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8 From Jim Crow Racism to Laissez-Faire Racism: The Transformation of Racial Attitudes

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The Swedish economist and social reformer Gunnar Myrdal arrived in the United States on September 10, 1938. He had come at the request of the Carnegie Corporation, which had commissioned him to head a comprehensive study of the status of African Americans. Among his first undertakings was a tour of the American South. This journey brought the energetic Swede face-to-face with Jim Crow segregation and discrimination against blacks. It also impressed on him the backwardness of the southern economy and the extreme poverty of most people in the region, especially but not only blacks. The journey convinced Myrdal of the importance of his mission for the nation as a whole.[1] With these stark images of a caste society and economic underdevelopment foremost in his mind, Myrdal and a distinguished staff and team of research collaborators began the research for *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and American Democracy.*[2]

The book was two impressive volumes. Throughout most of its pages, *An American Dilemma* provided a detailed account of discrimination against blacks in every domain of American life, debunked claims of innate black inferiority, and examined in detail black institutions (e.g., the church and political organizations). *An American Dilemma* provided the most comprehensive and shocking portrayal of the status of blacks ever assembled. Yet the legacy of Myrdal was not, in the main, the conditions he documented. Myrdal's legacy is to be found in the interpretive context in which he set "the Negro problem in American democracy."

Myrdal's analysis declared that above all else the race problem was a moral dilemma. He suggested that the United States, more than any other industrial society, possessed an explicit and popularly understood political culture that extolled the values of freedom, individual rights, democracy, equality, and justice. The status and treatment accorded African Americans by their fellow white citizens, however, stood in sharp contrast to what Myrdal viewed as the national religion or, more fittingly, the "American Creed."

Most white Americans, in his judgment, faced an "ever-raging conflict" between their general values, as expressed in the American creed, and their specific attitudes and behaviors toward blacks. The "American dilemma" was the inherent moral discomfort white Americans experienced in their relation to blacks.

An American Dilemma decisively reshaped how educated and liberal whites, especially those in the North, understood the race problem in American society. It is difficult to overestimate the impact of the book in this regard. According to the historian David Southern, "Myrdal's book played a significant role in changing the thought patterns and feelings of a people. For twenty years the Swede's authority was such that liberals simply cited him and confidently moved on."[3] Myrdal's biographer, Walter Jackson, wrote that *An American Dilemma* "established a liberal orthodoxy on black-white relations and remained the most important study on race issues until the middle 1960s."[4]

Indeed, Myrdal's work was a genuine cultural input to the coalescence of what has been called America's Second Reconstruction. The Second Reconstruction was a short but critical era from roughly the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, when the U.S. Supreme Court, the Congress, and the White House appeared to act in unison to protect the basic citizenship rights of black Americans.[5] The reach of Myrdal's influence is perhaps most clearly seen in explicit reference to *An American Dilemma* in the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling—the still controversial footnote 11—and the subsequent denunciation of Myrdal by southern defenders of segregation and other extreme right-wing groups.[6]

His influence had been seen earlier. The report of President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights,*[7] adopted Myrdal's theme of the contradiction between democratic values and the conditions

of blacks. Truman's committee also borrowed one other notion from Myrdal, namely, his faith that American social values would win out over the customs, interests, and prejudices that had to that point combined to subjugate blacks in the postslavery American South.

From Optimism to Pessimism

Myrdal had been optimistic about the course future events would take. He anticipated positive change because the nation had much to gain from modernizing the southern economy; because levels of education were rising, particularly for blacks, who were increasingly migrating to urban and northern areas; and because changes had been induced by the wartime mobilization. The core, deeply rooted commitment to the American creed, along with these other inducements and opportunities, prompted him to adopt the optimistic assessment that the American dilemma would be resolved in favor of equality and integration.

Yet generating optimism about the course of black-white relations is perhaps harder now than at any other point in the post–World War II period. To be sure, a quarter of a century ago the Kerner Commission warned us: "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal."[8] In the wake of the Simi Valley police brutality verdict and the rebellions in Los Angeles in 1992, even these words seem pallid and inadequate to capture the enormous gulf in perception, social standing, and identity that apparently still separates black and white Americans from one another. Myrdal's optimism now seems too naive. It is perhaps fitting then that Andrew Hacker's more recent book, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal,* updates and provides an even bleaker assessment of race relations in the United States than the Kerner Commission did.[9]

At bottom, Hacker's point is that white-dominated society and institutions have never intended full inclusion for blacks and do not now show any real inclination toward bringing it about. An equally bleak depiction of race relations was offered in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism,* by Derrick Bell, a black legal scholar.[10] For Bell, each wave of racial change, reform, and apparent progress, in the end, merely reconstitutes black subordination on a new plane. The underlying racial hierarchy in the United States has not fundamentally changed. Although the Kerner Commission shared Hacker's and Bell's belief that white racism was the central cause of the oppressive conditions in which black Americans lived, it stressed that the rift between black and white could

be reduced through "new attitudes, new understanding, and above all, new will" to address the racial divisions in the United States. Much of the recent scholarship and dialogue on race doubts the potential for genuine transformation of the type once envisioned by Myrdal and, to a degree, even the Kerner Commission.

The purpose of this essay is to assess whether these new attitudes have emerged or show any sign of emerging. Have racial attitudes genuinely improved, and are there grounds for optimism? Or is Hacker's prophecy that the United States faces "a huge racial chasm . . . and there are few signs that the coming century will see it closed" the more accurate forecast?[11] Although many positive changes in racial attitudes have taken place, we believe that racism is the core problem affecting black-white relations and that it remains a disfiguring scar on the American body politic.

