Scott Garber
725 K St. NE
Washington, DC 20002
202-675-0777 / 202-250-9599
scottgarber@scottgarber.com
148,000 words

White As Sin

Racial Haughtiness and Christian Responsibility

by

Scott Garber

Sample Chapters 1 & 2

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Genesis

Like many small towns in the northern United States, Cedarville, Ohio is not exactly a racial melting pot. More than ninety percent of its four thousand citizens are white. Fewer than one hundred African Americans make their home in Cedarville.

This community is also home to Cedarville University, a Baptist institution of a conservative stripe. With its enrollment of over 3,000 students, the school dramatically increases the number of people in Cedarville. It does not dramatically alter the local demographics, however, as minority representation in the student body is about the same as that of the town itself.

It strikes you as the kind of academic environment in which students might easily avoid multicultural issues. And perhaps they do, at least until they sign up for a class with the innocuous title *Romans & Galatians*. The professor for that course is my good friend, Chris Miller, and he has a few surprises up his sleeve.

Dr. Miller does, of course, direct his students to a deeper appreciation of the historic foundations of their faith, as found in these epistles. But he doesn't let them wiggle away from those passages that wrestle with the knotty ethnic tensions in the Early Church. In fact, you might even say that he kind of rubs their noses in it.

Most of the way through the semester, after weeks of exposure to the Apostle Paul's teaching about the unity of Jews and Gentiles, things come to a head in Galatians chapter two. There, in verses 11-14, Paul recalls his confrontation with Peter over that apostle's attempt to impose what Chris characterizes as "separate but equal facilities." Once his group of white, middle-class minds has quite rightly recoiled at the blatant hypocrisy of Peter's position, Dr. Miller poses this unnerving question: "So, then, why do we have two Baptist churches in Cedarville?"

Now, given the fact that Cedarville contains a far higher number of Baptists than most towns its size, two churches might not seem like

an excessive number. But by this time the students all know that the question has nothing to do with denominational distinctives or doctrinal disputes. There are two Baptist churches in town—one black and one white—separated by a hundred yards and hundreds of years of history.

What's most surprising about this surprising question is the very fact that it's surprising. It's not as if Dr. Miller found some Indiana Jones-style artifact in the caves of Qumran and unlocked an ancient, esoteric mystery. In fact, he would insist that the ethnic unity of the Church is one of the clearer and more pervasive teachings in all of the New Testament—so that "discovering" the disconnect between the biblical ideal and the experience of the American Church is rather like stumbling over the obvious. But if this incongruity is so obvious, how can it also be so invisible?

Clearly, the problem of the segregated church is not limited to Cedarville, Ohio. While the situation of these two Baptist churches may be hard to reconcile with Scripture, it is in perfect alignment with the racialized pattern of American church life. Cedarville's conundrum is merely a microcosm of a far more profound problem: why are there two Churches in America?

My interest in this question is not just academic; it is existential. I have been involved in multiracial/multicultural ministry since the early 1980's, long before it was trendy. Reconciling people in Christ across America's black/white divide has been my enduring passion. Unfortunately, however, the problem has proven to be enduring as well. A half century after the Civil Rights Movement, when other major social institutions have become relatively more integrated, the color-coded Church remains an anachronistic embarrassment to its founder and Lord.

Frustrated by the stubborn recalcitrance of this divide, I embarked upon a serious historical investigation, hoping that a deeper understanding of how we got into this mess would shed some light on how we could get out of it. Not surprisingly, I found no shortage of explanations for our ecclesiastical apartheid. The segregated Church has been shaped by a myriad of events, personalities, politics, institutions, economics, theological perspectives, and social psychology—all played out over the course of several centuries.

True enough, but still unsatisfying. What I really wanted to know was: what caused these causes? I continued to dig, and as my understanding increased, so too did my unease. Indeed, I was often tempted to exercise my white privilege, to simply turn my head and look away. But somewhere deep inside I wanted to see how our past would affect me if I allowed my spirit to steep in it.

