## 1

#### Interpretation: The affirmative must defend that the hypothetical enactment of a policy by which private entities cease appropriating outer space or by which they are prevented from doing so

#### Resolved means legislative action

Louisiana House3-8-2005, <http://house.louisiana.gov/house-glossary.htm>

Resolution A legislative instrument that generally is used for making declarations, stating policies, and making decisions where some other form is not required. A bill includes the constitutionally required enacting clause; a resolution uses the term "resolved". Not subject to a time limit for introduction nor to governor's veto. ( Const. Art. III, §17(B) and House Rules 8.11 , 13.1 , 6.8 , and 7.4)

#### Vote Neg:

#### [1] Procedural Fairness- Not all topics offer equitable ground. Absent a topical requirement, the aff will be biased by competitive incentives to find the most uncontroversial advocacy possible with a germane relation to the topic. That limits me to offensive arguments against the AC like oppression good. The only way to make sure that debates are fair is to have one chosen by a 3rd party topic committee. In-round competitive equity is a voting issue and outweighs the K.

#### A. Resolvability- the judge has to indicate who won the round, fairness best coheres with this since if one debater had ten minutes to speak and the other had three there would be incongruence that alters ability to judge the *truth value* of who wins on the AC so cross-applications don’t work.

#### B. Internal Link- Violations of competitive equity prevent effective dialogue and participation.

Galloway 07 Ryan, Samford Comm prof, Contemporary Argumentation and Debate, Vol. 28, 2007

Debate as a dialogue sets an argumentative table, where all parties receive a relatively fair opportunity to voice their position. Anything that fails to allow participants to have their position articulated denies one side of the argumentative table a fair hearing. The affirmative side is set by the topic and fairness requirements. While affirmative teams have recently resisted affirming the topic, in fact, the topic selection process is rigorous, taking the relative ground of each topic as its central point of departure. Setting the affirmative reciprocally sets the negative. The negative crafts approaches to the topic consistent with affirmative demands. The negative crafts disadvantages, counter-plans, and critical arguments premised on the arguments that the topic allows for the affirmative team. According to fairness norms, each side sits at a relatively balanced argumentative table. When one side takes more than its share, competitive equity suffers. However, it also undermines the respect due to the other involved in the dialogue. When one side excludes the other, it fundamentally denies the personhood of the other participant (Ehninger, 1970, p. 110). A pedagogy of debate as dialogue takes this respect as a fundamental component. A desire to be fair is a fundamental condition of a dialogue that takes the form of a demand for equality of voice. Far from being a banal request for links to a disadvantage, fairness is a demand for respect, a demand to be heard, a demand that a voice backed by literally months upon months of preparation, research, and critical thinking not be silenced. Affirmative cases that suspend basic fairness norms operate to exclude particular negative strategies. Unprepared, one side comes to the argumentative table unable to meaningfully participate in a dialogue. They are unable to “understand what ‘went on…’” and are left to the whims of time and power (Farrell, 1985, p. 114).

#### [2] Limits- Affs outside the topic justify a literal infinite number of affs because you only need to be germanely topical. You can combine any idea with a direction of the resolution. You can read fem rage, DnG, afropess, afrofuturism, and the list goes on and on. Only the topic can serve as a stable starting point on which to base research.

#### Only limited topics protect participants from research overload which materially affects our lives outside of round.

Harris 13 Scott Harris (Director of Debate at U Kansas, 2006 National Debate Coach of the Year, Vice President of the American Forensic Association, 2nd speaker at the NDT in 1981). “This ballot.” 5 April 2013. CEDA Forums. <http://www.cedadebate.org/forum/index.php?action=dlattach;topic=4762.0;attach=1655>

I understand that there has been some criticism of Northwestern’s strategy in this debate round. This criticism is premised on the idea that they ran framework instead of engaging Emporia’s argument about home and the Wiz. I think this criticism is unfair. Northwestern’s framework argument did engage Emporia’s argument. Emporia said that you should vote for the team that performatively and methodologically made debate a home. Northwestern’s argument directly clashed with that contention. My problem in this debate was with aspects of the execution of the argument rather than with the strategy itself. It has always made me angry in debates when people have treated topicality as if it were a less important argument than other arguments in debate. Topicality is a real argument. It is a researched strategy. It is an argument that challenges many affirmatives. The fact that other arguments could be run in a debate or are run in a debate does not make topicality somehow a less important argument. In reality, for many of you that go on to law school you will spend much of your life running topicality arguments because you will find that words in the law matter. The rest of us will experience the ways that word choices matter in contracts, in leases, in writing laws and in many aspects of our lives. Kansas ran an affirmative a few years ago about how the location of a comma in a law led a couple of districts to misinterpret the law into allowing individuals to be incarcerated in jail for two days without having any formal charges filed against them. For those individuals the location of the comma in the law had major consequences. Debates about words are not insignificant. Debates about what kinds of arguments we should or should not be making in debates are not insignificant either. The limits debate is an argument that has real pragmatic consequences. I found myself earlier this year judging Harvard’s eco-pedagogy aff and thought to myself—I could stay up tonight and put a strategy together on eco-pedagogy, but then I thought to myself—why should I have to? Yes, I could put together a strategy against any random argument somebody makes employing an energy metaphor but the reality is there are only so many nights to stay up all night researching. I would like to actually spend time playing catch with my children occasionally or maybe even read a book or go to a movie or spend some time with my wife. A world where there are an infinite number of affirmatives is a world where the demand to have a specific strategy and not run framework is a world that says this community doesn’t care whether its participants have a life or do well in school or spend time with their families. I know there is a new call abounding for interpreting this NDT as a mandate for broader more diverse topics. The reality is that will create more work to prepare for the teams that choose to debate the topic but will have little to no effect on the teams that refuse to debate the topic. Broader topics that do not require positive government action or are bidirectional will not make teams that won’t debate the topic choose to debate the topic. I think that is a con job. I am not opposed to broader topics necessarily. I tend to like the way high school topics are written more than the way college topics are written. I just think people who take the meaning of the outcome of this NDT as proof that we need to make it so people get to talk about anything they want to talk about without having to debate against Topicality or framework arguments are interested in constructing a world that might make debate an unending nightmare and not a very good home in which to live. Limits, to me, are a real impact because I feel their impact in my everyday existence.

#### Controls the internal link to the aff- I can’t engage in the 1AC’s critical issues in round AND you cause research overload so I cannot be politically active for your cause outside of round because I am too busy researching. Also proves your model of debate has material disparaties that you create that prevent effective dialogue.

#### [3] TVA- read an aff about how oppressive structures will be perpetuated in space

#### Solves all your offense

#### Additionally, if I win topical version of the aff, they have to win that never being topical is good since otherwise all their net benefits have been captured by my T interpretation.

#### [5] Ballot paradox – either they want the ballot and prove the competition args, or they’re only here for the discussion in which case vote neg but recognize the aff’s education is valuable – proves T comes first.

