

“Not eradicated by enlightenment alone”: Reinhold Niebuhr and the conflicted meaning of racial factions in American civic life.

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This article assesses the association between ethnic identity and political factionalism in the thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), the American theologian, ethical philosopher, public commentator, and former professor at Union Theological Seminary. It is the first study to offer an extended assessment of his interest in the political theory of James Madison, the chief architect of the US Constitution. In doing so it sheds new light on the interaction – but also the dissonance – between Niebuhr’s ideas on racial factionalism and the ideology of ‘colour-blind conservatism’ that developed in the decades after his death. Niebuhr queried those who believed that federal institutions could accomplish racial equality merely through top-down acts of legislation. However benevolent governments seemed, he asserted, they were likely comprised of fallible individuals whose support for racial equality masked more selfish interests. From the 1970s to the present day, some conservative policy commentators have tried to use Niebuhr’s ideas in opposition to affirmative action and other large-scale government initiatives, many of which are intended to impact positively against the continuing disadvantages of African-American communities. Alongside their reading of Niebuhr, they have tended to stress the necessary neutrality of government interventionism, as supposedly promoted by America’s constitutional architects during the late-eighteenth century. A desire for neutrality, they suggest, provides a framework to oppose any further state and federal initiatives in racial matters following the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Yet in contrast to their ideology of colour-blind conservatism, Niebuhr’s diagnosis of intractable race-pride did not require citizens to eschew the importance of state and federal institutions in diminishing racial inequality. Partially influenced by his reading of Madison on faction, Niebuhr suggested that the intractability of racial distinctions required continued federal activity even after the legal dismantling of segregation; so as to channel ethnic tensions through representative mechanisms, rather than simply wishing them away. During the last three decades, color-blind conservatism has tended to eschew the radical implications in Niebuhr’s discussion of the relationship between American government and ethnic factionalism.

“The opinions of men, depending only on the evidence contemplated by their own minds, cannot follow the dictates of other men....”

James Madison, Memorial & Remonstrance, May 1785

“Individual perfection is too often made an end in itself.”

Martin Luther King, Jr, “Reinhold Niebuhr’s Ethical Dualism,” May 9, 1952

“I love him [Niebuhr]. He’s one of my favorite philosophers...I take away the compelling ideas that there’s serious evil in the world, and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. But we shouldn’t use that as an excuse for cynicism and inaction...not swinging from naïve idealism to bitter realism”.

Barack Obama, April 2007

INTRODUCTION

In *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932) Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) outlined his disillusionment with the optimism that inclined contemporary thinkers to attribute goodwill to civic authorities. The influential American theologian, ethical philosopher, public commentator, and professor at Union Theological Seminary suggested that the human “ego force” merely magnified when individuals were concentrated in central political authority. In many of his subsequent writings and commentaries Niebuhr continued to deploy a Calvinistic conception of Original Sin; questioning liberal assurance in the positive trajectory of American foreign and domestic affairs. On the domestic front, for example, he queried whether federal institutions could further racial equality through carefully designed forms of legislation. However benevolent governments seemed, Niebuhr asserted, they were most likely comprised of fallible individuals whose support for racial equality masked more selfish interests. “Race pride”, Niebuhr argued in 1954, would dissipate more effectively in response to the gradual “interaction between law and custom” in local communities - rather than from centralized government directives. The latter, according to Niebuhr, risked inspiring a white backlash against even slow acts of desegregation. Yet a decade later, Niebuhr chided conservatives who used such knowledge to prevent any form of concerted action from government legislation. He reminded Americans that pride could just as easily be manifested among those who were “self-satisfied” in pointing out the universality of sin. Their fatalistic vision, in his opinion, merely provided a convenient justification for inaction in regard to the welfare of other men.¹

Despite questioning aspects of liberal optimism, therefore, the Niebuhrian critique was not straightforwardly opposed to all forms of political activism – including in matters of racial equality. It is thus unsurprising that the “long shadow” cast by Niebuhr has encouraged much ambiguity and confusion in the “acrid dispute between liberals and conservatives” during the post-Reagan era. As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. pointed out in 1992, policy wonks of all stripes posthumously “claimed him” as their

own - whether they were opposed to or in favour of federal interventionism in domestic and foreign affairs. Since Schlesinger's statement, and particularly after the election of Barack Obama, scholars and politicians have contributed to what has been described as a burgeoning "Niebuhr industry" in American public policy commentary, not least in regard to race relations. Once again, they have debated whether Niebuhr was liberal or conservative, pragmatic or idealistic, pessimistic or positive; and whether he perceived such dichotomies as in some way false when they were related to government legislation.²

Since 2008, some conservative writers, politicians, and policy-makers have frequently employed veiled racial allusions while referencing the political and moral theories of Niebuhr. Opposing the "unintended consequences" of Obamacare and other federal legislation, they have accused the President and "the liberal left" of unrealistic optimism in their support for large-scale government initiatives, many of which are intended to impact positively against the continuing disadvantages of African-American communities. In censuring urban health and welfare policies as tantamount to social engineering, they have incorporated critical ideas that first appeared in resistance to affirmative action during the 1970s, and which also attempted to use the philosophy of Niebuhr to provide intellectual and moral coherence. They have questioned the motivation and efficacy of those who claim to redress socio-economic imbalances through centrally-directed public policy (including Obamacare).³

The contemporary ideology of "color-blind conservatism" does not deny the ways in which segregation once connected the corrupt personal interests of a white racial pride to the communal authority of government (through the notorious discriminatory 'Jim Crow' racial legislation persisting in the southern states long after the US Civil War). But in the decades following the 1964 Civil Rights Act, according to its reasoning, specific racial interests have once again been attached to state and federal authority through affirmative action and other legislation – what Niebuhr might have defined as an ironically problematic consequence of government activism that purported to promote a color-blind society. Opposing the (supposed) bias of affirmative action in favour of African American vocational and educational interests, conservative activists often use Martin Luther King's religious sermons on racial equality and colour blindness to support their agenda. They highlight his strong influence by Niebuhr during the 1950s and 1960s in order to suggest his innate distrust of *all* federal institutions and laws – whether segregated or not.⁴

