

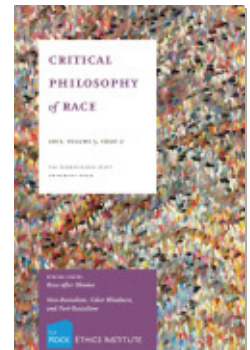


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**STEVE BIKO AND THE
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OF NON-RACIALISM
AND POST-RACIALISM**

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Abstract

Discussions of non-racialism in South Africa and discussions of post-racialism in the United States are sufficiently similar to invite the question as to whether South African thinkers could help to develop new ways of thinking about post-racialism and its potential in the United States. Biko's ideas are rarely taken up in the United States, yet they are relevant to contemporary discussions in critical philosophy of race. This article begins with an evaluation of the typology of non-racialism provided by Rupert Taylor and the historical study of non-racialism provided by Julie Frederikse, distinguishing different understandings of non-racialism. The second section presents Biko's understanding of non-racialism, arguing that Biko's understanding of which is embedded in his account of Black Consciousness, and not a variant of racial eliminativism. The final section focuses on the striking similarities between understandings of non-racialism and post-racialism using a distinction it introduces between principled and progressive forms of both these terms. Ultimately, this article makes the case for a

progressive understanding of post-racialism, which has yet to be articulated and is too easily dismissed in the United States.

Keywords: Biko, non-racialism, post-racialism, Black consciousness

The claim that a society is “post-racial” or “nonracial,” and the claim that post-racialism and non-racialism constitute effective methodologies are two different claims. The first claim answers the question of whether we have already gone beyond the racial, whereas the second concerns *how* we get there. This article addresses the second question. It is often thought that both non-racialism and post-racialism are merely variants of racial eliminativism.¹ Generally, racial eliminativism is the view that race should be removed from philosophical and political discourse due to its historical genealogy, reliance on a false biology, exclusionary properties, and logical incoherence. Racialism is the view that humans can be categorized into races, whereas “non-racialism” rejects racial categorization of individuals. Sometimes, it is argued, racialism is synonymous with racism. The term “post-racialism” tells us that racialism is a thing of the past. The salience of race varies in understandings of non-racialism and post-racialism. There are many ways to define each of these terms further. However, and most importantly, non-racialism and post-racialism do not always harmonize with racial eliminativism. For example, Bantu Stephen (Steve) Biko, the father of the Black Consciousness Movement, espoused non-racialism and maintained the importance of black consciousness.

In South Africa, the Black Consciousness Movement emerged in the mid-1960s after the Sharpeville Massacre and as a response to apartheid. The Black Consciousness Movement drew inspiration from the writings of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Malcolm X, and others. It also drew influence from other black liberation movements such as the Black Power Movement and the Négritude Movement. Black Consciousness is not simply a political ideology but instead is a philosophy that makes ontological, epistemological, and ethical arguments concerning the black condition. Apartheid, colonialism, and white domination promoted the idea of black inferiority and used it as a weapon. Black Consciousness promoted a positive sense of African identity, as a form of group pride, and focused on the importance of self-determination. Since the mind of the oppressed is the oppressor’s most powerful weapon, the Black Consciousness Movement aimed to reclaim the mind of the oppressed. These ideas are the main features

of Biko's work, which can be found in the collection of his writings and speeches *I Write What I Like*.²

Some non-racialists (and multi-racialists) maintain that the Black Consciousness Movement promotes the adoption of a racially exclusive ideology and therefore should be abandoned. This understanding of Black Consciousness has a lot to do with the controversy concerning the racial membership of South African political organizations. Whereas non-racialists are thought to discount race in matters of membership, multi-racialists are more concerned with diverse representation within a political organization. For example, the South African Communist Party (SACP) or the Communist Party of South Africa was one of the first non-racialist political organizations because it did not consider race for membership, whereas the African National Congress (ANC) only accepted black members until 1969 but worked with other segregated political organizations such as the Coloured Peoples' Congress. The claim that Black Consciousness is racially exclusive is inaccurate, and I will demonstrate this through an examination of Biko's ideas.

The term "post-racialism" does not have a long political history in the United States. However, there have been numerous historical articulations of what might be called the post-racial project. The campaign and subsequent election of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 led many to embrace the idea that the United States was post-race. In Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech, he addresses those who hold such views: "This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years. Contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy—particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own."³ This speech was framed as a response to Reverend Jeremiah Wright's statements from old controversial sermons, Obama's rejection of such statements and the call to move beyond black anger, white resentment, and to focus on widely shared social problems echoed through his presidential campaign and finally his presidency.

