Skin color as post-colonial hierarchy: a global strategy for conflict resolution.
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The post-colonial hierarchy is a critical dynamic of global coexistence. Power is associated with those sovereignties characterized by light-skinned populations. Those characterized by dark skin are denigrated and assumed less qualified to negotiate global issues as equals. Although political objectives are expected to stimulate conflict, skin color is directly correlated with the present world order. Moreover, most post-colonial sovereignties are heterogeneous in one way or another and yet do not engage in destructive conflict. From a global perspective, conflict resolution will require post-colonial sovereignties--particularly those of relative light skin--to forfeit their self-serving denigration of others. Strategies for conflict resolution should ignore skin color and incorporate measures designed to improve problem solving, moral reasoning, and the general etiquette skills of those engaged in any negotiation process.

Key words: colonialism, conflict, hierarchy, people of color, skin color


VARIATION IN PHENOTYPE AMONG THE HUMAN SPECIES is a fact of biological existence. Variation in cutaneo-chroma, hereafter referred to as skin color, is a fact in the viability of human coexistence. Thus, in the aftermath of European colonization, human sovereignties of diverse national backgrounds are predisposed to conflict as the result of a global association of light skin with power. If one assumes that power is germane to human coexistence, understanding the implications of skin color becomes compulsory in the fair and equitable negotiation of global outcomes.

In the works of Freud, there are few references to the social and psychological potency of human skin color (Gould, 1984). During Freud's era, sovereignties characterized by dark-skinned populations were denigrated by hierarchy with minimal consequence. Freud's lack of attention to this psychoanalytically rich phenomenon may have been a reflection of dirt fantasies in which the personal tragedies of dark-skinned people were simply irrelevant to mainstream scholarship (Rojek, 1986).

Previously, color-based denigration enabled hierarchy to be lodged firmly in the post-colonial subconscious. But the subconscious fantasies from which hierarchies are fashioned may, in effect, be more potent than reality itself. Such fantasies are a form of colonial nations' purification reflected in the modern obsession with cleanliness. This obsession was likely unknown among primitives (Bullough, 1988). Dirt in the form of excrement is externalized to the outside world and projected onto dark-skinned people, who must then thrive in spite of its implications. The objective of projection must be from the body to the outside world. If this is true, all things viewed as dirty or disgusting represent those aspects of the body and its waste products. Hence the psychologically
justifiable denigration of dark-skinned people such as that among Jews in India (Gaines & Reed, 1995; Relethford, Stem, Gaskill, & Hazuda, 1983).

Hierarchy by Color

"Brown Jews"--or Beni Israel non-European Jews, as they are called--reside for the most part near Bombay in Rangoon, Calcutta, and Malabar, India (Barton, 1934). Their skin color is a shade of brown, and their features look more like those of Hindus rather than the typical Semite. Even so, Brown Jews state emphatically that they are in no way a product of Hindu miscegenation. Brown Jews divide themselves into two distinct casts: "Black" and "White." Intermarriage of women is vehemently opposed. Many among the White caste (Gora) are darker in skin color than those of the Black caste, but insist upon the "White" terminology nevertheless. Poverty and the extreme heat of the Indian climate over the years form the rationale for their complexions having darkened.

White Jews maintain numerous methods of separating themselves. Jews of inferior status such as Black Jews are not allowed to touch White Jews' kitchen utensils and are served ritualistic wine only after White Jews have been served. Although relations between the two groups in India today appear cordial, the lines of demarcation in this male-dominated society remain ever poised for group confrontation.

As is evident among Indian Jews, dirt projections onto dark-skinned people reinforce a universal skin color hierarchy not unknown among victims. That hierarchy is potent because it is conducive to globalized conflict with minimal psychological consequence (Crowley & Derezotes, 1994). Akin to the distinction between dirt and purity, it also reinforces global stratifications of power and prestige. Therefore, phenotypes of the first, second, and third worlds are directly correlated with degree of pigmentation. The most powerful light-skinned sovereignties in each stratum make of the less powerful dark-skinned sovereignties something subordinate and ultimately inferior.

