, segregation, and second-class citizenship.²¹

Therefore, contemporary notions of "race" and social identity need to marry with the historical context of African America. This connection of past discrimination is more often than not diluted, and the viciousness, violence, and vituperative nature of white supremacy during enslavement and the era of segregation endured for over 300 years. Since the 1960s there have been some significant gains that have led to the tokenism discussed earlier, yet in all realms of life the African American community is not progressing as it might have been expected as we approach the third decade of the 21st century. At the heart of this is the notion of "race" and social identity. How one confirms or denies one's African heritage is inextricably interwoven with the historical legacy of white supremacy. To suggest that it is no longer a viable entity in determining the life chances of African Americans is ludicrous. It is certainly not the only factor, but it is a major one, whether one is middle class or working class. There will

always be those individuals who will succeed in spite of racism and obstinate barriers to one's social success.

Every generation since the inception of the American republic has had heroines and heroes coming out of the African American experience. Phyllis Wheatley (1753–1784) provided the 18th century with its first acknowledged black poet; Maria Stewart (1803–1879) gave the 19th century a black female writer, speaker, and abolitionist; Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) was the foremost spokesperson who put white supremacy to shame; and W. E. B. Du Bois straddled both the 19th and 20th centuries providing the discipline of sociology with its first systemic urban study of black life. One could add hundreds of others who relate to the social identity of African Americans who defied the logic of white superiority. Yet the power lay firmly in the hands of the white majority throughout the centuries and up to the present day.

Key to the struggle of "race" and social identity within the context of African American and people of color communities is forging a positive psychological response to the stigma. Once a person attaches him or herself to the out-group, using sociological terminology, then it means a life of perpetual struggle. This is why it is so important to stand firm against fallacious notions of white superiority—because it is a lie, and a lie cannot last forever, as Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) would often cite in his speeches. If we consider the lie having sustained itself, regardless of the many decades of protest and legislation attempting to create a more egalitarian society, there must be something at play keeping it alive. Or is there something keeping down the black poor other than lack of material wealth? In short, there must be something operating in the cultural makeup of society to sustain the lie, because the tenacious manner in which it continues to strap successive generations into a cycle of deprivation has to be accepted as an unnatural yet stubbornly consistent occurrence in destroying black lives either directly or indirectly. If "race" and social identity amount to having a lesser quality of life and a lower life expectancy, then this is a national crisis that continues to be largely ignored by those with the power to enact sensible public policy to alleviate this reality.

Even with the stereotyping of those communities materially disadvantaged in the cities across the nation, the route out of such dire conditions is determined largely by privileged white policy makers. Asante and Hall in *Rooming in the Master's House* offer a link between past and present to explain the social identity of African Americans locked in a perpetual cycle of poverty:

Much like life on the antebellum plantations, the urban environment subjugated the African people by maintaining power and the control of wealth in white hands. Privileged white Americans could not bring themselves to even the most warranted compromise if it might

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mean extending any measure of power to the African community as that community tried to confront the challenges that stood to devastate them. Welfare became the plantation system that sustained African life in the cities. Whites controlled the conditions for obtaining welfare—the extent of and under what circumstances African Americans might qualify for such assistance. This paralleled directly with the southern plantation way of life, thus maintaining a consistency of oppression over time between then and now.²²

The above is a sobering analysis that cuts across centuries and provides a framework for assessing the reality of “race” and social identity when it comes to the African American experience. There is actually a well-defined association from past to present that clearly allows one to comprehend the visceral underpinning of racial domination in the United States. Too often contemporary African Americans (those who trace their heritage to the enslavement process, not the newly arrived Africans from the 1960s–present) are told to “forget the past,” as it has no relevance to today. This is an erroneous argument, because the past does impact the present, just as today will impact the future. Indeed, this perspective is akin to stating that there is no connection between decades of carbon emissions and global warming; it just does not make sense with the increasing scientific evidence pointing to the contrary. Therefore, it is useful to look back and gain historical knowledge in order to aid in establishing a better future. This does not mean that one remains rooted in the past; there is no value in that for forthcoming generations of African Americans.

GLOBAL REALITIES OF “RACE” BY 2020

It is estimated that by 2020 the population on planet Earth will be close to a staggering 8 billion. Consider this: back in 1960 at the height of the modern civil rights movement, the world population was at about 3 billion. The U.S. population was at about 182 million, and the current population is around 320 million. When we consider the massive population growth over the last 50 years in line with lack of progress with racialized relations, it does not bode well if we cannot forge greater compassion and understanding between peoples of different cultures *within* and *beyond* the United States. The interdependency of the world’s population is arguably greater now than at any other time in human history. There is a need to comprehend this fact more when thinking and writing about “race” and social identity in the 21st century.

