

# WHITE TIME

## *The Chronic Injustice of Ideal Theory*<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The racialization of space is the subject of a huge body of literature, most recently in George Lipsitz's (2011) *How Racism Takes Place*. But less has been done on the ways in which time could be racialized. Inspired by provocative treatments of the subject in writings by Michael Hanchard (1999) and Lawrie Balfour (2011), I suggest in this paper that we need to explore the workings of a "White temporal imaginary" analogous to Lipsitz's "White spatial imaginary," which likewise serves to protect White racial privilege from the threatening encroachments of racial justice. Using Eviatar Zerubavel's (2003) *Time Maps* as a jumping-off point, I argue accordingly for the recognition of a "White time," a "sociomental" representation of temporality shaped by the interests and experience of the White "mnemonic community." The concept is obviously one of potentially very general usefulness, but in this essay I seek to apply it specifically to the dominant discourse on justice in political philosophy, as framed for the past forty years by John Rawls' ([1971] 1999c) "ideal theory." The relevance to the postracial theme of this issue is that, because of the peculiarity of philosophy as a discipline, it can claim it was always, or always-already, postracial, dealing as it ostensibly does with the (timeless) human condition as such. By making ideal theory—the normative theory of a perfectly just society—central to the conceptualization of social justice, by never exploring how radically different actual societies are from the ideal of society as "a cooperative venture for mutual advantage," an exclusionary sociohistorical framework is established that makes the Euro-time of the West—abstracted out of the West's relations of domination over people of color—the Greenwich Mean Time of normativity, while the alternative non-White temporality of structurally unjust societies requiring rectificatory racial justice remains a subject permanently untimely.

**Keywords:** Ideal Theory, Rawlsianism, Racial Justice, Racial Time, White Mnemonic Community, Time Maps, Philosophy and Postraciality, Rectificatory Justice

### INTRODUCTION: RACIALIZED TIME?

*White time*—what could that be?

White *space* is familiar, indeed overly familiar. The racialization of space is by now the subject of a huge body of literature (largely outside of philosophy, of course), as is the connection between this racialization and issues of justice (Lipsitz 2011). But how could time be racialized? Of course (following Lipsitz) racism does take time also, both in the sense of racist actions, policies, etc. requiring non-zero temporal periods to be carried out and in the sense of taking time *away* from people, redistributing time. Since the former is trivially true for all actions and policies, it is not clear that anything

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of philosophical interest in general, or normative interest in particular, can be generated from it. But the latter is obviously far more promising. Thus Michael Hanchard (1999) speaks of “racial time . . . the inequalities of temporality that result from power relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups . . . produc[ing] unequal temporal access to institutions, goods, services, resources, power, and knowledge” (p. 253).<sup>2</sup> So, for example, a racial regime (racial slavery, colonial forced labor, Jim Crow, or apartheid politics) imposes, *inter alia*, particular dispositions and allocations of time that are differentiated by race: working times, eating and sleeping times, free times, commuting times, waiting times, and ultimately, of course, living and dying times. Assuming that, with reference to the appropriate stochastic counterfactuals, we could conclude that the life expectancy of Blacks (for instance) has been diminished by these temporal deprivations, we can then say that the time *they would have had* has been removed.

Where has it gone? Could we speak, perhaps fancifully, of its having been transmuted into White time, and posit a set of intra- and intercontinental equations that could be shown to balance through increments of White time on one side matching decreases of non-White time on the other, shortened life-spans over here extending life-spans over there? If so, then metaphysically these processes, these regimes of temporal exploitation and temporal accumulation, would not just be taking time—as, trivially, all processes, exploitative and non-exploitative, do—but *transferring* time from one set of lives to another. How much time do you have?

But imagine a Marxist challenge. After all—speaking of regimes of domination with specific temporal prerequisites—there is also capitalist and bourgeois time: the time of the factory whistle, that disrupts the bucolic rhythms of rural life; the time of checking-in and checking-out; the Fordist imperative to make use on the assembly line of every second of time; the struggle over the length of the working-day (Marx 1976). And—in terms of the transfer of time—remember that in the *1844 Manuscripts*, Karl Marx (2000) describes the nexus of interrelations by which the wealth of the capitalist and the poverty of the worker, the palaces of the former and the hovels of the latter, are interconnected. Moreover, the labor theory of value is predicated on the idea of socially necessary labor time, and the crystallization of labor as value in the entities produced, so that a commodity, apart from the raw materials that are its base, represents a congelation of time. So how would an exploitative White racial temporal regime be differentiated from this (long familiar and extensively analyzed in the literature) exploitative bourgeois class temporal regime?

One would need, among other things, to talk about racial deprivations of time that are not reducible to the prerequisites of wage labor; of non-market compulsions (easy enough, in the case of slavery and colonial labor!); of race-to-race transfers that, even if they are class-differentiated in their subsequent trajectory, still benefit Whites as a group; and above all, perhaps, of the frequent breach for non-Whites of the crucial Marxist stipulation that, over a “normal” working lifetime, the (White) proletarian has to be provided daily with the social minimum necessary for him to be reproduced as a laborer and come back to work the next day. For some racial regimes, this prerequisite is calibrated to a different, less demanding norm. (In some periods of New World slavery, for example, it was more economical to work the slave to death over a few years and buy a replacement than to keep him alive over a more extended lifetime [Blackburn 1997].) So even for racialized capitalism there will be differences within populations admittedly partially overlapping (wage labor vs. subproletarianized labor), and for slavery and colonial forced labor the deviations will become even more marked. White and Black times as material realities within racial time could then be differentiated in these ways from bourgeois and proletarian realities within class time.

