19

Provisional Strategies for Decolonizing Consciousness

Phia S. Salter and Glenn Adams

In 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was on his way back from a convenience store when he caught the attention of self-appointed neighborhood watch "leader" George Zimmerman. Zimmerman thought the young man looked "real suspicious," so he called the police and decided to pursue Martin despite police dispatch explicitly instructing him not to do so. According to Zimmerman, he got out of his car, confronted Martin, and a physical altercation ensued. Martin had a bag of skittles and a can of iced tea. Zimmerman had a 9-millimeter handgun, which he used to shoot and kill Martin. The case caused national controversy, as authorities did not arrest Zimmerman for 44 days under Florida's "Stand Your Ground" law, and a jury subsequently acquitted him of any wrongdoing.

Perceptions of the case differed sharply as a function of race. According to national polls, 53 percent of white Americans believed that racial bias was a "minor factor" or "not a factor at all" in the events leading up to Martin's death, and 52 percent believed that race made no difference in the authorities' decision not to arrest Zimmerman at the time of the shooting. In contrast, 72 percent of Black Americans indicated racial bias as a major factor in the events leading up to Martin's death, and 73

DOI: 10.21983/P3.0250.1.22

percent thought that authorities would have arrested Zimmerman if Martin had been white versus Black.[1]

Different reactions to the killing of Trayvon Martin are one example of a broader topic that is the subject of our research and this chapter: specifically, racial group differences in perceptions of racism and racial bias. White Americans tend to see much less racism in contemporary US society more generally — especially in events involving police or other government actors — than do people from many racial minority groups.[2] The different reactions also illustrate the incorporation of antiracism movements that is the topic of this volume as a whole. Many Black Americans perceived Martin's murder and Zimmerman's acquittal as another example of how American society and the modern global order degrade, dehumanize, and devalue Black lives. This perception inspired the initial use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, which has since become a rallying call for

1 Frank Newport, "Blacks, Nonblacks Hold Sharply Different Views of Martin Case," *Gallup Politics,* April 5, 2012, http://www.gallup.com/poll/153776/blacks-nonblacks-hold-sharply-different-views-martin-case.aspx.

2 "Two-in-three Critical of Bush's Relief Efforts: Huge Racial Divide Over Katrina and Its Consequences," *Pew Research Center,* September 8, 2005, http://www.people-press.org/2005/09/08/two-in-three-critical-of-bushs-relief-efforts/; "Sharp Racial Divisions in Reactions to Brown, Garner Decisions: Many Blacks Expect Police-Minority Relations to Worsen," *Pew Research Center,* December 8, 2014, http://www.people-press.org/2014/12/08/sharp-racial-divisions-in-reactions-to-brown-garner-decisions/#race-as-a-factor-in-the-cases; "On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart," *Pew Research Center,* June 27, 2016, http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/06/27/on-views-of-race-and-inequality-blacks-and-whites-are-worlds-apart/. For additional scholarly examples, see Amy L. Ai et al., "Racial Identity–Related Differential Attributions of Inadequate Responses to Hurricane Katrina: A Social Identity Perspective," *Race and Social Problems* 3, no. 1 (2011): 13–24, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-011-9039-1; James Kluegel and Lawrence Bobo, "Perceived Group Discrimination and Policy Attitudes: The Sources and Consequences of the Race and Gender Gaps," in *Urban Inequality: Evidence from Four Cities,* eds. Alice O'Connor, Chris Tilly, and Lawrence Bobo (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 163–216; Laurie T. O'Brien et al., "Understanding White Americans' Perceptions of Racism in Hurricane Katrina-related Events," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 12, no. 4 (2009): 431–44, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430209105047.

broader efforts at racial justice.[3] In response, hegemonic institutions have reacted to such antiracism efforts by co-opting them, transforming calls for social justice into calls for equal treatment (i.e., #AllLivesMatter) that neutralize the revolutionary potential of antiracism efforts and erase the historical and cultural context in which racial violence, exploitation, and discrimination persist.

The Colonization of Perception and Consciousness

At the heart of *Antiracism Inc.* is a struggle over the definition and perception of reality: is the US a place of "liberty and justice for all" (as the Pledge of Allegiance claims), or is it a white supremacist state founded and maintained by racial violence? According to a poll with "millennials" aged 14–24, 91 percent of these teens and young adults "believe in equality" and believe "everyone should be treated equally."[4] Yet, a majority of them also believe "it's never fair to give preferential treatment to one race over another, regardless of historical inequalities" (65 percent for People of Color, 74 percent for white). These young people, operating in a neoliberal individualist mode of the modern global order, aspire to be enlightened citizens of the world, free from chauvinistic prejudice, who live with mutual respect and in peaceful harmony with their fellow human beings. They rail against blatant expressions of racism with genuine outrage, and they will occasionally take forceful measures to resist them. Yet, this is an inherently ambiguous move: how does one call for the elimination of racism from a position within the modern global

3 The *herstory* of Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi and why they created the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter is available on the Black Lives Matters website at http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/.

4 "MTV Bias Survey Summary," April 2014, http://d1fqdnmgwphrky.cloudfront.net/studies/000/000/001/DBR_MTV_Bias_Survey_Executive_Summary.pdf; see Jamelle Bouie, "Why Do Millennials Not Understand Racism?" *Slate,* May 16, 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2014/05/millennials_racism_and_mtv_poll_young_people_are_confused_about_bias_prejudice.html.

order or mainstream US institutions while failing to acknowledge the racist historical foundations for those systems?