Within each national sovereignty, differences of opinion exist regarding power. When global decisions are made, the populations of light-skinned nations wield more power than nations populated by dark-skinned groups; opinions of the former are assumed to be heard and acted upon with greater urgency (Huth, 1998). However, in a post-colonial era, efforts have been complicated by the emergence of the previously colonized latter onto the global body politic. The ensuing dynamics contribute to an adversarial relationship between more powerful light-skinned populations and the less powerful dark-skinned in their efforts to negotiate global issues (Keohane & Nye, 1971). The ensuing conflict and tension test the viability of global coexistence. As dark-skinned nations feel more inclined to sit as equals, post-colonial sovereignties feel morally obliged to accommodate them. However, despite moral obligation, the existence of a power disparity is the source of global conflict that has sustained a post-colonial hierarchy by the relentless denigration of those characterized by dark skin.

In a less totalitarian era, power disparities have a global impact. In quality-of-life negotiations, such disparities are tantamount to hegemony. Hegemony in some form is
indicative of most post-colonial sovereignties (Harris, 1994). It is a passive form of aggression acted out by those in power against those possessing less power. In a context of conflict, it precipitates an us-against-them mentality, whereby populations engage in unnecessary confrontations on the basis of skin color. The notion of us against them may be a contributing factor. As a result, the mere insinuation of denigration by color has been all but publicly denied because such insinuation runs the risk of creating international turmoil. It may furthermore compromise the integrity of the powerful and otherwise well intended among light-skinned populations.

Hierarchy by color is a denigration of dark skin and is characteristic of modern nation sovereignties. Such an exercise of power is an effective mechanism for sustaining control and, in effect, a colonial world order. It contributes to conflict commensurate with the distribution of wealth and the exploitation of the powerless by the powerful. Subsequently, interactions between the power dichotomy are then manifested in the denigration of dark skin not irrelevant to global coexistence.

Accordingly, in a post-colonial era, light-skinned groups are regarded as powerful and dark-skinned groups as powerless in the negotiation of global issues (Levy, 1981). Hence, light-skinned groups of whatever nationality are predisposed to the denigration of dark-skinned groups by a hierarchy that defines dark-skinned populations as inferior and less qualified to negotiate global issues as equals (Auerswald & Cowhey, 1997). To maintain an advantage in the negotiation process, light-skinned groups consistently dismiss information counter to the denigration of dark-skinned groups (Bercovitch, 1996). This reinforces the potential for conflict and ensures the continuation of the present world order.

Scholars have pondered the dynamics of conflict for the purposes of analysis and have determined that conflict can be both constructive and destructive (Caudron, 2000). Destructive conflict involves the expansion of conflict in such a way that consumes the issue of negotiation. Power is exercised to manipulate and intimidate. As a consequence, lines of demarcation harden and bring about similar types of behaviors. Conversely, conflict that is constructive pertains to the more direct negotiation of the issue(s) at hand. It takes place in a less threatening environment, where parties are apt to sit as equals. Under the circumstances, resolution is less subject to bias and given to the support and investments of all factions.

Global Conflict

Global conflict is here defined as a barrier or goal incongruity between those assumed powerful by skin color and those denigrated by skin color (Bernstein & Munro, 1997). The negotiation of global issues under such conditions is destructive and impedes coexistence. However, under certain constructive circumstances, conflict may contribute to global coexistence and the negotiation process if it is subjected to some equitable structuring. In a post-colonial era, this will require the unification of the various skin color segments into one holistic entity devoid of phenotypic hierarchy.
In the aftermath of advances in media and transportation technology, global accessibility has increased considerably (Dinerman, 1999). The resulting proximity of one sovereignty to another enhances the likelihood of conflict even though it may not be evident. Those involved in negotiations must have an established and conducive rapport with one another to thrive in a shrinking environment. However, if conflict remains based in some biological category such as skin color that extends to hierarchy, its pathological potential will be sustained over generations. The possibility of destructive or even violent confrontation will be exacerbated, putting the coexistence of future generations clearly at risk. Subsequently, the potential for devastation will gain momentum over time. Through conflict, attempts to negotiate will then be reduced to mere recapitulations of pent-up hostility.

With regard to global coexistence, the complete elimination of conflict between sovereign states is problematic (Caudron, 2000). The conflict experience provides the opportunity for diverse entities to acquire the skills for conflict resolution. The ability to reach resolution from conflict will enable factions to coexist and simultaneously differ. Thus, it is not conflict per se that is pathological, but rather how conflict is concluded (Skjorshammer, 2001).

