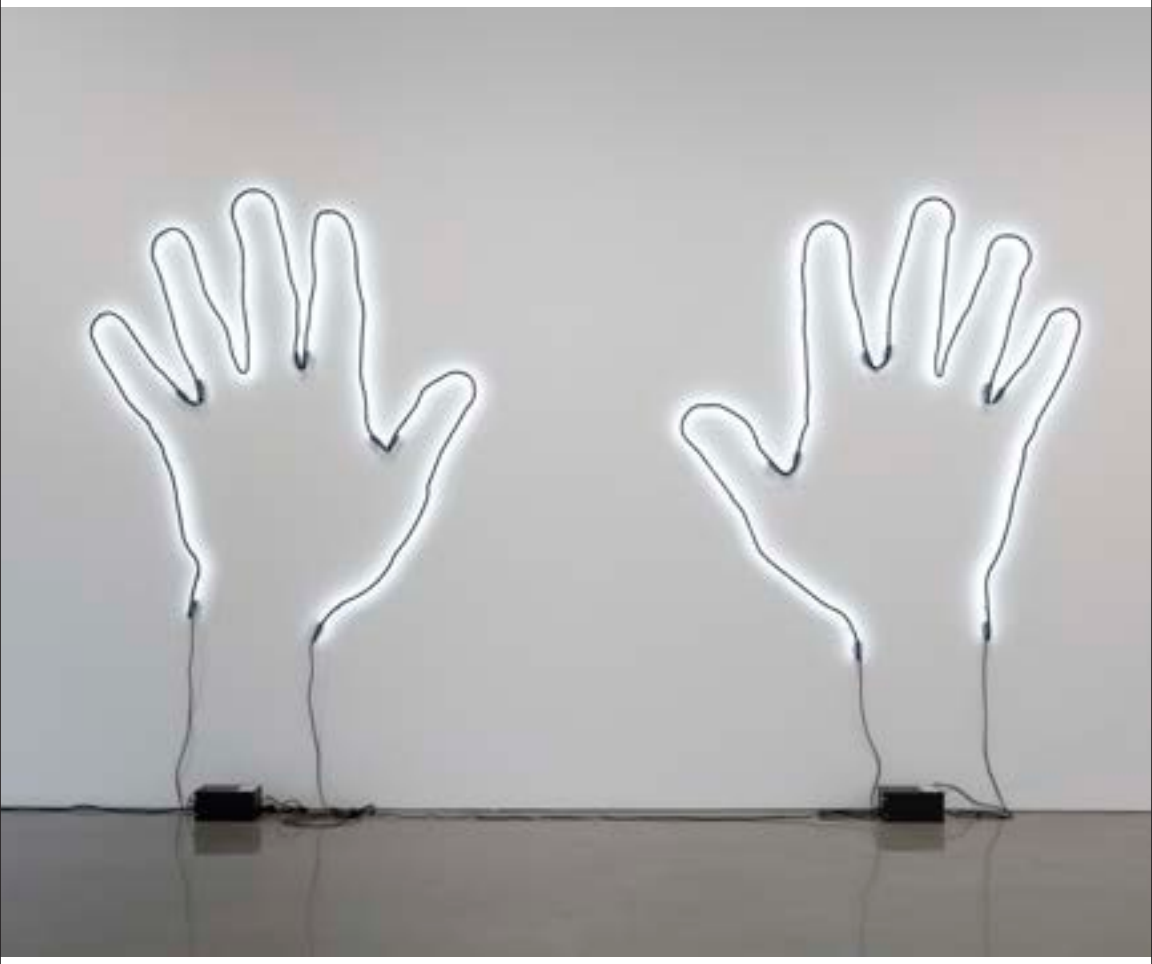
Racism
Postrace



Roopali Mukherjee Sarah Banet-Weiser Herman Gray editors

Racism Postrace

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Contents

PART TWO Performances

Introduction

Postrace Racial Projects

SARAH BANET-WEISER, ROOPALI MUKHERJEE,
AND HERMAN GRAY

As objects of study go, the concept of postrace has proved at once sticky and slippery—sticky in terms of its adhesive and adaptive grasp on public consciousness (Bobo 2014) and slippery in its ambivalence on race and difference, and unsettling of paradigmatic struggles for racial justice and equality. By most accounts, the term entered the US popular lexicon over the course of raucous electoral campaigns in 2008, which culminated in the election of the first African American to the US presidency. Received meanings of the term generally signify a repudiation of racial discrimination and racism, indeed, of racial categories themselves as meaningful. Ushered in by complex shifts in demographics, marriage and immigration trends, and youth attitudes set in contrast with the racial sentiments of older generations, postrace articulated rosy views of racial assimilation and an alacritous stance on diversity and difference. Circulating with enthusiasm across the political and ideological spectrum, including in the Left and liberal press, through viral circuits of social media, among public figures, and within the performative repertoires of the 2008 campaign itself, Barack Obama's unprecedented victory emerged

