

The Strategic Deployment of Hate in a Politics of Love¹

Bryan K. Nichols, Ph.D. and Medria L. Connolly, Ph.D.²

Like many of the best movies, I'll start this story with our present cliff hanging dilemma before flashing back to how we got here and suggesting why I suspect that the "owning" of hate may rescue us from our harrowing racial discourse. My partner, Medria Connolly and I, are currently engaged in a 3 year-long project attempting to articulate the psychological case for reparations to the descendants of American Slavery. Through our new friend and colleague Sociologist and Psychoanalyst, Jeffrey Prager, we came to recognize that the political construct of reparations had a psychological concomitant articulated by Melanie Klein (1937), "the drive to reparation (p. 306), a remorseful rejoining with mother by the baby who was previously quite annoyed with the tardy mom. Prager (2017), in marrying psychological development with political action, and inspired by James Baldwin (1962), suggested that reparations would represent a "politics of love" (p. 28).

Ever the dreamer, I thought that sounded pretty good. Ever the wise pragmatist, with many years of experience in group relations work, Medria was suspicious of applying the metaphor of the dyadic mother-child experience to the interactions between large groups. Indeed, we found C. Fred Alford (1990) who, influenced by Bion (1961), made that very point. He noted that to the degree that members of a group bond together, they suppress their ambivalence toward their fellow

¹ Paper presented at *the 30th Annual Interdisciplinary Conference of the International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education – Borders*, in Toronto, October 19, 2019.

² Editor's Note: While listed as co-authors since this paper is derived from Bryan Nichols' and Medria Connolly's joint experiences in their mutual "reparations project" journey, this paper is written from Dr. Nichols' perspective, incorporating their joint experiences when he refers to "we," and his own perspective when he makes first-person references.

group members and project those more unpleasant feelings toward out groups in a process now often referred to as “otherness” (Powell, 2015, p. 19). As Alford put it: “We purchase the love and concern found in our private relations by investing our anxiety and aggression in the group” (p. 9). Consequently, whereas we may imagine a scenario where an individual, governed by Klein’s depressive position, can express loving remorse for harm they created to another individual, groups are more likely governed by what Klein calls the *paranoid-schizoid* position and will tend to be hostile toward those they’ve harmed.

Well, when you’re right you’re right! But that doesn’t mean we have to like it. Is this the point where we just take our proverbial ball and go home? Give up? Say, reparations are a nice idea, but, like so many others, accept that it’ll never happen? Was it just something that gave this couple of senior psychologists a way to fill our time? Something to do instead of ceramics, or shuffleboard? Oh, hell no! Never quit! There’s gotta be a way! But, before we start trying to edge our way forward, a bit of a flashback may help provide better context.

Our project began, officially, at the 2016 IFPE *Skin* conference in Pasadena. Surprisingly, current IFPE co-president Larry Green had nominated me for an award, which led to me presenting a paper. In that paper, I described more than 30 years of working as a psychologist on “micro” level projects designed to promote empowerment for youth of color in the “hood,” and described the many frustrations attendant to that work. In particular, I noted that even in well-funded projects, successful implementation was often handicapped by failures to mutually understand and collaborate amongst the multi-cultural stakeholder groups tasked with program implementation (see Nichols, 2017). Furthermore, at that conference, I described a series of

serendipitous circumstances that led to my recognition that energies needed to be directed more at the “macro” level, specifically as an advocate for reparations. Not the least of these serendipitous circumstances was my transformative reading of Ta-Nehisi Coates’ “Case for Reparations” (2014), in which he described redlining—the mid-20th Century practice of excluding African Americans from purchasing affordable and desirable properties, effectively creating segregated white suburbs and relatively impoverished black inner cities. Coates’ argument was that reparations are the most appropriate moral response to a long-lasting legacy of American theft of African American treasure, including life itself.

Coates’ article answered a lifelong question for me: In the aftermath of the civil rights movement of the 50’s and 60’s, why are racial disparities and relations not better? The answer to that question now seemed starkly apparent. The country committed a crime against humanity that was slavery. But without fully and authentically apologizing for this crime, how could the country then expect things to simply get better?

