

“I’m Not a
Racist, But...”

The Moral Quandary
of Race



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Should We Try to Give Up Race?

If there are no races and if racial thinking has morally destructive consequences, should we not attempt to “give up race”? First, should we stop using racial words (“race,” “black,” “white,” “Caucasian,” “Asian,” and so on), and should governmental units such as schools, agencies, and the Census Bureau stop asking people their racial identity? Second, should we actually stop *thinking of* and *experiencing* people in racial terms? These are two quite distinct matters; it is hardly evident that giving up official racial categorizing would have the effect of substantially reducing racial thinking, given how pervasive it is and how significant racial categories are to the social experiences and standing of different racial groups. It is plausible to suppose that racial thinking would continue largely unabated, simply driven underground by a norm discouraging its expression.¹

Moral Benefits and Costs

Leaving aside for the moment how this daunting goal might be achieved, giving up racial thinking would involve important moral advances over our current situation. Without a racial frame, it would be much easier to see the internal diversity of racialized groups, and easier to see their mem-

bers as individuals. We can get some idea of what this would be like by considering how we generally think about our own racial group. We recognize all kinds of subgroup differences, and we are not prevented from seeing members of our own group as individuals. Admittedly, we might be blinded to others’ individuality by other group differences, such as economic or cultural ones. Getting rid of race is not the same as getting rid of all “group think.” Race, however, tends to be a stronger force than other groupings for suppressing internal diversity and individuality.

In addition to giving up the suspicion that whites are inherently superior to blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans, doing away with race would allow us to see common interests and experiences currently masked by race. Persons of different racial groups would more readily experience commonalities as workers, persons without adequate health care, parents who want good public schools for their children, and so on.² And jettisoning race would rid us of one of the strongest barriers to experiencing a sense of common humanity with those now thought of as “other.”

Yet jettisoning race in the two ways I’ve mentioned (racial language and racial thinking) would have important moral costs as well. Many would be misled into thinking that if there are no races, there can be no racism, no groups to be its target. But to be a target of racism requires only that a group is racialized, not that it is actually a race.

More fundamentally, race is part of our history and our current social arrangements. Groups defined by race are continuing targets of discrimination, inferiorizing, and stigmatizing. These groups, especially blacks, Native Americans, and some Latino/Hispanic groups, also live with accumulated deficits from even more horrendous injustices in the past. Whites possess a range of unearned advantages in virtually every major domain of social existence—education, jobs, health care, and political power; and often they harbor subtle assumptions that they are “all right” while other groups are defective in some way. If we give up race entirely, we abandon the ability to name these racial wrongs. We see this happening to some extent already. Whites have abandoned an earlier explicit consciousness of themselves as a racial group that needed to defend its privileges against threatening or inferior “others.” White privilege has become largely unacknowledged; and with the exception of widely deplored racist violence by extremist groups, race-based wrongs are frequently unseen and denied by whites. Color blindness has assumed the status of an almost absolute principle that further motivates whites to be blind to continuing racial discrimination and injustice.

Jettisoning racial language and thinking would render us no longer able even to talk or think about racism, racial injustice, racial insensitivity,

institutional racism, racial ignorance, and racial nonrecognition, and to make appropriate claims on the conscience of Americans.

How do we move ahead, then, in abandoning the false and destructive idea of race while retaining our ability to name and deplore racism and other racial wrongs? Distinguishing races from racialized groups is a necessary step to progress here, allowing us to do justice to both aims. In this chapter I will look at several aspects of the problem I have posed: the meaning of racial categories on the Census; Orlando Patterson's attempt to substitute ethnicity for race in order to do justice to the unreality of race; the defense of black racial identity, which attempts to preserve the ability to name racism and other racial wrongs and to retain a personally meaningful social identity; and the increasingly prevalent claiming of a mixed race identity, which has the potential to destabilize racial consciousness in general. Appreciating the difference between race and racialization, and at the same time attempting to do justice to the unreality of race and the reality of racism, may point us toward new ways of thinking and new forms of institutional practice.

How the Census Construes "Race"

Recognizing racial wrongs does not require acceding to the reality of race, but only to racialization.³ Melissa Nobles's historical account of the use of racial categories on the decennial census illustrates this point clearly.⁴ In contrast to many other nations, the United States has always "counted by race" on the Census; all the Censuses from 1790 until 1960 assumed the existence of races as real, biological divisions of the human species, though the specific understanding of what the term "race" meant changed significantly over that long stretch of history. Through 1930, science was fully implicated in the understanding of race assumed by the Census Bureau. Indeed, Nobles shows that the "mulatto" category from 1850 through 1920 (and "quadroon" and "octoroon," added in 1890) was initially placed on the Census explicitly to help racist scientists test their theories of racial purity, which implied that such categories of person were racially and reproductively defective and would die out with time.⁵ The presence of this category should in no way be viewed as some sort of recognition of "mixed-race" persons, in the current sense of that term.⁶

From 1930 through 1960, political and scientific developments left racial categories without their previously presumed intellectual foundation. Yet neither was the idea of race as biologically real explicitly aban-

doned. The most dramatic change in the purposes of, and the implied understanding of, racial categories came with the 1980 Census. With minority groups' and civil rights groups' input, and with a much greater sensitivity to racial designations as they were understood by individual citizens, the Census Bureau began to see the major purpose of such categories as the monitoring of discrimination to ensure compliance with civil rights and other antidiscrimination laws and, more generally, as providing relevant data for federal programs targeted to disadvantaged minority communities.⁷