On one hand, hegemonic narratives that inform mainstream constructions of American identity (rooted in an epistemic perspective of white Americans) propose that the US is essentially good: a shining beacon of human progress and a place of freedom and equality. These narratives do not necessarily dispute difficult-to-deny facts about racial violence (e.g., slavery, legal segregation, lynching) that might seem to contradict celebratory claims about the essentially good character of US society. Instead, they incorporate this knowledge into celebratory accounts of US identity in a way that does not disrupt the status quo and require drastic/revolutionary action to remedy.[5] According to these narratives, the problem of racism is a relatively circumscribed matter at odds with the defining features of contemporary US society, something that the virtuous majority of present-day citizens routinely repudiate in the rare instances when it occurs.

On the other hand, more critical constructions of American identity, often rooted in everyday experience and epistemic perspectives of marginalized racial and ethnic minority communities, provide a very different understanding of US society. These constructions note how the US is a colonial imposition, created when Europeans informed by notions of racial superiority stole land and resources from Indigenous societies, imported enslaved Africans to work and develop the stolen property, and then declared their independence when European rulers began

5 Take, for instance, a textbook discussion of the transatlantic slave trade where the authors refer to enslaved Africans as "workers." In cases such as this, even hard to deny facts about racial violence are reinterpreted and re-imagined to render them less damning. Laura Isensee, "Why Calling Slaves 'Workers' is More than an Editing Error," *NPR*, October 23, 2015, http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/10/23/450826208/why-calling-slaves-workers-is-more-than-an-editing-error. For a discussion of "interpretive silence," see Tuğçe Kurtiş, Glenn Adams, and Michael Yellow Bird, "Generosity or Genocide? Identity Implications of Silence in American Thanksgiving Commemorations," *Memory* 18, no. 2 (2010): 208–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210903176478.

to restrain these racial depredations. They founded a new nation rooted in revolutionary liberal ideals of individual freedom and representative government, but they deliberately excluded racialized Others from equal-status participation in this project. After a bloody Civil War and decades of struggle, this status quo rooted in racist violence persists. From this perspective, the problem of racism is a defining feature of the American project, something that requires a revolutionary intervention if American society is to achieve the lofty ideals to which it claims to aspire.

These different constructions of American history and identity likely inform the profound gap in perception of racism in US society that we mentioned in the introduction. In our contribution for the *Antiracism, Inc.* collection, we take this ubiquitous gap in perception of reality — whereby white Americans tend to perceive less racism in everyday life and foundational institutions of US society than do people from a variety of racialized ethnic minority groups — as a way to discuss the colonization of consciousness. Discussions of this idea emphasize that conventional or hegemonic understandings are not neutral reflections on objective reality from disinterested observers with a view from nowhere in particular. Rather, they are situated understandings from an epistemic perspective of whiteness that have become common sense via the projection of racial and colonial power. Regardless of one's social identities, participation in mainstream knowledge forms tends to colonize perception, affording understandings of everyday reality that reflect white epistemic perspectives (and affective sensibilities) and promote interests of white racial power.

How is one to understand racial group differences in perception of racism? Prevailing accounts in hegemonic psychological science typically focus on claims of racism by people in ethnic minority communities as the deviant phenomenon that requires explanation.[6] Direct or blatant expressions of this orientation are incredulous reactions to claims of racism and dismissal of

6 For discussion of "effect to be explained," see Peter Hegarty and Felicia Pratto, "The Effects of Social Category Norms and Stereotypes on Explanations

claims as an example of "playing the race card": a purportedly strategic move to exaggerate racial grievance.[7] A more subtle expression of this orientation is the tendency for journalists, scientists, and pollsters to report on group differences in ways that set up white patterns as the unremarkable standard from which racial Others deviate. In particular, such reports are likely to frame differences in perception of racism as "Blacks more likely to say race is a factor"[8] when an equally accurate description of results is that Whites are *less likely* to say that race is a factor.

This typical mode of interpretation constructs white American perceptions of limited racism as an unremarkable standard of rational objectivity. Measured against this standard, the tendency in mainstream institutions is to pathologize perception of racism. Mild versions construct Black American perception of racism as a form of "perceptual baggage":[9] excessive stigma consciousness, racial rejection sensitivity, or a willingness to believe in conspiracy theories.[10] Historically, more extreme ver-

---

for Intergroup Differences," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80, no. 5 (2001): 723–35, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.80.5.723.

7 Tim Wise, "What Kind of Card is Race? The Absurdity (and Consistency) of White Denial," *Counterpunch,* April 24, 2006, http://www.counterpunch.org/2006/04/24/what-kind-of-card-is-race; Rachel Weiner, "Herman Cain and the 'Race Card,'" *Washington Post,* October 10, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/post/herman-cain-and-the-race-card/2011/10/10/gIQAVJsRaLblog.html.

8 "Sharp Racial Divisions in Reactions to Brown, Garner Decisions."

9 James D. Johnson et al., "Variation in Black Anti-White Bias and Target Distancing Cues: Factors that Influence Perceptions of 'Ambiguously Racist' Behavior," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 29, no. 5 (2003): 609–22, at 621, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167203029005006.