## THE WHITE TEMPORAL IMAGINARY

However, my primary focus here is not going to be these differentially racialized material temporalities but their representation, and the link between these representations and dominant discourses of justice, specifically ideal theory. Lipsitz (2011) argues for “the importance of acknowledging the degree to which our society is structured by a white spatial imaginary” (p. 13):

Understanding the causes and consequences of the white spatial imaginary holds the key to understanding what happened to the dreams of the civil rights movement . . . . [Civil rights victories] have been partial, incomplete, and even ephemeral . . . . [R]ace remains the most important single variable determining opportunities and life chances in the United States. Nowhere is this more evident than in the racialization of space. Seemingly race-neutral urban sites contain hidden racial assumptions and imperatives . . . . When history takes place, it does so in actual spaces. Among aggrieved groups, history also takes places away, leaving some people, as David Roediger reminds us, displaced, disinherited, dispossessed, and just plain dissed . . . . I believe that understanding the causes and consequences of racialized space can advance the cause of racial justice . . . . The white spatial imaginary has cultural as well as social consequences. It structures feelings as well as social institutions[, promoting] socially shared moral geographies (pp. 14, 15, 20, 29).

What I want to suggest is that racial political work perhaps equally important is done, though less visibly, by the racialization of *time*, by the representational production of a “White time.” We need to explore a corresponding “White temporal imaginary” that is likewise multi-faceted and multi-dimensional in its consequences, structuring social affect as well as social cognition, and helping to constitute exclusionary gated moral communities protected by temporal, no less than spatial, walls. Such protection will, of course, be extended across many spheres of life, potentially open to critical investigation by a broad variety of disciplines. So though we will be looking at philosophy and normative theory in particular (justice), the applicability of the concept is obviously far broader.

The starting point I am proposing is the work of Eviatar Zerubavel, who for decades had been writing separately about time and cognition, but seeks in his *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (2003) “to integrate these two strands” of his scholarship by “looking at sociomental representations of the past” (p. xi). Zerubavel argues for a “sociology of memory” that grounds a “phenomenology of history,” since the way particular communities choose to remember the past is “part of the process of acquiring [their] social identity” (pp. 2–3). These “mnemonic communities,” as Zerubavel calls them, may range in size from families to ethnic groups and nations, but they share claims to a “collective memory” of a “common past,” one that is the product of a “mnemonic socialization,” regulated by “social *norms of remembrance* that tell us what we should remember and what we should essentially forget” (pp. 4–5). The past is “packaged” through “schemata” that can be likened to “mental relief maps” designed to accommodate particular “historical narratives,” these relief maps being characterized by a “variable density of historical intervals,” eventful “mountains” and uneventful “valleys,” “full” and “empty” times, and periodizations as “social punctuations” that purport to establish “defining moments” (pp. 4, 7, 25–34, 82–85). Moreover, conflictual relations between various social groups are likely to involve in part “mnemonic battles,” which in extreme cases, such as “discovery narratives,” could entail “mnemonic obliteration of entire populations” and “resetting

'historical chronometers' at zero" (pp. 2, 92, 91). So in general, he points out, "[t]here are many alternative ways to cut up the past, none of which are more natural and hence more valid than others. Any system of periodization is thus inevitably social," "done with an unmistakably social scalpel" (p. 96). Time maps are therefore intimately and necessarily tied up with amnesias, excisions, and forgettings that are not arbitrary but politically required—producing pasts that are "usable," utilitarian, and functional for the group's identity and trajectory in time, not pasts that are awkward and refractory, and that raise disturbing and untimely questions.

Now the relevance of all of this to race and what I am calling "White time" should be obvious, and though Zerubavel does not focus on race, many of his examples do illustrate the mnemonics and chronological cartography of Whiteness. Both macro- and meso-periodizations reveal the traces of the White scalpel, as the postcolonial critique has long since shown. In his book *The Theft of History*, for example, Jack Goody (2006) underlines how thoroughly the theology and related temporal mensuration of the West continue to shape our basic categories, at a level so deep we sometimes forget their contingency (the ascendancy to world-historical status of an obscure Middle Eastern religious sect):

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the construction of world history has been dominated by western Europe, following their presence in the rest of the world as the result of colonial conquest and the Industrial Revolution . . . . What has characterized European efforts . . . has been the propensity to impose their own story on the wider world . . . . The very calculation of time in the past, and in the present too, has been appropriated by the west. The dates on which history depends are measured before and after the birth of Christ (BC and AD, or BCE and CE to be more politically correct). The recognition of other eras, relating to the Hegira, to the Hebrew or to the Chinese New Year, is relegated to the margins of historical scholarship and of international usage . . . . Spatial and temporal categories, originating in religious narratives, are such fundamental and pervasive determinations of our interaction with the world that we are prone to forget their conventional nature (Goody 2006, pp. 13, 14, 16).

