Feeling Racial Pride in the Mode of Frederick Douglass

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Abstract: Drawing on Frederick Douglass’s arguments about racial pride, I develop and defend an account of feeling racial pride that centers on resisting racialized oppression. Such pride is racially ecumenical in that it does not imply partiality towards one’s own racial group. I argue that it can both accurately represent its intentional object and be intrinsically and extrinsically valuable to experience. It follows, I argue, that there is, under certain conditions, a morally unproblematic, and plausibly valuable, kind of racial pride available to white people, though one that could hardly differ more from what is generally meant by “white pride.”

Keywords: emotion, Frederick Douglass, pride, race, racial oppression, whiteness

1. Introduction

In an 1889 speech, entitled “The Nation’s Problem,” Frederick Douglass declared, “the whole assumption of race pride is ridiculous. Let us have done with complexional superiorities or inferiorities, complexional pride or shame.” Douglass was probably not the first, and certainly not the last, prominent thinker to critique racial pride.

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Despite this history of critique, however, many still endorse racial pride. For example, a 2009 *Associated Press* article, entitled “Mays: So proud when Obama elected that he cried,” reported that Willie Mays, the great athlete who helped to desegregate Major League Baseball, said that he long hoped for a black American to be elected to the presidency. Of Barack Obama’s election in 2008, Mays reflected, “that tells me all the things I went through, it was for good things. . . So I’m just proud of him [Obama], you know. He may be proud of something else. But I’m proud of him, what he stands for.”

Mays’s remark expresses several related emotions: pride about his role in integrating America and paving the way for a black president; pride in Barack Obama; and pride about what Barack Obama stands for (perhaps the decreasing racism of white America). This type of sentiment is powerful and commonplace. It is plausible to call it “racial pride” or, more specifically, “black pride.” However, there are puzzles about what racial pride is and whether it is ever justified.

Racial pride is spoken of in many ways. It is descriptively and normatively multifarious. It can be coherently invoked in relation to social movements for either racial justice or racial injustice, for self-respect or supremacy over others, and for solidarity or animosity. Racial pride inherits much of its multifariousness from the descriptive and normative ambiguities of pride itself, which Adrienne Rich aptly described as “a tricky, glorious, double-edged feeling.” Pride can apparently take the form of arrogance,

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conceitedness, and vanity, as well as self-respect and a proper pleasure in one’s achievements.⁵

Racial pride is an especially complex form of pride. Unlike, say, pride in one’s beautiful house, it is sometimes unclear what racial pride is about or whether some instance of pride qualifies as racial pride. Indeed, some dispute whether race even exists and, if it does, what sort of thing it is. This descriptive indeterminacy complicates evaluation of the emotion by, for instance, obscuring moral asymmetries.⁶ For, if racial groups are partly individuated by their location within an unjust socio-political hierarchy, and if white and black racial groups are defined partly in terms of unjust advantage and corresponding disadvantage (as I suspect they are), then pride in being white can reflect morally objectionable judgments in a way that pride in being black cannot.

Thus, it may come as no surprise that I will argue that there are many kinds of racial pride. However, I will also argue that, in the end, some kinds of racial pride are nearer to the core of this phenomenon than others. In particular, pride felt in resisting or overcoming racialized oppression is central, in a sense to be explained, to many or most forms of racial pride.


Moreover, there are many dimensions along which racial pride can be evaluated. For instance, as Douglass’s speech illustrates (discussed further in §4.1), it is sometimes claimed that one should feel pride only about achievements, and never about such things as beautiful complexions or hair. However, this “should” is ambiguous: is it based in prudential considerations? Or moral considerations? Or epistemic considerations? In this essay, I pursue the neglected question of how different sorts of racial pride stand up to different standards of evaluation.

One conclusion that I draw is that, because our evaluation of pride is a function of many descriptive and normative variables, any unconditional endorsement or rejection of racial pride brings with it an argumentative burden that cannot be met. Some forms of it—especially, I argue, forms that center on resisting or overcoming racialized oppression—are appropriate, all things considered. However, other forms of racial pride should be met with skepticism or ambivalence, at best.

Surprisingly, given the remark quoted at the start of the paper, I find that these conclusions are consistent with Douglass’s own thinking on the matter. Notwithstanding his explicit and unequivocal disparagement of what he calls “race pride” (which, I will argue, refers to only some forms of racial pride), Douglass in fact supports a kind of racial pride. And we should too.\(^7\)

In §2, I survey four important kinds of racial pride discussed in the literature. These kinds differ according to the emotion’s intentional object or, in other words, what the emotion is about. In §3, drawing on Douglass, I introduce a fifth kind of racial pride that is about resistance to racialized oppression. I argue that such pride is central to many or

\(^7\) For discussion of Douglass’s thought that presents him as, among other things, unequivocally skeptical about the value of race pride, see Ronald Sundstrom, “Frederick Douglass’s Longing for the End of Race,” *Philosophia Africana* 8(2), (2005): 143-170.
most forms of racial pride. In §4, I critically survey a variety of evaluative claims commonly made about the emotion of racial pride. I argue that racial pride can accurately represent its intentional object and that feeling racial pride can have positive intrinsic and extrinsic value.

These arguments are not intended as presumptuous decrees about how racially oppressed people should value themselves. Rather, I offer them with an eye towards determining what forms of anti-racist racial pride are available to white people, like myself, and thus towards answering the question posed by Lucius Outlaw (among others) of what “the particular positive, constructive race-formational aspects of whiteness, what the forms and instantiations of transformed, rehabilitated notions of whiteness must be.” So, in §5, I apply these conclusions to the case of feeling vicarious pride toward white people who have supported the resistance efforts of racially oppressed people. I argue that, under certain conditions, such pride is morally unobjectionable and plausibly valuable in transforming white identity, if anything is. I conclude the essay, in §6, by noting that further work is needed to make sense of the academically neglected character trait of racial pride and its relation to the emotion of racial pride discussed here.

2. The Emotions of Racial Pride

In a classic defense of racial pride, Bernard Boxill astutely distinguishes between three types of the occurrent emotion of black pride on the basis of each type’s characteristic

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intentional object. The first type is pride in one’s racialized bodily appearance, such as pride in the color of one’s skin, one’s facial features, or the texture and color of one’s hair. Somatic racial pride often involves aesthetically valuing the racialized body (e.g., “Black is Beautiful”). Such pride is sometimes described as pride in one’s racial designation itself (e.g., pride in being black), on the assumption that racial designations are (or are grounded in) particular sets of somatic features.

Somatic racial pride is individualistic, since it construes the intentional object of pride to be an individual’s bodily features, and need not refer to other individuals. It need


10 Thus, Boxill writes, “black pride may simply mean pride in being black, that is, pride in having a black skin and the other physical qualities typical of black people” (ibid., 176); and Zadie Smith, born of a black father and a white mother, writes, “I cannot honestly say I feel proud to be white and ashamed to be black or proud to be black and ashamed to be white. I find it impossible to experience either pride or shame over accidents of genetics in which I had no active part” (Zadie Smith, “Speaking in Tongues,” New York Review of Books 56(3), February 26, 2009; my emphasis).
not refer to socio-political facts that make such features salient, nor to the fact that others possess similar features, nor to the fact (if it is a fact) that there is a racial group to which one belongs in virtue of having these features. Given such individualism, is somatic pride even a type of group pride, let alone a type of racial pride? Somatic pride becomes racial pride only if one supposes that one’s racial identity is at least partly constituted by or grounded in one’s physical appearance or when one or more of the following types of pride is blended with it, in a sense to be discussed in §3.

