

Dædalus

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Inside front cover: After signing the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, President Johnson shakes hands with civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. Photograph © Bettmann/Corbis.

Police officers search African American youths in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles on March 15, 1966, following a racial flare-up. Earlier, Watts had been siezed by six days of rioting in August 1965, also the result of racial tensions. Photograph © Bettmann/Corbis.

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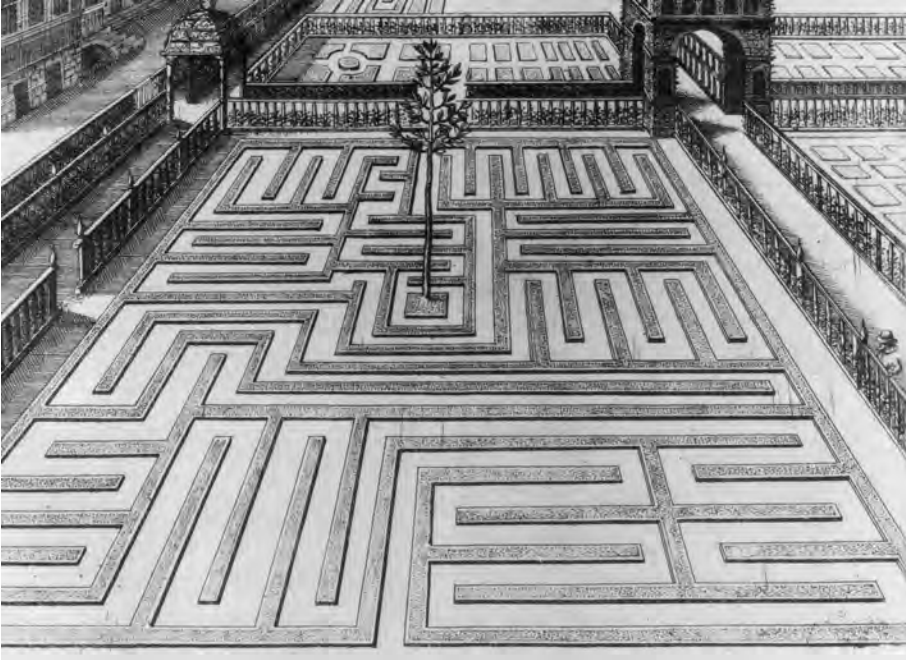
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Correction: In his essay for the Winter 2011 issue of *Dædalus* (vol. 140, no. 1, pp. 125 – 130), Clarence E. Walker wrote: “Cohn denied he was gay and actively persecuted gays during the Army-McCarthy hearings. Brock, like Cohn, was a closeted gay conservative activist who made a reputation smearing liberal politicians and black women. Brock came out of the closet after he found the conservative movement’s homophobia intolerable.” Walker has requested a correction to that text as follows: “Cohn denied he was gay. Brock, like Cohn, was a closeted right-wing gay activist. Brock came out of the closet after he found the conservative movement’s homophobia intolerable.”

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Design for the hedge maze is by Johan Vredeman de Vries, from *Hortorum viridariumque elegantes & multiplices formae: ad architectonicae artis normam affabre delineatae* (Cologne, 1615).

Dædalus was founded in 1955 and established as a quarterly in 1958. The journal's namesake was renowned in ancient Greece as an inventor, scientist, and unriddler of riddles. Its emblem, a maze seen from above, symbolizes the aspiration of its founders to "lift each of us above his cell in the labyrinth of learning in order that he may see the entire structure as if from above, where each separate part loses its comfortable separateness."

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*Controversial Blackness: The Historical
Development & Future Trajectory of
African American Studies*

© 2011 by Martha Biondi

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In this issue

Somewhere between Jim Crow & Post-Racialism: Reflections on the Racial Divide in America Today

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In 1965, when *Dædalus* published two issues on “The Negro American,” civil rights in the United States had experienced a series of triumphs and setbacks. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 extended basic citizenship rights to African Americans, and there was hope for further positive change. Yet 1965 also saw violent confrontations in Selma, Alabama, and the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles that were fueled by racial tensions. Against this backdrop of progress and retreat, the contributors to the *Dædalus* volumes of the mid-1960s considered how socioeconomic factors affected the prosperity, well-being, and social standing of African Americans. Guest editor Lawrence D. Bobo suggests that today we inhabit a similarly unsettled place: situated somewhere between the overt discrimination of Jim Crow and the aspiration of full racial equality. In his introduction, Bobo paints a broad picture of the racial terrain in America today before turning the volume over to the contributors, who take up particular questions ranging from education and family support, to racial identity and politics, to employment and immigration.

The Past & Future of American Civil Rights

by Douglas S. Massey 37

Although American society will not become race-blind anytime soon, the meaning of race is changing, and processes of racial formation now are quite different than those prevailing just two generations ago. Massey puts the present moment in historical perspective by reviewing progress toward racial equality through successive historical epochs, from the colonial era to the age of Obama. He ends by exploring the contours of racial formation in the United States today, outlining a program for a new civil rights movement in the twenty-first century.

The Declining Significance of Race: Revisited & Revised

by William Julius Wilson 55

Wilson reflects on the nearly eight hundred research studies that claim to provide an empirical test of the arguments presented in his book *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978; second edition, 1980). Wilson considers representative studies that incorrectly address his book, before discussing those publications that *correctly* address his thesis, including those that uphold, partially support, or challenge his arguments and basic claims. In the process, Wilson explores how some of these studies led him to revise or extend parts of

his basic thesis, especially as it pertains to race and interracial relations today. Wilson also takes into account changes within the African American population since he wrote *The Declining Significance of Race*. He reveals how his thoughts have changed with respect to both race- and class-based solutions for the problems faced by people of color.

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In contemporary America, racial gaps in achievement are primarily due to gaps in skills. Skill gaps emerge early, before children enter school. Families are major producers of skills, thus inequality in school performance is strongly linked to inequality in family environments. Schools do little to reduce or enlarge the skill gaps that are present when children enter school. Parenting matters, and the true measure of child advantage and disadvantage is the quality of parenting received. A growing fraction of American children across all race and ethnic groups is being raised in dysfunctional families. Investment in the early lives of children from disadvantaged families will help close achievement gaps. America currently relies too heavily on schools and adolescent remediation strategies to solve problems that start in the preschool years. Policy should prevent rather than remediate. Voluntary, culturally sensitive support for parenting is a politically and economically palatable strategy that addresses problems common to all racial and ethnic groups.

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The achievement gap between blacks and whites owes nothing to genetics. It is not solely due to discrimination or social-class differences between blacks and whites. It is due in good part to environmental differences between blacks and whites stemming from family, neighborhood, and school socialization factors that are present even for middle-class blacks. The gap is closing slowly, but it could be closed much more rapidly, with interventions both large and small. Preschool programs exist that can produce enormous differences in outcomes in school and in later life. Elementary schools where children spend much more time in contact with the school, and which include upper-middle-class experiences such as visits to museums and dramatic productions, have a major impact on poor black children's academic achievement. Simply convincing black children that their intellectual skills are under their control can have a marked impact.

Has the Supreme Court Been More a Friend or Foe to African Americans?

by *Michael J. Klarman* 101

This essay challenges the conventional wisdom that regards the Supreme Court as a heroic defender of the rights of racial minorities against majority oppression. It argues that over the course of American history, the Court, more often than not, has been a regressive force on racial issues. Klarman draws three lessons from his survey of the Court's racial jurispru-

dence: (1) the composition of the Court influences whether its racial jurisprudence is progressive or regressive; (2) the composition of the Court is, in significant part, a reflection of national politics; and (3) the Court's constitutional interpretations regarding race – just as on any other issue – broadly reflect the political and social climate of the era and thus rarely deviate far from dominant public opinion.

Affirmative Action: The U.S. Experience in Comparative Perspective

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Broadly defined, affirmative action encompasses any measure that allocates resources through a process that takes into account individual membership in underrepresented groups. The goal is to increase the proportion of individuals from those groups in positions from which they have been excluded as a result of state-sanctioned oppression in the past or societal discrimination in the present. A comparative overview of affirmative action regimes reveals that the most direct and controversial variety of affirmative action emerged as a strategy for conflict management in deeply divided societies; that the policy tends to expand in scope, either embracing additional groups, encompassing wider realms for the same groups, or both; and that in countries where the beneficiaries are numerical majorities, affirmative action programs are more extensive and their transformative purpose is unusually explicit.

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Modern American racial politics remains sharply divided over racial policy issues, with coalitions of political activists, groups, and governing institutions aligned on opposing sides. A “color-blind” policy alliance urges government to act with as little regard to race as possible. A “race-conscious” alliance argues that policies should aim to reduce material racial inequalities and that race-targeted measures are often needed. These modern racial policy alliances are strongly identified with the two major parties; as a result, they contribute to modern political polarization. In a predominantly white electorate, color-blind policies are far more popular than race-conscious ones. President Barack Obama has responded by stressing goals of national unity and foregrounding color-blind policies, while quietly choosing among them on race-conscious grounds and adopting limited race-targeted measures. It remains to be seen whether his approach can succeed in reducing material racial inequalities or immunizing him from charges of reverse racism. It also faces challenges at home and abroad for privileging American national interests above multicultural and internationalist concerns.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow?: Post-Racial & Pan-Racial Politics in the Age of Obama

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After Barack Obama's historic election, media reports overwhelmingly credited white independents with setting aside decades of racially polarized voting to send the nation's

first black president to the White House. Lee looks more closely to reveal that Obama owes a greater debt to non-white voters (partisan and nonpartisan) than to white independents. As more people of color – including immigrant and second-generation Latinos and Asian Americans – join the ranks of nonpartisan voters, the concept of *pan-racialism* can shed light on how individuals of a shared demographic category come to engage, politically, as a group. The age of Obama calls not for the celebration of a post-racial politics, but rather for a collective struggle to build a *pan-racial* politics: that is, a politics of mutual recognition, inclusion, and moral partiality between all racial and ethnic groups.

Destabilizing the American Racial Order

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Are racial disparities in the United States just as deep-rooted as they were before the 2008 presidential election, largely eliminated, or persistent but on the decline? One can easily find all of these pronouncements; rather than trying to adjudicate among them, this essay seeks to identify what is changing in the American racial order, what persists or is becoming even more entrenched, and what is likely to affect the balance between change and continuity. The authors focus on young American adults, who were raised in a distinctive racial context and who think about and practice race differently than their older counterparts. For many young Americans, racial attitudes are converging across groups and social networks are becoming more intertwined. Most important, although group-based hierarchy has not disappeared, race or ethnicity does less to predict a young adult's life chances than ever before in American history.

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Recent projections indicate that by the year 2050, racial minorities will comprise more than 50 percent of the U.S. population. That is, the United States is expected to become a “majority-minority” nation. This essay adopts a social psychological approach to consider how these dramatic demographic changes may affect both racial minorities and white Americans. Specifically, drawing from theoretical work on social identification, the essay examines the likely psychological meaning (if any) of a majority-minority nation for racial minorities' self-concepts and the resulting effects on their evaluations of members of other racial minority groups. In addition, the potential reactions of white Americans to the possibility of becoming a numerical minority are explored. Drawing on reactions to the election of Barack Obama as the first black president of the United States, the authors conclude by discussing the implications of America's shifting racial demographics for the U.S. racial hierarchy.

Hip-Hop & the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form

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Hip-hop, created by black and Latino youth in the mid-1970s on the East Coast of the United States, is now represented throughout the world. The form's core elements – rapping,

deejaying, breaking (dance), and graffiti art – now join an ever-growing and diversifying range of artistic, cultural, intellectual, political, and social practices, products, and performances. The artistic achievements of hip-hop represent a remarkable contribution to world culture; however, the “hip-hop nation” has created not just art and entertainment, but art with the vision and message of changing the world – locally, nationally, and globally. International representations of hip-hop capture and reinterpret hip-hop’s history by incorporating local as well as African American aesthetic, cultural, social, and political models. This essay examines the global movement of the hip-hop nation and its artistic incorporation into global youth culture. It considers how that movement is both a social and political process that integrates symbols of African American culture and political struggle.

Millennials & the Myth of the Post-Racial Society: Black Youth, Intra-generational Divisions & the Continuing Racial Divide in American Politics

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According to some academics and journalists, once the “millennials” dominate the political arena, many of the thorny social issues that have caused great debate and consternation among the American public will be resolved. This line of reasoning suggests that young people who embrace and personify a more inclusive society will eventually take over both policy-making and thought leadership, moving both in a more liberal direction. Yet data from the Black Youth Project and the Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement Project suggest that deep divides still exist among young people, with black youth particularly suspect of the idea of a post-racial anything. Furthermore, significant and profound differences in how young whites, blacks, and Latinos think about such topics as racism, citizenship, and gay and lesbian issues continue to define American politics today as practiced by the young – even in the age of Obama.

The Black Masculinities of Barack Obama: Some Implications for African American Men

by Alford A. Young, Jr. 206

This essay describes how the presidential campaign of Barack Obama reflected two tendencies of social conduct for African American men, colloquially summed up in African American public discourse as “keeping it real” and “keeping it proper.” The first refers to African Americans’ efforts to behave in public settings in ways that presumably indicate a strong social connection to other African Americans, or that validate black Americans over and against some notion of a non-African American standard of social conduct. The latter refers to African Americans’ efforts to adhere to presumably “mainstream” behavioral standards, whereby the humanity of black Americans is demonstrated and advanced. The essay explores how Obama exemplified both perspectives during his presidential campaign and discusses what implications his effort to balance these two, often diametrically opposed, tendencies has for forwarding new conceptions of African American masculinity.

Immigration: The New American Dilemma

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The American dilemma was once distinctively American, rooted in the particular history of the United States and in the conflict between liberal principles and exclusionary practice. The contemporary American dilemma takes a different form, arising from the challenges that emerge when international migration confronts the liberal nation-state. Solving the earlier dilemma called for extending and deepening citizenship so that it would be fully shared by all Americans. However, that more robust citizenship is only for Americans, who alone can cross U.S. borders as they please. Consequently, rights stop at the national boundary, where the admission of foreigners is controlled and restricted. Because entries are rationed, migration policies select a favored few, creating new forms of de jure inequality that separate citizens from resident aliens and distinguish among resident foreigners by virtue of their right to territorial presence. Thus, the encounter between citizens wanting to preserve their national community and newly arrived foreigners seeking to get ahead yields an inescapable social dilemma, one that America shares with other rich democracies.

Controversial Blackness: The Historical Development & Future Trajectory of African American Studies

by Martha Biondi 226

The forty-year history of African American studies has led some scholars to take stock of its roots and its future. This essay examines the field's unexpected origins in black colleges, as well as at predominantly white ones, and assesses the early debates and challenges along the road to academic incorporation. Biondi takes up such questions as: Did the field's origins in the Black Power movement jeopardize its claims to academic legitimacy? If black studies is a discipline, what is its methodology? As an outgrowth of black nationalism on campus, to what extent was black studies U.S.-centric? How did the field relate to the rise of diaspora studies and black feminism? Who takes black studies classes and to what extent does the field retain a political mission? The essay concludes that African American studies remains a vital and dynamic field as it moves into the twenty-first century.

Somewhere between Jim Crow & Post-Racialism: Reflections on the Racial Divide in America Today

Lawrence D. Bobo

In assessing the results of the Negro revolution so far, it can be concluded that Negroes have established a foothold, no more. We have written a Declaration of Independence, itself an accomplishment, but the effort to transform the words into a life experience still lies ahead.

–Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* (1968)

By the middle of the twentieth century, the color line was as well defined and as firmly entrenched as any institution in the land. After all, it was older than most institutions, including the federal government itself. More important, it informed the content and shaped the lives of those institutions and the people who lived under them.

–John Hope Franklin, *The Color Line* (1993)

This is where we are right now. It's a racial stalemate we've been stuck in for years. Contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have never been so naive as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy – particularly a candidacy as imperfect as my own.

–Barack H. Obama, “A More Perfect Union” (May 18, 2008)¹

LAWRENCE D. BOBO, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2006, is the W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of the Social Sciences at Harvard University and a founding editor of the *Du Bois Review*. His publications include *Racialized Politics: The Debate about Racism in America* (with David O. Sears and James Sidanius, 2000), *Urban Inequality: Evidence from Four Cities* (with Alice O'Connor and Chris Tilly, 2001), and *Prejudice in Politics: Group Position, Public Opinion, and the Wisconsin Treaty Rights Dispute* (with Mia Tuan, 2006).

The year 1965 marked an important inflection point in the struggle for racial justice in the United States, underscoring two fundamental points

about race in America.² First, that racial inequality and division were not only Southern problems attached to Jim Crow segregation. Second, that the nature of those inequalities and divisions was a matter not merely of formal civil status and law, but also of deeply etched economic arrangements, social and political conditions, and cultural outlooks and practices. Viewed in full, the racial divide was a challenge of truly national reach, multilayered in its complexity and depth. Therefore, the achievement of basic citizenship rights in the South was a pivotal but far from exhaustive stage of the struggle.

The positive trend of the times revolved around the achievement of voting rights. March 7, 1965, now known as Bloody Sunday, saw police and state troopers attack several hundred peaceful civil rights protestors at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. The subsequent march from Selma to Montgomery, participated in by tens of thousands, along with other protest actions, provided the pressure that finally compelled Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965. A triumphant Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and other activists attended the signing in Washington, D.C., on August 6, 1965. It was a moment of great triumph for civil rights.

The long march to freedom seemed to be at its apex, inspiring talk of an era of “Second Reconstruction.” A decade earlier, in the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court repudiated the “separate but equal” doctrine. Subsequently, a major civil rights movement victory was achieved with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbade discrimination in employment and in most public places. With voting rights now protected as well, and the federal government authorized to intervene directly to assure those rights, one

might have expected 1965 to stand as a moment of shimmering and untarnished civil rights progress. Yet the mood of optimism and triumph did not last for long.

The negative trend of the times was epitomized by deep and explosive inequalities and resentments of race smoldering in many Northern, urban ghettos. The extent to which the “race problem” was not just a Southern problem of civil rights, but a national problem of inequality woven deep into our economic and cultural fabric, would quickly be laid bare following passage of the Voting Rights Act. Scarcely five days after then-President Johnson signed the bill into law, the Los Angeles community of Watts erupted into flames. Quelling the disorder, which raged for roughly six days, required the mobilization of the National Guard and nearly fifteen thousand troops. When disorder finally subsided, thirty-four people had died, more than one thousand had been injured, well over three thousand were arrested, and approximately \$35 million in property damage had been done. Subsequent studies and reports revealed patterns of police abuse, political marginalization, intense poverty, and myriad forms of economic, housing, and social discrimination as contributing to the mix of conditions that led to the riots.

It was thus more than fitting that in 1965, *Dædalus* committed two issues to examining the conditions of “The Negro American.” The essays were wide-ranging. The topics addressed spanned questions of power, demographic change, economic conditions, politics and civil status, religion and the church, family and community dynamics, as well as group identity, racial attitudes, and the future of race relations. Scholars from most social scientific fields, including anthropology, economics, history, law,

political science, psychology, and sociology, contributed to the volumes. No single theme or message dominated these essays. Instead, the volumes wrestled with the multidimensional and complex patterns of a rapidly changing racial terrain.

Some critical observations stand out from two of those earlier essays, which have been amplified and made centerpieces of much subsequent social science scholarship. Sociologist and anthropologist St. Clair Drake drew a distinction between what he termed *primary victimization* and *indirect victimization*. Primary victimization involved overt discrimination in the labor market that imposed a job ceiling on the economic opportunities available to blacks alongside housing discrimination and segregation that relegated blacks to racially distinct urban ghettos. Indirect or secondary victimization involved the multidimensional and cumulative disadvantages resulting from primary victimization. These consequences included poorer schooling, poor health, and greater exposure to disorder and crime. In a related vein, sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan stressed the central importance of employment prospects in the wake of the civil rights victories that secured the basic citizenship rights of African Americans. Both Drake and Moynihan expressed concern about a black class structure marked by signs of a large and growing economically marginalized segment of the black community. Drake went so far as to declare, "If Negroes are not to become a permanent lumpen-proletariat within American society as a result of social forces already at work and increased automation, deliberate planning by governmental and private agencies will be necessary." Striking a similar chord, Moynihan asserted: "[T]here would also seem to be no question that opportunities for a large mass of Negro workers in the lower rang-

es of training and education have not been improving, that in many ways the circumstances of these workers relative to the white work force have grown worse." This marginalized economic status, both scholars suggested, would have ramifying effects, including weakening family structures in ways likely to worsen the challenges faced by black communities.³

If the scholarly assessments of 1965 occurred against a backdrop of powerful and transformative mass-based movement for civil rights and an inchoate sense of deep but imminent change, the backdrop for most scholarly assessments today is the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States, the rise of a potent narrative of post-racialism, and a sense of stalemate or stagnation in racial change. Many meanings or interpretations can be attached to the term *post-racial*. In its simplest and least controversial form, the term is intended merely to signal a hopeful trajectory for events and social trends, not an accomplished fact of social life. It is something toward which we as a nation still strive and remain guardedly hopeful about fully achieving. Three other meanings of post-racialism are filled with more grounds for dispute and controversy. One of these meanings attaches to the waning salience of what some have portrayed as a "black victimology" narrative. From this perspective, black complaints and grievances about inequality and discrimination are well-worn tales, at least passé if not now pointedly false assessments of the main challenges facing blacks in a world largely free of the dismal burdens of overt racial divisions and oppression.⁴

A second and no less controversial view of post-racialism takes the position that the level and pace of change in the demographic makeup and the identity choices and politics of Americans are rendering the traditional black-white

divide irrelevant. Accordingly, Americans increasingly revere mixture and hybridity and are rushing to embrace a decidedly “beige” view of themselves and what is good for the body politic. Old-fashioned racial dichotomies pale against the surge toward flexible, deracialized, and mixed ethn racial identities and outlooks.⁵

A third, and perhaps the most controversial, view of post-racialism has the most in common with the well-rehearsed rhetoric of color blindness. To wit, American society, or at least a large and steadily growing fraction of it, has genuinely moved beyond race – so much so that we as a nation are now ready to transcend the disabling racial divisions of the past. From this perspective, nothing symbolizes better the moment of transcendence than Obama’s election as president. This transcendence is said to be especially true of a younger generation, what *New Yorker* editor David Remnick has referred to as “the Joshua Generation.” More than any other, this generation is ready to cross the great river of racial identity, division, and acrimony that has for so long defined American culture and politics.

It is in this context of the first African American president of the United States and the rise to prominence of the narrative of post-racialism that a group of social scientists were asked to examine, from many different disciplinary and intellectual vantage points, changes in the racial divide since the time of the *Dædalus* issues focusing on race in 1965 and 1966.

The context today has points of great discontinuity and of great similarity to that mid-1960s inflection point. From the viewpoint of 1965, the election of Obama as the first African American president of the United States, as well as the expansion and the cultural prominence and success of the black middle class of which Obama is a member, speak to the enormous and enduring successes of the civil

rights era. Yet also from the standpoint of 1965, the persistence of deep poverty and joblessness for a large fraction of the black population, slowly changing rates of residential segregation by race, continued evidence of antiblack discrimination in many domains of life, and historically high rates of black incarceration signal a journey toward racial justice that remains, even by superficial accounting, seriously incomplete.

In order to set a context for the essays contained in this volume, I address three key questions in this introduction. The first concerns racial boundaries. In an era of widespread talk of having achieved the post-racial society, do we have real evidence that attention to and the meaning of basic race categories are fundamentally breaking down? The second set of questions concerns the extent of economic inequality along the racial divide. Has racial economic inequality narrowed to a point where we need no longer think or talk of black disadvantage? Or have the bases of race-linked economic inequality changed so much that, at the least, the dynamics of discrimination and prejudice no longer need concern us? The third question is, how have racial attitudes changed in the period since the mid-1960s *Dædalus* issues?

To foreshadow a bit, I will show that basic racial boundaries are not quickly and inevitably collapsing, though they are changing and under great pressure. Racial economic inequality is less extreme today, there is a substantial black middle class, and inequality *within* the black population itself has probably never been greater. Yet there remain large and durable patterns of black-white economic inequality as well, patterns that are not overcome or eliminated even for the middle class and that still rest to a significant degree on dis-

criminationary social processes. In addition, I maintain that we continue to witness the erosion and decline of Jim Crow racist attitudes in the United States. However, in their place has emerged a new pattern of attitudes and beliefs, variously labeled *symbolic racism*, *modern racism*, *color-blind racism*, or as I prefer it, *laissez-faire racism*. The new form of racism is a more covert, sophisticated, culture-centered, and subtle racist ideology, qualitatively less extreme and more socially permeable than Jim Crow racism with its attendant biological foundations and calls for overt discrimination. But this new racism yields a powerful influence in our culture and politics.⁶

Consider first the matter of group boundaries. The 2000 Census broke new ground by allowing individuals to mark more than one box in designating racial background. Indeed, great political pressure and tumult led to the decision to move the Census in a direction that more formally and institutionally acknowledged the presence of increasing mixture and heterogeneity in the American population with regard to racial background. Nearly seven million people exercised that option in 2000. The successful rise of Obama to the office of president, the first African American to do so, as a child of a white American mother and a black Kenyan father, has only accelerated the sense of the newfound latitude and recognition granted to those who claim more than one racial heritage.⁷

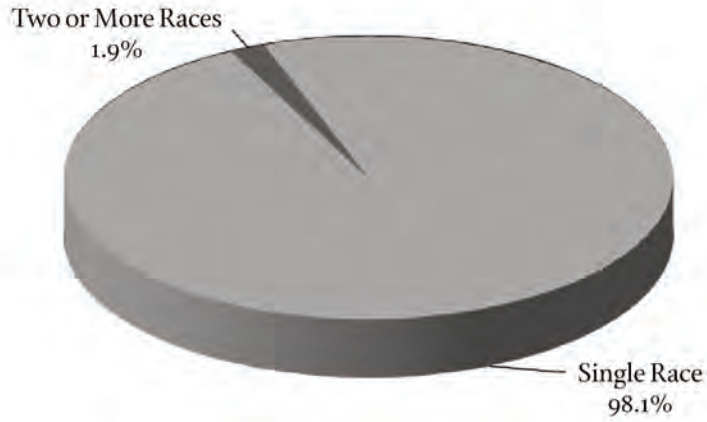
Despite Obama's electoral success and the press attention given to the phenomenon, some will no doubt find it surprising that the overwhelming majority of Americans identify with only one race. As Figure 1 shows, less than 2 percent of the population marked more than one box on the 2000 Census in designating their racial background. Fully 98 percent

marked just one. I claim no deep-rootedness or profound personal salience for these identities. Rather, my point is that we should be mindful that the level of "discussion" and contention around mixture is far out of proportion to the extent to which most Americans actually designate and see themselves in these terms.

Moreover, even if we restrict attention to just those who marked more than one box, two-thirds of these respondents designated two groups other than blacks (namely, Hispanic-white, Asian-white, or Hispanic and Asian mixtures), as Figure 2 shows. Some degree of mixture with black constituted just under a third of mixed race identifiers in 2000. Given the historic size of the black population and the extended length of contact with white Americans, this remarkable result says something powerful about the potency and durability of the historic black-white divide.

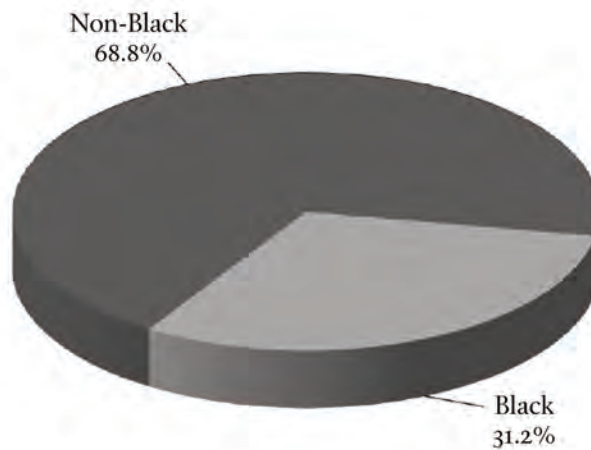
It is worth recalling that sexual relations and childbearing across the racial divide are not recent phenomena. The 1890 U.S. Census contained categories for not only "Negro" but also "Mulatto," "Quadroon," and even "Octoroon"; these were clear signs of the extent of "mixing" that had taken place in the United States. Indeed, well over one million individuals fell into one of the mixed race categories at that time. In order to protect the institution of slavery and to prevent the offspring of white slave masters and exploited black slave women from having a claim on freedom as well as on the property of the master, slave status, as defined by law, followed the mother's status, not the father's. For most of its history, the United States legally barred or discouraged racial mixing and intermarriage. At the time of the *Loving v. Virginia* case in 1967, seventeen states still banned racial intermarriage.⁸

Figure 1
Percent of Respondents to U.S. Census 2000 Identifying with One Race or Two or More Races (Non-Hispanic)



Source: Author's analysis of data from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, 2001, Table PL1.

Figure 2
Percent of Respondents to U.S. Census 2000 Identifying with Two or More Races Who Chose Black in Combination with One or More Other Races (Non-Hispanic)



Source: Author's analysis of data from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1, 2001, Matrices P8 and P10.

Formal, legal definitions of who was black, and especially the development of rules of “hypodescent,” or the one-drop rule, have a further implication that is often lost in discussions of race: these practices tended to fuse together race and class, in effect making blackness synonymous with the very bottom of the class structure. As historian David Hollinger explains:

The combination of hypodescent with the denial to blacks residing in many states with large black populations of any opportunity for legal marriage to whites ensured that the color line would long remain to a very large extent a property line. Hence the dynamics of race formation and the dynamics of class formation were, in this most crucial of all American cases, largely the same. This is one of the most important truths about the history of the United States brought into sharper focus when that history is viewed through the lens of the question of ethnoracial mixture.⁹

Still, we know that today the ethnoracial landscape in the United States is changing. As of the 2000 Census, whites constituted just 69 percent of the U.S. population, with Hispanics and blacks each around 12 percent. This distribution represents a substantial decline in the percentage of whites from twenty or, even more so, forty years ago.

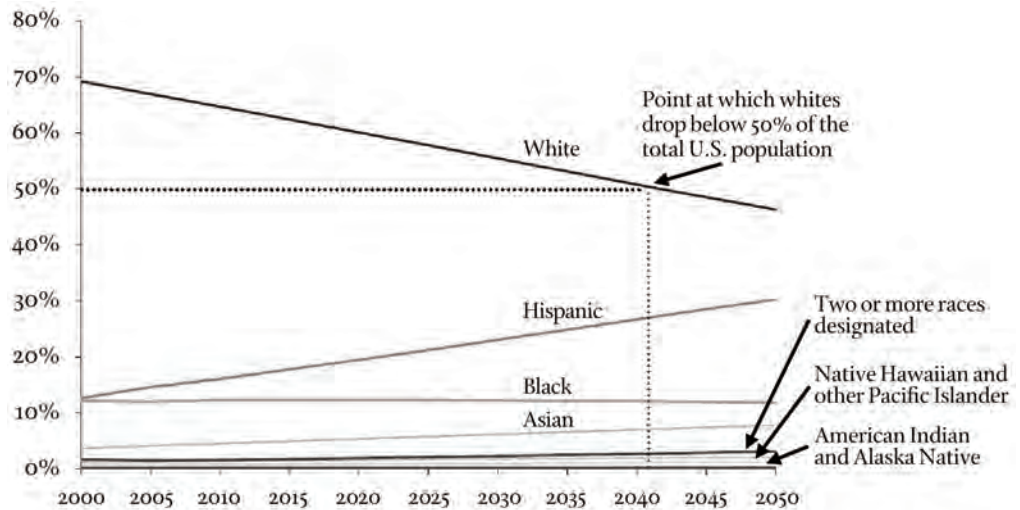
With continued immigration, differential group fertility patterns, and the continued degree of intermarriage and mixing, these patterns will not remain stable. Figure 3 shows the Census racial distribution projections out to the year 2050. The figure clearly shows a continued steady and rapid decline in the relative size of the white population; forecasts predict that somewhere between 2040 and 2045, whites will cease to be a numerical majority of the population. (This change could possibly happen

much sooner than that.) The relative size of the Hispanic population is expected to grow substantially, with the black, Asian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Alaska Native groups remaining relatively constant. Figure 3 strongly implies that pressure to transform our understanding of racial categories will continue.

Does that pressure for change foretell the ultimate undoing of the black-white divide? At least three lines of research raise doubts about such a forecast. First, studies of the perceptions of and identities among those of mixed racial backgrounds point to strong evidence of the cultural persistence of the one-drop rule. Systematic experiments by sociologists and social psychologists are intriguing in this regard. For example, sociologist Melissa Herman’s recent research concluded that “others’ perceptions shape a person’s identity and social understandings of race. My study found that part-black multiracial youth are more likely to be seen as black by observers and to define themselves as black when forced to choose one race.”¹⁰

Second, studies of patterns in racial intermarriage point to a highly durable if somewhat less extreme black-white divide today. A careful assessment of racial intermarriage patterns in 1990 by demographer Vincent Kang Fu found that “one key feature of the data is overwhelming endogamy for blacks and whites. At least 92 percent of white men, white women, black women and black men are married to members of their own group.”¹¹ Rates of intermarriage rose for blacks and whites over the course of the 1990s. However, subsequent analysts continued to stress the degree to which a fundamental black-white divide persists. As demographers Zhenchao Qian and Daniel Lichter conclude in their analyses of U.S. Census data from 1990 and 2000:

Figure 3
Population Projections by Race and Ethnicity, 2000 to 2050



Source: Author's analysis of data on race from Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Projected Population by Single Year of Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: July 1, 2000 to July 1, 2050 (August 14, 2008).

[O]ur results also highlight a singularly persistent substantive lesson: African Americans are least likely of all racial/ethnic minorities to marry whites. And, although the pace of marital assimilation among African Americans proceeded more rapidly over the 1990s than it did in earlier decades, the social boundaries between African American and whites remain highly rigid and resilient to change. The “one-drop” rule apparently persists for African Americans.¹²

Third, some key synthetic works argue for an evolving racial scheme in the United States, but a scheme that nonetheless preserves a heavily stigmatized black category. A decade ago, sociologist Herbert Gans offered the provocative but well-grounded speculation that the United States would witness a transition from a society defined by a great white–non-white divide to one increasingly defined by a black–non-black fissure, with an

in-between or residual category for those granted provisional or “honorary white” status. As Gans explained: “If current trends persist, today’s multiracial hierarchy could be replaced by what I think of as a dual or bimodal one consisting of ‘nonblack’ and ‘black’ population categories, with a third ‘residual’ category for the groups that do not, or do not yet, fit into the basic dualism.” Most troubling, this new dualism would, in Gans’s expectations, continue to bring a profound sense of undeservingness and stigma for those assigned its bottom rung.¹³

Gans’s remarks have recently received substantial support from demographer Frank Bean and his colleagues. Based on their extensive analyses of population trends across a variety of indicators, Bean and colleagues write: “A black–nonblack divide appears to be taking shape in the United States, in which Asians and Latinos are closer to whites. Hence, Ameri-

ca's color lines are moving toward a new demarcation that places many blacks in a position of disadvantage similar to that resulting from the traditional black-white divide."

If basic racial categories and identities are not soon to dissolve, then let me now address that second set of questions, concerning the degree of racial economic inequality. I should begin by noting that there has been considerable expansion in the size, security, and, arguably, salience and influence of the black middle class.¹⁴

Turning to the question of income, we find a similar trend. Figure 4 reports on the distribution of the population by race since 1968 across several ways of slicing the family income distribution. At the very bottom are those who the Census would designate as the "very poor": that is, having a family income that is 50 percent or less of the poverty level. At the very top are those in the "comfortable" category, having family incomes that are five times or more the poverty level. The proportion of whites in this upper category exceeded 10 percent in 1960 and rose to nearly 30 percent by 2008. For blacks, the proportion was less than 5 percent in 1968 but about 12 percent in 2008. Likewise, the fraction in the middle class (those with family incomes more than twice the poverty level) grows for both groups. But crucially, the proportion of blacks in the "poor" (at the poverty line) or "very poor" categories remains large, at a combined figure of nearly 40 percent in 2008. This contrasts with the roughly 20 percent of whites in those same categories.¹⁵

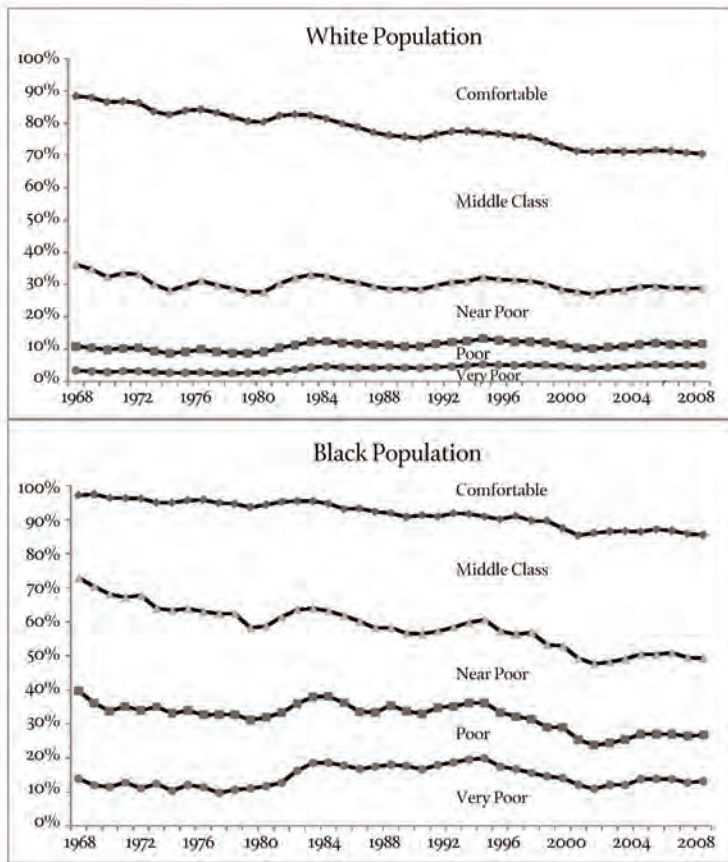
The official black poverty rate has fluctuated between two to three times the poverty rate for whites. Recent trend analyses suggest that this disparity declined during the economic boom years of the 1990s but remained substantial. As public policy analyst Michael Stoll explains:

"Among all black families, the poverty rate declined from a 20 year high of about 40 percent in 1982 and 1993 to 25 percent in 2000. During this period, the poverty rate for white families remained fairly constant, at about 10 percent." That figure of 25 percent remains true through more recent estimates. In addition, the Great Recession has taken a particularly heavy toll on minority communities, African Americans perhaps most of all. As the Center for American Progress declared in a recent report: "Economic security and losses during the recession and recovery exacerbated the already weak situation for African Americans. They experienced declining employment rates, rising poverty rates, falling homeownership rates, decreasing health insurance and retirement coverage during the last business cycle from 2001 to 2007. The recession that followed made a bad situation much worse."¹⁶

Overall trends in poverty, however, do not fully capture the cumulative and multidimensional nature of black economic disadvantage. Sociologist William Julius Wilson stresses how circumstances of persistently weak employment prospects and joblessness, particularly for low-skilled black men, weaken the formation of stable two-parent households and undermine other community structures. Persistent economic hardship and weakened social institutions then create circumstances that lead to rising rates of single-parent households, out-of-wedlock childbearing, welfare dependency, and greater risk of juvenile delinquency and involvement in crime. Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson points to an extraordinary circumstance of exposure to living in deeply disadvantaged communities for large segments of the African American population. This disadvantage involves living in conditions that expose residents to high surround-

Somewhere between Jim Crow & Post-Racialism

Figure 4 Economic Status of the Black and White Population, 1968 to 2008



Very poor denotes below 50 percent of the poverty line; poor, 50 to 90 percent of the poverty line; near poor, 100 to 199 percent of the poverty line; middle class, 200 to 499 percent of the poverty line; and comfortable, 500 percent of poverty line. Source: Author's analysis of data from Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, Trent Alexander, Donna Leicach, and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 2.0 (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2008).

ing rates of unemployment, family break-up, individuals and families reliant on welfare, poor-performing schools, juvenile delinquency, and crime. As Sampson explains:

[A]lthough we knew that the average national rate of family disruption and poverty among blacks was two to four times higher than among whites, the number of distinct ecological contexts in which

blacks achieve equality to whites is striking. In not one city of 100,000 or more in the United States do blacks live in ecological equality with whites when it comes to these basic features of economic and family organization. Accordingly, racial differences in poverty and family disruption are so strong that the “worst” urban contexts in which whites reside are considerably better than the average context of black communities.¹⁷

Recent work published by sociologist Patrick Sharkey assesses race differences in the chances of mobility out of impoverished neighborhoods. The result is a very depressing one. He finds evidence of little upward social mobility for disadvantaged blacks and a fragile capacity to maintain advantaged status among even the most well-off African Americans. He writes: “[M]ore than 70% of black children who are raised in the poorest quarter of American neighborhoods will continue to live in the poorest quarter of neighborhoods as adults. Since the 1970s, more than half of black families have lived in the poorest quarter of neighborhoods in consecutive generations, compared to just 7% of white families.” Discussing the upper end, Sharkey writes: “Among the small number of black families who live in the top quartile, only 35% remain there in the second generation. By themselves, these figures reveal the striking persistence of neighborhood disadvantage among black families.” This figure of 35 percent remaining in the top quartile across generations for blacks contrasts to 63 percent among whites. Thus, “White families exhibit a high rate of mobility out of the poorest neighborhoods and a low rate of mobility out of the most affluent neighborhoods, and the opposite is true among black families.”¹⁸

The general labor market prospects of African Americans have undergone key changes in the last several decades. Three patterns loom large. There is far more internal differentiation and inequality within the black population than was true at the close of World War II, or even during our baseline of the mid-1960s. The fortunes of men and women have recently diverged within the black community. Black women have considerably narrowed the gap between themselves and white women in terms of educational attain-

ment, major occupational categories, and earnings. Black men have faced a growing problem of economic marginalization. Importantly, this is contingent on levels of education; education has become a far sharper dividing line, shaping life chances more heavily than ever before in the black community.¹⁹

Several other dimensions of socioeconomic status bear mentioning. Even by conservative estimates, the high school dropout rate among blacks is twice that of whites, at 20 percent versus 11 percent. Blacks also have much lower college completion rates (17 percent versus 30 percent) and lower advanced degree completion rates (6 percent versus 11 percent). These differences are enormously consequential. As the essays in this volume by economist James Heckman and social psychologist Richard Nisbett emphasize, educational attainment and achievement increasingly define access to the good life, broadly defined. Moreover, some scholars make a strong case that important inequalities in resources still plague the educational experiences of many black school children, involving such factors as fewer well-trained teachers and less access to AP courses and other curriculum-enriching materials and experiences.²⁰

One of the major social trends affecting African Americans over the past several decades has been the sharply punitive and incarceration-focused turn in the American criminal justice system. Between 1980 and 2000, the rate of black incarceration nearly tripled. The black-to-white incarceration ratio increased to above eight to one during this time period. Actuarial forecasts, or lifetime estimates, of the risk of incarceration for black males born in the 1990s approach one in three, as compared to below one in ten for non-Hispanic white males. A recent major study by the Pew Founda-

tion reported that as of 2007, one in fifteen black males age eighteen and above was in jail or prison, and one in nine black males between the ages of twenty and thirty-four was in jail or prison. Blacks constitute a hugely disproportionate share of those incarcerated relative to their numbers in the general population.²¹

The reach of mass incarceration has risen to such levels that some analysts view it as altering normative life-course experiences for blacks in low-income neighborhoods. Indeed, the fabric of social life changes in heavily policed, low-income urban communities. The degree of incarceration has prompted scholars to describe the change as ushering in a new fourth stage of racial oppression, “the carceral state,” constituted by the emergence of “the new Jim Crow” or, more narrowly, racialized mass incarceration. Whichever label one employs, there is no denying that exposure to the criminal justice system touches the lives of a large fraction of the African American population, especially young men of low education and skill levels. These low levels of education and greater exposure to poverty, along with what many regard as the racially biased conduct of the War on Drugs, play a huge role in black overrepresentation in jails or federal and state prisons.²²

Processes of racial residential segregation are a key factor in contemporary racial inequality. Despite important declines in overall rates of segregation over the past three decades and blacks’ increasing suburbanization, blacks remain highly segregated from whites. Some have suggested that active self-segregation on the part of blacks is now a major factor sustaining residential segregation. A number of careful investigations of preferences for neighborhood characteristics and makeup and of the housing search process strongly challenge such claims.

Instead, there is substantial evidence that, particularly among white Americans, neighborhoods and social spaces are strongly racially coded, with negative racial stereotypes playing a powerful role in shaping the degree of willingness to enter (or remain) in racially integrated living spaces. Moreover, careful auditing studies continue to show lower, but still significant, rates of antiblack discrimination on the part of real estate agents, homeowners, and landlords.²³

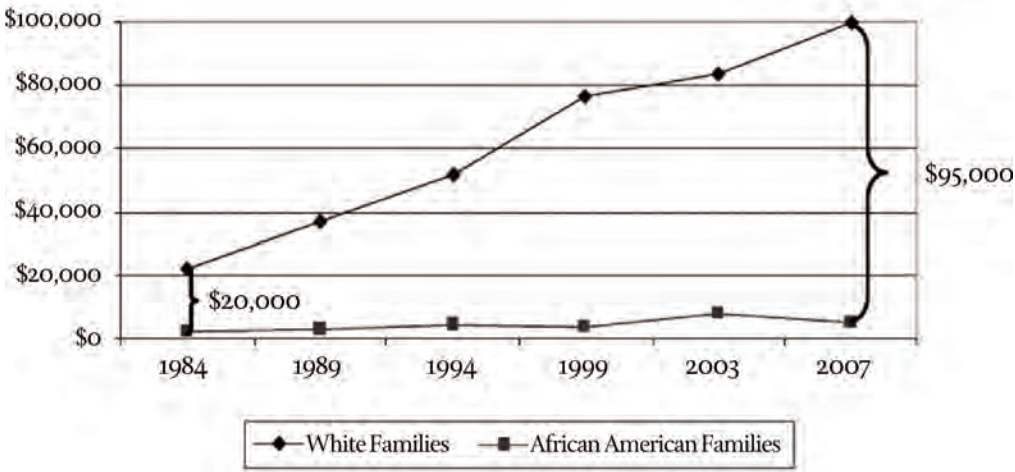
Lastly, I want to stress that wealth inequality between blacks and whites remains enormous. Recent scholarship has convincingly argued that wealth (or accumulated assets) is a crucial determinant of quality of life. Blacks at all levels of the class hierarchy typically possess far less wealth than otherwise comparable whites. Moreover, the composition of black wealth is more heavily based in homes and automobiles as compared to white wealth, which includes a more even spread across savings, stocks and bonds, business ownership, and other more readily liquidated assets. Whereas approximately 75 percent of whites own their homes, only 47 percent of blacks do. Looking beyond homeownership to the full range of financial assets, analyses from sociologists Melvin Oliver and Tom Shapiro put the black-to-white wealth gap ratio in the range of ten or eleven to one. Other estimates, such as those based on Panel Study of Income Dynamics data, are lower but still represent gaping disparities.²⁴

In order to provide a more concrete picture of the current state of the wealth gap, Figure 5 reproduces results from a recent Brandeis University study. It shows that over the past twenty-three years, the black-white gap in median wealth rose dramatically, moving from \$20,000 in 1984 to nearly \$100,000 by 2007. The study also revealed that for much of this

Figure 5

Median Wealth Holdings of White Families and African American Families, 1984 to 2007

Lawrence D. Bobo



Data do not include home equity. Source: Thomas Shapiro, Tatjana Meschede, and Laura Sullivan, “The Racial Wealth Gap Increases Fourfold,” Research and Policy Brief, Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, May 2010.

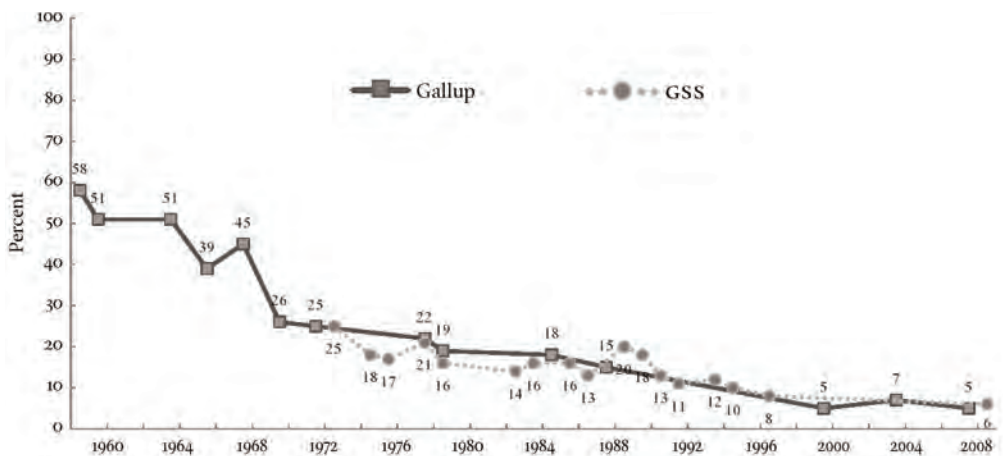
time period, middle-income white families had more wealth than even the highest income segment of African American families, with that gap rising to \$56,000 by 2007. Moreover, all earners, but especially African Americans, have fallen far behind the high-income white families in median wealth holdings. To the extent that wealth bears on the capacity to survive a period of unemployment, to finance college for one’s children, or to endure a costly illness or other unexpected large expense, these figures point to an enormous and growing disparity in the life chances of blacks and whites in the United States.²⁵

In many respects, these sizable gaps in wealth associated with race are one of the principal ways in which the cumulative and “sedimentary” impact of a long history of racial oppression manifests itself. Research has shown that black and white families do not differ substantially in the extent to which they try to save income.

Much wealth is inherited; it is not the product of strictly individual merit or achievement. Furthermore, social policy in many ways played a direct role in facilitating the accumulation of wealth for many generations of white Americans while systematically constraining or undermining such opportunities for African Americans. For example, Oliver and Shapiro and political scientist Ira Katznelson both point to federal home mortgage lending guidelines and practices, which were once openly discriminatory, as playing a crucial role in this process.²⁶

What do we know about changes in racial attitudes in the United States? The first and most consistent finding of the major national studies of racial attitudes in the United States has been a steady repudiation of the outlooks that supported the Jim Crow social order. Jim Crow racism once reigned in American

Figure 6
Percent of Whites Who Said They Would Not Vote for a Black Presidential Candidate,
1958 to 2008



The Gallup Poll asked, “If your party nominated a generally well-qualified person for president who happened to be black, would you vote for that person?” The General Social Survey (GSS) asked, “If your party nominated a (negro/black/African-American) for President, would you vote for him if he were qualified for the job?” Source: Author’s analysis of data from Gallup Poll, 1958–2007; Jeffrey M. Jones, “Some Americans Reluctant to Vote for Mormon, 72-Year-Old Presidential Candidates,” in *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 2007*, ed. George Horace Gallup (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 77–78; author’s analysis of data from GSS Cumulative Data File, 1972–2008.

society, particularly in the South. Accordingly, blacks were understood as inherently inferior to whites, both intellectually and temperamentally. As a result, society was to be expressly ordered in terms of white privilege, with blacks relegated to secondary status in education, access to jobs, and in civic status such as the right to vote. Above all, racial mixture was to be avoided; hence, society needed to be segregated. The best survey data on American public opinion suggest that this set of ideas has been in steady retreat since the 1940s.²⁷

Figure 6 contains one telling illustration of this trend. It shows the percentage of white Americans in national surveys who said that they would *not* be willing to vote for a qualified black candidate for president if nominated by their own party. When first asked in 1958, nearly two out of three white Americans endorsed such

an openly discriminatory posture. That trend has undergone unabated decline, reaching the point where roughly only one in five white Americans expressed this view by the time the Reverend Jesse Jackson launched his first bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984. It declined to fewer than one in ten by the time of Obama’s campaign in 2008.

In broad sweep, though not necessarily in exact levels, the trend seen in Figure 6 is true of most questions on racial attitudes from national surveys that deal with broad principles of whether American society should be integrated or segregated, discriminatory or nondiscriminatory on the basis of race. Whether the specific domain involved school integration, residential integration, or even racial intermarriage, the level of endorsement of discriminatory, segregationist responses has continued to decline. To an impor-

tant degree, these changes have been led by highly educated whites and those outside the South. African Americans have never endorsed elements of the Jim Crow outlook to any substantial degree, though many of these questions were not initially asked of black respondents out of fear that the questions would be regarded as an insult, or to the assumption that their responses were predictable.

This picture of the repudiation of Jim Crow is complicated somewhat by evidence of significant social distance preferences. To be sure, low and typically declining percentages of whites objected when asked about entering into integrated social settings – neighborhoods or schools – where one or just a small number of blacks might be present. But as the number of blacks involved increased, and as one shifts from more impersonal and public domains of life (workplaces, schools, neighborhoods) to more intimate and personal domains (intermarriage), expressed levels of white resistance rise and the degree of positive change is not as great.

The notion of the 1960s as an inflection point in the struggle for racial change is reinforced by the growing preoccupation of studies of racial attitudes in the post-1960 period with matters of public policy. These studies consider levels of support or opposition to public policies designed to bring about greater racial equality (antidiscrimination laws and various forms of affirmative action) and actual integration (open housing laws and methods of school desegregation such as school busing). The picture that results is complex but has several recurrent features. Blacks are typically far more supportive of social-policy intervention on matters of race than are whites. In general, support for policy or governmental intervention to bring about greater integration or to reduce racial inequality lags well be-

hind endorsement of similar broad principles or ideals. This finding has led many scholars to note a “principle-implementation gap.” Some policies, however, have wider appeal than others. Efforts to enhance or improve the human capital attributes of blacks and other minority group members are more popular than policies that call for group preferences. Forms of affirmative action that imply quotas or otherwise disregard meritocratic criteria of reward are deeply unpopular.

One important line of investigation seeking to understand the principle-implementation gap involved assessments of perceptions and causal attributions for racial inequality. To the extent that many individuals do not perceive much racial inequality, or explain it in terms of individual dispositions and choices (as opposed to structural constraints and conditions such as discrimination), then there is little need seen for government action. Table 1 shows responses to a series of questions on possible causes of black-white economic inequality that included “less inborn ability,” “lack of motivation and willpower,” “no chance for an education,” and “mainly due to discrimination.” The questions thus span biological basis (ability), cultural basis (motivation), a weak form of structural constraint (education), and finally, a strong structural constraint (discrimination).²⁸

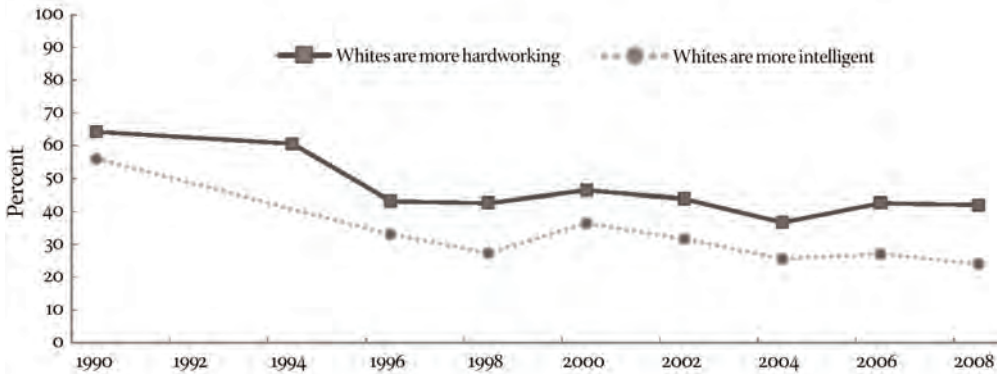
There is low and decreasing support among whites for the overtly racist belief that blacks have less inborn ability. The most widely endorsed account among whites points to a lack of motivation or willpower on the part of blacks as a key factor in racial inequality, though this attribution declines over time. Attributions to discrimination as well as to the weaker structural account of lack of a chance for education also decline among whites. Blacks are generally far more

Table 1
Explanations for Racial Socioeconomic Inequality by Education and Age across Selected Years

Whites								
Inequality is Due to:		Pooled	Years of Education			Age		
			< 12	12	13+	18 – 33	34 – 50	51+
Discrimination	1977 – 1989	40%	40	37	43	46	39	36
	1990 – 1999	35	47	32	36	35	34	35
	2000 – 2008	30	30	27	32	31	28	32
Less Inborn Ability	1977 – 1989	21	36	22	11	12	16	35
	1990 – 1999	13	27	16	6	7	8	22
	2000 – 2008	9	20	13	5	6	7	13
Lack of Chance for Education	1977 – 1989	52	42	48	63	55	52	49
	1990 – 1999	47	37	41	55	46	49	47
	2000 – 2008	43	33	36	49	41	45	44
Lack of Motivation or Willpower	1977 – 1989	63	74	67	51	54	62	72
	1990 – 1999	55	70	63	46	50	50	65
	2000 – 2008	50	66	61	41	45	45	57
Blacks								
Inequality is Due to:		Pooled	Years of Education			Age		
			< 12	12	13+	18 – 33	34 – 50	51+
Discrimination	1977 – 1989	77%	82	72	76	75	79	79
	1990 – 1999	71	74	68	73	67	74	72
	2000 – 2008	59	62	54	62	52	58	69
Less Inborn Ability	1977 – 1989	16	31	9	4	8	12	26
	1990 – 1999	11	16	12	6	10	8	15
	2000 – 2008	13	23	13	8	11	11	17
Lack of Chance for Education	1977 – 1989	68	69	65	70	63	68	75
	1990 – 1999	60	63	61	57	55	55	72
	2000 – 2008	52	56	46	55	47	50	61
Lack of Motivation or Willpower	1977 – 1989	35	44	34	26	30	33	44
	1990 – 1999	38	43	40	33	45	32	38
	2000 – 2008	44	51	50	38	49	42	42

Respondents were asked, “On the average (Negroes/Blacks/African-Americans) have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are”: “mainly due to discrimination”; “because most (Negroes/Blacks/African-Americans) have less inborn ability to learn”; “because most (Negroes/Blacks/African-Americans) don’t have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty”; or “because most (Negroes/Blacks/African-Americans) just don’t have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves up out of poverty?” *N* for whites ranges between 5,307 and 16,906. *N* for blacks ranges between 517 and 2,387. Source: Author’s analysis of data from General Social Survey, 1977 – 2008.

Figure 7
Percent of Respondents Who Said Whites Are More Hardworking or More Intelligent than Blacks, 1990 to 2008



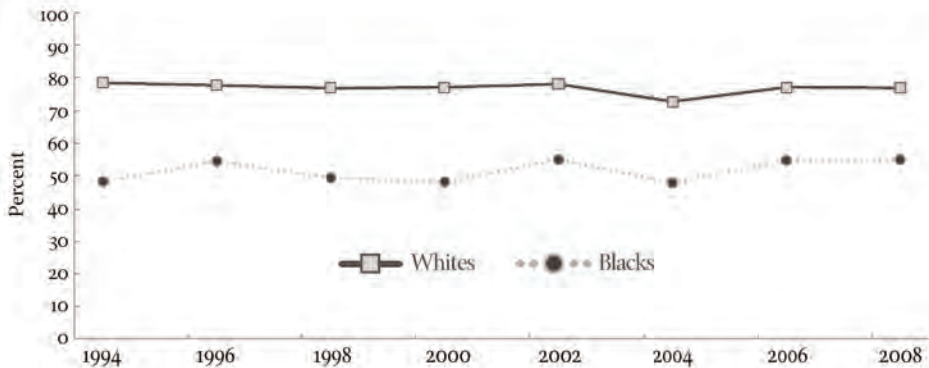
White respondents were asked to rate blacks and whites according to whether they thought blacks and whites tended to be hardworking or lazy. Respondents were also asked, “Do people in these groups tend to be unintelligent or tend to be intelligent? Where would you rate whites in general on this scale? Blacks?” The comparison is generated by subtracting the scores whites are given on a one to seven point scale from the scores blacks are given on each measure. On the resulting scale, positive numbers indicate that blacks are rated as possessing more of the desirable trait than whites; negative scores indicate that whites are rated more positively; and scores of zero indicate that both groups received equal ratings. Negative scores were coded as agreeing. Seven percent of whites rated blacks as more hardworking than whites, and 6 percent rated blacks as more intelligent. Source: Author’s analysis of data from General Social Survey, 1990–2008.

likely than whites to endorse structural accounts of racial inequality, particularly the strongest attribution of discrimination. However, like their white counterparts, a declining number of blacks point to discrimination as the key factor, and there is actually a rise in the percentage of African Americans attributing racial inequality to a lack of motivation or will-power on the part of blacks themselves. More detailed multivariate analyses suggest that there has been growth in cultural attributions for racial inequality. Among African Americans this growth seems most prominent among somewhat younger, ideologically conservative, and less well-educated individuals.²⁹

Another line of analysis of racial attitudes sparked in part by the principle-implementation gap involved renewed interest in the extent of negative racial

stereotyping. Figure 7 shows trends in whites’ stereotype trait ratings of whites as compared to blacks on the dimensions of being hardworking or lazy and intelligent or unintelligent. In 1990, when these trait-rating stereotype questions were first posed in national surveys, more than 60 percent of whites rated whites as more likely to be hardworking than blacks, and just under 60 percent rated blacks as less intelligent. A variety of other trait dimensions were included in this early assessment, such as welfare dependency, involvement in drugs and gangs, and levels of patriotism. Whites usually expressed a substantially negative image of blacks relative to how they rated whites across this array of traits. The trends suggest some slight reduction in negative stereotyping over the past two decades, but such negative images of blacks still re-

Figure 8
Percent of Respondents Agreeing with the Belief that Blacks Should Overcome Prejudice without Special Favors, 1994 to 2008



Respondents were asked, “Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with the following statement: Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors.” “Agree strongly” and “agree somewhat” responses are coded as agreeing. Source: Author’s analysis of data from General Social Survey, 1994 – 2008.

main quite commonplace. To the extent that unfavorable beliefs about the behavioral characteristics of blacks have a bearing on levels of support for policies designed to benefit blacks, these data imply, and much evidence confirms, that negative beliefs about blacks’ abilities and behavioral choices contribute to low levels of white support for significant social-policy interventions to ameliorate racial inequality.³⁰

A third and perhaps most vigorously considered resolution of the principle-implementation gap involves the hypothesis that a new form of antiblack racism is at the root of much white opposition to policies aimed at reducing racial inequality. This scholarship has focused largely on the emergence of attitudes of resentment toward the demands or grievances voiced by African Americans and the expectation of governmental redress for those demands and grievances.

