

A CRITIQUE OF POSTRACIALISM

*Conserving Race and Complicating Blackness Beyond the Black-white Binary*¹

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Abstract

This article offers a critique of the very claim that we live in post-racial times, and examines the residue of old systems of racism intermeshed with new forms of racism that perpetuate systematic institutional racism. I argue that to combat institutional racism we need *post-racism* rather than *postracialism*. Additionally, I reject the Black-white Binary as the singular or even primary paradigm for understanding racism in order to challenge narrow conceptualizations of racism. Finally, I argue for a more nuanced and complex analysis of Blackness.

Keywords: Postracialism, Post-racism, New Racism, Black-white Binary, Blackness

INTRODUCTION

There have been a plethora of historical articulations of what might be called the post-racial project. The idea of getting after, past, or beyond race is not new and has been conceptualized in numerous ways including, for example, various forms of assimilationism, racial eliminativism, and/or colorblindness. A recent iteration of post-racialism emerged during the 2008 presidential campaign followed by the election of President Barack Hussein Obama as the forty-fourth President of the United States.² Obama was often cast as a post-racial candidate, the election described as a post-racial election, and then after Obama's inauguration this nation was declared a post-racial America. It is fascinating that this representation of the United States as a post-racial utopia was so easily embraced by many on the basis of an election in which a biracial Harvard graduate won a hard-fought and narrow (if significant) victory.³

This article traces several examples of "postracialism" in a specific critical philosophy of race literature to support my contention that there is something old and familiar about an idea that is imagined to be new—the post-racial ideal. At the same time, it sheds new light on another concept imagined to be obsolete—systematic institutional racism. A critique of the very claim that we live in post-racial times, this article examines the residue of old systems of racism intermeshed with new forms of racism that perpetuate systematic institutional racism. I argue that to combat institutional racism we need *post-racism* rather than *postracialism*. Additionally, I reject the Black-white Binary (BwB) as the singular or even primary paradigm for understanding racism in order to challenge narrow conceptualizations of racism. Finally, I argue for a more nuanced and complex analysis of Blackness.

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The article is organized into four parts. In part one, I examine Howard McGary's *The Post-Racial Ideal* (2012) to situate the term postracial philosophically (i.e., what philosophers mean when we use the term), and different versions of postracialism—specifically assimilationism, eliminativism, and the colorblind ideal. In part two, I identify postracialism as a form of new racism not to be conflated with post-racism. I contrast postracialism with post-racism to underscore why I reject the assumption operating in each of the above forms of postracialism that the long-term goal must be the end of the concept of race. In part three, I take seriously the need to theorize race and racism beyond the Black-white Binary by focusing on the work of Linda Martín Alcoff. And in part four, I offer a more nuanced notion of Blackness using Eugene Robinson's *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America* (2010) to dislodge monolithic representations of Blackness, challenging the idea that reflecting on Blackness amounts to being confined within the Black-white Binary and/or is synonymous with neglecting the diversity of the racialized world.

WHAT DOES POSTRACIAL MEAN? SITUATING POSTRACIALISM

In his published lecture, *The Post-Racial Ideal*, McGary offers several versions of postracialism that provide a helpful starting point for articulating what postracial (PR) means: PR₁) a postracial society as a version of assimilationism, PR₂) a postracial United States as one in which we move beyond race and see persons as individuals insofar as the negative aspects of U.S. history regarding race are behind us, and PR₃) the postracial ideal as an endorsement of the colorblind principle. Each of these is an assimilationist version of postracialism. But McGary also considers a non-assimilationist position: PR₄) postracial as an end to anti-Black America which entails the removal of white privilege while simultaneously allowing nonracist identities to remain significant. I want to briefly review the first, second, and third versions of postracial presented by McGary before focusing on the fourth, which I find most philosophically interesting insofar as it is not postracial at all but rather makes the case for retaining nonracist identities as significant.

In examining a postracial society as a form of *assimilationism* (PR₁), McGary (2012) presents Frederick Douglass as an assimilationist holding the beliefs that “morally decent people should work to get beyond their racial identities,” “racial identity places constraints on individuals and prevents them from reaching their full human potentials,” and “a just society [is] an assimilationist society” (pp. 10–11).⁴ Although McGary underscores Douglass's assimilationism as an ideal to get beyond race, he also notes Douglass understood that institutions giving legal significance to racial identities have to be tolerated until society is able to move closer to this ideal assimilationist society. In this sense, Douglass had sounder judgment than postracialists of today who believe that racial identities need not be recognized or even tolerated in our current racial climate.