Discussions of non-racialism in South Africa and discussions of post-racialism in the United States are sufficiently similar to invite the question as to whether South African thinkers could help to develop new ways of thinking about post-racialism and its potential in the United States. Biko's ideas are rarely taken up in the United States, yet his ideas are relevant to contemporary discussions in critical philosophy of race. This article

is organized into three sections. In the first section, after I evaluate the typology of non-racialism provided by Rupert Taylor and the historical study of non-racialism provided by Julie Frederikse, I distinguish different understandings of non-racialism. In the second section, I present Biko's understanding of non-racialism. I argue that Biko's understanding of non-racialism, which is embedded in his account of Black Consciousness, is not a variant of racial eliminativism. In the final section, I focus on the striking similarities between understandings of non-racialism and post-racialism using a distinction I introduce between principled and progressive forms of both these terms. Ultimately, I hope to make the case for a progressive understanding of post-racialism, which has yet to be articulated and is too easily dismissed in the United States.

Non-Racialism in South Africa

Discussions concerning the liberatory potential of non-racialism have often been unproductive because of a failure to distinguish between the various and contradictory meaning of the term. David Everatt explains that non-racialism “was a rallying cry of the Congress Alliance and United Democratic Front and is among the founding principles of the democratic South Africa’s constitution, but has no real meaning.”⁴ By “real” meaning, I take Everatt to be implying that it has no stable or consistent meaning. In everyday speech, non-racialism is often used as a “blurry aspirational [. . .] but has no socio-political or economic project driving it.”⁵ This is not problematic *prima facie*; however, one does run into problems concerning the lack of specificity surrounding non-racialism when one considers its critiques. Any critique of non-racialism must be specific about which understanding of non-racialism it is attacking since its range of meaning make it difficult to attack all of them at once.

Rupert Taylor provides an account of what he takes to be the three main interpretations of non-racialism by tracking the salience of race.⁶ In Taylor’s typology, the first 1940s/1950s understanding of non-racialism rejected racialism and racism but accepted forms of segregation, thereby creating “a multiracial state with non-racial institutions.”⁷ In this instance, the language of race and the use of racial categories coexisted with institutions that claimed to be non-racial. The second (current) understanding of non-racialism rejects racialism and racism but accepts integration. The

status of race itself is attacked in this understanding of non-racialism. For example, the ANC currently claims to operate using this understanding of non-racialism. After all, there are no biological facts concerning race, and this discovery proclaimed by Ashley Montagu has “implications for the meaning of non-racialism.”⁸ The third understanding of non-racialism in Taylor’s typology is one where racialism and racism are rejected altogether. He contends that this has yet to happen. Because non-racialism is still not being taken seriously as a critical concept, there is still space to advance this third understanding of non-racialism.

Julie Frederikse maintains that the concept of non-racialism is an “unbreakable thread” in South African politics. According to Frederikse, the term was first used in 1912. However, the origin of the term ‘non-racialism’ is a continuing matter of debate. For example, Michael MacDonald argues that the term “originated in the Cape Colony in the mid- and late-nineteenth century.”⁹ Drawing on the writings of South African thinkers and activists, Frederikse declares, “When the people of South Africa make their demands for justice, there is one word they use again and again: ‘non-racialism.’”¹⁰ With this declaration, she conducts interviews and analyzes the writings of South Africans concerned with the question of racialism and the use of racial terminology. Her study is divided into five historical periods: 1652–1950, 1950–1968, 1969–1976, 1976–1989, present and future. She understands non-racialism to be in stark opposition to racialism. Furthermore, she describes non-racialism as the only logical move away from racial terminology and separatism. She writes, “It is this understanding that has actually helped us to formulate clearly and unambiguously the only solution to these divisions, which is of our people as a people, irrespective of race, colour, creed and sex: non-racialism.”¹¹ She takes the term’s frequent appearance in discussions about race throughout South African history as indicative of its wide-reaching support, but she is not concerned with the task of mapping its varied uses. Because non-racialism is supported by the youth, according to Frederikse, it is likely to flourish in the future.