as nothing short of "epochal," cleaving time itself, as filmmaker Spike Lee put it, "from B.B., Before Barack to A.B., After Barack" (quoted in Colapinto 2008).[1] As news reports, op-ed columns, popular media, and book-length commentaries indulged celebrations of "Americans as they might wish to be seen: fair-minded, freedom loving, and racially harmonious" (C. A. Young and Song 2014, 1071), the 2008 election took shape as "trailblazing" and "historic" (Herbert 2008), promising a "particularly American achievement, an affirmation of American ideals and a celebration of American circumstances" (Wallace-Wells 2006, B1). As "the last of the republic's old barriers to entry come tumbling down" (Alter 2006), putting "a period on the sorriest chapter in American history" (Morris 2007), news headlines heralded, at long last, "the end of race as we know it" (Early 2008), speculating on "the end of black politics" (Bai 2008) and "the end of white America" (Hsu 2009). A sign of its currency in popular culture, the term found its way into the *Urban Dictionary*, defined, in plain terms, as "a society or time period in which discussions around race and racism have been deemed no longer relevant within current social dynamics." Making a familiar temporal link, the dictionary added, "Popularized after the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States of America in 2008." On November 4, 2008, in the giddy euphoria of election night celebrations, perfectly on cue, a black voter from California proclaimed, "Color has no meaning and Obama has proved it" (quoted in Feldmann 2008, 25). Likewise, paraphrasing a jubilant white voter, the *Atlantic*'s Twitter feed summed things up, announcing: "Glad the battle btwn black & white, slave & slave owner finally over."[2]

Obviously, the battle was far from over, for the concept of postrace also mobilized a different, far less rosy response. If Obama's 2008 victory worked to shore up postracialism's vaunted status within the cultural imaginary, the historic campaign and presidency witnessed, with equal fervor, the emergence of new "born-again" racisms (Goldberg, 2009, 21; Kelley 2011) shaped in their continuities with older cultural logics of white racial grievance but also articulating new and distinct formations of whiteness, racial discrimination, and antiblack racisms. If postracialism spurred breathless proclamations about the end of racism in 2008, the moment also shored up support for populist formations of the Tea Party and birtherism, and vigilante strains of anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, and xenophobic sentiments with open calls to hunt "terrorists," "criminals," and "illegals" (Enck-Wanzer 2011; Joseph 2011). By 2016, strident proclamations about the "forgotten" white working class had helped to recalibrate forms of racist license, recuperating and reopening

US political discourse to regressive pre–civil rights–era racial appeals and delivering stunning electoral dividends a mere eight years later.

In turn, these reactionary strains of racism spurred and energized a vast array of social movements, including in support of the Obama administration's 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policies; mass mobilizations in support of undocumented workers and opposing state violence in "antiterror" and border detention camps; academic boycotts opposing the occupation of Palestine; the Black Lives Matter movement, which drew attention to and organized against spectacular and deadly encounters of militarized police against unarmed black men and women; and city, municipal, and campus sanctuary resolutions in the wake of the Trump administration's repeal of DACA and new policies like the "travel ban" and "extreme vetting" to limit US entry for immigrants and refugees from predominantly Muslim countries. These mobilizations, which are linked in their resistance to deeply racialized forms of state violence, repression, and surveillance, work variously to loosen the sticky resonance of postracialism and its euphoric promise of racial justice, equality, and progress. Likewise, puncturing what Catherine Squires (2014) terms the "post-racial mystique," research reports, analyses, and studies prior to, during, and since the 2008 election present a staggering dossier of counterevidence, underscoring a brutal range of abiding and, indeed, deepening inequalities tracking familiar axes of ethnoracial difference. Thus, for example, as these studies show, public schools across the United States have grown more, not less, racially segregated since the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision in 1954 (Hannah-Jones 2017; Reardon et al. 2012; US General Accounting Office 2016). Only 67 percent of Latino/as have access to affordable health care (US Department of Health and Human Services 2011). Black children still attend consistently underfunded schools (Yin 2017) and are 61 percent more at risk of being conscripted into the school-to-prison pipeline (Amurao 2013; McMillan Cottom 2017). Latinos were nearly twice as likely—and African Americans a staggering five times more likely—to be incarcerated than whites (Sakala 2014), and the imprisonment rate for black women was twice that of white women (Alexander 2011; Haney López 2010, 2011; Wilson Gilmore 2007). Black family income, on average, remains at little more than half that of white families nationwide (Black Demographics 2012; DeNavas-Walt et al. 2013; DeSilver 2013; Heckman 2011; Oliver and Shapiro 2006). In 2015, despite some improvements, Latinos still earned only 69 percent of white men's earnings, and Latinas remained lowest in income comparisons with white men, earning 58 cents on every white man's dollar

(compared with 65 cents for black women, and 82 cents for white women) (Patten 2016).