Figure 8 shows trends for one question frequently used to tap such sentiments; respondents are asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without special favors.” Throughout the 1994 to 2008 time span, roughly three-fourths of white Americans agreed with this assertion. The figure shows no meaningful trend, despite a slight dip in 2004: the lopsided view among whites is that blacks need to make it all on their own.³¹

Throughout the fourteen-year time span, whites were always substantially more likely to endorse this viewpoint than blacks; however, not only did a non-trivial number of blacks agree with it (about 50 percent), but the black-white gap actually narrowed slightly over time. The meaning and effects of this type of outlook vary in important ways depend-

ing on race, usually carrying less potent implications for policy views among blacks than among whites. Indeed, one reason for focusing on this type of attitude is that it and similar items are found to correlate with a wide range of social-policy outlooks. And some evidence suggests that how attitudes and outlooks connect with partisanship and voting behavior may be strengthening and growing.³²

Judged by the trends considered here and in the essays in this volume, declarations of having arrived at the post-racial moment are premature. Much has changed – and unequivocally for the better – in light of where the United States stood in 1965. Indeed, I will speculate that none of the contributors to the 1965/1966 *Daedalus* volumes would have considered likely changes that have now, a mere four or so decades later, been realized, including the election of an African American President of the United States, the appointment of the first black Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the appointment of two different African American Secretaries of State. Similarly, the size and reach of today's black middle class were not easy to forecast from the scholarly perch of mid-1960s data and understandings. At the same time, troublingly entrenched patterns of poverty, segregation, gaps in educational attainment and achievement, racial identity formation, and disparaging racial stereotypes all endure into the present, even if in somewhat less extreme forms. And the scandalous rise in what is now termed racialized mass incarceration was not foreseen but now adds a new measure of urgency to these concerns.

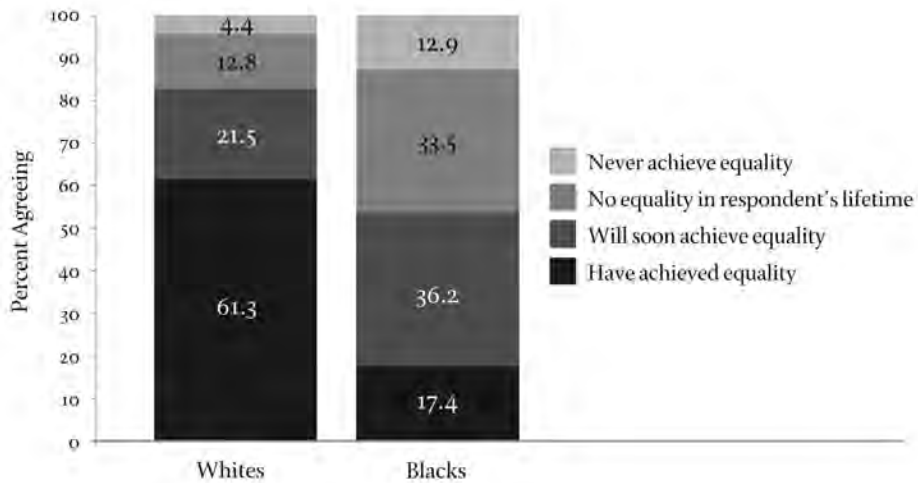
The very complex and contradictory nature of these changes cautions against the urge to make sweeping and simple declarations about where we now stand. But our nation's "mixed" or ambiguous

circumstance – suspended uncomfortably somewhere between the collapse of the Jim Crow social order and a post-racial social order that has yet to be attained – gives rise to many intense exchanges over whether or how much "race matters." This is true of scholarly discourse, where many see racial division as a deeply entrenched and tragic American flaw and many others see racial division as a waning exception to the coming triumph of American liberalism.³³

Average Americans, both black and white, face and wage much of the same debate in their day-to-day lives. One way of capturing this dynamic is illustrated in Figure 9, which shows the percentage of white and black respondents in a 2009 national survey that asked, "Do you think that blacks have achieved racial equality, will soon achieve racial equality, will not achieve racial equality in your lifetime, or will never achieve racial equality?" Fielded after the 2008 election and the inauguration of Obama in early 2009, these results are instructive. Almost two out of three white Americans (61.3 percent) said that blacks have achieved racial equality. Another 21.5 percent of whites endorse the view that blacks will soon achieve racial equality. Thus, the overwhelming fraction of white Americans see the post-racial moment as effectively here (83.8 percent). Fewer than one in five blacks endorsed the idea that they have already achieved racial equality. A more substantial fraction, 36.2 percent, believe that they will soon achieve racial equality. African Americans, then, are divided almost evenly between those doubtful that racial equality will soon be achieved (with more than one in ten saying that it will never be achieved) and those who see equality as within reach, at 46.6 percent versus 53.6 percent.³⁴

These results underscore why discussions of race so easily and quickly be-

Somewhere between Jim Crow & Post-Racialism
 Figure 9
 Whites' and Blacks' Beliefs about when Racial Equality will be Achieved



Respondents were asked, “Do you think that blacks have achieved racial equality, will soon achieve racial equality, will not achieve racial equality in your lifetime, or will never achieve racial equality?”
 Source: Lawrence D. Bobo and Alicia Simmons, Race Cues, Attitudes and Punitiveness Survey (Data Collected by Polimetrix), Department of Sociology, Harvard University, July 2009.

come polarized and fractious along racial lines. The central tendencies of public opinion on these issues, despite real increasing overlap, remain enormously far apart between black and white Americans. When such differences in perception and belief are grounded in, or at least reinforced by, wide economic inequality, persistent residential segregation, largely racially homogeneous family units and close friendship networks, and a popular culture still suffused with negative ideas and images about African Americans, then there should be little surprise that we still find it enormously difficult to have sustained civil discussions about race and racial matters. Despite growing much closer together in recent decades, the gaps in perspective between blacks and whites are still sizable.

The ideas and evidence marshaled in this *Dædalus* issue should help sharpen

our focus and open up productive new lines of discourse and inquiry. Four of the essays directly engage central, but changing, features of racial stratification in the United States. Sociologist Douglas S. Massey provides a trenchant, broad map of change in the status of African Americans. Sociologist William Julius Wilson reviews and assesses his field-defining argument about the “declining significance of race.” The core framework is sustained, he maintains, by much subsequent careful research; but Wilson stresses now the special importance of employment in the government sector to the economic well-being of many African Americans. Economist James J. Heckman focuses on education, building the case for enhancing the capacities of families and communities to prepare children to get the most out of schooling. Social psychologist Richard E. Nis-

bett looks closely at the types of early intervention strategies that evidence suggests are most likely to improve ultimate educational attainment and achievement.

Three essays put the changing status of African Americans in more explicit political, policy-related, and legal perspectives. Political scientist Rogers M. Smith and his colleagues identify the pivotal role played by agents of competing racial policy coalitions, pointing to the differing agendas and degrees of political success and influence of those pursuing a color-blind strategy and those pursuing a color-conscious strategy. Legal scholar Michael J. Klarman challenges the presumption that the U.S. Supreme Court has been a special ally or supporter of African American interests and claims. He suggests that the Court has often, particularly in a string of recent rulings, tilted heavily in the direction of a color-blind set of principles that do little to advance the interests of black communities. Political scientist Daniel Sabbagh traces the impetus for affirmative action and its evolution in the United States and compares that to how affirmative action is now pursued in a number of other countries.

Several essays examine the cultural dynamics of race and racial identities. Anthropologists Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett examine the remarkable dynamism, worldwide spread, and influence of hip-hop music. Social psychologists Jennifer A. Richeson and Maureen A. Craig examine the psychological dynamics of identity choices facing minority communities and individuals in this era of rapid population change. Political scientist Jennifer L. Hochschild and her colleagues assess how younger cohorts of Americans are bringing different views of race and its importance to politics and social life.

Three essays pivot off the 2008 presidential election. Political scientist Taeku Lee examines the complex role of race, group identity, and immigrant status in forging new political identities, coalitions, and voting behavior. Political scientist Cathy J. Cohen shows the continuing racial consciousness and orientations of black youth. Sociologist Alford A. Young, Jr., examines the special meaning of Obama's candidacy and success for young black men.

Two final essays push in quite different directions. Sociologist Roger Waldinger argues that even as the black-white divide remains an important problem, we as a nation are facing deep contradictions in how we deal with immigration and immigrants themselves, particularly those coming from Latin America. Historian Martha Biondi muses on continuities with and departures from past traditions in recent discourse surrounding the mission of African American studies programs and departments.

This issue is a companion volume to the Winter 2011 issue of *Dædalus*, *Race in the Age of Obama*, guest edited by Gerald Early, the Merle Kling Professor of Modern Letters and Director of the Center for the Humanities at Washington University in St. Louis. It has been my privilege to work with Gerald on this project, and I am grateful to the contributors to this volume for their informed analyses.

This essay's epigraphs from Martin Luther King, Jr., John Hope Franklin, and Barack Obama, each in its own fashion, remind us of the depth and complexity of race in the United States. Although it is tempting to seek quick and simple assessments of where we have been and where we are going, it is wise, instead, to wrestle with taking stock of all the variegated and nuanced

circumstances underlying the black-white divide and its associated phenomena. Just as 1965 seemed a point of inflection, of contradictory lines of development, future generations may look back and regard 2011 as a similarly fraught moment. At the same time that a nation celebrates the historic election of an African American president, the cultural production of demeaning antiblack images – postcards featuring watermelons on the White House lawn prior to the annual Easter egg roll, Obama featured in loincloth and with a bone through his nose in ads denouncing the health care bill, a cartoon showing police officers shooting an out-of-control chimpanzee under the heading “They’ll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill” – are ugly reminders of some of the more overtly racialized reactions to the ascendancy of an African American to the presidency of the United States.

As a result of complex and contradictory indicators, no pithy phrase or bold declaration can possibly do justice to the full body of research, evidence, and ideas reviewed here. One optimistic trend is that examinations of the status of blacks have moved to a place of prominence and sophistication in the social sciences that probably was never imagined by founding figures of the tradition, such as W.E.B. Du Bois. That accumulating body of knowledge and theory, including the new contributions herein, deepens our understanding of the experience of race in the United States. The configuration and salience of the color line some fifty or one hundred years from now, however, cannot be forecast with any measure of certainty. Perhaps the strongest general declaration one can make at present is that we stand somewhere between a Jim Crow past and the aspiration of a post-racial future.

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The Past & Future of American Civil Rights

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The history of civil rights in the United States has always been one of two steps forward and one step back. Significant progress toward racial equality has been made and then partially reversed, only to be advanced again at a later date. Race is too deeply embedded in the cognitive and institutional structure of American society to disappear entirely. (In speaking of race, I refer to attributes and meanings that are socially attached to inherited characteristics such as skin color.) Race has been a principal organizing frame in American society since its inception during the colonial era. Although race as a social category in the United States is unlikely to vanish anytime soon, its meaning will change. Indeed, the meaning of race has changed dramatically since the 1960s. In this essay, I review the history of racial formation in the United States to place the current moment in historical perspective. I then outline a new agenda for civil rights in the age of Obama.

When the first “20 and odd Negroes” disembarked in Jamestown in August 1619, race did not yet exist as a coherent social category. The informal practices, formal rules, and substantive meanings accruing to persons of European and African origin had not yet been invented. The earliest evidence of racial formation in the United States is from a series of court decisions handed down in colonial Virginia’s legal system. These rulings established the basic tenets of U.S. race relations

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that would prevail for centuries: that blacks were inherently inferior to whites; that blacks were less than fully human and could be treated as property; and that black inferiority was divinely sanctioned and to be publicly enforced.¹

These precepts were well established in colonial jurisprudence by the 1660s, but the growing number of slaves, the expanding mixed-race population, and the rise of a small community of free blacks created complexities in race relations that could no longer be handled through piecemeal court decisions. As a result, state assemblies stepped forward to legislate race. Leading the way in 1662, the Virginia House of Burgesses enacted a measure that required the children of a white father and black mother to be defined according to the status of the mother, thus making racial bondage hereditary as a matter of public law. In 1667, the Virginia House declared that baptism did not alter a slave's condition of servitude, and in 1669, it held that the killing of a black slave by a white owner did not constitute murder but a lawful disposition of property.

Over time, as racial laws proliferated, legislators felt a need to systematize them. In 1705, the Virginia House of Burgesses consolidated race-related legislation into a coherent body of law known as the Slave Codes. In addition to reaffirming the basic precepts of black inferiority that were already well established in colonial law, the codes explicitly banned interracial marriage, prohibited African Americans from holding public office, and legally defined as black anyone with a black grandparent. These laws served as legislative models and were widely copied in other states.

Upon American independence, race became a preoccupying issue for the founding fathers. The U.S. Constitution was carefully crafted to permit the existence

of slavery in a nation otherwise dedicated to the proposition that "all men are created equal." Following what the late Federal Appeals Court Judge A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., called "the principle of non-disclosure," Southern delegates voted repeatedly to strike words such as *Negro*, *African*, *slave*, and *slavery* from the text, preferring cryptic references to "other persons" and "persons bound to service" when constraining the rights of African Americans. The framers sought to make it virtually impossible to eliminate slavery constitutionally; they did so by granting disproportionate power to a minority of states through innovations such as an appointed Senate, the Electoral College, the three-fifths apportionment clause, and the requirement of supermajorities within Congress and the states to amend the Constitution.

Despite these constitutional protections, the legitimacy of the South's "peculiar institution" was never fully accepted. Over time, an abolitionist movement gained strength and sought ways to undermine the slave system. In defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, for example, Northern legislatures passed a series of "personal liberty acts" that offered freedom to escaped slaves who reached Northern soil. Abolitionists then mobilized to prevent the spread of slavery to other states and achieved partial success with the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which admitted Missouri as a slave state but prohibited slavery in future states located above Missouri's southern border. This compromise led to an uneasy peace between North and South until new territorial acquisitions upset the delicate balance in the late 1840s.

In 1846, a treaty with England settled the location of the U.S.-Canada border and officially relinquished the territories of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, and the Dakotas to the United

States. The Mexican-American War ended in 1848 with a treaty that ceded to the United States the present states of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California along with parts of Colorado, Utah, and Nevada. Southerners quickly realized that if all these territories were admitted as states under the terms of the Missouri Compromise, free states would eventually outnumber slave states and come dangerously close to the supermajorities needed to amend the Constitution and end slavery. In response, Southerners sought ways to consolidate the legal foundations of slavery within the nation.

The South struck back in 1850, when it forced through Congress a new Fugitive Slave Act that challenged the liberty of free blacks in the North. Congress acted again in 1854, passing (despite strenuous Northern objections) the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which rescinded the Missouri Compromise and allowed settlers in territories applying for statehood to vote on whether they would be admitted as slave or free states. Any remaining doubt about the legality of slavery under the Constitution was ended by the Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* decision of 1857, which not only affirmed slavery but articulated an explicit doctrine of black inferiority. Specifically, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney wrote that African Americans were not citizens under the Constitution but "a subordinate and inferior class of beings who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and the government might choose to grant them."²

The *Dred Scott* case and the Kansas-Nebraska Act made it clear that slavery would not end in the United States unless free states could achieve the super-

majorities needed to amend the Constitution. Abolitionists thus focused political attention on preventing slavery's spread to states beyond those where it already existed, and this principle became a plank in the platform of the newly formed Republican Party in 1860. When Republican nominee Abraham Lincoln won the presidency in the same year, South Carolina led ten Southern states into secession to ignite civil war. In keeping with the founding fathers' designs, slavery was ended not through standard constitutional procedures, but through an armed, bloody struggle.

Although the war ostensibly erupted over the issue of "states rights," the true cause was made explicit by the Confederate Constitution, which rejected the principle of "non-disclosure" and made repeated, unambiguous references to slavery in the text. The very first article stated that the Confederate Congress would be apportioned "by adding to the whole number of free persons . . . *three-fifths of all slaves*." It went on to state, "[N]o . . . law denying or impairing the right of property in *negro slaves* shall be passed." Likewise, Article IV held that "the institution of *negro slavery*, as it now exists in the Confederate States, shall be recognized and protected by Congress."³

Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens affirmed the centrality of slavery to the Southern cause in a speech he delivered in Savannah, Georgia, on March 21, 1861. In his remarks, Stephens stated, "[T]he new constitution has put at rest, forever, all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution – African slavery as it exists amongst us – the proper status of the Negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution."⁴

Although Northerners may have entered the Civil War to preserve the

Union and limit the spread of slavery, as the conflict and bloodshed wore on, the struggle took on a higher purpose: namely, freedom.⁵ On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln invoked his authority as Commander in Chief to emancipate slaves in the states under rebellion; two years later, with Union troops still dying in battle, Congress approved the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, thereby abolishing slavery in all states. The amendment was quickly ratified in the North and, once the Southern states were defeated and occupied, in the former Confederacy as well. The lone exception was Mississippi, which refused to ratify the amendment until 1995.

Once it took effect on December 18, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment ushered in a remarkable period of civil rights progress known as Reconstruction.⁶ Not only was slavery abolished, but with assistance from the federal government, African Americans advanced rapidly on multiple fronts: building schools, founding churches, creating self-help organizations, acquiring land, becoming literate, organizing politically, and achieving election to local, state, and federal offices. Forward movement on civil rights reached an apogee during the first Grant administration of 1869 to 1873. First, the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed equal protection under the law to all persons regardless of race. Next, the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment confirmed the right of all adult males to vote regardless of race or former condition of servitude. To enforce the new constitutional provisions, Congress passed its first Civil Rights Acts, one in 1866 and a second in 1875. Finally, under the supervision of military governors and occupying Union troops, Southern states were compelled to rewrite their constitutions to end slavery and ensure black suffrage.

Progress on civil rights faltered in the second Grant administration, however, and came to a definitive halt in 1876, when Rutherford B. Hayes, the Republican presidential candidate, agreed to restore home rule to the South in return for its acquiescence to his assuming office in a disputed election. True to his word, President Hayes withdrew federal troops from the South in 1877, and in 1878, Congress prohibited the military from supervising Southern elections. With its “redemption” thus achieved, the South set about creating new institutions of racial hierarchy to replace those associated with chattel slavery.

Southern lawmakers organized a new system of peonage to replace the slave system in the economic sphere and instituted strict racial separation in the social sphere, thus yielding a new arrangement of racial subordination that came to be known as Jim Crow. In 1890, Mississippi became the first Southern state to replace its Reconstruction-era constitution with a new charter designed to limit black suffrage. Mississippi Governor James K. Vardaman put it bluntly: “[T]here is no use to equivocate or lie about the matter. Mississippi’s constitutional convention of 1890 was held for no other purpose but to eliminate the nigger from politics; not the ignorant – but the nigger. Let the world know it just as it is.”⁷

With white political control reestablished, Southerners in Congress quickly accumulated seniority and gained effective control of appointments to the federal judiciary, including the Supreme Court, which systematically began to undo Reconstruction-era reforms. In the *Civil Rights Cases of 1883*, the Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional and that the Fourteenth Amendment applied only to states, not to individuals or private

groups. In 1896, the Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision explicitly endorsed the new system of racial separation by adopting the fiction that segregation rendered the races "separate but equal." Finally, in 1898, the Court ruled in *Williams v. Mississippi* that the latter's new state constitution did not violate the Fourteenth or Fifteenth Amendments, blithely ignoring Governor Vardaman's remarks to the contrary.

By 1900, Jim Crow was institutionalized throughout the South, creating a system of racial subordination that was "slavery by another name" and, in some ways, "worse than slavery," given the high levels of violence that accompanied it.⁸ Reconstruction was ultimately defeated not by political actions, but by a guerrilla war and terrorist campaign that drove federal officials from the South.⁹ African Americans bore the brunt of the violence before and after this "redemption" as lynching – the extrajudicial execution of African Americans by white vigilantes – became normalized in the South. Although the frequency with which lynchings occurred declined over time, the practice never disappeared; it remained a basic instrument of social control well into the twentieth century, rising during periods of economic and political uncertainty and falling during periods of calm and stability.¹⁰

Ironically, many of the discriminatory practices mandated under Jim Crow in the South originated in the North, where African Americans were neither perceived nor treated as equals despite Northerners' rejection of slavery as an institution.¹¹ Indeed, African Americans were routinely excluded from white society and relegated to the bottom of the Northern occupational hierarchy.¹² Moreover, as black populations increased during the Great Migration of the early twentieth

century, levels of discrimination and repression in Northern cities steadily grew. By 1920, institutionalized discrimination was endemic within Northern markets for housing, labor, services, products, and credit. Particularly in the residential sphere, a strict color line emerged, generating extremely high levels of school and neighborhood segregation.

During the 1930s, the federal government began to intervene more forcefully in the U.S. political economy and increasingly invoked public policies to perpetuate black social and spatial isolation. Specifically, the social programs of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal were deliberately racialized to accommodate de jure segregation in the South and de facto segregation in the North.¹³ The political reality was that no law could pass Congress without Southern support, and although Southerners favored the New Deal's populist economic programs, they did so only to the extent that the programs did not challenge the racial status quo. Therefore, at the insistence of Southern representatives in Congress, African Americans were systematically excluded from the various social protections and economic benefits of the New Deal. Traditionally black occupations were not covered by the Social Security Act; labor legislation was written to allow segregated unions; states were delegated authority to exclude African Americans from receiving veterans benefits; and bureaucratic rules were written to prohibit black families and black neighborhoods from receiving Federal Housing Association and Veterans Administration loans.

For most of the twentieth century, African Americans remained second-class citizens in both the North and South. In the wake of World War II, however,

America's self-proclaimed status as "leader of the free world" made the blatant oppression of African Americans difficult to sustain not only morally but also politically. In addition, black veterans, having served in the war to defend freedom against Fascism, returned home determined to exercise the civil rights they had long been denied. The civil rights era began in earnest in 1948, when President Harry Truman ordered the desegregation of the U.S. armed forces, and Democrats for the first time included a civil rights plank in their party platform, spurring a third-party revolt by Southern "Dixiecrats" led by Strom Thurmond of South Carolina.

In 1948, the Supreme Court also began a long retreat from legal segregation, declaring in *Shelley v. Kraemer* that racially restrictive covenants, routinely used throughout the real estate industry, were unenforceable and contrary to public law. In 1954, the Court finally dealt the constitutional foundations of Jim Crow a lethal blow when it overturned *Plessy*, declaring in its landmark *Brown* decision that separate was not and could never be equal, thus rendering the racial segregation of schools unconstitutional.

These court decisions, as bold as they were, nonetheless failed to bring about meaningful change in race relations in the face of implacable white opposition. Therefore, the main thrust of the civil rights movement shifted from the legal to the political arena. In 1957, Congress passed the first Civil Rights Act since Reconstruction. Ostensibly a voting rights bill to advance black suffrage in the South, its effect was largely symbolic in that it allowed Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson to demonstrate his mastery of the Senate by breaking a Southern filibuster led by Strom Thurmond.¹⁴ After Democrats captured the White House in 1960, President John F. Kennedy, facing a ris-

ing tide of civil rights agitation and Southern violence, decided to submit a comprehensive civil rights bill to Congress in June 1963.

Kennedy's assassination in November of that year opened the door for President Lyndon Johnson to use the young president's martyrdom and his own formidable legislative skills to push the civil rights bill through Congress, once again breaking a filibuster by Strom Thurmond. The 1964 Civil Rights Act turned the tide against Jim Crow by banning discrimination in public accommodations, services, and labor markets and putting new muscle behind school desegregation. The Voting Rights Act followed a year later, empowering the federal government to supervise elections in the South in areas where blacks were underrepresented. Although President Johnson also sought to ban discrimination in the real estate industry, this legislation stalled until the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., once again oiled the legislative machinery with a martyr's blood, leading to the passage of the Fair Housing Act in April 1968.

President Johnson was committed to more than ending legal segregation in the South, however. He also endeavored to break de facto segregation in the North and to move rapidly toward economic parity between the races. As he stated on June 4, 1965, in his widely quoted commencement address at Howard University:

Freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you are free to compete with all the others," and still justly be-

lieve that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity.¹⁵

To further the goal of equal opportunity, President Johnson launched his signature War on Poverty.¹⁶ In 1964, he pushed through Congress the Economic Opportunity Act, which created a new Office of Economic Opportunity that made antipoverty grants to local organizations known as Community Action Agencies. In order to circumvent state and local authorities that had systematically excluded the poor and minority groups since the 1930s, the new agencies were obliged to move forward with the “maximum feasible participation” of these constituencies. In 1965, Johnson prevailed on Congress to create the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which channeled federal funds to distressed cities. In that same year, he succeeded in amending the Social Security Act to create two new health insurance programs: Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for the poor. Additional money was made available for the War on Poverty through the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 and the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1967.

The remarkable string of congressional victories Johnson achieved between 1963 and 1969 represents the greatest period of civil rights legislation since Reconstruction and the most important period of social legislation since the New Deal. Together, they brought about a remarkable burst of progress for African Americans. In the decade from 1959 to 1969, the black poverty rate dropped from 55 percent to 32 percent; black incomes

rose 65 percent in real terms; the share of young African Americans completing high school rose from 39 percent to 56 percent; the ratio of white-to-black income dropped from 1.93 (where it had hovered for years) to 1.63 (still the lowest level ever reached); and the number of black elected officials jumped from under 300 to over 1,400.¹⁷

Unfortunately, however rapid this progress may have been in historical terms, it was not fast enough to keep up with the revolution of rising black expectations. Young African Americans, in particular, perceived good schools, decent jobs, union membership, college education, and professional occupations to be largely out of reach, and as the lag between expectations and opportunities gave rise to frustration, urban rioting swept over American cities during the late 1960s. Urban racial violence created a new political dynamic in which policy-makers, business elites, educational administrators, and civic leaders sought some means – any means – to accelerate the economic progress and integration of African Americans.¹⁸

In public education, the means chosen to advance integration was busing. Given the realities of de facto segregation in housing, the only realistic way to desegregate schools quickly in the North was to bus children between catchment areas. In employment and education, the tool of choice became affirmative action. Up to that point, blue-collar jobs had been distributed to people largely through segregated neighborhood- and kin-based social networks, and the only practical way to promote greater black inclusion was to force employers to recruit more widely. Likewise, because selective colleges and professional schools recruited heavily through legacy admissions and well-established institutional pipelines, the only realistic way to desegregate

higher education was to require admissions officials to expand their applicant pools.

Lyndon Johnson's dreams of a "Great Society" died in Vietnam, of course, but the momentum of the War on Poverty continued into the next administration. Despite Richard Nixon's stated goal of limiting civil rights enforcement and curtailing social spending, real efforts to turn back the Great Society were put off until his second administration. Indeed, shortly after his landslide victory in 1972, Nixon shut down the Office of Economic Opportunity, turned federal employment programs over to the states, introduced legislation to forbid busing students to other school districts, and deliberately slowed down civil rights enforcement.¹⁹ The backward movement would no doubt have continued had Richard Nixon not been forced from office by the Watergate scandal.

With the Republican Party temporarily derailed by Nixon's implosion, the civil rights movement got a second wind and rallied in 1974 to pass the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (to prohibit discrimination in mortgage lending), followed in 1975 by the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (forcing banks to publish data on the race of mortgage applicants), and the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 (outlawing the practice of neighborhood "redlining"). All told, in the two decades from 1957 to 1977, Congress passed seven major civil rights bills that eliminated the legal foundations for de jure segregation in the South and outlawed de facto discrimination and separation in the North. It was a remarkable period of civil rights progress that historian Manning Marable has called the "Second Reconstruction."²⁰

Given the history of America's first Reconstruction, it is hardly surprising

that its second incarnation sparked a similar counterreaction and backward movement with respect to civil rights. Resistance to the dismantling of de jure and de facto segregation is not only predicted historically, it is to be expected psychologically.²¹ Loss aversion is a well-established principle of human cognition. People find it painful to give up resources and benefits they already possess; indeed, they will fight much harder to avoid losses than to achieve gains. Unless public resources were somehow expanded after 1964 to accommodate black gains without white losses – a political gambit that Johnson's Great Society failed to realize because of the Vietnam War – white opposition to the second reconstruction was almost inevitable.

Loss aversion is only one of several psychological reasons to expect resistance to racial change, however. Human cognition is also characterized by considerable inertia, as established mental categories tend to resist modification. The mind works through pattern recognition and inductive generalization rather than deductive logic; it is wired to construct social categories that assign attributes and characteristics to people. Information that is inconsistent with existing categories of thought tends to be ignored or reshaped to fit preconceptions. Given that the social conceptualizations of race had evolved over hundreds of years and were deeply rooted in the American psyche, changes in racial thinking would come more slowly than changes in outward behavior.

Social categories are especially resistant to change because they are imbued with emotion. Labels such as "white" or "black" do not exist simply as neutral mental constructs; rather, they are associated with distinct emotional valences that contribute to prejudice – a predetermined orientation for or against certain

social groups. All people, whether they think of themselves as prejudiced or not, hold in their heads schemas that classify people according to age, gender, race, and ethnicity. These categories invariably include unconscious components whose expression is more or less automatic. Such “implicit prejudices” may be overcome rationally when their existence is made apparent and there is a will to change. But absent such deliberate cognitive work, prejudices tend to be expressed spontaneously and unconsciously, a phenomenon that psychologist John Bargh calls “automaticity.”

Together, the human traits of loss aversion, cognitive inertia, and automaticity offered fertile psychological grounds for a white political backlash, and in the late 1960s, Richard Nixon led the way with his “Southern strategy.” He began by cultivating Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond, who had switched parties in 1964 to become a Republican after his efforts to block the Civil Rights Act of 1957 failed. In secret negotiations, Nixon promised to retard civil rights enforcement as president if Thurmond would campaign on Nixon’s behalf.²² With Thurmond’s support, Nixon carried four former Confederate states – the first time a Republican had done so since Reconstruction. In subsequent years, most Southern Democrats would either be defeated or follow Strom Thurmond into the Republican Party. By the 1980s, the “solid South” had become a Republican rather than a Democratic monolith, with Southerners increasingly leading the party.

Blue-collar workers and middle-class whites in the North also abandoned the Democratic Party over its commitment to civil rights.²³ To a greater extent than party leaders cared to admit, working-class whites defined themselves in opposition to African Americans and measured their status in terms of the distance be-

tween themselves and black schools, neighborhoods, and people. Busing students across district lines was thus experienced as an attack on white working-class identity. Affirmative action in the labor market added insult to injury by forcing employers to hire African Americans into jobs that in the past would have been passed to whites through family and peer networks. Middle-class whites came to see affirmative action in education as “reverse racism,” unfairly taking scarce college admission slots away from “deserving” white students and giving them to “unqualified” black students.

In response to these racial “impositions” by liberal Democratic elites, angry working- and middle-class whites took to the courts. Parents in suburban Detroit filed suit to stop the busing of children across district lines to achieve integration, and in its 1974 *Milliken* decision, the Supreme Court agreed that such a remedy was constitutional only if there was direct evidence that district boundaries had been drawn to promote segregation, a condition that rarely held. Since school segregation after 1960 increasingly occurred between rather than within districts, this decision effectively eliminated busing as a tool for integration in the United States.

A few years later, a white applicant to the University of California, Davis, sued admissions officials when his application to the UC Davis medical school was rejected twice. He argued that because of affirmative action, less-qualified African Americans were unconstitutionally being admitted to medical school in his stead. In its 1978 *Bakke* decision, the Supreme Court agreed and prohibited the use of racial quotas in college admissions. Although it allowed race to be taken into account as one factor in admissions decisions, the Court later gave this policy an expiration date in its *Grut-*

ter v. Bollinger verdict, which stated that “race-conscious admissions policies must be limited in time.”²⁴

With the *Milliken* and *Bakke* rulings in place, the racial counterreaction shifted from the judicial to the electoral arena. Political realignment reached its full expression during the 1980s. Republicans occupied the White House for all but eight years from 1980 to 2008 and wielded effective control over Congress during much of that time, especially between 1994 and 2006. By 2002, Republican Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi was crowing to constituents, “I want to say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president [in 1948], we voted for him. We’re proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn’t have had all these problems over all these years, either.”²⁵ Thurmond’s campaign, of course, was based on the premise that “all the laws of Washington and all the bayonets of the Army cannot force the Negro into our homes, our schools, our churches.”²⁶

From 1980 through 2008, Republican administrations paid no more than lip service to antidiscrimination enforcement and filled the civil rights divisions of the Justice Department and HUD with either incompetent hacks or conservative ideologues openly hostile to black civil rights. In Republican hands, Congress de-funded not just the Great Society but much of the New Deal, slashing budgets for public assistance, urban development, public housing, and unemployment insurance, and ultimately ending welfare as a social entitlement.²⁷ Perhaps the most important development in the counterrevolution was the rise of a new race-making institution in the United States: a racialized criminal justice system that put record numbers of African Americans behind bars.²⁸

The origins of the new “criminal justice complex” lay in President Nixon’s 1970 State of the Union address, in which he declared a War on Crime, which evolved seamlessly into President Reagan’s War on Drugs. To prosecute these “wars” (both sardonic allusions to Johnson’s War on Poverty), former state-level crimes were federalized and mandatory minimum sentences and strict sentencing guidelines were imposed. Particularly severe penalties were enacted for nonviolent drug offenses, most notably for the use and sale of crack cocaine – a cheap form of the drug common in poor black communities. Criminal possession of a controlled substance became the principal legal instrument used by white authorities to regulate the behavior of poor African Americans, despite the fact that rates of drug use are much lower in the black community compared to the white.

In the wake of the twin wars on crime and drugs, legal infractions were more likely to result in arrests; arrests were more likely to result in imprisonment; imprisonment was likely to involve a long sentence; and long sentences were less likely to be shortened by parole. Between 1970 and 2003, the number of people in state and federal penitentiaries rose from around 200,000 to 1.4 million; thus, the United States achieved the highest incarceration rate in the world. As in all societies, the vast majority of crimes in the United States are committed by poor, young, socially unattached males. The new punishment regime was destined to have a disproportionate effect on members of any group fitting that profile.

By imposing harsher penalties on crimes committed by socially marginal groups, such as young black males, Congress effectively racialized the criminal justice system. Whereas only 0.7 percent of all Americans were imprisoned

in 2000, the figure was 2.1 percent for working-age adult males; and whereas among that group, the share behind bars was 1 percent for whites, it was 7.9 percent for blacks. Among young black men of working age, the incarceration rate was 11.5 percent; but among those without a college degree it was 17 percent, and among those without a high school degree, the share rose to one-third. The cumulative risk of incarceration by age 35 was 21 percent for young black men; and for those who were high school dropouts, it was 59 percent. By 2000, black males were more likely to be under criminal justice supervision than to be in college, the military, a marriage, or a labor union.

The election of the nation's first African American president in 2008 suggests that the momentum of the white racial backlash has shifted. Not only did Barack Obama win the presidency; he carried three states of the former Confederacy. In the wake of the civil rights movement and the Great Society, white racial attitudes changed despite resistance and opposition. Prior to the 1960s, a clear majority of white Americans favored racial segregation as a matter of principle: according to nationwide polls, two-thirds thought that blacks and whites should attend separate schools; 55 percent said that whites should have the first chance at any job; 54 percent favored segregation in transportation; 60 percent said that whites have a right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods, and 63 percent said they would not vote for a black candidate. By the 1980s, these figures had dropped, respectively, to 4 percent, 3 percent, 12 percent, 13 percent, and 5 percent – a remarkable historical shift by any standard.²⁹

Principled racism has not disappeared, of course, and is currently enjoying a par-

tial resurgence, as indicated by portrayals of President Obama as a foreign-born Muslim terrorist hell-bent on executing elderly white people. Nonetheless, overt racism is progressively aging out of existence. Social change is only partly about changing the minds of living people; it also follows from a powerful demographic process known as cohort replacement. Older people socialized before the civil rights era may be less tolerant, but every year more of them die and are replaced by young people raised in an era when civil rights was the rule and open racism was not tolerated. In addition, owing to immigration and intermarriage, younger Americans are more likely to be minorities themselves and thus naturally sympathetic to civil rights. According to exit polls, two-thirds of persons aged 18 to 29 voted for Obama, compared with just 52 percent of those aged 30 to 44, 50 percent of those 45 to 64, and a minority of only 45 percent among those 65 and older.³⁰

Although overt racism may be on the decline, this outward shift does not mean that racial stereotypes and racial sentiments are necessarily disappearing.³¹ Indeed, a significant share of white Americans continue to hold negative stereotypes about African Americans. According to one national survey, nearly a quarter of white adults hold universally negative views about blacks. Among whites interviewed in Los Angeles, 46 percent viewed blacks as less intelligent, and nearly three-quarters said blacks preferred to live off welfare. Such expressions of explicit negative stereotypes are strongly associated with discriminatory actions in a variety of domains.

Despite the persistence of antiblack stereotypes, for most white Americans, racial stereotyping has shifted to become a more variegated, subtle, and contingent process.³² Stereotyping occurs within a two-dimensional space of social cogni-

tion defined by the attributes of warmth and competence. We judge other people by whether they are trustworthy, approachable, and likeable (warm), and whether they are capable, effective, and worthy of respect (competent). People perceived as both warm and competent comprise societal reference groups, such as middle-class whites, and they tend to be esteemed and respected in society. In contrast, those perceived as low in warmth and high in competence constitute envied out-groups, such as the rich and certain middleman minorities. Those deemed high on warmth but low on competence define pitied out-groups, such as the elderly and disabled. Those seen as neither warm nor competent are generally members of despised out-groups, such as drug addicts and the homeless.

White racial stereotyping historically placed African Americans in the despised quadrant of low competence and low warmth: lazy, stupid, unmotivated people such as welfare queens, shiftless workers, and petty criminals. Other black stereotypes involve low competence and high warmth (minstrels, mammies, Uncle Toms) and high competence and low warmth (sexual predators, violent criminals). What historically has been missing in American social cognition has been the placement of African Americans within the zone of high competence and high warmth. This situation seems to have changed in recent years, however, and black professionals are now esteemed and respected in the social cognition of white Americans.

Although the emergence of positive black stereotypes is clearly progress, it nonetheless entails a subtle process of stereotyping by omission. In public discussions, whites tend to accentuate positive traits about African Americans while omitting stereotypically negative

traits; yet this omission implies the unspoken existence of these traits. The tendency to stereotype through omission is strongest among persons holding egalitarian attitudes – presumably those who least want to appear “racist” in discussing African Americans. Whites also routinely engage in stereo-subtyping, placing the smaller number of educated, middle-class, and professional blacks into the esteemed category of high warmth and high competence but relegating the much larger number of poor African Americans to the despised category of low warmth and low competence. Such negative stereotyping, however, is mitigated by habituation: that is, exposure to African Americans through the media and daily life brings familiarity and leads whites to evaluate blacks in terms of individual traits rather than gross stereotypes. Obama garnered white support not only because he is a black professional, but also because in the course of the campaign he became familiar and unthreatening.

People perceive the social world not only in terms of explicit, conscious stereotypes but also, as noted above, in terms of implicit biases that are expressed automatically and unconsciously. Although explicitly held stereotypes have long been known to affect behavior, research suggests that implicit prejudices appear to have greater power in predicting discriminatory conduct.³³ By virtue of growing up and living in a society that is filled with negative historical and contemporary images of blacks, virtually all Americans come to harbor implicit biases that unconsciously affect judgments and decisions in the social realm.

The prevalence of implicit, unconscious, automatic biases helps explain the nature of contemporary discrimination. Just as overtly racist attitudes are consciously rejected by most white

Americans, open discrimination against African Americans has largely disappeared from private markets and public spheres. One no longer encounters “whites only” signs or placards stating that “Blacks need not apply,” and African Americans are not told, “Sorry, but we do not sell to your kind.” Not only are such actions illegal, but the expression of racist sentiments is no longer publicly acceptable.

Although racial discrimination is no longer practiced openly, however, evidence suggests that it has not disappeared but has gone underground to be expressed in surreptitious and subtle ways that often are not directly observable.³⁴ Racial discrimination today is detected through a methodology known as the audit study, in which trained black and white testers are sent into markets to seek out proffered goods and services. How testers are received in various markets is recorded over a number of trials and compared by race to discern systematic differences in treatment. Numerous audit studies have documented the persistence of antiblack discrimination in markets for real estate, credit, jobs, goods, and services. Although discrimination may not be as intense or as open as it once was, it still exists.

To date there have been two major waves of forward movement on civil rights in the United States. The first occurred during the Civil War and Reconstruction, when slavery was abolished and African Americans achieved, for a brief time, significant political representation, something approaching equal treatment under the law, and substantial economic gains. The second wave of civil rights progress occurred during America’s “Second Reconstruction,” when landmark Supreme Court decisions in the 1950s and legislation passed in the 1960s and 1970s elimi-

nated the basis for legal segregation in the South, outlawed discrimination in the North, and sought to deracialize public policies throughout the nation. At the same time, social spending and affirmative action programs launched as part of Johnson’s War on Poverty brought significant economic progress for African Americans. As with the first Reconstruction, however, these forward steps sparked a white counterreaction that substantially blunted black progress after 1980.

Although progress toward racial equality may have stalled during the 1980s, the election of the nation’s first black president in 2008 suggests that we may have turned a corner. Overt racism still exists, of course, but it is rapidly fading; and while we cannot ignore the capacity of a dying racial order to wreak havoc and violence as it disintegrates, principled racism, open discrimination, and systematic exclusion are no longer the barriers to black social and economic progress they once were. We are now entering a new, third wave of civil rights in the United States. In this new age, the tools used to advance racial equality in the past are no longer appropriate and may even be counterproductive. New tools must be invented and applied if we are to move forward.

American race relations today are quite different from those that prevailed in the mid-twentieth century, when racist attitudes were freely expressed and challenges to white supremacy met by violent resistance. Under these circumstances, social change required direct, forceful actions such as sit-ins, demonstrations, boycotts, marches, rallies, prosecutions, and punishment. Today, however, open racism is no longer tolerated, racial discrimination is subtle, and although changes to the racial status quo are opposed po-

litically, race-neutral language has replaced violently racist rhetoric. Scholars have conveyed the contradictory nature of contemporary race relations using a variety of labels: symbolic racism, modern racism, laissez-faire racism, color-blind racism, and aversive racism.³⁵ Whatever the label used, actions such as marching, demonstrating, prosecuting, and punishing will be of little use in expanding civil rights beyond this point.

Consider the realm of attitudes, for example. Although some whites no doubt remain “closet racists” who hold anti-black views and oppose actions to advance racial equality without admitting it publicly, most Americans consciously reject racism and sincerely seek a “race-blind” society, even though they may continue to harbor implicit racial prejudices. In the domain of behavior, notwithstanding a small population of racists who continue to openly discriminate against blacks, many do not wish to discriminate; they only do so under certain conditions because of unconscious biases. Finally, in the policy arena, although some white policy-makers may consciously despise African Americans and work to devise policies intended to harm them, many others support such discriminatory policies without consciously wishing to harm blacks or without ever fully understanding their racially disproportionate effects.

In sum, we have reached a point in American society where race is expressed subtly rather than overtly and where racial disadvantage is perpetuated in the shadows rather than in the open. Such a world requires a more judicious and refined politics of civil rights because the overt injustices that called for protest, boycott, and prosecution in the 1950s and 1960s have largely vanished. Since racial biases are now for the most part implicit, and mechanisms of racial stratification not readily observable, the pri-

mary goals in a new civil rights movement should be to render implicit biases explicit and to make transparent the obscured mechanisms of racial discrimination. In doing so, the intent should not be to root out and shame the hidden racists among us or to denounce the racist intent behind public policies. Rather, the goal should be to identify the unconscious biases and unintended consequences and bring them to explicit attention for remedial action. Even if some of the biases are conscious and the consequences intended, direct attacks will no longer work.

If we make the implicit biases that most people hold explicit in a nonthreatening way, and if we expose their dissonance with stated principles, we can overcome them.³⁶ Humiliating or shaming people for harboring implicit biases and unconscious prejudices in a society where it is difficult *not* to acquire them, through the media and other sources, is inevitably counterproductive and more likely to produce resistance than change. Likewise, casting racist aspersions on supporters of policies with racially disparate impacts will not influence the behavior of actual racists, but it may hurt and offend those who are not and thereby cause them to dig in their heels and defend a policy line they might otherwise have been persuaded to abandon. The goal should be to change policies and structure, not punish people. The focus of civil rights action in the next wave should be elucidation and persuasion rather than confrontation and attack.

In translating these principles into concrete policy actions, there are two domains in which social science research has clearly demonstrated the existence of disproportionate impacts and implicit biases: the criminal justice system and U.S. markets. The racially disproport-

tionate effect of the shift from rehabilitation to punishment in criminal justice is well documented, as are the huge costs this disproportion imposes on both African Americans and U.S. society in general. To combat discrimination, the contemporary civil rights movement must make criminal justice reform a central goal, demanding a repeal of legal gimmicks such as three-strikes laws, mandatory minimum sentencing, and harsher penalties for crack than for powdered cocaine.

The persistence of significant racial discrimination in key U.S. markets is also well documented. Audit studies not only provide a means of measuring discrimination, they also offer a relatively cheap, easy, and legally valid way of enforcing antidiscrimination law. Up to this point, however, studies have been used only sporadically for civil rights enforcement, usually by underfunded nongovernmental organizations and civil rights groups in specific local areas. Court-ordered settlements have brought some justice to individual plaintiffs, but they have been too few and far between to mitigate discrimination in American markets.

A new civil rights movement should therefore demand the creation of federal programs to monitor levels of discrimination in key U.S. markets and take remedial action on a routine basis. If a society uses markets to allocate production, distribute goods and services, generate wealth, and produce income, then it is incumbent upon government to ensure that all citizens are able to compete freely in all markets. Lack of equal access to markets translates directly into a lack of equal access to material well-being and ultimately into socioeconomic inequality. Unfortunately, to secure passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, 1968, 1974, and 1977 and circumvent a filibuster,

most of the enforcement mechanisms included in the original legislation were stripped away. As a consequence, the federal government was largely disempowered from playing an active role either in uncovering discrimination in key markets or instigating actions to sanction those engaging in discrimination.

The existing body of civil rights law must be updated to establish within the U.S. Departments of Treasury, Labor, Commerce, and Housing and Urban Development permanent offices authorized to conduct regular audits in markets for jobs, goods, services, credit, and housing based on representative samples of market providers. On the theory that at least some of the discrimination identified by audits stems from implicit bias rather than conscious discrimination, producers caught discriminating would not be singled out for prosecution and public shaming; instead, they simply would be issued a ticket they could dismiss by paying a fine. Those wishing to contest the ticket would have the right to challenge the audit evidence in court, but authorities would seek strong sanctions only in cases where a systematic pattern and practice of discrimination was uncovered across multiple audits. Annual publication of audit results for the nation and key regional markets would raise awareness and educate the public about the realities of discrimination; at the same time, it would provide information to federal authorities about where to target future audits and enforcement efforts.

Finally, a revitalized civil rights movement must return to and build on Lyndon Johnson's observation, "[I]t is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates." Here again, social science research offers a clear basis for policy action by increasing our national

investment in early childhood education. It is now well established that key cognitive and noncognitive skills essential for later learning are produced early in childhood, well before the beginning of formal schooling. As economists James Heckman and Dimitriy Masterov have argued, “[S]chooling comes too late in the life cycle of the child to be the main locus of remediation for the disadvantaged. . . . [R]edirecting funds toward the

early years is a sound investment in the productivity and safety of American society, and also removes a powerful source of inequality.”³⁷ Although increasing funding for preschool education may not seem like a civil rights policy, African Americans would be clear beneficiaries, and the evidence suggests it would significantly mitigate a major source of racial inequality in the United States.

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The Declining Significance of Race: Revisited & Revised

William Julius Wilson

I published *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* thirty-two years ago, in 1978.¹ Given the furor and controversy over the book immediately following its publication, I did not anticipate that it would go on to become a classic. Indeed, the book's impact on the field of race and ethnic relations – its arguments have been discussed in nearly eight hundred empirical research articles, not to mention the nonempirical studies – lends credence to the idea of productive controversy and to George Bernard Shaw's famous dictum: "[I]t is better to be criticized and misunderstood than to be ignored." My motivation for this essay is to reflect on responses to the book that claim to provide an empirical test of my thesis. In the process, I indicate the extent to which important findings have influenced my thinking since the book's publication.

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The theoretical framework in *The Declining Significance of Race* relates racial issues to the economic and political arrangements of society. I argued that changes in the system of production and in government policies have affected, over time, black/white access to rewards and privileges as well as racial antagonisms. I advanced this framework to accomplish two major objectives: (1) to explain historical developments in U.S. race relations and (2) to account for paradoxical changes in the black class structure whereby, beginning in the last few decades of the twentieth century, the social and eco-

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conomic conditions of the black poor deteriorated while those of the black middle class improved.

In an elaboration of this framework, I focused on three periods of American race relations: the preindustrial period of antebellum slavery and the early post-bellum era; the industrial period that began in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and ended at roughly the New Deal era; and the modern industrial post-World War II era. I pointed out that whether one focuses on the way race relations were structured by the system of production, the polity, or both, racial oppression – ranging from the exploitation of black labor by the business class (including the plantation elite) to the elimination of black competition for economic, political, and social resources by the white masses – was characteristic of both the preindustrial and industrial periods of American race relations.

However, I noted that despite the prevalence of various forms of racial oppression, the change from a preindustrial to an industrial system of production enabled African Americans to increase their economic and political resources. The proliferation of jobs created by industrial expansion helped generate and sustain the continuous mass migration of blacks from the rural South to urban centers, especially the cities of the North and West. As the urban black population grew and became more segregated, institutions and organizations in the African American community also developed alongside a business and professional class affiliated with these institutions.

Nonetheless, it was not until after World War II (the modern industrial period) that black class structure began to take on some of the characteristics of white class structure and that economic class gradually became more important than race in determining the life chances

of individual African Americans. Several historical shifts accounted for these developments. In the preindustrial and industrial periods, the basis of racial inequality was primarily economic; in most situations, the state was merely an instrument to reinforce patterns of race relations that grew out of the social relations of production.² Except for the brief period of fluid race relations in the North from 1870 to 1890, the state was a major instrument of racial oppression.

State intervention designed to promote racial equality, together with the reciprocal relationship between the polity and the economy, has characterized the modern industrial period. Indeed, it is difficult to determine which factor has been more important in shaping race relations since World War II. Economic expansion facilitated black movement from the rural areas of the South to the industrial centers and created job opportunities leading to greater occupational differentiation in the African American community, as an increasing percentage of blacks moved into semiskilled and skilled blue-collar positions and white-collar positions. At the same time, government intervention (in response to the pressures of increased black political resources and the civil rights protest movements) removed many artificial discrimination barriers with municipal, state, and federal civil rights legislation. Moreover, state intervention contributed to the more liberal racial policies of the nation’s labor unions with protective union legislation. These combined economic and political changes created a pattern of black occupational upgrading that resulted, for example, in a substantial decline of African Americans in low-paying service jobs, unskilled labor, and farm jobs.

Given greater occupational differentiation, some aspects of structural economic change have resulted in a closer associa-

tion between black occupational mobility and class affiliation. Access to higher-paying jobs is increasingly based on educational criteria – a situation that distinguishes the modern industrial period from earlier systems of production and that has made the position of the black poor more precarious. In other words, the rapid growth of the corporate and government sectors has created a segmented labor market that currently provides vastly different mobility opportunities for different segments of the African American population. On the one hand, poorly trained and educationally limited African Americans have seen their job prospects increasingly limited to low-wage sector jobs, they have faced rising rates of unemployment and non-labor-force participation, and they have endured slower movements out of poverty. On the other hand, trained and educated African Americans have experienced increased job opportunities in the corporate and government sectors as a result of the expansion of white-collar positions and the pressures of state affirmative action programs.

Accordingly, the mobility pattern of blacks is consistent with the view that in the modern industrial period, economic class has become more important than race in predetermining job placement and occupational mobility for African Americans. In the economic realm, the black experience has moved historically from economic racial oppression experienced by virtually all African Americans to the economic subordination of the black poor. As a result, a deepening economic schism has developed in the African American community, with the black poor falling further and further behind higher-income blacks.

Moreover, the center of racial conflict has shifted from the industrial sector to the sociopolitical order. Neither the

low-wage sector nor the corporate and government sectors provide the basis for the kind of interracial job competition and conflict that plagued the economic order in previous years. The absorption of blacks into industrial unions and the federal government's protective union legislation effectively negated management's ability to undercut the demands of white workers for higher wages by replacing them with black workers. The traditional racial struggles for power and privilege have largely shifted away from the economic sector and are now concentrated in the sociopolitical order, as racial tensions have more to do with racial competition for public schools, municipal political systems, and residential areas than with competition for jobs. Although these developments within the sociopolitical order also affect the ultimate life chances of African Americans, their respective impact on social mobility opportunities is not as great as racial competition and antagonisms in the economic sector.

Thus, the original argument, as outlined in *The Declining Significance of Race*, was not that race is no longer significant or that racial barriers between blacks and whites have been eliminated. Rather, in comparing the contemporary situation of African Americans to their situation in the past, the diverging experiences of blacks along class lines indicate that race is no longer the primary determinant of life chances for blacks (in the way it had been historically).

In a paper reflecting on the critical reaction to *The Declining Significance of Race* immediately following publication of the book, the late sociologist Robin M. Williams, Jr., pointed out:

Despite the author's explicit qualifications and specifications, some critics seem to

miss one of the author’s central points: that both racial discrimination and class position importantly affect life-chances and that it is the changing character of the *interaction* of the two structural conditions that is critical for understanding the present situation. The increasing differentials within the black population in income, education, occupational prestige, and power-authority seem clear beyond dispute. That past-institutionalized racism has powerfully shaped these differentials is equally plain, as is the fact that large average interracial differentials continue to exist. What Wilson argues is only that economic class has become *more* important than race in determining job placement and occupational mobility, as signaled by the growth of a black middle class concurrently with the crystallization of a disproportionately large black underclass.³

As Williams indicates, my basic argument, including its underlying thesis – regarding the effect of economic and political changes on the shifting relative importance of race and class in black occupational mobility and job placement – is largely unaddressed in the many hundreds of studies responding to *The Declining Significance of Race*. For example, many of the articles whose titles play on the phrase “the declining significance of race” focus on issues that do not relate to my specific arguments – issues such as environmental racial inequality, skin tone differentials, mate selection, America’s drug crisis, capital punishment, and psychological well-being and quality of life.⁴ Others discuss residential segregation, school racial composition, and discrimination in public places without relating reported findings to my arguments regarding the shift in the concentration of racial antagonisms from the economic sector to the sociopolitical order.⁵

Of the universe of empirical studies that claim to respond to *The Declining Significance of Race*, I would like to highlight the high-quality publications that *correctly* address my thesis – including studies that fundamentally uphold or provide partial support for my arguments as well as those that challenge my basic claims. In the process, I will show how some of these studies have led me to revise or extend parts of my basic thesis, especially as it pertains to race and interracial relations today.

In her important book *Facing Up to the American Dream*, Harvard political scientist Jennifer Hochschild states, “One has not really succeeded in America unless one can pass on the chance for success to one’s children.”⁶ She highlights research on the occupational attainments and mobility of blacks revealing that, as late as 1960, there was no evidence to suggest that the effect of economic class position could rival the effect of race in terms of blacks’ achievements in occupation and income. Race, or skin color, was such a powerful factor in life that it clearly trumped class. As Hochschild puts it, blacks “‘experienced a perverse sort of egalitarianism’ – neither the disadvantages of poverty nor the advantages of wealth made much difference in what they could achieve or pass on to their children. Discrimination swamped everything else.” However, beginning in the early 1960s, she argues, class began to affect career and generational mobility for blacks as it had done regularly for whites: “Well-off black men thus could begin for the first time in American history to expect their success to persist and accumulate. Since 1973 these trends have continued, although less dramatically.”⁷

The research that Hochschild cites includes an important study by sociolo-

gist Michael Hout of the University of California, Berkeley.⁸ Analyzing data on intergenerational and intragenerational mobility of black men from the Occupational Changes in a Generation surveys of 1962 and 1973, Hout found support for arguments advanced in *The Declining Significance of Race*. More specifically, he revealed that between 1962 and 1973, class significantly affected intragenerational mobility for African Americans – a phenomenon similar to class effects among whites. As class differences in intergenerational mobility increased, African American men from the most advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds experienced the greatest upward mobility.⁹

Although Hout's findings are important, as sociologists Arthur Sakamoto and Jessie M. Tzeng explain, they "generally pertain to the period immediately before and after the civil rights movement"; therefore, they do not cover the wide temporal span of *The Declining Significance of Race*, "which is about changes across broad historical periods."¹⁰ By analyzing the 1940 and 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data sets (a large, nationally representative sample of the occupational attainment of black and white males in all sectors of the labor force), Sakamoto and Tzeng were able to test my thesis over a broader time span.¹¹ They found that whereas race was generally more important than class in determining occupational attainment among blacks during the industrial period of 1940, class was clearly more important than race in determining occupational attainment among black men during the modern industrial period of 1990. Indeed, their results "indicate that the net disadvantage of being black is substantially greater in the industrial period than in the modern industrial period."¹²

More specifically, after controlling for labor-force experience, schooling, and

region, Sakamoto and Tzeng found that the effect of race was smaller in 1990 than in 1940 for every level of education and sector attainment investigated. Furthermore, when comparing the impact of education with that of being black, they found that for the vast majority of black men in 1940, the racial disadvantage was greater in absolute value than the effect of education was; in 1990, however, the reverse was true: education was a much more significant factor than being black. Finally, class effects – in terms of relative educational attainment – substantially increased over this time span for black men. "These results," state Sakamoto and Tzeng, "support Wilson's thesis of the declining significance of race, and they are consistent with his claim that in the modern industrial period after the civil rights movement, 'economic class position [is] more important than race in determining black chances for occupational mobility.'"¹³

Nonetheless, this comparison over broad historical periods should not lead us to overlook changes in the relative importance of race and class within the current modern or postindustrial period. Here, I would include changes that narrow or increase the role that either race or class plays in black occupational advancement. On this connection, Michael Hout's significant 1984 findings revealed that public-sector employment "provided more high and middle-class occupations for black men than did the private sector employment" and therefore played "an important role in both occupational upgrading among blacks and the emergence of class cleavages within the black population."¹⁴ In *The Declining Significance of Race*, I did not highlight the relative contribution of the government sector and the corporate sector to black occupational gains. Given Hout's findings (and his subsequent research on this is-

sue, as discussed below), if I were writing *The Declining Significance of Race* today, I would not only place greater emphasis on black gains in the public sector and the major role of the polity in the crystallization of a black class structure, I would also underline the role and importance of affirmative action programs. In the process, I would discuss the impact of a possible contraction in government employment as well as waning public support for affirmative action on the occupational mobility of the more advantaged and educated African Americans, issues to which I now turn.

