

Philosophy and the Black Experience



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APA NEWSLETTER ON

Philosophy and the Black Experience

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FROM THE EDITORS

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With this issue, we would like to introduce a new feature of the newsletter, "Footnotes to History." For the last thirty years, there has been an explosion of Black philosophical writings on the philosophical canon, a development that parallels the explosion of writings about Black history and Black literature. The first stage of this project has generally taken on the character of unveiling the "whiteness" of the philosophical canon. They reject the historical exclusion of Black philosophers from the philosophical canon. Many Black philosophers have offered illuminating discussions of the racial biases lurking in the theories of canonical philosophers from Plato to David Hume to John Rawls. Yet, this dialectical moment has become stuck in the moment of negation. The time has come to recover the lost voices of past Black philosophers. Canon revision entails rediscovering the philosophical ideas developed by past Black philosophers. It should not be lost on the reader that what was Negro History Week, which Dr. Carter G. Woodson popularized and is now known as Black History Month, emerged as a solution to the neglect of the contributions that Blacks have made to US history. The history of African American philosophy provides us and future generations with philosophical ideas from past Black philosophers that are relevant to addressing current and future philosophical issues. One can even say that the *future* of African American philosophy rests on a recovery of the *history* of African American philosophy. In any case, as William R. Jones warned so many years ago, if we ignore the African American philosophical tradition, philosophy in the United States and elsewhere will continue to march under the banner of "FOR WHITES ONLY."

"Footnotes to History" will provide a brief biography of past Black philosophers and a selection of their writings. Hopefully, this will be the spark that starts a prairie fire. The first "Footnotes to History" is on Charles A. Frye (1946–1994).

We are excited to devote most of this issue to a book symposium on Alfred Frankowski's timely book, *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015). The articles in this symposium originated as commentaries

delivered at an "Author Meets Critics" session on Alfred Frankowski's *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization* during the 2017 American Society for Aesthetics conference in New Orleans, LA.

Noëlle McAfee's article, "Reading Alfred Frankowski's *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*," begins by analyzing a few of the key terms in the book's title: "post-racial," "limits of memorialization," and "toward a political sense of mourning." Then, she offers a Freudian account of what Frankowski calls *post-racial memorials*. She contends that these memorials can be understood as melancholic memorials. As such they do not and cannot facilitate our grieving of racial violence committed against Black people in the United States. Rather, they actively prevent us from mourning racial violence, whether that violence occurred in the past or is occurring now. McAfee interprets Frankowski as contending that what we need, instead, are memorials that facilitate the work of mourning. These memorials would facilitate the grieving process by all parties affected by the losses caused by racial violence, namely, all of us.

In "Common Sense and Racial Sensibility: Three Conversations on *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*," Michael L. Thomas conducts three conversations relevant to understanding the central motif of Frankowski's book. The first conversation is a continuation of an exchange between Thomas and Frankowski in the *Syndicate* symposium on Frankowski's *Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*. He analyzes Frankowski's Cassandra Complex using James Baldwin's concept of the "sense of reality." Baldwin's concept lets us see that there are at least two distinct sensibilities in the United States: a white (racial) sensibility and Black (racial) sensibility. The white sensibility depends on people feeling that they are innocent of the racial violence committed in the past and in the present and that the American Dream is available to everyone. The Black sensibility, on the other hand, is one in which Black people feel as though they cannot escape being potential and actual victims of racial violence even as they live in a supposedly post-racial context. Thomas contends that rather than simply accept the existence of two distinct sensibilities based on the absurdities of a post-racial context (that is, a context in which racial violence is regarded as part of our dark past even though Black people are still victims of racial violence), perhaps we should explore those moments when both Black and white people have had a shared sense of reality to lay the groundwork for a shared aesthetic sensibility. In the second conversation, Thomas explores how the Kantian notion of common sense, as interpreted by Frankowski and Monique Roelof, can be rehabilitated and used to form a shared sensibility

between Black people and white people. In the third conversation, Thomas discusses Jerrod Carmichael's HBO comedy special, *8*, to illustrate the possibility of forming a shared sensibility between Black people and white people in a post-racial context.

In "Politicizing Aesthetics May Not Be Enough: On Alfred Frankowski's *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*," Dwayne A. Tunstall raises three concerns about Frankowski's project. Tunstall's first concern stems from Frankowski's notion of the political sense of mourning. He questions whether mourning has any political relevance beyond "motivating some people to create memorials to racial injustices in the past so that others can be reminded not to inflict racial violence on marginalized racial groups today" (see p. 10 below). Tunstall's second concern involves Frankowski's apparent rejection of a "recognition politics," or a "politics of recognition," for contemporary Black people—namely, a politics in which US Blacks need to be recognized by non-Black allies with more political power than they possess to pursue their political interests effectively. Tunstall admits that a politics of recognition may not be a better strategy or tactic for confronting racial violence against Black people than a strategy aimed to transforming mourning the loss of Black lives due to racial violence into political action"; nevertheless, he contends that Black people collectively are not in a position to abandon a politics of recognition right now. Tunstall's third concern is that some segments of the US Black population will not consider Frankowski's racial realism and philosophical pessimism about the Black condition as accurate descriptions of their current condition.

In "Post-Racial Limits, Silence, and Discursive Violence: A Reply," Frankowski addresses the issues and concerns raised in McAfee's, Thomas's, and Tunstall's articles. He also briefly explains how *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization* was initially written to be a work of anxiety. The anxiety central to the book results from the continued and often neglected racial violence committed against Black people in a post-racial (that is, post-racialized) context. Yet, the post-racial discourse in the United States also masks the racialized dimension of the Trump administration's immigration policy and other policies that harm vulnerable communities. This current state of affairs has led Frankowski to regard his book as a work of agitation. He hopes that readers become uncomfortable with how post-racial discourse functions as a political strategy to divert our attention from the reality of racial violence against Black people and other vulnerable populations in the United States. He also calls for us to form a multiracial and multiethnic community dedicated to confronting anti-Black violence despite how unlikely we are to succeed in our efforts to build such a community without it succumbing to the very post-racial discourse that obscures present-day violence against Black people and other vulnerable populations.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

The *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* is published by the committee on the status of Black philosophers. Authors are encouraged to submit original articles and book reviews on any topic in philosophy that makes a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors welcome submissions written from any philosophical tradition, as long as they make a contribution to philosophy and the black experience broadly construed. The editors especially welcome submissions dealing with philosophical issues and problems in African American and Africana philosophy.

All article submissions should be between 10 and 20 pages (double spaced) in length, and book reviews should be between 5 and 7 pages (double spaced) in length. All submissions must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language and *The Chicago Manual of Style* formatting. All submissions should be accompanied by a short biography of the author. Please send submissions electronically to apa.pbe.newsletter@gmail.com.

DEADLINES

Fall issues: May 1

Spring issues: December 1

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FORMATTING GUIDELINES

- The *APA Newsletters* adhere to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.
- Use as little formatting as possible. Details like page numbers, headers, footers, and columns will be added later. Use tabs instead of multiple spaces for indenting. Use *italics* instead of underlining. Use an "em dash" (—) instead of a double hyphen (--).
- Use endnotes instead of footnotes. Examples of proper endnote style:

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90.

See Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" *Noûs* 34 (2000): 31–55.

FOOTNOTES TO HISTORY

Charles A. Frye (1946–1994)

Born in Washington, DC, on March 18, 1946, Charles Anthony Frye attended Howard University in Washington, where he received a bachelor's degree in political science in 1968 and a master's degree in African studies in 1970.