When exploring a postracial United States, (PR₂) or a form of *eliminativism*, McGary notes that this particular version of the postracial makes several assumptions: (1) that thinking about race means we cannot respect others as individuals (i.e., race thinking prevents us from interacting with others as individuals and racism is so embedded into our racial thinking that we cannot deconstruct it); (2) since races are not natural kinds, we can not in good faith talk about races (i.e., a racial ontology that questions the metaphysical reality of race and concludes that if races do not exist on an ontological level, they cannot have a moral or social reality); and (3) eliminating race is necessary for escaping our awful history (i.e., racism has been central to the makeup

of this country and the only way to overcome the damaging impact is by eliminating racial identities). McGary describes the third version of postracial as a *colorblind society* (PR₃) or an endorsement of the colorblind principle. According to the colorblind principle, giving significance to racial identities amounts to both a moral and legal failing (i.e., moral thinking should disavow reasoning in racial terms in part because acknowledging races causes us to give into racism).

I will examine the first (assimilationism), second (eliminativism), and third (colorblind principle) versions of postracial together as these particular versions of the postracial are most closely related to the aforementioned assumptions about the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. Let us combine these versions of the postracial and the accompanying assumptions related to the Obama presidency in this way (PR_{1,2,3}): *Barack Obama was elected the first Black (biracial) President of the United States in 2008 (and re-elected in 2012), therefore the United States is a postracial nation in which the negative aspects of our history regarding race are behind us, indicating that we have moved beyond race to see persons as individuals, and we have achieved the ideals of assimilationism, eliminativism, and/or the colorblind principle.* This claim makes several assumptions, among them: (1) that the election of the first Black President of the United States erased the history of racial oppression that has existed in this country since its inception; (2) that racial oppression in the United States has only operated on a Black-white Binary; and (3) that the election of the first Black President is sufficient to erase the history of racial oppression in all of its forms—not only anti-Black racism, but also other forms of racism, nativism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia directed at Native Americans, Asians/Asian Americans, Latinos/as, Muslims, and other racial, ethnic, and/or religious groups.

Against these assumptions, it is my contention that the postracial “ideal” is perhaps further from reality now (with Obama in office) than even the assimilationist vision Frederick Douglass hoped for in the aftermath of slavery. Of course, Douglass had reason to be hopeful about emancipation and Reconstruction (1865–1877). And the hope that Obama represented for many in 2008 is as understandable as Douglass’s hope of assimilation post-emancipation. But we must remember that post-emancipation labor exploitation continued through sharecropping and there was a bitter backlash in the form of Jim Crow segregation (legally sanctioned by the *Plessy* decision of 1896) as well as ongoing violent white terrorism. Likewise, in our time, proclamations about the United States becoming a postracial nation on the basis of the election of the first Black President presuppose that this singular event could somehow erase the history of racial oppression that has existed here since before its inception as a nation in 1776.⁵

We might respond to these proclamations of a postracial nation and the accompanying presuppositions by asserting that while President Obama’s historic election is certainly worth celebrating, this event in itself was not enough to undo centuries of systematic racism. Just as emancipation did not amount to full citizenship and equality for all before the law, the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections have produced neither a perfect union nor a postracial nation. This is evidenced by the post-Obama backlash already manifesting in anti-immigration legislation, the dismantling of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and government shutdowns (to offer only a few examples), as well as by the fact that systems of racial oppression in the United States and across the globe have largely remained intact. But even if we decouple the postracial ideal from the Obama presidency, we can still question the common underlying argument for postracialism in the form of assimilationism (PR₁), eliminativism (PR₂), and the colorblind principle (PR₃)—namely, that the long-term goal must be the end of the concept of race and/or that the end of the concept of race is the best way to eradicate racism. This brings us to the alternative non-assimilationist position taken up by McGary.