After nearly an entire month immersed in the study of lynching, I experienced a brutal epiphany. Soul weary from so much sadistic savagery masquerading as justice, I came across an old-time photo of a large, sturdy tree. From one of its branches hung a noose. Dangling forlornly from that noose was a charred, black body.

The image itself was not unlike so many others I had seen. But on that day one more horrific image proved one too many. All of a sudden the sepia scene began to melt into an impressionistic blur, and my chair began to quake, rhythmically convulsed by my disconsolate weeping. What seemed like a whole box of tissues later, my sobbing finally subsided—but not my sorrow.

My sorrow endured, in part, because it's not easy to walk away from such a prolonged exposure to inhumanity. More importantly, there came a point at which lynching became more than awful; it became shameful as well. You see, the perpetrators had a profile. They were white, American, and Christian. And as much as I wanted to believe that I wasn't like them, I could not deny that I was them.

Lynching did not just come out of nowhere; it was not a one-off atrocity. This extraordinary evil was part and parcel of the far more ordinary but no less sinister reality of white-on-black American life— a reality long characterized by dominance, ill will, cruelty, belittlement, and marginalization. Lynching may have been the terrorist tip of the iceberg, but the tip of the iceberg has something in common with the rest of the iceberg. It's all ice.

But what was that ice? What could have led us whites to initiate, perpetuate, or even tolerate the evils of racial imposition and oppression? Given the consistency of this historical pattern, we could hardly have been acting out of character. But wait… if we were not acting *out* of character, then we must have been acting *according* to character. Which means that, in order to do these despicable things, we must have already been the kind of people who would do them.

That terrible thought sent a shiver through my soul. But then came the even more unsettling corollary questions. If we were once that kind of people, how do we know that we are not still that kind of people? What if racial injustice is not just the product of white *activity* but of white *identity* itself?

As is often the case, the answer to a problem remains elusive only until you ask the right questions. If these are the right questions, then to conceive of the segregated church as simply the product of the things we have done is to miss the point. If these are the right questions, then to imagine that we can repair this institution by doing those things differently is naïve. If these are the right questions, then fixing the segregated Church must start with fixing the folks who segregated the Church.

Fast-forward several years to the present day. Having taken the time to carefully examine the moral pathology of our racial dysfunction, I have, at last, settled on an answer to this question. That spiritual diagnosis and its accompanying treatment plan are the stuff of this book.

This analysis is not for the faint of heart. *White As Sin* confronts the social order in America. It indicts white Christianity on multiple counts. It challenges the very benignity of white identity. And, last but certainly not least, it raises uncomfortable questions about you and me.

If my ultimate goal for this book is to foment racial reconciliation, why this nearly exclusive focus on white responsibility and white change? I realize, of course, that our current racial dysfunction involves a relationship, and that relational difficulties are rarely one-sided. So, I'll stipulate that African Americans can and should contribute to racial healing. Having spent some eight years in black churches and even more time in multiracial congregations, I'm not ignorant of that potential. So, why this "whites only" approach?

Well, first, this is a book about racial haughtiness. I repeat, this is a book about racial haughtiness. Second, I believe it's necessary to remove the beam from our own eye before addressing the flip side of the interracial dynamic. Third, I'm not at all sure that I have the credibility in the broader black community to be the point person for a discussion of the role African Americans should play in racial healing. Fourth, this subject matter requires some extremely heavy

lifting from the white majority. Assigning any specific role to others in the reconciliation matrix may look like an exit ramp to those wishing to mitigate their own moral discomfort. Fifth, it is my sincere hope and prayer that this strategy will, perhaps indirectly, provoke a response from African Americans. As whites learn to deal with the legacy of whiteness and to demonstrate the fruits of true repentance, I believe that many of their black brothers and sisters will rise up to meet them in a healing place.

