Understanding Morality in a Racialized Society

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Candice C. Robinson and Michael L. Rosino

Abstract

In this chapter, we join the many active voices raising the issue of the absence of scholarship acknowledging the unique lived experiences of all racialized people and the ongoing impact of racial oppression. In doing so, we challenge previous engagement with the sociology of morality that does not include race, racism, and racialization in any form. Inadvertently, these previous works become ahistorical and falsely race-neutral theoretical and analytical approaches to morality. We suggest a new constellation of frameworks that incorporates racialized power dynamics and inequalities in moral orientations. To this end, we draw on each of our recent ethnographic studies to demonstrate the role of racialized forms of morality in civic and political organizations. To conclude, we argue for a sociology of morality that moves beyond a colorblind approach to grapple with the social realities of racialization and oppression as part of the social structure.

In the original introduction to the Handbook of the Sociology of Morality, Hitlin and Vaisey set an agenda for the sociological approach to the broad field of morality. They argue that it is unthinkable and implausible to separate the "moral" from the "social" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010: 3). In this chapter, we agree with this agenda setting that the moral, meaning "the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil, in relation to the actions, desires, or character of responsible human beings," (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010: 5), cannot be separated from the social (meaning the institutions, organizations, and individuals that comprise society). In extending this agenda for a sociology that contends with morality, we argue that the "social" cannot be separated from the racial. The initial edition of the Handbook does not profoundly explore racialization or the implications of racial inequality as a foundational aspect of contemporary society, nor does it engage with the ongoing implications of racial oppression for collective moral sentiments. In failing to do so, the Handbook's first edition inadvertently engages with ahistorical and falsely race-neutral theoretical and analytical approaches.

Over the last decade since the publication of the Handbook of Sociology of Morality,

C. C. Robinson (✉)
Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, NC, USA
e-mail: robinsonca@uncw.edu

M. L. Rosino
Department of Sociology, Molloy University, Rockville Centre, NY, USA
e-mail: mrosino@molloy.edu

scholarship and advocacy have increasingly demonstrated the drawbacks and harms of separating any subfields of sociology from ongoing matters of racism and racial inequality within a racialized global society. Refusing to acknowledge and engage these essential social facts yields inaccurate, if not detrimental, assumptions about society and social life (Bonilla-Silva, 1999). This crucial intervention has been made evident by the current call-outs and call-ins of the discipline. Sociology is amid a reckoning with active voices raising the issue of the absence of scholarship acknowledging the unique lived experiences of all racialized people. Within this reckoning, a surge of scholarship has recognized the pervasiveness of Euro and White-centric research frames parallel to work that centers racialized social dynamics and the knowledge and experiences of people of color (e.g., Glenn, 2015; Golash-Boza, 2016; Hirschman, 2004; Maghbouleh, 2022; Winant, 2000; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Given this critical paradigm shift, we are excited about the invitation from this second Handbook of the Sociology of Morality to help build a new sociology of morality that incorporates a racial framework.

In this chapter, we reframe the constellation of frameworks used in the study of morality to center how racialized power dynamics and inequalities shape moral orientations. In other words, we seek to advance a sociology of morality that moves beyond an approach that avoids or ignores racialization (i.e. a colorblind approach). Instead, we use the chapter to grapple with the social realities of racialization and oppression as part of the social structure. Racialization is a sociopolitical process whereby racial meaning is ascribed to groups of people, social practices, and characteristics (Omi & Winant, 1986). As noted by Selod and Embrick (2013:647), it is a "theoretical tool scholars can use to understand the creation, maintenance, and changing nature of racial meanings and experiences." The related concept of racial oppression describes a process whereby "institutions and social systems distribute resources and rewards towards certain groups of people and away from others and influential

people construct and enforce rules to the advantage of particular groups rather than others" (Rosino, 2021:14–15) to maintain racial inequality and white domination. We implore sociologists to consider how these interconnecting processes pervade the relationship between morality and society.

