
Introduction

The Shadow of a Machine

When we see a bulldozer knocking down a house, crushing the furniture and belongings of its former inhabitants to rubble, to be scooped into trucks and hauled away, we know what is happening. Large machinery is obliterating an essential part of their lives. Some persons have lost their claim to exist in that place on the orders of someone else with greater power. The bulldozer driver is carrying out that power. We can assume that there were judicial procedures that legitimized this destruction. Or we can inquire what right someone had to destroy the residents' status and habitat, and hope to receive a response commensurate with the damage done.

When, in Jena, Louisiana, in 2006, a different social machinery does the damage during racial hostilities in the high school, things are not so clear. In one incident, a white student pulled a gun on a black student at a convenience store, in response to which the black student knocked him down and disarmed him. Yet it was the black student who was arrested and charged with assault and theft, while no charges were levied against the white student. When something like that occurs, we are not so sure we know what is happening.¹ Racism may be the familiar name for it. But "racism" names the damage, leaving us to ponder the machinery that gives permissibility and legitimacy to such an egregious inversion of basic justice. One can see a bulldozer approaching. But in Jena, when a large piece of social machinery demolishes something essential in a person's life, we do not see it coming

until after it hits. By then, after his indictment, this black student's ability to inhabit this world with dignity, which is contingent on his ability to defend himself against assault, has been bulldozed by a cold and distant legal process. His residence in the sanctity of personhood has been judicially damaged, his freedom chained to a bail bond. (Later, when a fight developed between two groups of students, white and black, six black students were indicted for attempted murder.) We can see who signed the order. But the fact that there was an indictment to be signed in the first place marks the operation of this social machinery. It lurks without recourse until it invades the space of certain people's lives. We search for the right of self-defense under the rubble.

In the case of the house, there ostensibly will have been courts, property rights, and deeds involved. Yet neither courts nor deeds have the power to tear down a house; they require the use of real bulldozers. And neither can a court tear down an individual's personhood or dignity without the use of a powerful piece of social machinery. "Racism" is not a big enough term to describe it.

In the case of the bulldozer, irate neighbors may come to the residents' aid, stand in its way, or stop it through appeals to reason, court injunctions, civil disobedience, or even sabotage, in pursuit of the "self-evident truth" that human life is more important, and more sacred, than property rights. This is, of course, risky, and we must pay homage to Rachel Corrie, who was crushed to death in Rafah, Gaza, on March 16, 2003, by an Israeli bulldozer as she stood, clearly visible, between it and a still-inhabited Palestinian house.² But how do irate neighbors stand in the way of social machinery that tears apart a black student's life if they cannot see it coming? There may be no surprise when it arrives. Its destructiveness may be totally familiar as the "same old white racism." But to whom can they appeal to stop it before it hits?

People have been responding to the existence of racism for 300 years, attacking its every overt daily expression. Yet after 300 years, it remains, changing form over time, in response to political conditions, while producing more damage. Whenever we have gotten strong enough to interfere with its operations (as the civil rights movements did), it comes back wearing different language, speaking an up-to-date lingo, while creating more of the "same old" effects. These effects, as Leonard Harris tells us, include "polymorphous agent[s] of death, premature births, shortened lives, starving children, debilitating theft, abusive larceny, degrading insults, and insulting stereotypes forcibly imposed" (Harris 1999, 437). These effects, the racial hierarchies and segregations that get taken for granted, are too dire for us to simply

watch them occur again and again, responding after the damage is done. Their resurgence, their recurrence, their longevity in the face of centuries of opposition suggest that their source lies deeper in this culture than we had imagined. Something keeps rebuilding that machine, renovating it, something beyond the nefarious individual prejudices and tainted desires by which racism manifests itself.

This book is an attempt to discern the outlines and the nature of that machinery so that we can see it and figure out how to stand in its way.

Oddly, many white people claim that racism is over, a thing of the past. After all, the nation has even elected a black man to the White House. They complain about programs and laws, such as affirmative action, that were designed to overcome the deficits imposed by centuries of segregation and discrimination. These are no longer relevant, many would say. "Today minorities are sucking our blood through government programs," they might claim, without asking what it means to refer to people as a "minority." It would not matter to them that black or brown employment or higher education enrollment did not approach their population proportions for a local area, meaning that whites remained a disproportionate majority in those job categories or on those campuses.³ Indeed, for many of these white people, the white prosecutor who indicted the black Jena student was himself only "fighting back" against black encroachment. And when 50,000 people (mostly black) showed up in Jena in 2007 to protest the indictments of the black students, the protesters were seen as the "problem."

Many anti-racist thinkers and activists have asked, how can we begin to get white people to resist racism in its institutional form?⁴ But this question, though pointing in a good direction, is inadequate if resisting racism means only dealing with effects. Dealing with effects is necessary and not to be skimped. But if the materiality of the history of racism allows it to be taken for granted, its machinery to lurk unseen, then the anti-racist actions of the moment will remain ephemeral. Those who act in a racist manner could then rest secure in the knowledge that what they do as individuals could not be responsible for the devastating social effects, the death, larceny, and insult, that Harris names above.

For the white anti-racist, there is an ethics involved in not seeing below the surface. There is an ethics in ignoring the underlying social machinery, or taking it for granted. If the history of that machinery is part of the history of white people themselves, then their ethics of not seeing becomes part of the ethics of the machine.

To begin an investigation of this machine, let us look briefly at some questions of ethics, of social role models, and of race.

The Ethical and the Judicial

What is an ethics? Simply put, an ethics is what one thinks is the right thing to do or say to others. It is always relational. And it always involves a question of permissibility. One can discover a person's ethics, what they have determined is permissible for themselves, in what they do with respect to others. Sometimes we discover our own ethics in what we find ourselves doing. In these general terms, one can also discover the ethics of an organization or institution in how that institution acts, and in its rules of operation. For instance, we would expect a corporation and a social welfare agency to operate differently, one treating people and land as resources for profit, and the other picking up the pieces, the people thrown away, after a corporation or other social institution has finished using them. These actions reflect different ethics. It is therefore a source of surprise to find a corporation and a social welfare agency acting similarly because both are bureaucracies.

A society can have an ethics. Its ethics consists of what is familiar to its citizens in its social operations. To discover a society's ethics is to discern the foundation of its cultural framework. We know an individual's ethics by what the person does. We know an institution's ethics by how it operates in society with respect to individuals. And we know a society's ethics by what is familiar to its inhabitants.

In the arrest of this black student who had defended himself against attack, we discover an ethics. It is an ethics that contradicts the human dignity preserved by the right of self-defense against wanton assault. We discern it in the fact of the indictment and the arrest, even though (or rather, because) legal procedures were followed. When legality stands in contradiction to an ethics of fairness and human dignity through its criminalization of self-defense, it amounts to an inversion of justice. One could say that legality has become criminal in an ethical sense insofar as it does wanton damage to a person's life. And here we are borrowing the term "criminal" from legal and judicial language, and using it in an ethical rather than a judicial (or legal) sense. That is, not only is it possible for legality to operate in a criminal manner (ethically speaking), but it is precisely that kind of criminality that highlights the operations of the social machine we are trying to discern.

This distinction between the judicial and the ethical is important. The judicial is what punishes acts that violate the law. Murderers are imprisoned for having killed someone. But when the state of Michigan (for instance; other states have similar statutes) condemns juvenile offenders (people under eighteen years of age, and still considered children) to life imprisonment without possibility of parole if they kill someone (and by 2008, 307

young people had been so condemned in that state), it is being criminally unethical.⁵ It proclaims a person legally not responsible because under age, and then holds that person responsible to the extent of totally ending his or her life in society. In other words, the state acts in a criminal manner ethically in the way it punishes certain criminality judicially. And it matters that there is a racial component to Michigan's criminal ethics. Although people of color comprise less than 20 percent of Michigan's population, they account for 60 percent of its prisoners and 70 percent of the children it sentences to life without parole.

To make an ethical judgment that the state of Michigan acts "criminally" is to speak metaphorically, of course. There is no tribunal before which to bring the state of Michigan or the city of Jena for their respective criminal inversions of justice. Both have done grievous injury to persons, but it is harm they can ignore because it was committed through authorized legal procedures. Thus, beyond our ethical judgment, we have no recourse. When the U.S. government invaded Iraq in 2003, it violated the U.S. Constitution, international law, and a whole host of treaties to which the United States was signatory (the UN Charter, for one) (Maechling 1990). In what judicial body could that criminality be indicted? When immigrants labeled "illegal" (because undocumented) are held in indefinite detention, the Constitution is again violated. That document states (Article I.9.2) that the right of habeas corpus will not be suspended for any persons (not just citizens). Indefinite detention amounts to kidnapping and false imprisonment. These are felonies committed by the judicial system. In which branch of the government could these felonies be charged?