Second, Boxill identifies a cultural type of racial pride: pride in participating in a set of cultural practices governed by racially distinctive ideals. This type often presupposes a cultural conception of race, such as that defended by the early W.E.B. Du Bois, according to which culture at least partly individuates races. Du Bois’s characterization of race suggests that members of a given race are typically committed to living in accordance with particular ideals of life, and that each race has its own distinctive set of ideals, the development and pursuit of which are powerful instruments of the progress of all. He

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13 Du Bois provides the following examples of racial ideals: “The English nation stood for constitutional liberty and commercial freedom; the German nation for science and philosophy; the Romance nations stood for literature and art, and the other race groups are
allows for the possibility that individuals will fail to develop or live in accordance with their racial group’s ideal, but argues against such cultural assimilation. For instance, he rails against “a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, … [rather than] a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals.”

Thus, Du Boisian racial pride is ethnic pride. Unlike the individualistic somatic conception of racial pride, this cultural conception is both thoroughly social and based in one’s agency as a participant in cultural practices.

Two objections confront the Du Boisian conception of racial pride. First, it is doubtful that each race has an individuating set of ideals, let alone a single characteristic “message” or “ideal of life.” Second, it is doubtful that all members of any race share or should share any substantive ideals of life. These objections threaten to undermine the Du Boisian characterization of race. But the cultural account of racial pride need not invoke this particular conception of race, nor depend upon dubious empirical (or quasi-

striving, each in its own way, to develop for civilization its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help to guide the world nearer and nearer that perfection of human life for which we all long, that “one far off Divine event”” (ibid., 42).

14 Ibid., 43.

15 For a similar treatment of racial pride, see Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 166.


17 Tommie Shelby advances related objections to the political claim that black solidarity ought to be founded upon a substantive black identity in “Foundations of black solidarity: collective identity or common oppression?” Ethics 112(2), (2002): 231–66.
definitional) claims about the existence of racial ideals. Perhaps, as Laurence Thomas argues, a set of group narratives will do.\(^{18}\)

Third, Boxill identifies vicarious pride taken in the great achievements of black individuals.\(^{19}\) On the one hand, like cultural pride, but unlike somatic pride, vicarious pride is essentially a social phenomenon, in two respects. First, as a vicarious emotion, it is essentially interpersonal. Second, as a vicarious \textit{racial} emotion, the class of potential objects of such pride is restricted to co-members of one’s racial group. (I return to this restriction below.) On the other hand, unlike cultural racial pride, but like somatic racial pride, the object of vicarious racial pride is not the exercise of one’s individual agency. Furthermore, the racial group through which one identifies with the object of one’s pride need not be construed culturally or somatically. Thus, one might take this sort of racial pride in individuals from another culture with different bodily features, if one nonetheless thinks of them as co-members of one’s racial group.

Lawrence Blum discusses a fourth type of racial pride: pride about one’s racial group, understood as a collective agent with achievements of its own. He argues that

\(^{18}\) Thomas argues that the existence and common knowledge of a group narrative—defined as “a set of stories which defines values and entirely positive goals, which specifies a set of fixed points of historical significance, and which defines a set of ennobling rituals to be regularly performed”—is a necessary condition for the flourishing of a social group living within a hostile society. Such narratives, he argues, provide an essential basis for trust between group members, the flourishing of group members, and the development of group autonomy. (Laurence Thomas, “Group Autonomy and Narrative Identity: Blacks and Jews,” in \textit{Blacks and Jews: Alliances and Arguments}, Paul Berman, ed., (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994): 286-303; 290.)

\(^{19}\) See also Shelby, \textit{op. cit.}, 237; and Howze and Weberman, \textit{op. cit.}
“Racialized groups are social and historical entities that can engage in pride-worthy behavior and accomplishments—such as resisting oppression and discrimination, persisting in contributing to the larger society in the face of racial obstacles, uniting to defend the rights of others, helping to educate others about the evils of racism and so on.”

One can be proud of one’s racial group and its achievements just like one can be proud of one’s country and its achievements. Note, though, that this type of racial pride presupposes controversial claims about the existence of group agents.

Although Blum mentions racial oppression in his discussion, none of the conceptions of racial pride canvassed in this section makes this idea central. That, I shall now argue, is a mistake.

3. Pride in Resisting Racialized Oppression

Pride in resisting racialized oppression is, in my view, a fundamental form of racial pride. Perhaps the typical reason why one might take pride in one’s racialized bodily appearance, or in one’s participation in a set of racialized cultural practices, or in accomplished individual co-members of one’s racial group, or in one’s racial group as a whole, is that these things—or one’s very admiration or celebration of them—represent or embody resistance to oppression. For instance, many common examples of vicarious black pride cite people who have overcome or undermined racialized oppression—think Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X, Billie Holiday, and Frederick Douglass. And much of the “Black is Beautiful” aesthetic movement is similarly self-consciously political. Mays’s pride also cannot easily be explained without appealing to the generations-long resistance to racial

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oppression that he endorsed and participated in. Thus, pride in resisting racialized oppression often or typically explains why one would experience any of the preceding four forms of pride.\footnote{Thanks to Rachel Fredericks for suggesting this point. See also Tommie Shelby (\textit{We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity} (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 97) for similar remarks.}

This is not to deny that cultural pride, in particular, is often autonomous from political concerns. Racialized cultural forms certainly have content and value that are independent of political oppression. Even in such cases, though, political oppression and resistance to it significantly shape such culture and often also the content of the corresponding racial pride.

That resisting racialized oppression is central to racial pride is not surprising, since racialization itself plausibly involves oppressive processes or events. In addition to plausibly shaping the very concept of race, oppression undoubtedly shapes our experience of having a particular racial designation or identity. The idea of oppression is even central to contemporary self-conceptions of people who espouse white pride, who often (erroneously) see themselves as resisting (what they falsely believe to be) oppression of the white race.\footnote{See Mitch Berbrier, “The Victim Ideology of White Supremacists and White Separatists in the United States,” \textit{Sociological Focus} 33(2), (2000): 175-191.}

However, is feeling pride in resistance to racialized oppression a genuine form of racial pride? Frederick Douglass seems to deny this. This denial, in turn, allows him to ridicule common chauvinistic and parochial race pride while strongly endorsing a racially egalitarian and ecumenical form of pride:
While I have no more reason to be proud of our race than another, I dare say, and I fear no contradiction, that there is no other man in the United States prouder than myself of any great achievement, mental or mechanical, of which any colored man or woman is the author. This is not because I am a colored man, but because I am a man, and because color is treated as a crime by the American people. My sentiments at this point originate not in my color, but in a sense of justice common to all right minded men.23

Douglass suggests that what is pride-worthy as regards race, at least in some cases, is resisting or overcoming unjust racial criminalization, and not racial superiority or the advancement of the interests of co-members of one’s racial group, as such. Douglass’s favored pride is not based “in my color” (a biological, or at any rate non-volitional, feature). Rather, its origins lie in a capacity for justice that is available to “all right minded men.” For these reasons, Douglass insists that such pride is not race pride, which he adamantly rejects. (In what follows, for clarity’s sake, I will follow Douglass in using the now somewhat antiquated locution, “race pride,” to refer specifically to the conception of racial pride that he rejects.)