Alongside its (re)reading of Niebuhr and King, color-blind conservatism has often reimagined the legacy of the Civil Rights movement through reference to the American Founding. It has tended to stress the necessary neutrality of government

interventionism, as supposedly promoted by America's constitutional architects during the late-eighteenth century- particularly James Madison, chief architect of the US Constitution. A desire for neutrality among American founders, color-blind conservatives suggest, provides a framework to oppose any further state and federal initiatives in racial matters following the Civil Rights Act.⁵

During the final years of the Obama administration, therefore, it is apposite to examine the legacy of the association between ethnic identity and government interventionism in Niebuhrian thought. Such an analysis will shed new light on the interaction – but also the dissonance - between Niebuhr's ideas on racial factionalism and the ideology of colour-blind conservatism that has developed in the decades after his death. Evaluating Niebuhr's understanding of the historical relationship between public policy and ethno-racial interest groups, this article then assesses its ambiguous influence on conservative opposition to affirmative action and other federal policies up to the present day. How in fact did Niebuhr link his vision of the American Founding, and his religious philosophy, to the ideology of the Civil Rights movement? How have modern conservative thinkers developed from this a rather different appreciation of the relationship between American constitutional history, government activism, and racial interest groups? Answering these two questions should provide a significant historical dimension that we can use to better understand today's dilemmas regarding the role of central federal authority in redressing racial imbalances; not just through affirmative action but also in other more general legislative areas.

NIEBUHRIAN THEOLOGY AND THE MADISONIAN FOUNDING

During the first half of the twentieth century, political analysts who advocated the transformative power of the federal government often cast Thomas Jefferson as an enlightened optimist. John Dewey, perhaps the archetypal “liberal reformist” thinker, detected a hopeful vision of human cooperation in Jeffersonian philosophy – an understanding that innate benevolence could be deployed in favor of concerted action by legislative bodies.⁶ Dewey described the author of the American Declaration of Independence as “the most universal... human being of all his American and perhaps European contemporaries” and appreciated him for “his faith in scientific advance as a means of popular enlightenment and of social progress” while valuing his “belief in the union of theory and experience – or practice”. He lauded Jefferson's apparent trust in the “will of the people as the moral basis of government” and avoided describing any dichotomy between popular volition and the activities of those who worked in federal

institutions or enacted national laws. Dewey perceived “this deep-seated faith in the people and their responsiveness to enlightenment properly presented...[as] the cardinal element bequeathed by Jefferson to the American tradition”. He cast himself, apparently like Jefferson, as a representative of “a moral idealism, not a dreamy utopianism”. His brand of liberalism has often been described as a branch of “social gospel” activism – a means to funnel individual moral efforts into civic activities.⁷

Dewey’s most prominent opponent was Reinhold Niebuhr, who questioned his optimistic vision of that which governments and institutions could accomplish. Niebuhr detected a disquieting continuity between twentieth-century social-gospel theory and a particular strand of eighteenth-century enlightenment philosophy. As a self-described polymath and sometime critic of orthodox Christianity, Jefferson gravitated towards enlightenment theories, particularly those that emanated from revolutionary France. Dewey’s attraction to Jefferson, according to Niebuhr, represented “a typical and convenient example” of those who failed to recognize “the power, extent and persistence of group egoism in human relations”. Rejecting Dewey’s faith in the growing “intelligence” and developmental progress of federal institutions, Niebuhr claimed that human sympathy was made “much more difficult, if not impossible, for human societies and social groups” – including in their representative political institutions. In “every human group there is less reason to guide and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships.”⁸

In his famous definition of democracy, in *The Children of Light, Children of Darkness* (1944), Niebuhr suggested that “Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary”.⁹ Describing the political model heralded by the American Founding, therefore, he further distinguished himself from Dewey. The first clause in his statement, according to Patrick Deenan, expressed his “democratic faith” in the *potential* of human political association. But potential differed from actuality in his vision. Thus the second clause questioned the confidence of those who believed that federal and civic institutions could harness the enlightened sensibility of their constituents.¹⁰ Niebuhr chided the “children of light” for their “naïve form of democratic faith” that sought to forge “an identity between the individual and the general interest”. They demonstrated “stupidity” in their “evolutionary hope” that “human history is moving toward a form of rationality which will finally achieve a perfect identity of self-interest and the public good”. Such a belief led Niebuhr to conclude that excess optimism in the scope of government represented “a source of peril to democratic society; for contemporary

experience is refuting this optimism and there is danger that it will seem to refute the democratic ideal as well.”¹¹

Thankfully, according to Niebuhr, the heritage of American constitutional philosophy offered an alternative to the hubristic optimism of Jefferson (or at least as Jefferson was depicted by Dewey and other Social Gospel theorists). Other political philosophers, particularly James Madison, offered modern Americans a more realistic – and even Calvinistic – account of the human propensity to form into political factions; manifestations of “group egoism” that contradicted the notion of universal human benevolence.¹² In *Federalist No.10*, the essay which Madison used to defend his 1787 design for the US Constitution, he defined his conception of faction: “By a faction I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse or passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”¹³ In *Federalist 55*, Madison wrote “[that] in all very numerous assemblies, or whatever character composed, passion never fails to wrest the scepter from reason.”¹⁴ In his *Irony of American History* (1952) Niebuhr described his own similar understanding of the association between factionalism and group-egoism, lauding Madison for having adopted “Christian realism in the interpretation of human nature...”¹⁵

In *Man’s Nature and His Communities* (1965), Niebuhr suggested that “Madison was the only one of the founding fathers who made a realistic analysis of both power and interest from a political and democratic perspective. He was governed by a basic insight of political realism, namely the “intimate relation” between reason and self-love. He did not propose to suppress faction but to manage it, because he wisely realized that the price of liberty was the free play of interests in collective terms.” And so, “in America, the revolution” was partially “saved from Lockean principles, which were its original inspiration, not only by many historical factors but also by...[the eventually legacy] of such moderate realists as James Madison...”¹⁶