We characterize and explain the changing racial attitudes of white Americans as a shift from Jim Crow racism to laissez-faire racism. We review patterns of change in racial attitudes as documented in major social surveys, evaluate several explanations of these changes, and then propose our own account. This account explores at some length key sociological works on the civil rights movement and its accomplishments. We do so because it is necessary to ground our argument firmly in a detailed understanding of the pivotal changes in social structure that opened the door for a shift from Jim Crow racism to laissez-faire racism. We then rely on Herbert Blumer's theory of "prejudice as a sense of group position" to link the attitudinal record of change to the record of social and political change.[12]

From Jim Crow Racism to Laissez-Faire Racism

Along with Howard Schuman and Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo, the senior author of this essay, wrote a book assessing broad patterns of change in American racial attitudes.[13] Writing in 1985, we concluded that whites' attitudes toward blacks had undergone a dramatic positive transformation. A key aim of this essay is to delimit the scope and meaning of that transformation more precisely. Specifically, we suggest that in the post–World War II period the predominant pattern of racial attitudes among white Americans has shifted from Jim Crow racism to a modern-day laissez-faire racism. We have witnessed the virtual disappearance of overt bigotry, demands for strict segregation, advocacy of governmentally enforced discrimination, and adherence to the belief that blacks are the cat-

egorical intellectual inferiors of whites. Yet Jim Crow racism has not been replaced by an embracing and democratic vision of the common humanity, worth, dignity, and equal membership of blacks in the polity. Instead, the tenacious institutionalized disadvantages and inequalities created by the long slavery and Jim Crow eras are now popularly accepted and condoned under a modern free-market or laissez-faire racist ideology.

Laissez-faire racism blames blacks themselves for the black-white gap in socioeconomic standing and actively resists meaningful efforts to ameliorate America's racist social conditions and institutions. These racial attitudes continue to justify and explain the prevailing system of racial domination, even while a core element of racist ideology in the United States has changed. Jim Crow racism was premised on notions of black biological inferiority; laissez-faire racism is based on notions of black cultural inferiority. Both serve to encourage whites' comfort with and acceptance of persistent racial inequality, discrimination, and exploitation.

It is important to differentiate our ideas about laissez-faire racism from the concept of symbolic racism. Symbolic racism is a theory of modern prejudice proposed by David Sears and his colleagues.[14] It maintains that a new form of politically potent antiblack prejudice emerged after the civil rights era. The waning of "old-fashioned racism," which involved overt derogation of blacks as inferior to whites and explicit insistence on racial segregation, opened the door to newer, more subtle antiblack sentiments. These new sentiments fused deeply rooted antiblack feelings, typically learned early in life, with long-standing American values, such as the Protestant work ethic. When blacks demand integration or such policies as affirmative action, under this theory, many whites react with opposition based on this attitude. The symbolic racist resents blacks' demands and views them as unfair impositions on a just and good society that warrant rejection.

At no point, even in the most extensive theoretical statements offered after more than a decade and a half of research,[15] do the symbolic racism researchers attempt an explanation of why "old-fashioned racism" went into decline or why "modern racism" assumes the specific form and content it does. This significant omission in theoretical development is, however, a virtual necessity of the logic of the theory. To wit, this model of prejudice expressly denies that there is any material social basis to the formation of antiblack attitudes outside of processes of socialization and the operation of routine cognitive and emotional psychological processes.

Our proposition about the emergence of laissez-faire racism, while sharing with symbolic racism a concern with central strands of the modern racial attitudes of white Americans, nevertheless differs in three critical ways from symbolic racism. First, as we develop below, our theory of laissez-faire racism is explicitly based on a historical analysis of the changing economics and politics of race in the United States. We argue that Jim Crow racist ideology reflected the economic and political needs, as well the prevailing cultural trends, of a specific historical epoch (the post–Civil War American South) and set of historical actors (principally the old southern planter elite). As the economic and political power of this group waned, as cultural trends changed, and as the power resources of the black community developed, Jim Crow social structures and ultimately Jim Crow ideology were defeated. Left in its place was the new laissez-faire racism. Laissez-faire racism legitimates persistent black oppression in the United States but in a fashion appropriate to a modern, nationwide, industrial free-labor economy and polity. We view the labels Jim Crow racism and laissez-faire racism as more specific and historically accurate than the vague expressions "old-fashioned racism" and "modern racism" used in the symbolic racism literature.

Second, the theory of laissez-faire racism is expressly rooted in a sociological theory of prejudice. We elaborate on Blumer's classic statement on prejudice as a sense of group position.[16] It places a subjective, interactively and socially created, and historically emergent set of ideas about appropriate status relations between groups at the center of any analysis of racial attitudes. The framework takes seriously the imperatives deriving from the institutionalized structural conditions of social life and from the process of human interaction, subjectivity, and interpretation that lend meaning to social conditions and thereby come to guide behavior.

Third, the theory of symbolic racism focuses principally on the individual and several specific attitudes that individuals may or may not hold. The theory of laissez-faire racism, as we develop it here, focuses principally on predominant social patterns. These patterns are an aggregation of individual views, to be sure. Yet our main concern is not with variation in the attitudes of individuals but with the common or general pattern of thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about blacks. In that sense, we seek to characterize the current historical epoch, not simply or mainly to explain the distribution and effects of the attitudes of individuals.

If the nature and causes of this transformation from the once dominant ideology of Jim Crow racism to the currently dominant ideology of laissez-faire racism fit the data we discuss below, then Hacker's and Bell's pessimism may be solidly grounded. Neither the decline of Jim Crow racism nor the emergence of laissez-faire racism can be attributed to the

goodwill of the American people or to the gradual ascendancy of the American creed of freedom, equality, justice, and democracy.[17] On the contrary, both of these epochal ideologies appear to involve support for specific forms of racial domination. These forms of domination each fit the different economic and political conditions of their eras.

Why Call it Racism?

For those who may doubt that the United States, which is legally committed to an antidiscrimination policy, still is a racially dominative society, we review a few facts.[18] First, the black-white gap in socioeconomic status remains enormous. Black adults remain two-and-one-half times as likely as whites to be unemployed. Strikingly, this gap exists at virtually every level of the educational distribution.[19] If one casts a broader net to ask about "underemployment"—those who have fallen out of the labor force entirely, are unable to find full-time work, or are working full-time at below poverty-level wages—then the black-white ratio in major urban areas has over the past two decades risen from the customary 2 to 1 disparity to very nearly 5 to 1.[20] Conservative estimates show that young, well-educated blacks who match whites in work experience and other characteristics still earn 11 percent less annually.[21] Studies continue to document direct labor market discrimination at both low-skill, entry-level positions[22] and more highly skilled positions.[23] A growing number of studies indicate that even highly skilled and accomplished black managers encounter "glass ceilings" in corporate America,[24] prompting one set of analysts to suggest that blacks will never be fully admitted to the power elite.[25]

Judged against differences in wealth, however, the huge black-white gaps in labor-force status and earnings seem absolutely paltry.[26] The average differences in wealth show black households lagging behind white ones by nearly twelve to one. For every one dollar of wealth in white households, black households have less than ten cents. In 1984 the median level of wealth held by black households was around $3,000; for white households the figure was $39,000. Indeed, white households with incomes of between $7,500 and $15,000 have "higher mean net worth and net financial assets than black households making $45,000 to $60,000."[27] Whites near the bottom of the white income distribution have more wealth than blacks near the top of the black income distribution.