Against these findings, proclamations of a postracial society, instead, work to obscure the relations of structural racisms, concocting a heady palliative against the continuing resonance and necessity of progressive antiracist struggle (E. R. Edwards 2011; Roediger 2006). Open to the lash of ridicule and scorn and, at the same time, celebrated within national scripts of racial transcendence and progress, the discursive career of postrace emerges, thus, ambivalent and unsettled but also productive and generative, profound in its affective grasp on the cultural imaginary and dangerous in its capacities to confound and stymie struggles for racial justice and equality. Indeed, in the context of rising white nationalisms across the world (Da Costa 2016), manifesting in, among other things, the visible recurrence of white nationalist rallies in the United States and the Trump administration's lenient response to them, renewed efforts to criminalize public protest and mass demonstrations, and continued attempts to redraw voting districts as a means to disenfranchise nonwhite voters, postracial promises of "freedom" clearly do not mean freedom for all people.

It is this halting and tendentious career, the quality of its influence on contemporary racial formations as well as its power to structure—as well as trouble—modes of racism and antiracism that this book explores. We trace rich expressions of postracialism over and through a wide cultural terrain—in public policy debates, academic disputes, popular cultural performances, media expressions, sport cultures, technology industries, music, and fashion spectacles. At once absurd and alluring, these fragmentary, and often contradictory, meanings of postrace reveal the subtle but pervasive exigencies of power and powerlessness, and the range of social, political, and economic interests at stake in both the articulations and the structuring silences that postrace coheres. Enshrining specific orderings of racial experience and circumstance as rational and normal, while marginalizing others as laughable, odd, or dangerous, the range of cultural meanings associated with postrace offers us a point of entry for critical interrogation into the discursive, affective, and material problem of the color line in the current moment. Among its core contributions, then, this book is dedicated, first and foremost, to parsing the meanings and mythic orders of postrace, unpacking in careful detail the dynamics and consequences of social power as they designate, authorize, and normalize specific connotations of race and racism.

Additionally, this book recognizes the real and deadly effects of postrace, taking stock of the historical, politico-economic, and cultural implications of

its emergence as the "racial common sense" in the United States. Our concern here is with the ways that media representations and affective resonances bear critically on their capacities to make the world. As such, we approach postrace as a construct with real political and material consequences, and the cases we showcase in the book grapple with the links between the structural and cultural productivities of the postracial, unpacking the mythic registers and relationships of postrace as key to understanding public policies and practices geared to state repression and violence, the material impacts of populist white anger, as well as those of social movements and alliances geared to racial and social justice. The collection's second core contribution, then, is to present careful analyses of the assumptions and implications of postrace, emphasizing its organizing force in shaping and articulating identities as well as social structures. Engaging with the spatiotemporal configurations of W. E. B. Du Bois's famous admonition that the problem of the twentieth—and now, twenty-first—century remains the problem of the color line, the project's third and final contribution is to parse how discourses of the postracial mark and moderate Du Boisian prognoses about racial justice, equality, and progress.

Defining Postrace

We approach postrace as *the* racial project of our time. We focus on unpacking how postracialism shores up fresh instantiations of structural racisms, distributing resources and value and assigning privilege and stigma. In other words, we take account of both the material and the discursive consequences of postrace. Part of what we are trying to capture here are the various ways in which the cultural production, consumption, and circulation of the postracial mediates—both illuminating and obscuring—the ways in which racial formations continue to produce the material conditions and constraints for a range of cultural practices and dynamics. The postracial manifests not in electoral politics alone but equally in popular cultural realms, including sports, social media, fashion, reality TV, and music. It shapes media productions and offers ready alibis to rationalize increasing rates of inequality across a range of social arenas, from education to incarceration, housing to health care. Presenting a series of case studies, each focused on specific cultural practices, state apparatuses, media texts, and/or performative regimes, the contributors to this volume variously interrogate the implications of postracialism vis-à-vis postracism and, in particular, the

conjuring tricks by which "race disappears but whiteness persists" (Roediger 2008). That is, we seek to understand how postrace intervenes within discourses of color blindness, diversity, and multiculturalism to manage, adjudicate, and redistribute advantages, handicaps, vulnerabilities, and risks based on racial differences.

Using postrace as an optic to better understand both historical and contemporary practices of racial formation and racial projects, the essays in this collection look forward toward the anticipatory influences of postrace, informed by scholarship on a range of developing regimes and cultural practices—the continuing commodification and fetishization of branded authenticity (Banet-Weiser 2012) and the hypervisibility of branded difference (H. Gray 2013b); the proliferation of data-lives and digital selves shaping, and shaped by, online spaces that remain structured by race and difference (Nakamura and Chow-White 2012); increased race-based surveillance and targeted health outcomes made possible by advances in genomics and biotech research (Nelson 2016; D. Roberts 2011); political and intellectual crises, still on the horizon, embroiled within fresh dilemmas of transgendered and transracial formations (Draz 2017; Tuvel 2017).

Finally, the essays in this collection explore the dynamics of social, cultural, and economic power that have decisively configured the neoliberal governmentalities of official antiracisms, in the current moment most often expressed as "multiculturalism" (S. Ahmed 2012; Duggan 2004; Ferguson 2012; Melamed 2011). This volume seeks to understand postrace as part of a *longue durée* of racial containment, adaptation, and absorption geared to foreclosing other more progressive paradigms for antiracist reform (Winant 2002). Parsing issues of discursive power and myth, of material structures and lived circumstance, and of histories of resistance and voice, the essays gathered in this anthology engage with a range of urgent and important questions: What lessons should we glean from the meteoric rise of the concept, its broad coalescence in the triumphalist euphoria of the Obama moment, and, indeed, its anticlimactic palling over the course of, and in the wake of, his historic presidency? What measure of its power as a political game changer might we take? How does it track the material conditions and shifting governmentalities of US race relations; the afterlives of enslavement, segregation, and white supremacy? And, as a powerful iteration of enduring national scripts, what prognoses does postrace make about continuing struggles over racial equality and autonomy, and the long-deferred promise of racial transcendence and freedom?

