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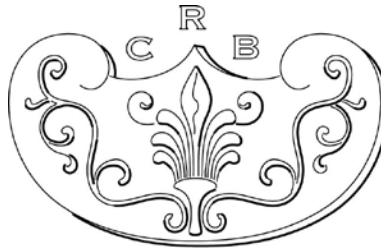
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Essay by David Azerrad

THE SOCIAL JUSTICE ENDGAME

TO THE CASUAL OBSERVER, THE PRO-fessed goals of contemporary identity politics appear unassailably virtuous. Who, after all, wouldn't want to build a more inclusive democracy? How could anyone oppose granting rights to the oppressed, the marginalized, and the stigmatized? As a student once asked me incredulously, "Isn't it better to love than to hate?"

The appeal of identity politics is further reinforced by its powerful morality tale. After confronting us with the injustices visited upon women, black people, homosexuals, and any number of other victimized groups, social justice arbiters then claim for themselves the exclusive right to mete out justice. On one side are the baddies, who are at best unaware of America's structural inequities and their own unearned privilege, or at worst just plain bigoted. On the other side are the good guys, the identitarian coalition of the woke and the oppressed fighting for social justice. You're either a racist or an anti-racist. *Tertium non datur.*

Cracks, however, soon begin to appear in the colorful mural of identity politics. The progress of social justice, it turns out, always comes at the expense of certain core natural and civil rights. Freedom of association had to be sacrificed to end discrimination. Free speech will suffer the same fate if hate speech is to be eradicated. As will due process rights

for men accused of rape if #MeToo has its way. More "rights" for more people means fewer rights for some people.

The language of love and inclusion is particularly deceptive as it gives cover to a deeply intolerant mindset. Like all ideologues, identitarians brook no dissent. They are quick to silence and impugn the motives of those who disagree with them. They periodically indulge in Two Minutes Hate against any number of Emmanuel Goldsteins who deviate from the accepted script when speaking of aggrieved identity groups. They reserve particular fury for women and minorities who eschew the victim mentality and dare to think for themselves. Tolerance, in truth, is extended only to those who already subscribe to the tenets of identity politics. And so the demand for diversity produces mind-numbing conformity—as is readily apparent in our institutions of higher indoctrination.

The manifold contradictions of identity politics invite us to look beyond the misleading kumbaya rhetoric and examine its actual goals. There is one question in particular the identitarians are careful to avoid, as it goes to the heart of their project. Identity politics has identified the most privileged, bigoted, and therefore problematic identity groups, who together prop up the oppressive American regime: whites, but also men and the non-LGBTQ (i.e., straights and so-called "cisgen-

der" people who believe their biological sex aligns with their identity). These oppressor groups intersect to produce the straight white cis male, who is blamed for almost all of the world's ills. Identitarian social justice, like all forms of justice, demands the guilty be punished. What, then, is to be done with this Great Straight White Cis Male Satan and the defining elements of his identity?

Statistical Parity

MANY REASONABLE PEOPLE WILL surely object to such an incendiary way of framing the issue. There is no movement calling for the elimination of straight white cis men—much less of straights, whites, men, or cisgender individuals. Journalist Sarah Jeong's old tweets—#cancelwhitepeople—have thankfully not yet caught on.

Indeed, in their public presentation, the identitarians join most progressives in simply calling for the various groups that comprise our diverse nation to be represented in all realms of life in proportion to their percentage of the total population. By this logic, social justice will culminate not in the elimination of any one group, but in a world where roughly 96% of the desirable positions in American life are held by cisgender heterosexuals, 60% by non-Hispanic whites, and 49% by men (or

whatever the percentages may be in the future given changing demographics).

"A truly equal world," Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg explained in *Lean In* (2013), "would be one where women ran half our countries and companies and men ran half our homes." Long before her, Martin Luther King, Jr., had already posited in *Where Do We Go from Here* (1967) that "if a city has a 30% Negro population, then it is logical to assume that Negroes should have at least 30% of the jobs in any particular company, and jobs in all categories rather than only in menial areas."

Widespread tacit acceptance of this principle of statistical parity fuels our national obsession with leveling disparities and closing gaps of all kinds. "Only 35 percent of African American lesbian and bisexual women have had a mammogram in the past two years, compared to 60 percent of white lesbian and bisexual women," the Center for American Progress has noted with alarm.

