THE PHILOSOPHICAL FORUM
Volume XXXII, No. 2, Summer 2001

PHILOSOPHY AND INTERRACIAL DIALOGUE

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That race has been an important factor in the life chances of people in North America is plain. In the past the dominant racial groups in Canada and the United States systematically controlled the important social institutions to the disadvantage of racial minorities. This is evident from the direct or indirect roles that colonization, slavery, racial segregation, selective protection of the law, selective employment, selective educational opportunities, selective political opportunities, and the like played in the history of North America. Such marginalizing practices were widely supported, sometimes even by unions, women's groups, or supreme courts that helped the otherwise disadvantaged.[1] As well, the dominant racial groups controlled the historical, cultural, and national narratives to the disadvantage of racial minorities. From the perspective of the dominant race, racial privilege and marginalization were either accepted as brute facts or rationalized by ideologies that construed racial minorities as diminished forms of humanity on grounds of their biology or culture. Such social norms provided a racialized context in which dominant narratives ascribed possibilities, capabilities, and degrees of moral worth on the basis of race. As a matter of historical fact, despite living under constitutions derived from universal, egalitarian principles taken to be self-evident truths, the life chances of members of racial minorities were diminished by interlocking barriers of discrimination systematically formed by the dominant racial group. At the same time, members of the dominant racial group were privileged to varying degrees because they did not face the discriminatory barriers faced by members of racial minorities and because group advantages accumulate over generations and automatically advantage their new members. On account of their different experiences, the privileged racial groups and the marginalized racial groups in Canada and the United States developed conflicting perspectives on the workings and fairness of the nations in which they now struggle to live under shared citizenship.

As James M. Jones illustrates by appeal to white Americans and black Americans, radically conflicting conceptions of society, one reflecting the perspective of the historically privileged racial group, the other reflecting the perspective of the historically marginalized racial groups, are solidly in place and strongly affect how their proponents empirically and normatively interpret the same events: "Whites are most strongly biased toward their own experiences, values, beliefs, and the products of their culture. Blacks, who have so often been victimized by those very beliefs and cultural outcroppings, mistrust them and ultimately dislike them."[2] This pattern was recently exemplified and reinforced by the reactions of whites and blacks to the O. J. Simpson trial.[3] Because the perspectives of racially privileged and racially marginalized groups on empirical and normative issues are incompatible, exchanges between members of these two groups are mediated by conflicting perspectives that limit mutual understanding.

For a multitude of reasons, including moral ones, Canada and the United States have attempted to redefine themselves by turning their backs on their historical pasts and former national narratives.[4] Their current self-proclaimed national agendas are to become cohesive, multiracial nations, where individuals are recognized as moral equals and extended the same opportunities regardless of their race. To this end, interdisciplinary discussions have centered around group-specific, proactive social policies to restructure Canada and the United States in ways that would enable the realization of their egalitarian ideals. But because the racially privileged and the racially marginalized have different perspectives on the workings of their nations, they also have different perspectives on the necessity, value, and rationale for proactive restructuring. Consequently, there is an inherent danger that interracial discussions of social justice concerning race will be at cross-purposes and that they will exemplify and deepen the racial issues they were meant to address.[5] What Jones said of America in this regard is no less true of Canada: "Each of us is sheltered from the experiences of others by emotional rhetoric, selective reporting of the media, and growing urban sprawl. We cannot know for sure what others feel, why or if they hate, whether or not there exists a chance for humane interaction. Laws, plans, policies and programs come churning out of state houses and federal buildings at a rapid clip, but the problems do not get simpler—they become more complex."[6] One could agree that social equality is desirable as an end in itself, that group-specific, proactive steps to change the structure of society are necessary to promote equality, and that social equality is necessary for social unity, but nevertheless argue that since none of the above can be achieved unilaterally, we have a practical and moral imperative to find principles that could enable racial groups to disentangle their conflicting perspectives.

The most important conflicts between the perspectives of racial privilege and racial marginalization concern the existence and nature of racism in

contemporary society. Although the perspective of racial privilege acknowledges the blatant and systematic racist barriers of the past, it maintains that racism is largely a thing of the past because of the antiracist measures taken since then. From the perspective of racial privilege, the contemporary problem of racism consists primarily in the irrational actions of individual hate-mongers who violate society's creed of universal egalitarianism. On the other hand, although the perspective of racial marginalization acknowledges that the blatant and systematic racist barriers of today are neither as prevalent nor as extreme as in the past, it maintains that racism became ingrained and sublimated in society and continues to operate systematically and covertly in the institutions and cultural norms still largely controlled by the racial majority. From the perspective of racial marginalization, the overt racism of the past became the institutional racism of contemporary society, and negative racial attitudes are now expressed covertly and even unknowingly. A related conflict concerns the contemporary requirements of social justice. While the perspective of racial marginalization generally calls for group-specific, proactive measures to remedy the ongoing effects of the past, the perspective of racial privilege rejects this view in favor of the uniform or color-blind treatment of individuals. I argue that these disagreements are significant contributing factors to the polarizing of racial groups, but that they can addressed in a worthwhile way by philosophical means.

