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A Preliminary Response to Ewell

TIMOTHY L. JACKSON

Philip Ewell contends that not only was Schenker himself a “fervent racist,” but claims that Schenker’s hierarchical analytical approach *per se* is inherently racist. With the latter assertion, he extends ideas about hierarchy in musical structure paralleling that of human races, just as he claims Schenker to have done. Since Stephen Slottow addresses that issue (pp. 189–94), I will focus here on other matters. When Ewell scapegoats Schenker and Schenkerians for the paucity of African Americans in the field of music theory, what he leaves unsaid becomes just as important as what he actually asserts. Although he brings up anti-Semitism late in his talk, he neglects to mention that Schenker himself was Jewish, as were most of his students, with enormous repercussions for the reception of Schenkerian theory in Europe and America. Furthermore, as Barry Wiener shows (pp. 195–206), because Ewell omits the full context of the excerpts he cites from Schenker’s letters and diary, he often falsifies or misconstrues their meaning. For every citation from Schenker, we cannot be too careful to provide and consider the context, and also check that the transcription and translation are correct. In this regard, most importantly, Ewell will not allow Schenker to evolve and mature, and to change his views. Although Schenker did not lack self-assurance, he did pivot very significantly from a typical German racist to an egalitarian viewpoint, and from a staunch German patriot who hated everything English and American, to one who saw new hope for Schenkerian analysis in America (given his student Hans Weisse’s success here). Furthermore, as anyone knows who carefully studies Schenker’s readings of pieces, he was constantly tweaking them, often revising them significantly as he refined his analytical tools and concepts. But Ewell wants to reify Schenker in order to condemn him, instead of acknowledging his personal metamorphosis. Furthermore, by cherry-picking short phrases out of their full textual and historical environments, he is able to misinterpret them, employing a technique similar to today’s political attack ads that employ video editing of speeches by adversaries to make them appear to say things they never intended.

Already by the mid-1920s, Schenker was keenly aware of the rise of Nazism, and the dangers it posed, and this realization forced him to change his views on race. Just as African Americans and Jews faced fierce racism here in the United States, Schenker and his students (most of whom were also Jewish) had to contend with an equally intense and rising anti-Semitism in Austria and Germany on a daily basis. For example, when his student Mrs. Páramoll visited on June 25, 1925, Schenker reports in his diary, “anti-Semitism hurts her deeply,” [“Die Antisemitismus trifft sie hart”]. On January 15, 1926, Schenker records a conversation with a chauffeur, who complains that he would have preferred to have worked in a factory rather than drive around “the Jewish pigs” [“Saujuden”] [“lieber in die Fabrik gegangen ist, als dass er die ‘Saujuden’ führte”]. With prescience, Schenker’s student Weisse decided to emigrate to America already in the late 1920s because of anti-Semitism.

When I was a student at CUNY in the early 1980s, my teacher Saul Novack arranged for me to meet privately with Felix Salzer, who had recently retired because of the onset of dementia. Fortunately, when I visited him in his apartment, he was still almost completely lucid, and I spent the better part of a day listening to him reminisce about his Vienna years, immigration to the US, and studying with Schenker himself in the last year of his life. Later, after Salzer’s death, I also met with his wife Hedi and

held several long conversations with her about related topics. The fact of Schenker's Jewishness, and that of most of his students, came up repeatedly in all of these conversations, Salzer considering it to be a factor of central importance for understanding the negative reception of Schenkerian Analysis, first in Europe during the period of the rise of Nazism, and then in early post-war America.

