

Racial Prejudice: Psychology, Psychological Impact, Ways to Transcend

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Today's Agenda:

3 Questions

- ◆ How does psychology help us to understand racial prejudice? Are there concepts of human nature, models of how the brain works, studies from social psychology, that can shed light on this?
- ◆ What is the psychological impact of racial prejudice, both on the person who receives it and on the person who projects it?
- ◆ What are some ways to transcend racial prejudice?

Today's Agenda: 3 Parts

- ◆ 1. Informational presentation: discussion and slide show
- ◆ 2. Q and A with Dr. Einhorn and participants
- ◆ 3. Breakout discussions about experiences of being the receiver and the projector of racial prejudice

But First, a Story

- ◆ Stories can encode information in metaphors and layers that are nested inside the narrative; not all of them verbal.
- ◆ We can absorb these meanings effortlessly, as we listen, especially in repeated tellings and listenings
- ◆ Here is such a story, a “teaching story,” brought to us by Hoopoe Books:



“The Old
Woman
and the
Eagle,”
by Idries
Shah




The old woman took a long, hard look at the eagle and said, "Oh my, what a funny pigeon you are!"

She figured he was a pigeon, you see, because although she had never seen an eagle, she had seen lots of pigeons.

"I am not a pigeon at all," said the eagle, drawing himself up to his full height.

"The old woman took a long, hard look at the eagle and said, "Oh my, what a funny pigeon you are."





"Nonsense!" said the old woman. "I've lived for more years than you've got feathers in your wings, and I know a pigeon when I see one."

"If you're so sure that I'm a pigeon," said the eagle, "then why do you say I'm a funny pigeon?"

"¡Tonterías!" dijo la señora. "Yo he vivido por más años que plumas tienes en tus alas, y sé reconocer una paloma cuando la veo."

"Si estás tan segura de que soy una paloma", dijo el águila, "entonces ¿por qué dices que soy una paloma extraña?"







"Well, just look at your beak," said the old woman. "It's all bent. Pigeons have nice, straight beaks.

And look at those claws of yours! Pigeons don't have long claws like that.


And look at the feathers on top of your head! They are all messed up and need to be brushed down. Pigeons have nice, smooth feathers on their heads."



"Pues, mírate el pico", dijo la señora. "Está todo torcido. Las palomas tienen picos bonitos, rectos.

¡Y mírate esas garras! Las palomas no tienen uñas largas como éstas.

¡Y mira las plumas encima de tu cabeza! Están todas revueltas y necesitan ser cepilladas y alisadas. Las palomas tienen plumas bonitas y suaves en sus cabezas."




And before the eagle could
reply, she got hold of him and
carried him into the house.



She took her clippers and
trimmed his claws until
they were quite short.

“And before the eagle
could reply, she got
hold of him and
carried him into
the house”



Y antes de que el águila pudiera responder, la señora la agarró y se la llevó para adentro de la casa.

Tomó sus alicates y le cortó las uñas hasta que quedaron bien cortas.

“She took her clippers and trimmed his claws until they were quite short.”

She pulled on his beak
until it was quite straight.

And she brushed down the
lovely tuft of feathers on top of
his head until it was quite flat.



“She pulled his beak
until it was quite
straight. And she
brushed down
the lovely tuft of
feathers on top of
his head until
it was quite flat.”

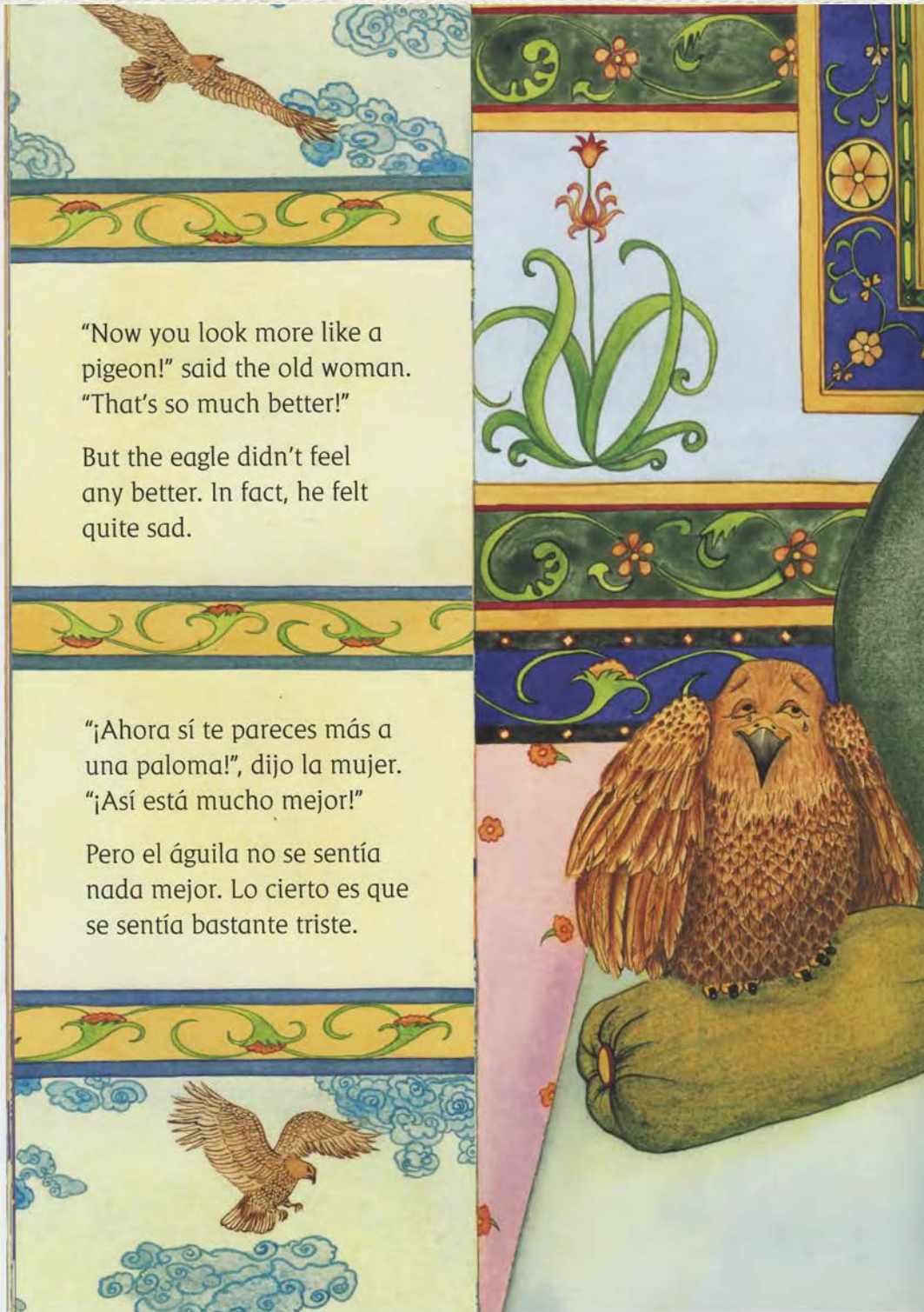
“Now you look more like a pigeon!”

“Now you look more like a pigeon!” said the old woman.
“That’s so much better!”

But the eagle didn’t feel any better. In fact, he felt quite sad.

“¡Ahora sí te pareces más a una paloma!”, dijo la mujer.
“¡Así está mucho mejor!”

Pero el águila no se sentía nada mejor. Lo cierto es que se sentía bastante triste.





Tan pronto como la señora la dejó ir,
el águila voló hasta la cima de un
árbol. Mientras estaba allí pensando
qué hacer, otra águila llegó y se posó
en la rama de al lado.

"Vaya", dijo el nuevo pájaro, "¡Tú sí
que eres un águila extraña! ¿no?"

"Bueno, por lo menos tú sabes que
soy un águila", dijo la primera águila.
"¡Menos mal!"

"¿Qué te ha pasado?"
preguntó la nueva águila.



The eagle flew away and
perched on a branch,
traumatized. Along
came another eagle.
"What happened to you?"

The eagle explained, and
his new friend helped
to restore him.

“There now...you look like an eagle again.”

“There now!” he said, “you look like an eagle again. Don’t worry about your claws, they’ll soon grow back.”

“Thank you, my friend!” said the first eagle.

“Think nothing of it,” said his new friend.



“¡Ahora sí!” dijo, “te pareces de nuevo a un águila. No te preocupes por tus uñas, pronto van a crecer otra vez.”

“¡Gracias amiga!” dijo la primera águila.

“De nada”, dijo la nueva amiga.



“But remember,
there are a lot
of silly people
in the world who
think that
pigeons are eagles,
or eagles are
pigeons, or all
sorts of other
silly things.”

And so everyone lived happily ever after.



Y así, todos vivieron felices para siempre.

“And when
they are
silly like
that, they
do very
foolish
things.”

The Old Woman *looks* at an eagle and *sees* a pigeon.

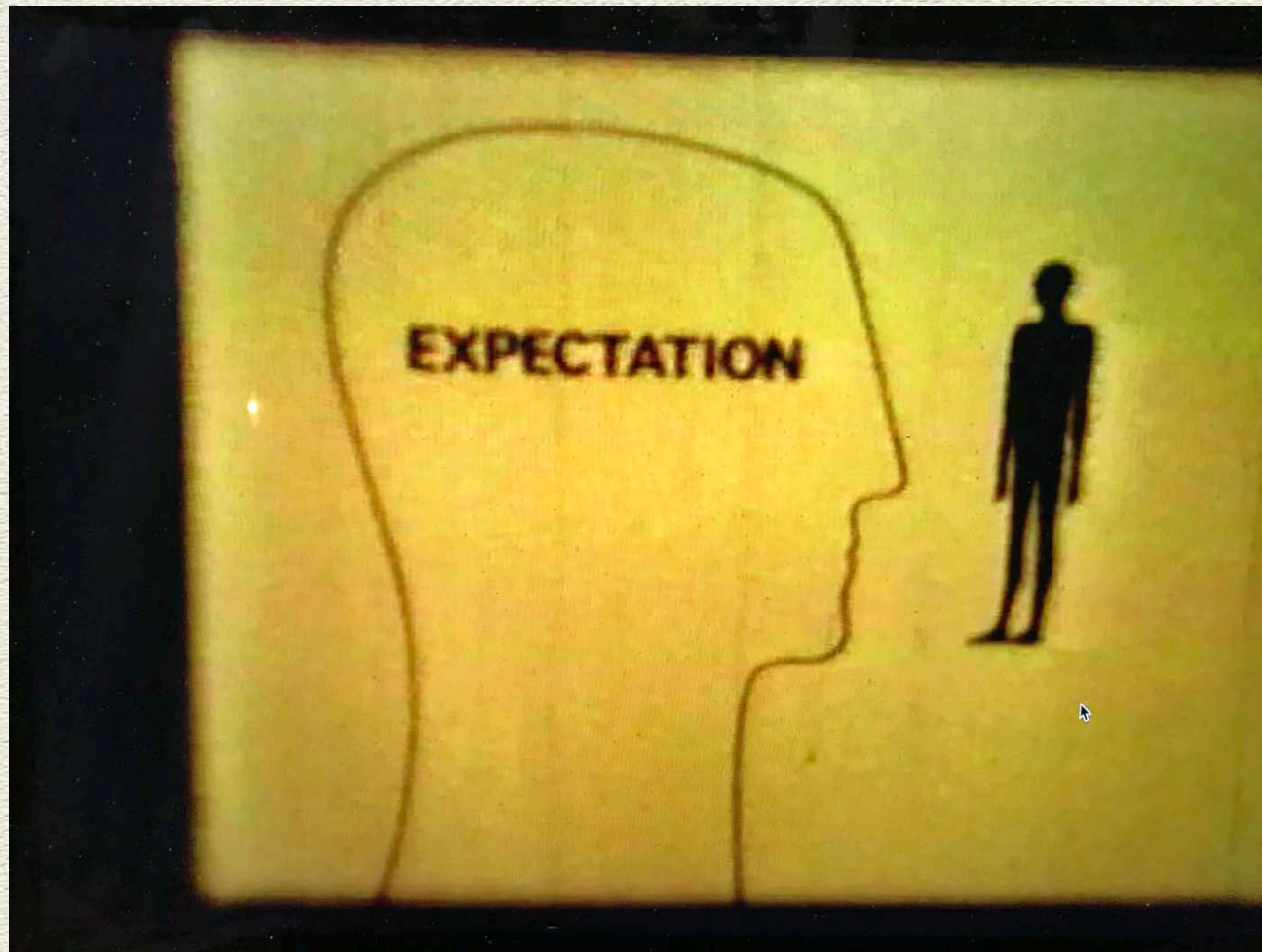
But what is involved in “seeing?”



