



SHERROW O. PINDER

COLORBLINDNESS,
POST-RACIALITY, AND
WHITENESS IN
THE UNITED STATES



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In memory of Bruce Wendell Richmond
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Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction: The Epigrammatic Layout of the Argument	1
1 Conceptual Framework	15
2 Colorblindness and Its Problematics	37
3 Post-raciality and the Meaning of Race and Racism	63
4 Whiteness and the Future of Race Relations	89
Epilogue: Seeing through Colorblindness and Post-raciality	117
Notes	129
References	185
Index	209

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Introduction

The Epigrammatic Layout of the Argument

In the United States, race-conscious affirmative-action programs were enacted, in part, to address the complex genealogy of the unequal position of blacks and other racialized ethnic groups.¹ Recently, these programs have been subjected to an increasing disavowal from the neoconservatives and have encouraged, among them, a “politics of resentment,” operating under the notion of colorblindness. In other words, the triumphalist approbation is, if we look beyond the mere appearances of race “as we know it” in the United States, equal opportunities for all members of a society, regardless of race, would avail themselves. Colorblindness, in this sense, has retreated from its original usage, when in 1896, in the landmark case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Justice John Marshall Harlan asserted that the Constitution is colorblind and to deprive a person of her or his rights because of race was unconstitutional.² Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech shared the dream of a place and time when race would not determine that blacks and other nonwhites are *less* than human.³ Dr. King was acutely aware that race hamstrung and interfered with blacks and other nonwhites’ ontological vocation to be more fully human. In fact, when Homer Adolph Plessy was asked to leave the carriage for whites and ride in the carriage for blacks, Plessy and all the other blacks understood that blacks were not considered fully human.⁴ The French postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon also shared his own traumatic story in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which he explained that he was denied the full status of a psychiatrist when a white woman refused to see him as a doctor that was qualified to treat her because of his race.

On November 4, 2008, in the midst of the environmental crisis, rising income equality, a soaring budget deficit, political scandals, an unpopular president (George W. Bush), military invasions, profound economic downturns, and a McCain-Palin ticket that had no solution for the worst

economic crisis since the great depression, Barack Hussein Obama, a black man, was elected president of the United States. This was indeed an earth-shattering event. However, in spite of all these factors, the election of the Illinois senator has encouraged the rearticulation of colorblindness to reject the significance of race in determining social outcomes; and what is more, Obama's election has prompted the inaccurate idea that the United States is now a "post-racial" society.⁵ And even though "post-raciality" as a concept is not vividly delineated and is still obscure in its details, post-raciality simply means that, in the United States, race no longer matters and racism is disappearing. So the foremost thing to say about colorblindness and post-raciality, each in its distinctive occurrences, these days, is that they are ways of talking about America's current race relations, which, for reasons that I will explain in the following chapters, are justifiably worrisome.

What is more, is that reference to colorblindness and post-raciality enables us to discern a different mode of racism today in the United States, which I call racism without "seeing" race. In this book, my intention is not to provide a blueprint of race relations in the United States but to show how and why, in the United States, discourses such as colorblindness and post-raciality maintain the presumptive hegemony of whiteness. What I want to suggest is the urgent need to challenge these discourses and equally challenge the malignance of whiteness that shapes and upholds white entitlement. Without overstating the case, concepts such as colorblindness and post-raciality bring to the forefront the problematics of whiteness as the transcendental norm. Therefore, in opposition to colorblindness and post-raciality, we can start by recognizing the saliency of race, which is, in part, upheld by what the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser explains and defines as the ideological state apparatuses, including education, the church, the family, and other systems and institutions that are in place to benefit the dominant group.⁶

Given that colorblindness and post-raciality have evolved as separate and interconnected discourses from a racist ontology, epistemology, ethic, and ideology and are concerned with racial otherness, it is helpful to ask whether colorblindness and post-raciality can detach themselves from the legacy of normalized whiteness.⁷ And if not, do they, in different ways, reinforce, perpetuate, and uphold the presumptive hegemony of whiteness? Is white privilege concealed, approved, and maintained by the power structure in place, working to unremittably subjugate and disadvantage blacks and other nonwhites? Can racial differences be overcome and celebrated in meaningful ways? And even though the hope of "whiteness studies," a term championed by Liz McMillen,⁸ is for whites to recognize their privilege and power and to promote a kind of "antiracist whiteness," does

antiracist whiteness, in its attempt to challenge and undo racism, maintain normalized whiteness? It would make sense to say, then, that whiteness must be grounded and contextualized as a diachronic analysis of power and its specificity.