But apart from these overarching epochal religio-temporalities, there are also, of course, discrete periodizations on a progressivist (Euro-)arrow:

The "theft of history" is not only one of time and space, but of the monopolization of historical periods . . . . [T]he very categories employed are largely European . . . . Here I am especially concerned with broad historical concepts of the development of human history and the way the west has tried to impose its own trajectory on the course of global events, as well as the misunderstanding to which that has given rise. The whole of world history has been conceived as a sequence of stages which are predicated upon events that have supposedly taken place only in western Europe . . . . Antiquity, Feudalism, then Capitalism . . . . The rest of Eurasia ("Asia") pursued a different course; with their despotic polities, they constituted "Asiatic exceptionalism." Or in more contemporary terms, they failed to achieve modernization. "What went wrong?," as Bernard Lewis asked of Islam, assuming that only the west got it right (Goody 2006, pp. 22–23, 25).

Goody goes on to challenge hegemonic representations of a dynamic progressive West versus a static East, mired in an ever-repeating past. More relevant for our purposes, of course, are the White times, the particular temporal topographies and

chronological colonizations imposed on Africa and the Americas, and their inhabitants. The White settler state, for example, “sets the historical chronometer” at zero, to signal that before its arrival, no history has taken place, no real passage of time, since a time in which no history passes is a time that has not really itself passed. Insofar as humans are distinguished from animals by their ability to make history, to master time and turn it to their ends, the inability to attain this level raises questions about one’s (full) humanity. The capacity to utilize time becomes racialized. When John Locke (1988) tells us in the *Second Treatise*, for example, that “in the beginning all the World was *America*” (p. 301), he is both commenting negatively on the lack of industriousness (and thus inappropriate use of time) displayed by Native Americans, in violation of the divine mandate to go out and appropriate the world, and passing judgment on the times thereby (not) produced. So White time becomes not merely a Euro-centered periodization, but a demarcator of the appropriate use of time, conceptions of daily rhythms of work and leisure, as opposed to the general misuse of time Europeans found elsewhere. Whites are self-positioned as the masters of their own time, as against those mastered by time. Two hundred years after Locke, closing the temporal bracket so to speak, Native Americans would be depicted as a “dying race,” a people who, unable to use the time, located not on the White time-track but in a pre-historic other time, “a futureless past,” were in any case almost out of time, scheduled for extinction (Brantlinger 2003, pp. 2-3).

Similarly, Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1956) famously denies history to Africa and Africans; these are not time-manipulating creatures. One’s time management skills are essential to constituting oneself as an entity able to impose oneself on time and *being* on time, paying attention to Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) as contrasted, say, with “Colored People’s Time” (CPT). Keeping time to a different rhythm (one turning counter-clockwise?), Black time would then be squandered time, wasted time, a temporality appropriate for a people on whom time itself is wasted. Blacks in the Americas, correspondingly, were premodern, a “backward” race holding back the nation from moving forward in time, requiring either expulsion or voluntary emigrationist schemes (as in the postbellum United States) or genetic dilution of chronically problematic chronological chromosomes through encouraging European immigration (as in Latin American eugenic programs of *blanqueamiento* [Andrews 2004]). The concept of a “child race,” a race that never grows up, also signifies this chronic racial temporal deficiency and retardation, not an attractive individual Peter Pan but a problematic collective Buckwheat.

Thus, as Hanchard (1999) emphasizes, the assertion of Black peoplehood necessarily involves a contestation of this temporal ghettoization, the staking of a claim to a different rhythm, not the imputed “natural” rhythm of the presocial and premodern, but a revisionist social beat syncopated by an alternative score, a rewritten modern: Afro-modernity. Vindicationist histories, reclaimed pasts, and reperiodized and reconceptualized Africas are all part of a temporal politics, a “seizing of the time”: a contestation of the imposed time maps of the White temporal regime and a demand for a *new* time. In other disciplines of the academy, this rewriting and recharting are by now familiar topics of inquiry. But where do philosophy and normative theory fit in? And how does the Black challenge manifest itself here?

## THE HISTORICAL SILENCES OF WESTERN SOCIAL JUSTICE THEORY

My claim will be that—albeit in the highly mediated and abstract forms distinctive of the discipline—the representation of the White narrative as the (raceless) human



narrative and the historic clock of the White mnemonic community as the (raceless) universal chronometer are to be found in philosophy also, particularly in the dominant discourse on justice. Specifically, I want to argue that ideal theory, which has since John Rawls (1999c) been the overtly announced hegemonic mode of political philosophy, has through the dominant practices of the philosophical justice community itself come to be the incarnation in the normative realm of a White time map.<sup>3</sup> Ideal theory's normative centering of a view of society conceived of as "a cooperative venture for mutual advantage" (Rawls 1999c, p. 4) has had the effect of obfuscating how radically different *actual* societies, such as our own, are from this ideal. In a demographically unrepresentative political philosophical community largely insulated from the negative consequences of systemic racial subordination, a slippage from norm to reality has taken place that sidelines corrective racial justice as an issue in any way pressing or important. And the Black challenge, as Lawrie Balfour (2011) suggests, following W. E. B. Du Bois, is to advance in White political philosophy a "mnemonic politics" that "struggles against the intertwined challenges of distortions of the past, on the one hand, and inaction against injustice in [our] own time, on the other" by offering a "counterhistory" that resurrects those "memories of the constitutive injustices of [the] past . . . [that] threaten to disrupt the racial order of the present" (pp. 15, 13, 10).

