

## **The Shadow and Evil in American Racism**

*The Negro is America's metaphor.*

– Richard Wright

*This paper is an abridged version of “The Metaphor of America’s Darkness,” a chapter in America’s Identity Crisis. It was delivered at the C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles in 2004 as the first lecture in a series entitled “The Faces of Archetypal Evil in Personal and Collective Experience.”*

*Introduction: a few words to commence our series*

We need to honor the psychic reality of evil, the fact that evil is a real force in the human psyche. The part of the psyche that is evil is the archetypal shadow. It is distinct from the personal shadow, which may be dark, but is usually not associated with evil. That may be the instrument of evil, but the source of what for millenia has been called “evil” is what in Jungian psychology is known as the archetypal shadow. Jung argues that it is not only the darkest side of human nature, but the dark side of God, which we see illustrated in one form or another in the scriptures of almost all the world’s religions. Jungian analyst Adolf Guggenbühl-Craig describes the archetypal shadow as the suicidal maniac and murderer in us. How relevantly this speaks to modern times.

As a living, archetypal force, evil is not merely the absence of good, or what some medieval thinkers described as a *privatio boni*. The modern poet Kahlil Gibran captured

this view when he said, “Evil is good tortured by its own hunger and thirst.” That sounds good, but hardly penetrates the dark, hypnotic, and numinous, invigorating intensity with which evil grips some people. Evil is indeed an archetypal force, and we need to respect this. As we proceed in this series, it is important to remember that we are dealing with an archetypal force, and we should not speak lightly about it, especially when we gather together to talk about it in the name of the psyche. It is known in our Institute that when speakers in the past have given talks about evil, strange things have happened. So let us approach this topic tonight and in the remaining talks of this series with a reverent attitude. And please, drive carefully.

### *The Roots of American Racism*

The issue of race in America today is perhaps more complex than ever before. Much has changed since the civil rights movement: the economic disparity and tension between blacks and whites have noticeably decreased due to the rising numbers of blacks who have attained middle class status. Also, blacks have been eclipsed by Hispanics as the dominant minority, and according to demographic trends, the ratio of Caucasians to colored peoples is steadily decreasing. However, underneath these surface changes, race relations between blacks and whites remain psychologically much the same as always. Overt racism is less tolerated, but the feelings and attitudes of each group toward the other are still strongly conditioned by old habits. History is far more entrenched than the conditions affecting economics or demographics. In this talk I’d like to take a look at the psychological and spiritual factors shaping our history of race relations. As we will here focus almost exclusively on black-white relations, we should keep in mind that these factors apply in varying degrees to the relations between whites and other races as well.

The black-white relationship offers a yardstick against which to measure other relations because it so intensely constellates the forces of the psyche.

To begin, the African American, as everybody knows, was brought to America for the purpose of supporting a plantation economy. However, considering that it was the European who colonized America, it is curious that racism during the first two centuries of American history became dramatically more pervasive and severe than the racism practiced in Europe during that time. The Indians, as we now finally admit, suffered a genocide on an enormous scale. The same rationale that permitted this also permitted the importation and slavery of up to 500,000 Africans by one account, an event whose institutionalized brutality was depicted in such popular films as "Roots" and Steven Spielberg's "Amistad." Aboard ships whose conditions have been likened to slaughterhouses, as many as one-third of the slaves died en route from Africa. By the time of the Civil War, there were approximately 4,000,000 slaves in America. Historians unanimously acknowledge that American slavery was among the cruelest in history. In contrast to the African and European slavery that existed at the same time, Americans treated their slaves as if they were subhumans, crushing their dignity as human beings, destroying their families, and forcing them into submission through such legal punishments as whipping, burning, mutilation, and death.

One has to wonder what it was about the black man that provoked such profound contempt and inhumanity on the part of the white American. Differences among groups of people were not new to the colonies. James Baldwin points out that before black people were brought to America, there were the Dutch, the English, the French, and the Germans, but when the Africans arrived, all the others suddenly became "white." A sharp division was cultivated as the white man vehemently kept the black man at arm's length and under his thumb. However, the color line, as W.E.B. Du Bois called it, served as a marker for differences—or rather, supposed differences—far more subtle than purely physical ones. To appreciate how this came about, we should consider an observation by

the historian Daniel Boorstin, one supported by Jung's observations as well from his travels in America. Listen to Boorstin's description of the early American experience:

When the intellectually and spiritually mature man of Europe first settled in America, he was forced to relive the childhood of the race, to confront once again the primitive and intractable wilderness of his cave-dwelling ancestors. In America he became an anachronism. This quaint juxtaposition of culture and barbarism—the Bible in the wilderness—which characterized the earliest settlement of the continent, has left a heritage of conflict and paradox for our own time.