Using data from the Current Population Survey, sociologist Melvin E. Thomas demonstrated that “contrary to the assumption of the declining significance of race thesis, blacks with higher levels of education were found to be worse off than less educated, lower status blacks when compared to similar whites.”¹⁵ I find two shortcomings with Thomas’s treatment of my thesis. First, Thomas failed to disaggregate the data to show comparisons between younger and older educated blacks. Second, he neglected to mention that in the second edition of *The Declining Significance of Race* (published in 1980), I referred to the significant income gap between all college-educated African Americans and all college-educated whites that still exists, noting that this finding was largely a consequence of the substantially lower incomes of older educated blacks.

Denied the opportunity to move into higher paying occupations when they graduated from college, or discouraged from pursuing such careers, older black college graduates tend to be concentrated in lower-paying fields such as teaching, social welfare, and segregated services; they were rarely employed as executives or professionals in large corporations

when they entered the labor market. By contrast, younger educated blacks are now entering, and are encouraged to enter, finance, accounting, management, chemistry, engineering, and computer science – fields from which they were deterred previously. I quoted a 1978 paper by Clifton Wharton, then chancellor of the State University of New York, who stated, “[I]n 1966, 45 percent of all black college graduates were majoring in education, today only 26 percent are. In 1966 only 5 percent of the Blacks were studying business, today 18 percent are.”¹⁶

I also stated that prior to the 1970s, African American men more often enrolled in education programs than in programs that prepare students for higher-paying corporate jobs, such as business or accounting. For all these reasons, the incomes of older educated black males lag significantly behind the incomes of comparable white males, whereas younger college-educated black males had approached income parity with their white counterparts.

Recognizing the need to focus on younger educated blacks in the post-civil rights period to provide “an appropriate test of the declining significance of race within the black middle class,” sociologists In Soo Son, Suzanne W. Model, and Gene A. Fisher examined “interracial differences in the net effect of higher education among young workers who entered the labor market after the mid-1960s.” Analyzing data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) from 1968 to 1981 on the occupational mobility and earnings attainment of young black and white males, the authors found “evidence of class polarization among blacks in the era following the 1960s’ antidiscrimination legislation.” In 1974, blacks lacking a high school diploma earned 57 percent of what black college graduates earned,

while the figure for comparable whites was 65 percent. By 1981, blacks without a high school diploma earned only 36.6 percent of what blacks with a college degree earned, while the analogous ratio for the two groups of whites declined only to 58.5 percent.¹⁷

Moreover, Son, Model, and Fisher found not only that African American men without a high school degree consistently earn the smallest proportion of comparably educated whites' incomes, but they were the only group that experienced a decline in their absolute real dollar earnings, bringing their 1981 earnings to only two-thirds that of their white counterparts. Black high school graduates' earnings were slightly better in both absolute and relative terms, with an earnings gap that increased 7 percent between 1974 and 1981. By contrast, the progress of black college graduates was substantially greater, with incomes that changed from fewer than 6 percent of comparable whites' incomes in 1974 to matching the income of their white counterparts in 1981. Even more spectacular, "[B]lack college graduates obtain more prestigious posts than their white counterparts."¹⁸ These findings are consistent with the data I presented on the black/white income gap of younger college graduates in the second edition of *The Declining Significance of Race*.

Despite the progress of educated blacks, Son, Model, and Fisher warned: "[T]he racial parity achieved by young college-educated blacks in the 1970s will be maintained only if the government's commitment to affirmative action does not slacken. Ideological and economic pressures to reduce federal spending, coupled with a tighter business environment, could easily lead to fewer opportunities for blacks."¹⁹ Sociologist Marshall I. Pomer reached a similar conclusion. In his 1986 article on intragenerational mobility

based on a subset of the data used by Hout, he stated: "Opportunities for blacks were best in the public sector where the observed rate of intrasector upward mobility was actually higher for blacks than for whites. . . . Since the public sector offers the most opportunity for black advancement, reductions in government employment are likely to be especially detrimental to blacks."²⁰

A 1996 study by A. Silvia Cancio, T. David Evans, and David J. Maume presents data suggesting that these concerns were justified. The authors also appropriately pointed out that "aggregate black/white earnings are invalid because older Blacks presently earn less than whites because of past discrimination practices" and concluded that a comparison of the salaries of young workers would be the "most appropriate test of the significance of race in the modern industrial period." Using PSID data from 1976 and 1985, they found that the effect of race, after controlling for other variables, increased during this period, and that the proportion of the racial gap in hourly wages due to discrimination (that is, after racial differences in measured qualifications were taken into account) also increased during this time span. Thus, they argued, "[T]he government's retreat from anti-discrimination initiatives in the 1980s resulted in organizational discrimination against blacks and contributed to the reversal in the postwar trend toward racial parity in earnings."²¹

Cancio, Evans, and Maume observed that until 1980, my arguments of observable racial progress are essentially correct. However, they stated: "Wilson gave no indication that he expected the long run trend toward racial parity in earnings to reverse in the 1980s. But that is what has happened to young cohorts."²² In the epilogue to my book's second edition, I acknowledged that vigorous affirmative

action programs may still be needed in the immediate future “because it is difficult to determine if the gains that younger educated blacks are experiencing in entry level positions will be reflected in promotions to higher level jobs in later years.” But I went on to say: “[A]t this point there is also reason to believe that trained and educated blacks, like trained and educated whites, will continue to enjoy the advantages and privileges of their class status. It appears that the powerful political and social movement against job discrimination will mitigate against any effective and systematic movement to exclude qualified blacks.”²³ I noted that the *real* issue is improving the plight of the black lower class, whose conditions have not been addressed by programs like affirmative action.

The research by Cancio and her colleagues suggests that my optimism concerning the movement against job discrimination was unfounded: “Events in the 1980s proved that African Americans cannot take for granted the political commitments to affirmative action and equal opportunity legislation. . . . Our results suggest that a waning devotion to these ideals negatively affected the earnings of Black workers.”²⁴ Their research clearly underscores the importance of the strength and direction of future government efforts to promote racial equality. They also point to the need for careful longitudinal studies to understand fully the racial differences in career dynamics:

Blacks and Whites are more likely to be paid equally at the *beginning* of their careers. Research that observes people at the beginning of their work and examines race differences as they move through the stages of a career . . . will shed needed light on the experiences of Blacks within organizations. Moreover, it is important to compare cohorts who started their careers in

different decades, as government policies on the labor market have changed over time. If these policies affect careers at their starting points, does their impact last into mid- and late-careers similarly for Whites and Blacks?²⁵

For the present essay, in the absence of longitudinal studies, I examined cohorts of male workers ages twenty-five to twenty-nine at ten-year intervals, using figures from the Current Population Survey comparable to the 1977 figures originally reported in the second edition of *The Declining Significance of Race*. I found that the black/white earnings ratio for college graduates declined significantly from 1977 to 1987 (blacks who graduated from college earned 93 percent as much as their white counterparts in 1977, but by 1987, that ratio had dropped to 73.2 percent). The ratio increased by 9 percentage points between 1987 and 1997 (from 73.2 percent to 82.5), then decreased by 2.9 percent from 1997 to 2007 (from 82.5 percent to 79.6 percent). Thus, despite some improvements during the 1990s, by 2007, the income ratio of young black college-educated males was significantly below the ratio of 1977.²⁶

Finally, in 1995, political scientist Theodore J. Davis presented findings on the consequences of race and class interaction for both upward and downward mobility. Using data from the 1972 to 1989 Cumulative General Social Survey, Davis found that although there is some evidence of a very gradual decline in the role of race in influencing occupational attainment in the 1980s, and although both black and white males experienced intergenerational occupational upward mobility in the 1980s, black males were also more likely than white males to experience downward occupational mobility.²⁷

Given the research discussed in this section, I reiterate a point I made earlier: if I were writing *The Declining Significance of Race* today, I would place greater emphasis not only on the role of the public sector in accounting for black occupational mobility, but also on the importance of sustained public support for anti-discrimination programs, including affirmative action, to ensure that the gains continue or, at the least, are not reversed. However, I also need to address another aspect of “the declining significance of race” thesis – namely, class changes within the African American community.

One of the basic arguments of *The Declining Significance of Race* is that there has been a deepening economic schism as reflected in a widening gap between lower-income and higher-income black families. In light of more recent data, not only has the family income gap between poorer and better-off African Americans continued to widen, but the situation of the bottom fifth of black families has deteriorated since 1975 (see Table 1).

In 2007, 45.6 percent of all poor blacks had incomes below 50 percent of the poverty line.²⁸ Overall, poor black families fell below the poverty line by an average of \$9,266 in 2007, a depth of poverty exceeding that of all other racial/ethnic groups in the United States.²⁹ Regardless of the reversal of the relative income gains of younger educated blacks reported in the previous section, the gap between the haves and have-nots in the African American population continues to grow.

Research also indicates that “higher socioeconomic status Blacks have more White neighbors, fewer poor neighbors, and live in neighborhoods with higher housing values.”³⁰ This fact is important because one’s neighborhood controls ac-

cess to jobs and schools, and even exposure to violence. Using individual-level data from the geocoded version of the PSID for the years 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2001 to correspond with the decadal censuses, urban planner Lance Freeman found that higher socioeconomic status among African Americans is generally associated with greater integration and improved locational outcomes.

The strength of these relationships, however, did not increase between 1970 and 2000. “Class does matter,” Freeman states. “Higher status Blacks generally live in higher-status neighborhoods and those with more Whites. But the importance of class has not increased since 1970. The determinants of spatial outcomes for Blacks have been remarkably durable at the end of the twentieth century. . . . It appears that Blacks will have to achieve upward mobility in other domains, such as education, before achieving widespread access to higher-status and White neighborhoods.”³¹ Reaching this goal may be more of a challenge for black males than for black females.

Indeed, what has also changed since I wrote *The Declining Significance of Race* is that the black class structure increasingly reflects gender differences, especially among younger blacks, as males have fallen behind females on a number of socioeconomic indicators: employment rates, high school completion rates, and average income, with some of the sharpest discrepancies at the lower end of the income hierarchy.³² Black women have also far outpaced black men in college completion in recent years. Despite the fact that the gender gap in college degree attainment is increasing across all racial groups, with women generally exceeding men in rates of college completion, this discrepancy is particularly acute among African Americans. That gap has widened steadily over the past twenty-five

“The Declining Significance of Race”: Revisited & Revised

Table 1
Average Income of Black Families by Income Group

	1975	1985	1995	2005	2007	1975 – 2007 (changes in dollars)	1975 – 2007 (percent change)
Lowest Fifth	\$8,939	\$7,284	\$7,463	\$7,784	\$8,143	-\$796	-8.9%
Second Fifth	18,533	17,833	20,073	22,085	23,384	4,851	26.2
Middle Fifth	30,650	30,832	35,022	35,842	40,278	9,628	31.4
Fourth Fifth	46,095	49,396	55,408	61,407	64,573	18,478	40.1
Highest Fifth	78,031	90,902	111,767	129,002	132,565	54,534	69.9
Top 5 Percent	106,908	131,672	183,471	212,818	220,916	114,008	106.6

All figures reported in 2007 dollars. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008 *Annual Social and Economic Supplements*, Table F-3, “Mean Income Received by Each Fifth and Top 5 Percent of Families.”

years. In 1979, for every 100 bachelor’s degrees earned by black men, 144 were earned by black women. In 2006 to 2007, for every 100 bachelor’s degrees conferred on black men, 196 were conferred on black women – nearly a two-to-one ratio. To put this gap into a larger context, for every 100 bachelor’s degrees earned by white men and every 100 earned by Hispanic men, white women earned 130 and Hispanic women earned 158, respectively (see Table 2). The gap widens higher up on the educational ladder. For every 100 master’s degrees and 100 doctorates earned by black men, black women earned 255 and 193, respectively. These ratios have huge implications for the social organization of the black community. If present trends continue, future discussion of the black class structure will have to include a gender component to show the increasing proportion of black women and de-

creasing proportion of black men in higher socioeconomic positions.

In the epilogue to the second edition of *The Declining Significance of Race*, I argued that a conclusion one could draw from my book was “that the sole concentration on policy programs dealing with racial bias makes it difficult for blacks to recognize how their fortune is inextricably connected with the structure and the functioning of the modern American economy.”³³ In concluding the epilogue, I wrote: “Supporters of basic economic reform can only hope that in the 1980s the needs and interests of the black poor (as well as those of the other minority poor and the white poor) will no longer be underrepresented in serious public discussions, policies, and programs.”³⁴ These statements were influenced by my sense at the time that while race-specific programs like affirmative action had

Table 2
Gender Imbalance in Higher Education: Number of Degrees Earned by Women for Every
One Hundred Degrees Earned by Men, Academic Year 2006 – 2007

	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander
Associate's Degrees	158	225	171	141
Bachelor's Degrees	130	196	158	122
Master's Degrees	167	255	185	122
Doctoral Degrees	124	193	129	108

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System, Fall 2007, Completions component.

elevated and would continue to improve the employment prospects of trained and highly educated blacks, they had not enhanced the employment opportunities of the black poor. I felt therefore that the focus should shift to more class-based, race-neutral programs. I no longer support this view. Recognizing that a detailed discussion of policy options would require far more space than that allocated for this article, I would like to conclude with a brief discussion of why *both* race-specific and race-neutral – including class-based – programs must be strongly emphasized and pursued to combat racial inequality.

As I indicated earlier, many studies claim to address or challenge “the declining significance of race” thesis by presenting data on residential segregation, racial composition in schools, and discrimination in public places without relating the findings to my argument that the concentration of racial antagonisms has shifted from the economic sector to the sociopolitical order. One notable exception is Jonathan Rieder,

whose 1985 book, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism*, discusses the racial antagonisms of Jews and Italians against inner-city blacks in Brooklyn and relates the conflict to my central theme regarding the increasing centrality of racial conflict that originates “in the sphere of consumption rather than of production.” In other words, his field research supported the idea that “competition between blacks and whites has moved from the sphere of jobs to the enjoyment of public goods, like schools and entitlements.”³⁵

The research discussed in the previous section suggests that the white backlash against racial entitlements such as affirmative action, which is so clearly described in Rieder’s book, contributed to the government’s retreat from antidiscrimination policies during the 1980s, a retreat that may have influenced hiring and promotion decisions in the corporate sector as well. It should come as no surprise that waning support for affirmative action programs would have an adverse effect on blacks, especially more advantaged

blacks. A number of empirical studies have revealed significant differences in the family and neighborhood environments of blacks and whites that are understated when standard measures of socioeconomic status are employed. Take, for example, the question of family background. Even when white parents and black parents report the same average income, white parents have substantially more assets than do black parents.

Whites with the same amount of schooling as blacks usually attend better high schools and colleges. Furthermore, children’s test scores are affected not only by the social and economic status of their parents but also by the social and economic status of their grandparents, meaning that it could take several generations before adjustments in socioeconomic inequality produce their full benefits. Thus, if we were to rely solely on the standard criteria for college admission, such as SAT scores, even many children from black middle-income families would be denied admission in favor of middle-income whites, who are not weighed down by the accumulation of disadvantages that stem from racial restrictions and who, therefore, tend to score higher on the SAT and similar conventional tests. For all these reasons, the success of younger educated blacks remains heavily dependent on affirmative action programs, whereby more flexible criteria of evaluation are used to gauge potential to succeed.

The policy implications are obvious. Race-specific policies like affirmative action will be required for the foreseeable future to ensure the continued mobility of educated blacks. But affirmative action programs are not designed to address the problems of poor blacks, which require greater emphasis on demand-side solutions, such as creating tight labor mar-

kets in which employers are looking for workers rather than workers looking for employers.

At the time of this writing, the nation is plagued with one of the highest unemployment rates since the Great Depression, affecting all racial and ethnic groups in the United States. For almost five decades, the black/white unemployment ratio was 2.0 or greater, which means that the black unemployment rate was at least twice that of the white unemployment rate in both good and bad economic times. What is unique about the current economic crisis is that the unemployment rate has surged for both blacks and whites. Since December 2009, the black/white unemployment ratio has fallen below 2.0. The ratio was 1.87 in October 2010 and 1.88 in November 2010.³⁶

This scenario presents a dilemma for the Obama administration, which has publicly acknowledged the need to combat racial inequality. Given the upsurge in unemployment among all racial groups, including whites, it would be politically prudent for the president to advance programs that address nationwide joblessness. However, a strong case could be made for introducing programs that are designed to combat unemployment in the highest areas of joblessness, including a mix of private- and public-sector initiatives. For example, in black inner cities, where the number of very low-skilled individuals vastly exceeds the number of low-skill jobs, a healthy dose of public-sector job creation is needed. This approach would also apply, say, in white and Hispanic areas that feature high rates of joblessness.

The point is that a continuous struggle is needed to address the problems of racial inequality – some calling for race-based solutions, like affirmative action, others calling for class-based solutions,

such as programs to increase employment in areas with the highest rates of joblessness. Accordingly, if I were writing *The Declining Significance of Race* today, I would provide more balance in my policy recommendations by placing

much greater emphasis on the need to *strongly and continuously* embrace, as well as advance, both race- and class-based solutions to address life chances for people of color.

William
Julius
Wilson

ENDNOTES

¹ William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (1978; 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). I would like to thank Anmol Chaddha for his help in reviewing the literature on *The Declining Significance of Race* and for his thoughtful comments on a previous draft of this manuscript.

² One notable exception was the pattern of black political subjection imposed by the urban political machines in the early twentieth century. However, although the racial developments in the municipal political system had little or no direct or indirect implications for racial interaction in the private industrial sector, one could argue that the systematic exclusion of African Americans from meaningful political participation was a response to the racial antagonisms generated from the social relations of production. Even if one is willing to concede this argument, it could hardly be said that race relations in the urban political system in turn influenced race relations in the private industrial sector.

³ Robin M. Williams, Jr., "Structure and Process in Ethnic Relations: Increased Knowledge and Unanswered Questions," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Boston, August 30, 1979.

⁴ See, for example, Michael Hughes and Bradley Hertel, "The Significance of Color Remains: A Study of Life Chances, Mate Selection, and Ethnic Consciousness among Black Americans," *Social Forces* 68 (4) (1990): 1105–1120; Clarence Lusane, "In Perpetual Motion: The Continuing Significance of Race and America's Drug Crisis" (The University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1994); Michael Hughes and Melvin Thomas, "The Continuing Significance of Race Revisited: A Study of Race, Class, and Quality of Life in America, 1972 to 1996," *American Sociological Review* 63 (6) (1998): 785–795; Aaron Gullickson, "The Significance of Color Declines: A Re-Analysis of Skin Tone Differentials in Post-Civil Rights America," *Social Forces* 84 (1) (2005): 157–180; and James Unnever and Francis Cullen, "Reassessing the Racial Divide in Support for Capital Punishment: The Continuing Significance of Race," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 44 (1) (2007): 124–158.

⁵ See Joe T. Darden, "The Significance of Race and Class in Residential Segregation," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 8 (1) (1986): 49–56; Carl Grant, "The Persistent Significance of Race in Schooling," *The Elementary School Journal* 88 (5) (1988): 561–569; Joe Feagin, "The Continuing Significance of Race: Antiblack Discrimination in Public Places," *American Sociological Review* 56 (1) (1991): 101–116; and Marvin P. Dawkins and Jomills Henry Braddock, "The Continuing Significance of Desegregation: School Racial Composition and African American Inclusion in American Society," *The Journal of Negro Education* 63 (3) (1994): 394–405.

⁶ Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Michael Hout, "Occupational Mobility of Black Men: 1962 to 1973," *American Sociological Review* 49 (3) (1984): 308–322. See also Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan, *The American Occupational Structure* (New York: John Wiley, 1967); and David Featherman and Robert

- Hauser, “Changes in the Socioeconomic Stratification of the Races, 1962 – 1973,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (3) (1976): 621 – 651.
- ⁹ A study by Lee Wolfle reached similar conclusions. Wolfle noted that previous research found that social background variables were more important determinants of educational attainment among whites than among African Americans. However, his study, using data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, controlled for estimated measurement error structures and found that “social background plays a similar role for whites and blacks. Increments in background social status variables lead to similar increases in educational attainment for whites and blacks. Moreover, the effects of personal characteristics variables (ability, curriculum, grades) of whites and blacks as they influence educational attainment are also similar for both groups”; Lee Wolfle, “Postsecondary Educational Attainment among Whites and Blacks,” *American Educational Research Journal* 22 (4) (1985): 501 – 525, quote at 501. Also, analyzing a subset of the data used by Michael Hout, Marshall Pomer reported that in contrast to higher-status black men, black men in low-paying occupations were significantly less likely than comparable white men to achieve upward mobility; Marshall I. Pomer, “Labor Market Structure, Intragenerational Mobility, and Discrimination: Black Male Advancement Out of Low-Paying Occupations, 1962 – 1973,” *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 650 – 659.
- ¹⁰ Arthur Sakamoto and Jessie M. Tzeng, “A Fifty-Year Perspective on the Declining Significance of Race in the Occupational Attainment of White and Black Men,” *Sociological Perspectives* 42 (1999): 160, 174.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 161. The authors state: “We restrict the analyses to native-born, noninstitutionalized white and black men aged 25 to 64 who were not enrolled in school and who participated in the labor force at the time of the census. Because most women did not work in the paid labor market in 1940 (Bianchi and Spain, 1986: 141 [Suzanne M. Bianchi and Daphne Spain, *American Women in Transition* (New York: Russell Sage, 1986)]) and because Wilson’s (1980) discussion of labor market trends focuses on men, we do not include women in our analyses. The 1940 PUMS provides systematic empirical evidence about the net racial disadvantage during the industrial period while the 1990 PUMS provides systematic empirical evidence about the net racial disadvantage during the modern industrial period.”
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 174.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 174 – 175.
- ¹⁴ Hout, “Occupational Mobility of Black Men,” 308.
- ¹⁵ Melvin E. Thomas, “Race, Class, and Personal Income: An Empirical Test of the Declining Significance of Race Thesis, 1968 – 1988,” *Social Problems* 40 (3) (1993): 328.
- ¹⁶ Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., “Education and Black Americans: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,” paper presented at the New York State Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Caucus, Inc., and New York State Conference of Branches, NAACP, February 19, 1978.
- ¹⁷ In Soo Son, Suzanne W. Model, and Gene A. Fisher, “Polarization and Progress in the Black Community: Earnings and Status Gains for Young Black Males in the Era of Affirmative Action,” *Sociological Forum* 4 (3) (1989): 309, 311, 324.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 325.
- ²⁰ Pomer, “Labor Market Structure, Intragenerational Mobility, and Discrimination,” 657.
- ²¹ A. Silvia Cancio, T. David Evans, and David J. Maume, Jr., “Reconsidering the Declining Significance of Race: Racial Differences in Early Career Wages,” *American Sociological Review* 61 (4) (1996): 541, 543.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 554.
- ²³ Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race*, 2nd ed., 178.

- ²⁴ Cancio, Evans, and Maume, "Reconsidering the Declining Significance of Race," 554.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ The income ratios reported here are based on an analysis of Current Population Survey microdata. To draw comparisons with the data I reported in the second edition of *The Declining Significance of Race*, I used the "white/black" designation, instead of "non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black" designation. There are only slight differences between the percentages for the two different designations; thus, the trends reported and conclusions reached would not have changed.
- ²⁷ Theodore J. Davis, "The Occupational Mobility of Black Males Revisited: Does Race Matter?" *The Social Science Journal* 32 (2) (1995): 121 – 135.
- ²⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008 *Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, Table POV28, "Income and Deficit or Surplus of Families and Unrelated Individuals by Poverty Status: 2007."
- ²⁹ By comparison, poor non-Hispanic white families fell below the poverty line by an average of \$7,957; poor Hispanic families by \$8,611; and poor Asian families by \$8,959; U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2007*, Current Population Reports P60-235, Table 4, "People with Income Below Specified Ratios of Their Poverty Thresholds by Selected Characteristics: 2007."
- ³⁰ Lance Freeman, "Is Class Becoming a More Important Determinant of Neighborhood Attainment for African-Americans?" *Urban Affairs Review* 44 (1) (2008): 3.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 24.
- ³² William Julius Wilson, *More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).
- ³³ Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race*, 2nd ed., 179.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.
- ³⁵ Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 101.
- ³⁶ Ratio calculations based on data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table A-2, "Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Race, Sex, and Age," December 3, 2010.

The American Family in Black & White: A Post-Racial Strategy for Improving Skills to Promote Equality

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Disparities between blacks and whites are persistent features of American society.¹ On many measures, blacks as a group perform worse than whites, and the trends are discouraging. These disparities, continuing reminders of America's troubled history of racial discrimination, clash with American ideals about equality, opportunity, and social mobility. Discussing these disparities is painful because American public policy has been so wrong in the past. The institution of slavery, the all-too-slow dismantling of segregation in the South and discriminatory practices elsewhere, prevented ready acceptance of blacks into mainstream American society. When the civil rights movement finally goaded the United States into abolishing state-sanctioned discrimination, integration of African Americans into the economy accelerated. Black economic status surged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with especially rapid progress in the previously segregated South.²

The success of the civil rights movement in reversing state-sanctioned discrimination gave rise to the hope that active government intervention in the economy, schools, and the courts could produce full equality for blacks in the larger society. Some forty years later, despite the visible success of an elite group within the black population, the economic and social progress of a large segment of African Americans has lagged. If anything, official statistics overstate the progress of African American males.³

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Why have the hopes of the civil rights movement not been realized? What can we learn from this stalled progress about how public policy should respond? In light of evidence amassed since the 1960s, are the challenges to making headway in economic and social arenas distinctive to African Americans, or are they the consequences of common forces that operate equally on all Americans?

Black America has a unique history and now faces unique challenges. However, as William Julius Wilson has wisely observed,⁴ the first-order problems facing African Americans in contemporary society are shared by many other groups. In particular, the shortfalls in achievement in the twenty-first century among all groups stem from shortfalls in skills – including education and on-the-job training as well as cognitive and personality traits – not in the rewards accorded those skills.

Global economic forces challenge unskilled persons of all races and ethnicities. Secular trends in trade and technology have boosted the demand for skilled labor. Yet the supply of skills has responded slowly. The percentage of Americans with college degrees is the highest in history, yet the high school dropout rate, properly counted, has increased in the past forty years.⁵ American society is dividing into affluent haves and underprivileged have-nots, with differences in skills accounting for most of the disparity. For Americans of all racial and ethnic groups, the supply of skills has responded slowly to shifts in market demand. The response is particularly slow for African American males.

About the same time he was promoting the 1964 Civil Rights Act, President Lyndon Johnson launched the War on Poverty. The programs created by that initiative recognized the importance of enhancing skills for reducing poverty.

Many of the War on Poverty programs and policies designed to boost skills failed.⁶ Our understanding of which skills are important and how to foster them effectively has improved greatly since the 1960s. However, many who advocate skill enhancement programs to close racial gaps continue to support unsuccessful approaches. Just as we need to reexamine the sources of racial inequality in contemporary American society, we also need to rethink our strategies for promoting skills.

Public policy to promote skills must reckon with three essential truths, which have been distilled from a large body of research conducted in the wake of the War on Poverty. First, success in life requires more than cognition and intelligence: *soft skills* are important, too. Conscientiousness, perseverance, sociability, and other essential character traits matter a great deal, though they are largely neglected in devising and evaluating policies to reduce inequality.

Second, skill formation is a dynamic, synergistic process. Skills beget skills; they cross-foster and promote each other. A perseverant, curious child learns more, and early achievement fosters later success. Advantages cumulate. Young children are flexible and adaptable in ways that adolescents and adults are not. Preventing deficits from arising in early childhood is much easier than remediating them later. The War on Poverty took a scattershot approach to fostering the skills of disadvantaged persons and did not target the early years, where skill-promoting interventions are most effective.

Third, families play an essential role in shaping their children's abilities. The family plants and nourishes the seed that grows into the successful student and adult. Skill formation starts in the womb. Early childhood lays the foundation for the rest of life. Substantial gaps in abili-

ties between the advantaged and the disadvantaged form before children enter school. Unequal as they are, American schools do little to widen or narrow the gaps. We need to take into account the knowledge that has accrued since the 1960s about the powerful role of the family in shaping the skills children have as adults.

Across all racial and ethnic groups, the American family is under strain.⁷ This reality has substantial implications for the next generation. More than 40 percent of all American children are born out of wedlock; more than 12 percent live in families where the mother has never married. Such families have fewer financial and parenting resources for child development. It is well documented that on many outcomes, the children of lone-parent families perform worse than those of dual-parent families.⁸ Any effective policy to foster skills must recognize the importance of the family, the mechanisms through which families create child skills, and the stress under which many families operate.

In 1965, when politician and sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote his famous analysis of the state of the African American family (dubbed the Moynihan Report), roughly 26 percent of all African American children were born out of wedlock.⁹ (The figure is now 72 percent.) He met a venomous reception and was falsely charged with “blaming the victim” because he pointed out the adverse consequences for children born out of wedlock. For years, to discuss the family as a contributor to black disparity was considered politically incorrect. Fortunately, and due in no small part to the writings of William Julius Wilson, it is now possible to discuss this delicate issue.¹⁰

Moynihan used strong language and focused on “the pathology of the Negro family,” an unfortunate choice of words

that obscured an important insight. Moynihan’s writings apply more generally to all American families. Dysfunctional families, which are increasingly prevalent in many quarters of American society, often produce dysfunctional children and greatly contribute to social inequality.

In 2011, the problems many African Americans face are also confronted by other Americans. Acknowledging this fact reframes the policy discussion and helps move past traditional flash points. Indeed, many American children across all races and ethnicities are in the same sinking boat. Policies that recognize the importance of the early childhood years, the central role of the family in producing skills, and the importance of skills other than those measured by achievement tests are likely to be far more effective than current school-based strategies and adolescent remediation programs.

Policies based on these three essential truths prevent problems rather than remediate them. By assisting families in creating and supporting capable, achievement-motivated students, they bolster school performance and relieve the burden on other social institutions. Moreover, strategies that address inequality by recognizing problems shared by all Americans shift the dialogue about disparity beyond racial boundaries. For this reason, such strategies are likely to gain more political support than race-based policies.

The failures of programs launched under the War on Poverty shed light on how to construct effective alternatives. In an era of massive government deficits at all levels, strategies for promoting skills must be cost effective. They must harness resources in the private sector, including the love mothers have for their children, to promote skill development.

In this essay, I first summarize a substantial body of evidence that shows that

Table 1

Shortfalls in Hourly Wages for Blacks and Hispanics in the Last Twenty Years: Actual Disparity and Disparity Adjusted for Ability

James J. Heckman

	Males		Females	
	Actual	Adjusted	Actual	Adjusted
Black	-25%	-6%	-17%	12%
Hispanic	-15%	3%*	-7%	17%

*Denotes not statistically significant from zero, that is, the adjusted gap is likely to arise from chance.

Source: Author’s calculations from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. For details, see the Web appendix at http://jenni.uchicago.edu/understanding_b-w_gap/. The wages are adjusted for age.

discrimination in the labor market is no longer a first-order cause of racial disparity. Second, I discuss the skill gap: which skills matter and how the family plays an important role in producing them. Third, I consider the consequences of adverse trends in American families that retard skill formation and increase inequality. Finally, I propose effective policies to supplement the resources of disadvantaged families. The true measure of child poverty is parenting, and an effective skills-oriented policy bolsters the parenting resources of the disadvantaged.

Overt Discrimination is No Longer a First-Order Problem in American Society. Discrimination exists and should be eliminated. The evidence suggests, however, that discrimination in how skills are rewarded does not account for much of the achievement gap in contemporary America. Rather, inequality in skills is the first-order problem. The skills individuals bring to the market, to school, and to other quarters of society determine their success. In the labor market, one group may earn lower wages than another because payments per unit skill

are lower, skills are lower, or both. Recent research addresses the relative importance of each factor.

In Table 1, the columns labeled “actual” show the percentage shortfalls in hourly wages of all employed blacks and Hispanics compared to the wages of all employed whites. The shortfalls for blacks relative to those of Hispanics indicate whether disparity in wages is a uniquely African American experience. (A negative number denotes a shortfall.) Black males earn 25 percent less than white males; Hispanic males earn 15 percent less. For females, wages are 17 percent lower for blacks and 7 percent lower for Hispanics. The gaps in annual earnings are generally larger because minorities tend to be employed for fewer hours.¹¹ These gaps are large and statistically significant – that is, they are unlikely to arise solely by chance.

The pattern of disparity is replicated in many other measures of social and economic achievement, including schooling, health, incarceration, and occupational success.¹² Blacks and Hispanics have worse outcomes than whites in American society. Further, blacks, on average, fare worse than Hispanics.

Are these disparities the result of pervasive labor market discrimination or of gaps in skills? The two possible interpretations of the evidence in Table 1 (and their counterparts for other outcomes, presented in the Web appendix) have profoundly different implications for public policy. On the one hand, if persons of identical skill are treated differently in the market on the basis of race or ethnicity, a more vigorous enforcement of civil rights and affirmative action policies is warranted. If, on the other hand, the gaps arise from the level of skills that individuals bring to the labor market, then policies that foster skills should be emphasized.

To resolve this issue, I adjust adult wages by scores on scholastic ability tests measured in the teenage years.¹³ (See the columns labeled “adjusted” in Table 1.) After adjustment, the gaps substantially diminish for black males and are essentially zero for Hispanic males. The gaps are reversed for females: that is, adjusting for their ability, minority females *earn more* than their white counterparts. (A positive number means that, on average, the ability-adjusted wages of minorities are higher than those of whites.)

There are gaps in educational attainment as well. High school dropout rates are higher for minorities, and college attendance and graduation rates are lower. As shown in Table 2, the proportion of blacks entering college is twelve points lower than that of whites. The corresponding figure for Hispanics is fourteen points.

Adjusting for their differences in scholastic ability (using the same measure as was used to adjust wages in Table 1), blacks are sixteen points *more likely* to go to college; and Hispanics are fifteen points more likely. After accounting for differences in adolescent ability, family income in the college-going years and

tuition costs play only minor roles in explaining the gaps.¹⁴

Any serious analysis of economic and social disparities must reckon with the importance of skills in American society.¹⁵ This contention does not deny the validity of numerous studies showing the discriminatory inclinations of firms in the labor market; certainly, America is not yet a color-blind society.

A distinction between group- and individual-level discrimination clarifies the role of discrimination in the labor market. Racial discrimination at the individual level involves treating a job candidate differently than otherwise identical candidates by virtue of his or her race, when race has no direct effect on productivity. For instance, audit pair studies at various firms, in which auditors of different races and ethnicities pose as equally qualified job candidates, show evidence of pervasive discrimination against individuals.¹⁶

Racial discrimination at a randomly selected firm does not, however, provide an accurate assessment of the discrimination that takes place in realized market transactions.¹⁷ Participation in the labor market is selective: that is, minorities seek the more tolerant firms. Measured wages reflect this sorting. Therefore, the impact of market discrimination on wages is determined not by the most discriminatory participants in the market, or even by the average level of discrimination among firms, but rather by the level of discrimination at the firms where minorities actually work. Numerous studies that measure discrimination by audit pair methods do not detect the margin at which market transactions occur. Thus, the discrimination reported in audit studies does not conflict with the small gap in ability-adjusted wages. Blacks constitute roughly 12 percent of the U.S. population; if nondiscriminatory or less-discriminatory firms have 12 percent or more

Table 2

Differences in College Entry Proportions between Minorities and Whites, mid-1990s

James J.
Heckman

	Black-White	Hispanic-White
Actual	-0.12	-0.14
Adjusted	0.16	0.15

Source: Stephen V. Cameron and James J. Heckman, "The Dynamics of Educational Attainment for Black, Hispanic, and White Males," *Journal of Political Economy* 109 (3) (2001).

of the jobs, the contribution of discrimination to overall wage gaps will be small.

This is not to deny that minorities experience bigotry or to downplay the real costs of locating nondiscriminatory employers. But unequal reward to skills is not the first-order explanation for observed gaps in racial achievement in contemporary American society. Any serious attack on the problem of racial and ethnic disparity must address disparity in skills.¹⁸

Gaps in Skills. The data reveal an uncomfortable fact: minorities *as a group* are generally less skilled than whites. The gap is especially pronounced for the measure of scholastic ability used to adjust wages and schooling in Tables 1 and 2.¹⁹

One possible explanation for the racial gap in test scores is that the tests are culturally biased. However, a large body of literature refutes such claims.²⁰ The tests used to make the adjustments in Table 1 predict performance in a number of activities for all race and ethnic groups.

In part, the test scores reflect the differences in the years of schooling attained at the time individuals are tested. Minorities generally have lower levels of education when they take the test and hence earn lower scores. Accounting for this disparity does not change the main message of

Table 1: that gaps in skills, not gaps in payments according to skill level, determine the lion's share of racial wage disparity.²¹

Another possible explanation for the gap in test scores is that expectations of discrimination in the labor market substantially reduce the educational aspirations of African American children and their parents. The evidence shows otherwise.²²

It has been argued that "stereotype threat" is a major factor. It is said to arise from the response of minority test takers to the information that their performance on a test will be used as part of a study to gauge differences in minority and majority abilities. Some claim that this factor causes much of the gap in test scores between minorities and whites. Evidence shows that telling minority students that the tests they are taking are being used to compare the abilities of minorities with those of whites reduces their performance on tests.²³

The test used to produce the evidence in Tables 1 and 2 does not frame the exam in a way that triggers stereotype threat. In addition, the quantitative importance of stereotype threat in accounting for test score gaps is slight.²⁴ Test score gaps between minorities and majorities are real, and they measure something that

matters for performance in economic and social life. However, they do not estimate all that is important.

Gaps in Soft Skills. Most discussions of racial and ethnic achievement gaps focus on measures of scholastic ability. Indeed, many analysts measure the achievement gap exclusively by differences in scores on standardized academic tests. This emphasis reflects a broad consensus in American society about the value of achievement tests that are used to monitor the success and failure of schools and students. The No Child Left Behind Act has pushed this focus to what some have described as a mania. The program has created a culture of “teaching to the test” in schools, with consequent neglect of the subjects and by-products of schooling that are not tested.²⁵

Success in life requires more than book learning or high scores on achievement tests.²⁶ As filmmaker Woody Allen put it, “Eighty percent of success is showing up.”²⁷ While the cognitive skills measured by achievement tests are powerful predictors of life success, so are socio-emotional skills. Sometimes called “soft skills” or character traits, these include motivation, sociability (the ability to work with and cooperate with others), attention, self-regulation, self-esteem, and the ability to defer gratification. Good schools and functional families foster soft skills as well as cognitive skills.²⁸ Soft skills are as predictive, if not more predictive, of educational success, wages earned, and participation in crime or in healthy behaviors as are cognitive skills.²⁹ Disadvantaged children of all race groups possess lower levels of soft skills.³⁰

The Early Emergence of Skill Gaps. Gaps in skills between the advantaged and the disadvantaged emerge at early ages and persist. Figure 1 shows achieve-

ment scores by age for white children classified by their mothers’ education level, a measure of social advantage. More-educated mothers marry more-educated men, have access to greater financial resources for their children, and provide their children with more nurturing and supportive environments than do less-educated women.³¹

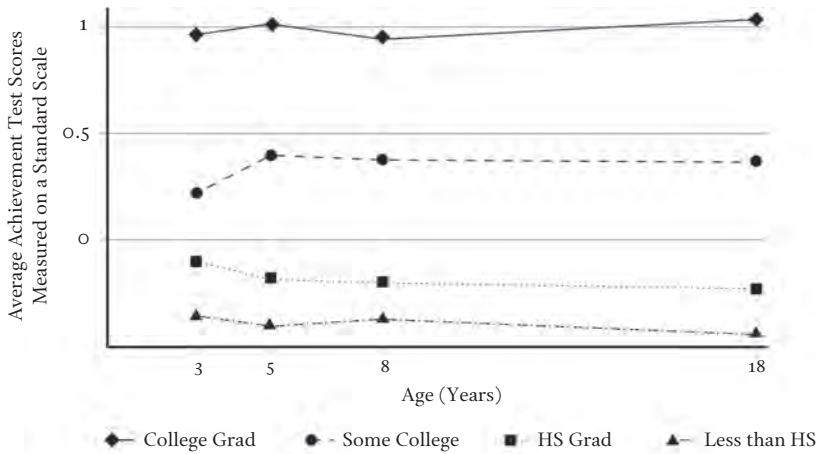
Figure 1 has two noteworthy features. First, gaps in achievement test scores by children of different social backgrounds are substantial. The gap between more-educated whites and less-educated whites is similar to the gap in test scores between blacks and whites.³² Second, the gaps arise early and persist throughout adolescence. Schools have little impact on these disparities, even though the quality of schooling attended varies greatly across social classes.³³ As multiple studies have shown, children from socially and economically disadvantaged families fall behind their more well-off counterparts before schooling starts, and low achievement scores persist throughout their education.³⁴ Similar gaps emerge and persist in indices of soft skills when children are classified by parental, social, and economic status.³⁵ Again, schooling does little to widen or narrow these gaps.³⁶

Biology and Genetics. Genetic determinists argue that inherited genes explain the link between children’s abilities and the level of privilege that parents are able to provide them. From this standpoint, Figure 1 would indicate the power of genes to perpetuate inequality across generations. In *The Bell Curve*, psychologist Richard Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray implicitly attribute black-white gaps in scholastic achievement test scores to genetic differences between blacks and whites. Their 1994 book raised a firestorm of criticism that, ironically,

Figure 1

Average Achievement Test Scores of Children by Age and by Maternal Education

James J.
Heckman



Scores are reported in standardized units (they are transformed to “z” scores, that is, normalized scores with unit variance). Source: Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Flavio Cunha, Greg Duncan, James J. Heckman, and Aaron Sojourner, “A Reanalysis of the IHDP Program,” unpublished manuscript (Infant Health and Development Program, Northwestern University, 2006).

convincingly discredited the idea that genetics are the sole or even main source of black-white disparity.³⁷

The standard estimate of heritability in behavioral genetics is 50 percent.³⁸ That is, genes inherited from parents account for 50 percent of the variability in measured behaviors across individuals. Genes do not fully determine life outcomes; neither do environments. Extreme claims about the influence of either are at odds with the evidence.

Culture and environment can powerfully impact child outcomes. A striking example is the gap in achievement test scores between genetically similar, but culturally different, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews in Israel. The discrepancy between the two groups is roughly two-thirds of the gap in measured achievement between blacks and whites.³⁹ The results from the intervention analyses discussed below further strengthen the

conclusion that environments help shape outcomes – and that environmental improvements can boost achievement.

Schooling raises scores on achievement tests that measure acquired knowledge along with “pure ability.” On the test Herrnstein and Murray used to measure intelligence (the same test used to adjust for scholastic ability in the analyses in Tables 1 and 2),⁴⁰ personality traits account for a substantial portion of the variability in scores.⁴¹

The lessons of modern genetics are more subtle than what is presented by the genetic determinists. The “nature versus nurture” debate is over,⁴² replaced with the understanding that the two factors are intertwined. Indeed, environmental conditions affect gene expression. Substantial evidence shows that early adversity affects biology and human development. Disadvantage literally shapes the biology of disadvantaged children.⁴³

By studying the gene expression of genetically identical (monozygotic) twins, scientists have observed how environmental conditions trigger gene expression.⁴⁴ Early environments are especially important. By age three – and certainly by age fifty – the genetic expressions of identical twins differ as a result of their separate life experiences, producing diverse life outcomes.⁴⁵

One study of gene-environment interactions shows that a variant of a particular gene predicts male conduct disorder and violence. However, the variant of the gene is most strongly expressed in individuals from adverse child-rearing environments. Many other studies have demonstrated that home life substantially modifies gene expression.⁴⁶

The effects of adversity do not always work toward accentuating the influence of genes. The heritability of many behaviors in children from less-advantaged environments drops to 30 percent, as opposed to the standard 50 percent reported in behavioral genetics.⁴⁷ This evidence is consistent with the notion that genes become relatively more important sources of variability in life outcomes after sufficient environmental resources are available. Under adverse conditions, environments are more determinative of many child outcomes.

Recent research suggests a form of Lamarckian evolution, namely, that adversity is partly heritable. The mother's social and economic hardship affects the gene expression of the child; early environmental influences are especially important.⁴⁸ History is embedded in gene expression. Failing to address early disadvantage produces a biological legacy that persists over generations.⁴⁹

How Best to Foster Skills. What are the best ways to promote skills and reduce achievement gaps? Fixing schools? Sup-

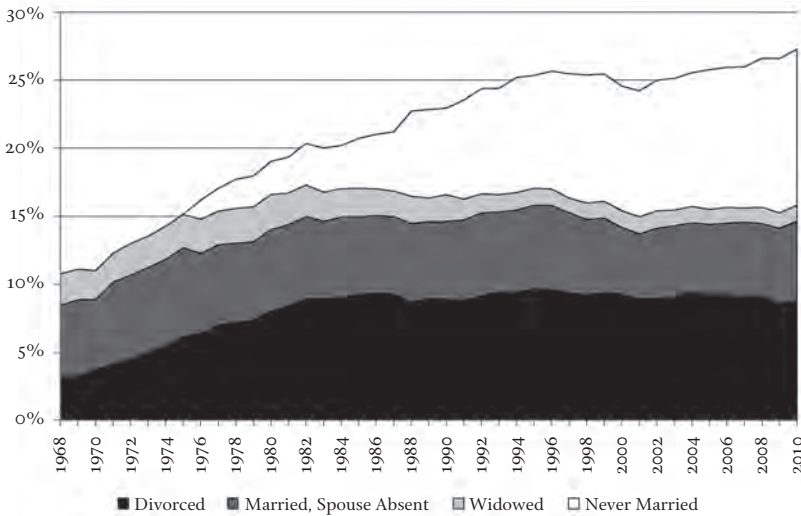
plementing family resources? In the current fiscal climate, we cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the War on Poverty by trying to do everything. Prioritization is essential. Low-performing schools should be improved, but supplementing the parenting resources of disadvantaged families is an effective and less commonly understood way to improve educational outcomes.

One year after the Moynihan Report discussed family structure as a determinant of life chances, the eminent sociologist James Coleman and his colleagues⁵⁰ published a study that challenged a central premise of American policy. The Coleman Report, as it came to be known, showed that families, not the attributes of schools (the focus of much current public policy), were the principal determinants of the educational success of children as measured by their performance on achievement tests. After forty years, American public policy has yet to learn from the wisdom of Coleman's and Moynihan's recommendations. But their message is clear: family matters, American families are in trouble, and families are the main drivers of children's success in school.

At present, our social policy for fostering children's skills largely focuses on improving schools. This strategy is politically palatable because it avoids the charge of "blaming the victim" as well as any hint of intrusion into the sanctity of the family – a deeply held American value. At the same time, a strictly school-based policy ignores the evidence about the inequality already present when children enter school.⁵¹ School-based policies do not target skill gaps at their source – namely, by addressing the lack of family resources for effective early childhood development.

The evidence on the success of school reforms is at best mixed.⁵² For example,

Figure 2
Percent of Children Under 18 Living with One Parent, by Marital Status of the Parent,
1968 to 2010



Source: Author's tabulations.

not all charter schools are more effective than public schools. The latest evaluations show that 20 percent are better; 20 percent are worse; and most – 60 percent – are about the same.⁵³ Moreover, parental involvement and encouragement appear to be essential ingredients for successful charters.

We can and should improve our schools. But in light of the evidence from the Coleman Report and the vast body of scholarly literature that arose from the study, improving schools by hiring better teachers, monitoring teacher performance, reducing classroom sizes, and improving Internet access is unlikely to be enough to eliminate gaps, although much recent public policy and philanthropic activity is predicated on that assumption. Schools work with the children that parents bring them and are more successful with parents' support.

Part of the hesitation in adopting a family-intervention policy is that we do

not fully understand all of the mechanisms of family influence. How do families produce advantage and disadvantage across the generations? Despite active research in this area, much remains unknown. However, we know for certain that parents do a lot more than pass on their genes, and that good parenting matters a great deal.

Family Environments for All American Children Have Worsened. By many measures, family environments have deteriorated for children of all racial and ethnic groups, although the severity of the problem differs greatly among them. Figure 2 shows that, in 2010, nearly 30 percent of all American children lived with a single parent. Among single-parent families, the percentage of parents who have “never married” has increased more than any other marital status category. Numerous studies in economics, demography, and sociology confirm Moy-

nihan's concern that the child-rearing environments of children in single-parent families are compromised, and with them, child outcomes.⁵⁴

The Consequences of Early Adversity. The central role of the family in producing skills and forming character has been recognized since time immemorial. American public policy must shift attention to the formative years *before* children enter school. Policy must act on the main lessons outlined in Figure 1: that gaps in child test scores emerge early and persist, and that schools contribute little to these gaps.

Maternal education is a strong predictor of a child's achievement. Sociologist Sara McLanahan refers to the "diverging destinies" of children on either side of a "Great Divide."⁵⁵ Fewer than 10 percent of college-educated women bear children out of wedlock. Educated women marry later, and they marry more-educated men. They work more; have more resources and fewer children; and provide much richer child-rearing environments that dramatically influence their children's vocabulary, intellectual performance, nurturance, and discipline.⁵⁶ These advantages are especially pronounced for children of two-parent stable marriages.⁵⁷ Even though they work more than less-educated women, college-educated mothers devote more time to child rearing, especially in providing child-enrichment activities.⁵⁸ They spend more time reading to children and less time watching television with them.

Disadvantaged mothers, as a group, talk to their children less and are less likely to read to them daily. Exposure to this type of parenting results in verbal skill deficits when the children start school.⁵⁹ Disadvantaged mothers tend to encourage their children less, adopt harsher parenting styles, and be less engaged with their children's school work.⁶⁰

The environments provided by teenage mothers are particularly adverse.⁶¹ Fetal alcohol ingestion alone, which is more frequent with teenage and less-educated mothers, appears to have substantial deleterious consequences on adult outcomes.⁶² A central premise of activist and educator Geoffrey Canada's much-discussed Harlem Children's Zone project, and especially his Baby College, is that parental engagement from the earliest years is an essential aspect of fostering later success for disadvantaged children.⁶³

Child poverty is not primarily about access to financial resources.⁶⁴ Johnson's War on Poverty made the mistake of focusing on remediating financial poverty. An overwhelming body of evidence suggests that *parenting* plays a crucial role – what parents do and do not do; and how they interact with and supplement the lives of their children, especially in early childhood. The true measure of child affluence and poverty is the quality of parenting. A lone mother living in financial poverty can create a stimulating early environment for her child.⁶⁵

Supplement Disadvantaged Families, Don't Blame Them. What are the best ways to aid struggling families? How can society devise a cost-effective policy that promotes skill formation in children that acknowledges the trends affecting many American families? Many great minds have recognized that the family is a major source of social inequality. Some have even proposed replacing the family – a policy that has been tried, with disastrous consequences.⁶⁶ Nothing can substitute for a mother's love and care. Public policy must be reformulated to supplement family child-rearing resources when they are lacking and to recognize the dynamics of skill formation – the biology and neuroscience showing that skills beget skills; that success breeds

success; that disadvantage affects the biology of the child and retards his or her development in terms of health, character, and intelligence.

While we do not yet know all of the mechanisms through which families influence their children, we know enough to suggest the broad contours of an effective child development strategy. Supplementing the early years of disadvantaged children addresses a major source of inequality. Indeed, many programs that supplement the child-rearing resources of families are effective. For example, the Perry Preschool Program targeted African American preschoolers in a city just outside Detroit who were born into poverty and had subnormal IQ scores.⁶⁷ For two years, the program taught children to plan, execute, and evaluate daily projects in a structured setting. It fostered social skills. Weekly home visits encouraged parenting. The Perry program was evaluated using random assignment with long-term follow-up for forty years. Rates of return were 7 to 10 percent per annum – higher than the return on equity over the postwar period from 1945 to 2008 and before the recent market meltdown.⁶⁸ Notably, the Perry program did not boost the IQs of participants. It instead fostered soft skills.⁶⁹

The Perry program and other successful child development programs work because they start early. Benefits include enhanced school readiness and reduced burdens on schools' special education programs. They produce benefits in the teen years such as better health behaviors, reduced teenage pregnancy, and lessened participation in crime. They promote higher adult productivity and self-sufficiency. They supplement the family by working with both the mother and the child. Successful programs are voluntary and do not impair the sanctity of the family. Most mothers, however

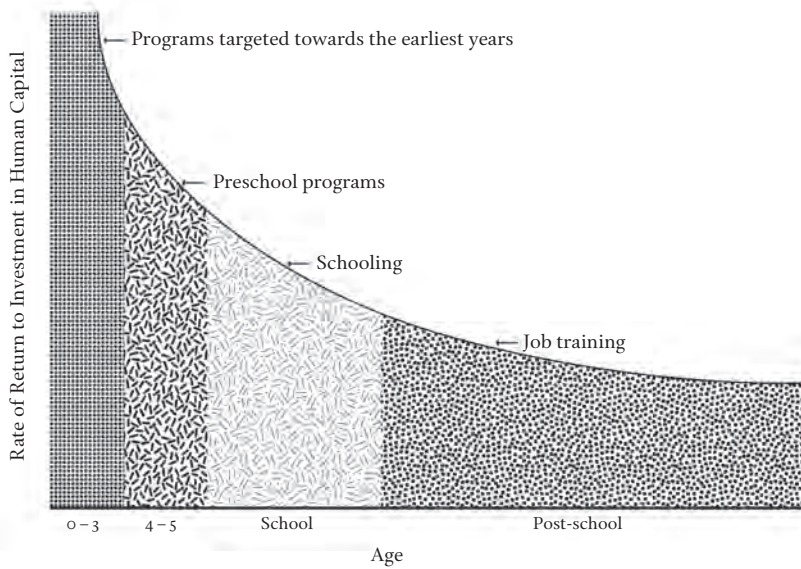
disadvantaged, want the best for their children. The voluntary nature of these programs avoids coercion and condescension and promotes dignity.

A deeper understanding of skill formation over the life cycle underlies the logic that promotes enrichment of early environments. Although this understanding was not available to the architects of the War on Poverty, we now know that more motivated and healthier children learn better. The process is dynamic and self-sustaining: academic and social success promotes greater self-confidence and a willingness in children to explore.

A strategy that places greater emphasis on parenting resources directed at the early years prevents rather than remediates problems. It makes families active participants in the process of child development. Adolescent remediation strategies as currently implemented are much less effective. This is the flip side of the argument for early intervention. Many skills that are malleable in the early years are much less so in the teenage years. As a consequence, remediating academic and social deficits later is much more costly, and, even then, sometimes ineffective. Certainly, such strategies earn annual rates of return far below the rates estimated for the Perry Program.⁷⁰

High-quality early childhood interventions involve none of the trade-offs between equity and efficiency that plague most public policies. Early interventions produce broadly based benefits and reduce social and economic inequality. At the same time, they promote productivity and economic efficiency. They are both fair and efficient. In contrast, the school-focused No Child Left Behind program diverts skill-development away from areas other than tested math and reading.⁷¹ Because it ignores inequality at the starting gate, No Child Left Behind in fact leaves many children behind.

Figure 3
Returns to a Unit Dollar Invested in Skill Formation



Source: James J. Heckman, “Schools, Skills and Synapses,” *Economic Inquiry* 46 (3) (2008).

Dynamic Synergies and the Timing of Effective Interventions. High-quality early childhood programs are investments with rates of return far higher than those earned by most government-funded skills programs. Figure 3 summarizes the supporting evidence from a large body of research in economics and developmental psychology. The figure plots the rate of return to investment for an extra dollar of investment in the early years, in preschool, in school, and in job training for a person who has an initial (low) common baseline investment at all ages. The return to investment at the earliest ages is high because it creates the foundation of skills that make later investment productive.⁷² This pattern is a manifestation of dynamic synergism – what economists call *dynamic complementarity*. For example, children who enter school with higher levels of character

and cognitive skills gain more from formal education.⁷³ Early investment percolates throughout the life cycle. Early disadvantage makes later investment less productive.

The negative side of dynamic complementarity is the equity-efficiency trade-off for skill investment programs targeted at disadvantaged adolescents and adults who lack a strong skill base. Remediation in later years to achieve the same level of competence is much more costly. This feature of dynamic complementarity accounts for the poor record of a variety of skill enhancement programs launched as part of the War on Poverty that still receive substantial public support.⁷⁴ Current policy does not heed the wisdom inherent in Figure 3. We over-invest in the remediation of disadvantaged adolescents and under-invest in the early years of disadvantaged children.

In contrast to the high rate of return per annum earned by the Perry program and other early childhood programs, returns on other skill-enhancement programs are much lower. Certainly, they are lower for public job training, criminal rehabilitation programs, adult literacy programs, and a variety of other remediation programs targeting adolescents and young adults with low cognitive and character skills.⁷⁵ For example, a recent evaluation of the Job Corps showed meager earnings benefits and a negative rate of return.⁷⁶ Reducing pupil-teacher ratios in schools also has a negative rate of return.⁷⁷ We need to listen to the logic of developmental biology in devising strategies to reduce disparities in parenting across all racial and ethnic groups.

Engage the Private Sector. How can we fund such programs? Despite strained government budgets, it would be possible to fund effective new programs if they replaced the numerous ineffective programs that currently receive government support. Few public programs of any sort would meet the standard set by the high rates of return earned by early childhood programs. Implementing high-quality early childhood programs would ease the budgetary burden of remediation.

Engaging the private sector – including philanthropic, community, and religious organizations – would bolster the resource base supporting early childhood. Bringing in diverse partners would encourage experimentation with new approaches that build on the success of templates such as the Perry program and, as another example, the Abecedarian program.⁷⁸ Educare is one promising program that fosters public and private partnerships.⁷⁹ Engaging diverse groups would also encourage the development of intervention programs that are culturally and religiously sensitive, and thus better prepared to

respect the sanctity of the family and the diversity of values that characterize modern American society.

James J. Heckman

ANew Strategy Based on New Knowledge. In contemporary American society, the racial gap in achievement is primarily caused by gaps in skills. We live in a skill-based society, where both cognitive and soft skills determine life success. Inequality in skills and school performance is strongly linked to inequality in family environments. The precise mechanisms through which families produce skills are under investigation, but much is already known: namely, parenting matters. The true measure of child poverty and advantage corresponds to the quality of parenting a child receives, not just the money available to a household.

A growing percentage of American children across all racial and ethnic groups is being raised in dysfunctional families. The widening divide between the early environments of advantaged and disadvantaged children foreshadows even greater inequality in the next generation of Americans. We have learned a lot about how to foster skills since the 1960s, when the War on Poverty attempted to remediate skills deficits in people of all ages and developmental stages.

Investments that foster early life skills enhance the productivity of investment at later ages. They support schools and enhance the productivity of adult job training. Because of the dynamic complementarity of skill formation, policies that attack inequality at its early origins are cost effective. They promote equality and, at the same time, promote economic efficiency. Such policies have no equity-efficiency trade-off.

The malleability and plasticity of young children declines with age. This fact makes investment in disadvantaged, low-skilled young adults less effective. To achieve the

same adult outcomes, later-life remediation for disadvantage costs far more than early-life prevention. There is an equity-efficiency trade-off for later-life remediation activities.

Our current policies to reduce achievement gaps ignore these simple truths. America currently places too much emphasis on improving schools compared to improving family resources. Supplementing the parenting resources of dis-

advantaged Americans will bolster American schools and enhance the effectiveness of school reforms. It will lower the burden of later-life remediation. A comprehensive, cost-effective policy to enhance the skills of disadvantaged children of all racial and ethnic backgrounds through voluntary, culturally sensitive support for parenting is a politically and economically sound strategy.

ENDNOTES

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The Achievement Gap: Past, Present & Future

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Ten years ago, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which legislated that race and class gaps in academic achievement be eliminated by 2014. I am unsure whether the act was passed with the cynical knowledge that no such massive change could be accomplished so quickly or in the naive belief that sheer will and a little money could suffice to achieve it. In any case, it is clear that we will not make the deadline. Will we ever?

The class and ethnic gaps are revealed by all types of testing, including for both academic skills and IQ, and the barriers in the way of reducing the gaps are large. Moreover, it is doubtful that the social-class gap can ever be brought to zero, if for no other reason than that people with more money will always see to it that their children get more and better education than people with less money. There is however plenty of evidence (which I review below) indicating that much can be done to reduce the social-class gap.

How about race and ethnic gaps? There is not much evidence about the possibility of closing the gap between Hispanics and whites, but there is plenty of evidence relevant to the possibility of closing the gap between blacks and whites. That is the gap I focus on in this essay.

Is there at least a partially genetic basis to the intellectual gap between blacks and whites? Many, if not most, Americans harbor a suspicion that this may be the case, including many highly edu-

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cated Americans. In their book *The Bell Curve* (1994), psychologist Richard Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray reviewed the literature on intelligence, argued that most of the variation in intelligence is due to genetics, and presented evidence – quite one-sided as we will see – that the difference between groups such as white Americans and black Americans is also partially genetic in origin.