If "ethics" refers to how one comports oneself toward others, what a person judges to be good, acceptable, and permissible behavior (whether one arrives at that judgment independently or as part of a group to which one belongs), then it has to be considered something very fundamental to human society. Two things follow. One is that one cannot impose an ethics on others. To do so means to tell the other not only how to live but who to be and what to think. To tell someone what to think is to violate their sovereignty as a person. In that sense, the imposition of an ethics is itself unethical, since ethics can pertain only to sovereign individuals and not to puppets. To impose one's ethics on another is to proclaim one's ethics universal, and thus to deny the other's ability or right to do the same thing. All one can do, ethically, is hold another responsible for his or her actions (from the perspective of one's own ethics). But self-universalization is always unethical. When white supremacists present themselves as a social and ethical norm, as the height of human evolution to which all others should aspire, they are not only proclaiming their ethics but universalizing

themselves, and thus acting unethically. When anti-racists tell white supremacists that what they are doing is wrong, they are falling into the same paradigm. The real issue is the criminality of white supremacy, as judged ethically by the harm it does to people.

Anti-racism may call for an end to the harm racism does, and hold those who do the harm responsible for it, but that has only limited bearing. It is the machine that renders white supremacist actions permissible, that makes racism ethical for the white supremacist, which is our focus here.

The second consideration that follows from the fundamental nature of ethics is that whatever a person does, at the moment of performing the action (including speech), he or she must think that it is the right thing to do. As Hazel Barnes puts it, the ethical is an “inner demand for justification as a self-imposed necessary relation between actions and judgments by and within the same individual.”⁶ Even in the midst of a criminal act, at the moment of commission, one has to think that what one is doing is the right thing to do; otherwise one would not do it. What drives an action may not be thought out; it may simply be a desire of the moment. But it will have appeared to be the right thing to do in that moment. It is its momentary situatedness as ethical that gives it permissibility and justification. The action’s sense of rightness may change in the next moment. The person may realize that he or she has done something horrible. But that is a subsequent state and not the state in which the act was committed. In the moment of commission of a criminal act (in the judicial sense), for the person acting, it is the victim who is wrong. Even the thief thinks, at the moment of stealing, that the other’s possession of the object taken is wrong in comparison with his own desired possession of it. Later, perhaps the next second, perhaps a week later, perhaps only when caught by the authorities, the person may come to realize that the act was wrong—or maybe not.

If we are to deal with a social machine composed of people who can invert justice, fairness, democratic procedure, and the ideals of human sanctity, which they rationalize on the basis of a concept of race, we have to be clear that the people who function in that machine, who speak and act as parts of its destructive operations, think they are doing the right thing. That is the big problem with racism and white supremacy.

The Ethical and the Institutional

When we consider governmental actions ethically (as opposed to judicially, with respect to the law), we find that there can be “legal” crimes (such as police murders, in which the officers are exonerated)⁷ as well as “illegal” crimes, in which a civilian acts to injure another. In both cases, the person

acting thinks he or she is justified in dominating the situation through an exercise of power over others. Even when a hungry man steals a loaf of bread or a slice of pizza, he is attempting to dominate the situation of his lack of food by imposing that need on someone else. The issue of which forms of domination are valid and which are not involves the question of a social or cultural ethics, as opposed to an individual ethics. What allows some crimes to be considered “legal” is that they are valorized by a cultural ethic. All the anti-democratic forms of racial segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement of people of color (even up to the present: in Florida in 2000, well over 100,000 people of color were illegitimately barred from voting)⁸ which have been experienced in this country have been ethically criminal (that is, unethical) because they are anti-democratic (an imposition on others of who to be or what to do) but were not seen as judicially criminal because valorized culturally. When a person can injure others in a criminal manner and still feel him- or herself to be honest, or innocent, or civilized, it is society’s cultural ethic that legitimizes that feeling.

Under the operation of a cultural ethic, police have been trained to shoot to death anyone who brandishes a weapon in their presence. They even killed sixty-six-year-old Eleanor Bumpurs, an arthritic woman who had a kitchen knife in her hand when officers arrived to evict her from her apartment in the Bronx for being behind in her rent, October 29, 1984. Killing someone who has a weapon in his or her hand neutralizes the threat that such a person presents to other people. But to kill elderly ladies suggests it has an additional meaning. It becomes a mechanical response to that person’s transgression of a presumed police monopoly on violence, as if vengeance must be exacted for that person’s trespass on police presumption. (When the person is distraught, he or she should receive a humane rather than a mechanical response.)

The absurd extent to which mechanical responses can go is exemplified by instances in which a police officer has shot and killed a man to prevent him from committing suicide. This fact has been euphemized by the expression “suicide by cop.” It means a person has acted in a way that brings immediate lethal force to bear on himself, even if his act is only to point a gun at his own head. The cynical nature of this police response needs no elaboration. It signifies that the police officer’s job is (in a mechanical sense) to kill a person who does certain things. We now have to recognize that we live in a society patrolled by a police force whose job (in an ethical sense) is to kill people in certain circumstances.

The judicial source of this killing ethic is, of course, capital punishment. Capital punishment means the state can kill a person who kills another, under judicial circumstances. The ethics of capital punishment is an ethics

of revenge. The desire to kill the person who has killed someone is a desire for vengeance. A government that practices capital punishment transforms the people of its society into vengeful people, people who can feel good about themselves for having wrought their vengeance (through the state) on those identified as criminal. The existence of capital punishment teaches people that revenge is a good way to be human and sociable. Even sociology gets enmeshed in this ethics. Sociology looks at statistics and asks whether capital punishment is a good way to deal with crime. Most sociological studies suggest capital punishment fails in its purpose to reduce murder rates. But ethically, that is not the point. The ethical question is whether revenge is a good way for people to feel good about themselves, which remains unaddressed. Sociology thus accepts the revenge ethic to the extent that it asks only if the punishment succeeds in its purpose or not.

The essence of a revenge ethic is that it repeats or enlarges the crime it seeks to redress or counteract, by adding the criminality of its act of revenge to the criminality it avenges. The fact that capital punishment fails in its purpose, or that revenge in general fails to diminish crime, is ethically irrelevant to a system that thinks the criminality of revenge is a proper and ethical procedure. To adopt capital punishment as proper is to be vengeful, and to adopt vengefulness as proper is to sanctify the criminality (murder) that one condemns. Under the revenge ethic, one condemns a certain criminality by valorizing it, and valorizes one's own criminality by condemning it in others. That is the problem with capital punishment and with its revenge ethic.

Those who live by the revenge ethic will loudly proclaim, "What about the victim, and the victim's family and friends, who have been harmed by this act of murder?" It is in the name of the living that the murderer is to join the dead. They argue that this would give the families and friends (and the victim, if surviving) some closure on their harm, their injury and pain. Closure for the revenge ethic means murdering the one who murders, or doing the violence of imprisonment to those who dominate others through violence. But this substitution of "closure" for justice is what demonstrates how the revenge ethic makes justice impossible. It dehumanizes people by suggesting they should feel better about committing the same crime as the one for which they condemn the criminal (through vengeance), and it presents this hypocrisy as ethical.

In a society that lives by the revenge ethic, such hypocrisy is all too common. We hear it all the time. "Do what I say, not what I do!" "I am beating you so that you will learn that violence is not a proper way to deal with things!" "We have imposed a trade embargo on Nation X, which we hope will create tremendous problems and hardships for its people, for which we will have been the cause, so that its people will see that they have to

remove their present government as the source of their problems and hardships.” What saves these “speakers” from seeing themselves as hypocritical is the formal mode in which their views are stated. In the case of capital punishment, the formal procedures the state has to follow to obtain the right to murder individuals who have committed murder separates and sanctifies its own act of murder for it. The law establishes procedures that sanctify its revenge ethic. But in fact, the ethics of revenge only establishes its acts as a role model. When the state valorizes its own right to murder, it valorizes it for the entire society.

The State as Role Model

Let us speculate on the question of role models for a moment. When President Ronald Reagan sent fourteen fighter bombers over Libya in 1986 to try to assassinate Moamar Khaddafi,⁹ he was in effect ordering the air force to commit what amounted to a drive-by shooting. One could argue that it is therefore hypocritical for the political institutions of the United States to condemn drive-by shootings when they occur in Los Angeles, for instance. Those who commit drive-by shootings can be seen as simply trying to keep up with the president. If drive-by shootings are to be considered criminal acts, and there is no law that sanctifies Reagan’s orders to the air force, then Reagan should have been condemned for it, along with any others who commit drive-by shootings, and jailed.

