



White Privilege

Psychoanalytic Perspectives

By *Neil Altman*

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Book Description

White Privilege: Psychoanalytic Perspectives looks at race and the significant role it plays in society and in clinical practice. Much of the effort going into racial consciousness-raising rests on the concept of unearned "white privilege". In this book, Neil Altman looks deeply into this notion, suggesting that there are hidden assumptions in the idea of white privilege that perpetuate the very same racially prejudicial notions that are purportedly being dismantled.

The book examines in depth the structure of racial categories, polarized between white and black, that are socially constructed, resting on fallacious ideas of physical or psychological differences among peoples. Altman also critically examines such related concepts as privilege, guilt, and power. It is suggested that political positions are also artificially polarized into categories of "liberal", "left" and "conservative", "right", in ways that contribute to stereotyping between people with different political leanings, foreclosing mutual respect, dialogue, and understanding. Finally, *White Privilege: Psychoanalytic Perspectives* explores the implications for the theory and practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, discussing these ideas in detail and depth with clinical illustrations.

Drawing on Altman's rich clinical experience and many years of engaging with racial and societal problems, this book offers a new agenda for understanding and offering analytic practice in contemporary society. It will appeal to clinicians, psychoanalytic

therapists, and anyone with an interest in social problems and how they manifest in society and in therapy today.

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1. Whiteness 2. Privilege 3. Guilt 4. Power 5. The perils of political liberalism 6. The perils of political conservatism 7. How does all this play out in the consulting room? 8. What does psychoanalysis have to do with it? 9. Toward a more perfect union

Author(s)

Biography

Neil Altman, Faculty, William Alanson White Institute, New York, and Visiting Faculty, Ambedkar University of Delhi, India; Editor Emeritus, Psychoanalytic Dialogues, Editorial Board member, Journal of Child Psychotherapy, and International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies; Member of Board of Directors, Journal of Infant, Child, and Adolescent Psychotherapy. Author, *The Analyst in the Inner City*, Second Edition, and *Psychoanalysis in Times of Accelerating Cultural Change*; co-author, *Relational Child Psychotherapy*.

Reviews

"Altman has the rare gift of being a sophisticated psychoanalytic thinker who writes in a personal voice, conversational tone, and jargon-free accessible language. He has developed "binocular vision" enabling him to apprehend the connections between the intrapsychic and the social, cultural surround. His reflections on white privilege and its associated defensive evasions and disavowals enhance our capacities to see ourselves and others more clearly."

James Barron, PhD. Chair, Section of the Psychoanalyst in the Community, Department of Psychoanalytic Education, American Psychoanalytic Association

"Dr. Neil Altman: Brave. Bold. Honest. Authentic. As a psychoanalyst who is African-Caribbean American, I am struck by how, once again, Dr. Altman has done the exceptional as in his classic *The Analyst in the Inner City*. He takes us on a journey of the evolving self as relational and uncovers the power of a psychoanalytic theoretical lens and the empiricism of psychoanalysis in practice to examine ourselves. He explores our racialized thinking and acting, white AND black, in perhaps one of the most controversial contexts: White Privilege. Living inside this conjoined and shared historical, socially-embedded and -constructed context of racism, dating back to slavery, he urges white folks (and also people of color) through the psychoanalytic process to learn to STAY with the deeply disturbing aspects of this relational self, to "own" awareness of what is uncovered ("splitting", "shame and guilt") in order to come out on the other side

with greater empathy and insight regarding our prejudices and the unwitting promulgation of racism.

Like the analyst engaged in the treatment hour, all along the way in *White Privilege*, Dr. Altman stops to pause and reflect on his ability to see clearly the landscape of privilege, his limitations as a white person. Moreover, in this extraordinary thoughtful endeavor, by the end he still wonders with us and recognizes that certain of his own blind spots inevitably remain, and in doing so, Dr. Altman values the psychoanalytic process, as an ideal way to welcome us all into a new evolving conversation with ourselves to be broken open from inside to outside, intra-psychically to interpersonally. "

Paula Christian Kliger, PhD, ABPP is a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst in clinical and organizational consultation practice