In other words, the early American experience involved a regression to the childhood of the species. With this in view, white American racism begins to make sense.

A regression to the childhood of the species meant that the American was compelled to drop down into the “Africa within,” as Joseph Conrad described this primitive, barbaric level of experience. This childhood is humanity's primal, root condition, what Jung described in his essay, “The Psychology of the Child Archetype,” as “the preconscious, childhood aspect of the collective psyche.” It is the natural, instinctive state out of which we evolved and from which, as Freud argued, we had to separate with the aid of taboos, laws, and moral codes. Always existing within us, but for the large part repressed into the unconscious, it can be a troublesome part of our nature—especially when it surfaces unexpectedly and unwantedly. Such was the situation in which the early American found himself. The wilderness and wildness of the continent evoked this side of his nature. And there can be no doubt that the African, like the Indian before him, also stirred it up, as their cultures lived closer to the instincts than European civilization did. This elicited fear because of the capacity of the instinctual life to overwhelm and extinguish the other aspects of human life. It elicited fear because 2,000 years of

Christian teaching, reinforced by the separation of body and mind that Western man inherited from the Greeks, had warned against the corrupting dangers of the senses and instincts. The Puritans of course incorporated this attitude into their way of life. To be chaste in body and mind was central to what made them pure or puritan.

The African and Indian, however, also inspired envy, which can be just as unsettling as fear. The instinctual life, being our root condition, is something most desirable (a fact prodigiously illustrated by the twentieth century's rebellion against the Victorian ethic). The intricate relationship tribal societies forged between the world of the senses and the world of the spirit was outside the experience of the American, and it both attracted and threatened him. As Marshall McLuhan said, "The cultural aggression of white America against Negroes and Indians is not based on skin color and belief in racial superiority. . . . the Negro arouses hostility in whites precisely because they subliminally recognize that he is closest to that tribal depth involvement and simultaneity and harmony that is the richest and most highly developed expression of human consciousness." This expression included the instincts in a way which the American deep down longed for even though he knew it could only disrupt the order he was attempting to impose upon his own instincts and upon nature at large. Given both the fear and the envy, it was more comfortable for the white American to project the "Africa within" onto the African outside, and to then hold him in contempt for reminding him of it. This was a side of human nature that the white man had for a long time not seen due to the camouflage of European civilization, and he did not wish to see it staring him in the face once again. It was ostensibly to feel in control of this unpleasant reminder that so many heinous acts of colonial, plantation, and frontier history were condoned.

If this sounds like too simple an explanation for the special character of American racism, we need only probe a little deeper into its implications. The return to primal childhood unleashes the threat of spiritual darkness, a threat and a darkness that have also been projected upon the black man. It would seem that "black" and "dark" have unconsciously become equated in the white American psyche. But they are not by any means the same. The tendency to confuse the two is, of course, not a uniquely American trait. The Oxford English Dictionary of sixteenth-century England defined black as: "Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul. Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister. Foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horribly wicked. Indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment, etc." In America, however, this tainting of the color black with the qualities of spiritual darkness has had drastic social consequences.

Spiritual darkness is basically the blackness of night and Thanatos, or death. It is, very literally, the darkness we must face every night, surpassed only by what we fear as the eternal darkness of death. The nighttime is the time of sleep and unconsciousness, of the "loss of soul," as primitive cultures perceived it. This harks back to the primordial night, the long span of time before the dawn of consciousness, when humankind lived in a state of unconsciousness—that is, un-*self*-consciousness—like all the other creatures in the animal kingdom. Much of our childhood as a species was spent in this state. "The coming of consciousness," Jung writes, "was probably the most tremendous experience of primeval times, for with it a world came into being whose existence no one had suspected before." He adds that God's proclamation in the Book of Genesis, "Let there be light," marks the "immemorial experience of the separation of the conscious from the

unconscious." Inevitably, the darkness of night is associated with the unconscious itself, with our original condition, and evokes the fear of falling back into it.