Influenced by growing Jew-hatred in the culture in which he lived, Schenker even internalized some of its stigmata when having to endure the unveiled anti-Semitism of a famous conductor like Furtwängler. On the evening of April 11, 1925, Furtwängler appeared, and Weisse also came with the score of his string quartet. In his diary, Schenker records that, "In the course of the discussion, he [Furtwängler] revealed himself openly anti-Semitic, *not without basis* [my emphasis]; while I had to agree with the reasons, I did not fail to stress my unwavering commitment to Judaism" ["Im Verlaufe der Gespräch, gab er sich unverhüllt als Antisemit, nicht ohne Begründung, da ich musste die Gründen zustimmen, habe aber nicht unterlassen, meine strengen dennoch am Judentum festhaltenden Standpunkt zu betonen"]. Some have argued Schenker's "folkish" claims about the superiority of German music can be understood as part of his effort, as a Jew, to assimilate and be accepted by mainstream German society. However, I doubt that Schenker made these "proclamations" in order to ingratiate himself with the Germans, or with anyone for that matter; that is just too self-serving. Rather, he genuinely believed in the divine origin of musical laws, and, for him, the great German composers paralleled the prophetic tradition in Judaism. In other words, Schenker's Jewish identity was deeply rooted in his belief in "immutable laws of music"—laws that he understood to parallel those set forth in the Torah, which means (in Hebrew) "teaching" or "law." Just as Moses proclaimed the laws of God, and the Jewish people were the bearers of those laws to the nations throughout the ages, so too, he, Schenker, revealed the laws of music as expressed in the art of the great masters of German music, who had followed and obeyed them. The divine origin of musical laws is an ancient position held by many Christian theorists that Schenker assumes from a Jewish perspective, and that is his primary motivation. Additionally, Schenker identified *both* Germans and Jews as persecuted peoples who needed to be mutually supportive. On October 26, 1926, he commented on a letter he had received from one of his relatives, that "above all, he [Victor] failed to understand the historical background and the difficult position of the Germans in the world, and does them as much injury as the other enemies of Germany, when instead, a national Jewish interest should bind him to Germany: persecuted, robbed, shoulder to shoulder. He has not yet recognized that it is the Englishman who destroys all that is good in the world, the Englishman in his original form or in the American derivation" ["Überhaupt fehlt ihm die Kenntnis des historischen Hintergrund, er begreift die schwierige Lage der Deutschen in der Welt nicht und tut ihnen, den ewig Bedrohten und Betrogenen, genau so Unrecht, wie andere Feinde Deutschlands tun, wo doch ein nationales jüdisches Interesse ihn eher mit Deutschland verbinden müsste: Verfolgte, Beraubte, Schulter an Schulter. Die Einsicht ist in ihm nicht reif, dass es der Engländer ist, der alles Gute in der Welt stört, der Engländer in der Originalgestalt oder in der amerikanischen Abhandlung"].

The Schenker Documents Online (SDO) English translations are very helpful, but at the same time, they must be used with caution and require exegesis. When, in 1925, Schenker exclaims: "die mir ein Hakenkreuzlerum andachten oder Unaufreichtigkeit um etwa das Verbergen des Judentums," which

SDO translates as, “all of the people who fantasize that I am a swastikite or insincere, such as by hiding my Jewishness;” a more “direct” translation would be, “all the people who suspect me of Nazism, or dishonesty, for example, by hiding my Jewishness.” To better understand exactly what Schenker means here, we also need to know that “Hakenkreuzlertum” is an uncommon, *disparaging* neologism for Nazism that Schenker may have borrowed from Joseph Roth’s 1923 novel *Das Spinnennetz*. After Hitler’s “seizure of power” in early 1933, initially enthusiastic about Hitler’s “defeat” of hated Communism, both Schenker and his close friend and colleague Reinhard Oppel became fully disillusioned—again, evidence of a change of heart. On 13 July, 1933, Schenker noted in his diary that he had received a letter from Oppel which was “evidence of [his] disenchantment with the new regime,” and, ten days later, on 23 July he reported: “Letter to Oppel dictated: *I confirm him in his skepticism* [my emphasis].” There are further indications of Oppel’s lack of enthusiasm for Nazism in his later letters to Schenker, who shared his views.