In this book, I will show that while colorblindness ignores all evidence that America's racialized systems and institutions disallow any form of genuine racial progress, it continues to uphold normalized whiteness. With the election of Barack Obama as the first black president of the United States, colorblindness has further infused the thinking that the United States has become a post-racial society. Post-raciality claims enthusiastically that in the United States, there is a "declining significance of race" and, therefore, racism is disappearing. Hence race and racism have been reconstrued to take on new meanings, including a racial false consciousness that turns racial discrimination into a defense of whites' entitlements and denies stratified racial differences. Given that the idea of race cannot be adequately understood or analyzed outside of whiteness, colorblindness and post-raciality, equally, fail to problematize race and racial meanings that determine the unequal position of blacks and other nonwhites. Colorblindness and post-raciality, each in its own prescription, then, are clearly about reinforcing and maintaining whiteness and white privilege. And even though antiracist whiteness exposes white privilege and paves the way toward antiracist projects whose primary aim is to put an end to racism in all its multidimensional forms of oppression, antiracist whiteness, in some ways, gives whites unrestricted freedom to assert and safeguard their interests without being overtly racist. In fact, antiracist whiteness does not free whiteness of its presumptive hegemony. Hence, for a colorblind or a post-racial America to be imagined, whiteness would have to be first fractured and stripped of its normalization. Given that whiteness is unlikely to be denormalized any time soon, a colorblind or post-racial United States remains an illusion. The task at hand, then, is for the United States to move in the direction of "postwhiteness," which is aimed at denormalizing whiteness.

The Extent and Organization of This Book

Given that this book is about how and why colorblindness and post-raciality, each in its separate manifestation, maintain the presumptive hegemony of whiteness, it is necessary first to elucidate the meaning of these three key theoretical concepts of colorblindness, post-raciality, and whiteness. Hence Chapter 1 conceptualizes the politics of colorblindness, post-raciality, and whiteness as separate as well as interlocking discourses

to subjugate blacks and other nonwhites. And while colorblindness and post-raciality might overlap in their scope, I will rely partly on critical race theory⁹ as a methodology to expose the problems posed by post-raciality, colorblindness, and whiteness for any kind of progressive race relations in the United States. More precisely, by drawing on what critical race theorists point to as the *ordinariness of racism*—that is, racism as a normal, everyday component of American society, then and now, I want to bring forward the complicity between colorblindness and racialized thought. I am using the term *racialized* to specify both the development and growth of racial meanings to racially unspecified relations, social practices, or groups and as a process that has the power to deconstruct and reconstruct racial groups and make known their meanings.

In fact, the proponents of colorblindness put forward that race-conscious affirmative-action programs are forms of “reverse racism,” which is an important impediment for improving race relations in the United States. Yet “reverse racism” is not sufficient to explain why many affirmative-action court cases have operated under the notion of colorblindness and are generally hostile to the fact that in the United States race matters.¹⁰ This, as I show in great detail in the chapter that follows, can be explained within the conceptualization of whiteness as a strategy of authority. And even though the concept of post-raciality implies a movement beyond race, it does not signify the disappearance of race.¹¹ Since “race can be ontological without being biological, metaphysical without being physical, existential without being essential, shaping one’s being without being in one’s shape,”¹² race as a signifier is pegged to other identity markers, including gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and religion. Nowadays, given that antiracist whiteness has reconfigured white identity to be racialized, I also, in the first chapter, want to problematize whiteness as not racialized but normalized and to show that whiteness is an identity as well as a structure.