Much of our perception is based on what cognitive psychologists and neuroscientists call “pattern matching.”

We have an pattern of expectation, deeply embedded in our brains/minds. Usually this works very efficiently, enabling us to recognize things very quickly and effortlessly.

But sometimes the perceptual pattern match gets switched on by something that is similar to, but not really, the embedded pattern

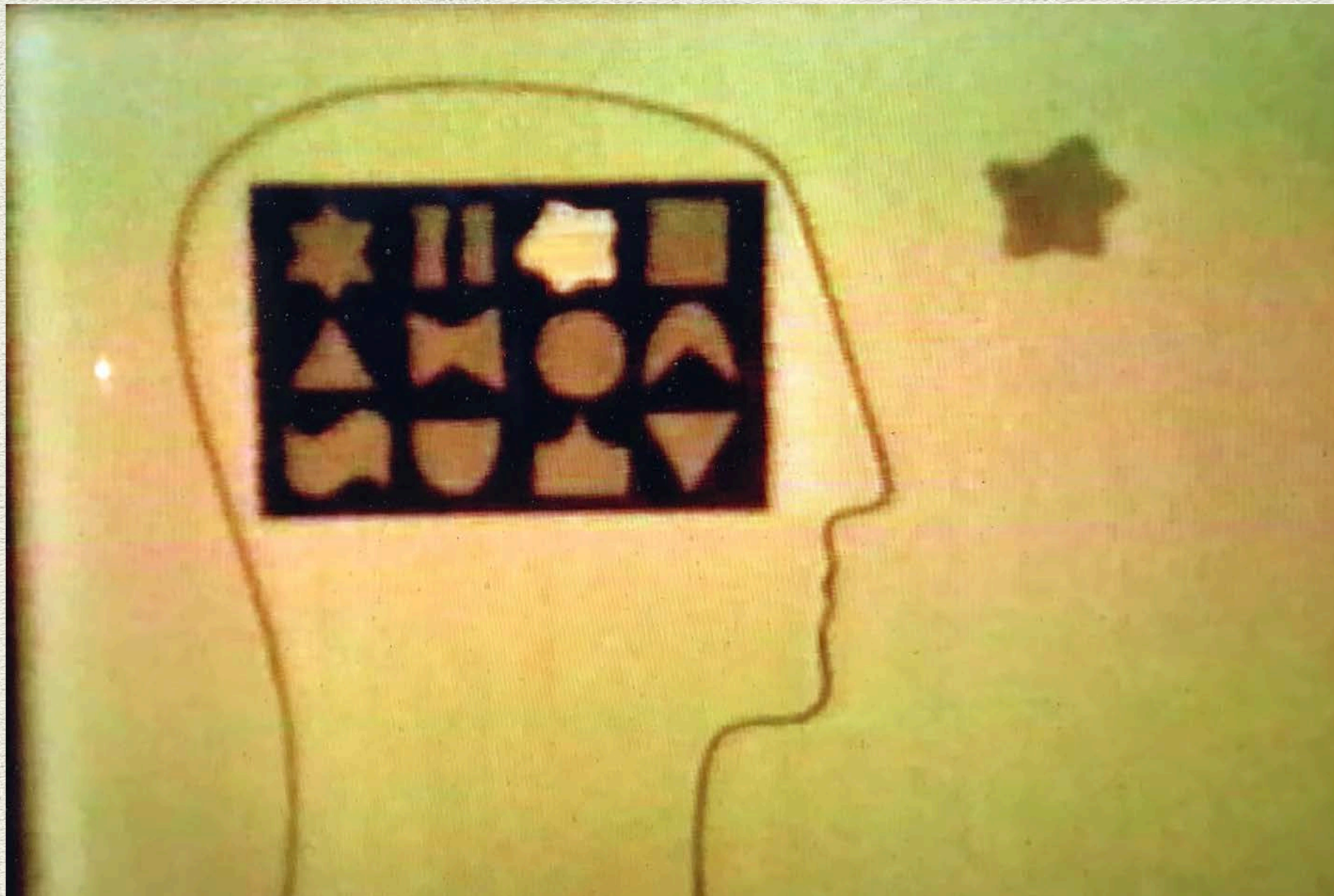


Prejudice—pre judgment—is a side-effect of how we perceive

When we encounter something that is similar enough to our embedded pattern...

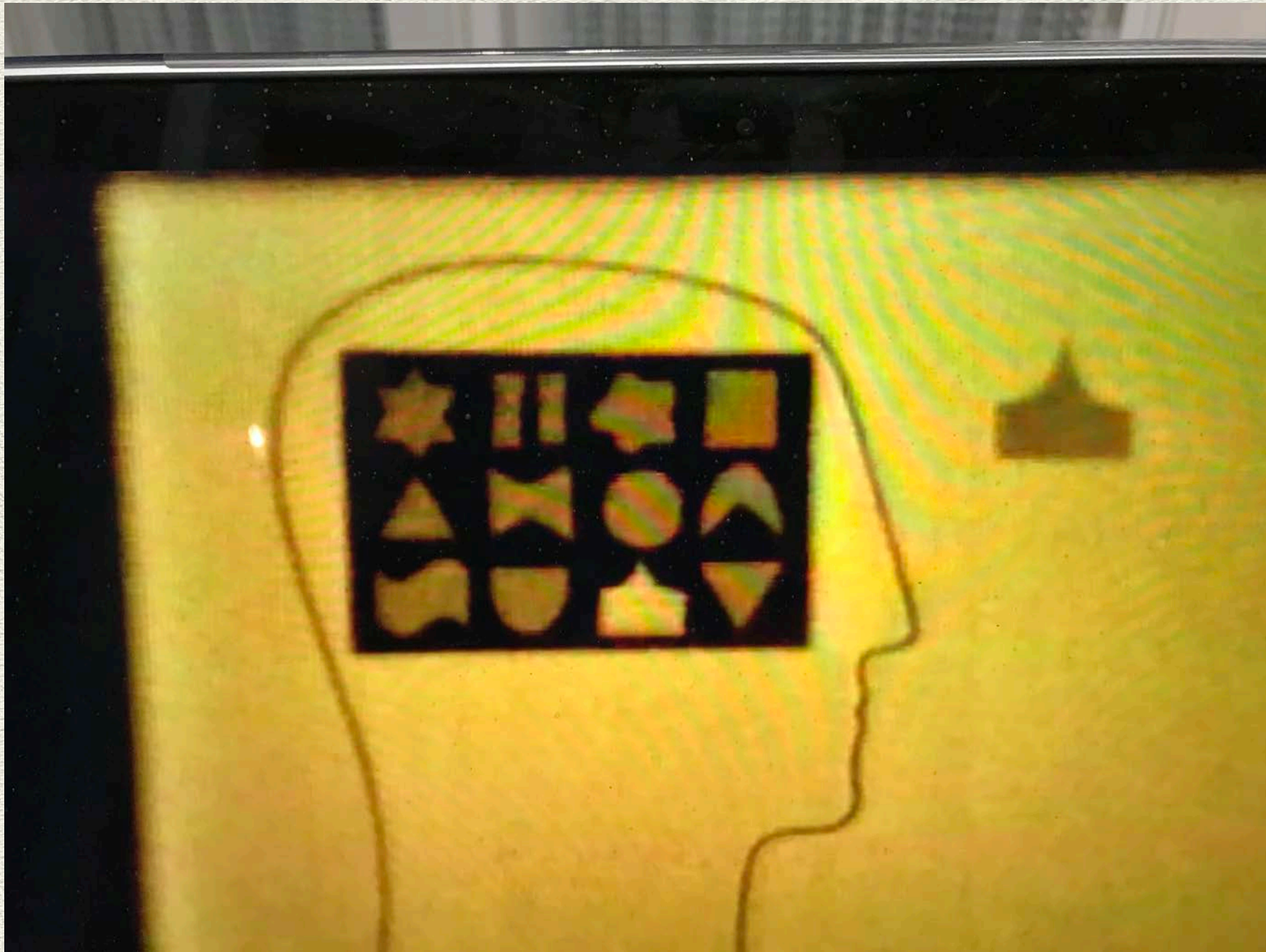
...we tend to perceive the pattern rather than to recognize that there might be a difference here

Usually, pattern matching works pretty well



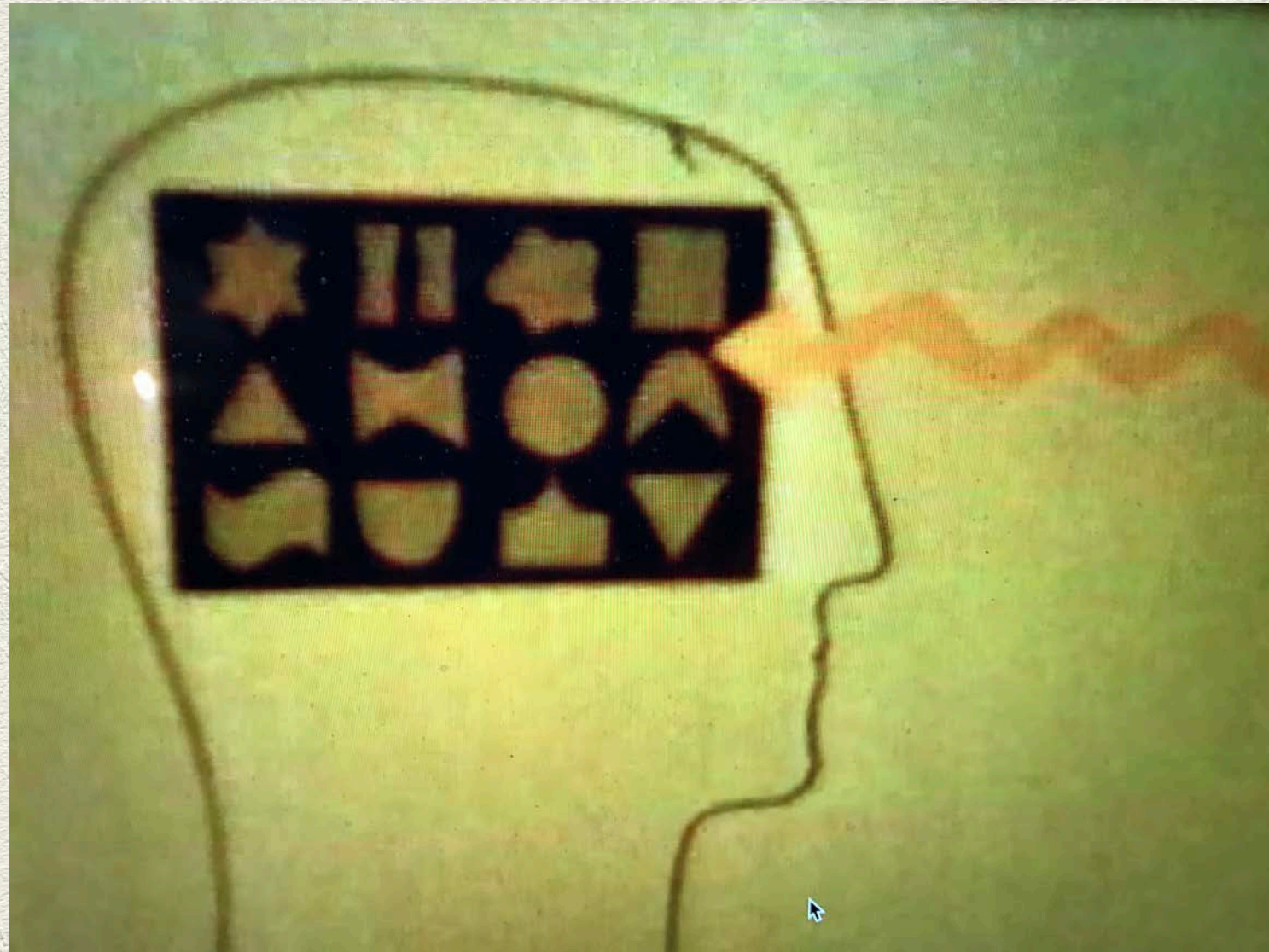
It is part of the reason we are all here!