In pushing forward this more inclusive and nuanced approach to morality, we use this chapter to do the following: 1) provide a brief history on the movement toward the inclusion of quality scholarship on the sociology of race and ethnicity writ large; 2) assess the in/exclusion of racial matters in the *Handbook of the Sociology of Morality* first edition; 3) bring forth suggestions of what other morality scholars ought to take into their scholarship; and 4) conclude with some ways to operationalize racial dynamics in morality analyses. This final point will include direct examples from our research on the intersection of morality, race, social movements, and organizations. In discussing examples, we draw upon original ethnographic case studies that come from a combined 75 months of ethnographic observations across two sites of civic organizations and approximately 100 structured and semi-structured interviews. Throughout points three and four, we isolate dynamics at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of racialized morality and demonstrate their interactions and implications.

1   A Racialized Society

Linkages between racialized power dynamics and notions of morality are deeply intertwined into the fabric of modern societies. Ethnocentric and racialized notions of moral superiority and inferiority have been central to the twin systems of white supremacy and colonialism, which continue to shape our modern social world (Rosino, 2017). However, until recently, critical scholarship on race has been treated as an elective or niche topic for sociology rather than central in our understanding and approaches as researchers within this field. Puentes and Gougherty (2013:161) point out, for instance, that "the

topic of race is frequently ghettoized to a specific chapter within introductory sociology textbooks."

Further, there is a general tendency for the scholarship written by sociologists of color or about communities of color to be marginalized as ideologically driven, subjective, or ungeneralizable as opposed to an integral part of understanding our social world (Collins, 1991; Morris, 2015; Young, 2004). Leading up to what has been known as the "racial reckoning" of the Summer of 2020[1] and immediately after, recent ASA presidents Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2019), Mary Romero (2020), Aldon Morris (2022), and Menjívar (2023), and scholars such as Earl Wright II (Wright II, 2017; Wright II, 2020) have used their platforms to inspire a new generation to reassess the racialized history of sociology and rethink dominant theoretical and analytical approaches. In addition to these points, the voices of racially marginalized individuals are foundational to sociological research.

1.1   Racialized History of Sociology

In engaging with the above points about the broad field of sociology, we first turn to the canonical scholarship of early sociologists. For decades, the average Introduction to Sociology student learned the European origins of sociology through Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber and the American origins of sociology through Robert E. Park and the Chicago School, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton. All white men. Scholars such as Morris (2015) and Wright II (2017) have spurred a reexamination of the origins of the discipline and the influence of W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois, a Black scholar, sits within the time between European and presumed American origins of the discipline. He has been thoroughly canonized within Africana Studies and scholarship on the Black American experience. Yet,

despite his early articulation of a holistic, systematic, innovative, and scientific approach to sociology, Du Bois and his scholarship have been primarily ignored as a scholar with findings for *society* writ large. Ironically, this exclusion reflects the very patterns of epistemology and influence that Du Bois (1903) would describe as the "color line."

Du Bois was the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard in History. In addition to his studies, he attended the German institution Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin, strengthening his interests in the field of sociology. Once back in the United States, Du Bois was tasked by the University of Pennsylvania to use his international training to develop a study to affirm for white leaders of Philadelphia that Black Philadelphians were the cause of any political strife (Du Bois, 1961). He instead explored the interests and experiences of Black people in the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia and, by proxy, the United States. This study includes an extensive multi-method positivist approach, including surveys, analysis of census data, and interviews. Published in 1899, *The Philadelphia Negro* is often credited as the first known American *scientific* sociological study. Despite this groundbreaking scholarship and the subsequent development of scholars at Atlanta University that predates the University of Chicago (Wright II, 2017), this study is not often found in core sociological courses of sociological methods or sociological theory. Despite this study outlining crucial dynamics of social life such as social class, religion, gender, crime, and organizations, to name a few, it has overwhelmingly been solely considered a book on the study of "race" because the population is Black Philadelphians.