Wealth is in many ways a better indicator of likely quality of life than earnings are. When we pose a few hypothetical questions, the reasons for this claim become clear. If we envision an "average" black family with about $3,000 in wealth and an average white family with about $39,000 in wealth we might then ask: which of these families is best equipped to send a child to college for four years? Which of these families could best survive a four-month period of unemployment? Which of these families could pay for costly medical treatment? Which of these families can attempt to start a business of its own? Indeed, which of these families might be able to do all of these things, and which one might be unable to do any? The gaping disparity in accumulated wealth is the real inequality in standard of living produced by three hundred plus years of systematic and pervasive racial discrimination.

Second, blacks are far and away the group from which whites maintain the greatest social distance.[28] The demographers Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton concluded that it makes sense to describe the black condition as "hypersegregation." Blacks are the only group, based on 1980 census data for large metropolitan areas, to rank as "hypersegregated" on four or more measures, and this was true for sixteen areas covering nearly a quarter of all blacks.[29] Housing audit studies continue to show high levels of direct racial discrimination in the housing market.[30] Middle-class blacks have enormous difficulty translating their economic gains into residential mobility, which has been a critical pathway to assimilation into the economic and social mainstream for other groups. Residential segregation has social consequences. As we all know, neighborhoods vary in services, school quality, safety, and levels of exposure to a variety of unwanted social conditions.[31]

Third, the value this society places on black life appears to be in steady decline. This is seen in how blacks and black life are treated by the criminal justice system as well as in overall figures in life expectancy. A 1990 study showed that fully 42 percent of black males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four in the nation's capital are in jail, on probation, or have warrants out for their arrest. Blacks are seven times more likely than whites to die as victims of homicide. Blacks who kill whites are more severely punished than whites who kill blacks.[32] When blacks kill whites, prosecutors are forty times more likely to request the death penalty than when blacks kill other blacks. Such profound differences prompted retiring Supreme Court justice Harry Blackmun to publicly repudiate the death penalty.

Looking beyond violent crime and the criminal justice system, black life expectancy at birth declined for four years in a row between 1985 and 1989, although this was a period of modest but continuing increase in life

expectancy for whites. Most stunning, the decline in 1988 reached such a level that it brought down the overall national average. Yet our national leadership conveyed no sense of real emergency about this shocking set of social statistics.

We could go on, but the severity of the disparities and the extent to which they cut across class lines in the black community are sufficiently clear to establish a strong prima facie case for maintaining that the United States society still has a system of racial domination.

The Attitudinal Record

In assessing whether there are any grounds for optimism about racial attitudes, we rely on data derived from sample surveys, especially national surveys, of Americans concerning their views on race and race relations. A word about the validity of such data is in order. Many observers doubt that people will honestly discuss their racial attitudes with an anonymous interviewer. Some contend that even if survey questions were answered accurately, the answers necessarily provide a superficial view of complex human thoughts and emotions and often have only a tenuous connection to behavior and other social outcomes.[33]

Evidence of "duplicity" in surveys takes several forms. White respondents have often been found to give more liberal responses to black interviewers than to white interviewers. Electoral contests that pit a black against a white candidate have on several occasions posed a serious problem for pollsters. There is little doubt that some "socially desirable" responses are given in surveys. At the same time, however, there is considerable evidence of complexity, nuance, and, in some instances, fairly overt racism in the attitudes expressed in response to survey questions.

Do racial attitudes, even if measured with reasonable accuracy, influence individual behavior? A number of the most glaring failures to find a connection between attitudes and behavior—most notably R. T. LaPiere's classic 1934 study[34]—have involved interracial settings.[35] Assuming that attitudes are accurately measured, there is good reason to believe that they will affect patterns of behavior,[36] even in the area of race relations.[37] Since the strength of the association between attitudes and behavior varies with situational and individual factors, however, attitudes must be regarded as but one input to behavior, not the overwhelming determinant of behavior.

Accumulating evidence also suggests that attitudes influence both interpersonal and larger political behaviors. For example, explicitly anti-

black attitudes played an important role in determining support for California's historic Proposition 13.[38] Negative racial attitudes also played a part in people's willingness to join in collective action against the use of school busing for desegregation.[39] An increasing number of analysts and scholars are convinced that racial attitudes now play a central role in American political identities and behavior,[40] including voting in national elections. In sum, an individual's attitudes and beliefs about race have important effects on interpersonal behaviors and a range of political choices and actions.

Are attitudes measured in surveys superficial indicators? Perhaps so. Trend studies may be particularly subject to this charge since they are typically unable to probe the emotional tonality of beliefs, the frames of reference and assumptions that underlie individuals' attitudes, and the behavioral inclinations that flow from them. However, no other approach can assess in an empirically verifiable and replicable way how representative samples of a population think, feel, and believe. Nor can any other method trace as systematically how those thoughts, beliefs, and feelings have changed over time. Large-scale surveys are thus one important lens on how and why attitudes on race take the patterns they do.

Patterns of Change in Racial Attitudes

The longest trend data from national sample surveys may be found for racial attitude questions that deal with matters of racial principles, the implementation of those principles, and social distance preferences. Principle questions ask whether American society should be integrated or segregated and whether individuals should be treated equally, without regard to race. Such questions do not raise issues of the practical steps that might be necessary to accomplish greater integration or to ensure equal treatment. Implementation questions ask what actions, usually by government, especially the federal government, ought to be taken to bring about integration, to prevent discrimination, and to achieve greater equality. Social distance questions ask about the individual's willingness to personally enter hypothetical contact settings in schools or neighborhoods that vary from virtually all white to heavily black.[41]

Transformation of Principles

Questions on racial principles provide the most consistent evidence on how the attitudes of white Americans toward blacks have changed. From crucial baseline surveys conducted in 1942, trends for most racial princi-

ple questions show whites increasingly support the principles of racial integration and equality. Whereas a solid majority, 68 percent, of white Americans in 1942 favored segregated schools, only 7 percent took such a position in 1985 (see figure 8.1). Similarly, 55 percent of whites surveyed in 1944 thought whites should receive preference over blacks in access to jobs, compared with only 3 percent who offered such an opinion as long ago as 1972. Indeed, so few people were willing to endorse the discriminatory response to this question on the principle of race-based labor market discrimination that it was dropped from national surveys after 1972. On both these issues, then, majority endorsement of the principles of segregation and discrimination have given way to overwhelming majority support for integration and equal treatment.