By extension, if a justice system valorizes victimization by repeating it, it only makes victimization in general more acceptable because committed by the state. Humility on the state’s part would dictate that if it reserves the right to commit murder, then any citizen who does likewise should be seen as simply emulating the state. To render murder a truly heinous crime, the state would have to recuse itself from the possibility of providing a role model for murder and repeal the laws that allow for capital punishment. Humility on the citizens’ part would require that they not permit their government to commit murder if it is going to condemn murder as a heinous crime.

This line of reasoning runs the risk of appearing wholly irrational or even unintelligible for those imbued with an ethic of revenge. It is not an inconsistency in its logic that would do this but rather its ethics. Ethics is more fundamental than reason. For those readers who are too imbued with a revenge ethic to see that what is being said here is proper, a change of ethics would be required. They would have to live according to a different ethics, and thus live in a different world. To leave a world in which certain acts and thoughts are valorized and sanctified (for instance, revenge), and move to a world in which those same acts would be condemned as criminal,

would be an insupportable journey. There is nothing about ethics that is light or superficial.

Now I have to admit that, at present, I have no extant substitute to offer for imprisoning violent criminals or those who engage in anti-social behavior that is injurious to other persons. To have such an alternative, one would have to envision a society in which a revenge ethic had been superseded. An ethics that would abjure revenge would not only seek a different outcome; it would have to have a different concept of crime. "Restorative justice," for instance, sees crime as a break in the fabric of a community, and thus a community concern, rather than simply a matter of the state punishing perpetrators.

In a society that considered crime an unraveling of the social fabric, the social task of justice would become how to mend that fabric, not how to extend the tear through punishment that takes the criminal as its model. Such a different outcome would be possible only in an alternate society, or alternate community, in which the state would become a different kind of role model. It would have to be an unstratified society in which dialogic relations existed uncontaminated by competitiveness or possessiveness (in particular, toward people). It would have to be a society that respected people, so that individuals would not feel the need to return the disrespect and the psychological and emotional harm that accompanies social disrespect. Ultimately, practical alternatives would have to come from people who can in some communal manner see their way to pro-democratically constructing a different ethics for their world.

Of Ethics and Race

Two ideas have been brought together here. The first is that there are many ethics, and they do not necessarily agree with each other. In particular, a revenge ethic and an ethics of pro-democratic justice stand opposed to each other. Second, we need to be able to discern and to describe the machinery of whiteness and white supremacy that stands behind the harm that "racism" commits, and to apprehend its ethics from a knowledge of how it operates. We must describe its origins and its contours, its dynamics and its substance.

"Racialization" is the term I use to refer to the operations of this machine. The term derives from the verb "to racialize." It refers not to the social status of people (of different colors) that produces itself culturally in this society (as Omi and Winant 1994 use the term), but rather to what is done socially and culturally to people, for which personal derogation and alien status are part of the outcome. It is a transitive verb. "Race" is something that one

group of people does to others. In the hierarchy of “race,” one group racializes another by thrusting them down to subordinate levels in a dehumanizing process. In the “materiality of its history” (as Kincheloe and Steinberg [1998, 5] put it), “race” is something that Europeans, in the course of the colonization of other people, have done to those people. “To racialize” and “to humanize” stand opposite each other, in contradiction (Fanon 1967).

It is the operation of this opposition that testifies to our inability to achieve racial justice in a society that operates on a revenge ethic. The revenge ethic engenders too much criminality in its own name to leave space for the social humanization that, in its profundity, racial justice would require. The task is not only to right the wrongs of this society’s past, but to create an ethical structure through which to see how it is that this society could possibly have seen those wrongs as right. It is the wrongs that have been committed in the name of justice and democracy that concern us, and they cannot be addressed through the given (because hypocritical) norms of justice that are based on revenge. Indeed, there is a form of supremacism that lives in a revenge ethic, in the impunity it arrogates to itself, and that further obstructs the possibility of justice. White supremacy, racial injustice, and the revenge ethics are all, as shown below, of a piece.

This book has an ethics—a pro-democracy ethics. Simply stated, democracy means that people participate in making the social and political decisions that will affect them. How people organize to accomplish this, its feasibility or efficiency, for instance, in national decision making or in court procedure, is not the question here. That must be left to those involved. What is at stake is how to articulate certain principles that run against the grain of the given, and to begin the process of opening legal or political operations to participation by those who will be affected by those operations, before they happen. A pro-democratic ethic would require that we make common cause with those barred from social participation in order to bring them into the decision-making process in their own terms. In that sense, all discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or sexuality is part of an anti-democratic ethics. A pro-democratic ethics needs to ask, how are we to understand and respond to an ethics that makes racial or gender discrimination culturally permissible for people?

The focus of this book is a democratizing project.

Of Birth and Race

To understand race, let us begin with the moment of birth. Birth is a social act because there are social meanings that attach to it. It is also a social act because it requires many people: the woman giving birth, a second person

at her head to look into her eyes and hold her hands so she knows she is not alone, and a third at her feet to preside over the transformation of the world from one in which this child does not exist into another in which it does. We, the society in which each baby is born, are there in the room with the mother in her labor, receiving and claiming the baby before the mother does.

When the baby is born, the first thing we look at is its sex. In so doing, we bestow something on the baby, something called gender. It is not the mother who does this, but we others, friends and midwives and attendants and doctors, who do it. After all, we know the sex of the baby before the mother does (modern technology aside). We do not ask why the sex of the baby is of primary importance. We take that for granted. It goes without saying. But the gender we bestow represents our knowledge. It represents an expectation, a future and a history, a uniform called tradition that the child will wear in the future. We attach all this to the baby at birth.

Since only two possible sexes appear to our eyes, our bestowal of gender is also binary. In this way, we create limitations. However, the child can surprise us and grow up to choose or become something outside that binary. We are surprised when the grown child lives or picks an alternate sexuality from a broadening spectrum of possibilities. We may even feel troubled by that outcome. We had placed that child in a social category, and given it a role to perform, in a society whose hierarchical binary organization of gender we have accepted. When it lives differently, it is betraying a faith we had placed in it, there in the birth room. The entire social system, of which we were the representatives, will have been discredited and discarded. Our power to define will have been “disrespected.” We pass laws to prohibit such an affront, without even seeing the “wrong” in our presumption. The laws we pass only serve to decriminalize the operation of that presumption.

The other category we bring to that birth room is “race.” Each time a baby is born, those who attend the birth, as well as the mother, think they know in advance its racial group. Race is not discovered at the moment of birth; the baby is already added to a racial group as if born in the midst of where it had already been. The parents and the community from which they come will be, themselves, the knowledge needed to resolve the issue. Like gender, it is a hierarchical category into which society places this child. And like gender, it enters the birth room from elsewhere, through us, and attaches to the baby. It does not matter who we are, or what we think about race, or racism, or white supremacy; we do this to the baby. It is not thought of in terms of performance, of a role the baby will be given to play or a role we are playing. It is simply another uniform.

If there are surprises, they occur right away. We do not have to wait for the baby to grow up. Yet the sense of betrayal will be the same. The surprises have to do with the father, not the baby—that is, with faulty foreknowledge of who the father is. If the color of the baby is not what is expected (though sometimes it takes a few hours or days to become evident), or if the facial features do not look as expected, there can be consequences. That is the nature of a social hierarchy.

There is something else happening in this scene that is easy to miss, however, and it needs to be seen. What we have done to this baby, we have done knowing that it is something everyone else will also do. While the mother has had her own choices to make, she has had to make them with us and others in mind. For instance, some black women whose skin is fairly light have been known to choose husbands who are lighter in the hopes that perhaps their children will be light enough to pass as white. Other light-skinned black women have chosen husbands who are darker, so that their children will be less ambiguously black, firmly placed within a community that she recognizes needs firmness and extra self-respect to live in its hostile white supremacist environment (X, 1965, 7). Because this environment remains hostile to the birth of a black child (as we see in Chapter 1), it is rare that a white woman will choose a black man as a husband in order that her children will be black. What is not as rare is for a white woman to fall in love with a black man. Their children will be black. *We* are that environment, the one she takes into account, in making her choices. There are no aspects of race, whiteness, or white supremacy that escape this basic relationality between her and ourselves, a relationality in which we impose our ethics as well as our racialized concepts on the child. We do this, not the mother. It is we who commit the unethical act of imposing our ethics, an ethics of racialization, on the child, through our acts of racialization. We do it without seeing the actual color of the child. Color is simply the logo for what we do.