The first American book published under the banner of sociology, Fitzhugh's 1854 *Sociology of the South* argued that whites were morally superior and defended chattel slavery on moral grounds. In contrast, the inherent question that Du Bois sought to examine about the Black American population in the nineteenth century was motivated by efforts at realizing a morally just society and countering the suggestion that Black Americans were marginalized or the cause of conflict because they were somehow morally

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[1] With the rise of white supremacist rhetoric and following the death of George Floyd, many organizations and individuals began to reassess how they approach conversations around race and racism, explicitly highlighting anti-Blackness and anti-immigrant sentiments.

inferior. Du Bois' research sought to settle public debates around the moral worth, human capacities, and rightful place of Black Americans as Americans in US society in the aftermath of chattel slavery (Abbott, 2022; Muhammad, 2011). In this way, the origin of morality scholarship is not merely a question relevant to the analysis of European sociologists like Durkheim, Weber, or Bourdieu, who are often seen as theorists of *society writ large*, as suggested in the original Handbook of the Sociology of Morality. Given this, dominant sociological approaches to morality have been constrained by the history of sociology's racial discrimination and exclusion.

Parallel to the development of sociology through Du Bois is also the development of scholars Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Black women who also predate much of the sociological canonical work we emphasize. They also engage in questions about the morality of racial inequality and the moral harms of ongoing brutality to Black communities. In 1892s *A Voice from the South*, Cooper examined her experiences as a Black woman in the American South and highlighted the power of marginalized women to bring a moral conscience to the nation. At the same time, Wells-Barnett sought to chronicle the experiences of Black men murdered at the hands of the police with a deep need to acknowledge the immoral aspect of continuing to ignore the abuse and lack of justice. For instance, in her discussions of lynchings in the 1892 pamphlet *Southern Horrors*, she articulates the persistence of racialized moral panics and the moral hypocrisy of racist violence in American society. Cooper and Wells-Barnett's works serve as a foundation for the importance of observing interlocking oppressions to understanding inequality as well as the impact of the voices of Black women specifically in understanding society (Allen, 2021; Collins, 1986; Collins, 1989; Collins, 1991). These articulations suggest that a white frame of sociology in any subfield is incomplete without the voices of racially marginalized scholars (Ladner, 1998 (1973)).

This racially segregated history of sociology proceeded through the twentieth century. The first African American President of ASA, E Franklin Frazier, dedicated his Presidential Address to the very issue of race in America. Within his address, he acknowledged the presumed differences in assumed values between Black and White Americans and their implications for both interracial interactions and sociological research. His recognition of these points emphasized Sociology's presumptions that Black Americans essentially live immoral and deficit lives that date back to the origins of sociology (Frazier, 1949). Despite Frazier's plea for sociologists to take an approach that acknowledged the full lived experiences of Black people, a thread of scholarship followed that promoted narratives of Black pathology to explain racial inequality. Notably, this included the Moynihan report (1965). This report has been the center of blaming many Black communities for their experiences with poverty and inequality via assumed wicked and dysfunctional ways of life and family formation rather than structural inequities.

In 1968, Black sociologists more loudly called for their voices to be heard within ASA. In 1970, the Caucus of Black Sociologists (CBS) was formally organized under the leadership of James E. Blackwell. By the end of the 1970s, the caucus separated from ASA to create the Association of Black Sociologists (ABS) and their own journal (Reed & Taylor, 2018). The sociology of race and ethnicity became increasingly recognized as a legitimate subfield toward the end of the twentieth century, incorporating more racial and ethnic minorities in voice and scholarship, as well as the development of the ASA Section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities (SREM). Given this historical context, it is unsurprising that the first official ASA journal dedicated to race scholarship, Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, was not created until 2015 under the leadership of SREM (Brunsma et al., 2015).