This pattern of movement away from support for Jim Crow toward apparent support for racial egalitarianism holds with equal force for those questions dealing with issues of residential integration, access to public transportation and public accommodations, choice among qualified candidates for political office, and even interracial marriage. It is important to note, however, that the high levels of support seen for the principles of school integration and equal access to jobs (both better than 90 percent) do not exist for all questions on racial principles. Despite improve-

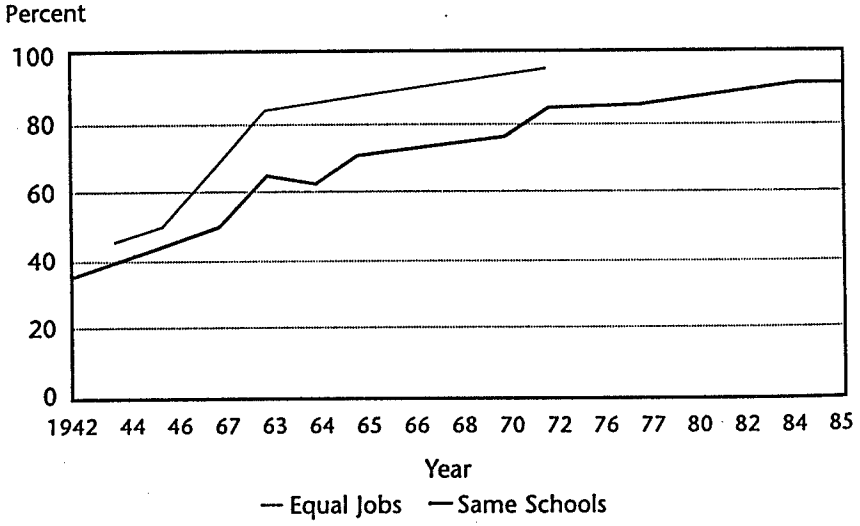

Figure 8.1. Trends in Racial Principle Questions among Whites, 1942–85. (Based on data in Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, and Lawrence Bobo, *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985], 74–75.)

ment from extraordinarily low levels of support in the 1950s and 1960s, survey data continue to show substantial levels of white discomfort with the prospect of interracial dating and marriage, for instance.

Opinions among whites have never been uniform or monolithic. Both historical[42] and sociological research[43] has pointed to lines of cleavage and debate in whites' thinking about the proper place of African Americans. The survey-based literature has shown that views on issues of racial principle vary greatly according to region of the country, level of education, age or generation, and ideological factors. As might be expected, opinions in the South more lopsidedly favored segregation and discrimination at the time baseline surveys were conducted than was true outside the South. Patterns of change, except for a period of unusually rapid change in the South, have usually been parallel, though. The highly educated also typically express greater support for principles of racial equality and integration. Indeed, one can envision a tiered reaction to issues of racial justice. At the more progressive and liberal end are college-educated whites who live outside the South. At the bottom are southern whites with the least amount of schooling.[44] Age plays a part as well. Younger people usually express more racial tolerance than older people do. Differences in socialization during more tolerant time periods and in average levels of education across generations help account for this pattern.[45]

There has been a sweeping transformation of attitudes about the rules that should guide black-white interaction in the more public and impersonal spheres of social life. Those living outside the South, the well-educated, and younger people led the way on these changes. However, change has usually taken place in all categories of people. Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo characterized this change as a fundamental transformation of social norms regarding race. Robert Blauner's in-depth interviews with blacks and whites over nearly three decades led him to a very similar conclusion: "The belief in a right to dignity and fair treatment is now so widespread and deeply rooted, so self-evident that people of all colors would vigorously resist any effort to reinstate formalized discrimination. This consensus may be the most profound legacy of black militancy, one that has brought a truly radical transformation in relations between the races."[46] In short, a tremendous progressive trend has been evident in white racial attitudes where the broad issues of integration, equality, and discrimination are concerned.

Those who believe that America is making progress toward resolving the "American dilemma" point to this evidence as proof that Americans have taken a decisive turn against racism. As Richard G. Niemi, John

Mueller, and Tom W. Smith argued, "Without ignoring real signs of enduring racism, it is still fair to conclude that America has been successfully struggling to resolve its Dilemma and that equality has been gaining ascendancy over racism."[47] If anyone doubts the validity of this transformation, it is noteworthy that even former Klansman David Duke felt compelled to assert that he was no longer a bigot and had shed parts of his past during his failed bid to become governor of Louisiana. Whether his claim is true is less important than the fact that Duke had to take such a public position. Some ideas—support for segregation, open discrimination, and claims that blacks are inherently inferior to whites—have fallen into deep public disrepute. Surveys have documented the speed, social location, and breadth of this transformation.

Resistance to Policy Change

If trends in support of progressive racial principles are the optimistic side of the story of the transformation of racial attitudes, the patterns for implementation questions are the pessimistic side of the story. It should be noted that efforts to assess how Americans feel about government efforts to bring about greater integration and equality or to prevent discrimination really do not arise as sustained matters of inquiry in surveys until the 1960s. To an important degree, issues of the role of government in bringing about racial change could not emerge until sufficient change involving the basic principles had actually occurred.

There are sharp differences between support for racial principles and support for policy implementation. This is not surprising insofar as principles, viewed in isolation, need not conflict with other principles, interests, or needs that often arise in more concrete situations. However, the gaps between principle and implementation are large and consistent in race relations. In 1964, for example, surveys showed that 64 percent of whites nationwide supported the principle of integrated schooling; however, only 38 percent thought that the federal government had a role to play in bringing about greater integration (see figure 8.2). The gap had actually grown larger by 1986, when 93 percent supported the principle, but only 26 percent endorsed government efforts to bring about school integration. We return to this point later.