He was professor and core coordinator in philosophy at the Banneker Honors College at Prairie View A&M University. As the former chair of Black Studies at Hampshire College, he founded *The New England Journal of Black Studies*. Frye also served as the director of the Center for African and African American Studies at Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO).

In 1976 he received a doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh. His dissertation, "The Impact of Black Studies on the Undergraduate Curricula of English and Selected Social Sciences at Three Universities," was later published as *Toward a Philosophy of Black Studies* in 1978.

Charles Frye worked in the areas of African philosophy and African American studies. He also studied how arcane African rituals became entwined with Christianity.

Over his twenty-five-year career, Dr. Frye not only taught at Prairie View A&M University, Hampshire College, and Southern University at New Orleans, but also at Howard University, Northeastern University, the City College of New York, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

He died of cancer on October 8, 1994, at the age of forty-eight. His papers are currently held at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division in New York City.

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ARTICLES

Reading Alfred Frankowski's *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*

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Before offering a commentary on Alfred Frankowski's sublimely monumental book, *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning*, let me first share my reading of it by taking up the key elements of its title. I will then offer a Freudian account of the melancholic aspects of the very memorial culture that Frankowski describes without ever using the word *melancholia*.

POST-RACIAL

The term *post-racial* occurs throughout the book as a modifier for all manner of matters: *post-racial discourse*, *post-racial politics*, *post-racial society*, *post-racial violence*, *post-racial memorialization*, and *post-racial memory*; yet, it is never taken at face value. Rather, in every use of the term, Frankowski sets it in italics. While he does not comment upon the typography, the meaning becomes clear: *post-raciality* is not a fact but a trope, one used to hide the reality of ongoing racism, a trope that attempts to erase what needs to be remembered. Its use always marks a contradiction: "The contradictions of *post-raciality* are clear," Frankowski writes. "The bodies of the racialized are prefigured in their exploitation and create the material symbols that hold up a society that appears to be *post-race* and yet are politically thoroughly racist" (9). The effect of this contradiction is material; it leads to "a transition of meaning, in which violence is learned, adapted to, and framed out of thought both in terms of what counts as knowledge and whose lives count as world-historical" (9).

"*Post-racial discourse*," he writes, "is always already implied within the ways we represent oppression and implicit in how we perceive and come to know both the oppression of the past and the oppression of the present" (107). Usually this is by way of depicting past oppression as over and reconciled and by neglecting ongoing phenomena of oppression. The past is neatly relegated, the present context neglected.

LIMITS OF MEMORIALIZATION

Whenever memorials, however well-meaning, are erected in an attempt to reconcile with the past, to announce that things are better now, to provide closure, memorialization itself becomes *post-racialized*. Frankowski points to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington, DC, unveiled in 2012, as the first *post-racial memorial*. It is so, Frankowski writes, in its attempt to situate racism safely in the past, calling for a forgetting of the many struggles to

which white society was and continues to be un-empathetic (2-3). Memorial culture attempts to both address and evade violence, but it attempts closure too neatly and too soon.

In Frankowski's compelling account, memorials fail when they attempt tidy representations and reconciliations of a violent racist past because "[their] representations function to both aestheticize the out-moded content, while depoliticizing its context" (39). Such a memorial attempts to halt memory in its tracks. It announces an achievement, an overcoming, and a time to heal old wounds. Pure representation offers a path toward reconciliation: this is what happened, with this memorialization we signal peace, and now racism is no more.

The alternative is to find a way to memorialize that does not evade or disavow ongoing troubles. Frankowski finds the key to this in Kant's theory of the Sublime. Unlike the Beautiful, which "is a movement away from tension and toward illumination" (72), the Sublime unsettles: it is a "diremptive force" that "unsettles us [so] that we present to ourselves that which unstrips our ability of representation" (89). Where the Beautiful becomes silent in relation to the Sublime, Frankowski follows the thread of silence to "develop further . . . a political sense of mourning" (89). Where there is silence, there needs to be questioning, reconfiguration, and tarrying with what is unsettling, uneasy, and incomplete.

One of the several examples Frankowski offers of this sort of memorial is Billie Holiday's haunting song "Strange Fruit":

Southern trees bear strange fruit
 Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
 Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze
 Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant South
 The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth
 Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh
 Then the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck
 For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
 For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop
 Here is a strange and bitter crop.¹

Holiday's musical memorial, Frankowski writes, "serves to remember exactly what is being displaced in the space of memory" (51). It is not set in the exact past of the lynching, but in the aftermath of the lynching that takes place in the song's present. "Here *is* the fruit for the crows to pluck." Uncannily, here it still is indeed, too often relegated to a history too easily unnoticed, packed away, *post-racialized*. Billie Holiday's musical memorial opens up the past to haunt the present.

TOWARD A POLITICAL SENSE OF MOURNING

The words of the subtitle, "toward a political sense of mourning," recur throughout the book. By *mourning*, Frankowski has something specific in mind: "[W]e keep our practices of resistance alive by suspending the idea that mourning will bring about resolution—instead we focus on

living within and living through our context" (107), which means "taking up action against those conditions that mark those lives as always already dead to begin with" (108).

As he closes the book, Frankowski suggests that mourning is political in that it is a way to "rethink our strategies, our agency, and our practical relations to concrete forms of oppression" (108). "It is not merely an intervention," he writes, "but a way of rethinking the texture of our life and the activity of our position" (108). Mourning begins to look like forgiveness when Frankowski writes that it allows us "to reclaim our political agency by accepting how every person, as a result of our contemporary existential condition, is entangled in processes that produce oppression toward others and result in our own identity as an object of oppression itself" (109).

MELANCHOLIC MEMORIALS

So now I turn to my own thoughts on the text, which I have to admit are haunted by Freud, who makes his appearance in a few passages but is otherwise hardly present. I find it curious that in a book on the political work of mourning, especially given what Frankowski notes are recurrent *failures* to mourn, the word *melancholia* never appears. There is the shadow of despair; there is sorrow and neglect, but there is no mention of what Freud referred to in his essay on mourning and melancholia as the shadow of the object:

Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification.²

Where in mourning, the libido is de-cathected from the lost object and finds new objects, in melancholia the libido withdraws into the ego, which undergoes an identification with the lost object. The libido is no longer object seeking; it has withdrawn, and with it the shadow of the lost object, where residual ambivalence, unfinished business, engulfs the ego, which then can never be done with the lost object, whose long shadow diminishes the ego's self-regard. Where true mourning allows for a process of grieving, melancholia forestalls grief and nurtures grievances and self-hatred.

I tread cautiously in connecting this Freudian account of mourning and melancholia to the issues Frankowski takes up; and, frankly, I worry that a facile comparison could go badly: that some might call for those who have been wounded to stop nurturing their grievances and move on. That would be a terrible reading. Moreover, a comparison is unwieldy because there does not seem to be a neat parallel: it is not clear that there is a particular lost object for which mourning is called. We have an idea of who suffers a loss but not exactly of what has been lost. The lost object seems to have no name. There is neglect and its sign—longing—but naming the lost object seems impossible. Sometimes all we have is silence.