The issue theme is the postracial. But what does the postracial come to in a discipline which has never admitted it was racial in the first place? The weirdness of philosophy means that it can claim it was *always*, or always already, postracial: the self-conception of the discipline itself tends to marginalize issues of race. Dealing as it ostensibly does with the (timeless) human condition as such, philosophy can boast it was postracial through being aracial, while never conceding it was ever racial. So whereas other disciplines might confess, if only grudgingly and belatedly, to a racial past, philosophy denies even this. The temporal markers between the racial and the postracial are appropriate for subjects grappling with the temporally bound and contingent, not the subject dealing with the eternal and necessary. So the temporality is different from, say, sociology or anthropology, where race is part of the official story from the beginning. The ideality of philosophy is manifest, *inter alia*, in a putative atemporality.

White time is then timelessness and racelessness. Postraciality thus merges into preraciality, which is araciality, which is the abstract universal. White time recapitulates the aspirational postracial future not just in the present but in the past, so that the immanent realization of the abstract norm (raceless humanity, which is White humanity) is already waiting to be unfolded. The general transdisciplinary pattern of modernity, by which Whites come to represent the human, is reinforced and exacerbated here by the discipline's pretensions to timelessness and abstract truth. The concrete White (male) body becomes the disincarnate abstract human, the representative figure. Philosophy is what happens when this body encounters and theorizes the world; its problems are general. In the past, facial or (more broadly) corporeal Whiteness did not conflict with araciality because the human race was appropriately incarnated in the White race. Philosophical truths could not be extracted about the human condition from those whose humanity was dubious. In a famous line, albeit one crude by contemporary standards, "Nigger, your breed ain't metaphysical" (Warren 2001, p. 17). Whiteness is representative because Whites *are* the fully human race. Now, in a different time period, Whiteness remains representative of the human condition through the suppression of the alternative histories, the non-White times, of other humans. By happy chromatic coincidence supposedly including all the other colors already, Whiteness now denies its former restrictive identity in the name of a facial colorlessness still reflecting its original exclusionary spectrum. In the specific case of political

philosophy, our focus here, this means that the representative political figure of the modern period remains the White contractor of social contract theory—not the Red aborigine whose land has been taken for the contractual construction of the White settler state, or the Black slave who has been contracted over by being bought and sold by the White Atlantic. The discourse of justice is then appropriately investigated through the putatively colorless perspective of this figure, its history—its time—taken as defining. White time manifests itself as a nominally timeless ideal theory, which excludes the non-White times that would make the remedying of non-ideal injustices the normative priority.

Let me try to make this claim of White racial bias more plausible by sketching a larger background normative pattern within the discipline of systematic group exclusion. Rawls' (1999c) exploration of social justice as distributive justice might seem to be continuous in spirit, if not in detail, with a much older lineage in the Western tradition. After all, the characterization of distributive justice, and the conceptual difference between it and rectificatory justice, supposedly goes all the way back to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (2000). The seeming antiquity of these concepts would thus naturally lead one to think that there is a long premodern history in the classical and medieval periods of their philosophical discussion. Rawls would then be building on a tradition of two thousand years, though giving a distinctively modern and left-liberal account of the desirable ideal.

But in fact this presumption, which is widespread in the literature, is quite mistaken; it is not even true for distributive justice, let alone rectificatory justice. Samuel Fleischacker's punningly titled *A Short History of Distributive Justice* (2004) demonstrates that the ancient and medieval sources, which one would naturally assume to have detailed explorations of the concept, are in fact utilizing a different sense of the term. Fleischacker (2004) claims that for Aristotle himself both distributive and rectificatory justice are tied to *merit*, not simple human status, and distributive justice "was not seen as relevant at all to property rights" (p. 5). The concept of distributive justice with which Rawls and contemporary political philosophers in general are working is "little more than two centuries old" (p. 2) and in fact, in Fleischacker's (2004) view, can be traced back to a figure no more distant than François-Noël Babeuf.

In effect, then, a fictive philosophical narrative has been constructed that dramatically understates how recent is the commitment to distributive justice in our contemporary sense. The view that people are entitled to certain goods and rights merely because of their common humanity is really a product of modernity. Nor, in retrospect, should this have been particularly surprising, since it is only with modernity that egalitarianism as a general moral principle, even hedged about and gender- and racially-restricted as it is, becomes established as a social norm. So the point is that even *distributive* justice as a "general" (scare quotes necessary) ideal is only about two hundred years old in the Western tradition. But if egalitarian distribution—distribution not, that is, in the strong sense of material egalitarianism, but in the weaker sense of being guided by norms of our equal humanity and equal moral status—is such a recent concept in philosophical discussions, it will be appreciated that egalitarian *rectificatory redistribution* for subordinated groups is even more underdiscussed and undertheorized. If those historically subordinated (by our own contemporary moral standards) were not entitled to "just" distributive shares in the first place (by the standards of their time), what need would there have been for theorizing the rectification of injustices to them?

The focus on "White" time, then, needs to be located in a *broader* critique of Western philosophy, and Western normative theory, as the discourse of the socially privileged.<sup>4</sup> In her *Analyzing Oppression*, Ann Cudd (2006) points out that hers is the

first book-length treatment of this subject in the analytic tradition—which is really, when one thinks about it, a profound indictment of the discipline. For it is not as if social oppression has been marginal to the history of humanity. On the contrary, with the possible exception of hunting-and-gathering societies (assuming—controversially for some feminist anthropologists—an equitable gender division of labor), *all* social systems have been oppressive in one way or another, whether on axes of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, race, colonial status, or some combination of the preceding. But women will constitute half the population to begin with. So once one adds to their number that subset of the male population disadvantaged by other group memberships, it follows straightforwardly that in virtually all societies over the past few thousand years, it is a *majority* of the population that have been denied equal rights and opportunities. Oppression is not marginal but modal. The general philosophical failure to recognize and theorize oppression is rooted in the sociology of the profession, a profession that, in the West, has generally excluded White women and people of color. As Cudd (2006) observes, “philosophers tend not to come from oppressed groups . . . . While one need not suffer oppression in order to see it or to be motivated to write about it, clearly it helps” (p. vii). Fleischacker’s (2004) revisionist re-reading of the Western tradition basically confirms that the discourse of justice over the two thousand-plus years of its history has largely been a rationale for group privilege.