By addressing the differences in perspective caused by histories of racial privilege and marginalization, the moral and epistemological principles independently defended by James M. Jones, Lawrence Thomas, and Cornel West provide crucial philosophical means for enabling meaningful interracial dialogue.[7] In different, but related, ways their principles call for racial groups to assume moral responsibility for their respective involvements in interracial relations. According to Jones and West, racial groups have a moral responsibility for their negative effects on their racial outgroups, including the negative effects of the racial identities they ascribe to their racial outgroups. According to Jones and Thomas, as well as having reciprocal moral obligations to each other, the racial majority and the racial minorities have differential moral obligations to each other because they assess the structure of society from different perspectives. In particular, while the racial majority has a *prima facie* obligation to defer to the racial minorities' claims concerning the existence and nature of racial marginalization, the racial minorities have a *prima facie* moral obligation to respect members of the racial majority as individuals despite the history of racial marginalization and privilege.

Before I argue my case, I should acknowledge certain simplifications in my discussion of group narratives. Although I write as if the perspectives of racial groups were expressed in univocal group narratives, this simplifies the dynamics within racial groups. Typically, within racial groups there is intragroup

competition to represent the group's perspective. Consequently, the narratives of racial groups tend to be pluralistic, conflicted, under constant revision, and driven to change. Furthermore, members of one racial group sometimes defend significant portions of the narratives of different racial groups. For example, black conservatives defend significant tenets of the narrative of racial privilege, and white civil rights activists defend significant tenets of the narrative of racial marginalization. Despite these considerations, the narratives of racial groups are important because they and the general perspectives they reflect are a significant part of the causal structure of society. In particular, they are the means by which new members of racial groups are socialized and they structure the context for interracial relations. For these reasons, the narratives of racial groups are one of the most important vehicles for changing society.

My discussion of interracial relations is also simplified because it focuses on one of several approaches to interracial issues and fails to address the complications arising from its inherent limitations. The approach to racial issues defended here is rationalist in the sense that it calls upon racial groups to evaluate and reconstruct their narratives rationally, in light of all the available reasons for and against them, including the reasons expressed by their racial outgroups. The resolution of social conflicts by rational reconstruction is obviously a method with its difficulties, given that a key component of interracial conflict is racism and given that racism derives from xenophobia, racial prejudice, and other forms of self-interest which impair rationality. Where racial group perspectives are driven by the latter, they tend to be self-serving ideologies inherently resistant to rational reconstruction.[8] These facts, although they point to difficulties to be overcome, do not negate the ultimate value or necessity of rational reconstruction, however, because interracial issues can only be worked out interracially, and rational reconstruction provides reasons that are binding across racial perspectives.

Given these qualifications, let me return to the task of arguing that differences in perspective concerning the existence and nature of racism and the requirements of social justice are significant contributing factors to the ongoing polarization of racial groups. Many voices speaking from the perspective of racial privilege maintain that although racism was a problem in the past, the antiracist countermeasures taken since then mean that racism is not a serious social barrier today. The findings of those working with racially mixed encounter groups on racial issues support the view that as a group the racially privileged believe that race is no longer a significant bar to educational, career, and political opportunities. According to Nancie Zane, the following comment from a white male participant in a racially mixed encounter group, which met to answer questions about attitudes toward racial issues, is typical of the perspective of racial privilege: "I feel that anyone can make it to the top here if they're willing to put in

the effort. I don't know if I was promoted because I was a white male but I sincerely believe that people are not judged here on the basis of race and gender."[9] Zane's interpretation of this attitude from the perspective of racial privilege, an interpretation widely shared among those investigating attitudes toward racial issues by means of encounter groups, is as follows: "For these white men, diversity was an issue based on false assumptions that belied the 'reality' of fairness and equal opportunity."[10] Similarly, according to Sandra M. Lawrence and Beverly Daniel Tatum, the racially privileged generally acknowledge the existence of racism in society and recognize that social inequalities between racial groups exist today because of racism in the past, but they generally reject the view that society is systemically racist on account of having ingrained racist institutional practices and cultural norms. Rather, they believe that the problem of racism consists in isolated cases of individual racism.[11] According to many of those within the perspective of racial privilege, it seems, the claims of the racially marginalized that society is systemically racist lack credibility and, to some, reflect a kind of resentment at the well-earned success of others.[12]

On the other hand, according to many speaking from the perspective of racial marginalization, Western societies are neither moral in practice nor moral in spirit. Furthermore, the negative racial identities they ascribe to the racially privileged conform to what Jean-Paul Sartre calls *antiracist racism*.[13] For example, Jones reports that in some surveys a high percentage of black students assume that white students are racially prejudiced;[14] Thomas Sowell claims that among the racially marginalized it is a "common pattern in the most disparate settings" to promote the idea that the racially privileged are all morally culpable;[15] according to Stephen L. Carter, many racial minority students are convinced that "the bad guys" (the white males) are still out there and winning using new and subtle means of oppression.[16] According to Patricia Turner, the impulse behind much of the folklore in black society concerning white society, including several white conspiracy theories, is "the familiar notion that the dominant culture remains intent on destroying blacks—one body at a time."[17] Perhaps not surprisingly, strongly racialized views are found in some academic narratives, which define Western culture as essentially racist if not murderously so. For example, after discussing the history of racial privilege and marginalization in America, Carolyn Murray and J. Owens Smith proclaim the following: "according to Western thinking, exploitation, oppression, and even genocide are morally defensible."[18] According to many voices in the narrative of racial marginalization, the racially privileged and their social institutions are inherently racist and, they seem to say, irredeemably so.