Once we are familiar with something



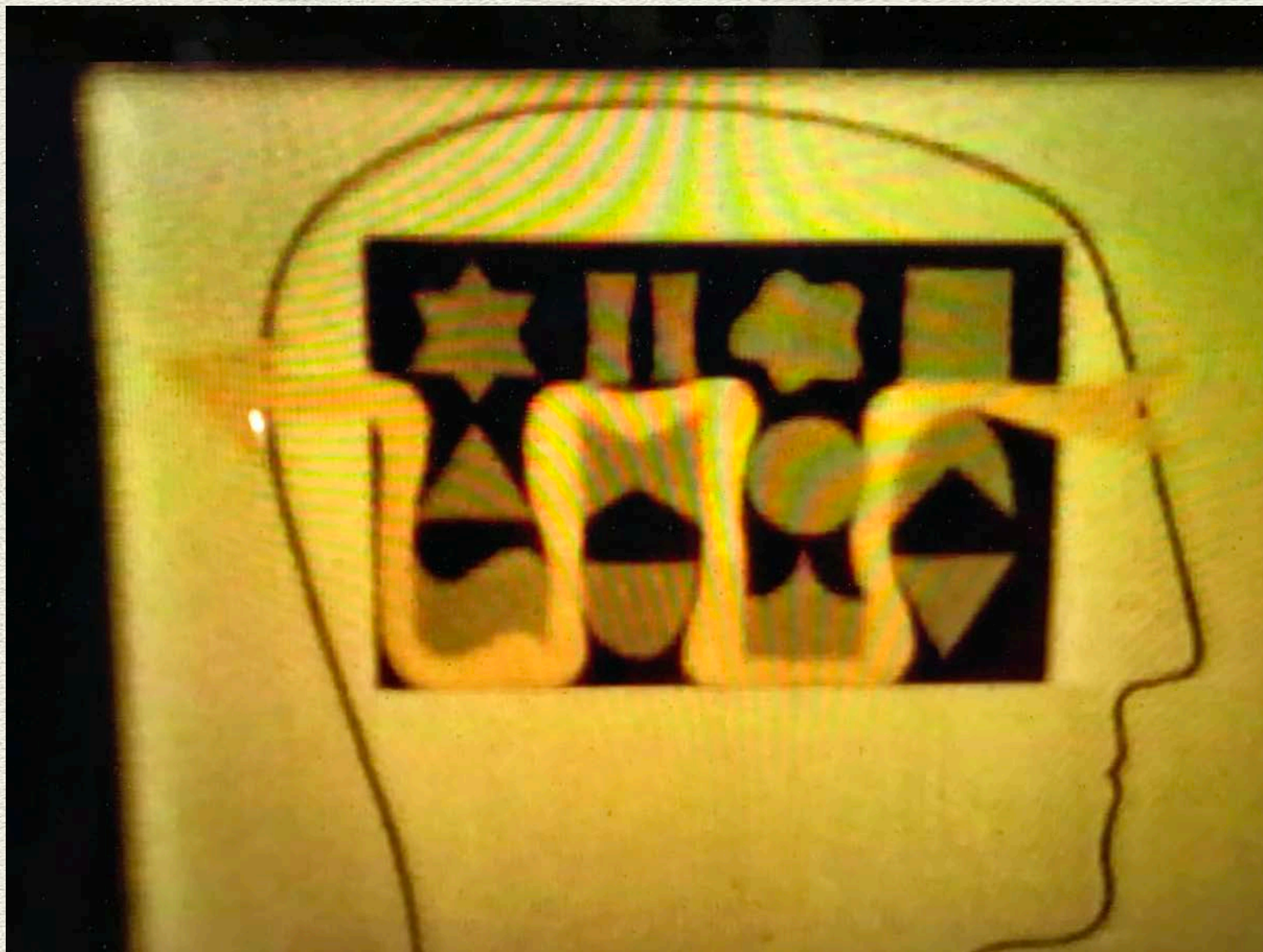
We can recognize it almost instantly,
and other things like it, with nearly no effort

But what about when we are not familiar with something?



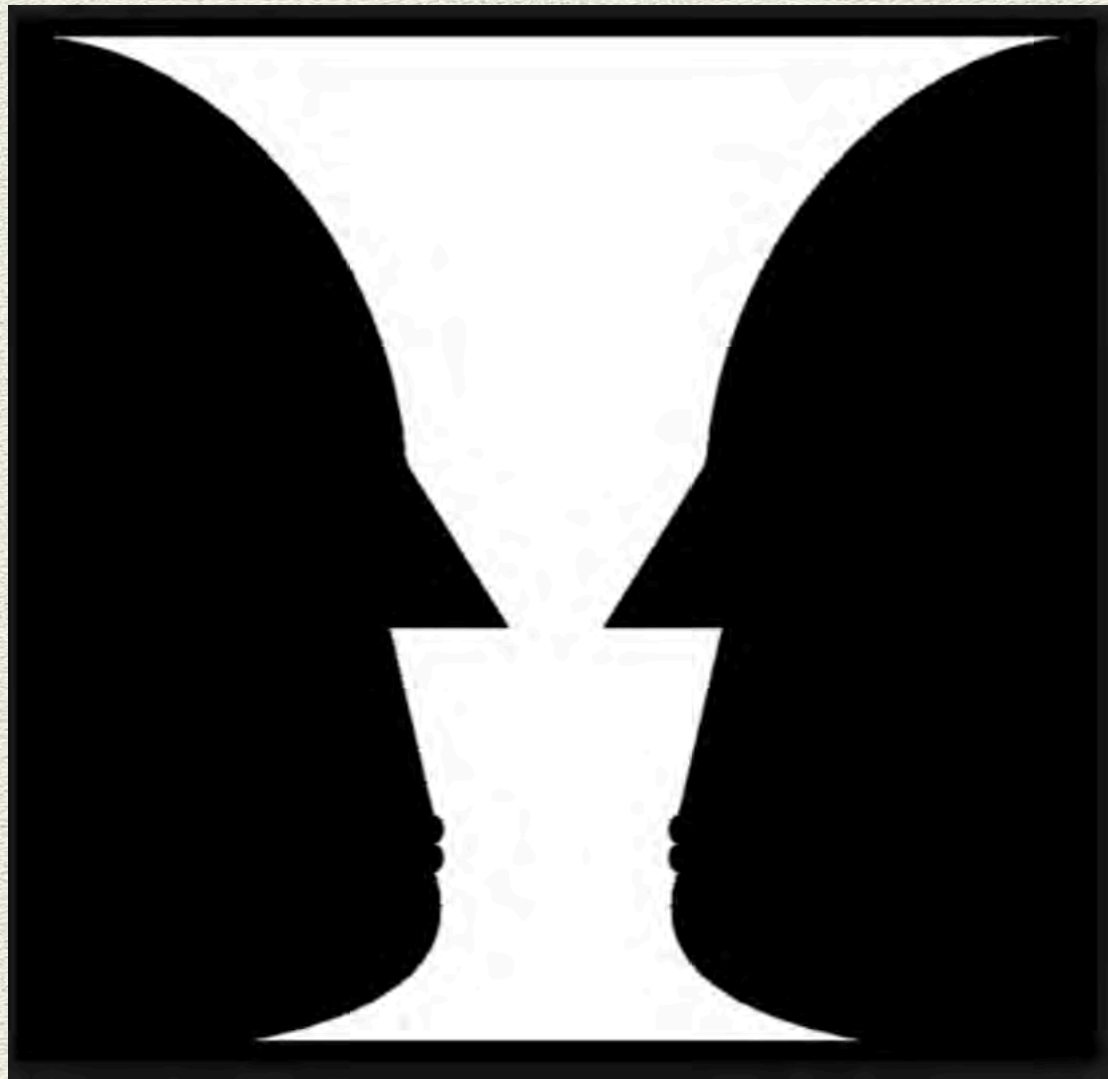
That with which we are unfamiliar can pass right through, without our noticing it

In one end and out the other!



And we have no more awareness of not having
perceived something than we do of the
unconscious patterns through which we perceive

Here are some examples of the perceptual process



The switch between faces and vase just seems to happen by itself.