Although the black British scholar Paul Gilroy finds comfort in the idea that “it is impossible to deny that we are living through a profound transformation in the way the idea of ‘race’ is understood and acted upon,”¹³ given the ontology and epistemology of race in the United States and its modalities of visual performance—that is, not what race is but what race does—I point to the dangers of assigning race to whites, substituting race for racism, and failing to analyze the indispensability of race and racism as two overlapping but sharply differentiated occurrences. What preoccupies me, then, is the question of how and why racism and white-skin privilege function in this society. Because whiteness remains invisible to those who inhabit it¹⁴ and are inhabited by it, racism, as a system in place that benefits whites, does understandably remain undetectable to those who cannot

experience it.¹⁵ Understandably, many whites think of themselves as not racist and may well invoke as evidence the fact that they voted for a black president. This kind of behavior is part of “white mythology.” Accordingly, racism, in this case, does not stem from a system of oppression but from ignorance. In other words, whites are racially sheltered and neither “know” nor understand the “other.” If they acquired some awareness and were able to realize that the “other” does not represent a threat to their way of being, they would certainly become more racially cognizant and sensitive to the plight of blacks and other nonwhites. In this sense, racism can be confronted with education. Not only does education enter into racism, but racism also penetrates education. For good reason, then, we must challenge the assumption that racism is initiated by ignorance.¹⁶

In terms of racism, however, even though many whites would argue that racism has nothing to do with them—“I am not racist,” in terms of “whiteness as property,” to use Cheryl I. Harris’s terms¹⁷—it is a grave challenge for most whites to disaffiliate themselves from whiteness and white privilege.¹⁸ Indeed, as feminist philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff puts it, “Whites cannot disavow whiteness.”¹⁹ Whiteness, in this context, is not only about having white skin; it is about being socialized to “experience one’s self as white”: the classificatory practice of race thinking daily and operating “to confer privilege to whites in numerous and significant ways.”²⁰ In light of Alcoff’s important insights on whiteness, it seems worthwhile to consider that whiteness is not always shaped, maintained, and advocated through understandable benefits; it is also imbedded in the discursive and nondiscursive practices that form and preserve whiteness. The African American philosopher and theorist W. E. B. Du Bois identifies these practices as the “public and psychological wages of whiteness.”²¹ And while whiteness, as an ontological neutral category, upholds the white subject as raceless and unmarked, blacks and other nonwhites are constantly racialized.

The appearance of race as the indicator for fluid and complicated processes of the racialization of identity markers, including gender, sexuality, religion, disability, and ethnicity—the illustration and definition of the “other” based on constructed differences—also constitutes a deeper problem. Nonetheless, at the forefront of America’s race relations, post-raciality suggesting that race has disappeared in the United States and colorblindness claiming not to see race, further reveals the reality of race in the United States. Blacks and other nonwhites, like Ralph Ellison’s “invisible man,” know the mounting provocation of being “seen” and yet not “seen.” It is important, then, for us to take into consideration the foundations of colorblindness and post-raciality in the United States.

Ever since the 1978 case, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*,²² race-conscious affirmative-action programs have been subject to a growing

rejection from all fragments of the American society, both liberal and conservative ideologues. From the reconsideration of these programs, the idea of colorblindness according to which race should be invisible began to surface. Let us just think in this respect about the misconstruction of Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech as promoting colorblindness. The neoconservatives, for one, fail to locate King's speech within the context of America's racism. President Ronald Reagan, for instance, misunderstood entirely King's speech when he appropriated it in his own political speech and claimed, "We want what I think Martin Luther King asked for. We want a color-blind society."²³ What is wrong with Reagan's announcement? Everything. Because want—in other words, desire—is not as straightforward as it seemingly appears, what we claim to want or desire is not always what we actually want or desire. In other words, we do not always act out of desire because our choices are not always preceded by a desire for or even an aversion to something or the other. And if we do act out of the cause of desire, then principles as something separate from the pursuit of desire vanish. In fact, President Reagan's attack on civil rights legislations and affirmative-action programs and his supply-side economics and welfare-reform policies impacted very negatively blacks and other nonwhites.²⁴

The new and insidious ways in which colorblindness tries to break loose from America's historical association with racial inequality returns, in fact, colorblindness to such a history. Chapter 2 shows how the declaration according to which "we don't see any color, just people" has paved the way to the colorblindness discourse. Colorblindness assumes, indeed, that the only way to combat the exclusion and degradation of blacks and other racial minorities is to promote equal rights that are blind to race. Yet colorblindness does not take into consideration the nature and functioning of institutionalized power.²⁵ Besides, even though racialized difference, in the name of multiculturalism and the politics of difference, is to be recognized and celebrated, visible display of differences is, for the most part, *de facto* intolerable.²⁶ As an example of how visibility plays a part in the intricacies of racist behavior, one can recall the recent much-debated discussion about whether Sikhs should be forced to take off their turbans during security checks at airports. In this respect, Pierre Bourdieu's warning that "aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent" stands as a theoretical reminder of how visible markers trigger effects.²⁷ Colorblindness, thus, by pretending not to see racial distinctions, needs to be reconsidered.