Every conversation takes place within a larger conversation, and this conversation is no exception. When I began writing this book, I wasn't quite sure where this important conversation about racial haughtiness fit into the contemporary conversation about race in America. Back then many pundits were wondering aloud if we might be entering a post-racial era. Less than a third of all whites thought that racism was a major problem.[1] The majority believed that the country had already done everything necessary to ensure equal rights for blacks.[2]

But then came Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and, most notably, Michael Brown. That police shooting of a young black man in Ferguson, Missouri, the roiling protests that followed, and the ongoing attention given to the plight of African Americans in the justice system began to erode the white fantasy of a post-racial society. Freddie Gray's death while in police custody and the urban chaos that engulfed portions of Baltimore further undermined the wishful narrative. Weeks later a disturbed white supremacist named Dylann Roof opened fire during a midweek Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, killing nine. Chicago police took a year to release the video of an officer shooting Laquan McDonald sixteen times. Perhaps we were not one big, happy, colorblind family after all.[3]

---

[1] "Across Racial Lines, More Say Nation Needs to Make Changes to Achieve Racial Equality." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press RSS. August 5, 2015. Accessed December 9, 2015. http://www.people-press.org/2015/08/05/across-racial-lines-more-say-nation-needs-to-make-changes-to-achieve-racial-equality/.

[2] Ibid.

[3] I believe that the recent spate of highly-publicized killings are collectively representative of a racial injustice deeply rooted in our history and still

An occasional injustice might be dismissed as a mere exception to the rule of racial equality. But now that every spectator is a cameraman, these "exceptions" are starting to seem far less exceptional. As the extent of institutionalized injustice has come out of the shadows and into the light of day, the aggrieved have strengthened their resolve and are making their voices heard. They have disrupted transportation and commerce, brought down a Missouri university president and Chicago police chief. The constant rollout of new injustices and emboldened responses has kept the media fixated, bringing long-forgotten and disquieting images of racial unrest back into white living rooms.

Forced to face a phenomenon that is too big to be ignored, whites are not only beginning to see what is happening, some of them are actually beginning to *see* what is happening. In fact, in the aftermath of Ferguson, *et al.*, polling confirms that white sensibilities about the state of race relations in America have changed rather dramatically.

In 2014 whites believed that race relations were "generally good" vs. "generally bad" by a margin of 60% to 37%. By mid-2015 that number had practically reversed itself, only 33% saying that race relations were "generally good," versus 62% who disagreed.[4] During

---

present in contemporary society. I have cited these examples, however, more because of their notoriety than because they are in every case the clearest and most unimpeachable examples of official misconduct. Indeed, the outcry they have provoked is only partly a result of the particular injustice alleged in each case and perhaps to a far greater degree a reaction to the long and unseemly legacy they represent.

[4] "New York Times/CBS News Poll on Race Relations in the U.S." The New York Times. July 22, 2015. Accessed December 9, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/23/us/document-new-york-timescbs-news-poll-on-race-relations-in-the-us.html. This is the detailed polling data related to the article: "A Growing Divide on Race." The New York Times. July 22, 2015. Accessed December 9, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/07/23/us/race-relations-in-america-poll.html. A year later a Washington Post/ABC New poll asked the same question and got essentially the same answer. 63% of whites characterized race relations as "generally bad," while 32% answered "generally good." See: Krissa Thompson and Scott Clement, "Poll: Majority of Americans think race relations are getting worse," The Washington Post, July 16, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/more-than-6-in-10-adults-say-us-race-relations-are-generally-bad-poll-

that same year (2014-2015) the percentage of whites affirming that further changes were needed in order to achieve equal rights rose from 39% to 53%.[5] In 2013 only 30% of whites felt that the criminal justice system in the United States was biased against blacks. Two years later 44% believed that such a bias existed.[6] From 2010 to 2015 the share of whites who classified racism as a "big" problem increased from 27% to 44%.[7]

Why does this change in white perceptions matter? Simply put, it's easier to offer answers to questions that people are actually asking. And these days people are not just wondering *what* is happening with regard to race relations. They're also wondering *why*, which is precisely the focus of this book.

But while the times may be a changin', that change is far from wholesale. Yes, 44% of whites now believe that the criminal justice system is biased against blacks. But 46% still believe that it is not. Yes, 44% now consider racism to be a big problem. But an actual majority doesn't think it's nearly so important. So, we dare not exaggerate the extent of this evolution.