“The Sublime and mourning are ways of articulating life in relation to the unreconcilability of something coming to an end and still living on at the same time” (92). There are ample signs of the crime, including all those collected in the curious museum of racist artifacts, but what they conjure up is only disorienting, like figures of the sublime that Frankowski describes toward the end of the book, objects that show how Blacks had been depicted and objects that still show how these motifs are still at play (88), making sensible what is unrepresentable (93):

The museum does not work like memory so much as it plays off of allegorical modes of silencing. And silence too needs to be thought of in more ways that link it to the activity of resistance, the activity of contextualizing violence and what is lost in our collective past and collective sense of our present. For something to go silent does not mean that there is merely a nonexistent content or a passive content at lay. Silence may also be that orientation toward that which all of the content, all of the words, fail to appropriate. (88)

Of course, while we may not be able to point to a lost object or some particular internalization of its loss, there have been grave losses, traumas, and wounds: the slave trade, the Middle Passage, families torn apart, loved ones murdered and terrorized, Jim Crow, all anti-Black racism that continues to this day, have robbed, killed, destroyed, stolen from Blacks. As Frankowski argues throughout the book, these all call for mourning. But throughout the book, I was frustrated by the absence of any specificity about what exactly has to be mourned or when it would be done. Frankowski seems to be calling for perennial mourning, which lies on the border between Freud’s mourning and melancholia. Where the mourner finds new attachments and the melancholic will not grieve old ones, the perennial mourner continues both to hold on to and to grieve its losses. I am not sure if there is a good way out of this quandary. So long as racism stays in the present, then mourning must remain perennial and unfinished.

And as for the absent word, *melancholia*, maybe its avatar is *post-racialization*. Perhaps melancholia is not being nursed by those oppressed who fail to grieve but by *post-racial discourses* that announce no need to grieve. Perhaps what is melancholic are not oppressed peoples but whole cultures that encrypt loss in memorial tombs. My way of putting it fits well with Frankowski’s. Recall his account of the MLK memorial as a *post-racial* memorial that attempts to erase any need to grieve. It attempts to situate racism safely in the past, calling for a forgetting of the many struggles to which white society was and continues to be un-empathetic (2-3). In attempting to both address and evade violence, it seeks closure too neatly and too soon. Such memorials cast a melancholic shadow, disavowing any need for grieving. The work of mourning, then, is a work that needs to be undertaken by all affected, on all sides of the ledgers of loss.

This brings me to a question I had throughout the book: Who is the “we” that Frankowski invokes on nearly every page? Throughout the text, the author calls on the reader

to take up the project, using the pronoun “we”—but I never was sure whom the “we” scooped up. In the final pages, Frankowski begins to answer it: “We are oppressed/oppressing subjects, and as such we need to take the oppression of others as matters that imply our own fate” (108). For Frankowski, this involves “suspending the progressive cultural narrative around issues of our cultural violence” (108). (I would like for him to address what he means here.) He points to a “shared neurosis when it comes to issues of racism” (might this be melancholia?) that can be ameliorated by taking up “the task of reconfiguring our own activity . . . as a practice of *living with* ourselves and others and *living through* our context” (108).

All of us in this we, Frankowski further suggests, whites and Blacks, oppressors as well as the oppressed, are collectively afflicted by the neurosis of racism. Might this be melancholia? Working through what gives rise to this neurosis involves the work of mourning, which seems to mean, though he never exactly says this, getting over idealizations of there being saints and sinners, evil and its overcoming, reconciliation and closure. And instead of erecting melancholia memorials, we need to remember in a way that *decripts* our collective and internal tombs of loss.

NOTES

1. Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit,” recorded April 20, 1939, track 1 of 20th Century Masters – *The Best of Billie Holiday: The Millennium Collection*, Universal, 2002, iTunes.
2. Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. and trans. by James Strachey (London, UK: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957), 249.

Common Sense and Racial Sensibility: Three Conversations on The Post Racial Limits of Memorialization

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Al Frankowski’s *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Towards a Political Sense of Mourning* is a crucial source for thinking about the role of aesthetics in our attempts to address the fissures in sensibility across racial lines and inside racial groups. I’d like to use this space to engage with Frankowski’s work through a series of conversations that aim at a wider sense of racialization as an aesthetic process. What I hope to show is that thinking in terms of aesthetics helps generate a field for creating concepts that allow us to address what it means to find a shared sensibility of the persistence of racial violence in what’s called our “post-racial” context. It also sets some conditions on scholarship to avoid pitfalls created by what Monique Roelofs has called processes of aesthetic racialization and racialized aestheticization.

CONVERSATION 1: FRANKOWSKI AND I IN SYNDICATE

The context for this discussion is a short exchange between Frankowski and me in a symposium on his book in *Syndicate*.¹ In this discussion, I attempted to wrap my head around the Cassandra Complex through an analysis of the opening to Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*:

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.²

In this scene, Du Bois provides us with a division between two worlds. These worlds are divided by distinctly racialized modes of experience, which are characterized by differences in sensibility. For Du Bois, the "problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line" insofar as the dichotomization of racial relations into Black and white veils experience. Outside of the veil, white gazes can see the horror of race without sensing the violence involved in being racialized. Inside the veil, one is left to wrestle with being seen by the outer world as the embodiment of a problem: an object of uncertainty, compassion, or violence, but rarely, if ever, a subject to be addressed.

"The real question" is unasked because Du Bois's interlocutors actively refuse to sense discomfort that would make it addressable. They react, instead, through displacing the problem by denying its psychological, historical, and spatial presence in their context. The first interlocutor uses contacts with members of Du Bois's identity group to assert his innocence. The second appeals to participation in a previous struggle to claim he's paid his dues. They both indicate their roles as allies while denying the experience of their ally. The third speaker distances the place of racism, isolating it to the South as opposed to, presumably, the North. Thus, Du Bois is effectively silenced, visible in his blackness, but invisible as a moral agent. He manages the discomfort generated by his presence, but is left alone with his "strange experience," which the other world can sense but can't address.

This reading of being a problem parallels Frankowski's Cassandra Complex, an aesthetic complex of relations and denials that numb our sense of violence in our shared reality through the feeling that it is "unthinkable because it is too distant in the past or too opaque in the present to understand."³ In Du Bois's encounters, the white responses to his presence deny the interpersonal racism is in play, displace it from the present to the Civil War past, and isolate it away in the South, leaving the Yankees innocent of any

wrongdoing. This sensual displacement of violence from the present context marks racialized others as "killable" since the conditions leading to their deaths are not directly confronted.⁴ The inability to address the problem, and thus Du Bois's own experience, means they do not treat him as subject to moral concern. In Kantian terms, they understand and have an anti-racist maxim in place, but lack the will to make it a moral duty. Thus, I pose the idea that we require a broader sense of the social aesthetics of race to develop forms of sensibility that can enable a sense of the racial violence that characterizes our present.

In response to my essay in *Syndicate*, Frankowski raises two important concerns when moving from this contextual frame to a broader social aesthetics:

- 1) The move to a broader social aesthetics must address Black vulnerability, white criticality, and indifference in order to highlight present practices that continue the history of racist violence.
- 2) It should maintain the connection between aesthetics and epistemology in the process of pleading innocence and shielding white sensibilities from aesthetic violence.⁵

I want to take up these two points in the following conversations by shifting the field of play. Going forward, I want to experiment with James Baldwin's concept of the "sense of reality" as the sensual plane where the distinction between people's lifeworlds takes place. The sense of reality, Baldwin says, is where our preconceptual ideological assumptions form an epistemic distinction between valid and invalid experiential testimony. It's what compels "[t]he white South African, southern sharecropper, or Alabama sheriff to believe that when they face the Negro that this woman, this man, this child I must be insane to attack the system to which he owes his entire identity."⁶ White sensibility, in order to maintain its innocence in the face of racial violence, holds to the dream that these struggles are identical to their own projects of eventual progress and prosperity. The American Dream or, simply "The Dream" in Ta-Nehesi Coates's formulation, creates an imaginative space to abstract away from the violence felt in the present by entering into the fantasy of a perfected future.⁷ For Black Americans, the persistence of this dream can serve as a reminder that they are isolated in this context of violence that their allies cannot see hiding in plain sight. Post-race is our most recent manifestation of this uncritical sensibility. In post-racial contexts, racial violence is recognized but displaced by the veil of race, inhibiting the ability to address how it feels to be a problem.

