Endarch
Journal of Black Political Research

About
Endarch: Journal of Black Political Research is a double blind peer-reviewed journal published by Clark Atlanta University Department of Political Science in partnership with Atlanta University Center Robert Woodruff Library. The journal is an online publication. Endarch seeks to reflect, analyze, and generate activity, which will ultimately lead toward the expansion, clarification, and solidification of black political thought. For this purpose, the journal publishes articles that report original investigations and contribute new scholarship to the field of political science.

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Statement of Purpose*

In a decade characterized by the complete atrophy of all struggle from the sixties and the defection of most of the former participants, the principal question must be, why? What has happened consistently to denature and distort incipiently progressive impulses that appear among black people? That question must be answered if we are to build a movement, and it cannot be answered apart from careful analysis of the economic, political and sociological structures and functions of capitalism in all its national and international, social and existential mediations. It is time that the victims move seriously to grapple with Leviathan.

Endarch, as its name would suggest identifies with motion; not any haphazard or desultory movement but movement that is conscious of its origins and destinations. As an embodiment of aggregate but mutually consistent perspectives, this journal seeks to reflect, analyze and generate activity which will ultimately lead toward the expansion, clarification and solidification of Black political thought.

The conscious nature of movement is derived from a clear social and analytic methodology. An approach which views the world as a totality but also diaphanously understands that the components comprising this world are not of equal importance. With this in mind, and given Black peoples historical grounding in oppression and exploitation, Endarch sees of paramount importance those phenomena and groups of phenomena which operate in the system of oppression and exploitation. Recognition of such phenomena must lead to the discernment of those vital elements, the crucial essences of which define and condition the world. Our purpose is to expose those essences and through this explication illuminate the totality from the vantage point of a specific oppressed people. Such is the task of a conscious and critical black political thought imbued with the task of defining the black experience in politics. It is toward this goal that we aim.

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“Post-racial America and the Presidency of Barack Obama”

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Abstract

President Obama’s presidential victory in 2008 was seen as a historic moment, and many people claimed Obama’s election made America a post-racial society. However, since his election, Obama’s growing opposition assert that their antipathy is based on his party and policies, but this resistance may instead be rooted in a subtle racism. Though Obama has sought to transcend race, this opposition suggests that America is not at all a post-racial society.

Introduction

Ushering in a new style of running for president, Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign was innovative in its strategies and mobilization tactics. Appealing to liberals, independents, and disaffected Republicans in a way that crossed class, racial, ethnic, and party lines, Obama’s bid for president was race-neutral. In other words, Obama ran a deracialized campaign and sought to transcend his race, a significant departure from prior African American presidential campaigns. Some even considered Obama to be emblematic of a “post-racial brand.”¹ After NBC News’ Brian Williams called the election for Obama, he asked NBC News analyst Tom Brokaw for his reaction. Brokaw² said:

This is a very emotional moment for everyone in this country and for the world for that matter. This is not just a moment in American history; this is a profoundly important passage out of the deep shadows of our racist past that began with that first slave off-

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loaded on a ship. Race has been a curse for America for a long time.

With its sordid history of racism, the ascendency of Obama to the White House was interpreted by many as redemption, “a new day” in which America had finally stepped out of the shadows of its racist past. Others claimed that “the myth of racist white voters was destroyed by [the 2008] presidential election.”

What is more, Obama’s election in 2008 was seen not only as the beginning of a post-racial America, but also a post-partisan America. If not post-partisan, Obama’s victory in 2008 was at least post-Republican as it was considered transformative to such an extent that Obama was compared to the likes of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The November 24, 2008, cover of *Time* magazine even featured Obama in a convertible car with a cigarette in a silver holder à la FDR. Similarly, many considered the Republicans to have been irrevocably weakened by the 2008 elections. As Theda Skocpol said, “Reduced to a hard core centered in the once-Confederate South and the inner West, Republicans were virtually written off by many commentators in late 2008.”

However, opposition was hardly eviscerated as the Republicans made significant gains in the 2010 elections. While such electoral swings are not uncommon in American politics, the conservative backlash was a unique coalescence of both mainstream and fringe, including the Republican Party, the Tea Party, Fox News, and paramilitary groups. In what strikes one as unprecedented vitriol, some of those in the negative coalition against President Obama have

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questioned whether he is a natural-born American citizen, whether he is a Christian, whether he is truly patriotic, and, essentially, whether he legitimately occupies the White House as the President of the United States. Ironically, with all of the discussion after President Obama’s historic victory about this nation having become post-racial, it now appears that the election of Barack Obama has brought into focus the myth that America is a post-racial society.

After reviewing the literature on racism in America, this article looks at some of the demographic features of Obama’s winning coalition in 2008 and 2012 and why this coalition may have caused a backlash among some whites. Covering the opposition to Obama from numerous segments of the American population, particular attention is given to the Tea Party, a populist political movement staunchly opposed to Obama. As such, the results from the 2010 Multi-State Survey of Race and Politics, which inspects the attitudes of the Tea Party supporters on issues of race and character traits concerning blacks and President Obama, are critically examined here. Importantly, other elements of the oppositional coalition beyond the Tea Party will be examined, fleshing out the multifaceted, yet relatively homogeneous, opposition to Obama. Finally, several major public events involving President Obama, including the town hall meetings surrounding the passage of the Affordable Care Act, Obama’s healthcare program and the centerpiece of his legislative agenda during his first years in office, will be discussed as the backdrop against which the opposition manifested itself. Lastly, we hope to show that the continuing attacks on President Obama have not only had an impact on his effectiveness but also on the office of the presidency itself.
Literature Review

Race regulates, conditions, and controls. Formally and informally, half a century after the formal rejection of legal segregation and racial inequality, race continues to serve as the cornerstone of the contemporary social hierarchy. Simply, race still matters and racism is a constant. Race can even be thought of as similar to Foucauldian notions of power; like Foucault’s notion of power, race is encompassing and inescapable in our social world. Yet, race and racism are not static and immutable, but are dynamic as they are continually modified and continually shifting.\(^7\) That race and racism are dynamic has led some to distinguish between new racism and old racism. Regarding the latter, this form of racism was open and straightforward bigotry based on the idea of white supremacy.\(^8\) The “racial institutional orders”\(^9\) of old racism were chattel slavery and the Jim Crow South. Many consider the era of explicit racist positions to have faded.\(^10\) But, in its place is a new racism, which is “more indirect, more subtle, more procedural, more ostensibly nonracial.”\(^11\) Whereas the blatant prejudice of old racism was “hot, close, and direct,” the new subtle prejudice is “cool, distant, and indirect.”\(^12\)

This new racism has found a home in the American ethos, opposing changes to the status quo because policies aimed at decreasing inequality are believed to violate the traditional

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\(^12\) Meertens & Pettigrew,“Is Subtle Prejudice Really Prejudice?,” 54.
American values of individualism, the Protestant work ethic, and discipline. In other words, the new racism holds that nonwhites are “violating cherished values.” The new racism is part and parcel of a “color-blind racial order,” which insists that all Americans be judged by their character and not their color, thus preserving patterns of racial inequality and sustaining white advantages. New racism and the concomitant color-blind racial order perceive white achievements as having nothing to do with race but are attributed to hard work and merit. Accordingly, race-conscious policies are considered unnecessary and even a disadvantage to whites through reverse racism.

Many whites see race as a zero-sum game so that less inequality for nonwhites means more inequality for whites. With that said, some have argued that there may be an unconscious component to racism, and political scientist Marjorie Hershey said, “Although a small percentage of the American people is willing to express overt racism, social psychologists argue that a substantially larger proportion holds racially biased attitudes of which they may barely be conscious: what some sociologists term ‘racism without racists.’” Nonetheless, the claims of new racism are post-racial claims that are more ideological than empirical as they deny persistent structures and patterns of inequality in race relations.

In many respects, new racism was a response to the civil rights movement and the “urban crisis,” which became the crucible for an alliance between neo-liberals and right-wing traditionalists.

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conservatives. Specifically, out of the 1960s and 1970s was a concerted assault on social welfare and big government, as well as attacks on crime by emphasizing the need for “law and order” that could be achieved through “broken windows” policing. The discourse of new racism is a coded language. For example, Richard Nixon sought to attract disaffected Southern white voters by “appealing to the fears of whites in response to the growing political power and demands of African Americans.” Such appeals were made by Nixon through coded language, that is, with phrases like “law and order” and “B-U-S-I-N-G.” Such racial codes have been referred to as “dog whistle” racism and almost always allow a level of plausible deniability, permitting the perpetrator to feign ignorance.

Regarding new racism’s opposition to big government and welfare, some have posited that strong opposition to big government is a proxy for racism. Indeed, the rise of new racism and the shift in the discourse to emphasize limited government and self-reliance is very much indicative of the color-blind racial order. It is worth noting that the biological elements of old racism, that blacks were naturally and essentially deficient, can be seen in new racism. For example, attacks on big government and welfare are rooted in the belief that these had created a culture of poverty, a pathologically deficient underclass. Yet, culture of poverty and underclass

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theories could also be read as positing a natural and innate inferiority of certain beings, notably blacks.27

New racism’s dog whistle of law and order also can be seen as suggesting an essential inferiority of blacks. Time in prison and contact with the prison system has become a normal life stage for many young black men, who are incarcerated at rates about eight times higher than those for whites.28 Some see the prison as genealogically linked to the ghetto, Jim Crow South, and chattel slavery as institutions defining, confining, and controlling African Americans.29 Importantly, as John Wideman30 said:

It is not racist to be against crime, even though the archetypal criminal in the media and the public imagination [is the African American male]. Gradually, ‘urban’ and ‘ghetto’ have become code words for terrible places where only blacks reside. Prison is rapidly being relexified in the same segregated fashion.

Indeed, being a black male has come to be seen as probable cause, as it is synonymous with being a criminal.31 In effect, with the actor divorced from the act, the young black male is seen as a criminal even without committing a crime.

Given this persistence of racism, it has been difficult for black politicians to achieve success. Many of the blacks who would become mayors, state legislators, and congressional representatives have organized outside of traditional party networks and formed independent organizations that allowed for relatively autonomous black leadership.32 That said, black

31 Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: Rethinking the Race Question in the U.S.,” 56.
candidates have to be cautious so that they are not perceived solely as “black candidates,” that is, they have to run color-blind campaigns. Even black candidates who run moderate campaigns can fall victim to racist attacks and racist sentiments amongst the electorate. For example, overt resentment about big government and its support for black demands contributed to Tom Bradley’s defeat in California’s 1982 gubernatorial race, though Bradley had presented himself as a color-blind, moderate candidate.33 Likewise, in the 1990 U.S. Senate race in North Carolina, Jesse Helms heralded himself as having “North Carolina values,” while Harvey Gantt was framed as an extremist with views and values outside the mainstream of American culture.34

L. Douglas Wilder, who, having been elected governor of Virginia in 1989, became the first black to be elected governor in the nation’s history, and Edward Brooke, who in 1966 became the first black to serve in the Senate since Reconstruction, have advocated that black candidates be race-neutral and run race-neutral campaigns. Neither of these two politicians presented themselves as black candidates. Rather, Brooke and Wilder presented themselves as candidates who happened to be black. As Brooke said, “I wanted to be perceived as a qualified candidate, not a black candidate.” Likewise, Wilder said, “I have never been a civil rights activist of any kind.”35 This kind of deracialized campaign would also be run by Barack Obama in his 2008 presidential run. Indeed, like himself, Wilder has said that Obama does not see politics through the strict prism of race. Discussing his own conversations with Obama, Wilder said, “[O]ne thing we discussed is that there are no such things as ‘black issues.’ Health and education

34 Strickland & Whicker, “Comparing the Wilder and Gantt Campaigns: A Model for Black Candidate Success in Statewide Elections,” 204-212.
are not black issues. Improvement of job opportunities is not a black issue. Many whites resent people campaigning as if all whites have it made or as if all whites are in a position of luxury.”

Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign was emblematic of deracialization and an attempt to transcend race. Rather than speaking on African-American trauma, going back to his 2004 speech at the Democratic National Convention, Obama has offered a “rhetoric of consilience.”

In contrast to figures like Al Sharpton or Jesse Jackson, Obama neither came out of the African American community nor had highly visible connections in the field of civil rights. There was even concern as to whether Obama was “black enough” insofar as he, among other things, was not the descendant of plantation slaves like the majority of black Americans. Further, Obama has continually emphasized programs, principles, and purposes that are meant to advance the common values and goals of all Americans, while his own story is a testament and embodiment of the American ethos—of individual achievement, hard work, and ingenuity.

In addition to other than Obama, other contemporary, high-level black politicians like Harold Ford Jr., Deval Patrick, and Cory Booker have pursued deracial strategies. In some respects, the reluctance to discuss race reaffirms the rules of the game in an “Anglo-conformity” that is acceptable to white elites as it does not threaten the color-blind racial order.

