

Taking Chances: Sacrificial Lotteries and Criminal Injustice

by Andrew J. McKenna

I begin with an epigraph, the well know statement by the high priest Caiphas in John's gospel: "It is expedient that one man die for the people than that the whole nation should be destroyed." That is very good rational advice, and without the cross hanging over our conscience, it's true. So I am going to investigate some issues of violence and truth here as I report on my latest research and teaching writing-intensive literature courses as a volunteer at a maximum security prison here in Illinois.

But I'll back up a bit. My career as a teacher of world literature was set on track by Dostoevsky. After getting hooked on reading through the beautiful and beguiling English novels of manners—Austen Eliot, Thackeray, Dickens—I looked elsewhere for great narrative realism on the European continent and read the Russians beginning with Dostoevsky.

It's no accident that the author of *Crime and Punishment* honed his genius out of his experience in prison, recorded in *The House of the Dead*, which brings me to this man, René Girard, my teacher at the Johns Hopkins University as a grad student. His first book, *Mensonge romannique et vérité romanesque (Deceit, Desire, and the Novel)*, and all his subsequent writings, has had a life changing effect for me, and many others: he's decoded desire, which he's learned from our best novelists, beginning with Cervantes, namely, that desire is mimetic, mediated, modeled by others. Between the desiring subject and his or her object, there is a model—parents, peers, or a whole community. Don Quixote wants to be a knight errant because he is utterly steeped in chivalric literature; Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, kills an old pawn broker woman to measure up to his model, Napoleon. *The Brothers' Karamazov* model one another's desire for women, a mimesis so powerful as to draw their father into the vortex. In this novel we also witness the battle for the soul of the youngest brother, Alyosha, that takes place between his spiritual advisor Zossima and his own brother Ivan; it is a struggle that reaches its climax in Ivan's rejection of God and his creation if it is to be accepted at the price of the suffering of a single child. So much for Caiphas.

This novel is too long to teach in prison, but Ursula Le Guin has transposed the issue in a fiction of her own, "The ones who walk away from Omelas," which I came across at a Girard conference many years ago and which I do teach in my classes. I won't spoil this text for you because so much of its genius depends on the way it reads, the way its story is punctuated with questions drawing the reader into the circumstances it describes, the way it involves the reader in the issues raised first by Ivan Karamazov and before that, John's gospel. Le Guin did not disguise that Dostoevskian model. The class discussion of Omelas suggested to me the interest

of teaching Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," which many Americans have read as early as High School, and whose outcome anyway is known in advance of our gathering. You recall that the story describes how people in what appears to be a small rural New England community gather one day of the year into a social circle to participate in a lottery-- for whatever reason, we don't know. It is conducted by the same ordinary person who also conducts square dances, teen club, Halloween festivities. There is some imprecise attention to a black box, a remnant from when the village was founded, from which names are to be drawn for the lottery. The atmosphere is cheerful enough, punctuated by soft laughter. We're told that people, including children, have been picking up stones but we are given no clue until the very end as to why. Everyone's name is written on a piece of paper and a Tessie Hutchinson arrives just in time, apologizing jovially for domestic concerns that delayed her, and the ritual process begins. Names are first drawn from the box that select out families and then again to single out an individual from one of them, and it is Tessie, mother of 3, who draws out the paper with the black spot. Here are the last sentences of the tale:

Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of a cleared space by now, and she held her hands out desperately as the villagers moved in on her. "It isn't fair," she said. A stone hit her on the side of the head. Old Man Warner was saying, "Come on, come on, everyone." Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him. "It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed, and then they were upon her.

There is no apparent animus against this woman, nor any evidence of wrath or fear or even stress circulating in the community; people are just calmly going through the same acts that they repeated every year. Everyone is getting on fine with one another. There is no apparent motivation, no social or political science to explain this Kafkaesque scenario. We move from banality to horror in a few unheralded instants.