These purposes no longer require a belief in races, either in the classic sense described in chapter 7 or in the more attenuated contemporary form of race thinking. For a group to be racially discriminated against, it does not have to be a race in any sense at all; it need only be a racialized group—a group generally treated and regarded as a race—or, even more minimally, a group that the individual discriminator regards as a race. But Nobles says that those who created the official Census categories of the current era "viewed races as natural human groupings, each with its own original geographic home."⁸ And in its continuing use of the general category "race" in an unexplained and unelaborated manner as the general rubric under which "white," "black," and "American Indian or Alaskan Native" are listed, the Census fails to distance itself from false racist understandings.⁹ Were the federal government to encourage a broad understanding that the purposes for which the Census is now explicitly used do not require a commitment to the existence of races in any form, but only to racialized groups,¹⁰ the legitimate discrimination-monitoring function of Census racial categories could be severed from any implication of racialism.¹¹

Substituting Ethnicity for Race

Orlando Patterson regards race as a false and pernicious idea, and argues that no meaningful distinction exists between ethnicity and what we think of as race. Patterson therefore proposes that we abandon all talk of race and substitute ethnicity where we formerly referred to racial groups.¹² We believe that racial differences rest on phenotypic differences while ethnicity is concerned with culture, Patterson says, but this distinction does not hold up. Jews, for example, were regarded as a racial group not only by Nazis but Europeans in general, yet in America they are now seen as an ethnic group. The distinction is arbitrary. Moreover, in England and

America both Jews and the Irish have been regarded as not white. Do we call prejudice against Jews racial or ethnic prejudice?

Moreover, Patterson asserts, "however similar people may look to outsiders, those who believe that there are differences tend to have very little difficulty identifying the believed-in different group and to see gross physical differences that outsiders find it hard to identify."¹³ So belief in phenotypic differences can not be used to differentiate race from ethnicity. At the same time, Patterson suggests, retaining racial language allows and encourages us to draw invidious distinctions between people.

Patterson's historical perspective does not, however, support his proposal. It is true that many southern and eastern European groups were not regarded unequivocally as "white" in the early part of this century (see chapter 6); nor were the Irish so regarded in the nineteenth century. Now, however, in the United States at least, these groups are seen as ethnic groups, defined by ancestry and culture; they are no longer racialized—seen as having distinct inherent natures and saliently marked by phenotype.

This argument presupposes that we can and do draw a distinction between race and ethnicity. A group *once* seen as racial (Poles and Jews, for example) can *come to be* seen as ethnic rather than racial. Blacks, Asians, and, to some extent, Latinos are still seen as racial, though they are seen as ethnic also. We could stop using words like "black," "white" and "Asian," and instead say "African American," "Caribbean American," "Polish American," "Korean American," and "Vietnamese American." But if we are to understand what the former groups' historical experience has been, and what their status in the nation is today, we must take account of their having been seen and treated as racial groups. Patterson asks, "Why is it not enough to be simply Jewish-American, Anglo-American, Irish-American, or, if one chooses, just plain American?"¹⁴ It may be "enough" for members of those groups, who may not wish to embrace the designation "white." But it is not enough if we want to understand their social and historical experience as groups racialized as "white."¹⁵

If we make clear that when we use "white," "black," and so on, we mean only racialized groups, we will further Patterson's laudable goal of undermining the legitimacy of race. To accomplish this while not rendering the social and historical experience of blacks, whites, and other groups invisible requires that we hold on to the distinction between an ethnic group and a racialized group. Doing so does not play into racist or racialist thinking. Patterson is right that representing a group as a race does imply unchangeable biologically based difference, which in turn invites hostility or inferiorization; seeing a group ethnically generally does not. But we

can not deracialize a racialized group simply by refusing to use racial language, or substituting ethnic language, when discussing it.

Racial and Racialized Identity

Many blacks feel a strong sense of racial solidarity or kinship with other blacks; black identity and the black community provide them a vital horizon of meaning. Of course they recognize other important sources of identity. But not only is race almost always present in the mix of identity features; it is often accorded a special and overriding place. William Cross articulates this primacy: "Many blacks . . . gain personal fulfillment and happiness from being Christians, lawyers, doctors, gamblers, police officers, gays, or believers in obscure cults. Such people cannot be said to have a black identity because their sense of personal well-being is anchored in something other than their blackness."¹⁶

Thus for many American blacks, questioning black identity and community would be taken as an attack on an important source of self-understanding and meaningfulness in their lives. Race is the one commonality that provides support, pride, and solidarity in the face of an often hostile, stigmatizing world.

Can there be racial identity without "race?" Isn't the honoring and preserving of black identity a reason not to jettison race? I do not think so. If there are no races, then any racial solidarity presuming them is without foundation. Based on a falsehood, it lends itself to the moral distortions described throughout this book. It encourages blacks to think they are more like each other, and more different from other groups, than they actually are. It encourages failure to recognize commonalities with individuals of other groups. It encourages stereotyping, even of one's own group. It encourages an unwarranted privileging of racial identity. On what basis does Cross say that in order to have an identity as "black" one must derive one's sense of well-being primarily from one's blackness? Why can't one be healthily, unashamedly, and responsibly "black" while making one's job, or work on behalf of refugees, or interracial family, for example, the center of meaning in one's life?

As suggested in chapter 8, a black consciousness can be based not on race but on racialized identity. This is no mere semantic trickery. Racialized identities are much less subject to the moral pitfalls just mentioned. Race assumes an inherent bond with every member of one's racial group. The bond supplied by racialization is of shared social and historical experience. But the experience of racialization is not the same across racial

groups. Not all blacks are treated the same, even if all are affected by being black. Not every black person is equally stigmatized, nor equally discriminated against. Gender, class, region, and other factors make for significant differences in racialized experience. Equally significant, there is no experience unique to one group; other racial groups experience racial discrimination and stigma as well. While there are differences of degree between groups, they are not necessarily greater than differences of degree within a given group.