Schenker’s wife Jeannette would be murdered in Theresienstadt, and his most gifted student Angelika Elias in the Ravensbrück concentration camp for women. If Schenker had lived longer, there can be no doubt that he too would have perished, alongside his wife. Schenker’s Jewish students, Weisse, Jonas, Salzer, Deutsch, Albersheim, and others including Oster (a student of Jonas)—the lucky few professional music theorists who were fortunate to escape to the US—had to contend not only with the general hostility of Americans towards foreigners and refugees, but also widespread anti-Semitism in academe as well as among the general public. Until the late 1930s, in parks and public beaches in the US and Canada, it was not uncommon to see signs that read, “No dogs or Jews allowed.” Here in the US, it was well known that the source of “Schenkerism” was German-Jewish emigrés, and, especially in the 1930s and 40s, when there were quotas on Jews in the universities, it was difficult for Schenker’s ideas to make headway. In Nazi Germany, Schenker’s publications were, of course, overtly banned, deliberately hunted down, and copies of his books and pamphlets destroyed. And here, until well after the war, Schenkerian analysis was “tacitly” regarded as “Jewish” music theory. I distinctly recall a conversation with a fellow student at Queens College who, as recently as 1982, warned me that, “New York City is not the United States, and Schenker does not travel.” Translation: “outside of New York City, with its large Jewish population, in the more anti-Semitic country at large, it will be difficult for you, as a Schenkerian, to find a job.” Also, in this context, Allen Forte told me that in the early 1960s he had risked his career for supporting Schenker and Schenkerians at Yale. When he first came to Yale, he was admonished in no uncertain terms by Howard Boatwright and others not to be too interested in “that Schenker stuff”—or else. Do not forget that Yale, like many Ivy Leagues, had been a bastion of institutionally sanctioned “White Privilege” and anti-Semitism, and the Yale administration had cozied up to the Nazis as late as 1937.¹ Was there still more than a whiff of anti-Semitism at Yale even in the early 1960s? Of course, we all know that Forte ignored that threat and soldiered on. However, I must

¹ On Yale’s support for Nazi Universities, see Timothy L. Jackson, “‘The Company You Keep’: Recipients of Honorary Doctorates from the 1936 Heidelberg Celebration—Sibelius and Those Honored alongside Him,” in *Jean Sibelius’s Legacy*, edited by Daniel Grimley and Veijo Murtomäki (Cambridge: Scholars Press, 2017), pp. 88–110, especially pp. 96–97, which discuss Yale’s participation in the 1936 Heidelberg Celebration organized by Joseph Goebbels.

point out that, by promoting Schenkerian analysis, maintaining his support for Oster (a German-Jewish refugee), and pursuing publication of an—also unwanted—English translation of *Free Composition*, Forte exhibited considerable moral courage and integrity. I urge scholars to read Forte's letters on behalf of Oster and the translation project now preserved in the Yale Archives.

Is the so-called "White Frame" a concept that can be validly applied to the Jewish Schenker, his students, and his work, as Ewell attempts to do? Indeed, the situation regarding Jewish ethnicity is highly complicated. While many Ashkenazi Jews are literally white-skinned, does that mean they automatically identify themselves as "White?" Quite to the contrary, many white-skinned Jews do not identify with "Whiteness" as defined by WASPs. As Jews, diary entries prove that Schenker and his wife knew very well that they were considered "Other" by mainstream German-speaking Viennese society, as his Jewish students would be later in America. Therefore, simply to assume that Jewish Schenkerians are "White" and therefore participate in "White Privilege" in America is surely a naïve, unnuanced, and overly simplistic viewpoint at best.²

Schenker's many earlier anti-French, anti-British, anti-American, and anti-Black vituperations—before, during, and after World War I—must be interpreted in the context of that war and its aftermath, in which these nations were all perceived enemies of Germany and Austria, and of German scientific racism. Furthermore, it must be recognized that racist and genocidal thinking was common among German intellectuals from the late twentieth century forward. Therefore, it is not coincidental that the first important genocide in the twentieth century was perpetrated by Germans against Black San, Herero, and Namaqua peoples in their African colony of what is today Namibia, although this pioneering genocide is insufficiently widely known or recognized for its prophetic significance (possibly because of the "White Frame" through which world history tends to be viewed).³ It was in their genocide in 1904 in Southwest Africa that the Germans honed their skills of concentration camps, medical experiments, and other pseudo-scientific genocidal techniques, on Blacks, whom they considered subhuman. Then, in the Armenian genocide of the First World War, the Turks employed German participation and advice (some of the same scientists who had been involved in the African genocide were consultants); and, yet again, this same "expertise" was applied by the Germans themselves, most systematically and on the grandest scale, to the Jews before and during World War II. It would be a mistake to regard German perpetration of the Holocaust as anomalous; rather, German scientific racism—with genocidal implications—had become ubiquitous in German culture by the beginning of the twentieth century, and one would be hard pressed to find educated Germans at that time who remained uninfluenced. Therefore, we should not be at all surprised that some of Schenker's earlier statements decrying racial mixture reflect this mindset;