The reader is left aghast: how could this happen? It could not have happened this way, amidst communal conviviality, and with neither children nor spouse protesting. But we know that such things could happen, did happen in recorded history, and very recently prior to the publication of "The Lottery" in 1947. Jackson acknowledged that her tale ominous tale was composed in the wake of the Holocaust. And such things happened not only there and then: a small New England-ish town was the scene of witch hunts, whose infamous lore is of a piece with the regional history familiar to the Vermontian author. But in Jackson's telling, nothing like witchcraft is evoked that might have served as a motive for the lethal ritual. So, again: it could not have happened this way and the readers is fairly impelled to reflect on how, absent witches and the fear of demonic spirits, absent local or national hysteria, it could have happened. That is the moral imperative of the tale: how can we see our ordinary social selves throwing stones, casting out.

Witch hunts conform to a pattern of events, like lynching in Jim Crow South, and like pogroms, a specialty of Easter week in Slavic cultures; Shoah industrializes these energies, which obey an idolatrous nationalism. It is a pattern the historians and anthropologists, Girard among them as of *Violence and the Sacred* and more fully in *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, recognize as scapegoating phenomena that typically erupt in times of social crisis, such as we find in *Oedipus the King*, where a plague upon the land clearly symbolizes a cultural meltdown. This is probably the case with the notorious witch trials of Salem, a place name which Le Guin transposes orthographically as Omelas.

The witch trials did not occur in a historical vacuum, but amidst a time of extreme social and moral stress during the terrors and especially the defeats experienced by our Pilgrim forefathers in King Phillip's war. These defeats generated hysteria among the populations of God's Righteous. As one source (there are many others) summarizes:

The Puritans believed in an invisible world, which they thought to be as real as the visible one. The Puritans were losing the war against the Indians, which was the war with the Devil in the visible world, and this made them even more willing to kill witches, which was the war in the invisible world. The Puritans felt the need to defeat evil driving them. Added to the fear and hysteria, this blinded most people in Salem Village to the truth and created the frenzy to find and kill witches.

(<http://www.mrsteelsclass.com/eng20-2/crucible/crucibext.htm>)

We can surmise that the Puritans, in their conviction of having founded the New JeruSALEM as God's elect, would search, as would any community, for people to blame for their misfortunes. I quote from Emile Durkheim, the founder of modern anthropology, while observing Antisemitism fueling the Dreyfus Affair, an episode that Girard cites frequently as an example of lynching on a national scale.

When society undergoes suffering, it feels the need to find someone whom it can hold responsible for its sickness, on whom it can avenge its misfortune. And those against whom public opinions already discriminates are naturally designated for this role. These are the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. (cited by Barbara and Karen Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of inequality in American Life* [Verso, 2014])

Like crazy looking homeless women, half-breeds, disabled people of all sorts. Durkheim goes on to describe the jubilation of the crowds in the streets upon news of Dreyfus's conviction: "Mort aux juifs, mort à Dreyfus, mort à Zola!" Zola had to flee his country after revealing the fraud of Dreyfus' conviction at a time when France was muscling up for revenge against Germany, which had stolen two provinces in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Then as now, the

army embodied national pride in its burning desire to make France great again. As Durkheim observes:

What confirms me in this interpretation is the ways in which the result of the Dreyfus trial was greeted in 1894. There was a surge of joy on the boulevards. People celebrated as a triumph what should have been a cause for public mourning. At last they know whom to blame for the economic troubles and social distress in which they lived. The trouble came from the Jews. The charge had been officially proved. By this very fact alone, things already seemed to be getting better and people felt consoled. (in Fields, *Racecraft*)

The Puritans faced an analogous situation, and they resorted to type, to sacrificial stereotyping that Girard has explored thoroughly in *The Scapegoat*. They searched and were bound to find signs of mysterious goings on in their midst and environs, and the hunt was on for more signs, more accusations, more victims and confessions, and burnings, until a tribunal magistrate from far off Boston, an outsider, finally called a halt to all proceedings.



Note the color-coded moral symbolism, in Western eyes at least: the Indians are framed against the black background, corresponding to the black devil in the witchcraft image, to which Jackson's "black spot" lottery alludes to as well. Jackson's story gives us some ritual elements

without any reference to divine sanction, though one or another form of it, God or the gods or the nation or the white race, the purity of white women, is available to the persecutors in a lynching. “The Lottery” is a fiction, it did not happen, and the stoning could not have happened that way, but witch hunts did happen, lynchings and stonings and drownings irrefutably did happen. Jackson’s tale responds to Marianne Moore’s best hope for poetry: “an imaginary garden with real toads in it.” This states why I teach literature.