A few scholars have acknowledged the role of skin color in global conflict. Among their research efforts is an attempt to assess its impact upon mental processes in the organization of hierarchies. For example, Brewer (1988) has suggested "a dual process model of impression formation." The essence of this model is the distinction between two types of psychological processing: person-based and category-based. Person-based psychological processing is data driven and most familiar to social scientists. It includes the accumulation of information both concrete and abstract (Brewer, 1988, p. 6). Alternative processing based on category extends from a macro to a micro perspective. Category-based processing is prone to subjective interpretations, which have an impact on how external reality is perceived and acted on. Thus, according to Brewer, global hierarchies based on category are more prevalent than person-based hierarchies, because global group information is more often constructed by native group intelligentsia.

The color hypothesis of global conflict is heavily contingent on rank categorization of the various national entities (Brown & Turner, 1979). Categorization of a national entity as powerful rather than powerless has been demonstrated to produce more conducive evaluations and perceptions of similarity (Tajfel, 1979). It has also facilitated the recall of positive information about those belonging to such groups and the reduction in memory of negative information regarding such information (Hewstone, 1990).

The dynamics of sovereign group identity are also critical to the comprehension of global conflict. According to social identity theory, the attitude of an individual is significantly shaped by group membership (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). This is his or her social identity. As a logical consequence, individuals tend to view their group more favorably than the other: the powerful versus the powerless. Consequently, individuals may develop destructive attitudes toward other groups and display enhanced loyalty to their own group. Active denigration of other groups will enable conflict. Relevant scholarship suggests
that native group identifications are more prevalent among the colonial powerful than among the colonized powerless (Ellemers, Doosje, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1992). Hence, the genesis of skin color serves as a criterion of group conflict that permeates to the individual.

Denigration by Skin Color

Cooley (1902) contended that individual identity is congruent with the "looking glass self" of classic literature. The looking glass self is a metaphor that characterizes the genesis of identity as a reflection of group perception. From that perception, its core is fashioned. A similar analysis was proposed by Mead (1934), who contended that identity is a product of social interaction. The process is complete when the host has moved from the "I" to the "me" perception of self.

Complementing the work of Mead, Erikson (1963) initially put forth the notion of identity as a fluid entity. Vis-a-vis skin color, it evolves out of a complex of decision-making experiences in the global environment. Exemplifying the more traditional, Erikson (1968) later wrote that final identity is fixed "at the end of adolescence." Other scholars have contributed significant advances to the science of identity. The work of Aboud (1984) and Semaj (1981) has illuminated the importance of cognitive development in the interpretation of attitudes and self-identification.

The universal denigration of dark skin suggests that among post-colonial sovereignties it sustains their potential for conflict and perceptions of one by the other (Bremer, 1992). It is a distinction based on hierarchy that is critical to human coexistence. Skin color is not only fundamental to conflict but may influence the quality of conflict as well. Subsequently, the potential for coexistence will be relegated to a zero-sum equation (Kim, 1999). That is, any expected gain by the denigrated powerless is necessarily perceived by the powerful as a total loss. What is more, certain gains by the powerless may be construed as threatening by the powerful, but not necessarily without benefit. A response on the part of the powerless could incur minimal consequence for the powerful and may in fact be viewed by them as advantageous, as in subject group segregation.

Thus, whereas zero-sum outcomes provoke overt conflict, non-zero-sum outcomes may dampen the potential for conflict and facilitate coexistence. Furthermore, the implications of power via skin color may be a critical factor in subsequent global outcomes. Negating the associations of power with light skin and group proximity to it may result in a reciprocal influence and provide a deterrent to potential conflict and incentives for global coexistence. In the aftermath, sovereign differentiation may be lessened by the salience of member variation and the exchange of intimate group information (Bryson & Anderson, 2000).

Hill (2000) suggested that skin color is a formidable cause of global conflict. The existence of inequities in education and work opportunity and the existence of poverty are the results of cognitive and affective psychological processes that sustain inequality.
Hill defended the notion of the association of skin color with public policy, an association that contrasts with equality.