Niebuhr suggested that the “Christian attitude” toward government – “one that stressed human depravity” – demanded a Madisonian conception of “political order as a vast realm of mutually dependent and conflicting powers” which in turn called for “the specific equilibria of forces”.¹⁷ “Madison”, Niebuhr pointed out, “feared the potential tyranny of government as much as Jefferson; but he understood the necessity of government much more... [Madison’s] Constitution projects the citizen against abuses of government, not so much by keeping government weak as by introducing the principle of balance of power into government”.¹⁸ As he summarized elsewhere, the “faith of modern man contains two related articles: the idea of progress and the idea of

perfectibility of man. The latter is frequently the basis of the former article. Man is regarded as indeterminately perfectible because it is not understood that every growth of human freedom may have evil as well as virtuous consequences... This essential religion of modernity is no less “dogmatic” for being implicit rather than explicit, and it is no more true for being arrayed in the panoply of science.”¹⁹ Towards the end of his life, therefore, Niebuhr suggested that “liberal democracies” had become “too Lockean, rationalistic, and voluntaristic to understand that statesmanship must rely primarily on a rational manifestation of the subrational loyalties of men [as once defined by Madison, and corroborated by Calvinist philosophy]”.²⁰

NIEBUHR AND THE INTRACTIBILITY OF RACIAL FACTIONS IN AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONALISM

Having acknowledged that the “latent causes of faction” were “sown in the nature of man”, Madison recommended balancing subjective interest groups against each other. He sought to harness rather than deny their negative traits, allowing equal and opposing egos to check each other, chiefly through the formation of a House of Representatives. Yet as Niebuhr noted in 1965, in an attempt to synthesize his constitutional and moral ideas from the previous two decades, Madison “did not anticipate that Western democracies would organize their procedures through the very ‘factions’ or parties, which the Founding Fathers so much abhorred”. Parties, in his view, had become problematic in their formal attachment to central governance and in their unrealistic desire to order, simplify and enlighten factional interests.²¹

Since the nineteenth century, according to Niebuhr, the entrenchment of white ethnic identity in parties had worked to undermine the Madisonian constitutional equilibrium. As he developed his interest in the political theory of the American Founding, therefore, he considered the vexing role of race in the history of American democracy. From as early as 1942, he defined ethnic discrimination as a communal manifestation of individual “race-pride”. The “collective activity” of racism was intrinsically immoral because it crystallized the subjective pride of white Americans. “[R]ace bigotry” was “in short, one form of original sin. Original sin is something darker and more terrible than mere stupidity and is therefore not eradicated by enlightenment alone...”²² Racism, Niebuhr argued in his 1944 work on *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, resulted from the tragic illusion of communal self-definition: white individuals purported to align themselves with a broader shared identity so that the “particular crime of the Negroes is that they diverge too obviously

from type. They are black.” From the nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century, in such an analysis, different ethnic factions were not represented in equal and opposing forces. Rather, civic institutions became manifestly aggregated towards *one particular* ethnic group identity - the white communal interest. Thus, as Niebuhr continued to point out through the 1950s, American constitutionalism had failed to harness the necessary chaos of competing egoism. The collective enlargement of white ethnic pride had been sufficient to override the Madisonian competition of interests in government; so large that the marginalization of African-Americans had come to dominate legislative discourse.²³

Niebuhr’s growing awareness of racial discrimination, and his Calvinist perception that it was rooted in sinful egoism, led him to critique white liberal optimism regarding the improvement of Civil Rights through government activism. In as early as 1928, in fact, he had used his essay on “The Confession of a Tired Radical” to highlight “the bigotries and prejudices” of white liberals who purported to oppose racial discrimination. He associated “racial arrogance” with “an undue amount of race pride”. While “not a unique Nordic sin” the (white) majority retained the capacity to “indulge its arrogance more freely” even when ostensibly in favor of civil rights. White liberals, according to Niebuhr, paid lip-service to equality without considering the immutability of human pride. In doing so, they failed to understand the intractability of racial conflict in America. He cautioned them for believing that a few acts of legislation could create a color-blind community. Notwithstanding their tentative support for civil rights, Niebuhr claimed that they, like “all groups, religious and racial, tend to preserve their self-respect by adopting contemptuous attitudes toward other groups and to express their appreciation of their own characteristic culture by deprecating that of others”.²⁴

Civic activism, according to Niebuhr, placed necessary pressure on government to represent a wider body of competing interests. Thus he avoided imagining racial and cultural neutrality in the political process, in the way of liberal “utopianism.” Rather, his realistic philosophy pressured federal institutions to incorporate more ethno-cultural groups in their combative deliberate frameworks: pressure to implement a process of “managed anarchy” that was never static or terminal.²⁵ The principle of government as “an organizing center within a given field of social vitalities” was on a “higher plane of moral sanction and social necessity than the balance of power.”²⁶ And so Niebuhr sought to reconcile the inevitability of “race-pride” with a Madisonian framework of central governance. He recommended binding “children of darkness” into authority even while they espoused widely differing notions of ethno-racial identity. Continued activism necessarily pressured governments to harness the competition between diverse

ethnic and cultural interests; rather than allowing any one subjective faction to dominate over another, or relying on the flawed ideal of neutral governance.²⁷

Niebuhr's ambivalence towards liberal political optimism even led him to question the importance of the June 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case, in which the Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional. Responding to a second *Brown* ruling, which settled for "all deliberate speed" in implementing the 1954 decision, Niebuhr wrote a controversial essay titled "A Theologian's Comments on the Negro in America". He did not deny that the *Brown* decision was necessary to remove an egregious instance of racial segregation. But he also wondered whether liberals were overly optimistic in regard to the power of federal interventions, and whether they overlooked potential "unintended consequences". As an entrenched manifestation of sinful egoism, according to Niebuhr, "race pride" might dissipate more effectively in response to the gradual "interaction between law and custom" in local communities - rather than due to centralized directives from afar. The latter risked inspiring a backlash that would negate the positive steps put in place by the *Brown* decision.²⁸

MISREADING MADISON? COLOR-BLIND CONSERVATISM AFTER NIEBUHR.