This is a bit puzzling. Douglass unequivocally ridicules “race pride” while in the same breath strongly endorsing a form of vicarious pride in people of color, the basis of which, however, he says is not racial. Like somatic racial pride, such vicarious pride is not about one’s own volitional activity. Therefore, volitional differences between these two forms of pride cannot explain Douglass’s different responses to them. Instead, I infer that Douglass implicitly accepts the restriction mentioned in the discussion of vicarious pride above, namely, that objects of vicarious racial pride must be co-members of one’s racialized group. For, Douglass’s remark that vicarious pride is not based “in my color”

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23 Douglass, *op. cit.*, 731.
establishes his conclusion that such pride is not race pride only if vicarious race pride must be based “in my color.” And vicarious pride is based “in my color” just in case it is restricted to such co-members, perhaps due to the conceit of racial superiority or the assumption of the existence of racial “families” the members of which we should be partial towards.

It follows that, on Douglass’s view, pride based in resisting unjust racialized criminalization (or oppression) (a) is not racial pride (all of which he regards as chauvinistic “race pride”), and, I infer, (b) can be elicited by anyone’s resistance to any form of racialized oppression, whether or not the proud person shares the same racialized identity or designation as their pride’s object (that is, whether or not they share “my color”). As I read him, Douglass welcomes this result, and rejects racial pride in favor of this more ecumenical pride, open to all “right minded men,” in resistance to racialized oppression.\(^{24}\)

Douglass’s conception of pride forces us to confront difficulties in the very idea of racial pride. First, it is unclear what we require of a “racial” emotion. I began this section by characterizing pride in resistance to racial oppression as a form of racial pride. Does the fact that Douglassian pride is not based in (or does not “originate” in) one’s own racial designation or identity, and can be about members of different racial groups, disqualify it?

\(^{24}\) Thus, it would be a serious mistake to attribute to Douglass, as Randall Kennedy does, the view that pride must be based in one’s own accomplishments. (“My Race Problem—And Ours,” The Atlantic Monthly (May 1997): 55-66.) Indeed, there is no reason to restrict Douglass’s line of reasoning to racialized oppression; insofar as gender, nationality, class, or religion are treated as crimes, achievements that resist such criminalization should equally elicit pride in “all right minded men.” For further discussion of Kennedy’s reading of Douglass, see Bill E. Lawson and Frank M. Kirkland, “Introduction,” in Lawson and Kirkland, eds., Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader, 1-17 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).
from being *racial* pride? Douglass’s claim (quoted in §1) that “The whole assumption of race pride is ridiculous” suggests that his answer to this question is “yes.” But have we reason to agree?

Second, it is also unclear what we require of pride. Can an emotion about a member of a different social group from one’s own, with whom one is unacquainted, count as pride? Pride, unlike, say, admiration, is an emotion felt in response to something that one regards as reflecting well on oneself. So, vicarious pride is typically understood as pride taken in somebody to whom one is partial. Douglass’s religiously inspired answer, “that God has made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,” suggests that he sees himself as being equally partial to all human beings. But this answer might seem to stretch the bounds of partiality too far, and certainly is not shared by all who have experienced what they would call racial pride.

Let’s consider this second question first. One can imagine feeling not just admiration, but pride towards the first person to walk on Mars and the space mission that supports him or her. Or one might feel pride in watching a gymnast score a perfect 10 on their routine. These events represent outstanding navigation of nature’s constraints on the human body. The fact that anyone may take pride in such events, we sometimes find, itself unifies people across social divisions. These examples suggest that mere shared humanity makes intelligible vicarious pride when and, it seems, only when the person one is proud of has achievements that bear upon our evaluating (or reevaluating) human nature and its limits. As I discuss in §4.1, such pride may, but need not, involve judgments of species-level group agency (or “species being”).

If I am reading him right, then in my view Douglass is correct that succeeding in the face of unjust racialized criminalization is comparable to these species-wide pride-

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worthy events. Such success involves navigating society’s constraints on both (as Douglass notes) the body and the mind. Unjust criminalization is among the bitterest civic experiences. Often, mere survival under conditions of persecution merits pride. But to not only survive, but thrive under such conditions—as Douglass and many others have done—is an immense achievement on a par with successful human space exploration or athletic perfection. Such achievements teach us about the limits of our human nature. So, our feelings towards the achievements of individuals with whom we are not acquainted (or otherwise closely related to) can be intelligible as pride.

However, turning now to the first question, in my view there is no reason to deny that such pride is genuinely racial pride, even if feeling it is based in a sense of justice and thus not restricted to racial group co-members. What makes such pride racial pride is not shared group membership, but rather the race-related domain of achievement. Compare: the fact that anyone with a sense of wonder about the universe (not just scientists or explorers) may feel pride in a successful journey to Mars does not entail that such pride is not scientific or explorational pride. Likewise, the fact that anyone with an appreciation of sport (not just athletes) may feel pride in the perfect performance of a gymnastics routine does not entail that such pride is not athletic pride. Similarly, the fact that anyone with a sense of justice (not just people racialized as black) may feel pride in Douglass’s great anti-racist achievements does not entail that such pride is not racial pride. Anti-racist pride is racial pride.

26 See Nicholas Buccola, ““The Human Heart Is a Seat of Constant War”: Frederick Douglass on Human Nature,” in Neil Roberts, ed., A Political Companion to Frederick Douglass, 252-282 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2018); 258.

27 Thus, I agree with Boxill (op. cit., 177) that Douglass was wrong to assume that racial pride is necessarily chauvinistic. I go further than Boxill in claiming that racial pride may
Douglass’s rejection of race pride on ecumenical grounds is directed at partisan conceptions of racial pride, perhaps such as that espoused by Martin Delaney. Douglass’s denial that he has any “more reason to be proud of our race than another” is analogous to the denial on the part of an impartial Olympics sports fan that they have any more reason to be proud of their nation’s athletes than another’s. Just as the latter denial is clearly compatible with endorsing a more impartial conception of athletic pride, so too is Douglass’s denial of partisanship compatible with endorsing an ecumenical conception of racial pride as pride in resistance to racialized oppression. Therefore, Douglass does not contradict himself when he declares his pride in the great achievements of black men and women, even though he rejects (partisan) race pride. However, if Douglass assumed that racial pride must be partisan—and not just that contemporary advocates of racial pride such as Delaney were partisans—then he was mistaken in doing so.

