When the 6'1" ebony-black, finely chiseled, muscular Jack Johnson fought the 5'7" white, soft-looking Tommy Bymes in 1906 in Australia for the heavyweight championship of the world, heavy betting initially was on Byrnes because, it was argued, no black man could beat any white man at anything. Once people got a good look at the two, the heavy money switched to Johnson because, it was argued, he was an animal, not altogether human and therefore was an unfair match for the gentle young Mr. Bynes.

Being African American in the United States is a constant up-hill climb. Forbidden by law to learn to read; later denied admission to colleges for no other reason than the color of your skin; forced to play movie roles depicting you as a buffoon, clown, superstitious, dancing, happy-go-lucky child; beaten savagely by the police who are then acquitted because they were simply following police procedure; then claimed to be genetically inferior because of a constant 15 point IQ difference; red-lined into poorer neighborhoods and provided schools with less of all needed supplies and resources; discriminated against in employment; then criticized for attempting to regain an even footing through group-based programs because these plans violate the principle of individual liberties and rights; you find you mistrust whites individually and collectively, you feel that any advance you make is in spite of your ability or qualifications, and you wonder how you can root for the United States—yet you do.

Being African American in the United States is seen often as a dual reality—African and American. Television journalist Marvin Kalb made this distinction clear when he challenged Presidential candidate Jesse Jackson in 1984 in these terms:

Kalb: The question...[is]...are you a black man who happens to be running for the presidency, or are you an American who happens to be a black man running for the presidency?

Jackson: Well, I'm both an American and a black at one and the same time. I'm both of these...

Kalb: What I'm trying to get at is something that addresses a question no one seems able to grasp and that is, are your priorities deep inside yourself, to the degree that anyone can look inside himself, those of a black man who happens to be an American, or the reverse?

Jackson: Well I was born black in America, I was not born American in black! You're asking a funny kind of catch-22 question. My interests are national interests. [excerpted from Meet the Press, February 13, 1984]
Are you black OR American? This either/or view is at the crux of the psychological reality of African Americans. It frames what I call the duality dilemma.

W. E. B. DuBois captured this duality in his essay *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903.

*It is a peculiar sensation this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—a Negro, an American; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder... The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost... He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.* (p. 214-215)

DuBois framed it and Kalb gave it voice—being African American in the United States is perceived, by blacks and whites alike, to be a conflict. For whites, blacks are either set apart because they are different and usually judged to be less worthy than whites, or are judged to be no different from whites hence no different from any other American. In either case, one's black identity seems to be a basis for either discrimination or invisibility, but not a foundation from which to build basic participation in U.S. society. For blacks, their racial identification is either a social category that they feel compelled to transcend since it is so frequently a basis for discrimination, or an identity that sets them apart from mainstream America and thereby puts them in opposition to the broader society. The psychological dilemma for African Americans and whites alike is to find a way to acknowledge and accept the legitimacy of African-American participation in U.S. society that draws upon the unique cultural foundation of the experiences of African origins, and unique African-American experiences.

Being African American in the United States is to have survived the brutality and systematic unfairness of slavery, the meanness of segregation, bigotry, discrimination, hatred and the myriad barriers to fair and equal opportunities. Why did this happen? How could this happen in the cradle of liberty, the land of the free, the land of opportunity? It could happen because white people of European descent felt that black people of African descent were genetically, culturally, and socially inferior and because it was economically, socially, politically, and psychologically to their collective advantage to feel so. Because it was so ugly, mean, cruel, and unfair, and because it was built into the fabric of our society and its institutions, it is an important cultural legacy of the United States. It is a cultural legacy because it formed the content and character of the U.S. culture (including efforts to eradicate slavery) and because it gave shape to the rationalizations that were required to live with this flagrant contradiction of the ethos of the American Revolution (the intellectuals, scientists, historians, politicians, clergy, and businessmen all found "evidence" for the inferiority and the legitimacy of the slave trade and the institution of slavery). Racism thus is embedded in U.S. society and affects all of us who live here.

But lest we Americans get an inferiority complex, we should recognize that racism is not unique to the United States, nor is institutional and cultural conflict fueled by social and biological differences. The "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia is as heinous and inhumane as any racist assault on African Americans. The history of the world is a history of conflicts in which one group asserts its superiority over another, then seeks to dominate that other group through physical, economic, social, or whatever means necessary.
and hostility is, and seems to suggest that the answer is yes.