2 There is a literature seeking to address the issue of whether Jews in America are "White." Emma Green asks, "Are Jews White?," *The Atlantic* December 5, 2016, delineating "rough sketches of two camps, concentrated at the margins of U.S. political culture. On the extreme right, Jews are seen as impure—a faux-white race that has tainted America. And on the extreme left, Jews are seen as part of a white-majority establishment that seeks to dominate people of color. Taken together, these attacks raise an interesting question: Are Jews white?"

3 The United States Holocaust Museum maintains an informative webpage about this genocide: www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/herero-and-nama-genocide

but these in no way prove that he was the “fervent” racist Ewell claims him to have been. The Germans were profoundly offended by the French use of colonial Black African troops to occupy the Rhineland after World War I since they felt it had been done purposely to humiliate them, which was true.

To be sure, the Great War provides *the* essential framework within which one must interpret Schenker’s earlier anti-French, anti-British, anti-American, and also anti-Black comments in his diary and letters. Indeed, readers of Schenker’s diary cannot ignore the extent and breadth of its author’s virulent, visceral hatred of the French, a *white* race; during and after World War I. His diatribes against the French fill *pages* of his diary with the most disgusting vituperative, long entries that make his few anti-Black comments scattered here and there pale into relative insignificance. However, by the mid-1920s, as the Nazis turned on the Jews, the sources disclose that Schenker became more sober. As already noted, letters between Schenker and his close friend and colleague Reinhard Oppel in Leipzig contain anti-Hitler and anti-Nazi sentiments. And by 1934, with the Nazis firmly in control in Germany, he writes in *Free Composition*, “Since the linear progression, as I have described it, is one of the main elements of voice-leading, *music is accessible to all races and creeds alike* [my emphasis]. He who masters such progressions in a creative sense, or learns to master them, produces art which is genuine and great.”⁴ Carl Schachter speculates that this statement may be a late addition to the text. Whether or not that is the case, as this quote unambiguously shows, now for Schenker [“classical”] music is a non-racial *meritocracy*. The race of the musician is irrelevant; what matters is the ability to hear and understand linear progressions, and then, through a developed technique, either compositional, performing, or analytical, to (re)create and interpret music accordingly. This fact, namely that classical music is a meritocracy based upon that very ability, is the fundamental reason why individual musicians from oppressed or marginalized groups (such as Jews, Gays, Asians, and Blacks) have found through it a path to social acceptance and financial security.

Having portrayed Schenker as “a fervent racist,” Ewell then proceeds to construct his conspiracy theory that Schenker’s immediate followers sought to conceal his racist views, for example by banishing them to appendices in *Free Composition*; this assertion is a direct attack on the book’s translator Oster and editor Forte. Ewell implies that the passages that Oster and Forte exiled to appendices are racist; they are not. Rather, they are pseudo-scientific and philosophical speculations; Oster and Forte decided to move these paragraphs into appendices because they were afraid they would needlessly prejudice readers against Schenker’s important theory of musical structure, which they felt, rightly or wrongly, to have little or no bearing on his technical analysis of music. Ewell argues, probably correctly, that Schenker would have objected. However, it is indeed possible—even desirable—to separate the technical musical-analytical aspects of Schenker’s theory from most of his philosophical, political, and aesthetic claims, which also mutated considerably over time. Many important figures in the history of science, the arts, and music firmly held beliefs which are now fully discredited and seem bizarre; that does not mean that we should reject their great discoveries. Neither Oster nor Forte knew the brief racist comments that Ewell excerpted from SDO in 2019 that were still buried in Schenker’s letters