Throughout all this discussion, I am not unmindful of the genocidal practices engaged against Amerindians that have been traced to the very earliest of our nation’s violent origins, as averred by Howard Zinn, among many others, in *A People’s History of the United States* (Harper, 1980). A proof text on this issue is available in *Prison Writings: My life is my Sun Dance* (Saint Martine Press, 1999) by Leonard Peltier, self-described as “a spiritual warrior of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nations.” He is serving a life sentence for the murder of an FBI agent, though no evidence connects the fatal bullet to his gun. Of the five men charged, four were acquitted, but in the view of an unnamed agent, “Someone had to pay.” This is, literally, Jackson’s lottery with a vengeance. The concurrence of genocide with the institution of chattel slavery is thoroughly plumbed by Edward S. Morgan in *American Slavery American Freedom* (Norton, 1975), which concludes: “Is America still colonial Virginia writ large? More than a century after Appomattox the questions linger.”

Sacrificial scapegoating practices are facts of history, which suggest connections to another story of a lottery, a biblical one, in which a social pathology of blaming is deployed and half revealed; in which a ritualized selection of a victim is scrupulously recounted, such that we becomes suspicious of the entire process. This suspicion is Israel’s gift to the world, the world of knowledge, of institutional practices; even if it is not fully articulated, it lingers among us.

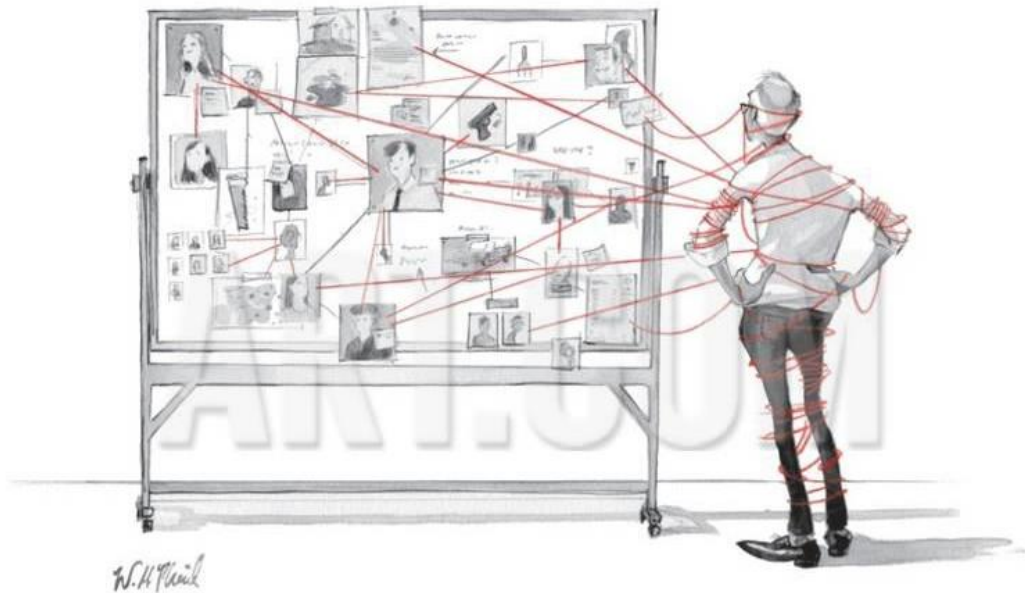
I am referring to the episode in the book of Joshua in which a defeat is endured by God’s chosen people. The narrative begins immediately after a stunning, seemingly miraculous victory over the enemy in Jericho: the walls that came tumbling down amid the triumphal shouts of God’s army are evidence to His power and favor of Israel—or, more humanly speaking, of Jericho’s panic-stricken response to encirclement. After this stunning victory, a reconnaissance in force suffers unwonted casualties. A dialogue ensues between Joshua and his God: Joshua complains of the Lord’s putative disfavor, and the Lord calls for a lottery to determine who among his people caused the defeat for having violated their Lord’s stern prohibition against taking any spoils of the enemy. In volume 2 of his scriptural lessons (*Jesus the Forgiving Victim: Listening for the Unheard Voice* [Doers, 2013]), James Alison rightly insists that God’s only role in this episode is to call for a lottery to be conducted among the tribes, then among the clans, then among the families in ever diminishing concentric circles of population in order to finger

the culprit; the lot falls on Achan. He confesses having taken some spoils, and he and all his household and all his goods are destroyed:

They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor. (*Joshua* 7.25-26)

The very next day, Israel rides to victory against the enemy with God's renewed favor.