Similar patterns emerge in the areas of jobs and housing. Support for the principle of equal access to jobs stood at 97 percent in 1972. Support for federal efforts to prevent job discrimination, however, had reached only 39 percent. Likewise in 1976, 88 percent supported the principle that blacks have the right to live wherever they can afford, yet only 35 percent

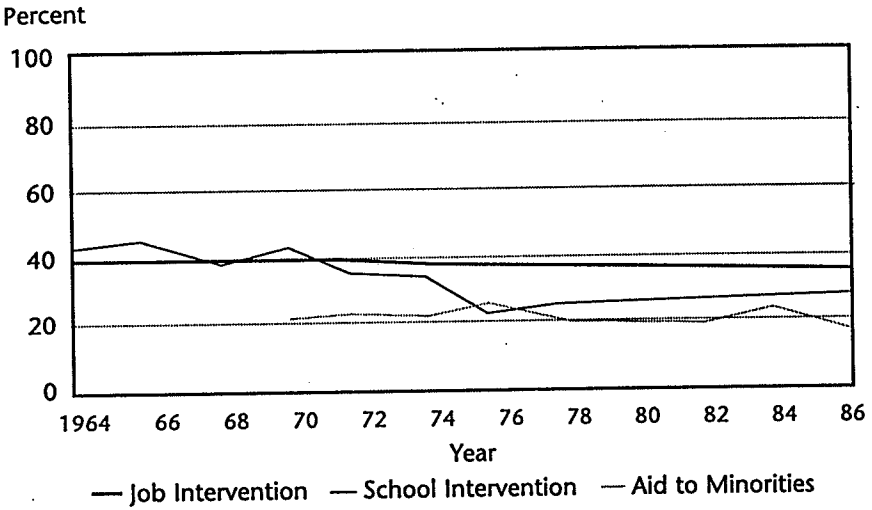

Figure 8.2. Trends in Implementation Questions among Whites, 1964–86. (Based on data in Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, and Lawrence Bobo, *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985], 88–89.)

said they would vote in favor of a law requiring homeowners to sell without regard to race.

There are not only sharp differences in absolute levels of support when moving from principle to implementation but also differences in trends. Most striking, there is a clear divergence of trends in the area of school integration. During the 1972 to 1986 time period, when support for the principle of integrated schooling rose from 84 percent to 93 percent, support for government efforts to bring about integration fell from 35 percent to 26 percent. It should be noted that this decline is restricted almost entirely to those living outside the South. This trend reverses the tier-tolerance effect described earlier. By 1978 there was virtually no difference between college-educated whites outside the South and southern whites who had not completed high school when it came to supporting federal efforts to help bring about school integration. To put it colloquially, Bubba and William F. Buckley increasingly found themselves in agreement on this issue.

Two complexities are worthy of note. First, a couple of implementation issues do show positive trends. The most clear-cut case involves a question on whether the government has a role to play in assuring blacks fair access to hotels and public accommodations. This may be the only

instance where parallel questions on principle and implementation show parallel positive change. A somewhat similar pattern is found for the principle of residential integration and support for an open or fair housing law. However, even as recently as 1988 barely 50 percent of white Americans endorsed a law that would forbid racial discrimination in the sale or rental of housing.

It should be borne in mind that antiblack animus is not the only source of opposition to government involvement in bringing about progressive racial change. Howard Schuman and Lawrence Bobo have shown that whites are equally likely to oppose open housing laws whether the group in question is black, Japanese American, or another minority.[48] There appears to be an important element of objection to government coercion in this domain that influences attitudes. At the same time, however, Schuman and Bobo also found that whites express a desire for greater distance from blacks than they do from other groups.

Second, opposition to implementation is widespread and is not substantially affected by the usual socioeconomic characteristics of respondents, including education, region, and age. Weak to nonexistent effects of education and age in particular suggest that we are unlikely to see much change in the future.

Unfortunately, comparatively few survey trend questions speak directly to affirmative action policies. Many different questions have been asked beginning in the mid-1970s. Affirmative action is a much maligned and misunderstood concept. Affirmative actions can range from advertising and special recruitment efforts to preferential treatment requiring quotas. Support for affirmative action varies dramatically, depending on exactly which type of policy is proposed.[49] Policies that mainly aim to increase the human capital attributes of blacks are comparatively popular.[50] Policies that lean in the direction of achieving equal outcomes, as powerfully symbolized by the term *quotas,* elicit overwhelming opposition among whites.

Theories of the Change

Cohort vs. Individual Change

If we think in descriptive rather than explanatory terms, the progressive trend in racial attitudes can be traced to one of two sources. First, part of the rise in racial liberalism on matters of principle can be credited to what demographers call cohort replacement effects. As older, less tolerant individuals die and are replaced by younger, more tolerant individuals, a progressive trend results. Second, part of the progressive trend can be traced to individual change. People who once advocated segregation and discrimination might undergo soul-searching and a change of heart, coming instead to see the case for integration and equality. This process also helped produce the progressive trend in support for racial principles.

Research suggests that the process of change is itself changing. During the 1950s and 1960s, there is evidence that both a large measure of individual change and cohort replacement effects contributed to positive attitude change. During the 1970s, individual attitude change and cohort replacement effects shifted to a less balanced mixture of the two. In addition, the distance between younger cohorts and their predecessors began to narrow (the size of the cohort effect decreased), strongly suggesting that the engines of change were cooling off. Work by Glenn Firebaugh and Kenneth E. Davis shows that the mixture of cohort replacement effects and individual change is increasingly issue-specific and region-specific.[51] On the issue of racial intermarriage, for example, there was no evidence of individual-level change between 1974 and 1984. Furthermore, most of the change seen in the South in the post-1974 period was attributable to cohort replacement effects. Whatever the mix of forces that propelled the progressive movement in whites' attitudes on issues of racial principles appears to be grinding to a halt, especially in the South.