In light of these two important discussions of non-racialism, I will in this section introduce a distinction between principled and progressive uses as an aid to categorizing understandings of non-racialism. Taylor’s typology of non-racialism highlights variations in the racial salience of the different understandings of non-racialism across time, but falls short in so far as he locates the origins of non-racialism to the 1940s/1950s, the

time of “the segregationist logic” of apartheid. Whereas Frederikse’s study succeeds in displaying the importance of non-racialism for South African politics, she limits her understanding of it to its narrowest form. Although Biko appears in her study, she fails to describe the specificity of his understanding of non-racialism, leaving the impression that Biko holds a view of non-racialism that is similar to the more general one she is concerned with in the rest of her book.

There are three understandings of *principled* non-racialism. The first understanding of principled non-racialism uses individualism as its defining principle. In this understanding, racism manifests itself in the behavior of individuals; therefore, combating it must be a concerted effort that focuses on the racial prejudices and behaviors of individuals. In his earlier essay “Deepening Non-racialism in South Africa,” Taylor points out that this is a common understanding of non-racialism, but he finds it too shallow to be useful.¹² Taylor writes,

The attack on racism comes down to *challenging individual racist attitudes* and furthering procedural, institutional, organizational and policy issues with regard to non-discrimination on the grounds of “race”: to eliminate racial barriers and, more recently, provide affirmative action programmes. This type of non-racialism is of a reactive nature, *synonymous with non-discrimination*, and is indistinguishable from the dominant use of multi-racialism.¹³

Taylor’s account of non-racialism focuses specifically on the salience of race; that is, where the language of race “coexists” with non-racialism.¹⁴ Racialism occurs on the individual level rather than the institutional level.

The second understanding of principled non-racialism uses assimilationism or integration as its defining principle. Combating racism entails envisioning a homogenous society. Usually, this homogeneity manifests as common nationality, rather than emphasize the racial divisions within a nation. An example of this comes from Nelson Mandela’s speech at the opening of his trial on charges of sabotage at the Supreme Court of South Africa in Pretoria on April 20, 1964: “I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a *democratic and free society in which all persons will live together in harmony with equal opportunities*. It is an ideal, which I hope to live for, and to see realised. But my Lord, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared

to die.”¹⁵ Rather than emphasize the differences among South Africans, Mandela focuses on South Africa as a nation with terms like “harmony” and “ideal.” The future of South Africa as a racially unified nation is the ideal at work with this version of principled non-racialism. Biko is often set in opposition to Mandela due to differences concerning their respective views on the cultural future of South Africa.

The third understanding of principled non-racialism draws on color blindness, a political motif that provides ethical and practical reasons for rejecting the category of race. According to color-blind ideology, race has no biological veritableness and therefore it is not real. Taylor describes it when he writes, “Here, ‘race’ is no longer taken to be a primary factor in self-identification or identification of others.”¹⁶ In Taylor’s typology, where the three forms of non-racialism are also identified, although he characterizes them somewhat differently, this is the form where three forms of non-racialism are also identified although he characterizes them somewhat differently, this is the form where racialism and racism are both rejected altogether. Unlike the first understanding of principled non-racialism that reflects philosophical individualism, this understanding investigates the status of race itself.

Although he does not explicitly refer to his early position as non-racialism, Kwame Anthony Appiah’s arguments are representative of a principled non-racialism that draws on color blindness.¹⁷ Because racism presupposes racialism as in the idea that humans are defined and categorized by inheritable traits so that they can be organized by races, Appiah concludes that attacking racism means we must jettison racialism altogether. Appiah designates two types of racism: extrinsic and intrinsic.¹⁸ Extrinsic racism is defined in terms of the belief that racial essences entail morally relevant qualities that warrant differential treatment. By contrast, intrinsic racism is the belief that each race has a different moral status, independent of any moral characteristics entailed by its racial essence. Given these distinctions, Appiah argues that racism involves the idea that races are produced through the process of racialism and that gives racial categories a moral significance. In reference to intrinsic racism, Appiah asserts that races are intrinsically morally relevant and are contingently correlated with morally relevant properties such as liberality, courage, or intelligence. Intrinsic racism is the foundation for any sort of racial solidarity or racial consciousness. Appiah concludes that intrinsic racism is also problematic: it fails the Kantian imperative

to make moral distinctions on morally relevant grounds because race is not a morally relevant ground.