Moreover, nonracial groups (women, the obese, the disabled, gays and lesbians) can be discriminated against or stigmatized also. Of course only blacks have undergone slavery, and that is a unique feature of their racialized experience. The significance of slave descent for the current situation of blacks, five or six generations later, is, however, much less clear. Each group has some elements of distinctive racialization—the experience of Native Americans is also unique among American ethn racial groups—but its overall experience contains elements shared, at least to some degree, with other ethn racial groups, and other types of groups as well.

Shared experience does not, to be sure, fix the appropriate limit of a racialized bond. Someone of a given racialized group can choose, and feel, a solidarity with fellow members whose experience is very different from his own. That solidarity can be put to political use, to rally other members of the racialized group to join in struggle against racial discrimination and injustice. Such a political and moral choice is, however, quite different from believing that mere racial membership itself insures an inherent tie to other members. Political solidarity does not require a belief in the reality of race, even though in fact some blacks do appear to regard criticism of race as an attack on the basis of racial solidarity. Not only is racialization sufficient for such solidarity, however, but its recognition supplies a more accurate understanding of the character of the racialized social order, encourages a stronger recognition of commonalities of experience and of political and moral commitments across “racial” lines, and, arguably, would in the long run be more politically effective in mitigating racism and racial injustice than would a belief in the reality of race.

The difference between race and racialization as a basis for identity is nicely illustrated in a 1996 *New York Times* article, “New Sense of Race Rises among Asian-Americans.”¹⁷ The article describes the reaction of diverse Asian American groups to discrimination against them as Asians, rather than as members of particular Asian ethnic groups. The discrimination causes the ethnic groups to identify more with one another than they had previously. This race-based unifying has served to overcome, at

least partly, historical tensions among some of the Asian American groups, especially Korean and Japanese.

In the article Peter Bersamin, a Filipino American psychologist, describes the experience of seeking a cottage rental in a complex with a “vacancy” sign, then having the owner close his doors to him. “That was my first experience with racial discrimination and the beginning of my awareness as being somebody other than white,” he says.¹⁸ The article’s author goes on to comment, “The psychologist has come to feel less part of a national or ethnic group and more part of a racial one.”¹⁹

Two quite different things might be going on for Mr. Bersamin (and the other Asian Americans discussed in the article). He might think that this experience of racial discrimination revealed something that had always been true, but that he had been unaware of—that he was a member of a particular nonwhite race, the Asian race. This would be similar to what W. E. B. Du Bois movingly describes in *Souls of Black Folk* when as a young boy in a mostly white school, a white female classmate rebuffs an innocent social overture. Du Bois realizes at that moment that he is black, of a different race than the other children and therefore “shut out from their world.”²⁰

But perhaps Bersamin means rather that he recognizes a commonality of racialized experience and social positioning with other Asian Americans that he had not recognized before—that they are all potential targets of race prejudice. Since there are no races, Mr. Bersamin can not have realized that he was a member of the Asian race.²¹ Racialization is all he need have recognized in order to appreciate the significance of the incident to his commonality with other Asian Americans. In that sense, Asian Americans similarly situated lose nothing if they fully eschew the idea that they constitute an actual racial group.

African American racial identity in the face of antiblack racism generally functions in quite a different manner. Black identity is generally experienced by African Americans as an identity they already possess, in distinctly racial form. Blacks do not generally regard what binds them together in a common plight to be *only* that they are all subject to stigmatization and discrimination.

Culture and Racialized Identities

Culture is an additional integral part of black identity, and, as Anthony Appiah says, there are many African American cultures—youth cultures, urban cultures, rural cultures, cultures related to distinctive African Amer-

ican religious practice, and so on.²² As we saw in chapter 5, the designation "black" has for a long time carried not only a racial but an ethnocultural meaning, and African American cultures are infused with racialized significance. Black Christianity, for instance, distinctively responded, in part through supporting and fashioning forms of resistance, to the experience of slavery and racial oppression. This is true as well of several distinctive black American musical forms—spirituals, gospel, blues, rap.

Asian American identity contrasts strikingly with African American. Indeed, Eric Liu says that "what's missing from Asian American culture is culture."²³ Liu says that there are distinctive Asian ethnicity-based cultural forms and practices—sushi, karaoke bars, taking one's shoes off in a Chinese home—but that these are not pan-Asian cultural forms, nor are they related to the ways that Asians have historically been racialized. The use of "Oriental," "Mongoloid," and "Asiatic" as racial terms for all Asians in the heyday of classic racial thought never had the effect of creating a widespread pan-Asian racial consciousness among the small numbers of Asian Americans prior to the large upsurge in Asian immigration in the past three decades.

For blacks, though, abandoning race might feel like giving up black culture as a distinctive expression of black identity. But I think this is not so. Black cultural forms arose partly in response to the experience of racialization, not from a racial essence inherent in all black people. Abandoning race would, perhaps, affect the way some black Americans think about their relation to their cultures. It might, for example, weaken a sense of *exclusive possession* of them. Having arisen from the distinctive experiences of racialized groups, cultural forms can be appropriated and developed by those of other racialized groups. Whites, Latinos, and Asians can learn to sing gospel, and perform and develop jazz and hip-hop. This is all to the good. Cultural forms are different ways of expressing the human spirit and should be seen as contributions to the inheritance of humanity, not the possession of a single group. All can be enriched by the expressive variety of cultural groups, as well as by the hybrid directions that outgroup members can develop.