Thinking with Frankowski, let's explore whether this notion of the sense of reality opens a way of seeing the limits of racial sensibility and using these limits to identify forms of shared sensibility that can move from the isolation of recognition to relations of moral concern. If post-racial contexts isolate the reality of racial violence to the worlds of people of color, one response would be to develop a shared sense of reality that makes the pervasiveness and intensity of racialized violence sensible in a way that makes the absurdity of post-racialism sensible. These moments

of shared sensibility may allow us to develop the capacity to cultivate moral concern, laying the groundwork for genuine allyship and responses to the persistence of racist oppression.

CONVERSATION 2: FRANKOWSKI AND ROELOFS ON "COMMON SENSE"

In *Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*, Frankowski's analysis provides an account of the resonance between post-racial and racist sensibilities. In his contrast between Kant and Fanon, Frankowski illustrates that Kant's aesthetic reinforces white aesthetic supremacy by tying the pleasure taken in beauty to the expansion of one's own representation to the level of a shared social world.⁸ In other words, the more a particular type of sensibility asserts itself as dominant, the greater level of pleasure taken by the one who holds that sensibility. As Monique Roelofs demonstrates in "Racialization as an Aesthetic Production,"⁹ Kant follows Hume in aestheticizing whiteness by a process of aesthetic racialization that mobilizes the taste of the white male bourgeois subject as the criterion for the beautiful. In addition, as Frankowski illustrates, Kant produces a form of racialized aestheticization that justifies the expansion of the white (aesthetic) lifeworld as a civilizational project. Civilization relies on the expanding dominance of a sense of beauty felt by white sensibility, making it a white supremacist project. What Roelofs adds to Frankowski's account of Kant's aesthetics is that Kant invokes common sense as a maker for the universality of this particular sensibility among rational agents who participate in civilized society. Thus, beauty as felt by the white male bourgeois subjects is not only universal; it should also be intuitive to everyone regardless of one's race or ethnicity if you've learned to sense things in the right way. In post-racial terms, the problem with racism is that you still see race. The problem with a Kantian post-racial aesthetic, both in terms of its logical and its aesthetic sensibility, is that it presumes that one can solve racial violence and injustice without directly addressing it.

This reading of Kant, along with Baldwin, shows how post-racial contexts make it common sense that racism exists, while simultaneously inhibiting a common sense of the violence at work in our present context. Resistance to sensing the racialized violence in post-racial contexts is a defense mechanism against sensing the discord present in the harmonious view many people want to hold of their reality. When Baldwin says of white Americans that "they don't know and they don't want to know" about the experience of Black Americans, he's gesturing to the fact that knowing the experience of Black Americans means sensing the reality of this violence and sensing the reality of this violence is impossible without breaking the pleasure tied to the security of believing in American justice. The "American Dream," whether a marker for a return to a glorious past or a post-racial future, requires a universal sense that things are going to be great or can be great again. Knowing racial violence means disturbing this sense of reality, accepting the justification of dissenting experiences, and denying American innocence. It means waking up from the dream.

The connection between the epistemic and the aesthetic points to alternative forms of common sense that owe their force to the contrast of shared situations with different forms of sensibility. In Baldwin's analysis, there's the common sense of the southern sheriff and sharecropper that treats African Americans critiques of US social and political life as ignorant and counterintuitive. Dave Chappelle invokes another form of racialized common sense in his *Saturday Night Live* monologue where he claims that he's not surprised that Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election because "he knows the Whites."¹⁰ Here, Chappelle decentralizes the common sense of American citizens, media, and polls, who were certain that Donald Trump could not become president. As a counterexample to this supposed common sense of American citizens, he uses the common sense of a historically informed black understanding of American politics. His use of humor accentuates the subversion of conventional wisdom (read: white conventions of the contractual enlightenment type). I would add that America has seen this same dynamic play out before in Louisiana. The 1991 Louisiana gubernatorial election pitted career politician Edwin Edwards against (former) Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan David Duke. While Edwards won 61 percent to 38 percent, it's worth noting that in the general primary Duke beat out the incumbent Republican candidate, Buddy Roemer, 31 percent to 26 percent. These moments are indicators of the persistence of white supremacist ideals in the political discourse of American conservatism. If anyone remembers the Tea Party backlash that accompanied Obama's election, they've seen this side of America before.

This notion of racialized forms of common sense maps divisions in our national sense of reality. Following Gillian Johns, we can say that Chappelle's comedy articulates a point of discord in the desired harmony of American innocence, pointing to an alternative form of common sense that sees and feels what the veil of race disarticulates.¹¹ The path toward a shared sensibility requires a manner of making sense that, to be epistemically honest, must include the discord at work in our patterns of beauty to develop an honest account for the violence at work in our context.¹²

CONVERSATION 3: SHARED SENSIBILITY?

What tools do we have at our disposal for a social aesthetics that accepts the discord at work behind harmony and moves from differentiated modes of common sense to a shared sensibility? Frankowski's political sense of mourning provides one method of approach insofar as it aims to reanimate our sense of the historical violence which persists in the present. The challenge of mourning is that, if Frankowski is right about the Cassandra complex, there's a large-scale aesthetic project required to make violence sensible in the right way. Chappelle's comedy gives us one path. By invoking discord and violence as a form of knowledge, he gives a polite "we told you so" to innocent American sensibilities. He plays a game of truth that uses humor as a vehicle to make sense outside of white common sense. At the same time, this doesn't necessarily lead to shared understanding. The one-sided nature of Chappelle's use of common sense maintains the gulf between forms of sensibility, claiming complicity

to one side without invoking the patterns at work in the other.

A similar problem is at work in narratives of white self-criticism which, as Roelofs notes, “pass[es] off . . . whiteness as more self-critical than it can be”¹³ in their self-aestheticization. (I should note that we can say the same of Blackness in some situations. One can be WOKE without waking from the dream.) In Suzy Hansen’s “Unlearning the Myth of American Innocence,” for example, we hear how she came to see the ideological sense of reality developed in her childhood in the 1980s once she goes abroad to Turkey.¹⁴ Through her conversations with her Turkish guides, her attitude shifts from bemusement to understanding at their conspiratorial thinking about their government. She sees the degree to which she takes the American progressive narrative for granted, forcing her to rethink her position of privilege—kind of.¹⁵ The story ends with her acknowledging her *potential* complicity as a journalist in perpetuating narratives that justify American violence abroad. Acknowledging that innocence is a myth and recognizing the chinks in America’s armor still don’t get someone to the point of altering sensibility.