Biko's Non-Racialism

In this section I examine two uses of the term “non-racialism” in Biko’s *I Write What I Like*. In the first instance, he has written a letter to Student Representatives Council presidents to describe the founding and the aim of the South African Students’ Organization (SASO), of which he was the president in February 1970. SASO grew out of the need to discuss the position of blacks in other student organizations such as the University Christian Movement and National Union of South African Students. These student organizations were white-dominated and gave little concern to the particular issues faced by the black student body. Further, blacks were not valued members in these organizations but rather place fillers to show that blacks were included in the organizations. These two concerns catalyzed the need for a black student organization leading to the creation of SASO in 1968. In its conception, there was a concern about the segregation of black students by white students as it seemed to follow apartheid logic. Biko expresses that SASO attempted to avoid segregation and was seeking true inclusion of all students from leadership to membership. Importantly, Biko points out in the conclusion of his letter that the list of criticisms of other student organizations, particularly NUSAS has been misinterpreted as “a rejection of non-racialism.”¹⁹ Here Biko makes two notable moves. First, he makes clear that this view that SASO is rejecting non-racialism constitutes a false understanding of SASO’s political goals, then, secondly, he implies that it is in fact other student organizations that are guilty of rejecting non-racialism by failing to integrate the black students into their groups.

The second occurrence of non-racialism I want to address is to be found in a brief letter Biko wrote containing the observations he made during SASO’s tour of black college campuses in South Africa. He describes what he calls artificial and token non-racialism. True non-racialism, at the student level, entailed blacks and whites participating as equal partners in the organizations. In other words, the concerns of black students would have equal weight as the concerns of white students. Prejudice was rampant in these organizations, according to Biko, making their non-racialism artificial. Artificial and token non-racialism, for Biko, was representative

of white liberalism. Liberalism and its endorsement of non-racialism required a denial of race both individually and structurally. This color-blind non-racialism is problematic because it does not seek to rectify the material inequalities in society. Biko's critique also points out that often whites maintain this color-blind non-racialism, so as to avoid interrogating their racial privilege. This enables whiteness to continue to go unquestioned. He argues that this type of non-racialism is artificial because it does not promote change and the transformation of society. Furthermore, this type of non-racialism is "token" because it merely makes the appearance that real change has occurred but this is a facade. This facade only serves whites, since white privilege and white power have in effect magically disappeared simply by the refusal to acknowledge race.

Biko also explicitly discusses non-racialism in a television interview.²⁰ According to Biko, he and his comrades did not believe in the guarantees of minority rights because these guarantees are based on the idea that individuals live in a non-egalitarian society. Rather than focus on the need for legal safeguards to protect against the breach of minority rights, Biko argues that the destruction of a non-egalitarian society is the most important political goal. He states, "There will be no minority or no majority. There shall just be people." Significantly, Biko explains that people will learn to live in a "non-racial" society only after education, in the same way that we expect people to learn to live in a socialist society only after education. It is the duty of "the vanguard political party" is to provide that education to the people. These three examples show clearly Biko's interest in non-racialism and his views on non-racialism can on this basis be accessed on their own terms.

As I state earlier, Frederikse includes Biko in her study on non-racialism twice but she identifies him simply as the leader who led student walk-outs and "heralded the demise of the era of fear and submissiveness and the birth of psychology of liberation."²¹ First, she includes Biko's inaugural article in *I Write What I Like*, which is entitled "Black Souls in White Skins?" Biko claims there that he does not support integration. Taking a position comparable to the Pan Africanist Congress's position (PAC), he describes the liberal understanding of integration in terms that we would now call assimilation. Integration in this sense requires that blacks assimilate to white values and norms. Liberals present this understanding of integration as a way to solve the problem of the separation between blacks and whites. They see only two options available: integration/non-racialism or separatism/apartheid/racialism. It would be a mistake to think

of Biko's understanding of non-racialism as on a par with the general view of non-racialism set out in *The Unbreakable Thread*. To be clear, Biko does not expect the achievement of a nonracial society to come merely from an opposition to multi-racialism, and he does not view non-racialism as the opposition to racial consciousness.

Second, Frederikse includes a photo of a poster with Biko's face on it with a caption that reads "Biko's Blood Did Not Spill in Vain," which was printed by the Azanian People's Organization.²² The Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) was founded in 1978. Frederikse includes a discussion of AZAPO's manifesto, which was presented on June 12, 1983, at the launch of the National Forum Committee. Their manifesto described the organization's commitment to destroying apartheid and racialized capitalism with three principles: anti-racism/anti-imperialism, anti-collaboration with the oppressor and political institutions, and a goal to organize independent working class people. AZAPO formed as the result of collaboration between the Black People's Convention, SASO, and the Black Community Project. AZAPO was influenced by both Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness and Marxism. Non-racialism as non-collaboration with the apartheid state is a position that also gets taken up by Neville Alexander, the Lenin Club, and the Non-European Unity Movement (shortened to the Unity Movement).