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40 Ibid, 9
44 Huntington, Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity, 145.
It is interesting to consider, albeit briefly, the aforementioned in terms of critical race theory. More precisely, Derrick Bell, a legal scholar and critical race theorist, has argued that throughout American history, significant progress for blacks has been achieved only when their goals coincide with the perceived needs of whites.\(^4^5\) However, although Obama has distanced himself from race, perhaps consciously to assert post-racial bona fides,\(^4^6\) Obama is not a post-racial figure. After all, the significance of Obama’s presidency and some of the opposition it has garnered have been rooted in race. And, given the pervasiveness of racial problems in this country, to speak of America as a post-racial society, as if race were in the rearview mirror, is not only absurd, it is also dangerous.

**The New Coalition Forged by Obama**

In his bid for the presidency, Obama forged a new coalition of voters nationwide that cut across racial and ethnic lines. As in 2008, in 2012, the black vote went almost unanimously for Barack Obama. This coalition included 93 percent of African Americans, down two percentage points from 2008; 71 percent of Hispanics in 2012, up from 66 percent of Hispanics in 2008, and 73 percent of Asians, up from 63 percent in 2008 – and a two percentage point higher rate than Hispanics. Among white voters with college or post-graduate education, Obama received 42 percent of the vote, down five percentage points from 2008. Overall, Obama received only 39 percent of the white vote in 2012, down from 43 percent in 2008. Romney received 59 percent of the white vote in 2012 – thus, becoming the first presidential candidate to receive so large a share of the white vote and lose the presidential election. The white portion of the presidential


electorate has been steadily declining for decades – from 87 percent in 1992 down to 72 percent in 2012.\(^{47}\)

What this means is that the Republican Party’s white base is dwindling and the election of the president is no longer determined by the white vote alone. Obama’s loss of the white vote is most evident in the South, where he fared poorly in 2008 and 2012. Obama garnered less than 50 percent of the white vote in each of the eleven states of the Old Confederacy in 2008 and 2012. In eight of those states: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, in 2008 and 2012, he received less than 35 percent of the white vote (see Table 1). Though he employed an aggressive strategy to win Southern states, Obama won three Southern states in the 2008 election (Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida), but only two Southern states in 2012. Even in the Southern states he won, he lost a majority of the white vote in both 2008 and 2012. With that said, as shown in Table 3, compared to Table 2, Obama’s white support declined from 2008 to 2012 in the two Southern states he won.\(^{48}\)

The new and broad coalition built by Obama was made up of those who predominantly favor color-blind policies, but who do want to see real, material racial progress and can tolerate some race-conscious measures, along with those who think significant race-conscious measures are needed, but who are willing to put them on the back burner if progress can be achieved through other means.\(^{49}\) Nevertheless, similar to 2008, the 2012 election highlighted the shifting demographics within the American electorate, and, as Dick Morris, in not-so-shrouded coded language said, “This isn’t your father’s America.”\(^{50}\) The new coalition of voters has been fueled


\(^{48}\) Wolff, “Race and the 2012 Election.”


by an increase in non-white immigration and a decline in the percentage of white voters overall in this country. Hispanics, of whom there are 48 million, have replaced African Americans as the largest minority and account for 16.7 percent of the total population but only 10 percent of voters in 2012. African Americans comprise 13 percent of the population and 13 percent of the electorate. Though Asians now make up 5 percent of the population, they account for only 3 percent of the electorate.\(^{51}\) By 2050, many demographers predict that whites will no longer be in the majority, and that the United States will be a majority minority nation.\(^{52}\) Already, four in ten Millennials are nonwhite.\(^{53}\)

**Race & Opposition to Obama**

While Obama’s 2008 victory was heralded as a “new day” and the Republicans were considered a dying breed, the honeymoon period was relatively short-lived. On February 19, 2009, CNBC commentator Rick Santelli, speaking from the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, went on a tirade against the nascent Obama administration, specifically assistance to underwater mortgage holders, many of whom were lower-income and minority Americans. By subsidizing “the losers’ mortgages,” Santelli exclaimed the “government is rewarding bad behavior.” Santelli invited America’s “capitalists” to a “Chicago Tea Party” to protest such government intervention, signifying a revolt of “real” Americans against an overreaching government and “freeloaders.”\(^{54}\) Around the same time as Santelli’s explosion, on February 23, Fox News’ Glenn Beck had a special show in which he and his guests spoke of the possibility of

\(^{51}\) Wolff, “Race and the 2012 Election.”
another Civil War in what was a discussion wrapped in fear of big government and thinly-veiled racism.\textsuperscript{55}

Despite attempts by the Obama campaign to run a race-neutral campaign, race was ever-present in 2008 and the vitriol was there even before Obama’s election as president. To begin with, though the Obama campaign had been relatively race-neutral throughout 2007, race crept in during the South Carolina primary as the Clintons began to use race-baiting, alluding to Obama as a Jesse Jackson-like figure.\textsuperscript{56} It has even been reported that Senator Ted Kennedy endorsed Obama after the South Carolina primary because he “worried that the Clintons were trying to turn Obama into the black candidate—the Jesse Jackson of 2008.”\textsuperscript{57} After receiving the nomination, the Obama campaign became the target of racist attacks by the mainstream media and the fringe of the conservative movement.\textsuperscript{58} In September 2008, Congressman Lynn Westmoreland of Georgia referred to the Obamas as “uppity.” Though benign in isolation, the adjective is loaded with connotations of repression in the context of the historically segregated South.\textsuperscript{59}

In July 2008, the cover of \textit{The New Yorker} magazine, a liberal-leaning publication, portrayed Obama as a Muslim in sandals and a turban, while Michelle was dressed in camouflage fatigues, combat boots, with an AK-47 strapped over her shoulder, and wearing an afro.\textsuperscript{60} Meant to be ironic, \textit{The New Yorker} cover confirmed the fears of some that the 1970s-era armed black radical was in cahoots with the 21\textsuperscript{st} century jihadist. Additionally, according to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Dawson, \textit{Not in Our Lifetimes: The Future of Black Politics}, 80-81.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Dawson, \textit{Not in Our Lifetimes: The Future of Black Politics}, 64.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Clayton, \textit{The Presidential Campaign of Barack Obama: A Critical Analysis of Racially Transcendent Strategy}, 80.
\end{itemize}
African American scholar Molefi Asante, Obama was the “first presidential candidate in history to receive Secret Service protection so early in the campaign…on April 3, 2007, because of serious threats against his person by numerous detractors.”61 Finally, unable to directly and explicitly use race against Obama, the McCain campaign tried to raise concerns that Obama would pursue race-conscious policies that would expand opportunities for African Americans. These efforts were accompanied by attempts to cast Obama as fundamentally different and outside of the mainstream with ads asking “Who is the real Barack Obama?” and “Vote for a real American, John McCain.”62

The racially-attuned opposition to Obama that emerged in 2008 and remained after his re-election has been persistent. Mark Potok, the Director of the Intelligence Project for the Southern Poverty Law Center, an organization that monitors hate groups, has noted:

> The 1990s saw the rise and fall of the anti-government ‘Patriot’ movement, made up of paramilitary militias, tax defiers, and so-called ‘sovereign citizens.’ By early in the 21st century, they had largely disappeared. After disappearing for almost a decade, right-wing militias, tax defiers, and sovereign citizens are reappearing across the country.63

What is different? As Potok said, “A key difference this time is that the federal government is now headed by a black man.” Potok believes that the election of Barack Obama, along with a loss in the percentage of whites in this country overall, on top of high levels of non-white immigration, have all helped to racialize the Patriot movement, which in the past was not primarily motivated by race hate.64

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63 Telephone Interview, 16 Dec. 2011
64 Ibid.
In fact, the Patriot movement, comprised of right-wing armed militias, rose exponentially after Obama’s election. Consistently below 200 between the years of 2002 and 2008, the number of Patriot groups was 500 in 2009. Growing consistently from then on, there were nearly 1,400 Patriot groups by 2012.\textsuperscript{65} Perhaps the most visible act by such groups during Obama’s time in office was the standoff at Cliven Bundy’s ranch in Nevada in which the anti-government Patriot groups stood armed against federal agents until the federal agents backed down.\textsuperscript{66} Indeed, there are some federal and local law enforcement groups who view the domestic terror threat from such groups as equal to or greater than the threat from foreign Islamic terror groups like ISIS.\textsuperscript{67}

Another highly vocal and visible manifestation of resistance to Obama was the Tea Party, which formed in early 2009. Composed primarily of white males over 45 and wealthier than most Americans,\textsuperscript{68} the Tea Party espouses anti-government, anti-debt, and anti-deficit principles. At least on its face, the Tea Party falls in line with a long tradition of conservative opposition to the encroachment of big government.\textsuperscript{69} But, the Tea Party “expresses a ‘heartland’ ethos of ethnocentrism among older white Americans experiencing rapid change in the kinds of people who make up the nation.”\textsuperscript{70} In fact, despite proposed libertarian principles, generally speaking,

\textsuperscript{70} Formisano, The Tea Party: A Brief History, 110.
the Tea Party is more akin to reactionary conservatism in the tradition of the Know-Nothing Party, the Ku Klux Klan, and the John Birch Society.71

In 2010, the University of Washington’s Institute for the Study of Ethnicity, Race, and Sexuality conducted a multi-state survey on race, finding that the Tea Party supporters were predisposed to racial intolerance.72 According to the survey results, approximately 45 percent of white respondents either strongly support or somewhat support the Tea Party movement. Commenting on the results, Christopher Parker, the principal investigator in the study, said, “If one believes that blacks don’t try hard enough, use slavery as an excuse, and...have received more than they deserve (racial resentment), they are 37 percent more likely than those who don’t believe this...to support the tea party.”73 Moreover, Parker said, “Once you control for partisanship, party identification and ideology, there’s STILL a significant, robust effect for race.”74 To facilitate comparisons across a range of support for the Tea Party, the study divided support for the Tea Party into four distinct categories: True Skeptics of the Tea Party, Middle of the Road, True Believers, and Never Heard Of.75

For the survey, respondents were asked a series of questions about blacks in general: whether they thought each group was hard-working, intelligent, or trustworthy. Of those who strongly supported or somewhat supported the Tea Party, only 35 percent believed blacks are

72 The survey is drawn from a probability sample of 1,006 cases, stratified by state. The Multi-State Survey of Race and Politics included seven states, six of which were battleground states in the 2008 presidential election. It includes Georgia, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, and California. Survey respondents include 494 whites, 380 blacks, 77 Latinos, and 64 members of other races and ethnicities. The study has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1% and was conducted by telephone from February 8 through March 15, 2010.
73 Quoted in Pitts “Obama, Race, and Tea Party Supporters.”
74 Ibid
75 Respondents were required to answer a question that asked whether or not they “strongly approved” or “somewhat approved” of the Tea Party. True Believers were those who strongly approved of the movement and True Skeptics were those who strongly disapproved of the Tea Party. Middle of the roaders were those who either somewhat disapproved or somewhat approved. Also included was a column for the group who claimed to have never heard of the Tea Party, and so have no opinion of the movement.
hard-working, only 45 percent believed blacks are intelligent, and only 41 percent believed blacks are trustworthy (see Table 4). It is worth noting, as Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson\textsuperscript{76} said, “Compared to other Americans, Tea Partiers rate whites relatively poor on these characteristics, too. Tea Partiers have negative views about all of their fellow citizens.”

When analyzing the responses of all whites surveyed for the same three questions, the results are startling, as only 40 percent of all whites interviewed felt that blacks are hard-working, only 49 percent of all whites felt that blacks are intelligent, and only 47 percent of all whites felt that blacks are trustworthy. Less than 50 percent of both Tea Party True Believers and all whites surveyed felt that blacks are hard-working, intelligent, or trustworthy. Indeed, whether they are Tea Party supporters or not, the data show that the whites surveyed hold negative stereotypes towards blacks, perhaps even assigning an essential deficiency to blacks.

Additionally, respondents were asked to react to whether they felt a series of phrases described President Obama either extremely well or quite well. The phrases given to respondents were: knowledgeable, intelligent, moral, or a strong leader. Of the Tea Party True Believers, only 38 percent described the president as knowledgeable, only 37 percent described the president as intelligent, only 32 percent described the president as moral, and only 44 percent described the president as a strong leader (see Table 5). These numbers provide a stark contrast to the results of all whites, which showed that 60 percent felt the president was knowledgeable, 63 percent felt that he was intelligent, 61 percent felt he was moral, and 64 percent felt he was a strong leader (see Table 5). Since the majority of Tea Party members tend to be white and Republican, there is the possibility that the low percentage of Tea Party True Believers who had unfavorable perceptions of Obama on the four traits may be due to partisanship and not racism. Nonetheless, that so many respondents would believe Obama to be unintelligent and unknowledgeable seems

\textsuperscript{76}Skocpol & Williamson, \textit{Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism}, 69.
to fly in the face of reality. After all, Obama has a bachelor’s degree from Columbia University and a law degree from the Harvard School of Law. While at Harvard, Obama was the first black elected president of the prestigious Harvard Law Review. Moreover, Obama is an accomplished author and served as a law professor at the University of Chicago Law School. In his Kill the Messenger stand-up special, comedian Chris Rock poignantly observed this social reality that blacks must be truly exceptional to achieve a certain status that ordinary whites occupy. That said, Obama’s accomplishments are extraordinary by any standard, not just for a black man.