Historicizing Postrace

While Obama's 2008 election is commonly signaled as the inaugural moment of postrace, there is a longer, more complicated history that precedes this moment. The essays in this collection problematize received histories of postrace that link the concept to the singular 2008 Obama moment. Engaging with a range of transformations associated with the civil rights and post–civil rights era, such as assaults on affirmative action and social justice more broadly, the rise of reactionary misogynies and a return to virulent masculinities as an organizing logic of populist movements, culture wars emanating out of social panics over queer organizing and feminist movements, and so on, our work in this volume historicizes postrace in its relations with hegemonic orders of color blindness and the economic, political, and cultural nostrums of neoliberalism.

Discourses of color blindness, as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and others have shown (Cho 2009; Crenshaw 1995), are premised centrally on strategic erasures within which the "white norm" and silent operations of white privilege do not disappear but, rather, become "submerged" within racial consciousness (Crenshaw 1995, 115). Setting the scene with plotlines pitting "self-made" heroes against "state-made" villains (Lubiano 1992, 354), such color-blind erasures turn on the technical fiction of "nonrecognition" in which individuals are asked to not consider race, gender, and other kinds of difference even though, as Neil Gotanda reminds us, "it is impossible to not think about a subject without having at first thought about it at least a little" (2000, 36). Crucially, these modes of "e-racing" make room for strategic "re-racings," especially in the context of workplace tokenism, criminality, and national security. Like the relations between "old money" and "new money," those e-raced by the "crossover" logics of color blindness are granted access to selective dividends of racial privilege even though, as Crenshaw points out, everyone still understands the "difference between the truly privileged and the newly entitled" (1997, 107). These mutually reinforcing amalgams of wishful thinking, studied denials, scripted declarations, and tortured performances gradually but unmistakably reenvisioned the domain of racism, yielding sticky new modalities of "racism without racists" (Bonilla-Silva 2014), adaptive in their grasp on long-deferred dreams of racial progress and transcendence. The notion of postrace, then, emerges not so much as an epochal game changer, cleaving time itself, as Spike Lee would have it, but instead, as this anthology underscores, as an iteration, albeit a powerful one, of formidable and enduring national scripts.

The affective allure of postrace as proof of long-promised progressive change tracks larger formations of what historians identify as a two-phased "racial break" within the history of racial modernity. As Howard Winant (2002) explains, the first phase, starting after World War II and culminating in the 1960s, initiated a shift or break in a worldwide racial system that had endured for centuries. Converging in and across a range of progressive antiracist movements—anticolonialism, antiapartheid, the worldwide rejection of fascism, and the US civil rights movement—the racial break called white supremacy into question to an extent unparalleled in modern history, bringing an unprecedented slate of progressive antiracist demands to state and civic attention. But by the 1970s, notes Winant, a second phase emerged facilitating "adaptations" of centuries-old and deeply entrenched systems of racial injustice toward the "containment" of recent antiracist challenges (2002, 145–46). In this crucial second phase, the racial break consolidated a new racial common sense, which conceded to some of the demands of antiracist movements but, equally, served to adapt modes of racial power and absorb conceptual paradigms for racial reform. Repackaging the ideological structures of white supremacy away from earlier modes of violent and overt racisms, the racial break incorporated civil rights reforms into the agenda of the political center, developing a comprehensive program of racial democracy that simultaneously reinforced key dimensions of US nationalist ideology (173).

Starting in the 1970s, massive transformations in the American economy spurred by global forces of deindustrialization, foreign competition, and rising unemployment consolidated in the potent and visceral politics of white backlash. The liberal retreat from racial justice (S. Steinberg 1995), forged in the social contexts of rising opposition to busing as a means to desegregate public schools in the mid-1970s (Delmont 2016) and the 1978 Supreme Court decision in *Regents v. Bakke*, which ruled affirmative action legal but invalidated the use of racial quotas, helped to recruit new patrons of color blindness from among the ranks of besieged white masculinities and proponents of claims of "reverse racism" and antiwhite discrimination. Over the 1980s and into the 1990s, these shifts paved the way for support from political constituencies firmly committed to defending white supremacy as ex-Klansman David Duke and other vocal white supremacists joined campaigns against affirmative action, claiming color blindness and the language and legacies of the black civil rights movement for politically regressive ends. As ballot initiatives from California to Michigan ran their course, bludgeoning affirmative action with racist precision, the divisive bent of these campaigns entangled the racial projects of color blindness with the transparent

racial-subordination agendas of the radical Right, injuring the brand for moderate-to-liberal voters (Cho 2009). A new concept like postrace would effectively rearticulate the "liberal embrace of colorblindness" (Haney López 2011, 808) but without so much of its retro-regressive baggage. Crucially, postrace would reach key constituencies of youth and moderate-to-liberal voters whom the tainted brand of color blindness had turned off and away.