10 Elizabeth C. Pinel, "Stigma Consciousness: the Psychological Legacy of Social Stereotypes," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76, no. 1 (1999): 114–28, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.1.114; Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton et al., "Sensitivity to Status-based Rejection: Implications for African American Students' College Experience," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83, no. 4 (2002): 896–918, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.4.896; Jennifer Crocker et al., "Belief in US Government Conspiracies Against Blacks Among Black and White College Students: Powerlessness or System Blame?" *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 25, no. 8 (1999): 941–53.

sions have linked Black American perceptions of racism with irrational fear and akin to paranoia. Black Americans who expressed a general mistrust of white society (i.e., cultural mistrust) were more likely to be misdiagnosed as schizophrenic or otherwise disturbed.[11] These constructions of racism perception as paranoia or exaggeration imply that Black communities are somewhat out of touch with reality in ways that white communities are not.

In summary, hegemonic knowledge systems obscure the operation of racial power and enable otherwise civic-minded people to insulate themselves from knowledge of their participation in the ongoing subordination of global humanity. Social justice advocates seek to illuminate the everyday racism of modern society in order to resist it. In response, defenders of social order seek to incorporate, domesticate, and assimilate understandings about racism — primarily considering it as individual bias and hostile racial animus — in ways that do not fundamentally disrupt the status quo. In this way, the definition and perception of racism becomes a central site of social struggle.

Decolonizing Perception and Consciousness

Resistance to the incorporation of antiracism requires strategies for decolonizing consciousness. The activity of intellectual decolonization is necessary both to counteract the (often apparently progressive) forms of knowledge that promote ignorance about ongoing racial domination and to illuminate ways of being that ensure a more just and sustainable existence for the im-

11 Arthur L. Whaley, "Cultural Mistrust and Mental Health Services for African Americans: A Review and Meta-Analysis," *Counseling Psychologist* 29, no. 4 (2001): 513–31, https://doi.org/ 10.1177/0011000001294003; Arthur L. Whaley, "A Two-stage Method for the Study of Cultural Bias in the Diagnosis of Schizophrenia in African Americans," *Journal of Black Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2004): 167–86, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798403262062; Steven J. Trierweiler et al., "Clinician Attributions Associated with the Diagnosis of Schizophrenia in African American and Non-African American Patients," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 68, no. 1 (2000): 171–75, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.68.1.171.

poverished global majority. Although very much a theoretical exercise, the task of intellectual decolonization is a key element of the practical struggle against racism and injustice. This imperative task of resistance has commonalities across a variety of liberatory thought traditions (e.g., decolonial, critical race, and liberation theology/philosophy)[12] and global social movements (e.g., Black Power, Chicanx, American Indian, Négritude, Pan-African, and Indian Independence Movements).[13] Though the idea of decolonizing consciousness itself does not reflect a single genealogy, it takes inspiration from several twentieth century scholars and activists including W.E.B. Du Bois, Mahatma Ghandi, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Gloria Anzaldúa among many others.[14] In writing about colonial resistance, they each illuminate the epistemic violence by which global institutions forcefully impose understandings and practices from powerful geopolitical centers to relatively powerless peripheries in ways that maintain systems of exploitation and domination. Intellectual frameworks derived from these thought traditions

12 For example: Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking Back to Move Forward," *Connecticut Law Review* 43, no. 5 (2010): 12–53; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Writings for a Liberation Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Walter D. Mignolo, "Decolonizing Western Epistemology / Building Decolonial Epistemologies," in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy,* eds. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 19–43.

13 Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Teresa Cordova, "Anti-Colonial Chicana Feminism," in *Latino Social Movements: Historical and Theoretical Perspectives,* eds. Rodolfo D. Torres and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 1999), 11–41; Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969); Reiland Rabaka, *The Negritude Movement: W.E.B. Du Bois, Leon Damas, Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Frantz Fanon, and the Evolution of an Insurgent Idea* (Lanham: Lexington, 2015).

14 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique — An Introduction," *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 2 (2011): 1–15.

advocate preferential consideration for epistemic perspectives of oppressed peoples as a privileged standpoint from which to understand everyday life in modern global order.[15]

Applied to the present case of differences in perception of racism, the idea of a preferential epistemic option implies taking subordinated group experience as a standpoint for understanding everyday events. Associated with this approach are two provisional strategies for decolonizing consciousness: *normalizing* racism perception and *denaturalizing* racism denial. We refer to these strategies as *provisional* in two senses of the word: both (a) something in process awaiting refinement, and (b) something useful to bring on a journey.[16] In similar fashion, the idea of *decolonizing consciousness* refers both to the process of interrogating existing tools for the production of particular kinds of (un) consciousness and the production of knowledge tools that are useful for this purpose.

The first strategy for decolonization of consciousness is to provide a context-sensitive, normalizing account of Other patterns that hegemonic accounts and psychological science regard as abnormal.[17] Rather than lack of contact with reality, this normalizing strategy suggests that one consider how apparently "paranoid" perceptions of racism may reflect engagement with ecologically valid forms of knowledge that promote racial con-

15 See contemporaneous scholarship such as Paulo Freire's (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000), Orlando Fals-Borda's work on participatory action research methodologies, "The Application of Participatory Action-Research in Latin America," *International Sociology* 2, no. 4 (1987): 329–47, https://doi.org/10.1177/026858098700200401, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (*New York: Zed Books, 1999) advocate this perspective when decolonizing consciousness in research and practice.

16 Our use of *provisional* follows Alison Reed's discussion of "queer provisionality" during meetings of the Antiracism Inc. group in April 2013. See also Alison Reed, "Queer Provisionality: Mapping the Generative Failures of the 'Transborder Immigrant Tool,'" *Lateral* 4 (2015), https://doi.org/10.25158/L4.1.4.