Despite these patterns, there is no evidence of a broad backlash in racial attitudes. Many have expressed special concern that young adults, those who underwent critical socializing experiences during the Reagan-Bush years, are the source of a racial backlash. Work by Charlotte Steeh and Howard Schuman indicates no distinctive pattern of backward movement among younger adults; indeed, they continue to be a bit more liberal than their immediate predecessors.[52] What evidence there is of retreat is quite issue-specific; most whites, regardless of age, have become less supportive of policies that imply racial preference.

These cohort studies are valuable, but they are also limited. None of these analyses of cohort replacement or individual change as sources of the sweeping increase in support for racial equality and integration is explanatory. They provide merely statistical decompositions of trends, not substantive explanation of the roots of change. For that we must turn elsewhere.

Myrdal's Hypothesis

One possibility, of course, is Myrdal's guilt hypothesis. He proposed that the discomfort and guilt created by the ever-raging conflict in the white American would increasingly be resolved in favor of racial equality. Any number of direct efforts to test Myrdal's hypothesis have failed to support it, however. Even in the 1940s and 1950s, few whites felt that blacks were

unfairly treated.[53] Those who acknowledged differences in treatment were quick to offer justifications for it.[54] Even more recent efforts to create sophisticated tests of Myrdal's ideas produced no support for the hypothesis.[55] The empirical research literature also provides no support for it.

Rejecting Myrdal's guilt hypothesis does not mean embracing the position that whites' racial attitudes generally reflect undifferentiated hostility toward blacks. An argument closely related to Myrdal's formulation can be called the "ambivalence hypothesis." Irwin Katz, Joyce Wackenhut, and R. Glen Hass have proposed that whites' racial attitudes are profoundly ambivalent, mixing both aversive and sympathetic tendencies.[56] Which one of these inclinations predominates in thinking is a function, in their argument, of other contextual factors. Using college student subjects in experimental settings, Katz and his colleagues have shown that contextual cues validating individualism, hard work, and self-reliance will incline whites to focus on blacks' shortcomings in these areas. Contextual cues that reinforce egalitarianism and humanitarianism will elicit more sympathetic responses to blacks. The ambivalence theory, however, fails to specify the likely predominant tenor of responses or how these ambivalent feelings are likely to play out in concrete social settings. More important, the ambivalence hypothesis does not explain the persistent and considerable opposition to a broad range of policies aimed at substantially improving the conditions of blacks.

Decline of Biological Racism

A second substantive explanation of the larger progressive trend is that key beliefs in the case for segregation and discrimination suffered a direct cultural assault and quickly eroded. Surveys showed that popular acceptance of the belief that blacks were less intelligent than whites went into rapid decline in the post–World War II period. In 1942, 53 percent of white Americans nationwide expressed the opinion that blacks were less intelligent than whites. By 1946, this percentage had declined to 43 percent—a 10 percent drop in only four years. By 1956, fully 80 percent of whites nationwide rejected the idea that blacks were less intelligent.

What seemed the bedrock belief in the case for a racially segregated and discriminatory social order had undergone a precipitous drop in acceptance. It is therefore not surprising that support for segregation and discrimination in schools, in housing, and the like would also gradually go into decline. The fight against racism, the considerable contribution of blacks in the war effort during the 1940s, and the continued trend in academe away from accepting notions of biologically given racial groupings all may have contributed to this process.[57]

Yet this explanation seems lacking. It begs the question of why popular acceptance of biological racism, an attitude in its own right, went into decline. What is more, there are strong grounds to believe that negative stereotypes of blacks remain widespread. A major national survey carried out in 1990 used a set of questions intended to measure social stereotypes. Respondents used bipolar scales to rate traits. Members of each of several social groups were rated as to whether they tended to be rich or poor, hard working or lazy, intelligent or unintelligent, and so on. The format of the questions did not force respondents to merely accept or reject a simplistic statement.

White Americans rated blacks, Hispanics, and Asians as less intelligent, more violence prone, lazier, less patriotic, and more likely to prefer living off welfare than whites were. Whites typically placed Asian Americans lower than whites but substantially ahead of blacks and Hispanics. Not only were whites rated more favorably than were people of color, but on four of the five personality traits examined, many whites rated the majority of blacks and Hispanics as possessing negative qualities, whereas a majority of whites were rated as possessing positive qualities.[58]

As figure 8.3 shows, some 56 percent of whites rated blacks as less intelligent than whites (two-and-a-half times the rate suggested by older,

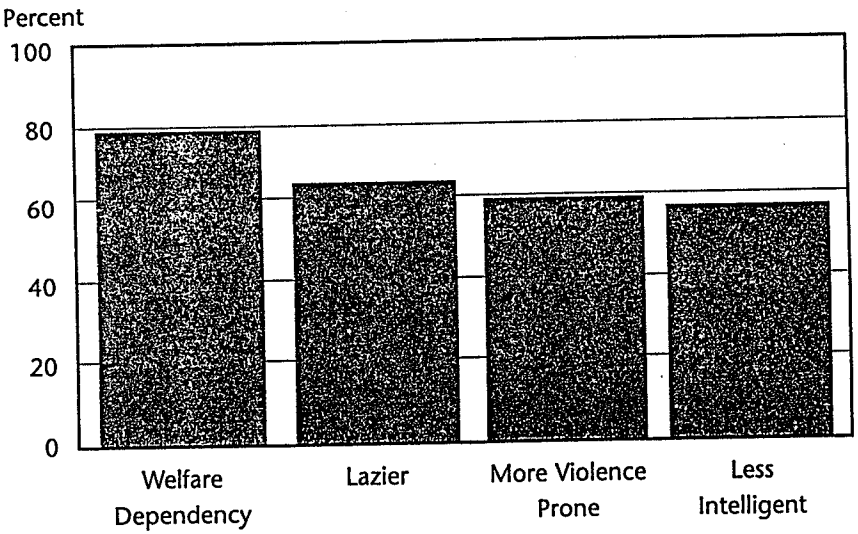

Figure 8.3. Percentage of Whites in the United States Rating Blacks Negatively, 1990. (Based on data in James A. Davis and Tom W. Smith, *The General Social Survey: Cumulative Codebook and Data File* [Chicago: National Opinion Reserach Center and University of Chicago, 1990].)