Identitarians increasingly permit us only one explanation for these disparities: bigotry. Any other explanation—whether it be biological, cultural, volitional, or stochastic—is *prima facie* ruled out and denounced as racist, sexist, homophobic, or any of the other terms used to stymie inquiry and silence dissent. Ibram X. Kendi's reductive treatment of this subject in his best-selling *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (2016) is revealing of the broader identitarian mindset. Kendi, a historian at American University and the youngest person ever to win the National Book Award for nonfiction, opens his massive tome by defining as racist "any concept that regards one racial group as inferior or superior to another racial group in any way" (emphasis added). Readers are therefore forbidden at the outset from making comparative generalizations of any kind in any area, and Kendi encourages us to apply his dogmatic pronouncements on race to other protected classes.

Kendi is, in effect, demanding that we silence our rational faculties. He wants to confine the mind to a chaotic world of particulars, never allowing it to ascend to the general where it might recognize patterns and aggregate differences. Not just reason, but humor too must be sacrificed at the altar of Kendian anti-racism. No Frenchman, Jamaican, and Chinaman—which is not the preferred nomenclature—may ever walk into a bar again.

Kendi's argument rests on two dogmatic assertions. The first is that race is in its entirety a social construct. There cannot be any genetic or cultural component to explaining

racial disparities. His refusal to entertain such arguments is understandable. Discredited racial science has in the past been used to defend a hierarchy of races and, in the extreme, to justify slavery and genocide. But to acknowledge the biological dimension of race is not to endorse such sinister practices per se. Natural human equality is not based on natural human homogeneity. Natural rights are no more predicated on genes than they are on I.Q., height, birth order, or income. One can permit science to acknowledge the biological dimension of race, and social science to study the cultural dimensions of human diversity, while upholding the dignity of man and the civic equality of all Americans.

Most Americans, myself included, would prefer not to talk about such matters. The findings of science are liable to misinterpretation. They are bound to offend some and stoke the pride of others. But the ever-more ubiquitous principle of statistical parity, and the ever-more draconian measures taken to enshrine it, leave us no choice. Science must be called in to defend the republican prin-

Identity politics invites us to embrace racism, but to do so in the name of anti-racism.

ciple of equal rights under equal laws for all citizens, regardless of life outcomes. This can be done in a responsible way, making an allowance for nature while eschewing biological determinism.

Kendi's second unexamined and unproved assumption is that "All cultures, in all their behavioral differences, are on the same level." They are all "equal in all their divergences," in his Orwellian turn of phrase. Why, then, do they differ so markedly in life outcomes for their members? For Kendi, there can only be one explanation: racial discrimination. It "is the sole cause of racial disparities in this country and in the world at large." As he told the *New York Times*: "when I see racial disparities, I see racism." Oddly, nowhere in his 500-page tome does he ever see racial disparities between Asians and whites. If he did, he would have to conclude that America is in fact an Asian supremacist nation which, based on income and educational attainment, discriminates against whites—unless they are Ashkenazi Jews—and blacks—unless they are Nigerians.

Beyond Parity to Diversity

ULTIMATELY, KENDI'S EXPECTATION OF statistical parity is groundless. The default setting in a liberal, pluralist, and free society that spans a continent is diversity—not in the superficial sense that has currency today, but in the deeper sense of diverse preferences, abilities, and subcultural norms that necessarily yield a great diversity of outcomes both *within* and *across* groups. Let us remember that the "extended republic" James Madison envisioned in *The Federalist* was *designed* to promote a "great variety of interests, parties, and sects."

Genuine diversity will be even more pronounced in a multicultural society such as ours, which tends to favor cultural separatism at the expense of assimilation into a mainstream. Here, for example, is Kendi's vision of what a "truly multicultural nation ruled by multiculturalists" would look like:

[It] would not have Christianity as its unofficial standard religion. It would not have suits as its standard professional attire. English would not be its standard language or be assessed by standardized tests. Ethnic Studies would not be looked upon as superfluous to educational curricula. Afrocentric scholars and other multicultural theorists, lecturing on multiple cultural perspectives, would not be looked upon as controversial. No cultural group would be directly and indirectly asked to learn and conform to any other group's cultural norms in public in order to get ahead.