Guided by Roy Brooks (2004), I came to understand that the quest for reparations is best done through the “Atonement Model” (p. 141). That model suggests that official institutional apology for the long and varied history of African American oppression should be accompanied by material restitution “to help repair the damage caused by the atrocity...” (p. 143).

It became clear to me that through atonement, a policy of authentic reparations would be healing, not just of the economic divisions within the country, but of the social and psychological injuries that continue to linger. But the question remained: Why had this process not occurred? What psychological factors prevented the moral response of a presumably (questionably) moral people

from doing the right thing?

Back in Pasadena, my long-time friend and colleague, Medria Connolly, offered to join me on this odyssey that we now call our “reparations project,” and off we went. Medria and I vowed at that time that we would strive to write an article articulating the psychological case for reparations as something of a complement, perhaps addendum to Coates’ paradigm-shifting article. Medria, the more creative member of our writing pair, tuned us into the need to recognize unresolved historical trauma as residing in omnipresent and ethereal haunting forces to which she referred as ghosts. She then channeled the well-known quote by the namesake of an award given by IFPE, Hans W. Loewald (1960), who urges us all to “transform ghosts into ancestors” (p. 29).

With our ideas more sharply defined, we hit the road at the urging of our self-appointed agent and friend, Shakil Choudhury, author of the book, “Deep Diversity, Overcoming Us vs. Them” (2015), and a Toronto native. Shakil, much more in tune with the activist community than us, guided us to speak at various conferences around the country. It is worth noting that Shakil’s book was something of a corollary to Alford’s admonition about projecting ambivalence to outgroups. Shakil observed that in the activist community, efforts to promote anti-racism and challenge conventional racial power dynamics often broke down into infighting that mimicked the power dynamics of those groups that the anti-racist groups purported to fight. He cited a near fanatical devotion to ideology that mitigated against self-care and facilitated burnout. He explicitly stated that the activist world could benefit from the self-reflective orientation of the psychological community, presumably, as we understood it, to fend off the proclivity toward

projective identification that eventually hollowed out interpersonal relations and undermined authentic collaboration.

Meanwhile, back in 2016, we leaned heavily on the work of Banaji & Greenwald (2013) who researched the phenomenon of implicit bias for 20 years and discovered that most Americans hold racial biases, often unconsciously, even when their conscious intentions are quite opposite. In a charitable formulation of this complex, Banaji and Greenwald entitled their book, “Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People.” This formulation begs the obvious question, how do good people handle it when their hidden biases are exposed? Or, even more relevant to the purpose of social change, how can good people be aided in attaining the most healing and socially just outcome when their hidden biases are made conscious?

Psychoanalyst Kimberlyn Leary (2000) provided an answer to the question of what happens to therapists when their hidden biases are exposed in therapy. Once their racial enactments become apparent, therapists experiences exposed vulnerability best described as shame. Shame struck us as the “smoking gun” of resistance to confronting racial biases, an emotional state so painful that it tended to require diffusion, misdirection, projection, or just simple denial.

What to do, what to do? One response to this perplexing question came from another of our friends, L.A. Psychoanalyst and Gestalt therapist Lynne Jacobs (2014). Lynne implored therapists to “Learn...to love white shame and guilt” by leaning into shame and finding an expanded, if not more humbled and grounded, sense of humanity. Echoing Banaji and Greenwald, she offered an empathic orientation to white therapists, suggesting that, through no fault of their own, they may find themselves “guiltily situated” as the inheritors of privilege.

This means they don't have to own the shame of such past atrocities as slavery, but they ought to own and lean into the shame, let's call it "embarrassment," of privilege built on the backs of those enslaved people. And, as such, they do bear responsibility to strive toward current racial equality.

We love Lynne and the courageousness of her suggestion to "lean into shame," yet we wondered how many white Americans would muster that degree of courage. Through another series of serendipitous circumstances, we came across the work of a political theorist at the University of Edinburgh, Mihaela Mihai (2013), who suggested that courage is precisely the quality to which reparations advocates should appeal. Mihai suggested that appeals for reparations should highlight the role of contemporary people, dedicated to notions of freedom and equality, who strive to bring their country into more alignment with these cherished ideals.