Predictably, conflicting perspectives like those discussed above have negative implications for interracial dialogue. Examples show that the current perspectives of racial groups frustrate the best intentions in multiracial contexts where

the existence and nature of racism is important. For example, Lawrence and Tatum worked with racially mixed encounter groups in which racially sensitive white educators eager to meet with people of color to learn more about their experiences and perspectives actually did so. Lawrence and Tatum found that their initial

> . . . eagerness subsided when the discourse focused on the racial dynamics between themselves and people of color in the room. Most often the source of tension revolved around questions of trust.
> For example, a Black male participant commented about using his "radar" to assess whether this racially mixed situation would be "safe" for him. When other African-Americans nodded their heads and exchanged knowing glances, many of the white people were taken aback that their colleagues would be suspicious of them, assuming that their very presence in the course would warrant the trust of people of color.[19]

Black participants did not trust the situation because it was racially mixed, and white participants felt prejudged because of their color. Tatum and Lawrence continue:

> The idea that white people were not assumed to be trustworthy unless proven otherwise was a recurring theme that consistently upset the white participants. This theme was sometimes brought into the discussion when white educators shared stories of their interactions with Black parents. During one particular session, a white teacher talked at length about his frustration that a Black mother had challenged his placement recommendation for her child. When Black participants spoke supportively of the parent's concern, placing it in the context of racist tracking policies, the teacher had difficulty accepting that his recommendations might be seen as part of that pattern.[20]

The legitimate aims of members of each group were frustrated because their group perspectives were at cross-purposes: from the perspective of the black participants, their concerns with racism did not register with the white participants; from the perspective of the white participants, their good will, in the sense of a desire for racial equality and unity, did not register with the black participants. Apparently, our current group perspectives are self-defeating since they are at cross-purposes even when there is good will on both sides.

Just as the perspectives of racial privilege and racial marginalization conflict regarding the existence and nature of contemporary racism, so they conflict regarding the contemporary requirements of social justice. From the perspective of racial marginalization, social justice can only be achieved through group-specific rights and proactive measures to remedy the ongoing effects of historical injustices. Against this view, the perspective of racial privilege maintains that group-specific, proactive measures create new forms of injustice by violating procedures of uniform or color-blind treatment. One of the more remarkable statements of the latter position was made by Pierre Elliot Trudeau in defense of

his government's so-called *White Paper on Indian Policy*, which proposed that the group-specific rights of Aboriginal people in Canada be abolished:

> If we think of restoring aboriginal rights to the Indians well what about the French who were defeated at the Plains of Abraham? Shouldn't we restore rights to them? And what about though the Acadians who were deported—shouldn't we compensate for this? And what about the other Canadians, the immigrants? What about the Japanese Canadians who were so badly treated at the end or during the last war? What can we do to redeem the past? I can only say as President Kennedy said when he was asked about what he would do to compensate for the injustices that the Negroes had received in American society. We will be just in our time. This is all we can do. We must be just today.[21]

In response to the reactions of Aboriginal people, Trudeau abandoned the uniform treatment view of fair and equal treatment, but this view is still held by many other people in Canada and the United States. Indeed, it is something of a national motif in each country that group-specific rights and proactive measures conflict with fair and equal treatment.[22]

On the other hand, according to academic positions expressing the narrative of racial marginalization, the demand for the uniform treatment of individuals is a type of racism on the grounds that it is a covert means of continuing the exclusionary practices of the past. According to Evelyn Kallen,

> The opposition to affirmative action for visible minorities, framed in the language of reverse discrimination, decries such programs as unfair to white Canadians. This form of the new racism prioritizes individualistic principles of equality and meritocracy and condemns as inegalitarian any measure of affirmative action designed to remedy group-level disadvantage of visible minorities. This covert expression of the new racism represents a strategy designed to maintain racial inequality in the face of the constitutional provisions of equality rights, particularly s.15 (2) of the Canadian Charter which allows programs of affirmative action.[23]

Jones presents a long list of the new and subtle forms of racism.[24] Included among them are what many speaking from the perspective of racial privilege would simply regard as conservative or maybe neoconservative stances on social policies, such as the stance that proactive measures are unfair because racism is a thing of the past, a stance McConahay refers to as *modern racism*, and the stance that the results of proactive measures are undeserved because their recipients do not do enough to help themselves in the first place, a stance Kinder and Sears refer to as *symbolic racism*.[25]

Clearly, the perspectives of the racial majority and the racial minorities on the contemporary requirements of social justice are at cross-purposes. From the perspective of racial privilege, antiracism requires universal, uniform treatment, but this is perceived as a subtle, racist ploy from the perspective of racial marginalization; from the perspective of racial marginalization, antiracism

requires group-specific, proactive measures to counteract the effects of the past, but these are perceived as violating principles of fair and equal treatment from the perspective of racial privilege.