Even more substantially, night is a time of terror, as the behavior of primitive tribes and children famously demonstrates. The night harbors the irrational, the supernatural, the unknown. Deadly things can happen at night, and in death, one supposedly goes into the night forever. Fear of death, as Ernest Becker elucidated in *The Denial of Death*, is universal, and secretly underlies the motives for many of our otherwise inexplicable behaviors. Death is perhaps the most ominous of all things unknown because it is a sure thing. Unlike God or life *after* death or other such mysteries, we know for certain that we will eventually come face to face with that great void we call death.

The intense fear and hatred that many white Americans have had, and continue to have, of the black man seems to be charged with the terror of Thanatos and the night. At a very basic, preconscious level, the white American has mixed up African blackness with the blackness of Thanatos and night. But the latter blackness is a transcultural phenomenon, as psychologist Robert Bosnak has noted. It is, he states, "another kind of black than the racial black. There will be thanatic black figures in the dreams of people from all kinds of different races." Likewise, the symbolism of the color white is also transcultural, signifying the light of consciousness, purity, holiness, and wisdom, whether in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or the religious traditions of Africa. The unconscious blurring of spiritual whiteness and racial whiteness in the white man's psyche seems to accompany the same blurring around the color black, and is probably a consequence of it.

From here it is easy to see how the problem of evil is also projected onto the African American. This age-old problem takes into its scope the dark, evil side of human

nature and the dark side of the God-image. In Judaism and Christianity, the evil in human nature and the corresponding agent of God that is seen as responsible for it are merged in the figure of the devil. Satan is a figure of darkness, as the name Lucifer implies: "Lucifer" in Latin means "to bear light." When Lucifer, an angel of light, revolted against God, he was cast into hell. In his fall from grace, he became both the opposer and opposite of light. His darkness is explicitly evil, and it too has become confused with African blackness in the white American's imagination. The crusades of the Ku Klux Klan, fully staged in white attire with burning crosses, reveal the religious dimension of white racism. Most deep-seated racism can be seen, in the final analysis, to occur on the level of the mythic and religious imagination.

### *The Infantilization of the African American*

The dynamic that is set in motion when primal childhood is projected by one group onto another is infantilization. The group in the authority position projects its own unconscious primitivity and spiritual darkness onto another group that serves as a hook for this projection, and then insists that this group needs to be tamed, civilized, and reared from its childhood condition. This has been the thrust behind all white-supremacist forms of racism, whether in the Americas, Africa, India, or Australia.

In the United States, slavery reduced its subjects to a degree of infantilization and subordination rarely equaled in the practice of slavery elsewhere in the world. To be a slave in the South meant remaining a permanent child, dependent forever. Slaves were considered material property, to be bought, sold, bequeathed, and inherited like any other property. They had no legal rights. Children could be separated from parents and parents from each other upon the master's whim. Reading and writing were forbidden, and a



slave caught with a book could be executed. Submission was enforced in a way that was absolute. One historical study estimates that half of all slaves were whipped.

After slavery ended, segregation continued to categorically impose a second-class, "less-than" status upon black people. Within living memory, many beaches, parks, and other public facilities were off-limits to blacks, strictly *verboten*. Black residents and taxpayers in Southern communities that had only one public library or swimming pool could never borrow a book or go for a swim. "Indeed," Andrew Hacker reminds us in *Two Nations*, "black youths were even forbidden to stroll past the pool, lest they catch a glimpse of white girls in their bathing suits."

The fear behind such infantilizing legal strictures was fueled by the fantasy that the black man's instinctuality could dangerously explode at any moment. Even worse, what if it were contagious? How would this affect innocent white girls? The Swedish sociologist, economist, and Nobel laureate Gunnar Myrdal correctly intuited that the underpinnings of segregation were the same as those of lynchings and the castrations that often preceded them. White women needed to be protected from the advances of black men. Stereotypical images of the black's lasciviousness and sexual prowess also figure in the condemnation of interracial relationships and marriage: white people wonder, what do black people have and do that they don't? If one side of the strong reaction white supremacists have against intermarriage is the fear of it impoverishing the white gene pool and racial standard, then the other, perhaps more secret side of this reaction is the envy they have of the benefits it might bring. Again, envy is as threatening and unsettling as fear because it points to one's shortcomings and to desires one cannot admit to or fulfill. The strange way white people are compelled to stare at interracial couples suggests this ambivalence.