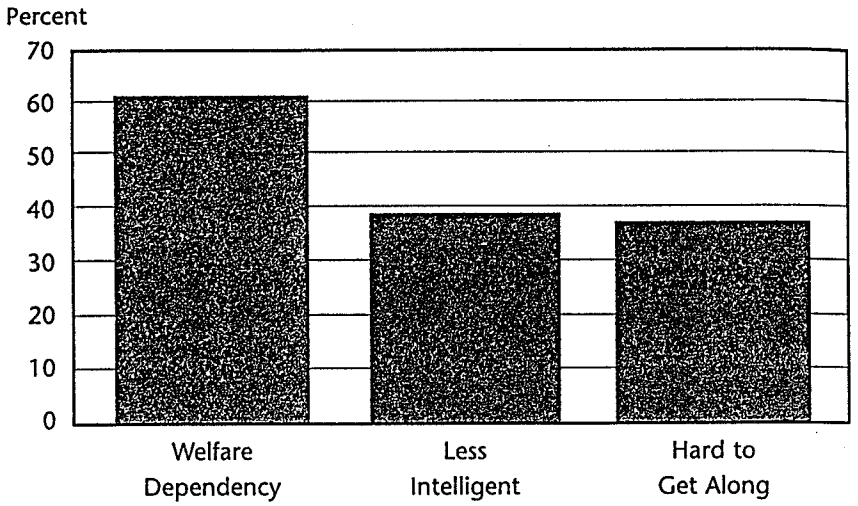

Figure 8.4. Percentage of Whites in Los Angeles County Rating Blacks Negatively, 1992. (Based on data in Lawrence Bobo, Camille L. Zubrinsky, and Melvin L. Oliver, "Public Opinion before and after a Spring of Discontent," in *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future,* ed. Mark Baldassare [Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994], 118.)

closed-ended format survey items). Fully 78 percent rated blacks as more likely to prefer living off welfare than whites were. Largely similar patterns—though not so extreme—were found in a more recent survey in the Los Angeles County area, as shown in figure 8.4.[59]

Whatever else one might say about the progressive trend in racial attitudes, it has not brought an end to negative stereotyping of blacks. Instead, the character or extremity of stereotyping has changed. What were once viewed as categorical differences based in biology now appear to be seen as differences in degree or tendency.[60] Furthermore, these differences in degree appear to be understood as having largely cultural roots, not biological roots.[61] We therefore do not accept the view of declining negative stereotypes about blacks as a crucial source of the broader shift in views on segregation, discrimination, and the principle of equal treatment.

African Americans appear to occupy the bottom rung of the American "rank order of discrimination." If the degree of social distance that members of other groups wish to maintain from members of a specific out-group provides any guide, blacks may be the most systematically avoided group in the United States. Data from the 1992 Los Angeles County Social Survey showed that feelings of social distance were greatest when nonblacks were asked to react to blacks. These are particularly telling

results since they are based on data involving large samples of white, Hispanic, and Asian respondents. Figures 8.5 and 8.6 present, respectively, the average level of objection to residential integration and to interracial marriage across all groups toward a specific target group. That is, all nonblack respondents were asked to react to blacks, all nonwhite respondents were asked to react to whites, and so on. The exact percentage of expressed opposition to social contact is not the critical issue here, since that is highly dependent on the exact wording of the question. What seems more telling is the unambiguously greater average level of hostility to contact with blacks among nonblacks than occurs in reference to any other group.

Basic Roots of the Shift

If these other explanations, including Myrdal's guilt hypothesis, are unacceptable, what accounts for the momentous changes that occurred in whites' racial attitudes? We believe that structural changes in the American economy and polity that reduced the importance of the Jim Crow system of exploited black agricultural labor to the overall economy lie at

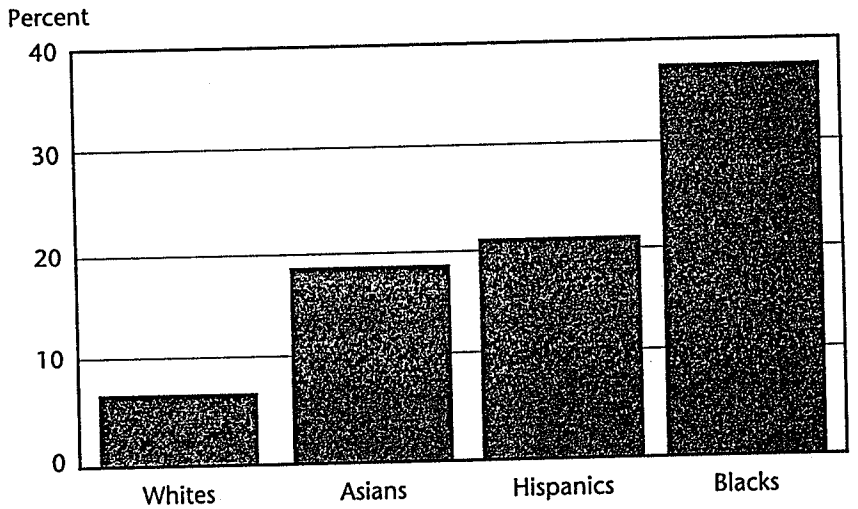

Figure 8.5. Average Level of Objection to Residential Integration among Out-Group Members, Los Angeles County, 1992. (Based on data in Lawrence Bobo, Camille L. Zubrinsky, and Melvin L. Oliver, "Public Opinion before and after a Spring of Discontent," in *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future,* ed. Mark Baldassare [Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994], 125.)