Once this broader context of theoretical culpability has been recognized, my claims about ideal theory should seem less exceptionable. It is not, as the philosophical naïf might think, that there has been a long history in the Western tradition of egalitarian concern and non-group-restricted conceptions of justice that is now suddenly being breached. *The exclusion of the majority of the population from the ambit of justice theory has historically been the philosophical norm, not the philosophical exception.* White time would then not be aberrant, but would take its appropriate nested place (time?) among other earlier (and concurrent) philosophical chronologies complicit with the rationalization of group privilege.

## **RAWLSIAN “IDEAL THEORY” AS (IN PRACTICE) UNDERWRITTEN BY WHITE TIME**

Against this background, let me now try to make my case for the de facto Whiteness of the temporality underwriting Rawlsian “ideal theory.”

First, a gloss. John Rawls’ (1999c) theory of justice famously presupposes a distinction between what he calls “ideal theory” and “non-ideal theory.” Ideal theory is not just normative theory, which is obviously a prerequisite for any investigation of justice, but the normative theory of “a perfectly just society,” what Rawls also terms “a well-ordered society.” We are to think of society as “a cooperative venture for mutual advantage” regulated by rules “designed to advance the good of those taking part in it.” A well-ordered society will then be an ideal subset of such societies in which “[e]veryone is presumed to act justly and to do his part in upholding just institutions.” Strict compliance theory, i.e., ideal theory, which examines the principles of justice of a well-ordered society, should be our theoretical starting point because, for Rawls, “it provides, I believe, the only basis for the systematic grasp of [the] more pressing problems” of partial compliance (non-ideal) theory. Non-ideal theory covers such matters as punishment, just war doctrine, resistance against unjust regimes, and compensatory justice. Clearly, then, racial justice—which is preeminently a matter of correcting for the injustices of the past—falls under non-ideal theory, “the principles that govern how we are to deal with injustice” (1999c, pp. 4–8). And this is confirmed in Rawls’



final book, *Justice as Fairness* (2001), where he writes that race and gender are not discussed in *Theory of Justice* because “we are mainly concerned with ideal theory: the account of the well-ordered society of justice as fairness” (p. 65).

My claim is that this set of conceptualizations is multiply unhelpful for the theorization of race, thereby producing a normative theory not colorless and all-inclusive but in effect white and exclusionary. To begin with, whatever the potentiality of ideal theory for addressing these problems, it is an undeniable *fact* that Rawls and the vast secondary literature on Rawls does marginalize issues of race and racial justice. So even if this were merely a contingent pattern, it would be one deserving our attention and analysis. The “Whiteness” of philosophy is so extreme that it is easy for philosophers of color to learn to take it for granted as a given, to cease to find it remarkable. But every now and then, it really needs to be brought to the forefront of our awareness, and I suggest that in this area it is particularly striking.

Racial injustice is arguably the most salient of all American injustices, given the establishment of the polity as a White settler state founded on aboriginal expropriation and genocide, and African slavery and subsequent Jim Crow (Fredrickson 1981; Jacobson 1999; Jennings 1975; Marx 1998; Smith 1997). For no other Western democracy has race been so central to the constitution of the nation, what Rawls (1999c) would call “the basic structure” (p. 3). If the political philosophy of *any* country should have racial justice as a central theme, that country should be the United States, especially given that the philosopher standardly credited with reviving Anglo-American political philosophy and making justice its proper subject was himself an American citizen. But in Rawls’ own work, as I have documented elsewhere (Mills 2009), race gets even less attention than gender, half a dozen pages or so. Nor is there any significant secondary literature attempting to develop Rawlsian ideas to deal with race that would compare in volume with the feminist literature on gender justice (Abbey 2013).

The companions and guidebooks of the last decade—such as Samuel Freeman’s edited *Cambridge Companion to Rawls* (2003) and *Rawls* (2007), Percy B. Lehning’s *John Rawls: An Introduction* (2009), Jon Mandle’s *Rawls’s A Theory of Justice: An Introduction* (2009), Sebastiano Maffetone’s *Rawls: An Introduction* (2010), Frank Lovett’s *Rawls’s A Theory of Justice: A Reader’s Guide* (2011), and Paul Voice’s *Rawls Explained* (2011)—have either no discussions at all of race, racism, and affirmative action, or at best a sentence or a paragraph or two. Nor do they indicate that this might be a problem, or comment anywhere on the absurdity of the most famous twentieth-century theorist of justice of a former White settler state having nothing useful to say about race—the central injustice on which that state rests. So the simple fact that racial justice has *not* been central to the discussions of justice in American political philosophy over the last forty years is itself a clear-cut testimony to its “Whiteness.”

Nevertheless, it can obviously be replied that this lacuna, embarrassing as it may be (though it doesn’t seem to be), is still only a contingent one, unrelated to the apparatus. It will be maintained that although White political philosophers in this tradition have not, as a matter of fact, sought to deploy Rawls’ apparatus to address these questions, there is nothing to stop them or others from doing so. So I need to make the case for a Whiteness that is not merely an artifact of demography, but reinforced by the design of the apparatus itself, if not ineluctably, at least as a strong tendency.