Based on Hansen’s self-reported conversations with her Turkish guides, we can say that this instance of racial reflection falls back into the trap of innocence. Hansen recognizes the problem only to dismiss it. The consolation at the end of the narrative produces the pleasure of universalizing her own perspective on the matter, using an epistemology of ignorance to purify her sense of reality. Here, the question is if it’s possible to move from recognition to a shared sense of the reality of the history of systematic violence against racialized people in the United States. What I’ve hoped to show is that this requires us to acknowledge that our common sense is limited. Addressing this discord requires accepting the reality of the experience of marginalized groups. This mode of address may lead to the rejection of the experience of others (for example, sadistic racist ignorance), self-flagellation engaged by well-meaning white Americans (commonly called white guilt), or progressive innocence (for example, neoliberal theories of diversity), though the alt-right shows that it’s more complicated than this tripartite structure shows.¹⁶

As a closing remark, I want to offer a comedic strategy used by Jerrod Carmichael in his recent comedy special, 8. In the middle of the performance, he breaks an extended pause with the following:

“It’s exhausting being Black . . .

“It’s a lotta fucking work.”

“I mean . . . sure. It looks fun. Especially when we’re like dancing . . . flying through the air dunking on somebody . . .

“It’s amazing . . . but . . .”

“It’s a burden, right? I mean, every fucking day.”

He looks at a Black audience member with two white men to his right and a white woman to his left:

“You’re here with white people.”

He points at the woman:

“You’re here with her?”

“Explain that to your grandma.”

Everyone laughs uncomfortably:

“Explain that to her [gestures to his friend].”

“Is your grandma alive?”

“Exactly, if she was alive, [gestures to the woman] you’d be a secret.”

Is this a moment of shared sensibility? I think it’s at least an opportunity. Carmichael’s joke works the same way for white Americans. If certain parents, grandparents, and other acquaintances are in play, your Black partner is a secret. The racial symmetry of this problem opens a space for seeing identical patterns of racialized social relations at work with a different sense of reality on either side of the division. It is not a moment of shared sensibility, but it is a space that’s full of material to tease out the similarities and differences for a sense of reality that captures the contrast between identity positions. Thus, it may be possible to say that we share a field of feeling but have different senses of reality due to divisions in our common sense. Bridging these gaps between political lifeworlds requires us to develop moments and sites of a common, differentiated sense of reality.

NOTES

1. Michael Thomas, “Being A Problem: Aesthetic Violence and the Politics of Recognition,” in *Syndicate Philosophy*, symposia on *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning* by Alfred Frankowski, ed. and with an introduction by Lissa Skitolsky (Cascade Books, May 22, 2017), <https://syndicate.network/symposia/philosophy/the-post-racial-limits-of-memorialization/>, accessed June 24, 2018.
2. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.
3. Alfred Frankowski, *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Towards a Political Sense of Mourning* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 66.
4. *Ibid.*, 81.
5. Alfred Frankowski, “The Cassandra Complex and the Aesthetics of Social Death,” in *Syndicate Philosophy*, symposia on *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning* by Alfred Frankowski, ed. and with an introduction by Lissa Skitolsky (Cascade Books, May 22, 2017), <https://syndicate.network/symposia/philosophy/the-post-racial-limits-of-memorialization/>, accessed June 24, 2018.
6. James Baldwin, “The American Dream and the American Negro,” in *New York Times*, March 7, 1965, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *The New York Times* (1851–2004): SM32.
7. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, NY: Spiegel and Grau, 2015).
8. Frankowski, *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*, 70–71.

9. Monique Roelofs, "Racialization as an Aesthetic Production: What Does the Aesthetic Do for Whiteness and Blackness and Vice Versa?," in *White on White/Black on Black*, ed. George Yancy (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 83–124.
10. David Chappelle, "Monologue," *Saturday Night Live*, NBC, November 12, 2016, <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/dave-chappelle-standup-monologue/3424955?snl=1>.
11. Gillian Johns, "Humor (Theory) and the (Articulate) Surprise of Race," presentation at "Exploring Truth and Beauty in Worlds of Color," sponsored by the American Society for Aesthetics, Oberlin, OH, September 29–30, 2017.
12. A wider sense of social aesthetics must include, as Johns, quoting Ralph Waldo Ellison says, "the good music that came from the bell of old Bad Air's horn."
13. Roelofs, "Racialization as an Aesthetic Production," 112.
14. Suzy Hansen, "Unlearning the Myth of American Innocence," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/08/unlearning-the-myth-of-american-innocence>, accessed June 24, 2018.
15. As Hansen writes in "Unlearning the Myth of American Innocence," "During that night of conspiracy theories, Emre had alleged, as foreigners often did, that I was a spy. The information that I was collecting as a journalist, Emre said, was really being used for something else. As an American emissary in the wider world, writing about foreigners, governments, economies partaking in some larger system and scheme of things, I was an agent somehow. Emre lived in the American world as a foreigner, as someone less powerful, as someone for whom one newspaper article could mean war, or one misplaced opinion could mean an intervention by the International Monetary Fund. My attitude, my prejudice, my lack of generosity could be entirely false, inaccurate or damaging, but would be taken for truth by the newspapers and magazines I wrote for, thus shaping perceptions of Turkey for ever.

"Years later, an American journalist told me he loved working for a major newspaper because the White House read it, because he could 'influence policy'. Emre had told me how likely it was I would screw this up. He was saying to me: first, spy, do no harm."
16. Following Lorde and others, my sense is that this openness requires an intersectional understanding of the places in which our localized notions of common sense diverge from a shared sense of the whole and teasing out those differences in experience that form limits to sensibility across identity categories.

Emmett Till, *The Untold Story of Emmett Lewis Till*, could condemn the lynching of Emmett Till, but could not depict his fate or the fate of his family in terms other than ones of grief and tragedy. We are denied the right to mourn his death publicly, and in the present.

Second, post-racial discourse forecloses the possibility of demanding that our fellow citizens and residents take seriously their complicity in the deaths of Black people. Post-racial discourse discourages people from identifying too closely with the victims of state-sanctioned violence against Black people, of the victims of police brutality, of the victims of extra-judicial killings of Black people by white Americans. We are denied the right to challenge what Cheryl I. Harris and Devon W. Carbado call the *black criminality frame*, the epistemic frame under which law enforcement officers and extra-judicial surveillance officers (e.g., Neighborhood Watch volunteers) are allowed to presume that certain ethnic and racial groups (at least when these groups are located in certain geographical areas, e.g., inner-city neighborhoods and gated communities) are criminals or at least dangerous until proven otherwise. This can explain why President Obama wasn't afforded the right to identify with Trayvon Martin, a seventeen-year-old African American, in his brief response to the George Zimmerman verdict on July 19, 2013. George Zimmerman, a then twenty-eight-year-old neighborhood watch captain, could profile Martin as "a suspicious person," follow him as he walked in the gated community where his father and fiancée stayed in Florida, and then confront him without just cause. Within a post-racial context, a seventeen-year-old African American male has to be depicted as an angelic, extraordinary person before people are considered justified in expressing their outrage at his death. We cannot depict him as a normal teenager who was defiant against a suspicious stranger who demanded that he justify his very presence in the gated community where his father stayed. Nor can we voice the problems with a Florida police department's initial acceptance of Zimmerman's claim of self-defense.

We can combine these two problems with post-racial discourse this way: While we can condemn past acts of racial violence, we are not allowed to acknowledge publicly how the present brutalization of young Black people in an anti-Black society is a necessary component of the status quo. Post-racial discourse does not provide us with the practices and language required to talk about post-racial violence without remaining complicit in it, without accepting the institutions, attitudes, and practices that do violence to certain people. These evasions of racial violence are commonplace in a society where people are expected to speak about race using post-racial discourse.