In *The Irony of American History*, Niebuhr predicted that well-to-do Americans would use "Jeffersonian" ideology to oppose the New Deal alliance between poorer workers, African-Americans, and interventionist federal institutions. Jefferson, after all, had castigated Federalists during the 1790s for centralizing government rather than trusting in the enlightened benevolence of local state actors. Niebuhr made his observation in order to show the unintended trajectory of subjective human ideas: Jeffersonianism had been adapted to support Dewey's optimism regarding the role of government in promoting social equality, yet could easily be appropriated by conservative pessimists.²⁹ Several strands of modern conservatism have indeed championed the Jeffersonian legacy in order to promote a shift of power away from centralized government towards independent private citizens in the local sphere. Niebuhr himself has often been appropriated towards the same cause.³⁰

From the 1970s to the present day, for example, conservative public policy commentators have often referenced Niebuhr alongside Martin Luther King when making the case against the perceived threat of affirmative action. Thirty five years after Niebuhr published *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, the former civil rights activist William

Bennet delivered a lecture at the conservative *Heritage Foundation*. Speaking in November 1993, Bennet was introduced to his audience as a man who had been “persecuted in 1968 by conservatives and by liberals in the 1990s” merely for arguing that “America should be a colour-blind society in which we do not discriminate or give preference based on race.” The introduction continued: “Bill Bennett was beaten up for holding these views in Mississippi in 1968. Today, when he expresses the same views, he is sharply criticized by race-conscious liberals from the Northeast and Midwest. Meanwhile black and white conservatives in Mississippi are now joining forces on issues such as prayer in the schools.” Liberals were portrayed as dividing contemporary America as had an earlier generation of conservatives. Both, according to the introduction, advocated race consciousness. Bennet continued on this theme, using a Niebuhrian vocabulary to highlight his own “ironic situation.” Pointing out that Christian piety enabled unity between blacks and whites, he suggested to his audience that “Martin Luther King” did “pretty well [with] Reinhold Niebuhr” as a model to remind him of the dangers posed by government-sanctioned racial preferencing.³¹

Bennet claimed to remind modern liberals of King’s “conservative” colour-blindness, as partially inspired by Niebuhr - a “moral obligation” to limit federal welfare initiatives that were deemed to favor one group over another. Walter Williams, an economist and libertarian, made a similar argument in 1993: “[civil rights organizations] once part of a proud struggle have now squandered their moral authority. They are little more than race hustlers championing a racial spoils system. They no longer seek fair play and a colour-blind society; their agenda is one of group rights where quota is king and colour-blindness is viewed with contempt. Today’s civil rights organizations differ only in degree, but not in kind, from white racist organizations past and present.” Ward Connerly, a leading proponent of California’s Proposition 209, claimed in 1997 to “fight to get the nation back on the journey that Dr. King laid out.” The proposition sought to ban affirmative action in public universities. All three figures used reasoning that was ostensibly similar to Niebuhr in his earlier critique of “group egoism”. In doing so, they distinguished modern government initiatives from the supposedly “colour-blind” legacy of King. Government action in historically black communities, they argued, violated a standard of “race-neutrality” that was set by King in his desire to restore American constitutionalism to its founding ideals.³²

Through the first decade of the twenty-first century and into the present era, a number of conservative politicians and commentators have appropriated King in similar ways. In 2003, for example, George W. Bush addressed the First Baptist Church in Landover, Maryland. He lauded the benefits of local religious initiatives over federal interventionism, invoking the “colour-blind” legacy of the Civil Rights leader.³³ A

month later, writing under his own name, Bush's speechwriter David Frum emphasized the importance of neutral racial policies and the limitation of affirmative action. Rejecting the notion that equality was contingent on radical changes wrought by federal policy, he highlighted what he viewed to be the conservative legacy of the civil rights movement. The movement, in his opinion, had approached social change in the way of the eighteenth-century American founders:

We can forgive George Washington and James Madison and Thomas Jefferson for founding a slave-holding republic precisely because we know that the republic abolished slavery, and we can forgive Martin Luther King for consorting with Communists because we know that the Communists' hopes to use civil rights to upend the free-market system were thwarted... In the case of the civil-rights movement, the country accepted what was acceptable (the demand for full legal equality between the races) and rejected what was unacceptable (the demands for a radical redistribution of wealth). That's how progress proceeds.

According to influential factions of the later Civil Rights movement, true equality in African-American communities required institutional mechanisms in the economic and civic sphere to be overhauled fundamentally. Frum opposed the radicalism inherent in such a conclusion. The eventual abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century, he pointed out, returned Americans to their founding ideals of liberty and neutrality without requiring every aspect of American civic life to be overturned. Similarly, the Civil Rights movement permitted the entrenchment of racial equality without maintaining its flirtation with "Communists" who demanded fundamental restructuring of American economic institutions – so that the country eventually "accepted what was acceptable...and rejected what was unacceptable". And so Frum sought to demonstrate "the way in which new ideas get integrated into the national life precisely by evolving into new and more conservative forms that all Americans can accept after the fact."³⁴

Frum appropriated a notion of colour-blindness while circumventing more "radical" aspects of King's civic vision. By invoking the "universal" morality of the American Founding he wrestled away the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement from those who sought societal change through the restructuring of federal institutions, and who regarded "themselves as the movement's true inheritors". Carolyn Garris, Program Coordinator in the Center for American Studies at the Heritage Foundation, used similar reasoning in a 2006 policy document she authored. "In a nation divided by cultural diversity", Garris argued, "conservatives defend and celebrate the characteristics that we share as Americans" by opposing affirmative action. As America apparently drifted "from the ideas and ideals of the Founders, conservatives stand with

King as believers that the principles of the American Founding are as relevant today as in 1776.” In opposing the federal government for favouring one ethnic group over another (in her opinion) only conservatives could provide true “unity” between citizens. Racial justice, in such an account, would follow gradual developments that were “expressed in our social interactions...[so as to harness] a morally-informed sense of social obligation” among individuals rather than as a result of top-down government legislation. According to Garris, conservatives reasserted ideals that had once been promoted by Civil Rights leaders and moral thinkers, including Niebuhr and King.³⁵

In justifying a gradualist approach to racial equality, then, conservative readings of the American Founding have privileged the primacy of legislative power during the era of Madison, but not thereafter. They have found room to support the 1964 Civil Rights Act only by defining its relationship with earlier constitutional ideals, redrawn from the late-eighteenth century. Unlike modern politicians, apparently, the founders were enlightened enough to instill the provisions of a colour-neutral constitutional framework. By removing racial segregation, according to such an analysis, the Civil Rights Act restored American constitutionalism without setting a precedent for further federal interventionism.