Consider, in this light, Rawls’ (1999c) opening characterization of society as “a cooperative venture for mutual advantage” governed by rules “designed to advance the good of those taking part in it” (p. 4). Are we to read this as a stipulative characterization of an *ideal* society or as a definition of *actual* societies? The answer is not as straightforward as it might seem. A first reaction would be that Rawls has to mean *ideal* societies, what societies *should* be, since, as earlier emphasized, actual societies over the

past few thousand years have been characterized by oppressions of various kinds. But then what would a well-ordered society be, and how would there be conceptual room for a distinction between ideal societies that are well-ordered and ideal societies that are not? Doesn't "ideal" as an adjective erase any such distinction? Moreover, what could Rawls then mean by saying, as he does, that "[e]xisting societies are of course seldom well-ordered in this sense . . . . Men disagree about which principles should define the basic terms of their association" (p. 5)? This seems to suggest that there *are* actually existent well-ordered societies, even if rare, and that even when there is disagreement, so that the (higher?) ideal of well-orderedness is not attained, existing societies *do* at least conform to the (lower?) ideal of being cooperative ventures established as reciprocally beneficial associations. Thomas Pogge, a former Rawls student, concludes in his *Realizing Rawls* (1989) that Rawls *does* in fact mean his characterization descriptively, and criticizes Rawls for such an obvious error: "This explication [of society] seems narrow, for there are surely many historical societies (standardly so-called) whose rules fail . . . to be designed for mutual advantage" (p. 20). *Realizing Rawls* appeared before the publication of *Political Liberalism* (Rawls [1993] 1996), and it could be argued that the later book clarifies the ambiguity, making clear that Rawls means that the conception of society as a cooperative venture is part of the culture of a democratic society. But it is noteworthy that Samuel Freeman (2007), the preeminent Rawls scholar, writes in his exegetical *Rawls* (a book published after Rawls' death and the appearance of all five of his authored books): "Basically [Rawls] conceives of society in terms of social cooperation, which he regards as productive and mutually beneficial, and which involves an idea of reciprocity or fair terms" (p. 106). And in the glossary of technical terms at the end of the book, we find: "Rawls regards society as a fair system of social cooperation" (p. 483).

It seems to me, then, that whichever interpretation, descriptive or idealized, we put on these formulations, the result is going to be deeply problematic for the theorization of race and racial justice. If Rawls genuinely believed, at the time of writing *Theory*, that all societies were at least cooperative ventures, even if only a few were well-ordered, then it means he had an astonishingly naïve view of how actual societies work—a view that appears to be foundationally shaped by class, race, and gender privilege. But even if (bypassing Freeman's characterization, which seems to deny any textual shift) we attribute the phrasing of *Theory* to some kind of inadvertent conceptual malapropism, and rely instead on an interpretation from the later writings which makes this an idealized formulation (an *ideal* society as a cooperative venture), we are still faced with the problem of how normative conclusions drawn about such societies are going to be extensible to real-world racist societies.

As numerous works in critical philosophy of race have argued over the last two decades, race is not natural but a social construct whose genesis depends on a certain kind of "basic structure" coming into existence, one marked by systemic discrimination and *non-cooperation* (Haslanger 2012; Taylor [1993] 2013). Race does not ontologically preexist the social; race is ontologically dependent on the social. Rawls locates race under non-ideal theory, not part of the normative universe of the well-ordered society, since a society that was genuinely a cooperative venture, let alone a well-ordered society, would not have races as social existents. And it is for this reason that in *Justice as Fairness*, Rawls (2001) explains that "a democratic society" (p. 21) excludes a racist one. But the challenge we then face is deriving from Rawls' work the principles of transitional justice necessary to move us from our actual ill-ordered racist society, characterized by structural subordination (where races do exist), to the well-ordered society where his two principles of ideal distributive justice apply (and races do not exist). And the problem is not merely that Rawls gives us so little guidance as

to how this derivation is to be carried out, but that by failing to map how radically divergent racist societies are from the well-ordered cooperative-venture ideal, he and his followers in the vast secondary literature on Rawlsianism handicap any attempt to introduce racial justice as a theme into this discourse. Elucidating distributive justice in well-ordered societies becomes the dikailogical<sup>5</sup> end in itself rather than (as Rawls originally [1999c] promised) being instrumental to the goal of developing an adequate theorization for the “pressing and urgent matter” (p. 8) of remedying injustice. By default, the “cooperative venture” (p. 4) characterization—even if originally meant normatively rather than descriptively—becomes the tacit operating picture of the actual.

The Whiteness of the dikailogical time map of mainstream political philosophy, the absence of the “mountains” (Zerubavel 2003, pp. 25–34) of social oppression as fundamental to its topography, is thus not contingent but appropriate for a global Euro-community systemically amnesiac—anti-mnemonic—about their planetary subordination of people of color and what measures of justice would be required to redress that subordination. Conceiving of society as a cooperative venture immediately locates one (given the actual history of the past few hundred years) on a metaphysically divergent and counterfactual timeline in which race never came into existence. With some dissenters (Isaac 2004), the conventional periodization of race makes it a product of modernity, or at the earliest late feudalism. Such for example is the timeline of George Fredrickson’s well-known *Racism: A Short History* (2002). So in the very modern period which gives rise to social contract theory, and its picture of equal moral individuals consensually establishing society and the polity for mutual advantage, race emerges as a line of normative and political demarcation distinguishing the morally/politically equal from the morally/politically unequal. Excluded from the consensual contract, these populations of color—expropriated indigenes, African slaves, and colonized “natives”—experience the global Euro-polity as imposed, not agreed-upon, as exploitative, and not beneficial. And race—as social, not natural—is the “basic structure” that incarnates this exclusion.