4 *Free Composition*, xxiii.

and diary. The one putatively “racist” passage in the first edition of *Free Composition* that Jonas took out and was not included in Oster’s translation concerns whether or not Beethoven was a German composer, since some scholars had argued that he was Flemish. (Schachter cites this passage in his article in *Theory and Practice*.) Given the heightened sensibilities about race and “blood” after WWII, Jonas—rightly—felt that Schenker’s pre-war argument in favor of Beethoven’s “Germanness” would not be well received. Thus, Ewell’s charge that Oster and Forte “whitewashed” Schenker’s racism simply will not hold up to scrutiny. It should be pointed out that Forte, putatively an apologist for Schenker’s racism, was one and the same person who gave a significant number of female, Jewish, Asian, and Black students—like Ewell himself—a chance for a career in music theory. Fortunately, Forte did not live to witness this attack.

Ewell’s scapegoating of Schenker, Schenkerians, and Schenkerian analysis, occurs in the much larger context of Black-on-Jew attacks in the United States. Over a quarter-century ago, a detailed scholarly article was published on African American anti-Semitism in a refereed social sciences journal.⁵ The author observed that according to surveys, American Blacks were increasingly more inclined to hold anti-Semitic prejudices than Whites, and to blame Jews for their problems. At the end of the article, the author warned that this trend was extremely worrying, and that it was necessary to take decisive steps to roll back anti-Semitism in the African American Community, both latent and overt. Presumably those steps were never taken. On the contrary, demagogues from the extreme right and left, Black Nationalist—and also White Nationalist—and also in academe, continue to legitimize scapegoating “the Jews” for every conceivable ill. In this sense, Ewell’s denunciation of Schenker and Schenkerians may be seen as part and parcel of the much broader current of Black anti-Semitism. Given the history of racism against African Americans, there is a strong tendency today to excuse or downplay these phenomena, but they are real—and toxic. They currently manifest themselves in myriad ways, including the pattern of violence against Jews, the obnoxious lyrics of some hip hop songs, etc.⁶

5 Lee Sigelman, “Blacks, Whites, and Anti-Semitism,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 36/4 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 649–56. In her recent article, “Save Me from My Defenders,” *Commentary*, January 2020, Ruth Wisse of Harvard University writes, “The point of departure in my talk was an opinion piece from the New York Times by Henry Louis Gates Jr. that had been published in 1992. Entitled ‘Black Demagogues and Pseudo-Scholars,’ Gates’s article warned that while anti-Semitism in America was generally on the wane, it was on the rise among African Americans, with Blacks twice as likely as Whites to hold anti-Semitic views. Gates cited research showing that anti-Semitism was most pronounced ‘among the younger and more educated Blacks,’ and as he was then writing as the newly appointed chairman of Harvard’s Department of Afro-American Studies, he was understandably concerned.”

6 Wikipedia, “Misogyny in rap music,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misogyny_in_rap_music. The authors observe that, “In a study of the images of African American women in rap music videos, three stereotypes were revealed: Jezebel, Sapphire, and Mammy/‘Baby Mama.’ In an analysis of 38 rap music videos, Emerson noticed that videos have the ideological controlling image of the hypersexual ‘Jezebel’ as well as images of agency, independence, strength, and autonomy. Emerson also points out that the videos often feature reversals of the traditional focus on female bodies from the male gaze. Instead, he notes that the videos have in common ‘the construction of the male body, and particularly the black male body, as the object of Black female pleasure.’ ‘Based on these three stereotypes, the videos present African American women as greedy, dishonest sex objects, with no respect for themselves or others, including the children under their care. The women in the videos are scorned by men and exist to bring pleasure to them.’ In the genre of ‘gangsta rap,’ women but more specifically African American women, are lessened to mere objects, with their only purpose being good for sex as well as abuse, and at the end of the day are a burden to men. Misogynistic

It is noteworthy that, when the New Jersey attacks took place, CNN initially failed to mention, and later played down, that the perpetrators of the latest attacks on the easily identifiable Ultra-Orthodox Jews were African American. Of course, the reason that Black anti-Semitism is soft-pedaled, excused, ignored, and even applauded, is that for too long Blacks themselves have been the object of racism. Yet history does not absolve African Americans of anti-Semitism. What we are seeing now in NYC and its environs, and increasingly across the US and Europe—especially in France—and in academia, are the lethal fruits of this slowly gestating disease.⁷