We also encountered the profoundly important work of historian Ibram Kendi (2016), who described the beginnings of the transatlantic slave trade in 15th century Portugal and the dehumanizing, racist characterization of enslaved Africans as animalistic heathens offered to the Catholic church as justification. This justification, passed down now for nearly 6 centuries, is what we understand to be the origins of the "ghosts" that need to be transformed.

Eventually, Medria and I were able to produce the paper to which we long aspired, "Transforming Ghosts into Ancestors: Unsilencing the Psychological Case for Reparations to Descendants of American Slavery" (Nichols & Connolly, 2020). In that article, we highlight our belief that slavery, and all the forms of American oppression toward African Americans that ensued, exacted not only a psychological toll on African Americans, but on white Americans as well. In an act of "theoretical appropriation," we labelled that psychological harm to white

Americans as “Moral Injury,” defined as carrying out and supporting acts that oppose internalized moral standards. We suggest reparations as a process that can activate healing, as white Americans mourn the loss of their idealized selves. And, we emphasize that care must be taken to administer that reparative program with psychological sensitivity to the shame, guilt, and anger that will inevitably greet reparations; a complex of emotional reactions DeAngelo (2011) labels “white fragility.”

However, in our paper, Medria and I did not fully address the cliffhanger that I identified at the beginning of this paper. Recall the conflict between Prager (2017), who merged Klein’s reparative impulse with Baldwin’s call for a “politics of love,” and Alford (1990), who suggested that groups are unlikely to behave in a reparative manner, because they are under the sway of the “paranoid-schizoid” tendency that is influencing them to behave with hostility toward those they’ve harmed. In addressing this conflict, I’d like to delve a bit more into Prager’s conceptualization, our reactions to that conceptualization, and how that reaction may provide clues for better managing Alford’s warning about the problems of reparations between groups.

But first, a word about the groups to which we are referring here. On the surface, discussion of reparations seems to immediately conjure notions of white Americans giving reparations to African Americans. My problem with this is that it supports the on-going conflation of those who identify as white people with the ideology of white supremacy. Many contemporary writers (e.g., Allen, 2012; Alexander, 2011; Powell, 2012) have taken great pains to clarify that there was no such thing as a “white race” when the first captive black indentured servants were brought to Jamestown 400 years ago. At that time, it was European Americans who brought those Black captives to the New World. It was only through the horrified reaction of the powerful to early rebellious collaborations between impoverished African and European people

were Europeans transformed into white people, while African captives were transformed to “Black Slaves.”

For instance, Michelle Alexander (2011), in her book “The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness,” describes Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676 where African and European indentured servants, and African slaves joined European planters in violently taking land from indigenous people on the Western frontier of Virginia. This was in violation of England’s negotiated “pause” in their genocidal assault on Native Americans. Though the rebellion was eventually put down, King George sought to ensure that dispossessed Europeans and Africans would never again find common cause. He instigated a process that resulted in the development of the “Virginia Slave Codes” in 1705, codifying status differences between those of European and African descent, and essentially creating “white people.”

The Virginia Slave Codes, with a major emphasis on the distinction between a “servant” (European) and a “slave” (African), established laws that prohibited anyone of African descent, enslaved or free, from owning a weapon. Another provision was that no settler of European descent could be owned by someone of African descent (see Beverly, 1705). These codes, crucial components of the foundational scaffolding of white supremacy, established European settlers as white and of superior status to their fellow African co-habitants in the new world.