#### [6] Jurisdiction on Tabroom or joy of tournaments its says debaters have to defend the topic, the judge has to affirm or negate the resolution, if I win they are non topical you vote neg because you cant vote aff since it was literally not an. Jurisdiction is an independent voter because it constrains judge obligation

### Voters

#### Fairness – axiomatic of any competitive activity with wins and losses, requires equal opportunities to win the round.

#### Education – the purpose of the activity is to promote educational discourse, it’s the reasons schools support it.

#### competing interps key to setting norms, reasonability doesn’t tell you what rule you’re endorsing, this means competing interps is key to solving abuse in the future because only this approach can set norms in the future 3) creates a race to bottom where debaters just claim they’re reasonably fair or educational

#### Drop the debater:

#### A) Key to endorsing good methodologies—1AR severance prevents effective dialogue on the role of the ballot and having a methods debate sets a norm for other rounds. It’s too late to have a constructive debate about public policy since there are only three speeches left.

#### B) If I win their advocacy is not topical and that topicality comes first then they have no advocacy and thus cannot have offense.

#### Don’t let them crossapply their arguments from case

#### Norm-setting: If there is risk of violation of the shell, then the crossapplication is irrelevant because we have to rectify the abuse claim first

#### Predictability: I can’t predict what they’ll go for because meanings of philosophy are unknown to most people and all interpretations of philosophy differ between individuals, so even if I go for what I think can be cross applied then I still loose

#### Structural skew: They get 6 minutes to read constructive arguments, so I’d have to line by line all of them if I don’t want them to cross apply them – that’s literally impossible if I want to read off case positions too

#### Conflates pre/post fiat distinction – framework arguments are not relative to the round itself, if they were, then the judge would have to be ok with murder if you read skep or benautar

## 2

#### The starting point of morality is practical reason.

#### 1] Regress: A theory is only binding when you can answer the question “why should I do this?” and not continue to ask “why”. Only practical reason provides a deductive foundation for ethics since the question “why should I be rational” already concedes the authoritative power of agency since your agency is at work. Metaethical standards outweigh: they determine what counts as a warrant for a standard, so absent grounding in some metaethical framework, their arguments aren’t relevant normative considerations.

#### And, reason must be universal – a reason for one agent is a reason for another agent. I can’t say 2+2=4 is true for me but not for you – that’s incoherent.

### Method:

#### Thus, counter-methodology:

#### Vote negative to engage in a liberation strategy of universal reason.

#### This entails a starting point where we abstract from individual perspectives to understand the universal, and use this starting point to apply it to empirical institutions and agents.

#### No perms: Uniquely non-sensical in a method debate:

#### [a] It assumes a notion of fiat that doesn’t make sense without a plan. The 1AC role of the ballot forefronts the performative and methodological which a permutation steals away

**[b] non-T affs shouldn’t get perms since they can defend literally anything in the world – thus the burden is on them to prove their advocacy is the best solution to the problem they propose.**

The Role of the Judge is to act as a moral educator.

Educators have a duty to create moral leaders to challenge injustice in the world but contemporary educational practices default to the norms of the dominant group.

ANN HIGGINS-D’ALESSANDRO (psychology professor at University of Fordham). “LAWRENCE KOHLBERG’S LEGACY: RADICALIZING THE EDUCATIONAL MAINSTREAM,” *Kohlberg Revisited*, 27–49. 2015.

**Kohlberg** strongly **opposed** moral relativism as a basis for school life. Power and Power (2012) capture the weakness of **moral relativism as a basis for schooling** by calling it the “default curriculum,” that is **the norms and values of a school that are accepted** by teachers, parents and students alike **because such norms and values reflect their community’s norms and values**. It is the sea in which they swim. In addition, in diverse neighborhoods, **schools and teachers** most **often instantiate the norms and values of the traditionally predominant groups** with the accompanying risk of alienating others. **Morality by implicit consensus cannot challenge a** school’s rules or **society’s laws when they are unfair**, give voice to the powerless, or enable the weak to become less vulnerable. Abraham **Lincoln and** **M**artin **L**uther **K**ing, Jr. **are** **American examples of those who spoke the language of universal morality** in their challenges to the status quo. The last great world leaders whose messages were embedded within a universal moral perspective were Desmond Tutu. **Although the world seems to need such leaders**, **young people** themselves **debate** and discuss **using universal moral categories when solving interpersonal or intergroup issues**, seemingly **quite naturally**. Moreover, **they quite easily understand and debate each other across the major distinguishing threads of traditional moral philosophies**—deontic, teleological, and utilitarian as they tend to temper them all with concerns about quality of life (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). Noddings (2008) has written forcefully and elegantly **about the moral purpose of schooling as building trusting community**; like Kohlberg, she **emphasizes respectful, caring, and truthful relationships among all school members**. Like Noddings and Kohlberg, students come to these ideas in various instantiations, sometimes with adult guidance, sometimes without such guidance being necessary. The next section describes how the conditions within the Just Community make it an experiment in moral education, more than only an exercise in democracy, leadership, and cooperation.

#### Additionally Prefer:

#### [1] Ideal theory is capable of radical possibilities.

Holmstrom 12 [Holmstrom, Nancy [Prof. Emeritus @ Rutgers]. "Response to Charles Mills's." Radical Philosophy Review 15.2 (2012): 325-330.]

We have to speak to people where they are, he says, and that means appealing to core values of liberalism: individualism, equal rights and moral egalitarianism. Against what he calls the conventional wisdom among radi- cals, he argues that there is no inherent incompatibility between these values and a radical agenda. If these values are suitably interpreted, I think he is absolutely right. Over two hundred years ago, Mary Wollstonecraft and Toussaint Louverture took the abstract universalistic principles of the French Revolution and extended them to groups they were intended to exclude. Gradually and incompletely women and blacks and landless men have achieved the democratic rights promised to all (in words) by the anti-feudal revolution. So I agree with Charles that such universalistic principles have great value; even if usually applied in self-serving ways, they have a deeply radical potential and it would be foolish of radicals to reject them, any more than we should reject all of the technological developments of the Indus- trial Revolution which also developed with the rise of capitalism. in fact, few American radicals have rejected these aspects of liberalism in their politi- cal practice but have been their strongest champions since the Revolution; socialists of all kinds helped to build the labor and civil rights movements.‘

#### [2] Universality is the best way of solving oppression.

Mills 18 Charles W. Mills. “Black Radical Kantianism.” Res Philosophica, Vol. 95, No. 1, January 2018, pp. 1–33 https:// doi.org/ 10.11612/ resphil.1622 SJ//VM Organic Intellectual