As seen through this brief history, we are not the first to point out that the foundations of mainstream sociology (and thus its most influential early formulations of morality) were forged by dominant figures that failed to problematize chattel slavery, colonialism, expropriation, segregation, apartheid, and other systems of racial violence and exploitation. Accordingly, sociologists of morality must contend with the

reality that, even within sociology itself, notions of morality have been weaponized as a tool for white supremacy. At the same time, the "foundational forefathers," often cited in volumes on the sociology of morality, did not grapple with these basic social facts.

1.2   Key Racial Theoretical Approaches Within Sociology

In addition to the discussions above, sociologists in the last 50 years have increasingly sought to articulate the societal impacts of racialization and oppression through their scholarship. In response to such scholarship as *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), which suggested that integration helped to move Americans away from race-based inequalities, other scholars acknowledged the ways that the racialized social system continues to impact people's life chances and group experiences. In 1973, Ladner introduced the *Death of White Sociology* to challenge scholars who continued to be married to white sociological approaches that ignored the moral experiences of non-white people. Scholars like Steinberg (1981, 2007), Omi and Winant (1986), Mills (1997), Feagin (2000), Bonilla-Silva (2001, 2018), and Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008) have subsequently highlighted varied ways that racial dynamics continue to shape the social world via racial politics, racialized notions of cultural hierarchies, systemic racism, and racial ideology.

We opened with this assessment of sociology because the sociology of morality as a subfield within sociology has similarly suffered a lean into "colorblind" and "white logic" scholarship with "white methods" and analytical approaches (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). Below, we further examine the impacts of this legacy on the first Handbook's attempt to lay the groundwork for the sociology of morality. Rather than rejecting these foundations as a whole, however, we seek to integrate the promising and relevant features of this groundwork with critical understandings of race and racism.

2   Understanding Morality: Assessment of the First Edition of the Sociology of Morality Handbook

The Sociology of Morality promises that it can transform questions of morality by considering their pragmatic elements and social contexts. In other words, these questions are not philosophical abstractions but empirical matters with profound societal implications. As the first edition of this Handbook demonstrates (notably, Powell, 2010), this subfield is well-positioned to answer the following types of questions:

- What is the relationship between morality and society?
- What is the relationship between morality and social groups and forms of social organization?
- What is the relationship between morality and individual people's actions in the social world?
- What is the role of moral judgments and sentiments in collective action, social conflict, and social change?

In building the original Handbook, Hitlin and Vaisey (2010:6) point out that the sociology of morality has been concerned with "(a) determining the proper relationship between innate moral capacities and the moral variation observed within and between societies (e.g., Hauser, 2006, Turner this volume); (b) empirically analyzing the contours of moral variation within and between societies; and (c) uncovering the social antecedents of particular moral frameworks and their social and behavioral consequences." In short, the field examines variations in the relationship between the concept of morality, social action, and structures.

The original Handbook follows what we briefly outlined above, following a white history of sociology that engages with stories from the perspectives of overwhelmingly white people and about white people in a way that presumes can be generalizable to all people regardless of race. By building a canon on the sociology of morality

formulated by Weber and Durkheim, the Handbook reifies the use of traditional foundational scholars without also incorporating the works of other scholars outlined above, nor the impact of their social positions on how they would view morality, despite acknowledging morality can be determined based on an individual's positions within society.

We live (and therefore engage in social and cultural practices around morality) in a racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Meghji, 2022). With this social reality in mind, we rephrase and reframe the questions above to account for the omnipresence of racial oppression and resistance. We must operationalize and theorize a new set of questions. The following are only some of these questions:

- Given the context of enduring racial inequity and domination, do we live in a moral society? Or more, presciently, what does a moral society look like?
- How are racial inequality and oppression rationalized on moral grounds by social actors?
- What is the moral set of actions to undertake for various actors in a racially unjust world?
- What role does notions of morality play in the struggle for racial justice and what are their implications?
- How are people's moral frameworks shaped by their positions in the racialized social system?