The dynamic of infantilization is particularly evident in the image whites unconsciously have of blacks. In the minds of many white Americans, the African American has become a sort of *enfant terrible*. Perceived as angry, primitive, and

unpredictable, the black man evokes the fear that he will take his revenge upon the white man for the deeds of the past. The eruption of black rage as a formidable force on the American scene cannot be denied. The nationwide riots in the 1960s and the Los Angeles riots in 1992 were demonstrations of this, and there are others. However, all show that the social effects of this rage tend to fall back upon the African American, further exacerbating his sense of infantilization and explosive frustration and hostility.

The most obvious proof of this were the riots. The mayhem they let loose was largely limited to the black communities where they took place. Enraged blacks destroyed *their own* businesses, public facilities, and, in some instances, even their own homes. Although it has been argued that rioters also destroyed white-owned businesses and government facilities that represented white authority, their destruction in the long run only served to deprive black communities. In the midst of the mindless fury that consumed people there may have been some instinct of self-preservation or -protection at work here. Blacks know only too well that white America would not tolerate the spread of mass violence into its own neighborhoods and business districts, and would be severely punitive for such a transgression.

But this is hardly the main reason why blacks inflicted such destruction upon themselves. Self-destructiveness as a response to infantilization has been observed in situations other than the African American's. As Frantz Fanon noted before the close of the colonial era over a generation ago, natives in colonized societies periodically turned against themselves, beating each other in "astonishing waves of crime." And then of course there is the behavior of children, with whom the term "infantilization" is obviously connected and who are known to destroy their rooms and toys when they feel unjustly punished. In their powerlessness and overwhelming rage, they cannot distinguish between what is self-destructive and what is destructive to the other. This lack of discrimination appears to be a key factor behind the self-destructiveness that is incurred by infantilization. Such a comparison is not to reduce the psychology of African

Americans to that of children, a gesture that would have a shaming quality and would of course be further infantilizing. Rather, its purpose is to show how power in its most basic, elemental form—the power to be and to express oneself—can be thwarted with a large population as easily as with a child. In both cases, the psyche is crippled before it finds its sea legs. John Bradshaw, the popular spokesperson for the "inner child," commented on how the Los Angeles riots were an expression of the same "preverbal powerlessness" experienced by the child who is unseen, unheard, and unappreciated. Feelings that were never validated came out the only way they could.

Riots in fact are few and far between. The rage of the disesteemed, as James Baldwin called it, surfaces in America on a daily basis in ways that, though perhaps spreading the rage thinner, cover far more territory. The dramatic increase in crime in recent decades, much of it drug-related, goes hand-in-hand with the disillusionment and despondency of inner city life.

Again, much of the crime reflected in the above figures is enacted within the black community. Most violence perpetrated by blacks is black on black. Three-quarters of the black men who perpetrate rapes choose black women as their victims, and similarly, more blacks than whites are victimized by black muggers. It is widely accepted that men do not rape for sexual pleasure. They rape because they feel disempowered in their manhood, most often in their roles as social achievers and financial providers. Rape as a psychological statement says: I have been raped, now I will rape you. The loss of power and self-esteem experienced by black men is in turn inflicted upon those who most immediately threaten them and are available, namely, black women.

Nowhere are the raging effects of infantilization more evident in the black community than in the preponderance of gang violence. Studies of gang members show that the key factor motivating them to join gangs is not so much rage as despair, the rage being something that vents once the gang congeals and gives voice to the grievances of

its members. Young people join gangs not because they are angry but because they have nowhere else to turn. As McLuhan wrote, "the teenager, compelled to share the life of a city that cannot accept him as an adult, collapses into 'rebellion without a cause.'" The absence or failure of role models is endemic to the inner city. Large numbers of an entire generation of men who might otherwise have served as father figures or mentors are unemployed, underemployed, employed in illegal activities, drug addicted, or incarcerated in prison. Fathers do not keep their commitments to their children either as providers or as teachers about life, often having three or four children with as many women. The vacuum left by a fatherless household is filled by the gang, but the gang only mimics patriarchy. It is a sibling society, which is why the infighting between gangs resembles sibling rivalry.

The killing or decimation of black youth, however, occurs in the sphere of morale and identity well before it manifests physically. One rap singer summed it up thus: "If you strip away the identity of a child, he is left with nothing. That vacuum is filled by the surrounding environment. If his environment is cold-blooded, negative and violent, he becomes cold-blooded, negative and violent." (It is no coincidence that rap music, too, is as a rule cold, negative, and violent.) A broken family and chaotic home life, the degradation caused by poverty (51 percent of black children live in poverty), a drug- and crime-infested neighborhood, the poor quality of education in many inner-city schools, the irrelevance of the curriculum to the cultural history, experience, and needs of African Americans, and the limited prospects of continuing on to higher education and attaining gainful employment—in spite of affirmative action—are the chief factors contributing to the demoralized state of inner-city kids.