In fact, under the circumstances, a colorblind world is ineffective and is, in a colonial sense, unattainable. Thus, it is compulsory to acknowledge skin color to the extent that colonial hierarchies manifest continuing influence on global interaction. Furthermore, in the United States, and in other nations where relevant, the repeal of affirmative action policies may reinforce color hierarchies that dilute the potency of less powerful groups (Hall, 1997), which compromises these groups' ability to eliminate societal injustices that exceed racial, cultural, and national demarcations. Manifestations are apparent in litigation brought by Puerto Ricans and Americans of African descent.

Litigation on the Basis of Skin Color

Perhaps the first skin color litigation brought by an American of African descent was that of Tracy Walker versus the Internal Revenue Service in 1989 (Walker v. Secretary of Treasury of IRS). The plaintiff, Ms. Tracy Morrow Walker, was a permanent clerk typist in the Atlanta office of the IRS. The plaintiff is a light-skinned African American woman. Her supervisor, also an employee of the defendant (the IRS), was Ms. Ruby Lewis. Ms. Lewis is a dark-skinned African American woman. The employees in the office where the plaintiff worked were predominantly African American. In fact, following her termination, the plaintiff was replaced by another African American.

According to records, the working relationship between the plaintiff and Ms. Lewis was strained from the very beginning, from approximately November of 1985. The plaintiff contended that Ms. Lewis singled her out for close scrutiny and reprimanded her for many things that were false or unsubstantial.

At the conclusion of the trial, the federal court ruled in favor of the IRS. The charges were deemed poorly documented, and Walker's claims of color-biased harassment could not be supported by witness testimony. It was allowed that skin color prejudice may exist between Blacks, although perhaps the case before the judge was not the best test of the issue. In the aftermath of such claims and litigation involving Americans of African descent, skin color is not irrelevant as a dynamic of global conflict.

Travel brochures to the island nation of Puerto Rico aptly profess the rich variation in skin color and other phenotypes among its people. Vacationing tourists are impressed by the seeming lack of conflict because of color, which residents proudly proclaim. Unmentionable, however, is the perception of blatant employment discrimination against dark-skinned Puerto Ricans. Its existence is invisible to the casual observer but is substantiated as fact by referenced litigation. This litigation is typological in that it accounts for charges of skin color discrimination across group and gender lines and within these lines.

One of the first cases of litigation brought by Puerto Ricans, in 1981, was that of the dark-skinned Felix (plaintiff) versus the lighter-skinned Marquez (defendant). Both
plaintiff and defendant were employees of the Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (OCPRW). The plaintiff alleged that the defendant did not promote her on the basis of skin color discrimination. At the trial, the plaintiff introduced the personnel cards of 28 of her former fellow employees. She testified that among them, only 2 were as dark or darker in color than she. All of the other employees in the office, according to the plaintiff, were light skinned. Other highly credible evidence presented to the court suggested, however, that she might have been in error.

According to the defendant, the plaintiff was not entitled to a promotion in grade by virtue of her position, her qualifications, her seniority, and/or her length of service. The evidence showed that her employer awarded promotions in grade based on criteria that were neutral with respect to skin color. Employees whose color was as dark or darker than the plaintiff's were given promotions in grade, whereas many other employees who were lighter were given infrequent promotions or no promotions at all.

Similar neutrality with respect to skin color was evident in the promotions in grade among employees throughout the entire agency. On the basis of the rules of legal proceeding, the OCPRW did not discriminate against the plaintiff because of her color in failing to recommend her for a promotion in grade. Thus, the court decided that the plaintiff was not promoted in grade for legitimate business reasons having nothing whatever to do with her skin color (Felix v. Marquez, 1981).

In the aforementioned litigation, the existence of conflict by skin color is a matter of judicial record. Having internalized light skin as the esteem of power, Puerto Ricans and Americans of African descent have acquiesced in the denigration of dark skin. Although the plaintiffs in the aforementioned cases did not prevail in the context of law, the imposition of a post-colonial hierarchy is subject to little doubt.

Brown Racism

Such hierarchy is not irrelevant to Asian populations insensitive and ignorant of historical fact. Their denigration of dark skin is referred to by Washington (1990) as brown racism. Brown racism is perhaps the most dramatic manifestation of denigration by skin color and post-colonial hierarchy. According to Washington (1990), brown racism is perpetrated by Mestizos, Chinese, Filipinos, and South Asians against dark-skinned persons of African descent. It is considered a variation of the White racism that probably occurred as a result of European colonization.