I should emphasize, in defense of Douglass, that this ecumenical conception of racial pride (like the impartial conception of sports fandom mentioned above) is perhaps uncommon. Many people do seem to understand black pride, say, as involving a sense of shared black identity. Moreover, many blacks understand this shared blackness as itself be ecumenical in the sense outlined above. For an account of racial pride that is based in racial group membership and yet does not involve or entail morally objectionable attitudes towards other racial groups, see Jorge J. E. Gracia, “Racism: Negative and Positive?” The Monist 93(2), (2010): 208-22.

involving anti-racist resistance. So, the ecumenical conception of racial pride that I have developed from Douglass’s text perhaps detaches racial pride from some of its more sociologically paradigmatic instances.\(^{29}\) If so, then it is perhaps an emotional analogue to Douglass’s highly lauded rhetorical disidentification with certain of his audiences—as in his famous 1852 Fourth of July address—and selective rhetorical invocation of “we.” In shifting the domain of racial pride away from racial co-members and towards co-workers pursuing racial justice, Douglass in effect offers a new conception of “We, the People” towards whom we are rightly emotional partial.\(^{30}\)

This ecumenical account explains an important asymmetry between white pride and black pride. For the achievements of white individuals are rarely of this racial kind (though they may well represent social achievements of other kinds). Overcoming or resisting racialization is irrelevant to J.S. Bach’s achievements—if anything, Bach’s racialized status illicitly provided him with resources for his achievements, not obstacles to overcome. So, feeling \textit{racial} pride towards Bach would be absurd (though there may be

\(^{29}\) I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I emphasize this point.

\(^{30}\) As Jason Frank argues, “Douglass refused to simply proclaim a \textit{we} on behalf of an already constituted political identity, whether the black or the constitutionally organized white people. Douglass spoke on behalf of a people that was not . . . yet” (“Staging Dissensus: Frederick Douglass and ‘We the People,’” in \textit{Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 209-236; 217; emphasis added, ellipses in original. For further discussion of the rhetoric of dissociation and identity in Douglass, see Kirt H. Wilson, “Political Paradoxes and the Black Jeremiad: Frederick Douglass’s Immanent Theory of Rhetorical Protest,” \textit{Howard Journal of Communications} 29, No. 3 (2018): 243-257.
some sort of pride available toward Bach’s achievements), in a way that feeling it towards Billie Holliday might not be.

The five types of racial pride described in §2 and the present section are rarely carefully distinguished, perhaps because people who have the sentiment of racial pride are often disposed to experience instances of all five types of the emotion, which tend to blend together. This raises the possibility that racial pride sometimes refers to a disposition to experience various types of emotion. I conclude this section by briefly considering two versions of this dispositional emotion and the central role that Douglassian racial pride often plays in both.

One version is the disposition to feel several sorts of different episodes of racial pride. This seems to fit the case of Willie Mays, who described his experience of pride in terms of vicarious racial pride in Barack Obama, as well as perhaps both (American or Black American) group pride and individual pride in resisting racial oppression.

“Racial pride” also can refer to a broader disposition to experience shame, hope, fear, jealousy, anger, humor, and love, as well as many sorts of different episodes of pride, among other emotions. Being disposed to experience somatic racial pride and pride in resisting racial oppression may also, by virtue of the same disposition, dispose one to experience anger at racial oppression, shame at the failings of fellow members of one’s racial group, and love of these fellow members in spite of their failings. Crucially, dispositional emotions are characterized in terms of which occurrent emotions one both does and does not experience. Thus, it is sometimes the dispositional emotion that is referred to when racial pride is construed as refusing to be ashamed of one’s racial identity.

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Racial pride is often dispositional, and the disposition often or typically includes occurrent pride in resisting racial oppression, either vicariously or directly. The judgments involved in such occurrent pride also often help to structure the disposition of which it is a part. Universal judgments about the pride-worthiness of resisting racialized oppression are often joined with particular judgments about which people, events, qualities, or states of affairs resist it (or reflect such resistance). This is the sense in which resisting racial oppression is often or typically central or fundamental to feeling racial pride, and the sense in which somatic, cultural, group, and vicarious pride often blend together.

I assume that the evaluative status of a dispositional emotion is a function of the evaluative status of the occurrent emotions that possession of the dispositional emotion disposes one to experience. Therefore, I limit the next section’s discussion of evaluating racial pride to the evaluation of occurrent emotions.

4. Proper Pride

In this section I consider the extent to which racial pride is appropriate. In §4.1, I consider whether racial pride ever accurately represents its intentional object as pride-worthy. In §4.2, I consider whether feeling racial pride is ever valuable.

4.1 Representational Correctness

To assess whether racial pride ever accurately represents its object, we need a general account of how the emotion of pride represents its object. Each type of emotion presents its object as having certain properties: roughly, fear represents its objects as dangerous, anger as having done something wrong, hope as in some way good and realizable. I will follow Jeremy Fischer and Antti Kauppinen, assuming that their arguments show that pride represents oneself, in virtue of the object of pride, to be living in accordance with one’s
worthy personal ideals, which are norms about what sort of character, commitments, relationships, and attitudes one should have.\textsuperscript{32}

Assuming that pride involves the judgment that one is living in accordance with some of one’s personal ideals in virtue of the object of pride, a token of pride accurately represents its object if and only if:

1. The object of pride exists;\textsuperscript{33}
2. The object of pride provides evidence that one is living in accordance with some of one’s personal ideals; and
3. The relevant personal ideals are worthy.

This account articulates the judgments involved in experiencing the emotion of pride as well as the conditions under which the emotion correctly represents its intentional object (i.e., is “fitting”). Fitting pride requires that there is \textit{in fact} an object of pride that \textit{in fact} provides evidence that one is living in accordance with personal ideals that are \textit{in fact}


\textsuperscript{33} The wording of this condition is shorthand for whatever success conditions are appropriate for the emotion’s type of intentional object. If the intentional object is an individual or group (e.g., my country) then the object must exist; if it is a proposition (e.g., I won the race) then the proposition must be true; if it is an event (e.g., my achievement) then it must have occurred; if it is a property of some individual (e.g., my house’s beauty) then the individual must have that property.
worthy. Let us consider whether any of the five forms of the emotion of pride surveyed above can be fitting.

Somatic pride has often been charged with being unfitting. Douglass, for instance, argues that bodily features like skin color are not the achievements that pride represents them as being:

Our race and color are not of our own choosing. We have no volition in the case one way or another. The only excuse for pride in individuals or races is the fact of their own achievements. Our color is the gift of the Almighty. We should neither be proud of it nor ashamed of it. But we may well enough be proud or ashamed when we have ourselves achieved success or have failed of success. If the sun has curled our hair and tanned our skin let the sun be proud of its achievement, for we have done nothing for it one way or the other.\textsuperscript{34}

Since I am assuming that pride represents oneself as according with one’s personal ideals, I interpret Douglass’s argument as implying that living in accordance with one’s worthy personal ideals requires achievement that reflects volitional activity. Let us reconstruct the argument as follows:

(P1) Pride is fitting only when the object of pride provides evidence that one is living in accordance with worthy personal ideals.

(P2) Only achievements can provide evidence that one is living in accordance with worthy personal ideals.

\textsuperscript{34} Douglass, \textit{op. cit.}, 730. For a similar argument, following Douglass, see Kennedy, \textit{op. cit.} I take Douglass’s claim that one’s achievements are “the only excuse for pride” to be about pride’s “fittingness,” or what property an object must have in order for pride to accurately represent it. Howze and Weberman (\textit{op. cit.}) instead take Kennedy’s Douglassian argument to concern the \textit{rationality} of feeling racial pride.
(P3) The object of racial pride is always some set of racialized bodily features.