Frankowski proposes a way to silence post-racial discourse and to disclose the vulnerability of Black bodies to racial violence even in a post-racial context—namely, "the *politicization of aesthetics* through a political sense of mourning."² In a post-racial context, memorials to commemorate Black sufferings and achievements would resist the tendency to de-racialize contemporary racial violence against Black people. They would also resist efforts to distance ourselves from our collective complicity in such

Politicizing Aesthetics May Not Be Enough: On Alfred Frankowski's *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*

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In *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning*, Alfred Frankowski identifies what I consider to be the two main problems with post-racial discourse for Black people in the United States. First, post-racial discourse downplays the violent acts committed against Black people precisely because they are racially Black, reinterprets those acts so that they are viewed as having non-racial causes and occurring in non-racial circumstances, or neglects that such acts happen at all. When we speak of *racial violence* in a contemporary US context at all, we are allowed to remember, recognize, or represent acts of racial violence in public as tragic events that occurred in the past or as anomalies or aberration if they occur today.¹ For example, the 2004 documentary on

acts, given that we often willingly reap the benefits from the sociopolitical and economic system that was built on the enslavement of Africans, the genocide of Indigenous peoples, the exploitation of poor and working class laborers and prisoners, the economic and military dominance over the Americas, as well as condoned legal segregation, the internment camps for Japanese Americans living on the West Coast during the Second World War, etc. Memorials commemorating how Black people survived and overcame past racial injustices ought to be objects that initiate the public mourning process over those past injustices, but not in an attempt to reconcile our nation's past with our present conditions. Nor would those memorials function as places where people can mourn our past injustices together and then forget about those injustices as we collectively move forward to a better, post-racial future. Post-racial memorials created by artists guided by a political sense of mourning would be places where we can reimagine our political options, as well as our race-inflected political lifeworlds, in such a way that we can mourn but not neglect or forget about the state-sanctioned violence against marginalized groups, particularly Black people living in an anti-Black (as well as a misogynistic, sexist, xenophobic, jingoistic, ableist, transphobic) society. These memorials may even motivate some people to engage in activism against police brutality and other state-tolerated and sanctioned acts of racial violence against Black people. This orientation is compatible with the racial realism and philosophical pessimism Frankowski briefly discussed in the concluding chapter of his book.

Despite my sympathies with Frankowski's project, I have three concerns about it.

My first concern is that I am not confident that mourning should be expected to do anything political beyond motivating some people to create memorials to racial injustices in the past so that others can be reminded not to inflict racial violence on marginalized racial groups today. Memorials may invoke a sense of sensibility in its visitors, reminding them that the horrors of past racial violence still haunt our living present but cannot be exorcized from our communities. These horrors remain present to us and shape who we are, along with how and where we live with others (or fail to live with others). What else can the political sense of mourning accomplish other than reminding us that the legacy of racial violence is our social and cultural inheritance and that we are responsible for either carrying it forward or actively resisting it? In other words, is it enough to contend that the political sense of mourning "has the potential to be reconfigured as fundamentally an interruption, and [. . .] it is this sense in memorializations that are politically powerful to the extent that they make the present strange"?³

My second concern stems from Frankowski's view that recognition politics is not and cannot be a viable option for Black people to improve their material and social conditions in the United States. No Black community in the US is self-sufficient enough to eschew the politics of recognition as they work to improve their collective economic and social conditions. As the third largest racial/ethnic group in the United States, the Black population is

still dependent on some non-Black citizens recognizing their grievances against state-sanctioned and tolerated racial violence as legitimate ones. They are also dependent on the willingness of non-Black allies to form political coalitions with them strong enough to pressure legislators and legislatures to pass legislation to protect marginalized racial groups from police brutality and other unjust police actions. Can Black communities afford to adopt the political sense of mourning as a viable strategy or tactic for challenging anti-Black racism in government policies and people's everyday practices in a post-racial context? I am doubtful that this is the case. Seeking political recognition may not be a better strategy or tactic for challenging anti-Black racism in government policies and people's everyday practices in a post-racial context. Nevertheless, it is a more realistic approach than eschewing recognition altogether, at least given the US's current demographics.

Third, I can imagine the Black proponents of the American Dream responding to Frankowski's racial realism and philosophical pessimism this way:

This is America, where chromosomal predestination must be challenged by individual achievement. This is America, where a third Founding (taking Lincoln's promise at Gettysburg as the second) was achieved in the civil-rights movement and the momentous passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The inclusive promise of *We the People* was finally delivered to all peoples in this country. America has always been a place of regeneration, renewal, and self-examination, a place where peoplehood is not a given or a smug achievement but, rather, a long and continuous aspiration.⁴

These are the words of Jason Hill, who is a representative of the Black optimist idealist. He believes that any remaining problems facing Black people involve personal responsibility and a culture of poverty, not institutional racism. He is legion. He may grow more representative of Black immigrant sentiment in the US, as the Black immigrant population is estimated to increase from 3.8 million (8.7 percent of the total Black population in 2013, or roughly 1 in 11 Black Americans) to 16.5 percent of the total Black population (1 in 6 Black Americans) in 2060.⁵ They will arrive in a post-racial context, listening to people speaking in the language of post-racial discourse. Some of them may be disinclined to identify with the struggles of African Americans who are descendants of enslaved Africans and free Africans in the US during slavery and of Black Americans in the US during Jim Crow. How would "the *politicization of aesthetics* through a political sense of mourning"⁶ work for Black Americans who immigrated to the US for educational and economic reasons after the Jim Crow era? Why would they view the racial violence of the Jim Crow era as part of their history as residents and citizens of the United States? Why would they identify with African Americans whose ancestors were not immigrants in the classic sense, but were either enslaved or free during the antebellum period or lived through the Jim Crow era?

NOTES

1. See Alfred Frankowski, *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 77–78.
2. *Ibid.*, 108.
3. Alfred Frankowski, “The Cassandra Complex and the Aesthetics of Social Death,” in *Syndicate Philosophy*, symposia on *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning* by Alfred Frankowski, ed. and with an introduction by Lissa Skitolsky, May 15, 2017, accessed April 15, 2018, <https://syndicate.network/symposia/philosophy/the-post-racial-limits-of-memorialization/>.
4. Jason D. Hill, “An Open Letter to Ta-Nehisi Coates: The Dream Is Real,” *Commentary Magazine*, September 13, 2017, accessed October 8, 2018, <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/open-letter-ta-nehisi-coates/>.
5. See Christina M. Greer, *Black Ethnics: Race, Immigration, and the Pursuit of the American Dream* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25, 140; see also Nielsen Company, *Increasingly Affluent, Educated and Diverse: African-American Consumers—The Untold Story* (2015), 12.
6. Frankowski, *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*, 108.

Post-Racial Limits, Silence, and Discursive Violence: A Reply

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The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning was intended to be a work of anxiety. Although I hope it continues in this line, given the contemporary political situation of anti-Black and anti-immigrant racism in the US, I also hope the ideas that set up this book are taken as a form of agitation. I hope it continues to agitate by making the uncomfortable present appear in reference to the political violence of the past that has never really gone away. I also hope we can see how important this agitation continues to be in the present.