In this assessment, we appreciate that much of the work on the sociology of morality is discussed through structures, resources, and power. These general concepts are fruitful for examining racialization and racial oppression. In doing this, we must consider how the sociology of morality must contend with a macro-, meso-, and micro-understanding of our racialized society.

At the micro-level of society, "one's position in social space provides a vantage point from which allies and rivals, role models and cautionary tales, all play a role in shaping the salience of particular kinds of moral judgment over others" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010: 9). A complex interplay between racial inequities and identities, everyday social practices, and moral judgements lie at the heart of moral life in racialized societies. One crucial approach highlighting these elements is the racialized interaction order (Meghji, 2022; Rosino, 2017). Drawing on a host of historical case studies, Rosino (2017: 158) notes, "performances of self within social interactions predicated on cultural schemas of difference, moral worth, and group position have played a fundamental and foundational role in the establishment and temporal and spatial spread of racialized institutional and social structures." The racialized interaction order has subsequently been refined and demonstrated by scholars in a host of global and historical contexts (Kim, 2021; Meghji, 2019, 2022; Papadantonakis, 2019), yet its implications for the sociology of morality remain underdeveloped.

As Hitlin and Vasey (2010: 10) note, "at the macro level, not all groups or actors possess the same degree of power to promote their version of "good life" or "good society." They point to "historical shifts, government action, social movement advocacy, and other forms of contested collective action influence perceptions about right and wrong, good and bad" (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010:10). This conception of power at the macro-level dovetails nicely with incorporating the interplay of racial domination, hegemonic morality, and ongoing matters of marginalization. The language and logics of morality have long been used to advance white supremacy. For instance, white elites have often fomented racialized moral panics to buttress systems of racial oppression and to consolidate power in the face of potential racial progress (Rosino, 2021). Examples of racialized moral panics abound, from the decades-long War on Drugs to the current backlash against the teaching of the so-called critical race theory in schools (Ray, 2022). As Huante and Rosino (2022), write,

> Moral panics emerge when a group, event, or person becomes seen as threatening the function and well-being of society. Racialized moral panics involve racial meanings and practices and correspond to racial interests. Moral panics are amplified

and directed by moral entrepreneurs—individuals who seek to advance a specific definition of the implicit threat and its implications. The consequences of moral panics, particularly on behalf of powerful groups, can reshape institutions and group relations. Moral entrepreneurs ultimately seek to influence social norms and laws.

Each of these moral panics has had its own "folk devils" (Cohen, 1972) that came to represent immorality and danger. Early works on moral panics, moral entrepreneurs, and folk devils, emphasized how they reflected group conflicts and reshaped and reaffirmed regulations and norms in society (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1972). However, the crucial point here is that racialized moral panics are not simply matters of group interests clashing within the social construction of crime and deviance. They are active and consequential manifestations of dominant racialized notions of morality and their weaponization against communities of color.

Moreover, the racial ideologies that permeate our society and tend to rationalize the status quo also contain collective moral visions for society. They implicitly articulate the features of a moral society or a moral course of social action. These ideologies often hinge upon notions that it would be "wrong" to reallocate resources and opportunities in US society to remedy centuries of ongoing racial discrimination and subjugation (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Consider, for instance, the clarity with which Martin Luther King (1964, 1967), who incidentally held a degree in sociology, discussed the moral imperative to dismantle barriers to racial equality throughout his activism and writing. Now consider how this moral vision has been subsequently distorted in mainstream discourse into one in which ignoring the impacts of racial categorization is seen as the hallmark of a moral society (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). In short, sociologists must do more to understand that racialized power relations can shape dominant forms of moral reasoning. Significantly, these racialized forms of moral reasoning also shape our institutions, practices, and policies and the macro-structure of society itself.

