Commentary on Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton University Press, 2010)

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The title of Elizabeth Anderson's book recalls an issue that might appear to have been put to rest several decades ago, amidst the controversies of *Brown v. Board of Education* and school busing in Boston. Through the misguided, but widespread celebration of our "post-racial" era, as marked by the election of the United States' first black president, one might suppose that the issue of racial integration is obsolete. This false assumption might understandably be predicated on the image of men and women of color who staff the current President's Cabinet, mainstream network and cable news channels, television shows, and numerous films that are now being produced in Hollywood.

Anderson is keenly aware that the some of the above phenomena, along with the language of color-blindness, the existence of middle-

class multiracial neighborhoods, and the widespread language of multiculturalism can lead to the belief that racial integration is finished and done. But make no mistake: the topic of her book is hardly obsolete or restricted to one small segment of American race relations. Rather, it encompasses a much broader subject matter, namely the pervasive phenomenon of racial segregation across all walks of life—not just schools. In this sense and others, hers is a radical and broad challenge to the idea that segregation is limited to a few narrow dimensions of modern American life—as some not-so-quaint holdover from the period of Jim Crow.

Anderson draws upon Charles Tilly's description of "durable inequalities," or "[l]arge, stable, systematic social inequalities across the world [which] are tied to many kinds of group identities, as of race gender (sic) ethnicity, religion, caste, tribe, clan, family line, and national citizenship." (7). She prefers the term "group-" or "categorical inequalities," in order to emphasize that these are linked to social categories that exemplify systematic hierarchies. Her examples include "black/white, male/female, citizen/alien, and Hindu/Muslim," rather than to individual and variable characteristics such as height, color or 'intelligence.' (7)

Anderson develops her position that group inequalities are tracked through differences in material resources, rights, privileges, and power by tracing their origins in the tribal or nationalistic impulses of groups who have control over large swaths of land. This may explain her development of segregation as taking two major forms—namely spatial and role-based.

The book takes us methodically through is a series of rich chapters that begin by amassing data to show how spatial segregation closely tracks segregation in many other areas, from education, employment, public and retail spaces, and law enforcement. In the first three chapters of her book, Anderson martials an enormous range of arguments to argue that racial segregation is a pervasive element of modern American society. The evidence presented is ample, clear, and persuasive beyond a doubt--that segregation leads to a pervasive structural inequality.[1] Her analysis provides an excellent foundation

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[1] Anderson observes that the data on social segregation does not track similarly for Asian and some Latino migrants. This is, she claims, because

by which to establish a methodical argument in favor—not only of integration, but of a (moral/social) imperative to integration.

The second half of the book illustrates that moves toward racial integration have generally had beneficial effects for whites as well as blacks. The racial response and attitudes of whites towards blacks improves as a result of racial integration. It follows that there is a strong pragmatically case for undertaking many of the reforms to which Anderson points.

As persuasive as Anderson's arguments are, I am left with a nagging question. We have all seen numerous occasions when individuals do not act in such a way as to enhance their own self-interests. This is displayed vividly during election years, when individuals who stand to be harmed by the policies endorsed by one political candidate will nevertheless vote for that very same candidate. I am not making a partisan statement; in the United States, examples could be given on behalf of both major party presidential candidates. Witness, for example, that before the 2008 election, then-Senator Obama returned from the campaign trail to vote for the renewal of FISA, which promised to increase state surveillance powers and to give telecommunications companies immunity for turning over subscriber details to the U.S. government in violation of standing privacy laws. Liberal voters barely noticed. Similarly, many poor white voters in 2012 voted for Sen. Mitt Romney, despite his overt promises to enact economic policies designed to harm poor voters.

And so, I wonder what the impetus is to garner support for the albeit very persuasive arguments that Anderson makes among an enormous group of whites who have evinced little interest in moving towards racial justice or racial integration, despite any long-term benefits that it may harbor for them as well? This question leads me back to Anderson's discussion of the sources of long-standing inequality, namely Max Weber's analysis of the tribal or nationalistic

impulses of controlling land or domains and closing it off to others (7). Anderson extends this analysis to other historical periods—to the Japanese samurai caste, immigration groups in the U.S., and even cases that occur during the feudal period (8).

Yet, it seems that the missing element in considering the origins of group inequality is the notion of racism or racial threats; perhaps the element is there but obscured under the aegis of "tribal" or nationalistic impulses. On Anderson's account, race appears to have a very specific reference—mostly to black-white relations. As she acknowledges, group inequalities can have their symptoms and sources in power as well. I wonder whether these inequalities that can be traced to power, in fact, emerge from racial impulses. What we call tribal or nationalistic—at least in the United States—is based less on kinship relations than on certain antagonistic group encounters (a generous interpretation) that occurred at various historically specific moments, such as the conquest of North American lands, widespread wars against and massacres of American Indians, and of course, the importation of African slavery. I am not suggesting that race be broadened to include all antagonistic group encounters. Still, within the context of North America, it would include certain non-kin based hostile encounters such as those having to do with indigenous populations versus settler groups,[2] and in later history, immigrants and other dark populations.[3]

Weber's analysis of tribal or nationalist social control/exclusion still seems to be missing the systematic racist impulse that Anderson acknowledges throughout her meticulously argued work. I focus on this because I think that understanding social inequality as emerging from racial divisions changes our understanding of U.S. history and political structures somewhat, and points us to a question that still desperately needs to be answered. Our understanding of U.S. history changes in that we might be able to understand more insightfully

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migrants from these groups arrive to the United States through different circumstances than do African Americans, and thus their access to human and financial capital, and consequent group behavior has been distinct from that of African Americans (28).