These kids are not only social products of their dysfunctional families and neighborhoods. They represent a pocket of society into which is stuffed all the displaced primitive and spiritual darkness from which the rest of society has dissociated itself. This particular pocket of society, whose members populate the nation's inner cities, prisons,

and now its schools, is the displaced part of America, the part it cannot accept. Let us turn to this.

*The Infatuation with the African American, or the African American as Golden Shadow*

It is ironic, in view of the low esteem in which the white American has held the African American, how the latter has become a culture-hero, that is, a cultural icon. There is among white people in America a curious infatuation with things African American. This was clearly captured as early as with George Gershwin. In the words of jazz musician Warner Carr, Gershwin "depicted the American Negro in an enigmatic, spiritual, and beautiful way." In more recent times, the African American has become the embodiment of all that is "cool." He often speaks in a "cool" vernacular and frequently looks and behaves in a "cool" manner. In films and elsewhere he conveys a laid-back, easygoing demeanor. The imitation of the African American that one typically sees now in the language, clothing style, and musical taste of white suburban teenagers across the nation is just one form of this infatuation.

It is important to recognize what drives this attraction. One can suspect that it has a great deal to do with the very thing that makes the white man so hateful and fearful of the black man: namely, the deep, natural connection to the instinctual life, or as McLuhan earlier described it, "that tribal depth involvement and simultaneity and harmony that is the richest and most highly developed expression of human consciousness." Here in this attraction the coin of hatred and fear again flips over onto its other side, envy and desire. The black man's connection to the primal depths, to primal childhood, long ago buried by Western civilization, becomes now the white man's way to reconnect to the same—but he does so *through* the black man. The black man carries not only the split-off, sociopathic part of the white man, but the split-off, instinctual part; not only the part that is pathologically void of superego, but the part that is imbued with the vital energies of the id. The African American is a culture-hero for *all* Americans because he carries a

particular kind of Eros that the majority culture cannot. It is thus a special role that the black man plays in connection to the white man: he has to be the white man's conduit for Thanatos *and* Eros. What a great burden he carries—far outweighing the fallacy that has been called the "white man's burden"—and what a great service he provides.

The evidence of the African American's Eros is everywhere, and it has been suggested that, of all the strains of Eros in American culture, the African American's is the richest. Its roots go back to the Bantu cultures of Africa. Michael Ortiz Hill explains:

The roots of the African American psyche are in Western Bantu village culture, from the estuaries of the Zaire River as far inland as the Zambesi basin in central Africa. Western Bantu people—Kongo, Luba, Lunda, Chewa, Ovimbundu and others—account for perhaps half of the slaves imported to the American colonies. Unlike slaves taken from other parts of West Africa, who were ethnically diverse, Western Bantu people had mutually comprehensible languages and cultural sensibilities. The classical African American culture in the rural South is replete with "bantuisms" in language, place names, proverbs, stories, traditional medicine—even the religious imagery of old spirituals.

These cultural sensibilities and "bantuisms" are more pervasive in America than one might think. They have had a profound influence on the shaping of American culture at large. Jung understood this influence as a kind of boomerang effect of the African upon the white American: ". . . whenever you affect somebody so profoundly [as when you enslave him], then, in a mysterious way, something comes back from him to yourself." This boomerang effect, Jung informs us, also occurred with the Indian. It is the effect of two collective psyches merging on an unconscious level.

What came back to the white man, what was internalized in an unconscious way, Jung felt, was the basic temperament and behavioral style of the African. The movement of American culture away from European culture was markedly a movement toward African culture. This was stronger in the Southern than the Northern states because of

the different quality and degree of interdependence of blacks and whites. Jung believed that the openness and great ease of expression typical to Americans are probably an African influence. This style is more emotional and free with laughter—and boisterous laughter—than most European styles. "America as a nation can laugh," Jung says, "and that means a lot." The rapport between people, the remarkable vivacity of self-expression ("Americans are great talkers," he adds), the slang and aliveness of language, the gossip and chattering of even the newspapers, the boundless publicity of American life that diminishes the distance between people, all are more characteristic of an African village than a European city. McLuhan decades later independently reached the same conclusion when he said that America is more like an oral, tribal culture in Africa than a European one.