To make sense of colorblindness, it is necessary to erase the ghastly extremities of, for example, indentured servitude, slavery, the Jim Crow South, and the Japanese internment camps from America's history and buy into the rhetoric of equality of opportunity and free choice for all.

Doing so, one would arrive at very problematic conclusions, such as that blacks and other nonwhites remain poor in this society because they lack the entrepreneurial drive and Weber's work ethic wrought by the principles of discipline, sustainability, imagination, and hard work. Ideological discourses and concepts such as "model minority" and "honorary white" would not be critically assessed as racist. Because colorblindness maintains the status quo of racial inequality and allows many whites to claim uncritically that race-conscious policies such as affirmative action are a form of preferential treatment or "affirmative racism,"²⁸ it makes it difficult to develop strategies that underscore and challenge "whiteness *habitus*."

Whiteness does not obviously manifest itself in the same way as it did during such historical periods as indentured servitude, slavery, Reconstruction, the Jim Crow South, and the Japanese internment camps; yet it still pervades society in the philosophy, customs, and *habitus* of white privilege and entitlement. Colorblindness, then, would be viable as an ideological strategy for America's race relations if, and only if, the society was liberated from prejudices stemming from racial and cultural differences. This is not the case.²⁹ In spite of the neoconservatives' exposition that the United States should be colorblind, race continues to be configured and reconfigured in its constitution of knowledge and exercise of institutionalized power. And given that the concept of race originated and developed within the practice of racism, it is partly for this reason that Paul Gilroy is "against race"³⁰ and Kwame Anthony Appiah's fervent hope is that race was submerged "without trace."³¹ The so-called disappearance of race does not even send out a signal that racism is slowly ending. On the contrary, racism and its horrible predispositions continue to swamp the daily lives of blacks and other nonwhites.

The effectiveness with which colorblindness has undermined race-conscious equity programs does nothing but perniciously reinforce, perpetuate, and maintain the hegemony of whiteness and its discursive functions. Chapter 2 is thus devoted, in part, to how and why colorblindness perpetuates, reinforces, and upholds whiteness. In other words, given that whiteness is endemic to America's sociocultural underpinning and legacy—to its laws and political, social, and economic structures, to its epistemologies and every day customs—whiteness has assured implications for blacks and other nonwhites. It would be a mistake, then, to suppose that colorblindness works in opposition to normalized whiteness. In fact, in the United States, because blacks and other nonwhites are racialized and whites remain the norm, the erasure of race, for whites, is not a problem—it merely marks the conceitedness of whiteness.

The election of a black man, Barack Obama, as the president of the United States was indeed an astonishing reversal of America's history.³²

For many, Obama's victory signals a "face of hope," that the United States has entered an age of post-racial politics, where leadership and political debates are not hamstrung by race.³³ In fact, given the history of race in the United States, it was highly suspicious that most white Americans, operating amid commonsensical presumptions about race, would have voted for a black presidential candidate, but a remarkable presidential candidate happened to be black. Hence the idea was for Obama, as an exemplary Kantian subject, to be guided by practical reason and an understanding of human nature as shaped by the institutions and structures that surround it. Accordingly, Obama had to appeal to many whites' racial sensibilities. This is important because, unlike black leaders such as Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, Obama had to prove that he had no racial agenda and, thus, was surrounded by a mostly white staff. To put it simply, Obama had to work hard to make many whites feel safe and secure by insisting that race did not matter—"we" are all Americans. With this in mind, the "one America" rhetoric became part of his campaign strategy for president.