Context cues can influence perception
outside of our awareness

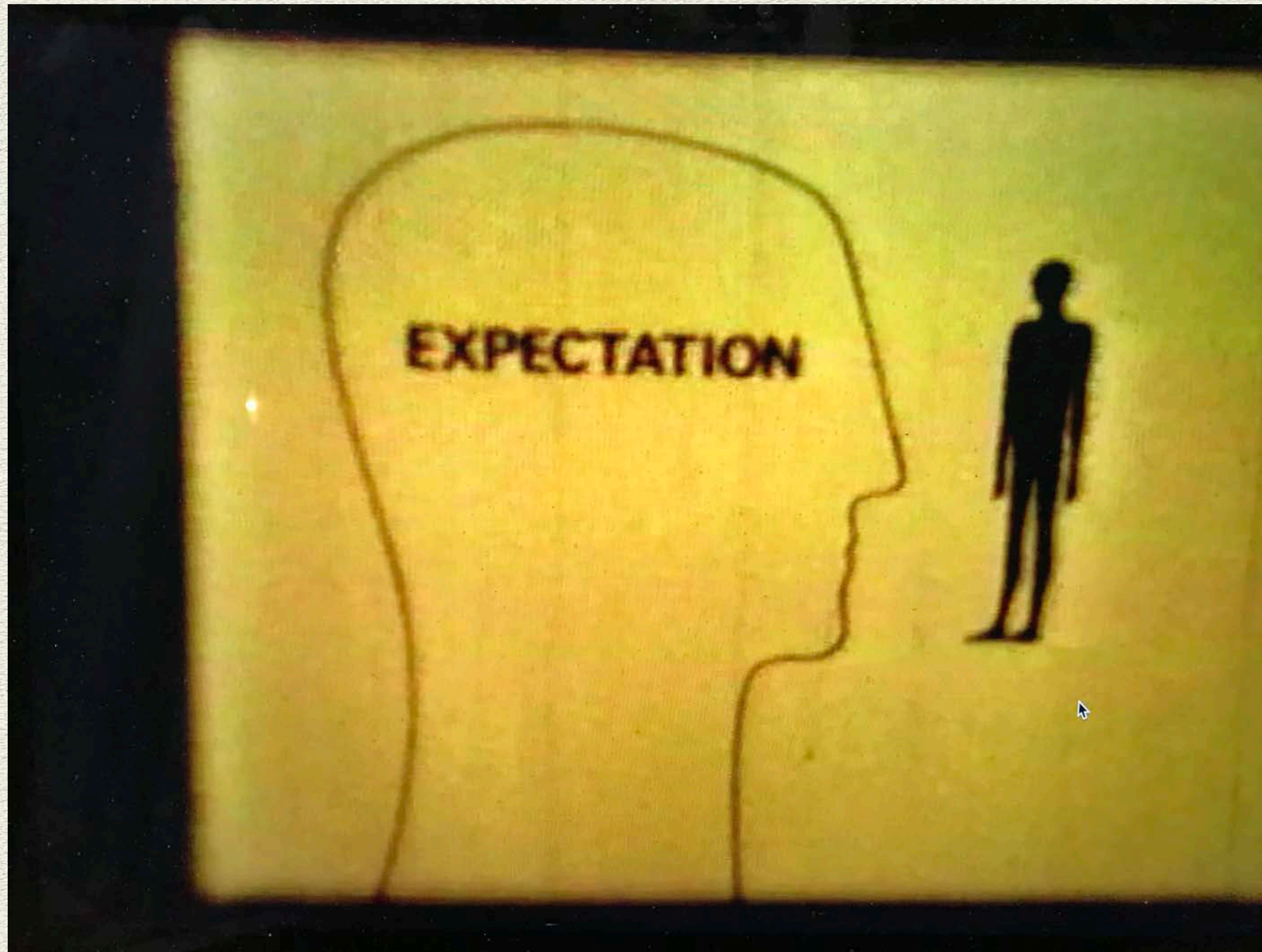


What's this?

In context, we recognize
it automatically



What's this?



We perceive what we unconsciously expect to

Pattern Formation About Race & Ethnicity Begins Early in Life

- ◆ Evidence suggests that infants as young as 6 months old perceive differences in race/ethnicity.
- ◆ In-group preferences are observed as early as the pre-school years.
- ◆ Awareness of cultural stereotypes tied to skin color and out-group prejudices begin to emerge in middle childhood.
- ◆ From: "Racial Discrimination and Well-Being During Adolescence: A Meta-analytic Review," by Benner, Wang, et al, in *American Psychologist*, V3, 7, October 2018

Case Study: “Deborah”



A victim of racial housing discrimination

Psychological Evaluation of Deborah

- ◆ Deborah, an African-American woman, was an attorney who was the victim of housing discrimination. When she applied to rent an apartment, the landlord told her it was rented. Her attorney sent a “tester” team, a white couple, after she was turned down. The landlord was happy to rent to them.

Psychological Evaluation of Deborah

- ◆ As part of the assessment of damages in Deborah's lawsuit against the landlord, her attorney requested a psychological evaluation of Deborah, to see if she had been injured psychologically by being discriminated against.
- ◆ Deborah went along very reluctantly. An intensely private person, opening up for a psychological evaluation was quite unnatural for her, and she didn't expect it to show any psychological injury.

Psychological Evaluation of Deborah

- ◆ Deborah prided herself on being tough and realistic, and regarded emotional vulnerability to social mistreatment as a form of weakness.
- ◆ Her attitude was that there are these despicable elements in society and one had to hold one's nose around them and get on with one's life.
- ◆ Sophisticated, beautiful, intelligent, ambitious and accomplished, she presented herself as unfazed by the racial discrimination, after the initial shock.

Psychological Evaluation of Deborah

- ◆ In fact, the evaluation showed that she had been injured, much more deeply than she recognized.
- ◆ Although she denied emotional impact of the episode of racial discrimination, she had experienced various distressing physical symptoms, beginning immediately after the episode of discrimination and persisting for several months at the time of evaluation.

Psychological Evaluation of Deborah

- ◆ These symptoms included frequent migraine headaches, stomach aches, diarrhea, and menstrual dysrhythmia.
- ◆ I diagnosed these physical symptoms as psychosomatic reactions to her having been the victim of housing discrimination.

Psychological Impact of Racial Discrimination

- ◆ The great psychologist George Kelly taught that, “Experience is not what happens to us, it’s what we do with what happens to us.”
- ◆ For Deborah, this housing discrimination against her was, psychologically, an attack against the integrity of herself as a human being.

Psychological Impact of Racial Discrimination

- ◆ “Racial discrimination strikes at the victim’s personhood, and if left to fester, will poison the victim’s self-esteem.” Seng, Brown, and Einhorn, “Counseling a Victim of Racial Discrimination in a Fair Housing Case,” *John Marshall Law Review*, Fall, 1992.
- ◆ To Deborah, despite her conscious attitudes and defenses, the unconscious meaning of being victim of housing discrimination was that, despite all her hard work, discipline and achievement, she would never be good enough to be treated on her own merits.

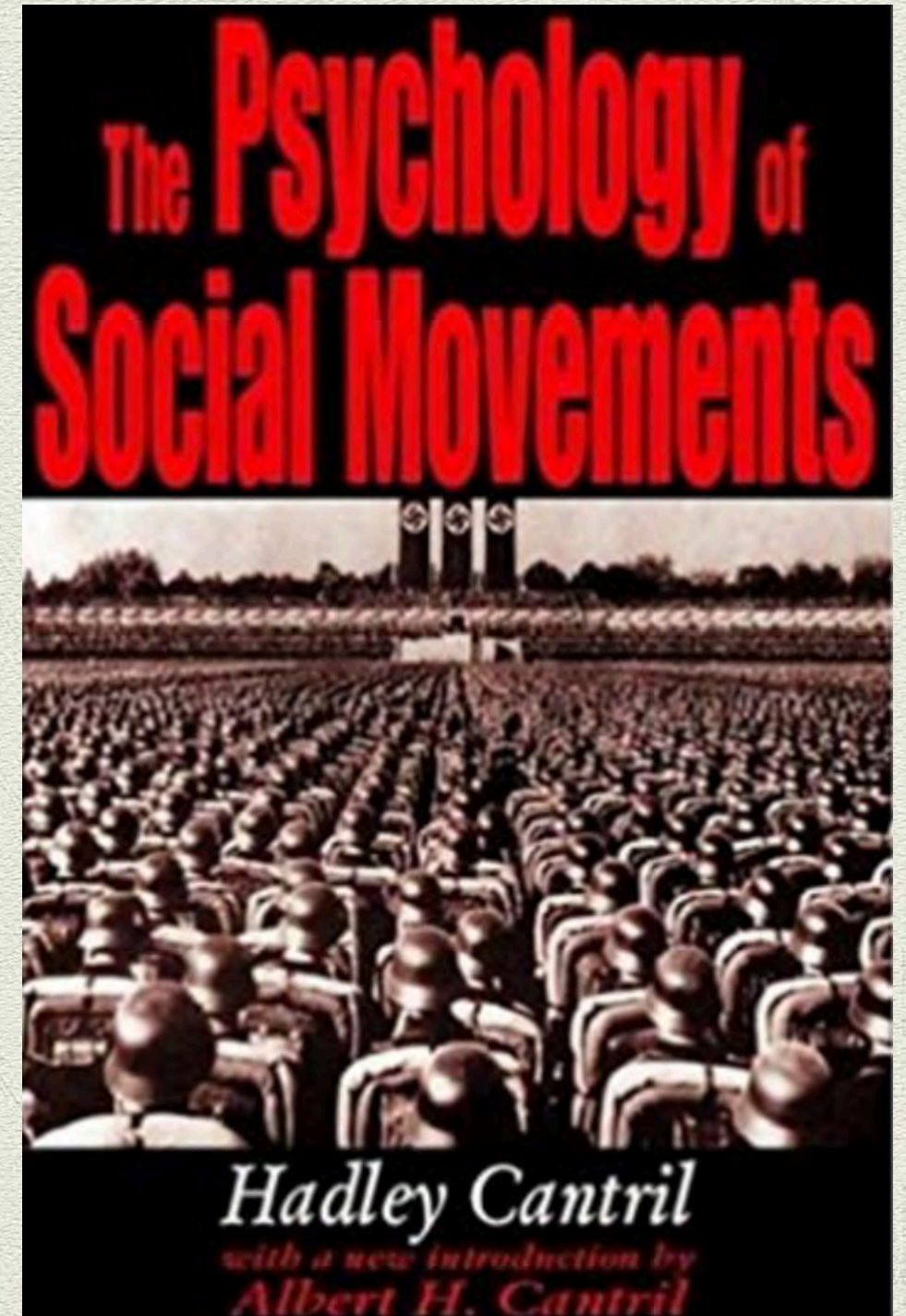


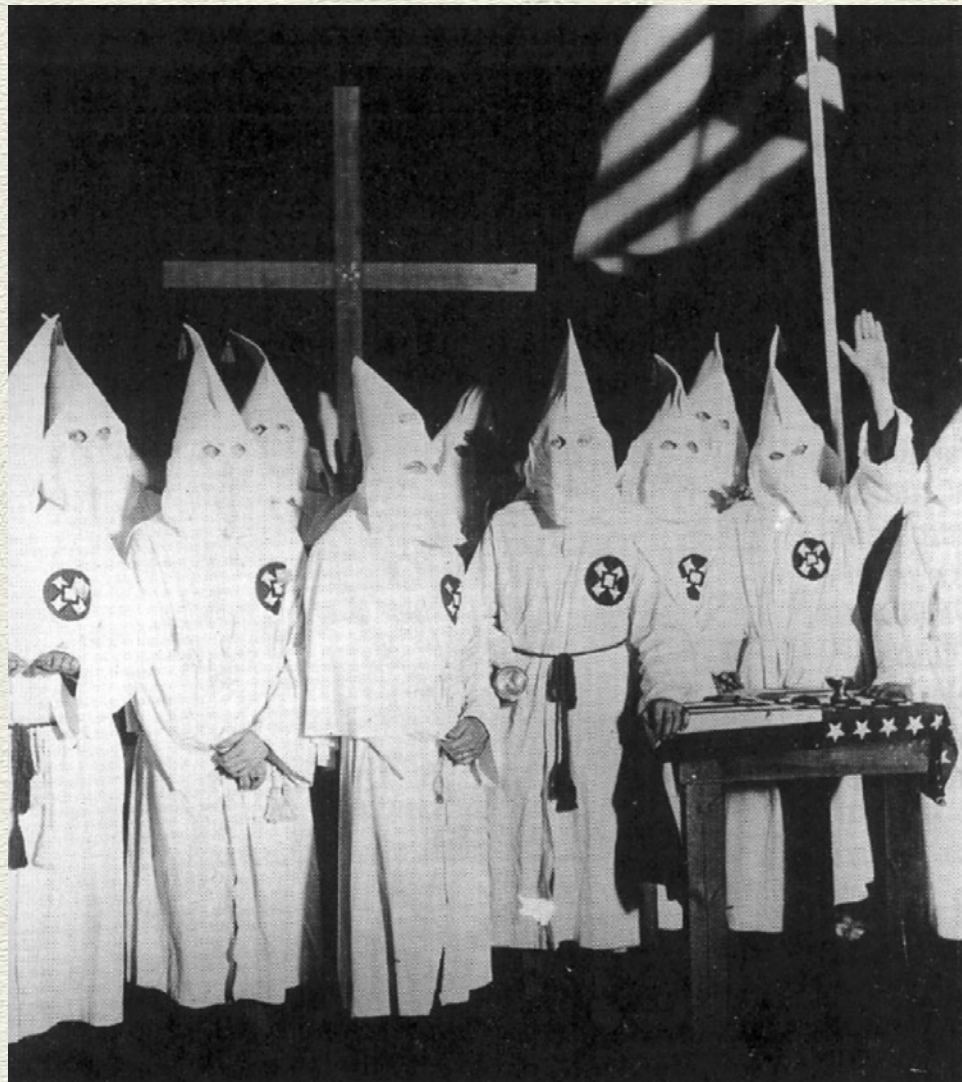
Racial prejudice
originates in
perception, but
there's more
to it than that.