17 Glenn Adams and Phia S. Salter, "Health Psychology in African Settings: A Cultural-Psychological Analysis," *Journal of Health Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2007): 539–51, https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105307076240.

sciousness. As an example of this strategy, consider our work on the *Marley Hypothesis*: the idea that perception of racism in US society reflects accurate knowledge about historically documented instances of past racism.[18] Black and white Americans completed a true-false test of statements about incidents of racism in US history. Black participants performed better on the test — that is, they were more likely than white participants to confidently identify historically documented instances of racism as true, but they were no more likely to incorrectly identify fake/fictional items as true — and this Black-white difference in accurate knowledge of past racism accounted for the Black-white difference in perception of present-day racism. The normalizing implication is that Black American tendencies to perceive racism are not distortions of reality (e.g., strategic exaggeration), but instead constitute realistic concerns about enduring manifestations of racism that are finely attuned to accurate knowledge about American history.

The second strategy for decolonization of consciousness is to "turn the analytic lens" back on hegemonic knowledge forms to denaturalize the patterns that these forms portray as a just-natural standard.[19] In the present case, the hegemonic knowledge form is the unmarked (and unnamed) white norm to minimize or deny racism in US society and the modern global order. Applied to this case, this strategy of denaturalization suggests that white American tendencies are not an unremarkable reflection of objective reality. Instead, they reflect cultural-psychological processes that lead people to minimize or deny the true extent of racism. From this perspective, the phenomenon that requires explanation in not (only) subordinated group perception of racism (i.e., Blacks see *more* racism), but (also) dominant group denial of racism (i.e., whites see *less* racism). Racism denial is

18 Jessica C. Nelson, Glenn Adams, and Phia S. Salter, "The Marley Hypothesis: Racism Denial Reflects Ignorance of History," *Psychological Science* 24, no. 2, (2013): 213–18, https://doi.org/ 10.1177/0956797612451466.

19 Adams and Salter, "Health Psychology in African Settings," 542.

not a natural reflection of objective reality but reflects operation of important sociocultural and psychological processes.

Our own and others' research generally points to two sources of white racism denial. One source is motivated perception or wishful thinking. Perception of racism in US society is threatening to white identity because the continuity of past and present-day racism calls into question the merit of whites' advantaged status, the morality of the nation, and the broader legitimacy of the status quo. As a result of these identity threats, white Americans are motivated to deny the pervasiveness of racism in American society.[20] When researchers use experimental techniques (e.g., self-affirmation strategies) to temporarily neutralize these social identity threats, they observe that white Americans perceive greater racism[21] and are more willing to acknowledge systemic forms of racism and privilege.[22]

A second source of white denial of racism is cultural knowledge. Even if people could put aside identity-defensive motivations and weigh questions about racism in an unbiased fashion, a focus on cultural knowledge suggests that white Americans might still deny the extent of racism in the US because they lack information about and experience with racism-relevant realties. In other words, white Americans fail to perceive racism because

20 Nyla R. Branscombe, Michael T. Schmitt, and Kristin Schiffhauer, "Racial Attitudes in Response to Thoughts of White Privilege," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 37, no. 2 (2007): 203–15, https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.348; Eric D. Knowles et al., "On the Malleability of Ideology: Motivated Construals of Color Blindness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96, no. 4 (2009): 857–69, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013595; Brian S. Lowery, Eric D. Knowles, and Miguel M. Unzueta, "Framing Inequity Safely: Whites' Motivated Perceptions of Racial Privilege," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33, no. 9 (2007): 1237–50, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207303016.

21 Glenn Adams, Teceta Thomas Tormala, and Laurie T. O'Brien, "The Effect of Self-Affirmation on Perception of Racism," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 42, no. 5 (2006): 616–26, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2005.11.001.

22 Miguel M. Unzueta and Brian S. Lowery, "Defining Racism Safely: The Role of Self-Image Maintenance on White Americans' Conceptions of Racism," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44, no. 6 (2008): 1491–97, http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.07.011.

they inhabit information ecologies that enable them to remain ignorant about the extent of racism in US society.

One example of relevant cultural knowledge is representations of history. Just as Black American perceptions of racism have roots in greater knowledge of historical racism, white American denials of racism have roots in greater ignorance of historical racism. As we discuss in a subsequent section, representations of history vary in their attention to past racism, and this variation has consequences for perception of present-day racism. Again, as research on the Marley Hypothesis demonstrates, accurate knowledge about incidents of past racism is associated with tendencies to perceive greater racism in present-day society.[23]

Another example of relevant cultural knowledge is definitions of racism. Even when hegemonic representations of history do address past racism, they frequently construct it as the product of "a few bad apples" limited to a few rogue individuals.[24] This construction resonates with white sensibilities. Research suggests that a majority of white Americans endorse a conception of racism as hostile, individual prejudice rather than something embedded in the structure of society.[25] In contrast, Black Americans tend to endorse a more systemic conception of racism, which reflects and promotes a more expansive understanding of the way that racism operates in US society and the modern global order.

23 Nelson et al., "The Marley Hypothesis."

24 James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: New Press, 2008).

25 Victoria M. Esses and Gordon Hodson, "The Role of Lay Perceptions of Ethnic Prejudice in the Maintenance and Perpetuation of Ethnic Bias," *Journal of Social Issues* 62, no. 3 (2006): 453–68, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2006.00468.x; O'Brien et al., "Understanding White Americans' Perceptions of Racism"; Samuel R. Sommers and Michael I. Norton, "Lay Theories About White Racists: What Constitutes Racism (and What Doesn't)," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 9, no. 1 (2006): 117–38, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430206059881.