Jung also thought that the easygoing and demonstrative way the American physically carries himself, in his walk and other movements, is an imitation of African behavior. American jazz, he noted, "is most obviously pervaded by the African rhythm and the African melody." American dance, with its swinging shoulder and hip movements, reminded him of the African *n'goma* dance he observed on his travels in Africa. And finally, Jung thought, American behavior incarnates the African soul through the expression of religious feeling. Revival meetings, the Holy Rollers, and other forms of charismatic religion were strongly influenced by the African American and his animated faith and gospel music. This kind of religious awe and worship didn't just spring up spontaneously on American soil, according to Ortiz Hill. Contrary to the popular assumption that Africans first encountered Christianity when they were brought to America, many of the slaves were already Christians, bringing with them a Christianity that had a distinctly African flavor. Those from the Western Bantu cultures of central Africa practiced Bantu Christianity, known for its rich emotional expression.

These aspects of temperament and behavior are facets of Eros, or what African Americans refer to as "soul." They have been subtly taken over by the majority culture,

their origins quickly forgotten. Who would guess, for example, that the Nashville recording company that first signed Elvis Presley was originally established to record black musicians of the South? When it was discovered that Presley could perform the sound of the black South with conviction, the career of the "King of Rock 'n' Roll" was launched. Presley eventually received three Grammys for gospel, and inspirational music was the category in which he earned the most awards. The so-called "British invasion," too, was really an introduction of the African American via a white, Anglo-Saxon package: the Beatles were obviously inspired by black artists, in particular, Chuck Berry and Little Richard, and the Rolling Stones acknowledge among their primary influences, in addition to the aforementioned, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, and Jimmy Reed—three blues artists. Like jazz, much of rock 'n' roll has its origins in that distinctly African American art form, the blues. Of course, who could better sing the blues than a black man or woman who has lived them everyday in no small measure because of his or her color and place in society? Eros here manifests as the dark passion of pathos.

This brings us to another factor responsible for the emergence of the African American as a culture-hero: his suffering. He is attractive and admirable because he is, in accordance with the paradigm of Christ himself, a suffering servant and an outcast. Steven Spielberg nicely makes this connection in "Amistad," but one can see this theme beginning to crystallize as early as Stanley Kramer's film "The Defiant Ones," in which a black convict, played by Sidney Poitier, is portrayed in an admirable, empathic way. Of course, there is nothing new about African Americans being figures worthy of admiration. Long before film became a venue for them, history recorded their heroic deeds in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and every war since. What is new is the white American's growing recognition of this and his own process of identifying the African American as a culture-hero.

The African American culture-hero wears a variety of masks, and it goes without saying that he is not always a hero to both blacks and whites. He can be a basketball



player, a musician, a lawyer, or a gang leader. He can be Martin Luther King or Colin Powell, or he can be O.J. Simpson or Tupac Shakur. Often, he or she is a figure who had to overcome great odds to achieve success. In addition to whatever field had to be mastered, the African American hero had to contend with the color barrier. As a general rule, something more or extra special has been expected from the African American, as he had to become distinguished not only among his own people, but also among his white professional counterparts and skeptics. Think of Frederick Douglass, George Washington Carver, Paul Robeson, Louis Armstrong, Thurgood Marshall, Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker. Indeed, much of African American excellence is intimately connected with the struggle for freedom, equality, and self-mastery.

### *The Meaning of Integration*

The white American has probably always had a secret curiosity about, if not an overt infatuation with, the black man. The fact that this curiosity is now increasingly becoming part and parcel of mainstream American culture bodes well for relations between the two races. Yet this in itself cannot heal a wound which, as many have pointed out, is so divisive and poisonous that it is one of the most serious threats to America's future as a great nation. As Erik Erikson writes, "nations, as well as individuals, are not only defined by their highest point of civilized achievement, but also by the weakest one in their collective identity: they are, in fact, defined by the distance, and the quality of the distance, between these points." The huge gulf between the races that is the result of racism not only brings *both* races down to their lowest or weakest point; it brings America's contribution as a civilization down with them. Integration of blacks and whites into a single society is a moral imperative that, in the long run, will make or break American civilization. Integration here implies a spiritual and psychological partnership and not just economic parity. It implies a genuine sense of shared community and not

just paranoid togetherness. Can America truly be a model of a refined, democratic civilization in the absence of such integration?