Although Tea Party members are vehement in arguing that race has nothing to do with their opposition to President Obama, it is clear from the data that we do not live in a post-racial society, and that the perceived racial superiority among whites still has a significant impact on their negative stereotyping of blacks in America. Echoing this, Logan said that the “most controversial aspect of the [Tea Party] movement in 2009/2010 was the way its supporters positioned themselves with regard to race.” For example, at Tea Party rallies one could see several signs depicting Obama as a terrorist, as an African witch doctor with a bone through his nose, or as Hitler. In the summer of 2010, the NAACP even passed a resolution condemning the racism of the Tea Party. No doubt, the racial sentiments here are nuanced. Arceneaux and Nicholson posit that racial resentment does color the judgments of the Tea Party members about government aid to the poor, but that racial animus is not the primary force behind their opposition. Furthermore, describing the Tea Party Convention held in February 2010, Jonathan

79 Ibid
Raban\(^{81}\) observed that there were those in attendance clearly motivated by a vehement racism, though he noted that others were repulsed by it. Nevertheless, the aforementioned examples indicate racial undertones and overtones are constitutive elements of the opposition to Obama.

**The Conservative Backlash against Obama**

Upon taking office, strong anti-Obama rhetoric quickly became noticeable in the elite conservative political and media circles. In fact, their disagreement with Obama’s policies continued to grow and become more sustained as conservative leaders made an about-face on several issues, flipping from advocacy to derision on similar positions they supported under Republican presidents. For example, as journalist Bakari Kitwana said, “The $700 billion Wall Street bailout was a necessary evil. But, for them, the $787 billion economic stimulus marked the end of capitalism.”\(^{82}\) Similarly, Kitwana notes that under President Bush, support for the Iraq War was pro-American, but under Obama, the idea of not criticizing a war president has been abandoned.\(^{83}\)

Obama is not the first president to be accused of expanding government and advocating socialist policies. Similar to the constant of racism and conservatism that desperately seeks to arrest change, there is a constant found in an increasingly interventionist state, particularly from the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century through the present. At the very beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century, referring to the need for the federal government to check corporations, Herbert Croly\(^{84}\) argued that Hamiltonian means should be employed in order to achieve Jeffersonian ends, that is, big

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\(^{83}\) Ibid

government ought to be a tool to preserve individual freedoms and liberties. During the New Deal era of President Franklin Roosevelt the role of government was greatly expanded to combat the Great Depression, and, in the process, laid the foundation for a welfare state. But, regarding the New Deal programs, Newman and Jacobs \(^{85}\) said, “Public opinion was skeptical of the value and legitimacy of relief programs. An overwhelming majority believed the government was spending too much money on relief.”

Beyond fiscal concerns, it is not unfounded to be wary of an expanding government. After all, the most horrific suffering in human history has been the result of large-scale, often progressive, projects carried out by highly centralized and bureaucratic states. \(^{86}\) With that said, opposition to big government is not only the result of fiscal concerns or fears of an ever-present government. Rather, there is also a racial motivation. As an opponent of the New Deal programs said:

> We mean to do this without the aid of bought Negro relievers, WPA-ers, subsidized non-producers, pampered Alien and Labor Union hangers-on, or that misguided coterie surrounding you who have so amiably and so senselessly squandered our billions. We prefer to link up with the yearly increment of American-born new voters who will remember their heritage and keep it clean. \(^{87}\)

Indeed, it would not be difficult to imagine these words being spoken today, as such animus still exists within certain discourses, especially within the anti-Obama rhetoric.

The rise of hate speech and anti-Obama rhetoric in America is prevalent in the conservative media and blogosphere. There is, further, a rather blurry line between objective news and ideological orchestration. Such a blurry line is particularly noteworthy with Fox News,

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which, at times, appears to operate as a right-wing propaganda machine for the Republican Party. While Fox News’ anchors and reporters argue that news reporting and political commentary operate independently of each other, many people on the right, including right-wing extremists, take their cues from the media outlet and similar media sources. In fact, Fox News amplified the public attention that Tea Party groups received, and connected their viewers with online tools to start or link up with their local Tea Party. Whereas other media outlets covered big, national Tea Party events when they happened, Fox News was out in front, offering steady “coverage” for weeks leading into each major event. And Fox acted as a kind of movement orchestrator, offering models and contact information to local and regional viewers hoping to connect with one another. Accordingly, Fox News served as a cheerleader and megaphone for Tea Party events and helped otherwise scattered conservatives gain a sense of shared identity and pooled tactical knowledge.  

In an article titled “Political Hate Talk and the Safety of President Obama,” journalist Herndon Davis quotes Joan Walsh, the editor-at-large of the online news magazine Salon.com, saying, “I think there is clearly a fringe of people who are economically vulnerable and who are susceptible to the alarmist rhetoric being spewed about the president. I do worry about violence.” Moreover, Davis has asserted that some of the most virulent anti-Obama rhetoric has come from pundits, politicians, and even ministers like Steven Anderson of Arizona. Former Fox News talk show host Glenn Beck said, “President Obama has a deep-seated hatred of white people. This guy [Obama] I believe is a racist. Obama’s healthcare is driven by reparations.”

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90 Ibid
Similarly, Fox News’ Sean Hannity has repeatedly leveled harsh criticisms at the president and regularly questions his intelligence.\(^91\)

The king of conservative talk radio, Rush Limbaugh said, “I hope Obama fails. Adolph Hitler, like Barack Obama, also ruled by dictate. The Obama healthcare logo is damn close to a Nazi swastika logo.”\(^92\) Members of the U.S. Congress have made equally outrageous comments. Former Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC) said, “If we’re able to stop Obama [on healthcare reform], it will be his Waterloo. It will break him.”\(^93\) In a statement made to the *National Review,* Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY), the Senate Minority Leader at the time, blatantly professed, “The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president.” Rep. Michelle Bachmann (R-MN) said in response to some of President Obama’s policy proposals, “I want people in Minnesota armed and dangerous on the issue of the energy tax because we need to fight back.”\(^94\) And former Governor and Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin referred to President Obama’s healthcare reform legislation as “downright evil” and inferred that his policies would force her youngest son, who has Down Syndrome, “to stand in front of Obama’s death panel.”\(^95\)

Through relentless obstruction on the part of Republicans, it seems that the Office of the Presidency has been diminished in terms of prestige and authority. In January 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was invited by Speaker of the House John Boehner, without

\(^92\) Davis. “Political Hate Talk and the Safety of President Obama.”
\(^93\) Ibid
\(^94\) Ibid
\(^95\) Ibid
having consulted President Obama, to address a joint session of Congress.\textsuperscript{96} Similarly, Republican Senators recently sent an open letter to Iran in an effort to derail the nuclear negotiation between Iran and the U.S., acting as if Obama is not even the President.\textsuperscript{97} Finally, Mitch McConnell has sought to undermine Obama’s Climate Plan with other countries and has even urged states in the union to openly defy the Environmental Protection Agency’s proposed rules to limit greenhouse gas emissions.\textsuperscript{98} Undermining Obama domestically and internationally may have dangerous and inalterable consequences for the office of the Presidency. Indeed, former President George W. Bush has avoided criticizing Obama, saying, “I don’t think it’s good for the country to have a former president undermine a current president; I think it’s bad for the presidency for that matter.”

\textbf{Conspiracy Theories}

When Obama was first elected in 2008, many conservatives, most notably Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, questioned whether he was born, not in Hawaii, but in Kenya, the birthplace of his father. Championed by Trump, this “birther movement” continued to grow until the White House ultimately released a certified copy of Obama’s Certificate of Live Birth (the long-form birth certificate)\textsuperscript{100} that showed he was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on August 4, 1961. Despite this evidence, Trump, among others, still refuses to publicly

acknowledge this fact and has declined to correct those who insist on keeping the conspiracy theory alive. In addition to questions about his citizenship, allegations have persisted that Obama is not a Christian but is a Muslim. According to an article in newsweek.com by journalist Lisa Miller, Obama was born to a Christian-turned-secular mother and a Muslim-turned-atheist African father. In fact, Obama grew up in several locations around the world with plenty of spiritual influences, but without any particular religion. Obama became a Christian and was baptized in the early 1990s at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago. There is no requirement according to the U.S. Constitution that one profess a particular religious faith as a condition of holding public office.

Obama is not the first presidential candidate to face scrutiny because of his race or perceived religious beliefs. In 1960, John Kennedy sought to become the first Catholic President of the United States. All of the previous presidents had been white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. John Kennedy was challenged by many American liberals on his faith. According to an article by Thomas Carty, within the liberal community some “believed that Catholic candidates would be subject to pressure from their church hierarchy, and they feared that Catholic Church intervention in U.S. politics would undermine the religious liberty of non-Catholic Americans.” Not unlike the speech Obama gave on race on March 18, 2008, while still a candidate, in an attempt to assuage the fears of whites who felt that Obama would not represent their interests, Kennedy delivered a speech on religion and the importance of separation of church and state as being absolute. Despite continued opposition, Kennedy was able to win the Democratic presidential nomination by successfully distancing himself from unpopular Catholic

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positions and strongly asserting his commitment to separation of church and state.\textsuperscript{102} Ironically, some of those opposed to Kennedy after he became president in 1961 created a poster that appeared as a “mug shot” of President Kennedy with a caption below that said “Wanted for Treason” and a list of grievances. That same poster resurfaced on the internet after the election of Obama in 2008 with a picture of Obama instead of Kennedy with similar talking points.\textsuperscript{103}

Another attack leveled against Obama during the 2012 presidential campaign was concerning Obama’s use of the teleprompter. In the 2012 Republican primaries, Rick Santorum called Obama’s use of the teleprompter as Teleprompter Derangement Syndrome and referred to the president as “reader-in-chief.”\textsuperscript{104} While campaigning in Mississippi for the Republican nomination for president, the former Pennsylvania senator remarked, “when you run for president of the United States, it should be illegal to read off a teleprompter. Because all you’re doing is reading someone else’s words to people.”\textsuperscript{105} Representative Steve Womack (R-AR) proposed eliminating funding for President Obama’s teleprompter as a way to further reduce federal spending. Apparently, notes Schlesinger, the criticism of the President’s use of a teleprompter is the idea that he is reading remarks that were prepared in advance and with the assistance of others.\textsuperscript{106} This criticism implies Obama is unable to speak extemporaneously without the use of modern technology, a veiled racist accusation that he is inarticulate.

Among the aforementioned “dog whistles” acquired by the fringe of the Right and mainstream Republicans, invoking Obama’s paternal Kenyan ancestry, was the argument that

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, 578
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid
Obama believed in “anti-colonial Mau-Mausim.”\textsuperscript{107} Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee picked up on this, claiming that Obama grew up in Kenya where he learned to despise colonialism from his father and grandfather. Subsequently, Huckabee relocated Obama’s supposed third world radicalization from Kenya to Indonesia, saying, “Most of us growing up going to Boy Scout meetings and, you know, our communities were filled with Rotary Clubs, not madrassas.”\textsuperscript{108} Likewise, Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the House, asked, “What if [Obama] is so outside our comprehension that only if you understand Kenyan, anti-colonial behavior, can you begin to piece together [his actions]?”\textsuperscript{109} More recently, denying his statement that Obama does not love America, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani said, “This isn’t racism. This is socialism or possibly anti-colonialism.”\textsuperscript{110}

**Healthcare Reform Town Hall Meetings**

But the larger question is not whether Obama was really born in the United States or whether he is secretly a Muslim. Are some opposed to Obama because they believe since he is African American, he lacks legitimacy to be in the White House? Therefore, whether he is constantly referred to as a “Muslim,” not born in America, a “Socialist,” a “terrorist,” or a “Nazi,” he is considered to be something “other.” Political writer Toynaa Weathersbee, in referring to the 2009-2010 healthcare town hall meetings held by members of Congress to discuss proposed healthcare legislation, writes that the script Obama-hating Americans are


\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
reading from is an old one. According to Weathersbee, “Their forbearers, in fact, wrote the script in the late 1950s—the last time that a black man, Martin Luther King Jr., was making headway in changing an oppressive system that wasn’t working for millions of Americans.” In essence, Weathersbee is comparing attacks against Obama to attacks made against Martin Luther King Jr. and saying that some of the tactics used now are similar to the tactics used by racists during the Civil Rights Movement. For example, Martin Luther King Jr. and others who supported integration in the 1950s and 1960s were labeled as Communists, just as Obama is being labeled a Communist by some of his detractors today.