Moreover, this rather significant statistical change remains somewhat superficial. Just as in the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement, many whites find themselves sympathetic to the current outrage. But sympathy is not enough.

Sympathy won't solve our racial dysfunction, because sympathy is a response to somebody else's problem. The premise of this book, however, is that our racial dysfunction is not just a black problem; it is a white problem as well. And it is a white problem, not just because we're so incurably compassionate or even because disgruntled blacks

---

indicates/2016/07/16/66548936-4aa8-11e6-90a8-fb84201e0645_story.html. Accessed on 7/18/2016.

[5] Pew Research Center, Across Racial Lines, "More Say Nation Needs to Make Changes to Achieve Racial Equality."

[6] New York Times/CBS News Poll on Race Relations in the U.S., July 23, 2015, 11. This poll question was not asked in 2014.

[7] "Across Racial Lines, More Say Nation Needs to Make Changes to Achieve Racial Equality." The change from 2014 to 2015 was itself significant, as indicated by graphics published by Pew, but the exact year-to-year statistical breakdown was not included in this article in written form.

inconvenience the exercise of our hegemony. It is a white problem, because we have been and continue to be substantively responsible.

Sympathy is an appropriate response when someone suffers a misfortune that is beyond your control. But let's just say that you are in some way responsible for the creation or continuance of that misfortune. Let's just say that you could alleviate or end that misfortune, but you don't. Under those circumstances sympathy becomes a wholly *inappropriate* response—substituting a sentimental solidarity for real justice, relational healing, and remedial action.

My sincere hope is that this burgeoning awareness will allow us to go beyond superficiality, beyond sympathy, beyond Band-Aid solutions that cover up the effects of the problem while ignoring its cause. Let's begin, then, by identifying that cause—as it exists in our history, as it exists in our society, as it exists in our churches, and as it exists in our shared white identity.

<u>Chapter 2</u>

Original Sin

In March of 2008 then Senator and presidential candidate, Barack Obama, found himself besieged by controversy on account of racially-charged remarks made by his pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright. His candidacy in serious jeopardy, the future president seized the moment with a bold national address on the subject of race, in which he referred to slavery as "America's original sin."[8] The extensive media coverage that ensued forever forged Mr. Obama's association with that catchphrase, but he is certainly not the first or the last to make use of this theological terminology to stress the foundational role that slavery played in defining our racial reality.

Given the seminal nature of this historic transgression, the designation of slavery as our "original sin" has an undeniable resonance. It's important to note, however, that American slavery did not just magically appear out of the ether. That "original" sin also had an origin—and not just in the Garden of Eden but in the formative cultural, religious, and moral developments that defined the white American psyche.

We are about to embark upon a forensic examination of that inner reality, an investigation that will cast "America's original sin" in a somewhat different light, one that is actually more akin to the traditional theological use of the term.[9] In theological parlance *original sin* refers not so much to an original sinful act but to the

---

[8] "A More Perfect Union." Obama Speech on Race at the National Constitution Center. Accessed December 9, 2015. http://constitutioncenter.org/amoreperfectunion/.

[9] The fact that I am employing the term "original sin" in a somewhat different way than others is not intended as a critique or correction of their usage. We are dealing with a metaphor, one that could be legitimately applied in a variety of settings. I'm simply taking advantage of a theological term that has come into the popular usage to build a bridge to the principle theme of this book.

condition of sinfulness that resulted from that act and henceforth adhered to the entire human race. And that is precisely the way I am using this metaphor of *original sin*—to denote a sinful condition, an immoral malware embedded in the very root directory of white identity. This errant orientation not only led us into slavery; it has led us into temptation at every stop along our long and checkered history of racial domination.

As we review that history, it will become abundantly clear that the sin that drove us to slavery was not co-terminus with the practice of slavery. The segregated Church is a case in point. Slavery certainly gave rise to and gave shape to the segregated Church as we know it today. But long before slavery created an *institutional* segregation in the Church, a *de facto* segregation was already present in the Church.