The Individual Discovery of Race

We find ourselves confronting something we thought was an objective condition and discover it to be an active social process in whose unfolding we are all implicated. At the moment of birth, we act with foreknowledge rather than discovery, while it is the child who eventually must discover the *meaning* of race and find it has little or no choice in the matter (unlike the ability to choose gender). When Richard Wright discovers that he is black, he is already six years old. He is shocked to find that his humanness is divided

against others he does not know, known as “white people.” Toni Morrison and Patricia Williams go through a similar coming to racial awareness.¹⁰ For both, there is dismay and anger. Something has been done to them that was unwarranted. These experiences, it would seem, are typical.

Do white people go through a similar shock of awareness, finding that they are not simply human, but white, and thus different from people known as black? Some do. I remember being unastounded at the discovery. Henry Giroux talks about growing up white and being aware of his whiteness as a non-hidden signifier and condition (Giroux 1998, 127). Thandeka gives an account of white children who, unaware of the difference, find themselves castigated by parents who seek to impress on them the wrongness of befriending black people. These are steps toward their separation into supremacy (Thandeka 1999, 6). For most white people, there is no shock. Instead, there is a sense of honor or prestige. For some, it becomes a conceit; for others, there is a sadness because it marks a separation that was unexpected. When Wright and Morrison make their respective discoveries, something is done to them, suddenly and silently, like an ambush. When a white child is told he is white, something is done to him as well; a new power is given to him to act that is not given the others. That power is not inherent, it is given. One grows up with a responsibility to those others who gave it.

The corollary to this is that whites are not born white. There is no inherency to being white. They are given their whiteness by the white supremacist society into which they are born. One is made white or not according to prior political criteria and prior political decisions. For each white person, others engage in a verification of criteria, of parentage, with respect to the past and the present (however cursorily). If one accepts this whiteness, one accepts a role and stratified position in society.

Likewise, black people are not born black; they are given their blackness by the white supremacist society into which they are born. Many black people born in other lands, such as Belize, or various black (maroon) towns in Mexico or in Ecuador (for instance), when they come to the United States and are told they are black, do not understand what that means. They look at their real color and see themselves and not someone else’s social category. Only through an awareness of certain attitudes, when they become the object of a white person’s contempt or disdain, does the meaning of color become clear (Yancy 2008, 83). For black people born in the United States, there is a varied process of acceptance of blackness. In response to their relegation by white people to a predefined (black) social category, many black people reconstruct an affirmative black identity for themselves, as a mark of a certain social autonomy (Kelley 2002). It is a means of defending them-

selves against, and transcending, the derogation contained in the white-imposed identity.

What would white people become if they (we) actually confronted the fact that being white was not inherent in a person, in ourselves and others, but actually a demand that others make on us, a role we must play to fulfill a certain responsibility? Part of what is demanded is that we see others as different, yet attribute that difference to those others and not to ourselves, who are told to see it. Who would white people become if they saw their own eye as an active agent in the production of race through that eye's attribution to others? The so-called colorblindness that has become a prevalent notion these days would be impossible. If the essence of race, for which color is a symbol (of the imposed categorization), exists in the eye itself and not in the object seen by that eye, which has its own qualities, to what could that eye be blinding itself? Who would we become if we saw those others not as different but as living under an imposition of difference? Who would we become if we saw that imposition of difference as something in which we were not only implicated but active agents in producing? Who would we become if we sought to interpose ourselves in that process of imposition, to obstruct it in its primordial moment? Who would white people become if they saw themselves through the eyes of those on whom they impose themselves? Would they see themselves making those attributions? If white people stopped attributing racial difference to others, could they still see themselves as white? Compared to what?

These are deadly serious questions. Many people have died, killed in the name of the sanctity of white supremacy and its system of social categorizations called "race." Many have been tortured and beaten to make them certify that certain attributes are inherent and not socially imposed. The acceptance of a social categorization loses all pretense to being "natural" when it has to be forced—when one is forced to accept, or when one forces others to accept. The problem with "race" is that it is the result of force, the force of imposition that then pretends to an inherency, something to be taken for granted.

George Jackson warned us about this. Speaking about prisons, and semi-metaphorically about race, he says, at the beginning of *Soledad Brother*, that if you want to understand prisons, look at their administration and not at the prisoners.

To get to the causes [of racism in prisons], one would be forced to deal with questions at the very center of Amerikan political and economic life, at the core of the Amerikan historical experience. . . . For a real understanding of the failure of prison policies, it is senseless

to continue to study the criminal. . . . The real victim, that poor, uneducated, disorganized man who finds himself a convicted criminal, is simply the end result of a long chain of corruption and mismanagement. (Jackson 1970, 23)

The implication is that if we want to understand race, we must study the “administration” of race. We must look at the political and economic structure (the corruption and dehumanization) of that administration. Is it astonishing that race could be “administered”? It is what happens in the birth room. Over the past decades, from the 1950s to the present, we have seen the nature of racism shift and change its form, while underneath those changes this society somehow manages to reracialize itself, to construct yet another form of white supremacy.

An understanding of the problem of race must begin with how the act of imposition gets transformed into a state of inherency. For something to be taken for granted, those who do the imposing must be able to see themselves as not doing it, in order to see themselves instead as just reaping the benefits of its having been done (elsewhere, by others). Today, in the wake of the civil rights movements, the problem of race is how it is being again imposed, and the meaning of what is being reimposed as the concept of race. These issues occupy Chapters 2 and 3 of this book.

The Administration of Race

Theodore Allen has written a book called *The Invention of the White Race*, in which he describes in careful detail why and how the English colonists in seventeenth-century Virginia developed a concept of a “white race” for themselves (T. Allen 1996, 1997). For Allen, the “white race” is a class concept, an invention used to stabilize and organize colonial society by establishing poor white workers and farmers as a control stratum over the black bond-laborers working the plantations. As he describes it, the colonists’ notion of a “white race” signified that the difference between the white workers in the control stratum and the black workers they guarded was actually a cultural and a class difference. It became a cultural difference through its production of a cultural unity, uniformity, and homogeneity among the English in the settlement. And it ultimately became a class difference because it marked a class collaboration between the poor whites of the control stratum and the colony’s elite. Not only did the control stratum serve to keep black bond-laborers in their forced labor situation, but it functioned to control and discipline the white workers themselves by giving them the responsibility of policing the black bond-laborers.

It was from the resulting sense of unity and homogeneity that a social concept of white identity first emerged among the colonists. That is, out of the reduction of Africans to other-than-human by the slave codes, the English transformed their own cultural identity from being European to being white.¹¹ It was this sense of being white that was “biologized” in the eighteenth century by European naturalists to form the modern concept of “race.” In other words, it is from the invention of whiteness that the concept of race emerged. (We examine more carefully how all this happened in Chapter 1.)

What is implicit in Allen’s title is that whiteness is not a race but rather a story, a fiction written by people in the past. Let us look at a small piece of this story.

According to standard race theory, a white woman can give birth to a black child, but a black woman cannot give birth to a white child. A black person among one’s foreparents will make one black, but a white person among one’s foreparents will not make one white (Zack 1993, 9). These are conceptual conditions that create different criteria for being white than for being black. There is nothing natural about this disparity between white and black. The disparity in these criteria express a conceptual value system. Value systems exist only for human consciousness, not for nature. Nature does not emphasize one color over others; it simply mixes them in unhierarchical and ecological ways. The necessity for all one’s foreparents to be white in order for one to be white is a political decision. It means that there is a condition of purity that attends whiteness and not blackness as a white political invention.

I have discussed elsewhere at greater length the origin of this purity concept in the pragmatics of colonial administration (Martinot 2003b, 22). The early colonial settlements in Latin America and Africa discovered that the children produced by intimacies with or assaults on indigenous women had a color that matched neither the mother nor the father. They were lighter than the indigenous, the colonized, but darker than the settlers. For the settlers, the social status of these children presented a problem. In each colony (Spanish, English, Dutch, Portuguese, and so on), the European administrative group tended to be a minority. Its authority as European would have been diluted should these next-generation children be included according to traditional European patriarchal right, since they would also owe allegiance to their mothers. The indigenous would obtain a claim to participate in the colony’s administration, in contradiction to the colonialist ethic of conquest and supremacy. Political pragmatism then dictated that the offspring of mixed parentage would be considered indigenous, or black, but not European, in order not to blur the administrative boundary.