Powerful social and economic forces
nurture and perpetuate it

Hadley Cantril: The Psychology of Social Movements (1941)

Among the social movements he studied were the rise of lynchings of African-Americans in the South after the Civil War, and the rise of Nazism in Germany after World War I.





In both cases, a previously established middle class was disenfranchised, or threatened with being disenfranchised

They needed to recover lost social and economic status, and identity, to find scapegoats to blame for their troubles, and keep down perceived threats.



Germany After W.W.I



- ◆ Comments from Germans about conditions after W.W.I, from “The Psychology of Social Movements:”
- ◆ “The terrible burden of the breakdown threatened to bring all economic life to a halt.”
- ◆ “A time of utter misery now set in for the family. I had to leave school. Once again we came to know hunger...”

- ◆ Comments from Germans about conditions after W.W.I, from “The Psychology of Social Movements:”
- ◆ ...An abysmal hatred flared up in me against the regime that could not provide employment for a family man who had done his duty in the war.”
- ◆ ““Morals, ethics, faith, love, loyalty, all were destroyed in the delirium of inflation.””

The South After the Civil War



A devastated society and economy

The South after the Civil War

- ◆ Cantril saw lynchings as a response to loss of status, or threat of loss of status, in a devastated society. For the individual:
- ◆ “A discrepancy arises between what he thinks his status should be and what it actually is...he is motivated to preserve his status by removing what he regards as the circumstances threatening it.”

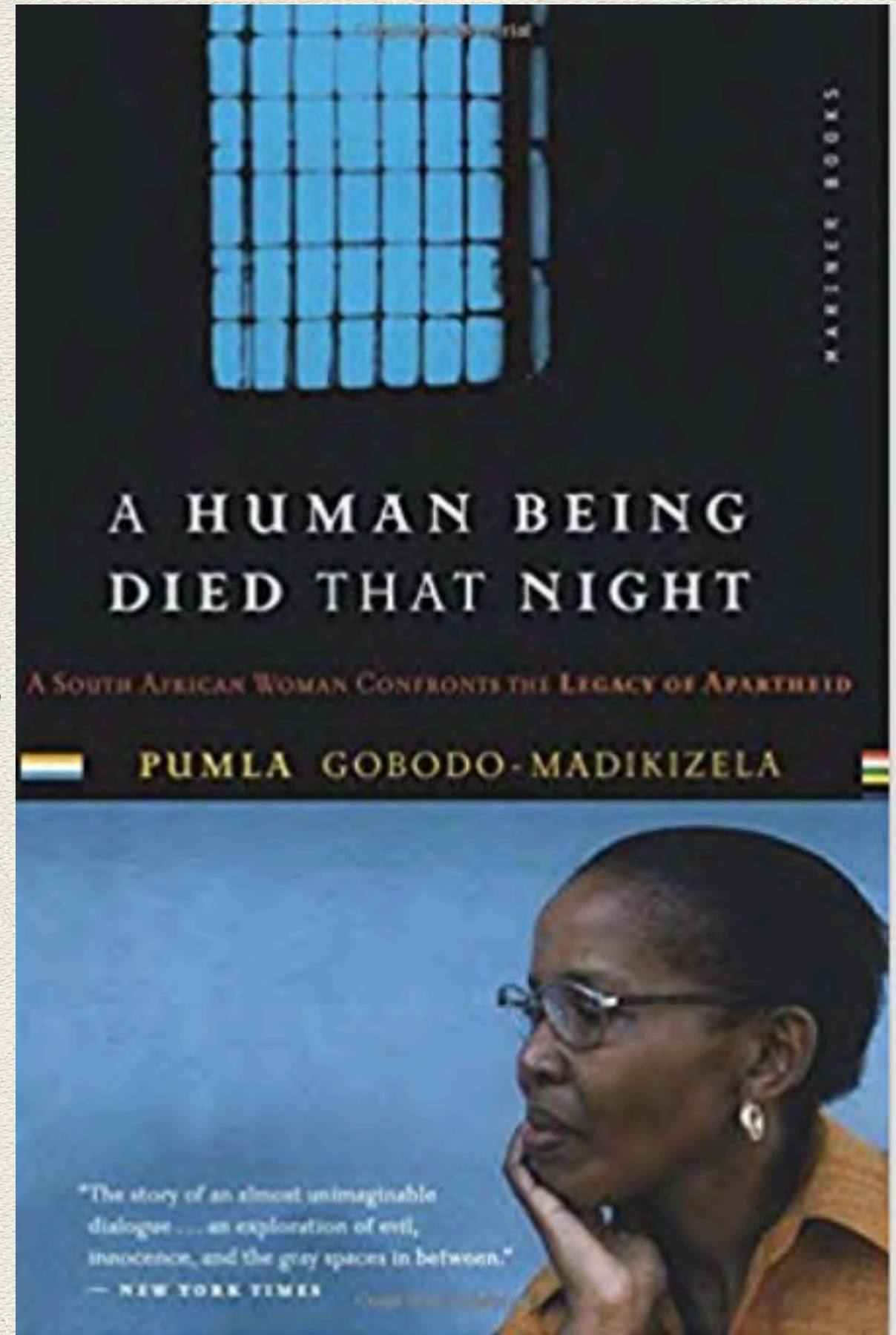
The South after the Civil War

- ◆ Loss of ethical values: “The desire of each individual to defend his status ...is coincidental with the desires of other individuals...the usual ethical values of the whole community are absent.”
- ◆ “If an outsider questions the legality or ethics of the mob’s actions, he will be told that he is not a red-blooded American, or that he doesn’t know how to handle colored people.”

Economics and Prejudice

- ◆ “Analysis of lynchings occurring during any given period clearly reveals the economic dislocations of the communities where the lynchings took place
- ◆ “The close relationship between lynchings and dollars and cents is further shown by the correlation obtained when the number of lynchings is compared to the price of cotton—the higher the price of cotton, the fewer the lynchings.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela,
South African clinical
psychologist associated
with the Truth and
Reconciliation Commission,
observes that violent
racial prejudice tends
to be inflicted by societies
that were recipients of it



Japanese troops occupy Korea



The landlord who discriminated against Deborah was Korean.



The March 1st Demonstrations, taking place in 1919, were one of the earliest displays of public resistance against Japanese occupation. Tens of thousands of Koreans were killed or injured during the protests, and many surviving activists were faced with the abysmal conditions of Seodaemun Prison. pilgrimwithapassport

March 1, 1919, public demonstrations against Japanese occupation. Tens of thousands killed or injured, many imprisoned in dreadful conditions



“Comfort women”



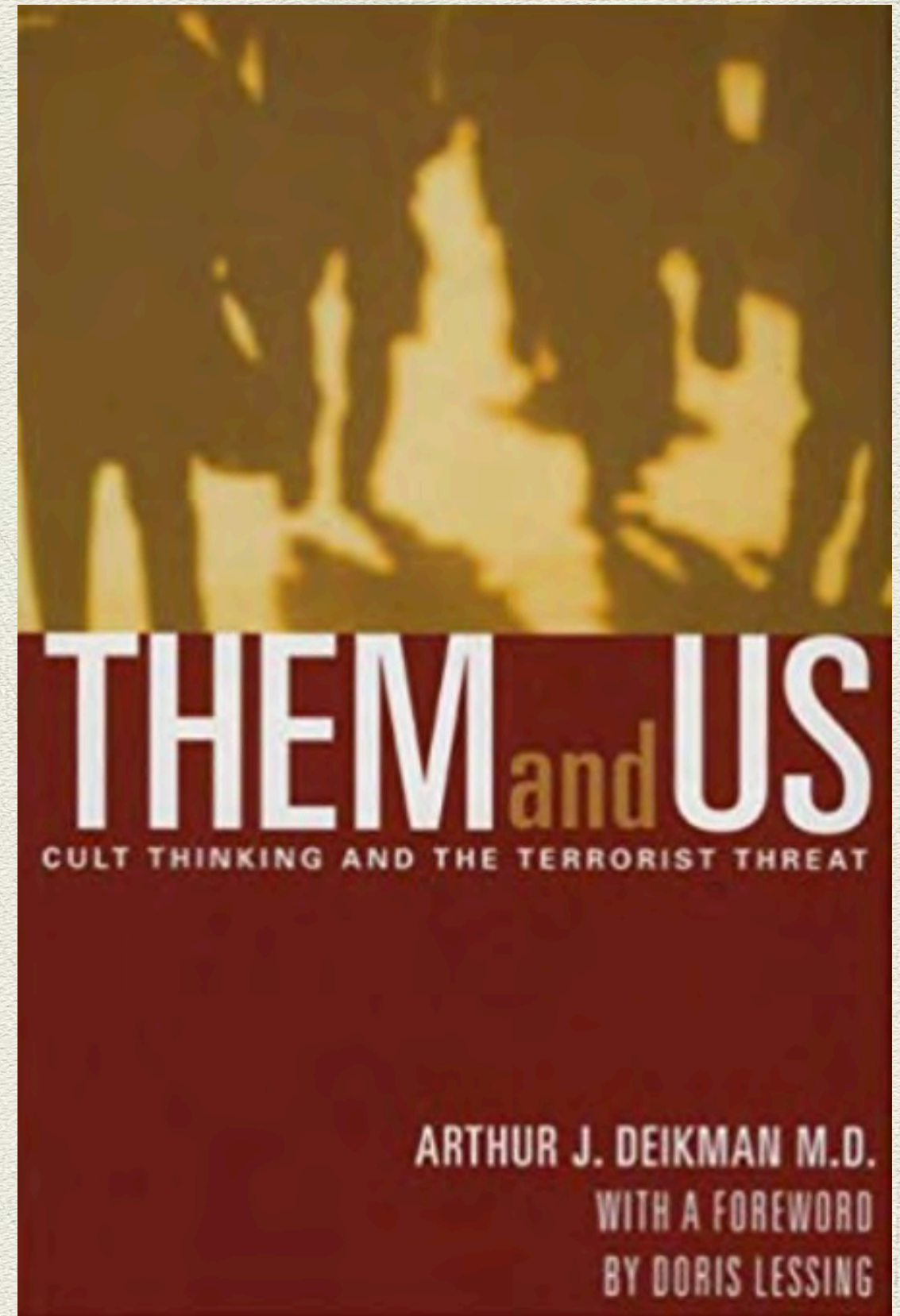
A Japanese officer is seen taunting a senior Korean. imgur

Japanese officer
taunting senior
Korean man

The “intergenerational transmission of trauma”
is passed down through the generations

Often as a set of attitudes
whose origin is forgotten or unknown

In “Them and Us:
Cult Thinking and
the Terrorist Threat,”
Arthur Deikman discusses
the seductive power
of being part of a
“special” group.