Unlike the aforementioned assimilationist position (PR₁), eliminativist position (PR₂), and colorblind position (PR₃), McGary (2012) describes non-assimilationists in this way, “They do not believe that the good or just society requires us to move beyond race, however, they do insist that all racial groups must be regarded as legal, moral, and social equals” (p. 12). This non-assimilationist position offers a version of the postracial that calls for an end to white privilege and anti-Black racism in America while allowing for maintaining nonracist identities as significant (PR₃). This version of the postracial does not require the elimination of the idea of race but rather seeks to eliminate overt and subtle forms of racism—and simultaneously allow the preservation of benign racial identities.⁶ McGary looks at Douglass as an assimilationist and I want to present W. E. B. Du Bois as a non-assimilationist insofar as he argues for the conservation of race.⁷ While Douglass was understandably hopeful post-emancipation, Du Bois (1997) had reason to caution Blacks in 1897 (twenty years after Reconstruction), that despite the fact that we have been encouraged to “depreciate and minimize race distinctions . . . in our calmer moments we must acknowledge that human beings are divided into races” (pp. 228–229). He describes the ideal of human brotherhood as not yet practical at the end of the nineteenth century and on that basis admonishes his audience not only to acknowledge that human beings are divided into races but also to conserve race. Du Bois’ conservationist cautionary note remains applicable in the post-Obama times in which we currently find ourselves and his position is as relevant to contemporary postracial rhetoric as it was over a century ago to rhetoric about universal human brotherhood.

To be clear, this article does not endorse the versions of postracial as assimilationism, eliminativism, or the colorblind principle—each of which makes the false assumption that not acknowledging races is tantamount to resisting racism. Of the options offered by McGary, my argument is most closely aligned with the non-assimilationist position (PR₄). One might regard this as a misnomer (as a form of postracialism) insofar as it allows for the “conservation of races” and is actually about transcending racism rather than race. The article’s main point is not *racial* eliminativism but rather a *racist* eliminativism (i.e., seeking to eliminate overt and subtle forms of racism and simultaneously allowing the preservation of benign racial identities). Rather than harp on the Obama connection to the postracial ideal, let us examine the systematic institutional racism that has not been undone by his historic election and that is even less likely to be undone by assimilationism, eliminativism, or the colorblind principle.

POSTRACIALISM IS NOT POST-RACISM: SITUATING OLD AND NEW RACISMS

The words “racist” and “racism” for many conjure up images of chattel slavery, Jim Crow, white only signs, speak English signs, white actors in Black face, the Ku Klux Klan riding on horses with white robes and hoods, burning crosses on front lawns, house and church bombings, police officers using attack dogs and fire hoses on demonstrators, angry whites hurling offensive racial epithets, or perhaps Hitler and Nazism. This list could easily proliferate, but my point is that these words, “racist” and “racism,” seem to have been frozen in a space and time, perceived as old, previous, past, bygone, or no longer. It is because we have so many “old” images associated with “old” racism that it is necessary to provide a framework for the new colorblind racism. I find the notion of a “new” racism along with the idea of “colorblind” racism without racists (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Collins 2004) helpful and revealing. Retaining the word “racism” allows for some continuity with the historical contexts and situations out of

which systems of racism, racial oppression, and racial discrimination have emerged, while terms like new racism mark the present specificity of the current contexts and situations in which these systems continue to operate.

Patricia Hill Collins describes the new racism as a situation of both permanence and change. The elements of past racial formations and prior forms of racial rule have not been replaced, but rather have been incorporated into new forms of global capitalism, political structures that continue to disenfranchise under the guise of inclusion, transnational mass media reproduction and dissemination of ideologies and images used to justify racism, hypersegregation, poverty, and the prison industrial complex. Collins (2004) uses the language of “past-in-present” (p. 55) racial formations to capture the persistent enduring residue of past racial formations in emerging structures of the new racism. She also examines “the color-blind ideology of the new racism” (p. 178) which shifts from biological racist discourse to a cultural discourse that still assumes the unassimilability of Blacks and places emphasis on individualization (individual values, motivation, and morals).⁸ What is most powerful about Collins’s analysis of the new racism is her intersectional approach. Rather than treating race and racism as categories of identity and oppression that operate on a singular axis, she constantly emphasizes how class, gender, and sexuality inform the ways in which racial identities and oppressions are formulated and experienced.