(P4) Racialized bodily features are never achievements.

(C) So, racial pride is never fitting.

Douglass is correct that regarding genetically determined somatic features in themselves as achievements would be absurd.\(^{35}\) So, (P4) is true. However, as we have seen, racialized bodily features are only one of many possible sorts of objects of racial pride. Thus, (P3) is false. We may modify Douglass’s argument to restrict its conclusion to somatic racial pride, but this modification still leaves the argument open to objection on the grounds that (P2) is false, as follows.

Suppose that slogans like “Black is Beautiful!” are injunctions to feel pride in one’s racialized physical appearance. The relevant personal ideal here is physical beauty, which is supposed to be met just by the fact that one is black, and is not supposed to require the exercise of one’s agency. But, it is possible to live in accordance with the aesthetic personal ideal in question without achieving anything through one’s agency. So, merely having racialized bodily features provides evidence that one is living in accordance with this personal ideal. As Boxill remarks, “If, as Douglass observed, ‘Our color is the gift of the Almighty,’ race pride may simply be a rejoicing in the gift of the Almighty.”\(^{36}\)

\(^{35}\) Although when it comes to beauty norms, matters are rarely so simple. Achieving a “natural look” often requires considerable effort, cosmetic or otherwise. For example, consider the psychological effort that may be involved merely in resisting the social or economic pressure that a black woman may be under to chemically alter the texture of her hair or the color of her skin, or the pressure that some Asian people may be under to surgically alter their eyes’ appearance. Thanks to Rachel Fredericks and Elizabeth Scarbrough for discussion on this point.

One might doubt that any ideal that is so easy to live in accordance with can be worthy in the sense that is required for one’s pride to be accurate. Yet race-related aesthetic ideals can be worthy insofar as being comfortable with, and taking pleasure in, one’s embodiment can make one’s life more meaningful. Showing that aesthetic ideals make life more meaningful requires a full-length treatment, which I cannot hope to provide here. But that is where the argument must take place, and the burden of proof lies with Douglass, whose conclusion conflicts with common sense.37

As suggested above, the existence of cultural racial pride provides reason to reject (P3), since cultural participation involves agential activity. Such pride may accurately represent its object: the object of pride, whether pursuing racial ideals or developing racial narratives, may in fact take place; such activity can in fact provide evidence that one is living in accordance with some of one’s personal ideals; and such personal ideals may in fact be worthy. The ideals, which will differ from group to group, may involve norms about humor, body language, and other conversational practices; and religious, artistic, political, romantic, familial, and culinary practices, among others. And endorsement of them may enhance trust and community within the racial group. Provided that the relevant community does not have immoral ends, being a contributing member of a community is a worthy ideal, whether the community is geographically, politically, racially, or otherwise defined. So, such cultural activity can also be pride-worthy.

Vicarious racial pride differs from the first two types insofar as it seems to be about another person. I say “seems to be” because it is, plausibly, a logical truth about pride that it always concerns the self. This reflexivity distinguishes pride from other-regarding

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attitudes like admiration.\textsuperscript{38} So purported instances of pride in another person are either mis-described as pride or are covertly about the self. Yet if such pride concerns the self, it is obscure how another’s activity could establish anything about whether one is living in accordance with one’s personal ideals.

One answer is that pride in another’s activity could be fitting if one enabled it, as perhaps in the case of Willie Mays helping to enable Obama’s presidency. However, this would not render fitting pride in one’s ancestors or those whose success one did not enable. A second answer is that, in feeling vicarious pride, one empathetically identifies (in some sense) with the other person.\textsuperscript{39} On this account, experiencing pride in another person’s accomplishments is analogous to feeling embarrassed by another person’s social gaffe. In both cases one’s judgment about the activity of another person generates, via empathetic identification, an emotional experience about oneself. Such identification can make life more meaningful by structuring one’s agency and helping to make one the person one is. As such, personal ideals that involve empathetic identification of this sort may be worthy of one’s commitment.\textsuperscript{40}

A third answer appeals to the group conception of racial pride. Group pride is derivatively about oneself and also about any other members of one’s racial group. For

\textsuperscript{38} Hume argues, in the first two chapters of the second book of his Treatise, that such reflexivity distinguishes pride from love. For a contrary view, see Bennett Helm, Love, Friendship, and the Self: Intimate Identification and the Sociality of Persons (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).


example, one might, as a black American today, take pride in the leading role that black Americans as a group played in defeating the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{41} If so, then one takes one’s membership in the same pride-worthy group to reflect well upon oneself. This sort of pride accurately represents its object insofar as membership in any pride-worthy group is itself pride-worthy.\textsuperscript{42} Thus, vicarious racial pride may involve judgments about one’s contribution to another’s achievement or common group membership, or empathetic links between self and other. Such judgments or empathetic links, if appropriate, render pride accurate.

The final type of racial pride, pride in resistance to racial oppression, is most obviously a fitting type of pride. I assume that paradigmatic examples of resistance to oppression include protest against injustice, assistance to victims of oppression, legislative or institutional work to end oppression and, most generally, the steadfast pursuit of the interests of oppressed people, including oneself.\textsuperscript{43} Each of these kinds of achievements is worthy of pride. Such feats are also well suited for vicarious and group racial pride, since one’s resistance to this oppression plausibly contributes to others’ resistance to similar oppression, and \textit{vice versa}. Moreover, given that all oppression is group-based, resistance to racial oppression is always potentially a group project.


\textsuperscript{43} See Ann Cudd, \textit{Analyzing Oppression} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), especially Chapters 7 and 8.
If, as I am inclined to believe, the very existence of racial groups depends upon racialized oppression (and not upon some biological or cultural property of individuals), then resisting racialized oppression will be among the most pride-worthy accomplishments, *qua race*, of any racialized individual or group. For, this political view of race (together with uncontroversial egalitarian moral claims) entails that one, if not *the*, primary worthy goal with respect to race is eliminating racialized oppression. Moreover, if race reduces to such political facts, then aesthetic, ethical, and political ideals are worthy as *racial ideals* primarily insofar as they are oriented towards illuminating and ending, or at least enabling people to survive under, racialized oppression. These ideals can survive the end of racialization; the end of racialization would merely eliminate their racial aspect. (Compare presently existing aesthetic ideals relating to Jewish humor, much of which derides anti-Semitism with various degrees of subtlety, and which was thoroughly racialized in the early 20th Century but is no longer widely regarded as racial.)

So, racial pride can be fitting. However, this fact does little to buttress claims about the value of experiencing racial pride. By analogy, the fact that something of mine is envious would not entail that it would be beneficial or otherwise valuable for others to envy me. Let us now consider whether pride is like envy in this respect.

4.2 Value

Concern about the value, or lack thereof, of feeling racial pride drives much of our interest in it. So, I will critically evaluate two arguments for the claim that experiencing racial pride can be extrinsically valuable: first, the individualistic argument that pride is valuable because it increases individual self-esteem or well-being; and second, the collective argument that pride is valuable because it promotes or helps to constitute solidarity against racial oppression.
Note first, however, that experiencing fitting racial pride is sometimes itself intrinsically valuable. For, taking pleasure in what is intrinsically good is intrinsically valuable.\(^{44}\) Since some objects of racial pride (e.g., the beauty of one’s racialized physical features, one’s Du Boisian racial culture, the achievements of members of one’s racial group or of the racial group itself, or resistance to racialized oppression) are intrinsically good, feeling fitting pride in these intrinsically valuable objects for their own sakes is also intrinsically valuable.