Why is this "race-thing" still an issue? Well, from a white perspective, I often hear students claim, "I was not raised to be a racist, I was raised to respect everyone and that the color of a person's skin doesn't make any difference." A well known social historian (Bloom, 1987) wrote

... White and Black students do not in general become friends with one another... The forgetting of race in the university, which was so predicted and confidently expected when the barriers were let down, has not occurred. There is now a large Black presence in major universities... but they have, by and large, proved indigestible... The programmatic brotherhood of the sixties did not culminate in integration but veered off toward Black separation... The discriminatory laws are ancient history, and there are large numbers of blacks at universities. There is nothing more that white students can do to make great changes in their relations to black students. (p. 91-92)

Allan Bloom's thesis suggested that black people achieved equality in 1964, and that by 1993, any continuing friction between blacks and whites was now the fault of black students! His idea of blacks being indigestible is a graphic illustration of what the melting pot idea means to a black person; you disappear in the belly of the beast who has oppressed you. In this analysis, to resist being devoured leaves you contentious, fractious and lacking in brotherhood. In 25 short years, Bloom seems to feel that the slate has been wiped clean. We are on an equal footing, and African Americans should open their arms and embrace these well-intentioned white people who approach them. Not only is 25 years no longer than an eyeblink in the history of racial strife in the United States, it is a nanosecond in the march of ethnic conflict through the history of the planet.

African Americans say white people will do anything to maintain their power. They believe that racism is alive and well, and there are enough statistics and examples to give credence to this viewpoint. Let me give you one clever scientific finding that illustrates this point. White subjects were brought into a laboratory for the purpose of helping another student learn some word associations (Rogers and Prentice-Dunn, 1981). The helper was instructed to deliver electric shocks when the learner made an incorrect response. The experimenters were interested in how much aggression the subjects showed toward the learners as indicated by the level of shock administered and how long they held down the shock button. Now there were two interesting twists. First, some of the learners were African American and some were white. Second, some of the subjects "overheard" the learner make disparaging remarks about them ("I know people like him; they're jerks; I'd be surprised if he could even figure out how to work that apparatus" and so forth). The results showed that race had a significant influence on the behavior of the white subjects. Specifically, the white subjects delivered less shock to the African American than the white learners, when they had not been insulted. But, when the subjects had been insulted, the African-American learners were shocked much more than the whites were. So, we may conclude, that the white subjects were "sympathetic" toward the African Americans when they were normal, but when they got "out of place," zap!

Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal called it An American Dilemma; W. E. B. DuBois called it Double Consciousness; I call it a Duality Dilemma. In our ideal world, whites should treat African Americans fairly and African Americans should be open and trusting of whites. Sounds good, but there are some fundamental problems that are embedded in the culture of the United States that have to be worked out. We have always espoused values that were not met. The principles of the American Revolution were noble and good, but they did not extend to Americans of African descent. Slavery was not just an economic institution—it was a psychological one. That is, coping with the oppression not only took a psychological toll on African Americans, but it also created a psychological resilience necessary for survival. It also required a psychological hardness on the part of the slave owner, and a belief in the rightness of the cause to offset the atrocity of the actual practices. How could a white American leader live with the contradictions? What should an African American think about fighting for the United States and then, when not killed defending his or her country, come home to second class citizenship, denial of rights, limitations of opportunity? How could a white person submit an African American to that? Because, again, whites believe that African Americans are inferior and that belief somehow makes the disadvantage, the oppression, and the unfairness palatable or tolerable, acceptable or even appropriate.
U.S. institutions were not created to serve African-American people. When not designed to oppress them directly, at best, they ignored them. Having made official acknowledgment of these discriminatory biases, we now try to discern what is fair and practice it. Former Secretary of Education William Bennett argued that we should be a color-blind society and the best way to achieve that goal is "...to act as if color doesn’t matter." Well, if you are African American it does matter! The stakes are not mutual and reciprocal. African Americans potentially have a lot to lose by acting as if race doesn’t matter. You could argue that things are bad enough that they have more to lose if they don’t act that way! An interesting question that needs lots of conversation and perhaps some more data.