But such integration, to begin with, requires an acknowledgment of race as a problem at the center of American life, a problem that poses a heroic challenge in the profoundest sense. The jazz musician Wynton Marsalis has aptly described this challenge:

Race for this country is like the thing in the story, in mythology, that you have to do for the kingdom to be well, and it's always something you don't want to do. It's always that thing that is about you confronting yourself and that is tailor-made for you to fail. And the question of your heroism, courage, and success at dealing with this trial is, can you confront it with honesty and with energy to sustain an attack on it? . . . . The more we run from [race] the more we run into it. It's an age-old story. If it's not race, it's something else. But in this particular instance, in this nation, it is race.

In most of the myths, legends, and folk tales of the hero, there is a confrontation between the hero and a “wholly other,” some monster, evil figure, or antagonist who threatens him or tests his worth and abilities. From a psychological point of view, the “wholly other” is really within the hero himself; it is the unrealized or unconscious part of his own personality. Perhaps it is his fear, or his untapped strengths, or, not unlikely, it is the monstrous, evil part of himself. The outer battle or conquest is a symbol for the inner one. The truth of such tales is universal, and Marsalis is correct in appraising the heroic challenge of race relations in America as a confrontation with oneself.

On an experiential level, fundamental changes must take place within both races before the gulf between them can be really bridged. Each race must confront the “wholly other” within itself before it can reach across the racial divide to the other. Each race must confront its dissociated part and integrate it into *itself* before it can integrate with the other race into a single society under a common roof. It was to these dissociated parts that Jung was referring when he said, “every [American] Negro has a white complex and every [white] American a Negro complex.” Herein lies one of the mechanisms that make

racism the destructive form of innocence that it is: when a complex such as one of these takes hold of us, we act it out unknowingly, unconsciously, seeing both others and ourselves in a distorted way through the lens of the complex.

The white complex is, figuratively speaking, the white man inside the black man's psyche, as the black complex is the black man inside the white man's psyche. The white complex operates in the African American psyche as a judgmental and alienating authority principle, and compels the African American to displace onto the white man his inner authority and the measuring rod of his own goodness. The black complex operates in the white American psyche as a paganizing primal-childhood principle, compelling the white American to displace onto the black man his animal nature, dark fears, and evil impulses. The white complex of the black American is grounded in a very real history of oppression, suffering, and injustice, leading on the one hand to the black's deep resentment and mistrust of the white American, and on the other to a profound longing to be accepted by him. The black complex of the white American is not grounded in a historical experience; rather, it is loaded with dark, thanatotic material of a fundamentally irrational and mythic, religious nature. This casts the black man into the position of somebody or something "wholly other" than the white man.

On the one side then, integration would require the white American to become conscious of his black complex and assimilate it into his being. For this, he must come to terms with what makes the African American an enemy at the same time as a culture-hero: his deeply tabooed but deeply desirable connection to the instinctual side of the psyche. This includes the "wholly other" darkness he so dreads to face. *By having unconsciously projected all this upon the black man, the white man has in fact become what he most fears in the black man: barbaric and diabolically dark.* And yet, the more the white man condemns and pushes this side of his psyche away, the more it is forced to live itself out through the African American. The latter thus becomes the white American's unconscious connection to this side. The more it is scorned, the more it is

forced to manifest in a shadowy, menacing form. The problems from which African Americans suffer and which invariably affect the rest of society—poverty, unemployment, drug abuse, violence and crime—are basically symptoms or ways through which the dissociated part of the white American psyche returns to obtain recognition and redemption. What is not let in through the front door sneaks around and breaks in through the back door. Unfortunately, in this way the white American's worst fantasies of the black American become a self-fulfilling prophecy, and American society remains polarized and divided by racial animosity.