Town hall meetings, held in 2009 and 2010 surrounding the passage of the healthcare proposal, often included “birthers,” anti-tax Tea Partiers, and town hall hecklers that occasionally turned violent. Attendants sometimes showed up carrying placards depicting Obama as Adolph Hitler with a toothbrush moustache, with a hammer and sickle on his forehead, or wearing a feather headdress and a bone through his nose, calling him a “Socialist” and a “Communist,” among other things. Journalist David Dishneau wrote that outside one town hall meeting in western Maryland, a man held signs reading “Death to Obama,” and “Death to Michelle and her two stupid kids.” At an anti-Obama rally in September 2009, there was a sea of Confederate flags, and numerous signs with racial overtones, such as one that read “The zoo has an African lion—the White House has a lyin’ African” and others that “demanded Obama be sent back to Kenya.”

114 Ibid
Weathersbee acknowledges that many participants at the town hall meetings had legitimate concerns about the health care proposals in Congress. But others, she notes, weren’t attending these meetings to help solve the problem, but to stop progress. Furthermore, she asserts that people attending the town hall meetings where they hurled insults and screamed about proposed efforts to devise a health care system to cover everyone felt “disenfranchised because a black man now sits in the Oval Office. They couldn’t stop Obama from being elected, so now, they’re bound and determined to prevent him from governing.”

Since President Obama took office, Republicans in the Congress have attempted to stall, delay, or reject many of the president’s policy initiatives. The Senate has refused to confirm many of President Obama’s judicial appointments at the appellate and district court levels. Moreover, they have failed to confirm numerous appointments made by the president to key regulatory commissions and agencies, which has prompted the president to make several recess appointments. In 2011, Congress refused to consider President Obama’s jobs bill, which was the centerpiece of his push to revive the economy. During the payroll tax-cut debate at the end of 2011, the Republicans in the House balked at continuing the tax cuts but ultimately they agreed to the extension, so as not to be seen as so mean-spirited during a time of economic recession. More recently, the Senate delayed the confirmation of President Obama’s choice on Loretta Lynch, the first African American female nominee for Attorney General, for a historic five months.

Opposition to the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) remains constant and is still a large source of animosity against President Obama. The United States House of Representatives has held over 50 votes to repeal the act since it was signed into law. It was challenged in lawsuits on more than one occasion all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. On June 28, 2012, the Supreme

115 Weathersbee, “For Obama Foes, It’s Not the Plan— It’s the Man.”
Court upheld the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act’s individual mandate as Congress’ legitimate exercise of its taxation power. However, those opposed to Obamacare have continued their fight to repeal it, both in the court of public opinion and in the actual court system. On March 3, 2015, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments for the second time on provisions of the Affordable Care Act. On June 25, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in favor of the Affordable Care Act by holding that the ACA authorized federal tax credits for eligible Americans no matter where they live.

**Political Protest in America**

History shows that personal and conspiratorial attacks leveled against a sitting president may not be new. In an article in the *Washington Post* titled, “In America, Crazy is a Preexisting Condition,” journalist Rick Perlstein writes that “in the 1950s, Republicans referred to the presidencies of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman as 20 years of treason and accused the men who led the fight against fascism of deliberately surrendering the free world to communism.” Moreover, notes Perlstein, “there were right-wingers claiming access to secret documents from the 1920s proving that the entire concept of a ‘civil rights movement’ had been hatched by the Soviet Union.” Examples of conspiracy theories have been a frequent part of the American political landscape since the founding of this nation. Perlstein further muses, “Anti-Catholic conspiracy theorists existed in the 1840s and 1850s” and “when the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act was introduced, one frequently read in the South that it would ‘enslave’ whites.” It appears the carnival-like atmosphere that has accompanied protests by the

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117 Ibid

118 Ibid
“birthers,” anti-tax Tea Partiers, and town hall hecklers continues a longstanding tradition. However, in a National Public Radio discussion of the sometimes-bitter discourse that occurred over healthcare reform when it was being debated by Congress, Faya Rose Toure, founder of the Voting Rights Museum, stated “race is a major factor… There are people with legitimate concerns,” she noted, “but they have never [before] expressed their legitimate concerns with such vengeance and hatred.”

There has always been political dissent in this country, as well as a long history of conspiracy fears and anti-immigrant campaigns. In fact, that is the nature of an open society where free speech is a cherished principle of the democratic process. Criticism of presidents is nothing new; it did not start with the election of Barack Obama. It is a routine part of our political discourse, and at times it is vicious and nasty. According to journalist Keith Richburg, writing for the *Guardian* newspaper, “Ronald Reagan was derided as lazy and ill-informed. George W. Bush was mocked as the ‘toxic-Texan’ and an imbecile who bumbled us into Iraq.” But, notes Richburg, “Obama-hatred among a certain segment of the extreme right has crossed a line into something else—it borders on the pathological. When a southern congressman shouted ‘You lie!’ in the middle of Obama’s speech to a joint session of Congress, it was a stunning display of disrespect, not just to the institution, but to the president himself.” Kevin Connolly, writing for BBC News, felt that Rep. Joe Wilson’s (R-SC) comment “was something that went beyond disrespect of the president’s office implied by mere heckling. Here was

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120 Richburg, “Jimmy Carter was right. ‘Post-racial’ America is still a forlorn hope.”
121 Ibid
something that implied to anyone who knows the codes and tones of American politics a contemptuous sense of racial superiority over the commander-in-chief.”

The continuous attacks on President Obama come largely from his enemies to score political points, but racism has been a constant undertone for the continued disrespect of Obama and his family. Some of Obama’s political opponents are often heard saying, “We want our country back!” Implicit in that statement is that someone who is not American or doesn’t truly believe in real American values has usurped or stolen their country from them, and they want to take it back. In their minds, this country is white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. Thus, Obama represents something different to them, something foreign, something “other.” According to journalist Bob Reynolds, “racism simply compounds something that runs even deeper; this fear of the ‘other’ is not a new phenomenon.”

Conclusion

The election of Barack Obama as the 44th U.S. president heralded a new era in race relations in America. A majority of Americans elected the first African American president. There was renewed hope that America had finally gotten beyond its ugly racist past. Many Americans seemed excited to elect Barack Obama as president because he was an African American. President Obama represents the realities of the changing demographics in this country in a new millennium—a multicultural and multiracial nation. However, there are those in America who fear the changing face of America and appear reluctant to let go of the past. The


Jim Crow era of legalized racial segregation no longer exists in America. But President Barack Obama is the first African American to occupy the White House. He is the leader of the most powerful nation in this world. And some in this country – a country that has a legacy of slavery and segregation – are opposed to President Obama because he is an African American. Moreover, we have argued that this vehement opposition to Obama has not only lessened President Obama’s stature at home and abroad, but it has damaged the office of the presidency, and has weakened the powers of the presidency. Future research will be needed to evaluate the extent that the relentless attacks on President Obama during his two terms in office have damaged and diminished the office of the presidency and to what degree.

Indeed, America has not entered into a post-racial society, but, rather, remains a society that is divided by race, where basic assumptions and stereotypes about race continue to serve as the cornerstone of the contemporary social hierarchy. To that end, future research should also examine usage of the term post-racial because post-racial is looking at race as though it is in the rearview mirror. But race still matters in this country and we do not live in a color-blind society. This racism, put on display during Barack Obama’s election and presidency, is a new, more subtle form, but is ultimately part of a long continuum of conservative opposition to change, grounded in racist attitudes.
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Table 1: Percentage of White Support for Obama Under 35 Percent

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2012</th>
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<td>Obama’s Percentage of White Vote</td>
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<td>Alabama</td>
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Source: CNN: 2008 and 2012 Presidential Exit Polls

Table 2: Percentage of White Support for Obama in the Three Southern States that He Carried in 2008

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<th>State</th>
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Source: CNN: 2008 Presidential Exit Poll

Table 3: Percentage of White Support for Obama in the Two Southern States that He Carried in 2012

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Source: CNN: 2012 Presidential Exit Poll
Table 4: Stereotypes About Blacks by White Tea Party Approval

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<th>True Believers</th>
<th>Never Heard Of</th>
<th>All Whites</th>
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Note: Cell entries represent the percent in the corresponding category. Rows denoted with * significant at p < .05 or better.
Source: University of Washington, March 2010 Multi-state Survey of Race and Politics
Prof. Christopher Parker, Principal Investigator
Online: http://depts.washington.edu/uwiser/racepolitics.html
Table 5: President Obama Traits by Tea Party Approval

<table>
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<td>65%</td>
<td>37%</td>
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Note: Cell entries represent the percent in the corresponding category. All rows significant at p < .05 or better.
Source: University of Washington, March 2010 Multi-state Survey of Race and Politics
Prof. Christopher Parker, Principal Investigator
Online: [http://depts.washington.edu/uwiser/racepolitics.html](http://depts.washington.edu/uwiser/racepolitics.html)
Race as an Institutional Factor in the Arrest, and the use of Excessive and Deadly Force against African American Males

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Abstract

These authors assert that race is a determinant used by police officers to arrest and use deadly force against African American males. Race is an institutionalized factor that is embedded and widespread in society’s social structure. Hence, the institutional discrimination perspective is utilized to explain the issue of race. Institutional discrimination consists of practices or organizations and institutions that have a harmful effect on members of subordinate groups, in this case, African American males. Because race is institutionalized in the social structure, it is not surprising that law enforcement agencies use race as a factor in the arrest and deadly force against African Americans.

Introduction

Crime data indicate that blacks are more likely to get arrested, sentenced and convicted than whites. Self-reported studies indicate that African American and white suspects are generally similar in behavior and that the differences in arrest statistics may indicate a differential selection policy by police.\(^1\) Police are more likely to apprehend black and Latino males than any other group. Evidence of racial bias in the arrest process can be found in police

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officers profiling African Americans and searching their cars without probable cause or reasonable suspicion.² Suspects who are poor, black or male are more likely to be formally arrested than white suspects.³ Engle and Calnon found that young African American and Latino males are more likely to be stopped by police and cited, searched, and arrested even though, they are no more likely to be in the possession of illegal contraband than whites.⁴

In this paper, the authors assert that race is institutionalized, not only in police departments, but is also a determining factor in practically every social institution in America. This assertion is supported by the findings reported by the U.S. Department of Justice in Ferguson, Missouri, which showed that:

There are stunning racial disparities in both police traffic stops and use of force, including deadly force, none of which could be explained by any differences in the rate at which people of different races violate the law. These disparities occur, at least in part, because of unlawful bias against and stereotypes about African Americans.⁵

Moreover, the Justice Department found:

That there also racial disparities in the court’s fine assessment practices. The average fine assessment was higher for African Americans than for (whites). African Americans were assessed an average fine of $206, whereas the average fine for others was $147. The magnitude of disparities in fines assessed on the basis of race consistently disfavored African Americans.⁶

In addition to the racial disparity analysis, the Justice Department also concluded that the City of Ferguson’s police department and judicial system focused on generating revenue for the city by

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² Larry Siegel Criminology (Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012).
⁵ United States Justice Department, Civil Rights Division: Investigation of Ferguson Police Department. (Government Printing Office, March 2015).
⁶ Ibid. page, 69.
ticketing and assessing fines disproportionately on the majority black population and the poor for various type infractions.\textsuperscript{7}

**Theoretical Consideration**

Carmichael and Hamilton noted that not all, and perhaps not even most, discrimination is perpetrated by individuals. Our social institutions i.e., well established structures such as family, the state, the educational system, the economic system, and religion, which perform basic functions in society, play a critical role in the creation and perpetuation of racial inequality.\textsuperscript{8} Institutional discrimination is applied, in this study, to explain police behavior in the arrest, use of force, including deadly force, against people of color, especially African American males. Institutional discrimination is more subtle, less obvious, and more indirect in application than individual discrimination. Although a considerable amount of discrimination tends to be unintended, it yields outcomes that are discriminatory in effect.\textsuperscript{9} The issue of race is entrenched in customs, laws, and social practices. Therefore, discriminatory patterns and practices are likely to persist in the areas of banking, criminal justice, employment, education, health care, housing, and many other areas in the private and public sectors.\textsuperscript{10}

James Comey, the Director of Federal Bureau of Investigation, noted that law enforcement agencies history is based on discriminatory practices against minority groups. He further noted that people use “race” unconsciously in making decisions. People in the white-majority culture practice unconscious racial bias and react differently to a white face than a black face. Racial bias, however, is not confined to law enforcement any more than its existence in any

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid. page, 12
\textsuperscript{9} Martin Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations.* 8\textsuperscript{th} ed. Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009.
\textsuperscript{10}Vincent Parrillo, *Strangers To These Shores.* 11\textsuperscript{th} ed. Pearson
other institution in America. 11 Although unconscious discrimination oftentimes does not reflect a deliberate effort to discriminate, it is nonetheless important to recognize that unconscious discrimination has a disparate impact on those who are disadvantaged. It is also important to recognize that it is deeply rooted in society’s racially unequal power structure. 12 To further demonstrate the practice of race unconsciousness, a study conducted by CNN indicated that prejudice and stereotypes is culturally transmitted. In this study, researchers asked children, between the ages of 5 and 10 years old, a series of questions addressing the issue of race. They found that white children were more likely to respond with a high rate of “white bias.” White children identified their skin color with positive attributes and darker skin with negative attributes. Black children were found to display some bias toward whites, but far less than the bias white children display towards blacks. White children were found to embrace stereotypes much more strongly than the African-American children. 13