[2] Carole Pateman, "The Settler Contract," in Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, *Contract and Domination*. Malden, MA: Polity, 2007.

[3] Lucy Salyer. *Laws Harsh as Tigers. Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995.

why racial inequality is a holdover from the very origins of American society, and points to how and why this structure—even as Anderson does her best to begin from nonideal theory—is not likely to be challenged by whites. Yet, as Anderson argues compellingly in ch. 5, "Democratic Ideals and Segregation," the staunchest of white supremacists have been morally compelled to recognize racial injustice (100). Both of these—paradoxical--ideas point us to the question that emerges for me as I read her book: namely, of what it will take for whites to move toward racial justice on a wider scale?

This question also leads me to consider Anderson's insightful discussion of racial stigma, which she explores at length in chapter 3. There, she points out that stigmatization is a self-confirming status, in that stereotype holders will seek out or recall evidence that confirms the stereotype, or that groups who are racially stigmatized will be "induc[ed]… to behave in ways that confirm the stereotype" (55). When we turn to chapter 4, where Anderson attempts to rebut conservative arguments that place responsibility for black segregation/disadvantage on blacks themselves (75ff), it is striking to see Anderson's concession that

"[c]onservatives are not wrong to point to numerous imprudent and harmful activities by blacks in "underclass" communities—especially involvement in gangs and crime, the dominance of single-parent families, often started by financially insecure youth in unstable relationships, and poor school work—as important proximate causes of black disadvantage. If poor blacks would stay out of legal trouble, delay childbearing until they are financially secure and committed to raising their children with their partners, and study diligently until graduating from high school, they, their children, and their neighbors would be much better off.

"These causal claims should not be controversial. Nor should it be controversial that blacks who act in these ways are attributively responsible for their actions. What is controversial is the moral response Americans should take toward these facts. How should substantive responsibility for dealing with the causes and consequences of destructive behavior be allocated among those who act irresponsibly, among the black community (which contains many individuals who are not so acting), and among wider American institutions? Judgments of attributive responsibility do not dictate

judgments of substantive responsibility. Even if a group of people habitually engages in self-destructive behavior for which they are attributively responsible, it does not follow that they should be made to bear all of its costs, or denied some outside help" (75-76).

These acts, which Anderson agrees with conservatives are imprudent and harmful, are understood as causal. Yet, I wonder whether conservatives are not also engaging in racially stigmatizing behavior by pointing to these behaviors as causal sources of inequality and disadvantage rather than symptomatic of the same? If we keep with Anderson's larger argument that there are pervasive social inequalities between blacks and whites, then if wealthier, more advantaged, whites were to engage in many of the same activities, would we still be inclined to see these as imprudent and harmful, or would we understand them as modeling self-preserving behavior (as used to be the case for white farm families in early 20th century America[4])?

Could it not be the case that the absence of socially just structures is what leads conservatives to view such behaviors as imprudent and harmful? In other words, if we begin from the position that racism/racial stigma is the source of racial inequality, then these behaviors may be seen as symptoms rather than causes of racial inequality and disadvantage. For example, the dominance of single-parent families may be less due to the irresponsibility of black fathers than the pervasive racial profiling and tendency to incarcerate 1 out of 10 black men.[5] Empirical studies have shown that in cases where men's earnings are low and uncertain, there are substantially decreased rates of marriage. Equally prevalent, where the rates of men to women are low, marriage rates are also low.[6] Similarly, we could see the absence of black fathers as due to the result of the state to criminalize young black men at an alarming rate for a War on Drugs, even though "people of color are actually no more likely to be guilty of drug crimes and many other offenses than whites," as

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[4] Steven Ruggles, "Multigenerational Families in Nineteenth-century America," *Continuity and Change* 18, no. 1 (2003): 145.
[5] http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=122
[6] David Ellwood and Christopher Jencks, "The Spread of Single-Parent Families in the United States Since 1960.," *Kennedy School Government Working Paper* RWP04–008 (2004): 18.

Michelle Alexander argues.[7] As well, the inability to "study diligently until graduating from high school" may be less a destructive habit than a response to the same insufferable circumstances that Anderson herself argues are the result of racial segregation, i.e. crumbling infrastructure, inadequate material resources and personnel, the need to find a source of income to help one's family survive, etc.[8]

I review Alexander's argument in order to ask Anderson whether it may not be useful to consider racism as the source of pervasive racial inequality? If so, this source—rather than the impulse to social control and dominance--may provide even stronger foundations for her sound and extensive arguments behind the imperative to integration. However, if racism is an original source of durable or group or long-standing inequalities, then the answer to my initial non-ideal question may still not find a sufficient answer through Anderson's otherwise remarkable book: what is at stake—what is the compelling impetus--for whites and other non-blacks to work towards this imperative?

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[7] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow:Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York and London: New Press, 2010), 17.

[8] Lani Guinier makes an argument about understanding those who can survive such trying circumstances by moving on to post-secondary education as a mark of excellence. Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).