One could add to this black complex a guilt complex that the white man has for what he has done to the black man. Because one can hardly claim that this complex haunts him, it exists more as an unconscious guilty condition than as a guilt complex in the usual sense of the meaning. Unlike the black complex, this condition *is* grounded in history as the counterpart to the black man's complex. Though one may deny its existence, it has a palpability and pervasiveness that affect even immigrants and others who have no connection to the enslavement or segregation of blacks in their personal or family history. Commenting on a similar condition that has affected Germany since the end of the Second World War, Jung wrote: "Psychological collective guilt is a *tragic fate*. It hits everybody, just and unjust alike, everybody who was anywhere near the place where the terrible thing happened. . . . Therefore, although collective guilt, viewed on the archaic and primitive level, is a state of *magical uncleanness*, yet precisely because of the general unreasonableness it is a very real fact, which no European outside Europe and no German outside Germany can leave out of account. If the German intends to live on good terms with Europe, he must be conscious that in the eyes of Europeans he is a guilty man." The same goes for the American case: if the white American intends to live on good terms with the black American, he must be conscious that in the eyes of the black American he is a guilty man. Of course, the argument that the Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel made in regard to Germans can be made in regard to white Americans too: it is unfair to

hold current and future generations responsible for the deeds of past generations. Rather than to blame and punish, the existence of collective guilt as a “very real fact” seems to have the purpose of making sure that the abominable transgressions of the past are not forgotten; it seems to be history’s way of living on in the present, seeking redemption through our acknowledgement of it.

But is this enough? To be conscious of guilt in a way that produces meaningful results must involve more than merely acknowledging the past deeds that merit the guilt. In 1998 there was discussion in the media about whether the government should issue a formal apology to African Americans for the slavery under which their ancestors suffered. Such a public acknowledgement of collective guilt might have been a nice gesture, but to believe that this alone would have really amounted to anything more than pure emotionalism is as innocent as the beliefs that permitted this injustice in the first place. Guilt cannot be absolved simply by saying "I'm sorry." As McLuhan writes, without some redeeming act of expiation or creative renewal, guilt and remorse are just forms of despair and sloth.

In recent years, affirmative action has been one form of attempting to expiate guilt and create new possibilities for African Americans, and through this, American society as a whole. Of course, this program is not without its flaws; many whites *and* blacks believe that it perpetuates the infantilization of blacks by giving them special breaks that have not been squarely earned. But any compensatory measure that makes amends by singling out one group and favoring it is bound to be seen by some as indulging that group or as reverse discrimination against other groups. The need thus far for social interventions that operate by strict quotas only speaks to the fact that expiation and creative renewal will not occur spontaneously. Indeed, the resistance to change is so strong that the past deeds meriting guilt and giving rise to such interventions are by no means ancient history. They are in tow to their present versions. Institutional racism is *still* rampant. For example, in the same year that there was discussion about a

government apology for slavery, the U.S. Department of Agriculture admitted to discriminatory loan practices that, while enabling white farmers to save their farms, led to the bankruptcy of many black farmers. The situation was so overtly racist that the Department of Agriculture was compelled to offer a settlement the following year to those affected by these practices. Yet even with this acknowledgement of guilt, the very fact that this case occurred goes to show that the white American treats his general condition of guilt like he treats his black complex: he is still too dissociated from it and still too innocent.

On the other side of the equation of what integration would require, there is the work the African American must undertake to integrate his white complex into his being. Any examination of race relations in America must take into account the role of both parties in collective infantilization. This, again, is the dynamic that occurs when one group projects the childhood aspects of the psyche onto another. To the extent that this latter group then "buys into" or internalizes this dynamic, it indeed becomes infantilized. Too many African Americans are still in the grip of infantilization, defeated in their outlook and ragefully exploiting and hurting their own people. *By not assimilating their own white complex, blacks unconsciously act out the role of the white exploiter, but upon themselves.* They believe they have no power to help themselves, that all the power rests with the white man. No doubt, inasmuch as money or ownership of resources is power, the facts show that much of the power in America does reside in white hands. But people with a sense of peoplehood are powerful too, and as civil rights leaders have pointed out, integrity of self is the most important power one can have. Hopefully the rest of society will recognize that the inner city needs more in the way of education and opportunities than just promises and good will, but waiting for this to happen cannot be an excuse for the people who live there to waste their energies and lives away. Psychological integration of their infantilizing white complex is the first and most critical step toward their empowerment.

The only real solution to America's race problems, as Jung repeatedly emphasized in regard to social issues, is consciousness of the shadow, of the disowned, projected parts of the personality and of one's own propensity toward evil. But this can only be practiced by individuals, as it is a matter of learning to live with awareness. Such learning can surely be fostered by good education—education that has depth—but by and large, it is not something that can be enforced collectively or top-down from the government through social programs. The solution to America's race problems is a matter of the individual's efforts to achieve integration within himself, and of many such efforts by many individuals. In the end, a nation can only be as conscious, integrated, and moral as its individual citizens.