Like Collins, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) identifies old and new forms of racism. The old Jim Crow racism justified the social standing of Blacks by relying on arguments about biological and moral inferiority and justified the racial order through overt means like signs and shotgun diplomacy. In contrast the new (colorblind) racism shifts from an emphasis on biological inferiority to cultural limitations, it is more subtle and institutional, yet it remains a formidable political tool for maintaining white privilege and the racial order. Bonilla-Silva outlines four central frames of colorblind racism: *abstract liberalism* (including variations of humanism, individualism, universalism, egalitarianism, and meliorism); *naturalization* (a depiction of race-related matters as natural, human nature, or just the way things are); *cultural racism* (presents cultural practices as fixed features and uses culturally based arguments to justify racial inequalities); and *minimization of racism* (attempts to minimize the significance of racism by suggesting that discrimination exists, but is no longer a central factor in minorities’ outcomes or collective standing in society).⁹ In addition to providing these frames of the new, colorblind racism without racists, Bonilla-Silva also offers a helpful distinction between nonracist and antiracist, urging political movements away from identifying as the former and closer toward becoming the latter. Bonilla-Silva (2010) explains: “Being an antiracist begins with understanding the institutional nature of racial matters and accepting that all actors in a racialized society are affected *materially* (receive benefits or disadvantages) and *ideologically* by the racial structure” (pp. 15–16). The nonracist versus antiracist distinction presented here lines up well with the postracial versus postracist distinction that I have in mind.

We should not conflate postracialism (the idea that eliminating racial categories or ignoring race will make racism go away) with post-racism (the antiracist struggle to identify and dismantle systems of racial oppression, especially institutionalized racism). McGary himself questions whether racial eliminativism is a viable option in the real world. McGary (2012) offers statistical evidence showing that America does still have a color line problem and that the identities of African Americans in particular do directly impact the directions and outcomes of their lives (pp. 29–30).¹⁰ Drawing on implicit bias scholarship and Patricia Hill Collins’s notion of controlling images, he asserts that people’s conscious beliefs about racial equality do not always line up with their subconscious prejudicial acts, and furthermore, eliminating institutional racism

must entail dislodging negative controlling images of different racial groups.¹¹ He encourages us to move beyond individual racist acts (a focal point for many liberals, and liberalism more generally), and to take seriously the problem of institutional racism, that is, “. . . racist attitudes and practices and institutions that reproduce patterns of racial discrimination without the intentional contributions of the dominant racial groups” (p. 70). Here I would like to expand beyond anti-Black racism to include other forms of racial oppression by turning to the critical philosophy of race scholarship that has sought to examine racial oppression beyond the Black-white Binary.

SITUATING RACE AND NEW RACISM BEYOND THE BLACK-WHITE BINARY

In the last decade, there has been increased philosophical interest in the Black-white paradigm or the Black-white Binary as an overly narrow focal point for theorizing race and racism.¹² In its simplest form, the BwB is the reduction of racial identities and racial oppression to Black and white to the exclusion of other racial categories and other forms of racial discrimination. Linda Martín Alcoff (2006) not only considers what is overlooked using the BwB as a singular paradigm for theorizing race, but she also unpacks this binary from the perspective of coalition building in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. For her, the BwB is disadvantageous because it does not adequately account for the complexity and plurality of racial identities and oppressions. Alcoff asserts, “the hegemony of the black/white paradigm has stymied the development of an adequate account of the diverse racial realities in the United States and weakened the general accounts of racism that attempt to be truly inclusive” (p. 253). Alcoff presents seven main arguments (including two of her own) against the Black-white paradigm: (1) it has disempowered various racial groups from being able to define their own identity (having had descriptions foisted upon them from the outside); (2) it historically ignores and/or marginalizes Asian Americans and Latinos (among others) in the public discourse on race and racism, resulting in a weakened analysis within the discourse; (3) it undermines development of effective legal and political solutions to variable forms of racial oppression by eliminating the specificities of the “Black” or non-white group; (4) it proposes that all conflicts between communities of color can be understood through anti-Black racism and white supremacy; (5) for these reasons, it undermines possibilities for coalition building; (6) the BwB has resulted in an imaginary of race in which there is a large white majority confronting a small Black minority, reinforcing a sense of the inevitability of white domination and a sense of fatalism; and (7) the BwB mistakenly configures race as exclusively having to do with color, as if color alone determines racial identity and is the sole object of racism.