What exactly does "one America" mean? Should America be so imagined? The central concern in Chapter 3 is to look at mainstream America and show how, for this mostly white population, the election of Obama as the first black president of the United States represents the irrefutable proof that America has become a post-racial society. Well aware of the racist forces at work, Obama himself, in his political campaigns for the presidency, strategically distanced himself from issues pertaining to race and cautiously (too cautiously for some) avoided engagement with the issue of "race-based politics." Race-based politics has to do with supporting a black agenda, the kind that was taken up by the March 1972 Gary, Indiana, Black Political Convention.³⁴ When previous black candidates embraced race-based politics,³⁵ they barely received any white votes. In fact, in 2006, Joe Klein of *Time* magazine praised Obama for "transcend[ing] the racial divide so effortlessly"³⁶ and bringing together, in a mythical way, "the two worlds of race."³⁷ Hence the media exposure of Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ reverend Jeremiah Wright's angry outbursts in opposition to racism as a catalyst for increasing joblessness, poverty, crime, violence, lack of access to adequate health care, and educational underachievement in black communities were criticized by Obama. We can understand why Obama was quick to openly denounce Reverend Wright as "having a profoundly distorted view of [the United States]—a view that sees white racism as endemic."³⁸

Racism is a multifaceted schema of conditions, facts, activities, and practices. It is a device that is structural and is not reducible to merely an ideology, a core state of awareness through which we can rationally think our way. Racism has taken on many new forms and, as I mentioned

before, there is now the substitution of class or culture for race. Within the framework of colorblindness and post-raciality, racism continues to manifest itself in gruesome ways. What we have here, then, is racism without “seeing” race. Furthermore, not “seeing” race, or a deliberate withdrawal from visual perception, does not mean that one forgoes what one is always already socialized to think about race. And given that the *face* of race always already conjures up all kinds of preconceived ideas about the racialized body, which results in racial profiling, police harassment, and the killing of unarmed black men, we must diligently attend to race matters in the United States. I see police violence perpetrated toward unarmed black men as the ultimate expression of the bodiliness of racism—that is, a body located within racism. Such a concept lends itself to an embodied understanding of race and racism that is necessary for the interrogation of the “post” in post-racial insofar as it brings to the forefront the myth of the United States as a post-racial polity. One way around this, conceivably, is for us to confront and unravel the myth of a post-racial America.

In fact, if we want to understand what Senator Obama’s election evidentiary tells us about race in the United States, our questions must be the following: Why was it important for Senator Obama during his presidential campaigns to shy away from discussion of race and racial issues? What is the “post” in post-racial? Is Obama’s presidency propelling America to move toward racial progress? While these questions frame the discussion in Chapter 3, ultimately, I demonstrate that race and racism have taken on new meanings in the United States. A “new” form of racism rears its head above colorblindness and post-raciality and has been redirected to the “old” blatant one, which is to incessantly subjugate blacks and other nonwhites. In other words, the dialectical nature of racism simply means that the end of racism is, in a sense, a return to the beginning of racism, which is expressed through a variety of coded signifiers. The coding of race as culture or class does not depend on racial cataloging, which, in the past, for example, had produced a compendium of ill treatment toward blacks and other nonwhites.³⁹ Nowadays, it is noticeable that “we”—a “we” that believes itself to be “different” from the “them”—can speak about blacks and Mexicans as having deficient cultures and mark “them” as the “underclass,” even though the term “underclass” is itself a racist term.⁴⁰ In this context, we can see clearly why the logic of racism needs to be assessed in terms of its metonymic amplifications.

More recently, whiteness studies scholars have denounced racism and its multifaceted display of discriminatory practices as indeed harmful for progressive race relations in the United States. These scholars, rightfully so, have reversed the gaze from the racial object to the racial subject and have drawn attention to whiteness and white privilege. Even though there

are some difficulties in generating a satisfactory definition of “whiteness studies” because of the wide range of contributions by scholars from a variety of disciplines, a framework has emerged in academia that is associated with whiteness studies. This framework, by drawing attention to the valorization of whiteness and the constitutive factor of white-skin privilege, allows whiteness studies scholars to summon all whites to face up to their privilege. In fact, these scholars point to specific epistemologies, ideologies, and practices that are in place to systematically authorize and safeguard white privilege.⁴¹ Chapter 4 shows that whiteness studies makes whiteness the focus of their inquiry by giving serious attention to whiteness and white privilege.