For Hogue, the most obvious indications of a skin color hierarchy among Asians exists in attitudes of the Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans (Garrett, 1999). All three peoples have a significant degree of racial homogeneity within their population. Arguably, it is among the Japanese that the strongest evidence of a hierarchy exists. They have historically maintained myths that rationalize the superiority of light-skinned people that have not been immune to global conflicts.
Thus, according to the Japanese, the global population is composed of the light-skinned and their inferior counterparts referred to as "gaijin." It should come as little surprise that this belief would be relevant to Japanese treatment of non-Japanese--particularly the dark-skinned. Furthermore, the Japanese were no less arrogant and brutal in their management of colonial subjects than the Europeans (Chang, 1997). The color hierarchy in Japan is manifested by a strong sense of superiority, which they apply on the basis of dark skin, ranking those darkest at the very bottom. The same system is applied to Japanese citizens who may be among Japan's native minority group, the Ainu.

In The Rape of Nanking, author Iris Chang refers to the cruelty and brutality of the Japanese toward the Chinese during their colonial occupation (Chang, 1997). However, the Japanese and the Chinese are not so different in their regard for dark-skinned people. Like the Japanese, the Chinese have historically regarded themselves as superior to dark-skinned people. Any descendents of Africans are considered barbarians who would welcome the opportunity to stain the purity of Chinese blood. As a result, when Chinese students traveled abroad to be educated, they were warned by their elders not to return married to a "Black devil"--whom they did not perceive as human (Garrett, 1999). So-called Black devils were, of course, dark-skinned humans who hailed from Africa and various Western locations. Among the Chinese, those who were dark skinned occupied a rank so low as not to even be considered worthy of denigration. That attitude toward the dark skinned was apparent in a rock-throwing incident in which hundreds of Chinese students descended unprovoked upon African students who were visiting mainland China (Washington, 1990).

In the interest of objectivity, the issue of color in China is much more complex than the Western colonial version. China did in fact assimilate Mongolian and Manchu invaders whom they regarded as barbaric. Furthermore, China also absorbed a population of minorities, making the issue of skin color in many ways confusing to non-Chinese observers. In their logic, to be superior is to be light-skinned and Chinese, which would create great difficulty for any foreigner. In contrast, Chinese living off the mainland in such places as Hong Kong participate actively in exogamy. In fact, in post-colonial nations such as Australia, the Chinese engage in exogamy more than any other migrant group--but not to dark-skinned people (Garrett, 1999).

To its credit, Israel is one of the few post-colonial sovereignties where true ethnic diversity exists. Perhaps more than any other culture, it encompasses a rich mixture of skin colors, languages, and religions (Ashkenazi & Wein, 1983). Unfortunately, what is to its credit has also caused problems. Increased diversity has led to conflict among the various factions for the conduct of policy on the basis of being light or dark skinned (Henik, Munitz, & Priel, 1985). Different languages and religions contribute to the tension, but the color of skin is by far the most potent factor.

The darkest in skin color among Jewish Semites are arguably the Beta Israel or Ethiopian Jews sometimes referred to as Black Jews or Falasha (Yilmah, 1996). They do not "look Jewish" nor do they pretend to look Jewish. Many of the women have intermarried with tribes of varied skin colors-some Hamitic and some Semitic. Opinions about their
migration to Israel are varied, but some insist that prejudice pertaining to the color of their skin is a major source of conflict. In fact, Ethiopian Semites in Israel are in more danger than the lighter skinned Semites from the Soviet Union.

Assisted by Israeli Semites in the spring of 1979 and early 1980, the American Association for Ethiopian Jews unified significant numbers of Ethiopian Semites with their families in Israel (Yilmah, 1996). The organizations worked with Christians in Ethiopia and Ethiopian Semites in Israel to substantiate the authenticity of the persons who were rescued. However, matters grew tense when an Israeli Jewish agency threatened the Association. Pressure from other Jewish organizations and several United States senators in 1980 convinced the Jewish agency to implement a family unification program much like the one developed by the American Association for Ethiopian Jews. Tensions were relieved after the various factions agreed to cooperate, and the co-op was a successful strategy. A considerable number of Ethiopian Semites joined their families in Israel.