Contesting Incorporation: Tools for Colonial and Decolonial Consciousness

The problem with classic distinction between motivated and informational sources perceptual bias is that it can treat informational sources as politically neutral or disinterested cultural differences.[26] In other worlds, it fails to understand the extent to which different cultural realities are "intentional worlds," sites of struggle invested with beliefs and desires of people who create and reproduce them.[27] An emphasis on the intentionality of everyday worlds highlights the extent to which hegemonic institutions in US society have evolved in accordance with the imperative to promote white comfort. White racial power exerts pressure on the evolution of cultural forms, as cultural gatekeepers select understandings of history and society that promote white comfort and omit or deselect understandings that promote white discomfort.[28] This is the domain of *Antiracism Inc.*: institutions that have emerged — sometimes intentionally,

26 For a related discussion of the constant interaction and overlap between motivated group interests and inference (perception, memory, ideology), see Charles W. Mills, "White Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance,* eds. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 11–38.

27 See Richard A. Shweder, "Cultural Psychology: What Is It?" in *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development,* eds. James Stigler, Richard Shweder, and Gilbert Herdt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 1–44. For a more recent articulation, see Glenn Adams, "Context in Person, Person in Context: A Cultural Psychology Approach to Social-Personality Psychology," in *Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology,* eds. Kay Deaux and Mark Snyder (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 182–208; Phia S. Salter and Glenn Adams, "On the Intentionality of Cultural Products: Representations of Black History as Psychological Affordances," *Frontiers in Psychology* 7, art. 1166 (2016): 1–21, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01166; George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

28 See Zeus Leonardo and Logan Manning, "White Historical Activity Theory: Toward a Critical Understanding of White Zones of Proximal Development," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 20, no. 1 (2017): 15–29; http://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2015.1100988. See, also, Paula Ioanide, *The Emotional Poli-*

but often unwittingly through acts of barely conscious selection based on unrecognized preferences — because they serve needs of people advantaged by domination to produce constructions of reality that represent and "define racism safely."[29]

Incorporating Black History: Celebrating Diversity or Ignoring Racism?

When Carter G. Woodson created the institution of Black History Month (BHM), he believed that the commemoration practice not only would instill racial pride within the African American community, but also would introduce an antiracist consciousness among white Americans.[30] As mainstream American society increasingly incorporated BHM, this cultural tool evolved to serve a variety of different purposes.[31] Some expressions of BHM — for example, advertisements for Budweiser proclaiming that "this chapter of history brought to you by the king of beer" — are clearly tangential (or even antithetical) to the original purpose of antiracism education.[32] In such cases, BHM becomes another opportunity for corporations to advertise

tics of Racism: How Feelings Trump Facts in an Era of Colorblindness (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

29 Unzueta and Lowery, "Defining Racism Safely."

30 Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "Making Black History Practical and Popular: Carter G. Woodson, the Proto Black Studies Movement, and the Struggle For Black Liberation," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 2 (2004): 372–83; Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-education of the Negro* (San Diego: Book Tree, 2006).

31 Abul Pitre and Ruth Ray, "The Controversy around Black History," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 3 (2002): 149–54.

32 Hailey Persinger, "'Black History' Beer Poster Makes a Stir: Budweiser Sponsored the Commemoration of Kings and Queens of Africa," *San Diego Union-Tribune,* February 16, 2011, http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2011/feb/16/black-history-beer-poster-makes-a-stir/. See also John Hope Franklin et al., "Black History Month: Serious Truth Telling or a Triumph in Tokenism?" *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 18 (1998): 87–92, https://doi.org/10.2307/2998774; Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, "'Of All Our Studies, History is Best Qualified to Reward our Research': Black History's Relevance to the Hip Hop Generation," *Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3 (2005): 299–323, https://doi.org/10.1086/JAAHv90n3p299.

products to a niche market and thereby profit at the expense of oppressed communities. However, even expressions of BHM that share the goal of antiracism education can vary in effectiveness. Many institutions have incorporated BHM into school programming and curricula for educational purposes, but it is not clear to what extent these efforts have realized Woodson's original mission of promoting antiracism.

In general, representations of American history tend to glorify the heroic efforts of a few individuals and to sanitize identity-threatening versions of the past.[33] The desire to silence events and reemphasize the good of the nation are amplified in cases where the events under consideration — enslavement, rape and torture, segregation, and terroristic violence — are crimes against humanity. This raises a problem for the incorporation of BHM commemoration practices into mainstream US society, because such violent events are central to the collective narrative identity of Black Americans.[34] Despite its relevance to the topic, research that we conducted in Midwest US high schools revealed that BHM commemorations typically silenced memory of such violence via (at least) two sanitizing strategies. One strategy is to highlight individual Black American achievement — whether inventors, intellectuals or Civil Rights heroes — while minimizing the historical barriers that these individuals faced or the collective struggle to eliminate those barriers.[35] Another strategy is to direct discussions about Black history toward multicultural tolerance and diversity instead of focusing on the ongoing legacy of systemic expropriation, exploitation, and violent oppression.[36] We saw this strategy appear to a greater extent in

33 Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.

34 Ron Eyerman, "The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory," *Acta Sociologica* 47, no. 2 (2004): 159–69, https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699304043853.

35 Wayne Journell, "When Oppression and Liberation are the Only Choices: The Representation of African Americans Within State Social Studies Standards," *Journal of Social Studies Research* 32, no. 1 (2008): 40–50, at 40. See also Pitre and Ray, "The Controversy Around Black History."