So the common theme is the demand for equal recognition, equal dignity, equal respect, equal personhood, in a white-supremacist world where disrespect rather than respect is the norm, the default mode, for blacks. A racesensitive Kantianism not merely purged of Kant’s own racism but attuned (in a way nominally color-blind Kantianism is not) to these racially demarcated particularities for the different sub-sections of the human population— a black radical Kantianism—will thus understand the need to “universalize” the categorical imperative in a very different way to register the crucial differences between those socially recognized as persons and those socially recognized as sub-persons. I suggest that we divide the different moral relations involved into two categories based on whether one is a member of the privileged race, the R1s, or the subordinated race, the R2s. That gives us the following six-way breakdown: (1) one’s duty as an R1 to give respect to oneself, (2) one’s duty as an R1 to give respect to one’s fellow-R1s, (3) one’s duty as an R1 to give respect to R2s, (4) one’s duty as an R2 to give respect to oneself, (5) one’s duty as an R2 to give respect to one’s fellow-R2s, and (6) one’s duty as an R2 to give respect to R1s. Historically, each of these will have been affected by race (as racism), leaving an ideological and psychological legacy, habits of disrespect, that will shape the “inclinations” most likely to be determinative and most imperatively to be resisted. Instead of (what could be graphically thought of as) “horizontal” relations of reciprocal and symmetrical race-indifferent respect among equal raceless persons, the R1s will have historically respected themselves and each other as R1s, while “vertically” looking down on, disrespecting, R2s as inferiors. In turn, the R2s will have been required to show racial deference to the R1s, looking up to them as R2s, and—having most probably internalized their lower ontological status—will have been prone to regard both themselves and their fellows with racial contempt.

### Negate:

#### [1] Independently not defending the topic is non-universalizable b/c if nobody defended the topic than a topic wouldn’t have even been created in the first place which is a contradiction in conception.

#### [2] The aff has a deontological obligation to be topical.

#### Nebel 15 Jake Nebel,"The Priority of Resolutional Semantics by Jake Nebel," Briefly, <https://www.vbriefly.com/2015/02/20/the-priority-of-resolutional-semantics-by-jake-nebel/>

A second strategy denies that such pragmatic benefits are relevant. This strategy is more deontological. One version of this strategy appeals to the importance of consent or agreement. Suppose that you give your opponents prior notice that you’ll be affirming the September/October 2012 resolution instead of the current one. There is a sense in which your affirmation of that resolution is now predictable: your opponents know, or are in a position to know, what you will be defending. And suppose that the older resolution is conducive to better (i.e., more fair and more educational) debate. Still, it’s unfair of you to expect your opponents to follow suit. Why? Because they didn’t agree to debate that topic. They registered for a tournament whose invitation specified the current resolution, not the Sept/Oct 2012 resolution or a free-for-all. The “social contract” argument for topicality holds that accepting a tournament invitation constitutes implicit consent to debate the specified topic. This claim might be contested, depending on what constitutes implicit consent. What is less contestable is this: given that *some* proposition must be debated in each round and that the tournament has specified a resolution, no one can reasonably reject a principle that requires everyone to debate the announced resolution as worded. This appeals to Scanlon’s contractualism. Someone who wishes to debate only the announced resolution has a strong claim against changing the topic, and no one has a stronger claim against debating the announced resolution (ignoring, for now, some possible exceptions to be discussed in the next subsection). So it is unfair to expect your opponent to debate anything other than the announced resolution. This unfairness is a constraint on the pursuit of education or other goods: it wrongs and is unjustifiable to your opponent.

#### [3] When the aff doesn’t semantically affirm the resolution then it’s not full participation, because the affirmative is trying to achieve some external goal

#### Schapiro 18

Written by Tamar Schapiro. [Tamar Schapiro is an associate professor of philosophy at Stanford University, where she studies theories of morality, practical reasoning, and agency. She has written a series of articles focusing on the question of how to conceive of moral rules such that they have the rigidity of principles while allowing for appropriate exceptions. Her work on this topic has appeared in Ethics, the Journal of Philosophy, and Noûs.] “Three Conceptions of Action in Moral Theory” Wiley, 05-07-2018. Pp 102.

Now this characterization of moves in a practice may just seem false, be- cause there appear to be cases where the proper description of an action falling under a practice does not depend in any way upon the whether the agent con- forms to deliberative constraints. Suppose, for example, that a tennis player hits a hard shot right at her opponent's head, and that she does so not out of a desire internal to the practice (i.e. to play competitively), but out of a personal, venge- ful desire to physically injure the other player. From the point of view of an umpire, the shot will count just as it would if it followed the exact same trajec- tory but was chosen on the basis of the practice-dependent desire. Similarly if, in her external actions, the utilitarian judge conforms to the procedural rules associated with punishing, she will succeed in doing something which, from a legal point of view, counts as "punishing" the defendant.31 However Rawls' claim is not about what counts as a move in this external, legalistic sense. His claim is that at a philosophical level, there are deliberative conditions which have to be met in order for an agent to count as "making a move" of a particular kind within a practice. This makes sense, I think, if we read Rawls as relying on an unstated assumption. The assumption is that mak- ing a move in a practice is a way of participating in it, a way of engaging in it as a form of activity. Corresponding to this notion of "participation" is an ideal of full participation or full engagement in the activity defined by the practice rules. That ideal is one according to which the agent regards her will, and not merely her external actions, as subject to the action-guiding authority of the prac- tice rules. To fully participate in a practice is to identify oneself and others in terms of the concepts defined by the practice rules, and to regulate oneself in terms of its principles. Thus one who fully participates in a game of tennis re- lates herself as a player to others conceived as players. By contrast, one who settles a personal score on the court merely uses the practice rules to promote a practice-independent end. In this sense she does not fully participate in the ac- tivity defined by the rules. She acts like a player, but not as one.32 If Rawls has this sort of ideal in mind, then his claim is that every action which falls under practice rules is to be regarded as a form of participation, and that the concept of participation is what determines its standard. A participant fully participates, and hence fully "makes a move," only when she makes the practice rules and their associated concepts determinative of her will.

## Case

#### Their frame of gratuitous violence overdetermines human actions within a changeable system

Gordon 20 - Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Connecticut at Storrs; Honorary President of the Global Center for Advanced Studies; Honorary Professor in the Unit for the Humanities at Rhodes University, South Africa; Chairperson of the American Philosophical Association Committee on Public Philosophy; and Chairperson of the Awards Committee and Global Collaborations for the Caribbean Philosophical Association, Lewis Gordon, “Freedom, Justice, and Decolonization,” Routledge, December 31, 2020, <https://www.routledge.com/Freedom-Justice-and-Decolonization/Gordon/p/book/9780367632465>

* Gordon: debate about proof of pessimism is red herring b/c no way to know, even based on history, to project 10 years in the future what social systems will look like, no metaphysical basis to say that things will never change, functions as a tiebreaker
* Impact turn: no inherent trajectory or arc to how things happen, fact this debate is messy and examples on both sides proves shouldn’t invest mental energy in debating these theoretical endpoints, sort out contingent applications
* Answers ontology: ontological structures themselves are inherently paradoxes, to say that anti blackness is ontological imposes the condition itself, persons marked by political systems, justifications they’ve made for ontology rely on a flawed premise that ignores that systems of power can only be relational and contingently imposed