Yet by describing the American Founding as somehow enlightened in its approach to neutral representation, the rhetoric of conservative color-blindness has departed from the Madisonian emphasis in Niebuhr’s political theology. It has tended to oversimplify or eschew his definition of intractable racial inequality. Niebuhr certainly claimed that liberal optimism overestimated the capacity for government to create a race-neutral society. But in questioning optimism, he did not necessarily require opposition to all subsequent forms of government activism, including in the sphere of racial representation. It is likely that Niebuhr would have objected to such an association in the modern era; not least in the way that the legacies of the American Founding and the Civil Rights movement have been dually appropriated.

Niebuhr’s response to the 1954 Brown ruling provided fodder for African-American critics of white Protestants, whom they accused of advocating gradualism rather than any radical intervention against segregation. Yet his diagnosis of intractable race-pride did not usually require citizens to eschew the importance of state and federal intervention in racial matters. His Brown comments, in fact, were more concerned with puncturing the excess optimism of white liberalism than in advocating gradualism or localism as a primary agenda in all spheres of civil rights. Societal institutions, Niebuhr argued through the 1960s, transformed more slowly than the laws they produced because they incorporated proud and intractable human beings in their daily activities,

even after momentous acts of legislation. On the one hand, Niebuhr noted in his 1964 statement on “the struggle for justice”, “[s]ome of us are beginning to realize that the struggle for justice for our Negro citizens is a long and hard one; that even the enactment into law of the civil rights bill will not solve all our problems.”³⁶ On the other hand, he also reminded Americans that pride could be manifested among those who were “self-satisfied” in pointing out the universality of sin. Their fatalistic vision, in his opinion, merely provided a convenient justification for inaction in regard to the welfare of other men. At one point Niebuhr argued, “When the mind is not confused by utopian illusions it is not difficult to recognize genuine achievements of justice and to feel under obligation to defend them against the threats of tyranny and the negation of justice.” Niebuhr continued: “We are in for not only a long hard summer but for decades of social revolution.”³⁷

Portraying a continuous struggle between citizens and their governing authorities, therefore, Niebuhr did not abjure the importance of federal activity altogether. Rather, citizens would continually seek to influence state and federal institutions from the bottom upwards. Those institutions would be pressured to incorporate a more equal *struggle* between competing racial actors; between those who continued to espouse their white privilege in tacit ways and those who sought to reassert African-American group interests.³⁸

According to Niebuhr, the Madisonian system of American government had been forged to incorporate differing (even clashing) human identities in its working framework. Such a chaotic process, in his estimation, actually profited from the partiality of its constituent parts - ethnic or otherwise. Overarching neutrality was gained by harnessing - rather than denying - the diverse, subjective, and even corrupt interests of competing groups on the federal level. The governing process would function, ironically, when it incorporated a balance between contentious interests. It could never be truly color-blind because racial identity, like other aspects of the ego-force, remained as an unfortunate manifestation of flawed humanity. It was precisely the intractability of racial distinction, Niebuhr argued, that required continued federal activity *even after* the legal dismantling of segregation; so as to channel rather than simply wish away remaining tensions between various ethno-cultural interests. Without concerted action to incorporate new ethnic groups into the governing process - even after monumental acts of legislation - white egoism would dominate the civic agenda at the expense of a more complex counterpoise between competing ethnic identities.³⁹

Indeed, by acknowledging the likely continuation of racial inequality in the socioeconomic sphere, irrespective of legislative acts, Niebuhr’s Madisonian understanding of innate factionalism anticipated the more radical agenda that Martin

Luther King would later adopt (and even the ideas of the subsequent Black Power movement).⁴⁰ In his 1963 book *Why Can't We Wait*, King suggested that racial justice would not merely be achieved through a single measure of legislative equality: "Whenever the issue [of engineering racial equality] is raised, some of our friends recoil in horror. The Negro should be granted equality they agree, but should ask for nothing more. On the surface, this appears reasonable, but is not realistic. For it is obvious that if a man enters the starting line of a race three hundred years after another man, the first would have to perform some incredible feat to catch up."⁴¹ There is a strong case, even, that King had influenced Niebuhr's greater radicalism during the 1960s, rather than vice versa. In 1960, Niebuhr referenced the "model" of orthodox theology and social activism set by King in explaining "how my mind has changed". In 1966 Niebuhr described King as "the most creative Protestant, black or white."⁴² As Mat McCorkle has recently argued, while a number of scholars "have debated the influence of the 1930s radical Niebuhr on King, all sides of the Niebuhr debate need to appreciate the leftward push of King on the 1960s Niebuhr".⁴³

Ralph Luker has reminded us that Niebuhr and King *both* relied "on a distinction between the 'optimism' of Northern white liberal allies of the civil rights movement and the 'hope' of its Southern African-American leadership." The Calvinistic perception of "hope" knew "what the evidence says about human nature...that tomorrow is likely to be a troubled day; that there is little obvious reason to be optimistic. But it kn[ew] something greater than that...that there is a power that makes a way out of no way [thanks to the future potential of divine grace]...a crucial distinction."⁴⁴ King, echoing Niebuhr, thus distinguished between "hope" and the "unwarranted optimism concerning man... [that] leaned unconsciously toward self-righteousness".⁴⁵

King's distinction between hope and optimism, indeed, reflected an ironic continuity that had earlier developed between Dewey and Niebuhr, the supposed antagonists. As Patrick Deneen has noted, at the conclusion of *Moral Man and Immoral Society* Niebuhr wrote in a redemptive tone that appeared to depart from the hard-headed analysis that preceded it, portending his lifetime belief that realism could inform idealism and serving as a "benchmark first statement of a refurbished optimism." Having "rid [ourselves] of some of our illusions," Niebuhr sounded "a Deweyan note: We can no longer buy the highest satisfactions of the individual life at the expense of social injustice. We cannot build our individual ladders to heaven and leave the total human enterprise unredeemed of its excesses and corruptions. In the task of that redemption the most effective agents will be men who have substituted some new illusions for the abandoned ones. The most important of these illusions is that the

collective life of man can achieve perfect justice. It is a very valuable illusion for the moment; for justice cannot be approximated if the hope of its perfect realization does not generate a sublime madness in the soul.”⁴⁶