However, discussions of racial pride’s value typically concern its extrinsic and, more specifically, instrumental value. For example, one recent meta-analysis of 38 psychological studies concludes, “it is clear that higher levels of racial pride are linked to positive outcomes for African American youth.”\(^{45}\) The authors understand racial pride to be positive “feelings about their African and African American heritage, culture and phenotypic features.” The positive outcomes that are linked to such feelings include academic achievement, self-esteem, and mental health (especially the reduced incidence of depression).\(^{46}\)

Which type of racial pride is most valuable in this regard? Boxill argues that vicarious racial pride “best enhances black self-esteem.”\(^{47}\) For, to a greater extent than somatic or cultural pride, vicarious pride directly challenges the white racist judgment that


\(^{47}\) Boxill, *op. cit.*, 178.
black people are incapable of significant accomplishment. Boxill, thus, rightly appreciates the subversive quality of racial pride.

However, the self-esteem-based argument faces three limitations of scope or prima facie objections. First, even if experiencing racial pride increases self-esteem, it is unclear whether black Americans have a deficit of self-esteem. Research suggests that, since the early 1980s, black individuals have consistently reported the highest levels of self-esteem of any racial group in the United States.48 So, it is unclear whether the problem that Boxill concentrates on still exists in all oppressed racial groups.

Second, even if enhancing self-esteem is desirable, there is no reason to believe that feeling racial pride in the achievements of other members of one’s maligned racial group opposes racist judgments any more effectively than does the mere belief that those racist judgments are false. So, the self-esteem-based argument no more justifies inculcating the feeling of racial pride than it justifies inculcating the belief that members of one’s racial group are capable of significant achievement.

Third, vicarious racial pride might not help one to psychologically confront a (purportedly) primary source of one’s race-related deficit of self-esteem, namely racial oppression. Consider Boxill’s example of vicarious black pride towards St. Augustine. That Augustine was black indeed puts to rest the claim that black people are incapable of significant achievement. Such pride may help to increase one’s self-esteem if one doubts the compatibility of achievement and one’s being black. However, such individualistic examples of racial pride, especially examples of pride in individuals who never needed to overcome racial oppression, do not address self-esteem deficiencies based in despair about

one’s inefficacy in overcoming racial oppression. This example, in differing from so many other common examples of objects of racial pride, such as Cesar Chavez and Sojourner Truth, highlights by omission the centrality of resistance to racial oppression to common examples of racial pride.49

Given these three prima facie objections to the individualistic self-esteem rationale for feeling vicarious pride, I suggest that it be supplemented with or replaced by an appeal to the collective value of feeling racial pride. Feeling pride in one’s own and others’ resistance to racialized oppression plausibly promotes or helps to constitute socially valuable relations or achievements. Ecumenical racial pride in resistance to oppression, including perhaps vicarious pride in Sojourner Truth but not pride in Augustine, is, plausibly, necessary for sustaining effective large-scale resistance to oppression. For, it partly constitutes the identification that group members in a state of political solidarity have with each other.50 In this respect, as Douglass remarks about the desire to perpetuate illustrious examples of excellence joined with pious gratitude, “It imparts dignity to human

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49 For a related objection to vicarious racial pride, see Michael Eric Dyson, *Pride* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), especially Chapter 4. This is not to deny that black pride in people who did not face racialized oppression is also common. See, for example, Du Bois’s endorsement of the “just pride” taken in Nefertari, Askia, and Moshesh, in his “On Being Ashamed of Oneself: An Essay on Race Pride,” in *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, Lewis, ed., (New York: Holt, 1995 [1933]): 76-80.

50 See Feinberg, *op. cit.*; Shelby (op. cit., 2005, 68); and Dyson (*ibid.*, 84).
nature, and makes the lives of the great and good, of all ages, contemporary with our own, and co-workers with us.”

Moreover, unlike Boxill’s account of the anti-racist value of racial pride, my account need not invoke the racist’s biological conception of race. Thus, if such conceptions of race are false, then my account avoids a version of Douglass’s objection that such pride is “a positive evil. It is building on a false foundation.” Pride in resistance to racialized oppression may instead invoke a social constructionist account of race according to which race is understood in terms of racialized oppression. Such pride is about resisting or overcoming some of the very forces that objectionably bind racial groups together in the first place. Racial pride of this sort is valuable to all, even to those who do not suffer from a deficit of self-esteem, since it is an anti-racist emotion with the potential to generate appropriate understanding, desires, and behavior in the context of racialized oppression. Such pride plausibly helps to focus attention upon the fact of


53 As Sally Haslanger notes, this conception of race undermines the view that race is a positive social identity. (“Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?” *Nous* 34(1), (2000): 31-55; 48.) So, an account of racial pride founded upon this conception of race might seem incongruous. However, even if one lacks grounds for pride in the mere fact of being black (say), one may still have grounds for racial pride in one’s own and others’ resistance against racialized oppression.

54 This claim is compatible with there being unobjectionable sources of race-based community.
racialized oppression and upon the goal of eliminating such oppression. Such pride also helps to generate productive habits of remembrance that sustain one’s anti-racist identity and efforts. The political value of this attentiveness is absent from racial pride in objects that are unrelated to oppression.

Finally, and again, this account explains one dimension of the moral asymmetry between white pride and the racial pride felt by people of color. The latter is often a celebration of resistance to racialized oppression; white pride, as commonly construed, completely lacks this content, and often actually celebrates racial oppression. Thus, as they are commonly construed, black pride and white pride embody opposed evaluations of racialized oppression. Insofar as white pride involves taking pleasure in intrinsically bad facts or relations (which it seems to do in many, if not all, actual cases), it is both intrinsically bad (for the reasons given at the start of this subsection) and also likely to be extrinsically bad.

5. Racial Pride for White People?

But perhaps there is a type of racial pride available to white people besides the common construal of it. Indeed, this is so, if, as I have argued, Douglassian ecumenical racial pride


in resisting racialized oppression is available and valuable to all persons. This section sketches what such pride might look like.

Just as people of color can do, a white person who manages to achieve “a sense of justice common to all right minded men” can experience Douglassian vicarious racial pride in the resistance efforts of racially oppressed individuals.\(^5^8\) For, as Douglass emphasizes, such pride, now detached from racial group co-membership, is grounded in shared humanity and the universal value of challenging or overcoming unjust racial criminalization.

Although I (following Douglass and Boxill) have focused on the achievements of people of color, Douglass’s formulation allows that, though white people are not subjected to racial oppression, they may nonetheless challenge the crime of unjust racialization in a pride-worthy way. Pride taken in being a so-called “white race traitor” might be fitting and valuable, insofar as that emotion, properly construed, generates effective anti-oppressive desires, emotion, cognition, and/or behavior.