In knitting the micro and macro-levels together, the "meso level is an essential medium through which racialization happens and racial structures evolve" (Meghji, 2022:97). We implore sociologists to consider the influence of racialized notions of morality within communities and organizations (Ray, 2019). For instance, the moral reasoning that people engage in as they navigate civic life and work toward collective goals has essential implications for the outcomes they produce and whether those outcomes uphold or challenge racial oppression. In this vein, we demonstrate these dynamics in our research on civic and political organizations later in this chapter.

So, in thinking about the racialization of morality, we must also think about how dominant forms of morality have been suffering from a colorblind approach and the logic of white supremacy. Sociological knowledge that explicitly concerns itself with morality is steeped in understandings that ignore the connections and many more that we proposed above. We argue that if scholars of all backgrounds, particularly scholars of morality, acknowledge their racialized positioning and engage in reflexivity, this scholarship is greatly improved.

3 Understanding Morality in a Racialized Society

3.1 Toward a Sociology of Racialized Morality

In moving forward with building a better and more holistic sociology of morality, we are encouraging the scholars within the original Sociology Morality Handbook and this new edition to rectify their understandings of our racialized society. The racial silence of the previous text on the social positions of its authors and the social mechanisms it examines speaks volumes. The first edition of the Handbook offers fragments that might be generative of valuable insights on morality in a racialized society but fails to center these matters in a meaningful way. When presented, practices and processes like racialization, racial ideology, racial identity formation, and racial discrimination are used as

illustrations of general social phenomena rather than the interplay of moral and racial dynamics. Rawls (2010:118), for instance, points to racialized identities as a way that morality is constituted in interactions:

> When I explored this idea with ethnically identified students in the US (international, Spanish, Swedish—not just Arab and Black) they responded that in most public encounters with those not in their category (as "other") they are not given a chance to "choose" their own presentation of self. The word "choose" is of course a problem here—as no one really has the experience of choosing an authentic self. But, what they describe is having thrust upon themselves a characterization of self that makes it impossible for them to act "normally." White students do not recognize this distinction. It does not happen to them. Only ethnically identified and international students feel they have been— type-cast on sight—and given no benefit of the doubt. They recognize that in the interaction whatever they do will be seen light of the stereotype— the working consensus is not extended to them in these interactions—however polite the interactions appear to be.

Additionally, Steensland acknowledges racialized notions of class and morality as a part of more extensive social processes of constructing boundaries. He notes that "The working poor—especially the white ethnics of the Northeast—actively distanced themselves from any government benefit that could be conceived as "welfare" (Rieder, 1985). This dynamic was very similar to the race-laden moral differentiation that Lamont observed three decades later among working-class whites" (Steensland, 2010: 446).

These themes are not examined as distinct lines of inquiry within the sociology of morality with their own nuances and contexts. However, these nuances and contexts matter for serious investigation. As we continue to lean into the work on understanding the racialization of individuals, we must also acknowledge other ways that racial inequity and racialization are vital pieces in organizations, cultural capital, civic engagement, social movements, and more (Bracey, 2016; Cartwright, 2022; Ray, 2019; Robinson, 2019).

In addition to how scholars can bring themselves to think about the racial implications of their social position and epistemology as they talk about morality, the next step would be to think about how to theoretically incorporate and methodologically operationalize new approaches to morality. Rather than simply "inserting race" on top of any given topic within the sociology of morality, what would be most beneficial would be to operationalize the impacts of racial inequity and racialization at the start. Here we talk about our contributions to this work and what they tell us.

Racialized forms of morality are shaped by the lived experiences of racial groups and the extent to which they develop an awareness of themselves as part of a racialized community. Marginalized racial group members often envision themselves as holding a linked fate and a distinct set of shared interests from the dominant social system (Dawson, 1995; Morris & Braine, 2001). Dominant or normative groups, in this case, whites, tend to see themselves as racially untethered individuals driven by an abstract sense of being a good person (Farough, 2004). This consciousness is not something essential or pre-social. It is shaped by racialized individuals' experiences, choices, and social position in the racial order. Moreover, it shapes the moral reasoning used in everyday life, particularly the moral motivations ascribed to political and civic engagement.