Since the narratives of racial privilege and racial marginalization are at cross-purposes, they hinder interracial dialogue and interfere with attempts to fulfill the duties of shared citizenship. In addition to their harmful consequences for interracial dialogue, our current racial perspectives come up wanting because they ascribe negative racial identities, whether of the outright demonizing kind or more subtle negative types, to their outgroups. Because of their social power, when the racially privileged ascribe negative racial identities to the racially marginalized they cause many people to be harmed on account of their color. When, in return, the racially marginalized ascribe negative racial identities to the racially privileged, they too, albeit to less effect, cause negative attitudes and actions against people on account of their color. An ironic illustration of the latter is provided in the fact that African Americans who can pass for white are sometimes subjected to mistreatment from other African Americans on account of their color. As a further illustration of the wrongness of ascribing negative racial identities to racial outgroups, we can attend to the fact that the ascribing of negative racial identities has sometimes made social existence harmful in an absurd manner for biracial individuals: it has led to nations in which the same persons might be harmed by some on account of being too white and harmed by others on account of being too black.

Ascribing negative racial identities to racial outgroups has another harmful consequence: it creates a psychologically intolerable situation for people of good will who value antiracism and their racial outgroups. Because some feel a need to give and receive moral recognition from their fellow citizens, the ascribing of negative racial identities to racial outgroups can produce what W. E. B. DuBois describes in terms of a double and unreconciled self:

> 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.
>
> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost.[26]

To a lesser degree, the tendency towards a conflicted identity is experienced by so-called exceptional blacks who, although recognized by their racial outgroups for their abilities and their contributions to society at large, are not fully accepted by their racial outgroups because of their color. More recently, to a lesser degree still, the tendency towards a conflicted identity has been experienced by so-called progressive whites who, although they value antiracism and their racial

outgroups, are not fully accepted by their racial outgroups because of their color. According to Becky Thompson, this sense of a conflicted identity is a familiar predicament for antiracist whites working in multiracial contexts: "over the years many of us have felt simultaneously complimented and erased when African Americans and Latinos/as have labelled us 'honorary Black girls', 'Whatinas', 'not like other white people', 'not really white', or 'Jewish, not white'. In these moments of intended solidarity, people of color . . . have, unintentionally, asked us to divorce ourselves from ourselves."[27] If our current racial group narratives have such effects, then they are antithetical to full moral recognition and meaningful dialogue between racial groups. Our shared obligations of citizenship require us to do something about this situation.

Despite their attendant dangers, we cannot dispense with group narratives and deal with racial issues from some color-blind position. Given the attachment many have to their racial groups, given that our own identities are affected by the identities others ascribe to us, and given a history of racialism and racism, group narratives must be significantly racialized. What can be done, however, is to evaluate the content of our group narratives in terms of their consequences for interracial relations. Minimally, as Jones argues, any morally desirable narrative in a multiracial political community would foster respect for its citizens regardless of their race: "If intergroup harmony of any consequence is ever to be achieved, we must adopt a superordinate goal which stresses the value of human life. We must continually scrutinize our actions and goals and attempt never to constrict or constrain, to threaten or to eliminate the life of another human being."[28] The basic moral principles that apply within racial groups also apply across racial groups, and there are other moral principles that apply across racial groups. Until the intricate epistemological and moral relations between racial groups, their narratives, and individuals are worked out and the necessary moral content is incorporated into the narratives of racial groups, the type of interracial dialogue necessary for social unity and equality will not happen. The point here is a general one that must be faced by all racial groups seeking a civil society. It is the same point West makes regarding the tension in black-Jewish relations:

> The present impasse in black-Jewish relations will be overcome only when self-critical exchanges take place within and across black and Jewish communities not simply about their own group interest but also, and, more importantly, about what being black or Jewish means in *ethical terms*. This kind of reflection should not be so naive as to ignore group interest, but it should take us to a higher moral ground where serious discussions about democracy and justice determine how we define ourselves and our policies and help us formulate strategies and tactics to sidestep the traps of tribalism and chauvinism.[29]

As is clear from West's example, to define what it means in ethical terms to be a member of a particular social group requires a moral discussion about the particular group's social obligations. The difficulty of this undertaking is apparent.[30]

The following would seem to be minimal requirements for racial groups to define themselves in ethical terms: (1) racial groups must assume responsibility for their negative effects on their racial outgroups; and (2) racial groups must not portray their racial outgroups as diminished forms of humanity. A clear example of failing the first element of West's principle is the white moderate of the 1960s opposed to civil disobedience who, as King puts it, "paternalistically believes that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom."[31] By hypocritically asking African Americans to accept what must be rejected as a matter of self-respect, white moderates failed to acknowledge the implications of their own position for the racially marginalized. Both the racially privileged group and the racially marginalized group fail the second requirement of West's principle when they portray their racial outgroups as diminished forms of humanity on biological or cultural grounds. Both run afoul of the most basic form of antiracism, namely, the idea that humans are not separable into morally better and worse ones on racial grounds. If we do nothing to assume responsibility for the known harmful consequences of the content of our current racial group narratives, we fail to define our racial groups in ethical terms.