How this heterogeneous whole is supposed to produce uniform outcomes across all its constitutive components, Kendi never bothers to explain. In fact, he seems completely unaware that his celebration of authentic multiculturalism contradicts his demands for statistical parity. The more different we're all encouraged to be, the more we'll all be the same. Or so his logic goes. But why would we expect the many "communities" that make up our multicultural republic to succeed and fail at the same rates in the same realms if they value different things, cultivate different virtues, and have different visions of the good life? Besides which, as Thomas Sowell never tires of pointing out, even biological siblings raised in the same family don't turn out the same. Even the most conformist monocultural society imaginable will not produce equal outcomes, and neither will our multicultural one.

That is why enforcing the principle of statistical parity requires levels of social engineering, thought control, and expropriation that would make Big Brother blush. In the most horrifying passage of *Stamped from the Beginning*, Kendi calls for “creating an agency that aggressively investigates the disparities and punishes conscious and unconscious discriminators. This agency would also work toward equalizing the wealth and power of Black and White neighborhoods and their institutions” (emphasis added). Lest we worry about the totalitarian implications of granting the state complete jurisdiction over our minds and property, Kendi reassures us that his Department of Anti-racism would only be staffed with “formally trained experts on racism” (such as himself, presumably) and “no political appointees.”

It is a testimony to the power of identity politics in America that Kendi can make such totalitarian demands without bothering to argue on their behalf, and that almost no one has called him out for it. Imagine by contrast what would happen to someone who had the temerity to suggest that irreducible biological differences place limits on what men and women can do.

There is no basis in reality for asserting that discrimination is the only reason, or even the primary reason, why statistical parity is not a reality—especially in 2020. Human nature being what it is, discrimination will never be fully rooted out from the heart. It has, however, been considerably attenuated in the past two generations. In many areas, it has been completely eradicated—at least in its traditional form (the *bien pensants* and the courts do permit discrimination, but only against men, whites, and Asians). Corporate America, universities, and all levels of government have increasingly made it their mission to achieve diversity—often at the expense of maximizing profits, imparting knowledge, and serving the public.

Even if, for the sake of the argument, we were to concede that statistical parity is both just and achievable, we still could not help noticing that no one in America—especially not the identitarians who claim to be most committed to eliminating disparities—seems to care about disparities that cut against whites, men, or heterosexuals. The gender pay gap has received more attention than the Kennedy assassination, but how many moral crusades have been launched to eradicate the violent death gap, the life expectancy gap, the sentencing length gap, the workplace accident gap, or any of the many other gaps in which men fare much worse than women? Aside from Christopher Caldwell in *The Age of Entitlement*, has

anyone else noticed that nonwhites gained ten million jobs, while whites lost 700,000, during a span of years that roughly aligned with the Obama Administration? And who among us has heard of the gay and lesbian premium? A 2017 study by C.S. Carpenter and S.T. Eppink of Vanderbilt University in the *Southern Economic Journal* found that homosexuals earn significantly more than their heterosexual counterparts. We are unlikely to hear about the injustice of that discrepancy anytime soon.

The Real Endgame

INDEED, FOR ALL THEIR TALK OF PARITY, identitarians can never have too many women, people of color, and LGBTQ people in the desirable realms of life. Nor can there

color may be, so long as it's not white—the higher the grade. So the NBA gets an A+, even though its roster is less than 20% white in a country that is 60% white. Although it is almost never explicitly said, everyone knows that straight white men contribute nothing to diversity. In fact, they undermine it, thus leading to the paradox that an office with no straight white men would be considered more diverse than an office with some straight white men. (The only exceptions to this rule are all-black neighborhoods or schools—because of the suspicion of racism—unless the school in question is a historically black college or university.)

The primacy of diversity over parity is further confirmed by the barely restrained jubilation with which the media and the Left greet news of America's impending demographic transformation into a so-called “majority-minority” country. In 2015, at a lunch in honor of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, Vice President Joe Biden celebrated America's “unrelenting stream of immigration”—specifically Muslims, Africans, Asians, and Hispanics. “It's not gonna stop, nor should we want it to stop,” Biden enthused. “As a matter of fact, it's one of the things, I think, we can be most proud of.” In his excitement, Biden moved up the date of the demographic tipping point by almost three decades:

Folks like me, who are Caucasian of European descent, for the first time, in 2017, will be an absolute minority in the United States of America. Absolute minority. Fewer than 50% of the people in America from then and on will be white, European stock. That's not a bad thing. That's a source of our strength.