To conceptualize this history in terms of “consent” and “cooperation” is thus to eliminate a central pillar of the actual (local and global) basic structure and to extend the local intra-White time of the modern Western Euro-state to the chronology of the planet as a whole. A racially post-lapsarian world is being presented as pre-lapsarian, as if race, serpentine, had not already corrupted human relationships, creating a history based on the denial to people of color of equal moral standing, equal respect, and the equal capacity to form a polity themselves. White time here is the illusory inclusiveness of a hypothetical alternative time-track being presupposed as actual: a possible world which could conceivably have developed, but never did; which cannot now be reconstructed—but which is nonetheless being represented as the common time in which to investigate questions of justice. But taking race seriously means beginning with the repudiation of the idea of society in modernity as a cooperative venture, and excavating the suppressed archaeology, the temporal strata, of social oppression. To the extent that one does *not* do this in one’s descriptive and normative theory, one will, in effect, be restricting one’s dikailogical concerns to the White population. *A body of theory predicated on such assumptions simply does not have the time to deal with racial justice.*

So Rawls’ later seeming retreat from the originally global pretensions of *Theory*’s scope to the more restricted ambit of the Western “democratic” nations does not solve the problem of the theory’s zone of applicability. Westphalian time then becomes the local time in which the democratic West evolves, temporally disjoined from the rest of the world, and thereby disconnected from the actual relations of imperial domination and exploitation that explain the asynchrony of the Western and non-Western clocks.

The state of the global South is then attributed to the intrinsic deficiencies of its inhabitants, their premodern backwardness, rather than, as Walter Rodney (2011) pointed out decades ago, their underdevelopment by the global North. Olufemi Taiwo's recent *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (2010) explicitly highlights the temporal dimension of this process. Rather than a common time with differentiated outcomes produced by an exploitative White temporal colonial regime, colonial power maintained "sociocronically" in place—in time—indigenous traditions that were dissolving, and made them the explanans of African stasis (pp. 11–15). Thus, Western responsibility for the racial injustice retarding non-Western development is displaced by racially differentiated local times, modern and premodern, fast and slow—not differential racial access to temporal resources within geo-synchronicity, but differential racial ability to make use of time within local geo-particularities.

But what, it might be retorted, about the "four-stage sequence" (Rawls 1999c, pp. 171–176) outlined in section thirty-one of *Theory*? While this is a logical construction, "a device for applying the principles of justice" (p. 176) rather than an actual recounting of historical events, surely it does provide, contra my claims, the theoretical entrée for the consideration of the temporality of historical oppression that I am accusing Rawls of neglecting. After all, the original position, while it may in some sense be a conceptual descendant of the state of nature, is crucially differentiated from it in being the setting of a thought experiment we enter into *from* our actual location in history. And those theorists who have assumed that racial justice can be handled within a Rawlsian framework have taken for granted that it is indeed here that one inputs the pertinent historical information at the appropriate stage. But my response would be that from the perspective of the time relevant here—the theoretical time appropriate for framing the determination of the principles of rectificatory justice—the concepts made available to us by ideal theory *cannot accommodate the real-world history*. So to the (limited) extent that Rawls does recognize non-ideal social realities in his writings, he does not provide for us the apparatus necessary for dealing with their dikaiological implications.<sup>6</sup>

Recall the earlier point that, according to Fleischacker's (2004) revisionist account, distributive justice as a "general" norm only comes into existence as an ideal about two hundred years ago. Moreover, to the extent that it does so, it is not, of course, really general at all but restricted to White males. The ascension of White men, no longer class differentiated, to the status of normative equality does not take White women and people of color with them (Mills 1997; Pateman 1988). That is a *separate* struggle that is, indeed, still in progress. So even when, by Fleischacker's clock, distributive justice as an overarching "modern" norm has finally been established, it is limited to a subsection of the human population, not extended to those who are not in the moral universe of the "equals" to be counted in the first place. Classical social contract theory (1650–1800), though focused on political obligation rather than social justice, registers this partitioning of moral and political concern in the structuring of its crucial concepts, in what and whom it pays attention to and what and whom it ignores.

Would it be in the least surprising, then, if the version of social contract theory that Rawls resurrects more than a century and a half later with the publication of *Theory* continues to be structured by this exclusionary normative blueprint? As the second wave of feminist political theorists pointed out (most famously Susan Moller Okin [1989]), the substantive as against merely nominal inclusion of women required a redrawing of the contract's assumptions about the demarcation of the public and private spheres, and the realms where justice did and did not apply. Gender justice necessitated a gender-based reconceptualization of the apparatus. My claim would be that racial justice requires a similarly profound rethinking, and that the crucial normative

boundary here—the racial equivalent of the public/private demarcation—is temporal: the limitation of justice to the distributive and synchronic. For if racial oppression has indeed been central to the history and structure of the United States, or, more generally the Western “democracies” (putatively) that become Rawls’ normative reference-point, then the substantive normative inclusion of previously excluded non-White populations will require the correction of the disadvantages inherited diachronically from that history. Rectificatory justice will be their priority.