To further ground these observations, we draw parallels from our own ethnographic case studies of the participants of a national Black civil rights organization (Robinson) and a white-dominated grassroots political organization (Rosino). We must recognize how these moral orientations and forms of racial consciousness translate into racialized group relations at the micro- and meso-level. Drawing from Du Bois' work on double consciousness and studies of racial discrimination (e.g., Rawls, 2000), we see that racial conflict and domination have shaped the general moral orientations of White and Black Americans. Whites as a collective have had the cultural hegemony to define the dominant moral visions of our society, often in individualistic, power-blind, and ahistorical ways. As manifested in double consciousness, marginalized racial groups are aware

of and subject to this dominant moral vision but simultaneously develop distinctive and often more communitarian and racially literate moral visions within their own communities.

Here we think about morality through the intersections of the individual, organizational, and institutional levels. When thinking about the goals of an organization, specifically a political, civic, or social movement organization, it helps us to think about what morality may look like to participants in each context and the structure in which the organization exists. These organizations are often mission-driven and guided by moral visions of what makes for a good way of life, society, or community. For example, many of these organizations emphasize social equality in all its forms (race, class, and gender) as a fundamental moral goal to move toward. Furthermore, we must distinguish the position of moral leanings and the act of placing a value judgment on these moral leanings. Instead, we point out the need for a pragmatic accounting of racialized morality.

Consider the notion of saving the nation from moral peril. This concept is a powerful narrative device and framework for motivating collective action. Yet, a person or organization's moral drive is refracted through racialized sociopolitical understandings. One may be compelled to "save America" through the attempted right-wing coup on January 6 or to "save America" through Black Lives Matter Protests and resistance to racial oppression and state violence. Importantly, these are both morally driven projects with wildly different pragmatic implications for racial inequity in the United States. Here, we begin to think through how morality is racialized and how racialization contains moral frameworks.

For example, in Robinson's research built around her dataset on the National Urban League, she engages with how members of the Black Middle Class are impacted by their racialization. For example, when assessing why they may give back, a moral question, they emphasize the relationship to their racial identity through the concept of linked fate (see Dawson, 1995). Robinson's Black Middle-Class respondents feel a deep sense of moral responsibility to help other Black people that is directly tied to the white supremacist social structure that causes inequality. It is crucial to acknowledge the participants' unambiguous reference to their racial sense of self. It's also equally important to recognize the ways the Black community is bounded by the development of racial social structures that place them in these necessary moral positions in the first place (Robinson, 2021).

In the case of Rosino's work on white-dominated grassroots progressive political organizations, uniquely individualistic forms of morality acted as motivating forces for white participants. These organizations operate as white space. In white space, whites are often seen by each other as "normal" or "individuals" rather than as racialized beings, as in the case of Robinson's work above (Farough, 2004; Lewis, 2003). In work on an organization pseudonymously called the Grassroots Action Party (GAP), Rosino (2020, forthcoming) observes that White GAP members regularly described a simultaneous journey of self-discovery that led them to the organization as a means of actualizing their true selves or morals as a good progressive. Their participation in grassroots progressive politics was not motivated by a sense of community uplift but rather by a sense of self-actualization flowing from their own individual values.

In its public-facing materials, this organization holds the empowerment of racially oppressed communities as one of its core pillars of value and a key political goal. Yet, their participation itself was part of what made them feel like good people, regardless of its impacts on racialized communities that would most benefit from the progressive and redistributive policies they espoused. The satisfaction of personal goodness and self-discovery helped motivate sustained and meaningful participation. However, this approach to political organizing devalued and obscured conscious and intentional connection with or empowerment of communities of color as a strategy. These moral notions rendered it difficult to see anything other than expressing their own moral goodness as individual progressives and working to advance electoral goals as worthwhile. In doing so, it maintained the practices and

policies within their organization that resulted in the prolonged exclusion of people and communities of color in their regions. It held them as outside of the moral visions that tended to motivate the political activism of these communities.