By at least the early nineteenth century, most white Americans believed in the congenital intellectual inferiority of blacks. (Lincoln was confident of it, though Jefferson thought it was “an hypothesis only” that blacks were intrinsically inferior.) The IQ test, developed early in the twentieth century, reinforced the genetic view. Because whites scored higher than blacks, many psychologists, basing their hypothesis on the fact that IQ is heritable to a degree, assumed that the black/white group differences were genetically based.

For decades, whites scored about fifteen points higher than blacks on IQ tests. Whites averaged a score of about one hundred, blacks about eighty-five – a difference of a full standard deviation. If such a difference were wholly or substantially genetic in origin, the implications for American society would be dire. It would mean that even if the environmental playing field were leveled, a much higher proportion of blacks than whites would have trouble supporting themselves, and a much lower proportion of blacks than whites would be capable of success in business or the professions.

Some laypeople I know – and some scientists as well – reject the possibility of genetic difference in intelligence between the races. But such a conviction is entirely unfounded; there are countless ways that a genetic difference in intelligence could have arisen, either in favor

of whites or in favor of blacks. The question is an empirical one, not answerable by a priori convictions about the essential equality of groups. In fact, there is a great deal of empirical evidence on the question, albeit most of it is indirect. (Readers who would like to see a refutation of such evidence will find it in the appendix to my book *Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count*.¹) Here, I present what I believe is the most important direct evidence about the contribution of genes to the black/white gap.

The gap between the races is not due to some obvious artifact, such as blacks not being familiar with formal English, being less motivated to perform on IQ tests, or having teachers or IQ testers with low expectations for their performance.² Moreover, it is not the case that blacks perform better at either school or work than their IQ scores (or SAT scores) might indicate. At least as late as 1980, when educational psychologist Arthur Jensen reviewed the question, academic performance and occupational outcomes for blacks were actually lower than would be predicted by their IQ scores.³ At a given IQ level, whites perform better than blacks.

Blacks have lower socioeconomic status (SES) on average, and people with low SES have lower IQ test scores. But that fact by itself does not speak clearly to the heritability issue, because it is not clear to what extent low SES drives IQ lower versus to what extent low IQ drives SES lower. Blacks have lower IQs than whites at every level of SES, so SES cannot fully explain the black/white IQ difference.

The direct evidence about a possible genetic contribution to the difference in IQ between blacks and whites comes from studies that examine “blacks” of mixed African and European heritage. If European genes confer an advantage,

then we could expect the offspring from one black parent and one white parent to have IQ scores lower than those with white-only parentage but higher than those with purely black ancestry.

Skin color of blacks is one guide (a quite imperfect one) to genetic heritage. As it happens, there is almost no correlation between skin color of blacks and IQ,⁴ even though we would expect lighter-skinned blacks to have social advantages over darker-skinned blacks that might manifest in higher intellectual attainment and higher IQ.

Another test of the genetic hypothesis arose from the fact that, at the end of World War II, both black and white American soldiers fathered children with German women. Thus some of these children had 100 percent European heritage and some had substantial African heritage. Tested in later childhood, the German children of the white fathers were found to have an average IQ of 97, and those of the black fathers had an average of 96.5, a trivial difference.⁵

If European genes confer an advantage, we would expect that the smartest blacks would be particularly likely to have substantial European heritage. But when a group of investigators sought out the very brightest black children (IQ 130+) in the Chicago school system and asked them about the race of their parents and grandparents, these children were found to have no greater degree of European ancestry than blacks in the population at large.⁶

Most tellingly, blood-typing tests have been used to assess the degree to which black individuals have European genes. The blood group assays show no association between degree of European heritage and IQ.⁷ Similarly, the blood groups most closely associated with high intellectual performance among blacks are no more European in origin than other

blood groups.⁸ (This evidence is not quite knockdown, however, because European blood genes are only very weakly, if at all, associated with one another in the black population. If not associated with one another, they might also not be associated with the white genes that are determinative of IQ.)

One way of testing the heredity versus environment question is to look at black children raised in white environments. If the black deficit in IQ is due entirely to the environment, then blacks raised in white environments ought to have higher IQs than those raised in black environments. The hereditarians cite a study from the 1970s showing that black children who had been adopted by white parents had lower IQs than whites adopted by white parents.⁹ Mixed-race adoptees had IQ scores between those of the black and white children. But, as the researchers acknowledged, the study had many flaws; for instance, the black children had been adopted at a substantially later age than the mixed-race children, and later age at adoption is associated with lower IQ. (This study, incidentally, is the only direct-evidence study that Herrnstein and Murray deal with at any length in their book.)

A superior adoption study was carried out by developmental psychologist Elsie Moore, who looked at black and mixed-race children adopted by middle-class families, either black or white, and found no difference in IQ between the black and mixed-race children.¹⁰ However, she found a very large difference – thirteen points – between the IQs of blacks and mixed-race children raised by whites and those raised by blacks. Clearly, something about family environment or the neighborhood and school environments associated with race has a marked impact on IQ – enough, in fact, to account for virtually all the IQ difference between

blacks and whites that existed at the time of the study.

Important recent research helps pinpoint just what factors shape differences in IQ scores. Psychologists Joseph Fagan and Cynthia Holland tested black and white community college students on their knowledge of, and their ability to learn and reason with, words and concepts.¹¹ The whites had substantially more knowledge of the various words and concepts, but when participants were tested on their ability to learn new words, either from dictionary definitions or by learning their meanings in context, the blacks did just as well as the whites. Whites showed better comprehension of sayings, better ability to recognize similarities, and better facility with analogies – when solutions required knowledge of words and concepts that were more likely to be known to whites than to blacks. But when these kinds of reasoning were tested with words and concepts known equally well to blacks and whites, there were no differences. *Within* each race, prior knowledge predicted learning and reasoning, but *between* the races, only prior knowledge differed, not reasoning ability.

It seems unlikely that differences in knowledge would have a genetic basis if there are not differences between the races in learning and reasoning ability. It seems much more likely that the knowledge differences are entirely due to environmental effects. (However, I would never argue that knowledge differences do not count as intelligence differences. Your intelligence depends to a substantial degree on the words and concepts that you know.) Some of the most convincing evidence about whether the IQ gap has environmental causes concerns political scientist James Flynn's discovery about IQ changes over recent gener-

ations.¹² He established that, in the developed world as a whole, IQ increased markedly from 1947 to 2002; in the United States, it went up by eighteen points.

Our genes could not have changed enough over such a brief period to account for the shift. The only plausible explanation is that it was the result of powerful environmental factors. And if such factors could produce changes over time for the population as a whole, they could also produce big differences between subpopulations at any given time. Indeed, black IQ now is superior to white IQ circa 1960. If black genes for IQ are inferior to those of whites, that gain could not have happened – unless you argue that the environment for blacks today is far more conducive to high IQ than the environment for whites in 1960. I doubt that many people would attempt to make such an argument.

Finally, because there is good reason to believe that the environment of blacks has been improving at a more rapid rate than that of whites, we would expect the black/white gap to be less today than in the past. In fact, the IQ difference between black and white twelve year olds has dropped, to 9.5 points from 15 points, in the last thirty years, a period that in many ways was more favorable for blacks than the preceding era.¹³ Black performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Long-Term Trend Test shows equivalent gains. Improvement in reading and math has been modest for whites but substantial for blacks. The shrinkage of the gap on the NAEP test is roughly equal to the change in standard deviation terms that was found by Dickens and Flynn for IQ tests.

What can be done to hasten the complete closing of the black/white gap in IQ and academic achievement? Schools (and preschools) are the arenas in which

we have the most control, so I will focus on the evidence about gap reduction that we might expect from improvements in education.

I am a social psychologist, and two of the most important general principles in my field are that 1) some big-seeming interventions can have little or no effect on some process or phenomenon and 2) some trivially small-seeming interventions can have a significant effect. Both principles are confirmed over and over again in the field of education. Head Start, for example, seems like a pretty big intervention; it is certainly costly. Poor children and minority children, and especially poor minority children, are placed in small settings where at least some of the activities are supposed to be intellectually stimulating. But Head Start's effects are slight: reduction of the gap by a few IQ points at the beginning of elementary school before fading into nothing after a few years of school. The effect on grades is similarly transient. The United States will spend \$11 billion on Head Start this year and that money is largely wasted, in my opinion.

Fortunately, there are bigger interventions that have a marked effect on ability and subsequent success in life. These include the Perry Preschool Project, carried out with poor black children in Ypsilanti, Michigan.¹⁴ This program provided a full day of preschool, with most activities deliberately chosen to increase intelligence and academic skills. Another example, the Abecedarian program, did the same on a half-day basis.¹⁵ Both programs employed educators with considerable skill and experience – criteria that are often not met in Head Start. These intellectually enriched programs result in big IQ gains on entry into elementary school and massive academic gains that persist for the long haul.

The programs were able to cut in half the percent of children put into special education, to cut by almost two-thirds the percentage in the bottom 10 percent on standardized tests, to reduce by almost half the percent forced to repeat a grade, to increase by a third the percentage who graduated from high school, to more than double the percent who went on to a four-year college, and to cut in half the percentage who claimed welfare benefits as adults. The programs are expensive, but the payoff to the public has been estimated at between \$4 and \$9 per dollar spent on these programs. If you pull out all the stops in preschool education you can have an enormous effect. Smaller but still big-seeming measures may fail.

What are some of the big-seeming interventions in K-12 education that have disappointing results? Vouchers sound like a big intervention to many people. Families receive money to pay for education at any school in the community; the freedom of choice supposedly tailors the school to the child and results in steady attrition of the least effective schools, which parents begin to shun. But there is no evidence that vouchers result in better scholastic outcomes for kids.¹⁶ How about charter schools, institutions that are “off the grid” of public education and that can design their own programs and hire and fire teachers as they please without necessarily having to deal with unions? The best evidence indicates that (most) charters are little better than regular public schools, and perhaps a little worse during their start-up periods.¹⁷ I might send my child to an established charter school – without much conviction that it would be better than regular public schools – but I would not enroll him in a new charter.

“Whole school” interventions are very ambitious-sounding. Corporations go into a school with a new curriculum,

special teacher training, suggested lesson plans, reorganization of the administration, and so on. But there is not much evidence that they improve things substantially. Schools undergoing such makeovers are only a very little bit improved by the experience – and they are very expensive, so the bang for the buck is poor.

But again, there are *really* big interventions that do make a huge difference for poor and minority kids. Uncommon Schools, Achievement First, Harlem Children’s Zone, and KIPP (the Knowledge is Power Program) keep kids in school for as much as 60 percent more time than regular public schools. The best-researched of these programs is KIPP. KIPP students start the school day as early as 7:30 and finish as late as 5; the schools are open some Saturdays and continue into the summer for a few weeks. Instruction is not just of the “drill and kill” variety. Students enjoy experiences and programs typical of what upper-middle-class children receive: museums, sports, dance, art, theater, photography, and music performance. KIPP principals have the power to hire and fire teachers, and they insist on cooperation among teachers. Teachers visit parents and children in their homes, require kindness and good behavior of their students, and hand out rewards and penalties on the spot for behavior and academic achievement. One KIPP teacher described the atmosphere at the schools thus:

We’ve never had a kid talk back to a teacher, and we’ve never had kids fight. I don’t attribute this to the discipline system. It’s from setting expectations from the start. The smallest detail was called out. . . . It’s because kids believe that this is an extraordinary place, and we’ve taught them that. I don’t think they don’t tease because they

are afraid of the bench [for bad behavior]. It’s just something that they would not do at KIPP. This is the one school they’ve been to where there’s no teasing. They feel safe, and they are learning more.

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KIPP gets remarkable results. A Stanford Research Institute study of San Francisco Bay area students who entered a KIPP school in the fifth grade showed marked improvement over the course of a year.¹⁸ Twenty-five percent of the students scored at or above average on a nationally standardized language arts test at the beginning of the school year; in the spring, 44 percent did this well. In the fall, 37 percent of KIPP fifth graders scored at or above national averages in math; in the spring, 65 percent did this well. Progress continued at a good clip in the subsequent middle school years. A more recent study by Mathematica, the Cambridge, Massachusetts, research corporation, found comparable effects in a larger study with a somewhat different design: the “intention to treat” design,¹⁹ meaning that not all children assigned to the intervention group actually get that treatment (because they drop out of the KIPP school, for instance). The design yields a conservative estimate of the effects of three years of KIPP education, which in this case indicated that KIPP student performance in math exceeded that of controls by at least 0.5 standard deviations and in reading by 0.3. Those three years obliterated half of the black/white difference in math and a third of the black/white difference in reading! Again, big-seeming interventions sometimes fail to have big effects; *really* big-seeming interventions can have huge effects.

How about high school? There are no KIPP-type programs for high school yet, but we have a pretty good idea of what can be achieved with poor minority stu-

dents in math. You may have seen *Stand and Deliver*, the 1988 movie about math teacher Jaime Escalante's achievement in getting his East Los Angeles barrio students – who typically did not even graduate from high school – to pass AP calculus at higher rates than students from the rich Beverly Hills High (and for that matter, from most elite high schools in the country). But is the story told by the movie true?

There is good news and bad news about Escalante's feat. Most important, it is perfectly true that it happened. But unfortunately it did not happen in the way the movie implies: Escalante did not announce to unsuspecting seniors that he was going to make them into math whizzes that year. He started by building up math programs at junior high schools that then fed highly prepared students into his three-year high school.²⁰ And he made sure his students had excellent courses in high school math before he ever taught them as seniors. Once again, massively ambitious programs can make a massive difference.

Finally, the biggest intervention of all: college. Black students start college a full fifteen points lower in IQ than white students. But blacks in college gain in intellectual ability much more than whites, so that by the end of college the IQ difference is reduced to six points.²¹ Black students are on track to erase even that difference in the years ahead.

I started out by saying that big interventions do not always have a big effect but that small interventions *can* have a big effect. That is decidedly true for interventions with minority students.

Many Americans believe that abilities are essentially fixed at birth: you either have math ability or you don't. Others believe abilities are highly susceptible to manipulation: if you work hard you'll be

better at a given skill than if you don't. Social psychologist Carol Dweck and her colleagues²² have measured attitudes about ability in a group of mostly minority junior high students, asking for beliefs about such statements as "You have a certain amount of intelligence, and you really can't do much to change it" and "You can always greatly change how intelligent you are." Their results showed, not surprisingly, that students who believe that ability is a matter of hard work get higher grades than students who believe that ability is rooted in genes.

Dweck and her colleagues then tried to convince a group of poor minority junior high students that intelligence is highly malleable and can be developed by hard work.²³ The thrust of the intervention was that learning changes the brain by forming new connections and that students are in charge of this change process. Dweck reports that some of her tough junior high school boys were reduced to tears by the news that their intelligence was something substantially under their control. Students exposed to the intervention worked harder, according to their teachers, and got higher grades than students in a control condition. The intervention was more effective for children who initially believed that intelligence is a matter of genes than it was for children who were already inclined to believe that it is a matter of hard work.

NYU professor Joshua Aronson and his colleagues from the School of Education at the University of Texas performed similar experiments, with dramatic results.²⁴ They conducted one study with poor minority students in Texas who were just beginning junior high school.²⁵ Their intervention was short and easy to pull off. Each student in the Texas study was assigned a college student mentor for his or her first year in junior

high. The mentors discussed a variety of issues related to school adjustment. Mentors for the control group participants gave information about drugs and encouraged their students to avoid taking them. Experimental group participants were told about the expandable nature of intelligence and were taught how the brain can make new connections throughout life. Students were exposed to a Web page that reinforced the mentor's message. For students in the experimental group, the page showed animated pictures of the brain, including images of neurons and dendrites, and featured narratives explaining how the brain forms new connections when new problems are solved. The mentors also helped the students design their own Web pages, where they could re-imagine, through words and pictures of their own making, the message the mentor had been presenting.

The effects of the intervention were very powerful. On the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test for math, performance of male students exposed to the intervention was much higher than for males not exposed to the intervention: 0.64 standard deviations. For females, who tend to worry whether their gender makes them less talented in math, the difference was truly massive: 1.13 standard deviations. In reading, students exposed to the intervention did much better than students in the control group: 0.52 standard deviations on average.

Daphna Oyserman, from the University of Michigan School of Social Work, set up an elaborate, but still easily carried out, intervention with poor minority junior high students.²⁶ She gave them several sessions designed to make them think about what kind of future they hoped for, what difficulties they would likely have along the way, how they could deal with those difficulties, and which of their

friends would be most helpful in dealing with the difficulties. These were supplemented with sessions in which students worked in small groups on how to deal with everyday problems, social difficulties, academic problems, and the process of getting to high school graduation. The intervention had a modest effect on GPA (0.25 standard deviations), a bigger effect on standardized tests (0.36 standard deviations), and a very big effect on likelihood of retention in grade (lowering those chances by half).

One small intervention with students at an integrated high school in the East had effects that were breathtakingly large. The study, by Geoffrey Cohen and his colleagues at Yale University, involved asking students, as they began their high school years, simply to write about their most important values: sports, school achievement, family, and so on.²⁷ This intervention had no effect on whites or on high-performing black students. But it had a huge effect on low-performing black students, reducing the need for remediation from 18 percent to 5 percent and very substantially improving GPAs. Cohen reasons that the exercise was self-affirming, building confidence in a situation where stereotypes about low black ability were sapping the energy and efforts of black students. The intervention made them feel more a part of things and more comfortable in their surroundings. Interestingly, the same intervention had no effect on black students in a segregated school situation. It seems that the stereotype threat inherent in integrated settings is not so active in segregated settings, and therefore the intervention cannot lessen its deleterious effects on performance.

Small interventions can also make a difference in college. Most students worry about social acceptance and fitting in on campus, but for minority

students this fear can be particularly worrisome. If they fail to make friends, because there typically are not that many minority students on campus and because they may feel ill at ease with majority students, they may begin to wonder if they belong on campus. It is common for minority students' motivation to flag and for their GPAs to suffer as they progress through college.

Cohen and his student Greg Walton reasoned that lagging performance could be mitigated if minority students knew that worries about social acceptance are common for all students, regardless of ethnicity, and that things would likely improve in the future.²⁸ The researchers performed a modest intervention with black students at a prestigious private university. They invited black and white freshmen to participate in a psychological study at the end of their freshman year and exposed them to older students who assured them that worries about social acceptance are common for everyone but that over time most students find friends and a comfortable social niche. The intervention had no effect on whites but a large positive effect on blacks. In the period after the intervention, blacks reported studying more, making more contacts with professors, and attending more review sessions and study group meetings. In the subsequent term, grades of the blacks in the intervention group reflected these behaviors: their grades were much higher than those of blacks in the control group – 1.10 standard deviations higher, to be exact.

Much can be done, from infancy through college, to reduce the achievement gap. Some expensive and big-seeming interventions have no effect, while much more expensive interventions can have huge effects. How expensive are these very big interventions?

If we put the poorest sixth of children into the most effective preschool programs, the cost would be about \$50 billion a year. If we put the poorest sixth of children in KIPP-type elementary school programs that would cost about \$18 billion. (Current KIPP-type programs cost very little more than regular public schools, but that is only because their teachers work about 60 percent more than regular public school teachers. That would not be possible to duplicate on a large scale.) Can we afford this kind of outlay for education for the poor? By way of orienting the question, Congress felt in 2001 that we could afford \$70 billion per year in tax cuts for the richest 2 percent of Americans, and Congress reapproved those cuts in December 2010. The bill for bailing out AIG in 2009 was \$145 billion.

Bear in mind that some very big-seeming interventions do not cost much more than school as usual: Escalante's enriched math classes are but one example. And of course all the small-seeming interventions with notable effects cost next to nothing to carry out: recall the huge gains achieved simply from convincing minority students that their intelligence and academic achievement are within their power to affect.

Perhaps the single most important fact to remember when thinking about the future of the achievement gap is that we can reduce the black-white gap in reading by more than a third, and the black-white gap in math by a half, in a matter of three years with a program whose expense is clearly within our reach. Are we likely to attempt it? It is not impossible.

Continued reduction of the achievement gap is highly probable even if we do little to change the status quo. If we were to do the most that is within our power now, the gap would be drastically

reduced in a very short period of time.
We can only hope that society comes to

believe in the value of these investments
and moves to implement them.

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Has the Supreme Court Been More a Friend or Foe to African Americans?

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According to conventional wisdom, the U.S. Supreme Court heroically defends unpopular religious and racial minority groups from majoritarian oppression. As Justice Hugo Black stated in a landmark 1940 decision, the Court protects the rights of the “helpless, weak . . . or . . . non-conforming victims of prejudice.” This view, however, is deeply flawed: a quick review of American history reveals that the Court, more often than not, has been a regressive force on racial issues.

Before the Civil War, the Court upheld federal fugitive slave laws against substantial constitutional challenges, and it invalidated the laws of Northern states that were designed to protect free blacks from kidnapping by slave catchers. In the infamous *Dred Scott* decision of 1857, the Court voided an effort by Congress to restrict the spread of slavery into federal territories, and it denied that even free blacks possessed any rights “which the white man was bound to respect.” After the Civil War, the Court relied on legal technicalities to free the perpetrators of white-on-black lynchings and racial massacres, and it invalidated a federal law designed to secure blacks equal access to public accommodations. Well into the twentieth century, the Court mostly sustained the constitutionality of state-mandated racial segregation and various Southern state measures for disenfranchising African Americans.

The long history of the Court’s complicity in racial oppression is often hidden behind the ro-

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matic image of the Court as savior of African Americans that derives largely from *Brown v. Board of Education* and its immediate progeny. To be sure, the Court's epic 1954 ruling, which invalidated state-mandated segregation in public schools, was of enormous symbolic importance to blacks – “the greatest victory for the Negro people since the Emancipation Proclamation,” according to many contemporary black newspapers. By making Jim Crow seem more vulnerable, *Brown* raised the hopes and expectations of black Americans and helped catalyze the transformative racial change accomplished by the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Yet one should not exaggerate the importance of the Court's contribution to racial progress. The *Brown* decision itself reflected social and political change as much as it caused them. The ruling would not have been possible without the tremendous impetus for progressive racial change provided by World War II. The war's anti-Fascist ideology, the battlefield contributions of African American soldiers, the growing political power of blacks that resulted from their mass migration from the rural South to the urban North, and the Cold War imperative for racial change that followed the war (that is, the perceived need for Americans to counteract Soviet racial propaganda by dismantling Jim Crow) all laid the groundwork for the Court's decision. In their internal deliberations in *Brown*, the justices candidly noted their amazement at the progressive racial change of the preceding decade, commenting on the “spectacular” advances and the “constant progress” being made.

Moreover, the Court followed its bold pronouncement in *Brown* with a remedial decree so weak and vacillating that it probably encouraged white Southerners to believe that the justices could be intim-

idated into backing down. Then, after *Brown II*, the Court essentially vacated the field of school desegregation for the better part of a decade – with one notable exception, in which the Court was confronted with outright defiance by a Southern governor. The justices apparently had concluded that they had no further constructive role to play until national public opinion, the president, and Congress rallied behind the Court's decisions. No such show of support was immediately forthcoming. As a result, as late as 1964 – a full decade after *Brown* – only one or two Southern black children in a hundred attended a desegregated school.

As the direct action phase of the civil rights movement – sit-ins, freedom rides, and street demonstrations – swept the nation in the early 1960s, the justices began to reassert themselves, both with regard to school desegregation and other racial issues. In 1963, the Court warned that the desegregation context had been “significantly altered” since 1954/1955 and that desegregation plans that “eight years ago might have been deemed sufficient” were no longer so. In 1964, the justices ruled that closing public schools to avoid court-ordered desegregation was unconstitutional, and in 1968, they held that the constitutionality of school desegregation plans depended on whether they produced meaningful integration, not just formal desegregation. During the 1960s, the Court also went to great lengths to overturn the criminal convictions of sit-in demonstrators, created new constitutional law to protect the NAACP from legal harassment by Southern states, expanded the range of private actors subject to the Fourteenth Amendment's antidiscrimination command, and upheld broad exercises of congressional power on behalf of civil rights.

Furthermore, the justices of the Warren Court revolutionized the rights of criminal defendants (who were disproportionately members of racial minority groups), and they transformed the law of federal courts in an effort to prevent Southern states from nullifying the constitutional rights of civil rights protestors. For a short decade, the Court came about as close as it ever has to actualizing its romantic image as a protector of racial minorities.

Then, just as the civil rights movement reached its zenith, shifting social and political conditions disrupted racial progress. Opinion polls had ranked civil rights foremost on the nation's political agenda from Summer 1963 through Spring 1965, but the war in Vietnam then displaced it. Moreover, as civil rights leaders shifted their focus to the North and broadened their objectives to include economic redistribution, many previously sympathetic whites withdrew their support. Less than six weeks after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law in Summer 1965, a devastating race riot swept through the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, killing thirty-four people; it served as a harbinger of dozens of other race riots in that decade. By the mid- to late 1960s, black nationalism, which often eschewed racial integration as a goal and nonviolence as a tactic, was sowing divisions within civil rights organizations and souring many white Americans on racial reform. "We shall overcome" proved to be a far more appealing message to most whites than "burn, baby, burn."

Indeed, white voter backlash was already beginning to manifest itself in national politics. In 1964, the Republican Party nominated Senator Barry Goldwater, a vocal opponent of that year's Civil Rights Act, as its presidential candidate. Goldwater's nomination accelerated a

national political realignment, as five Deep South states voted Republican for the first time since Reconstruction, while blacks deserted the party of Lincoln in droves. By 1966, a racial backlash among whites was also evident in the North, as urban race riots, proposals for fair housing legislation, and black demands for economic empowerment sundered the civil rights coalition. In 1968, Republican candidate Richard M. Nixon won the presidency on a platform emphasizing law and order, a relaxed pace for school desegregation in the South, and neighborhood schools (that is, no busing) in the North. Ninety-seven percent of blacks voted for Democrat Hubert Humphrey that year, but only 35 percent of whites did so. The 14 percent of voters who supported the third-party bid of the notoriously racist George Wallace provided a temptation for the Republican Party to move even further to the right on race issues in the future. Nixon's victory at the polls translated directly into changes in the Court's racial jurisprudence: he appointed four new justices during his first term.

In its initial rulings on school desegregation, however, the Burger Court, so named for Chief Justice Warren Burger, who was appointed by Nixon during his first year in office, continued to push aggressively for change. When the Court declared in 1969 that desegregation extensions would no longer be granted to school districts, Nixon privately raged at "the Court's naive stupidity," and he denounced the justices as "irresponsible ... clowns." As late as 1971, the Court unanimously sustained student busing as a remedy for school segregation and approved the imposition of sweeping desegregation orders upon proof of fairly minimal constitutional violations.

Yet the Court quickly drew the line at a school district's boundaries. In 1974,

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the Court decided its most important school desegregation case since *Brown*. In *Milliken v. Bradley*, by a five-to-four vote, the justices barred the inclusion of largely white suburbs within an urban school desegregation decree, absent proof that school district lines had been racially gerrymandered. As a result, federal courts were disabled from accomplishing meaningful school desegregation in most cities, where white residents had recently flocked to the suburbs. Nixon's appointees comprised four of the five justices in the majority in *Milliken*. The Warren Court almost certainly would have decided differently the issue of interdistrict busing orders. Whether it could have made such a ruling stick in light of hostile public opinion is another question.

On another racial issue of critical importance, the Burger Court ruled in *Washington v. Davis* (1976) that laws making no racial classification would receive heightened judicial scrutiny only if they were illicitly *motivated*; showing that a law simply had a disproportionately burdensome *impact* on racial minorities was deemed insufficient to establish a violation of the Equal Protection Clause. To illustrate the consequences of this ruling, consider the dispute over the vastly disparate punishments prescribed by federal law for possession of crack and powder cocaine. Under federal sentencing guidelines, possession of five grams of crack is punished the same as possession of five *hundred* grams of powder cocaine. It turns out that 90 percent of crack defendants are black, while three quarters of powder defendants are white. Yet, under *Washington v. Davis*, lower courts have generally ruled that this enormous racial disparity does not violate the Equal Protection Clause because challengers have been unable to

show that a racially discriminatory motive underlay the disparate penalties.

In the famous *Bakke* decision of 1978, the Burger Court issued another landmark ruling on race that pointed in the same direction: affirmative action – that is, the use of racial preferences to advantage traditionally disfavored racial minorities – was subject to the same strict judicial scrutiny as was traditional Jim Crow legislation. Conservative justices, then and since, have read the Fourteenth Amendment, which was adopted in order to protect the newly freed slaves from racial discrimination with regard to their civil rights, as a mandate of government color blindness. The Court's overall record on race-based affirmative action has been mixed since *Bakke*. The conservative justices have almost invariably voted to invalidate such programs, while the liberal justices have almost always voted to sustain them. Individual case outcomes generally have been determined by the votes of swing justices – first, Lewis Powell, and then Sandra Day O'Connor. But the Court has invalidated more affirmative action programs than it has sustained.

The conservative justices' hostility to affirmative action reflects a constitutional double standard. These are the same justices who ordinarily – for example, in cases involving abortion, gay rights, or physician-assisted suicide – profess commitments to judicial restraint, democratic decision-making, respect for states rights, and an interpretive methodology of textualism and originalism. Yet all these considerations point in the direction of permitting race-based affirmative action. To strike down affirmative action programs is for unelected judges to invalidate the policy preferences of state and local governments on a thin constitutional basis. The text of the Fourteenth Amendment says nothing

about government color blindness – indeed, it doesn’t even mention race – and the original understanding of those who adopted and ratified the amendment was plainly not a mandate of color blindness. The Framers of the Fourteenth Amendment (and their constituents) were too racist to require government to eschew all racial classifications. They thought that laws disenfranchising blacks, excluding them from jury service, segregating them in schools, and forbidding interracial marriage were plainly constitutional.

The Rehnquist Court – named for William H. Rehnquist, who was promoted from Associate to Chief Justice in 1986 – pretty consistently ruled against the interests of racial minorities, though most of its decisions were narrowly divided along partisan political lines. Since Presidents Reagan and Bush appointed five new justices to the Court between 1981 and 1991, the conservatives have enjoyed a secure majority on most racial issues (though, interestingly, not on other constitutional issues, such as abortion, gay rights, the death penalty, or the separation of church and state). By 1991, the last ten appointments to the Court had been made by Republican presidents, none of whom won much more than 10 percent of the black vote at the polls.

It was the Rehnquist-led conservatives who sounded the death knell for court-ordered school desegregation. In a case from Oklahoma City in 1991, a narrowly divided Court ruled that once a school board had complied in good faith for a “reasonable period of time” with a desegregation order, and the vestiges of past discrimination had been eliminated “to the extent practicable,” the school district was entitled to be released from federal supervision. If terminating a de-

segregation decree under these conditions resulted in increased school segregation, then private housing preferences were probably the cause, according to the conservative majority, and responsibility could not be ascribed to the state. In short, these justices’ patience for court-ordered school desegregation had run out.

In 1995, the conservative justices indicated that their tolerance for remedial alternatives to busing had also run thin. In a five-to-four decision, the Court forbade the use of magnet school programs for the purpose of enticing suburban whites into racially integrated urban schools and imposed virtually insurmountable hurdles to judicially mandated increases in educational funding as a remedy for school segregation.

In addition to curbing court-ordered school desegregation and race-based affirmative action, the Rehnquist Court’s conservative majority inaugurated a new strand of constitutional jurisprudence that called into question the permissibility of legislative districts that were gerrymandered to enhance the prospects of minority racial groups electing representatives of their own choice. In a series of five-to-four decisions, the Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment presumptively bars such districts when the predominant motive behind their creation was racial. As with the conservative justices’ posture toward affirmative action, these decisions are difficult to reconcile with the original understanding of the Fourteenth Amendment, which plainly did not protect political rights such as voting. Moreover, these rulings stand in stark contrast with the conservative justices’ insistence that *political* gerrymandering is a nonjusticiable political question.

Perhaps most disturbing, the Rehnquist Court proved largely indifferent to race discrimination in the criminal jus-

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tice system. In *McCleskey v. Kemp* (1987), the conservative justices narrowly rejected an equal-protection challenge to the discriminatory administration of the death penalty in Georgia. Specifically, according to a study that the justices stipulated to be valid for purposes of the case, defendants who murdered whites were 4.3 times more likely to receive the death penalty than were those who murdered blacks. In essence, Georgia was undervaluing the lives of its black citizens, by declining to enforce capital punishment as vigorously when blacks were murdered as when whites were. Rejecting the challenge, the Court observed that race discrimination could not possibly be entirely eliminated from the administration of the death penalty so long as actors integral to the system – such as prosecutors and jurors – exercised significant discretion. The majority also noted that similar racial disparities existed throughout the criminal justice system, which meant that vindicating McCleskey’s claim would have had potentially enormous consequences. (One may be pardoned for wondering why this observation did not make McCleskey’s claim more compelling rather than less so.)

Similarly, in *United States v. Armstrong* (1996), the Court imposed a virtually insurmountable hurdle for defendants who alleged racially selective prosecution. Before black defendants could gain discovery – access to the prosecutor’s files – on such claims, they had to demonstrate that similarly situated whites had not been prosecuted. Yet this was the very point on which discovery was sought. Although the justices in cases that challenged the constitutionality of minority voting districts had frowned on the assumption that blacks and whites generally have different political preferences (which might warrant creating

majority-black districts), *Armstrong* rejected the lower court’s assumption that all crimes are equally likely to be committed by members of all races. The fact that in the preceding year this particular U.S. attorney’s office had prosecuted twenty-four blacks and not a single white for crack distribution did not establish the prima facie case of selective prosecution that was necessary to justify an order for discovery. The vote in *Armstrong* was eight-to-one, which suggests that even today’s liberal justices are less sensitive to racial discrimination in the criminal justice system than were their predecessors on the Warren Court.

In 2007, another slim conservative majority brought the Court’s racial jurisprudence full circle from *Brown*. The Court had ruled in 1954 that state-mandated racial segregation in schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment. In 2007, the conservative majority ruled that for school districts to take the race of students into account in order to promote racial *integration* also violated the Fourteenth Amendment.

The majority in *Parents Involved* (2007) spoke of the constitutional mandate of color blindness without offering any textual or historical argument in support (probably because, as already noted, no convincing arguments of these sorts exist). Instead, the conservatives relied most heavily on *Brown* and, extraordinarily, on the NAACP’s arguments to the Court in *Brown* – an unusual source of constitutional interpretation, to say the least. *Brown*, of course, need not be read to forbid all government racial classifications; it can just as easily be interpreted to forbid only those racial classifications adopted for the purpose, or having the effect, of disadvantaging historically oppressed racial minorities. It is true that the NAACP argued in *Brown* for

a constitutional mandate of color blindness, but that is not what the Court gave it. The justices in 1954 were too wary of calling into question antimiscegenation laws – an especially explosive political issue at the time – to insist on government color blindness across the board. Moreover, the conservative justices in *Parents Involved* took the NAACP's *Brown* argument badly out of context: the NAACP had argued for government color blindness during an era of formal Jim Crow. To portray the NAACP as repudiating race-conscious government measures designed to remedy past discrimination at a time when nobody could have dreamed of legislatures adopting such measures smacks of disingenuousness.

What lessons might one draw from this brief excursion through the last fifty years of the Supreme Court's racial jurisprudence? Let me suggest three. First, the composition of the Court matters. Second, politics matters because it influences the composition of the Court. Third, the justices broadly reflect the political and social climate of their eras; none of the Court's race rulings during the last half-century has veered far from dominant public opinion.

Regarding Lesson One, most of the Court's prominent race rulings since 1970 have been five-to-four decisions. Had there been one more liberal justice on the Court, many of these cases likely would have been decided differently. It was not predestined that the Court would reject race-based affirmative action, terminate the school desegregation project, or reject the argument that the Constitution bars racially disparate impacts regardless of discriminatory motive. Constitutional interpretation involves judicial discretion; judicial discretion reflects political ideology; and

conservative justices tend, unsurprisingly, to subscribe to the conservative racial ideology of the party that appointed them. That ideology embraces a narrow, formalist conception of what counts as race discrimination; abhors the use of racial preferences, whether benignly motivated or not; and deems this nation's ugly history of white supremacy as something more to be repudiated than remedied.

With regard to Lesson Two, while the political composition of the U.S. Supreme Court is partly fortuitous, the victories of the conservative bloc of justices on race issues since 1970 have predominantly been a function of politics. Between 1968 and 2008, Republicans controlled the presidency for twenty-eight years, Democrats for only twelve. Of the fourteen appointments made to the Supreme Court between 1969 and 2006, twelve were made by Republican presidents, most of whom prided themselves on their conservative politics. Because constitutional interpretation is so inextricably fused with politics, it should come as no surprise that justices appointed by presidents for whom very few black people voted would decide race-inflected cases in ways that contravened the preferences of most African Americans.

As to Lesson Three, one has to wonder how much difference it would have made had the liberal justices triumphed on some of these racial issues. Public opposition to court-ordered busing was so intense by the early 1970s – think of the 1974 anti-busing riots in Boston, the so-called cradle of abolitionism – that a contrary decision in *Milliken* might have either spawned a constitutional amendment to overturn the ruling or inspired massive defiance. A conservative majority of justices has succeeded in invalidating most affirmative action plans reach-

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ing the Court, but even when the liberals have scored an occasional triumph, as with the University of Michigan Law School case in 2003, that result has been overturned at the polls, as most Americans seem inclined to support referenda forbidding “benign” racial preferences. The Court’s conservative racial rulings in the criminal procedure context mirror well the starkly retributive turn in penology that began in the 1970s. Finally, by the time the Court, in 2007, invalidated race-based pupil assignment policies in grade schools that were designed to promote integration, only 5 or 10 percent of all school districts employed such policies; most of the country had already given up on racial integration.

In sum, while the last forty years of conservative hegemony on the Court has yielded racially regressive results pretty much across the board, one should not absolve the larger society that the Court serves of responsibility for such outcomes. The Supreme Court mirrors society at least as much as it shapes it. The conservative justices could not have foisted such a regressive racial jurisprudence on the American people without their acquiescence.

Affirmative Action: The U.S. Experience in Comparative Perspective

Daniel Sabbagh

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Broadly defined, *affirmative action* encompasses any measure that allocates resources – such as admission to selective universities or professional schools, jobs, promotions, public contracts, business loans, or rights to buy, sell, or use land – through a process that takes into account individual membership in underrepresented groups. Its purpose is to increase the proportion of individuals from those groups in the labor force, entrepreneurial class, or student population from which they have been excluded as a result of state-sanctioned oppression in the past or societal discrimination in the present. According to legal scholar Sean Pager, “Unlike traditional welfare policies grounded in distributional equity, affirmative action takes its moral force from a corrective justice ideal.”¹ It allocates scarce resources so as to remedy a specific type of disadvantage, one that arises from the illegitimate use of a morally irrelevant characteristic. Such measures may result from constitutional mandates, statutes, administrative regulations, court orders, or voluntary initiatives. They extend further than antidiscrimination policy strictly conceived, insofar as individuals are not required to provide evidence of discrimination to benefit from affirmative action. Their goal is to counter deeply entrenched social practices that reproduce group-structured inequality (even in the absence of intentional discrimination) by creating positive externalities beyond individual recipients.² Such measures benefit groups “with

whose position and esteem in society the affiliated individual may be inextricably involved.”³

Affirmative action policies vary substantially across countries. Their *intended beneficiaries* may include not only ethnic, racial, or religious groups held to be economically and/or socially disadvantaged, but also aboriginal peoples, women, the disabled, or even war veterans. Other differences between policies relate to which (more or less flexible) *instruments* they use; what the *legal norms* are from which they derive; how extensive the *domain of implementation* is; and what their *ultimate goal* consists of, considering how the policies work and the justifications provided to support them. Programs also vary in how explicitly they target designated groups and the extent to which they benefit those groups. In this respect, there are at least three types of affirmative action:

Indirect affirmative action. These policies are “purposefully inclusionary” measures⁴ that appear neutral but are designed to benefit disadvantaged groups more than others. Such measures might be construed as “disparate impact” discrimination if the outcomes for the affected groups were reversed. In the case of race and ethnicity, one example is a law enacted in Texas in 1997.⁵ The law requires state universities to admit the top 10 percent of graduates from each high school regardless of their test scores. The purpose is to increase the percentage of blacks and Hispanics in the student body, which is made possible by the large number of high schools in that state from which virtually all graduates belong to one of these two minority groups. Similarly, in France, formally “color-blind” yet arguably “race-oriented” policies allocate additional financial resources to educationally and/or economically disadvantaged areas. The criteria used for assessing an area’s need – school perfor-

mance, the percentage of families with three children or more, and the unemployment rate – are correlated with ethnicity: they vary partly according to the proportion of African immigrants within the population. In these more or less conspicuous instances where the state employs a “substitution strategy,” the distinctive ethnic profile of the beneficiaries appears to be the secondary effect of a formally neutral principle of allocation. Yet that anticipated effect is at least in part the reason the principle was adopted in the first place. Such measures reflect the perceived illegitimacy or unlawfulness of policies that would address inequities among ethnic groups in a more straightforward manner.⁶

Outreach. Outreach programs are proactive policies designed to bring a more diverse range of candidates into a recruitment (or promotion) pool. In this case, group membership is explicitly taken into account, but in a limited way: it is allowed to enter the picture in order to enlarge the pool from which individuals will be selected; however, it does not factor into the selection itself.

Direct affirmative action. Sometimes labeled (not always pejoratively) “preferential treatment” in the United States⁷ and also known as “positive discrimination” in France and Britain, direct affirmative action grants an advantage to the members of designated groups in final decisions for jobs or college acceptance. More or less flexible policy instruments may be used, including compulsory quotas, tie-break rules, and aspirational goals or targets. In this case, an applicant from one of the designated groups (DGA 1) will be selected for a position for which he or she is basically qualified even if at least one applicant from a non-designated group is deemed more qualified. If another applicant from a designated group (DGA 2) had the same qualifica-

tions as the applicant from the non-designated group, he or she would have been selected instead of DGA 1.⁸ In other words, group membership is the key factor that triggers the outcome. DGA 1 obtains the position only because he or she is identified as a member of a designated group. Direct affirmative action, the main focus of current political and legal controversies and the topic of this essay, can thus be criticized for conflicting with two esteemed principles of the different societies under consideration: the meritocratic principle, according to which the most qualified applicant should always be selected, and the principle of “blindness” to characteristics such as race, gender, or caste.

Contested as it is today, affirmative action originally emerged as a strategy for conflict management in deeply divided societies. The important exceptions are Brazil⁹ and India; in the latter, “reservations” for lower caste members in government office and higher education and the extension of benefits to a broader group of recipients have, in fact, triggered some violent resistance by urban upper caste youth in northern states.¹⁰ In most cases, however, countries that believed themselves to be on the brink of civil war, or that had experienced at least some serious unrest, set up affirmative action policies to alleviate an empirically substantiated risk of mass violence. Affirmative action, then, has been understood in part as a last-resort device meant to deal with or prevent a major crisis in which the preservation of the social compact was or would have been at stake. As Justice Albie Sachs of South Africa’s Constitutional Court explains, countries that introduce affirmative action “do so not to meet widely proclaimed human rights standards but, sadly, because the social and economic costs of change are

outweighed by the social and economic costs of policing the status quo. Put bluntly, affirmative action has frequently come about as a rushed and forced response to what have been called race riots.”¹¹

The United States is a case in point. Sociologist John David Skrentny has shown that direct affirmative action programs were the somewhat paradoxical outcome of a reversal in law and policy that took place in a remarkably short time frame: the second half of the 1960s.¹² Indeed, not only did Congress fail to provide such programs with a constitutional foundation, in contrast with the pattern observed in India, Malaysia, and South Africa; it also had enacted a statute, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, that seemed to preclude their coming into existence. The Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex by private employers with fifteen or more employees; federal, state, and local governments; and educational institutions, employment agencies, and labor unions. Specifically, Title VII of the Act declared it “an unlawful employment practice for an employer . . . to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge *any individual* or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, *because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex or national origin.*”¹³ Thus, even though the motivating force behind the bill certainly was to end the discrimination suffered by blacks, whites were also protected from race-based discrimination in employment. Furthermore, section 703 (j) of Title VII explicitly stated: “Nothing contained in this subchapter shall be interpreted to require any employer . . . to grant preferential treatment to any individual . . . because of the race . . . of such individual . . . on account of an imbalance.” Yet the first (direct)

affirmative action programs were implemented only a few years later.

The factor most directly accounting for this dramatic policy innovation was the *bureaucratic rationalization* of antidiscrimination law enforcement by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).¹⁴ This development, in turn, was made possible by a highly unstable political atmosphere. Between 1964 and 1968, an unprecedented wave of race riots afflicted American cities, resulting in several hundred deaths. Alarmed, the federal government responded to black leader A. Philip Randolph's warning that "the Negro ghettos in every city throughout the nation [were] areas of tension and socio-racial dynamite, near the brink of similar explosions of violence."¹⁵ The problem of unemployment among young urban blacks – understood to be the underlying cause of that violence – seemed compelling enough to justify radical measures that had been dismissed a few years earlier. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (also known as the Kerner Commission), which President Johnson had tasked with investigating the causes of the riots, mentioned neither racial quotas nor more flexible goals. Yet although the means for implementation were left unspecified in the Commission's prescriptions, the severity of the crisis and the breadth of the commitment needed to prevent further riots were clear.

The causal relationship between racial violence and the introduction of affirmative action programs was most immediately perceptible in the field of law enforcement. Previously, blacks and Hispanics were nearly absent from the police forces in predominately black and Hispanic urban areas. Therefore, one of the main recommendations submitted by the Kerner Commission was to "increase substantially the recruitment of

Negroes in the Army National Guard." That blacks made up only 1.15 percent of National Guard members in August 1967 was viewed as a "deficiency [to] be corrected as soon as possible."¹⁶ From that point on, some form of affirmative action beyond outreach was made part of the recruitment agenda.

In the United States, the role of inter-racial strife in creating a new decision-making environment that led to the introduction of direct affirmative action was made particularly visible by the existence of a contradictory prescription in a statute enacted only a few years earlier. Yet a similar dynamic has been operating in other countries. In Malaysia, the May 1969 riots pitting Chinese against Malay residents of Kuala Lumpur resulted in a death toll of several hundred persons (most of them Chinese). The violence prompted not only a markedly authoritarian turn in the Malaysian political system but also the introduction, in 1971, of a New Economic Policy, which extended affirmative action from the public to the private sector. The government believed the key to restoring minimal intercommunal harmony was to reduce the gap between the politically dominant Malays and the economically successful Chinese.

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, the need to defuse violent conflict sustained by persistent religious discrimination has led to a stronger affirmative action regime. In accordance with the Fair Employment Act of 1989, all public authorities and private sector employers with more than ten employees are required to register with the Equality Commission, periodically submit reviews on the religious composition of their workforce, and consider implementing an affirmative action program whenever discrepancies are substantial.¹⁷ By contrast, in mainland United Kingdom, "positive ac-

tion” programs are, theoretically, non-compulsory for private employers.¹⁸ In what is still the only example of a mandatory quota in U.K. law, section 46 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act of 2000 goes so far as to require that equal numbers of Catholics and non-Catholics be appointed to the police service from a pool of qualified applicants.

Even in France, where, according to the prevailing legal doctrine, “color blindness” has been constitutionalized (in contrast to the United States¹⁹), the most blatant (yet unacknowledged) violation of that rule occurred during the Algerian War of Independence. The French government then launched an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to legitimize the colonial order by co-opting its Algerian subjects in greater numbers. Between 1958 and 1960, a series of affirmative action measures – including straight quotas – was enacted through executive orders (*ordonnances*) to promote the integration of Algerian-born French Muslims into selected components of the civil service and public administration.²⁰ In March 2003, to ensure that a similar process of decolonization through armed conflict would not take place in New Caledonia, the French Constitution was amended to authorize overseas territories to implement preferential measures “in favor of [their] population in . . . employment, in the award of licences required for certain occupations, or regarding the protection of land assets.”²¹ The causal link between violence that threatens to disrupt the existing political order and the introduction of affirmative action programs – a link observed in otherwise strikingly different cultural and legal environments – is thus hard to deny.

Another structural feature of affirmative action regimes is that they are resilient and tend to expand over time. In

theory, the goal of special treatment for members of disadvantaged groups is to make the need for it disappear as quickly as possible; in reality, the programs are difficult to dislodge. Although affirmative action has generally been conceived and justified as a temporary measure,²² it tends to become permanent in democratic societies, where benefits, once given, cannot be easily withdrawn. In many cases, affirmative action programs have even expanded in scope, either embracing additional groups, encompassing wider realms for the same groups, or both.

In the United States, for instance, affirmative action almost immediately spread outward from native-born blacks to other groups with an arguably lesser need for remedial treatment, including women²³ and other ethno-racial minorities – Hispanics and Asians in particular, whose numbers increased dramatically as a result of immigration reform. The consequences of extending the policy’s range received little thought. It was the exceptional experience of blacks – and the impulse to remedy the injustice inflicted on them – that allowed affirmative action to be (imperfectly) legitimized in the first place “and subsequently . . . picked up by other groups who would not have been able to make the original claim.”²⁴

Yet even if it had been “politically feasible and socially desirable” to cast affirmative action as a corrective measure predicated on the *sui generis* African American experience, a measure exclusively designed to undo the harm suffered by members of that particular group, the Supreme Court held that courts do not have the capacity to determine whom should receive preferential treatment. As Justice Lewis Powell explained, the unavoidable comparative assessment of the degrees of victimization experienced

by all groups with potential claims for affirmative action benefits involves a “kind of variable sociological and political analysis . . . [that] does not lie within judicial competence.”²⁵ Instead, the Court has conditioned the use of race-based affirmative action on enhancing the diversity of viewpoints represented in higher education,²⁶ a safer argument, but one that does not prevent the policy from being extended to an ever-broader set of groups; indeed, quite the contrary has happened.

Moreover, in addition to this first kind of expansion, while affirmative action programs emerged as a requirement imposed by the federal government on public contractors, they are now in play at universities, state and local governments, private firms, and regulatory agencies responsible for granting licenses. In some domains the Supreme Court made the policy’s conditions of validity more restrictive over time²⁷; in others – such as higher education – it confirmed the constitutionality of affirmative action provided that the programs remain suitably informal.²⁸

Similar to trends in the United States, in India quotas in university admissions and government employment were originally instituted to help the historically oppressed Scheduled Castes (SCs) – the “Untouchables” – and Scheduled Tribes (STs),²⁹ but over time were extended to the somewhat better-off lower castes. As of 1980, 52 percent of the Indian population was eligible. As in Malaysia and South Africa, the national affirmative action regime now offers benefits to ascriptive (non-gender) groups that make up a *majority* of the population, despite a large-scale resistance to that extension that persisted over several decades.

Affirmative action began in India under British colonial rule as a set of programs designed for the advancement of the Un-

touchables, first in the field of education as early as 1892, then in civil service and political office. After the country gained independence, the 1950 Constitution of India mandated that a proportional number of seats be reserved for members of SCs in federal and state legislative assemblies. The Constitution also enabled states to set aside a population-linked share of government jobs and places in educational institutions for those groups’ benefit. Furthermore, it authorized the potential extension of quotas to groups other than SCs and STs in Article 15 (4), which explicitly allows the states to “mak[e] any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens.” Yet the ratios used, and even the definition of the relevant groups – in the case of the so-called Other Backward Classes (OBCs) – were left for state governments to determine. Caste was by no means preordained as a defining feature.

Aside from the case of SCs and STs, both the Constituent Assembly and successive post-independence parliaments expected criteria of “backwardness” to be defined in economic terms; for forty years, they dismissed the recommendations of various Backward Classes commissions that caste should determine affirmative action benefits.³⁰ One such commission, the Mandal Commission, proposed in 1978 to add a national quota of 27 percent in government jobs for OBCs. This recommendation was in addition to the existing (proportional) quota of 22.5 percent: 15 percent for SCs and 7.5 percent for STs. Although the OBCs were granted affirmative action benefits in some individual states and provinces, it was not until the beginning of the 1990s that the proposal was adopted and received the imprimatur of India’s Supreme Court.³¹

In addition to extending benefits to other groups, India's quota system has expanded within the public domain. Places were reserved for SCs and STs first in admission to state colleges and professional schools, then in appointments to the state and central administrative services, and, eventually, in any number of positions in the public sector. More recently, as economic liberalization – under the direction of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs – and the privatization of government sector jobs have drastically reduced the reach of affirmative action, some have considered bringing the private sector under the purview of the reservation policy.³²

As the historical developments of the U.S. and Indian affirmative action regimes suggest, regardless of whether the policy is explicitly authorized in a country's Constitution, affirmative action tends to expand to other groups and domains. When, initially, the intended beneficiaries are stigmatized numerical minorities, the number of recipients and/or policy areas covered increases over time. That a similar expansion takes place in countries where affirmative action has been constitutionalized in more specific terms, and where the policy benefits politically dominant yet economically disadvantaged *majority* groups, is therefore hardly surprising.

In most countries where the beneficiaries of affirmative action (women excepted) are or originally were minority groups, the legal validity of targeted programs depends on whether the programs meet a set of formal requirements. Arguably the most important requirement is that the process by which scarce resources are allocated should not be determined *exclusively* by group member-

ship. Thus, in the 1963 *Balaji v. State of Mysore* decision, while the Indian Supreme Court did not object to the use of caste as a criterion for the identification of "backwardness," it held that caste could not be the only criterion considered. Similarly, the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court decision *California v. Bakke* allowed university admissions to take race into account as long as it was treated as just one among many potential diversity-enhancing features to be weighed against all the others.³³ In the same vein, the European Court of Justice has opposed appointment or promotion schemes under which women candidates would be automatically preferred to men³⁴; the court approved, however, "a tie-break rule giving preference to women where women and men are equally qualified, as long as an equally qualified male had the opportunity to establish that a reason specific to his case should tilt the balance in his favour."³⁵

These formal constraints are much less stringent in countries where law discourages resistance to affirmative action as a matter of principle. In Malaysia and South Africa, where the disadvantaged groups that benefit from the policy are numerical majorities,³⁶ affirmative action programs, unsurprisingly, are both more extensive and more explicit. Thus, Malaysia's 1957 Constitution confers privileges to *bumiputeras* (ethnic Malays) with a view to uplifting their economic position and thereby eradicating the remnants of the old colonial order in a particularly broad range of settings, including the award of business licenses and the distribution of land ownership.³⁷ Moreover, in the aftermath of the 1969 riots, the 1948 Seditious Act was revised to make it illegal to question the existence of these privileges.³⁸ Advocating for the suppression of affirmative action thus constitutes a criminal offense pun-

ishable by up to three years in jail³⁹ – a provision without equivalent in any other country.

In South Africa, the 1996 Constitution was also designed to forestall any argument over the permissibility of affirmative action for members of disadvantaged groups, with a view to avoiding legal controversies of the kind that were then unfolding in the United States. Section 9 (2) states: “[T]o promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.”⁴⁰ Section 9 (3) indicates that “the state may not *unfairly* discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.”⁴¹ Section 9 (5) makes clear that, in some cases, discrimination may be considered “fair”; and the 1998 Employment Equity Act confirms that “affirmative action” measures by “designated employers” vis-à-vis members of “designated groups” fall under this rubric.⁴²

In Malaysia, in the aftermath of the events that made reducing group inequality appear more urgent than ever, the constitutional status of affirmative action provided the central government with an already familiar set of programs, whose scope was then enlarged substantially for the sake of political stability. Hence the New Economic Policy entailed, inter alia, the acquisition of shares in private corporations on behalf of *bumiputeras* by public authorities. The official goal of this policy was to promote “the restructuring of society so as to eliminate the identification of race with economic function”⁴³ by 1990. The project of bringing about a radical, large-scale

social transformation, which arguably underlies affirmative action even in liberal democracies,⁴⁴ was thus made strikingly – and unusually – explicit.

Similarly, the Employment Equity Act in South Africa explicitly states that affirmative action measures may “include preferential treatment.”⁴⁵ Most distinctively, under sections 20 (3) and 20 (5) of the Act, a designated group member’s lack of the necessary qualifications is not a sufficient reason for hiring a non-designated group member instead: the employer “may not unfairly discriminate against a person solely on the grounds of that person’s lack of relevant experience.” Rather, the only legitimate matter of concern is the applicant’s “capacity to acquire, within a reasonable time, the ability to do the job.” By squarely rejecting the very criterion of merit as conventionally defined by the level of qualification, South African law thus embraces a conception of affirmative action reflecting the comparatively high degree of legitimacy that the policy enjoys in that country. This fact is explained largely by the clear causal link between current group inequality and the recently dismantled and morally discredited apartheid regime. In this case, affirmative action most visibly partakes of a simultaneously corrective and prospective strategy geared toward the deracialization of power and the structural transformation of the polity in an egalitarian direction. This approach is in line with the reference to the “crea[tion] of a new order” in the Preamble of the 1993 Interim Constitution⁴⁶ and the Postamble’s definition of this document’s ultimate purpose as being no less than the “reconstruction of society.”⁴⁷

How do these different affirmative action regimes define the social outcome, the attainment of which would

justify the termination of the policy? Two cases might be usefully distinguished. In some countries – such as Malaysia, for instance – the proportionality criterion provides an obvious and relatively uncontroversial “focal point.”⁴⁸ In others – such as the United States, by contrast – proportional representation is emphatically rejected as a distributive principle, even though it arguably operates covertly at the policy-making level by defining the benchmark against which “discrepancies” and “deficiencies” will be identified and compensated for. Yet at the end of the day, one may well argue that the ultimate goal of affirmative action will be reached only *when it will not occur to anyone* to verify the percentage of black

students or employees at a given university or enterprise. If race should eventually become – according to the color-blind ideal – as negligible a physical characteristic as eye color,⁴⁹ it would not be a matter of simply *knowing* that there is no correlation between that trait and the positions held by individuals in the economic and occupational hierarchy. Rather, societies must reach a point at which no one would even *think* of undertaking an empirical investigation designed to find out. In this respect, at least in countries where the ideal of societal integration is the strongest, an irreducible paradox of affirmative action policy is that it openly aims to eliminate the conditions that justify its implementation.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Sean Pager, “Antisubordination of Whom? What India’s Answer Tells Us about the Meaning of Equality in Affirmative Action,” *UC Davis Law Review* 41 (1) (2007): 336.
- ² See Paul Brest and Miranda Oshige, “Affirmative Action for Whom?” *Stanford Law Review* 47 (1995): 855–900. The authors describe benefits of affirmative action in eliminating stereotypes and creating minority role models.
- ³ *Beauharnais v. Illinois*, 343 U.S. 250 (1952), 263.
- ⁴ Christopher McCrudden, “Rethinking Positive Action,” *Industrial Law Journal* 15 (1) (1986): 223.
- ⁵ The text is available at <http://www.utexas.edu/student/admissions/research/HB588Law.html>.
- ⁶ See Jon Elster, *Local Justice: How Institutions Allocate Goods and Necessary Burdens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 116–120.
- ⁷ See Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel, and Thomas Scanlon, eds., *Equality and Preferential Treatment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).
- ⁸ See Thomas Nagel, “Equal Treatment and Compensatory Discrimination,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2 (4) (1973): 348.
- ⁹ See Mala Htun, “From Racial Democracy to Affirmative Action: Changing State Policy on Race in Brazil,” *Latin American Research Review* 39 (1) (2004): 60–89.
- ¹⁰ See Christophe Jaffrelot, “The Impact of Affirmative Action in India: More Political than Socioeconomic,” *India Review* 5 (2) (2006): 184–185.
- ¹¹ Albie Sachs, “Foreword,” in *Race and Inequality: World Perspectives on Affirmative Action*, ed. Elaine Kennedy-Dubourdieu (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2006), ix.
- ¹² See John David Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture, and Justice in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 67–110.