Alcoff and others implore those of us doing critical philosophy of race work, as well as those of us working in racial justice, politics, and/or coalition building, to theorize race, racialization, and racism(s) in more inclusive and complex ways. Compelling arguments against the BwB show that while racial oppression has in fact operated on a Black-white binary in many cases, Black and white are not the only racial formations *and* anti-Black racism coupled with white supremacy are neither the primary nor the exclusive forms of racial oppression in the United States. Furthermore, it has been argued that the binary jettisons and even reinforces other forms of discrimination such as outsider racialization, model minority racialization, xenophobia, nativism, and racism experienced by groups that are not and do not identify as Black.

I wholly support the call for more expansive conceptions of race and racism, not only to account for various forms of racial discrimination, but also to account

for interlocking systems of oppression operating at the intersections of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and sexuality, religion, ability/disability, and other considerations. I take seriously the strong and relevant critique of the BwB, while also agreeing with Alcoff (2013) that “[t]he difficult challenge of this critical project has always been the question of how to critique the binary without deflating our commitment to address antiblack racism or implicitly denying the value and importance of work that is centered on this virulent form of racism” (p. 121). With this in mind, in the next section I underscore the diversity of Black identities in order to complicate conceptions of anti-Black racism, resist the reduction of African Americans to a monolithic group, and debunk the idea that all “Blacks” in the United States are “African American.”

SITUATING BLACK IDENTITIES: THE DIVERSITY AND DEVALUATION OF BLACKNESS

The use of the term African American is already complex, and the category Black—even in the U.S. context—does not always mean African American. In *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America* (2010) Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Eugene Robinson argues that there is not one Black America, rather, there are four (at least), including: (1) a *mainstream* middle-class majority with a full ownership stake in American society; (2) a large, *abandoned* minority with less hope of escaping poverty and dysfunction than at any time since Reconstruction’s crushing end; (3) a small *transcendent* elite with such enormous wealth, power, and influence that even white folks have to genuflect; and finally (4) two newly emergent groups—individuals of a *mixed-race* heritage and communities of *recent Black immigrants*—that make us wonder what “Black” is even supposed to mean. All of these groups are distinguished from one another according to demography, geography, psychology, profiles, mind-sets, hopes, fears, and dreams. Robinson (2010) explains there was a time “When We Were One,” though he does not claim here that Black Americans were ever a “monolithic” (p. 58) group. Rather, he notes there has always been diversity within this group.¹³

Three of the four Black Americas outlined by Robinson already complicate the meaning of Blackness for African Americans along the lines of class, wealth, power, and influence. But I also want to underscore his description of the fourth group, the “emergent newcomers,” who are specifically individuals of a mixed-race heritage and Black immigrants to the United States from Africa and the Caribbean. In describing the latter group of emergent newcomers, he states, “Africans are the best-educated group of immigrants coming to live in the United States—not Asians from China or India, not Europeans from Britain or France, not Latin Americans from Brazil or Argentina, but Africans from Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire” (Robinson 2010, p. 73). According to Robinson, the influx of these immigrant populations was facilitated by the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 that loosened restrictions on immigration based on geography in 1976, 1980, and 1990.¹⁴

The point that I am making in presenting Robinson’s analysis of the various Black Americas, and the Black immigrant “emergent newcomers” in particular, is that there is more to the “Black” part of the BwB than one might imagine. Not all Black people experiencing anti-Black racism in the United States are Black Americans and some of the other Blacks in America also have to contend with various forms of nativism, xenophobia, outsider racialization, and model minority racialization associated with other racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, I want to parse out conceptions of Blackness that emerge outside of the BwB—that is, I want to underscore the presence of Black members of the very groups typically signaled as excluded from the BwB, and

the persistence of anti-Black racism for the members of those groups who identify (or are identified) as Black.

Alcoff explores overlaps between mixed racial identity and anti-Black racism in *Visible Identities*. Alcoff (2006) analyzes the complexity of Latino identity stating, “The term ‘Latino’ signifies people from an entire continent, subcontinent, and several large islands, with diverse racial, national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic aspects to their identity” (p. 227).¹⁵ She describes Latino identities as “vexing” to the historically dominant conventional categories of race in the United States, but notes that Latin Americans are generally categorized “racially” as: “white (which often involves a double deceit: a claim to pure Spanish descent, very rare, and a claim that pure Spanish descent is purely white or European, also very rare); black (meaning wholly or mostly of African descent, usually sub-Saharan); Indian (meaning having some or mostly Amerindian descent); and mixed (which is sometimes divided into subcategories *mestizo*, *mulatto*, *cholito*, etc.) with the mixed category always enjoying the majority” (p. 235).