As a dialectical thinker, of course, Niebuhr did not jettison Christian realism for purely hopeful optimism. Rather, he claimed that an initial sense of disillusionment was a necessary impetus for constructing the later illusion of hope in future redemption. Dewey distinguished himself from Niebuhr by eschewing the dialectical importance of an orthodox understanding of sin. He recommended instead that humans become “re-illusioned” away from the “disillusionment to which traditional religion inclines us.” As Daniel Rice has noted, nonetheless, Niebuhr and Dewey still shared a little more in common than they were ever likely to acknowledge. Both concluded that humankind at least required an illusion of hope to counter the lazy fatalism that misunderstood the former as akin to naked optimism. Niebuhr’s orthodox Calvinism thus described the limits of worldly human perfectionism, yet also claimed that the most “realistic” Christian assessment of human limitations was ironically flawed: it was too confident in the innate ability of humans to predict the trajectory of provenance, however negative the prediction might have been. Even while realism portended problematic outcomes in human moral affairs, its rejection of limitless human agency was itself over-reaching in its perceptual confidence.⁴⁷

In the present era, contrary to the ideology of conservative colour-blindness, a radical and even interventionist federal agenda could be supported by the subtle distinction between “hope” and mere optimism. Cornel West has raised the importance of such a difference in a recent discussion of the relationship between racial identity, Nieburhian philosophy, and the continuing democratic and legislative struggle since the 1990s:

Hope...has nothing to do with optimism...There is simply not enough evidence to infer that things are going to get better. That has been the perennial state and condition of not simply black people in America, but all self-conscious human beings who are sensitive to the forms of evil around them. We can be prisoners of hope even as we call optimism into question. To be part of the democratic tradition is to be a prisoner of hope. And you cannot be a prisoner of hope without engaging in a form of struggle in the present moment that keeps the best of the past alive. To engage in struggle means that one is always willing to acknowledge that there is no triumph around the corner, but that you persist because you believe it is right and just and moral.

As a contemporary African-American ethicist and public policy commentator, West has often drawn inspiration from Niebuhr in his response to the present state of racial

inequality – including in a forward to a new addition of Niebuhr’s *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Spirituality, according to West, “requires an experience of something bigger than our individual selves that binds us to a community” – “hope” in future improvement, despite the bleak egoism of the present state. Such an agenda, according to West, ought to drive citizens to pressure the federal government to redress racial inequality through public policy, long after the ostensible dismantling of segregation.⁴⁸ As West’s insight makes clear, “hope” in the scope of government interventionism need not presuppose an entirely positive view of human nature from a moral perspective.

In a discussion of Niebuhr during his first election campaign, Barack Obama made a similar observation to West in order to question conservative critiques of federal interventionism:

“I love him [Niebuhr]. He’s one of my favorite philosophers...I take away the compelling ideas that there’s serious evil in the world, and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. But we shouldn’t use that as an excuse for cynicism and inaction. I take away... the sense we have to make these efforts knowing they are hard, and not swinging from naïve idealism to bitter realism”.⁴⁹

The election of America’s first black president has been hailed as the culmination of a struggle that began during the era of the Civil Rights movement – a period that coincided with the career of Niebuhr. When intellectual historians consider the philosophical legacy of America’s first black president, indeed, they might draw a comparison with the political theology that had once united Niebuhr and Dewey. Commentators have already begun to observe that Obama’s mixture of pragmatism and idealism draws from the often unnoticed continuities between the two moral thinkers. In *Reading Obama* (2010) Kloppenbergs notes that when “Niebuhr criticized Dewey for overlooking the propensity of humans to self-interest, he was not repudiating the egalitarian principles that both of them shared and that both of them derived (as least originally, in Dewey’s case) from the Christian law of love”. Niebuhr wanted “only to remind Dewey that power must be met with power, in the domestic sphere as in the international sphere.”⁵⁰

During the latter part of his career, mirroring the growing social radicalism of King, Niebuhr posited the need for continued political activism to confront ethnic distinctions. Those distinctions, he increasingly claimed, were likely to remain long after the ostensible dismantling of segregation. Partially influenced by his reading of Madison on the civic influence of political factions, his diagnosis of intractable race-pride did not

require citizens to eschew the importance of state and federal institutions in diminishing racial inequality. It was precisely the intractability of racial distinction, Niebuhr argued, that required continued federal activity even after the legal dismantling of segregation; so as to channel ethnic tensions through representative mechanisms, rather than simply wishing them away. During the last three decades, color-blind conservatism has tended to eschew the radical implications in Niebuhr's discussion of the relationship between American government and ethnic factionalism. Like Niebuhr and King before him, conversely, Obama has not discounted the complex role of "hope and change" through government intervention and public policy initiatives – including those that target particular ethnic and urban communities; even while political actors continue to confirm the Madisonian conception of inherent factionalism and competing interests.

NOTES

¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York, 1932), xi, xii, xxii, 22, 35; Reinhold Niebuhr, “Justice to the American Negro from State, Community, and Church”, in Reinhold Niebuhr, *Pious and Secular America* (New York: Scribner’s Press, 1958), 78-80; Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (New York: Peter Smith Pub Incorporated, 1976), 283

² Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “Reinhold Niebuhr’s Long Shadow”, *New York Times*, June 22, 1992; “Forgetting Reinhold Niebuhr”, *New York Times*, September 18, 2005. According to Paul Elie, “the Niebuhr revival [after Obama] has been perplexing, even bizarre”. See Paul Elie, “A Man for All Reasons”, *The Atlantic* (November 2007): 84

³ On the potential distinction between Niebuhr’s vision of federal activism and Obama’s supposedly “redistributive” policies, and conservative opposition, see for example R. Ward Holder and Peter B. Josephson, *The Irony of Barack Obama: Barack Obama, Reinhold Niebuhr and the Problem of Christian Statecraft* (Ashgate, 2012), chap. 5

⁴ On these developments in color-blind conservatism, including the appropriation of Niebuhr and King, see Michael O Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 47, 70, 87, 154; William Berman, *America’s Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton*, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press: 1998), 109-110, 130-131