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- ¹³ Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, section 703 (a), <http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/vii.html>; emphasis added.
- ¹⁴ See Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action*, 9, 14, 231.
- ¹⁵ Quoted in John David Skrentny, "Policy-Elite Perceptions and Social Movement Success: Understanding Variations in Group Inclusion in Affirmative Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 111 (6) (2006): 77.
- ¹⁶ "Letter from the Kerner Commission to President Johnson," in *Civil Rights During the Johnson Administration, 1963 – 1969*, ed. Steven F. Lawson (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1984); on microfilm, part 1, reel 10, frame 1237.
- ¹⁷ Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act of 1989, section 31, http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1989/Ukpga_19890032_en_1.
- ¹⁸ See Steven Teles, "Positive Action or Affirmative Action? The Persistence of Britain's Antidiscrimination Regime," in *Color Lines: Affirmative Action, Immigration, and Civil Rights Options in America*, ed. John David Skrentny (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 241 – 269.
- ¹⁹ Article 1 of the French Constitution of 1958 states: "France . . . ensures the equality of all citizens before the law, *without any distinction of origin, race, or religion*," <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/html/constitution/constitution2.htm>; emphasis added. In the United States, the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment, according to which "no state shall deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," was not originally intended to incorporate a general requirement for state authorities to abstain from race-based classifications. The legal issue of whether one ought to infer a *rule of color blindness* from the constitutionally grounded *principle of equality* was deliberately left open for the courts to decide on a case-by-case basis; see Alexander Bickel, "The Original Understanding and the Segregation Decision," *Harvard Law Review* 69 (1) (1955): 1 – 65.
- ²⁰ See Gwénaële Calvès, "Affirmative Action in French Law," *Revue Tocqueville/The Tocqueville Review* XIX (2) (1998): 172 – 173.
- ²¹ See Constitution of France, article 74, section (*alinéa*) 8.
- ²² For a U.S. example, see the Supreme Court decision *United Steelworkers v. Weber*, 443 U.S. 193 (1979), 208. In India, while the original reservations specified in the Constitution of 1950 were set to expire ten years later, they were extended by amendment for additional ten-year periods up to this day. In Malaysia, preferences for Malays enshrined in the 1957 Constitution were intended to remain in place for a period of fifteen years and be repealed in 1972; they were not.
- ²³ In 1967, Executive Order 11375 expanded the coverage of the 1965 Executive Order 11246 on affirmative action to include women; see Executive Order 11375, 32 Fed. Reg. 14303 (1967), <http://www.dotcr.ost.dot.gov/documents/ycr/eo11375.htm>.
- ²⁴ Teles, "Positive Action or Affirmative Action?" 258. See also John David Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- ²⁵ *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978), 297.
- ²⁶ *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003).
- ²⁷ "Minority set-asides" are a case in point. See *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.*, 488 U.S. 469 (1989); *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña*, 515 U.S. 220 (1995). Beyond the domain of public contracting, only in a small number of states (California, Washington, Michigan, and Nebraska) did popular initiative referenda lead to the elimination of affirmative action across the entire public sector since the mid-1990s.
- ²⁸ See Daniel Sabbagh, "Judicial Uses of Subterfuge: Affirmative Action Reconsidered," *Political Science Quarterly* 18 (3) (2003): 411 – 436.

- ²⁹ “Scheduled Tribes” are other disadvantaged groups defined by their aboriginal status ; religious, linguistic, and cultural specificities ; and geographic isolation.
- ³⁰ See JaffreLOT, “The Impact of Affirmative Action in India,” 177 – 179.
- ³¹ *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India*, All Indian Reporter 1993 S.C. 477 (India). The OBCs were granted a quota that is half the size of what it would be if directly based on their proportion in the Indian population. In an earlier decision, *Balaji v. State of Mysore*, All India Reporter 1963 S.C. 649, the Supreme Court had capped at 50 percent the percentage of goods to be distributed through reservations by any single decisional unit. Thus, the 3,743 castes identified in the Mandal report as making up the OBCs for all practical purposes were to receive only what was left of the 50 percent available for reservation after the SC and ST proportional quotas had been taken into account. In this respect, and in sharp contrast with the U.S. affirmative action regime – in which policy-makers and judges alike have always avoided establishing a hierarchy of needs among recipients – members of the groups generally considered as the most disadvantaged receive special treatment in relation to other beneficiaries.
- ³² See, for example, Prashant Roy and Mohsin Alam, “Corporate Social Responsibility and Affirmative Action Programs: An Indian Perspective,” *Revue de l’organisation responsable* 3 (2) (2008): 49 – 60.
- ³³ *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 315 – 318.
- ³⁴ *Kalanke v. Freie Hansestadt Bremen*, C-450/93 (1995).
- ³⁵ *M. H. Marshall v. Southampton and South-West Hampshire Area Health Authority*, C-271/91 (1993).
- ³⁶ In Malaysia, the ethnic Malays and other indigenous groups now make up 65 percent of the country’s estimated population of 27.5 million, while 26 percent of the population is Chinese and 8 percent Indian ; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2777.htm>. In post-apartheid South Africa, according to figures from 2007, “blacks” (that is, “Africans,” “Coloureds,” and “Indians”) made up 91 percent of the population, estimated to be 47.9 million ; <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/population.htm>.
- ³⁷ See Constitution of Malaysia, articles 89 and 153 (2) ; <http://confinder.richmond.edu/admin/docs/malaysia.pdf>.
- ³⁸ Sedition Act of 1948 (Act 15), section 3 (1) (f), <http://www.agc.gov.my/Akta/Vol.%201/Act%2015.pdf>.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, section 4 (1) (d).
- ⁴⁰ Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996, chapter 2, section 9 (2), <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/index.htm>.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, section 9 (3) ; emphasis added.
- ⁴² Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, section 6 (2), http://www.workinfo.com/Free/Sub_for_legres/data/equity/Act551998.htm.
- ⁴³ Website of the Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister’s Department (Malaysia), Introduction, http://www.epu.gov.my/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=10370&folderId=31146&name=DLFE-2501.pdf.
- ⁴⁴ On the U.S. case, see Andrew Koppelman, *Antidiscrimination Law and Social Equality* (New Haven, Conn. : Yale University Press, 1996).
- ⁴⁵ Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, section 15 (3). In the same section, “quotas” are excluded, however. In this respect, the case of South Africa stands as an exception to the otherwise observable pattern connecting the constitutionally sanctioned nature of affirmative action with the use of this rigid instrument (as in Malaysia and India) and the absence of an explicit constitutional authorization for the policy with the predominance of supposedly flexible goals (as in Canada and the United States).

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documents/constitution/93cons.htm](http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/93cons.htm).
- 47 Ibid., "National Unity and Reconciliation."
- 48 Thomas Schelling, *A Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1960), 57.
- 49 See, for example, Richard Wasserstrom, *Philosophy and Social Issues : Five Studies* (Notre Dame, Ind. : University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 15.

Challenging History: Barack Obama & American Racial Politics

Rogers M. Smith, Desmond S. King & Philip A. Klinkner

When the American Academy of Arts and Sciences devoted two issues of its journal *Dædalus* to the topic of “The Negro American” in 1965 and 1966, the United States had reached the triumphant end of the second of three eras of racial politics that characterize the American national experience thus far. The election of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 raised hopes that the end of the third era was near, after which racial inequalities and conflicts would no longer be central to national life. Although the demographics of the 2008 electorate signaled the impact of historic racial transformations and the possibility of even greater changes, the campaign offered at best a glimpse of how the central issues of the third racial era in U.S. history might be resolved. As long as the debate over managing race-based discrimination and inequities persists, the current era cannot be said to have ended.

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We view the three eras of American racial politics in terms of rival *racial policy alliances*: that is, durable coalitions of political actors, activist groups, and governing institutions united by their stances on the central racial policy issues in the eras of American politics their conflicts help define.¹ In the *slavery era* of 1790 to 1865, pro-slavery and anti-slavery alliances fought over whether slavery should be maintained and extended. Next, after a period of transition, the *Jim Crow era* emerged in the mid-1890s and endured (for practical purposes) until

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the mid-1960s, while pro-segregation and anti-segregation alliances contested the maintenance and extension of de jure racial segregation and effective black disenfranchisement. After another period of transition lasting from roughly 1965 to 1978, the modern *era of race-conscious controversies* has witnessed struggles between opposed “color-blind” and “race-conscious” alliances over race-targeted policies and programs.

The central racial issues of the slavery and Jim Crow eras resolved only when extraordinary forces combined to enable one alliance to win decisively over the other. In each case, change came under the pressure of major wars (the Civil War in the former and World War II, combined with the ensuing Cold War, in the latter) that compelled U.S. leaders to rely on the economic and military contributions of African Americans and to justify the nation’s cause in terms of inclusive democratic principles. In turn, domestic political forces impelled the United States to live up to those principles more fully.² Nonetheless, despite those successes, deep racial inequalities and sharp disagreements over how to address them remained, even among the members of the triumphant anti-slavery, then anti-segregation, alliances. The persistence of material race inequities and conflicts explains why, after periods of transition, new racial alliances emerge on opposite sides of new racial issues.

In all three eras, racial alliances have sought political power either to resist or to advance the measures promoting greater material racial equality that they have deemed the most consequential, even if those measures have fallen short of addressing all racial concerns. The alliances have also sought to influence the positions of major political parties. During much of the first two eras, the opposed racial coalitions had allies in

both of the major parties of their day, albeit in unequal proportions, creating pressures and possibilities for racial compromises. Today, partisan divisions and racial alliance divisions are almost co-extensive: the Republicans regularly endorse color-blind policies, while Democrats support race-conscious ones. Even though the issues that define our current racial era seem more amenable to reasonable compromises than those that defined previous eras, this structural reinforcement of racial/partisan positions has contributed decisively to a polarized politics in which resolving racial issues is a mammoth task.

Few scholars have appreciated the distinctiveness and significance of this partisan structure of modern racial politics. During most of the slavery era, there were pro-slavery and anti-slavery components to both major parties: first among the Jeffersonian Republicans and the Federalists, and later the Jacksonian Democrats and the Whigs, although the Jeffersonians and Jacksonians tended to lean more strongly toward the pro-slavery side. This cross-cutting – rather than reinforcing – structure of racial and party positions explains why leaders of the two parties repeatedly, and especially in 1820 and 1850, managed to forge compromises that left the future of slavery unclear. But as Abraham Lincoln argued, slavery was not an issue that could be compromised on forever. The nation could not endure half-slave and half-free. In the 1850s, when the evenly divided Whigs broke apart over the slavery issue, a new partisan alignment arose that overlapped more closely with the era’s racial alliances. It pitted thoroughly pro-slavery Democrats against Republicans drawn from former Whigs and Free Soil Democrats who uniformly opposed the extension of slavery. The new Republican Party’s moderate but firm anti-slav-

ery position was made still more threatening to the South by the presence of a small but influential abolitionist movement. As a result, Southern Democrats viewed further compromises on slavery as suicidal and refused to accept the rise of the Republican Party to national power. The Civil War erupted soon after.

In the wake of the Union's Civil War victory, the anti-slavery alliance embedded into the Constitution the position on which they all agreed. As affirmed in the Thirteenth Amendment, there would be no involuntary servitude in the United States. But slavery's opponents, who ranged from former Democrat Andrew Johnson to Radical Republican Charles Sumner, disagreed passionately about the extent to which the United States should pursue racial equality beyond the end of slavery. Thus, the nation entered a transition period, during which Southern Democrats rebuilt their strength by persuading most Northern Democrats and many white Republicans that national harmony could be restored through the establishment of a new form of white supremacy: the putatively equal Jim Crow system of local, state, and national segregation policies.

By the late 1890s, most – though not all – Republicans had ceased to oppose measures to enforce African American disenfranchisement and segregation. Throughout the ensuing Jim Crow era, there were critics as well as supporters of segregation in both the Democratic and Republican parties; the Democrats, however, were the primary architects of segregation, while most Republicans simply acquiesced. Over time, in the face of international pressures including World War II and the Cold War struggles with Communism, segregation practices became political, economic, and military liabilities. These problems combined with domestic pressures, particularly the rise of

the modern civil rights movement and the migration of African Americans to Northern cities where they formed a pivotal potential voting bloc, to make change possible. Domestic and international developments enhanced the power of policy-makers who opposed segregation, especially in the northern Democratic Party after 1932. Along with more mobilized African Americans, increasing numbers of white citizens and leaders, particularly outside the South, came to regard segregation as lacking any persuasive moral or even political justifications. Jim Crow segregation, too, was no longer viewed as a matter for compromise. Eventually, the Democratic Party became predominantly anti-segregationist. Thus, after 1960, when Democrats gained control of all three branches of the federal government and added crucial anti-segregation support from Republicans, they enacted major new civil rights laws and won favorable constitutional rulings that toppled the Jim Crow system of de jure segregation and disenfranchisement.

Again, however, those victories left in place entrenched forms of racial inequality and considerable white resistance to further egalitarian change. In this regard, President Lyndon Johnson, the former Southern segregationist who led the legislative triumphs of the mid-1960s, is said to have remarked when he signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act that the Democratic Party had “lost the south for a generation.” He meant, of course, that Democrats had lost the white South, along with many other white voters, and therefore many elections. He was more right than he knew. According to exit polls, no Democratic presidential candidate has won more white votes than the Republican candidate in any national election since 1964, not even Jimmy Carter or Bill Clinton, both Southern

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Democrats who nonetheless won the White House.³

Yet if it is true that the civil rights laws of the 1960s set the stage for an era of Republican predominance in national elections, it is also true, as political scientists Philip Klinkner and Thomas Schaller argue, that Great Society laws transformed the American electorate over time in ways that, by 2008, made Barack Obama's victory possible. The 1964 Civil Rights Act and, particularly, the 1965 Voting Rights Act spurred enfranchisement and expanded political opportunities for millions of African American and, eventually, Latino voters. Without these measures, the Obama campaign would have been inconceivable. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, ending the race-based national origins quota system and leading to expanded Latino and Asian immigration over the several decades following enactment, also transformed the American electorate: in 1964, more than 90 percent of voters were non-Hispanic whites; in 2008, that number had fallen to under 75 percent. The 1965 Higher Education Act, providing funding for low- and middle-income students, increased the number of voters with college degrees from 13 percent in 1964 to 46 percent in 2008. Notably, Obama's popularity with college-educated voters was an asset in his primary campaign against Hillary Clinton and in the general election.⁴

Even so, exit polls indicate that in November 2008, Obama lost among white voters by 55 to 43 percent. He won 95 percent of the black vote, 67 percent of the Latino vote, and 62 percent of the Asian American vote – supermajorities that, combined with increased turnout among these groups, secured his victory.⁵ A number of analysts have concluded that although Obama did slightly better

nationally among white voters than John Kerry did in 2004, he fared worse among Southern whites and whites with high racial-resentment scores than a white Democrat likely would have done under the circumstances of the 2008 election.⁶ Although Obama's race was a plus for some liberal white as well as many non-white voters, most of those voters probably would have voted Democratic anyway. In contrast, racial resentment appears to have cost Obama votes that a white Democrat would have won if the voting had been based primarily on economic views – enough to diminish his net national vote by about 5 percentage points, according to political scientists Michael Lewis-Beck, Charles Tien, and Richard Nadeau.⁷

It seems clear, then, that the legislative and judicial triumphs of anti-segregation forces in the 1950s and 1960s transformed the American electorate – and therefore American politics – in racially inclusive directions. Nevertheless, these forces failed to eliminate the political consequences stemming from white racial resentment.⁸

The victories of the civil rights era had a further impact on the national political landscape. Taking one set of racial issues off the table transformed the nation's policy debates over how to respond to the reality of continuing racial inequalities and tensions. New alliances formed around new issues that emerged as pivotal. Proponents of greater material racial equality were faced with the fact that even though non-whites now had voting rights and formally equal economic rights, they continued to trail whites significantly in every area of American life, including employment, income, wealth, education, housing, health and mortality, incarceration, and political representation. Veterans of the civil rights

struggles, such as Julian Bond and Jesse Jackson, came to believe that further progress could not be achieved without direct, race-targeted measures such as affirmative action programs in education admissions and employment; race-conscious pupil assignment policies in the public schools; housing and job programs aimed at areas with high percentages of poor, non-white residents; race-conscious lending and fellowship programs; and majority-minority districts.⁹ But to many Americans, even many who, like Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas and Harvard sociologist Nathan Glazer, had opposed segregation laws, these measures seemed unjust – even a form of reverse racism.¹⁰ By the mid-1970s, the modern structure of American racial politics had formed, with a coalition of political actors and institutions promoting race-conscious policies and a rival coalition insisting that public measures and institutions should be “color-blind.”

With the emergence of each new structure of rival racial alliances, members of *both* alliances have professed allegiance to the resolution of the previous era’s disputes. Not even the proponents of Jim Crow sought to restore chattel slavery, which they conceded to be inefficient and immoral. Today no one calls for a return to the Jim Crow system. Instead, both advocates of color-blind policies and proponents of race-conscious policies present themselves as the true heirs to the anti-segregation civil rights movement. Both criticize their opponents for betraying its aims. For members of the color-blind alliance, the civil rights movement centered on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s hope that persons would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. They believe that race-conscious measures violate that aspiration and

perpetuate racial discord. By contrast, members of the race-conscious alliance believe that the central aim of the civil rights movement was to reduce embedded material racial inequalities. They see the color-blind alliance’s rejection of race-targeted policies as operating to perpetuate and even exacerbate pervasive inherited white advantages, whether or not that outcome is intended.

The two modern alliances emerged on either side of the debate over affirmative action in employment, but they can be found largely intact in legislative and judicial struggles over a remarkably wide range of other issues. Their basic structure is laid out in Table 1.

Some members of the color-blind alliance, such as white supremacists, support color-blind policies tactically, as a potent means to preserve white advantages. Others do so sincerely. The problem of disentangling racial aversions, perceptions of racial threats, and ideological commitments to race-neutral policies is intractable. Though there is evidence that at least some members of the color-blind alliance seek to preserve existing white advantages over non-whites, we presume that most proponents of color-blind policies believe these measures are best for racial progress and justice.

These modern coalitions cannot be adequately grasped in class terms: the business sector is divided on race-conscious measures, while most unions – formerly frequent opponents of civil rights reforms – now support them. The most distinctive feature of the structure of modern racial politics is, again, their division along major political party lines. Since at least the end of the Nixon administration, Republicans have favored color-blind policies, even if some do so more ardently and consistently than others; the great majority of Democrats,

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 Table 1
 Rival Racial Alliances, 1976 to 2008

Color-Blind Alliance

Most Republican Party officeholders and members after 1976
 President, 1980 – 1992, 2001 – 2008
 Some conservative and neoconservative Democrats
 Majority of Supreme Court after 1980
 Most lower federal court judges, many state judges after 1980
 Some white-owned businesses and business lobbyists
 (e.g., Equal Employment Advisory Council)
 Some labor unions, particularly traditional union locals
 Conservative media (e.g., Rush Limbaugh, Charles Krauthammer)
 Conservative think tanks/advocacy groups
 (e.g., Center for Individual Rights, Cato Institute)
 Fringe white supremacist groups
 Christian Right groups (e.g., Family Research Council)
 Conservative foundations (e.g., The Lynne and Harry Bradley Foundation)

Race-Conscious Alliance

Most Democratic Party officeholders and members
 President (mixed support), 1993 – 2000
 Some liberal and pro-corporate Republicans
 Some federal and state judges
 Many civil service members of executive agencies
 Many large businesses, minority-owned businesses
 Most labor unions
 Military leadership
 Liberal media (e.g., *The New York Times*)
 Liberal advocacy groups (e.g., American Civil Liberties Union)
 Most non-white advocacy groups (e.g., National Association for
 the Advancement of Colored People, La Raza, Asian American
 Legal Defense and Education Fund)
 Liberal religious groups (e.g., National Council of Churches)
 Liberal foundations (e.g., Soros Foundation, Ford Foundation)
 Liberal blogs and Internet groups after 2004

Source: This table is documented in Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith, *Still a House Divided: Race and Politics in Obama's America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).

meanwhile, have officially supported race-conscious measures, even if some do so half-heartedly. Official party platforms since 1972 have stated these distinct positions explicitly, though the Republican commitment to color blindness became more full-throated after 1980, while Democrats have less forcefully defended race-conscious measures since the “Reagan Revolution.”¹¹ Even so, in contrast to the near-universal re-

pu diation of white supremacist *attitudes* in national politics, this polarization on appropriate racial *policies* is consistent with, and may be an insufficiently appreciated contributor to, the modern partisan polarization documented by many political scientists.¹² Primarily because most American voters are white and most whites oppose race-conscious policies, the nearly full fusion of the modern racial alliances with the two major parties

has contributed to the GOP's predominance in national elections since the mid-1970s.

This fusion, combined with the materially inequalitarian historical legacies of the nation's two previous eras of racial politics, has had further significance. Racial politics today is shaped by passionate beliefs that what the nation found to be true in the past remains true for current racial conflicts: that policy approaches can brook no compromise. American public policies, many believe, *must* be either altogether color-blind or consistently race conscious; there can be no principled middle ground. In one sense this is logically indisputable. If the nation has any race-conscious measures at all, then it has not achieved pure color blindness (if we make the questionable assumption that pure color blindness is possible).

Yet if the basic precept common to both modern racial alliances is to make extensive opportunities available to all regardless of race, then it is almost certainly true that the public policies most conducive to that goal involve some combination of race-“neutral” and race-“conscious” measures, whatever the correct relative proportions may be. But because compromise on racial issues seems immoral to many on both sides, because some on each side suspect their opponents of racism or “reverse racism,” and because the positions of both sides have also come to be identified with the political fortunes of the rival parties, the structure of American racial politics stands in the way of policy-makers and institutions openly devising and implementing such hybrid measures without being paralyzed by controversy.¹³ Ironically, the American party system was better able to work toward compromises during eras when the issues, in the end, were not truly subject to legitimate com-

promise. Today, when the need for ultimate victory by one side or the other is far less clear, compromise seems far more unlikely.

Barack Obama's writings, his strategy as a presidential candidate, and his actions during the first year of his administration all show that he understands the chief implication of the modern structure of partisan-allied racial alliances: a Democratic president cannot hope to satisfy the substantial portion of his constituents who adhere to the race-conscious alliance if he openly repudiates all race-targeted measures, nor can he be confident in making progress toward alleviating material racial inequalities if he does so. Yet in the (still) predominantly white national electorate, most voters favor color-blind policies, and any candidate who is strongly identified with race-conscious measures is likely to lose. Aided by exceptional circumstances, Obama negotiated adroitly the electoral challenges the structure of modern racial politics posed for him in his run for the presidency. How far his strategy will permit him to govern successfully, particularly on racial issues, remains to be seen.

Indeed, both major party campaigns in the 2008 presidential election showed awareness of the constraints as well as the opportunities modern circumstances afforded them. The racial alliances framework helps clarify why neither campaign stressed race and why, as the voting patterns discussed above show, racial concerns were nonetheless at work.¹⁴ Senator John McCain, the candidate of the color-blind alliance's party, knew he could not openly comment on the race of his opponent; after all, his coalition's ideology held that race should be treated as politically irrelevant. At the same time, because Barack Obama appears black to most Americans and identifies himself

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as African American, his candidacy raised worries among many in the color-blind alliance that, as president, Obama would expand pro-black racial preferences in many ways.¹⁵ But unless Obama openly urged such policies – which he was careful not to do – the McCain campaign had to make those concerns salient to voters without explicitly speaking of race. This rhetorical dilemma may account for the McCain ads asking, “Who is the real Barack Obama?” and declaring that McCain, in contrast, was “the American President Americans have been waiting for.”¹⁶ The appeals were efforts to stir fears about Obama, and for at least some proponents of color-blind policies, those fears must have included concerns that he would champion racial preferences.¹⁷

Obama faced still greater strategic challenges in his presidential campaign: as a black American, he had to win the support of an electorate that predominantly favors color-blind policies. Press coverage based on interviews with white working-class voters suggests that it would have been enormously difficult for him to speak extensively about race and racial issues without exacerbating concerns that he would indeed support more expansive race-targeted programs – fears that could have sealed his defeat.¹⁸ At the same time, his racial identity and his background as a civil rights lawyer meant that Obama did not have to articulate a specific racial agenda for many proponents of race-conscious measures to presume that he would be far more sympathetic to their positions than his opponent. Even so, Obama would have alienated important segments of his core supporters if he had unequivocally repudiated race-conscious programs and policies. Hence, his best option was to foreground largely “race-neutral” policies in his campaign, while retaining – in the background – indications of constrained but continuing sup-

port for race-conscious measures such as affirmative action.

In *The Audacity of Hope*, his book of policy and campaign positions, Obama explained his support for this strategy. In his chapter “Race,” he offered “a word of caution” not to assume that “we have arrived at a ‘postracial’ politics” or “already live in a color-blind society,”¹⁹ citing stark statistics on persistent material racial inequalities and invoking his own experiences of racism. Obama then argued, in accord with race-conscious proponents, “Affirmative action programs, when properly structured, can open up opportunities otherwise closed to qualified minorities without diminishing opportunities for white students.” He added, “[W]here there’s strong evidence of prolonged and systematic discrimination by large corporations, trade unions, or branches of municipal government, goals and timetables for minority hiring may be the only meaningful remedy available.”²⁰ But Obama also stressed his understanding of arguments for color-blind measures. He advocated for an “emphasis on universal, as opposed to race-specific programs” as not only “good policy” but also “good politics.”²¹ He concluded that “proposals that solely benefit minorities and dissect Americans into ‘us’ and ‘them’ may generate a few short-term concessions when the costs to whites aren’t too high, but they can’t serve as the basis for the kinds of sustained, broad-based political coalitions needed to transform America.”²²

In making this argument, Obama sought in his book and in his campaign to build a racial alliance that joined those Americans who predominantly favored color-blind policies, but could tolerate some race-conscious measures to alleviate material racial inequities, with those who thought substantial race-conscious

measures were needed but were willing to make concessions if progress was being achieved through other means. The only alliance that viably could have opposed this “mixed-strategy” coalition would have consisted primarily of voters openly opposed to further progress toward material racial equality altogether – a group that Obama could have reasonably expected to be small in twenty-first-century America. He pursued his strategy, for the most part, simply by not talking about race and by minimizing its likely impact on the election. Thus, he presented his rhetorical emphasis on unity and change in terms congenial to proponents of color-blind and race-conscious measures alike.²³ Though he did not eliminate the impact of racial resentment, it is likely that he reduced it.

In negotiating color-blind and race-conscious policies, Obama skillfully pursued the central theme of his campaign – indeed, of his entire political career. It is a theme embodied in his own life-story: America must strive to achieve the promise of *e pluribus unum*, “that out of many, we are truly one.”²⁴ He also benefited, however, from the extraordinary pressures for change that have abetted racial progress in the past. Obama was the candidate of the “out” party at a time when the nation, drained by warfare in two countries and wracked by the most severe economic collapse since the Great Depression, was poised for a Democratic landslide, at least according to many political scientists.²⁵ The Republicans ran a strategically dubious campaign, with McCain’s choice of an undeniably inexperienced vice presidential candidate, former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, undercutting his argument that Obama was not ready for the presidency. Obama’s deft presentation of his theme of shared commitments to fellow Americans (rather than of race-

consciousness), reinforced by this remarkable conjunction of favorable external circumstances, helped him overcome the factors that long precluded a black candidate’s election as president of the United States.

Obama’s campaign theme – finding common ground by emphasizing unity and mutual service, even while respecting diversity – and the attendant strategy of stressing universal measures while not rejecting all race-conscious ones raise the question: can the president govern in ways that will sustain a coalition broad and deep enough to predominate in American politics for years to come? Will his “middle way” coalition end America’s third racial era of contestation over color-blind versus race-conscious policies? As of this writing, in Winter 2010, it is too soon to tell. President Obama has reduced U.S. troop deployments in Iraq but increased them in Afghanistan, and although the economy has ceased its precipitous fall, aided by Obama’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, unemployment and economic hardships remain high, and the rising public debt is a daunting policy constraint. He has won other significant domestic and foreign policy victories, including the Affordable Health Care for America Act, the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” the New START Treaty, and the Food Safety Modernization Act. But his party also endured major losses in the 2010 midterm elections. These circumstances leave Obama with little financial or political capital to spend on a specifically racial reform agenda. And despite his exceptional political skills, his administration and the United States still face major additional obstacles to progress on racial issues.

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First, by stressing color-blind or race-neutral approaches without rejecting all race-conscious policies, Obama continuously walks a tightrope. His administration was buffeted by controversies over the race-conscious remarks of his first Supreme Court nominee, Sonia Sotomayor, who suggested that at least in some cases, a “wise Latina” might be able to reach better decisions than a white man.²⁶ It also saw a bare majority of the Supreme Court, but probably a larger segment of the public, reject the position of its amicus brief in the *Ricci v. DeStefano* case.²⁷ Consonant with Obama’s approach to race, the Justice Department argued that in order for public employers (in this case, the Fire Department in New Haven, Connecticut) to avoid lawsuits under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, it should be permissible to abandon one race-neutral test for promotion in favor of another race-neutral test that is preferable on race-conscious grounds – that is, one likely to produce a more diverse workforce and leadership.²⁸

The city maintained that it would be vulnerable to lawsuits if its fire department used its original written test for promotion. The Supreme Court, whose Republican-appointed majority has moved the institution ever more firmly into the ranks of the color-blind alliance, adopted a daunting “strong-basis-in-evidence” standard to judge the city’s legal vulnerability that the city was unable to meet.²⁹ In dissent, Justice Ruth Ginsburg criticized this novel standard and insisted that the city could use a test that produced a racially disparate pattern of promotions only if that test was a business necessity. The record presented indicated that other tests that better identified merit would also be more racially inclusive.³⁰ Both the Court’s ruling and public discussions of the case showed that even this limited degree of

openness to race-conscious public policies faced strong judicial and political opposition.

New Haven had wished to turn to observational “assessment center” tests for promotion, tests that probably would have assessed merit at least equally as well and that likely would have produced a more racially diverse workforce and department leadership. If municipalities henceforth choose to avoid litigation by adopting such tests in advance (the general strategy preferred by the Obama administration), race-neutral means chosen on race-conscious grounds might prove more acceptable. In other words, a policy adopted as a quietly routine practice may provoke less controversy than one held up to judicial and political scrutiny. Furthermore, despite her comments, Sonia Sotomayor was confirmed, though in the hearings she backed away from, rather than defended, her earlier endorsement of race-conscious judging.³¹ These experiences suggest that Obama’s approach to racial issues may sometimes embroil him and his coalition in controversies he wishes to avoid; but the strategy may nonetheless form part of his endeavors that, on balance, succeed both politically and as policy.

A more fundamental question is whether Obama’s approach to race, and his more general strategy of seeking “*e pluribus unum*” solutions, can successfully reduce the nation’s material racial inequalities, as well as alleviate economic problems more generally, in a period of severe recession and polarized politics. As Obama recognizes, the persistence of severe racial disparities in most spheres of life makes it a virtual certainty that racial divisions will be visible in American politics as well. If toward the end of Obama’s first term the nation’s economy appears to be moving in the

right direction – a prospect that is now very uncertain – he may be able to sustain and even broaden his electorate, making a second term and further change possible. But he probably will have to do so almost entirely through “universal,” “race-neutral” measures. Both history and logic indicate that such programs often fail to reduce material racial disparities substantially. Frequently, they reduce some material suffering but leave racial gaps intact. Given the depth of the nation’s current economic and racial hardships, the possibility that “universal” programs will sufficiently diminish racial inequalities to quiet calls for race-conscious measures from the Left, or to limit concerns about black favoritism from the Right, is zero.

Also questionable is whether Obama can persuade many white Americans that his “universal” policies really are race-neutral. Political scientists Michael Tesler and David O. Sears find, for example, that racial resentment scores among whites continue to correlate strongly with assessments of Obama and with policy positions on a range of issues, such as health and tax policy, more so than with previous presidents.³² Prominent conservative commentators such as Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck regularly describe Obama’s policy proposals as “reparations,” even suggesting that Obama is a “racist” with a “deep-seated hatred of white people.”³³ Those perceptions lead to the dismissal of Obama’s efforts not to stress race-conscious measures.

There are also two other, somewhat less-apparent reasons that the third era of American racial politics is unlikely to be at an end. The first is that the race-conscious politics of the modern era have generated what might be termed “the multicultural challenge.” It is a challenge that goes to the heart of Obama’s core campaign promise: to embrace the

diversity of Americans and yet to find ways to “bridge our differences and unite in common effort – black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American; Democrat and Republican, young and old, rich and poor, gay and straight, disabled or not.” All Americans are to come to feel and act politically as “one nation, and one people” who will together “once more choose our better history.”³⁴

But Americans do not agree on what constitutes their “better history” or what constitutes “bridging,” as opposed to “erasing,” their differences. Some see the spread of religious diversity and greater secularity, for example, as advances for unity-despite-diversity. Others see those developments as moral decline, a retreat from America’s calling to be a “Christian nation.” Some believe their country’s “best history” centers on the realization of ideals arising in historically Anglo-American cultural traditions. Others see those cultural traditions as responsible for the repression of valued communities and identities. Put more broadly, it may well be impossible to give any specific content to the putative unifying values of Americans, without appearing to fail to recognize and accommodate the diversity of values Americans in fact exhibit. For many more multiculturally minded Americans, that diversity of values and identities should be not only tolerated but actively assisted in group-conscious public systems of political representation, public aid programs, educational curriculum, legally recognized rights, and other measures. Even if severe racial inequalities were miraculously alleviated during an Obama administration, race-conscious controversies over policies would remain. Nor is it clear that these disputes should be resolved one-sidedly: multicultural ideals have force in part because there are good reasons to doubt the propriety of a uni-

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fied sense of American national identity and purpose in which differences in racial experiences and identities are submergled or denied. Yet the need for some forms of unity is real.

Related to this multicultural challenge is another difficulty: the “cosmopolitan” challenge. Obama presents his own identity as a preeminent example of how unity can be forged from a background encompassing a broad mix of races, religions, nationalities, geographic residences, educational systems, and economic statuses. But his identity has arguably been forged most of all by his choices to embrace much of what characterizes dominant but contested forms of American identity, including Christianity over Islam or secularity, American patriotism over cosmopolitanism or foreign allegiances, and an emphasis on unity across the races over racial separatism. He has contended, “coming together, all of us” to “do the work that must be done in this country” is “the very definition of being American.”³⁵ But among the domestic coalition that is Obama’s political base, as well as among the international leaders and movements with which he seeks to forge alliances, there are many who see Obama’s stress on the primacy of national identity as retrograde, archaic in an age of globalization, a barrier to desirable multilateral and international arrangements, and a rhetoric capable of being deployed on behalf of chauvinism. In this regard, too, Obama’s vision requires him to walk a tightrope between those who see his conception of Americanism as insufficiently celebratory of national greatness and too open to surrenders of national sovereignty, and those who see his stance as a refusal to accept that the era of sovereign nation-states, much less U.S. hegemony, is and ought to be coming to an end.³⁶

In response to all these challenges, Obama has defended in principle, and to all appearances he is pursuing in practice, a path expressive of the philosophic and political pragmatism historically associated with the University of Chicago, where he taught.³⁷ In *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama interpreted the U.S. Constitution as “one that sees our democracy, not as a house to be built, but as a conversation to be had” – a conversation that rests on “a rejection of . . . the infallibility of any idea or ideology or theology or ‘ism’” that might stand in the way of finding practical means to meet as many partly conflicting, partly common aspirations as possible.³⁸ Obama recognized that the politics of “democratic deliberation” he applauded “seems to champion compromise, modesty, and muddling through; to justify logrolling, deal-making, self-interest, pork barrels, paralysis, and inefficiency” – practices he would soon be accused of indulging in as president. But he insisted it involved processes of “information gathering, analysis, and argument” that allowed Americans “to make better, if not perfect, choices, not only about the means to our ends but also about the ends themselves.”³⁹

Yet Obama then went on to recognize the limits of deliberation and the need not just for “the pragmatist, the voice of reason, or the force of compromise,” but also the “unbinding idealist” who demands true “justice,” like William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, or Harriet Tubman. He lamented, “I am robbed even of the certainty of uncertainty – for sometimes absolute truths may well be absolute.”⁴⁰

Obama did not, however, identify his own “absolutes” – though his writings and speeches leave little doubt that they are defined in large part by the social justice traditions of America’s black

churches.⁴¹ His failure to articulate the absolutes of this moral vision is another consequence of the structure of modern racial politics. Although the preferred policies of the two rival racial alliances are not, in fact, utterly resistant to reasonable compromises, the leaders of today's racial alliances and political parties treat them as if they are, at least rhetorically. Therefore, it is difficult for Obama or anyone else to define a moral principle or policy that indicates how those differences can be resolved. Stating an "absolute" racial principle might reinforce the prevailing sense that no common ground on racial issues can be

found. Obama must hope instead that his politics and policies of pragmatic accommodation can achieve enough of what most Americans desire with regard to education, health care, employment, energy supplies, a clean environment, greater international peace, and freedom from invidious discrimination at home, so that tensions over racial principles and practices recede into the background. But much has to go right if that indirect approach to alleviating the nation's racial inequalities is to work. If it does not, Americans will remain enmeshed in the third era of U.S. racial politics for many years to come.

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ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁹ Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 232.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 244.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 247.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 248.
- ²³ Obama did, of course, feel compelled to discuss race by the controversy over the views of his pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright. For discussion of Obama’s response in relation to the racial alliances framework, see Smith and King, “Barack Obama and the Future of American Racial Politics,” 30–31.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
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- ²⁶ Dana Bash and Emily Sherman, “Sotomayor’s ‘Wise Latina’ Comment a Staple of Her Speeches,” <http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/06/05/sotomayor.speeches/#cnnSTCTest>.
- ²⁷ *Ricci v. DeStefano*, 129 S. Ct. 2658 (2009).
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Somewhere Over the Rainbow? Post-Racial & Pan-Racial Politics in the Age of Obama

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In his acceptance speech on Tuesday, November 4, 2008, President-elect Barack Obama took note that “tonight, because of what we did on this date in this election at this defining moment, change has come to America.” On the same night, Obama’s Republican challenger, Senator John McCain, responded similarly: “This is a historic election, and I recognize the significance it has for African-Americans and for the special pride that must be theirs tonight. We both realize that we have come a long way from the injustices that once stained our nation’s reputation.” The next day, in a *Los Angeles Times* op-ed, scholar and critic Michael Eric Dyson declared: “The distance from King’s assassination to Obama’s inauguration is a quantum leap of racial progress whose timeline neither cynics nor boosters could predict. Today is a benchmark that helps to fulfill – and rescue – America’s democratic reputation.”¹

Looking back through history, few would argue against the view that Obama’s election to the presidency represented a rupture from centuries of white privilege as a presumption and a reality. Since the election, a greater diversity of opinion has emerged on what the presence of an individual of African American descent in the White House means for the future of race relations and racial politics in America. One particular view, however, has had a curiously forceful hold on public discourse. Beside Dyson’s op-ed, *Los Angeles Times* columnist Shelby Steele wondered aloud, “Does

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[Obama's] victory mean that America is now officially beyond racism? ... Doesn't a black in the Oval Office put the lie to both black inferiority and white racism? Doesn't it imply a 'post-racial' America?"² Then, in the news coverage following President Obama's first State of the Union address, MSNBC commentator Chris Matthews infamously remarked: "I was trying to think about who he was tonight. And, it's interesting he is post-racial, by all appearances. You know, I forgot he was black tonight for an hour."

In this essay, I examine the continuing (if evolving) racial undertones of politics as a touchstone for three main points. First, I challenge the emergent understanding that an electoral key to Obama's post-racialism is the debt he owes to white independents, who presumably set aside decades of racially polarized voting and came to his side. Second, rather than affirming post-racial aspirations, I stress the need to redouble our efforts to understand how processes of racialization and "other-ing" are constituted and how they are shifting in the dynamic political moment we now occupy. Third, I propose using the concept of *pan-racialism* to think about how individuals of a shared demographic come to engage, politically, as a group. Careful consideration of how "group-ness" is constituted is essential to conceiving of a *pan-racial* politics across the diversity of racially and ethnically defined groups in the United States today.

I should preface my discussion of the current discourse on Obama and post-racial politics with two reminders. First, an abundance of proof suggests that rumors of the demise of race are, to summon Mark Twain, greatly exaggerated. Even during the election campaign and in spite of Obama's best efforts to convey a "post-racial" narrative, public dis-

course in 2008 was replete with signs of racial schism. It is difficult to reflect on Obama's candidacy and presidency thus far without conjuring memories of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright's controversial remarks and Obama's subsequent "A More Perfect Union" speech; the McCain-Palin campaign's thinly veiled allusions to race and patriotism in their "America First" sloganeering; the subsequent and ongoing mobilization of "Birthers" and "Tea Party Patriots"; the cries of "Foul!" to then-Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor's support for a "wise Latina" standpoint on the bench; the "beer summit" between Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Cambridge police officer James Crowley; and many other instances of racial tension. Post-racialism, if the prefix *post-* means "coda," "transcendence," "abnegation," or "invisibility," is clearly more an aspiration (for some) than a materially achieved fact.

Why, then, in the face of all the vitriol and viperine attacks, do assertions of Obama's post-racialism persist? My second reminder is that much of the current discourse prevails because it is explicitly framed as non-racial or color-blind, or it is contrived in terms of patriotism, constitutionalism, cronyism, or some other allegedly race-neutral guise. That is, much like the deployment of stereotypes of black male hypersexuality and criminality through images of the furloughed felon William Horton in 1988,³ the racial character of Obama's presidency survives through framed messages, implicit associations, and the semblance of plausible deniability.

Not everyone will agree that race persists and that it survives behind a veil of color blindness and post-racialism. Nevertheless, in this essay, I consider these premises to be widely acknowledged in order to focus my discussion on a gener-

ally hidden transcript in the current dialectic of post-racialism. Political media coverage in the first years of the Obama presidency has been saturated with at least two controlling messages: first, that Obama's policy agenda and governing legitimacy are under siege; and second, that there is a groundswell of partisan disaffection – large enough to forecast an electoral tsunami in the off-year elections – punctuated by the ascendancy of Tea Party activists and other populist uprisings against both the Democratic and Republican parties.

There is a third, related media message that captures a key dimension of the current dialectic of post-racialism. That is, nonpartisan (read: white) voters are a critical segment of the electorate to whom Obama owes his 2008 victory, and those voters will bear decisively on his reelection prospects in 2012. During the 2008 campaign and after, the primacy of electoral place given to independent voters in mass media coverage could not have been more pronounced. As early as January 2008, an article in *The New York Times* carried the headline, "In This Race, Independents Are the Prize."⁴ In April, *Real Clear Politics* ran the article "Obama's Independent Edge" with this punchy subheading: "It's electability, stupid."⁵

By May 2009, four months after Obama entered the White House, the Pew Research Center published the in-depth report *Independents Take Center Stage in Obama Era*.⁶ As disproportionately white segments of nonpartisans began to mobilize protest against Obama, the framing of that message shifted, starting with *The Wall Street Journal's* November 2009 pronouncement, "Obama is Losing Independent Voters."⁷ Following Massachusetts Republican Scott Brown's dark horse Senate victory and the passage of health care reform in April 2010, *The*

Washington Times ran the story "Independent Voters Turn Angry."⁸ A more recent contribution to this common narrative summarizes it thus: Barack Obama was "elected largely by independents and moderates who were furious at Republicans [and] at the status quo and the deeply divisive politics practiced by the two main parties"; and the seemingly ephemeral currency of Tea Party activists belies "a much more profound second wave of disaffected, independent voters."⁹

What is instructive in these journalistic diagnostics on independents and the Obama presidency is the near-total absence of any consideration of race. Yet when an explicit consideration of race is absent, an implicit presumption of whiteness (and its attendant privileges) often fills the space. As I will argue, the current discourse on independents is no different. In some accounts, the independents to whom Obama owes his place in American political history are represented by political scientists as ignorant, fickle, and ideologically centrist. In other popular accounts, they are mutinous, intensely anti-government voters typified by self-identified Birthers and Tea Party activists. In both cases, the presumption is that these voters are white. To challenge that presumption, Tea Party activists often create media spectacles to demonstrate that there are persons of color in their midst.

Obama's electoral debt to white independents rests on a loosely bundled associative logic, beginning with the postulate that the independent vote helped usher Obama into the White House. Attached to this hypothesis are two other suppositions: that independent voters are white, and that these white voters transcended their own racial identity and self-interest because Obama represented a post-racial politics. From these

assumptions, it stands to reason that Obama's future electoral prospects hinge on satisfying white independents and maintaining a resolutely post-racial political stance.

This trim and tidy logic falters in the face of some background facts about race, nonpartisanship, and voting behavior. Here I borrow arguments from my forthcoming book with Zoltan Hajnal to underscore three key points.¹⁰ First, the dynamics of partisanship have been shifting rapidly, and whites are no longer a disproportionate share of nonpartisan constituents in America. Second, an argument can credibly be made that Obama owes a greater electoral debt to non-white voters (partisan and nonpartisan) than he does to white independents. Third, these first two points can sustain an opposite inference about electoral debts and post-racial politics: namely, that there is a rare opportunity (which is still not lost, even after the Republican Party's gains in the 2010 midterm elections) for the age of Obama to be a defining moment not for the celebration of a post-racial politics, but rather for a collective struggle to build a *pan-racial* politics.

On the first point, in the earliest academic and media polls, independents were a relatively minor and (for the most part) ignored segment of the American electorate. The first Gallup polls in the 1940s show a range of 15 to 20 percent of Americans identifying as independents, and in the early 1950s, according to the initial American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys, about 20 to 25 percent identified as such. Studies of independents in this period were few and far between,¹¹ and political scientists generally took a dim view of these voters. Philip Converse, for instance, proposed the idea of a "normal vote," maintaining that partisan attachments are linked to voting behavior.¹² V. O. Key more explic-

itly described independents as "an ignorant and uninformed sector of the electorate highly susceptible to influence by factors irrelevant to the solemn performance of its civic duties."¹³

In these early surveys, presuming that independents were whites raised few eyebrows. The most visible sea change with respect to patterns of partisanship for non-whites was the realignment of African Americans from belonging to the "party of Lincoln" to strong attachments to the Democratic Party. Furthermore, non-whites were almost nowhere to be found in surveys of partisanship. From 1952 to 1972, more than 90 percent of all self-identified independents responding to the ANES survey were self-identified whites. The authors of some of the most commonly cited studies of independents simply excluded all non-whites from the analysis. They believed that any "increase in Independents was confined to the white population" and that including African Americans would only cloud the analysis; in other words, the study held that "because blacks are the most disaffected of any major population group, omitting them also avoids complications if one examines relationships between alienation and independence."¹⁴

What has changed about partisanship since the 1940s and 1950s? For one, the growing trend of identifying as an independent is unmistakable. By the 1970s, upwards of a third of Americans (and in some years, upwards of 40 percent) self-identified as independents, reacting to the root question, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" This figure is striking not just by comparison to earlier figures, but also because it is no longer uncommon for self-identified independents to constitute a plurality of the electorate.

This shift toward nonpartisanship, more likely than not, relates to factors such as declining levels of political trust, the tendency toward candidate-centered elections and nonpartisan local elections, and the putative rise in party polarization.¹⁵ It is also co-terminous with the rising backlash against the civil rights movement and urban uprisings in the 1960s on the one hand, and with the surge of migration to the United States after passage of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 on the other. Thus, the dynamics of race and immigration redound to the rise in nonpartisanship in three ways: whites are shifting their partisanship from Democrat to independent as a result of ideological ambivalence between their racial conservatism and liberal views on other political dimensions; African Americans in growing numbers are moving to nonpartisanship as they see their political interests marginalized and their votes taken for granted; and immigrants and second-generation Latinos and Asian Americans in surging numbers are remaining un beholden to parties they know little about and that do little to reach out to them.¹⁶

The growing number of Latino and Asian American non-identifiers in the electorate is part of a broader transformation in the American voting public. Some fifty years ago, white voters made up 95 percent of the active electorate. By 2008, whites were less than three-quarters of the voting population. This contrast over time is even sharper with independents. I noted earlier that through the early 1970s, whites made up more than 90 percent of self-identified independents. According to the 2008 ANES survey, less than 60 percent of all self-identified independents were white. Thus, as a general feature of nonpartisanship, it is simply mistaken to assume that independents are a “white” electorate.

What, then, about the specific postulate that a groundswell of white independents ushered Obama into the White House? Here, it is instructive to disaggregate the claim into two lines of inquiry. First, we can look more closely at the much-vaunted new voters of 2008. According to the Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement, roughly five million new voters were mobilized in 2008. Of these, the CPS estimates that about two million were African American, two million Latino, and six hundred thousand Asian American. The CPS also finds no statistically significant new mobilization of whites in 2008. If one simply carries this data through the National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll estimates of vote share by race – specifically, that 95 percent of African Americans, 67 percent of Latinos, 62 percent of Asian Americans, and 43 percent of whites voted for Obama – one could reasonably extrapolate that Obama enjoyed the support of almost 80 percent of these new non-white voters.

Second, to examine the impact of the independent vote itself, we can compare the partisan breakdown of vote patterns in the 2004 presidential election, when Democratic candidate John Kerry lost, to those of 2008. The NEP exit poll data here show some basis for the claim that Obama owes his victory to (white) independents. The two-way split favoring the Democratic candidate remained unchanged between 2004 and 2008: 89 percent of self-identified Democrats voted for the Democratic candidate in both years. By contrast, a slightly higher proportion of self-identified independents reported voting for Obama (52 percent) than reported voting for Kerry (49 percent).

To this contrast in vote patterns, three additional facts should be added. First, Obama also saw an equivalent increase

(in percentage terms) in support among self-identified Republicans, garnering 9 percent of the Republican vote, while Kerry won only 6 percent of the crossover vote in 2004. A second key point is that the 3 percent uptick in independents' support for the Democratic candidate in 2008, as compared to 2004, is relatively slender compared to the changes when voters are differentiated by race rather than by partisanship. Support for Obama in 2008 exceeded support for Kerry in 2004 by 7 percent among African Americans, 9 percent among Latinos, and 6 percent among Asian Americans. Finally, while a majority of all independents reported voting for Obama, that central tendency shifts when independents are differentiated by race: according to the NEP data, only 47 percent of white independents voted for Obama, compared to roughly 70 percent of non-white independents.

These various points on race and independent voter trends invite caution in drawing conclusions about contemporary racial politics and the view that Obama and the Democrats are particularly beholden to white independents. Specifically, the evidence calls for a closer, more careful examination of the way that racial meanings are either sewn into or excised from the facts on the ground of the 2008 election (and, for that matter, of the 2010 midterm elections). Perhaps even more fundamental, the breakdown of voting patterns reveals a dynamic aspect in the evolution of democratic politics in America. The basic ingredients in the electoral stewpot – that is, who voters are and for whom they are voting – are being cooked anew, with an unmistakable racial and ethnic flavor to the fusion.

For many, the 2008 election was a long-anticipated watershed moment.

According to this view, the changing demographic and racial landscape that we have observed and experienced in America since the 1960s led to success on the national political stage. And that success was engendered by a *pan-racial* coalition of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and racially sympathetic whites. To others, Republican gains in the 2010 midterm elections – and the attendant rejection of Obama's agenda – represent a troubling counterpoint to Obama's 2008 victory as well as a reprise of the racial backlash that followed the legislative triumphs of the mid-1960s. As we look forward, a regnant concern of scholars and political observers alike will be whether the future is more likely to look like the election of 2008 or the election of 2010. In other words, is the multiracial coalition that was mobilized in 2008 a harbinger of future election dynamics, or will the ideal of a racially progressive coalition fracture under the weight of economic crises, partisan polarization, political distrust, and counter-mobilizing moral and racial panics?

The aspirations we can realistically glean from the 2008 election depend crucially on the meaning we attach to Obama's win. Much of this essay has been devoted to a critical stance toward one interpretation: that Obama's election signifies the triumph of post-racialism. Proposing an alternative meaning, of course, requires more than rejecting post-racialism. While a full consideration and defense of pan-racialism are beyond the scope of this essay, such a discussion would start by breaking away from the prevailing dialectic between a *racial* and a *post-racial* politics. The antipodes of this dialectic are a deeply particularistic (in some renditions, primordial) notion of zero-sum group loyalties counterposed against a radically disembodied and ahistorical conception of

willful color blindness. Pan-racialism proposes to overcome this bind through a relational and historically embedded standpoint of mutual recognition, collective inclusion, and moral partiality between all racial and ethnic groups that constitute a society.

The dialectic between a racial and post-racial politics is analogous to the opposition in ethics between the standpoint of a subjective and narrowly material form of ethical egoism and that of an impartial “ideal observer” (à la Kant, Rawls, or some version of agent-neutral consequentialism). Breaking free from the dialectic in ethics requires a defense of moral partiality, whether it is steeped in the tradition of analytic philosophy¹⁷ or in a relational “ethic of care.”¹⁸ The parallel between race and ethics underscores why post-racialism is so attractive in some quarters: there is a reigning fear that a *racial* politics behind the 2008 election implies a president and a presidency bound by particularism and drawn into modes of political clientelism. The analogy also suggests that pan-racialism might be a normatively desirable and defensible alternative to racial and post-racial politics.

To return to the question of what the future of electoral politics will bring, the extent to which race is central is especially pressing given current and future patterns of demographic change. A remix of electoral dynamics – who votes, whether their choices will be aligned to political parties, and whether parties will drum up the organizational resources and cultural competency to mobilize new voters – most likely will continue. Most prominent among the reasons for this prediction are the enduringly high rates of immigration from Latin America, Asia, and, to lesser degrees, the Caribbean and Africa. Moreover, increasing rates of racial exogamy and mixed race identification are accompanying the expansion of

immigrant-based ethnic communities of color. What is unclear is whether emerging groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans will evolve into significant players on the electoral stage as *Latinos and Asian Americans* and, if so, what impact they will have. However, the impulse to deploy conventional categories and modes of thinking hampers our ability to understand dynamic changes in our conceptual tools for studying both politics in general and racial politics more narrowly.

Politically, our thinking is anchored by our conventions about partisanship and its central place in American politics. Social scientists Donald Kinder and David Sears, for instance, note that “party identification remains the single most important determinant of individual voting decisions.”¹⁹ Yet as already noted above in this essay and elsewhere, non-partisanship (and not just Tea Party activists) is a growing force.²⁰ Moreover, this groundswell of nonpartisan discontent is transpiring together with (and perhaps in response to) a full-blown political polarization at the level of partisan elites.²¹

Among emerging groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans, nonpartisanship is especially widespread, and independents are not the only nonpartisan group of relevance. The relationship of Latinos and Asian Americans to the predominant two-party system in the United States underscores a pivotal point: the party identification scale that most political scientists continue to use (ranging from strong Democrats on one end to strong Republicans on the other, with independents at the midpoint) appears increasingly irrelevant to many Americans. It turns out that modal Latino or Asian American survey respondents simply do not know how to place themselves on such a scale. “Non-identifiers” (those

who respond to survey measures of party identification with “I don’t know,” “no preference,” “none of the above,” or “I just don’t think in terms of parties”) are more than one out of every three Latinos or Asian Americans. When self-identified independents are added to this group, nonpartisans comprise more than half of all respondents in the 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS) and the 2008 National Asian American Survey (NAAS).²² Thus, we limit our ability to accurately study and fully understand the electoral changes afoot by adhering to well-worn ways of categorizing and conceptualizing politics.

The same can be said of well-worn ways of categorizing and conceptualizing race. In the domain of racial politics, a further anchor that moors our thinking is the continued predominance of what Juan Perea termed a “Black/White binary paradigm.” Here, the accuracy of the term *paradigm* – at least in the Kuhnian sense – is debatable, and Perea’s definition of it as “the conception that race in America consists, either exclusively or primarily, of only two constituent racial groups, the Black and the White,” already feels dated.²³ Yet “black” and “white” continue to stand in as metonyms for two distinct models of politics. “Black” represents an archetype for a distinctive group politics based in racial self-definition and solidarity.²⁴ “White” represents a duality: of simultaneously being nowhere and everywhere, defined in direct opposition to the experience of African Americans and accepted without interrogation as the “null” hypothesis or “normal” state of affairs.²⁵

To consider the role of Latinos and Asian Americans in the future of racial politics, we might begin with a question posed by historian Gary Okimoto: “Is Yellow [or Brown] Black or White?”²⁶ Much of the extant political science

research on partisanship presumes a binary outcome variable whereby Latinos and Asians will either identify predominantly with the Democratic Party on the basis of group attachments, as African Americans have since the civil rights era, or split more evenly between parties on the basis of nonracial interests and ideologies, as whites are presumed to do. Similarly, scholars of political participation often imagine that Latinos and Asians will either be spurred into action by their racial group consciousness – a dynamic found among African Americans – or brought into politics through their socioeconomic position, civic skills, or the mobilizing force of organizations – as is found to be the case for whites. This binary logic further extends to debates over coalition politics, with scholars seeking to discover whether Latinos and Asians will form multiracial coalitions with African Americans or pan-ethnic coalitions across constituent ethnic groups, or whether racial and ethnic markers will recede in significance and cede to ideological, issue-specific, or context-specific determinants of intergroup conflict and cooperation.

In conceiving of the future of racial politics in these familiar, if problematic, dialectical terms, scholars and political observers presume that demographic labels such as “Latino” and “Asian American” imply a *prima facie* basis for group politics.²⁷ This premise, which I refer to as the “identity-to-politics link,” has a solid empirical foundation for African Americans but is decidedly less certain for other racially and (pan)ethnically defined groups. We cannot assume that Latinos and Asian Americans are functionally isomorphic either to African Americans (for whom a strong racial group identity and corresponding politics are expected) or to whites (for whom the absence of such identity-based politics,

or the presence of undifferentiated processes of assimilation into “whiteness,” is expected).

Discerning whether we are headed for a racial, post-racial, or pan-racial electoral future will require better theoretical frameworks for race and racial politics. I propose, as one point of departure toward such improved frameworks, an examination of several specific and conceptually separable processes that are often bundled together when identity categories are linked to group politics. These processes include racial classification, category identification, and group consciousness, as well as two aspects of collective action: venue selection and coordinating choice.

In what follows, I describe each of these processes and illustrate their potential utility by examining their specificity to one emerging group: Asian Americans. For most informed observers, the idea of a politics of Asian Americans *as* Asian Americans may seem like a nonstarter. While Asians in America may commonly be defined under a single, “pan-ethnic” rubric, beneath that thin fascia of social convention lies a remarkable “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity” that defies simple categorization.²⁸ Furthermore, while the sheer growth in numbers of Asian Americans is dramatic and unlikely to plateau, a disproportionately low number (slightly more than one in three Asian adults in the United States) are active voters. As mentioned above, nonpartisanship is pervasive among Asian Americans as well.

Yet precisely because the idea of a group-based politics for Asian Americans *qua* Asian Americans seems inchoate, and perhaps even untenable, Asian Americans represent an especially important test case for theories of racial group identity. For one, periods of rapid

change and growing complexity – including the present times – often represent critical junctures for redefining existing group boundaries and intergroup relations. Furthermore, Asian Americans represent a *prima facie* “most different” case to African Americans. While both groups share the joint experience of externally perceived homogeneity, internally lived heterogeneity, and a resulting history of marginalization and struggle, their racial positions are distinct. The “relative valorization” of Asian Americans as “model minorities” is a relational standpoint vis-à-vis African Americans: in the public imaginary, Asians are praised for exhibiting putatively model behavior relative to other racial minorities, who are supposedly less norm-conforming and virtuous in their behavior.

Classification. To determine whether a coherent and politically significant conception of pan-ethnic “group-ness” exists for Asians in the United States, we must first more fully understand how a society defines, categorizes, and counts its population by identity categories. Our current pentachromatic classification system – per the 1977 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) “Directive 15” and, before that, the 1965 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) “EEO-1” form – is generally adopted and replicated in surveys and other modes of data collection without much question or consternation. Yet even a cursory glance over time reveals the often contested and radically unstable nature of the identity categories we use to define a population in racial and ethnic terms. In short, those categories are not foreordained but wrought through a combination of social, economic, legal, and political processes.²⁹

Americans of Asian origin never fit comfortably into the country’s initial racial categorization of Caucasian/white, Negro/black, and American Indian.

Consequently, the racial classifications assigned to them are variable and often arbitrary. Here, two pivotal legal decisions are instructive. In the 1922 case *Takao Ozawa v. United States*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a person could not be deemed white by virtue of light complexion because individuals of Japanese origin belonged to an “unassimilable race.” Three months later, in an apparent reversal of its decision, the Court ruled in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* that, despite the anthropological consensus of the day, persons from the Indian subcontinent were to be classified as Caucasian; a person of Asian-Indian origin, however, could not be deemed white because such a classification violated “the understanding of the common man.”

Our present system of racial classification is no less mired in contradictions. The most recent decennial census forms, for instance, imply that some populations defined by national or territorial origin – Asian-Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese – are separate races (categorically equivalent to “white” and “black, African American or Negro”), while others – Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban, for example – share a single “ethnicity.” Moreover, in 1997, the OMB revised its Directive 15, drawing the boundaries of Asia (for the purposes of racial classification) between the Asian subcontinent and the Middle East; accordingly, individuals with “origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa” are defined as white. As former director of the U.S. Census Bureau Kenneth Prewitt laments, “[T]he racial measurement system is now vastly more complicated and multidimensional than anything preceding it, and there is currently no prospect of returning to something simpler.” He adds that this system is “less well

grounded in science than any other population characteristic measured by the nation’s statistical agencies.”³⁰

Category Identification. The second process that links demographic identity categories to a group-based politics is the degree to which individuals identify with the racial classifications assigned to them. The mere contrivance of racial categories is no guarantee that the individuals to whom the categories are meant to apply will accept them. The intrinsic distinction between how individuals think of themselves (identification) and how those individuals might be defined by others (ascription) may seem like a mere theoretical possibility, but that possibility is likely to be quite palpable for certain groups, such as new immigrants who come with no priors on the grammar of race in the United States.