In "The Definition of Black Consciousness," Biko introduces the philosophy of Black Consciousness as means to achieve positive changes in black life as a means of black liberation. He explains that the "interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory programme is of paramount importance."²³ The individual is the subject of Black Consciousness and the individual's awareness of his or herself as a black individual—or what Lewis R. Gordon refers to as "being Black-in-the world"—is where the phenomenological account starts. This consciousness, combined with an emancipatory program that unifies other black individuals to achieve a group is the general idea of Black Consciousness.

There is a debate around the philosophical nature of the claims Biko makes concerning Black Consciousness. While Sam Nolutshungu claims that Biko's Black Consciousness lacks philosophical grounding, Mabago P. More suggests that Biko was an Africana existential philosopher.²⁴ Meanwhile, Gordon has argued that Biko's Black Consciousness is existential and phenomenological. He writes, "Why phenomenology? Phenomenology examines the formation of meaning as constituted by

consciousness where the latter is relationally understood as always directed in the manifestation of something. That Black Consciousness refers to a form of consciousness already calls for a phenomenological analysis.”²⁵ Gordon’s focus on phenomenology is another way to conceptualize how Biko’s account of Black Consciousness is directly philosophical. It is a basic assumption of this article that Biko’s ideas are philosophical and worthy of philosophical investigation.

There are three concepts fundamental to Biko’s understanding of non-racialism: black identity, black solidarity, and true integration. Black identity refers simply to the embracement of one’s blackness. Black solidarity denotes the group effort to achieve black liberation. The final concept, true integration, signifies the equal respectability of black and white cultures and their eventual blending. Each of these concepts serves as a step within Biko’s teleological understanding of non-racialism, which I am calling Biko’s *progressive understanding of non-racialism*.

Embracing one’s black identity is the catalyst for Black Consciousness; it is the first movement toward consciousness. It was Biko’s thought that people who were oppressed by white racism should come together to overcome their oppression. Hence, Mandela’s previous quotation about the late Biko quotes Biko himself: “Assert yourself and be self-reliant!” These words represent the very idea behind embracing black identity. In order to overcome oppression, individuals must embrace their black identity (or blackness if you will) and, more importantly, they must assert this identity. Biko’s words “Assert yourself” focus on the centrality of individual autonomy. Black Consciousness is not a simple acceptance of an identity; rather, it is the embracement of a collective identity as a path to engagement. This is what it means to “be self-reliant.” This embrace of black identity also served, controversially, as a critique of some “coloured” South Africans who hesitated to align themselves with the black liberation struggle.

In the context of Black Consciousness, black identity is not about the color of one’s skin, but rather the need to correct the association of blackness with inferiority. Biko explains, “Being black is not a matter of pigmentation—being black is a reflection of a mental attitude.”²⁶ To be black is to strive toward emancipation. Being non-white, by contrast, is a matter of accepting one’s subservience: focusing on inferiority rather than pigmentation: “the fact that we are all not *white* does not necessarily mean we are all *black*. Non-whites do exist.”²⁷ Admittedly this passage is open to a number of interpretations, but, Biko appears to be pointing out the

potential for blackness to be detached from inferiority, a detachment that would require disassociating blackness with inferiority.

The second concept that frames Biko's understanding of non-racialism is black solidarity. Black solidarity is a direct consequence of this embracement of black identity. Embracing one's black identity should simultaneously generate an intrinsic motivation to liberate oneself. This liberation can only take place through a group effort. The next step on the path to black liberation is dissociating inferiority from black identity and black culture.