As I was working out the details of my reply to the thoughtful articles in this issue, I was also obsessively following the news and thinking about how this country is trying (again) to deal with its explicit violence against vulnerable communities, a violence that appears at the intersection between a discourse on national identity centering around secure borders and discourse on human rights and the uses and abuses of political power.¹ I was struck by thoughts of how these policies are legal and the absence of any specter of illegality. I was struck by how the language of immigration was being employed and withdrawn, depending on whether there were sentiments for or against the policies. This is not simply a discourse about who is granted asylum, citizenship, or who is punished or excluded; nor is it only a discourse expressing the frailty of whiteness or white anxiety over an identity crisis;² rather, the discourse is sharply determined by a race discourse that does not appear as such aesthetically, and is marked by not only a lack of representation or appearing but a lack of sense. The current administration’s commitment to open, visible, and declarative political violence against racialized and invisible communities has served as both a memory

and repetition of this formative violence. But the shock that accompanies the “tough” immigration policy of separating children from parents is a decay of, if not a complete failure of, our collective political sensibility. What we have to confront in all of this is the possibility that despite the sensibility that accompanies protests and outrages—and no matter how the administration responds—the US continues to traumatize vulnerable populations and does so in a *post-racializing* register.

The articles in this issue by Noëlle McAfee, Michael Thomas, and Dwayne Tunstall have already presented a number of questions provoked by the book. In my reply, I would like to follow up on the questions presented from a slightly different angle and from the standpoint of agitation.

In *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization*, I attempted to disentangle the aesthetic critique from the political critique of this political moment, without excusing the violence that contemporary political discourse seemed to conceal or distance itself from. What is the use of aesthetic critique? How does it relate to political discourse? In what way does this relation connect to what we see on a concrete level? While our political discourse is global and focused on expansion, and thus is marked by how much of the globe and global histories we can touch and influence—and conversely be influenced by—aesthetically we are engaged in developing this political discourse by way of something different altogether. The more visible, the more on *display*, the more declarations to *never forget* that appear, the more all of these expressions get taken up as something distant—which is another way of saying that they are disarticulated in their articulation. The differences between the aesthetic critique and the political critique is striking, and set out the ground of *post-racial claims*. But in this context, the *post-racial* is thought of as a type of failure or limit. As Tunstall points out, a *post-racial discourse* is a type of silencing of the aesthetic, or a making un-sensible the violence directed towards Blacks as *violence*. It is in following up on this thought that McAfee points out that what *post-racial discourse* names is a discursive contradiction. *Post-racial discourse* exists in the failure of race-discourse in so many ways. Yet how we fail to speak and think about racism as a form of political violence in our speaking and thinking about racism makes the problem of silence and discursive contradictions not only about what can or cannot be said, but also about what histories, peoples, questions, and concepts appear as present, as known, and do so, in the same moment, without impact or any sense of meaning. For example, in the book I argue that the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, *The Stone of Hope*, is the first *post-racial* memorial. It is a *post-racial memorial* because it represents a past that is not finished, but in the memorialization of King’s image, the history of anti-Black racism is taken up in a discourse of pastness, aligned with founding fathers, and part of the rich fabric of the US. Yet, the words from King’s speeches seem to constitute a unique analysis of the moral and political challenges of today. This in-betweenness, or this contradictoriness, is important because it is through this that the memorial becomes a site of *post-racialization* whereby the monument is both interruption and continua at the same time. Not only does this reveal the violence of the *post-racial* through an aesthetic critique as a type of

displacement and silencing, but it shows us that the *post-raciality* is violence, and it is so as part of contemporary sensibility.

The *post-racial limits* of memorialization, then, are about emphasizing violence that is relational to our context. We cannot understand America without engaging its anti-Black structure any more than we could understand colonialism without reference to anti-Black practices that brought Chattel slavery into the world.³ The problem is not that we know little of these events or relations, but rather that we know them too well; we know them and know them in such a way that to see them as something present does not make sense. In this way, *post-racial discourse* is not just contradictory, it is neurotic. But this makes Tunstall's question concerning whether or not memorials can be the interruption we need both urgent and complicated given our shared *post-racial context*. It is complicated because we need to understand the hermeneutical challenge imposed on us by the post-racialization of the memorial. While memorials to the history of anti-Black violence operate as interventions, as interruptions, and as moments of shared justice, they do so in a *post-racial context* that is predicated on understanding them only to ensure that their political violence does not make sense. After all, there is a difference between an intervention that is tolerated and an intervention that challenges the terms of our present political world itself. This is the question that the Equal Justice Initiative's (EJI) *National Memorial for Peace and Justice*, which opened in the spring of 2018 in Montgomery, Alabama, has to navigate, and the problem is not solely with the memorial or the act of memorialization. The *Memorial for Peace and Justice* stands as the nation's first and only memorial to this country's history of lynching. Much of the anticipation and anxiety around this memorial is whether or not the memorial will be the interruption we need. Aesthetically, the memorial is powerful in how it is constructed out of hanging pillars that identify the county and the names of people who were determined to be lynched. A number of pillars have "unnamed" persons identified as well, marking the silence that continues.

Tunstall's question hits right at the nerve of the conjunction between aesthetic critique and political discourse that I have been thematizing as *post-racial*. The memorial is undeniably powerful and will likely remain a significant marker for Black communities, and especially so for those who can trace their histories within the country's practices of lynching violence. On the week of its opening, a number of news articles and outlets ran segments on the memorial, interviewing both Brian Stevenson, one of the lawyers for the EJI, and others who are connected to this history. As wonderful as the opening of this memorial is, the press surrounding the opening of such a traumatic history was eerily similar. The stories often began by framing the memorial as a confrontation with a moment in America's dark past. *PBS NewsHour* and NPR ran stories detailing the memorial and EJI's task to confront our dark history of racism in order to heal. These discursive practices are banal and perverse at the same time. They set the memorial as a representation of a past that has been silenced and therefore positioned the general public in the present as the ones who can address this past. While the segments

represented lynching as one of the details of history, it ran against the most incisive elements of the EJI's own research, which shows lynching was no detail, but a fully developed and extremely public system. And more disturbingly, as the segments focused on this unfortunate racism, they did little to name it as what it was, namely, anti-Black terrorism—nor did they make it appear as what it continues to be: a political agenda of anti-Black terrorism. By discursively displacing the memorial in this way, it makes no sense to link these memorials to the uptick in explicit white supremacist violence, the re-emergence of explicit lynching, the immigration/refugee policies, and the continual political violence exerted in plain view. These all have deep roots in the history of lynching, and yet *post-racialization* makes this appear as a Black issue or issues pertaining to a particular group. I do not want to deny the significance of the particularity of this, but to make something a *Black issue* in an *anti-Black context* is to make it only the concern of a particular group, and therefore it is of no real importance—or what amounts to the same thing: it appears as a problem whose general or universal importance makes no sense.

If the representational limit of the memorial is that the representation *is its silence*, then we are still left with the question as to whether the memorial can be more than its silence. Can we understand our anti-Black context as part of the silence that issues from the limits of a memorial silence? Moreover, given that the analysis of the Cassandra complex poses a social pathological dis-ordering of the sensible, can we know the difference between a silence that is complicit with post-racial formations and a silence that can disrupt this sensibility itself?