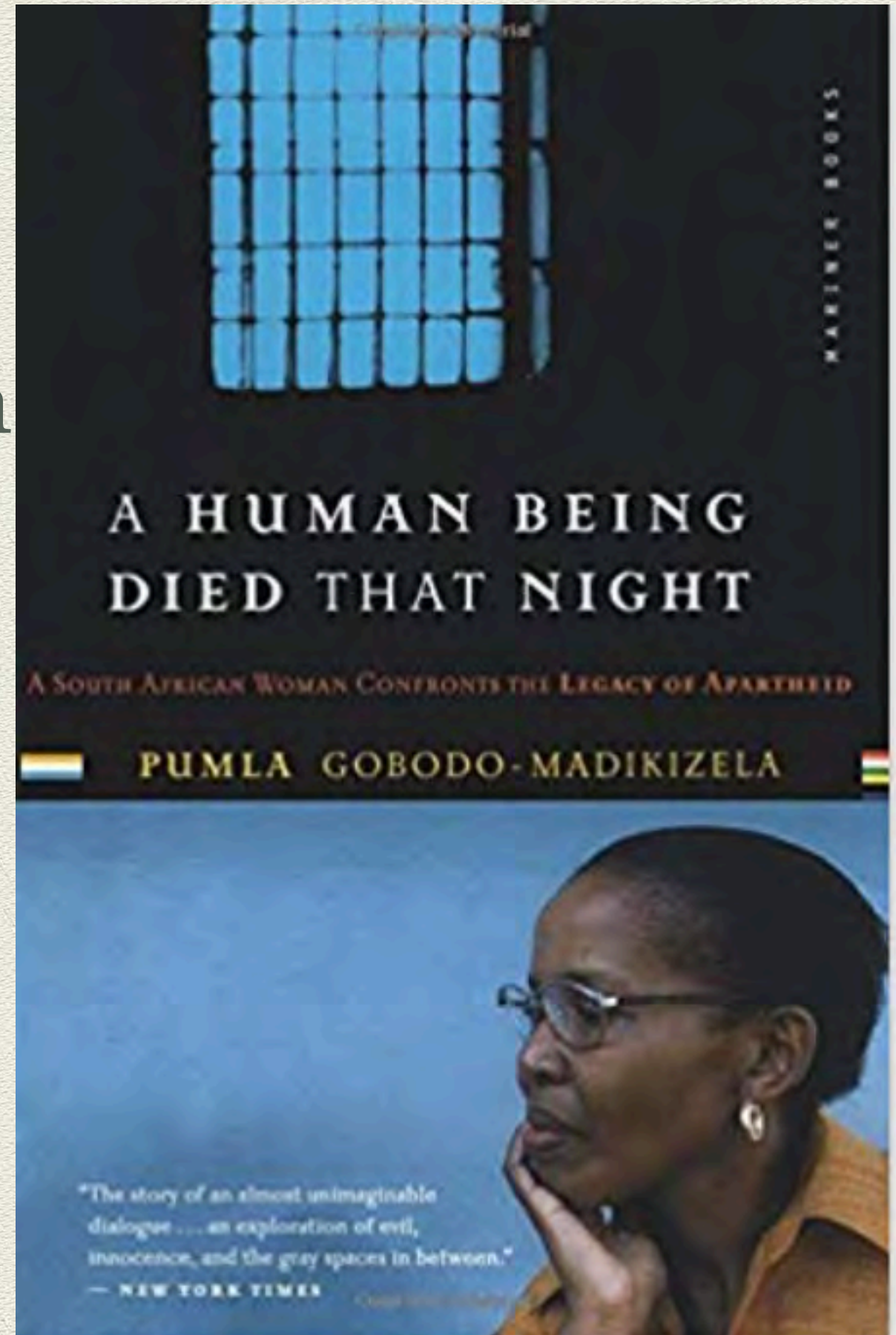
Needs for dependency,
security, identity,
belongingness, a way
of being in the world,
the feeling of being
and doing the right thing,
all come with “Them
and Us” thinking

This permits members
of one group to
dehumanize outsiders, a
prerequisite for doing
economic and physical
violence to them.



Arthur Deikman, M.D.

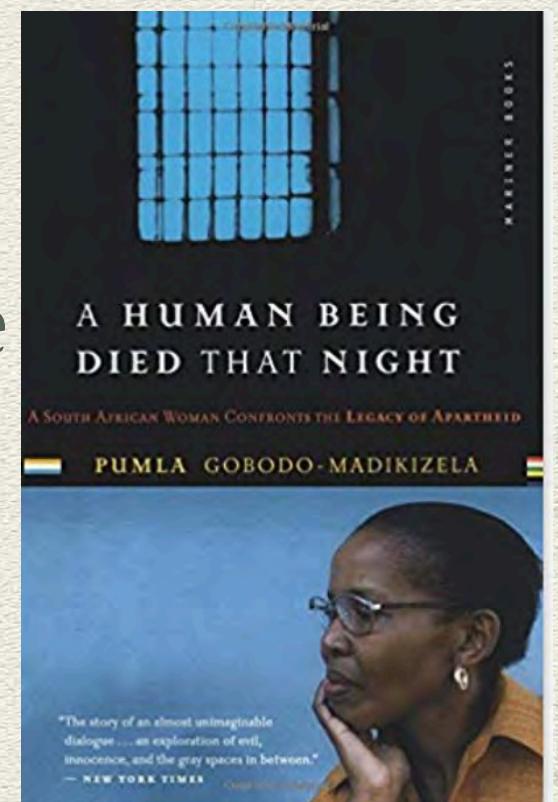
From dehumanization
to rehumanization;
lessons from the
South African Truth
and Reconciliation
Commission



The TRC was set up by Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and others, to avoid a bloodbath by reconciling different parts of the South African nation.

People who had committed crimes during the war, who testified honestly about what they had done, whose crimes were political and not personal, and who answered any questions asked of them, were, for the most part, not prosecuted.

Testimony was in open court, with victims and their families present. Perpetrators were not required to ask forgiveness; some did, some did not.

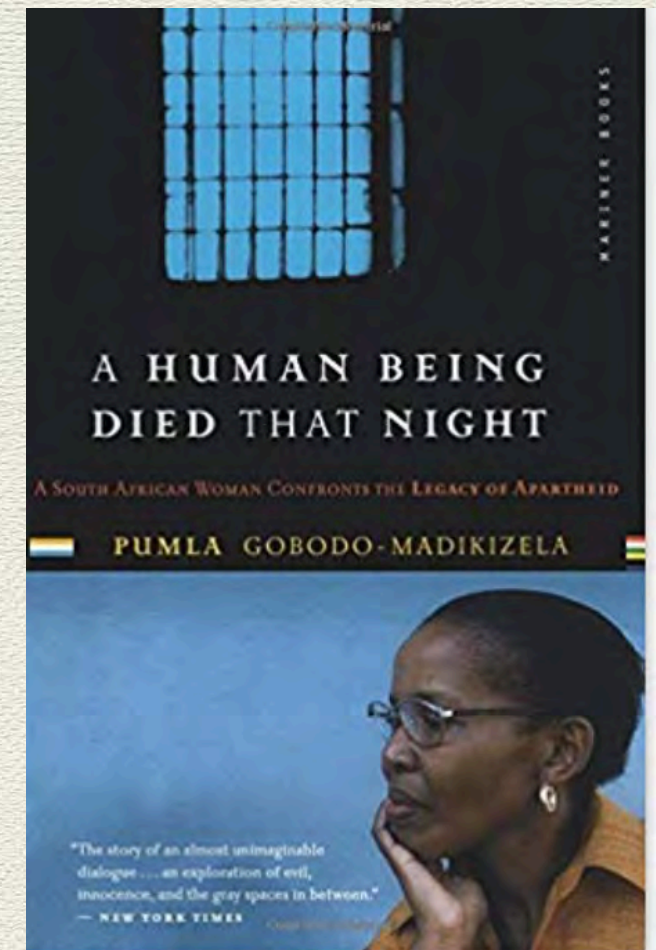


These were terrible crimes, such as kidnapping and murder.

The victim's families had often not been able to mourn them, because they didn't know what had happened.

Hearing what happened, they were able to mourn.

And, being asked for forgiveness, they were often forgiving.





Deborah won a settlement from the Korean landlord, but the entire event remained bitter for her.

What if there had been a restorative justice process, like the TRC? If the landlord had to explain, in open court, what he did and why? If he was confronted with Deborah's humanness, and the effects of his decisions? If he had the opportunity to ask for forgiveness, and she to give it?



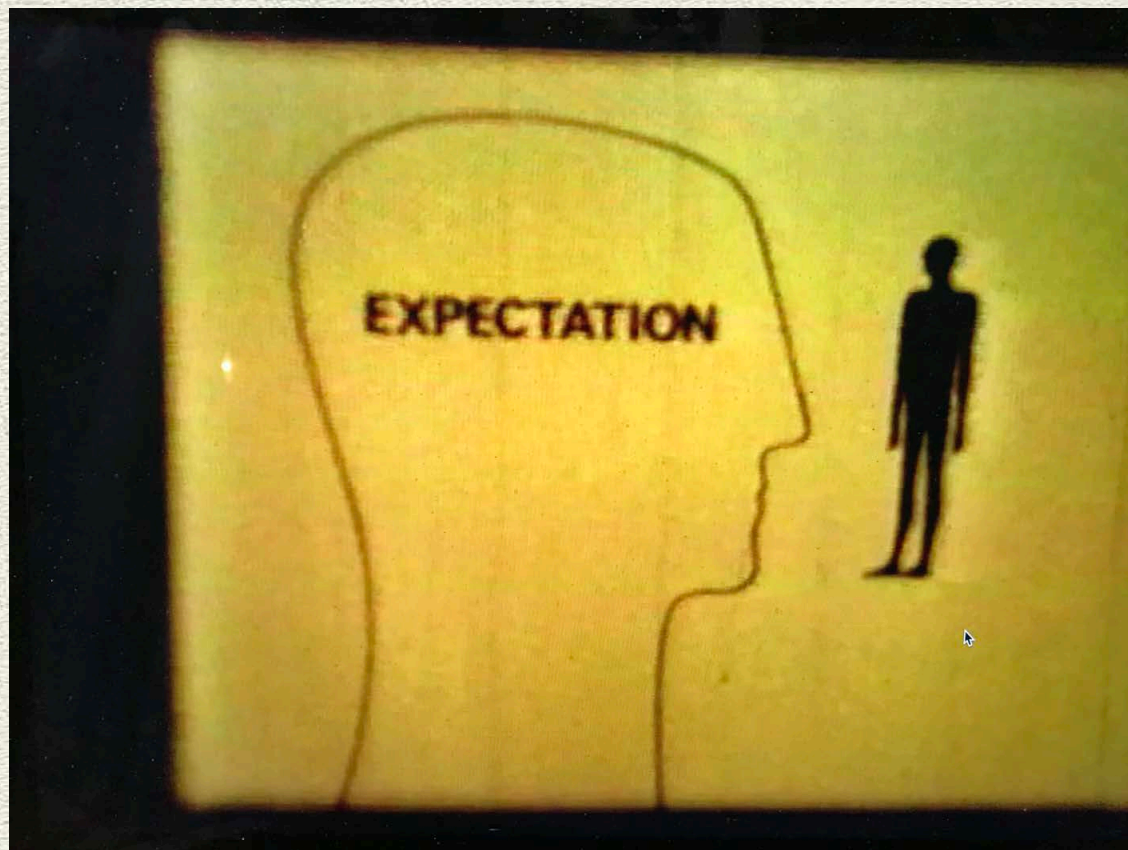
When racial discrimination crimes are settled—as they often are—there is no record of what happened, and no restorative justice.