Unfettered by regressive political baggage, thus, postrace produced powerfully integrative and cohering effects targeting the state and demanding the dismantling of administrative protocols of indexing, auditing, indeed even seeing race (Flores, Moon, and Nakayama 2006; Goldberg 2002; HoSang 2010). Synchronized with the 2008 Obama election, the arrival of postrace, then, is marked crucially by the corroborating synergies between color blindness and postrace but, equally, by strategic differences between these concepts. Yoking antiracist discourses to color-blind denials of racial privilege and stigma, the postracial break ushered in a new racial common sense that achieved twin ends that remain, to the present, key to foreclosing alternative and more democratic paradigms for antiracist reform (Melamed 2011). Concealing the intersectional links between race and material inequality, and working to disconnect the legacies of white supremacy from enduring mythic and material inequalities, postrace works, like color blindness before it, as an alibi for versions of racial capitalism—creating and stigmatizing redundant labor, organizing and exposing the most vulnerable consumers to financial insecurity, and exploiting differential access to economic risk on the basis of race.

Far from disrupting the ongoing march of the "neoliberalization of race" (Goldberg 2007), postrace embeds and eases a bundle of neoliberal beliefs: the naturalness of the market, the primacy of the competitive individual, the superiority of the private over the public, and so on (Hall, Massey, and Rustin 2013). Enrolling whole populations materially and imaginatively into a financialized and marketized view of the world, postrace renders racial grievances by people of color an anachronism while amplifying white grievance, the former surviving as little more than tedious investments in long-ago crimes and fetishizing a victimhood that no longer exists. Corraling black and other people of color into neoliberal regimes of "enterprise culture" (N. Rose 1996, 57–58), these beliefs re-race these "dangerous individuals," demanding that they abdicate their "reverse racisms" as the "provenance of an unjust, irrational ascription and prejudice" (Singh 2004, 11). Shoring up resonant mythologies of progress and advancement in which twin bad habits of state dependence and racial grievance are censured with fresh vigor, postrace authorizes antiracist projects from which "the threat of racial protest is banished, or its

promise magically fulfilled" (E. R. Edwards 2011, 33). Embodied by Obama, together with a fresh cohort of telegenic black and brown political stars (Antonio Villaraigosa, then mayor of Los Angeles; Cory Booker, then mayor of Newark, New Jersey; Deval Patrick, then governor of Massachusetts; Nikki Haley, the former governor of South Carolina; and so on), the semiotic and mythic schema of postrace substantiates new modes of "racism without race, racism gone private, racism without the categories to name it as such" (Goldberg 2009), drawing vast numbers of people to the "common sense" of race as the difference that makes, or should make, no difference at all.

The foregoing series of shifts suggest neither an epochal transformation nor a coherent trajectory to the discursive career of postrace. Indeed, our work in this collection explores the terms of a critical historiography of postrace, instead probing the halting and circuitous perambulations of the racial projects of postrace, tracking fragmentary, and often contradictory, expressions of the postracial across a range of cultural artifacts from fashion to music, public policy to social media.

Mediating Postrace

The shifts and transitions between color-blind racism and postracialism are maintained and normalized within the broad reach of the media industries. The concept of postrace, in other words, has gained in discursive legitimacy in part through its mediations in culture and, specifically, via ideological consolidations of the analytic gaze it engenders.

One of the ways that postrace has been visualized in the media is through the identity category of the "ethnically ambiguous," a malleable representation that fits with ease within a neoliberal multicultural framework.[3] Well before Obama's 2008 election, the commercial and for-profit media-industrial complex was taking full advantage of these manifestations of racial ambiguity, and television casting, advertising, branding, social media, and fashion became newly invested in versions of the racially flexible. Thus, Hollywood unveiled a "revolutionary, colorblind approach to casting" that featured people of various ethnicities "without much attention to the actors' ethnoracial identities" (Medved 2003, 13A; see also Beltrán 2005; La Ferla 2003; Warner 2015). Mattell introduced "Madison, Chelsea and Kayla, a new line of ethnically ambiguous dolls" in step with the advent of "mosaic marketing," which sought to develop advertisements not targeted to specific ethnoracial groups but, rather, "to grab all the diversity" by being as ethnically "indistinct" as possible (R. Walker 2003, D1). Black filmmakers like John Singleton and

Spike Lee who, twenty years earlier, had brought gut-wrenching race dramas to the screen, now produced features in which "differences in skin color [were] no big deal" and where "ethnicity never [became] an issue" (Medved 2003, 13A).[4] And culture columnists took note of the crossover appeal of "ethnically vague" actors like Vin Diesel and Halle Berry and star athletes like Tiger Woods and Derek Jeter who signaled the "disappearance of whiteness as synonym for American-ness" (R. Walker 2003, D1).[5]

The identity category of the ethnically ambiguous is, like other racial identities, a technology of race, and one that has been profitable for the media industries. As a technology of race, the mediatization of the concept of postrace *produces* race and, in particular, produces the conditions that make possible aggressive claims of whiteness and white grievance. That is, if we take the ethnically ambiguous as a quintessential media sign of the postracial, and as such as neutral and desirable, we find postrace at the core of authorizations of lifestyle commodification, multiculturalism, and biogenetics as conditions for the possibilities in which whiteness can both mark and reassert its hegemony in a racial capitalism without stigma. If, as Omi and Winant (1994) argue, race and racial identities are "unstable, flexible, and subject to constant conflict and reinvention," the media industries' use and commodification of this flexibility reveal not just the political and cultural but also the economic stakes of postrace.