Or not. We don't know whether any such events occurred, but historians and anthropologists concur that throughout the ancient world lotteries and similarly oracular sanctions were sought on the road to battle. A social scientist, or even just a military strategist, reading this story would come to different conclusions about the whole process. The prohibition of spoils makes good military sense, since it avoids the danger of the army getting into fights for possession of them; there is the real and present danger of slack moral and military discipline, of dissension among the troops and of possible dissolution of the army. Roman history, for example, is rife with such examples, as is Napoleonic history as well. After all, pagan armies were recruited by the promise of spoils in the ancient world; soldiers' pay depended on plunder. This necessity explains the destruction of all his Achan's household, lest there be any of that number who might seek revenge, or who might allege, as is most probable, that at least some other soldiers in the army also took spoils, an idea picked up by this *New Yorker* cartoon.



"Well, this is troubling."

But the impersonal, anonymous logic of selection by lots is impeccable, in that it removes suspicion of personal interests or grudges at work in the process. Mere chance is a guarantor of objectivity, here fulfilling the hieratic role ascribed to the judgment of God. (Chance or fate, “tuchè,” has the same ascription for the ancient Greeks.) Unanimity minus one is the unbeatable formula for a successful sacrifice, and good military sense: in the event of an untoward/unwonted defeat, such as would imperil army morale, it is a good idea to finger someone for the blame, someone designated by the hand of God. And as the lottery proceeds methodically with its process of elimination, by tribe, by clan, and by family, it is inevitable that confidence in the process, in its integrity, is enhanced on the part of all those not designated, not fingered for the transgression. With the final immolation, morale peaks, confidence is restored and Joshua now has an eager fighting force at his command, the kind any army needs to win battles, which it does the very next day.

I am reminded here by the episode in *Exodus* of Moses raised hands resulted in winning against the foe (*Exodus* 17.11), though this gesture might just have given heart to beleaguered forces. And, too, of this *New Yorker* cartoon which raises a question of an all-powerful divinity calling on one his creatures to do His work. For Moses’ question here also applies to Joshua 7: I mean why didn’t he just tell Joshua about Achan, or take him out himself?



“Yeah, I could walk all the way to Egypt. Or you could just free them yourself using magic.”

Those committed to biblical inerrancy, to various forms of the Scripture's literal truth, would not subscribe to this social scientific explanation, however much more it makes plain human sense, a sense that, in Girard's view, the Bible is ever urging us to make in its critique of scapegoating. The rationale for Achan's selection is cynically enunciated by Caiaphas during the trial of Jesus, and fully reveals it as a lynching: better one man die than the people be destroyed. It is the sacrificial principle par excellence, and it is reenacted throughout history and throughout all human institutions, which must need strive for their endurance and growth at the expense of some of its members or of those against whom membership is defined, such as Indians for early American settlers.

Alison's approach to Scripture is not theological but anthropological, based on his conviction, after Girard, that the bible is a vital agency of human self-understanding, the watershed of our best social science; that its ongoing and insistent critique of crowd behavior, of scapegoating, is owed to its representation of violence from the perspective of the victim. This is its point of view from the blood of Abel in *Genesis* through the passion and crucifixion in the Gospels, and beyond. It is scripture itself which has made us skeptical about lynching. Think of the stoning of Stephan, with Saul of Tarsus looking on and thereafter finding en route to Damascus that far from being an agent of his God's law, its prosecutor, he was its persecutor, its violator. I can point you to a an eloquent and living example of this experience: former ADA Preston Shipp tells the same story about himself. It is the story of his conversion as a church-going Christian whose job as state prosecutor was to rubber stamp convictions with mandatory sentences drawn from a hand book (<https://www.newsweek.com/prosecutor-who-helped-keep-cyntoia-brown-prison-quit-after-case-720324>). As a result, by chance, of volunteering to teach criminal justice in prison, he came to see himself, quite like Paul, not as a prosecutor of the law but as a persecutor of fellow citizens, who numbered among his students. Shipp quit his job to become an advocate for radical, systematic change in our criminal justice system, which he came to see, along with many others, as a criminal system. One well-funded, well researched study has come up with the term "criminogenesis" to describe the fact that a life of crime is learned in the recidivist pipeline from school to jail to prison to prison (*The Growth of Incarceration in the US: Exploring Causes and Consequences* [Academia Press 2014]).