I wrote a book in 1972 called Prejudice and Racism. I had just finished graduate school where I learned about experimental social psychology. I did not learn anything about prejudice or racism as a scientific or academic subject matter. I did, though, have my own ideas about it as a black man of some 28 years. When I read the literature in social psychology, I felt it was inadequate to address the problems of race in the United States. It focused too much on prejudiced individuals, bigots, and usually southerners. In my view as a black man who grew up in northern Ohio, I knew that bigotry was not limited to the South, and that institutional practices were designed to maintain the status quo of limited racial contact, and lower opportunities for blacks. We could set pins at the bowling alley, but we couldn’t bowl there. We could caddie at the country club, but we couldn’t join it. We could skate at the roller rink but only on Thursday nights when blacks came from all over northern Ohio for black night at the rink. The interesting thing, though, is that growing up in a racist society had its problems, but it also demanded a certain amount of ingenuity, resilience, determination, and hard work. As my aunt used to always say, a black person had to be twice as good as a white person to get the same opportunity. Because of those personal experiences and observations, I felt that I could blend the psychological reality of my life with the social and behavioral science of racial studies to make some different and useful observations. Thus, in Prejudice and Racism, I tried to distinguish prejudice from racism at both a personal and a social level. Prejudice was closest to racism when considering what I called individual racism "...one’s belief that Black people, as a group, are inferior to Whites because of physical traits (p. 118)". But, when institutional practices and outcomes yielded inequalities along racial lines, institutional racism was the diagnosis ["...those established laws, customs, and practices which systematically reflect and produce racial inequalities in American society (p. 131)"]. This diagnosis was appropriate whether the individuals running the institutions intended them or not! Finally, I argued that the whole ball of wax was understood within the broadest context of cultural racism. That is, the values, symbols, history, and meaning that sustained and reinforced the creation of institutions and the socialization of young children. When all three levels are combined in one definition of racism, we have the following:

Racism results from the transformation of race prejudice and/or ethnocentrism through the exercise of power against a racial group defined as inferior, by individuals and institutions with the intentional or unintentional support of the entire culture. (p. 117)

I believe that racism at the cultural level is the defining issue that needs to be understood to solve our problems today. In my class on black psychology, a young white woman was reduced to tears because her effort to join with a black woman in a class project was rejected and her intentions or motivations challenged. This young woman’s self-concept was strongly egalitarian, non-racist, and accepting. She was offended and hurt to be treated as if she was just another white racist. The mistrust of the African American student was strong and uncompromising. I pointed out to both of them that they, as indeed the whole class, were victimized to some extent by the facts of our cultural past as far as race is concerned. We cannot expect things to flow smoothly and gently. There are deep scars for African Americans, feelings of guilt and a misunderstanding of privilege among whites.

There are real opportunities for many African Americans, and an absence of opportunities where many think they exist. The future of the United States as a country cries out for the solution of the "race question." This question is now even more complicated because it is expanded to include the "diversity" question. The challenge to "celebrate diversity" is to resolving the racism problem, as "just say no" is to solving the drug problem. We tend to blame or praise the individual without appreciating the complicating factors of history, society, and culture.
Now, I have emphasized the negative aspects of white racism and oppression as a recurring and vitally important aspect of being African American in the United States. However, I want to be clear that the tension, conflict, and difficulty of this perpetual conflict is a factor in producing the creative energy and drive that has made the African American a unique and powerful cultural group in the world. Whether you are an artist, an athlete, a scientist, a politician, or a laborer, as an African American, the struggle against racism is embedded in your soul, your collective unconscious as Jung would say. It may not be a "chip on your shoulder" or a "heart on your sleeve," but it lurks constantly as a force that has meaning for who you are and what you can and will become. Being African American is dangerous, exciting, stimulating, wonderful, tragic, and important. The sociologist Alphonso Pinkney (1993) provides a broad and informative account of how African Americans cope with and adapt to being black in America. America is what it is, the most open society on earth, because of its struggles with liberty and its successes and failures in embracing all of its citizens.

As we stand on the brink of a new century, we are confronting the challenge of inclusion and diversity in the most straight-ahead way we ever have as a nation. The challenge and guidance of African Americans is crucial to the ultimate success of maintaining our strength and purpose. As a psychologist, I am interested in figuring out how we can create a society in which people feel better about themselves, have legitimately expanded opportunities that do not simultaneously stigmatize them for taking advantage of them. I believe that just as slavery was a psychological as well as an economic institution, social policies can help solve the race problems only if they are understood in psychological terms. My own work on race, culture, and personality is provoked by my belief that the problems and solutions are social psychological in nature. I invite you to read and learn more about what we know and formulate your own ideas about what you can do as a teacher, a scholar, or a citizen to make the 21st century more respectful of our rich human diversity and the strength it provides upon which the future of our humanity ultimately rests.

REFERENCES