In this line of thought I take Michael Thomas's example to heart, because in his interpretation of it he does not suspend the idea of critical interventions that, while not being directly interruptive, achieve something of a confrontation with our discursive contradictions and modes of silencing composing and revealing the Cassandra complex. Thomas's article points out the role that comedy plays in animating not only dialogue that is silenced, but the affective import of the silences themselves. He illustrates this in the unspoken elements of a comedy routine performed by Jerrod Carmichael. Carmichael asks the audience, why must Black people get over things so quickly?! He illustrates this through some banter and uncomfortable conversation with the audience, but it is not just funny because it is absurd to say we should get over the murder of Michael Brown, but we will never forget 9/11; it reveals an unspoken way that the statements, taken separately, make sense. When Carmichael turns to an interracial couple in the audience, it is an aesthetic shock to find Carmichael noting that she would be a secret if his grandmother were alive. Thomas argues that this humor exploits the contradictory discourse and silences of the Cassandra complex. It exploits the anti-Black context, as a sensibility and as a form of knowing, that is necessarily displaced in *post-racial discourse* and quite possibly embodied in the couple's relationship, a disquiet that Thomas illustrates as a confrontation with reality in Baldwin. Thomas points out the importance of the "You would be a secret" line because it draws into question not only that we have a shared sensibility around silence,

but also what that shared sensibility means. Moreover, this line is not located in the past, as in, “you would be a secret if this were the 1940s”—it is, you would be a secret if she were alive today. I think there is something to the fact that Carmichael is bringing a melancholy moment onto the stage in that in their recognition of the secret, in some sense, they are both and their relationship is still a secret. It is just a secret *post-racialized*, and thus insofar as it is retained as part of the public. Maybe the more unsettling point is that in an anti-Black society, progress is not only marked by how visible its anti-Black political violence is, but also in what ways it disfigures interpersonal relationships from the social to the family to the embodied, a disfigurement that cannot help but turn the interior inside out, if not in terms of representation, then in terms of practices.

Post-racialization is a structural name for a set of practices that conceal the political violence of racism we live through. In line with this, McAfee points out the resonances of this analysis with psychoanalytic understandings of mourning, but not only with reference to Freud. Much like Freud, I am emphasizing the complete questioning of meaning undergone in keeping loss personal and present. But there are significant differences and differences as to what questions are kept present and what this means. The articulation of loss in Freud is itself a marking of a negative relationality, a marking of silence that places the ego, or one’s place in the world, in question. This tells us something essential about the difference between psychoanalytic understandings of pathology and the task of thinking anti-Blackness as the context of our discursive practices. In psychoanalytical theory, we must assume a subjectivity, a representability, and an individuality that has never been materially present in modernity for Black thought or subjects, and what this assumed subject is saying is only made to say exactly what our discursive practices can’t understand. Yet she must say it in a way that it can be understood, and said in such a way that everyone else knows that what is said has been understood as something known all along. That is, the psychoanalytic focus on mourning is set up to engage in a set of discursive practices within a horizon of its own possibilities, practices that conceal what we know and don’t know, and to conceal it in such a way that what is said we have known and deny reality or even the knowability of reality. Knowing and not knowing is consummate not only with a sense of what one sees or the process of un-seeing, but rather the entire pattern of coordinated aesthetics, that is, a pathology of the sensible.⁴ Yet, unlike psychoanalysis, the problem is not the resolving of the community so much as unsettling it. The *post-racial limits* of memorialization are indeed limits. They put resolution in question, no matter how critical the analysis.

I would further argue that the practice of mourning in a political sense is a practice of agitation that is *not for the sake* of some goal or end. It may be very close to what McAfee describes in terms of a melancholy politics, one more focused on the hermeneutical stakes of interrogating the violence that determines the present as opposed to resolving the past and projecting the future. But our task, it seems, requires the emphasis of just this difference as a difference that is alienated in the *post-racial discourse* and appears only as a limit in front of which thinking and

speaking appear dumb or without sense. These limits are not just the foreground for understanding a political sense of mourning, but they also set the stage for mourning to be thought of again as a limit. This limit is clearly being agitated in the question as to whether or not groups that do not share a history of Jim Crow, a history of the anti-Black structures embedded in the roots of this country, need to mourn racialized violence against Black people in the US. What does mourning or any part of this analysis mean to them? After all, as Tunstall points out, Jason Hill and proponents of Hill’s view might argue that the anti-Black violence I am insisting upon is merely a result of tribalism or some other cynical view of the political.⁵ There is nothing freakish about this position on its face. It makes sense. So the question remains as to what is required to reduce concrete realities, experiences of violence and systematic death, to nonsense. It seems to me that the violence that targets Blacks must be literally *seen* as incidental, unfortunate, and, maybe most of all, historical, but it does not make sense as a defining structure of our contemporary political moment. By reason, then, the talk that Ta-Nehisi Coates has with his son or any of the talks that Black parents have with their Black children about surviving anti-Black violence in this country does not make sense as anything other than a cynical philosophical interpretation or folk conception of the world. It is this *not making sense* that is exactly what is at stake in naming *post-racial discourse* as a strategy and a political agenda. What does not make sense *is* the confrontation of anti-Black violence as a present, political structure and not just a historical fact. And it is this point that makes the mourning that I am calling for about the formation of community generating from a confrontation with anti-Black violence as opposed to formations that seek to be universal by reducing, avoiding, or minimizing the significance of this violence, locally and globally.

My point throughout this reply has been to emphasize the need to draw into question the limits of the sensible in race discourse. I think in the present conditions where US administrations’ commitment to ultimately racist ideologies results in human rights catastrophes, we need to think the concrete particular as a universal; in other words, we need to take critical strides to understand what our discourse puts into play, and distinctly what it puts out of play, as politics. But that is the question the Cassandra complex continues to pose to us collectively, and a question it also poses to itself. As McAfee noted, the “we” in the book appears determinate, and yet it is continually configured in an indeterminate way. I hope the indeterminate we of this text continues to appear as an agitation. I hope it agitates the ways our identifying and thinking do not bind our commitments to actions that bring a just world into view. The questions we are confronted with in this book are not just who is addressed in it, but also what it means for the limits of racial discourse itself to be distinctly not in question for those of us who are dislocated in our confrontation with *post-racial violence*.

NOTES

1. See Seyla Benhabib’s “The Right to Have Rights: Hannah Arendt on the Contradictions of the Nation-State” and “The Law of Peoples, Distributive Justice, and Migration,” in *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (Cambridge, UK:

Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Eddy Souffrant's *Global Development Ethics: A Critique of Global Capitalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

2. See Linda Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Brooklyn, NY: Polity, 2015). Also see Alison Bailey, "'White Talk' as a Barrier to Understanding the Problem with Whiteness," in *White Self-Criticality beyond Anti-Racism: How Does It Feel to Be a White Problem?*, ed. George Yancy (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 37–56.
3. Frantz Fanon, "Racism and Culture," in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, trans. Haakon Chevalier, 29–44 (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Also see Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997). Many scholars have argued that colonialism and slavery are part of the same historical and political foundation of the modern world, but Glissant argues that the experience of Western modernity is aesthetically tied to the experience of the slave ship, meaning it is the experience of capture, displacement, enslavement that informs our sensibility through and through.
4. See Judith Butler, "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia," in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15–22. Alexis Shotwell offers a comparative analysis of this in her essay, "Unforgetting as a Collective Tactic," in *White Self-Criticality beyond Anti-Racism: How Does It Feel to Be a White Problem?*, ed. George Yancy (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 57–68.
5. For a direct reference to Hill's arguments, see Jason Hill, *Beyond Blood Identities: Post-Humanity in the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

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