As I understand it, authentic reparations would free European Americans from the stranglehold of white supremacy. As such, I strongly disavow notions of “white people” giving reparations to “Black people.” Instead, it’s about institutions such as the federal, state and local governments, corporations, and some Universities paying that debt to African Americans on behalf of what was done in the name of white supremacy. For instance, if the United States

government provides reparations to its African American citizens, is that a case of white people paying reparations to Black people? Does it carry all the dynamics of one group acting toward another group? As presently constituted, the United States of America is a multi-ethnic entity which would presumably pay reparations from a tax base paid by all its constituent elements, including, paradoxically (and I think, necessarily), African Americans. I believe this offers some mitigation of the group dynamic about which Alford warns. I do concede that many white Americans are identified with the United States as a representation of whiteness, thereby causing the country's actions to be felt as a representation of the actions of white Americans. However, I believe it is the task of a loose affiliation of individuals and groups advocating for reparations to highlight the distinction between those identified as white and white supremacy, paving the way for the death of white supremacy, and the simultaneous liberation of European and African Americans.

With that said, I suggest that the group dynamics requiring most attention will be within that loosely affiliated group of reparations advocates, and then between reparations advocates and those who oppose reparations. This group of reparations advocates, in its efforts to “bend the arc of history toward justice” will be challenged to be exemplary of the post reparative world we seek. This group, in its multiracial membership, will serve as a microcosm for the larger society in managing the dynamics of implementing reparations. It will be challenged not to break down into racialized sub-groups of finger pointers, angrily and bitterly undermining the loving spirit required to pursue reparations. It will also be challenged to not fall into an “us versus them” dynamic that Shakil (2015) warns about, potentially replicating the racial othering they're trying to resolve.

Returning to Prager's (2017) application of the reparative impulse as metaphor for U.S.

reparations to its African American citizens, Prager imagines white Americans symbolizing the demanding, omnipotent baby in the reparative moment who is required to actualize the reparative impulse if real reparations are to occur. And, in following the metaphor, Prager casts African Americans in the role of needing to be the sympathetic, non-vengeful mother in response to the infants fledgling attempts at repair.

Despite our great respect for Prager's struggle to find solutions for multi-generationally enacted racism, we struggled to envision the scene of African Americans manifesting a saintly patience toward a centuries-long tormentor. Conversely, in conceiving a reparations movement based upon atonement, like Prager, we cannot imagine the success of such a movement in the absence of a tolerance and empathy based in love—a deep and abiding love of humanity that must carry us through all the damage wrought by an unimaginably long, torturous and traumatic history. And if that love is to truly carry the day, it can't be one-sided. It must be manifested by African Americans, sympathetically and determined, as well as white Americans, remorsefully and authentically.

Prager (2017, p. 28), drawing inspiration from Baldwin (1962), suggested that if Klein's reparative morality is to manifest in a broad scale American reparations movement, then that movement must be guided by a "Politics of Love." Baldwin's conception is not romantic love, rather more a self-determination to strive toward a greater world. Baldwin says, "I use the word 'love' here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth" (1962, p. 95).

Indeed, as we see it, that "toughened love" doesn't look like a sappy hallmark card with a

thousand hearts on it. It's a love that cares for the welfare of humanity while recognizing all the ways humanity rejects such love. It means a love that accounts for ambivalence in human exchanges. It also means a love that accounts for its opposite, hate.

In the principles of nonviolence that Martin Luther King used to infuse while leading the civil rights movement, he attempted to direct hate toward ideology, not people. His third of 6 principles of nonviolence states, "Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people. Nonviolence recognizes that evildoers are also victims and are not evil people. The nonviolent resister seeks to defeat evil, not people" (TheKingCenter.org). In this particular deployment of hate, King surgically separates white supremacy from white people, preserving the capacity to appreciate the human struggle of European Americans swept up in the ideology of white supremacy.

This strikes us as the ultimate aspiration. But, can it be done just because we say it ought to be done? We must acknowledge that King was governed by a religious conviction that doesn't completely cover all the ground that we in the psychological community traverse. We understand that our emotions aren't so cleanly managed. That while a "surgically precise deployment of hate" is a nice and potentially crucial goal, it is not readily achievable given the complex matrix of human emotions. Emotions are messy, resistant to perfect control, especially the most powerful ones such as hate.

