

[EXT] Fwd: Response to Ewell?

Timothy Jackson [REDACTED]

Wed 12/11/2019 5:40 PM

To: Stephen Slottow [REDACTED]; Bakulina, Ellen <Ellen.Bakulina@unt.edu>; Graf, Benjamin <Benjamin.Graf@unt.edu>; Walls, Levi <LeviWalls@my.unt.edu>; Cubero, Diego <Diego.Cubero@unt.edu>; Chung, Andrew <Andrew.Chung@unt.edu>; Lavacek, Justin <Justin.Lavacek@unt.edu>

Dear Colleagues,

I have approached a number of Schenkerians directly with request for comment on Ewell's SMT presentation. We will receive publishable replies from at least four outside distinguished scholars. Not from Eric Wen, however, see below.

We need to decide about issuing the general call for responses.

Best, Tim

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Eric Wen** <ewen@juilliard.edu>

Date: Tue, Dec 10, 2019 at 10:09 PM

Subject: Re: Response to Ewell?

To: Timothy Jackson [REDACTED]

Thanks for sending this, Tim.

Aristotle believed in slavery, do we throw him out the window, too?

I watched the video, and simply cannot waste my time responding to such a simplistic view of Schenker. If we denigrate the work of important artists and scholars based on their personal and idiosyncratic views, we might as well completely dismantle most of civilization's achievements.

Today's obsession with political correctness has simply obscured any real judgement.

At my age I'm ready to be put out to pasture...

All best,
Eric

From: Timothy Jackson [REDACTED]**Sent:** Saturday, December 7, 2019 6:57 PM**To:** Eric Wen <ewen@juilliard.edu>**Subject:** Response to Ewell?**External Mail**

Timothy L. Jackson
Distinguished Research Professor of Music Theory
Professor of Music Theory
College of Music
University of North Texas
Denton, TX 76203 USA

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Dear Eric,

I am taking the liberty of contacting you with regard to a call for responses by the *Journal for Schenkerian Studies* to Phillip Ewell's lecture at the Plenary Session of the Society for Music Theory this past November. His Power Point Slides and a video of his lecture are available at PowerPoint slides: <http://philipewell.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SMT-Plenary-Slides.pdf>

Video recording: <https://vimeo.com/372726003>

In order to expedite the call for responses, Ewell's remarks on Schenker are transcribed, and the content of the relevant slides is reproduced below.

As an Asian American, and as the author of the (in my view, best) textbook on Schenkerian analysis, I would consider a reply from you to be especially important. If you wish, you can watch the video of the talk in its entirety at the link above. I have transcribed just Ewell's remarks about Schenker, who serves as his example of racism in music theory. He contends that not only was Schenker himself a virulent racist, but that his analytical approach is inherently racist.

Ewell's comments about Schenker, as his core example of racism in music theory, begin with, "The best example through which to examine our white frame is through Heinrich Schenker, a fervent racist, whose racism *undoubtedly* influenced his music theory, yet it gets whitewashed for general consumption. It would be hard to overestimate Schenker's influence on American music theory.....Schenker represents our shared model of what it means to be a music theorist. In his voluminous writings, Schenker often mentions white and black as modifiers for human races." Ewell then reads the quotes from Schenker's diary and letters taken from Schenker Documents Online in the slide, "Schenker's Racism." Then comes the slide "Schenker's Anti-Black Racism." "Schenker disparages the music of blacks, especially Negro spirituals claiming that they were completely falsified dishonest misappropriation of European music. It seems Schenker liked these spirituals, since he compared them to European music. But instead of according blacks a measure of artistic integrity, he reduces the genre to thievery, stripping it of its humanity, which in turn reflects his hatred of blackness....." [Then Ewell reveals Schenker's hatred of the black male body, and his views against racial mixing.] "This is paramount because white racial frame authors on the rare occasion that they deal with this topic have generally called Schenker's racism cultural and not biological." [Thereby, as per the next slide, the white frame seeks to shield Schenker from unwanted criticism.] "Schenker's racism presented a problem for those who promoted his work. To solve this problem, his offensive writings were either removed or whitewashed for general consumption." [The next slide is about the "white racial frame that whitewashes people like Schenker."] "This is precisely what has happened with Schenker in our white racial frame."

Then comes (at 13:12) a very important slide, entitled "Whitewashing Schenker, I," which quotes Jonas, Oster, Forte, Rothstein, Benjamin, and Cook; Ewell now asserts that all of the above-named Schenkerian scholars "whitewashed" Schenker because they claimed that his music theory can be separated from his political and other views, and also, very importantly, that these scholars removed offensive, *racist* passages from *Free Composition* (might we note that this is a direct attack especially on Oster and Forte, who translated and edited *Free Composition*). "On this slide I have listed six clear instances in which our white frame has shoved aside, ignored, or treated as incidental, Schenker's racism, that it has no bearing on his music theories, that it can be disregarded, or omitted; that his supposed indiscretions were just peripheral ramblings." William Benjamin implies, "not only was Schenker not racist, he was actually a closet egalitarian." "The only thing left off the table is simply calling Schenker the virulent racist he was." In the slide labeled "Whitewashing Schenker, II," (14: 20) "John Rothgeb is saying that not only was Schenker himself incorrect, when he expressed that his racist speculations were key to his musical precepts, Rothgeb is actually implying that it would be inappropriate or unfair to examine race in Schenker's theories. Finally, in an eighth example of whitewashing Schenker, among countless others,

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Nicholas Cook says that it would be unhelpful to make the obvious parallel between Schenker's theories on music and his theories on race. What Cook means to say here is that it would be unhelpful to music theory's white racial frame insofar as it would call attention to race and whiteness."