Keeping records of settlements of racial discrimination cases, and including opportunities for restorative justice, would help societies to transcend racial prejudice

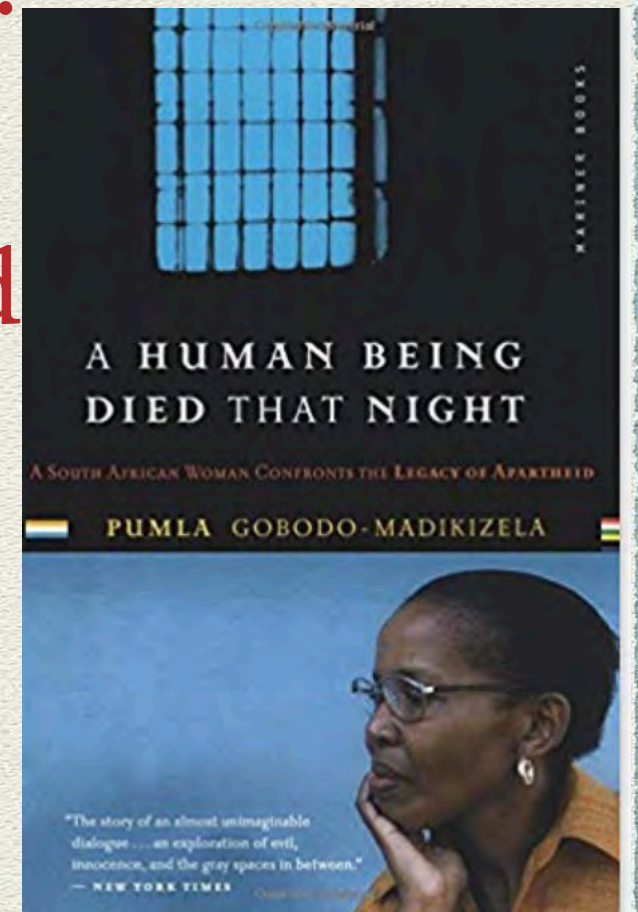


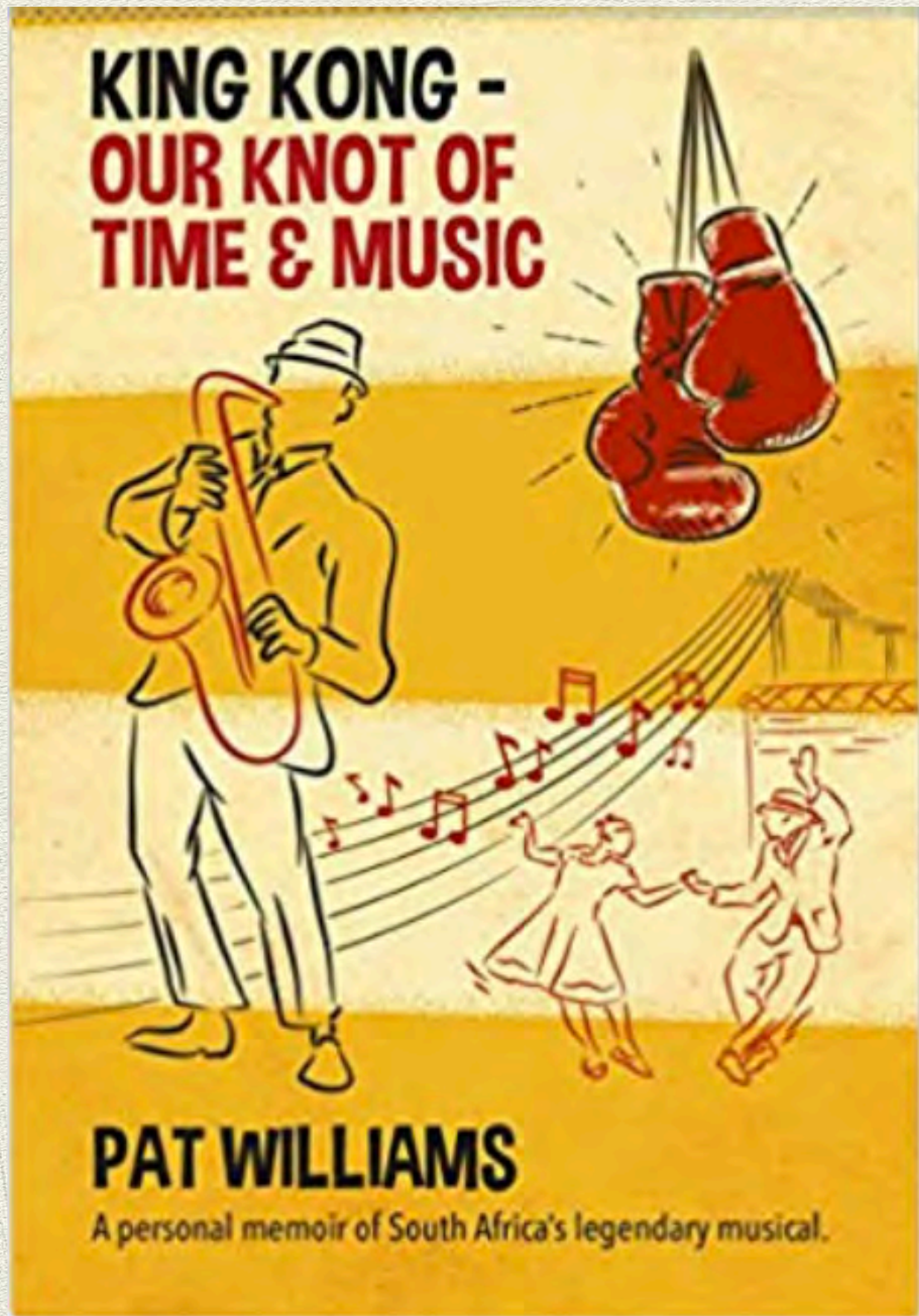
A Japanese officer is seen taunting a senior Korean. imgur

What else can we do...



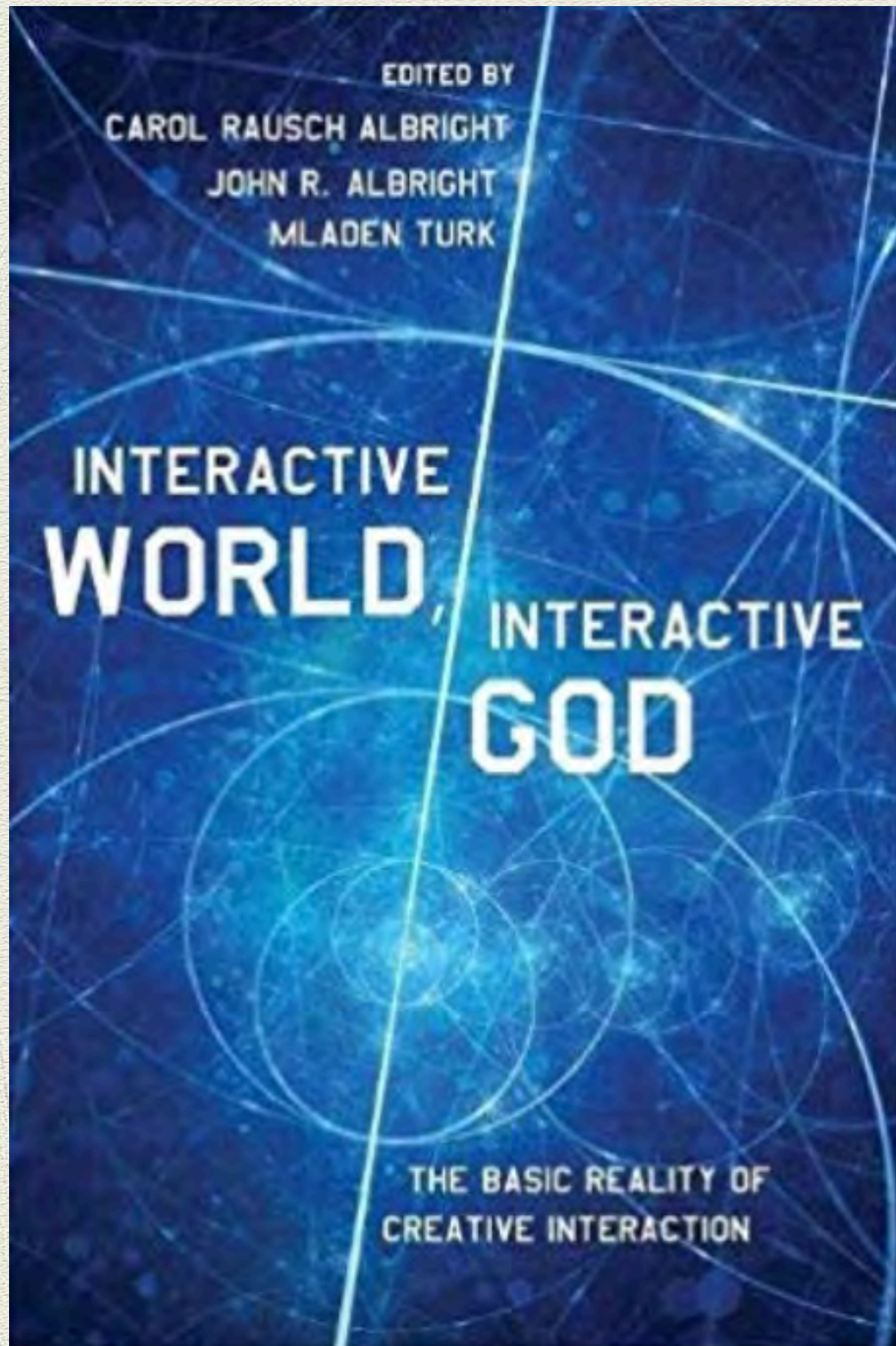
To transcend
racial
prejudice?





Tell stories featuring the successful collaboration of people across racial lines, like Pat Williams' "King Kong: Our Knot of Time & Music."