So, I pressed on, endeavoring to blend the notion of a politics of love with my sense of how hard it would be for African and white Americans to consistently manifest this type of love with each other, and with Alford's notion that within a group, such loving expression includes projection of hate outside the group. As I contemplated this complex challenge, I had the simple-minded thought that maybe we need to bring back the hate within the confines of the group, and maybe

we need to re-absorb our projections. How goofy is that?

But then I remembered my boy, IFPE Co-President Larry Green, came to me many years ago asking me to read an article he had written. “What’s it about, Larry?” I say. “Why Bryan, it’s about hate,” he says. “Say what?!,” I say. “Hate,” he repeats, “hate in countertransference.” “Larry, you wrote a whole article about hate?” I ask... “My mother wouldn’t even let me use that word in the house! It was like a curse word,” I say. “No, no,” he says, “we have to own the natural hate we sometimes feel when clients profoundly frustrate us. That is how we preserve ourselves while engaging in the very difficult work of being therapists. That’s why my article is about “The *Value* of Hate in the Countertransference” (Green, 2006).

Larry was actually riffing off of a classic article by Winnicott, “Hate in the Countertransference” (1949). Winnicott advised us that:

If the analyst is going to have crude feelings imputed to him he is best forewarned and so forearmed, for he must tolerate being placed in that position. Above all he must not deny hate that really exists in himself. Hate that is justified in the present setting has to be sorted out and kept in storage and available for eventual interpretation (p. 70).

Larry amplified this point in suggesting that when therapists’ needs, in countertransference, are frustrated by patients, hate is self-preserving and empowering:

Becoming aware of one’s hate can reestablish a sense of separateness from the patient. It’s as if hate empowers the self by saying, “I don’t need to rely on you to recognize me because I am freeing myself from my need for regulation from you.” When the therapist uses his

or her aggression in this self-delineating way, the patient is removed from therapist's internal world and thus becomes a subject once again (p. 190).

It is at this point that I suddenly came to realize that which was, at once, obvious and obscured. As prerequisite to articulating what I so cleverly, perhaps glibly, described as the “strategic deployment of hate,” I now realize that *I have to feel my hate!* I repeat, *I have to feel my hate!* I have to indulge it, marinate in it, own it! I have to groan in pain over the cataclysmic exploits of what Afrocentric scholars call the *Maafa*, (Ani, 1988) the “great Disaster” that has befallen African Peoples for many centuries. I have to revile the privilege accrued by so many European Americans at the expense of subjugated, dehumanized, and dead African bodies. I completely resent the faux innocent denial of complicit contemporary white folks, even as they make presumed efforts to cleanse themselves of past atrocities through “wokeness.” I really hate their grip on a patriotism built on the backs of exploited Africans—hate that their claim on the identity of the great American is so psychologically central that many white folks would rather cling on to it than really help build a more equitable society. I hate all of that, especially when it shows up in my colleagues in the reparations battle.

And you know what? I know they hate me too. They hate me for reminding them of all the atrocities committed to my people in the name of their people. They just want it to go away and here I am reminding them of it. Over and over again, like a broken record in their worst nightmare. And this, despite their presence here to help, their conscious wish to make things better. They hate the fact that they are a perpetual suspect in the African American mind—always on guard for their next misstep, their next micro-fuckin’ aggression, their next unconscious manifestation of privilege.

Whew, hate is exhausting! But, I might add to Larry's description that it can also be cleansing. As I look up from the gradually clearing fog of hate. I know you are here white people. I see you! You showed up; you are social justice warriors. You're here, and despite my intense hatred for all that other stuff, I can love you for being here, doing whatever you can to pitch in, to join a history altering-struggle to express an immeasurable degree of political love through acts of atonement that might restore justice to a previously marginalized people. I can respect that you are governed by ideals that compel you to fight for a more loving and just society.