Articulating what it means in ethical terms to be a member of a particular racial group, in West's sense, requires self-critical examination, especially an examination of the ingroup's effects on its racial outgroups. But the latter is possible only with all the relevant evidence, including the evidence offered by the racial outgroup on how it is affected. This is a problem because in order to accept the testimony of the racial outgroup as evidence, it must be presumed to have merit. No doubt Jones is right when he claims: "Alas, can't we all get along? It seems to me that the starting point is to recognize the profound differences in experiences and the perceptual, emotional consequences to which they give rise. . . . To tone down the race rhetoric, I believe, we must be willing to recognize variations in experience and perspective, and try to understand it. To examine our viewpoints and the *possibility* that other viewpoints not only exist but have merit."[32] But how? For too many, the possibility that the perspectives of their racial outgroups have merit is a non-starter when they conflict with their ingroup's perspective. What would show that we sometimes have an obligation to take the conflicting opinions of our racial outgroups as the more informed position?

One promising approach to this impasse is provided by Thomas's concept of *moral deference*. Thomas argues that by being socially marginalized some people undergo what he calls *downward social constitution*. The cumulative effects of the latter include an emotional configuration, in particular a sense of otherness or exclusion, that the privileged cannot grasp because it is outside their realm of experience: "This sense of otherness is not something that a person who does not belong to one's particular diminished social category can

grasp simply by an act of ratiocination. In particular, it is not something which people belonging to privileged social categories can grasp."[33] On Thomas's view, it is predictable that the racially privileged will tend to disbelieve claims about systemic racism because they do not themselves experience downward social constitution. Indeed, being a member of the racially privileged group means that one is not generally exposed to the sort of thing that is part of the social reality of the racially marginalized.

Given that the racially privileged and the racially marginalized bring different perspectives to the question of whether and how society is systemically racist, how should we approach these differences in perspective? What does each side of the racial divide owe the other? According to Thomas, because being subjected to downward social constitution produces morally relevant experiences which the racially privileged do not themselves undergo, the racially privileged owe the racially marginalized moral deference when the latter speak about the existence and nature of racial marginalization: "Moral Deference is owed to persons of good will when they speak in an informed way regarding experiences specific to their diminished social category from the standpoint of an emotional category configuration to which others do not have access. . . . This presumption is warranted because the individual is speaking from a vantage point to which someone not belonging to her diminished social category group does not have access."[34] On Thomas's view, the racially privileged should defer to the racially marginalized when the latter speak in an informed and charitable manner on the issue of whether and how society is systemically racist; this is true because the racially privileged are not ordinarily in a position to experience the effects of racial marginalization, and so they are not well-positioned to appreciate the existence or nature of racial marginalization. Thomas's point is the good one that generally those who do not have first-hand experience of a given phenomenon must defer to those who do, and since the racially privileged are not in a position to have first-hand experience of the cumulative effects of racial marginalization, they must defer to those who are, namely, the racially marginalized.

It is important to note that Thomas is not committed to the view that racial marginalization can be detected only by the racially marginalized. In fact, the existence and nature of racial marginalization can be detected in ways that are accessible to all. For example, when racial stereotypes are publicly reinforced, as happens frequently and subtly in the media according to the perspective of racial marginalization, the people to whom those stereotypes apply are victimized by subtle downward social constitution, and their appreciation of these facts is based on first-hand experience.[35] While subtle downward constitution, such as that in the media, might be quite obvious to the racially marginalized, it might be equally unnoticed by the racially privileged. Nevertheless, the existence of such forms of marginalization can be demonstrated in ways that are accessible to

members of any racial group. To test the proposition that the news media reinforce negative racial stereotypes, as stated in the narrative of racial marginalization, John Miller and Kimberley Prince measured the ways in which several leading newspapers in major Canadian cities portrayed members of racial minorities. Miller summarizes their findings as follows: "We found that people who read those papers can easily reach three general conclusions about visible minorities: that half of them are either athletes or entertainers; that if they're in the news otherwise, they're in trouble of some sort; and that few make any contributions to business or have noteworthy lifestyles."[36] The quantitative methods of the social sciences provide one means of demonstrating the existence and nature of subtle racial marginalization to those who are not in a position to experience racial marginalization first-hand.