At the same time, to say that cultural products can not be the exclusive possession of their original creators is not to deny that appropriations of those products by a group other than their original creators can be justly criticized on both moral and aesthetic grounds. African Americans sometimes assert such proprietary interest because of a history of exploitation and nonrecognition. An especially egregious example is the white music producers, promoters, and singers who have appropriated black music, rendered it acceptable to a mass white teen audience, and reaped the

profits, leaving the black originators uncompensated and unrecognized.²⁴ It is wrong not to acknowledge the provenance and pay homage to the creators of any form of cultural endeavor, and wrong to use one's greater wealth and cultural power to exploit it. But the solution is not to racialize culture and turn it into the exclusive possession of the group that originated it.

Asserting too tight a link between race and culture by protecting a group's cultural borders from "racial interlopers" also has an unnecessarily constricting impact on members of that group themselves. For it discourages them from attempting to cross boundaries in the other direction and become proficient partakers and developers of the music, art, and lifestyles of other cultural groups. An African-American should be able to love Irish music unashamedly and without any sense either that he does not belong, or that he has somehow abandoned his racial blackness by doing so. Shifting one's self-understanding from a racial to a racialized one is of course no guarantee against inappropriate cultural possessiveness or exclusiveness, but by abandoning racialism's sense of inherent connection between culture and racial identity, one rejects a principal source of narrow racial ways of thinking.

Recognizing the ethnocultural dimension of a racialized black American identity would go a long way toward preserving what is valuable in maintaining black identity.

At this point in American history, Asian-Americans and Latinos and Hispanics have a very weak sense of being distinct racial groups. Many do appreciate that they have been racialized, but do not confuse this with being an actual race. For many, a panethnic consciousness has emerged as a personally important identity. But, again, panethnicity is not the same as race. For large numbers in both groups, their ethnic identity, as Korean American, Cambodian American, Mexican American, or Dominican American, is much more important than a panethnic or racialized, much less racial, consciousness. Native Americans have been deeply racialized in American history, and no doubt possess some degree of racial consciousness as well as intensifying pan-Indian consciousness, especially in the years since the founding of the American Indian Movement in the late 1960s. Nevertheless, specific tribal identities and loyalties constitute a buffer to the form of racial consciousness developed by African Americans.

Many whites would also find the jettisoning of race for racialization difficult, though they might *think* they would be relieved by it. The specialness and superiority of whiteness is deeply embedded in American politics and culture. The idea that whiteness is not real, that it is in a sense not anything, that it was constructed to rationalize undeserved status, might

be emotionally difficult to accept. Ultimately, however, the enhanced ability to live in equality with those of other racial groups would be a moral gain for whites; and this would be facilitated by recognizing their own racialization.

Multiracial Identities

The unashamed and even proud claiming of biracial, mixed-race, or multiracial identity is a genuinely new phenomenon. Although "mulattos" were recognized in former eras, including on the federal Census, that designation belongs to a period when such persons were generally regarded as defectives, even biologically.²⁵ Biracial and multiracial persons by their very existence pose a challenge to racial thinking; but the extent to which that challenge will translate into the actual destabilizing of racial thinking depends in part on how this group of persons position themselves in relation to existing racial groups, communities, and categories.

Interracial couples and biracial children are a small but growing portion of the population. The latter represented 3.4 percent of births in 1989, but their rate of growth since the early 1970s is 260 percent compared to 15 percent for monoracial persons.²⁶ Two percent of Americans identified themselves as having more than one "race" on the 2000 Census.²⁷ From 1970 to 1996 the number of black-white married couples has more than quintupled, to 337,000.²⁸ Several national organizations have formed to represent the interests and increase the visibility of multiracial people. Their visibility was greatly enhanced by their attempt to persuade the Census Bureau to seriously consider (although it ultimately rejected) including a "multiracial" category, in addition to the standard racial choices, on the 2000 Census.

What is the significance of these developments for the future of racial consciousness in the U.S.? Let us focus on the "biracial" designation first. Generally, this category comprises offspring of persons who are members of two distinct racial classifications—"Asian" and "black," "black" and "white," and so forth. On one level the biracial marriage and the biracial child constitute a triumph over racialism and racism. By loving one another, the partners have prevailed over the sense of radical difference created by racial thinking; the biracial child single-handedly refutes the idea that group difference is a species-like division. (A biracial adoptive family, in which both parents are of a different racial group than the child, poses a similar, though slightly weaker, challenge to race.) Biracials blur the boundaries between racial groups, thereby challenging the idea that every individual can be slotted into one and only one race.

Nevertheless, in some respects these challenges to racialism are limited. Biraciality still implies that each parent does indeed "have a race." The biracial child may not want to confine herself to a single racial identity, because doing so constitutes a denial of one of her parents' racial identity (often expressed, somewhat misleadingly, except in the case of blacks, as a "heritage"). Such a biracial child has two races, not one; but she still "has race," and her parents each have one, in the traditional sense.

The idea of mixed-race or multiracial is less beholden to standard racial classification. It is not tied to the racial identity of a particular parent or even a distinct familial ancestor but only to the individual's having biological ancestry of more than one racial group.²⁹ In this sense most African Americans are multiracial, including those whose ancestors for several generations back identified themselves as "black." Generally, multiracial (as distinct from biracial) identity is not claimed as a way of honoring a particular ancestor. For Latinos and Hispanics, mixed-race identity is a component of ethnoracial or national identity (see chapter 7.) Multiraciality does not presuppose, hence legitimize, any specific ancestor's racial identity.

Nevertheless, multiraciality does require some conception of traditional races as the contributing elements to the mix. Of course a person with a mixed-race identity could view them as racialized groups, and so could the biracial individual. But saying that "I fall into a category distinct from traditional races by being a combination of those races" is much less challenging to the idea of race than saying, "As a person whose biological ancestry includes a mixture of what have been called 'races,' I reject the idea of race entirely. My identity lies entirely outside your racial classification system."