In the end, as you have just witnessed, I can't truly claim that my version of "deployed hate" is really so neatly "strategic." Perhaps, it's best viewed as necessary in a long complex struggle that embodies love, but wades through a horrible history of atrocity and trauma. Hate serves as a bit of check on the group tendency to idealize fellow group members in a haze of unity, while projecting inevitable negativity on others. As opposed to a projective type of hate, deployed hate grounds us while preserving a personal, interpersonal, and inter-group space for love. It's a delicate balancing act that will inevitably tilt dangerously off its center from time to time. But, if done well, it allows for Baldwin's (1962) Politics of love to be so robust that it accounts for and acknowledges hate without acting on it, with eyes always keenly tuned to the prize of a more racially equitable country.

Bryan K. Nichols can be contacted at Bnicholsphd@drnicholsandassociates.com

And Medria Connolly at Medria.Connolly@verizon.net

References

- Alford, C. (1990). Reparation and civilization: A Kleinian account of the large group. *Free Associations*, (19):7-30.
- Alexander, M. (2011). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the age colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.
- Allen, T. (2012). *The Invention of the White Race: Volume 1, Racial Oppression and Social Control*. London: Verso Books.
- Anderson, C. (2016). *White rage: The unspoken truth of our racial divide*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Ani, M. (1988). *Let the circle be unbroken: The implications of African spirituality in the diaspora*. New York: Nkonimfo Publications.
- Baldwin, J. (1962). *The Fire Next Time*, New York: Vintage Books.
- Banaji, M. & Greenwald, A. (2013). *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Beverly, R. (1705). Of servants and slaves in Virginia, 1705. Library of Congress. Retrieved from <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/power/text8/BeverlyServSlaves.pdf>
- Bion, W. (1961). *Experiences in Groups*. London, Tavistock Publications.
- Brooks, R. (2004). *Atonement and forgiveness: A new model for black reparations*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Choudhury, Shakil (2015). *Deep diversity: Overcoming Us vs. Them*. Toronto, Canada: Between the Lines.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. (2014). The case for reparations. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from

- www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-reparations/361631/
- DeAngelo, R. (2011). White fragility. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, Vol 3 (3)*
pp 54-70.
- Foner, E. (1990). *A short history of reconstruction*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.
- Green, L. (2006). The value of hate in the countertransference. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 34, (2)*, 187-199.
- Jacobs, L. (2014). Learning to love white shame and guilt: Skills for working as a white
Therapist in a racially divided country. *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self
Psychology, 9*: pp. 297-312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15551024.2014.948365>.
- Kendi, I. (2016). *Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in America*.
New York: Nations Book.
- Klein, M. (1937). Love, guilt and reparation. In *Love, guilt and reparation and other works, 1921-1945* (pp. 306-342). London: Virago Press, 1988.
- Leary, K. (2000). Racial enactments in dynamic treatment. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 10, (4)*,
639-653.
- Lincoln, A. (1865). *Second Inaugural Address*. Retrieved from [www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/
Lincoln/speeches/inaug2.htm](http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/Lincoln/speeches/inaug2.htm).
- Loewald, H. (1960). On the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. *International Journal of
Psycho-Analysis, 41*: 16-33
- Marimba, A. (1994). *Let the Circle be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the
Diaspora*. New York: Nkonimfo Publications.
- Mihai, M. (2013). When the state says “sorry”: State apologies as exemplary political
judgments. *The Journal of Political Philosophy: 21 (2)*, pp. 200-220.

Nichols, B. & Connolly, M. (2020). Transforming Ghosts into Ancestors: Unsilencing the Psychological Case for Reparations to Descendants of American Slavery.

Other/Wise, In Press.

Nichols, B. (2017). Promoting empowerment in the face of societal inequities: What I learned as a psychologist in the hood. *Other/Wise, Winter.*

Powell, J. (2015). *Racing to justice: Transforming our conceptions of self and other to build an inclusive society.* Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Prager, J. (2017). Do black lives matter? American resistance to reparative justice and its fateful consequences. *Political Psychology, 38*, 637-651.

Tangney, J. P. (1990). Assessing individual differences in proneness to shame and guilt: Development of the Self-Conscious Affect and Attribution Inventory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59*, 102-111.

TheKingCenter.org

Winnicott, D. W. (1949). Hate in the countertransference. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 30*, 69-74.