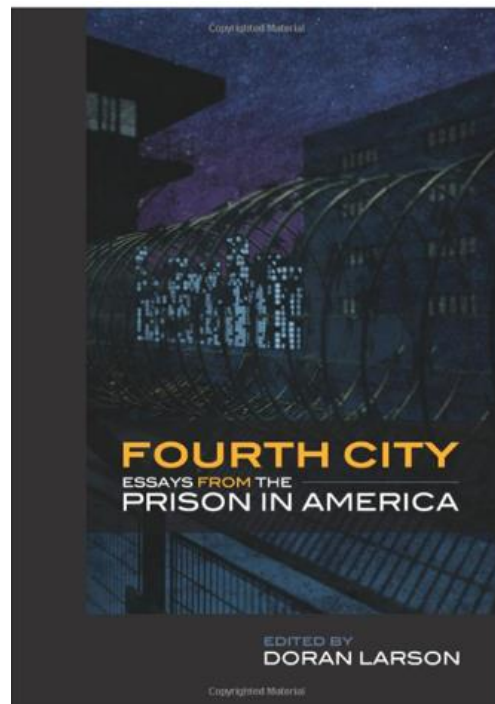
There are other avenues connecting the lottery logic with our Prison Industrial Complex (PIC), including what has been called "the lottery of birth," after the documentary film by that name, which we are told has convened "leading activists, journalists and the best minds in psychology, history and philosophy" (<https://mangu.tv/film/the-lottery-of-birth/>)--no novelist or playwright among them, although imaginative fiction is in the lead in this discovery procedure, Dickens to witness.

'My dear young lady,' rejoined the surgeon, mournfully shaking his head; 'crime, like death, is not confined to the old and withered alone. The youngest and fairest are too often its chosen victims.'

'But, can you--oh! can you really believe that this delicate boy [apprehended as a thief] has been the voluntary associate of the worst outcasts of society?' said Rose. But even if he has been wicked,' pursued Rose, 'think how young he is; think that he may never have known a mother's love, or the comfort of a home; that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to herd with men who have forced him to guilt. Aunt, dear aunt, for mercy's sake, think of this, before you let them drag this sick child to a prison, which in any case must be the grave of all his chances of amendment.'

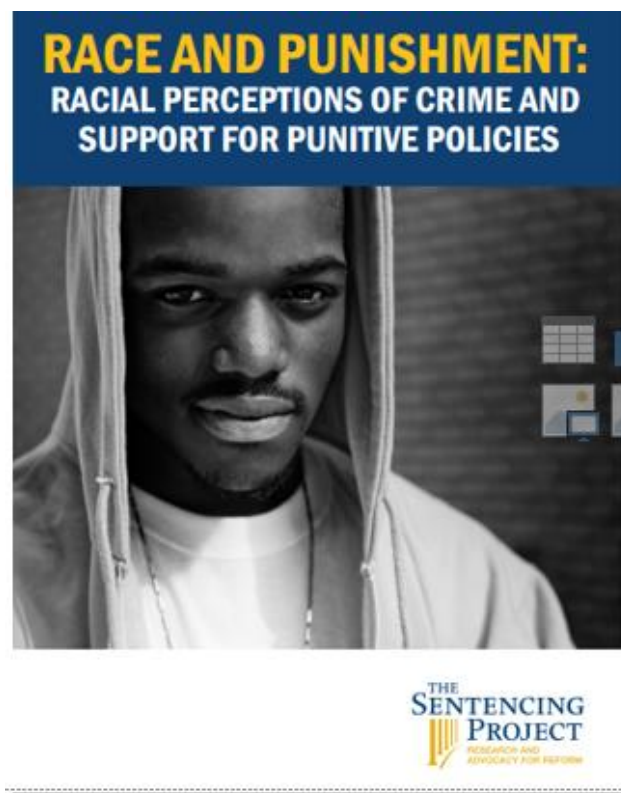
(*Oliver Twist*, ch.30)