Another way of understanding what black solidarity means for Biko is through culture. While Biko does not spend much time explicating what he means by culture, one can infer from the South African contexts that he emphasizes culture because of the various cultural groups living in South Africa with different languages, values, religions and educational backgrounds. The white cultures are the English (Anglo) and the Dutch (Boer), and the various black cultures include the Zulus, Xhosas, etc. For Biko, it is essential that black culture be as equally respectable as white culture in order for true integration to occur. Take, for example, the idea that African culture is "time-bound," an idea that Biko opposes. This is the idea that African culture somehow remains trapped in the past. He concedes that the "two major cultures that met and 'fused' were the African Culture and the Anglo-Boer Culture. Whereas the African culture was unsophisticated and simple, the Anglo-Boer culture had all the trappings of a colonialist culture and, therefore, was heavily equipped for conquest."²⁸ This description distinguishes African culture as primitive and simple. These commonly ascribed traits make the Anglo and Boer cultures appear superior in comparison. Black solidarity fights against common conceptions that deem African cultures as inferior. According to Biko, African culture is modern, just like European cultures.

The third concept that frames how Biko understands non-racialism is true integration. It provides the futuristic character of Biko's non-racialism. The long-term goal of Black Consciousness was indeed integration. Biko thought that there would be no need for Black Consciousness if South Africa were a free and equal country. He writes that "the 'Black Consciousness approach would be irrelevant in a colourless and non-exploitative egalitarian society."²⁹ However, true integration could only be achieved by those cultures that were considered equal. The Black Consciousness Movement intended to destroy that which stunted

black liberation; namely white racism and black inferiority. From this perspective, a nonracial society marks the most important achievement in the black liberation struggle. It is important to note, however, that Biko distinguishes his understanding of non-racialism from others. According to Biko, these other modes of understandings non-racialism draw on artificial rather than true integration.

Artificial integration required blacks to assimilate into minority white culture in South Africa. In explaining the aim of the Black Consciousness Movement, Biko writes that it “seems to infuse the black community with a new found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and outlook to life.”³⁰ In opposition to artificial integration, true integration is a blending of equal cultures; it should not be applied thoughtlessly. Biko states, “Each group must be able to attain its style of existence without encroaching on or being thwarted by another. Out of this mutual respect for each other and *complete freedom of self-determination*, there will obviously raise a genuine fusion of the lifestyles of various groups. This is true integration.”³¹ The distinction between artificial integration and true integration serves as a critique of liberal approaches to non-racialism.³² Biko thought that white liberals were playing their “old game,” when they adopted non-racialism. He claims, “We are concerned with the curious bunch of nonconformists who explain their participation in negative terms: the bunch of do-gooders that goes under all sorts of names—liberals, leftists, etc.”³³ His critique of the uses of non-racialism is not merely aimed at liberals, but those on the left more generally. This separates Biko from Neville Alexander and the Unity Movement, which both had communist foundations and held the view that class should be the focus of resistance movements. Alexander’s focus on class, rather than race, represents a particular strand of non-racialism.

The embrace of black identity, black solidarity, and true integration are fundamental concepts for Biko that represent process toward achieving a nonracial society. Consequently, Biko’s non-racialism can be classified as teleological or progressive. The steps again are as follows: embrace one’s blackness; recognize that all cultures are equal; and use this consciousness to facilitate a blending of these cultures to achieve a nonracial society. Sometimes Biko discusses these steps in a style that suggests that they occur simultaneously. My own depiction of these steps as consecutive is intended only to draw out the importance of each aspect of racial consciousness as it pertains to Biko’s non-racialism.

Post-Racialism in the United States

As with non-racialism, the discussion of post-racialism has suffered due to its variable meaning. Howard McGary explains that a concept of the post-racial has difficulty getting off the ground because it “has been used to describe a range of views that run the gamut.”³⁴ Unlike the discussion surrounding non-racialism, post-racialism has endured a lot of criticism. Recently, critical philosophers of race have attempted to define post-racialism further, such as Paul C. Taylor’s “Post Black, Old Black,” Howard McGary’s Aquinas Lecture entitled “The Post-Racial Ideal,” and Kathryn Gines’s “A Critique of Post-Racialism: Conserving Race and Complicating Blackness Beyond the Black-white Binary.”³⁵ Post-racialism is also a blurry political aspiration but this is not problematic until one considers its critiques. Any critique of post-racialism must be specific about which understanding of post-racialism it is attacking since its range of meaning makes it difficult to attack all of them at once.

McGary provides a useful typology for post-racialism. His typology of post-racialism corresponds to the understandings of non-racialism, which I discussed in the first and second sections of this paper. He distinguishes between post-racialisms that amount to forms of racial eliminationism and those that do not. The former can usefully be divided into three: post-racialism as individualism, post-racialism as racial integrationism, and post-racialism as color blindness. These understandings of post-racialism are what I call principled forms. He calls these three understandings of post-racialism the assimilationist views. McGary’s fourth understanding of post-racialism is a non-assimilationist view that maintains benign racial identities.