As more children were produced at the borders between these categories, color and bodily variation were found to vary extensively, so much so that the differences escaped clear classification. Ultimately, human coloring (and other characteristics as well) occurs along a continuous spectrum on which there are no natural breaks. "Continuity" means that between any two persons of different shades, a third person can be found whose color will be between those two. The implication was that administration could not rely on mere appearance to ensure the required division of colonial society between colonizer and colonized. Relying on appearance would allow colonialist supremacy to be superseded by a more "natural" organization of society, for instance, by families and clans. To obviate this possibility, a different mode of differentiation was required. An artificial division had to be created in the continuous spectrum of color. The purity concept provided that separation. The purity of European descendance became the administrative dividing line between the colonizers and all others. Once the Europeans had concocted that first division, they were then able to define other divisions. In other words, Europeaness, and later whiteness, represented the invention of a first differentiation between people that Europeans would later codify as race.¹²

In addition, as a primary instrument for dividing humans into categories, the purity concept, in making essential reference to parentage, linked the political definition of race to biology, providing it with a biological mask. In effect, the purity concept is the essential condition on which the invention of race depends. The Spanish and Portuguese colonialists were satisfied to locate their purity concept in direct European descent. In Virginia it was whiteness that was developed as a first social category. It first appears in the 1690s. And the reason it appeared in Virginia rather than the earlier Spanish colonies is linked to the specific (corporate) form of economic organization of the English colony (as we see in Chapter 1).

In sum, the concept of race, as a politically defined hierarchical system of social categorizations, is only symbolically constructed using color. Once color symbolisms became systemic, however, they were no longer simply descriptive. There is very little that is truly chromatic about these terms. After all, few black people are really black (in the United States), and very few white people are really white. Instead, it was "otherness," as a hierarchical designation, that was defined by the opposition of black to white. To attach a color term as a label to a social category, however, marked a racialization of language itself. It provided a racialized symbol (black, white, and so on) that could then be filled with whatever characteristics or traits might be opportunistically needed by those doing the defining (originally the European colonizers). These might include other physical features, geo-political origin,

cultural and intellectual capabilities, and the like. Different traits have been used at different times by white supremacy to fill those symbols.

The important element of this racialization process is the fluidity of its symbolization. Indeed, that fluidity dispenses with the need to refer to anything real once it has served to socially and hierarchically categorize. Symbolization creates what it refers to by its act of categorizing. What is important is the symbolic effect this has on the consciousness of the racialized, as well as on the mind of the racializers. To maintain a colonial system, for instance, the colonizers had to invent a form of consciousness for the colonized that would alienate them in their own minds from their former humanity, their former freedom, and their former claim to their own land. The concept of race, as an “ontological” difference between people, was developed to fulfill this purpose. If the first use of racial categorization was to rationalize European seizure of indigenous people’s land and their imprisonment in forced labor, its current forms of symbolization (which include assumed “criminality,” the “illegality” of some immigrants, “terrorism” as applied to local resistance movements) serve to rationalize a massive prison industry, a hyper-exploitative agricultural economy, and global interventionism (which we examine more closely in Chapter 4).

In sum, “race” names a system of socio-political relations in which whites define themselves with respect to others they define as “non-white” for that purpose. Because whites are the definers, “race” is inseparable from white supremacy. That is, “race” as a concept is inseparable from the white hierarchical domination that constructs it. Whiteness marks the primary symbolology of race, in terms of which other symbols, and the divisions they name, become definable, again by whites. It is by exercising this power to define that whites render themselves the “transcendental norm” (as George Yancy puts it [2008, xvi]). In the matrix of that process, whites see themselves as virtuous, civilized, law-abiding, secure, and superior.

Historically, the primary defining relation of race is that of whiteness to black people, since it was through the oppression of black people that Europeans invented themselves as white in the first place. By extending this originary white/black binary,¹³ whites have defined “other” races at will, through the generalizations, derogations, and symbolizations they have created and defined for those others.

It is important to understand that whiteness, and the system of racialization it has produced for itself, have nothing to do with blood. “Blood” is simply a metaphor for the fact that ancestry becomes a factor of account through the purity principle.¹⁴ It is the “motherhood disparity” that is both the source and the demystification of the so-called one-drop rule. In the birth room, when the child is categorized, it is we who are “there” in the

room who do it, and not the “blood” of the child. Nor does the categorization process have anything to do with the complex process of conceiving and giving birth to a child. We do it, not the mother.

On White Self-Decriminalization

Having its origin in coloniality, “racialization” emerges from a history of criminality, including kidnapping, false imprisonment, forced labor, murder, contempt for personhood, assault, torture, and theft of land. In all this, whiteness signified dominance, or the production of dominance, and as Ruth Frankenberg argues, still does (Frankenberg 1993, 231). “Race” and whiteness remain a power hierarchy that takes that criminality as its tradition. Today, in its daily relationship to black people, for instance, it models itself on that colonialism through its violation of the (social) contract (disenfranchisement), stalking (in department stores and police profiling), social exclusion (school tracking and neighborhood segregation), consistent terrorism (police brutality), fraud (redlining and disparate mortgage rates), extortion (felonization of misdemeanors), and blackmail (plea bargaining). All of these constitute elements of the process of racialization. Insofar as the primary symbology of race has become the criminalization of the racialized, the socio-political function of that criminalization is precisely to decriminalize whites in their acts of racialization. It is the relation between the criminalization of others and white self-decriminalization that marks the history of race and whiteness in the United States.

Let us mention a few moments in the trajectory of this relation. In 1800 a group of free African-Americans from Pennsylvania petitioned Congress to end the slave trade and begin the abolition of slavery altogether. A mere twenty-four years had passed since the Declaration of Independence had proclaimed all to have the right to liberty. Though the petition was mild in its terms and correct in its utilization of respectable channels of political expression, it was rejected outright by Congress, and resulted in a move to deny (that is, to criminalize) the right to petition for African-Americans (Litwack 1961, 34).

In an 1806 congressional debate on how to deal with smugglers of slaves into the United States after the slave trade was banned, some suggested that the smuggled slaves should be freed and released, thinking that would dissuade the smugglers. Southern Congressmen argued that free black people “threatened to become ‘instruments of murder, theft, and conflagration,’” and that while slavery might be cruel it was the only way to ensure “the safety of the white community.” Both sides then agreed that Africans, if freed, would perish quickly with no one to give them assistance (Robinson

1971, 325–326). In other words, at the highest levels of government, pro-slavery and anti-slavery advocates united in affirming this white supremacist “realism” that no one would provide these victims of criminality (e.g., kidnapping, enslavement, abandonment to the elements) a helping hand. Where white criminality toward black people was acceptable, a pro-democratic ethic of political or social inclusion of people wronged by their capture remained undiscussable.

When black people were disenfranchised under Jim Crow, it meant that they could not testify in court against a white person. Thus, white decriminalization with respect to black people was even written into the law and into court procedures. When police barriers and electoral malfeasance prevented more than 100,000 black people from voting in Florida in 2000 (see note 8), the issue that was permitted to emerge as a political concern was not the criminality of the police or electoral personnel who had deprived people of the vote, but rather that people themselves had voted in an inept manner (hanging chads, for instance). Those prevented from voting were given no voice.

In contradistinction, a myriad of socio-political institutions (corporations, unions, political parties, electoral systems, etc.) have constructed themselves in a manner to maintain white dominance over the social categories into which whites have placed all others (hiring bias, segregationism, etc.). Individual racism has relied on that institutional integument to preserve the culture of domination that makes individual racism both possible and permissible.

Today, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the same ethic persists. In Jena, black self-defense is criminalized and white aggression is decriminalized. Immigrants from Latin America, without proper papers, are detained indefinitely when not immediately deported, even though indefinite detention is a violation of the Constitution. The Constitution holds that habeas corpus shall not be withheld from anyone except for extreme (military) threats to public safety. The mere fact that these immigrants do not have the proper papers is used to decriminalize the violation of its own Constitution by an entire branch of the Justice Department (Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE]). Yet only marginal organizations, such as the ACLU or immigrant rights movements, seem to recognize the criminality of this. (We look more closely at the connection between slavery and being an “illegal” immigrant in Chapter 5.)

This sense of legitimate violation of the Constitution is not unconnected to the white purity concept. White self-decriminalization, central to the ethic of whiteness, provides it with its sense of cultural purity. This “cultural” purity is not the same as the original white purity condition by which

whites defined themselves and race in the first place. What it marks, however, is an extension of that originary purity concept to the domain of social identity, insofar as both define themselves through what they have defined as “other.”