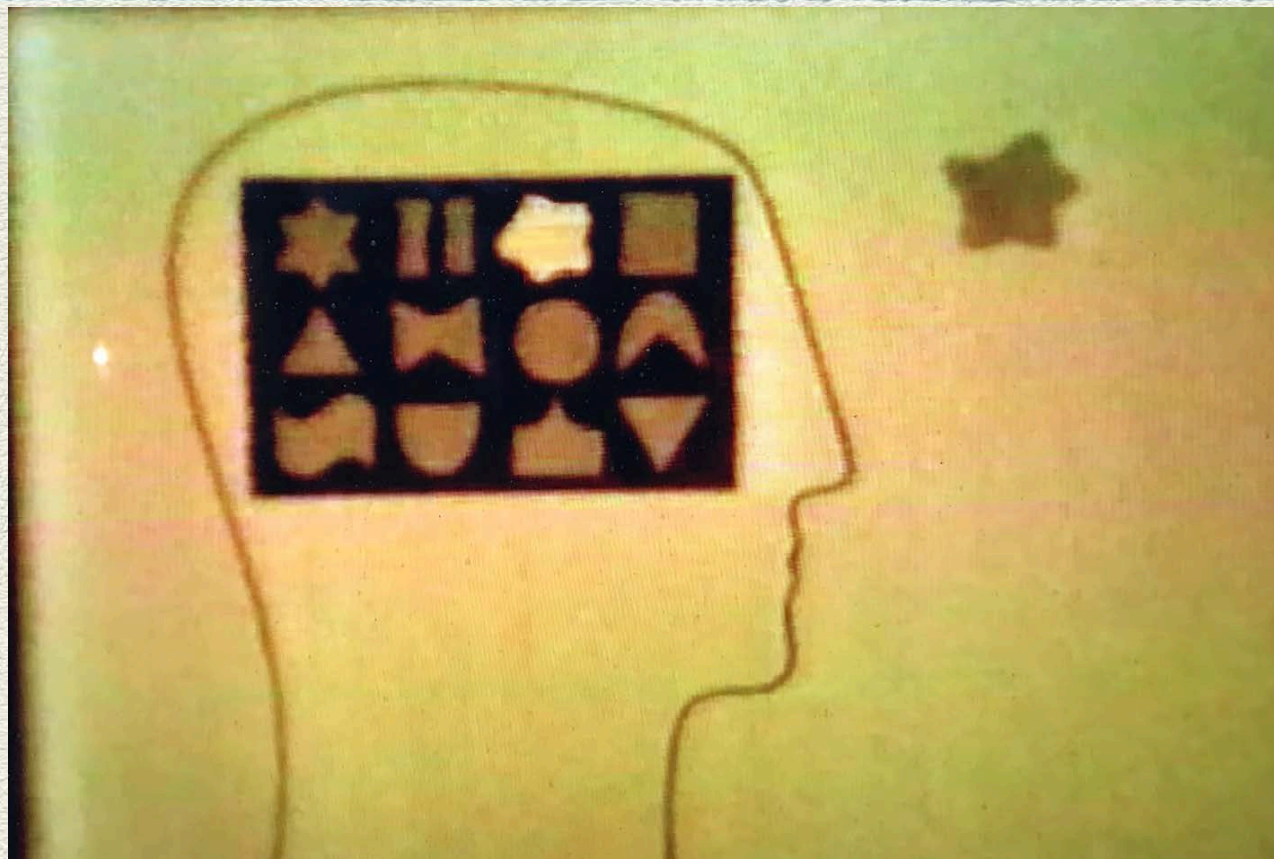
This legendary musical defied apartheid rules and launched several careers, including those of Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masakela.



Include, in religious instruction, different models of the divine-human relationship.

Not just the patriarchal and tribal ones.

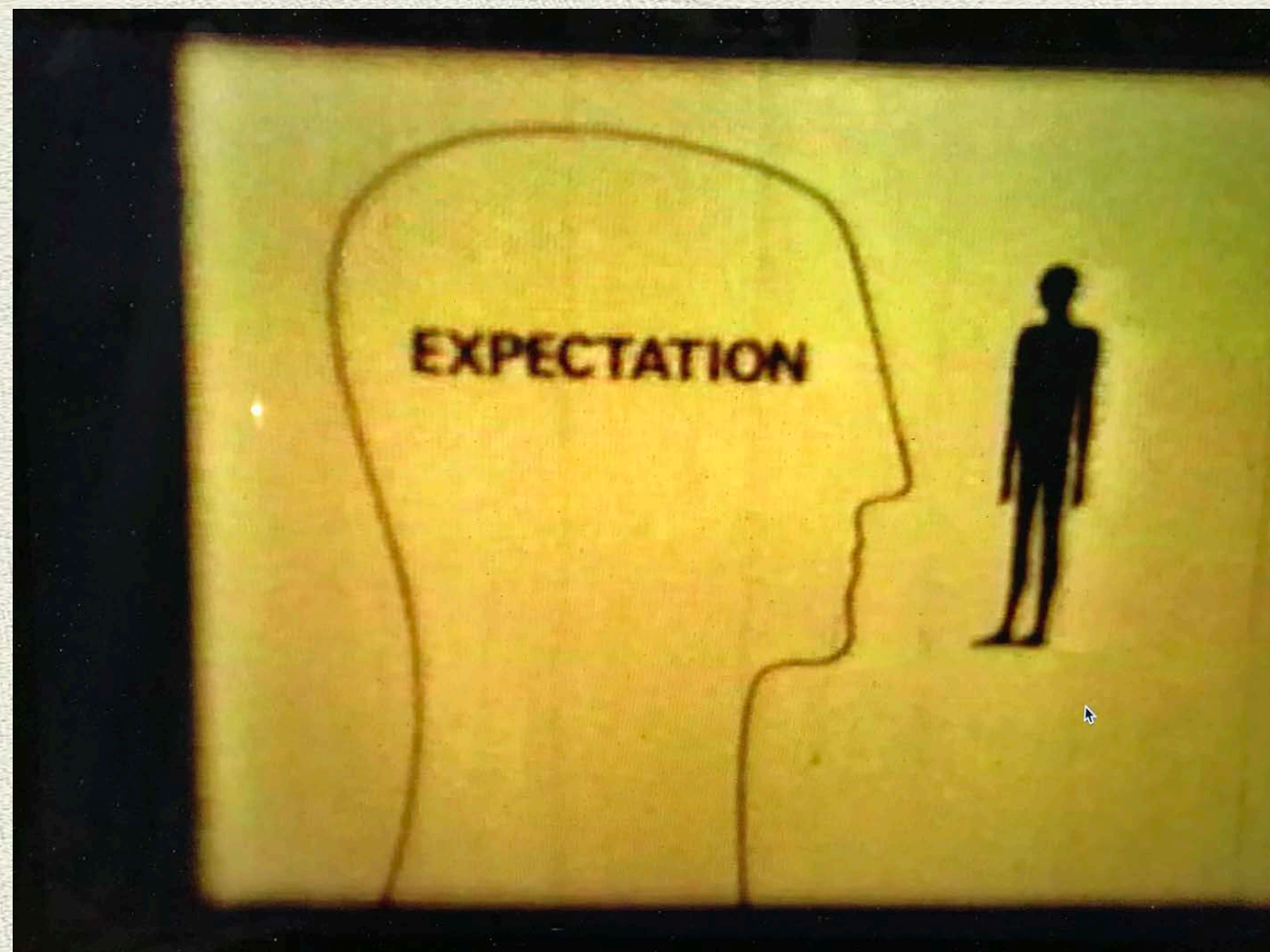
“Interactive World, Interactive God” emphasizes complexity, emergence, mutuality, in the sciences and in the divine-human relationship



Increase the understanding and teaching about how we perceive

Support the understanding that prejudice—of any kind—is a built-in side-effect of how we perceive

Which we can manage to avoid being undermined by if we are aware of it



"There now!" he said, "you look like an eagle again. Don't worry about your claws, they'll soon grow back."

"Thank you, my friend!" said the first eagle.

"Think nothing of it," said his new friend.

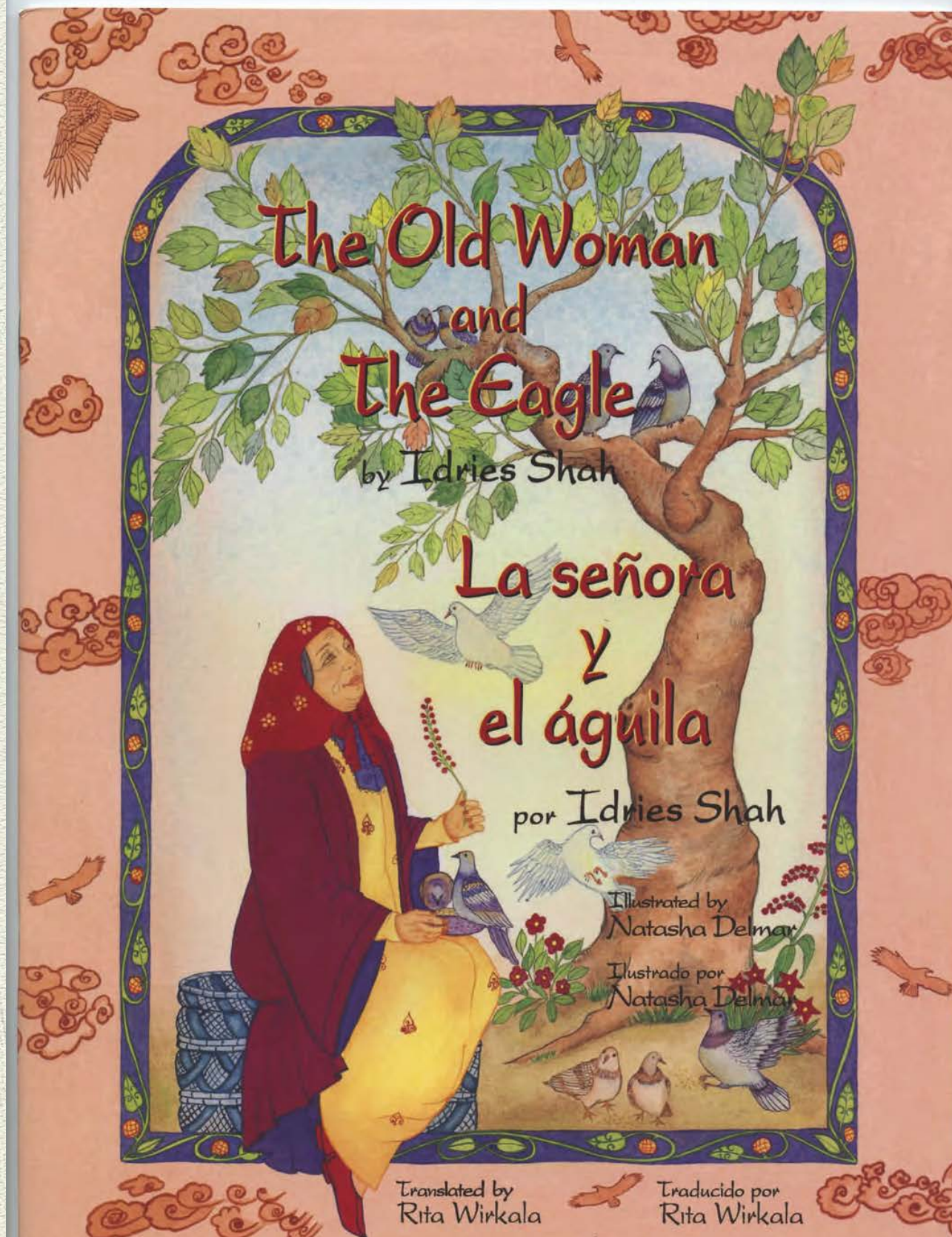


Cultivate "Networks of Sanity."

People with whom we can
be honest about what's
really happening.

Who share a commitment
to common sense

And who can support
one another when
we are the victims
of prejudice



Tell stories that illustrate
prejudice in action
in a way that is
easy for children to
accept and, later,
learn from

It is, after all, our human
nature to be prejudiced

**And our human potential
to rise above it.**

Thank You!

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Q and A

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Breakout Session

In pairs or small groups, discuss times when you have been the recipient and the projector of racial prejudice



◆ References

- ◆ “A Human Being Died That Night,” Pumla Gobodo-Madikazela.
- ◆ “The Old Woman and the Eagle,” by Idries Shah, Hoopoe Books, <https://hoopoebooks.com>
- ◆ Head pictures of perception, unpublished video by Idries Shah, © Idries Shah Foundation, <https://idriesshahfoundation.org>
- ◆ “King Kong: Our Knot of Time and Music,” by Pat Williams.
- ◆ Interactive World, Interactive God, edited by Carol and John Albright and Mladen Turk, published by Cascade Books, Eugene, Oregon, 2017
- ◆ “Them and Us: Cult Thinking and the Terrorist Threat,” by Arthur Deikman.
- ◆ “The Psychology of Social Movements,” Hadley Cantril, 1941.