Afropessimism grew into an influential area of black thought by the second decade of the new millennium. The term “Afropessimism,” as I am using it here, came out of “Afro-pessimism.” The elimination of the hyphen is an important development since it dispels ambiguity and in effect announces a specific mode of thought. Should the hyphen remain, the ambiguity would be between pessimistic people of African descent and philosophical or theoretical pessimism.1 The conjoined, theoretical term is what proponents of that intellectual movement often have in mind in their diagnosis of what I shall call “the black condition.” The appeal to a black condition is peculiarly existential, though it is done in this context in ironic ways. Existentialists, after all, as is well known, reject notions of human “nature,” on the grounds that human beings live in a world of possibility, which makes an essentialist notion such as “nature” a matter, at least for such realities, always in the making.2 In the classic formulation, human reality exists prior to its essence. For each human being, essence is, as it were, an appointment whose actuality is not always fulfilled. Such a task does not mean that human beings lack anchorage. Everyone has to start from somewhere and that or those are conditions of possibility for a human world. Existentialists, thus, often prefer to speak or write of “human condition” or conditions for these reasons. What human beings produce is manifold, but key in every instance is a mode of life, a world, so to speak, in and through which human beings could emerge as human. Human beings thus, for the most part, produce human realities and worlds (whether good or bad). Such realities and worlds offer a network of relations and relationships through which many other things are produced, all of which are constellations of meaning. Again, what comes about could be appreciated or rejected, but either is valuable or not in terms of how meaningful it is for ongoing human projects. There is, thus, also a very pragmatic dimension to this existential portrait of what is also called “human reality.” Critics of existentialism often reject its human formulation. Heidegger, for instance, in his “Letter on Humanism,” lambasted Sartre for supposedly in effect subordinating Being to a philosophical anthropology with dangers of anthropocentrism.3 Yet, as I have argued in a variety of writings, a philosophical understanding of culture raises the problem of the conditions through which philosophical reflections become meaningful.4 Though a human activity, a more radical understanding of culture raises the question of the human being as the producer of an open reality. If the human being is in the making, then “human reality” is never complete and is more the relations in which such thought takes place than a claim about the thought. Additionally, what Heidegger fails to understand is, as Keiji Nishitani reminds us, Being is not all it is cracked up to be, as it also covers over instead of reveal reality.5 That includes human reality. The etymology of existence already points to these elements. From the Latin ex sistere, “to stand out,” it also means to appear; against invisibility in the stream of effects through which the human world appears, much follows through the creative and at times alchemic force of human thought and deed. Quarrels with and against existential thought are many. In more recent times, they have surfaced primarily from Marxists, structuralists, and poststructuralists, even though there were, and continue to be, many existential Marxists and even existentialists with structuralist and poststructuralist leanings and tendencies.6 I begin with this tale of philosophical abstraction to contextualize, at least in philosophical terms, Afropessimism. Its main exemplars, such as Jared Sexton and Frank Wilderson III, began their careers with training in academic literary theory, an area dominated by poststructualism since the 1970s through recent times in the Northern academies, even in many cases that avow “Marxism.” Sexton and Wilderson divert from a reductive poststructuralism, or at least attempt to do so, through examining important existential moves inaugurated, as Daniel McNeil observed, by Frantz Fanon and his intellectual heirs.7 The critical question that Afropessimism addresses in this fusion is the viability of posed strategies of Black liberation. (I am using the capital “B” here to point not only to the racial designation “black” but also to the emancipatory one “Black.” Afropessimists often mean both, since blacks and Blacks have a central and centered role in their thought.) The world that produced blacks and in consequence Blacks is, for Afropessimists, a crushing historical one whose Manichaean divide is sustained contraries best kept segregated. There is not only epistemic apartheid, as Reiland Rabaka would formulate it, but also ontological apartheid.8 Worse, any effort of mediation leads, in their view, to confirmed Black subordination and, worse, erasure. Overcoming this requires purging the world of antiblackness, although achieving such would be futile where the black remains since, for them, the black would by definition not “be” there, or, for that matter, anywhere.9 Where cleansing the world is unachievable, an alternative is to disarm the force of antiblack racism. Where whites lack power over Blacks, they lose relevance—at least politically and at levels of cultural and racial capital or hegemony. This is a position I have argued since my first book Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism.10 Wilderson joins me in that critique through exploring my concept of “an antiblack world” to build similar arguments. Sexton makes similar moves, although with a focus on the thought of the sociologist Orlando Patterson, in his discussions of “social death.”11 The rest of this chapter is an exploration of some nonexhaustive criticisms I have of the Afropessimist versions of these arguments, which may be of some use for readers interested in this area of thought. The first is that “an antiblack world” is not identical with “the world is antiblack.” The latter is an antiblack racist project. It is not the historical achievement of such. Its limitations emerge from a basic fact. Black people and other opponents of such an enterprise fought, and continue to fight, against it. The same argument applies to the argument about social death. Such an achievement would have rendered even those authors' and the reflections I am offering here stillborn. The basic premises of the antiblack world and social death arguments are, then, locked in performative contradictions. They fail at the moment they are articulated. Yet, they have rhetorical force. This is evident through the continued growth of its proponents, literature, and forums devoted to it, in which all lay claim to stillborn status. In Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism, I argued that there are forms of antiblack racism that are also offered under the guise of love. I was writing about whites who exoticize blacks while offering themselves as white sources of black salvation. It was a response to those who regard racism exclusively as acts of demonization. There are also racist forms of valorization. Analyzed in terms of bad faith, where one lies to oneself in an attempt to flee displeasing truths for pleasing falsehoods, exoticists romanticize blacks while affirming white normativity and themselves as principals of reality. These ironic, performative contradictions are features of all forms of racism, where one group is elevated to a godlike status and another is pushed below or outside that of human despite both claiming to be human. Antiblack racism offers whites self–other relations (necessary for ethics) with each other but not so for groups forced in a “zone of nonbeing” below or outside them. Although to be outside is not necessarily to be below, it is so in a system of hierarchy in which above is also interpreted as being within. There is asymmetry where whites and any designated racially superior groups stand as others who look downward to those who are not their others or their analogs. Antiblack racism is, thus, not a problem of blacks being “others.” It is a problem of their not-being-analogical-selves-and-not-even-being-others. Fanon, in Black Skin, White Masks, reminds us that Blacks among each other live in a world of selves and others. It is in attempted relations with whites under circumstances where whites control the conditions that these problems of dehumanization and subordination occur. Reason in such contexts, as he observes, has a bad habit of walking out when Blacks enter. What are Blacks to do? As reason cannot be forced to recognize Blacks because that would be “violence,” they must ironically reason reasonably with such forms of unreasonable reason. Contradictions loom. Racism is, given these arguments, a project of imposing nonrelations as the model of dealing with people designated “black.”12 In The Damned of the Earth, Fanon goes further and argues that colonialism is an attempt to impose a Manichean structure of contraries instead of a dialectical one of ongoing, human negotiations of contradictions. The former segregates the groups; the latter is produced from interaction. The police, he observes, is the primary mediator between the two models, as their role is the use of force/violence to maintain the contraries instead of the human, discursive one of politics and civility requiring the elimination of separation through the interactive, and ultimately intimate, dynamics of communication. Such societies draw legitimacy from Black nonexistence or invisibility. Black appearance, in other words, would be a violation of those systems. Think of the continued blight of police, extra-judicial killings of blacks and Blacks in those countries.13 The ongoing model of fascist