The approach to post-racialism that employs the principle of individualism is the most common conception of post-racialism in the United States. According to McGary, this understanding of post-racialism is understood to be one “where ‘no one thinks about race anymore,’ but instead we are able to see one another as ‘individuals’ because we have put some ugly aspects of US history behind us.”³⁶ This conception often appeals to the argument that races are not natural kinds and, as a result, we cannot talk about races at all. Furthermore, as the logic goes, individual identity is disrespected when race-talk is used. McGary reminds us that post-racialism that employs the principle of assimilationism is not new. Fredrick Douglass might be considered one of the earliest proponents of

a view similar to this one. Douglass argued that racial identities restricted individuals and acted as a barrier against human progress. Both Douglass's assimilationism and his universal humanism led him to argue that race, gender, and national identities are superficial; thus, we should all focus on our common humanity rather than individual differences in the journey for human progress.

The second understanding of post-racialism focuses on integration. Lawrence Bobo illustrates this point best, when he writes, "A second and no less controversial view of post-racialism takes the position that the level and pace of change in the demographic makeup and the identity choices and politics of Americans are rendering the traditional black-white divide irrelevant."³⁷ This understanding was essential to the success of Barack Obama's presidential campaign. In his speech at the 2004 Democratic national convention, Obama appealed to this line of reasoning. "There is not a liberal America and a conservative America—there is the United States of America. There is not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America—there's the United States of America." For Obama, the focus is on our shared identity as Americans, rather than our racial differences. Furthermore, it is implied that to make any sort of progress and to maintain hope for the future, national identity is more important. According to McGary, these post-racialists "do not believe that the good or just society requires us to move beyond race, however they do insist that all racial groups must be regarded as legal, moral, and social equals."³⁸ In the United States, as in South Africa, the nation as a whole becomes the dominant focus.

The third understanding of post-racialism focuses on color blindness or racial eliminativism. This is the most attacked version of post-racialism. I think this the most helpful aspect of McGary's typology. He makes a distinction between post-racial ideas that want to eliminate race and those that merely want to eliminate racial inequality but retain benign racial identities. He implies this through a general distinction between post-racial ideals: the common post-racial ideal and the cautionary post-racial ideal, with Appiah being a representative of the common post-racial ideal and Tommie Shelby being a representative of the cautionary post-racial ideal. As previously discussed, Appiah's solution to the problem of race, is to stop acknowledging race altogether and thus to embrace a form of color blindness. Shelby, on the other hand, makes room for the acknowledgement of race and therefore does not support this version of post-racialism.³⁹

In the United States, post-racialism defined by color blindness has been taken up in legal studies. Suma Cho defines post-racialism as

the move is to effectuate a “retreat from race.” This retreat from race takes at least three forms: material, as the retreat from state-imposed remedies; sociocultural, as the retreat from white liberal/progressive deference to Black normativity on the meaning of racial equality and justice; and political, as the retreat from collective political entities organized along racial lines and agendas as a legitimate protest or reform vehicle.⁴⁰

Cho’s understanding of post-racialism as a “retreat from race” emphasizes the way in which post-racialism (based on the color-blind principle) finds fault in discussing race and moves to stop discussing race altogether. In explaining this understanding of post-racialism, Cho goes further than I do here to show all the ways in which the principle of color blindness is used. The important thing to note is that this understanding of post-racialism has become prevalent within legal studies.

Conclusion

There are other understandings of non-racialism besides the one proposed by Biko that claim that racial consciousness is important. In “Race as an Emancipatory Concept in South Africa,” Raymond Suttner argues that race must be included in discussions about non-racialism; and yet he also turns around and argues that it “makes sense” to exclude race talk, when discussing humanity.⁴¹ Regardless, it does not make sense to exclude race talk when discussing the existence of social inequality. Interpretations of non-racialism that include racial consciousness may not always be progressive, but they can be principled. As an example, Suttner advocates the strategic use of racial categories; at the same time, he demonstrates a concern that these categories could become permanent. To the argument that Biko’s progressive understanding of non-racialism is not radical enough, I would respond only that it is radical enough for my purposes here.