Rewarding ethnically ambiguous faces, bodies, and personae, now perceived as good, desirable, and successful, meant not only that bodies and biographies that insist on older forms of ethnoracial identity and difference could be read as undesirable and/or dangerous but also that only some versions of diversity and difference would survive within the emerging mediascape where postrace was fast taking shape as a hip cultural trend. Recognizing and rewarding some versions of difference, race postrace eases, indeed, as Herman Gray argues, it demands specific forms of racial and ethnic visibility in order to be recognized in an attention economy. Depoliticizing racial categories in line with the "fashionable argument that race itself is a fiction" (La Ferla 2003), media celebrations of mixed race ambiguity work to shore up key adjustments in the racial privilege/stigma divide and, as Ralina Joseph (2012) reminds us, are keenly aligned with neoliberal assaults on black and poor populations—adjudicating risk, asset stripping, financializing and imperiling life—based on contemporary understandings of racial identity and difference now delinked from racism.

The media work of postrace, then, is to maintain that the raced body (blackness and otherness) is no longer aligned with abjection, subordination, and suspicion; rather, we should simply celebrate the "remix" identity,

which is at once marked by race but also "ethnically neutral." The postracial work of race relies on the obduracy of race in the face of the desire for, if not the end or absence of race, then, the ambivalence and ambiguity of race as the basis for the social arrangement of advantage. The "proliferation of difference" (H. Gray 2013b) that populates the commercial media context relies on a conception of racial capitalism that, like other capitalisms, promises a level playing field through the positioning of race in general and whiteness in particular as the neutral, unmarked, defining starting point. That is, in the context of racial capitalism, it is through the discourse of the postracial that the collective, public, and historical understanding of race as the basis of economic, social, and cultural disadvantage is relegated to the realm of private, personal, and individual. In turn, the notion of a collective commitment to the common good, and the role of the state in protecting the common good, is racialized and thus degraded through the work of culture and mediations that rely on the desire for and representation of racial ambivalence and ambiguity.

These operations in the realms of law and public policy, financial incentives and policy protections for corporations, and attacks on the unemployed and working poor captured by the term "racial capitalism" stress the alliance between capitalism as a racial project and racism as a foundational component of capitalism (Robinson 2000). This alliance requires that blackness anchors and signifies as a site of social excess, value extraction, and threat that forms the discursive ground on which postracial ambiguity can operate. Indeed, this alliance is evident, for instance, in ongoing attacks on the state and the rhetoric of dependency versus entitlement, or in what Clyde Woods (2009) describes as asset stripping in the case of New Orleans, where, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we witnessed the transfer of public goods to the private sector in the name of rebuilding and revitalization; or in the case of the most recent financial crisis where African Americans were systematically targeted as sites of financial risk to be bundled and sold on the stock market. In other words, mainstream mediations of hip and fashionable racial ambiguity move apace with racialized antiblack and anti-immigrant sentiments. Both provide social traction and political legibility to articulations of postracial white grievance while shoring up the ways that racial capitalism both marks and exploits racialized bodies and circumstances at the same time that it uses racial ambiguity as an alibi for doing so.

Indeed, through media, cultural, and political discourses, the postracial end of race produces and enshrines a profound *incapacity* to see race as a social and economic basis of social and cultural dis/advantage. In this moti-

vated discursive incapacity, race is either belittled as identity politics by liberals and political conservatives or relegated to the realm of anachronistic grievance on the part of blacks and other people of color. And collective social commitments to public goods like education, citizenship, and health care emerge particularly vexed and acrimonious where the public is allied with specifically raced identities and linked explicitly with racial histories, traditions, and memories. Thus, the work of the postracial within racial capitalism is to critique, demonize, and resist, as an instance of race and racial thinking, the notion of a collective commitment to the common good and the role of the state in protecting the common good against rapacious privatized incentives of the market. If the critical link here is the role of dominant media and culture in the active production of the discursive incapacity to see the links between the contours of racial capitalism and the postracial operations of race, the monumental task that confronts social organizations like Black Lives Matter and the sanctuary movement in the United States is the struggle to productively link race, racialization, and capitalism, that is, to render visible, and enable ways of seeing, race as foundational to capitalism and as a crucial site of subjugated knowledges fueling critical resistances to racial injustice, state violence, mass incarceration, and economic exploitation.