Although the racially marginalized are owed moral deference regarding their experiences of marginalization, it does not follow that their views on the existence or nature of racial marginalization are indefeasible, according to Thomas. To a high degree, experiencing downward social constitution is laden by theories of how people should be treated and by theories of the intentions of the racially privileged. For these reasons, experiences of downward social constitution are subject to mistakes of interpretation. Furthermore, group narratives have functions other than descriptive accuracy. According to Turner, the narratives of the racially marginalized are also about promoting racial group solidarity and a sense of empowerment in the face of racism.[37] But some expressions in a group narrative might be effective for certain ends and counter-productive for other ends. In particular, although ascribing negative racial identities and racist conspiracies to the racial outgroup will promote the ingroup solidarity of the racially marginalized, it will interfere with the moral recognition of the racially privileged and with interracial dialogue. According to Thomas, in light of the multiple functions of group narratives, members of racially marginalized groups must evaluate their group narratives to ensure that the manner in which downward social constitution is incorporated into their group narratives does not conflict with other moral concerns; in West's terms, they must articulate their group perspective in ethical terms.[38]

The principles defended by Jones, Thomas, and West place heavy burdens on both the racially marginalized and the racially privileged to consider the ways in which they affect each other and their intergroup relations. The racially privileged group must recognize the testimony of those directly affected by marginalization by presuming merit in their claims about the existence and nature of marginalization; and the racially marginalized have a *prima facie* obligation to respect members of the racially privileged as individuals apart from the history of racial privilege and marginalization and must, therefore, resist the

tendency to subsume the racially privileged under conceptions of diminished humanity.

This being said, there is obviously no sense asking people to adopt a position, moral or otherwise, unless it lies within the realm of human possibilities. This is especially so if maintaining that position comes at the cost of making oneself and one's group vulnerable. If it is not possible for the racially marginalized to recognize members of the racially privileged as individuals apart from their group history, then if the racially privileged were to show the racially marginalized moral deference, they would undermine their group interest. If it is not possible for the racially privileged to recognize the merit of the racially marginalized's perspective on the fairness of society, then if the racially marginalized were to show the racially privileged moral deference, they would undermine their group interest. Can the racially marginalized show the racially privileged moral deference? Can the racially privileged show the racially marginalized moral deference? I will consider these issues in turn.

The reformist and inclusive tone of so many voices in the narrative of racial marginalization makes it clear that the racially marginalized do show the racially privileged moral deference. For example, many African American writers have criticized the ascribing of negative racial identities to the racially privileged as itself a form of racism and as a barrier to better relations between racial groups.[39] As Birt puts it,

> Inverted racial essentialism (one version of which in America is "narrow nationalism") may be an understandable response to the degradation of blacks by whites, but it invariably leads to a dead end. Fanon noted that the "Manicheism of the settlers" during colonialism "produces a Manicheism of the native." To the theory of the "absolute evil of the native" the theory of the "absolute evil of the settlers replies." But Fanon's analysis shows that the progress of the struggle for a new society and a genuinely new human being requires the transcendence of these gross simplifications.[40]

Furthermore, prominent voices among the social scientists in the perspective of racial marginalization also reject the view that the racially privileged generally lack good will. Even so trenchant a critic of society as Jones writes: "I believe there is a strong positive sentiment in most Americans, Black and White, to make this society a kinder and gentler one."[41] Kinder and Sanders argue that the United States is still divided by color, but their research also shows that racially sympathetic white Americans are far closer to black Americans than they are to racially resentful white Americans in their opinions on racial matters.[42] Given the disagreement between racially sympathetic white Americans and racially resentful white Americans,[43] a case could be made from the findings of Kinder and Sanders that at a more fundamental and important level American society is now divided by sentiment rather than by color.

Just as the racially marginalized show the racially privileged moral deference, so the racially privileged show the racially marginalized moral deference. The findings of those working with racially mixed encounter groups show that, despite the initial resistance caused by their group perspective and narrative, the racially privileged do show moral deference in response to the testimony of the racially marginalized, at least in contexts designed to enable interracial dialogue. From there, the racially privileged come to appreciate that fellow citizens are marginalized because of their race. Furthermore, they come to feel a moral responsibility for counteracting systemic racism. According to Zane, the following comments are representative of the white participants in racially mixed encounter groups who originally conceived of racism solely in terms of individual racism and as largely a thing of the past, but by listening to the voices of the racially marginalized came to believe that some are systemically marginalized because of race:

> To me the biggest impact came from the personal stories that we heard in our two-day session. . . . [I]ntellectually, I thought I was aware of some of these issues, but when you actually hear the depth of emotion and general consistency in the stories, it made an impression on me that there is a problem here, and it is not just a couple of malcontents whining and complaining.[44]

> When I thought I "had it" on an individual level I was the most dangerous since I didn't get it on a group level.[45]

Lawrence and Tatum also claim that it was typical of white participants in encounter groups to recognize the existence of systemic racism in light of the testimony of the racially marginalized.[46]

Given membership in the same moral communities, as written in constitutions derived from universal, egalitarian principles taken to be self-evident truths, the racially privileged have a moral responsibility for counteracting racial marginalization. This too was recognized by participants in the groups studied by Lawrence and Tatum.[47] Zane reports to being "struck by the psychological and cognitive leaps"[48] made by many of the white participants through their encounters with members of the racially marginalized group and by how those participants were able to incorporate aspects of the perspective of racial marginalization in a way that enlarged their former perspective into a more inclusive one antithetical to "discriminatory policies and practices."[49] Furthermore, the scientific and scholarly work of white social scientists, social critics, and social activists demonstrate that members of the racially privileged do show the racially marginalized moral deference regarding their testimony on the existence and nature of racial marginalization.