For Alcoff, there “is no internally consistent or coherent theory of ethnic or racial identity underlying the diversity of categories . . . the only point that seems to be consistent throughout is that the category black is the only category that is invariably racialized—that is, it is presented as black or mulatto and never as ‘West Indian’ or ‘African’” (pp. 235–236). She describes this invariable racialization as a form of anti-Black racism: “it seems clear that the striking use of ‘black’ for all people of African descent, employed in a schema that uses cultural and national markers like Spanish and European for other groups, is an indication of antiblack racism” (p. 236). On the one hand, Alcoff seems sympathetic to the suggested connection between “all Black people in the diaspora across nationalities and other cultural differences,” (p. 244), however, she also highlights an “Anglo/Latino divide” (p. 244) pertaining to Black identity. More specifically she calls for recognition of “the way in which U.S. hemispheric imperialism, as well as cultural and linguistic differences, create real resistance against an assimilation to the predominantly Anglo-constructed cultural articulation of Black identity” (p. 244).

Paul C. Taylor (2003) has also considered the ways Blackness is theorized explicitly within the BwB, but perhaps more implicitly outside of the binary. He takes up Blackness in various forms throughout *Race: A Philosophical Introduction*, including the relationship between race, culture, and ethnicity, micro-diversity as inner heterogeneity, and African immigration to the United States. At first glance his outline of the BwB seems concerned exclusively with African Americans (and the so-called Negro Problem) in contrast to Latinos/as, Indians, and Asians/Asian Americans. But a closer look reveals a more complex analysis of Blackness, including African immigrants who are not African American, as well as Blacks *among* Latino/a peoples (or *within* Latino/a groups). Taylor (2003) asserts, “As is the case in every place that’s been shaped by modern slavery, there is a pro-white colorist continuum: lighter is better” (p. 144).¹⁶ He revisits this point later when, following Alcoff (2000) and Lewis Gordon (2000), Taylor analyzes Blackness as an ontological position. He underscores a pattern—not only in the United States but also in Australia, the United Kingdom, Asia, and Latin America—in which “the condition of blackness, in its various forms, [is] firmly established at the bottom of several modes of social organization” (p. 154).

The purpose of reflecting on the BwB and then revisiting Blackness and anti-Black racism is to show that reflecting on Blackness does not amount to neglecting the diversity of the racialized world or the various forms of racial oppression operating within it. But this should not be confused with a dismissal of critiques of the BwB. Far from rejecting these critiques, I agree that we should heed the warnings about

the limitations of the BwB, but at the same time, we can still attend to the diversity of Blackness both within and beyond the binary. Returning to an analysis of Blackness on these terms allows us to theorize its internal diversity as well as the numerous manifestations of anti-Black racism that include, for example, xenophobic nativism and model minority racialization.

CONCLUSION

Racism has many historic and contemporary threads interwoven in the fabric of global inequality, and the United States is certainly no exception. Racism has survived as an oppressive system by constantly changing itself, by establishing, adjusting, and recreating racial hierarchies, and furthermore, by divide and conquer. It has survived not only through racialized slavery and colonial conquest, but also by attempting to establish and enforce rigid divisions (for example, separating Native Americans, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians from one another), all while maintaining and reinforcing white power and supremacy. Far from eliminating racism, calls to deny the existence of racial categories actually further entrench racism and white supremacy. Denying that races exist on a physical, metaphysical, and/or ontological level disempowers people who are targets of systematic institutional racism by denying them not only a framework in which to articulate the experience of oppression, but also a means to express solidarity to defend against such oppression.¹⁷ In the twenty-first century, postracialism has become a hegemonic ideology that claims racism is over. Racism is not only surviving by hiding under the cloak of postracialism, but it is also thriving unchecked because many have bought into the false assumption that there can be no racism without races.¹⁸ The flaws of the postracial project are further evidenced by the material and ideological realities of institutional racial oppression that expose the absurdity of the claim that we in the United States of America (not to mention across the globe) live in a postracial society.