Institutional discriminatory practices are so interwoven in customs, norms, traditions, policies, and laws, until persons attempting to provide racially sensitive assistance to racially insensitive individuals are oftentimes unaware that they too perpetuate unfair practices on the basis of race. 14 For example, if poverty and the lack of jobs perpetuate crime in urban areas that may be construed that economic development is woefully inadequate in poor inner communities. Industries tend to locate and create jobs in the suburbs rather than in inner city urban areas where high unemployment and catastrophic under-employment proliferates. The location of these jobs

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13 CNN, Study: white and black children biased toward lighter skin” May 2010.  
http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/05/13/doll.study/
14 Vincent Parrillo, Strangers To These Shores. 11th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2014).
Negatively affect blacks who might qualify for them but reside mainly in urban areas where the jobs do not exist.\textsuperscript{15}

**Brief historical context of race in America**

DuBois’ noted that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line”.\textsuperscript{16} Race remains a polemic issue in the twenty first century. Issues of race and race ideology are subverted through the proliferation of practices requiring adherence to the laws of the U.S. Constitution. Moreover, some decisions mandated by the U.S. courts further suppress and subordinate African Americans and people of color. Intended or not intended, the subordinate status of African Americans was laid in the foundation of the United States Constitution. The U.S. Constitution, as a document, structured and defined the organization of American government and group relationships to that government as well as within society. One needs only to review critical Articles in the U.S. Constitution to discern how African Americans were categorized as a subordinate group upon the very founding of this country. From the outset, African Americans were marginalized as part of a compromise for congressional representation.

As a social and political construction, race has been codified in laws and policy through a history of cultural and political domination. Consequently, prior to the Civil War, black rights were suppressed continuously. In *Prigg vs. Pennsylvania* (1842) the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Fugitive Slave Act requiring slave-owners’ human property, i.e., slaves themselves, be returned to their masters. Then, in *Jones v. Van Zandt* (1847) the court staggered into defining slavery as a “scared compromise” in the constitution. The status of newly freed blacks after the Civil War was even more precarious. Judge Higginbotham outlines how the United States

\textsuperscript{15} Martin Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations*, 8\textsuperscript{th} ed. (United States: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009).

Supreme Court sanctioned racial hatred by establishing public policy inimical to the fair treatment of African Americans in the 1883 Civil Rights Cases.\textsuperscript{17}

Even after the Civil War, the Court continued to favor policy grounded on the perceived inferiority of black people and the legitimization of racism through the establishment of “separate but equal” accommodations (Civil Rights Act of 1875 and \textit{Plessey v. Ferguson}, 1896). Moreover, the colonization of African countries by Europeans, coupled with the capturing of Africans to be made slaves, gave rise to the issue of race and race relations in the United States. This provided the impetus for the United States Constitution to use the issue of race to exclude Africans as citizens. These practices gave rise to the notion of ethnocentricity and led whites to believe that they are the dominant race. This fostered a national attitude which reinforced how race is applied unconsciously and sometimes consciously against blacks in the social structure. Despite the fact that slavery ended in this country years ago, Collins lamented that the legacy of race is deeply embedded in current patterns of prejudice and discrimination against African Americans.\textsuperscript{18} This brief history explains how race is institutionalized and provides an explanation for how and why police officers use race as a determinant to arrest, use force, including deadly force, against African American males.

\textbf{Police Arrest of African Americans}

Since race is so deeply rooted in the social structure and intertwined in how American society functions, African Americans are far more likely than whites to have negative encounters


with law enforcement and express more discontent. African Americans consistently report that they believe that the police treat them unfairly or have experienced unfair treatment themselves. The Gallup Poll also found that thirty-seven percent of African Americans said that they had been “unfairly stopped by police,” compared with only 4 percent of whites. Similarly, a majority of blacks’ say that they or a family member have personally experienced being treated unfairly by the police strictly on the basis of race. Half of African-American respondents, including 6 in 10 black men, said they had been treated unfairly by police because of their race, compared with 3 percent of whites. Another 15 percent said they knew of a family member who had been treated unfairly by the police because of their race.

Proponents of racial profiling argue that profiling is an effective method in the fight against crime. This encourages police officers to focus on Black and Latino males because they are believed to be the mostly likely criminal suspects. One of the most widely publicized incidents of profiling in recent memory occurred in the New York Police Department (NYPD). The NYPD initiated a stop and frisk policy in 2002.

The policy allowed officers to profile individuals they believed to be involved in crime. The NYPD’s stop and frisk report indicated that the majority of stop and frisk incidents involving African Americans did not support their contentions of criminal suspects. In 2012, the NYPD stopped 532,911 citizens in the city of New York. The data show that 284,229 (55 percent) were African American, 165,140 (32 percent) were Latino and 50,366 (10 percent were white. Incredulously, 473,644 (89 percent) were innocent.

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Additionally, in 2013, there were 191,558 New Yorkers who were stopped by the police of which 104,958 (56 percent) were African American, 55,191 (29 percent) were Latino and 20,877 (11 percent) were white. It was also found that 169,252 (88 percent) were totally innocent. The New York Civil Liberties Union (2014) also found that innocent New Yorkers have been subjected to police stops and street interrogations more than five million times since 2002 and that African American and Latino communities were disproportionately targeted for such search frisk tactics.  

Meehan and Ponder found that police officers were likely to use racial profiling to stop African American motorists traveling in predominantly white neighborhoods. An African American driving in an all-white neighborhood is viewed by white police officers as suspicious and out of place. An overview of studies on race and the criminal justice process concluded that most studies reveal what police officers freely admit that race is significantly independent, as a causal or determinative factor in deciding who to follow, search, or arrest. Research also reveals that a person’s color and physical attributes are important factors in shaping police officers’ discretion and decision-making to stop and arrest people of color. These practices lead to a higher concentration of blacks in arrest data and the over-representation of blacks in the criminal justice system. For police officers, this oftentimes result in overestimating young Africa-American males as a threat. Police officers who dehumanized blacks were also likely to

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have had a record of using force on black youths in custody. They also found that white police officers viewed black youth as less innocent than their white counterparts. The perception that blacks have superhuman strength leads police officers to use deadly force. Therefore, the only way to deal with someone like that is to put him down.  

**Police Officers use of Deadly Force against African American Males**

African Americans are treated differently based on stereotypes and perceptions that they are more likely to be dangerous to the community. Police officers’ use of deadly force on alleged African American male suspects demonstrates the belief that black lives are not highly valued. Donald Black provided data that suggest that black lives are not highly valued in society. Black laments:

> When people offend a social superior or inferior, different pattern emerges. Those accused of offending persons above them in social status (whites) are likely to be handled more severely than those accused of offending someone below them (blacks). Those victimizing a white, inhabit a legal space all of their own, with a risk of severity greater than anyone else. When a black suspect is convicted of killing a white, the risk of capital punishment leaps far beyond any other racial combination. When a white suspect is convicted of killing a black, the risk of capital punishment is approximately zero.

Similarly, Levine and Montgomery also found that African Americans who killed whites are four times more likely to get a death sentence than whites who kill blacks. These subtle messages

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provide justification for police officers to use excessive and deadly force when confronting African American males.

In recent months if not years, African American males have turned out to be neither armed nor guilty of any crime, but have been killed by police officers who may well have reacted, at least partly, to the color of one’s skin. For instance, in the case of Amadou Diallo, a black male in New York, four officers, mistaking his wallet for a handgun, fired forty-one shots at him, striking him nineteen times. The police officers, who were involved in the shooting, were acquitted of all charges. A more notable case, which occurred in Florida in 2012, did not involve law enforcement personnel, but a person acting as a peace officer in the form of a neighborhood security. George Zimmerman, a security guard, called 911 because he believed that a suspicious black male youth was in the wrong place. Zimmerman was unaware that the unarmed suspicious black youth, he had shot and killed, Trayvon Martin, lived in the neighborhood. Zimmerman was also acquitted of the charges of murder.

On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed black male, was shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. It was alleged that Michael Brown held his arms in the air and said “do not shoot”, but the white officer shot and killed him anyway. The facts of the case were ultimately decided by the grand jury, which issued a No Bill, not to prosecute the white police officer. The United States Department of Justice investigated the white police officer’s shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed black suspect, and the racial disturbance that occurred in Ferguson, Missouri as a consequence of No indictment for the white police officer.

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The Justice Department found significant disparities in the Ferguson Police Department’s use of force against African Americans. More specifically the Justice Department found:

That nearly 90 percent of documented force used by the Ferguson Police Department was leveled against African Americans. These disparities occur, at least in part, because of unlawful bias and stereotypes that the white police officers had about African Americans. The report also found evidence of substantial racial bias among police officers and the court staff in Ferguson. Police supervisors and leadership did little to ensure that officers act in accordance with law and policy, and rarely responded to citizens’ complaints of officer misconduct. The result is a pattern of stops without reasonable suspicion and arrests without probable cause and use of excessive force in violation of the Fourth Amendment.37

**Summary and Discussion**

The authors assert that race continues to be a controversial issue in this country in spite of the country electing an African American as President of the United States. Race is not only an issue in the criminal justice system, but it is also embedded and widespread in other institutions and organizations. For example, banks are less likely to give mortgage loans to African Americans and if they do, blacks are given higher interest loans than whites. Eckholm found that “Black and Hispanic home buyers tend to pay higher interest rates than whites with similar credit ratings.” At the University of Oklahoma, a white fraternity was found singing a racist chant. The fraternity members chanted “hanging a black from a tree.” It was later learned that chant was taught on a national leadership cruise that was sponsored by the fraternity’s national

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Honda Corporation reached a settlement to resolve allegations that the company discriminated against minority (African Americans, Latinos, and Asians) car buyers by marking up interest rates on loans. This is a practice industry experts describe as common because of the discretion given to individual dealerships. These aforementioned incidents, as well as the CNN study, which found that white children internalize stereotypes much more strongly than African American children, affirm the notion that race is a strong indication of institutional discrimination / structural discrimination and that racial bias and racial discrimination is culturally transmitted.

Consequently, it is not surprising that police officers employ race to stop, arrest, and excessive and deadly force against blacks and Latinos. In general, whites view blacks as suspicious or involved in some type of crime. Concomitantly, when these cases are brought before the district attorney’s office, they may not view the shooting of a black male significant enough to warrant prosecution. Hereto, prosecutorial misconduct may suggest that alleged black suspects must be guilty of something even though there is no evidence to prove otherwise. Excluding the shooting of unarmed blacks, by the police following Hurricane Katrina, rarely are police officers prosecuted for using excessive and deadly force against an alleged unarmed black male suspect. When brought to trial for shooting unarmed black suspects, white police officers are usually acquitted or found guilty of lesser charges. In Cleveland, Ohio, the judge, who heard the case of an unarmed black suspect, shot by a white police officer, stated that he would not "sacrifice" this police officer to the anti-police sentiment that has swept across America in the

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wake of other police shooting of unarmed black suspects. The white officer was acquitted of voluntary manslaughter. 41

In the *Tennessee v. Garner* case (1985), the U.S. Supreme Court decided when police officers can use deadly force under limited circumstances. Since the Garner decision, states have revised their laws regarding when officers can employ deadly force. States revise laws not, for the protection of innocent suspects, but for the protection of police officers. In the Michael Brown case, for example, even though he held his hands above his head, his slight movement towards the police gave the police justification to use deadly force according to the Missouri law.

Police officers have a myriad of duties and responsibilities; they have to make split second decisions to resolve crime and protect society. 42 But, at the same time, they must also solve problems, prevent crime and establish positive community relations. Blacks and Latinos, however, have a distrust of the police. This distrust is based on the practice of racial profiling by the police and the use of excessive and deadly force against African Americans and Latinos. Police departments however, view the latter methods as an effective crime control approach. 43

Although a number of police shootings of unarmed black suspects have been captured on cell phone videos and broadcast nationally, these incidents are not new; these shooting have been occurring for decades. Until the North Charleston video shooting, there has not been an indictment against a white officer for shooting an unarmed black suspect. These incidents have been covered up by either the police department or the district attorney’s office. The killing of an unarmed black suspect is generally ruled justifiable. Investigations conducted by police

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departments, district attorneys’ office and other police agencies (local and state) into the killings of unarmed black suspects is not without bias. To this end, this research recommends the utilization of independent citizens’ review board to investigate shootings by police officers. An independent and representative citizens’ reviews board may contribute to better police-community relations in the black community. Until race is no longer an issue in America, African Americans and Latinos will continue to receive unequal justice. Racial bias and discrimination, however, is nearly impossible to eliminate because it is deeply embedded into the social structure.
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Discrimination, Class Conflict or Cultural Degeneracy: An Analytical Review of Theoretical Arguments Purporting Causes of Racial Disparities in America

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Abstract
Issues of inequality and racial disparities are some of the most contentious issues in American politics and the issues have been raised again in the 2016 presidential primary campaigns. The difference between African Americans and whites in terms of social outcomes has been a constant feature exhibited across American history. There have been important changes in racial relations in the United States since the 1960s including many new political and economic opportunities for African Americans. The most egregious discriminatory practices have by now been prohibited by law. Yet, sharp disparities remain, and differential treatments along with disparities outcomes for racial groups seem resistant to legal remedies and changes in public policy. This article provides a critical review of the some of the most commonly cited primary causes for disparate racial outcomes. Conceptual contentions regarding the study of racial discrimination and disparities are described and explicated. By critiquing works of several prominent authors the explanatory power of their theoretical positions is evaluated.