America's original sin neither began nor ended with slavery. Even now, a century and a half after the Emancipation Proclamation, the segregated Church still holds us in bondage. Even now, long after the demise of Jim Crow, the Church continues to pursue "separate but equal." Landmark legislation can free us from social conditions, but it cannot free us from ourselves. Something drove us to slavery, and I believe that something still drives us today.

What is that driving force? I would maintain that the ultimate explanation for (and solution to) our racial dysfunction is not merely historical or institutional or sociological or psychological; it is spiritual. Slavery was, without a doubt, the incubator from which an entire series of segregated social ills emerged. Nevertheless, all of these historical symptoms, including slavery, can be traced back to a common moral pathogen.

Not surprisingly, socio-historical treatments of racial oppression do not typically frame this issue in such openly moralistic terms. They do, however, recognize a *pattern* of white domination moving episodically through time. In order to explain such a pattern they must postulate the existence of a common, psycho-social constant—a phenomenon capable of generating generation after generation of likeminded racial imposition. They typically locate this ongoing dynamic in both our institutions as well as in our collective psyche. They call it racism.

Racism is very, very real. Unfortunately, however, talking about racism is often surreal—first, because its connotations overpower its

denotations, and, second, because those denotations are themselves problematic. As a result, the *language* of racism poses some significant problem for our investigation of "America's original sin."

Let's think first about its denotations. For some people racism equals anti-black animus. For others it can also be anti-white or anti-any-color animus. Some hold that only whites can be racists; others insist that it is an equal-opportunity misdeed. Some believe that slavery caused racism; others think it's the other way around. Some see racism as primarily an institutional reality; others see it as primarily an individual, attitudinal matter. Some think that you have to actually discriminate against others to be a racist; others think that you're a racist if you're inclined to discriminate against others, even if you don't actually do so.

The term *racism* ends up being applied to virtually every aspect of our racial dysfunction. It might refer to either the cause or the effect of that dysfunction—or both. Depending on the person or the community with whom you are speaking; *racism* may be an ideology, an attitude, a social custom, a practice, a perspective, a tool of power, a structure of power, something else I forgot to mention, or any combination of the above.

Nevertheless, a lot of people still think they know what *racism* means. And maybe they do know what it means—to them. But it's a lot harder to know what *racism* means to anybody else, let alone to everybody else.

As if this lexical morass were not sufficiently problematic, consider the connotations of this terminology. Racism has acquired a nearly singular status in the pantheon of social transgressions. People will readily admit to having weaknesses, even admit to being sinners. But to be a racist is to be a pariah, making it basically an inadmissible flaw. Note that even the KKK wears hoods.

Racism is not even the kind of thing that you can be "working on." People might tell you how failure has made them more patient or even share their battles with addiction. But nobody's going to crow about being somewhat less racist this year than last.

Though we can't agree about the meaning of racism, we do agree about what it means to be a racist. We tell ourselves: "To be a racist is to be a terrible person, and since I am not a terrible person, I am not a racist."

The erudite can and do debate the "proper" definition of racism, a discussion that can be helpful for exploring the nature of the phenomenon itself. But if anyone thinks they can, by force of logic or linguistics, control how others hear and react to this terminology, I fear they are mistaken. Facilitating a collective conversation on race is already challenging enough without the additional complication of self-defeating semantics.

For the purposes of this book, *racism*-speak is particularly unhelpful. I'm trying to talk about racial dysfunction in a therapeutic way—that is, in a way that promotes healing. And in order to have that curative conversation we must first agree on the nature of the problem. If, however, that agreement requires us to: 1) share a common cognitive and affective response to this language and 2) admit that I/we are in some sense racist, then that effort is likely to be about as successful as it has been thus far.

Wary of the pitfalls of *racism*-speak and sensing the opportunity to cast this discussion in a fresh light, I have decided not to rely upon *racism* as an explanatory principle.[10] Mine is a spiritual thesis, and it therefore seems more appropriate to present it in the language of biblical morality. Admittedly, this approach introduces its own set of challenges. My hope, however, is that a less-encumbered nomenclature will help open our hearts and minds us to a significant paradigm shift.