Some biracial or multiracial persons desire acceptance in each of the traditionally defined racial groups to which they claim a connection.³⁰ They want to be able to be part of, say, the black community, and also the white community.³¹ Actually securing such acceptance would challenge racial thinking, especially with regard to black-white mixes. Whites would have to accept as one of their own someone who is seen as "black" and such acceptance would be especially threatening to their idea of race because white racial identity has always required a purity, reflected in the one-drop rule, that denies whiteness to anyone with any fraction of non-whiteness, especially blackness. By contrast, blacks have always accepted mixed-race persons as part of the black community; someone who wishes to sustain an allegiance to a white community as well as a black one, however, poses more of a challenge to standard conceptions of black communal identity. People's claiming of multiple race-based communities would destabilize racial thinking no matter what groups are involved. At the

same time, with the exception of whites mentioned above, multiracial persons seeking acceptance in multiple communities do not explicitly challenge the idea of race or the self-understanding of race-based communities. Indeed, they accept the traditional racial communities as they now exist, asking only that they not be confined to one of them.

On the other hand, some multiracial persons seek an identity *distinct* from traditional racial groups, in a new community of "multiracials."³² Such an identity is less directly parasitic on standard racial classifications than the form involving attachment to traditional racial groups.

The attempt by organizations representing elements of the multiracial community to gain recognition on the 2000 Census reveals how the form of public recognition sought by multiracial and biracial people affects the challenge to traditional racial classifications and racial thinking.³³ These organizations have sought a distinct category of "multiracial," to appear alongside "white," "black," and the others. But despite its being separate from the array of categories currently understood as racial, "multiracial" would seem to derive its meaning and legitimacy from its position in the already existing racial pantheon; it would seem like a quasi-racial category of its own.³⁴ The proposal ultimately adopted in 2000 for the first time by the Census Bureau—to allow "check all that apply" as an option—avoids this ironic quasi-validation of the racial classification system. It does, however, render multiracial persons less visible as a group than does the multiracial organizations' proposal.³⁵ In addition (like the "multiracial" category), in a certain way "check all that apply" accepts standard racial categories in their own right, challenging only the idea that all persons must be slotted into one and only one of them. But, again, this formal acceptance is perfectly consistent with viewing such categories as naming racialized rather than racial groups.

If multiracial persons were to use their identity as a direct challenge to the idea of race, they would be likely to have a more destabilizing impact on racial thinking than would their mere presence. Cynthia Nakashima notes that one impetus within the multiracial movement is "to dismantle dominant racial ideology and group boundaries and to create connections across communities into a community of humanity."³⁶ But the multiracial community is very diverse, not only in its racial composition but in individual desires for distinct forms of recognition and acknowledgment. Though it is, in one sense, well placed to lodge assaults on the idea of race, it is not particularly right or fair to expect it to do so.

Whatever impact multiracial persons and the multiracial movement have on destabilizing the idea of race, we should not confuse that benefit with the potential impact on racial injustice. Because race as an ideology

arose as a rationale for oppression, undermining race has been confused with undermining racial inequality. Even without this direct confusion, the public interest in racial matters could simply shift from racism and racial injustice to multiracial people, their identities, communities, families, and the like.³⁷ The latter topics are safer for whites; they don't challenge white privilege.

A desire to keep the racial justice purposes of classification clearly in view underlay the Census Bureau's decision not to include a "multiracial" category on the 2000 Census. Although we have seen that the Bureau is not entirely clear where it stands on the question of whether races exist, its major purpose in collecting race-based data is to monitor racial discrimination and target programs to racially disadvantaged communities. This purpose requires knowing an individual's public racial identity—that is, her racialized identity.³⁸ It is mostly on the basis of how she is seen in society, not how she sees herself, that she is discriminated against, stigmatized, or inherits a history of racial advantage or disadvantage. This racialized identity can be at odds with an individual's own identity preference, and the Bureau chose to privilege the needs of racial justice over those of individual identity expression and recognition.

In rejecting the "multiracial" category, the Census Bureau (and civil rights groups that pressed for this position) reasoned that if the category were offered as an alternative to "black", many blacks, a significant percentage of whom have European racial ancestry might prefer it.³⁹ They might do so because they feel the "multiracial" designation better expresses their personal sense of identity, or because they feel that "black" is a more stigmatized identity in the United States than "multiracial."⁴⁰ But such persons would often face the same discrimination as those who identified themselves as "black" and for the same reason—they would still be seen as black. The purposes of collecting racial data, and the cause of racial justice, would be adversely affected.

Achieving Racial Equality and Harmony and Abandoning Race

Although racial justice is an urgent goal, ridding ourselves of false and divisive racial thinking—abandoning race—is a worthy aim in its own right. At first glance these two aims seem at odds, since we require racial categories in order to keep in view the way that racialization has affected life chances. Yet doing so would seem to reinforce rather than weaken a consciousness of race.

In the larger scheme of things, however, the achievement of racial jus-

tice itself weakens racial consciousness. Racial consciousness thrives on social, economic, political, educational, and civic inequality, and on the social, residential, and occupational segregation that is both a cause and a consequence of that inequality. The tendency to think that those lower on the social and economic scale are in *some* way inherently inferior is very difficult to resist, even if the weight of science undermines any foundation for such belief. And social separation feeds the idea that "those people" are fundamentally different from oneself. Social intercourse among racial groups on a basis of equality and in a spirit of comity would do more to undermine a lived sense of those groups as races than would the increasing presence of multiracial people or scientific arguments about the unreality of race.