"I wish to recouple this severed link between Schenker's beliefs about music and his beliefs about people. Ironically the person who would most agree with this recoupling is Heinrich Schenker himself, who often spoke of how his unified world view should be considered a whole. Ultimately, our white racial frame's removal and denial of race in the study of Schenker and his musical theories is a textbook example of colorblind racism. When reading Schenker's musical theoretical works anew from a critical race perspective, it is actually quite easy to see his racism in his music theories. As with the inequality of races, Schenker believed in the inequality of tones." [Ewell then presents his slide, Two Schenker Quotes, One on the Inequality of Peoples, the Other on the Inequality of Tones.] Here we begin to see how Schenker's racism pervaded his music theories. In short, neither racial classes, nor pitch classes, were equal in Schenker's theories. He uses the same language to express these beliefs. Since he wrote this in 1922, when virtually all of Africa was under white colonial rule, his sentiment is clear: blacks must be controlled by whites. Similarly, Schenker believed notes from the fundamental structure must control other notes, as the quote on the right of the slide shows. I have only scratched the surface showing how Schenker's racism permeates his music theories."

Here is the text of the slides, which we don't need to reproduce, but which coordinate with the main text:

Schenker's Racism [SDO = Schenker Documents Online]

- He speaks of "Less able or more primitive races" (2015, online "Literature" supplement, 21), "inferior races" ([1910 and 1922] 2001, vol. 1, 28), and "wild and half wild peoples" (Diary entry, September 8, 1914, SDO).
- He speaks of whiteness in relation to the "animal" Japanese, that the "white race" will need to adapt in order to "annihilate" the Japanese "animals" (Diary entry, August 20, 1914, SDO).
- Writing about the "Slavic half-breed": "There will be no peace on earth until...the German race crushes the Slavs on the grounds of superiority" (Diary entry, July 26, 1914, SDO).
- "'Race' is good, 'inbreeding' of race, however, is murky" (Handwritten letter, January 13, 1934, SDO). • He expressed horror at the mixing of races in "Senegalese marriage relationships" ([1921– 1923] 2004, vol. 1, 5) and "intermarrying black racial stock with...a French mother" ([1921– 1923] 2004, 18).

Whitewashing Schenker

1. Oswald Jonas omitted several passages of *Der freie Satz* "that have no bearing on the musical content of the work" (Schenker [1935] 1979, xiii).
2. Ernst Oster: "I felt it best to omit several additional passages of a very general, sometimes semi-philosophical nature here; these omissions are not expressly indicated" (Schenker [1935] 1979, xiii).
3. Allen Forte: "Almost none of the material bears substantive relation to the musical concepts that [Schenker] developed during his lifetime and, from that standpoint, can be disregarded" (Schenker [1935] 1979, xviii).

4. William Rothstein reduces Schenker's offensive language to "supposed indiscretions" and "peripheral ramblings" (Rothstein, 8).
5. William Benjamin: "[Schenker's] apparent racism was an emotional reflex which stood in contradiction to his personal belief system" (Benjamin, 157).
6. Nicholas Cook offers "humor," [i.e., Schenker was joking] as a possible reason for Schenker's disgusting language (Cook, 148).
7. John Rothgeb: "We urge the reader to recognize that however much Schenker may have regarded his musical precepts as an integral part of a unified worldview, they are, in fact, not at all logically dependent on any of his extra-musical speculations. Indeed, no broader philosophical context is necessary—or even relevant—to their understanding" (Schenker [1910 and 1922] 2001, xiv).
8. Nicholas Cook comments on Schenker's "authoritarian impulse that is expressed in the many hierarchies which make up Schenker's worldview (it is tempting but I think not very helpful to draw the obvious parallel with his music theory)" (153).

Two Schenker quotes, one on the inequality of peoples, the other on the inequality of notes

"But let the German mind also gather the courage to report: it is not true that all men are equal, since it is, rather, out of the question that the incapable ever become able; that which applies to individuals surely must apply to nations and peoples as well" (2015, online "Literature" supplement, 23n13).

"It is therefore a contradiction to maintain, for example, that all scale tones between 'C' and 'c' have real independence or, to use a current but certainly musically unsuitable expression, 'equal rights'" ([1935] 1979, 13n3).

Two Schenker quotes, one on whites controlling blacks, the other on the fundamental structure controlling the middleground and foreground

About whites controlling blacks he says, "Even negroes proclaim that they want to govern themselves because they, too, can achieve it" (Handwritten letter, September 25, 1922, SDO). [That is, blacks must be controlled by whites.]

About the scale degrees of the fundamental structure, he says, "the scale-degrees of the fundamental structure have decisive control over the middleground and foreground" ([1935] 1979, 111).

Looking forward to hearing from you,

With best wishes,

Tim