Why, then, are there so few Black professors of music theory in American universities? Is it because of a conspiracy by racist Schenkerians practicing their inherently racist analytical methodology, as Ewell would have us believe? Of course, I understand full well that Ewell only attacks Schenker as a pretext to introduce his main argument: that liberalism is a racist conspiracy to deny rights to “people of color.” He is uninterested in bringing Blacks up to “standard” so they can compete. On the contrary,

descriptions of black women in rap music is predominately dominated by their black male counterparts which might actually reflect a real problem between the tensions of gender relationships within African American communities. In Dennis Herds article, Rose (2008) states, ‘Sexism is visible, vulgar, aggressive and popular, fueled by a complex of factors including sexism in black communities that influence rappers’ attitudes and lyrics as well as the patriarchal values permeating the wider society.’”

7 This strain of African American anti-Semitism has, in the past several years, metastasized into *repurposing* legitimate disability studies in the service of an overtly anti-Semitic agenda. In Jasbir Puar’s *Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Duke, 2017), Israel is reconceived as the Satanic “colonial” state par excellence because Israeli Jews now can be demonized as “White colonizers” of the indigenous “peoples of color,” namely the Arabs. Just as White Americans shoot unarmed African Americans, Israelis “maim” innocent Palestinians, an “intersectionality” that links Gaza with Ferguson. Furthermore, through “pinkwashing,” Puar claims that Israel exploits its support of LGBT rights to conceal its crimes against the Palestinians. As Balázs Berkovits observes in “Critical Whiteness Studies and the ‘Jewish Problem,’” “the tag ‘whiteness’ is susceptible to be turned against Jews, not merely as a ‘critical’ concept, but rather in an explicitly accusatory manner, [as] is evident if one takes a look at how whiteness and racism scholars analyze the state of Israel....To be sure, in these works, the arbitrary usage of the concept of ‘whiteness’ becomes even more conspicuous than in Whiteness Studies proper, as it encompasses an increasingly diverse set of phenomena. However, this fact does not bother totalizing critics *emboldened by their academic prestige* [my emphasis].” For such critics, Israel is the apex of ‘predatory imperialism,’ ‘Jewish whiteness,’ ‘Jewish hegemony and supremacism,’ ‘Zionist racism and colonialism,’ and so on. Berkovits points out that, while “Most of the time, these interpretations are contradicting one another. Still, there is a unanimous intention of radical criticism, and total political agreement on the evaluation of Zionism, Israel, and Jews in the Middle East. A furtive look into these texts would be sufficient to conclude that whenever it comes to Israel, political criticism fully subordinates any interpretation. It is also evident that the concept of ‘Jewish whiteness’ serves that kind of criticism, by which one can comfortably detect that Jews have not only become part of the dominant majority, but also the ruling white elite or ‘caste’ exercising their domination on racist grounds, thereby forming one of the most oppressive majorities in the world.” As Puar explained in a lecture at Vassar, reported on by John-Paul Pagano, “It [Israel] controls ‘infrastructure’ so it can ‘modulate calories ... to provide a bare minimum for survival.’ And to what end? To transform the Palestinians into a population of half-fed zombies whose ‘dismantled and dismembered bodies’ can be subjected to ‘gendering,’ ‘ungendering,’ and ‘epigenetic deterioration’ through biological ‘hacking.’ This not only enables the extraction of Palestinian resources right down to their very flesh [i.e., the harvesting of their internal organs], but it nourishes the Jewish privilege conferred by the Holocaust: ‘[Israelis] need the Palestinians alive in order to keep the kind of rationalization [sic] for their victimhood and their militarized economy. I think any Jewish resident of medieval Cologne or Worms would recognize this scene for exactly what it is: In this occulted room, Puar chanted an abracadabra of quasi-religious jargon and blood libels that must have struck her audience as wondrous.” Cited from “Anti-Racism Erases Anti-Semitism,” *Tablet Magazine* (2016) www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/204990/anti-racism-erases-anti-semitism. The great danger of lending academic imprimatur to these demagogues is that it establishes the requisite ideological foundations for a second Holocaust of Israeli Jews, just as Nazi academic literature in 1920s and 1930s laid the groundwork for the (first) Holocaust.

he is claiming that those very standards are in themselves racist. African Americans have the right to embrace their own culture as precious—i.e. rap music, hip hop, etc.—and study and teach it in universities, so that the products of the “defective,” “racist” White culture—i.e., classical music—can be shunted aside.