But the ethical inversion contained in white self-decriminalization works against itself. To construct whiteness out of a purity concept implies imposing a non-purity, an impurity or corruption, on others through that “white” perspective. They become less than human. But to associate the purity condition with an anti-democratic dehumanization of other people means to depend on the criminality of exclusionism, and on the necessity to decriminalize the whiteness produced. The originary purity concept thus corrupts itself. Whiteness cannot escape the corruption of basing a sense of humanity (and of its humanity) on an exclusionism.

One reason many white people wish to think of themselves as simply human is to evade the inherent corruption that whiteness imposes on them. The exclusionary ancestry that has produced one as white stands in contradiction to being “just human.” But to shift identification in that way means to submerge oneself in a corrupted concept of the human because it emerges from white society, already imprisoned in a supremacism and its artificial division of humanity. To seek to see oneself as simply human without dismantling the purity/corruption binary by which whiteness has defined itself is to accept the white supremacist corruption of the human. The idea of being “simply human” might allow white people to think of races as existing in some kind of parity, on a horizontal plane. But this horizontality is then only another form of decriminalization of the criminality of having imposed a vertical hierarchy on people in the first place. Many white people claim that whiteness and white supremacy are not the same thing, and they seek a sense of whiteness that is not supremacist. We examine whether this is a possible position to take, or whether one’s non-acceptance of white exclusionism implies a non-acceptance of whiteness itself, in Chapter 7.

But as Frankenberg warns us, white people simply assume a natural or universal significance for what they do or say. For them, the assumption of individuality seems assured, since they can “dys-consciously” (to use Frances Rains’s term [1998, 87]) ignore their participation in what is done to other people socially. The white individualist, for instance, is one who thinks he or she can escape what the system does because individual acts are by nature not systemic. But such “innocence” is a luxury provided the hegemonic, which allows them to ignore the fact that the meaning of their acts is precisely systemic. That is what “hegemony” means. Indeed, “hegemony” is itself one of the meanings that individualism is given. To seek dys-conscious comfort in one’s individualism ignores the fact that the meanings individual acts

obtain are social meanings, given by others, and that the acts of those of a hegemonic group are thereby given hegemonic meanings. It is a reflection of the white self-decriminalization ethic that for the hegemonic mind, a white person's acts represent only themselves while a black person's acts (for instance) represent "their race" (McIntosh 1997).

The Structure of Racialization

This description of the originary structure of whiteness has been based on three facts: the "motherhood disparity" of the "white race" story, the undivided continuity of biological variation, and the fact of colonialist origins (leaving for later the actual story of how those colonial origins unfolded). These factors are sufficient to produce an outline and initial analysis of the structure of whiteness and race.¹⁵ The implication is that whiteness is actively produced historically as a system of social practices. It does not simply emerge in the world, out of nothing. Social practices are things that people do. As Marilyn Frye puts it, "If one is white, one is a member of a continuously and politically constituted group that holds itself together by rituals of unity and exclusion" (Frye 1995, 115). White people "do" race in the sense of "committing" certain practices, actions, and attitudes (see note 13). What white people do to others through those practices, however, tends to remain unseen by their white perpetrators once the practices become elements of a cultural structure in which they simply "go without saying." Because these practices necessarily produce harm in others, through the force of thrusting them into social categories, of disparaging them and making them other than who they are, they are ethically criminal practices. Though they may be "legal" in the terms of the culture that whites have constructed for themselves (using derogatory terms, for instance), ethically they remain criminal practices (derogatory terms are really forms of assault—weapons using words but weapons nevertheless).

For racialization to be an active process done to others, there must be an interest in doing it. Because whites invented themselves as a race through their racialization of others, it follows that whites are the only group that has had, and still has, an interest in it.¹⁶ This is not "interest" in the sense that a student may be interested in mathematics, but in the way a stockholder has an interest in a corporation. That is, there are both material and cultural benefits to be gained.¹⁷ While the original "interest" was to consolidate a colonialist regime, today that interest expresses itself through other forms of power. To understand the major contours of that power, we have to understand how racialization and racial domination are, for white people, a dependency relation.

Whiteness is a dependency of whites on those they racialize in the same sense that all domination is dependent on those it dominates to maintain its identity as dominant. As Peter McLaren puts it, "The excluded . . . establish the condition of existence of the included" (1998, 68). White interest in racism and racialization emerges from the necessity to defend and protect white racialized identity from that dependency, that is, to maintain the system's hierarchical character. If whites were to cease to dominate, or cease to exercise a determining white power over any situation, they would lose their identity because they would lose control over the source of that identity in others. (Many white people might disagree with this; we examine it politically and philosophically in the chapters that follow.) Whiteness, insofar as it produces "race" for itself through its racialization of others, can persist only to the extent it can maintain its sense of supremacy by keeping those others in place. This is what Toni Morrison calls the "metaphysical necessity for Africanism" on the part of whites in the United States (1992, 64). That is, even in their absence, there is for the white consciousness a "presence of black people" in all aspects of white society and identity. The white interest in race and racism is thus a need to render those on whom it depends dependent on itself. Those on whom it depends have to be kept in "place." For this reason, social power has to be exercised to subordinate, and all attempts by the subordinated to establish autonomy must be expunged. This control does not have to occur in racial terms; the rhetoric of "color-blindness" will serve the purpose as long as the one color the colorblind can see is "white" (Goldberg 2002, 222). For race to exist, however, white power must remain at its center, and thus white racism must remain at the center of white power.

But power is never absolute. Against it, many in the Black community have constructed an autonomous black identity as a form of self-defense and a survival strategy against the hostilities of white supremacy, and in that sense they have a different interest in "race." Though whiteness depends on defining black people as black for the purposes of self-definition, white people do not define Blackness. It is black people who have defined Blackness for themselves as an aspect of resistance, the creation of a rehumanizing social identity, a communal sense of dignity and self-respect.¹⁸ Blackness is a black appropriation of what had been imposed on black people (by whites) in order to transform it into something of their own. In various ways, and under a multiplicity of guises, it produces a structure of cultural and social identity arrayed against white imposition of subjugation and inferiorization.¹⁹ A Black culture specific to the United States has formed out of this need for resistance, and it has produced a history and a social tradition with global influence during the twentieth century, from the alliance of the civil rights

movements with African liberation struggles to jazz and hip-hop. Black power, which emerged from the civil rights movements, was a call for social and cultural autonomy. It was for that reason that it was ultimately seen as a threat by whites and targeted for intense repression during the 1970s by both the white mainstream and the government (e.g., Cointelpro [Churchill 2002]).

In sum, to the elements of a structure of racialization already enumerated (which include a purity concept, a coloniality, a process of political definition, the creation of a white racialized identity, and a paradigm of white decriminalization through the criminalization and denigration of those whom whites racialize), we must now add the element of repressive power, deployed against the autonomy of the racialized.

Race as a Socially Active Process

The system of racialized social categories that constitute the existence of “race” can now be seen to be essentially a binary relation of racializers and the racialized, of the supremacist and the inferiorized (originally invented in terms of white and black). This division is its fundamental character, upon which it attaches a variety of visible traits.

Insofar as whites, as a society of racializers, produce “race,” there are meanings which accrue to their everyday actions as whites, simply because their whiteness symbolizes the racialization of this society, and which do not accrue to black or brown people’s actions (and vice versa). For instance, because racializing practices are extant as socially instituted, every white face then appears to the racialized as a member of that institutedness. A person with a white face cannot not act white. That is, within the overarching milieu of white racializing society, each white face becomes a racializing action toward those others who are racialized by white society. Because they had been made not-white by that whole society, they are again made not-white by that face. Each white face ceases to be a thing and becomes a white action. And this occurs only because it is embedded in a matrix of past and present oppressions (discrimination, segregation, hyper-exploitation, gratuitous hate and hostility, torture and murder), whose persistence it recalls. In other words, there is always a dimension of unacknowledged racism (in the form of existential racialization) that accompanies each white person by dint of the symbolism given his or her whiteness by white racialized society.

These are meanings that accrue to the social interactions between individuals despite their desire to think they can act individually without taking those social meanings into account. If white people wish to rehumanize their

faces, it is not their appearance that they must change but the structure of racialization that gives that appearance its symbolic meaning.