white rule as the daily condition of blacks is to prevent the emergence of Blacks. An immediate observation of many postcolonies is that antiblack attitudes, practices, and institutions are not exclusively white. Black antiblack dispositions make this clear. In addition to black antiblackness taking the form of white hatred of black people, there is also the adoption of black exoticism. Where this exists, blacks simultaneously receive avowed black love alongside black rejection of agency. Many problems follow. The absence of agency bars maturation, which would reinforce the racial logic of blacks as in effect wards of whites. Without agency, ethics, liberation, maturation, politics, and responsibility could not be possible. This is because blacks would not actually be able to do anything outside of the sphere of white approbation and commands. Afropessimism endorses the previous set of observations, but this agreement is supported by a hidden premise of white agency versus black and Black incapacity. They make much of Fanon's remark that “the Black has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white.”14 Fanon's rhetorical flare led many unfortunate souls to misread this remark. As he had already argued that racism is a socially produced phenomenon, his point was that those who produced it take it to be ontological. In other words, such people—in this case whites—do not take seriously that blacks have any ontological resistance to white points of view. Fanon was not arguing that blacks are ontologically beings, or even nonbeings, of that kind. If this were so, he would not have pointed out, in numerous sections of that book, black and Black experiences with each other. The whole point of the chapter in which that remark is made, “The Lived-Experience of the Black,” is to explore blacks' and Blacks' points of view. This is a patent rejection of an ontological status while pointing to the presumed ontological status of a skewed perspective. Proponents of Afropessimism might respond that their position on white agency and black incapacity comes from Fanon's famous remark that though whites created le Nègre—the French term for, depending on the context, “negro,” “nigger,” and “black”—it was les Nègres who created Négritude.15 Whites clearly did not create Afropessimism, which Black liberationists should, in agreement, celebrate. We should avoid the fallacy of confusing the source with the outcome. History is not short of bad ideas from good or well-intentioned people. If intrinsically good, each person of African descent would become ethically and epistemologically a switching of the Manichean contraries, which means in effect only changing the players instead of the racist game. We come, then, to the crux of the matter. If the goal of Afropessimism is Afropessimism, its achievement would be attitudinal and, in the language of old, stoic—in short, a symptom of antiblack society. At this point, there are several observations that follow. The first is a diagnosis of the implications of Afropessimism as a symptom. The second pertains to the epistemological implications of Afropessimism. The third is whether a disposition counts as a political act and, if so, is it sufficient for its avowed aims. There are more, but for the sake of brevity, I will simply focus on these.16 An ironic dimension of pessimism is that it is the other side of optimism. Oddly enough, both are connected to nihilism, which is, as Nietzsche showed, a decline of values during periods of social decay.17 It emerges when people no longer want to be responsible for their actions. The same problem surfaces in movements. When one such as the Black Liberation movement is suffering from decay, nihilism is symptomatic. Familiar tropes follow. Optimists expect intervention from beyond. Pessimists declare that relief is not forthcoming. Neither takes responsibility for what is valued. The valuing is what leads to the second, epistemic point. The presumption that what is at stake is what can be known to determine what can be done is the problem. If such knowledge were possible, the debate would be about who is reading the evidence correctly. Such judgment would be a priori—that is, prior to events actually occurring. The future, unlike transcendental conditions such as language, signs, and reality, is ex post facto; it is yet to come. Facing the future, the question is not what will be or how do we know what will be but instead the realization that whatever is done will be that on which the future will depend. Rejecting optimism and pessimism, there is a supervening alternative, as we have seen throughout the reflections offered throughout this book—namely, political commitment. The appeal to political commitment is not only in stream with what French existentialists call l'intellectuel engagé (the committed intellectual) but also in what reaches back through the history and existential situation of enslaved, racialized ancestors. Many were, in truth, an existential paradox of commitment to action without guarantees. The slave revolts, micro and macro acts of resistance, escapes, and returns to help others do the same, the cultivated instability of plantations and other forms of enslavement, and countless other actions, were waged against a gauntlet of forces designed to eliminate any hope of success. The claim of colonialists and enslavers was that the future belonged to them, not to the enslaved and the indigenous. Such people were, in colonial eyes, incapable of ontological resistance. A result of more than 500 years of “conquest” and 300 years of enslavement was also a (white) rewriting of history in which African and First Nations' agency was, at least at the level of scholarship, practically erased. Yet there was resistance even in that realm, as Africana and First Nation intellectual history and scholarship attest; what, after all, are Africana, Black, and Indigenous Studies? What, after all, are those many sites of intellectual production and activism outside of hegemonic academies? Such actions set the course for different kinds of struggle today. Such reflections occasion meditations on the concept of failure. Afropessimism, the existential critique suggests, suffers from a failure in their analysis of failure. Consider Fanon's notion of constructive failure, where what does not initially work transforms conditions for something new to emerge. To understand this argument, one must rethink the philosophical anthropology at the heart of a specific line of Euromodern thought on what it means to be human. Atomistic and individual-substance-based, this model, articulated by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and many others, is of a nonrelational being that thinks, acts, and moves along a course in which continued movement depends on not colliding with others. Under that model, the human being is a thing that enters into a system that facilitates or obstructs its movement. Under this model, the human being is actually a being. An alternative model, shared by many groups across southern Africa, Asia, South America, and even parts of Continental Europe, is a relational version of the human being as part of a larger system of meaning. Actions, from that perspective, are not about whether “I” succeed but instead about “our” unending story across time. Under this model, no human being is a being simpliciter or being-in-her-or-himself-or-themselves. As relational, it means that each human being is a constant negotiation of ongoing efforts to build relationships with others, which means no one actually enters a situation without establishing new situations of action and meaning. Instead of entering a game, their participation requires a different kind of project—especially where the “game” was premised on their exclusion. Thus, where the system or game repels initial participation, such repulsion is a shift in the grammar of how the system functions, especially its dependence on obsequious subjects. Shifted and shifting energy afford alternatives. Kinds cannot be known before the actions that birthed them. Participation, understood in these terms, is never in games but acts of changing them. Abstract as this sounds, it has much historical support. For example, Evelyn Simien, in her insightful political study Historic Firsts, examines the new set of relations established in the United States by Shirley Chisholm's and Jesse Jackson's U.S. presidential campaigns.18 There would have been no President Barack Obama without such important predecessors affecting the demographics of voter participation. Simien intentionally focused on the most mainstream example of political life to illustrate this point. Though no exemplar of radicalism or revolution, Obama's “success” came from Chisholm and Jackson's (and many others') so-called “failure.” Despite the appalling reactionary response of a right-wing majority in the 114th Congress during the second term of Obama's presidency and the election of Donald Trump, whose obsession with erasing Obama's legacy exemplified a form of psychoanalytical little man's trauma, the historic fact remains that Obama took the helm of a mismanaged executive branch and gave it a level of dignity and intelligence matched by few of its white exemplars. His successors claim for a restored greatness only reveals the joke that is, in fact, any project on which the term “supremacy” is built: the naked racism and mediocrity that followed—there is an amusing photograph of a Klansman holding up a sign declaring his race's “superior jeans!”