The non-automaticity of category identification is visible in the responses that Asian Americans give in opinion surveys. Consider the category “Asian American,” the pan-ethnic rubric that is commonly ascribed to U.S. residents of Asian origin. Respondents to the 2008 NAAS were given the prompt, “[P]eople of Asian descent in the U.S. use different terms to describe themselves,” and then asked how they thought of themselves.³¹ Only about one in eight respondents self-identified primarily as “Asian American,” with roughly 70 percent preferring their ethnic/national origin group (for example, either “Filipino” or “Filipino-American”). By contrast, in the 2006 LNS, the proportion of respondents who self-identified as “Hispanic” and “Latino” was roughly equal to self-identification with national origin descriptors (at just below 40 percent).³²

Group Consciousness. A third key component of a racial group-based politics is a shared sense of commonality and collective interests. This process potential-

ly is decisive because not all individuals and groups who accept an identity label ascribed to them will agree about what that label means to their subjective sense of self. These categories may, on the one hand, represent nothing more than analytic truths or linguistic conventions. Yet on the other hand, they may embody an intimate connectivity among individuals. Here again, it is instructive to consider immigrants and their offspring as newcomers to American society. An immigrant from El Salvador may choose to self-identify as “Latino” as a learned response, taking cues from his or her relatives, friends, coworkers, or neighbors. Yet it hardly follows that the individual would feel a sense of solidarity or common destiny with others who have also learned to self-identify as Latino.

We have seen that few Asian Americans identify primarily with the prevailing pan-ethnic descriptor. But do they share a greater sense of common purpose or collective consciousness, notwithstanding their attachment to labels? NAAS respondents were asked about their sense of “linked fate” or, more specifically, whether “what happens generally to other groups of Asians in this country affects what happens in [their] life.”³³ In this sense of “groupness,” the picture is mixed: while close to 40 percent of respondents agreed that their personal lot was at least somewhat connected to the fate of other Asians, only 9 percent reported a strong connection. By contrast, nearly three out of every four African Americans surveyed in the 1996 National Black Election Study reported at least a “somewhat strong” sense of linked fate; close to 37 percent felt a “strong” connection. At the same time, Asian Americans who feel a strong sense of collective consciousness are politically distinct from those who do not: they are more likely to be partisans

and ideologues, to be politically active, and to perceive political commonalities with Latinos, African Americans, and other non-whites.

Group-Based Coordination. A final precondition to group politics is coordinating collective action itself. The road from affinity to action is often winding and bumpy, if connected at all. Collective action does not materialize spontaneously, even in the presence of agreement about the applicability of group labels and solidarity among those to whom the labels are attached. Moreover, there are multiple aspects of choice that require coordination. Ab initio, those who intend to act together in the best interests of the group must first decide (or at least accept as a premise) that politics is a meaningful venue for the pursuit of the group’s interests. Despite clear and strong civic norms of participation and the historical memory of empowerment through collective movements, it is still far from obvious that racialized groups – especially when social stigma and material privation factor into that racialization – are inclined to pursue recognition and remedy through politics rather than the collective pursuit of economic advancement, cultural maintenance, bonding social capital, community self-determination, or some other mode of group-based engagement. For immigrant-based groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans, the question of where to direct collective efforts is likely to be especially pressing.

For Asian Americans, survey data suggest that the pursuit of common in-group interests does not necessarily take place in the political arena. Respondents to the 2008 NAAS were asked, “what, if anything, do Asians in the United States share with one another?” Of four possible bases for commonality given – “a common race,” “a common culture,” “common economic interests,” and

“common political interests” – the highest proportion of respondents believed that Asian Americans shared a common culture (almost two-thirds) while the lowest proportion (under 40 percent) believed that politics was a unifying dimension of the Asian American experience. At the same time, respondents with a strong linked-fate orientation were also significantly more likely to believe that Asians shared all four foundations: more than half of Asian Americans with a strong linked-fate orientation were likely to view Asians as sharing collective political interests, while only one in three who rejected the linked-fate hypothesis viewed Asian Americans as having common political interests.

Beyond the choice of politics as the proper venue for collective pursuits, group-based coordination requires agreement over what to do. That is, a given group of individuals originating from various countries in Asia may be given the common label “Asian American,” may self-identify with that descriptor, may feel a sense of solidarity with their sisters and brothers in that identity category, and may even agree that politics is the proper place for their racial projects. Nonetheless, there are many aspects of collective choice, such as whether to focus one’s politics at the federal, state and local, or transnational level; whether to form a partisan bloc vote or a less partisan swing vote; or whether to influence policy agendas by engaging in the electoral arena, gaining access through campaign contributions, or building a strong “civil society” of community-based organizations, voluntary associations, and advocacy groups. These key steps in collective choice are often presumed to materialize in the case of African American politics, where the modes and levels of political participation are multiple and where, for a

given election, 80 to 90 percent of individuals within this demographic identify with the Democratic Party and vote, often in lockstep, with the party’s political candidates.

For Asian Americans, by contrast, there are several interrelated and unfolding narratives of choice. One recurring theme is the relatively high proportion who are unattached to either of the two major parties that define U.S. politics; yet there is a discernible trend toward forming partisan ties the longer one is in the United States. Further, there has been a trend over the last several presidential elections toward Asian American voters crystallizing as a strongly Democratic segment of the electorate. A second theme is the still relatively low proportions that vote; however, the 2008 election shows (as with Latinos and African Americans) the capacity for a sizable and decisive mobilization. A third, related theme is the continuing reluctance (for the most part) of the majority of candidates and party elites to view Asian Americans as a segment of the electorate that can be mobilized; nevertheless, those Asian Americans who report being contacted by a party or candidate are significantly more likely to be voters. On the last point, the 2008 NAAS data show that respondents who were mobilized by a party or candidate were more than twice as apt to be a “likely voter” than those who were not. Moreover, the campaign effort to contact potential voters had a clear substitution effect: it increased support for Obama and decreased the proportion of undecided voters.

This essay is somewhat of a two-step with two left feet. One foot is tapping out the rhythm of the commonly held view that the 2008 election heralded the inception of a post-racial era of electoral

politics and that Obama owes a primary political debt to white independent voters who abandoned their racial loyalties to make history. Against this narrative, I have suggested that Obama's electoral success is also the result of the mobilization of partisan and nonpartisan voters of color. Moreover, the current political moment might just as well be the harbinger to a more pan-racial, not post-racial, era of politics. Along the way, I have also highlighted several ways in which nonpartisanship is increasingly multiracial, multifaceted, and politically consequential.

Meanwhile, the other foot is tapping to the rhythm of an important background question: that is, will demographically defined populations come to do politics together – and if so, when and how? Here, one must be careful of a disruptive counter tempo: the tendency to look at emerging, immigrant-based groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans through the lens of African American or white politics. A group basis to politics is contingent, not on other groups' political narratives, but on the convergence of multiple processes: namely, the contestation and construction of racial and ethnic descriptors that align with how a population thinks of itself; a shared sense of common destiny and collective solidarity within a given population, defined in ethnic and racial terms; and coordination on the fitting venue for the

pursuit of common goals as well as on the collective choice itself (to be swing voters, bloc voters, or non-voters; to engage in elections, community activism, or some other mode of engagement; and so on). To animate these steps, I have sampled some beats from the politics of Asian Americans to see how they jive (or fail to jive) with this identity-to-politics link. In doing so, I hope not only to have illuminated why the politics of a group such as Asian Americans remains distinct from that of both African Americans and whites, but also to have uncovered the processes that must be activated to solidify a more (or less) group-based politics.

Ultimately, both feet in this polyrhythmic dance come together on two simple yet crucial points. First, prevailing beliefs about post-racialism, nonpartisanship, and their defining effects on the political moment are aspirations and assumptions as often as they are established facts. To accept them is to permit tacitly an act of collective obscurantism. Second, what many have called the "age of Obama" is neither a predestined outcome nor a material fact. It is a public construction whose form will depend on how we interpret ongoing events and determine which future (racial, post-racial, or pan-racial) we struggle for. Barack Obama, irrespective of his preferences on the matter, stands as a metonym for race relations in the twenty-first century.

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Destabilizing the American Racial Order

Jennifer L. Hochschild, Vesla M. Weaver & Traci Burch

Since America's racial disparities remain as deep-rooted after Barack Obama's election as they were before, it was only a matter of time until the myth of postracism exploded in our collective national face.

– Peniel Joseph, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*
(July 27, 2009)

In electing me, the voters picked the candidate of their choice, not their race, which foreshadowed the historic election of Barack Obama in 2008. We've come a long way in Memphis, and ours is a story of postracial politics.

– Congressman Steve Cohen, Letter to the Editor,
The New York Times (September 18, 2009)

Race is not going to be quite as big a deal as it is now; in the America of tomorrow . . . race will not be synonymous with destiny.

– Ellis Cose, *Newsweek* (January 11, 2010)¹

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Are racial divisions and commitments in the United States just as deep-rooted as they were before the 2008 presidential election, largely eliminated, or persistent but on the decline? As the epigraphs show, one can easily find each of these pronouncements, among others, in the American public media. Believing any one of them – or any other, beyond the anodyne claim that this is “a time of transition” – is likely to be a mistake, since there will be almost as much evidence against as for it. Instead, it is more illuminating to try to sort out what is changing in the

American racial order, what persists or is becoming even more entrenched, and what is likely to affect the balance between change and continuity. That, at any rate, is what we propose to do (if briefly) in this article.

Given space constraints, we focus on young adults. Even if we cannot fully disentangle the effects of age, historical era, and cohort, understanding this population is essential if we are to grasp what is and is not changing in the American racial order. We argue that younger cohorts of Americans were raised in a different racial context and think about and practice race differently than their older counterparts do.² Older Americans are products of “the sixties” and its sequelae – namely, a rise in immigration, blacks’ assertion of pride and dignity, whites’ rejection of racial supremacy (at least in public), a slow opening of schools and jobs and suburbs to people previously excluded, and a shift in government policy from promoting segregation and hierarchy to promoting (at least officially) integration and equality. Now, however, new institutions and practices are moving into place: official records permit people to identify with more than one race, antidiscrimination policies are well established in schools and workplaces, and some non-whites hold influential political positions. The very meaning of race for most of the twentieth century – a few exhaustive and mutually exclusive groups into which one is born and in which one stays – is becoming less and less tenable. Immigration and interracial relationships have produced a set of people who do not fit conventional racial categories and who change their racial identity in different contexts. Today’s young adults will move through adulthood with the knowledge that one need not be white in

order to become the most powerful person in the world.

For these and other reasons, young Americans’ racial attitudes are usually more liberal than those of older Americans, and their social networks are more intertwined. Race, while still predictive, is less able to determine a young adult’s life chances and eventual socioeconomic status than ever before in American history. These changes in the views and behaviors of young people have the potential to produce a new American racial order – that is, if Americans take the political and policy steps needed to diminish barriers that still block the chances of too many young Americans. If residents of the United States make the right choices over the next few decades, the country could finally move toward becoming the society that James Madison envisioned in Federalist No. 10, one in which no majority faction – not even native-born European Americans – can dominate the political, economic, or social arena.

We are hardly the first to notice significant changes in young Americans; bookstores are full of volumes on “the new millennials.” But we analyze destabilization of the racial order more systematically and theoretically than many others have done, and we add some distinctive elements. Following the work of government and social policy scholar Brenna Powell, we define a racial order as a society’s widely understood and accepted system of beliefs, laws, and practices that organizes relationships among groups understood to be races or ethnicities.³ A racial order can be analyzed through five components: definition of a race or ethnicity; classification of individuals into races or ethnicities; groups’ position relative to that of other groups; acts that are forbidden, permitted, or required; and social rela-

tions among groups. All these components are changing – within individuals, between persons, among groups, and across society. Variations in the five components of the racial order may even be multiplicative in the sense that forms of instability interact to increase the momentum of transformation. Young adults are not only more likely to be immigrants and to marry across racial lines, they are also less committed to the cognitions, emotions, behaviors, and assumptions associated with the racial order of the civil rights era and its aftermath. If these new views and practices persist as young adults move through the life cycle, influencing the people growing up behind them, then the magnitude and pace of racial destabilization may increase at ever faster rates.

This image of a snowball gaining girth and speed as it tumbles down a hill does not, however, quite complete our argument. The racial terrain has roadblocks and boulders that can halt, deflect, or even explode the rolling snowball. Some of the least attractive features of the current American racial order have remained stable, and some may even be solidifying, especially among younger Americans. New groups – for instance, undocumented Latino immigrants or Muslim men – may be moving into the old roles of “most disfavored.” Extraordinarily high levels of police stops and incarceration among young black urban men deepen old racial barriers. Some features of the American racial order could even be solidifying *because* other features are becoming unstable. For example, advocacy groups may seek even greater group solidarity for fear that the dissolution of a unified group will worsen persistent race-based prohibitions or deplete the ability to defend against growing anti-immigrant discrimination. They may be right, since percep-

tions and practices of racial distinctiveness are dissolving faster than group-based hierarchy is being undone, potentially leaving the worst-off without supporters or even a language to challenge injustice.

On balance, the old racial order is being transformed – but how it is changing, how much, for whom, and to what effect is not easily discerned. Disaggregating the changes into five strands is, in our view, the best way to address these questions. Having done so, we are confident in predicting that racial attitudes, practices, and relative inequalities will be profoundly different for our children and grandchildren than they are for us. We anticipate, but we cannot confidently predict, that the gains will outweigh the costs. That result will depend largely on how the American political and social systems deal with the unintended consequences of these pending transformations.

Young adults face an array of answers to the simple question, what is a *race*? Figure 1 shows two forms used by major American universities on job applications for an assistant professorship during the mid-2000s. The University of California, Berkeley (left) aimed at precision through detail, while Pennsylvania State University (right) aimed at precision through minimalism. Both mix race and ethnicity on a single list; Berkeley adds the complications of ancestry while Penn State hints that its main interest lies in legal statuses with budgetary implications. Berkeley acknowledges both biological and cultural components of race; Penn State was silent on the culture/biology dimension.

These examples suggest that definitions of race are increasingly in flux – returning us in some ways to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As postmodernists have been pointing

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Figure 1
What is a Race?

University of California, Berkeley

Race/ethnicity Please choose one category. If more than one choose the one with which you most closely identify.

White, not of Hispanic origin : persons having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East

African American, not of Hispanic origin : persons having origin in any of the Black racial groups of Africa

American Indian or Alaskan native : persons having origins in any of the original American Indian peoples of North America, including Eskimos and Aleuts, or who maintain cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition

Unknown

Hispanic (including Black individuals whose origins are Hispanic)

Mexican / Mexican American / Chicano : persons of Mexican culture or origin, regardless of race

Latin-American / Latino : persons of Latin American (e.g., Central American, South American, Cuban, Puerto Rican) culture or origin, regardless of race

Other Spanish / Spanish American : persons of Spanish culture or origin, not included in any of the Hispanic categories listed above

Asian or Pacific Islander

Chinese / Chinese American : persons having origins in any of the original people of China

Japanese / Japanese American : persons having origins in any of the original people of Japan

Filipino / Pilipino : persons having origins in any of the original people of the Philippine islands

Pakistan / East Indian : persons having origins in any of the original people of the Indian subcontinent (India and Pakistan)

Other Asian : persons having origins in any of the original people of the Far East (including Korea), Southeast Asia, or Pacific islands (including Samoa), not included in any of the Asian categories listed above.

The Pennsylvania State University
Affirmative Action Data Card

PLEASE CHECK THE APPLICABLE CATEGORIES
(Group definitions can be found on the back of this card.)

American Indian or Alaska Native Asian or Pacific Islander

Black (non-Hispanic) Hispanic

White (non-Hispanic)

Disabled Disabled or Vietnam Era Veteran

United States Citizen or Permanent Resident

Source: Non-random sample of race/ethnicity forms used by various universities for job applications, collected by the authors in 2007.

out for several decades, if the meaning of a term is unstable and nonconsensual, the social structures and practices built around it are much less solid than they appear to be.⁴

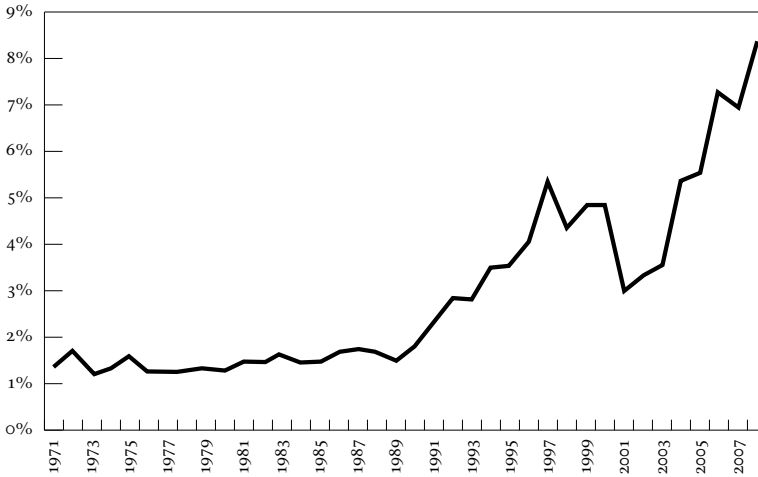
Young adults are coming to realize that nominal racial groups do not have the

solidity that they used to. In 2007, for example, young black adults were more likely than older ones to agree that “Blacks today can no longer be thought of as a single race because the black community is so diverse.” A year later, young black adults were slightly more likely to agree

Figure 2

Percent of First-Year College Students Choosing Two or More Races, 1971 to 2008

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Data include only full-time students at four-year institutions, and only institutions with at least a 60 percent participation rate. Sample sizes range from 142,000 to 286,000, in hundreds of institutions chosen by a complex stratification system. Source: Analysis completed for the authors by staff from the Higher Education Research Institute, Cooperative Institutional Research Program, *Freshman Survey* (Los Angeles: Graduate School of Education and Information Services, UCLA, various dates).

that “there is no general Black experience in America.”⁵ What counts as a race is no longer stable, and what characteristics a race has is becoming less clear, at least to the young.

As race itself is becoming more complicated, individuals’ classifications are becoming less fixed. An increasing number of young Americans, for example, identify as multiracial or as some combination of conventionally defined races. Since 1971, a University of California, Los Angeles, survey of full-time, first-year students at American colleges and universities has permitted respondents to choose more than one race. Figure 2 shows the pattern for all students, based on the weighted sample and including Hispanic as a “race” analogous to black, white, Asian, and American Indian. By 2007, more than 8 percent of students entering American higher education

identified with more than one racial or ethnic group; the rise since 1990 has been uneven but unmistakable, and no evidence points to reversal.

That more young adults are choosing to identify as multiracial is no surprise, given that more are demographically mixed race. About half of the roughly seven million people who marked more than one race in the American Community Survey of 2009 were under age eighteen. Interracial mixture will continue to grow because marriages across group lines are increasing. Interracial marriages rose by 65 percent from 1990 to 2000, and by 20 percent (from a higher base) over the next decade. Roughly 8 percent of all American marriages are across racial lines, and about 15 percent of new marriages in 2008 crossed group boundaries. Young adults are much more likely to marry across racial lines than are even the newly married among their

elders; 13 percent of currently married people under twenty-five have a spouse of a different race. Intermarriage rates drop steadily with increasing age, so that just 5 percent of married adults over age sixty have wed across group lines.⁶

In short, young Americans are not only facing a society in which the definition of a race is less and less clear, they are also increasingly less able or inclined to locate themselves within only one conventionally defined race. In one survey of students at highly selective colleges and universities, descriptions of ethnicity or ancestry included “gay Jewish Cuban American,” “adopted Chinese into an Indonesia [*sic*] and Filipino Family,” “Mixed between American slave descendants and native Liberians, Liberian,” and “usually Black, sometimes biracial.”

As these survey responses suggest, immigration complicates individual classification in a different way. Many immigrants are reluctant to be categorized within the usual American racial nomenclature. Somalis, for example, care much more about religious identity and clan divisions than about American racial labels. As one student wrote in a school essay, “The Somalis that live here in the U.S. won’t talk to each other until they know your tribe. . . . [E]very time I meet someone the first thought that comes to me is, do they hate you [*sic*] tribe?”⁷ Some immigrant or immigrant descendants change their racial identity when they move away from home: “[R]aised by White parents in a predominantly White town, I considered myself to be White. . . . In college new worlds of thought opened to me. Amid a boiling student struggle to create an Asian American studies program . . . I began to see myself as an Asian American.”⁸ Others identify with a different group from their parents, in a way that is hard for American-born blacks and whites

to conceive of: “[R]ates of Mexican identification fall to 81 percent for second-generation children with only one Mexican-born parent.”⁹ After all, if the racial or ethnic labels are essentially arbitrary from the vantage point of the person being labeled, why not let them vary?

From the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, people of most Asian nationalities were excluded from the United States and denied citizenship even if they managed to immigrate. Some states prohibited Asians from owning certain kinds of property, and thousands of American citizens of Japanese descent were interned during World War II. But in recent decades, the relative socioeconomic status of Asian Americans and whites has been reversed, especially among young adults. Levels of higher education are the only indicator that we have space to report here. In 1980, close to 70 percent of young adult Asians had at least some college education; by 2009, that figure had risen even higher, to over 80 percent. The comparable figures for whites are just under 50 percent in 1980 and just over 60 percent in 2009 – an absolute gain, but not a relative gain compared with Asian Americans.

Although still educationally disadvantaged, even young adult African Americans and Hispanics are attaining more schooling than in 1980. The proportion of young adult blacks with at least some college has risen from just over 30 percent to almost 50 percent; for Latinos, the move was from less than 30 percent to about 45 percent. Thus, if post-high school education is a rough indicator of other measures of socioeconomic status, young Asian Americans are now better situated than all other groups and, if anything, gaining in advantages. At least compared with their situation a few decades ago,

young adult blacks and Hispanics are better able to move into jobs requiring cognitive skills, but they remain considerably behind whites and Asians. A crucial question for the coming decades is how to avoid “black exceptionalism,” in which all other non-white groups, possibly excepting unauthorized immigrants, improve their absolute and relative statuses, leaving blacks at the bottom. There are good reasons to believe that this outcome can be avoided – some articulated in this essay – but doing so will require concentrated efforts to address disparities of class as well as of race.

Instability in relative group positions takes a different form in the political arena; here, African Americans have a distinct advantage over Asians and Hispanics. The data are not systematic, but multiple observations point to the idea that the role, or perhaps tone, of race in electoral politics is changing. Writer Darryl Pinckney observed a panel including Jesse Jackson, Jr., Al Sharpton, and Cornel West, all of whom emphasized “an alternate understanding of American history” that distinguishes blacks from other Americans. “And yet,” Pinckney wrote, “I got a sense from the students around me that although they were saying thank you to the older style of black politics, it was for them very much a new day.”¹⁰ San Francisco District Attorney Kamala Harris makes roughly the same point: “[O]ur civil rights heroes fought so that we could be free to be anything we wanted. But today’s plan of attack would not be to march; it would be to change legislation. We try to change the system from the inside.”¹¹ A young black candidate for the Boston City Council describes her generation as “coalition builders,” able to “talk to and relate to other people. . . . I think the successes of our parents’ generation have better positioned us – by being exposed to differ-

ent opportunities, you’re exposed to different people, different cultures, different perspectives.”¹²

These quotations could be multiplied. More systematically, a survey conducted by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found young black elected officials to have different, less conventionally Democratic political views from their elders, and to be more willing and able to appeal to voters outside their race.¹³ That finding suggests an increasing chance to develop new, broader constituencies – as well as to disrupt old assumptions and allegiances within minority populations.

The 2008 presidential election reinforces the sense that non-whites’ political power is rising. Minorities were crucial to Obama’s success both in the primaries and the general election, and their impact has made it clear that at least in some states, candidates no longer can focus only on white voters. In addition, Obama “scored an unprecedented victory among young Americans, taking 66 percent of the under-30 vote nationally.”¹⁴ Even controlling for education, race, party identification, and views about the economy and equity, age was significantly related to support for Obama’s candidacy.¹⁵ If, as political scientists have consistently found, a person’s earliest political experiences tend to shape their later commitments and attitudes,¹⁶ then young white voters may be more willing over the next few decades to support non-white candidates than their counterparts used to be, and young non-white voters may feel more efficacious in electoral politics than their older counterparts did.

It would be naive to imagine that race no longer matters in electoral politics – one need only to look at the Senate or the set of governors to be disabused of that idea. Furthermore, black legislators

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remain less successful in getting their bills passed.¹⁷ But mounting evidence shows that opportunities for young black political candidates are improving, that black candidates have more flexibility in possible policy positions and strategies for appealing to voters, and that young voters of all races are increasingly willing to support some black candidates. While Asians have overtaken whites in educational attainment (and achievement), blacks are at least weakening whites' hold on political power.

U ntil the 1960s, whites had the widest array of permissions and the narrowest list of prohibitions; in legal terms, the civil rights movement and Great Society policies swept all that away. Social scientists should never make absolute statements and risk overlooking exceptions, but we can say that we have not been able to identify any current laws that permit or prohibit action based on race or ethnicity alone. (The Voting Rights Act and affirmative action policies come close to being exceptions, but they make distinctions by race or ethnicity with the purpose of benefiting rather than harming disadvantaged minorities.) This 1960s transformation of the legal structure underlying the American racial order made possible further destabilizations in the 2000s.

Nevertheless, some argue that, at times, state actions still uphold the old, pre-civil rights racial order. Evidence for this claim is most apparent in the criminal justice system, and most apparent for the young. Controlling for delinquency, black teens are twice as likely as whites to have experienced a police intervention by the tenth grade. A study of Chicago found that 20 percent of all sampled residents, but fully 70 percent of young black men, recalled being stopped by police in the past year.¹⁸ As one stu-

dent puts it, “[T]hey’ll pull me aside sometimes because they say I fit the description. Yeah. Young Black male. I always ‘fit the description.’”¹⁹

Immigration is another arena in which official or quasi-official state policies tilt toward the old system of race-based prohibitions; again, young non-white men are disproportionately affected. Section 287 (g) of the 1996 immigration law “permit[s] designated . . . local law enforcement . . . officers to perform immigration law enforcement functions.”²⁰ Even the institutionally cautious Government Accountability Office concludes, “Better Controls Needed over Program.” It found that some local agencies have focused not on terrorism or serious crime as the program intended, but instead “used 287 (g) authority to process individuals for minor crimes, such as speeding.” All local agencies lacked sufficient oversight, and most reported community concern that “use of program authority would lead to racial profiling and intimidation by law enforcement officers.”²¹

Section 287 (g) has an impact well beyond the small number of communities using it. By 2010, slightly over half of Latinos – a third of the native-born and seven-tenths of the foreign-born – worried that they or a close associate might be deported. A third claimed to know someone who had in fact been detained or deported within the past year.²²

Perhaps most important, in 2010, Arizona passed a law that would permit the police to request proof of legal status after stopping someone for a traffic or other offense. The law is currently blocked by the courts on the grounds that it interferes with federal authority, but legislators in roughly twenty other states have suggested that they will introduce similar legislation.

Protecting citizens against crime, policing the borders, and guarding against

terrorism are essential functions of government. But racial profiling, harassment of immigrants (and Muslim men), and the extremely high levels of incarceration of young black men reinforce old patterns of racial hostility and alienation, especially among teens and young adults. If group-based prohibitions persist, they could prevent the current destabilization of the old racial order from becoming a genuine transformation, at least for the people immersed in racially inflected modalities of control.

Overt expressions of stereotypes are declining in several ways. While many Americans, especially whites, still hold pejorative views of people of other races, the population overall identifies fewer sharp-edged group differences than in previous decades. Almost two-thirds of Americans, including seven-tenths of whites, agreed in 2007 that whites' and blacks' values have become "more similar" in the past decade. Asked if they "don't have much in common with people of other races," 24 percent of young adults "completely" disagreed in 1987–1988; that figure rose to 57 percent in 2009. (Among adults over age sixty, the proportions rose from 11 percent to 43 percent – a steeper climb, but to a lower summit.)²³

In addition, Americans now hold – or at least admit to – fewer negative assumptions about groups other than their own than they did in the past. Young adults are the most likely to hold "very favorable" opinions of various groups, as Table 1 shows. Certainly, Americans have learned over the past few decades that it is politically and socially inappropriate to express negative stereotypes; thus, some of these "very favorable" opinions are probably insincere.²⁴ Nevertheless, we have found no reliable evidence showing that young people are

more likely than older adults to give a socially desirable response instead of a sincere one. So it seems reasonable to conclude that, in general, young adults hold more positive images of other groups than do older adults.

Daily life can bring the results of rather sterile survey data to life. At a high school senior prom in Walnut, California, a Thai dances with an African American, while a white, black, and Latino all dance with one another. "Isn't it like this everywhere now?" asks one of the dancers.²⁵ Second-generation immigrant young adults in New York, more jaded than high school seniors, perceive plenty of discrimination; but for them, too, "cultural traditions collide, merge, and coexist. . . . These young people . . . are often proud of their bicultural abilities."²⁶

Whether or not they get along with one another, children and young adults are growing up in a world that their grandparents could not have fathomed. About 40 percent of public school students in New York City live in a home in which a language other than English is spoken. The school system translates documents for parents into Spanish, French, German, Chinese, Japanese, Urdu, Persian, Hindi, Russian, Bengali, Haitian Creole, Korean, and Arabic. It teaches students who speak 167 languages – no surprise given that they come from 192 countries.²⁷ According to Montgomery (Md.) College President Charlene Nunley, community colleges are making similar adjustments:

When you change in this diverse way, you have to fundamentally change your institution. You have to change the language skills of your frontline people in admissions, registration and records. You have to create international student offices. You have to change the art so people feel their

Table 1
Percent of Adults with “Very Favorable” Opinions of Various Racial or Ethnic Groups, 2007

	White Respondents	Black Respondents	Latino Respondents	Total Respondents
Opinion about Whites				
18 to 29 years	(30%)	28%	46%	34%
30 to 44 years	(34)	26	44	33
45 to 59 years	(31)	21	40	28
60+ years	(29)	25	33	28
Opinion about Blacks				
18 to 29 years	27	(38)	47	37
30 to 44 years	31	(41)	35	34
45 to 59 years	24	(41)	38	31
60+ years	20	(38)	35	26
Opinion about Latinos				
18 to 29 years	19	28	(60)	34
30 to 44 years	29	26	(57)	33
45 to 59 years	21	22	(51)	24
60+ years	18	20	(49)	20
Opinion about Asians				
18 to 29 years	30	28	42	33
30 to 44 years	34	25	41	32
45 to 59 years	25	21	37	25
60+ years	22	20	26	22

Figures in boldface indicate decrease in “very favorable” opinions with increasing age. Figures in parentheses indicate respondents’ views of their own group. “Other” respondents not included. Source: Authors’ analyses of data from the Pew Research Center, “Racial Attitudes in America,” September 5 – October 6, 2007 (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2007), <http://pewsocialtrends.org/assets/pdf/Race.pdf>.

culture is represented. You have to change the food – fundamentally change the way you do business.

Even this list is incomplete. Nunley continues by observing, “[Y]ou’ve got to have people on your campus that your diverse students can identify with. You’ve got to have people who understand their issues and their cultures.... It’s not good

enough to say, ‘There’s nobody out there; I can’t find anyone.’ You’ve got to find them.”²⁸

Finally, long-standing and deeply embedded explanations for the old American racial order, in which whites held most of the best positions and blacks held most of the worst positions, are being transformed even as the relative

Table 2
Percent of Respondents Agreeing to Certain Explanations for Racial Socioeconomic Inequality, by Age and Across Cohorts, 1985 to 2008

Year	Age	<i>Inequality is Due To :</i>			
		Less Inborn Ability		Lack of Willpower	
		Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks
1985 to 1988	18 to 29	13	9	53	32
	30 to 44	13	6	57	30
	45 to 59	24	25	64	41
	60+	36	30	74	48
2004 to 2008	18 to 29	4	14	46	49
	30 to 44	6	11	48	47
	45 to 59	6	7	47	39
	60+	15	19	58	40

Data from the General Social Survey (GSS). Each time period combines three rounds of the GSS in order to have a large enough sample size of blacks. Source: Authors' analysis of GSS, various dates.

positions themselves are (more slowly) shifting. Since 1977, the General Social Survey has asked respondents for explanations of racial inequality in socioeconomic position. Two of the standard four response options – “less inborn ability” and “lack of motivation or willpower” – clearly make negative attributions to blacks. Comparing responses across decades enables us to see both differences by age at a single point in time and cohort change over time.

Younger respondents are almost always less likely than older ones to attribute blacks' lower status to lack of ability or lack of motivation.²⁹ However, disaggregating the data by years reveals a fascinating pattern of cohort change, particularly among blacks. Table 2 shows the results. In the early period, pejorative attributions to blacks rose with age in both races. And with only one exception, within each age group whites expressed

more negative views of blacks. In the current period, older whites remain more willing than younger whites to express negative stereotypes, although the absolute levels have declined. Now, however, younger blacks are almost as willing as older ones (in one case), or more willing (in the other case), to attribute socioeconomic differences to blacks' own failings. Most important, in one case, the views of the two youngest groups of adults are converging and, in the other case, the views of all but the oldest group of adults are converging, in explanations of racial inequality. With one exception, the differences between the oldest and youngest adults within a race are now greater than the differences between the two races in a given age group.³⁰

Not everything is changing. Old-fashioned racism has not disappeared, as FBI reports of hate crimes, incidents of daily

discrimination, and hostility to even legal immigrants make clear. Newer, more subtle – but also pernicious – forms of racial domination (often described as *laissez-faire*, implicit, or symbolic racism) have partly replaced overt Jim Crow forms of control.³¹ And not all forms of destabilization will bring racial justice and equality closer. Without a clear and demonstrable villain, it is very difficult for young people of color and their white allies to understand how racial domination – legacies of the past as well as continuing practices in the present – still constrains their lives. Without group solidarity, if not identity,³² many young black or Latino men in poor inner-city neighborhoods will lack the allies and group-based resources that they desperately need in order to have any chance of conventionally defined success.

Still, American young adults live in a different world from that of the 1960s, a decade that witnessed civil rights struggle, initiation of a new wave of immigration, and first steps toward affirmative action, school desegregation, electoral equality, and immigrants' rights. This generation is more likely to come into interracial contact both voluntarily (choosing more diverse friends, networks, partners, neighborhoods) and involuntarily, given demographic changes. They can hardly help but do so: "four out of 20 children and young adults are minorities, compared with three out of 10 baby boomers and only two out of 10 seniors. New-immigrant minorities . . . are both younger and more likely to have children than the native White population." Non-Hispanic whites younger than six years old will be in the minority by 2021; eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-old non-Hispanic whites will be in the minority by 2028. Hispanics will then comprise more than a quarter of young adults, and blacks will comprise 13 per-

cent. (In contrast, whites older than sixty-five will make up about 60 percent of their age cohort through 2050.)³³

Partly through these encounters, and partly because of institutional and attitudinal change, members of this generation will have more leeway to choose their own racial identities, and to change those identities if they want to. Race will be less of a determinant in a young adult's life chances than it was for his or her parents. The old racial memory of marches, fire hoses, and boycotts on behalf of farm workers are being replaced with the burning towers of 9/11, the New Orleans Superdome of 2005, and the 2008 election night euphoria in Grant Park, Chicago. Those images are equally powerful, but their collective impact is more confusing. The American racial order is becoming less and less stable in a variety of ways. That reality clearly leads to dangers, but on balance, we concur with Toni Morrison's report of "guarded optimism": "Guarded. Because the young people I talk to are just different. They're not hanging on to the powerful stories. They're just marching along, marrying who they want to marry. They are not like my generation or even the generation right after me."³⁴

ENDNOTES

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⁴ A good recent example of this argument is in Christina Beltran, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

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- ²⁴ Nevertheless, one might argue that a racial order has changed in important ways if more and more people who once used derogatory group stereotypes no longer feel free to express them publicly.
- ²⁵ Marie O'Connor, "Learning to Look Past Race," *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 1999.
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- ²⁷ Leanna Stiefel, Amy Schwartz, and Dylan Conger, "Language Proficiency and Home Languages of Students in New York City Elementary and Secondary Schools," February 2003, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1064581>.
- ²⁸ Charlene Nunley, quoted in David Pluviose, "Study: Most Community Colleges Not Fully Prepared for Demographic Shift," *Diverse*, May 18, 2006, 10–11.

- ²⁹ Not surprisingly, there is a strong correlation between these two attributions. We found no significant age difference in the likelihood of explaining status differences by discrimination or lack of education.
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Intra-minority Intergroup Relations in the Twenty-First Century

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Recent projections indicate that by the year 2050, racial minorities will comprise more than 50 percent of the U.S. population.¹ That is, during the twenty-first century, the United States is expected to transform into what some call a “majority-minority” nation. Despite this emerging trend, social psychological research on intergroup relations has focused almost exclusively on the attitudes that members of majority, high-status groups and members of minority, low-status groups hold toward one another. Less is known about the psychological dynamics that affect what we have termed “intra-minority intergroup” relations: the attitudes that members of one low-status and/or minority group hold regarding, and the behavior they direct toward, members of a different low-status and/or minority group.² Given the projected emergence of a majority-minority country, we believe that attention to such intra-minority intergroup relations, in tandem with research on traditional intergroup relations, is critical to our understanding of racial dynamics in the twenty-first century.

In this essay, we consider the broad question of how members of different racial minority groups may evaluate one another in a majority-minority nation. How, for instance, might a majority-minority nation affect the attitudes that Asian Americans express toward members of other racial minority groups (for example, blacks)? We begin with a review of classic social psychological theory regard-

ing the role of social identification in shaping intergroup attitudes and bias. We then present contemporary theories from which predictions can be made regarding racial minorities' reactions to a salient majority-minority nation. Specifically, we explore two theoretical accounts that offer relatively competing predictions for how attempts to foster a common "minority" social category will affect intra-minority intergroup relations. Next, we briefly consider how white Americans may respond to a majority-minority nation, in general, and their coming numerical minority status, in particular. Drawing from reactions to Barack Obama's election as the first black president of the United States – a symbolic transformation of America's racial hierarchy – we finish by discussing the implications of the country's shifting racial demographics for the U.S. racial hierarchy.

Social psychologists have long argued that human beings are predisposed to sort people into meaningful categories and, therefore, do so spontaneously and with minimum effort or awareness.³ Unlike the categorization of objects, however, social categorization involves a basic distinction between the category containing the self (the ingroup) and other categories (outgroups) – or between "we" and "they."⁴ A wealth of research has shown that this recognition of different social categories, even when based on the most minimal of category distinctions, can influence social perception, affect, and behavior, resulting in the systematic favoring of the ingroup relative to outgroups.⁵ Among other things, Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that people derive self-esteem from group memberships and attempt to enhance their esteem by perceiving their own group (the

ingroup) more positively than outgroups.⁶

These processes stemming from basic social categorization have important implications for intra-minority intergroup relations. Recent research building on SIT suggests that how members of racial minority groups construe a majority-minority nation will shape how they respond to it and, as a result, how they evaluate members of other racial minority groups. In the paragraphs that follow, we review two theoretical perspectives – the Common Ingroup Identity Model and Social Identity Threat Theory – that offer competing predictions for how minorities are likely to respond to the emergence of majority-minority status.

The very notion of a majority-minority nation presupposes that members of different racial minority groups have a common category membership (that is, as "minorities") that distinguishes them from whites. Although such a common category may be useful for charting a U.S. population undergoing change, the implications of such a category for intra-minority intergroup relations depend, at least in part, on whether members of different racial minority groups think of themselves as members of, and/or identify with, such a collective. To the extent that they do, research in social psychology suggests that the emergence of a majority-minority nation should engender positive evaluations among members of different racial minority groups. Specifically, the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM)⁷ asserts that categorizing oneself and outgroup members in terms of a common, superordinate identity leads to more positive attitudes toward outgroup members than when individuals think of themselves as members of distinct groups.

A common ingroup identity is thought to improve outgroup attitudes because those outgroups become included in individuals' representation of their ingroup and thus are perceived as connected to the self. Studies conducted in various situations, including a multicultural high school, an ethnically diverse workplace, and a football game, found that white individuals expressed more positive attitudes toward racial minorities when a common, superordinate identity was made salient.⁸

Given the effectiveness of a common ingroup identity in improving whites' attitudes toward racial minorities, it certainly seems possible that making a common "minority" identity salient could facilitate positive attitudes among members of different racial minority groups. Research in our lab has begun to study this possibility. We sought to examine how exposure to the discrimination that one's racial group faces in the United States affects attitudes toward different racial minority groups.⁹ If exposure to group discrimination triggers a common ingroup identity, perhaps as "disadvantaged minority," then one can expect attitudes toward other racial minorities to be positive compared to when individuals are not exposed to discrimination. Indeed, this is the result we have found. In a series of studies, we asked Asian Americans (Studies 2 and 3) and Latinos (Study 4) to read about the discrimination faced by their racial groups in the United States (or to read a control article) then subsequently complete attitude measures regarding blacks, embedded among a number of other items. Results showed that compared with participants in the control condition, participants in the anti-Asian (or anti-Latino) racism exposure condition revealed more positive attitudes toward blacks on both explicit, self-report measures

(Studies 2 and 4) as well as a measure of individuals' more spontaneous and automatic racial associations (Study 3). Furthermore, and consistent with the CIIM, participants exposed to discrimination against their group rated themselves as more similar to blacks than did control condition participants.¹⁰ In other words, reading about the racial discrimination that one's group in particular faces in the United States seems to trigger a common ingroup identity that includes members of other racial groups, presumably because these groups are also thought to be the targets of racial discrimination. Given this work, it is certainly plausible that the growing attention to and awareness of our emerging majority-minority nation will similarly engender this type of common ingroup identity – and thus more positive intra-minority intergroup relations.

A separate line of research and theory in social psychology suggests that, rather than adopting a common ingroup identity, members of distinct racial minority groups may react to the predicted demographic changes quite differently: namely, as a social identity threat. According to research on the effects of Social Identity Threat,¹¹ efforts to categorize at least some racial minorities as part of a new majority-minority category may actually disrupt any sense of common fate – and, thus, positive attitudes – that those minorities currently have toward members of different racial minority groups. Nyla Branscombe and her colleagues articulated four types of threats to individuals' social identities, three of which are particularly relevant to the issue of intra-minority intergroup relations in a majority-minority nation: categorization threat, distinctiveness threat, and value threat. Although the specific routes through which catego-

rization and distinctiveness threats are expected to affect intra-minority intergroup relations differ, each is predicted to have a negative effect on racial minorities' attitudes (and behavior) toward members of other racial minority groups. Both threats preclude the possibility that members of different groups will identify with a common minority ingroup and, as a consequence, harbor positive attitudes toward other racial minorities. Value threat, by contrast, can either undermine or enhance identification with a common minority ingroup.

Categorization Threat. Individuals experience categorization threat when they perceive that outgroup members are attempting to impose a category label upon them and treat them accordingly. This type of threat is thought to occur in part because individuals believe that they will be treated more negatively due to an affiliation with the undesired category membership compared with when they are categorized differently (or as an individual); but theoretically, it could also stem from externally imposed categorization into a group associated with "positive" stereotypes. In either case, categorization threat results in individuals distancing themselves from the undesired category, perhaps even going so far as to derogate the category altogether.¹² This type of threat seems particularly likely for members of relatively high-status racial minority groups: for example, East Asian and Indian Americans. Such individuals may perceive categorization into a majority-minority category particularly threatening insofar as it assumes commonality with racial minority groups that have decidedly more negative stereotypical associations, namely, Latino and black Americans. Some Latino and Caribbean black immigrants as well have been shown to hold negative attitudes toward black

Americans, identify with white Americans more than black Americans, and eschew shared racial categorization with black Americans.¹³ This type of categorization threat is particularly common among more affluent Latinos and Caribbean blacks who, in terms of income and educational attainment, may indeed be more similar to non-Hispanic whites than to other racial minorities; however, it has also been found among poorer Latinos.¹⁴ Similarly, recent work suggests that many Asian-white and Latino-white biracial individuals are choosing to identify as white rather than with a racial minority group.¹⁵ Hence, some individuals may reject the common category implied by the majority-minority concept in favor of affiliation with white Americans or simply with their distinct racial (or ethnic) categories. In either case, the social identity threat stoked by attempts to impose a majority-minority identity upon many racial minority groups may lead members of those groups to harbor attitudes toward other racial minorities that are more negative than they would have otherwise been.

Distinctiveness Threat. Rather than, or perhaps in addition to, categorization threat, it is possible that a majority-minority category may trigger distinctiveness threat among some racial minority groups. Distinctiveness threat can occur either when individuals perceive that the boundaries between an important and self-defining social category and relevant outgroups are being blurred¹⁶ or when a social category membership is perceived to be too big to provide a meaningful basis for self-definition.¹⁷ It is not difficult to imagine that a majority-minority category could propel either type of distinctiveness threat. First, the fact that a majority-minority category, by definition, includes a numerical majority of the U.S.

population may preclude it from providing a meaningful basis for self-categorization. Marilynn Brewer has argued that individuals are most likely to identify with groups that provide a balance between their needs for affiliation (protection) and differentiation (distinction).¹⁸ Numerical majority groups are typically perceived to be insufficiently distinct and, thus, tend not to be primary bases for identity. The emergence of a majority-minority category, therefore, may actually undo any common ingroup minority identification that members of different racial minority groups currently hold. In other words, by virtue of becoming a numerical majority, racial minority or non-white status may no longer provide a psychologically useful and/or desirable basis for self-categorization; individuals may thus begin to dis-identify with it.

A majority-minority nation may also trigger the other type of distinctiveness threat in members of racial minority groups. Because it includes members of many different racial and ethnic categories, it may blur the perceived boundaries between these groups, threatening the distinctiveness of individuals' different racial/ethnic group memberships. Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans may perceive that the common minority identity undermines the recognition of what is distinct about their racial/ethnic categories. This type of distinctiveness threat typically results in members of one group attempting to differentiate themselves from the "threateningly similar" outgroup(s), either by derogating that group or by emphasizing characteristics, experiences, and/or stereotypes (positive or negative) of the "threatened" ingroup.¹⁹ For example, to the extent that black Americans experience this form of distinctiveness threat from attempts to include them in

a majority-minority category, they may derogate Latinos and emphasize the unique experiences of blacks in the United States.²⁰ Given that it is the estimated rise in the number of Latinos that largely accounts for the projected rapid increase in the U.S. minority population,²¹ it is entirely likely that black Americans – a group that has heretofore been the prototypical racial minority in the United States – may be particularly likely to experience this type of distinctiveness threat. Indeed, some early indications of distinctiveness threat and its negative repercussions have been found in cities such as Los Angeles, where Latinos are now the majority racial group.²²

Value Threat. The third form of social identity threat that is likely to be triggered by a majority-minority nation is value threat. It stems from individuals' perception that their group is perceived more negatively, either in its competence or morality, relative to other groups. Whereas racial minority groups often face this type of threat, a majority-minority category may accentuate the experience of value threat. The majority-minority concept could easily call attention to the disparity between numerical majority/minority status and the power/prestige disparity between whites and racial minorities. In other words, the dawn of a majority-minority society may well serve to remind members of racial minority groups of the disparity between their numerical presence in the country and their underrepresentation in high-status, powerful roles in business, politics, and other spheres.

Unlike categorization and distinctiveness threat, however, the effects of value threat for intra-minority intergroup relations are less clear. Similar to the predicted effects of categorization threat, members of racial minority groups that are associated with relatively positive

stereotypes and high-status roles (for example, Asian Americans, in at least some domains) are likely to respond to value threat by dis-identifying with the common minority group and, perhaps, derogating members of other racial minority groups. Alternatively, value threat could serve to increase identification with a common minority category. The disparity between the numerical majority status of members of racial minority groups and their sociocultural status may serve to galvanize individuals to work for societal change. Research has found that perceived discrimination can increase ingroup identification and cohesion.²³ Indeed, the studies we carried out (described above), in which Asian American and Latino participants were exposed to the discrimination that their groups face, could be viewed through the lens of value threat.²⁴ Specifically, exposure to group discrimination threatens the value of one's group membership insofar as it is a reminder of the group's relatively low sociocultural status (compared with whites). We found consistent evidence that this manipulation increased both Asian Americans' and Latinos' perceived similarity to and positivity toward black Americans. In other words, the very type of value threat that is likely to be triggered by a majority-minority category – that is, the salience of racial minorities' persistently low sociocultural status despite their increased population – could foster identification with the common minority category as a means of enacting societal change.

To the extent that a new majority-minority category is construed as a threat to individuals' racial identities, it may disrupt a sense of common fate (if any such fate exists) that members of different racial minority groups may currently have; it may even foster intergroup hostility and negativity. That said,

perceived value threat stemming from a comparison with a salient outgroup to a minority category (white Americans) may serve to increase feelings of commonality among members of different racial minority groups and may encourage positive intra-minority intergroup relations. Considered in tandem with the research on CIIM, the social identity threat framework offers an important perspective on the psychological dynamics that govern for whom, under what conditions, and how the changing racial dynamics are likely to affect the attitudes that members of racial minority groups harbor toward one another, and how this relates to their ability (and willingness) to disrupt the current racial hierarchy in the United States.

Just as racial/ethnic minorities' reactions to the changing racial demographics will be shaped by their construal of what a majority-minority nation means for their self-concepts, so, too, will the reactions of white Americans. One seemingly important distinction is likely to be between white Americans who come to think of themselves as “minorities” (and/or at risk of becoming in the minority) and those who do not construe the changing demographics in this way. Although whites are projected to be in the numerical minority relative to all other non-whites (racial/ethnic minorities) by 2050, they will continue to hold a plurality of the population (46 percent): that is, white Americans will continue to be more numerous than any other single racial group.²⁵ Hence, just as the notion of a majority-minority nation presupposes some sense of common psychological identification among members of different racial minority groups that may or may not exist, it also requires that whites think of themselves as more distinct from various racial minority groups than

they perceive such groups to be from one another. In other words, a majority-minority population is a construction that need not be reflected in or honored by white (or racial minority) individuals' sense of self.

Drawing on Branscombe and colleagues' Social Identity Threat model (as discussed above), however, it is likely that many white individuals who come to see themselves as minorities (or potential minorities) will experience value threat.²⁶ For many individuals, the shift from racial majority to minority is likely to be experienced as a loss of status and thus poses a psychological threat to the prestige of their racial group. Recall that research suggests that individuals respond to value threats by derogating members of salient outgroups; in this case, the likely targets will be members of America's current racial/ethnic minority groups. If whites begin to perceive themselves as the numerical minority, they may also begin to categorize themselves racially (that is, as white) more explicitly and to feel a sense of racial solidarity with other whites. Individuals often identify more strongly with groups that are perceived to be under threat (especially groups that are also perceived to be inescapable).²⁷ Consequently, rather than perceiving themselves as relatively race-less,²⁸ the changing demographics may inspire white Americans to acknowledge that they do indeed have a racial group membership and that they should work on behalf of it.²⁹

It is possible that for at least some white Americans, such a shift in self-identification could improve relations with and attitudes toward other groups; however, it is entirely likely that such a change in identification could result in greater levels of bias against racial minorities (blacks, Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, and so on). Consider, for instance,

the reaction of conservative pundit Pat Buchanan, who declared that the projected U.S. demographic changes would result in "the death of the West," in general, and in a "third-world America," in particular.³⁰ Negative reactions to the increase of racial minorities in formerly predominantly white areas have similarly been found among some whites in affluent, high-achieving school districts in California, in response to the rising numbers of Asian American families and students. In a *Wall Street Journal* article from 2005, Suein Hwang described what she termed the "new white flight": white families moving their children out of the public schools as Asian American students become the majority.³¹ It is not difficult to imagine similarly negative reactions to Latino Americans as their percentage of the population increases in the United States and as white Americans attempt to cope with feelings of marginality in an emerging majority-minority nation.

The emergence of a majority-minority country, and how it affects the social self-concepts of both racial minority group members and white Americans, may or may not follow the demographic shift. Consequently, there is little reason to believe that the demographic change will necessarily disrupt the current U.S. racial hierarchy. Quite the contrary, the potential rise in feelings of racial paranoia and/or collective white identity among white Americans is likely to reinforce the racial status quo, if not spark new efforts to address the specific concerns of whites.³² Evidence for the possibility of these outcomes can be gleaned from reactions to Barack Obama's campaign for and ultimate election to the presidency of the United States, a symbolic challenge to the U.S. racial hierarchy. Recall, for instance, Hillary Clinton's

appeals to white racial solidarity in the waning days of her run against Obama for the Democratic Party's nomination. Specifically, Clinton claimed in a *USA Today* interview, "Sen. Obama's support among working, hard-working Americans, white Americans, is weakening again."³³

These and similar episodes that equate "American" and "white" are likely the result of unconscious mental associations. Research has demonstrated that most white Americans automatically associate "American" with the racial category "white" more so than with the racial categories "black" or "Asian."³⁴ A majority-minority country poses a direct challenge to this pernicious equation of "American = white" and thus threatens the current racial hierarchy. Again, reactions to President Obama may provide insight into what to expect in response to the predicted racial demographic changes. Soon after his election, a very vocal minority of Americans began to engage in a number of behaviors seemingly designed to question Obama's legitimacy. Most notably, a conspiracy theory that Obama is not a natural-born citizen of the United States (a requirement to hold the office of president) gained momentum, capturing attention in the mainstream media and garnering support among some elected officials. We saw Obama's rise to the position of America's chief executive and Commander in Chief met with resistance in the form of challenges to his fundamental "Americanness." It is not unreasonable to expect that the "American = white" equation will engender similarly negative reactions to the country's demographic shift. In turn, such reactions will undermine efforts to create an equitable, just, and racially diverse society.

The United States is expected to transform into what some call a majority-minority nation during the twenty-first century. In this essay, we examined the likely reactions of racial minorities and whites to this new majority-minority nation, with a specific focus on a) intra-minority intergroup relations and b) whites' recognition of and reactions to a white "minority." Extant social psychological theory and research suggests that racial minorities may not construe themselves as having common fate with other racial minorities and thus may be particularly unlikely to behave or relate to one another as if they are part of a non-white group that holds majority status. Consequently, members of different racial minority groups may not seek to claim any additional political power by virtue of their new "majority" status. By contrast, the research and theory reviewed suggests that white Americans may be particularly likely to think of themselves as members of (or potential members of) an actual or feared white minority. Whites may experience the rising numbers of non-white Americans as an identity threat, resulting in renewed white racial solidarity and increased, intensified bias directed toward racial outgroup members. Given that whites continue to possess disproportionate social, economic, and political power in the United States, such a reaction would serve to reduce racial equality and crystallize the current racial hierarchy.

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Hip-Hop & the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form

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To me, hip-hop says, “Come as you are.” We are a family. . . . Hip-hop is the voice of this generation. It has become a powerful force. Hip-hop binds all of these people, all of these nationalities, all over the world together. Hip-hop is a family so everybody has got to pitch in. East, west, north or south – we come from one coast and that coast was Africa.

– DJ Kool Herc

Through hip-hop, we are trying to find out who we are, what we are. That’s what black people in America did.

– MC Yan¹

It is nearly impossible to travel the world without encountering instances of hip-hop music and culture. Hip-hop is the distinctive graffiti lettering styles that have materialized on walls worldwide. It is the latest dance moves that young people perform on streets and dirt roads. It is the bass beats and styles of dress at dance clubs. It is local MCs on microphones with hands raised and moving to the beat as they “shout out to their crews.” Hip-hop is everywhere!

The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) reported that hip-hop music represented half of the top-ten global digital songs in 2009.² *Hip-hop* refers to the music, arts, media, and cultural movement and community developed by black and Latino youth in the mid-1970s on the East Coast of the United States.

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It is distinguished from the term *rap* in that it does not focus solely on spoken lyrics. Hip-hop initially comprised the artistic elements of (1) deejaying and turntablism, (2) the delivery and lyricism of rapping and emceeing, (3) break dancing and other forms of hip-hop dance, (4) graffiti art and writing, and (5) a system of knowledge that unites them all.³ Hip-hop *knowledge* refers to the aesthetic, social, intellectual, and political identities, beliefs, behaviors, and values produced and embraced by its members, who generally think of hip-hop as an identity, a worldview, and a way of life. Thus, across the world, hip-hop “heads” (or “headz”) – as members of hip-hop culture describe themselves – frequently proclaim, “I *am* hip-hop.”⁴

As hip-hop has grown in global popularity, its defiant and self-defining voices have been both multiplied and amplified as they challenge conventional concepts of identity and nationhood. Global hip-hop has emerged as a culture that encourages and integrates innovative practices of artistic expression, knowledge production, social identification, and political mobilization. In these respects, it transcends and contests conventional constructions of identity, race, nation, community, aesthetics, and knowledge. Although the term is not official, the use of “hip-hop nation” to describe the citizens of the global hip-hop cultural community is increasingly common. Moreover, it is one of the most useful frameworks for understanding the passionate and enduring investment hip-hop heads have in hip-hop culture. The hip-hop nation is an international, transnational, multiracial, multiethnic, multilingual community made up of individuals with diverse class, gender, and sexual identities. While hip-hop heads come from all age groups, hip-hop culture is primarily

youth driven. Citizenship in the hip-hop nation is defined not by conventional national or racial boundaries, but by a commitment to hip-hop’s multimedia *arts* culture, a culture that represents the social and political lives of its members.⁵ In this way, the hip-hop nation shares the contours of what international studies scholar Benedict Anderson calls an “imagined community,” a term he uses to explain the concept of nationhood itself.⁶ Though not a conventional political community, it sometimes functions in that manner.

The hip-hop nation serves as an imagined cultural community and, just as important, it functions as a community of imagination – or an imagination community. Its artistic practices are not merely part of its culture; rather, they are the central, driving force that defines and sustains it. Moreover, hip-hop culture is based on a democratizing creative and aesthetic ethos, which historically has permitted any individual who combines authentic self-presentation with highly developed artistic skills in his or her hip-hop medium to become a legitimate hip-hop artist. Because most hip-hop artists are self-taught or taught by peers in the hip-hop community, hip-hop has empowered young people of all socioeconomic backgrounds all over the world to become artists in their own right. That is, it has supported artists whose worth is validated not by commercial success or elitist cultural criticism, but by the respect of their peers in local hip-hop communities as well as by their own sense of artistic achievement and integrity.

Intellectual debate by hip-hop heads about hip-hop art and culture is also a central feature; thus, regardless of their artistic ability, young people worldwide are developing into what political theorist Antonio Gramsci describes as “organic

intellectuals”: those who use hip-hop to develop critical thinking and analytical skills that they can apply to every aspect of their lives.⁷ The result is the emergence of local hip-hop “scenes,” where young people practice the elements of hip-hop and debate, represent, and critique the cultural form and their social lives.

The significance of these scenes became apparent in the early months of 2011, a time that proved to be among the most politically significant in the recent history of hip-hop culture. When revolution swept through North Africa and the Middle East, it did so to the sound of hip-hop music. In North Africa, where young people played a central role in the national protest movements, hip-hop emerged as the music of free speech and political resistance.

It began in Tunisia. A week before the self-immolation of fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi became a catalyst for national protest, a twenty-one-year-old Tunisian MC released a hip-hop song that has been described by *TIME* magazine as “the rap anthem of the Mideast revolution.” Hamada Ben Amor, who is known by his MC name, El Général, told *TIME* that he has been inspired by African American hip-hop artist Tupac Shakur, whose lyrics he describes as “revolutionary.”⁸ For years, the government had banned El Général’s music from the radio and forbid him from performing or making albums. In December 2010, the artist posted the protest rap “Rais Lebled” (which translates as “President of the Republic” or “Head of State”) on YouTube. The video went viral on YouTube and Facebook and was broadcast on Al Jazeera. Tunisian youth found the song so compelling – and the government found it so threatening – that after El Général released another hip-hop song supporting the protest movement,

thirty police officers arrested him. Overwhelming public protest following his arrest prompted a phone call from then-President Ben Ali; days later, he was released.⁹ Within weeks, the national protest movement led to Ben Ali’s removal, and in late January 2011, El Général performed the song live, for the first time, before an audience of protesters in the nation’s capital city.¹⁰

El Général’s songs became popular with young Egyptians, who had their own hip-hop soundtrack for Egypt’s national revolution. Despite government warnings, Egyptian hip-hop crew Arabian Knightz released its song “Rebel” in support of the protest. Soon, hip-hop artists all over the world began to express solidarity with the Egyptian revolutionary movement by recording songs and posting them online. Master Mimz, a Moroccan-born, United Kingdom-based woman MC, released “Back Down Mubarak” in support of the movement. The song includes a feminist class critique as she rhymes, “First give me a job / Then let’s talk about my hijab.”