Much of our participation in political and civic life is motivated, at least partially, by a quest to express our moral values. In the case of white-dominated progressive political organizations, this observation also connects to whites' tendency to use individualism to avoid the sense of *moral injury* that comes from participating in and benefiting from systems of racial oppression yet holding moral worldviews rooted in social justice. Whereas in the case of a longstanding civil rights organization, there is a tendency for collectivism and acknowledgment of linked fate.

In both scholarly projects, we acknowledge our positions to understand racial dynamics, engaging in positionality and reflexivity. We show how the moral interests of our research participants are bounded by their racial identities and positions. In both cases, paying attention to the racialized social system, the organizations in which individuals participate, and how individuals are impacted by their racialization augments what we can learn about the social and moral. The racialized life experiences and self-concepts of our respondents impact the motivations that they have to engage in civic engagement that they believe will produce a better world. In tandem with these analyses, our positionalities as a Black woman (Robinson) and a white man (Rosino) profoundly shaped our rapport with participants, our entry into these organizations, and our abilities to pick up on implied meanings and subtle patterns of interaction.

A crucial part of understanding this approach is that we are not being additive. In the case of Robinson's work, the scholarship overwhelmingly centers on the experiences of the Black Middle Class. In centering this population, her work takes into account in its theorization and analysis that Black people who are considered to have often "transcended" race are still trapped within this racialized social structure (macro),

meaning that the organizations they engage with (meso) are often racialized organizations and that on the micro-level, the social and cultural capital that they engage in are also based on a racialized understanding of individual experiences (Robinson, 2020). In understanding this population and their interactions with others along race, class, and gender lines, this work can bring forth questions and answers about broader American society related to race and morality.

Pushing for scholars to pause and think about racialization and inequality reframes how we approach studying morality and how we understand and define it. It encourages us to take seriously the role that inequalities and resultant racialized particularities of experiences, resources, and opportunities play in sociological understandings of morality. The point here is not that there cannot be universalistic theoretical claims about morality but that those claims must grapple with and be inclusive of these particularities to adequately describe (and perhaps even transform) the role and influence of morality in the racialized social system.

4   Concluding Remarks

Here we have sought to intervene in the ongoing epistemological ignorance (Mills, 1997) around the role of racialization and racial inequality within the sociology of morality. Throughout this chapter, we have sought to reframe the underpinnings of the field by demonstrating that questions of morality have been foundational to the works of marginalized scholars of color as they contemplated life in a racialized society. Drawing on these insights, we thus derived a general agenda for how the sociology of race and ethnicity and the sociology of morality can engage in a mutually beneficial conversation to understand racialized notions of morality. Moreover, we demonstrated, via examples from our own ethnographic work, how racialized notions of morality can be operationalized and understood in the context of racialized political and civic organizations. For the Sociology of Morality to engage in more effective scholarship, the

subfield must face the various ways racialization and racial oppression impact all levels of social order—bringing the moral, social, and racial together.

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Candice C. Robinson, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She earned her Sociology degrees from Hampton University (BA), University of Iowa (MA), and University of Pittsburgh (PhD). Dr. Robinson's research agenda is motivated by a commitment to understanding the contributions of the Black Middle Class, Black Elite, and

the long-standing civil rights organization the National Urban League to social change and American society generally. Her mixed methodological approach to this work has far-reaching implications in the areas of race, class, social inequality, social movements, and Africana studies.

Michael L. Rosino, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Molloy University. He has published widely on the connections between racial oppression, struggles for racial equality, political conflicts, debates over public policy, and everyday social life in various scholarly and public outlets. His work emphasizes social change, policy, and community and civic engagement. His current research examines how activists within progressive grassroots political organizations engage with racial and political inequality through their identities, habits, and political strategies. This project illuminates pathways to building more robust spaces for multiracial grassroots democracy and advances new understandings of racial politics grounded in everyday social life.