This demographic trend line—what has been called “the browning of America”—is presented to America's white majority as a just dispensation from above to which all must submit. America will be made less white. There is nothing you can do about it. Nor should you want to do anything about it, since a less white America will be a better America—whites being responsible for slavery, Jim Crow, the Trail of Tears, the Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese internment camps, and the systemic racism that defines the country to this day. The fewer whites, the more diversity, the better the country, the world, and the planet.

Any attempt to slow, halt, or—heaven forbid—reverse this demographic trend is, of course, denounced as racist. Only a racist would oppose the rapid demographic transformation of his country—unless that coun-

Books discussed in this essay:

Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America, by Ibram X. Kendi.
Bold Type Books, 592 pages,
\$32.99 (cloth), \$19.99 (paper)

Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line,
by Michael Eric Dyson.
Basic Books, 240 pages, out-of-print

Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America, by Michael Eric Dyson.
St. Martin's Press, 240 pages, \$24.99

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,
by Michelle Alexander. The New Press,
352 pages, \$27.99 (cloth), \$18.99 (paper)

ever be too many men, whites, or straights in the non-desirable realms of life. The principle of statistical parity is, in reality, applied selectively as a cudgel against “oppressor” groups. The real goal of identity politics thus proves to be not proportional representation, but greater diversity, i.e., fewer whites, fewer men, and fewer heterosexuals. For that is all that “diversity” means: fewer members of the bad groups. How few we are never told, but fewer than we currently have is always an imperative. Beyond that, the term “diversity” is essentially meaningless. It tells us nothing about the actual composition of a population or a group.

Each year, for instance, the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport releases a racial report card for professional sports leagues. The more people of color—whatever their

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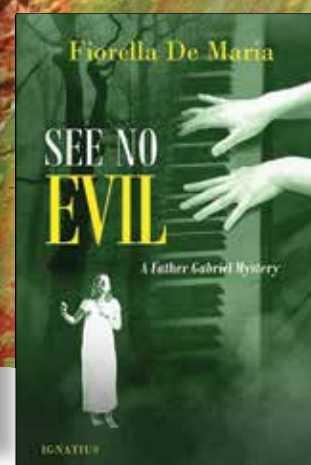
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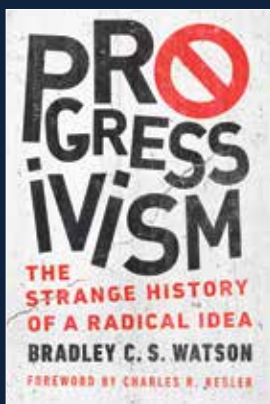
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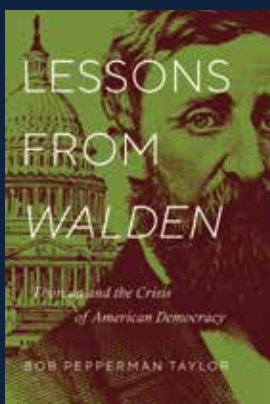
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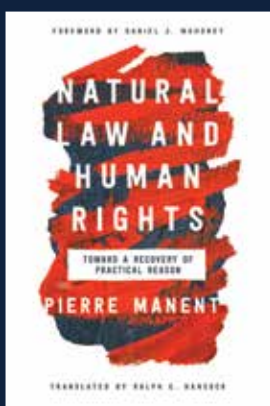
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try is nonwhite, in which case change should be opposed lest it overwhelm the native people and their traditional culture. Western nations, being mostly white, are not afforded this right. Any policies that delay—even by a few years—America's demographic tipping point are also fiercely opposed, regardless of whether they were intended to do so. In early 2018, for example, the Trump Administration proposed to reform the country's immigration laws and to secure the southern border. No mention of demographics, race, or ethnicity was made in the plan itself or in its public presentation. But then-House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi immediately denounced the whole effort as part of "an unmistakable campaign to make America white again."