I began by rejecting postracialism and outlining a few examples of historical articulations of the postracial project. I have argued that despite claims that we live in postracial times, the reality is that we are confronting what Collins and Bonilla-Silva have called the new racism. I have also expanded the possible meaning for the new racism by taking into consideration critiques of the Black-white Binary as presented by Alcoff. I am sympathetic to concerns that the BwB often functions to overshadow or erase forms of racism that are not explicitly anti-Black, as well as claims that the binary jettisons (even reinforces) other forms of discrimination. Consequently, my analyses of the meaning(s) of postracialism as new racism take seriously the issues raised by critiques of the BwB. Having said that, I also argued that it is important to underscore the complexity of Black identities in ways that resist the reduction of Blacks to a monolithic group. Above all, it has been my aim to show that postracialism as assimilationism, eliminativism, and/or the colorblind principle are neither viable nor desirable solutions to anti-Black racism or the various other forms of discrimination outlined here. Asserting that racial and ethnic categories (even if socially constructed and fluid) do not exist does not eradicate racism. And the eradication of racism is not contingent upon racial eliminativism. As Alcoff (2005) has rightly noted, the willful attachment to raced or sexed identities—even if they are identities created in conditions of oppression—is *not* necessarily pathological. Lucius Outlaw (1996) makes a similar claim, explaining, “the continued existence of discernable race- and ethnically-based communities of meaning is highly desirable even if, in the very next instant, racism and perverted, invidious ethnocentrism in every form and manifestation would disappear

forever,” (p. 157). I emphatically agree. The ultimate goal is not denying the existence of racial categories or eliminating the idea of race, but rather the eradication of systematic institutionalized racism. It is neither necessarily pathological to have a willful attachment to racial identities nor altogether undesirable to maintain race and ethnic based communities—even in the absence of racism and ethnocentrism.

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NOTES

1. I would like to acknowledge and thank Robert Bernasconi and Paul Taylor for reading and offering critical feedback on early drafts of this paper and thank the anonymous readers who offered critical feedback with helpful suggestions. Any limitations and oversights that remain, in spite of keen suggestive insights from my readers, are my own. I prefer to keep *Black* and *Blackness* capitalized, as *African American* is capitalized, though I use *Black* rather than *African American* throughout because it is a more inclusive term. Also, I prefer to keep *white* in lowercase as an intended disruption of the norm (i.e., using either capitals or lowercase letters for both terms). This preference is applied to the text in my own voice, but not to quotes of other texts.
2. We could add to the election of President Obama the nomination and then confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Of course, leading up to and throughout the confirmation hearings one of the main attacks launched against Sotomayor claimed that her Latina heritage would bias her and unfairly affect her judicial rulings. (The assumption here being that non-whiteness = bias against whites, while whiteness is unbiased, universal, transcendent.)
3. In addition to winning a contentious democratic primary against Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama went on to defeat republican candidate John McCain (who did not know how many homes he owned) and running mate Sarah Palin (who claimed insight into international politics because she could see Russia from her porch in Alaska). Rather than view these victories as evidence of America's postracialism, the contentiousness of the campaigns and the closeness of these elections indicate the persistence of race and racism as factors in electoral politics.
4. McGary (2012) also notes that based on Douglass's universalism "He valued all of humanity over race, gender, or nation" (p. 11). McGary also takes up Black Nationalism and racial solidarity in Tommie Shelby's book *We Who Are Dark* (2005).
5. My claim that racial oppression has existed in the United States since its inception is rooted in the fact that racialized slavery has existed here from before the American Revolution and certainly continued long after the United States became an independent nation. This country's ongoing commitment to slavery and slaveholders was demonstrated in the editing of the Declaration of Independence in the late eighteenth century. For example, Thomas Jefferson's (1984) rebukes against the king of Great Britain "[d]etermined to keep open a market where MEN could be bought and sold" were removed because they also represented an indictment against American slavery (p. 22). See also Horton and Horton (2005) and Morgan (1975). Early systems of racial oppression have included not only anti-Black racism, but also other forms of racism, nativism, and xenophobia directed at Native Americans, Asians/Asian-Americans, Latinos/as, and other racial, ethnic, and/or religious groups. As Linda Martín Alcoff (2006) has stated, "the reality of race and racism in the North American continent has been more complicated than black/white since the initial conquest of native peoples by European Americans. Slavery was itself an idea put forward by Columbus when he suggested that the indigenous population could be enslaved in order to bring profits to the Spanish crown . . ." (p. 252).
6. Examples of philosophers holding this position include Martín Alcoff, Kathryn T. Gines, Lucius Outlaw, and Lewis Gordon.
7. McGary (2012) also analyzes contemporary assimilationists like Anthony Appiah and Jorge Garcia, eliminativists like Naomi Zack and Anna Stubblefield, and non-assimilationists like Lucius Outlaw. He also talks at length about Black Nationalism and racial solidarity as examined by Tommie Shelby.