Whiteness studies has extended itself to antiracist whiteness as a way to confront America’s racism and its multidimensional forms of oppressive practice. The problematic of antiracist whiteness, as I envision it in the present study, is how to deal with the inherent contradiction of what whiteness desires and what whiteness is—that is, unraced and unmarked. Given that whiteness positions blacks and other nonwhites as the object of racial discrimination, if the United States is to imagine itself as post-racial or colorblind, concepts such as antiracist whiteness, would have to be interrogated and problematized as reinforcing and upholding whiteness as a system of domination. And because whiteness continues to be the norm, a post-racial or colorblind United States of America remains illusory. For the United States, then, the duty is to move in the direction of postwhiteness, which would have to continuously work to dehegemonize and decenter whiteness. Postwhiteness is certainly a significant device for a critique of normalized whiteness and as a basis within which a postwhite subject can be posited. However, it is rather unlikely that whiteness will be denormalized any time soon.

Charles Gallagher suggested that a “transformation of whiteness” is occurring.⁴² This signals that whiteness is in some kind of “crisis.” What makes this a “crisis” in the first place is the uncorroborated idea that we are living in a period of a potential hindrance and challenge to white entitlement. I suppose, then, if whiteness is in the midst of a “crisis,” the idea that whiteness studies is to make whiteness visible to whites might be a form of recouping and mobilizing whiteness through whiteness studies. More accurately described, many whites are disciplined, in the Foucaultian sense, to think of themselves as entitled to higher paying jobs and a good education, and the tainted logic that upholds this feeling bears heavily on many whites going against race-based equity programs. Plainly, what cannot be avoided here is, to take my cue from the postcolonial theorist Gayatri C. Spivak, the unlearning of white privilege by considering it as a loss, which, in itself, constitutes a double recognition—that is, whites gaining a

certain kind of “other knowledge” that they, before the unlearning process, were not equipped to access because of their situated subjectivity. In other words, because whites are positioned as a part of the cultural norm, they are prevented from gaining a kind of “other knowledge,” not merely information that they have not yet acknowledged or received, but knowledge that they are not equipped to value.⁴³ Hence unlearning dominant systems of knowledge and representation, which, for Spivak is a “transformation of consciousness—a changing mindset,” inextricably comprises a dual acknowledgement.⁴⁴ This dual acknowledgement is necessary to dislocate white entitlement.

I want to conclude by stating that, in the United States, terms such as colorblindness, post-racial, and race neutrality, in different ways, have surfaced in order to assert and maintain whiteness’s presumptive hegemony. Albeit the fact that colorblindness, for example, is a right-wing production, it has powerfully upheld and saturated, in many ways, the discourses in which it perpetually flows. Yet within the particular discourse of race invisibility, colorblindness cannot be willingly resignified or designified and to picture that its perfidious connotations can be easily rearticulated into a seemingly empathetic idiom wrapped in an exhaustive self-congratulatory wishful thinking. Sentences such as “I don’t see color,” or “I judge everyone as an individual, everyone according to his or her merits,” need to be understood as mere postures. The prevalence of such a posture is, at best, a serious condition of Sartrean “bad faith,”⁴⁵ a form of self-denial and lying to oneself,⁴⁶ and, at worst, an “epistemology of ignorance,”⁴⁷ to use African American philosopher Charles W. Mills’s formulation. The locus of power, in this respect, legitimizes and extends the interests of those served by the ongoing effects of such operational power.⁴⁸ In the end, colorblindness, guided primarily by the idea of the nonappearance of race and racial meanings displays two problematics: first, it projects onto to blacks and other nonwhites another form of invisibility, a sense of absence, of nothingness, a nonhuman presence; and, second, colorblindness not “seeing” race, or an intentional lack of the visibility of race, does not mean that the sociality of race, what we are already socialized to think about race, would disappear. Instead of focusing on colorblindness as a seemingly corrective approach to America’s race problems, we need to dislodge structures and systems that are in place and working to disempower blacks and other nonwhites and elaborate a more complex understanding of white privilege. Insisting, then, that America should be colorblind and race does not matter only serves to bolster white supremacy insofar as it leaves whiteness normalized.⁴⁹ A form of critical analysis of “whiteness *habitus*,” in terms of what Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, explains and defines as genealogy, is more fundamental than ever. A genealogy of whiteness

would look at how the systems and structures inscribe and uphold white domination and bring blacks and other nonwhites face to face with their subordination.