The *Washington Post*, after conducting its own analysis of the plan, concluded it would delay the tipping point by up to five more years. "By greatly slashing the number of Hispanic and black African immigrants entering America, this proposal would reshape the future United States," Michael Clemens of the Center for Global Development told the *Post*. "Decades ahead, many fewer of us would be nonwhite or have nonwhite people in our families. Selectively blocking immigrant groups changes who America is." America, in other words, is defined teleologically by its future demographic composition—not its past or its current population (much less its founding principles). It belongs not to all its citizens, but to the future progeny of its nonwhite population. They are who we are.

The national push for greater diversity in matters of race will not of course come to a stop once non-Hispanic whites are reduced to a minority. If diversity has a limiting principle, it has yet to be stated. That is not to say that diversity does not have a limit. It does. For all their denunciations of whites, the identitarians remain strangely drawn to them. Louis Farrakhan hates white people and wants nothing to do with them. Our identitarians hate white people but want to be around them. Many are themselves white and generally preach diversity more than they practice it, especially regarding the neighborhoods in which they live and the schools to which they send their children. Wokeness for them is more performed than lived. This is most apparent in the academy, where tenured white professors don't seem especially eager to resign their positions to make way for professors of color.

As for the nonwhite identitarians, in particular the black ones, many embrace a strange form of neo-segregationism. They want to live, study, and work among whites—

but to do so with the possibility of escaping their company as desired. They want segregated integration. As Georgetown University professor Michael Eric Dyson observed in his *Race Rules* (1996):

Those of us who are integrationists want our cake of mainstream values. But many of us want to buy it from a black baker and eat it in a black restaurant in the black section of town. Others of us want our racial separatism. But we often want it in mixed company: a black dorm at a white university, a black history month in a predominantly white country, and a black house in a white suburb.

In order to appease its people of color, America must therefore maintain a sufficient number of whites to sprinkle around its schools and neighborhoods. Identity politics does not, in the end, promise a future without whites—although it does not censor eliminationist rhetoric either. The white race may well be "the cancer of human history," in the memorable formulation of activist Susan Sontag. But this is one cancer we do not want to cure. We just want to reduce the size of the tumors and distribute them more evenly across the body.

Gender Trouble

IDENTITARIAN SOCIAL JUSTICE DEMANDS America become not only less white, but also less straight. This will not be done through immigration (although it was hailed as a victory for diversity when the Obama Administration repealed a rule prohibiting HIV-positive people from entering the U.S.). Instead, identitarians want to "queer" America by creating an ever-more accepting climate that allows people to express their hitherto stifled sexual identities. That is why news of the rising number of Zoomers and Millennials who do not identify as straight is always greeted as a sign of progress. "It is heartening to see the future of this country loosen the shackles of traditional identities and unapologetically embrace who they are," GLAAD President Sarah Kate Ellis explained in 2017, after her organization published a survey claiming that 20% of Millennials identify as LGBTQ.

For the time being, most identitarians maintain that sexual identities are natural and not chosen (for those keeping track, science must therefore deny that races exist, but affirm that the elusive gay gene does). This presumably sets an upper limit on how gay America can become. But cutting-edge aca-

democratic queer theory rejects all “essentialist” accounts of sexuality: it argues that homosexuality is as socially constructed as heterosexuality. On questions of sex, then, identity politics converges with the sexual revolution, whose ultimate promise is polymorphous perversity—the celebration of unbridled sexuality. The full emancipation of sexuality requires us to abandon all constrictive identities—from gay to straight, including bi—and follow our urges wherever they may take us. Liberation, in the fullest sense of the word, points to a world in which all will have become omnisexual.

The invocation of diversity to reduce the percentage of whites and straights in the American population obviously cannot be applied to men. Nature, deaf to the cries of radical feminism, continues to produce slightly more than one male baby for every female baby. According to modern identitarian feminism, however, the problem lies not with the natural existence of the Y chromosome but with the socially-constructed masculine gender. As Simone de Beauvoir might have said, one is not born a man, one becomes a man. Sex may be a given, but masculinity can be—and must be—deconstructed and ultimately abolished. As must femininity. Justice demands that we transcend gender altogether.

In a post-gender world, neither men nor women would be nudged, pressured, or forced to follow scripted gender roles. All would be radically free to choose. But rest assured, they would all freely choose the same! These genderless but sexually-differentiated humans would still end up being proportionally represented in all realms of life. How this will happen—without coercion—in spite of vast differences in body size, brain chemistry, and hormonal makeup, has yet to be explained. Perhaps a fourth wave of feminism can study the question.