I suggest, then, that the Whiteness of the Rawlsian theoretical temporality as originally formulated by Rawls, and subsequently developed in the secondary literature by the overwhelmingly White community of political philosophers, inheres in the simple fact that the entire apparatus is oriented towards ideal distributive justice, not non-ideal rectificatory justice. Though Rawls (1999c) asserted at the start of *Theory* that ideal theory was the best foundation for doing non-ideal theory, he never made good on this claim. Nowhere in the two thousand pages of Rawls’ five authored books is there *any* discussion of rectificatory justice (“compensatory justice” for Rawls). For the four-stage sequence to provide a theoretical entrée for such matters, a self-conscious theorization of ill-ordered societies characterized by systemic oppression would be necessary, and an explanation of how the successive raising of different layers of the veil must modify—in the transition from the original position through the constitutional and legislative stages to the stage of the “application of rules to particular cases by judges and administrators” (Rawls 1999c, p. 175)—the two principles so as to derive appropriate norms of compensatory justice to remedy past wrongs and eliminate ongoing structural subordination. But no such account is provided. Instead, Rawls (1999c) tells us that “principles [of partial compliance theory] are discussed from the point of view of the original position after those of ideal theory have been chosen” (p. 175), and directs us to section thirty-nine, where we learn only that we should prioritize the remedying of the most extreme “deviation[s] from perfect justice” guided by the “lexical ranking of the [ideal] principles” (p. 216). But no details are given, unlike for “the cases of civil disobedience and conscientious refusal” (p. 175) which are discussed at length over *five* sections of the book (sections fifty-five to fifty-nine). Neither in Rawls nor his myriad commentators, exegetes, and disciples over the succeeding forty years has there been any attempt to work out what the principles of compensatory justice would be for “removing” (1999c, p. 216) the “pressing and urgent” injustices revealed by the final lifting of the veil, despite the fact that achieving “a systematic grasp” (p. 8) of the principles for guiding such removal was precisely the rationale for beginning with ideal theory in the first place.

I submit that the complete *lack* of urgency about these matters makes clear that the “history” that has been permitted entry to the four-stage process is the sanitized and idealized White time of the modern Western liberal Euro-states, conceived of as “democracies” *simpliciter* rather than (in Pierre van den Berghe’s ([1972] 1978) famous phrase) *Herrenvolk* democracies, and purged of their actual history (undesirable and unacknowledged non-White time) of genocide, slavery, aboriginal expropriation, and absolutist colonial rule over people of color. The history of racial oppression cannot be admitted into the “socially shared moral geography” (Lipsitz 2011, p. 29) of the White mnemonic philosophical community, because of its foundational disruption of the notion of society as a cooperative venture created by human beings whose moral equality is reciprocally recognized. The contractarian framework fits with the “mental relief map,” the “norms of remembrance” (Zerubavel 2003, pp. 7, 5), of the modern Euro-narrative, completely amnesiac about—or, at best, radically revisionist of—the colonial past. The legitimacy of distributive justice as a classless entitlement of all White men is now admitted. The struggle of White women to expand this entitlement is



challenge enough. The struggle of people of color not merely to be distributively included but to raise the deeper question of making *rectificatory* rather than distributive justice central is too extreme even to be considered. Ideal theory establishes the coordinates for a White time map in which issues of rectificatory justice, the dikaiological concern most pressing for the non-White population, are literally off the map. It is a general manifestation of the socially privileged demography of the profession, and, with respect to race, its Whiteness. The very fact that the deep and flagrant racial injustice that has been central to modern world history is so undiscussed in the Rawls literature brings home how White this whole discourse is. It is the normative discourse of the non-enslaved, the non-expropriated, and the non-victims of genocide—the discourse of the racially privileged Euro- and White settler population, whose normative temporality need pay no attention in determining questions of justice to a deeply non-ideal (non-admitted, non-mapped, non-theorized, and thus non-existent) past that has been altered not metaphysically but representationally, gated out of their moral consideration.

In sum—  
*White time.*

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## NOTES

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2. For this reference, as well as for her own very suggestive discussion on the subject, I am indebted to Lawrie Balfour (2011).
3. Here and at other points, Anderson's key recommendation, which I have followed, was to soften to *dominant practices* of the White political philosophy community what I had originally made close to a *conceptual necessity* following from the nature of ideal theory.
4. Rodney Roberts has argued that the under-discussion and under-theorization of rectificatory justice in the profession is itself a manifestation of the overwhelmingly privileged social background of its historically dominant demographic groups; see Roberts (2002).
5. "Dikaiological": philosophical term (adjective) referring to matters pertaining to justice; from the Greek *dikaïosune*, justice.
6. Rawls' discussions of non-ideal theory are limited to the problems of civil disobedience (nationally) (Rawls 1999c, pp. 319–343) and "outlaw states" and "burdened societies" (internationally) (Rawls 1999b, pp. 89–120). At no point does he offer any detailed theoretical discussion of questions of rectification. Moreover, it is noteworthy that, even for the case of civil disobedience, he stipulates that his discussion is restricted to "the context . . . of a state of near justice, that is, one in which the basic structure of society is nearly just" (Rawls 1999c, p. 309). Systemically unjust Western societies where the basic structure is *itself* a structure of oppression, as in the racist society of which he was a citizen, are simply beyond the ambit of his theoretical concern.

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