There are many a passage I could cite from Richard Wright's *Native Son*, or the epilogue to Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* for this same view. Both authors have mined their insights and techniques from the pages of Dostoyevsky, who discovered in Dickens, among others, a model to build on. Our best novelists and playwrights are masters, by trade, of empathetic imagination, which can be defined as projecting one's self into the place of another and seeing the world from that point of view. An exercise of this kind can be undertaken with a sterling compilation of prisoners' writing:



I quote from the publicity on “The Lottery of Birth,” which aims to “offer an alternative perspective on today's society and the future we're creating: “We do not choose to exist, or the environment we grow up in. Our starting point in life is one of passive reliance on forces over which we have no control. THE LOTTERY OF BIRTH shows that from birth onwards our minds are a battleground of competing forces: familial, educational, cultural, and professional. The outcome of this battle not only determines who we become, but the society that we create.”

“Battleground,” “battle”: note the blithe assumption of violence in all of this, with no sense of its actual agency in this experience, whose institutional and systemic valences are, as Girard avers, the focus of biblical revelation and many a literary inspiration. The documentary is “An attempt at instilling an awareness of ideology,” as one reviewer wrote; in the American context, ideology is code for racism. Nicholas Kristoff evokes the “lottery of birth” notion in an essay contrasting the lives of a ghetto junkie and a suburban star student. [NYT Sunday Oct 30 News of the Week in Review (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/21/movies/the-lottery-of-birth-examines-how-things-go-wrong.html>)]. “The lottery of birth determines your chances in life,” such as a lawful one or a life of crime, by accidental, arbitrary features, such as skin color. In what has been identified as the white racial frame” (Joe R. Feagin *The White Racial Frame* [Routledge, 2013]). Or frame-up, as we read in crime novels. It is the lens through which the face of crime appears as the young black male, which we find on the cover of this report on our prison system.



Ours is the largest in the world, a black spot demarking our exception among the nations.

American exceptionalism, if such there be, must include the installation of chattel slavery in its founding document and we fought civil war to abolish it, the worst the world had seen, and yes, for a just cause; as Lincoln said compactly: “if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong.” As Thomas Jefferson already noted in 1785 “The Almighty has no attribute which can take sides with us [slave owners] in such a contest” (“Notes on the State of Virginia”).

In place of slavery we got Jim Crow, the consequence of a thoroughly sacrificial deal, the trade-off of removing Federal troops to guarantee Reconstruction in the South in exchange for a Republican electoral victory in 1876. In place of Jim Crow, we got the *New Jim Crow* (Michelle Alexander, 2012), our Prison Industrial Complex, which we are at pains to remedy. The scourge which bestrides this ongoing tragedy—in the original sense of the word, tragus-ode, scapegoat song—is racism, which flourishes all the more among us for its denial. Most of us Americans believe ourselves to be immune to its blemish, innocent of its iniquity; we shrink back from its overt expressions, and as James Baldwin remarks, “that innocence is the crime” (“A Letter to my Nephew”). This should remind us of Jesus’ reproach to the Pharisees, whom He called whitened sepulchers for disassociating themselves from the murder of their prophets.

This systemic obfuscation also is available to rigorous anthropological analysis, for which we can thank Barbara and Karen Fields in *Racecraft*. They remind readers of the pernicious career and commonplace usage in our history of the very word “race,” a category of human being that has no biological or anthropological foundation, but which is deeply rooted in the American psyche. W. E. B. Dubois, a founder of American anthropology, is crisp and clear on this issue, defining a black man as “a person who must ride Jim Crow in Georgia.” Race has serviced “an invisible ontology” that has run through our history. And we have to recall, against morally specious distinctions between North and South, that slavery lay at the foundation of our stunningly vast industrial wealth, as steamboat capitalism moved sugar, tobacco, and cotton North for processing and shipping everywhere. As the Fields write “Slavery engaged an immense geography of connected activities that no Americans could escape, wherever they were and wherever they lived. What is more, slavery does not belong only to America’s past, but is the heritage of all American alive today.” Faulkner famously quipped: “In the South the past isn’t dead; it’s not even past.” This is true nationwide for many of our institutional practices to this day.