In the real world, ridding ourselves of the myth of race can not be severed from the politically more challenging task of changing the structural relationships among racial groups. Closely linked in practice to the goal of equality, but worth articulating as a distinct value, is the virtually forsaken nonassimilationist goal of harmony between the "races" associated with integrationism, which continues to play a role (albeit minor) in the moral cachet of the idea of color blindness. In all domains of life, from friendship and family life to work life and civic engagement, persons of different racial groups must learn a sense of kinship and connection. As equality counters the hierarchical dimension of race, harmony counters the vertical, the "othering." As the nation becomes increasingly multiracial and multi-ethnic, the twin goals of racial equality and racial harmony become increasingly urgent while increasingly complex. Were they to be achieved, however, "race" as we know it would virtually disappear, and scientific and philosophical arguments concerning the unreality of race could be integrated into everyday thought and life.



Notes

Chapter 1. "Racism": Its Core Meaning

1. David Duke, before he shed his formal ties to the Klan in order to become a politician, was criticized by a fellow Klansman for "conduct unbecoming a racist." See James Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face. The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Nazi Skinheads, and the Rise of a New White Culture* (New York, 1990), 146.
2. Bernard Weinraub, "Stung by Criticism of Fall Shows, TV Networks Add Minority Roles," *New York Times*, Sept. 20, 1999, A1, A14.
3. "Black and White in Baltimore," *Indianapolis Star-News*, Aug. 23, 1999 (article ID no. 1999235133, on www.Indystar.com).
4. David K. Shieler, *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America* (New York, 1997), 92.
5. Kathleen Ostrander, "Milton Board Decides to Retire Indian Logo, Name," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (on line), July 20, 1999.
6. In chapter 7 I will argue that there are no races in the sense in which "race" is generally understood in popular discourse, so that it is misleading to say that someone "is of a certain race." It is more accurate to say that she has, or has been assigned, a racial designation, or that she is a member of a racial group; I will generally use the latter expression.
7. James Nuechterlein, *First Things, Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 6, 1996, B9.
8. *Time*, Dec. 5, 1994, cited in *Extra!* 9, no. 2 (March/April 1996):18.
9. Robert Miles, *Racism* (London, 1989), 41-68.
10. "Police Probe Sees No Racism in Noose Prank," *Boston Globe*, May 5, 1999.
11. *Boston Globe*, Apr. 29, 1999, B1.
12. "Identifying the Face of the Enemy," *The Plain Dealer*, July 13, 1999.
13. See note 2. It was the newspaper article, rather than the NAACP itself, that framed the issue as one of racism. Kweisi Mfume, the president of the NAACP, said only that the programming was "a virtual whitewash."

35. Rainier Spencer decries this familiar move undertaken in the name of social construction: "In an effort to distance the acceptance of race from biologicistic notions, race is recast as a social construction, suggesting—wrongly—that as such it is independent of and not informed by an underlying belief in biological race. This appears to give race a legitimacy. The false consciousness should not be referred to as a 'social reality.'" Spencer, *Spurious Issues*, 39. Orlando Patterson sees a similar pattern in certain contemporary writing about race: "Having demolished and condemned as racist the idea that observed group differences have any objective, biological foundation, the liberal intellectual community has revived the 'race' concept as an essential category of human experience with as much ontological validity as the discarded racist notion of biologically distinct groups." Patterson, *The Ordeal of Integration: Progress and Resentment in America's "Racial" Crisis* (Washington, D.C., 1997), 72.

36. *Boys on the Side*. Dir. Herbert Ross. Alcor Films, 1995.

37. I draw the idea of scalarity from Anthony Skillen, "Racism: Flew's Three Concepts of Racism," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (1993): 78.

38. Donna Reed, Robert Redford, Barbara Streisand, and the film *The Way We Were* (dir. Sydney Pollack. Columbia Pictures, 1973) are all used as "white" cultural markers in relation to Robin.

39. Harlon Dalton, discussing the issue of scalar race in relation to culture and identity, writes: "What really matters is not whether a black person talks, acts, or performs White, but whether it appears that she would prefer to be White." *Racial Healing*, 89.

40. Stephen Carter, "The Black Table, the Empty Seat, and the Tie," in Early, *Lure and Loathing*.

41. To be more precise, Carter is distrustful of setting standards for how one manifests attachment to or love for black people; but he does not really raise the question whether "love for black people" is an appropriate norm for black persons. Anthony Appiah is more clearly concerned with the ways constricting standards can get built into what it means to be "black." Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, and Survival," and "Race, Culture, Identity."

42. In his study of ethnoracial groups at the University of California at Berkeley, Troy Duster reports that "Native American students express the highest levels of internal tension and conflict between the demands of assimilation and accommodation to new cultural and social skills required for success in the university setting and maintaining the integrity of their cultural roots and connections." Duster, *Diversity Project*, 19.

Chapter 9. Should We Try to Give Up Race?

1. Glenn Loury makes this point well: "Many proponents of color-blindness as the primary moral ideal come close to equating the use of racial information in administrative practices with the continued awareness of racial identity in the broad society . . . The implicit assumption of color-blind advocates is that, if we would just stop putting people into these boxes, they would oblige us by not thinking of themselves in these terms. But, this assumption is patently false." Loury, *Shape of the River*, xxviii.

2. There is evidence that white workers are especially harmed by not recognizing their commonality of interest with minority, especially black, workers. One study found that 59 percent of blacks, compared to 28 percent of nonblacks, would vote for a union if given a chance. Cited in Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Unionization as a Civil Right," *American Prospect*, Sept. 11, 2000, 14. Gerald Torres and Lani Guinier plausibly argue that racial minority workers are often the most militant and the least prone to buy into ruling elites' mystifications of their interests; and that white workers can and do benefit from following the lead of such workers. *The Miner's Canary* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002).

3. I am grateful to Melissa Nobles for assistance with this section.

4. Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*.