36 Glenn Adams et al., "Beyond Prejudice: Toward a Sociocultural Psychology of Racism and Oppression," in *Commemorating Brown: The Social Psychol-*

predominately white schools, where BHM materials highlighted contemporary issues of multiculturalism and diversity rather than historical events specifically.[37]

Implications for Antiracism Efforts

BHM representations are a tool for the production of both knowledge and ignorance about racism. To illustrate how constructions of history afford reproduction of ignorance, first consider implications for the focus of antiracism efforts. Acceptable antiracism efforts within mainstream US institutions require incorporation of sanitized narratives that maintain an image of the US and its citizens as ultimately good. In the case of BHM, mainstream institutions affirm their dedication to diversity (versus social justice) by celebrating BHM with stories highlighting the many contributions of African Americans to US history. The presence of celebratory narratives helps us remember the events about which we can be proud. At the same time, the silences embedded in historical erasure facilitate collective forgetting of those events that afford shame or guilt. The problem with reproducing sanitized versions of history is that, instead of critically addressing the relationship between historical racism and present-day inequality, silence about racism obscures this relationship. Slavery, Jim Crow, and other forms of state-sanctioned violence are at the foundation of many social-psychological, economic, and structural barriers manifest in current day racial disparities. Silence about these historical realities in BHM commemorations promotes collective forgetting and deflects attention away from structural barriers that continue to impact people of African descent.

---

ogy of Racism and Discrimination, eds. Glenn Adams et al. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 215–46; Stephen C. Wright and Micah E. Lubensky, "The Struggle for Social Equality: Collective Action Versus Prejudice Reduction," in *Intergroup Misunderstandings: Impact of Divergent Social Realities,* eds. Stephanie Demoulin, Jacques-Philippe Leyens, and John F Dovidio (New York: Psychology Press, 2009), 291–310.

37 Salter and Adams, "On the Intentionality of Cultural Products."

Like the emphasis on tolerance and diversity, the emphasis on heroic and individual achievement also deflects attention from structural barriers. However, this emphasis has the added advantage of resonating with such dominant group ideologies as colorblindness, meritocracy, and protestant work ethic. These ideologies afford the tendency to blame minority group disadvantage on group characteristics rather than systemic forces embedded in the foundations of American society.[38]

Implications for Perception of Racism

Similar to predominantly white schools, representations of BHM from predominantly Black schools also emphasized Black individual achievement. In contrast, and unlike predominantly white schools, representations of BHM in predominantly Black schools made more explicit references to historical racism.[39] This difference in emphasis has important implications for perception of racism and support for antiracist policy. In particular, empirical evidence from two studies indicated that BHM representations typical of schools where Black students were in the majority were more effective at promoting perceptions of racism in US society compared to BHM representations typical of predominately white schools. In the first study, participants engaged with actual BHM materials sampled from commemoration displays in predominantly Black or white Midwestern high schools. In the second study, participants engaged with BHM narratives inspired by the differences we observed in the materials: celebratory representations of Black history that emphasized past achievements of Black Americans, critical representations

38 John T. Jost, Mahzarin R. Banaji, and Brian A. Nosek, "A Decade of System Justification Theory: Accumulated Evidence of Conscious and Unconscious Bolstering of the Status Quo," *Political Psychology* 25, no. 6 (2004): 881–919, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00402.x; Shana Levin et al., "Ethnic Identity, Legitimizing Ideologies, and Social Status: A Matter of Ideological Asymmetry," *Political Psychology* 19, no. 2 (1998): 373–404, https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00109.

39 Salter and Adams, "On the Intentionality of Cultural Products."

that emphasized historical instances of racism, or mainstream representations of US history that rendered people of African descent invisible. Participants exposed to critical representations not only perceived greater racism in US society, but also indicated greater support for policies designed to ameliorate racial inequality than did participants in the other two conditions. The impact of critical history knowledge on perception is important because, in both studies, perceptions of racism facilitated support for antiracism policies. This research helps to illuminate how white institutional spaces reproduce racism by promoting constructions of the past that fail to mention instances of racist oppression.[40] Sanitized representations of the past minimize perception of racism in present, which undermines support for antiracism policies.

Defining Racism Safely: The Prejudice Problematic

Another epistemic tool that affords ignorance of racism concerns what scholar Margaret Wetherell has referred to as the "prejudice problematic": a way of understanding racism that locates the foundations of the problem in the stereotypical beliefs, prejudicial evaluations, and learned associations of individual minds.[41] Early theorists of prejudice, most notably Gordon Allport, focused on racial dynamics in terms of individual expressions of antipathy and hostility towards a group or its members

40 Salter and Adams, "On the Intentionality of Cultural Products"; Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis, "Troubling National Discourses in Anti-Racist Curricular Planning," *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne de L'éducation* 28, no. 3 (2005): 295–317, https://doi.org/10.2307/4126472. For a discussion of white institutional space more broadly, see Wendy Leo Moore, *Reproducing Racism: White Space, Elite Law Schools, and Racial Inequality* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

41 Margaret Wetherell, "The Prejudice Problematic," in *Beyond Prejudice: Extending the Social Psychology of Conflict, Inequality, and Social Change,* eds. John Dixon and Mark Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 158–78.

based on (false) generalizations or stereotypes.[42] Though some researchers began to consider broader group-level explanations for racial prejudice in the mid-1960s and early 1970s (because conceptions of individual prejudice failed to account for the institutionalized nature of racism that was the focus of the Civil Rights Movement in the US),[43] the root cause was still largely considered the problem of biased individuals who discriminate. Notably, even today, this individual level understanding of racism is more prominent among white Americans than People of Color[44] and despite efforts to shift academic discourse toward discussions of systemic racism, prejudice models continue to inform contemporary conceptions of racism in mainstream institutions such as law, politics, and hegemonic social science.[45] Indeed, within academia, this understanding of racism is perhaps nowhere more evident than in our home discipline of psychological science.