In the meantime, preferential measures and re-education into androgyny are necessary to ensure statistical parity between men and women. A relentless stream of propaganda must encourage women to silence their feminine longings and set their sights on competing with men for money and honor. The boys, meanwhile, must be stuffed with Ritalin and their spiritedness extinguished. Those who submit to the gynococracy will be rewarded in the workplace. *Whoever thinks otherwise goes voluntarily into the madhouse.*

Deconstructing Whiteness

THE EMASCULATION OF MEN, THE PROMOTION of sexual perversion, and the flooding of America with non-white immigrants are necessary but not sufficient to achieve identitarian social justice. Even then, a rump of whites will still remain. And though they will have been reduced to a minority who are no longer overrepresented in all realms of accomplishment, they will still be white, with all the psychological and historical baggage this entails. Whiteness itself will therefore have to be deconstructed. Whites will have to understand that race is a historical and social construct with no basis in nature. They will have to learn, as the clerics of wokeness are fond of saying, that race itself is racism. Or as Rachel Dolezal, the infamously “transracial” white woman, has proclaimed: “Racism creates race.”

America, the identitarians insist, has constructed arbitrary racial categories to justify its oppressive rule over others. Whiteness may not be real by nature, but it has been made real. There is no biological white race, but there is a social white race. And it “consists of those who partake of the privileges of white skin in this society,” as John Garvey and Noel Ignatiev announced in 1993 when they launched their journal *Race Traitor*, whose motto was “Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity.” Whites must therefore be taught to acknowledge their privilege, repent for the sins of their race, adopt a deferential pose vis-à-vis the people of color who continue to be oppressed by the pervasive whiteness of America, and actively oppose racism. In his *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* (2017), Michael Eric Dyson intones: “The most radical action a white person can take is to acknowledge this denied privilege, to say, ‘Yes, you’re right. In our institutional structures, and in deep psychological structures, our underlying assumption is that our lives are worth more than yours.’” Whites, in short, must learn their place.

By contrast, people of color—as the term itself implies—are never asked to deconstruct their blackness, redness, yellowness, or brownness. Their races are no more real than that of whites, but they are encouraged to take pride in and celebrate the achievements, real or imaginary, of their colorful brethren across history. Racial solidarity is in fact encouraged as a means to dismantle the structures of

white oppression. Identity politics thus both denies and celebrates race at the same time. It cultivates guilt, repentance, and self-flagellation in whites, while promoting pride, aggrivement, and vindictiveness in nonwhites. It teaches race for me, but not for thee. And it encourages all to hate the accursed white race. As the father of Black Power, Stokely Carmichael, proclaimed, “we must fill ourselves with hate for all white things.”

And if we do this long enough, then perhaps one day we may reach the promised land of racial reconciliation. Kendi ends his interminable history of racism by reassuring us that there “will come a time when we will love humanity, when we will gain the courage to fight for an equitable society for our beloved humanity.” Similarly, civil rights lawyer Michelle Alexander concluded her 2010 best-selling book on incarceration, *The New Jim Crow*, with an impassioned plea “to cultivate an ethic of genuine care, compassion, and concern for every human being” and to build “a thriving, multiracial, multiethnic democracy free from racial hierarchy.”

Paradoxically, the way to do this is not by transcending race, but by paying even more attention to it. Racial harmony will come not through colorblindness but through “a permanent commitment to color consciousness,” according to Alexander (emphasis added). In other words: the more we focus on race; the more we entrench into our laws a racial caste system; the more we see racism everywhere; the more we relentlessly attack whites for their privilege; the more we allocate desirable positions on the basis of race rather than merit, then the more likely we are to all get along one day.

Identity politics in effect invites us to embrace racism, but to do so in the name of anti-racism. And it asks us to believe that this anti-racist racism, because it is in the service of a good cause, will lead not to a race war but to healing our divisions and bringing us together. Hence the fundamental contradiction of identity politics: it speaks of love, but fans the flames of hatred. And hatred, once it takes hold of the soul, does not readily give way to forgiveness and reconciliation—especially not outside the context of Christian theology. The Reverend King could forgive. Ibram X. Kendi cannot—nor does he want to.

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