Be that as it may, I would like to propose that genuine solutions lie elsewhere, especially by the African American Community establishing different priorities, by addressing the deficiency of background in classical music caused by few opportunities for serious training, and by the removal of systemic barriers in American society at large. As I see it, a fundamental reason for the paucity of African American women and men in the field of music theory is that few grow up in homes where classical music is profoundly valued, and therefore they lack the necessary background. To master classical performance practice on any instrument, to achieve musical literacy, and theoretical competence, one must begin intensive training when very young. Therefore, parents must provide their children with lessons and insist upon regular practice from an early age. Low socio-economic status does not preclude any racial group from doing so; poverty does not prevent setting priorities; it is not *solely* a matter of money. All four of my grandparents were poor working-class Jewish emigrants who had fled from Central and Eastern Europe to the United States and England with the clothes on their backs, who spoke heavily accented English, which they wrote phonetically to the end of their lives. Yet, my mother recalled that even during the Great Depression, when there was barely enough to eat, her parents somehow scraped together the money to buy her a cheap violin and pay for lessons! My father grew up in the poverty-stricken Jewish Ghetto in the East End of London; yet again, miraculously, a rickety old upright piano appeared and my father took lessons. As a consequence of this early grounding, both of my parents loved classical music for the rest of their lives, even though they did not become musicians themselves. Classical music was cherished not only for itself, but as the great social equalizer—as a meritocracy, and as the path to a better future for the children of immigrant parents. For my working-class grandparents, who had done hard, menial labor all of their lives, classical music was like a call from another world, divine, mysteriously exalted, pointing to a higher plane of existence than that which they had experienced and could barely imagine. I still recall them listening raptly to me playing on a rented piano when I was six years old, and saying in awed tones, “my grandson the *composer*,” as if this were something totally inconceivable, as indeed it was to people of their generation and background. At that time, they promised my parents that if I stayed with music until I turned thirteen, they would buy a certain number of keys of a new grand piano if my parents would pay for the rest. They kept that promise, and I still have that piano with the keys they paid for today. These personal experiences show that success in classical music is a matter of setting priorities, and summoning inner resources to succeed, no matter what it takes: first and foremost, young African Americans must *want* to be classical musicians, and their families must be supportive. But admittedly that is not enough. If we are to achieve true social justice in music theory, then we will be compelled to engage with the real issues. We must address African American students’ lack of foundation, especially music-theoretical, by facilitating their early training with appropriate resources, and by demolishing institutionalized racist barriers; *this* is the solution,

not blaming Schenker, his students and associates, and practitioners of Schenkerian analysis.⁸ Ashley Horne, a distinguished African American violinist, speaking of the Black composer Joseph Bologne, Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745–99), shares Schenker’s later view of classical music as a meritocracy, when he observes in the documentary on the composer’s life, “I think, Black children need to know that there was a great (Black) composer in the European style. We all need to know that. Whether the kids be Asian or Caucasian or what have you, Jewish, I don’t care. But he certainly is an important person as a composer, and an important person as a character of history, whom it is criminal to submerge beneath the waves of history.”⁹ As for Black composers, they have had to overcome unbelievable prejudice and hardships, yet there have been many talented and technically competent Black composers in the past hundred years. We can certainly listen to their music with pleasure, even if they are not “supreme geniuses” on the level of the very greatest classical composers. One of the cruelest things in Ewell’s agenda is his concomitant dismissal of the works of Black classical composers as irrelevant. They are the people who suffer the most from ideologues. That is racism.