8. Collins (2004) asserts, “Under the color-blind ideology of the new racism, Blackness must be *seen* as evidence for the alleged color blindness that seemingly characterizes contemporary economic opportunities . . . At the same time that Blackness must be visible, it must also be contained and/or denuded of all meaning that threatens elites” (p. 178, emphasis original).
9. Colorblind racism allows for a variety of ways of holding these frames, from crude and straightforward to gentle and indirect (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues, “These frames are central to the views of whites, young . . . and old . . . and serve them as an interpretive matrix from where to extract arguments to explain a host of racial issues . . . More significantly, together these frames form an impregnable yet elastic wall that barricades whites from the United States’ racial reality” (p. 47).
10. McGary (2012) asserts, “At this moment in our history, I doubt whether the boundaries and psychological blind spots that still exist between certain perceived racial groups have been diminished to a point where serious human equality can be seen irrespective of a person’s racial identity” (p. 57).
11. See also Collins (2000); Greenwald and Banjii (1995, 2008). In existentialist philosophy, Frantz Fanon (1963) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1991, 2001) have described the idea of institutional racism as a system. Robert Bernasconi (2012) examines this position and asserts, “We hear much less than we once did about institutional, structural, or systemic racism. For example, segregation in the schools, which was once unambiguously racist when sustained by laws, is tolerated when the segregation becomes merely *de facto*. Because the culture of the United States is dominated by individualism and legalism, the effects of past racisms that survive intact within the system are rendered virtually invisible because nobody is willing to own it or take responsibility for it: the problem is said to be nonimputable. This same culture appears to be spreading, so this is far from being a localized problem. In this context there is still much to be learned from the analyses of Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon, who both used the resources of existentialism in their struggle against colonialism to expose a systemic racism that transcends individual actions” (p. 342).
12. See the following for examples of books in the last decade on philosophy and race which take up this issue: Taylor (2004), Alcoff (2006), Sundstrom (2008), and Sheth (2009). Each of these philosophers identifies and problematizes the BwB in compelling ways.
13. What Robinson (2010) describes as being “one” (p. 25) pertains in part to the fact that anti-Black racism (including Jim Crow segregation often “enforced by law and terror” (p. 38)) meant that “for most of the twentieth-century black Americans lived in mostly black or all-black neighborhoods and towns” (p. 39).
14. Robinson (2010) asserts that the Immigration act of 1990 “was supposed to be a back door for more white folks [Europeans] to slip in. No one anticipated that the measure would open a major new pipeline for Africans, but it did: Between 1986 and 2006, more than one-quarter of all available diversity visas went to sub-Saharan Africans” (p. 73).
15. Alcoff (2006) adds, “More than the national interpellations like Cuban or Mexican, Latino identity generally signifies one’s situatedness outside of Latin America. This spatial referentiality brings the concept, the identity, and the experience under the domain of North American symbolic systems and conceptual schemas to a greater extent, which is one reason some give to reject the label entirely” (p. 228).
16. Acknowledging the ways in which wealth and prestige can “whiten” darker individuals, Taylor (2003) also reminds readers of the literal import of color, noting that, e.g., in Brazil “the Afro-Brazilian population —that is, those people who are unambiguously or predominantly Black—are overrepresented among the poor and destitute, and underrepresented, as elsewhere in Latin America, in government and the media” (p. 144).
17. Bernasconi (2010) explains that efforts to outlaw the use of the term race “had the effect, in spite of the intention, of shrouding the problem to be addressed [i.e. racism] beneath a cloak of invisibility” (p. 12).
18. I am referring here to the false idea that if there are no longer races or racial categories then racism will somehow disappear. But this phrase “racism without races” is also intended to invoke Bonilla-Silva’s (2010) claim, with which I agree, about the persistence of “racism without racists.”

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