One problem with the prejudice problematic is its location within the broader, neoliberal individualist ways of being and associated forms of knowledge that inform standard accounts in hegemonic social science. Perspectives of decolonial theory emphasize the extent to which these forms of knowledge are not an objectively neutral or politically innocent understanding of social reality, but instead reflect the racial power of colonial violence.[46] From this perspective, the very possibility of modern/

42 Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954); Todd D. Nelson, *The Psychology of Prejudice* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2006).

43 James M. Jones, *Prejudice and Racism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997); Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1967).

44 "On Views of Race and Inequality."

45 "On Views of Race and Inequality"; Alan David Freeman, "Legitimizing Racial Discrimination Through Antidiscrimination Law: A Critical Review of Supreme Court Doctrine," *Minnesota Law Review* 62 (1977): 1049–19; Leah N. Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

46 Glenn Adams, Sara Estrada-Villalta, and Luis H. Gómez Ordóñez, "The Modernity/Coloniality of Being: Hegemonic Psychology as Intercultural Relations," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 62 (2017):

individualist subjectivity/positionality rests upon the colonial violence that provided a privileged few (at the expense of the vast majority) with sufficient affluence to enable the sense of freedom from constraint and independence from context associated with modern individualism. However, the reference to coloniality is not only a comment on the origins of modern individualism in racial violence, but also refers to the consequence of associated knowledge forms for the ongoing *reproduction* of racial violence.

Implications for Antiracism Efforts

To illustrate how individualist constructions of person — and the prejudice problematic in particular — afford reproduction of violence, consider implications for the focus of antiracism efforts. Simply put, a conception of racism as individual prejudice suggests a focus of antiracism efforts on reduction of this prejudice.[47] One problem with this conception of antiracism efforts is that transforms the historically particular problem of white supremacist violence and European global domination into a more general issue of equipotential intergroup intolerance. In other words, it regards anti-white prejudice among people of

13–22, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.06.006; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 240–70, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548; Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

47 Indeed, resonating with a prevailing conception that equates racism with individual prejudice, influential work in social psychology and interventions based on this work have tended to emphasize prejudice reduction and equipotential intergroup tolerance rather than more powerful interventions to disrupt the embedded structural racism of the colonial present. See John Dixon et al., "'Let Them Eat Harmony': Prejudice-Reduction Strategies and Attitudes of Historically Disadvantaged Groups," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 19, no. 2 (2010): 76–80, https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721410363366. See also Phillip Hammack, *Narrative and the Politics of Identity: The Cultural Psychology of Israeli and Palestinian Youth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

African descent to be just as problematic as anti-Black prejudice among people of European descent.[48] The result of this conception of racism as equipotential prejudice — any endorsement of intergroup bias regardless of power differentials and historical context — is an #AllLivesMatter approach to antiracism action that focuses on equal treatment regardless of race, while conveniently forgetting the downstream effects of differential treatment set in motion by centuries-old colonial violence that continue to reproduce the unjust status quo.

This suggests a second problem with the conception of antiracism efforts as prejudice reduction. It transforms problems of structural injustice into problems of tolerance and interpersonal emotion. In response to people who express indignation about enduring structural racism, this expression of Antiracism, Inc. asks "can't we all just get along?" In response to the masses who express a deep hunger for social justice, this expression of Antiracism, Inc. replies "Let them eat harmony."[49] That is, let the suffering masses be content with knowledge that (most) people bear them no ill feeling or racial animus. This construction of antiracist action delegitimizes and attenuates indignation about historical and ongoing injustice, leads people to trade justice for peace and harmony, and contributes to the reproduction of an unjust status quo by undermining motivation for resistance.

48 The prevalent appeal of this idea in US society is evident in the frequency of questions about anti-white racism and the possibility of Black racists. Our response to such questions is to distinguish between prejudice and racism. Although it is possible (and perhaps adaptive) for people of color in the US to harbor a healthy suspicion or even *prejudice* toward white Americans, this is not what we mean by racism. Instead, we reserve the use of *racism* to refer to beliefs or actions that promote white Supremacy. From this perspective, a person of color performs racism not by harboring biases that portray white people in a negative light (e.g., as potential perpetrators of racism), but instead by acting in ways (e.g., engaging in discriminatory hiring practices by declaring a candidate's name too "ghetto") that ultimately serve the interests of white Supremacy.

49 Dixon et al., "'Let Them Eat Harmony.'"

Implications for Perception of Racism

As another illustration of how conceptions of racism as individual bias afford reproduction of violence, consider implications for perception of racism and support for antiracist policy or collective action. By locating the foundations of racism in individual bias, the prejudice problematic understates the extent to which racism causes harm. In particular, it limits the notion of racism to cases where one person engages in differential treatment toward another person, whether as a result of deliberate prejudice or less conscious bias. It does not admit the possibility of racism via disparate impact, whereby the similar treatment results in systematically different outcomes for racially advantaged and disadvantaged targets. Nor does it admit the possibility of racism embedded in the structure of American society.[50] A person who draws upon this conception to make judgments about the extent of racism in American society or about the role of racism in particular events is likely to focus on the beliefs and attitudes of the people involved. Given that a large proportion of people in US society claim non-racist ideology, the person is likely to conclude that racism is not a plausible explanation for differential outcomes, and this conclusion is likely to undermine the person's support for forceful antiracism measures.