In the United States, black people grow up in a different world than whites do. Having to deal continually with white supremacy is not something white people face. But it leaps out at black people with hostility at the most unexpected moments.²⁰ One should not be surprised that some black people see each white person as a potentially hostile encounter. This is not prejudice; it is simply the fact that a black person cannot tell from the outside if a white person is aggressively supremacist or not. The possibility that he or she might be is established by the persistence of white supremacy as a social fact and mode of organization in the United States.

It is difficult for many white people to understand the difference between being a racializer and being the racialized because it is hard for them see that the racialized live in a different world, made different by the hostilities and ambushes of white people. Having an interest in maintaining social categorization, on the one hand, and wishing that white people would just leave one alone, on the other, are incommensurable social attitudes. Many white people may not like this, but they (we) have not yet figured out how to dismantle the institutedness of whiteness or the structures of racialization. The two worlds cannot be just wished into coincidence. The structures of whiteness and of racialization that make them different would have to be dismantled. Yet most anti-racist white people continue to speak in terms of "race" as if it were biologically real, thus hiding from themselves the fact that it is something that white people and white society "do," through a system of social practices for which they are to be held responsible. This is not a guilt trip; it is the existential dilemma that white people face (hooks 1992, 342).

Not all white people are supremacist, though very few non-supremacists will actually contest the actions of supremacism. After all, whites do not grow up having to deal with white supremacy as an assault on their own persons. Some do encounter such assaults, however, when they attempt to contest supremacist or racist actions or situations. In general, most will at one time or another have to deal with white supremacy as a demand on their own behavior. To the extent they accede to that demand, they gain the respect of some (supremacist) white people, and to the extent they do not, they gain the respect of others (anti-supremacists). Each white person makes a separate decision somewhere along the line from which part of the spectrum of white groups (from supremacists to anti-supremacists) each wants respect. Subsequent comportment toward black people is then conditioned by that decision. But that comportment is enacted in order to gain the respect they desire from certain whites. It is a question of membership, not of freedom (of choice). What most white people remain blind to is that their

comportment toward black or brown people is in reality a performance for other whites. White people's comportment enacts how they live their white membership in white society, for which black or brown people are the means. Even radical anti-racists fall into this paradigm. And of course, it goes without saying that most black people do not generally enjoy being the means by which white people make decisions concerning their particular political identities.

Frantz Fanon (1967) recognized that "race" was something done to others, and he counterposed the term "to humanize" to the verb "to racialize." Insofar as "to racialize" means to separate others from their humanity by rendering them a category of persons to be dominated, for Fanon, white society is to be indicted as the source of that dehumanization. That is, whites dehumanize others and dehumanize themselves through their racialization of others. He warned the many peoples who were in the process of liberating themselves from colonialism that to rehumanize themselves they needed to abandon their idealization of, or their desire to emulate, white or European culture. They would be looking in the wrong place. He was not the first. The list goes back to Frederick Douglass, David Walker, Nat Turner, W.E.B. DuBois, William Wilberforce, Robert Owens, and others. Theodore Allen (1969), a contemporary of Fanon, coined the term "white skin privilege" to refer to a bargain that had been made between the white working classes in the United States and the white capitalist elite to keep people of color suppressed and dependent. It meant that exploited white people had not only dehumanized themselves by participating in the processes of racialization, but also traded away their ability to rehumanize themselves through their own struggles against their own exploitation. It is a form of double dehumanization that persists to the present.

It is because "race" (the generation of racial differences) is an active white-oriented process (a process in which whites have a primary interest) that the idea of society suddenly becoming "colorblind" is a sham. Color is not a spectacle or landscape one can just turn away from; it is a system of symbols for social categorizations constructed by racializers. That system continues to exist whether one looks at it or not. As David Goldberg points out, white supremacy gains three major benefits from the colorblindness rhetoric (2002, 217). First, it silences the public critique or analysis of everyday racism, and of the social structures of that racism. Second, it obstructs the ability to tie contemporary racism to its historical past because it pretends that past has been transcended. And third, it relegates any attention to racism to the private domain and away from consideration in the public sphere. The "colorblindness" slogan thus names a covert relation between the ongoing process of racialization and white racialized identity. It has been used as

a shorthand by many white people for preserving white domains (jobs and institutions) in as “pure” a condition as possible.

In summary, the concept of “race” for white people in general names active practices of categorizing other people as “non-white” in order to render “color” symbolic of an imposed social condition, through which white people can continue to see themselves as white. When black people adopt “Blackness” as the name of their own autonomous social practices, they are engaging in acts of resistance that turn what had been imposed on them to their own account. Race, then, is never abstract. It is always constituted by a real systemic conflict of socializing acts (imposition against resistance, resistance against imposition) in which an entire group (whites) participates in contextualizing the performance of a social identity that white racializing practices produce for them.

There is a difficult corollary to this. If it is white people who “do” race, who have the power to racially categorize people, as the essential operation of racializing themselves as white, then there is no difference between whiteness and white supremacy. If to be white means to think or to operate (consciously or unconsciously) in terms of the power implicit in the exclusionist purity principle through which others are defined and excluded as “non-white,” or other, then it is supremacist. White supremacy brought itself into existence by inventing the modern concept of race for itself as a hierarchy in which whites occupied the highest level by definition (that is, by assuming the power to define). It has disguised this power under a “naturalized” (horizontal) conception that humanity is divided into comparable races, among which the white race simply fought its way to the top, in order to dominate. The ethics of white supremacy revolves around the self-proclaimed sense that white people are the social norm and can dominate because of that.

The Relationship of Anti-racism to Structure

Racialization persists, under the disguises white supremacy gives it, as something that white people carry on endlessly with respect to others. It is constituted by practices guided and conditioned by an underlying cultural structure. Yet this remains a difficult idea to grasp, even for white anti-racist thinkers and activists. One reason for this is their insulation in the present from the historicity of that cultural structure.

Monica Patterson, for instance, suggests that “whiteness” is a pseudonym for Westernization and Eurocentrism as an ideology (Patterson 1998, 118). That is, one learns it. But that does not explain its need for violence, or for prisons, or its dependency on inferiorization procedures by which it decriminalizes that violence. To see whiteness as an ideology embedded in the

matrix of EuroAmerican culture means it inherits its exclusionist value (its purity concept) from that culture. But the logic of that value is that if the system of social categorizations ever broke down, a true multiculturalism would take over. Whiteness would no longer be what there was to learn. That would mean that whiteness was not a facet of EuroAmerican culture, but its very envelope. That is, whiteness is the historical context in which modern EuroAmerican culture is embedded.

Howard Winant points this out in his critique of the new abolitionist project. The new abolitionists propose that white people should abandon their whiteness and the supremacism that comes with it, as the solution to the problem of racism and racial oppression. By throwing off whiteness as a social construct, whites would rejoin humanity. After all, if whiteness is given to white people at birth, then surely it should be possible to give it back. Winant suggests, however, that simply advocating the repudiation of whiteness “fails to consider the complexities and rootedness of its social construction” (or “racial formation”) (Winant 1997, 48). For him, the appearance of similar racial practices from era to era on the foundation of those complexities suggests that white identity is more than a cloak (or ideology) to be discarded. Its tenacity suggests it has roots in a cultural structure beyond the individual. Insofar as a cultural framework is a coalescence of people within a sense of common belonging, individuals cannot repudiate that belonging without answering to others in that cultural framework.

For Frankenberg, whiteness “generates norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and other, and even ways of thinking about the notion of culture itself” (1993, 231). This self-normativity is what leaves whiteness an “unmarked marker” for race. It simply constitutes the assumed point of view, the “universal” condition, the perspective that is taken for granted (Frankenberg 1993, 239). But if others are socially marginalized, pushed outside that universal, or excluded from it, then it cannot be a universal except for those dominating. In other words, the white presumption to universality only universalizes whites themselves. The content of the normative, its history and its consequences, which call on dimensions of the force and power of racializing activity, can only be an imposition of universality, driven by the presumption to impose. That the imposition is ongoing, unceasing, and not just “once and for all” means that its historicity is central to it.

The centrality of that normativity has also to be recognized as a matter of life and death. John Edgar Wideman presents an instance concerning his brother. A close friend has died because of shoddy and inadequate diagnosis and care at a hospital in Pittsburgh. Four friends, all young black street guys, sit around talking after the funeral. They are angry at “whites in general who

had the whole world in their hands and didn't have the slightest idea what to do with it." It is a veiled indictment of the crime committed by the doctors who just let their companion sicken and die (Wideman 1984, 63). From this view outside white society, whites had wasted all their power and knowledge just to play with the world, forgetting or ignoring the fact that other people existed. Those who held the world in their hands could have been doing better things all along, such as establishing justice and a sense of humanity. "The man owned everything worth owning and all you'd ever get is what he didn't want any more." This is a view of whiteness not as ideology but as historical wastefulness.