After President Mubarak resigned as a result of the protest, *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, one of Egypt’s largest independent newspapers, noted on its English-language website, “Although singers affiliated with various musical styles have shown support for the Egyptian people, the style that prevailed – or at least that had the biggest impact – in this fight for freedom and liberty is rap music. East and west, north and south, rappers have emerged as the voice of the revolution.”¹¹

In February 2011, inspired by the protest activities throughout North Africa and the Middle East, a group of Libyan hip-hop artists in exile compiled *Khalas Mixtape Vol. 1: North African Hip Hop Artists Unite*. (*Khalas* means “enough” in Arabic.) The album features songs by artists from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Algeria.

The global influence of hip-hop directly relates to its popularity as a major music source among youth in the United States. In 1996, there were 19 million young people aged ten to fourteen years old and 18.4 million aged fifteen to nineteen living in the United States.¹² According to a national Gallup poll of adolescents between the ages of thirteen and seventeen in 1992, hip-hop music had become the preferred music of youth (26 percent), followed closely by rock (25 percent).¹³ Moreover, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) reports that from 1999 to 2008, hip-hop music was the second-most-purchased music after rock for all age groups.

There is a growing body of scholarship on hip-hop as well. Academic analyses of hip-hop culture began to appear in the 1990s and include the 1994 publication of Tricia Rose's *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* and Russell Potter's *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*, which, in 1995, was the first critical work to examine hip-hop as an artistic, social, and cultural phenomenon.¹⁴ Also in the 1990s, the First Amendment free-speech issues associated with the group 2 Live Crew drew public comments from Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Houston Baker, Jr., who were then new academic stars and rising public intellectuals.¹⁵ Angela Davis and bell hooks, both authors and activists, published separate conversations about politics and feminism with Ice Cube, a former member of the hip-hop group N.W.A. (Niggaz with Attitude).¹⁶ The significance of hip-hop in African American culture was also addressed by the philosopher Cornel West, historian Robin D.G. Kelley, political scientist Michael Dawson, and sociologist Paul Gilroy, all of whom celebrated and critiqued the impact of the relentless and often prob-

lematic images, philosophies, and personas underlying hip-hop culture.¹⁷

Today, this scholarship extends across most disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, from political scientist Cathy Cohen's *Democracy Remixed: Black Youth and the Future of American Politics* to *The Anthology of Rap*, a collection edited by literary scholars Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois.¹⁸ Volumes have also been published in the emerging field of global hip-hop studies, including *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*; *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Popular Culture*; *Tha Global Cipa: Hip Hop Culture and Consciousness*; *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*; and *The Languages of Global Hip Hop*.¹⁹

We consider hip-hop to be the lingua franca for popular and political youth culture around the world. In this essay, we analyze hip-hop's role as a global imprint that symbolizes unity, justice, and equality through its interpretation of black cultural and political practices and values. Our purpose is to examine the perspectives of many followers of hip-hop. These perspectives include, for example, a Japanese young person who stated: "I mean a culture like Hiphop... that's bringing us together like this – that's amazing! That's the power of music, I think. And not only that, the power of Hiphop. I'll say this: it is black power."²⁰

Though hip-hop is now ubiquitous, its adoption and adaptation into cultures outside of the United States have at times been problematic. Researchers have recoiled at the explicit racist parody and comic-like copies of the gangster persona that appeared in the early stages of hip-hop's global presence. For instance, early attempts by Japanese youth to "repre-

sent” hip-hop’s African American heritage reportedly involved intensive tanning, the use of hair chemicals to grow Afros and dreadlocks, and caricatures of hyper-stereotyped urban black masculinity as a rationale to abuse young women.²¹ As hip-hop’s cultural beliefs became more widely understood, global hip-hop began to take on a character of its own, reflecting the culture, creativity, and local styles of the youth who embraced and produced it. Hip-hop is now a multibillion-dollar global industry that continues to grow and diversify, but its impact remains underreported; often overlooked is the fact that hip-hop influences not only conventional “rap music,” but also all forms of popular music as well as radio, music, television, film, advertising, and digital media throughout the world.²²

Though commercial hip-hop represents a significant part of the music industry, it is only a fraction of the artistic production and performance of hip-hop culture, most of which is local. Every populated continent (and most countries) have thousands of local hip-hop scenes shaped by artistic and cultural practices that are produced, defined, and sustained primarily by youth in their own neighborhoods and communities. In the United States, these scenes are generally described as *underground hip-hop*, both to characterize their critical challenge to conventional norms and to distinguish them from commercial hip-hop.²³ And as it turns out, the underground is more densely populated and deeply substantive than the commercial cultural space on hip-hop’s surface. The Internet has added a new and transformative dimension to local and global hip-hop cultures and communities, empowering young people to document and distribute their personal and local art, ideas, and experiences. These local scenes are rarely financed by

multinational media corporations yet are more essential to hip-hop culture and the hip-hop nation than commercial production. Commercial production could end, but hip-hop culture would continue, and even thrive, through local scenes.

Some observers have conceived of the movement of hip-hop culture around the globe as a hip-hop diaspora that shares characteristics of ethnic constructions of diaspora.²⁴ Global hip-hop scenes are sometimes (quite accurately) described as *translocal* because they so often represent complex cultural, artistic, and political dialogues between local innovations of diverse hip-hop art forms; transcultural interactions between local hip-hop scenes in cities and nations outside of the United States; and exchanges between local scenes and U.S.-based hip-hop media.²⁵

While the translocal dynamics of the hip-hop diaspora foster countless routes of cultural interaction and exchange, at least two major routes of cultural globalization are at the crossroads of these numerous pathways. African American culture and African diasporic cultural forms are integral to the formation of both these major routes. Here, we focus primarily on hip-hop music, but the routes characterize other hip-hop art forms as well.

The first route of diaspora relates to the origins of hip-hop culture. While hip-hop may have emerged in New York in the 1970s, many of its diverse global and multicultural beginnings can be tied to African diasporic cultural forms and communities.²⁶ Especially in the case of rapping/rhyming, it is almost impossible to isolate a single cultural trajectory because the aesthetic and linguistic features of lyrical rhyming can be found throughout Africa and the Caribbean as well as the United States. Many of the young black and Latino artists who collaborated in the development of hip-hop

culture in New York were recent immigrants from the Caribbean and, therefore, were shaped by a range of African diasporic cultures. Jamaican musical forms, for example, have been particularly significant in the development of hip-hop aesthetic practices.²⁷ Yet reflections on African American musical traditions reveal that many aesthetic features of early hip-hop were already a part of the complex cultural roots, and routes, of African American history.

Musician and sound curator David Toop traced these many trajectories in his discussion of the origins of hip-hop culture:

Whatever the disagreements over lineage in the rap hall of fame or the history of hip hop, there is one thing on which all are agreed. "Rap is nothing new," says Paul Winley. Rap's forbears stretch back through disco, street funk, radio DJs, Bo Diddley, the bebop singers, Cab Calloway, Pigmeat Markham, the tap dancers and comics, the Last Poets, Gil Scott-Heron, Muhammad Ali, a cappella and doo-wop groups, ring games, skip rope rhymes, prison and army songs, toasts, signifying and the dozens, all the way to the griots of Nigeria and the Gambia. No matter how far it penetrates into the twilight maze of Japanese video games and cool European electronics, its roots are still the deepest in all contemporary Afro-American Music.²⁸

The second major route of hip-hop culture is its movement into local youth cultures around the world. Soon after it was developed in the United States, hip-hop culture traveled as part of the larger processes of America's global media distribution. While multiethnic collaboration produced early hip-hop forms, African Americans played a vital cultural and political role in its development. As African American studies scholar Imani Perry argues, "[P]romiscuous composition

does not destroy cultural identity. . . . The African aesthetic origins of hip hop, as with all black American music, allows for it to have a shared resonance among a wide range of diasporic and continental Africans."²⁹ Moreover, in addition to representing a shared cultural terrain for members of international African diasporic cultures, these African aesthetics have also shaped the aesthetic consciousness and tastes of non-African Americans for centuries. The world's youth have responded with a stunning proliferation of hip-hop-based artistic and cultural production.

Aside from being translocal, the movement of hip-hop between local and global contexts can also be explained by the concept of *glocalization*: that is, simultaneously engaging the intersections of global and local dynamics.³⁰ In their analysis of European hip-hop, sociolinguists Jannis Androutsopoulos and Arno Scholz suggest that glocalization involves a recontextualization of cultural forms through "local" appropriations of a globally acceptable cultural model "that are then integrated into a new social context."³¹ *Transculturation*, which describes the cultural features of glocalization, refers to a process of continuous cultural exchange; historically, it has been used to critique the unidirectional model of cultural transmission implied by the concepts of acculturation, appropriation, or cultural imperialism. Complex transculturation processes shape global hip-hop; they have been observed within and across international, national, local, and digital environments, and they sometimes result in entirely new cultural or artistic products and forms. Consequently, global hip-hop cultures retain many qualitative features of African diasporic and U.S.-based hip-hop cultures while simultaneously engaging in dynamic and prolific processes of aes-

thetic innovation, production, and diversification.³²

Along with hip-hop's cultural norm of inclusion, global hip-hop remains symbolically associated with African Americans. It has incorporated many aspects of African American language ideology, even when the English language itself is not part of a particular expression of hip-hop culture. In other words,

it is not mere words and expressions that create a bond among hip-hop followers throughout the world. Rather, it is based on African American language ideology where the words signify multiple meanings and critiques of power. Hip-hop presents African American English (AAE) as a symbolic and politicized dialect where speakers are aware of complex and contradictory processes of stigmatization, valorization and social control. The hip-hop speech community is not necessarily linguistically and physically located but rather bound by this shared language ideology as part of politics, culture, social conditions, and norms, values, and attitude.³³

Hip-hop language ideology remains central to the construction and continuation of all hip-hop cultures, local and global. The use of dialects and national languages, including complex code-switching practices, serves as a declaration that hip-hop culture enables all citizens of the hip-hop nation to reclaim and create a range of contested languages, identities, and powers.³⁴

In her introduction to *The Languages of Global Hip Hop*, sociolinguist Marina Terkourafi recalls her first encounter with hip-hop in the mid-1980s in Heraklion, Greece. A new student at her high school, whose family had emigrated, returned from Germany with a new dress code "consisting mainly of hooded

sweatshirts – a new style of 'calligraphy' (graffiti) – which we quickly adopted for the headlines of the class newspaper – and, last but not least, a new style of dance: breakdancing."³⁵ She remembers that in the same summer, she and some friends watched *Beat Street*, the 1984 classic hip-hop movie, at the local open-air cinema. Terkourafi's story was repeated many times over around the world as the 1980s generation was introduced to hip-hop culture through *Beat Street* and *Wild Style*.³⁶ These films played a central role in making international youth aware of hip-hop culture, music, graffiti, and dance. In Japan, Germany, and other nations, youth initially responded less to the English language-based rapping and more to the graffiti and dance representations.³⁷

The particulars of hip-hop's more recent emergence reveal an old story of how African American culture has circulated throughout the world. In fact, the global influence of African American culture has been inextricably linked with the rise of the American Empire since at least the late nineteenth century: for example, in 1873, the Fisk Jubilee singers performed "Negro" spirituals for England's Queen Victoria. African American music and culture historically have traveled when and where African American bodies could not. During the twentieth century, while Jim Crow segregation restricted African Americans' movement in their own country, African American music, including blues, jazz, and, later, rock and roll and soul, traveled the world, shaping world music in ways that have yet to be fully acknowledged.³⁸ Beginning in the late twentieth century, hip-hop music, the first African American musical form to be created in the post-civil rights era, continued this global journey, a journey whose impact has been expanded and problematized in

the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries by processes of corporate globalization and new – especially computer-based – technologies for musical production and distribution.

Understanding the global presence of hip-hop culture is like putting together puzzle pieces from around the world. Over the last several decades, international newspapers and magazines have collectively printed thousands of articles (many of which we reviewed for this essay) about the presence of hip-hop culture worldwide. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of websites devoted to hip-hop in different areas. Every nation, region, and even neighborhood that represents hip-hop culture does so with a unique history. Yet much of this culture remains undocumented or under-documented, particularly because only hip-hop media that engage conventional commercial markets achieve wide recognition. Given that much of hip-hop culture is local, including in the United States, and that it is produced by young people who do not have access to mainstream media outlets, it is often ignored by conventional modes of recognition and assessment.

Despite the fact that much of local hip-hop culture does not receive commercial or global attention, a number of emergent themes and trajectories indicate hip-hop's significance as a global arts and media movement. These factors include the use of hip-hop culture to expose injustice or fight for justice and, in an ironic parallel, to conventionalize the nationalization of hip-hop cultures as the political, commercial, and even spiritual arbiters of national and international culture.

One of the most influential groups to uncover injustice and encourage activism, Public Enemy (PE) shaped the early overt politicization of hip-hop music and cul-

ture in the United States and elsewhere. In 1992, when PE toured Europe with the rock group U2, their charge to hip-hop's nation of millions was "Fight the Power!" This slogan began to appear on walls in England, Poland, and Italy, among other nations. According to PE's highly politicized MC Chuck D, the group visited more than forty countries within the first ten years of its formation.³⁹ In 2010, PE launched its seventieth tour, which included numerous world destinations. MC Ferman of the Basque group Negu Gorriak describes the impact PE had on him as an artist: "[W]e had been listening to a whole lot of music, especially linked to the rap explosion. We were shocked by Public Enemy, by the force that the rap movement had, its power to criticize."⁴⁰ Chuck D himself was particularly affected by a conversation he had in 1994 with a fan in Croatia. The fan applied PE's African American political analysis to the religious and ethnic conflict that had long affected the region, explaining:

Public Enemy showed us that Rap music is not afraid of subjects connected with national and race issues. We started to see how powerful rap could be if it were used in expressing our attitudes. The kind of lyrics and consciousness that reveals the whole process of civilization, which is the story of dominance, the dominance of white people over Black people, the dominance of male over females, the dominance of man over nature, and the dominance of majorities over minorities.⁴¹

Another significant influence in the international spread of hip-hop as grounded in the African American and black experience is the Universal Zulu Nation.⁴² American DJ Afrika Bambaataa founded the community-based organization in the 1970s to promote peace, unity, and harmony among bat-

ting gangs and peoples.⁴³ The Zulu Nation utilized black liberation ideologies to bring to its many global followers a mantra of interplanetary humanism. Bambaataa explains:

[M]y thing is to always try to bring people together in unification and to see ourselves as humans on this planet so-called Earth, and what can we do to change the betterment of life for all people on the planet Earth and to respect what so-called black, brown, yellow, red and white people have done to better civilization for people to live on this planet so-called Earth, and recognize that we are not alone.⁴⁴

Bambaataa and other hip-hop pioneers adhered to belief systems that upheld basic human equality and that explicitly denounced constructions of race and racist activities to separate and hierarchically situate human beings. Inspired by singer James Brown's "I'm Black and I'm Proud," Negu Gorriak produced what anthropologist Jacqueline Urla calls the group's "anthem": "Esan Ozenki," whose main rhyme – "*Esan ozenki. Euskaduna naiz eta harro nago*" – translates as, "Say it Loud: I'm Basque, and I'm proud."⁴⁵

In the 1980s, nations with English-speaking populations easily engaged with hip-hop music and rapping, while nations where English was not the primary language often forged their initial relationship with hip-hop through graffiti and break dancing. As a result, places such as England and Anglophone former colonies, including South Africa, Australia, and Nigeria, have been creating hip-hop music since it emerged in the United States. Certainly, Jamaican musical forms have been in a cultural dialogue with African American music since before hip-hop was formally constructed. Both African American and Jamaican verbal genres, such as toasting

(a style of chanting over a beat in dance hall music), were actively engaged in that construction.

France's long-standing engagement with African American culture through artists such as dancer and singer Josephine Baker, writer James Baldwin, and countless jazz musicians enabled that country to build a bridge to American hip-hop culture with relative ease. In 1982, for example, the French radio network Europe 1 sponsored the New York City Rap Tour that brought to France important American hip-hop artists, some of whom were themselves immigrants or the children of immigrants. Artists included Fab 5 Freddy, the Rock Steady Crew, and Afrika Bambaataa, whose Zulu Nation took root in Paris at the same time.⁴⁶

As American hip-hop artists began to achieve tremendous economic success and cultural influence in other countries and music markets, global youth quickly began not only to consume but also to produce their own hip-hop cultural forms.⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, thousands of local scenes and national hip-hop artists emerged in different areas of the world. Though influenced by American hip-hop forms, these artists typically developed their own styles, drawing from local and national cultural art forms and addressing the social and political issues that affected their communities and nations. These scenes generated a widespread interest in hip-hop culture and the growth of commercial hip-hop music in national contexts; thus, hip-hop music was no longer accessible only as an American import. Both international and American hip-hop artists have topped music charts and sales throughout Europe and Africa as well as in parts of Asia and Latin America and, more recently, Australia.

France is the world's second-largest hip-hop market, and it is one of the larg-

est producers and consumers of hip-hop culture.⁴⁸ In 2003, four hip-hop singles were nominated for the Victoires de la Musique, the French version of the Grammy Awards. France's MC Solaar, who was born in Senegal and whose parents are from Chad, has topped French charts with his singles and albums for nearly two decades; he has had best-selling albums in dozens of other countries, too. In 1995, he was named Best Male Singer in the Victoires de la Musique awards. He has launched successful world tours of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the United States; received recognition from American hip-hop artists; performed with American hip-hop group De La Soul; appeared on albums with rappers Guru and Missy Elliott; released a song through American hip-hop, R&B, and pop label Tommy Boy Records; and appeared in Bollywood movies.

American multinational record corporations have hip-hop divisions all over the world. Def Jam Records, for example, is one of hip-hop's most iconic record labels. Founded by Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin in 1984, it is famous for acts such as Public Enemy, Run DMC, and the Beastie Boys. Currently owned by Universal, Def Jam now operates in Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan. It has an international hip-hop music game, Def Jam Rapstar, which features international artists. In November 2010, the company created a Web portal to enable unsigned artists around the world to access Def Jam online distribution resources.

National record companies in other countries have also developed hip-hop divisions or labels, or they showcase a roster of hip-hop acts. In 1981, Germany's Bombastic Records released one of the first German hip-hop albums, featuring songs in German and English by German MCs. (The album title, *Krauts with Attitude: German HipHop Vol. 1*, referred to

the American group N.W.A.) Cantonese hip-hop's MC Yan, a member of Hong Kong's first major hip-hop act, has created an independent hip-hop label (Fu@kin Music) that successfully promotes the new group Yellow Peril. Nigeria's Kennis Music distributes hip-hop along with R&B and pop and promotes itself as "Africa's Number One Record Label." Nigerian MC Ruggedman, who holds a political science degree, famously called out Kennis Music in his song "Big Bros" for excluding gifted hip-hop artists and promoting mediocre ones; he has created his own label, Rugged Records, to promote acts according to his vision.

In response to hip-hop's continued popularity, national and international music awards ceremonies have incorporated hip-hop into their productions, and artists have won awards both within the hip-hop music genre and in broader categories. Hip-hop music videos, which were initially excluded from America's MTV along with all other African American musical forms, have been broadcast worldwide on television since the 1980s and, more recently, on the Internet. Hip-hop artists, both in the United States and elsewhere, use music videos to promote their brands and their music. Although music videos have always served primarily to boost record sales, they have long aided another significant process: the transcultural exchange of hip-hop. Young people who watch videos from other cultures or nations can acquire a great deal of knowledge not only about the music, but also about the dance, fashion, style, and overall aesthetics of hip-hop in diverse cultures.

Moreover, arbiters of national culture have increasingly come to recognize hip-hop as a legitimate art form. This validation may have reached an unusual zenith in 2004, when a Polish break dancing

crew performed for Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. The video – widely viewed on the Internet – shows the Pope smiling, nodding, and clapping during the performance and blessing the dancers afterward. As just one example of hip-hop’s growing cultural validity, the episode hints at hip-hop’s potential reach.

Cultural acceptance of hip-hop, however, is often accorded to dance rather than music. Although hip-hop dance historically has been less explicitly controversial than hip-hop music, it nonetheless implicitly challenges a range of institutional and cultural norms about dance, movement, and the body. International break dancing competitions and hip-hop dance festivals have existed for decades, but in the twenty-first century they are acquiring more institutional and commercial support and funding. The year 2010 offers three striking examples: In July, Salzburg, Austria (birthplace of Mozart and stomping ground of Hitler) witnessed its first Urban Culture Festival, featuring hip-hop dancers from around the world. Australia sent Kulture Break, its multiethnic break dancing crew, to the Shanghai Expo to represent its national culture in a performance for thousands of international participants. In South Korea, where the b-boys are considered among the best hip-hop dancers in the world, the government spent millions on the second annual global invitational hip-hop dance competition, only to make millions more – an estimated \$35 million – in advertising revenues.

Hip-hop culture is also used to educate and socialize young people. In 2004, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT, sponsored a Global Hip-Hop Summit to organize and educate world youth about a range of issues. Fidel Castro sponsors an annual hip-hop conference in Cuba; he has de-

scribed hip-hop as “the existing revolutionary voice of Cuba’s future.”⁴⁹ Indeed, hip-hop is the main source for discussion of racial injustice in Cuba today: at least two documentaries have been made about Cuban hip-hop culture; African American MC Common has demonstrated a long-term commitment to collaborating with Cuban hip-hop artists; and former Black Panther and American exile in Cuba, Assata Shakur, has been actively engaged in helping Cuban youth become empowered through hip-hop.

Music Mayday, an organization that promotes youth empowerment and education through the arts in Africa, puts particular emphasis on hip-hop and sponsors a range of hip-hop-related educational and cultural activities. One of their biggest events is B-Connected, an annual music and arts festival that links youth through concurrent festivals in five different countries, including The Netherlands, Tanzania, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Hungary. These festivals feature an international roster of MCs that includes, but is not limited to, artists from the host countries.

In South America, Brazilian hip-hop culture has in many ways mirrored themes in African American hip-hop. On the one hand, the Brazilian media have stereotyped hip-hop as the music of drugs and violence, and on the other, Brazilian artists use hip-hop to address racism, poverty, and police brutality – issues that Brazil’s myth of racial harmony attempts to conceal. Brazil’s traditional martial art, *capoeira*, is widely recognized for its remarkable similarity to break dancing, and both forms emerge from African diasporic roots. However, more recently, hip-hop in Brazil has distinguished itself, through its aesthetic complexity, engaging diverse musical forms and becoming increasingly accepted as a social and political tool to

educate and empower Brazilian youth.⁵⁰ The 2005 documentary *Favela Rising*, which has won dozens of international awards, examines the music group and social project Grupo Cultural AfroReggae. AfroReggae is Rio's most successful hip-hop band, merging hip-hop with other musical forms and touring the world. (The group opened for the Rolling Stones in Brazil in 2006.) It is also an NGO, a dynamic hip-hop organization that empowers Rio's poorest young people through dozens of arts and social justice projects. Led by former small-time drug-dealer-turned-MC Anderson Sa, Grupo Cultural AfroReggae has become so powerful that it serves as one of the most effective mediators between different institutions, groups, and factions within Rio de Janeiro's complex social and political structure.⁵¹ In 2007, Brazil nationalized its investment in hip-hop culture when its Ministry of Culture began to apply AfroReggae's mission to the entire nation through its Culture Points program. By providing grants to fund local organizations, such as the project Hip Hop Nation Brazil, the program empowers local hip-hop communities to educate and serve Brazilian youth. The organizations are often run by local hip-hop artists, including one run by MC Guiné Silva in São Paulo. As he explained to *The New York Times*: "This program has really democratized culture. . . . We've become a multimedia laboratory. Getting that seed money and that studio equipment has enabled us to become a kind of hip-hop factory."⁵²

During the 2010 World Cup in South Africa (the first to be held in Africa), hip-hop played a meaningful role in the international soccer championship. Nomadic Wax, a Fair Trade international media company that focuses on hip-hop and the diaspora, brought together fifteen international hip-hop artists from Africa,

the Caribbean, Latin America, the United States, and Europe to create "World Cup," a twelve-minute mix track that is described as a "transnational hip-hop collaboration." Nomadic Wax released the track for free online. Coca-Cola chose "Wavin' Flag" – whose lyrics were changed for the promotion by K'Naan, the world-famous Somali-born Canadian MC – as one of the anthems for its World Cup campaign and World Cup Trophy Tour, which traveled internationally and featured K'Naan as a headlining act. K'Naan also performed the song at the World Cup concert with Alicia Keys, Shakira, and the transnational, multiracial, and multicultural American hip-hop group the Black Eyed Peas. The performance was broadcast to millions.

In another example of national and institutional endorsement of hip-hop and of the role of technology in the development of hip-hop culture, the National Museum of Australia commissioned MC Wire and Morganics, a white MC and hip-hop theater artist, to undertake a hip-hop-based oral history project. They toured Australia to collect more than 1,500 autobiographical rap songs by youth from across the continent. Both men then used the songs to conduct youth workshops and trainings throughout Australia.

Women hip-hop MCs are appearing in greater numbers, though there are far more male artists. Their limited numbers reflect larger issues of global sexism and the international marginalization of women's voices as well as the gender politics of hip-hop culture. Many women MCs perform lyrics about gender and are often actively involved in using hip-hop to educate and empower youth.

In the global Muslim hip-hop movement, women MCs are playing an increasingly vital role, a phenomenon that contests stereotypes of Muslim cultures

and people as universally misogynistic. Lebanese MC Malikah was proclaimed “Best MC in Libya” with another finalist on MTV Arabia’s program *Hip HopNa*.⁵³ Palestinian-British MC Shadia Mansour, known as “the first lady of Arab hip-hop,” explains, “Hip-hop holds no boundaries. It’s a naked testimony of real life issues. You just break down your message and get your point across in the music.”⁵⁴

The 2008 film *Slingshot Hip Hop* documented how Palestinian rappers form alternative voices of resistance within the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. It featured female artist Abeer Al Zinati (also known as Sabreena da Witch). The 2006 film *I Love Hip Hop in Morocco* featured the female MC Fati, who is now a solo artist.⁵⁵

Fijian-Australian MC Trey is one of the most prominent hip-hop artists in Australia and one of the world’s pre-eminent female hip-hop artists. She has collaborated with Maya Jupiter, an Australian MC of Mexican and Turkish descent, in the hip-hop group Foreign Heights. In addition to her work as an MC, Trey is an activist and aerosol artist whose artwork has been displayed on the streets of three continents. She has collaborated with a collective of U.K. and Australian hip-hop artists on a theater project called “East London West Sydney.” Vodafone, one of the world’s largest telecommunications companies, provided a grant to MC Trey and other Australian hip-hop artists to work with Australia’s Information Cultural Exchange program (ICE) to develop hip-hop arts and digital education workshops for at-risk youth in Australia. MC Trey’s work with ICE is a practical example of the theoretical model that indigenous Australian MC Wire – who claims that, for him, MC means “my cousin” – elucidates in describing his album and identity, AboDigital. The

“original abodigital” explains that his identity “has an ambiguous meaning because of the word digital. I’m abodigital because I’m a twenty-first century Aboriginal, I’m down with laptops and mobile phones and home entertainment. But digital also means your hands and your fingers, so I’m still putting my fingers in the dirt; I’m still using my hands to create things. So that’s the ambiguity.”⁵⁶

Israeli hip-hop music reflects Israel’s complex political dynamics and includes Zionist, pro-Palestinian, and Jewish Ethiopian-Israeli artists. Sagol 59 is a prominent Jewish Israeli MC who uses hip-hop to build bridges between Jewish and Muslim communities. In 2001, he organized and produced “Summit Meeting,” which is believed to be the first recording featuring a collaboration between Jewish and Arab artists in Israel. He also hosts Corner Prophets/Old Jeruz Cipher Hip Hop series, a cultural project focused on uniting diverse groups in Israel through hip-hop culture.⁵⁷

In one of the lighter examples of hip-hop’s reach, Finland-based multinational communications corporation Nokia has incorporated hip-hop into a Chinese commercial in which elderly rural Chinese farmers claim to have created hip-hop music using local farming tools and labor. The hilarious commercial reveals not only Nokia’s assessment of hip-hop’s selling power, but also the advertisers’ complex knowledge of the debates regarding origins, cultural authority, and individual authorship that play a significant role in hip-hop culture around the world.

The above examples of record labels, artists, events, campaigns, and social programs are just a handful of the thousands of ways in which hip-hop exerts a cultural and economic force worldwide. Most of these examples reflect hip-hop’s

inclusion in commercial media and privileged cultural spaces, but these institutional representations and events are possible only because they are fueled by the originality, imagination, commitment, and endurance of local hip-hop cultures.

While the influence of PE and the Zulu Nation is widespread, global hip-hop culture has a complex relationship with other aspects of African American cultural representation. First, though the originators and innovators of hip-hop included a diverse group of talented, determined, and creative youth, media outlets created a hyper-stereotypical account of hip-hop as the product of poor, young black men who were literally “wild” and menacing.⁵⁸ While this depiction has stuck in the United States, it is not as effective globally, where African American youth are credited for social justice struggles like the civil rights and Black Power movements. American forms of racism are so widely known and studied as an example of injustice that individuals all over the world know both the explicit signs and the smoldering, everyday existence of repression. Yet there is extensive commentary and critique of the representation of U.S.-style violence in hip-hop. Among African hip-hop artists in particular, there is a sustained critique of hardcore hip-hop. Commercial gangsta rap lyrics have been central to hardcore hip-hop culture, and have historically represented, (in some cases) analyzed, and (in too many others) glamorized the intersection of masculinity, dominance, and violence. As a result, hardcore hip-hop culture has been the historical target of global and American communities; and it has produced a contested relationship with local hip-hop cultures in the United States and elsewhere.

When hip-hop came to Africa from the United States, it had among its first fans (and imitators) elite and upper-middle-class African youth. Hip-hop developed as several former colonial powers, including France, served as conduits bringing hip-hop to Francophone Africa. Countries that embraced the new cultural form included Senegal, the first African country to adopt and develop rap music; Tanzania, one of the first countries to develop a strong “mother tongue” rap presence; Ghana; and Nigeria. However, given that hip-hop has its roots in an African diasporic art form, its presence in Africa has raised a complex discourse about origins and homecomings.⁵⁹ Senegalese trio Daara J, whose music combines hip-hop with a range of global styles, describes hip-hop’s return to Africa in the title track of their album *Boomerang*: “Born in Africa, brought up in America, hip-hop has come full circle!” As a result of their sense of cultural authority, African hip-hop artists have actively engaged in the process of redefining hip-hop culture in ways that challenge colonial norms and values; indeed, they do not hesitate to critique the practice of those norms and values by African Americans.

One common theme throughout Africa has been the question of how to adapt hip-hop so that it represents local and national issues without incurring violence. African artists focus on both culture and the realities of violence. For example, politically motivated hip-hop was pioneered in the Western Cape by the groups Prophets of the City (POC), Black Noise, and, later, Brasse Vannie Kaap (BVK, or Brothers of the Cape). These groups continue to promote the ideals of socioeconomic and racial parity through community development programs. In contrast to this overtly “conscious” message, a contemporary

genre known as *kwaito* has emerged in the vicinity of Johannesburg, South Africa. This style is dance-oriented, incorporating elements of house music, indigenous black languages, and vernacular dialects. Arthur Mafokate, the self-proclaimed King of Kwaito is widely regarded as the progenitor of this style. The late Brenda Fassie and crossover artists such as TKZee have contributed to the mainstream success of *kwaito* in South African culture.

Hip-hop MCs often rhyme in their own language and in local dialects that have been historically marginalized. African MCs, who are often multilingual, and who have a long intellectual and literary history of rejecting colonial languages in favor of their own, frequently code-switch into two or more languages within a single song, just as some bilingual U.S. and Caribbean-Latino MCs code-switch between English and Spanish.⁶⁰ The musical and linguistic possibilities of hip-hop culture are particularly dynamic in Africa's most populated nation, Nigeria. One of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, Nigeria has more than five hundred languages spoken within its borders. English is the official language, used in schools and government offices, but Nigeria also recognizes three dominant languages: Hausa (spoken primarily in the North), Yoruba (spoken mostly in the Southwest), and Igbo (spoken in the Southeast). The country's unofficial lingua franca is Nigerian Pidgin English. About half of Nigerians are Muslims; 40 percent are Christians; and about 10 percent practice indigenous religions. (Indigenous practices are often infused into both Islam and Christianity as well.)

Popular music in Nigeria has a reputation for melding local melodies, languages, and polyrhythms with influences from all over the world, includ-

ing Brazil, Cuba, Niger and the Sahara, Congo, Jamaica, and the United States. It is often used to express religious messages, and even hip-hop contains a sub-genre of gospel rap. Popular music also carries political and social messages. The most famous example is Fela Kuti, the king of Afrobeat, whose inflammatory lyrics (in Nigerian Pidgin) and non-traditional lifestyle endeared him to millions inside and outside Nigeria. Local music, especially in the Hausa north, might address a particular political candidate or officeholder, or it might exhort the populace to take a particular action. For the past several years, the most widely listened-to music has been American-inspired rap and dance hip-hop based on local beats and enhanced with music production technology. As young Nigerian rappers – who as children idolized American stars like Tupac, KRS-One, Jay-Z, and Nas – are coming of age and have greater access to production equipment, Nigerian rap is becoming increasingly popular. Artist JJC talks about avoiding guns because “we got too much drama already.” For other Nigerian artists, avoiding gangster posturing is about “keeping it real.” Says GrandSUN, “We fight with our hands.” Certainly, on a continent where oral literatures and literacies have been culturally and politically central for longer than written history is capable of documenting, African hip-hop heads also fight with their words.

As global hip-hop maintains the tradition of American hip-hop, it must also account for equally powerful local traditions of art, culture, and protest. It must represent life on a local level. The critique and constant examination of the genre is at the heart of hip-hop culture. It focuses on growth and analysis – even when it also takes American hip-hop to task for its gangster posturing, as K'naan does in “What's Hardcore?”:

I'm a spit these verses cause I feel
 annoyed,
And I'm not gonna quit till I fill the void,
If I rhyme about home and got descriptive,
I'd make Fifty Cent look like Limp Biskit,
It's true, and don't make me rhyme about
 you,
I'm from where the kids is addicted to
 glue,
Get ready, he got a good grip on the
 machete,
Make rappers say they do it for love like
 R-Kelly,
It's HARD,
Harder than Harlem and Compton
 intertwined,
Harder than harboring Bin Laden and
 rewind,
To that earlier part when I was kinda like
"We begin our day by the way of the gun,
Rocket propelled grenades blow you away
 if you front,
We got no police ambulances or fire
 fighters,
We start riots by burning car tires,
They looting, and everybody starting
 shooting."
[...]
So what's hardcore? Really?
Are you hardcore? Hmm.
So what's hardcore? Really?
Are you hardcore? Hmm.⁶¹

K'naan criticizes the senseless posturing in U.S. hip-hop as a way to critique the senseless destruction and oppression in Somalia and to indict a world that does not have the stomach or heart to make a difference.

As the lingua franca of global youth, hip-hop unifies young people across racial and national boundaries while honoring their diversity, complexity, intellect, and artistry. As mentioned above, the role of hip-hop in the protests in North Africa and the Middle East demonstrates how hip-hop con-

tinues to function as a dynamic culture of resistance. It also reveals how hip-hop artists have used online technology to reach audiences who would not otherwise have access to their work. This is particularly true in the case of artists who have been banned by their governments from performing or releasing albums. Many of the hip-hop songs in the North African protest movements include musical or aesthetic references to African American hip-hop, and the artists acknowledge African American influences on their music. They have transformed those influences to achieve local and national, aesthetic and political goals. The hip-hop songs of the North African and Middle Eastern revolutionary movements collectively represent a meaningful moment in the history, not only of hip-hop culture, but also of popular and youth culture. African American hip-hop artist Nas famously rhymed, "All I need is one mic to spread my voice to the whole world." North African and Middle Eastern hip-hop artists have embraced that ethos, using their voices and hip-hop culture as powerful instruments of revolutionary change.

While mainstream American discourses have marginalized, maligned, and trivialized hip-hop music and culture, multicultural youth in America and around the world have come together to turn hip-hop into one of the most dynamic arts and culture movements in recent history. It is disturbingly ironic that the nation that produced hip-hop culture has the least respect for it; meanwhile, the United Nations and individual countries are crossing the bridge that the global hip-hop nation has been building for decades. Nations are using hip-hop to see, hear, understand, serve, and, ultimately, be transformed for the better by their brilliant and powerful young people.

Hip-hop's aesthetic culture – which began with the four core elements of rapping, deejaying, breaking, and graffiti art – now encompasses all those elements along with an ever-growing and diversifying range of artistic, cultural, intellectual, political, and social practices, products, and performances. These developments include, but are not limited to, studio, live, and digital music production; writing and rhythmic performance of spoken words alone and to beats; street, club, and studio dance innovations; fashion and style expressions; visual arts, including graffiti innovations; theater and performance arts; international club cultures' engagement with diverse music, dance, and style expressions; and digital, public, and academic knowledge-production and distribution practices. The artistic achievements of hip-hop represent, by themselves, a remarkable contribution to world culture. However, the hip-hop nation has not just made art; it has made art with the vision and message of changing worlds – locally, nationally, and globally.

The hip-hop nation has done more than heed Public Enemy's famous call to "Fight the Power." It has *created and become* the power. U.S. and global hip-hop heads have put into practice and expanded on psychiatrist Frantz Fanon's theory: namely, that an individual or group that "has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. . . . Mastery of language affords remarkable power."⁶² Citizens of the global hip-hop nation have not merely mastered a language, they have formed a new one. They have used that new language to redefine, name, and create their many worlds and worldviews. Through their unprecedented global movement of art and culture, the citizens of the hip-hop nation have used their unique and collective aesthetic voices both to "possess" and transform the world, a process that has not merely afforded them power, but has also enabled them to produce new forms of power, beauty, and knowledge.

ENDNOTES

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Millennials & the Myth of the Post-Racial Society: Black Youth, Intra-generational Divisions & the Continuing Racial Divide in American Politics

Cathy J. Cohen

Since the election of Barack Obama, much has been made of the generational divide in the populace. Some have suggested that once the so-called millennials come to dominate the political domain, many of the thorny social issues that have caused great debate and consternation among the American public will be resolved. This line of reasoning implies that young people who embrace and personify a more inclusive society will eventually take over policy-making and thought leadership, moving both areas in a more liberal direction. Commentators point to the significant differences in opinion registered among various generations on topics such as same-sex marriage and abortion as evidence of the more inclusive worldview held by the majority of young people. According to a 2009 CNN.com story, “Fifty-four percent of people questioned in a CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll released Monday said marriages between gay or lesbian couples should not be recognized as valid with 44 percent suggesting they should be considered legal. But among those 18 to 34 years old, 58 percent said same-sex marriages should be considered legal.” The article closes with a quote from CNN political analyst Bill Schneider that underscores the potential of young Americans to change the trajectory of equal rights in the country: “Young voters strongly favor marriage equality. They’re the future of American politics.”¹ A *USA Today* story makes a similar argument, proclaiming that “younger Americans, more eclectic in their views

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on social issues and more likely to have friends or family members who are openly gay, are more tolerant of same-sex couples than their parents or grandparents and appear to be more interested in compromise.”²

The promised harmony around social issues that is presumably evident among younger Americans extends beyond the confines of sexually infused social policy to the prominent and always simmering issue of race. An article published in *The New York Times* suggests that much of the problem of race and racism found in the Tea Party and the NAACP has to do with the fact that they both are largely comprised of older members who grew up as the targets or beneficiaries of Jim Crow. Columnist Matt Bai writes, “The Tea Party and the N.A.A.C.P. represent disproportionately older memberships. And herein lies a problem with so much of our discussion about race and politics in the Obama era: we tend not to recognize the generational divide that underlies it.”³ As evidence of this substantial generational divide, Bai cites pre-midterm data from the Pew Research Center indicating that “there is nearly a 20 point spread between Mr. Obama’s approval ratings among voters younger than 30 and those older than 65.” Perhaps Bai’s most important observation is one that he seems to add almost as a throwaway: his comment that “These numbers probably do reflect some profound racial differences among the generations.” I would contend that, in fact, the significant and profound differences in how young whites, blacks, and Latinos think about such topics as racism, citizenship, and gay and lesbian issues are a defining and often ignored feature of American politics as practiced by the young today, even in the age of Obama.

Far from the generation of millennials signaling the end of race or even the be-

ginning of a post-racial society, data from the Black Youth Project (BYP)⁴ and the Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement Project (MCPCE)⁵ suggest that deep divides still exist among young people, with black youth particularly skeptical about the idea of a post-racial anything. When we first administered the BYP in 2005, we asked respondents – who were then ages 15 to 25 – a series of questions regarding the impact of race in the lives of young black Americans. Repeatedly, we discovered a significant gap in how young whites and young blacks thought about such issues, with young Latinos often landing somewhere in the middle. For example, 61 percent of black youth agreed with the statement, “It is hard for young black people to get ahead because they face so much discrimination,” compared to 43 percent of white youth and 45 percent of Latino respondents. Similarly, 54 percent of black youth agreed with the statement, “On average, black youth receive a poorer education than white youth,” compared to 31 percent of white youth and 40 percent of Latino youth. When asked if they agreed with the statement, “In the health care system, Blacks are treated less fairly than Whites,” the majority of black (59 percent) and Latino (52 percent) youth indicated their agreement, while only 32 percent of young whites agreed. On the specific topic of AIDS, when asked if they agreed that “if more white people had AIDS, the government would do more to find a cure,” over two-thirds of black respondents (68 percent) agreed, compared to only 34 percent of white youth and 50 percent of Latino youth.

When we turned our questions to the treatment of blacks by the government, compared to its treatment of other groups, we continued to see marked disagreement. For example, when black youth

were asked if the government treats immigrants better than most blacks, nearly a majority of black youth agreed (48 percent), compared to the expected much smaller percentage of Latinos (18 percent) and 29 percent of white youth. Interestingly, the one area in this battery of questions where we can identify relative agreement across racial and ethnic groups is on the topic of how the police treat black youth. Specifically, when asked if “the police discriminate much more against black youth than they do against white youth,” 79 percent of black youth, 73 percent of white youth, and 63 percent of Latino youth agreed.

Perhaps not surprisingly, when asked whether racism would be eliminated in their lifetime, respondents were pessimistic, with about only one-third in each racial/ethnic category believing the elimination of racism in their lifetime was very or somewhat likely. Interestingly, black respondents, who were most negative when asked about the specific experiences of black youth, were slightly more likely to believe racism would be eliminated in their lifetime, with 33 percent of blacks, 25 percent of whites, and 31 percent of Latino youth stating that it was very or somewhat likely that racism would be eliminated in their lifetime.

Finally, there are two positive notes that should be highlighted as we seek to represent the complexity of political thinking by young people today. First, black and Latino youth registered lower levels of encounters with discrimination than might be imagined. When asked how often they experienced racism because of their race, young blacks most often chose the category “every now and then,” with 32 percent of black respondents marking this answer. Among whites, an equal percent declared they had rarely (41 percent) or never (41 percent) been discriminated against be-

cause of their race. Latino respondents demonstrated a pattern similar to whites, with most respondents choosing the answer “rarely” (32 percent) or “never” (36 percent). (The choice of “rarely” or “never” among Latinos may have to do with the fact that we asked about discrimination based on race and not on ethnicity.) Second, a majority of respondents from all racial and ethnic groups agreed that they felt like full and equal citizens with all the rights and protections that other people have, with 60 percent of blacks, 82 percent of whites, and 70 percent of Latino youth agreeing. Of course, we should note the 22-percentage point gap between those black and white youth who feel like full and equal citizens.

The reality of such a monumental racial divide, between whites and blacks in particular, has long been documented in the research of scholars such as Michael Dawson, Lawrence Bobo, Donald Kinder, and Lynn Sanders.⁶ These scholars and others have painted a detailed picture of the differences in public opinion among black and white Americans on topics ranging from the role of the state, support for redistributive policies and programs, social issues, and the belief that racism plays a major role in American society. Again and again, the data across studies reveal that black Americans, while generally socially conservative, believe in a more activist state; register higher support for redistributive programs such as welfare and food stamps; and are more likely to indicate that they believe that racism continues to play a major role in limiting the opportunities available to blacks and Latinos.

Given this line of research, it may not seem surprising that young black Americans continue to believe that racism is still a major problem in the country. Moreover, the continuing reality of race and

racism in structuring the opportunities presented to young people, especially black youth, seems to scream out from the many statistics offered up to highlight the lived experience of marginal youth of color. For example, by now most people know that black youth suffer disproportionately from social crises such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, childhood obesity, incarceration, and unemployment, among other problems. More recently, black youth and their families have also been hit especially hard by the recession. As others have noted, the combination of lost manufacturing jobs, predatory lending practices, unparalleled foreclosures, a shocking drop in property values, and the continued use of discriminatory hiring practices in a jobless recovery has meant that black youth and their families face, not a recession, but “a silent depression” and the loss of any generational progress for young blacks.⁷ Thus, given these lived realities, it is hard to imagine that there would not be significant racial and ethnic differences in how young people think about race and their lives more broadly.

However, for many Americans, especially white Americans, the election of Barack Obama marked what they believed to be a major shift in the racial consciousness of the country, with a color-blind framework predicted as rightfully coming to dominate the racial landscape.⁸ In the wake of the election, commentators and politicians felt empowered to tell black people, and black youth in particular, that it was now time to stop the “whining” because they had no more excuses. The running dominant narrative – that the country has arrived at a place, in part through the victories of the civil rights movement, where color blindness is the fair way to make decisions, create policy, and distribute resources – helps produce such disparities

in the political thinking of young people today. For while many whites see President Obama’s election as the best example of how color blindness works, many black youth, who enthusiastically supported Obama, believe that his election reflects the desperate yearning for change in the midst of political and economic crisis. It was this desire that led whites to vote for change rather than using their votes to preserve the racial order.

In 2008, the country witnessed the largest outpouring of black youth voting during any presidential election. Contrary to the myth that black youth are apolitical, it seems that when presented with a candidate they care deeply about, they will go to the polls. For many journalists and commentators, the large turnout of young people was yet another sign that more political agreement and tolerance existed among our younger voters than we can ever hope to see among older voters. While it is true that young people joined together in force to vote for a new direction as represented by Barack Obama (and against the old path as laid out by the Bush administration), it seems that the meaning of and agenda attached to those votes were different for various racial and ethnic groups of young people. Seven months after the 2008 election, we asked respondents to the MCPCE study, including a significant number of those eighteen to thirty-five years old, if they believed racism was still a major problem. The divide between black and white young people (ages eighteen to thirty-five) was stark: 68 percent of black youth stated that racism remains a major problem, compared to 33 percent of white respondents and 58 percent of Latino respondents (see Table 1). A similar split was evident when we asked if blacks had achieved racial equality. A near majority of whites (48 percent) thought blacks

Table 1
 Perspectives on Racism since the Election of President Obama

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Respondents by Race/Ethnicity	Racism Remains a Major Problem	Racism Exists but Not a Major Problem	Racism No Longer Exists in Our Society	Racism Never a Major Problem in Society
Black Youth n=310	68%	29%	1%	2%
White Youth n=226	33%	63%	3%	1%
Latino Youth n=440	58%	32%	8%	2%

Source: 2008 Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement (Wave 2).

had achieved equality, compared to 15 percent of blacks and 39 percent of Latinos (see Table 2).

As we know, the racial landscape is far more expansive than one that accounts for just blacks and whites. When asked if Latinos had achieved racial equality, support for this assertion dropped among whites. In fact, only 29 percent of whites, 16 percent of blacks, and 20 percent of Latinos believed that Latinos had achieved racial equality (see Table 3).

Finally, on the question of whether our respondents felt like full and equal citizens, we found that, in 2008, there remained a substantial split in the level of inclusion black and white young people feel, with 55 percent of young blacks agreeing with the statement that they felt like full and equal citizens, compared to 69 percent of young whites (see Figure 1). This 14-percentage point difference is less than the 23-percentage point gap registered between blacks and whites in the BYP data, but we should remember that respondents to the BYP data were younger (ages fifteen to twen-

ty-five) than the eighteen to thirty-five year olds who participated in the MCPCE study. Furthermore, while a gap continues to exist between young blacks and whites, the most sizable difference in feelings of inclusion was registered among young Latinos and whites, with only 39 percent of young Latinos believing themselves to be full and equal citizens. Undoubtedly, the word *citizen* has a significant bearing on their feeling of not being included in the larger political community. However, their responses are not simply a reflection of their actual legal status as citizens; they also represent the myriad ways in which Latino citizens are perceived as “illegal,” resulting in their exclusion from fully lived citizenship.

Like many young people, blacks, whites, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other citizens who turned out to vote on November 4, 2008, the young black people at the heart of this data were generally exuberant over the election of the nation’s first African American president. In a February 2009 focus group discussion with

Table 2
Perspectives on Whether Blacks Have Achieved Racial Equality

Respondents by Race/Ethnicity	Have Achieved Racial Equality	Will Soon Achieve Racial Equality	Will Not Achieve Racial Equality in Your Lifetime	Will Never Achieve Racial Equality
Black Youth n=303	15%	47%	23%	14%
White Youth n=225	48%	30%	16%	6%
Latino Youth n=432	39%	34%	22%	6%

Source: 2008 Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement (Wave 2).

Table 3
Perspectives on Whether Latinos Have Achieved Racial Equality

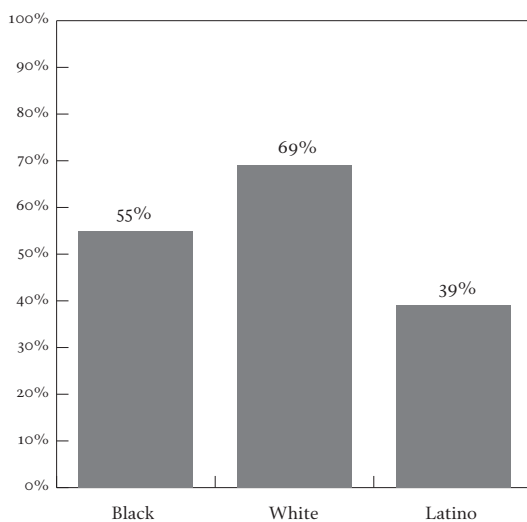
Respondents by Race/Ethnicity	Have Achieved Racial Equality	Will Soon Achieve Racial Equality	Will Not Achieve Racial Equality in Your Lifetime	Will Never Achieve Racial Equality
Black Youth n=295	16%	51%	25%	9%
White Youth n=226	29%	41%	24%	6%
Latino Youth n=432	20%	51%	22%	7%

Source: 2008 Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement (Wave 2).

young blacks ages eighteen to twenty-four living in Chicago, participants expressed their pride in the country having just elected Barack Obama. At the same time that they expressed great pride and hope in Obama, they also made it clear that no one politician – not even the pres-

ident – would be able to change drastically the lives of young black Americans. They stated that for their lives to improve, a number of entities would have to change: the government, employers, teachers, parents, and young people themselves. Interestingly, in both our survey

Figure 1
Percent of Respondents Who Believe They Are Full and Equal Citizens



Black respondents: $n=304$; white respondents: $n=231$; Latino respondents: $n=451$.
Source: 2008 Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement (Wave 2).

data and our focus group responses, black youth conveyed their belief that change, in general, and in the racial landscape, in particular, is possible, but not directed by one person. Even given their very realistic assessment of the impact of the 2008 election on their lives and the need for change among many entities, seven months after the election, young blacks were more likely than young whites to believe that there had been “big change” or “some change” in the country since President Obama took office (see Table 4).

Although young black Americans believe in the change promoted by President Obama, they also seem to subscribe to a vision of American politics in which collectives of concerned individuals and groups produce change. During a focus group with young people in Chicago, one young woman stated that the election of President Obama “told us American people that the power is in our hands and however you want this country ran we

pretty much can decide that. I think everyone realized that and saw it for themselves this time around.” Another young person in the same focus group went on to explain, “It’s not good enough if one guy makes it. That’s not good for everybody in general, so everyone, if all of us can come out of it, then we can say we’ve done something to make change happen. But for one man to come out of it, that’s not good enough. In fact, that’s not doing anything at all.”

In the many articles written about the generational shift in attitudes on social issues, such as gay marriage or even race, few, if any, take the time to disaggregate the data by race and ethnicity to determine whether there might be divergent trends among the many groups comprising “youth.” When researchers disaggregate their data (that is, if they have sampled enough people of color to pursue statistical analysis of different racial and

Millennials & the Myth of the Post-Racial Society Table 4
Change since President Obama Took Office

Respondents by Race/Ethnicity	Big Change	Some Change	Very Little Change	No Change
Black Youth <i>n</i> =297	18%	64%	15%	4%
White Youth <i>n</i> =229	12%	45%	34%	10%
Latino Youth <i>n</i> =429	15%	52%	29%	4%

Source: 2008 Mobilization, Change, and Political and Civic Engagement (Wave 2).

ethnic groups) they often find that there are significant differences in how young people from the various racial and ethnic groups that make up the American populace think about not only same-sex marriage and abortion, but also race. If opinion leaders continue to make policy and write articles with data assuming that the ideas of white youth represent the attitudes of all young people, they are in for a rude awakening.

As the demographics of the country continue to move from one dominated – in population and power – by whites to one increasingly populated by individuals of color, our analyses must start paying attention to the ideas, attitudes, and actions of young people of color. In the case of sensitive social issues such as abortion, sex, and homosexuality, black youth signal, at best, a position of limited tolerance. In the realm of race, the experience of black youth and, at times, Latino youth is that race still figures prominently in their lives, shaping where they can live, if and where they work, and how state authorities, such as the

police, treat them. For these young people, racism still blocks their access to full citizenship, in particular the psychological aspects of believing that one belongs to and is valued in the larger political community.

Far from signaling a significant change in racial politics that can be sustained in some sectors of the country, Obama’s election has unleashed an unbridled racism that has not been witnessed in such regularity for some time. Whites who have been affected by layoffs and the failing economy, the escalating cost of health care, the bottoming out of the housing market, and the decline in our public schools have been motivated by radio and talk show hosts to rebel and once again to blame black people, immigrants, and, of course, our first black president for their declining predicament. In response, they have held Tea Party and 9-12 rallies where President Obama has been demeaned and depicted as “other,” an unspeakable evil on par with Hitler.

As many traditional journalists and pundits have claimed, vilification of a

sitting president is part of the vitriol we call American politics. But others, such as former President Carter, have suggested that what we are witnessing in the backlash against President Obama is the continuing racist attitudes and behaviors of some whites. These individuals instinctively focus on racial explanations for their difficulties instead of pointing to capitalist greed and neoliberal policies that have dismantled many of the protections middle- and working-class people depend on. In the midst of

such a backlash, both structurally and symbolically, it is not surprising that many black youth continue to believe and assert that racism remains a major problem for the country and in their lives. What I hope this essay has made clear is that waiting for the generational shift will not be enough to change the diverging experiences and perceptions of young people. We must pay attention to existing racial and ethnic differences that are evident among the millennial generation today.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Paul Steinhauser, "CNN Poll: Generations Disagree on Same-sex Marriage," CNN.com, May 4, 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/05/04/samesex.marriage.poll/index.html?iref=mpstoryview>.
- ² Chuck Raash, "Generations Reshape Gay Marriage Debate," *USA Today*, May 21, 2009, http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/columnist/raasch/2009-05-21-new-politics_N.htm.
- ³ Matt Bai, "Beneath Divides Seemingly about Race Are Generational Fault Lines," *The New York Times*, July 17, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/us/politics/18bai.html>.
- ⁴ Data from the BYP were collected from July 2005 to November 2005. There were 1,590 total respondents to the survey, ages fifteen to twenty-five, including an oversample of blacks. The BYP research team developed and tested the questionnaire. The survey was administered by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago under the title of "Youth Culture Survey." For more information on the survey and methodology or to download the data, see <http://www.blackyouthproject.com>.
- ⁵ Panel data from the MCPCE project are drawn from a random sample of the population of households in the United States. The survey sample for this study is a nationally representative panel survey that includes oversamples of blacks, Latinos, Asians, and young people ages eighteen to thirty-five. One-third of the Latino respondents came from Spanish language-dominant homes who received the questionnaire in Spanish. The questionnaire was administered through Knowledge Networks. For more information on the survey and methodology or to download the data, see <http://www.2008andbeyond.com>.
- ⁶ Michael C. Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 1994; Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1996; Lawrence Bobo, "Whites' Opposition to Busing: Symbolic Racism or Realistic Group Conflict?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45 (1983): 1196 – 1210.
- ⁷ Kathy Bergen, "African-Americans Hit Inordinately Hard by Recession: Staggering High Unemployment among Black Middle Class Wipes Out a Generation of Wealth," *Chicago Tribune*, November 6, 2009, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009-11-06/news/0911050858_1_african-americans-recession-unemployment.
- ⁸ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

The Black Masculinities of Barack Obama: Some Implications for African American Men

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Barack Obama's presidency has stimulated thinking about new possibilities for race relations in America.¹ Yet it has also inspired accounts that question whether his election has been overstated as a positive factor for contemporary race relations in this country.² Indeed, a recent conversation I had with Ronald, an African American man who participated in some of my earlier research,³ confirmed the skepticism of the latter perspective. Ronald and I discussed a number of issues concerning Obama's election and the possible fate of the African American community before he finally said, "You know, despite the fact that Obama's election is a change for this country, one thing is the same: everybody who ever held the office of the president was the son of a white woman."

Ronald's remarks did not come from frustration or anger. Instead, in a matter-of-fact tone, he simply conveyed his sentiment that what may have seemed like a radical unfolding to some people felt more like a moderate shift to him (and possibly others). Since that talk with Ronald, I have been pondering the potential shifts in the meanings of race in America around the time of Obama's election. That Obama, like every other president of the United States, is both male and the son of a Caucasian woman has led me to think specifically about how race and masculinity converge in African American men's views of Obama, a self-proclaimed black man who is, yet is not, like many African American men. More specifically, I was

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drawn to the various images of Obama that have been promoted – both through his own volition and by his administrative team – during and since his presidential campaign.

This thinking has been sustained by the fact that as a sociologist primarily focused on studying African American men, I was both pleasantly surprised and intrigued by Obama's election. In the world of social research and in popular commentary, African Americans are often regarded as instigators of danger and anxiety, illustrations of failure, and portraits of malaise. Even many of the more sensitive and sympathetic perspectives cast African Americans as in need of extreme remedial intervention.⁴ Consequently, having a black man assume the most powerful position in the world amidst these portrayals gives rise to new thinking about the prospects and possibilities for other African American men.

Hearing Ronald's comment about Obama's presidency encouraged me to seek out the views of various African American men. I turned to the African American men who have come into my life either as participants in my research projects or as relatives, friends, and colleagues. I wanted to know what kind of black man they think he is, and whether his being black makes any difference in how they think about themselves and their life prospects. Moreover, I wanted to understand how these views relate to the kind of black man Obama *appears to be*, rather than what kind of man he is. After all, as a political figure, his appearance in the public eye may have minimal connection to the kind of black man he actually believes himself to be. I still have much work to do in my quest to better understand how black men make sense of the black masculinity of Obama. However, the first step in doing so, and what I focus on in this paper, is resolving my

own queries about what kind of black man Obama has been made to be in the public domain. My own brief connection to him gives me some insight into how his appearance has been framed vis-à-vis who he may actually be and how other black men make sense of him.

Between 1993 and 1996, while I was in graduate school at the University of Chicago, I shared time on the basketball court with Obama. He could best be described as an inconsistent regular at our campus lunchtime game. I am confident that many of the other regular participants would affirm my claim that he was one of the better players (a notch below the stand-out high school and college players). Aside from his basketball skills, however, he struck some of us as an extraordinarily intelligent and very disciplined person. These traits were most evident in his manner of engaging the few social issues that the men (and this lunchtime gathering consisted almost entirely of men) would raise on the sidelines while waiting to play. I never had the opportunity for an extensive one-on-one discussion with Obama, but I listened intently when he spoke in group settings at courtside.

Some months after first seeing him on the court, I was told by a fellow graduate student that Obama was a clinical professor in the law school. I began to wonder why, given his acumen, he was not on the tenure track. I certainly did not know him well enough to consider asking him about the matter, but I recall deciding that perhaps he was not disposed to this degree of ambition. Given what Obama has become today compared with my reading of him fifteen years ago, it is fortunate for me that I chose an academic discipline that usually does not invest in intimate study of the individual as the unit of analysis! Still, revisiting that experience, from

the perspective of a sociologist and an African American man, reinforces my curiosity about Obama's election and the significance it has had for African American men.