The Prevalence of Disparity
African Americans live in the same geographical area with whites, they are governed by the same laws and regulations, they generally purchase the same goods and services, and they interact within the same major institutions of American society. African Americans frequently have close social contact with white Americans. They often have the same or similar religious values, they commonly enjoy the same kinds of food, music, sports and entertainment activities, they have similar career aspirations, and they speak the same language.

Despite this long list of broad similarities and shared experiences among African Americans and whites, we nevertheless observe stark differences between them in practically every major category of social well-being. Racial disparities run rampant throughout the American political economy. Incidents of blatant racial discrimination are occasionally exposed such as the Justice Department’s recent report on the biased law enforcement practices of the
local officials in Ferguson, Missouri or the targeting of African Americans for subprime loans by major banks during the period leading up to the 2008 financial crisis. However, racial discriminatory patterns are usually only implicit, operating through subtle socialization practices and impersonal institutional procedures and therefore inconspicuous. Civil rights legislation brought an end to legalized anti-black discrimination, but wide disparities in outcomes between blacks and whites have not substantially changed in 50 years\(^1\).

Blacks are more likely to be uninsured, and they are less likely to be treated with certain procedures. Yet, blacks report chronic illnesses and disabilities more frequently than other demographic groups. Black women have lower rates of breast cancer than white women, but of those with the disease black women suffer a higher mortality. Mortality rates for heart disease and other forms of cancer also tend to be significantly higher for blacks. Overall, whites can expect to live about 78 years, while the life expectancy of blacks is 73 years\(^2\).

The most valuable asset owned by most families is the family home, and about 46 percent of blacks own their own home in comparison 74 percent of white families. According to the Pew Research Center surveys, the median wealth of white households increased between the years of 2010 – 2013 by 2.4 percent from $138,000 to $141,900. During this same time frame the median wealth of Black households decreased by 33.7 percent from $16,600 to $11,000\(^3\). Furthermore, blacks are twice as likely as whites to be unemployed, but even when employed with the same kind of job blacks can expect to earn less income. The Georgetown Center on Education and the


\(^3\) “Kings Dream Remains and Illusive Goal; Many Americans See Racial Disparities,” pewresearch.org, August 22, 2013.
Workforce found that Blacks earn on average $2,000 - $10,000 less than whites for the ten highest paying professions. Overall, blacks earned 66 percent of the income earned by whites in 2011 according to Pew Research Center surveys. At the same time the poverty rate was 27.6 percent for blacks, but 9.8 percent for whites. Median household income for whites in 2011 was $67,175 compared to $39,760 for Blacks.

Perhaps the most glaring racial disparities are to be found in the criminal justice system. African Americans are 13 percent of the population, but they account for 28 percent of all arrests and 40 percent of all prison inmates. Blacks are more likely to be sentenced to prison, and less likely to receive probation than whites who are charged and convicted of the same offense. The average sentence for a violent crime given a Black inmate was one year longer than that given to a white inmate. African American juveniles are placed in residential facilities at four times the rate of white juveniles.

Over the past decade several studies have indicated that whites engage in recreational drug use more frequently, but Blacks are more likely to be arrested and convicted on drug charges. An ACLU study covering ten years from 2001 to 2010 found that 18 to 25 year whites use marijuana as slightly higher rates than blacks, but blacks were much more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession. White adolescents and young adults are significantly more

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5 “Kings Dream Remains and Illusive Goal; Many Americans See Racial Disparities,” pewresearch.org, August 22, 2013.
likely to misuse prescriptions drugs than blacks.\textsuperscript{8} Some studies further reveal that whites deal drugs more often, while blacks are more likely to be arrested for drug dealing.\textsuperscript{9} Overall, blacks are arrested and imprisoned at significantly higher rates on drug charges. The 2012 Bureau of Justice Prisoners Report indicated that Blacks made 45 percent of those imprisoned for drug offenses while whites were 30 percent of that number.

All things being equal, there should be little or no variation with respect to race for outcomes in income, wealth, life expectancy or crime. That is we would expect that over time the average collective outcomes for blacks and whites living under the same conditions in America will be more or less the same. But, blacks and whites in America while sharing the same social environment experience vastly different outcomes. An explanation is demanded to account for how these circumstances have come about.

We will critique the perspectives of several authors who have offered their own hypotheses, analyses, and conclusions in the attempt to explain the entrenched and pervasive racial disparities in America. Without question, the initial relationship between whites and blacks existed on a predicated stance where whites assumed the dominant position. Blacks were subordinated and their labor forcibly expropriated and systematically prevented from gaining access to resources and opportunities for social advancement. Researchers and scholars disagree on why this is so, and we will investigate the merits and demerits of several arguments.

\textsuperscript{8} Broman et al., J Child Adolesc Behav 2015, 3:5 http://dx.doi.org/10.4172/2375-4494.1000239
\textsuperscript{9} Christopher Ingraham, “Whites are more likely to deal drugs, but black people are more likely to get arrested for it,” washingtonpost.com, September 30, 2014, accessed on February 21, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/09/30/white-people-are-more-likely-to-deal-drugs-but-black-people-are-more-likely-to-get-arrested-for-it/
Conceptualizing Difficulties

It is not unusual for intellectual disagreements to center on different perspectives of what seems to be the very same phenomenon. Two different authors may use the same terms such as race or class in reference to social relationships, and yet the meanings implied by each author may be quite different or even contradictory. Although they seem to be addressing the same phenomenon, they are in fact discussing different phenomena or perhaps different aspects of the same general phenomenon.

To avoid such confusion, we may endeavor to define the terms of the debate, and to clarify our conceptual understandings when pursuing an inquiry of the phenomena in question. Well-defined analytically precise terms are used to give detailed descriptions for research investigations and to make comparative evaluations or qualitative analyses. However, such descriptions may narrow the focus of attention to such an extent that major aspects of the phenomenon are excluded from consideration. Some authors deal with that problem by giving broad general descriptions of the concepts under consideration that seemingly fit most situations as opposed to conceptualizing more precise designations. However, the capacity to make definitive unambiguous determinations might be lost. An author may avoid the problem of definitions altogether by sidestepping any definitive designations, and simply proceeding to use the terms in question as though their definitions were already commonly known.

Thomas Sowell notes that the term race has been used with various meanings. He further determines to avoid “semantic issues” and decides to refer to both “racial and ethnic groups under the rubric of race, in part because more precise definitions could easily lose touch with social realities in a world of growing racial intermixtures over the generations.” He finds that, “…biological intermixtures have accelerated in our own times, even as the stridency of racial
identity rhetoric has increased.”

Of course, if one cannot provide clear descriptions of race and ethnicity or even distinguish between the two, then we might consider it premature to speak of increases or decreases in biracialism or racial intermixtures. Sowell simply ignores the historical origins and the chronological development of scientific racism. He pretends not to notice that racial constructs in the modern world have a definite history, and that these ideologies have repeatedly and overwhelmingly been used to the advantage of particular groups and against the interests of others. Nevertheless, using this unfocused description, he proposes to address issues of disparities comparing different culture groups across widely dissimilar political, geographical and historical circumstances. He myopically proceeds to present fragmentary examples of differences that are designated as racial disparities over the past 150 years. Sowell’s work shows little consideration for contextual peculiarities and no consideration for the self-understanding of those persons whose behavior he chooses to label and characterize.

According to Domhoff, sociologists generally divide classes into two types: economic and social. Economic class is determined by the amount and type of income, and whether or not one is a business owner or a wage earner. However, social class is established by lifestyle and personal associations. Some overlap exists and both types of classes are seemingly interrelated. However, it is also possible for two persons to have the same income and occupy the same economic class, yet have no common or similar associations in terms of club memberships, civic associations or network of friends and family relations, thus occupy two completely different social classes. The extremities of the two types of classes tend to merge. People in the uppermost economic class, or the top 1 percent of income earners, also tend to associate together.

Domhoff’s approach moves beyond generalized descriptions and effectively operationalizes definitions that give analytically significant designations. By comparing associations such as

club memberships, occupations, membership on the board of directors of major companies, and top government posts, Domhoff develops a method for tracking networks of relationships among the power elite. Using this basis he is able to give a functional definition of the ruling class in America and demonstrate its impact on public policy.\textsuperscript{11}

Carmichael and Hamilton define racism as the “predication of decisions and policies on consideration of race for the purpose of \textit{subordinating} a racial group and maintaining control over that group.”\textsuperscript{12} They then describe racism as operating both overtly and covertly with individual and institutional modes of action. The two forms are related in that institutional racism is reliant on individual anti-black attitudes, but the operation of institutional racism also reinforces such attitudes. Individual racism is often obvious, but institutional racism is, “…subtle, less identifiable…but no less destructive of human life…it originates in the operation of established and respected forces in society, and thus receives far less condemnation than [individual racism].”\textsuperscript{13} Racial discrimination then results from patterns of racist behavior which act to systematically exclude some from access to opportunities while enhancing access to those same opportunities for others. The discussions of Carmichael and Hamilton treat black and white racial identities as historically constructed collectives which draw criticisms from those who prefer to selectively problematize and atomize social identities. However, their descriptive understanding has the advantage of being congruent with commonly reported self-identifications, which are chronologically traceable, and they further provide us with conceptual tools needed to systematically examine racial discrimination and its effects.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 4 – 5.
Historical Background of Disparities in America

According to James Stewart, “…the exploitation of enslaved Africans was especially vital to the development and performance of the United States (US) economy,” in the 18th and 19th centuries. Enslaved labor on southern plantations produced sugar, molasses, cotton and indigo which fueled northern textile mills and distilleries while the intercontinental importation of the enslaved nourished the ship-building industry. All of this economic activity was underwritten or financed by investment banking concerns and insurance companies which in turn profited greatly. Immense personal fortunes garnered from slaveholding were invested in purchasing real estate in urban areas, building luxurious residences and even for endowing prestigious academic institutions including Harvard and Princeton Universities. The enslaved were worked not only in plantation fields, but many became skilled artisans and craftsmen in urban areas. Some of the skilled enslaved were permitted to hire themselves out and obliged to periodically make predetermined payments to the slaveholder, thereby instituting a form of perpetual debt bondage.

The experiences of deprivation and systematic exploitation did not end with the end of slavery. In the 1890s whites began to re-impose a regime of frank white supremacy throughout the south where most blacks lived. A doctrine of separate but equal was devised, and stipulations for the racial segregation of public facilities were instituted. Invidious systems of sharecropping, tenant farming and prison labor continued the large scale expropriation of black labor well into the 20th century and did not end until the onset of World War II.


As Jones relates the perpetuation of discriminatory differential treatments would not have been possible without institutionalization of the ideology of white supremacy:

…the ideological justification for the superordination of whites is the institutionalized belief in the inherent superiority of that group. This condition cannot be overemphasized. It says that it is not their late arrival, their patterns of migration, their numerical strength, nor their cultural patterns which, beginning with Jamestown and continuing to the present, have underlain the differential treatment of blacks; it says that any attempt to explain the black political experience in terms of any one or a combination of these will be insufficient."¹⁶

Robert Smith adds that the imposition of these unequal conditions could only have been maintained and enforced using “extraordinary violence.”¹⁷ Smith goes on to observe that in more recent times frank expressions of white supremacy have declined, but more subtle patterns of racism persist. Thus, racial discrimination in America has proven to be quite adaptable over time and highly resistant against all legal maneuvers employed against it. Discrimination against blacks continues insidiously through ingenious innovations and under stealthy forms and guises. All of which serves to obscure discriminatory behaviors and render causal links of disparities much more difficult to study, track and analyze.

Critique of a Conservative Argument

Walter Williams does not doubt that there is racial discrimination in America. He does however take issue with the effects of discrimination, and the policies used to combat it.