Given that moral deference is indeed possible, and given the history of antiracism in Western societies, I would argue that even if Western societies are

systemically racist, they are also systemically antiracist. This position is exemplified in antiracist social reformers such as King, who saw his goal as bringing the immoral practice of America into line with its essentially moral spirit. A complex, collective thing such as a society can be both systemically racist and systemically antiracist, in the same way that individuals can be racist in some respects, but antiracist in other respects. I argue that the good will in many individuals on both sides of racial lines requires a more effective vehicle of transmission than that offered by our current group narratives. No doubt we need to change the world, but a reevaluation of the narratives through which the world is perceived is a necessary condition for changing the world in a desirable direction. By enabling mutual understanding and real dialogue, the rational reconstruction of our group narratives is a crucial precondition for meaningful social change. In the interest of interracial dialogue, the challenge for the racially privileged and the racially marginalized is to assume greater responsibility for their group narratives by assuming their obligations as defended in the works of Jones, Thomas, and West. Given that societies do not spring into existence *ex nihilo*, and given that current social reality always derives in part from the past, the immoral content that we allow in our group narratives today will burden the people of tomorrow.

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NOTES

I would like to thank Elizabeth Trott, Betty Harlow, David Checkland, Andrew Hunter, Jim Dianda, Patti Kazan, and John Caruana for their discussions and comments regarding this paper.

1 See James W. St.G. Walker, *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Toronto: The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).

2 See James M. Jones, "Whites Are from Mars, O. J. Simpson Is from Planet Hollywood: Blacks Don't Support O. J. and Whites Just Don't Get It," in *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society*, ed. Michelle Fine et al. (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 253.

3 Jones, "Whites Are from Mars, O. J. Simpson Is from Planet Hollywood," p. 257.

4 Of course, some dispute this very claim by arguing that the resistance to racial equality is simply more subtle than it was in the past. For a recent argument along these lines see Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). It is part of my argument here that how much one perceives things as having changed depends on one's perspective, and to a great extent one's perspective depends on one's race.

5 Indeed, my own interest in these issues was generated by experiences shared with others while we were members of a racial issues committee at a post-secondary educational institution. We found the discussions stimulating but polarized in places and we wondered how such

polarization might be overcome. This paper is the result of those initial concerns and subsequent discussions.

6 James M. Jones, *Prejudice and Racism* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1972), p. 7.

7 Jones, *Prejudice and Racism*, 1st ed., and ibid., 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997); Jones, "Whites Are from Mars, O. J. Simpson Is from Planet Hollywood." Lawrence Thomas, "Moral Deference," in *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. John P. Pittman (New York: Routlege, 1997). Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

8 For an excellent discussion and illustration of this phenomenon see Adrian M. S. Piper, "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," in *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. Pittman.

9 Nancie Zane, "Interrupting Historical Patterns: Bridging Race and Gender Gaps between Senior White Men and Other Organizational Groups," in *Off White*, ed. Fine et al., p. 345.

10 Zane, "Interrupting Historical Patterns," p. 346.

11 Sandra M. Lawrence and Beverly Daniel Tatum, "White Educators as Allies: Moving from Awareness to Action," in *Off White*, ed. Fine et al., p. 336.

12 Zane, "Interrupting Historical Patterns," p. 346.

13 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus*, trans. S. W. Allen (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1963), p. 15. Sartre claims that the negative identity ascribed by the marginalized to the dominant racial group is necessary for a marginalized group to reclaim its humanity, but that this is an intermediate step to the final stage of appreciating the humanity of individuals regardless of their race (pp. 59–60).

14 Jones, *Racism and Prejudice*, 1st ed., p. 88.

15 Thomas Sowell, *Preferential Policies: An International Perspective* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), p. 160.

16 Stephen L. Carter, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 26.

17 Patricia A. Turner, *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 201.

18 Carolyn B. Murray and J. Owen Smith, "White Privilege: The Rhetoric and the Facts," in *Multiculturalism from the Margins: Non-Dominant Voices in Difference and Diversity*, ed. Dean A. Harris (London: Bergin and Garvey, 1995), p. 151.

19 Lawrence and Tatum, "White Educators as Allies," pp. 340–41.

20 Lawrence and Tatum, "White Educators as Allies," p. 341.

21 Pierre Elliot Trudeau, speech given August 8, 1960, in Vancouver, reprinted in Wesley Cragg, ed., *Contemporary Moral Issues*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992).