⁵ See for example, J. Conti and B. Stetson, *Challenging the Civil Rights Establishment: Profiles of a New Black Vanguard*, (Praeger, Westport, 1993) 182; Robert Woodson, “The Conservative Virtues of Dr. Martin Luther King”, *Heritage Lecture 481*, 5th Nov. 1993; David Frum, “Race and Republicans”, *National Review Online*, Wednesday, February 05, 2003; Carolyn Garris, “Martin Luther King’s Conservative Legacy,” *Memo 961*, January 12, 2006,

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/AmericanFoundingandHistory/wm961.cfm>

⁶ According to Daniel F. Rice, “Dewey’s Jeffersonianism rested, in part, on his vision of societal harmony based on a presumption that human ambitions were moderate and conflicts were amenable to rational accommodation.” See Daniel F. Rice, *Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey: An American Odyssey* (Albany, N.J., SUNY Press, 1993), 256.

⁷ John Dewey, “Presenting Thomas Jefferson”, cited in Daniel F. Rice, *Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey: An American Odyssey* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 256.. On the Social Gospel at this point see Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History, Baltimore, ML.: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), Gary Scott Smith, “To Reconstruct the

World: Walter Rauschenbusch and Social Change,” *Fides et Historia* (1991) 23:40-63; William R. Hutchison. “The Americanness of the Social Gospel; An Inquiry in Comparative History,” *Church History*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Sep., 1975): 367-381

⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York, 1932), xi, xii, xxii, 22, 35

⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, (New York: Scribner’s Press, 1944), vii.

¹⁰ Patrick J. Deenan, *Democratic Faith* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press: 2005), 255.

¹¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, (New York: Scribner’s Press, 1944), 29-30, xii; . Deenan, *Democratic Faith*, 254.

¹² Niebuhr admired Madison’s recognition of the “inevitability of factions”. Niebuhr admired Madison’s recognition of the “inevitability of factions”. See Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 119. See also Reinhold Niebuhr, *Irony of American History* (New York, Scribner’s Press, 1952), 89. According to Daniel F. Rice, in “the pantheon of America’s democratic theorists, Dewey’s mind and heart belonged to Jefferson; whereas Niebuhr was most attracted to Madison.” See Daniel F. Rice, *Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey: An American Odyssey* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 255.

¹³ For the development of Madison’s thinking on faction in the years prior to the Federalist Papers see James Madison, ‘Vices of the Political System of the United States (1787)’ *The Papers of James Madison*, ed., William T. Hutchinson et al. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1962-77), Vol. 9:357; Ralph L. Ketcham, ‘James Madison and the Nature of Man,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 19, 1, Jan 1958: 62-76; Roy Branson, ‘James Madison and the Scottish Enlightenment,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40, 2, April-June 1979: 235-250.

¹⁴ James Madison, “Federalist Number 55”, in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: Mentor Books, 1999), 310. On the influence of a reformed Christian epistemology on James Madison’s political ideology, see Garrett Ward Sheldon, *The Political Philosophy of James Madison*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), chapter 1; Donald Drakeman, “Religion and the Republic: James Madison and the First Amendment.” *Journal of Church and State*. 25 (Autumn 1983): 440-441, Ralph L. Ketcham, ‘James Madison and the Nature of Man,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 19, 1 (1958): 62-76.

¹⁵ Niebuhr, *Irony of American History*, 89

¹⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Man’s Nature and His Communities* (New York: Scribner’s Press, 1965), 61-2, 66-67.

¹⁷ Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2 (Human Destiny), cited in Deenan, *Democratic Faith*, 256

¹⁸ Niebuhr, *Irony of American History*, cited in Rice, *Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey*, 258

¹⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, “Intellectual Biography”, in Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 15.

²⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul E. Sigmund, *The Democratic Experience: Past and Prospects* (1969), cited in Rice, *Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey*, 248

²¹ Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, 22, 66-67, 85

²² Niebuhr, “Christian Faith and the Race Problem,” *Christianity and Society* (Spring 1945); and Niebuhr, “The Race Problem,” *Christianity and Society* (Summer 1942), reprinted in D.B Robertson, ed., *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1957), 125-29 and 129-32, esp. 128.

²³ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light*, 151; Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1957), 25

²⁴ Niebuhr, “The Confessions of a Tired Liberal”, *Christian Century*, 30 August 1928, 1046, in *Love and Justice*, 120-121.

²⁵ See, for example, Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, 66-67. In *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Niebuhr insisted that “without a tolerable equilibrium no moral or social restraints ever succeed completely in preventing injustice and enslavement. In this sense an equilibrium of vitality is an approximation to brotherhood within the limits of conditions imposed by human selfishness. But an equilibrium of power is not brotherhood. The restraint of the will-to-power is not brotherhood. The restraint of the will-to-power of one member of the community by the counter-pressure of power by another member results in a condition of tension. All tension is covert or potential conflict.” In *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, Niebuhr concluded that “a balance of power is in fact a kind of managed anarchy”. See Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2 (Human Destiny), 275; Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, 174

²⁶ Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2 (Human Destiny), 276

²⁷ See for example Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice*, 25-30; Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 2 (Human Destiny), 275; Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities*, 66-67. Racial identities were grounded in pride, which heightened the propensity for communal faction. It required incorporation in an ongoing – and never static – system of civic engagement and representation. See the discussion of Niebuhr’s reasoning here in Patrick J. Deenan, *Democratic Faith*, 259. Niebuhr reflected Madison’s reasoning that a “well constructed Union [to] break and control the violence of faction”, nonetheless rejected efforts to cure the “mischief of faction” by either “destroying liberty which is essential to its existence [or] by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same

passions, and the same interests”. See James Madison, Federalist No. 10, in *The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Random House Modern Library, nd), 53 and 54-55

²⁸ See “Justice to the American Negro from State, Community, and Church”, in Reinhold Niebuhr, *Pious and Secular America* (New York, Scribner’s: 1958), 78 - 80

²⁹ In *The Irony of American History* Niebuhr highlighted the “ironic contrast between Jeffersonian hopes and fears for America and the actual realities” and noted that it was “increased by the exchange of ideological weapons between the early and the later Jeffersonians. The early Jeffersonians sought to keep political power weak, discouraging both the growth of federal power in relation to the States and confining political control over economic life to the States... Subsequently the wielders of great economic power adopted the Jeffersonian maxim that the best possible government is the least possible government”. See Niebuhr, *Irony of American History*, 32-33. As Rice has pointed out, “there were significant differences between Dewey and Jefferson. Dewey’s position in the twentieth century led him to appreciate the role of governmental involvement in the democratic process more fully than Jefferson did, and it is precisely this aspect of Dewey’s democratic theorizing that made Dewey, and not Jefferson, the ideological father of post-1929 liberalism”. See Daniel F. Rice, *Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey: An American Odyssey* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 257.