When Biko reconciled Black Consciousness with a progressive non-racialism, he was confident that Black Consciousness was a viable political program in South Africa. Given the differences in this context between

South Africa and the United States, for example, the proportion of the population that is black, there may be no reason to believe that a political program that would work in one place would work in the other. It was not my intention, however, to make principled non-racialism and principled post-racialism appear identical, but rather to show only that they use the same principles.

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NOTES

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1. The term “racial eliminativism” has no currency in South African philosophical discussions.
2. Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004).
3. Barack H. Obama, “A More Perfect Union,” speech delivered at the National Constitution Center, Philadelphia, May 18, 2008.
4. David Everatt, “Non-racialism in South Africa: Status Prospects,” in *Non-Racialism in South Africa*, ed. David Everatt (New York: Routledge, 2014), 2.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Rupert Taylor, “South Africa: From ‘Race’ to Non-Racialism.” In *“Race,” Ethnicity and Nation: International Perspectives on Social Conflict*, ed. Peter Radcliffe (London: UCL, 1994).
7. Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 96.
8. Taylor, “South Africa: From ‘Race’ to Non-Racialism,” 95.
9. Michael MacDonald, *Why Race Matters in South Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2006), 92.
10. Julie Frederikse, *The Unbreakable Thread: Non-racialism in South Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 7.
11. *Ibid.*, 259.
12. Rupert Taylor, “Deepening Non-racialism in South Africa.” *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 39, no. 1 (2012).
13. Taylor, “South Africa: From ‘Race’ to Non-Racialism,” 93. Emphasis mine.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Nelson Mandela, “I am prepared to die” (speech, Pretoria, South Africa, April 20, 1964).

16. Taylor, "South Africa: From 'Race' to Non-Racialism," 95.
17. I will discuss Howard McGary's argument that Appiah's arguments are a form of post-racialism, in the penultimate section.
18. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Racisms." In *The Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990), 5-6.
19. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 15.
20. "Steve Biko Talks on Non-Racialism," <http://www.polity.org.za/article/steve-biko-talks-on-non-racialism-archive-2015-06-18>.
21. Frederikse, *The Unbreakable Thread: Non-racialism in South Africa*, 108.
22. *Ibid.*, 205.
23. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 49.
24. Mabago P. More, "Biko: African Existentialist Philosophy." In *Biko Lives: Contesting Legacies of Steve Biko*, ed. Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander, and Nigel C. Gibson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 49.
25. Lewis Gordon, "A Phenomenology of Biko's Black Consciousness." In *Biko Lives: Contesting Legacies of Steve Biko*, ed. Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander, and Nigel C. Gibson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 83.
26. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 48.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, 41.
29. *Ibid.*, 92.
30. *Ibid.*, 49.
31. *Ibid.*, 50. Emphasis mine.
32. Biko's criticism of the liberal use of non-racialism has led contemporary non-racialists to attempt to separate non-racialism from liberalism and to clarify non-racialism itself as a distinct concept. Kelly Gillespie focuses on a tradition of non-racialism that has radical roots in order to help inform South Africans about how they can think about changing the racial predicament they face today. Raymond Suttner focuses on ways to strengthen non-racialism as a concept. This speaks to the potentiality of the non-racialism and racial redress needed to make non-racialism an emancipatory concept. Rupert Taylor considers the problems of the concept and proposes ways to advance the discussion of non-racialism. These were all efforts to promote non-racialism historically, conceptually and for its general intellectual and social advancement in South Africa. (See "Works Cited.")
33. Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 92.
34. Howard McGary. *The Post-Racial Ideal*. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2012), *The Post Racial Ideal*, 13.
35. Howard McGary, *The Post-Racial Ideal*. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2012).
- Paul C. Taylor, "Post Black, Old Black," *African American Review* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2007).
36. McGary, *The Post Racial Ideal*, 13.
37. Lawrence D. Bobo, "Somewhere between Jim Crow and Post-racialism: Reflections on the Racial Divide in America Today," *Dædalus* 140 no. 2 (Spring, 2011), 13.

38. McGary, *The Post Racial Ideal*, 12.
39. Although I do not have the room here, I would like to suggest that theories like Shelby's also point to the liberatory potential of post-racialism. This involves arguing that he is a post-racialist and I am persuaded by McGary's argument that Shelby is.
40. Suma Cho, "Post-racialism," *Iowa Law Review* 94 (2009), 1594.
41. Raymond Suttner, "Understanding Non-racialism as an Emancipatory Concept," *Theoria* 59. no. 130 (2012), 22.

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