However, Israel remained reluctant to permit the migration of Ethiopian Semites for a number of reasons. Migration was opposed by the late Emperor Haile selassie until 1974. It was not until 1975 that the Law of Return satisfied the Israeli government opposition to entry of dark-skinned Ethiopians. There remains today an unspoken resignation in Israel to the migration of Ethiopian Semites that is associated with the pattern of color denigration that is so indicative of modern post-colonial sovereignties (Foulkes, 1994).

Global Coexistence

The denigration of populations by skin color has had a devastating impact on global coexistence. Overtly motivated by the White supremacy model of colonial rhetoric, and covertly condoned by post-colonial sovereignties, skin color is the unspoken factor in the various manifestations of conflict. In a global context, dark skin is correlated with the lack of economic, political, and other forms of power (Hall, 2000) and is apparent in sovereignties where colonial nations have had a considerable influence.

In Puerto Rico, for example, skin colors vary from the darkest African type to the lightest European type. It is no secret that the power structure in that nation happens to be light-skinned. In Cuba, which arguably has had limited colonial influence, there is a similar reality. The light skin of Fidel Castro looks more in appearance like the American version of a power structure with which he has been at odds for decades. The same can be said of Jamaica, the Virgin Islands, and numerous countries in South America.

Just how the situation in each nation came about is a matter for debate. The fact that it exists is obvious to anyone who has personally observed it in South America and elsewhere. Thus, whereas Puerto Rico, Cuba, Jamaica, and the countries that make up South America are all very different culturally, they have this one fact in common: At some point in their history, they were all colonized and/or dominated by a light-skinned, European, colonial power structure (Hall, 1994). Because domination by colonization is an unequal exchange of power, the choice of influence obviously traveled in one
direction. Therefore, in each of the nations mentioned, those individuals in a position of affluence and power are also disproportionately light skinned (Hall, in press).

The denigration of persons by skin color is the mainstay of conflict in the post-colonial era. Rejecting the denigration of persons via color may reduce conflict by compromising the power of light-skinned sovereignties. Conversely, a reorganization of sovereignties by a more encompassing criteria may eliminate the denigrating impact of hierarchy. By ignoring skin color as a criterion for hierarchy and replacing it with a more global mechanism, the cognitive and motivational forces that sustained conflict may operate to discourage it. More global mechanisms not only reduce conflict but will ultimately enable beneficial outcomes beyond conflicting group interactions.

As global sovereignties increasingly interact with one another, it will become imperative that they learn to negotiate in a civil fashion. Hierarchies such as those contingent on skin color must be eliminated in order to minimize the potential for conflict inherent in an all-too-complex global domain. Strategies for conflict resolution could incorporate measures designed to improve the problem-solving, moral reasoning, and general etiquette skills of those engaged in any negotiation process. The rationale for this approach comes from the notion that colonization established a world order that, in the aftermath, denigrates some groups to the advantage of others (Arias, 2000). The resulting hierarchy creates assumed differentiations in power that reduces the prestige of dark-skinned populations, who are otherwise equal members of the global community. This assumed differentiation in power exacerbates a potential for conflict that would be otherwise unnecessary. Sovereignties then align themselves on the basis of skin color, resulting in hard-line strategies and outcomes destructive to all, necessitating the urgency of conflict resolution (Hall, 1994).

From a global perspective, conflict resolution will require post-colonial sovereignties--particularly those of relative light skin--to forfeit their self-serving denigration of others. Necessary skills will include the ability to compromise, the ability to apply a global context to conflict, the ability to reach value-free solutions, an acknowledgment of the impact of colonization, and the reversal of colonial trends, including the denigration of dark skin. The universal application of the aforementioned skills will vary on the basis of population, geographic location, and history, but they can be a useful tool for minimizing or circumventing conflict between complex post-colonial sovereignties.

Reaching an effective conflict resolution strategy will demonstrate that the global community is poised to realize the next level of civilization, in which human hierarchies are nonexistent. Furthermore, colonial sovereignties should remember that colonized populations who are actively involved in resolving global conflicts experience a more intense sense of global ownership. Consequently, impending conflicts can then be negotiated in a much less hostile and more conducive environment that will ultimately serve the interests of all mankind.
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