It follows from this reasoning that an important intervention to counteract epistemologies of ignorance is to promote conceptions of racism as a force embedded in the structure of American society. Evidence for this assertion comes from two experiments in which researchers exposed social psychology students to either a "sociocultural" tutorial that defined racism in structural terms or a more standard tutorial that defined racism as individual bias (i.e., the prejudice problematic). Results of both experiments confirmed that students not only, (1) tended to perceive greater racism in everyday events, but also, (2) showed greater endorsement of forceful antiracist policy after exposure to the tutorial outlining a sociocultural conception of

50 Adams et al., "Beyond Racism."

racism (i.e., as a force embedded in the structure of modern society) than after exposure to a more standard tutorial rooted in the prejudice problematic.[51]

Conclusion: How to (Re)produce Decolonial Consciousness

In this chapter, we presented two provisional strategies to decolonize consciousness. We applied these strategies to consider group differences in perception of racism. The first strategy is to provide a context-sensitive, normalizing account of oppressed group patterns that hegemonic accounts portray as abnormal. The second strategy is to "turn the analytic lens" and denaturalize white American tendencies of racism denial that mainstream accounts portray as unbiased reflection of objective reality.[52] The foundation of these decolonizing strategies lies in a preferential consideration for epistemic perspectives of the oppressed as a privileged standpoint from which to understand everyday life in modern global order.[53] This suggests that an important direction for antiracism action is cultivation of opportunities for people to engage with marginalized epistemic perspectives.

Like other hegemonic institutions in US society, universities have evolved in accordance with the imperative to promote white comfort. This is perhaps especially true in the context of the neoliberal university, in which instructors face increasing pressure to offer the products that consumers (a.k.a. students)

51 Glenn Adams et al., "Teaching about Racism: Pernicious Implications of the Standard Portrayal," *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 30, no. 4 (2008): 349–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/01973530802502309.

52 Ibid.

53 See Glenn Adams et al., "Decolonizing Psychological Science: Introduction to the Special Thematic Section," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2015): 213–38, https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v3i1.564; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa," *Anthropological Forum: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Comparative Sociology* 22, no. 2 (2011): 113–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2012.694169; Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

demand.[54] When those consumers are the modal, middle-class white students who disproportionately constitute many university settings, there are strong pressures to offer products that provide credentials for the market rather than critical thinking skills to prepare people for civic engagement. There are pressures to offer products that produce positive feeling and reinforce glorifying narratives of American exceptionalism. As a result of these pressures, universities are not neutral sites, but rather racialized corporate entities actively engaged in elevating certain epistemic standpoints over others.

To decolonize consciousness, we must decolonize knowledge institutions by infusing them with epistemic perspectives of racially subordinated groups. Within the US, a key site of this struggle is the conflict over Ethnic Studies courses.[55] Outside the US, key sites of this struggle include the #Rhodesmustfall movement or demands by South African students to "Decolonize the University." Advocates for such interventions rightly note their importance as an antidote for internalized oppression, autocolonialism, or colonial mentality[56] among people from racially

54 Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz, "Insubordinate Spaces for Intemperate Times: Countering the Pedagogies of Neoliberalism," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 35, no. 1 (2013): 3–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2013.753758.

55 As an example, neighboring states Arizona and Nevada have landed on opposite sides of the debate. While Arizona's legislature is pushing to extend a K–12 ban on courses that are "designed primarily for students of a particular ethnic group" to the college level (HB 2120), Nevada's state senate unanimously passed a bill to create and authorize ethnic studies in public high schools (SB 107). Arizona House Bill 2120, Section 15-112, January 17, 2017, *LegiScan,* https://legiscan.com/AZ/bill/HB2120/2017. Nevada State Bill 107, February 8, 2017, *LegiScan,* http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/79th2017/Bills/SB/SB107.pdf.

56 David and Okazaki define colonial mentality as "internalized oppression, characterized by a perception of ethnic or cultural inferiority…that involves an automatic and uncritical rejection of [colonized ways of being] and uncritical preference for [colonizer ways of being]." See Eric John Ramos David and Sumie Okazaki, "The Colonial Mentality Scale (CMS) for Filipino Americans: Scale Construction and Psychological Implications," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 53, no. 2 (2006): 241–52, at 241, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.53.2.241. See also Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *Frantz*

subordinated groups.[57] Here we emphasize their importance as an antidote to epistemologies of white ignorance that promote denial of racism and opposition to antiracist policy. The fierce resistance to these epistemic interventions serves as a reminder that white racial power has a strong interest in the production of sanitized knowledge and suppression of potentially transformative knowledge. As the case of BHM and other contributions to this book suggest, this resistance and suppression sometimes come in the form of incorporation rather than explicit resistance.

Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression (New York: Plenum Press, 1985); Shawn Utsey et al., "Assessing the Psychological Consequences of Internalized Colonialism on the Psychological Well-Being of Young Adults in Ghana," *Journal of Black Psychology* 41, no. 3 (2015): 195–220, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798414537935.

57 As an example, educational researchers Thomas S. Dee and Emily K. Penner found significant gains in GPA and attendance rates for at-risk students of color who were enrolled in ethnic studies courses. Thomas S. Dee and Emily K. Penner, "The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum," *American Educational Research Journal* 54, no. 1 (2017): 127–66, https://doi.org.10.3102/0002831216677002.