³⁰ See for example the discussion in Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing : The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 194-5.

³¹ Adam Meyerson, ‘Introduction to the Conservative Virtues of Dr. Martin Luther King’, Speech by Robert Woodson and Dr. William J. Bennett, *Heritage Lecture 481*, 5th Nov. 1993.

³² Walter Williams, *Freedom Today*, (December 1993): 15; Michael Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You*, 25; ‘Has Proposition 209 Discouraged Black Students from Seeking Places in Private Universities in California’, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 26, (Winter 1999-2000): 42-43

³³ George W. Bush, ‘Address at First Baptist Church of Glenarden, Landover, Maryland’ January 20, 2003

³⁴ David Frum, ‘Race and Republicans’, *National Review Online*, Wednesday, February 05, 2003,

<http://frum.nationalreview.com/post/?q=NGUyMmY3MDFmOTI2NzY1ZjY2YTdhY2RIOWRjYW1NWI=>

³⁵ Carolyn Garris, ‘Martin Luther King’s Conservative Legacy,’ *Memo 961*, January 12, 2006, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AmericanFoundingandHistory/wm961.cfm>

³⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Struggle for Justice,” *New Leader* (July 6, 1964): 10-11

³⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Peter Smith Pub Incorporated, 1976), 283

³⁸ As Deenan has pointed out, “Niebuhr’s insistence upon humility, and his strong opposition to a version of “democratic faith” that stressed the transformative potential of humanity, was curiously made in the service not only of a chastened sense of political possibility but also arguably and ultimately in support of a vision of democracy as fully utopian as that advanced by the progressive opponents he otherwise excoriated.” See Deneen, *Democratic Faith*, 247. On the potential radicalism of Niebuhr’s philosophy in this regard see also Kenneth Durkin, *Reinhold Niebuhr* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing 1990), 50–3.

³⁹ Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 35, xxii; Reinhold Niebuhr, ‘The Struggle for Justice,’ *New Leader*. July 6, 1964, 10-11

⁴⁰ This would support David Chappell recent argument that downplays any discontinuity between civil rights groups such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the black power movement of the 1970s, who supposedly undermined the former. An understanding of the universal intractability of human sin meant that the black power movement’s disillusionment with liberal efforts to redress racism had a precedent in King’s biblical and ‘prophetic’ theology: A gradualist approach to civil rights after desegregation could not reduce racial inequality thanks to the universal sin of race pride. Thus, more concerted action was needed. See Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, introduction.

⁴¹ Martin Luther King, *Why Can’t We Wait*, (Signet Classic: Rep. 2000), 124. Indeed, in his 1967 book *Where Do We Go From Here?*, King argued that ‘a society that has done something special against the Negro for hundreds of years must now do something special for him, to equip him to compete on a just and equal basis.’

⁴² Reinhold Niebuhr in Harold E. Fey (ed.), *How My Mind Has Changed* (Cleveland: Meridian Press, 1961), 116–32, 118, originally published as ‘The Quality of Our Lives’, *Christian Century*, 11 May 1960, 568–72; Niebuhr’s Foreword to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. et al., *Speech on the War in Vietnam* (New York: Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam, 1967), 3

⁴³ See Mac McCorkle, “On Recent Political Uses of Reinhold Niebuhr”. See also Martin Halliwell, *The Constant Dialogue*, 236-40.

⁴⁴ Luker, ‘On David Chappell’s A Stone of Hope’, *History News Network* <<http://hnn.us/blogs/entries/57532.html>>. Chappell’s analysis is inspired by the treatment of Niebuhr and King’s intellectual relationship in C. Lasch’s work, *The One and Only True Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 386–93. See Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 206 n. 5, 213 n. 41, 236 n. 41, 310.

⁴⁵ See Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991), 389, 390-93; Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: Harper, 1991).

⁴⁵ Cornel West, “The Moral Obligations of Living in a Democratic Society”, in David Batsone and Eduardo Mendieta, ed., *The Good Citizen*, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 5, 9, 12.

⁴⁶ Patrick Deneen, *Democratic Faith*, 257

⁴⁷ Deneen, *Democratic Faith*, 351; Rice, *Reinhold Niebuhr and John Dewey*, xvii, 238. See also Reinhold Niebuhr, “As Deceivers, Yet True,” in idem, *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History* (New York: Scribner’s, 1937), 1–24; Reinhold Niebuhr, “Augustine’s Political Realism,” in ERN, 128.

⁴⁸ Cornel West, “The Moral Obligations of Living in a Democratic Society”, in David Batsone and Eduardo Mendieta, ed., *The Good Citizen*, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 5, 9, 10, 12; Reinhold Niebuhr, with a new forward by Cornel West, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Westminster John Knox Press; 2nd ed., 2013).

⁴⁹ David Brooks, “Obama, Gospel and Verse”, *New York Times*, April 26, 2007. According to McCorkle, “While invoking Lincoln the statesman and King the prophet as guiding lights, our new president seems to understand in a more or less Niebuhrian way the impossibility of fulfilling the unified statesman-prophet ideal.” See Mac McCorkle, “On Recent Political Uses of Reinhold Niebuhr”, 40; Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 97–98. (‘I’m reminded that deliberation and the constitutional order may be the luxury of the powerful, and that it has sometimes been the cranks, the zealots, the prophets, the agitators . . . that have fought for a new order . . . I’m left then with Lincoln who understood both the deliberative function of our democracy and the limits of such deliberation’).

⁵⁰ James T. Kloppenberg, *Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass. 2012), 121

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