Although we now live in an era of “alternative facts,” I believe that demagoguery and intellectual dishonesty must not go unanswered. We have seen what occurs when this happens on a massive scale, with catastrophic results in the twentieth century, and now again in our own time. I was not present when Ewell spoke at the SMT plenary session, but I heard about the standing ovation he received, which, to my mind, is just as worrying as his talk itself. The warm reception, the applause that Ewell earned there, is as outrageous and dangerous as the contents of his speech, and bespeaks the sorry state of the field of music theory generally these days. Schenkerians of the different pedagogical schools have always “decoupled” ideological claims from music theoretical approaches. Furthermore, not only did Schenker’s own ideas about politics and race evolve considerably (as I have shown), so did his analytical methodology (as Pastille, Bent, and others have amply documented). Looking back, at least two generations of Schenkerians have explored and critiqued the evolutions of both aspects. For example, what a tremendous transformation there is between Schenker’s early and later ideas about just the particular issue of organicism; the same holds true for his views of race, which also changed dramatically!¹⁰ Schenker’s critics assume that his cultural-political ideas were immutable, but in fact they were not: just as there were u-turns in the rapid developments in his analytical methodology and his readings of specific pieces, so too they occur in the ideological realm in his transformation from anti-organicist to organicist, racist to non-racist, etc.. To call attention to just one further striking example, Schenker’s perception of the United States evolved significantly in his last years. For most of his life,

8 Brandon Keith Brown’s article, “When Black Conductors Aren’t Comfortable at Concerts, Classical Music Has a Real Problem; There’s a Reason so Few Black People Go to the Symphony,” *MLevel*, February 2020, shows how much more needs to be done to eliminate racism in the world of classical music.

9 The supreme irony here is that the first important Black composer of classical music, the Chevalier de Saint Georges, was imprisoned and almost executed after the French Revolution, even though he had supported it — and the emancipation of slaves — because he had been too close to “the oppressors,” i.e., to the aristocrats of *l’ancien regime*! He had been too friendly with people like Marie Antoinette, among others. However, the Revolutionaries spared him the guillotine, perhaps because he was just enough of an “outsider” to be forgiven.

10 William Pastille, “Heinrich Schenker, Anti-Organicist,” *19th-Century Music* 8/1 (Summer, 1984), 29–36.

Schenker had held America and Americans in low esteem, as is evidenced from the quotation given above and many other comments until the later 1920s. However, after Weisse emigrated to America in 1931 and began sending Schenker reports about the enthusiastic reception of his theory there, and especially after *Five Analyses in Sketchform* was published by the David Mannes Music School in 1933 with an English translation of Schenker's introduction, the great theorist's opinion of America became decidedly more positive! Ewell assures us that Schenker would have objected to "decoupling" his philosophical, historical, political, racial, and other ideas from his music theory. But is this claim, even if true, really as self-evident as it might initially seem, since the question then becomes: *which* philosophical-historical-political ideas cannot be disassociated from which stages of music-theoretical development, given the very significant advances in both dimensions? Therefore, even Schenker himself must have recognized, especially late in his career, not only the possibility, but the absolute necessity of such decoupling.

Some would like to demolish the classical canon of "Bach-to-Brahms," falsely claiming it to be exclusively a "white male" elitist meritocracy, and arguing that we should replace it with putatively egalitarian pop, hip-hop, punk, and world musics. This is a mischaracterization because the great tradition of classical music includes Black, Jewish, and female composers, and remains, as Schenker ultimately recognized, an "elitism of the hearing of the spirit, not of race." A colleague recently wondered—given the apparent current lack of focus on "the notes" of complete pieces within the Bach-to-Brahms canon (unfortunately, also a concept associated with Schenkerian analysis)—if we music theorists were not now metamorphosing into non-theorists. In other words, by divorcing ourselves from the detailed investigation of the structure of pieces within the canon—which now, because deemed elitist, becomes obsolete—we will all wake up one morning soon, just like the protagonist of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, who found himself a giant beetle. But, perhaps, just as Schenker finally saw the light, albeit late in life, we music theorists will eventually also come to our senses. In all cases, better late than never.