—reveal the folly and terror of white megalomania. Beyond presidential electoral politics, there are numerous examples of how prior, radical so-called “failures” transformed relationships that facilitated other kinds of outcome. The trail goes back to the Haitian Revolution, which offered a vision of Black sovereignty that garnered the full force of Euromodern colonial and racist alliances to stall, and back to every act of resistance from Nat Turner's Rebellion in the USA, Sharpe's in Jamaica, or Tula's in Curaçao, and so many other efforts for social transformation to come.19 In existential terms, then, many ancestors of the African diaspora embodied what Kierkegaard calls an existential paradox. All the evidence around them suggested failure and the futility of hope. They first had to make a movement of infinite resignation—that is, resigning themselves to their situation. Yet they must simultaneously act against that resignation. Kierkegaard, as we have seen, called this seemingly contradictory phenomenon “faith,” but that concept relates more to a relationship with a transcendent, absolute being, which could only be established by a “leap,” as there are no mediations or bridge to the Absolute whose distant is, as Kierkegaard put it, absolutely absolute. Ironically, if Afropessimism appeals to transcendent intervention, it would collapse into faith. If the Afropessimist's argument rejects transcendent intervention and focuses on committed political action, of taking responsibility for a future that offers no guarantees, then the movement from infinite resignation becomes existential political action. At this point, the crucial meditation would be on politics and political action. An attitude of infinite resignation to the world without the leap of committed action would simply be pessimistic or nihilistic. Similarly, an attitude of hope or optimism about the future would lack infinite resignation. We see here the underlying failure of the two approaches. Yet ironically, there is a form of failure at failing in the pessimistic turn versus the optimistic one, since if focused exclusively on resignation as the goal, then the “act” of resignation would have been achieved, which, paradoxically, would be a success; it would be a successful failing of failure. For politics to emerge, there are two missing elements in inward pessimistic resignation to consider. The first is that politics is a social phenomenon, which means it requires the expanding options of a social world. It must transcend the self. Turning away from the social world, though a statement about politics, is not in and of itself political. As we have seen, the ancients from whom much Western political theory or philosophy claimed affinity had a disparaging term for an individual resigned from political life—namely, idiōtēs, a private person, one not concerned with public affairs, in English: an idiot. I mention “Western political theory” because that is the hegemonic intellectual context of Afropessimism; I have not come across Afropessimistic writings on thought outside of that framework. We do not have to end our etymological journey in ancient Greek. Recall that extending our linguistic archaeology back a few thousand years we could examine the Middle Kingdom (2000 BCE–1700 BCE) of Kmt's Mdw Ntr word idi (deaf). The presumption, later taken on by the ancient Athenians and other Greek-speaking peoples, was that a lack of hearing entailed isolation, at least in terms of audio speech. The contemporary inward resignation of seeking a form of purity from the loathsome historical reality of racial oppression, in this reading, retreats ultimately into a form of moralism (private, normative satisfaction) instead of public responsibility born of and borne by action. The nonbeing to which Afropessimists refer is also a form of inaudibility. The second is the importance of power. Politics makes no sense without it. As we have seen throughout our earlier reflections on power, Eurocentric etymology points to the Latin word potis as its source, from which came the word “potent” as in an omnipotent god. If we again look back farther, we will notice the Middle Kingdom Mdw Ntr word pHty, which refers to godlike strength. Yet for those ancient Northeast Africans, even the gods' abilities came from a source. In the Coffin Texts, HqAw or heka activates the ka (sometimes, as we have seen, translated as soul, spirit, womb, or “magic”), which makes reality.20 All this amounts to a straightforward thesis on power as the ability with the means to make things happen. There is an alchemical quality of power. The human world, premised on symbolic communication, brings many forms of meaning into being, and those new meanings afford relationships that build institutions through a world of culture, a phenomenon that Freud, we should recall, rightly described as “a prosthetic god.” It is godlike because it addresses what humanity historically sought from the gods—protection from the elements, physical maledictions, and social forms of misery. Such power clearly can be abused. It is where those enabling capacities (empowerment) are pushed to the wayside in the hording of social resources into propping up some people as gods that the legitimating practices of cultural cum political institutions decline and stimulate pessimism and nihilism. The institutions in Abya Yala and in Northern countries, such as the United States and Canada, very rarely  attempt to establish positive relations to blacks, and Blacks the subtext of Afropessimism and this entire meditation. The discussion points to a demand for political commitment. Politics is manifested under different names throughout the history of our species, but the one occasioning the word “politics” is, as we have seen, from the Greek pólis, which refers to ancient Hellenic city-states. It identifies specific kinds of  activities conducted inside the city-state, where order necessitated the resolution of conflicts through rules of discourse the violation of which could lead to (civil) war, a breaking down of relations into those appropriate for  “outsiders.” Returning to the Fanonian observation of selves and others, it is clear that imposed limitations on certain groups amount to impeding or blocking the option and activities of politics. Yet, as a problem occurring within the polity, the problem short of war becomes a political one. Returning to Afropessimistic challenges, the question becomes this. If the problem of antiblack racism is conceded as political—where antiblack institutions of power have, as their project, the impeding of Black power, which in effect requires barring Black access to political institutions—then antiblack societies are ultimately threats also to politics defined as the human negotiation of the expansion of human capabilities or, more to the point, appearance, speech, and freedom. Antipolitics is one of the reasons why societies in which antiblack racism is hegemonic are also those in which racial moralizing dominates; moralizing stops at individuals at the expense of addressing institutions the transformation of which would make immoral individuals irrelevant. As a political problem, it demands a political solution. It is not accidental that blacks continue to be the continued exemplars of unrealized freedom and against whom violence is waged against appearance and speech. As so many from Ida B. Wells-Barnett to Angela Y. Davis, Michelle Alexander, Angela J. Davis, Noël Cazenave have shown the expansion of privatization and incarceration is squarely placed in a structure of states and civil societies premised on the limitations of freedom (Blacks)—ironically, as seen in countries such as South Africa and the United States, in the name of freedom.21 That power is a facilitating or enabling phenomenon, a functional element of the human world, a viable response must be the establishment of relations that reach beyond the singularity of the body. I bring this up because proponents of Afropessimism might object to this analysis because of its appeal to a human world. If that world is abrogated, the site of struggle becomes that which is patently not human. It is not accidental that popular race discourse refers today to “black bodies” instead of “black people,” for instance. As the human world is discursive, social, and relational, this abandonment amounts to an appeal to the nonrelational, the incommunicability of radicalized singularity, and appeals to the body and its very limited reach, if not isolation. At that point, it is perhaps the psychologist, psychiatrist, or psychoanalyst who would be helpful, as turning radically inward offers the promise of despair, narcissistic delusions of divine power, and, as Fanon also observed, madness.22 Even if that slippery slope were rejected, the performative contradiction of attempting to communicate such singularity or absence thereof requires, at least for consistency, the appropriate course of action: silence. The remaining question for Afropessimism, especially those who are primarily academics, becomes this: Why write? It is a question for which, in both existential and political terms, I do not see how an answer could be given from an Afropessimistic perspective without the unfortunate revelation of cynicism. The marketability of Afropessimists in predominantly white institutions—perhaps as an exotic phenomenon that affirms white standpoints as ontological sites of legitimacy—is no doubt in the immediate and paradoxical satisfaction in dissatisfaction it offers. Indeed, if Afropessimists were correct, their only solace would be in black institutions, but that, too, would pose a problem since the argument is that such institutions lack agency because, as black, they are absent. This is not to say that critical black and Black thinkers should not do their work in predominantly white spaces. It is simply that the argument of the impossibility of their doing so makes their location in such places patently contradictory. We are at this point on familiar terrain. As with ancient logical paradoxes denying the viability of time and motion, the best option, after a moment of immobilized reflection, is, eventually, to move on, even where the pause is itself significant as an encomium of thought.