5. "Mulatto" was understood as someone with approximately half "black African" ancestry and half white; "quadroon" one-fourth black; and "octoroon" one-eighth black.

6. "The mulatto category was a qualifier of the 'negro' category, not a wholly independent category." Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*, 82. The elimination of the "mulatto" category from the 1930 Census signaled the ascendancy of the "one-drop" rule. See further discussion below.

7. The designing of racial categories for the Census from 1980 on has an interesting history, recounted in Nobles. The categories were the product of a committee representing a range of federal agencies concerned with collecting racial and ethnic data. The basic structure of categories for all federal agencies was laid out in the so-called Directive No. 15 of the Office of Management and Budget in 1977. This document has remained the basis of Census categorization; but the input of different ethnic and racial groups, often directly sought by the federal government, which has appointed Asian Pacific, black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Alaskan Native advisory committees, has resulted in some changes in the 1990 and 2000 censuses.

8. Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*, 80.

9. In contrast to the others, the "Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian" category is not accorded a panethnic designation on the census; instead, ethnic subdivisions of that category are listed—Chinese, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Vietnamese, and so on—as discussed in the previous chapter.

10. Nobles points out that civil rights groups did not themselves explicitly take up the matter of "race" itself, but were concerned only with attacking racial discrimination. Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*, 75–77. Challenging discrimination and its moral foundation without challenging the full notion of "race" is one reason racial identity remains regarded as largely unproblematic by many American blacks. See chaps 5 and 6.

11. In its preamble, the OMB Directive no. 15 takes a baby step in the direction of rejecting racialism: "These classifications should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature." The directive does not give any instruction as to a clear alternative way of thinking about the meaning of these categories (e.g., as referring to racialized groups); nor does it suggest what might be the consequences of jettisoning a scientific or anthropological understanding of them.

12. Patterson makes this argument in *Ordeal of Integration*, 72–77. He also offered the proposal specifically in relation to the then upcoming decennial Census in "The Race Trap," *New York Times* (date unknown, but almost certainly 1996 or 1997, as those were the years of public debate about categories to appear on the 2000 Census). The same proposal was made by the American Anthropological Association, and was also made in the 1950 UNESCO statement on race, written by a distinguished group of scientists that was dominated by anthropologists: "Because serious errors . . . are habitually committed when the term 'race' is used in popular parlance, it would be better when speaking of human races to drop the term 'race' altogether and speak of ethnic groups." Montagu, *Statement on Race*, 13.

13. Patterson, *Ordeal of Integration*, 74.

14. *Ibid.*, 76.

15. In his thoughtful account of contemporary usage of "racism" as a category of historical analysis, the historian George Fredrickson analyzes it as a form of assertion of ethnic group status based on ancestry. "Understanding Racism: Reflections of a Comparative Historian," in Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination* (Berkeley Calif., 1999), esp. 84–86. One virtue Fredrickson sees in this analysis is his claim (drawn from Donald Horowitz) that "designation of people by skin color and the mistreatment of them on that basis has no special features that would distinguish it in any definitive way from group domination based on religion, culture, or the simple belief that some people have defective ancestry" (84). See Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, Calif., 1985), esp. 64–83. Fredrickson's purposes are analytical rather than normative, and his account of racism may well possess some virtues for those purposes. But the statement quoted above does not seem true. As

a comparison of Irish and black Americans suggests, race is not the same as ethnicity, even if both involve some tie to ancestry. Nor is race equivalent to “designation of people by skin color.” The ancient Greeks designated people by skin color but lacked a notion of race. Race is not simply seeing skin color as conferring a social identity. It brings the full baggage of implication of unequal worth, inherent mental and psychological characteristics, and moral division. In addition, “ethnicity” really means one thing in the United States—where it is explicitly contrasted with “race”—and another in other parts of the world. Serbs and Croats, Tutsis and Hutus exemplify a form of what amounts to “racialized ethnicity” in which the groups are thought of as having something like different natures and are experienced as radically “other” in the manner characteristic of race. (This kind of ethnicity is akin to the early twentieth-century view of southern and eastern European immigrants that Patterson mentions, and, in that regard, also more akin to the European strand of nineteenth-century racial thought discussed in chapter 6). Horowitz’s work mostly concerns ethnic groups in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, so his notion of ethnicity is closer to this racialized form than to the American version. Regarding the United States, Frederickson and Horowitz’s view overlooks the fact that ethnicity is, in large measure, a less morally troubling form of distinction among persons than race.

16. Cross, “Oppositional Identity,” 198.
17. Norimitsu Onishi, “New Sense of Race Arises among Asian-Americans,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1996, A1, B6.
18. *Ibid.*, B6.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 38.
21. This is true as well of Du Bois, though when he wrote *Souls* he still believed in races in the classic sense. He abandoned this belief in the early decades of the twentieth-century.
22. Appiah, “Race, Culture, Identity,” 89–90.
23. Liu, *Accidental Asian*, 79.
24. On the exploitation of black music particularly in the 1950s, see Reebee Garofalo, *Rockin’ Out: Popular Music in the USA* (Boston, 1997).
25. Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*, 35–69. See also note 6. But opposition to interracial marriage and a view of biracial persons as defective have by no means disappeared from American life. In 1994 a school principal in Alabama forbade racially mixed couples from attending the prom, and told a mixed-race student who protested the policy that the rule was aimed at preventing “mistakes” like her. Carlos A. Fernández, “Government Classification of Multiracial/Multiethnic People,” in *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*, ed. Maria P. P. Root (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 1996), 32–33.
26. Maria P. P. Root, “The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as a Significant Frontier in Race Relations,” in *Multiracial Experience*, xv.
27. Eric Schmitt, “For 7 Million People, One Race Category Isn’t Enough,” *The New York Times on the Web*, Mar. 13, 2001, <http://nytimes.gpass.com/gpass-archives>.
28. Shipler, *Country of Strangers*, 117.
29. As of 1997, the few states that had defined “multiracial” for the purposes of state record-keeping had defined it as “biracial.” California, however, defines a “multiracial” person as “an individual whose biological parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents are of more than one race.” Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*, 139. This definition is a step toward the idea of thinking of oneself as possessing a mix of racial ancestry without tying that mix to specific persons in that ancestry; this is what I mean by “multiracial.” Maria Root suggests that “biracial” itself can be employed with a similar connotation, “when . . . there is racial mixing in the family history that is important to the individual.” “Glossary,” in Root, *Multiracial Experience*, ix.
30. Cynthia Nakashima, “Voices from the Movement: Approaches to Multiraciality,” in Root, *Multiracial Experience*, 82.
31. Among those claiming dual or multiple racial communities, some may wish the com-