To be clear, such pride differs from pride in one’s whiteness, one’s white identity, one’s “white culture,” or in having and exercising white privilege. As Samantha Vice notes, “It would be inappropriate to value a history of oppression, a system of privilege or whitely


\[^{58}\text{Douglass, op. cit., 731.}\]
habits, and for many of the world’s people, this is what white stands for.” Fitting pride in white identity would therefore require “refashioning” such identity, so that the history of white oppression no longer overshadowed whatever distinctively white cultural values or accomplishments there may be. Yet the prospects of such a refashioning are bleak. Therefore, I agree with Vice that there is little or no reason to believe that being white in itself could be pride-worthy. My Douglassian proposal is even compatible with Vice’s claim that the whiteness of one’s self is worthy instead of shame or guilt.

The Douglassian racial pride available to white people concerns actions, not selves. It is about discrete achievements, not habits or dispositions. It is about defying racially oppressive cultural norms, not adopting or perpetuating white culture. It is thus, in Douglassian spirit, about the race-related achievements of humanity, and not white achievements qua white or achievements belonging solely to the white race.

There are numerous important objections and counter-arguments to the claims that (a) racial pride about a white person’s anti-racist achievement is sometimes fitting and that (b) a white person feeling such pride is sometimes morally unobjectionable. Let us consider three. One might argue, first, that this is not really racial pride, if the pride is not taken qua whiteness. Note, however, that in cases of black pride the emotion need not (and in the case of Douglassian racial pride, cannot) be taken qua blackness. Indeed, assuming a political account of race, according to which being black involves being racially oppressed, some instances of black pride are about defying one’s blackness. Other instances might be about non-racially identified anti-racist achievement. Likewise, with respect to Douglassian


60 I am grateful to an anonymous reader for posing the question, whether anti-racist resistance as a black person might be more valuable than anti-racist resistance that lacks
racial pride available to, or about, white people who defy their white racial role. Pride in John Brown’s raid, say, could be such racial pride.

Second, one might object that one cannot take pride in the anti-racist activities of a white person, if Vice is right that whites generally or always have racially vicious character traits. For, an anti-racist act is pride-worthy only if it is fully virtuous; and as Aristotle argues, an act can be fully virtuous only if it expresses or is caused by virtuous character. However, I deny this Aristotelian claim. Having a stable virtuous disposition is not necessary for occasionally acting virtuously. Virtuous actions are motivated by considerations that, in the given set of circumstances, characteristically motivate a virtuous person; and such considerations can on occasion motivate even a vicious person.

One might object, instead, that white anti-racist activity is never pride-worthy, since it is always merely discharging moral duties. Refusing to act wrongly or engage in blameworthy activity is never supererogatory, i.e., beyond the call of duty. So, refusing to be complicit in racial oppression is merely responding to the call of duty, not exceeding it. It is the least one can do. Yet, one might think, pride-worthy moral or political accomplishment must be supererogatory. Otherwise, as Vice worries, “the bar may be set too low if attaining basic decency and fairness becomes a moral achievement worthy of pride.”\(^61\) This objection to the fittingness of racial pride towards a white person’s anti-racist activities has force. It is true, as Vice argues, that much anti-racist white activity is not supererogatory.\(^62\) Furthermore, let us grant that pride-worthy moral accomplishment must be supererogatory. (One wonders, though, whether the pride-worthy anti-racist activity of any sense of racial identification. I cannot here try to answer this important question, which would require developing an account of the nature and value of racial identification.

\(^61\) Vice, \textit{ibid.}, 203.

\(^62\) Vice, \textit{ibid.}, 202-203.
people of color must, in fact, be supererogatory.) Nonetheless, anti-racist white achievements that involve significant risk of severe harm are plausibly supererogatory and thus pride-worthy.

I mention six examples to illustrate the point. I have alluded already to the famous case of John Brown. Attempting to free kidnapped and enslaved people by force, not only at Harper’s Ferry but also in Kansas, Missouri, and elsewhere, and then submitting to execution upon capture, as he did, is plausibly morally permissible and supererogatory, but doubtfully morally required. Even if such force was impermissible, though, Brown’s years of organizing work with the Underground Railroad and other non-violent activities were plausibly supererogatory. Consider next Silas Soule, a white Union captain and former volunteer in the Underground Railroad who in 1864 not only refused to follow orders to kill Cheyenne and Arapaho people in the Sand Creek Massacre, but then testified publicly against the colonel who commanded the assault. Soule’s act of courage was a possible cause of his being shot and killed shortly thereafter, at the age of 26. Consider Jessie Ames, who crafted a feminist campaign against lynching partly by insisting, as a Southern white woman, that black men were not the threats to Southern white womanhood that racist whites often took them to be. Ames founded the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching in 1930. Consider Helen Hunt Jackson, a white scholar and

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63 I am grateful to an anonymous reader for suggesting this point.


activist who authored the 1881 critique of U.S. policy towards Native Americans, *A Century of Dishonor*, and the 1884 bestselling novel, *Ramona*, an exposé of injustice towards Native Americans. Jackson later served as an agent of the U.S. Interior Department, working (though with little success) to identify and secure claims of Native Americans in California.\(^{66}\) Or consider the journalist, Anne Braden, who in 1954 along with her husband, Carl, bought a Louisville home on behalf of the Wade family who was denied purchase due to a restrictive covenant. Braden also organized to desegregate a hospital in Kentucky in 1950, and organized throughout her life, starting in the 1950s, to protect the rights of prisoners.\(^{67}\) Finally, consider Edward Coles, who in 1814 initiated a fascinating correspondence with Thomas Jefferson, pressing him to publicly advocate for abolition. Five years later, Coles fled Virginia to free the 19 enslaved people whom he “inherited,” providing each family with 160 acres of land in Illinois. Three years later, Coles became the second governor of Illinois, and worked to completely eradicate slavery from that state.\(^{68}\)

None of these figures is entirely unobjectionable. But some of their actions are supererogatory pride-worthy racial achievements. I submit that it is lamentable and, indeed, shameful that few of these figures’ efforts are widely known or celebrated by white people.


\(^{67}\) Catherine Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South*, Foreword by Angela Y. Davis (Palgrave MacMillon, 2002).

Taking pride in such efforts would help redirect white attention to both white people’s perpetuation of racial oppression and their resistance to it. Inculcating such pride may also send the message that white people should use their persistent and unjustified racial position in pride-worthy ways, and celebrate supererogatory resistance to oppression they are customarily called on to help inflict.