On the one hand, the essays collected here attend precisely to these dappled operations of power and powerlessness, unpacking the ways that postrace has become authorized as a cultural signifier of extraordinary affective resonance and tactical appeal. On the other hand, the chapters in this volume grapple with a whole range of counterknowledges premised on disbelief, skepticism, and refusal that seek tenaciously to show up the conceits and specious allure of the significations of postrace. Through a series of case studies, the chapters explore specific media events and performances as well as embattled cultural episodes—some historical and others playing out in the current moment—that render the terms of juxtapositions between proliferations, resonances, and critiques within discourses of postracialism as well as the implications of these battles.

Drawing the most ardent of proselytizers and detractors, opposing views on postrace divide into warring camps—on one side, the full-throated certainty of voices, both elite and nonelite, celebrating the arrival, at long last, of a postracial America and, on the other, somber warnings of postracialism's repulsive dissimulations and denials, emphasizing the cruel joke it plays on people's lives and life chances, brutally adjudicated, now as in the past, by the material power of race and its intersectional orders of difference. Grappling

with polarized and irreconcilable contests over the idea of postrace, the collection underscores the importance of careful analyses of the term as it enshrines specific orderings of racial experience and circumstance as rational and normal while relegating others as absurd and impossible.

Organization of the Chapters

The collection includes new works by scholars, both established and emerging, working in a range of disciplines, including film, media, visual, and cultural studies; critical race, gender, and ethnic studies; American studies; critical legal and policy studies; and communication, journalism, and information studies. Methodologically diverse and including a mix of historical and contemporary analyses, the chapters collectively advance our larger project of critically unpacking agglomerations of articulation, silence, and cultural practice, which variously enshrine as well as trouble postrace as the "truth" of race in the twenty-first century. These works are organized in two parts, "Assumptions" and "Performances."

The essays collected in the first part, "Assumptions," explore a range of conceptual assumptions about racial history and "progress" that are linked to the allure of the postracial. They consider key assertions and silences ushered in by the postracial closure, erasure, and disappearance of race as a recognized axis of inequality, a legitimate circumstance, and a meaningful object of study and intervention. Attending to the paradoxes inherent in pursuing historical, cultural, media, and policy analyses on something that, allegedly, no longer has a name, these chapters take note of the embedded logics of visibility, recognition, and discipline that cohere in the term, as well as key assumptions about resistance and its urgency (or lack thereof), which the term telegraphs, raises, or reconciles.

These works are linked in their emphasis on how postrace embeds veiled strategies for attacking state-sanctioned guarantors of basic protections for people of color, including security, safety, and reduced risk of exposure to vulnerabilities in health, housing, social justice, and hunger. Unpacking postrace within the long history of racial formations, the contributors in this part contextualize postrace within broader sociolegal policy responses to race (e.g., color blindness, diversity, multiculturalism) and trace some of the ways that race and difference take new form, keeping pace with shifts in contemporary material and discursive conditions.

Our emphasis in this part is on thinking through the range of ways that the postracial articulates with linked modalities of social, political, and

ideological power. How, for example, are contemporary reinscriptions of misogyny and antifeminism shaped and impacted by dilemmas raised by postrace? How do current struggles over colorism, ethnophobia, and racism, proliferating at various registers across and beyond the United States, temper and amplify the discursive labors of postracialism in the service of the global and raced projects of neoliberal racial capitalism? And, further, in what ways are contemporary inscriptions of postracialism linked to currently unfolding epistemic tensions over fact and falsehood, articulating with profound epistemological anxieties over evidence and rumor, truth and propaganda?

Attending to the modalities of racial power, in terms of both the unseen structures of social and economic forces and the practices, meanings, and modalities through which racism functions, these works urge us to consider the ways that postrace empowers ongoing challenges by political conservatives and members of the extreme Right to question and denounce the nature of evidence and the veracity of social institutions, organizations, and professionals like journalists, scientists, and policy makers in the knowledge industry whose job it is to identify, research, and analyze the evidence on which we make decisions and reach new understandings of the social world. Culturally these disputes and critical challenges are evident in the long battle over climate science, claims to racial neutrality in legal and public policy decisions, and more recently the veneration of Confederate monuments by new strains of old white supremacy. These circumstances shape the field of force in which the discourse of postracial race operates—the nature of the discourse, its effects, and the language and symbolic forms through which the truth of race is known. Postracial race is conditioned too by progressive struggles and antiracist movements, including Black Lives Matter, DACA and sanctuary mobilizations in support of immigrant rights, and LGBTQ rights movements, against the work of postracialism in the United States. Contextualized within a series of familiar and ongoing struggles, the chapters collected in the first part of the book variously challenge the assumptions of postrace, clearing important paths for critically evaluating the dangerous discursive and structural racial projects of postrace.

In the second part, "Performances," the collection features chapters examining specific practices—celebrity and spectacle, media artifacts and events—that showcase specific difficulties, and illegitimacies, each in ways that advance the larger political and cultural projects of postrace. Attending to shifts in television programs and film genres, social media platforms and other DIY practices, politico-economic or policy shifts, and performances

of racial identity or difference that appear increasingly nonsensical, anachronistic, or untranslatable within the logics of postrace, the chapters in this part show how subtle and seemingly unrelated cultural shifts cohere dangerous new instantiations of structural racisms and vitiate an urgent politics of progressive antiracist struggle.