#### Anti-blackness is contingent and historically shaped – their theory overestimates white supremacy’s durability.

Kelley 17 Robin D.G. Kelley, Gary B. Nash Professor of American History at UCLA, “Robin D.G. Kelley & Fred Moten In Conversation”, YouTube, 1:57:36 – 2:02:56, 15 June 2017, accessed: 21 January 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fP-2F9MXjRE>, \*most likely transcribed by Dustin Meyers Levi (dml), R.S.

Kelley: Um, Fred—Fred will take most of these questions. So that's why I'm going to begin first because he's gonna, he's gonna—he's gonna end it because he, he, he has the answer to all these questions ‘cause I turn to him for these questions. On the specific, on the first question, I just want to make sure I understand it because I'm, you know, I don't always recognize, uh, it may be because I'm just old, but I don't always recognize, uh, that black politics, black [unclear—maybe “guys”] work politics have been structured or defined by white supremacy. I mean, white supremacy is there. And I guess maybe because I'm such a student of Cedric Robinson, you know, not everything is about, or in response to, white supremacy.

And in fact, one of the critiques coming out of doing Southern history was this idea that race relations framework, that race relations defines, uh, African-American history or Black history. And it's simply **not true** because much of what people do in terms of, of social formation, community building, um, is, is, is what Raymond Williams might call alternative cultures. In other words, **it may be structured in dominance in some ways, but not defined by it.** And Cedric's Black Marxism, you know, really made this point. He talks about the ontological totality, you know, the, this sense of being and making ourselves whole, in that we come out of an experience, again, structured by white supremacy, structured by violence, structured by enslavement and dispossession, but, but one in which western hegemony didn't work, you know, that modes of thinking wasn't defined by Enlightenment modes of thinking.

In other words, that, that part of the **Black radical tradition is** a **refusal to be property**, to even admit that human beings could be property. You know, so we sometimes give white supremacy **way too much credit**, and maybe I misunderstood the question. And so I think that there's lots of things that happen outside of joy and survival, and survival is important, but survival is not the end all, you know. So I think, and I'll give you one very, very specific example, and now I'm not gonna say anything else after this. The way we have tended to more recently treat slavery, Jim Crow and mass incarceration as a piece, as the reinstantiation of the same thing, the continuation, that denies the fact that these systems are **actually** **distinct**, that they are historically specific, and in fact they’re responses to, in many ways, to the weakness of this as a racial regime.

So if you think of like the whole idea of the new Jim Crow to me is very, very problematic. Um, although that book by Michelle Alexander is very, very powerful and very useful in terms of educating people about prisons. **Jim Crow was not the continuation of slavery.** It was not. Jim Crow was a **response to** the **Black Democratic**, uh, **upsurge** after slavery. It was a revolution of Reconstruction. It was a way to try to suppress that. The fact that, that, you know, there was this incredible response. That's why there's a, there's a huge gap between 1877 at the official end of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow, which is the 1890s, disfranchisement, lynching. That's because you've had 13, 14, 15, 20, 25 years of a democratic possibility and struggle. The same thing with mass incarceration—yes, we've had incarceration, but it's, but that, that, that, that upward swing has a lot to do with, again, **response**s **to** the **struggles in the 1960s**, the assault on the Keynesian welfare-warfare state, the fact that you know the, the war on political, the formation of political prisoners, those struggles in fact was the state's **response to opposition.** And so if we don't acknowledge that, then what we end up doing is thinking that somehow there's a structure of white supremacy that's unchanging, fixed, and so powerful we can't do anything about it when in fact it's the opposite.

White supremacy is fragile. White supremacy is weak. Racial regimes actually are always having to shore themselves up precisely **because they're unstable.** We can see that. We can't see it because **the whole system of hegemony** is to give us the impression that it is so powerful, there's **no space out.** And yet it’s working overtime to, to respond to our opposition. Right. That may not answer your question, but that's sort of a way I think about it. Maybe it’s not satisfactory, but yeah.

#### Libidinal economy is a hoax -- neurophysiological phobias and philias are malleable thru habit forming.

Cikara & Van Bavel **’15** [Mina and Jay; June 2nd; Assistant Professor of Psychology and Director of the Intergroup Neuroscience Lab at Harvard University; Assistant Professor of Psychology and Director of the Social Perception and Evaluation Laboratory at New York University; Scientific American, “The Flexibility of Racial Bias: Research suggests that racism is not hard wired, offering hope on one of America’s enduring problems,” <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-flexibility-of-racial-bias/>; GR]

It would be easy to see in all this powerful evidence that racism is a permanent fixture in America’s social fabric and even, perhaps, an inevitable aspect of human nature. Indeed, the mere act of labeling others according to their age, gender, or race is a reflexive habit of the human mind. Social categories, like race, impact our thinking quickly, often outside of our awareness. Extensive research has found that these implicit racial biases—negative thoughts and feelings about people from other races—are automatic, pervasive, and difficult to suppress. Neuroscientists have also explored racial prejudice by exposing people to images of faces while scanning their brains in fMRI machines. Early studies found that when people viewed faces of another race, the amount of activity in the amygdala—a small brain structure associated with experiencing emotions, including fear—was associated with individual differences on implicit measures of racial bias. This work has led many to conclude that racial biases might be part of a primitive—and possibly hard-wired—neural fear response to racial out-groups.