Despite frequent assertions to the contrary, many of the seemingly intractable problems encountered by a significant number of black Americans do not result from racial discrimination. This is not to say that discrimination does not exist. Nor is it to say that


discrimination has no adverse effects. For policy purposes, however, the issue is not whether discrimination exists, but the extent which it explains what we see today.\textsuperscript{18}

The implementation of assistance programs by the federal government precipitated the crisis in the black family, according to Williams. It was not slavery and discrimination which have devastated the black family, but policies of the federal government promoting welfare and the minimum wage. Black households just out of slavery were more likely to be composed of two parents than the black poor of today. The “dramatic breakdown” of the black family did not occur until the 1960s.

We can see the effects of welfare on the work experience of poor families. In 1959, 31.5 percent of heads of poor families worked full-time year-round; by 1989, the percentage had fallen to 16.2 percent. In 1959, 30.5 percent did not work at all (either full-time or part-time); by 1989 that figure had risen to 50.8 percent. Some argue that such high unemployment stems from lack of job opportunities in the inner city. That observation is questionable. During 1979 – 1980, the National Bureau of Economic Research conducted a survey in the ghettos of Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Only a minority of the respondents were employed, yet almost as many said it was easy or fairly easy to get a job as a laborer as said it was difficult or impossible; and 71 percent said it was fairly easy to get a minimum-wage job.\textsuperscript{19}

Statistics are often used to reveal those things that are not actually so, a possibility arising from the fact that statistical quantities in and of themselves have no meaning. Numerical values receive their significance relative only to that constructed perspective wherein we choose to give them meaning. That is, when presented with statistics, proclaiming some astonishing new revelation we might do well to ask: “As compared to what?” To draw conclusions based upon a comparison of the national rates of employment for the poor from two different dates over a 30 year period with a selective survey of several large cities in still another particular year is to misuse or abuse the data. Employment numbers and the number of available jobs fluctuate continuously in all sectors of the economy and over all regions of the country. There may be

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 9.
intervening recessions and recoveries over any 30 year period, and these may be unevenly experienced across the economy. Also, people can and do move in and out of poverty over time. Due to structural changes in the economy, manufacturing jobs have steadily declined in urban areas since the 1960s. Furthermore, real wages for working Americans have not increased since the 1970s, but cost of living expenses for housing, food, education, transportation and healthcare continue to rise faster than the rate of inflation. Indicating their intelligence, many poor persons are unenthused about seeking employment in minimum wage or part-time jobs that barely earn enough to cover the cost of bus fare to work.

Williams assertion that, “...most [enslaved] black children lived in biological two-parent families,” is baseless. In fact, for more than two centuries enslaved African Americans were not permitted legalized marriages and neither did they have legally recognized families. Thus, any definitive assertions concerning the constitution of enslaved families made without consulting their own testimonies are ill-advised at best and deceitfully misleading at worst. Of course we do have records of slave narratives, ignored by Williams, which are replete with examples of enslaved persons who did not know one or both of their parents. Oftentimes it was the slaveholder himself who was one of the parents. It is unclear if Williams meant to include slaveholders together with their enslaved concubines as two parent households.

Slave breeding of young females and widespread sexual exploitation of black women by slaveholders sharply contradicts the notion of the stable nuclear enslaved family that Williams

20 Walter E. Williams, Race and Economics: How Much Can We Blame on Discrimination?, 7.

attempts to project. As Smithers relates, the formerly enslaved gave ample testimony to the practice of slave breeding:

In relation to slave-breeding practices, then, there are three main points that former slaves typically emphasized. First, slaves insisted that slave owners, overseers, and slave traders selected particularly fecund men and women to breed slaves. They insisted that these men and women were known as “studs” or “bucks,” the women as “wenches.” Second, they said that the forced breeding of slaves not only represented the commodification of slave sexuality but also created a set of dehumanizing social practices that separated the “breeding” slaves from the average field slave. Third and most enduringly, the imposition of slave-breeding regimes on black men and women separated family members and caused unquantifiable amounts of grief that last well into the twentieth century. 22

The enslaved adjusted and adapted to the impositions of enslavement by attempting to retain some semblance of family life often with extended or blended family types. 23 Patricia Hill Collins points out that more than a decade prior to the 1960s black scholars had already examined the constitution of black families and the effects of racial oppression:

…[Du Bois and Frazier] described the connections among higher rates of female-headed households in African American communities, the importance that women assume in Black family networks, and the persistence of Black poverty. However, neither scholar interpreted Black women’s centrality in Black families as a cause of African-American social class status. Both saw so-called matriarchal families as the outcome of racial oppression and poverty.” 24

Angela Davis adds that black women played the crucial role in maintaining family life for the enslaved though often burdened by abusive conditions. 25 That many of the formerly enslaved sought the security of marriages may be due to circumstances in which they could find support nowhere else in racist America. Black women of that period in particular were excluded from


many types of employment and remaining in marriage, even a bad marriage, may have been an economic necessity. The evolution of material circumstances and the liberalization of employment opportunities which also began in the 1960s permitted many to exercise their option to leave or to forego unhappy marriages.

The “dramatic breakdown in the black-family structure” can partially be attributed to adaptations made by people attempting to cope and survive in a deeply racist and hostile social environment. Single parent headed households are better than no parent headed households after all. Certainly, the grinding pressures of being constantly and pervasively discriminated against in employment, consumer services and the criminal justice system could be included as such factors.

Williams asserts that resolutions for the problems of the black poor will involve more access to free markets and the elimination of the minimum wage. He notes quite accurately, that the Davis Bacon Act of 1931 was passed not only to set a federal minimum wage for government contracted construction workers, but also to drive Black workers out of the construction industry.26

Understanding the effects of minimum wage laws requires first a few simple observations. While legislative bodies have the power to order wage increases they have not found a way to order commensurate increases in worker productivity that make the worker’s output worth the higher wage…To the extent that the minimum wage law raises a worker’s pay level that exceeds his productivity, employers, predictably make adjustments in the use of labor. Such adjustments will produce gains for some workers at the expense of others. Those workers who retain their jobs receive a higher wage gain. Most of the adverse effects are borne by workers who are most disadvantaged in terms of marketable skills. They will lose their jobs or not be hired in the first place.27

Thus poor blacks are not desirable workers and they should be paid less, and they should willingly accept lower wages, because they are unskilled and therefore less productive. This

26 Walter E. Williams, Race and Economics: How Much Can We Blame on Discrimination? 33 –34.

27 Ibid., 38 –39.
argument illustrates the grand possibilities of deductive absurdities achievable once one has detached a problematic condition from the historical background and social context in which it occurs. Being poor and unskilled need not exclude one from preferential treatment and such treatment may well be appropriate to address the inequities. There is in fact a long history of poor immigrant Europeans who have been given preferential treatment in their efforts to secure a foothold in the American workplace. The fact is that until the 1960s whites were provided exclusive access to programs of ‘affirmative action’ or preferences in immigration, subsidized small business loans, the right to purchase federal land at subsidized rates, the right to lease federal land to exploit oil, gas and mineral resources, and exclusive access to major federal contracts.\(^{28}\) These restricted privileges were provided through public policies with the intention of enriching a particular racial group, including many poor whites while purposefully excluding others from the possibility of similar gains.

Williams suggests that every problem encountered by a black American cannot be attributed to racial discrimination and without considering anything else, that statement might as well be true. However, people do not live as singularities, and human beings are notoriously social creatures. The problems that people face are partitioned into discrete compartments only at the great risk of significantly distorting the nature of both the problems and the people. A thoughtful consideration of the setting and social environment out of which people must live and interact is helpful since problems incurred from the surroundings and problems experienced within those surroundings are never completely separable.

Despite several interesting logical illustrations and a few well-constructed hypothetical exercises, Williams’ failure to move beyond abstract argumentation finally renders his discourse

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 34 – 35.
a nebulosity. This is most clearly seen as he tries to operationalize the term at the heart of his argument.

…discrimination may be operationally defined as the act of choice or selection. All selection necessarily and simultaneously requires non-selection. Choice requires discrimination...when the term discrimination is modified with the nouns race and sex, we merely specify the criterion on which the choice is made.29

Hence, to choose is to discriminate and to discriminate is to select something, but also necessarily to reject something else. Again, given no context at all, this is all well and good. Williams delivers articulate analytical propositions that are quite unable to explain the perpetuation of racial disparities favoring whites and detrimental for blacks. As every good lawyer knows one can make rigorously logical arguments and still draw conclusions that are known to be false. The goal of operationalization is not simply to measure something, but to measure something worth measuring. People make choices, but people do not choose in a vacuum. They do so within a society with pronounced cultural orientations and where there are economic pressures, political motives and personal experiences coming to bear on the choices that are made. The chronological progression from American chattel slavery to enforced racial segregation and now continuing with widespread anti-black racial discrimination cannot be explained away by eloquently delivered logical irrelevancies.

Critique of a Leftist Argument

Reed and Chowkwanyun reviewed recent studies and they found that while many exhibit methodological dexterity in ferreting out disparate outcomes, these studies usually conclude, unsurprisingly, that race or institutional racism is a factor in American life. They go on to suggest that these studies are beset with “interpretational pathologies” including dichotomous

29 Walter E. Williams, Race and Economics: How Much Can We Blame on Discrimination?, 113–114.
determinations of race and class, overgeneralizations of white racial animosity, and failure to consider how race and racism have evolved over time.\textsuperscript{30}

Simplistic use of race as the key analytic category, moreover, suggests intra-racial class uniformity and encourages monochromatic dyads. Much of the problem rests with the almost exclusive reliance on quantitative data sets, which usually limits researchers to pre-defined administrative and demographic variables while ignoring consideration of forces not captured by the data…\textsuperscript{31}

The authors do not deny that race is a key factor in racial disparities, but to them race seems to be overemphasized as a factor. The real aim of these authors is to stress the role that class might play a causative factor for widespread racial disparities in America. Whether class dynamics are “overarching” factors or not heavily depends upon how we define socioeconomic classes. And operationalizing the concept of socioeconomic classes would then shape any conclusions that are drawn. It would indeed be beneficial to see more studies which use class as a starting point. Also, investigating intra-racial class differences will surely bear fruit. But, such studies would also have interpretative limitations. The problematic of defining classes is just as complicated as that of defining races. Ambiguities prevail if the descriptions are too broad, and contradictions proliferate if the descriptions are too narrow. In defining socioeconomic classes one might consider lifestyles and values as well as income levels, types of income and net worth in addition to relationships to the various means of production. And all of these factors can vary with time so that class relationships are continuously transforming. Furthermore, there are significant interactions between race and class. That the attitudes and behaviors of the black


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 152 – 3.
middle and upper classes largely mimic those of their white counterparts would seem to be related to the racial dominance of the latter.

Reed suggests a fundamental relationship between race and class as he explores the conceptual and theoretical challenges of explaining the social realities of American history.

I propose the familiar juxtaposition of race and class forces debates about American inequality misunderstands both phenomena by treating them as fundamentally distinguishable. Instead, both are more effectively, and more accurately, seen as equivalent and overlapping elements within a singular system of social power and stratification rooted in capitalist labor relations. Hierarchies of civic status mediate and manage this stratification system by defining populations and assigning them ascriptively to what come to be understood as appropriate niches of civic worth and entitlement. These hierarchies evolve and are enforced formally through laws, public policies and quasi-official means …

Thus, it is not possible to disentangle race and class in America since these two ascriptive designations mutually reproduce and reinforce one another. Reed provides a nuanced and thoughtful discussion of the dynamic relationship between race and class. But, his approach tends to obviate motive factors that make considerable contributions to the maintenance of comprehensive systems of domination and control.

In a review of interracial cooperation among labor activists in the 1890s Reed finds that such associations were only prevented by the harshest means.

…notwithstanding the pervasiveness of ideologies of racial hierarchy and attitudes that would today properly be understood as racist, elimination of potentially consequential interracial political solidarities formed on the basis of shared practical, largely class-based concerns required elite led putsches that “purified” the electorate of blacks and many poor whites and imposed harsh legal and moral sanctions – including freely applied, officially condoned violence – on transgressions of the apartheid like regime they installed.


33Ibid., 266.
This line of reasoning provides a weak, superficial and unconvincing explanation of the enduring and profound role that racism has played in America. The domination fixation emanating from the cultural core of the controlling group is left unexamined. Dismantling and preventing biracial coalitions among working class people could just as easily be viewed a useful adjuvant activity to the primary objective of sustaining the ruling racial class.

The all-pervading cultural impetus to dominate others, as the anthropologist Marimba Ani suggests, might be a determining factor.34 The goal then would not just be control over the means of economic production, but control period. For the ruthless mindset restlessly driven to dominance and supremacy, an enterprise need not be financially profitable in order to be deemed worthwhile; exploitation can thus be a secondary consequence to the psychopath’s will to power.

The agreed upon fiction of Western capitalist democracies holds that power of authoritative coercion and state sanctioned violence are exercised for the public good and by consent of the governed. In reality only those with access to sufficient capital to maintain a controlling stake in the means of production are endowed with the privileges and rights to give such consent. Those without capital have no rights, only permissions or conditional privileges which may be unilaterally reduced or rescinded although sometimes with the pretense of due process.