These chapters explore the racial break between color-blind racism and postrace and demonstrate the various ways that this transition is both maintained and normalized within media cultures. If the first part of the book theorized and historicized the assumptions that undergird postrace, the second part takes up particular case studies as a way to show how the conditions of postrace manifest in specific ways within varied media industries. These analyses draw from the mainstream of popular culture as well as more marginal but nevertheless rich media proliferations, including those operating through affective registers of ridicule, scorn, and irony as well as more frontal modalities of defiance and dissent. These chapters explore a range of efforts aimed at destabilizing the discursive potency of postrace as well as cultural moments that reveal the enshrining of postrace as the dominant discourse of our time.

The media industries explored in this part offer various arguments and theorizations about the dynamics of social, cultural, and economic power that consolidate official antiracisms of neoliberalism, often expressed as "multiculturalism." For example, the global fashion industry, governed by neoliberal economies and this multiculturalism, marks racial otherness through visibility as evidence of racial progress and even racial transcendence. Indeed, the fashion industry allows designers, editors, photographers, and stylists to articulate a multicultural racial identity even when nonwhite bodies are not represented. Popular music capitalizes on a postracial concept of racial progress and insistently, relentlessly, declares that we should be "happy," and that postrace is a platform for emotional uplift in a moment of widespread social inequality and uncertainty. Reality television programs about popular music, such as *The Voice*, position singers as a medium for a variety of "posts"—postrace, postgender, postclass—where ostensibly unmarked expressions of talent transcend racial and gender specificity. Reality television uses postracial ideals to reinscribe racial boundaries and offers an opportunity to explore how race is woven into the highly stylized fabric of daily life represented on TV. Professional sports in the United States celebrate the ambivalence of the postracial moment, vaunting sports as an "equal playing field" for all while also supporting audience engagement with the explicit race politics that structure these professions. In other words, tracking how

the commercial and for-profit media-industrial complex takes advantage of postracial performances of racial ambiguity and multiculturalism, these essays consider how television casting, popular music, advertising, branding, social media, and fashion have become invested in the racially flexible.

Some of these performances highlight spontaneous eruptions of epistemic refusal; others enact highly strategic grassroots interventions geared to the constitution and circulation of counterknowledges. Independent web-distributed producers of media programs, for example, offer an opportunity to critique corporate efforts to embrace postracial representations of race as a marketing tactic. Indeed, a queer perspective on representation allows for moving beyond the marketing tactics of postrace in order to seek out spaces that encourage intersectional specificity. Circulating within economies of racial affect, the sentiments and sensations they express, their expressions of desire, trauma, melancholy, and haunting, the actions they motivate and the effects they produce are deeply cultural and social and therefore a central province of our contemplation in this collection. The "deconstructive jolt" of these performances, and their capacities to demystify and denaturalize the allure of postrace facilitate interrogations of a range of cultural voices, spaces, and practices struggling to organize alternative "truths" about the continuing violence of the color line.

Notes

Portions of this chapter revise and restate work previously published in Roopali Mukherjee, "Antiracism Limited: A Pre-history of Post-race," *Cultural Studies* 30, no. 1 (January 2016): 47–77.

1 Certainly, postracial rhetoric has been deployed with force by right-wing politicians as well as right-leaning news outlets, and conservatives and neoconservatives alike from early cultural events like Clarence Thomas's appointment to the US Supreme Court in 1991 to General Colin Powell's service on George W. Bush's cabinet as US secretary of state from 2001 to 2005, and Condoleezza Rice after Powell from 2005 to 2009. But, as David Roediger (2006) and others have pointed out, the concept of postrace is not reducible merely to the right-wing politics of backlash and reaction. Rather, the term coheres a wider heteronomous racial project reaching across the ideological spectrum, and articulated not just by conservatives but also by left liberal voices, including, for example, David Remnick, editor in chief of the *New Yorker*, the popular-culture critic Touré, and New Jersey senator and ex-mayor of Newark, Cory Booker.

2 The line appeared on *Atlantic* magazine's Twitter feed after Obama's victory had been announced at the close of polls on November 4, 2008. It paraphrases a quote from a white woman from Virginia who was in the jubilant crowd that gathered in Grant Park in Chicago.

3 The 2000 US census marked the first time that respondents were able to check off more than one racial/ethnic category. By the 2010 census, the total US population had increased

by 9.7 percent, and the number of people who chose the "multiple race" option had grown by 32 percent (N. A. Jones and Bullock 2012).

4 Examples include John Singleton's *2 Fast 2 Furious* and F. Gary Gray's *The Italian Job*, both released in 2003, and Spike Lee's *25th Hour* in 2002 and *Inside Man*, which opened in 2006.

5 In the wake of a sex scandal that rocked golf star Tiger Woods's pristine postracial image in late 2009, *Vanity Fair* reverted, as if by default, to well-established racial markers of "black brute" masculinities, using as the cover for its February 2010 issue a "blackened" and shirtless portrait of the athlete (www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2010/02/tiger-woods-201002).