In effect, the exclusionist purity condition for whiteness, its sense of supremacy, and its production of impurity and inferiorization through a self-supremacization imposed on others constitute a direct structural connection between white racialized identity and the entire spectrum of banal and murderous racist actions that manifest racism on a daily level.

To better understand this relation, let us look at an instructive example. In California, the three-strikes law was a ballot initiative that provided a mandatory life sentence for criminals who committed three crimes, two of which were felonies. The campaign to pass this initiative involved writing the law, collecting signatures, raising money, buying media time, and getting out the vote. The purpose for those who worked on it was to create longer prison sentences for people they did not know but who they were proclaiming, before the fact, in a generalized, decontextualized way, to be incorrigible criminals. The idea of the law was to impose a generalized otherness (categorized as "hard core" or "unredeemable") on those people, for which they would be imprisoned for life. Insofar as the law has succeeded in sentencing masses of non-violent offenders to life imprisonment, it expresses a campaign to hold many responsible for the few who actually commit violent crimes, for which the campaigners are the instruments or weapons. In adopting the generalized revenge paradigm represented by this law, people allowed themselves to be weaponized by the campaign to pass it.

The people who worked on the campaign came to comprise a vast alliance and association unified by their common purpose. As they worked together in this effort, the campaign defined an identity for them. For some, that "identity" provided the opportunity to feel "heroic," to be seen as defenders of the sanctity and purity of society against despoliation by a criminal "element." For others, it provided a sense of social tranquillity, or a defense of private property, or family values. Some later regretted having been involved, once they realized that the law tended to corrupt justice through its autocracy, rather than foster it. (We do not have to rehearse the excesses inherent in mandated life imprisonment—for instance, for a person

caught stealing a slice of pizza—for such stories have become endless in three-strikes states.)

Though many eventually understood that campaign to have perpetrated a tremendous injustice, they continue to live that identity. It was an identity that people constructed for each other in concert through the process of defining others they did not know on the basis of an a priori concept, without looking carefully at what that actually meant. Neither did they look at who it made them be through their imposition of an identity on those subjected to life imprisonment. In their relation to the campaign, they linked their identity to an institutionality (life imprisonment) that constituted that identity through identification with it.

As long as one refuses to think of its injustices, the punishment that buries those caught and exiled by the law can be considered an act of purification, an exorcism of corruption producing social virtue and respectability. As long as the excesses do not have to be accounted for, one need not ask what might be askew or dehumanizing in the law's very conception. Similarly, in racialization, white people purify themselves by creating an otherness in others so they can in concert think of themselves as white, as a common purpose, whether they look at how it was done or not. They can think of themselves as virtuous and respectable as long as the anti-democratic processes set in motion by whiteness (as exclusionary and dehumanizing) do not have to be accounted for.

The Task: To Examine the Structure of How "Race" Is "Done"

Before we can figure out how to create a society in which no one in the United States has to see his or her world dominated by white coloniality, and in which the racialized do not have to continually face their racialization at the hands of racializers, and in which black and brown people do not have to see white people as white, and in which the white purity concept has been replaced by structures of pro-democracy and justice, we have to fully understand the structures of racialization as they exist today. To decolonize the color-coded social categorization we call "race" will require decolonizing white people along with the elimination of the many forms of social colonization.

So far, this discussion has outlined two originary principles, the purity condition as an anti-democratic exclusionary principle, and a structure of activity by which white people racialize others (do "race") in a socially instituted manner. These principles are the foundation on which white people construct their white racialized identity. For each individual white person,

to want or to accept that purity condition is to want or accept that coloniality as well as the normativity of white exclusionism. Whites generally take these principles for granted, without concern for their role in building that identity or for what they become in doing so. The criminality contained in those principles remains typically ignorable for them. Aside from the acts of violence that maintain coloniality by suppressing the autonomy of the racialized, the fundamental criminality of these principles lies in their being imposed on others. The power to impose (through terror and imprisonment), and the power to define that constitutes its content, drive the operations that racialize.

In truth, the colonialism that brought race, racism, and white hegemony into existence was only a technological opportunism from the beginning. It succeeded because the Europeans had the military technology and the moral turpitude to act barbarically enough toward others (killing, kidnapping, and terrorizing) to both conquer and enslave them, instead of simply respecting the people they found on other shores. To the extent white people are still capable of violence in order to avoid facing their dependency, their contemporary violence and that of the origin of race participate in the same coloniality.

To understand “race,” we have to understand this cultural identity, the political relations between the individual and the social in their racializing operations, the structure of racialization that guides those operations, and the forms of power these take. They are all evident in the indictment of the black student in Jena, in the machine that could simply bulldoze his life.

Today most people provisionally accept the idea that “race” is a social construct. The conditionality of their acceptance, however, emerges from an inability to abandon the notion that race is a biological fact, or inherent in some sense because inherited. The motherhood disparity with which we started should dispel this hesitancy, of course. To continue to think that a biological feature symbolizes race is to have already forgotten that symbolization is a cultural activity that exists only for those who define or accept it. The fact of symbolism is a confluence of social activity and a historical construction of meaning.

Nevertheless, it is insufficient to say that race is a social construct. That statement defines not a fact but a task. The task is to describe the structure that has been constructed socially. If “race” is a structure of social activities, practices, and meanings, we have to describe how that structure conducts or directs those activities, as well as how it gives them the meanings they take. Our task is to describe the contours of this structure, beyond the well-known and well-worn ideological notions of “racism,” so we can see it.

The historical question that gives urgency to this investigation is the fact that over the course of 300 years, masses of people have said “Stop!” to racialization and it has not stopped. What are the weapons the racializers have used to offset such a demand? Why do those who wish to stop this bulldozing machine not have weapons as powerful? What would white people become if they found that they themselves were weaponized in what they did—that thinking themselves free as white, they were actually swords in a hidden hand that directs them at others who are targeted? Would they wrench themselves out of that grasp in order to be free, or would they call on it to get busy so they could taste blood again? What is it about the history of whiteness that this choice can actually be articulated and not seem wholly unintelligible?

Since the late 1980s much work has been done toward accomplishing this task. There have been extensive critiques of whiteness, what it is, and what it means, in attempts to add to the struggle against racism. They have been from the sociological (Ignatiev, Kincheloe, Delgado), literary (Morrison), historical (T. Allen), philosophical (Yancy, Martinot), and political (Roediger) perspectives. The present work is not designed or intended to compete with any of these critiques. And these works of the past few decades need not be seen as competing with one another. The work is too important not to see each effort fitting somehow into an eventual totality. In some cases, there have been polemics, but for the most part, researchers have understood that the topic is so profoundly embedded in the cultural framework of the United States that no particular work stands a chance of being definitive or all-encompassing. We are far from dispensing with the problem. The struggle to free the world from the criminality of white supremacy will be long and hard.

This book focuses on the following topics. First, it addresses the instrumentalization of women as a necessary step in the formation of a concept of race. This is related to the way the state continues to instrumentalize women for the purpose of ongoing racialization. How the state functions to continue the racialization of U.S. society through the prison industry, police impunity, and the two-party system extends that analysis. But there is a philosophical question with which such a discussion of the state confronts us. We live in the wake of the civil rights movements, when the structures of racialization were pushed back. It is unnerving to realize that they have come forward again in new form, but with the same content. It poses the question, what is it about white racism and white supremacy that this society cannot just let go? Will the many attempts people have made to re-conceptualize race allow us to apprehend its inordinate tenacity? Even those

attempts at philosophization can be shown to be racialized. In other words, the structure of racialization even reaches deep into our very attempts to understand it. What this philosophical knot represents cannot be ignored.

The book next examines the politics of racialization and analyzes the culture of interventionism—why and how U.S. government interventions in other nations obtain general (and generally white) support; how an anti-immigrant populism has threaded its way through U.S. history; and how white supremacy takes a populist political form.

If the bulldozing machine of racialization can be seen, we can become pro-active toward stopping and dismantling it. This book is dedicated to expunging white supremacy from the earth. It is first necessary to analyze the structures of whiteness and its racialization of other people. These are complex issues. By presenting them in their complexity, I attempt to reveal the difficulty of the task. I do not want to sugarcoat anything. I do not want to create false hopes—for instance, that if only white people did such-and-such, then the problem of racism would be resolved. There is an entire cultural structure that must be transformed before white supremacy and its racisms are eliminated from U.S. social practices.