The Fields’ astute conflation of racism with witch craft sharpens our analytical tools for its analysis. The simple fact is that if we believe in facts at all, if we believe in history and science, we no longer believe in witches. It’s a superstition, however much it was capable of convening communities around their destruction. So, as the authors show, is race, belief in which perpetuates the same kind of suspicion, erupting in hysteria, bogus tribunals under the sanction

of law, and outright lynching, often abetted by the constabulary. All the assumptions that guided witch hunts are recurrent in those invested in race: pathologies of belonging and difference, preposterous accusations, fear driven confabulations of every kind, mobocracy. Fields's subtitle alludes to W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Soul of Black Folks*, and the book engages Du Bois in a virtual dialogue with his social science contemporary, Emile Durkheim.

Durkheim projects an image of social organization as a circle convened by an experience of effervescence at its center and by the belief in imaginary transcendence that this effervescence betokens. René Girard improves on this structural image in a way that is more concrete, precise, foundational: he posits the center as host to the scapegoating of sacrificial violence, whose victim is viewed as the cause of social disorder and whose unanimous destruction is experienced as the restoration of order, of social harmony. His critique of this dynamic is borne aloft by the critique of sacrificial violence in Hebrew and Christian scriptures, culminating in the crucifixion, which declares the innocence of the victim of crowd mimesis, of a lynch mob, a role assigned in our Easter Week liturgies to the congregation in the pews.

It was the "double consciousness," to use Dubois' term, that he shared with Durkheim, the dual status of being at once an outsider and insider to their culture: Durkheim as French Sorbonne professor no less, and a Jew; and Du Bois as American and a negro. It is this ambiguous position, in which legitimate social membership could not be taken for granted, that favored their anthropological insight. The outside point of view is that of the victim of communal violence, as we've seen from the outset. It is our criteria for objectivity, for truth. It is the goal of our social sciences, with wildly varying results. Kalil Gibran Muhammed (Harvard UP, 2010) has shown how it was recruited to identify the Blacks of the great migration at the turn of the 20th century to northern cities as a criminal class:



The Fields go on to comment: “In other words, whoever or whatever cannot lay claim to a ‘fellow-feeling’ is available for designation as society’s ‘IT’—Du Bois’ *tertium quid* at whose expense that fellow- feeling is affirmed.” By *tertium quid* De Bois meant “more than an animal, less than a human being,” that is, quite simply, something unnatural, sacred, monstrous to behold like a sphinx, a werewolf, a witch, or a non-white member of our species.

Durkheim zeroed in on the sacrificial, scapegoating function performed by our PIC. He discerned, in Fields’s paraphrase, that as “crime and repression of crime have the positive function of providing the means and the occasion for reaffirmation of the conscience collective, then it would seem, pariah-hood would work analogously.” With “racecraft,” as the Fields observe, “real action creates evidence for the imagined thing.” As in the lottery in Joshua 7.

Racism cannot be abolished where it is not acknowledged, and invisibility, along with deniability, is essential to its currency: “I’m not a racist but....” is the statement emanating from whitened sepulchers all over our nation.

In a letter to the marquis de La Fayette in the early 19th century James Madison described our slave trade as America’s “original sin,” a perhaps mythical conception which Girard has unpacked as the mimetic principle, its nefarious agency among us, the “accusing,” “Satanic” agency which scatters, divides humans against themselves. Our first parents are divided against their creator by the serpent; Cain against his brother by envy, etc., etc. Slavery is our original sin, and we have to acknowledge that despite our four years’ civil war baptism of blood, we are still at pains to abolish its traces among us. There is plenty of evidence of its weirdly invisible ontology. That is why the finely chiseled words of 150 years ago, replete with biblical resonance, of our greatest president, the martyred founder of our union, still speak to us today with renewed urgency in his 2nd inaugural address. I quote while asking you to attend to the crisis of difference the words spell out with their biblical reference, and the appeal to a non-sacrificial resolution:

Both [sides of the conflict] read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. ‘Woe unto the world because of offenses [aka scandal]; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.’ If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the

offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes [echo of Jefferson] which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?

This rhetorical question is a direct challenge to a nation that imagines itself as Christian. He continues:

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

As a teacher and a scholar of history, literature, the human sciences generally, as a researcher and writer of sorts, I for one am convinced that we still stand under this judgment: welcome home.