There is little question that categories such as race, gender, and age play a major role in shaping the biases and stereotypes that people bring to bear in their judgments of others. However, research has shown that how people categorize themselves may be just as fundamental to understanding prejudice as how they categorize others. When people categorize themselves as part of a group, their self-concept shifts from the individual (“I”) to the collective level (“us”). People form groups rapidly and favor members of their own group even when groups are formed on arbitrary grounds, such as the simple flip of a coin. These findings highlight the remarkable ease with which humans form coalitions.

Recent research confirms that coalition-based preferences trump race-based preferences. For example, both Democrats and Republicans favor the resumes of those affiliated with their political party much more than they favor those who share their race. These coalition-based preferences remain powerful even in the absence of the animosity present in electoral politics. Our research has shown that the simple act of placing people on a mixed-race team can diminish their automatic racial bias. In a series of experiments, White participants who were randomly placed on a mixed-race team—the Tigers or Lions—showed little evidence of implicit racial bias. Merely belonging to a mixed-race team trigged positive automatic associations with all of the members of their own group, irrespective of race. Being a part of one of these seemingly trivial mixed-race groups produced similar effects on brain activity—the amygdala responded to team membership rather than race. Taken together, these studies indicate that momentary changes in group membership can override the influence of race on the way we see, think about, and feel toward people who are different from ourselves.

Although these coalition-based distinctions might be the most basic building block of bias, they say little about the other factors that cause group conflict. Why do some groups get ignored while others get attacked? Whenever we encounter a new person or group we are motivated to answer two questions as quickly as possible: “is this person a friend or foe?” and “are they capable of enacting their intentions toward me?” In other words, once we have determined that someone is a member of an out-group, we need to determine what kind? The nature of the relations between groups—are we cooperative, competitive, or neither?—and their relative status—do you have access to resources?—largely determine the course of intergroup interactions.

Groups that are seen as competitive with one’s interests, and capable of enacting their nasty intentions, are much more likely to be targets of hostility than more benevolent (e.g., elderly) or powerless (e.g., homeless) groups. This is one reason why sports rivalries have such psychological potency. For instance, fans of the Boston Red Sox are more likely to feel pleasure, and exhibit reward-related neural responses, at the misfortunes of the archrival New York Yankees than other baseball teams (and vice versa)—especially in the midst of a tight playoff race. (How much fans take pleasure in the misfortunes of their rivals is also linked to how likely they would be to harm fans from the other team.)

Just as a particular person’s group membership can be flexible, so too are the relations between groups. Groups that have previously had cordial relations may become rivals (and vice versa). Indeed, psychological and biological responses to out-group members can change, depending on whether or not that out-group is perceived as threatening. For example, people exhibit greater pleasure—they smile—in response to the misfortunes of stereotypically competitive groups (e.g., investment bankers); however, this malicious pleasure is reduced when you provide participants with counter-stereotypic information (e.g., “investment bankers are working with small companies to help them weather the economic downturn). Competition between “us” and “them” can even distort our judgments of distance, making threatening out-groups seem much closer than they really are. These distorted perceptions can serve to amplify intergroup discrimination: the more different and distant “they” are, the easier it is to disrespect and harm them.

Thus, not all out-groups are treated the same: some elicit indifference whereas others become targets of antipathy. Stereotypically threatening groups are especially likely to be targeted with violence, but those stereotypes can be tempered with other information. If perceptions of intergroup relations can be changed, individuals may overcome hostility toward perceived foes and become more responsive to one another’s grievances.

The flexible nature of both group membership and intergroup relations offers reason to be cautiously optimistic about the potential for greater cooperation among groups in conflict (be they black versus white or citizens versus police). One strategy is to bring multiple groups together around a common goal. For example, during the fiercely contested 2008 Democratic presidential primary process, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama supporters gave more money to strangers who supported the same primary candidate (compared to the rival candidate). Two months later, after the Democratic National Convention, the supporters of both candidates coalesced around the party nominee—Barack Obama—and this bias disappeared. In fact, merely creating a sense of cohesion between two competitive groups can increase empathy for the suffering of our rivals. These sorts of strategies can help reduce aggression toward hostile out-groups, which is critical for creating more opportunities for constructive dialogue addressing greater social injustices.

Of course, instilling a sense of common identity and cooperation is extremely difficult in entrenched intergroup conflicts, but when it happens, the benefits are obvious. Consider how the community leaders in New York City and Ferguson responded differently to protests against police brutality—in NYC political leaders expressed grief and concern over police brutality and moved quickly to make policy changes in policing, whereas the leaders and police in Ferguson responded with high-tech military vehicles and riot gear. In the first case, multiple groups came together with a common goal—to increase the safety of everyone in the community; in the latter case, the actions of the police likely reinforced the “us” and “them” distinctions.

Tragically, these types of conflicts continue to roil the country. Understanding the psychology and neuroscience of social identity and intergroup relations cannot undo the effects of systemic racism and discriminatory practices; however, it can offer insights into the psychological processes responsible for escalating the tension between, for example, civilians and police officers.

Even in cases where it isn’t possible to create a common identity among groups in conflict, it may be possible to blur the boundaries between groups. In one recent experiment, we sorted participants into groups—red versus blue team—competing for a cash prize. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to see a picture of a segregated social network of all the players, in which red dots clustered together, blue dots clustered together, and the two clusters were separated by white space. The other half of the participants saw an integrated social network in which the red and blue dots were mixed together in one large cluster. Participants who thought the two teams were interconnected with one another reported greater empathy for the out-group players compared to those who had seen the segregated network. Thus, reminding people that individuals could be connected to one another despite being from different groups may be another way to build trust and understanding among them.

A mere month before Freddie Gray died in police custody, President Obama addressed the nation on the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday in Selma: “We do a disservice to the cause of justice by intimating that bias and discrimination are immutable, or that racial division is inherent to America. To deny…progress -- our progress -- would be to rob us of our own agency; our responsibility to do what we can to make America better."

The president was saying that we, as a society, have a responsibility to reduce prejudice and discrimination. These recent findings from psychology and neuroscience indicate that we, as individuals, possess this capacity. Of course, this capacity is not sufficient to usher in racial equality or peace. Even when the level of prejudice against particular out-groups decreases, it does not imply that the level of institutional discrimination against these or other groups will necessarily improve. Ultimately, only collective action and institutional evolution can address systemic racism. The science is clear on one thing, though: individual bias and discrimination are changeable. Race-based prejudice and discrimination, in particular, are created and reinforced by many social factors, but they are not inevitable consequences of our biology. Perhaps understanding how coalitional thinking impacts intergroup relations will make it easier for us to affect real social change going forward.