From the time he launched his presidential campaign, Obama has navigated a public identity that carefully balances contrasting images of black masculinity. That effort rests on the fact that his life has involved a wide range of circumstances, events, episodes, and patterns, each of which can be identified with African American men at different points along the socioeconomic spectrum. Said more simply, Obama's life-story depicts each of two highly durable, but also dichotomous, representations of black masculinity. The first, best conveyed by the colloquialism "keeping it real," promotes images of blackness that stand in contrast to the images and tropes commonly associated with mainstream, middle-class America (of course, whether those images truly exist in regard to that segment of the African American community is another matter altogether). The second style of representation, "keeping it proper," refers to the social practices of African Americans (and most often to those of upper-income or professional status) that promote the most sanitized and, therefore, most acceptable public faces to both white and black America. Doing so serves as a means of affirming the dignity and humanity of a people who have often been viewed as incapable of exhibiting these traits. Both "keeping it real" and "keeping it proper" reflect distinct and often contrasting class-based dimensions of black masculinity (and black American cultural expression more generally). A remarkable aspect of the public black masculinity of Obama is found in his incorporation of these two styles in ways that, like his being biracial, make him appear

at once different from many black American men yet also seemingly just like one of them.

The practices and dispositions associated with "keeping it real" and "keeping it proper" have been thoroughly documented and interpreted in the tradition of urban ethnographic studies of African Americans. The notion of "keeping it proper" turns up in W.E.B. Du Bois's quandaries about what he saw as the distinctive cultural traits of lower-income black Americans living in the seventh ward of Philadelphia in the last decade of the nineteenth century.⁵ In *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois expressed his disdain for what to him was an excessive display of public improprieties by lower-income African Americans, including, but not restricted to, street corner associating, public gambling, and gregariousness in social interaction. Looking at the presumed industriousness and discipline of the middle and upper classes of African Americans, Du Bois found much more to affirm about proper social conduct and comportment.

Such a class-specific framing of social conduct and mores was reinforced in 1945, when social scientists St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton completed the next seminal community study of black Americans, *Black Metropolis*.⁶ That work offered a more systematic documentation of cultural and economic distinction in the African American community. In doing so, it also conveyed more directly than did Du Bois's work just how each class sector of the African American community embraced its own package of representations and mannerisms as legitimate (or better yet, as legitimately black American).

More recently, in introducing a dichotomy that is similar in effect to "keeping it real" versus "keeping it proper," soci-

ologist Elijah Anderson has introduced the terms *street* and *decent* as tropes to depict different segments of the African American community.⁷ He implicates class as a critical factor for how and why certain black Americans are identified as belonging to one category or the other. In short, street people are those who constitute the threatening and profligate portion of the African American community that is often referred to as the underclass.⁸ However, while the street is a common reference point in derogatory assessments of certain aspects of the African American community, it is also part of what is taken to be most authentic or genuine about black Americans, as the street conjures images of the intense sociability and publicity often identified as valued social traits in the black American community.

The extreme depictions exemplified by *street* and *decent* have been captured in the works of other contemporary scholars. Anthropologist John L. Jackson, Jr., has explored how black American residents of Harlem engage in the social politics of racial authenticity across class lines (and in doing so, define each other as real and proper, or insincere and improper, depending on which side of the class spectrum they stand on and how they view those standing on the other).⁹ Sociologist Mary Pattillo-McCoy, in her book *Black Picket Fences*, discusses how some younger African Americans' efforts "to keep it real" are reflected in their succumbing to a "ghetto trance," a preoccupation with the cultural artifacts (such as music and clothing) and public interactive styles presumably embraced by lower-income African Americans (the often overdetermined media proliferation of such images notwithstanding).¹⁰ She asserts that the allure of the street by some of the so-called decent African Americans keeps this historical divide

in the African American community in play.

Street and *decent* can be inflammatory terms (both inside and beyond academic circles), yet they remain pivotal constructs in all kinds of considerations of African American public conduct (whether within academia or outside of it). They also appear somewhat less inflammatory when transformed into the notions of *real* and *proper* and, subsequently, into the nomenclature of "keeping it real" and "keeping it proper." Obama's balance between keeping it real and keeping it proper relies upon a careful interplay of street and decent in his past and present public behavior.

Obama's various efforts to keep it real are made evident in his autobiographical writings and in the various publications about his life.¹¹ This body of work provides ample testimony to his somewhat wayward youth: by his own admission, he consumed illegal substances and was aimless and misguided throughout a good portion of his adolescence. His inconsistent performance in school and his use of illegal substances reflect a common (but by no means universal) portrait of urban-based African American males. Yet Obama's youthful behavior has not firmly positioned him on the prototypical *street* side of African American masculinity. This outcome is in part because he had to learn much about African American urban communities while already entering adulthood; his community of rearing was in Hawaii, a place that, despite having pockets of deep poverty, escapes the imagination of many as the kind of place where black Americans come from, especially those who appear to be "from the streets." Still, Obama's youthful indiscretions have allowed him to draw selectively from his past to situate himself as having not always been the tradi-

tionally decent political figure. He can then, perhaps, appear more “real” than other contemporary political figures such as George Bush or Bill Clinton. If not true street credibility, Obama’s past has given him social credibility of another sort – enough for him at least to appear to have been keeping it real.

Obama also (and quite conscientiously) maintains a public image of proper professional and personal conduct that is consistent with the social desirability engendered by “keeping it proper.” Evidence of this image is found in a number of his pre- and post-election speeches to African American organizations, in which he emphasizes a personal responsibility thesis. Perhaps the most notable of such talks are the address delivered to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during its annual convention in 2009 and his 2008 Father’s Day address delivered at the Apostolic Church of God in Chicago on June 15, 2008. In both cases, Obama seemed consciously to de-emphasize or ignore structural factors such as high unemployment in discussing the outcomes associated with African Americans men’s underachievement in various societal arenas as well as their consistent failures in the family. The accentuation of personal responsibility and agency appears as well in his talks about education and the African American community. Here, he has stressed the so-called acting white thesis as a durable factor in the underperformance of African American students, especially males.

This pattern of assessing the African American social condition, in general, and the state of African American males, in particular, reflects more than what some may regard as mild social conservatism. Rather, it serves as a clear example that those who aim to keep it proper campaign for respectability (to borrow a

term from Elijah Anderson) as much as street people do. Obama’s efforts to campaign in this way, however, do not come across as socially conservative rhetoric to serve practical political ends. He avoids this charge largely because he addresses these topics from the perspective of having been directly victimized by the kinds of problematic men he talks about (Obama’s father was a minimal part of his early life) or as having been the kind of individual (an underachiever, for one) who he is challenging to be better. He strives to keep it real, then, at the same time he aims to keep it proper.

The keep-it-proper dimensions of his public persona are supported by what Stanford University law professor Richard Thompson Ford explains as Obama’s ability to reflect none of the rage, alienation, and self-doubt that were strongly identified with the previous generation of African Americans (particularly African American men).¹² Obama appears to reject a prototypical African American ultra-masculinity in favor of what Ford and others have referred to as a post-civil rights era public style.

Interestingly, Obama’s capacity to break with the more traditional imagery of African American masculinity arises, at least in part, by the public role his wife, Michelle Obama, has performed, first on the campaign trail and now as first lady. In recent scholarly assessments of her public style, Michelle Obama has been viewed as upholding some traditional notions of the African American woman vis-à-vis depictions of her as the “angry black woman.”¹³ Accordingly, literary scholar Elizabeth Alexander attributed part of Michelle Obama’s role in the campaign to be the voice of the angry African American man in lieu of her husband, who could not afford to be portrayed in such a way while campaigning for the

White House.¹⁴ Moreover, political scientists Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and Melanye Price discuss Michelle Obama's appropriation of what historian and political scientist Manning Marable has called the black messianic leadership style often attributed to black men, thus making it safe for Obama not to have to do so.¹⁵ Hence, at least some of Obama's capacity to keep it proper in the public domain is contingent on his wife's efforts to keep it real in her own public engagements.

While it is far too early to tell, the public black masculinities of Barack Obama may amount to much more than an opportunity for public consideration of the extent to which his public identity mirrors his private sense of self. For black Americans, there are more practical political stakes involved. This is in no small way due to the fact that many African Americans became increasingly attentive to the electoral process at some point after Obama declared his candidacy. I am careful here to say attentive to the *electoral process*, rather than simply *politics*, because whether or not they vote, black Americans have consistently been politically aware.¹⁶ Political expression for many black Americans emerges in the barbershop, beauty salon, bar, and other spaces that constitute the public sphere for black America. As scholars have documented, that expression is rooted in sarcasm, irony, and cynicism, fueled by a consistently held sentiment that the American political arena has never fully embraced African Americans as citizens, nor has it made the issues and concerns most important to them a central part of American politics (as indicated by reference to such matters as *special interest politics*). Hence, African Americans have a long-standing history of being political. What is different

about the present moment is that African Americans are now attentive to electoral politics and curious about, if not convinced of, the possible goods it may deliver, whether tangible or symbolic. The mere presence of an African American man in the White House validates many black Americans' dreams and hopes for American society; and it is in this sense that Obama functions most effectively as a symbol.

For African American men (and black Americans more generally) who have never before been able to connect with a president along racial lines, their sense of closeness to Obama is not as transparent or simplistic as it may seem. Aside from what is most apparent – that black Americans are experiencing someone like them occupying the White House – Obama's presidency may be most interesting sociologically for the diversity of reactions, particularly across class divisions in black America, that it produces.

Lower-income black American men may simply hope that the Obama presidency will usher in improvements to their life condition. Perhaps, as some such disadvantaged men who I have researched in the past year have said, because Obama knows a little more about the lives they lead he may do more for them than other presidents did. Of course, many others believe that Obama is today so enmeshed in the social world of the privileged that he no longer has to devote significant attention, save for a few speeches, to the plight of the most downtrodden and marginalized.

Another dimension of the Obama phenomenon with substantial bearing on the African American class divide relates to how his public persona encourages renewed thinking about what it means to be "legitimately" black. In recent years, there has been substantive discussion about how blackness has been construed

as authentic to the extent that it reflects patterns of discourse and public appearance often associated with hip-hop culture or some variation of styles expressing an oppositional or counter-mainstream orientation (keeping it real).¹⁷ Adorned in business suits and well versed in the lexicon of mainstream professional America, Obama represents none of the oppositional or counter-mainstream styles. However, many would argue that there are aspects of his interactive styles that reflect an urban, African American cultural flavor: recall, for example, the celebratory fist-bumps he shared with Michelle following his primary and election-day victories – not the kind of public demeanor usually associated with African American white-collar professionals and politicians. In terms of cultural styles, Obama may appear to stand squarely between the class divides in black America.

Ultimately, the balance between keeping it real and keeping it proper rests somewhere on the continuum between low-income black Americans, who have been unfairly circumscribed by the underclass label and its attendant imagery, and post-civil rights era black American professionals, who have access to social and private places that distinguish them from less-privileged African Americans. Various sociologists and social scientists have examined the chasm between these class-defined cohorts of black Americans.¹⁸ Public reaction to Obama's life experiences, and to his behavior as president, situates him as a potentially pivotal figure in determining the state and significance of that chasm in the future.

Barack Obama has lived a life very different from many Americans. Sales of his books and the positions he has attained in government have made him a wealthy and prominent man. Yet he has encoun-

tered forms and types of disadvantage that have never been a part of the lives of many other wealthy, prominent people. He is a black American, but he has lived in places that do not resemble the social words often associated with black America. His parentage (a white American mother and a Kenyan father) does not immediately conjure up thoughts of the typical black American family.

Although only time will tell the extent to which African Americans ultimately believe in his capacity to do so, Obama appears to be uniquely positioned both to keep it real and to keep it proper. His quest to maintain that balance allows many middle-class African Americans who strive to do the same to feel a sense of connection with him. As a middle-class professional who now lives in a college town, but who has direct roots in the kind of economically disadvantaged milieu where many black Americans live, I, as well, have a vested interest in working to keep it both real and proper. More specifically, my spouse and I aim to raise our two sons to be proper, at least according to our definitions of the term. But we also try to raise them to keep it real. In our case, achieving this balance means that they do not develop a snobbishness or elitism with regard to less-privileged black Americans who do not often share social space with us. It means consistently exposing them to Detroit (where my oldest son commutes from Ann Arbor to go to school), Harlem, Brooklyn, and other places where African Americans who are not as fortunate as we are have carved out lives for themselves, so that these people are not exoticized, vilified, or despised.

Just as important, though, it means strongly encouraging our sons to resist the romanticizing that is all too common today on college campuses (among other places), where middle-class African

American youth assume the posture of many urban, low-income residents in order to foster some crude demonstration of how “real” they happen to be. One of the most potent effects of the Obama presidency may not have much to do with his policies, but with how his image serves to resolve or proliferate class-based tensions in black America: how he negotiates what it means to be

black and how people classified as such should function in social spaces. Class divisions in the African American community will exert a strong influence on how blacks read and react to varied aspects of Obama’s identity and social conduct. In turn, these divisions will shape African Americans’ sense of either closeness or distance to him.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See Jabari Asim, *What Obama Means . . . for Our Culture, Our Politics, and Our Future* (New York: William Morrow, 2009); Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “For Obama, Nuance on Race Invites Questions,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2010; Kevin Alexander Gray, *The Decline of Black Politics: From Malcolm X to Barack Obama* (London: Verso, 2008); Adia Harvey Wingfield and Joe R. Feagin, *Yes We Can?: White Racial Framing and the 2008 Presidential Campaign* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Manning Marable and Kristen Clarke, eds., *Barack Obama and African American Empowerment: The Rise of Black America’s New Leadership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Gwen Ifill, *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).
- ² For example, Manning Marable, “Racializing Obama: The Enigma of Post-Black Politics and Leadership,” *Souls* 11 (1) (2009): 1–15.
- ³ Ronald is a pseudonym. The research project he participated in, nearly a decade ago, is culminating in a manuscript entitled “Black Men Rising: Navigating Race, Engaging Mobility.” In this work, I explore the views of a small group of African American men in their late-teens and twenties who were born into poverty but engineered paths toward high-skilled blue-collar or white-collar professional careers. I have remained in contact with Ronald over the years since we first worked together.
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Immigration: The New American Dilemma

Roger Waldinger

On July 3, 1984, *The Wall Street Journal's* editorial page called for a laissez-faire immigration policy, allowing labor to flow as freely as goods. In a salute to immigrants, the editors asked, would anyone “want to ‘control the borders’ at the moral expense of a 2,000-mile Berlin Wall with minefields, dogs, and machine-gun towers?” Answering “no,” the editors instead proposed a constitutional amendment: “There shall be open borders.”¹ In this manner, the *Journal* celebrated every July 4, until the events of September 11, 2001, made it difficult to adhere to the old-time libertarian faith. While American businesses and economists have continued to believe that more immigrants are better than fewer, most Americans see the matter differently. Much to the public’s frustration, America’s government has been unable to reduce immigration; only the Great Recession of 2009 managed to curb the flow of migrants crossing U.S. borders.

From the perspective of the developing world, migration controls imposed by the United States and other rich democracies are all too effective, deterring millions from sharing the good fortune enjoyed by the residents of wealthy countries. Given that people from the poorest countries have the most to gain from crossing borders, opening the doors even modestly would yield a significant benefit for the world’s poor. In fact, if rich countries allowed their labor forces to rise by a mere 3 percent, the gains to citizens of poor countries

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would exceed the costs of foreign aid by a factor of almost five.²

However, the public in America and elsewhere in the West does not view the matter from the perspective of people in the developing world. Rather, the preferred course entails spending money to prevent migrants from moving across borders (in which case, their needs could not be so easily ignored). The United States spends almost \$20 billion a year on immigration enforcement alone, amounting to 60 percent of its expenditures on foreign aid.³ Still, for the lucky migrants who make it into the “promised land,” getting through the door produces far more benefits than the aid targeted at those willing to accept their fate at home.

Unable to depress immigration to the level the public demands, the U.S. government has instead sought to demonstrate that *something* can be done: policy is aimed at fortifying the border, deporting immigrants, and building new walls separating U.S. citizens from their non-citizen neighbors. As a result, the “circle of the we” has narrowed, yielding a steady restriction of immigrant rights and an ever-growing gap between democracy and demography. Put differently, inequality between natives and foreigners is increasingly upheld by law; basic rights are beyond the reach of immigrants, who not only are deprived of membership, but often cannot obtain even a driver’s license.

This is the shape of the new dilemma that America confronts. The older American dilemma – one that is not fully resolved – was distinctively American, rooted in the specific circumstances under which the country was established: that is, through coerced migration, enslavement, and the social construction of race that built and reinforced the boundary between free and enslaved. With the birth of the United States, practice and

principle diverged, as continued racial oppression meant that America failed to implement the core principles it avowed. Ending racial exclusion entailed a struggle for citizenship, with the civil rights revolution extending citizenship to all individuals – not just those of European ancestry. Later, in the post-civil rights era, the cultural differences between Americans of various nationalities or ethnicities came to be seen as valued assets of a diverse society rather than foreign traits to be discarded. These changes notwithstanding, citizenship status and citizenship rights do not yet align perfectly: African Americans, as well as a variety of other groups, remain disadvantaged despite citizenship’s promise of equality. Thus, America must hold true to its promise to ensure that all *Americans* are first-class citizens.

In that better America, the full privileges of citizenship would belong to *all* Americans; however, even an expanded, fully robust *American* citizenship would not extend rights beyond the water’s edge. For that reason, international migration is a global dilemma, one that America and other rich democracies experience in similar ways. The older American dilemma was caused by “enduring anti-liberal dispositions” that were contrary to the country’s founding principles.⁴ By contrast, international migration involves a contradiction that is not specific to one nation but inherent to liberalism and the liberal nation-state, wherever it may be.

That contradiction stems from the fact that the liberal nation-state is the state, not of humanity at large, but rather *of, by, and for* some particular subset of humanity – namely, *the people*. The people may well be diverse, and a variegated population is always crisscrossed by conflict. It is also distinct from the other national peoples located beyond the state’s borders.

Maintaining a national community *demands* that the people be bounded, lest there be no members with interests reflected in and represented by *their* state. However, those boundaries obstruct the path of migrants seeking to cross *national* borders in order to attain the most classical of liberal goals: getting ahead by virtue of their own effort. Keeping migrants out *requires* discrimination against those people who happened to have the bad luck of being born on the wrong side of the national border. The commitment to ration entries well below the levels that unhindered migration would produce *compels* selection of a favored few, chosen not on merit but on criteria designed to meet the needs and preferences of citizens. While states can try to control borders, that effort never fully succeeds. Consequently, the move to regulate flows across national boundaries *inevitably* produces a new category of person: namely, the “illegal” immigrant. Because the citizenry needs the stability and commitment that come with membership, passage across the internal boundary of citizenship is *never* guaranteed to all persons who happen to cross the territorial boundary. Hence, the admission of strangers *invariably* creates new forms of de jure inequality, separating citizens from aliens and distinguishing among aliens by virtue of their right to territorial presence. For these reasons, international migration confronts America with a new dilemma, producing a conflict of “right against right” from which no escape can be found.

Modern liberal states *could* follow the motto inscribed on the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your hungry. . . .” In practice, none do; rather, the impulse to control immigration is nearly universal. In restricting immigration, the United States and other gov-

ernments of the developed world are responding to their peoples’ desires. As shown by the 2005 wave of the World Values Survey, opposition to free movement across borders is nearly universal: just 7.2 percent of residents surveyed from nations belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) voiced support for the idea that their countries should “let anyone come,” with Americans slightly less inclined to support open borders than Germans – even though the former considers itself a nation of immigrants and the latter long insisted that it was not a country for immigration. Indeed, almost half of all Americans wanted “strict limits,” and 7.6 percent wanted an absolute ban on immigrants – making Americans more restrictionist than nationals elsewhere in the OECD, to say nothing of the Germans. The Pew Research Center’s 2007 Global Attitudes Survey revealed the same pattern: the residents of rich democracies support foreign trade and free markets, but the idea that people should move as freely as goods has no appeal. Large majorities everywhere prefer rigorous controls: 75 percent of Americans thought that immigration should be further controlled and restricted, once again outdistancing Germans as well as residents of the remaining OECD countries.⁵

Americans not only view immigration similarly to nationals in other rich democracies; maintaining immigration control is one of the rare issues on which Americans themselves agree. Data from the 2004 International Social Survey Program, a multicountry survey coordinated with the U.S. General Social Survey, affirm that when it comes to migration policies, America is not exceptional. As Table 1 shows, 55 percent of Americans would like to see immigration reduced, proving themselves to be less

Immigration: The New American Dilemma Table 1
 Percent of Respondents Who Said Immigration Levels Should Be Reduced, Stay the Same, or Be Increased

	<i>Immigration Levels Should:</i>		
	Be Reduced	Stay the Same	Be Increased
U.S. Respondents			
All	55%	35%	10%
By Race/Ethnicity			
Whites	59	34	7
Blacks	54	33	14
Hispanics	37	38	24
By Ideology			
Liberals	43	44	13
Conservatives	62	31	7
By Party Affiliation			
Strong Democrats	50	33	17
Strong Republicans	64	31	5
Non-U.S. Respondents			
Germans	73	22	5
All Other OECD Countries	54	34	14

Source: U.S. data are from the 2004 General Social Survey. Data for other OECD countries are from the 2003 International Social Survey Program.

restrictionist than Germans but more restrictionist than the residents of all other OECD countries. Not all Americans share this opinion; however, divisions do not fall along the usual cleavages. Regardless of group or political affiliation, only numerical minorities – and small ones at that – favor expanded migration, a view endorsed by roughly a quarter of Hispanics, 17 percent of strong Democrats, and 14 percent of

African Americans. By contrast, majorities of most categories – including whites, blacks, strong Democrats, and strong Republicans – favor reducing immigration; this view is held by more than one-third of Hispanics and more than four-tenths of liberals.⁶

Thus, the immigration policy preferred in today's democracies entails discrimination against foreigners on the wrong side of the border: it is what the people

want. Yet policy-makers and citizens alike understand that zero immigration is neither a feasible nor a desirable goal; they also realize that many more immigrants would arrive were there no controls at all. Hence, immigration policies in the United States and other developed countries are designed to keep the door only partially open, so as to select just a small portion of the many would-be immigrants ready to leave home for a brighter future abroad.

Today, selection takes a different form than it did when the last age of mass migration came to an end after World War I. Though the portals were never shut entirely, the lucky outsiders who gained entry after the war were almost always selected on the basis of national background; migrants with ethnic backgrounds similar to those of the nation's dominant groups were deemed most appealing. In the twenty-first century, selection by ethnic origin is in retreat, increasingly replaced by an alternative principle that sociologist Christian Joppke has called "source country universalism."⁷

In a sense, the end of ethnic selection was tied to the process by which America solved, or at least alleviated, its older dilemma. Ethnic selection fit poorly with the ideological environment that swept through rich democracies after World War II. As a result, the traditional settler societies – Australia, Canada, and the United States – all felt obliged to discard the ethnically driven policies they had put in place several decades before. For the United States, the 1924 National Origins Act, which drastically curtailed immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe and prohibited immigration from Asia, was an embarrassment, undermining the U.S. claim to lead the "free world." In 1965, the apogee of the civil rights movement provided the

essential fillip needed to move to a different, more open system – albeit one that constrained options for legal immigration from Mexico.⁸

What is true of the United States generally holds for the rest of the developed world: policies discriminating on the basis of ascribed characteristics are, if not taboo, at least in retreat. As Joppke argues, liberal states seek neutrality when it comes to the ethnic or cultural differences among the *existing* people of the state. The same principle applies to *potential* members of the state. Thus, selecting on the basis of inborn characteristics – race, national origins, or ethnicity – no longer proves acceptable. The shift from ethnic to a more universal form of selection has transformed American immigration by producing a population with origins in the Americas, Asia, and, increasingly, Africa. Its advent inevitably will yield an America in which "minorities" will become the majority.

While selection on ethnic grounds may be obsolete, other forms of selection remain alive and well. Policies can use any number of selection criteria: these days, higher degrees or technical skills are the qualities preferred among those foreigners allowed to settle for good; by contrast, brawn suffices for the migrants allowed to move on a temporary basis to do dangerous, difficult, and dirty work – but who are then obliged to go home. Either option may be equally legitimate, though recruiting more foreign brains or cracking down on asylum seekers may raise the red flag of ethnic selection. However, to be acceptable, exclusion policy simply has to be applied universally, focusing not on the color of an immigrant's skin, but on the number and mix of immigrants most likely to advance a country's competitive position in today's global, interconnected world – and keeping out the rest. In-

deed, door-keeping is biased toward those foreigners who bring the most to the table: virtually all developed countries allow for temporary migration of skilled workers, and most encourage their permanent migration as well (which is to say that developed countries are keen on creaming the developing world). By contrast, impeding or barring permanent migration of unskilled workers is a widely shared goal.⁹

Put differently, citizens decide which aliens may enter. Residence is necessary to acquire citizenship; thus, existing club members determine the rules by which newcomers gain membership. For the most part, the rules reflect the preferences of people who did not obtain citizenship on merit, but rather inherited it as a birthright. Not surprisingly, the rules reinforce those privileges relative to those who want entry into the club. Club members have *some* obligation to admit persons in flight from persecution, whether found abroad (refugees) or on home soil (asylees); by and large, refugee admissions are kept tightly controlled. Otherwise, selection is based on what is good for club members: that is, brains or brawn for employers and nepotistic ties for ordinary citizens.

Discrimination against the aliens on the wrong side of the border is so natural as to be invisible; to many citizens, it hardly bears mention. Today, migrants “have a right to have rights,” the basic fundament of citizenship famously described by Hannah Arendt in 1951; even the undesirables are no longer cast out of humanity as they were in the mid-twentieth-century world she depicted.¹⁰ Lack of citizenship status no longer implies lack of citizenship rights. Still, the package of rights that the United States and other democratic states make available to *all* persons found on their soil is fairly limited.

Hence, inequality inheres in the relationship between citizens and foreigners, whether resident or visiting. Rights and entitlements further vary depending on status. Not all legal immigrants are the same; refugees and asylees – persons who are certified victims of persecution elsewhere – have special entitlements that ordinary legal immigrants do not enjoy, which is precisely why developed states grant this status so reluctantly. “Non-immigrants,” who are present legally but only for sojourns of limited duration, lack the full range of privileges accorded legal residents. Other persons are present without authorization, but this, too, is a group with legally varying statuses. Some find themselves in a “twilight” zone: they lack permanent residency but may be en route to legal status; thus, they enjoy some protections while remaining vulnerable to deportation.¹¹ Others qualify for “temporary protected status” – still another liminal category reserved for persons whose presence may be unauthorized, but who have fled countries where disaster, civil war, or some other consideration makes return perilous. Others are simply unauthorized; they are not utterly bereft of rights or protections, but they do without many of the entitlements that citizens take for granted.

Thus, international migration – a product of categorical inequality *among* nations – inevitably produces categorical inequality *within* nations, yielding differences between citizens and aliens and among the various groups of aliens themselves. In the United States, however, the divergence between policy and public preference has caused the differences between those groups to widen. While Americans clamor for tighter borders, policy has veered in a different direction: foreign-born shares of the popula-

tion climbed from 4 percent in 1970 to 12.5 percent as of 2009; annual inflows of legal and undocumented immigration averaged one million during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

To some extent, the dynamics of the political process explain why policy has diverged from public preference.¹² Public views have generally been easy to ignore, as immigration usually ranks far below other issues in salience. Until recently, it has been difficult to draw attention to the issue, in large measure because opposition to immigration has yet to find an acceptable voice. Although some on the political fringe are willing to play the nativist card (activating the type of racist sentiments that fueled restrictionists' efforts a century ago), established political figures are not yet ready to head down that route. However, in contrast to its low position on the public's agenda, immigration has ranked high on the agenda of established interest groups from both the Right *and* the Left. On the one hand, employers are eager to tap into foreign sources of labor (whether high- or low-skilled), and on the other, ethnic groups and human rights activists feel an affinity toward immigrants and want America to be welcoming of newcomers. This coalition of strange bedfellows has long been mobilized to secure policies that produce expanded flows.

While policy favoring expansion has recently been replaced by stalemate, the impasse naturally favors perpetuation of the status quo. Moreover, once begun, migrations have a momentum of their own: the social networks linking settlers in the United States with their friends and relatives abroad reduce the costs and risks associated with migration. This reality is reinforced as settlers earning U.S. wages can effectively absorb the costs produced by ever-tighter restric-

tions.¹³ Once implanted in a workplace, recruitment networks funnel newcomers with great effectiveness; consequently, immigration has steadily diversified across industries and places.¹⁴ Stalemate is also consistent with the front door/back door divide – distinguishing legal from illegal immigration – that has characterized policy for the past nine decades. The government has put the brakes on legal immigration and made illegal border-crossing more difficult and more costly for those willing to take matters into their own hands. But more vigorous measures that might significantly curb illegal immigration have been avoided: by focusing enforcement on the border while abandoning internal enforcement at workplaces, the United States has implicitly opted for a policy that facilitates, rather than constrains, undocumented migration. By making border-crossing a more arduous, costly experience, policy has made the undocumented population both more selective – and therefore better able to avoid further detection – and more eager to settle in the United States for good, as the risks entailed in another unauthorized border-crossing are too much to bear.

To correct the divergence of public policy from the preferences of a public that insists on controls, the course of least resistance has been to widen formal differences between the people *of* the state and all the other people *in* the state. Facilitating that option is the fact that immigrants, though present on the territory, remain outside the polity. Of America's thirty-eight million foreign-born residents, just over one-third are citizens, having acquired the right to vote. Of the remaining two-thirds, roughly one-third is comprised of candidates for citizenship: that is, permanent residents who are deprived of the franchise but enjoy a broad – if

limited – panoply of rights. Another third consists of undocumented immigrants who enjoy far fewer protections and face ever-growing barriers to the transition to candidate-level membership.¹⁵

Hence, expanding admissions has gone hand in hand with both a restriction on rights and with a growing divergence between demography and democracy. Borders *within* the United States have been sharpened, as de jure inequality between citizens and foreign residents has grown. The rights and protections available to undocumented immigrants have undergone particular contraction. Undocumented immigrants are not utterly deprived of rights: children under age eighteen are guaranteed the right to schooling; and emergency rooms have to accept all patients, regardless of legal status. Otherwise, the pattern is one of exclusion. Once eligible for social security benefits – America’s most important and successful program of social provision – undocumented immigrants have lost any means of access. The many who contribute (via false or fraudulently obtained social security numbers) are permanently frozen out of the system, with no chance of ever benefiting from the contributions they make when in unauthorized status.¹⁶ Immigration legislation of the mid-1990s prohibited illegal immigrants from access to federal, state, and local benefits and mandated that state and local agencies verify that immigrants are fully eligible for the benefits they apply for. Undocumented immigrants are not confined to the back of the bus, but the possibility that they might obtain a driver’s license is an idea that a majority of voters opposes. At the same time, those voters show no interest in improving mass transit for individuals who are not supposed to drive – many of whom also work for the citizens who do not want to pay for foreigners’ hospi-

tal bills. Because they lack the right to drive, undocumented immigrants are also deprived of another fringe benefit: the fact that the driver’s license has become a de facto identity card.

Moreover, the wall between undocumented immigrants and candidate Americans has become less penetrable. Persons who once crossed the border without authorization can no longer transition to permanent residency without first returning to their home countries for an extended stay; for all practical purposes, unauthorized border entry is grounds for permanent exclusion from the United States. As the last amnesty for undocumented immigrants was approved a quarter-century ago, undocumented status is increasingly a long-term trait. Furthermore, any future amnesty is unlikely to be as generous as the amnesty of the past, which allowed eligible undocumented immigrants to gain legal status quickly. Rather, the more likely course is the one signaled by the last ill-fated effort at comprehensive immigration reform: the 2006 McCain-Kennedy bill that provided a multiyear transition out of undocumented status, with no guaranteed track to citizenship. As of this writing, the prospects for the type of comprehensive immigration reform that could yield amnesty of any sort appear increasingly dim.

Even foreigners interested in lifelong settlement who reside in the United States legally are not guaranteed membership in the people’s club; instead, citizenship is carefully rationed and its privileges increasingly restricted. The divide between citizens and permanent residents, which had narrowed in the aftermath of the civil rights era, has once again begun to widen. Legally resident non-citizens are no longer eligible for benefits that are now available to citizens alone; state and local agencies are forced to verify that im-

migrants are fully eligible for the benefits they apply for; and legal residents are at risk of losing their residence rights if they fall seriously afoul of the law.¹⁷ Unlike citizens, legal residents enjoy limited border-crossing rights. Residency rights can be lost if an immigrant has spent more than a year outside the United States; legal residents who received welfare or some other public benefit can lose the right to return to the United States after only 180 days out of the country. Most important, residency is not a guaranteed right: international law forbids governments from expelling their own citizens, but no such bar applies to non-citizens. Indeed, legislation passed in the 1990s made deportation a likelihood for non-citizens guilty of a number of crimes, including minor infractions. Interior deportation, once an unusual occurrence, is becoming a common reality, with deportations up from roughly 114,000 in 1997 to 396,000 in 2009. Though not the majority, immigrants legally present in the United States figure prominently in this group. Mainly long-term residents with family members living in the United States, most were deported for nonviolent crimes.¹⁸

Moreover, the challenge posed to democracy, given the influx of people living *in* the state who are not *of* the state, is one that Americans have generally preferred to ignore. As the size of the foreign-born population has grown, the proportion obtaining citizenship has declined. Failed efforts at naturalizing residents have become ever more common, and the cost of citizenship acquisition has risen sixfold (from \$100 to \$600 in constant dollars) over the past twenty years.¹⁹ In contrast to the last era of mass migration, when “alien voting” was a common phenomenon at state and local levels, non-citizens are almost universally barred from the polls.

Restriction from the franchise may not bother the individual alien; however, the consequences add up in socially meaningful ways. That disparity between demography and electorate yields concrete effects, in contrast to the turn of the twentieth century, when the state’s main job was to get out of the way.

In the twenty-first century, the made-in-America distinctions between citizens and foreigners of different types give the people *of* the state far greater influence than their presence among the people *in* the state would suggest. The case of California – the epicenter of contemporary immigration, containing almost 30 percent of the nation’s foreign-born population – demonstrates the dynamics at play. As of 2000, California’s whites were a minority of the population but made up 70 percent of the electorate and were overrepresented among voters in 2000 to a greater extent than they had been ten years before. Likewise, people with the traits of white voters – those who are older than fifty-five, do not have children living at home, are well educated, and earn higher incomes – vote, make political contributions, and participate in political parties at far higher rates than the younger, poorly paid, and poorly educated parents who predominate among the foreign-born. Moreover, tomorrow is likely to resemble today: forecasts for 2040 project that whites will make up just 26 percent of California’s population but will account for 53 percent of its voters.²⁰

What holds true in California applies nationwide, albeit to a lesser degree. The proportion of the adult population lacking citizenship grew from 2 percent in 1970 to 8 percent in 2009. Due to the increasing discrepancy between population and democracy, combined with the low skills and modest earnings of the immi-

grants left outside the polity, the question of “who is what” has had a steadily widening impact on “who gets what.” Non-citizens are poorer than citizens, a gap that has substantially widened over the past four decades. Moreover, the poorest of the non-citizens are those most firmly excluded from the polity: two-thirds of the immigrants with less than a high school education are in the United States illegally. But these are also the people whom the citizens entitled to influence policy and most likely to engage with politics are *least* inclined to help. Whereas the median voter has always been more selective – better educated and more affluent – than the median citizen, that discrepancy has remained relatively unchanged. By contrast, the gap between the median voter and the median resident (legal or otherwise) has grown, as the latter has fallen increasingly behind the former. Consequently, redistribution has become less attractive to the median voter because it requires sharing resources with non-citizens. Given that the burden of America’s growing inequality has been born disproportionately by non-citizens, the motivations to divide the pie more equitably have correspondingly declined.²¹

In the end, the United States has let circumstances take their course. Deciding not to decide, it has allowed mobili-

ty across the border to increase yet has proved unwilling to provide new foreign residents with membership in *the people* of the state. On the contrary, America, like other rich democracies, is doing more to constrain its new foreign residents from trying to get ahead by dint of their own efforts – just like everyone else. Policing the internal boundary between the people *in* the state and the people *of* the state is not attractive, but it is very hard to avoid if and when the external boundary cannot be better controlled. While a democratic state cannot tolerate a (quasi) fixed distinction between citizens and aliens who have long resided in the country, the problem does not appear to be one that disturbs many Americans in their sleep. On the contrary, it seems there is nothing better than gardeners or maids to whom one does not have to attend and whose voices will not ring in the public arena, at least not in the short term. To be sure, policy-making around immigration is always beset by a temporal illusion, focusing on short-term benefits, as opposed to the long-term costs which cannot be evaded. But the problem is that the very pressures making for ever-more trespassable borders are the same that make it easy to ignore the strangers in our midst. The new American dilemma, alas, is here to stay.

ENDNOTES

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Controversial Blackness: The Historical Development & Future Trajectory of African American Studies

Martha Biondi

The election of Barack Obama as president of the United States has prompted some observers to assert that the nation has overcome its history of white supremacy and moved into a “post-racial” era, making continued attention to race and racism passé and unnecessary. Radio and television host Tavis Smiley posed this provocation to his guests in a 2009 radio special on the fortieth anniversary of African American studies in American colleges and universities. He asked, is African American studies still necessary in the age of Obama? Eddie Glaude, Elizabeth Alexander, Greg Carr, and Tricia Rose – chairs of African American studies departments at, respectively, Princeton University, Yale University, Howard University, and Brown University¹ – each articulated important themes in the intellectual tradition of African American studies. Thus, their discussion is a useful lens through which to explore key themes in the historical development and future trajectory of the field.

Eddie Glaude and Greg Carr captured two truths about the history of African American studies. Glaude noted its origin in black student activism of the 1960s. The upsurge of campus activism in 1968 and 1969 was a critical component of the broader black freedom struggle. In contrast to the media-driven notion that Black Power was merely a slogan lacking concrete application, black college students successfully turned the concept into a genuine social movement. On some campuses,

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the students emphasized the black college graduate's responsibility to serve black communities. They saw black studies as a means of generating leaders for, and sharing intellectual resources with, neighboring black communities. Even more, they envisioned black studies as a means of training black students to one day return to, and help enact the self-determination of, their communities. But the black student movement also aimed to affect campus politics. On most campuses, the push for curricular transformation – alongside the fights for open admissions, affirmative action, black cultural centers, and black faculty, coaches, and advisers – was part of an intentional effort to redefine the terms of integration: away from assimilation into a Eurocentric institution and toward the restructuring of that institution and its mission. Students won many victories and launched major changes in campus culture, opportunity structures, and intellectual production, notwithstanding continued resistance and challenges.

Greg Carr offers a more critical interpretation of this history. African American studies, he notes, was “a concession” that began as “crisis management.”² Today, it bears remembering that in 1969, the majority of white academics and administrators doubted the scholarly gravitas of African American studies and viewed black studies as a means to appease student discontent. African American studies began its modern career in a context of insurgency and turmoil, and its advocates continually had to fight for resources and support. Carr argues that the real history of African American studies, as a serious, respected endeavor, lies in historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other black-controlled spaces, such as Atlanta's Institute of the Black World, an activist think tank of the 1970s. Indeed, HBCUs employed the schol-

ars who wrote pioneering studies of black life, namely, giants such as intellectual leader W.E.B. Du Bois, political scientist Ralph Bunche, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, and philosopher and educator Alain Locke. This intellectual tradition is at the heart of the black studies project. Moreover, Carter G. Woodson's Association for the Study of African American Life and History, founded in 1915, exemplifies the long history and autonomy of Africana intellectual life.

Still, this genealogy is contradictory and complex. A tidal wave of protest swept through HBCUs in the 1960s and 1970s. The outcry was inspired by a range of student grievances, most notably, criticism of white financial and administrative control, excessive regulation of student life, excessive discipline, inferior facilities and faculty, and outmoded or Eurocentric curricula. “Without question, the Black Power-Black Consciousness movement has been felt in the South,” wrote political scientist and activist Charles Hamilton, formerly a professor at Tuskegee Institute (now University); its biggest manifestation was the quest for a “Black University,”³ he said. Hamilton first articulated the concept of a black university in a 1967 speech on “The Place of the Black College in the Human Rights Struggle.” He called on black colleges to reject the white middle-class character imposed on them by white funders and to redefine their missions to provide greater aid and assistance to black communities. Later published in the *Negro Digest*, Hamilton's article spawned a yearly tradition of devoting an entire issue of the *Negro Digest* (later the *Black World*) to the idea of a black university.

According to Hamilton, the mission of the black university was to develop a distinctive black ethos; to prepare students

to help solve problems in poor black communities; and to offer a new curriculum, one that was relevant to contemporary needs but that also required a course in ancient African civilizations. "I am talking modernization," Hamilton asserted. "I propose a black college that would *deliberately* strive to inculcate a sense of racial *pride* and *anger* and *concern* in its students." The ideas in his essay illustrate the emerging view that the black intelligentsia was a relatively untapped and potentially radical leadership resource for the black liberation movement. "We need," Hamilton declared, "militant leadership which the church is not providing, unions are not providing and liberal groups are not providing. . . . I propose a black college that would be a felt, dominant force in the community in which it exists. A college which would use its accumulated intellectual knowledge and economic resources to bring about desired changes in race relations in the community." It would dispense with "irrelevant PhDs," he wrote, and "recruit freedom fighters and graduate freedom fighters."⁴

Given that schools such as Howard and the Atlanta University Center had been home to pioneers in black scholarship, what provoked the charge of Eurocentrism? Darwin T. Turner, dean of the graduate school at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, argued that the academic turn away from blackness emerged from the optimism spawned by early legal decisions supporting desegregation, the defeat of Fascism, and postwar affluence. Political repression, too, most likely was a factor. "The tendency for black educators to neglect materials related to Afro-American heritage intensified, I believe, during the early 1950s," Turner wrote. The many "indications of opening doors persuaded many blacks to discourage any education

which emphasized the existence of Afro-Americans as a body separate from the rest of America." As a result, "studies of Afro-American history, literature, sociology, economics, and politics were stuffed into the traditional surveys, which were already so overcrowded that important materials must be omitted." He felt that "integrated surveys" were necessary but insufficient "to provide Afro-Americans with the necessary understanding of their culture."⁵

Indeed, in 1968, several members of Howard's board of trustees "were shocked that courses in Black history, jazz and literature were not presently offered. 'We had many of these things in the 1930s' commented one member."⁶ Students there had taken over a building to press for a department of African American studies. They pressured Howard to identify itself as a black university and adopt an explicit mission of serving local black communities.

Black nationalist thought and action in this period were also directed toward transforming black education on white campuses. Much of the impetus to develop black studies came from exposure to the freedom schools of the Southern (and Northern) civil rights movement. Activists had come to view the entire nation's educational system as a contested and profoundly significant space: a means of racial domination, on the one hand, or a path to black empowerment on the other. Thus, as Greg Carr suggests, administrators may have viewed the introduction of black studies courses as "crisis management," but for students, the turn toward black studies reflected a genuine development in their approach to advancing the cause of black liberation.

Strikingly, this huge achievement of the black power movement immediately faced a crisis. With the students gone, who would design and develop this new,

and quite extensive, national black studies infrastructure? In 1970, less than 1 percent of those with a Ph.D. in the United States were black, and most of these scholars were over age fifty-five.⁷ In a further dilemma, quite a few traditionally trained specialists in African American subjects initially opposed the creation of African American studies as an autonomous unit, or were reluctant to risk their careers on an untested experiment. Many young black scholars probably questioned whether black studies would even last and may have viewed launching a career in the field as too risky. On this reluctance from black scholars, sociologist St. Clair Drake observed, “[T]hey want the security and prestige of being in a traditional department. Black Studies might be a fad, and they’d be left out in the cold.”⁸ At times, non-academics filled faculty positions; on occasion, immigrant scholars with little connection to the students’ political vision filled positions, generating new tensions and many local debates over the field’s responsibility and mission.

A view quickly took root among many elite academics that creating African American studies programs was smarter than creating departments: the former, by being formally affiliated with other departments, stood a better chance of attracting top scholars. Yet for all the scorn/neglect/resistance heaped on them, departments have defied the recurring predictions of their demise. Most student-founders preferred departmental status, owing to the department’s greater status and independence or, as the students would have put it, its autonomy and control. The more recent development of doctoral programs in African American studies has relied on departmental structures, even inducing Yale to convert its program – once held up as the national exemplar – to a department. Today, African American studies attracts

leading scholars, trains graduate students, and produces influential research, even though faculty still face occasions when they must explain or defend its existence.

The black studies movement has been marked by intense debates over its academic character. During and after the years of its emergence, black studies was criticized, internally and externally, on two interrelated grounds: that it lacked curricular coherence and that, by not having a single methodology, it failed to meet the definition of a discipline. As a result, many educators in the early black studies movement pursued a two-pronged quest for a standardized curriculum, on the one hand, and an original, authoritative methodology on the other. At the same time, many scholars in the black studies movement questioned whether either of these pursuits was desirable or even attainable. In other words, while some scholars have insisted that African American studies must devise its own unique research methodology, others contend that as a multidiscipline, or interdisciplinary discipline, its strength lies in incorporating multiple, diverse methodologies. In a similar vein, while some have argued for a standardized curriculum, others argue that higher education is better served by dynamism and innovation. I argue that the discipline’s ultimate acceptance in academe (to the extent that it has gained acceptance) has come from the production of influential scholarship and research and the development of new conceptual approaches that have influenced other disciplines. Pioneering scholarship and influential intellectual innovations, rather than standardized pedagogy or methodology, have been the route to influence in American intellectual life.

A tension between authority and freedom animates these debates. As late as

2000, an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reinforced the idea that multiple perspectives and methodologies had retarded the progress of African American studies. The author of an essay on the state of the field criticized the diverse character of African American studies courses at different universities: “The Ohio State class is chronological with a literary bent,” she wrote. “Duke’s take: cultural studies. The Penn course filters everything through a W.E.B. Du Bois lens, and N.Y.U. combines pan-Africanism with urban studies.” Of course, this sampling reflects the range one would find in the departments of history, sociology, or English at these same universities. But the author stresses disarray. “There’s a reason 30 years after the discipline developed that people still wonder whether the black-studies curriculum represents a coherent subject or a smorgasbord,” she concludes. In this view, the discipline’s strengths – “eclectic, expansive, experimental curricula” – are also its weaknesses.⁹

James B. Stewart, a former president of the National Council of Black Studies, shares this anxiety about disarray. In his view, “We do everything – the diaspora, sex, history, language, economics, race.” Yet he seems oblivious to the fact that each of these areas has been vital terrain for research innovation. “We don’t have a paradigm,” he laments. “That is why we don’t make progress.” If achieving this unified paradigm is the measure of progress, then Stewart, judging forty years of African American studies, sees none. Longtime black studies educator Abdul Alkalimat echoes Stewart’s view that “standardization means the discipline exists.”¹⁰ Arthur Lewin, a professor of black and Hispanic studies at Baruch College, agrees that black studies lacks “a coherently stated rationale,” a consequence, in his view, of having

“burst full-blown upon the academic scene a generation ago.” He envisions a “grand theory” that would unify the views of black nationalists and “inclusionists” as well as benefit from the insights of Afrocentrism while moving beyond its ethnocentrism.¹¹

Scholars and teachers influenced by Afrocentricity have been among the most consistent advocates of the need to create a distinctive methodology. For Temple University scholar Molefi Asante, Afrocentricity “is the only way you can approach African American Studies” because it puts ancient African knowledge systems at the center of analysis.¹² For Greg Carr of Howard University, the challenge is to draw on “deep Africana thought,” the traditions of “classical and medieval Africa,” for guidance in enacting positive social change for African descendants. A key mission of African American studies, he believes, should be to reconnect “narratives of African identity to the contemporary era.” His department taps “into the long genealogy of Africana experiences” in order to assess how to improve the world. Carr distinguishes this mission from the mission of African American studies on other campuses. “We’re not trying to explain blackness for white people” or looking at “our contributions to American society.” Rather, the approach at Howard is “an extension of the long arc of Africana intellectual work.”¹³ The inclination to look for insights in the precolonial African past, rejecting European modernity and thereby hoping to escape or resolve the legacies of colonialism and enslavement, is fundamental to the approach that leading architects of Afrocentricity have taken. Indeed, for Ron Karenga, author of an early black studies textbook and the founder of Kwanzaa, “the fundamental point of departure for African American Studies

or Black Studies is an ongoing dialogue with African culture. That is, continuously asking it questions and seeking from it answers to the fundamental questions of humankind.”¹⁴

Whether proponents of Afrocentricity or a different approach, most scholars in African American studies reject the effort to impose a single methodology, seeing it as unrealistic and stifling. Rhett Jones, cofounder and longtime chair of the department of Africana studies at Brown University, was an early critic of the “one size fits all” approach to the discipline. “In its early years, Black studies wasted considerable human, intellectual, and material resources in battles over finding the master plan for the study of Black people,” he argues. Similarly, he feels that “much energy was also wasted on responding to the charge by America’s Eurocentric, racist disciplines that Black Studies had no methodology of its own. Neither did the Eurocentrists. And they still don’t.” He points out, “Historians are no more agreed on methodology or theory than are anthropologists ... sociologists or philosophers.”¹⁵ In contrast to those who see pluralism in black studies as a weakness, Jones believes that this element was crucial to the development and staying power of the field. Pluralism was “a credit to black studies,” he observes, as “its founders realized there could be no master plan as to how the discipline should serve black Americans.”¹⁶ Historian Francille Rusan Wilson similarly resists the effort to impose a single approach. “There’s not one way to be black or to study black people,” she asserts. “The discipline is quite alive,” in her view, “and the differences indicate that.”¹⁷ Political scientist Floyd Hayes concurs, stating, “One must ask whether there should be conformity to a model curriculum and a single theoretical or ideological orientation in African Amer-

ican Studies.” Moreover, Hayes believes it is important to cultivate “a more flexible and innovative atmosphere” so that “African American Studies can continue to grow and develop.”¹⁸

Scholars have endeavored to move beyond the notion that African American studies was merely “additive knowledge” by emphasizing that it constitutes a profound critique of the major disciplines and seeks to transform intellectual life generally in the Western academy. For Eddie Glaude, African American studies is about “pushing the boundaries of knowledge production” and influencing fields of study across the university. African American studies at its best, in Glaude’s view, is “challenging the ways we know the world.” Elizabeth Alexander shares this emphasis on humanistic transformation and regards African American studies as an essential component of “being fully educated.” Tricia Rose’s approach to the question of the field’s focus is in many respects exemplary of dominant trends. She expresses agreement with Greg Carr that an important African intellectual tradition preceded European colonial contact, but in her view, scholars must confront the transformations wrought by processes of enslavement and colonialism. “We are in the west, in the so-called New World,” she contends, and should “examine the circumstances we are in, examine the hybridities that have emerged from it.”¹⁹

The early black studies movement coincided with major anticolonial struggles in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau; struggles against white settler regimes in southern Africa; and a widening African solidarity movement among black American radicals. According to (pioneering scholar of the African diaspora) St. Clair Drake, “[T]he country was deeply mired in the Vietnam War

but many black youth were much more interested in how the war against Portugal was going in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau than in the war in Vietnam.” In his view, it was critical to understand that the “*modern Black Studies movement emerged within this international context.*”²⁰ Still, a global consciousness in black studies was not simply a product of postwar solidarity struggles. It has shaped black historical writing ever since its origins in the nineteenth century. Black historiography has been both invested in rewriting the Western distortion of African peoples and societies and keenly interested in erecting a powerful counter-discourse to the statelessness, dispersal, subjugation, and dehumanization of Africans in diaspora. W.E.B. Du Bois is most famously associated with this effort, but its practitioners are numerous.²¹

Although the black studies movement is thought of as resolutely U.S.-based, many of its early scholars tried to persuade universities and funders to connect formally the study of continental Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. There was widespread agreement that the typical American curriculum had “ignored the African heritage of African Americans, characterizing them as having begun their existence in North America as a *tabula rasa* – blank slates to be imprinted with Euro-American Culture.” This was a difficult battle in part because African studies had been programmatically established after World War II as a result of Cold War pressures to develop knowledge about an area of the world that the United States viewed as part of Soviet strategic designs. These programs, in the words of scholar Robert L. Harris, “had no real link to Black people in the New World.” African studies “became wedded to a modernization theory that measured African societies by Western standards. African history, culture and poli-

tics were explored more within the context of the colonial powers than with any attention to African cultural continuities in the Western hemisphere.” Black American intellectuals had long resisted this “compartmentalization of knowledge about Black people.”²²

Administrators initially sought to limit the scope of African American studies to the United States, but early efforts to include Africa as well as the diaspora in black studies departments and professional organizations ultimately bore fruit. After four decades, it has become increasingly common to encounter departments of African and African American studies or departments of Africana studies, which explicitly take Africa, the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America as their subject. Campuses as diverse as the University of Illinois, Dartmouth College, the University of Minnesota, Duke University, Harvard University, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Kansas, Stanford University, the University of Texas, and Arizona State University join together African and African American studies. Of course, the limitations of budgets and faculty size may interfere with fully realizing the promise of interdisciplinary, truly global coverage. But the crucial point is that the black studies movement ultimately achieved a degree of success in undoing the colonialist compartmentalization of research and knowledge that had insisted on severing African studies from African American studies.

At various junctures in its forty-year history, African American studies has been steeped in a discourse of crisis. In the 1970s, many of the discipline’s units were marked by declining course enrollments, budget cuts, part-time faculty, and continued questioning of their legitimacy and scholarly rigor. The rise of

black women's studies in the 1980s provided an extremely significant counterweight to these trends and proved critical to re-visioning the field. An outpouring of scholarship and literature by and about black women helped revitalize African American studies – and raise its stature. In many respects, this development is ironic, given the patriarchal character of the early black studies movement. Male scholars dominated leadership of the field and often resisted research and pedagogy on gender and sexuality, casting these topics as beyond the boundaries of black studies. But as historian Darlene Clark Hine noted in 1990, after summarizing a body of pioneering black feminist scholarship, “[T]he study of black women is the current frontier in black studies.”²³ In more recent years, the rise of black queer studies has further pushed African American studies to confront the homophobic and hetero-normative assumptions that shaped early pedagogy and scholarship in the field. According to Tricia Rose, on the discipline's fortieth anniversary, “[G]ender, class and sexuality are more and more a part of the field.”²⁴ The study of intraracial divisions – along various axes – has assumed a prominent place in African American studies.

Yet in this era of escalating income inequality, mass incarceration, permanent unemployment, and global economic restructuring, many African American studies programs and/or scholars maintain a commitment to using scholarship and the resources of the academy to address the multiple crises facing black communities. Social conditions are dire for large segments of the African American population, as the middle class shrinks, HIV/AIDS incidence soars, jobs disappear, and the number of families living in poverty increases. The left-wing, or progressive, tradition in black studies

has been most visible in curricula that seek to join and engage traditions of social resistance and critique. Individuals such as sociologist and radio host Michael Eric Dyson and scholar and civil rights activist Cornel West make such interventions to a mass media audience, but more typical are the less well-known black studies scholars and teachers who are activists in their local communities on issues ranging from immigration to health care, employment, education, and housing. Black studies, along with other interdisciplinary fields, has created leaders in producing scholarship and engaging in critical social analysis on issues ranging from the rise of neoliberalism to the development of the United States as a mass prison society with all its attendant social, economic, cultural, and political implications.²⁵

Returning to Tavis Smiley's question: what is the role of African American studies in the age of Obama? Princeton's Eddie Glaude argues that African American studies teaches “the skills to understand race and racism,” which in many respects is more urgent than ever as we face a post-racial discourse that refuses to acknowledge racism and racists. As Elizabeth Alexander puts it, the goal is not to be post-racial, but *post-racist*. Tricia Rose believes the independent mission of African American studies remains essential because “most academic knowledge in the west has not been race neutral.” The disciplines came “into formation inside ideological moments when white supremacy was profoundly dominant,” and this formation is relatively recent.²⁶ But has the mission of African American studies changed in other ways?

One change, commented on by many longtime professors in the field, concerns a shift in the composition of students taking black studies courses, from almost ex-

clusively black in the early days to multiracial in later years. Rhett Jones cites student diversity as the most striking difference from 1969: "In the early years our classes were almost entirely black. Now we know we will find a rainbow of Latino, Asian American, white and black students in our Afro-American Studies courses."²⁷ According to Elizabeth Alexander, 30 percent of students at Yale are of color. "What we do," in African American studies, she insists, "is for all of our students."²⁸ This shift is widely celebrated as a sign of the broad appeal of African American studies and the fact that a diverse group of students appreciates its centrality to a well-rounded liberal arts education. Yet this development also illustrates the shift away from the original Black Nationalist intent by some advocates of black studies – that is, to halt "the mis-education of the Negro" and instill black collegians with a strong racial consciousness. As the black liberation movement waned, the ambitious visions of the more radical Afro-American studies programs also waned, or were crushed, depending on the campus. And as employment prospects soured in the 1970s, black students pursued an agenda in higher education more closely tied to acquiring job skills and professional mobility. According to a business major at George Washington University at the time, "Black students are taking accounting instead of black history as a matter of survival. They're asking 'what can you do with Black Studies?'"²⁹

In more recent years, black students have faced a series of obstacles in their efforts to attend college. Forty years ago, student activists asserted a right to education and not only won open admissions and affirmative action but also increased financial aid. Many of these reforms have been repealed outright or dramatically weakened. The early black studies move-

ment was a vibrant development in both urban, working-class public institutions and elite research universities. This dual presence survives, but as the incorporation of African American studies by elite institutions coincides with the defunding of public institutions and the sharp rise in economic inequality in the United States, a widening chasm has formed between these locations, and distanced them from their shared histories. These developments have led some community-based black studies programs or veterans to question the contemporary direction of the field. The rise to public prominence of black studies scholars at Ivy League institutions likely fuels this feeling of estrangement. Olive Harvey College, a working-class public institution based on the South Side of Chicago, has been hosting an annual African American Studies Conference since 1977. On its thirteenth anniversary, conference convener Armstead Allen expressed concern that the new wave of black studies proponents had strayed too far from the founding mission. "From its inception, black studies has sought tangible, not just theoretical, connections to the everyday concerns of the African-American community," he said, contending that the field had moved in less relevant academic directions.³⁰

The relationship between African American studies and Latina/o, Asian American, and other ethnic studies is increasingly broached in this era of rapidly changing demographics and new racial discourses and configurations. On the one hand, African American studies is respected as a pioneer and looked to as a model of interdisciplinarity as well as institutional resourcefulness and longevity. As Rhett Jones rightly notes, "Ideas about multiculturalism, pluralism, and diversity are now central elements in higher education because of

black studies' many successes. Cynics and conservatives predicted that Africana studies would be a fad, but it has instead proved to be a strong and enduring part of higher education, shaping scholarship, teaching, and service." In addition, "African American studies serves as the model for ethnic studies, women's studies, Native-American studies, Latino studies and Asian-American studies."³¹ This modeling happened quickly on many campuses in California, where, in the late 1960s, radicalized Asian American and Mexican American students demanded curricular inclusion and recognition, and in New York City, where Puerto Rican students protested alongside African Americans in the 1969 uprisings that swept the City University of New York.

But the push for Latino/a, Asian American, and comparative ethnic studies came later in other parts of the country. In some instances, budgetary pressures and the seeming logic of the white/non-white divide have induced administrators to collapse heretofore independent black studies programs into umbrella ethnic studies units, introducing new anxieties into a discipline whose resources and stature, to the extent that it has them, have come relatively recently. In any event, African American studies will face many challenges and dilemmas as it adapts to a new intellectual/political/demographic landscape. For example,

Muslims in the United States have been targets of many forms of racial profiling in the years since the attacks of September 11, 2001, politicizing a new Muslim generation that has begun to assert itself on college campuses. These students are demanding a voice and place among ethnic studies and student-of-color organizations. Will African American studies approach this development as an opportunity to cultivate solidarity and sharpen and update its analysis of racism in the United States? Or will it ignore such concerns in favor of an exclusive focus on the culture, struggles, and dilemmas of African Americans?

Arguably the most exciting development for African American studies in the twenty-first century is the expansion of doctoral programs. The opportunity to train young scholars can only add to the growth, rigor, and institutional stature of the field. But ensuring the success of this development will necessitate further investments in order to enable departments to provide the additional mentoring and teaching graduate education requires. After forty years, it is now clear that African American studies has been one of a series of new departures in the academy that have dramatically altered the narrow, Western-oriented curriculum and culture of the American university. Perhaps a fuller appreciation of what has been accomplished can inspire hope in the possibilities that lie ahead.

ENDNOTES

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Inside back cover: President-elect Barack Obama walks onstage with his daughters, Natasha and Malia, and his wife, Michelle, as they arrive to address a crowd at Grant Park in Chicago, Illinois, to celebrate his victory on Election Day, November 4, 2008. Photograph © Shawn Thew/EPA/Corbis.

Thousands of people join a march in Washington, D.C., on September 12, 2009, to protest health care reform proposed by President Barack Obama. Organized by a conservative group called the Tea Party Patriots, the demonstration began at Freedom Plaza and ended at Capitol Hill. Photograph © Michael Reynolds/EPA/Corbis.



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