Various vicious habits do need to be guarded against, if such racial pride is to be morally appropriate. For example, “white savior” narratives are generally, and notoriously, morally objectionable, given the context of white oppression and the pervasiveness of stereotypes about the inefficacy of people of color. White people therefore must guard against the habit of regarding the objects of racial pride (vicarious or self-directed) as “white saviors” who rescue “helpless” people of color. Moreover, one risk of such racial pride is foregrounding, yet again, the achievements of white people in the historical record at the cost of backgrounding the achievements of people of color. This concern provides a reason to celebrate white people who, as Du Bois said of John Brown, work with people of color, not simply for them. Furthermore, there is a risk that taking first-personal or vicarious pride in the achievements of the past will lead whites to complacency or ignorance about contemporary forms of oppression that may be more subtle, and will prevent them from considering the possibility that further efforts at personal and political improvement are needed. Thus, precautionary measures should be taken, such as setting short-, medium-, and long-term goals for one’s own efforts at resistance to racialized oppression; finding contemporaries to stand in solidarity with and to hold one accountable through one’s efforts at resistance to racialized oppression; developing habits that regularly bring one into contact with different kinds of people who will share their experiences of

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ongoing racialized oppression; and re-conceptualizing one’s pre-existing goals to require such resistance.\textsuperscript{70}

To reiterate, such considerations should not be taken to justify pride in whiteness itself. The point is not to exonerate whites of their crimes, to celebrate the alleged commitment of “white culture” to norms of justice, to prove that whites are good “allies,” or to portray the allegedly self-correcting nature of white institutions. Rather, the point (perhaps among others) is to reorient oneself and ourselves away from the norms and assumptions of white supremacy. Racial pride thus construed is therefore what Alison Jagger calls an “outlaw emotion”: “Outlaw emotions are distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values.” For example, “pride becomes feminist pride when it is evoked by realizing that a certain person's achievement was possible only because that individual overcame specifically gendered obstacles to success.”\textsuperscript{71} Unlike people of color, white people do not generally face racialized obstacles to success. On the contrary. Yet, the above (purported) examples of pride-worthy white anti-racist achievement can reorient white people to raise the bar on what they themselves might achieve, and thereby motivate them to deliver at least what they owe to others and perhaps more. It can also help them to identify the “dominant perceptions and values” that pose racialized psychological and

\textsuperscript{70} I am grateful to an anonymous reader for suggesting this concern and to Rachel Fredericks for brainstorming with me about possible precautionary strategies.

social obstacles to their own decency and justice, and to appreciate the different political responses available to whites vis-à-vis racial oppression.\textsuperscript{72}

Finally, one might object to an implication of my claim that vicarious racial pride’s object need not be a co-member of one’s racial group. One might worry that it is objectionable appropriation for white people to feel racial pride about the achievements of people of color in resisting racial oppression perpetuated by white people. Even non-racial vicarious pride often seems objectionable on similar grounds: one might, say, take exception to the fact that one’s abusive family members are proud of one’s achievements, and reasonably ask, “Who are you to take pride in \textit{my} accomplishment?” This worry is greatly compounded when somebody else takes vicarious pride in one’s resistance to the very oppression in which they are complicit. I agree that complicity in racial oppression can make such pride not only morally objectionable, but also unfitting. For, such complicity can undermine the second condition of pride’s accuracy, that the object of pride reflects one’s living in accordance with one’s ideals. The matter may be different, though, when one makes substantial efforts to extricate oneself from this complicity and to create what Douglass called a “composite nationality.”\textsuperscript{73} If such efforts satisfy reasonable

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\item This politically oriented proposal complements MacMullan’s culturally oriented proposal that whites take pride in their ethnic (e.g., Scots-Irish) traditions as a way of “decoloniz[ing] the[ir] minds …, by asserting the differences within whiteness” (\textit{op. cit.}, 202).
\end{enumerate}
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demands, which I suspect is quite difficult to do, then it is reasonable to see oneself as taking part in anti-racist efforts and as sharing anti-racist ideals with those of whom one is proud, even if complete extrication from complicity is impossible. So, vicarious pride in anti-racist achievement is unavailable to many, but perhaps not all, white people who remain complicit in racialized oppression. I leave it to others to determine which white people, if any, are, as a result of their substantial efforts to extricate themselves from such complicity, merely unavoidably complicit.

6. Conclusion

I have focused this essay on establishing two main theses about the emotion of racial pride. First, resistance to racialized oppression—and not, say, delight in one’s racialized body—is central to understanding racial pride; and second, some instances of racial pride, including possibly some few instances of anti-racist racial pride felt by whites, are both accurate and valuable, especially insofar as they have collective political value.

One upshot is that two new responses are available to the frequently heard, and typically hostile and bad faith, white demand that, if there is to be a Black History Month, there should be a White History Month to encourage analogous racial pride in whites. The common response that every (or nearly every) month is already, in effect, White History Month is correct so far as it goes: historical attention in the United States, including in U.S. philosophy departments, remains until this day largely riveted to the history of Europeans and their American descendants. But, although the unreasonable demand mentioned above deserves no further response, it is also true that whites tend to pay insufficient attention to anti-racist achievements, including those of white anti-racists. Much of what Douglass said about John Brown applies to at least some of these other white people as well: “Like the great and good of all ages—the men born in advance of their times, the men whose bleeding footprints attest the immense cost of reform, and show us the long and dreary spaces,
between the luminous points in the progress of mankind,—this our noblest American hero must wait the polishing wheels of after-coming centuries to make his glory more manifest, and his worth more generally acknowledged.”

So, first, we may add in response that whites who have made substantial efforts to extricate themselves from complicity in continuing racial oppression are already free to take pride, in a Douglassian spirit reflecting “a sense of justice common to all right minded men,” in the racial achievements of people of color. Second, if the first response fails to satisfy white chauvinists, as I assume it would, we should agree to consider establishing a White History Month, with a catch: the activities involved therein must focus on celebrating anti-racist white achievements, serving as the polishing wheels of these neglected but pride-worthy achievements. Proposing such a memorial in a way that conveys an egalitarian public message would be rhetorically difficult, and attempting to do so in the current political climate may be ill advised. But I believe that doing so is worth considering, for two reasons. First, this response to misguided hostility against black racial pride redirects attention to a primary basis of black pride, namely resistance to racial oppression perpetrated by white people. Second, white anti-racists’ achievements of the sort enumerated above should, as already explained, be more widely known and celebrated.

Throughout this paper, I have emphasized that there are multiple types of racial pride and a variety of standards of assessment that should be carefully distinguished in scholarship on the topic. There are at least five types of occurrent racial pride and two types of dispositional racial pride. There are also two general kinds of evaluation one might make of an instance of racial pride, corresponding to whether pride accurately represents its

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74 Frederick Douglass, “John Brown,” [1881] in Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings; 633-647.
object and whether experiencing pride is valuable. There are also several standards of value, intrinsic and extrinsic, against which one might evaluate racial pride.

I conclude by observing that most of the philosophical literature on racial pride (this essay included) notably omits discussion of yet another variety of racial pride: the character trait of racial pride. The character trait, unlike the emotion, involves complex conative and behavioral dispositions, which makes it an attractive topic of popular ethical and political discourse. For example, consider the lyrics to James Brown’s song, “Say It Loud—I'm Black And I'm Proud”:

Some people say we got a lot of malice / Some say it's a lotta nerve / But I say we won't quit moving / Until we get what we deserve … I've worked on jobs with my feet and my hands / But all the work I did was for the other man / And now we demand a chance / To do things for ourselves … We’d rather die on our feet / Than keep living on our knees.

It is striking that these lyrics make no reference whatsoever to any positive emotion, let alone to the emotion of pride. Numerous other popular examples share this feature. Plausibly, “racial pride” does not always, and perhaps not even principally, refer to the emotion of pride.

As is the case with the emotion of racial pride, there are several varieties of the character trait of racial pride. However, adequately discussing this variety, as well as the normative considerations that bear upon whether an instance of the trait is virtuous or vicious, requires separate treatment.

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75 For an exception, see Vice, *op. cit.*, 204-205.