Given the fact that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. forewarned of a crisis relating to social and economic disparities based on “race” and social identity, let us read his words again on the importance of human connectedness:

In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All men [and women] are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.²³

Dr. King was correct; the interdependency of humanity is now undeniable. The problem seems to be in convincing the many ignorant of this to come to the table of reconciliation. Until this happens, there will always be conflict over scarce resources. Yet this growing hatred in regard to "race" and one's social identity is problematic. There is a profound need to go beyond superfluous materialism to increase greater spirituality and interconnectedness between peoples.

According to social identity theory, social groups endeavor to reinforce their supposed particularity, but in terms of African Americans we can argue that there is both reinforcement and fragmented distinctiveness—a conundrum in terms.²⁴ In this sense there is no easy fit to one's "race" and social identity due to the diversity *within* any given group. Even those who consider themselves "white" have a real problem defining true distinctiveness if pushed analytically to do so. What white is it: Irish, German, Swedish, Icelandic, Polish, or some other "white" ethnic group? The absurdity of "race" is rather obvious when we break down this simple question: what is white? But on the social level we have been made to consider it a normative nomenclature for those persons with certain phenotypical features, with white skin being the key physical marker.

Considering the level of de facto racialized segregation that continues to manifest throughout the nation, there is little wonder that "race" and social identity form uniquely depending on the social group in question. The discussion herein has focused mainly on the African American experience, noting both the historical and contemporary continuity of struggle against the forces of racialized discrimination.

It has also been noted that many individuals survive and prosper in spite of the racism that can stymie one's life chances. Yet this should not be the situation that one encounters if all are citizens of North American society; it raises a moral question about when one individual has to put up with insults and setbacks while another is privileged. One should not fear for one's life while walking the streets or driving one's car because your skin happens to be brown or darker in shade. One should not die by a choke hold for selling loose cigarettes, for playing with a toy gun in a park as a black boy, or while looking at guns in a Walmart store. Yet these and other incidents between police and African Americans occur seemingly on a day-to-day basis. We have to come to terms with the realities of "race" and social identity in the era of President Obama: these are not good times,

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and the gains of yesterday's struggles are fast diminishing. We need to come to terms with mass incarceration and an unfair, biased, and unlawful criminal justice system.²⁵ We also need to come to terms with the growing income inequality that will only breed more fear, mistrust, and enmity toward racialized groups. Acknowledging Dr. King's call for a greater distribution of wealth is what is required. Julius Bailey has aptly suggested that "America may not need a revolution, but it does need an intervention."²⁶ The current income inequality is unsustainable and detrimental to all racialized groups and social identities.

Crucially, this chapter may well have opened up more avenues of discussion than provided solutions to the myriad realities of "race" and social identity. However, there is enough food for thought that can be gleaned by the reader with a compassionate heart and a discerning mind to realize that there is no place for continued racialized discrimination. Historically, there has been too much animosity, too much social inequality, and a distinct disregard for the betterment of all regarding to "race" matters. Without honest dialogue and firm commitment from educators, community activists, political leaders, law enforcers, the business community, and all religious leaders, we cannot anticipate progress to develop. Humanity needs to finally get its act together in regard to racializing discriminatory practices to comprehend fully the notion of interdependency and interrelated existence—or be doomed.

NOTES

1. I put the term "race" in quotations to emphasize the concept as problematic and not particularly useful in explaining human biology from a scientific point of view. In other words, in this chapter I prefer to acknowledge the concept of "race" as a historical, social, economic, and political concept that has been used differentially across the globe. Moreover, in terms of the North American region, "race" has been defined various ways from state to state since the mid-1600s. Therefore, it has no scientific validity other than superficial genetic difference, nothing that creates "human types" and massive difference.

2. Roberts (2011, chap. 1).

3. Hacker (1992, 252).

4. Coates (2015, 10).

5. *Ibid.*, 11.

6. Rothenberg (2012).

7. Christian (2012).

8. *Ibid.*

9. Emirbrayer and Desmond (2015, 208).

10. *Ibid.*, 203.

11. Du Bois (1994, 2).

12. Feagin (2014, 22) and Bailey (2016).

13. Asante and Hall (2011, 48).

14. Malcolm X (1970, 63–64).

15. West (2015, xiv).
16. Ibid.
17. Feagin (2014, 123–124).
18. Emirbrayer and Desmond (2015, 5).
19. Christian (2012) and Feagin (2014).
20. Tillotson (2011, 106).
21. Harding (1981) and Mullane (1993).
22. Asante and Hall (2011, 141).
23. King (1990, 70).
24. Du Bois (1994, 10).
25. Alexander (2012).
26. Bailey (2016, 167).

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Race

INTRODUC

Socialization of the American people is perceived as a process forced by federal laws and court decisions. Because of this, it has been so thoroughly anthropologized that humans, past and present, are "race." This construction of race. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court Association (A) reached a consensus yet temporary thinking. Although too late.

In the United States, conditions within