So, if we eschew *racism* as the most apt descriptor for "America's original sin," and if we refuse to reduce that sin to the practice of slavery—then just what are we talking about? What is this immoral constant that has dogged us throughout our history? What spiritual phenomenon defined America's racial beginnings, fuels our racial present, and helps explain what happened in between?

---

[10] I'm not saying that it's wrong or impossible to address the moral aspect of this problem in the language of racism. Various Christian writers have addressed the "sin of racism," and I applaud their moral acumen. (For an excellent example, see: Jim Wallis, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*.) For the reasons already cited, however, it does seem to me that the language of racism complicates rather than facilitates that discussion. Though I do not employ this terminology in the course of my own exposition, the language of racism will, naturally, appear in citations and in my interaction with the thoughts of others.

I have to admit that when it first came to me, I was a bit underwhelmed. A proper theory, it seems, benefits from a name with a certain scientific cachet. As explanations for human behavior go, however, this one sounded more like something from a Charles Spurgeon sermon than from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

It wasn't exactly a syndrome or even a psycho-social something or other. It didn't end in *ism* or *osis*. It was just a plain, old, garden-variety sin—and not even one of those that gets a lot of airtime. It was just haughtiness.

At least that's what I thought at first, that it was "just" haughtiness. But a prolonged test drive of that hypothesis forever altered my thinking, because there is nothing mere or trivial or ordinary about racial haughtiness. Mixing haughtiness with racial identity is like mixing *Mentos* with *Diet Coke*. It's going to erupt—overflowing into supremacy, domination, and oppression.

Haughtiness is, of course, a form of pride. But the term carries with it some very specific nuances that are useful for our purposes. To be *haughty* is to be "scornfully and condescendingly proud." (The American Heritage Dictionary) Haughtiness is not just how one thinks about oneself. It bolsters that self-assessment by debasing others, displaying an "arrogant superiority to and disdain of those one views as unworthy." (WordNet 3.1) In certain contexts pride might seem justifiable or even admirable, but not haughtiness. Its inherently superior pretensions render it uniformly ignoble.

For some readers, such an unapologetic emphasis on morality might be unwelcome or at least unfamiliar. After all, race relations is a phenomenon that social scientists typically address in the language of sociology, psychology, politics, and economics.

My purpose, however, is not to substitute a spiritual treatment of the subject for a scientific one. Rather, I'm offering a dedicated lens through which we can examine and appreciate the phenomenon of evil in racial identity. Sin is real, and it matters. But sin does not exist in a vacuum. I have depended heavily on the social sciences to help me think about how that evil was shaped by its environment and how it shaped that environment in return.

Other readers might welcome such a moral critique but worry that my emphasis on *personal* morality is just another attempt to privatize

and spiritualize a problem with important institutional and societal implications. As the argument of this book unfolds, I trust that my overall strategy will become more evident. But let me say a word up front about the nexus between the individual and corporate aspects of this problem.

I do, indeed, stress the need for personal moral engagement and response. In part, that's because I'm convinced of its relevance. But it's also because my particular white audience is generally quite attuned to matters of individual morality, whereas it exhibits distinct antistructuralist tendencies.[11] Therefore, trying to engage them on this issue primarily at the collective and institutional level is like trying to pick up a plastic spoon with a magnet. Or perhaps like trying to pick up a magnet with the same polar end of another magnet.

Calls for a collective response may feel prophetically satisfying, but it doesn't do much good to talk about what "we" must do, unless you can convince people that they belong to the "we." Moreover, if "we" effectively refers to the cohort of white people who are currently prepared to do battle against haughtiness, then that is not an easy group to identify, let alone to mobilize. If *White as Sin* is to have any enduring impact, I must give readers a viable way to respond to our racial reality at a level where they can exercise some control.