munity to accept them *as multiracial* (as well as “black,” “white,” or “Latino”). Others may be indifferent to this sort of acknowledgment, or even prefer to be thought of as “just like everyone else” in the group.

32. Nakashima, “Voices from the Movement,” 81. Since each racial group has a distinct identity and faces distinct racial issues, some multiracial or biracial people seek community only with those of the same “mix” as themselves, not with all other multiracials.

33. The two major organizations are “Project RACE” (“Reclassify All Children Equally”), and the Association for Multiethnic Americans (AMEA). The former’s mission is to advocate for a multiracial classification on all official forms asking for racial data. The latter’s is to promote a positive awareness of interracial and multi-ethnic identity; this group was supportive of the Census Bureau’s ultimate decision to allow respondents to check “all that apply” without providing a distinct “multiracial” category, while Project RACE was not. See discussion of the philosophies and political initiatives regarding identity recognition and the Census in Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*, 130–45.

34. Joel Perlmann points out that the separate category “multiracial” conveys no new information about an individual who provides “her component races” but “it sends the message that somehow something more is being communicated, that multiraciality is somehow equivalent to a new racial status.” “Reflecting the Changing Face of America: Multiracials, Racial Classification, and American Inter-marriage,” in *Black-White Inter-marriage in American History, Literature, and Law*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York, 2000), 516.

35. The methods by which the Census is tabulated also affect the visibility of multiracials. The Census Bureau could simply report the number of all persons who availed themselves of more than one racial designation in the “check all that apply” option. Or they could report how many persons checked each category, thus in a sense double-counting multiracial individuals but not tabulating them as a distinct group. Or, somewhat against the spirit of the new option but in line with the concern to monitor civil rights compliance and to gain an accurate count of racial minorities who might be the target of discrimination or who are entitled to various programs (as a proportion of the actual population), multiracials who are partly white could be counted only in their nonwhite category. These options are not mutually exclusive; different tabulations could be used for different purposes. For a discussion of tabulation options, see Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship*, 164–69. As of this writing (May 2001), the Bureau had begun to avail itself of some of these options. See Schmitt, “For 7 Million.”

36. Nakashima, “Voices from the Movement,” 81. Naomi Zack, a mixed-race philosopher, articulates such a humanistic, antirace position, though one that could be adopted by monoracial as well as multiracial people: “The concept of race is an oppressive cultural invention and convention, and I refuse to have anything to do with it. . . . Therefore I have no racial affiliation and will accept no racial designations.” “An Autobiographical View of Mixed-Race Deracination,” *American Philosophical Association Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* 91, no. 1 (spring 1992): 6–10. Cited in Nakashima, *Voices from the Movement*, 89.

37. The *Newsweek* issue discussed in note 25, chap. 8, partakes to some degree in both these developments—a shift in interest from racism to multiracial people, and a conflating of questioning race with undermining racial injustice.

38. Although how the individual is viewed racially by others is the primary desideratum, the Census no longer gathers such information by having its own enumerators identify a subject’s race. Since 1970 the Census has operated only by self-designation. If the Census allows only the standard racial designations as options, however, it probably presumes that, on the whole, self-designation corresponds to the way the individual is viewed by the wider society. Only if “multiracial” is offered as an option might these two views begin to diverge in significant numbers.

39. Regarding the possible tension between civil rights and individual identity recognition, it is worth noting that Republicans tended to support the addition of a “multiracial” category (through the “Tiger Woods” bill, introduced in 1997), whereas the Democrats opposed it. Nobles comments: “Republicans were attracted to the idea that ‘multiracial’ fur-

ther complicated the country's already complex and highly charged racial politics. Democrats, in contrast, dared not risk alienating their key constituencies, and they remained committed, on some level, to monitoring civil rights violations and enforcing of civil rights legislation." *Shades of Citizenship*, 141

40. It is worthy of note, however, that at least some mixed-race persons opted for only "black" and not also "white" on the 2000 Census, with its instruction to "check all that apply." "Many people, indeed most, who could claim more than one race are not expected to do so, demographers and census officials say." Diana Jean Schemo, "Despite Options on Census Many to Check 'Black' Only," *New York Times*, Feb. 12, 2000, A1, A9.

I have been able only to skim the surface of the many complex issues regarding mixed-race identity and its significance for race, racial injustice and racism, and harmony among racial groups. These issues are explored in a burgeoning literature, sometimes in the form of collections of personal testimonies of those claiming mixed-race or biracial identity. For some representative examples, see Maria P. P. Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America* (Newbury Park, Calif., 1992); Root *The Multiracial Experience*, Naomi Zack, *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity* (Lanham, Md., 1995); Lisa Funderburg (ed.), *Black White Other: Biracial Americans Talk about Race and Identity* (New York, 1994); and Sollors *Black-White Intermarriage*.