22 For discussions, see F. L. Morton, "Group Rights versus Individual Rights in the Charter: The Special Cases of Natives and Quebecois," in *Minorities and the Canadian State*, ed. N. Nevite and A. Kornberg (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1985); Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism and the "Politics of Recognition*," ed. Amy Guttman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Sally Weaver, "Federal Difficulties with Aboriginal Rights Demands," in *The Quest for Justice: Aboriginal Peoples and Aboriginal Rights*, ed. Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); and Jeremy Webber, "Individuality, Equality and Difference: Justification for a Parallel System of Aboriginal Justice," in Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Aboriginal Peoples and the Justice System: Report of the National Round Table on Aboriginal Justice Issues* (Ottawa: Ministry of Supplies and Services Canada, 1993).

23 Evelyn Kallen, *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 32–33. In this passage Kallen refers to F. Henry, "Democratic Racism and the Perpetuation of Inequality in Canada," presented as the Plenary Address for the Twelfth Biennial Conference of the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association, Vancouver, November 27–30, 1993.

24 Jones, *Prejudice and Racism*, 2nd ed., pp. 368–70.
25 J. B. McConahay, "Modern Racism, Ambivalence, and the Modern Racism Scale," in *Prejudice, Discrimination and Racism*, ed. J. F. Dovidio et al. (Orlando: Academic Press, 1986), pp. 92–93. D. R. Kinder and D. O. Sears, "Prejudice and Politics: Symbolic Racism versus Racial Threats to the Good Life," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40 (1981): 414–31, p. 416. On the issue of accusing defenders of the procedural view of just and equal treatment of racism, we should bear in mind that it takes careful work to disentangle (1) resistance to proactive measures because of negative racial attitudes from (2) resistance to proactive measures because of belief that discrimination is a thing of the past and from (3) resistance to proactive measures because of belief that proactive measures should be color-blind. For a discussion see Kinder and Sanders, *Divided by Color*. Although Kinder and Sanders maintain that opposition to proactive measures is a form of racism, they also maintain that many white and black Americans are in fundamental agreement on some key points relevant to the legitimacy of proactive measures to remedy the past. For example, considered by group, black Americans and white Americans are more likely to support hiring quotas for companies with a proven history of racial discrimination (p. 194), and both groups favor color-blind proactive policies for all disadvantaged social groups before they favor proactive policies targeting any particular disadvantaged social group (p. 184).
26 W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Vintage Books/The Library of America, 1990), pp. 7–8.
27 Becky Thompson et al., "Homework: Antiracism Activism and the Meaning of Whiteness," in *Off White*, ed. Fine et al., p. 358.
28 Jones, *Prejudice and Racism*, 1st ed., pp. 177–78.
29 West, *Race Matters*, p. 75.
30 The truth is that there are always many within any racial group who seek to define the moral character of their racial identities. As West points out, for various reasons their views do not always get the profile they deserve: "For example, most Americans wrongly believe that the black community has been silent in the face of Yankel Rosenbaum's murder. This perception exists because the moral voices in black America have been either ignored or drowned out by the more sensationalist and xenophobic ones. . . . Black anti-Semitism is not caused by media hype—yet it does sell more newspapers and turns our attention away from those black prophetic energies that give us some hope." West, *Race Matters*, pp. 78–79. A parallel point holds for the moral voices among Jews concerning their relations with other social groups.
31 Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (Toronto: The New Library of Canada Ltd., 1963), p. 84.
32 Jones, "Whites Are from Mars, O. J. Simpson Is from Planet Hollywood," p. 257.
33 Thomas, "Moral Deference," p. 240.
34 Thomas, "Moral Deference," pp. 243–44.
35 John Miller, *Yesterday's News: Why Canada's Daily Newspapers Are Failing Us* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1998), p. 141.
36 Miller, *Yesterday's News*, p. 139.
37 Turner, *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*, p. 151.
38 Turner, *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*, p. 244.
39 Michael Eric Dyson, "Essentialism and the Complexities of Racial Identity," in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994); Robert Birt, "Existence, Identity, and Liberation," in *Existence in Black*, ed. Lewis R. Gordon (New York: Routledge, 1997); Naomi Zack, "Race, Life, Death, Identity, Tragedy, and Good Faith," in Gordon, *Existence in Black*; West, *Race Matters*.
40 Birt, "Existence, Identity, and Liberation," p. 212. Birt's reference to Fanon is the following: Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 93.

41 Jones, “Whites Are from Mars, O. J. Simpson Is from Planet Hollywood,” p. 257.
42 Kinder and Sanders, *Divided by Color*, p. 279.
43 Kinder and Sanders, *Divided by Color*, p. 124.
44 Zane, “Interrupting Historical Patterns,” p. 346.
45 Zane, “Interrupting Historical Patterns,” p. 348.
46 Lawrence and Tatum, “White Educators as Allies,” p. 337.
47 Lawrence and Tatum, “White Educators as Allies,” p. 336.
48 Zane, “Interrupting Historical Patterns,” p. 349.
49 Zane, “Interrupting Historical Patterns,” p. 352.