In reality, the individual and the collective aspects of this issue, while certainly distinguishable, are not easily divisible. The collective psyche is the product of the individual psyches of which it is comprised. On the other hand, those individual psyches are shaped by the collective psyche in which they are nurtured. Racial haughtiness, in particular, is inherently corporate in nature, and the social ills that stem from it create self-perpetuating institutional dynamics. Those institutional issues cannot be resolved simply by personal penitence— but neither can they be resolved without personal penitence.

I not only want to *address* the institutional aspects of this problem; I want to fundamentally *alter* that conversation. The current range of responses to white social advantage are stuck in a rut—a rut created

---

[11] For a more thorough discussion of this issue, along with polling information, see: Emerson, Michael O., and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 76 ff.

by well-worn narratives. And all of those narratives are operating under the influence of racial haughtiness.

The first of these narratives sees white advantage as *slipping*. According to this mentality, whites are losing their hegemony, and that is reason for alarm. Our efforts to address racial injustice have been an overreach, resulting in reverse discrimination. Restoring the proper equilibrium would require us to do less rather than more.

A second narrative conceives of white advantage as *static*. That is, now that we have created the proper legal and structural framework for racial justice, the important work of reform is done. What remains is to more or less manage the status quo.

The problem is that the social equilibrium we are managing is not equal. As a result, whites must occasionally cede small portions of their advantage (whether cynically or compassionately), in order to ameliorate the most egregious effects of that inequality. These minor calibrations, combined with a commitment to "better race relations," serve to mitigate the frustration of the disenfranchised and to keep the societal boat from rocking.

The third narrative aspires to white advantage as *shared*. Recognizing that whites enjoy a disproportionate share of social wellbeing, this narrative embraces sharing as an ethical ambition rather than a necessary "evil" required to sustain the status quo. Because the redistribution of social goods on this scale requires a mechanism more robust than mere philanthropy, subscribers to this narrative are generally more amenable to governmental intervention.

The often acrimonious tension between these three narratives serves to obscure just how much they actually have in common. For these competing strategies are actually united by a shared presupposition—*the appropriate permanence of white advantage*. Those who are actively trying to shore up its slippage are certainly the most straightforward advocates of this dogma. But even those who are willing to share their advantage are rarely thinking in terms of actual social parity. They, too, assume that whites will continue to control the nature and extent of that sharing from their perpetual position atop the racial hierarchy.

As a result of this unintentional ideological collusion, every one of these three narratives ends up being the opposite of equality. No

matter which approach dominates, white hegemony remains a categorical imperative and an uninterrupted social reality.

The key element in the phrase "the appropriate permanence of white advantage," is the word "appropriate." What would make an unequal racial hierarchy seem "appropriate?" Well, the material benefits we whites derive from social dominance would certainly make it attractive. But there is a considerable difference between "attractive" and "appropriate." I am convinced that what ultimately makes white dominance seem appropriate is the sin of racial haughtiness. Haughtiness breeds a subtle sense of deservedness that arises, not from a rational *calculation* of worthiness (supremacist arguments notwithstanding) but from an immoral *presumption* of greater worthiness.

As long as this institutionalized inequality seems appropriate at some level, we can never really get rid of it. It will morph; it will evolve; it will shape shift; but it will not go away— because it is ultimately a manifestation of a racial identity steeped in the sin of haughtiness. That's why the answer to our racial dysfunction must begin with a moral accounting.

It would sure help if we had an understanding of contemporary whiteness and the extent to which it is defined by racial haughtiness. But white people trying to comprehend whiteness is a bit like fish trying to comprehend water. We suffer from a basic lack of distance between the knower and the known. Granted, we have a capacity for self-perception that fish lack. But we also have a capacity for self-deception that fish lack, and if the latter proves more powerful than the former, well…

There may, however, be a way for us to create the necessary distance between ourselves and the object of our contemplation, even when we are that object. I say that, because what we are today is the product of what we've been becoming. So, if we look backward, trace the development of white identity over time, and see what our racial identity has been becoming—we'll have a pretty good idea what whiteness looks like today.

That sweeping survey of "America's original sin" begins in the very next chapter, as we examine the rise of haughtiness in the European mindset from which our Founding Fathers drew their cultural heritage.