The exercise of raw power and brute force violence does not require a rational basis beyond desire for its perpetuation. Prominent business corporations like major financial holding companies, outsized investment banks, large scale media concerns and even nation-states have been able to operate successfully for long periods of time without ever turning a profit or balancing a budget. They may even eventually be declared net losers or bankrupt. Yet, it is their

pronounced capacities to control the flow and operation of commerce, resources or information and to manipulate or intimidate populations which make them viable and value enterprises to those obsessively seeking domination over others.

Reed and Chokwanyun correctly observe that social understandings and designations of race and racism have changed over time. But, an investigation seeking to understand diachronic transformations must also be careful to note those forms or relationships which somehow resist change and endure over time. It is observed that a particular group, identifiable by class and by race, has maintained effective control of the American political economy. The power, prestige and prominence of the most privileged group of white Americans has remained invariant across the entirety of American history. In fact many of the most wealthy and powerful families in the United States can trace their elite status lineage back to the antebellum period, some going back to the colonial era.35 And so we may conclude that relative to American history, domination and control are not race neutral, and race is then a primary determinant of outcomes in the American political economy, though always mitigated or attenuated by class, gender and other factors. Neither the fact that a few blacks, by closely aligning themselves with influential whites, sometimes attain an elite class privileged status, nor the fact that at any given time 10 percent or so of the white population find themselves in desperate financial straits invalidate the conclusion of racial primacy.

Critique of a Structural Argument

Robert C. Smith posits that racial discrimination is an organized institutional practice which then systematically results in disparities. He employs the concept of racism as given by Carmichael and Hamilton which describes racism as essentially a power dynamic that enforces dominant/subordinate relationships and which can be expressed individually or via institutional controls and procedures. Institutional racism then is identifiable whenever we can observe that policies result in systematically negative outcomes for blacks or other minorities. Smith explains:

…institutional racism is understood as policies and practices that, controlling for social class, subordinate blacks or maintain or “freeze” then in a subordinate position…the concept focuses on the effects of a decision, not its intent. A decision, policy, or practice that is nominally nonracist, sincerely so, may nevertheless be racist in its consequences or effects.\(^36\)

By controlling for class Smith attempted to distinguish the effects of racism from those of class differences since disparate outcomes can be the result of either. He notes: “…much of what may appear to be institutional racism is simply the effects of routine class bias in a market economy.”\(^37\) Smith does not explicitly define or describe what he means by a class, but based upon the studies he reviews we presume that he refers primarily to income levels. In any event, as Reed suggests race and class, howsoever defined, will most certainly be inter-influencing phenomena and we doubt that any method of data disaggregation will be able to completely distinguish the effects of one from the other. Nevertheless, Smith’s approach to extrapolating the effects of institutional racism by controlling for class is a promising method for investigating patterns of discriminatory behavior and systemic structural racism. We may inquire if wealthy blacks experience less negative outcomes than do poor blacks. The results of such an inquiry

\(^36\) Ibid., 53.
\(^37\) Ibid.
might point to some class bias, but they would neither confirm nor disconfirm the presence of institutional racism. A more revealing question would be: How do relatively well-off blacks compare in terms of outcomes with similarly disposed whites? Should disparities disadvantaging blacks prevail across socioeconomic classes then the argument for structural impositions racism is strengthened.

Disparate outcomes due to discriminatory procedures and practices in education, employment, housing, health and consumer services are examined by reference to examples. Standardized testing results from college placement exams and IQ tests have been used to deny access to educational opportunities. Test results are also used to promote stereotypical notions of black inferiority. He also reviews several examples of discriminatory practices in employment and how institutional procedures that are seemingly race neutral can be employed in order to enforce the racially subordinate status on Blacks. Disparities in the treatment of various types of diseases in the healthcare system are also noted. Additionally, blacks are frequently offered higher rates for home mortgages and higher prices for automobiles than whites of the same economic class. Thus, institutional racism is demonstrated at work across the American economic landscape.  

The issue of inferiorization is addressed in a manner incongruous with the main topic. The impact of the Black Power Movement on consciousness and racial identity is traced. Smith then reviews conceptual problems in attempting to study self-hatred among blacks and notes a difference between personal and collective self-esteem. He states that many blacks use referents other than race to gauge their self-esteem and thus they have high levels of personal self-esteem while showing little or no pride in race. He cites empirical studies claiming to show that some Blacks have higher self-esteem scores than comparable whites. Smith goes on to note examples

38 Ibid., 54 – 75.
of color conscious discrimination or intra-racial discrimination among blacks. The author does not provide any evidence that directly relates inferiorization to disparate outcomes.\(^{39}\)

Further investigations seem to be in order here. Observance of a group of people targeted for negative discriminatory treatment, but who nevertheless experience high levels of personal self-esteem because they decline to identify with the characteristic that is the focus of discrimination against them, suggests the occurrence of an interesting phenomenon. Inferiorization could be conceptualized as resulting in an irrational abhorrence against working productively with others of one’s own ethnicity or race. The impaired ability to engage in cooperative activities serves to weaken efforts to build and maintain economic, educational and political institutions needed for collective survival which must precede any individual achievements. This condition might be expected among those subjected to an environment of pervasive discriminatory activity devaluing their humanity. The failure to engender identification with the collective racial referent leaves the group unable to organize politically and effectively counter racial discriminatory practices applied against them. Self-destructive behavior is usually considered indicative of a disorder. Given pervasive anti-black discrimination, the denial of racial identity might itself be an indicator of some kind of psychosocial malady.

Finally, the author concludes his most informative and thoughtful review on a decidedly gloomy downbeat note:

…I do not see any realistic or politically feasible strategies or policies to deal with the problem…the civil rights revolution represented a frontal attack on the doctrine of white supremacy, but it did not destroy what [King] called the “monster” of racism itself…virtually all of the talent and resources of the leadership of black America have been devoted to integration or incorporation into the institutions of the American polity, while the core community it purports to lead has become increasingly segregated, and its

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 88 – 100.
society, economy, culture, and institutions of internal governance and communal uplift have decayed...there is little prospect – at least in the near term – for the development of a politics or the adoption of policies that effectively deal with the interrelated problems of racism and poverty in the United States.\(^{40}\)

And so the author leaves us with no productive propositions, promising policy prescriptions or positive programmatic prospects. Even so, as Smith pointed out himself, all of the negative factors of social decadence deleteriously affecting the black community are also working their corrosive effects on all other racial and ethnic communities, though perhaps to varying degrees of difference. Rather than bemoaning our collective fate, we might well find it more beneficial and perhaps less depressing, to plan patiently and study intently while remaining ever watchful for the inevitable opportunities of remediation and redress.

**Conclusions**

The arguments of Sowell and Williams revolve around two basic truisms: 1) not all differences or disparities are due to discrimination and 2) improvements in individual behavior, stronger work ethics and the acquisition of skills or more education will result in improved outcomes. What both authors assiduously avoid, however, is a critical examination of the structural relationships of domination and exploitation implicit in the persistence of racially discriminatory practices that both authors acknowledge do exist. Structural relationships determine that one group will regularly, systematically and comprehensively extract resources, services and labor from another group in order to enrich itself. Such structural relationships also allow the dominant group to suppress any demands for redress of the grossly unequal allocation of resources. It is this predacious parasitical imposition by the dominant group, demonstrable across American history, which makes racial discrimination a primary cause of disparities.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 141 –143.
The culture of poverty notion advanced by conservatives to explain disparities in social outcomes is simply not creditable. It can be said that some poor blacks are lazy, inclined to criminal activities and sexually maladjusted, but the very same can be said with equal conviction about some well off whites. Moreover, since the wealthy have ready access to means and facilities allowing them to mask and conceal their negative proclivities we might suspect that the prevalence of social deviance amongst them is greatly underreported. Meanwhile any hint of pathological behavior among the black poor is subjected to research studies and media depictions exposing the most lurid details in the lives of society’s most vulnerable people. Often these reports turn out to be grossly exaggerated such as the ‘crack babies’ hysteria of the 1990s. Nevertheless, surveys reveal that abuse of pharmaceutical drugs and alcohol occurs less often among the poor than among those better off. Also, studies indicate that child sexual abuse has about the same prevalence among the economically disadvantaged as among those of higher socioeconomic classes, i.e. sexual abuse has no relation to class. Indeed one might well wonder if the ‘spiritual poverty’ of those wealthy and well off, with all of their material advantages, does not constitute a more damning moral indictment than any which might be pronounced upon those frequently discriminated against and materially impoverished.

In our theoretical imagininations anything might be true, and everything could be false, we need only imagine it and then devise a rationale to allege that it is so. However, the challenge of serious social science is to relate concepts and theoretical propositions to conditions in which people actually live; conditions involving interrelationships that may be very complex, which are usually multifaceted, and which may not lend themselves to precise quantifiable delimitations. Yet, the propositions ought to be consistent with empirical observations. They may also be

suggestive of public policy implications, and preferably one should make policy suggestions without sacrificing one’s personal integrity in the process. We may thereby hope to enhance possibilities of correcting gross imbalances and significantly improve our social conditions. But, some have shabbily submitted themselves to the service of masking the multitudinous modes, means, and methods of oppressive power.

A more serious examination of disparate outcomes is engaged by leftist theorists. Class conflict alone, however, is not sufficient to explain the persistence and intensity of racial disparities. Bohmer found that class-based theories were able to reliably explain the history and perpetuation of capitalism. However, he also points out that class dominance theories generally downplay the autonomous role that blacks play in the struggle against oppression and exploitation. Furthermore, class dominance theories have yet to provide, “…a convincing explanation of why white workers often accept or support racial inequality and racist ideology.”42 He observes that Marxist views tend to be reductionist and lead to an economic determinism in which, “…economy determines politics, culture, consciousness, and struggles of society; it minimizes the autonomous role of culture and race.”43

Class conflict dynamics informed by the concentrated elite class-domination as suggested by G. William Domhoff, and combined with the equivalent component of systematic and ideologically based racial dominance as proposed by Mack Jones may be able to consistently explain racially disparate outcomes. Domhoff explains that the American power elite which manages the system of control is a group of select professionals with roots in the ruling classes, but which can and will incorporate talented outsiders from the lower classes. But, the elite social class is much more exclusive. Composed of extended interrelated families, selective bloodlines

43 Ibid.
or “blue bloods” socialize in exclusive gatherings, which allow the social elite to “…instill a class awareness that includes feelings of superiority, pride and justified privilege. Deep down most members of the upper class think they are better than other people…”

Although Domhoff barely mentions race, class-dominant elite theory necessarily leads us back to race as a primary factor in the system of domination and control. This is so because the American ruling class is essentially and overwhelmingly, if not entirely, composed of members from one particular racial group, a circumstance which has remained constant for the entirety of American history. Due to the fact that the ruling class is unequivocally racially identifiable, privileges of identity and rank descend to all others who share in that collective identity including those in the lower classes. Whites then across all lines of class, gender and sexual behavior derive and enjoy opportunities they would not necessarily have otherwise.

From the beginning the system of racial oppression was designed to bring a range of benefits to white Americans. The society rooted in slavery provided whites with many undeserved social, economic, political, and cultural advantages. Once the frame work of unjust impoverishment and enrichment was created under slavery, the white leadership of the new nation, strongly supported by the average white man and woman, set into motion the segregative and discriminatory means for perpetuating the enrichment and impoverishment across generations…Most white Americans underestimate not only the level of their privileges but the degree to which these privileges exist because they have been passed down from their families and ancestors.45

The drive to reproduce power relationships and the dynamics of intergenerational transfers ensures the propagation of racial domination. Power is transferred from one generation to the next via the handover of properties, resources and influence by investiture with positions of institutional dominance. Quite often these transfers occur between those within the same family, overwhelmingly to those within the same ethnic or racial group, and always to those who

are socialized into a similar worldview and similar cultural values. Disruptions may occur only where there is usurpation, a military conquest or a successful mass revolt ending with the overthrow of the ruling class.

Historically, white supremacy developed in tandem with capitalism and the two are closely intertwined, mutually supportive and practically inseparable. Some leftist cling to an economic determinism and continue to view class conflict as ultimately the sole primary factor causing disparities; if we move beyond capitalism then we will move beyond racism. The racism experienced by African descendent people in declared Marxist-socialist states casts doubt upon this view.46 Genuine concern for the most marginalized and exploited people requires serious consideration of the possibility of racist imperatives beyond economic motivations. If racism is determined to be more than a transitory diversion then we might want to take a closer look at Derrick Bell’s racial realism and the racial domination dynamics of Mack Jones.

The paradox of American politics is that while an elite and racially uniform class dominates public policies it would be untrue to say that average citizens, the masses, and outgroups like blacks, have no influence. The influence of the masses may be inconsistent, irregular and unpredictable, but it is nevertheless real, as the study any number of protest movements will reveal. Substantive transformation of disparate conditions, as unlikely as this may sometimes seem, is not an impossibility.

Bibliography


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