In the midst of the Obama administration, the countless examples of white victimology as expressed in the ultraconservative Tea Party movement⁵⁰—calling for “taking the country back” and “returning the American government to the American people”—show that race and racial meanings are not transforming themselves any time soon.⁵¹ The disparaging and racial reaction to the Obama administration shows the importance of W. E. B. Du Bois’s Hegelian reading and rereading of race relations in the United States. For Du Bois, America’s race relations can only be appropriately understood if we conceptualize how whiteness as domination and nonwhiteness as subordination are constituted such as to uphold and maintain the color line (racial divide), which, for him, was the overreaching problem of the twentieth century. The permissible racial divide is still at work in the twenty-first century, in black ghettos and superghettos, prison systems, and urban schools. And in spite of the July 2009 Rasmussen report, claiming that race relations are improving, comments such as “Obama is too worried about black people and the poor”⁵² from right-wingers and demonstrations against President Obama’s health care reform bill show the converse. Some portrayals of President Obama on posters as outside of the human, as a monkey, or as an African witch doctor wearing tribal regalia are revealing cases in point illustrating what Charles W. Mills calls the *racial contract*, the way American society is structured “to bring in race.”⁵³ It is hard to remember a time when race matters have been subsided in the United States. By framing race-related issues in terms of colorblindness and post-raciality, practical approaches to deal with inequalities, stemming from race and racial thinking, are ignored and, as such, whiteness maintains its presumptive hegemony. In fact, we do not have to be colorblind to be blinded by the pervasiveness of racism and its multidimensional forms of oppression.

This book is by no means an exhaustive or indubitable account of race relations in the United States. Yet saying what this book is saying about race relations in the United States needs to be said. More details could be added, ideas refined, claims reformulated, and so forth, but in a novel and ambitious way, this study offers a real point of departure to construct the pedagogy of race that goes against colorblindness, post-raciality, and whiteness. The pedagogy of race is indeed unsettling because, for one, it makes possible the presumptive hegemony of whiteness, operating “socio-discursively through subjectivity and knowledge production,”⁵⁴ which whites, whether individually or collectively, have invested in, and profited from, to be fractured and split open so as to constitute a postwhite subject.

This unsettling hopefully will propel us to uncover something different, which would be the present and foreseeable future challenge for race politics in the United States.⁵⁵ Here, drawing implicitly on the legacy of the configuration of whiteness and its constituting and reconstituting of the salience of race in the United States, a rather different version of a color-blind or a post-racial America might begin to take shape.

Conceptual Framework

In an attempt to think about how operative terms such as colorblindness and post-raciality, in the face of the presumptive hegemony of whiteness, are today attempting to define race relations in the United States, the normative consensus is that race does not matter; discrimination on racial grounds no longer exists; and if you do work hard, opportunities would eventually avail themselves in spite of your race. So that a concept such as “model minority,” for instance, to designate Asian Americans, finds “natural” comfort in the colorblind and post-racial discourses. Indeed, it masks the disciplinary device that keeps “Asian” Americans in their place as politically docile bodies to be controlled and excluded from the mainstream politics.

In this discussion, I make eclectic use of various critical thinkers and bring together insights from political theory, political-sociology theory, American political development, whiteness studies, feminist theory, and especially, critical race theory, a new school of legal thought that developed within the auspices of African American studies.¹ In this discussion, critical race theory is used as an explanatory framework for examining the conspicuous challenge of the materiality of race and its implications in the United States.² In other words, it is a theoretical framework that I find useful to problematize and work against colorblindness, post-raciality, and normalized whiteness. In the work of critical race theorists such as Derrick A. Bell, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Mari J. Matsuda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, I find “a third space” for interpretation and counterhegemonic analysis of the foundational and institutional racial oppression that permits all other forms of discrimination—sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, Islamophobia, ageism, and xenophobia—to materialize.

Racism’s discursive practices and direct expressions within the discourses of colorblindness and post-raciality—each are in their separate orientation but, as is obvious together, have significant compatible relations