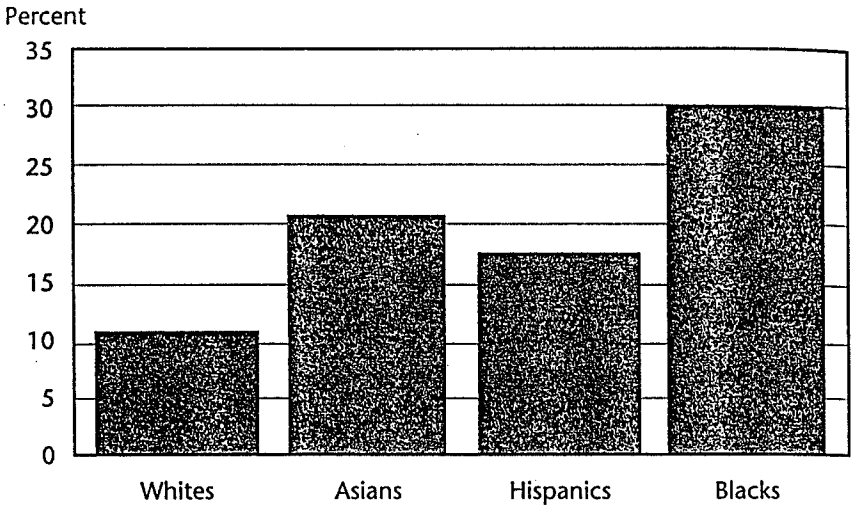

Figure 8.6. Average Level of Objection to Racial Intermarriage among Out-Group Members, Los Angeles County, 1992. (Based on data in Lawrence Bobo, Camille L. Zubrinsky, and Melvin L. Oliver, "Public Opinion before and after a Spring of Discontent," in *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future,* ed. Mark Baldassare [Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994], 125.)

the base of the positive change in racial attitudes. In short, the structural need for Jim Crow ideology disappeared. Correspondingly, though slowly and only in response to aggressive and innovative challenge from the black civil rights movement, political and ideological supports for Jim Crow institutions yielded. The defeat of Jim Crow ideology and the political forms of its institutionalization (e.g., segregated schooling and public facilities, voting hindrances) was the principal accomplishment of the civil rights movement.

We submit that there are inevitable connections between economic and political structures, on the one hand, and patterns of individual thought and action, on the other hand. As the structural basis of long-standing patterns of social relationships changes, there is a corresponding potential for change in the ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that had previously been commonplace.

Our argument is similar to Myrdal's. His optimism about the future course of race relations in the United States rested explicitly on a set of ideas about economic interests and needs, demographic trends, and the wartime mobilization, which he thought would all work in the direction of more fully integrating blacks into American society. We part company with Myrdal, however, when he argued that the American creed was a fundamental impetus to changing conceptions of the place of African Americans. Instead, we are impressed with how long many white Americans have been comfortable with conditions in the black community and in the daily lives of African Americans that constitute profound violations of the high moral purposes articulated in the American creed.

Our analysis of the sources of change in racial attitudes rests principally on three important sociological works analyzing the emergence, dynamics, and impact of the civil rights movement. Doug McAdam's *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* provides a rich analysis of how socioeconomic and demographic shifts fundamentally altered the power resources in the black community, opening the door to a sustained, innovative, and potent social movement.[62] Aldon Morris's *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* reveals in detail the internal organizational dimensions of strategies used by black communities and leadership as they set about mobilizing the growing resource base in their own communities for political and economic gain.[63] Jack Bloom's *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* helps pinpoint that the great success of the civil rights movement was the political defeat of the old planter aristocracy, whose economic fortunes were most dependent on the Jim Crow strictures that kept blacks a poor, indebted agricultural labor force.[64] Taken together, these works provide a detailed picture of how the interweaving of the economy and the polity resulted in changes in the status of blacks and set the stage for the emergence of a new American ideology on race.

Economics, Demographics, and Black Institutional Development

Four factors, according to McAdam, set the stage for the emergence of a sustained and potent civil rights movement: (a) a series of reinforcing socioeconomic and demographic changes that led to (b) expanded political opportunities for blacks, which in turn (c) increased the potential for developing strong internal indigenous organizations and thus stimulated a larger (d) cognitive transformation of consciousness within the black population. So long as blacks were a severely oppressed, poorly educated, predominantly southern, and mainly rural agricultural labor force, they were unlikely to be able to mount effective political resistance.

During the Jim Crow era, core institutions of the black community that would later become engines of the civil rights movement—the black church, black colleges and universities, and such organizations as the NAACP—were fledgling versions of what they would become. From

roughly 1880 through 1930, the black church tended to espouse an "other worldly" theology of waiting for better treatment in the afterlife, and black congregations tended to be small, financially strapped units headed by poorly educated ministers. Black colleges were sorely underfunded, and many provided little more than the equivalent of a high school education. The NAACP, founded in 1909–10, was principally a northern organization, focused on crafting its long-term legal strategy for change.

The position of blacks as an impoverished and acutely oppressed agricultural labor force began to shift decisively with the decline of "king cotton." Increasing foreign competition, the introduction of new technologies and synthetic fibers, the boll-weevil infestation, and the declining centrality of cotton to the American export economy began to push more blacks out of the rural South to earn a living.

The importance of the decline of cotton in laying the foundations for black insurgency cannot be underestimated. Indeed, according to McAdam, "the factor most responsible for undermining the political conditions that, at the turn of the century, had relegated blacks to a position of political impotence . . . would have to be the gradual collapse of cotton as the backbone of the southern economy."[65] When measured by the amount of cotton acreage harvested and the average seasonal price of cotton per pound, the decline in cotton was enormous. Examining data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, McAdam reports that the price of raw cotton took a nose dive "from a high of 35 cents per pound in 1919 to less than 6 cents in 1931."[66] From 1931 to 1955, the price of raw cotton actually rose, but during this same period, the total amount of cotton harvested significantly decreased as planters attempted to increase the demand for cotton.

In addition, with World War I and the cessation of heavy European immigration, there was a growing need for black labor in the industrial North. The combination of these and other forces created one of the greatest internal migrations of all time. Upwards of about 200,000 blacks migrated to the North in the 1900–1909 period, while the next decade witnessed the greatest amount of black out-migration, at over 500,000.[67] The migration of blacks out of the South subsequently affected the total number of southern black farm operators, which had reached a high in 1920, at just over 915,000, only to plummet to a low of 267,000 by 1959.[68] Blacks shifted from a largely rural and southern population to a heavily urban and increasingly northern population.

These changes, in turn, had a series of effects that altered the resource base for the critical black institutions of the church, black colleges and universities, and the NAACP. The rise in the number of blacks in urban

settings had the effect of increasing their economic resources and reducing the level of intimidation and violence used to repress blacks. Urban black church congregations tended to be much larger and have much more substantial financial support. This facilitated hiring better-trained and better-educated ministers. These forces, coupled with greater political latitude in urban areas, contributed to a shift in the theological emphasis in many black churches toward an increasing concern for justice in the here and now.

At the same time, the growing success of the NAACP legal strategy, which initially sought to force southern states to live up to the "separate but equal" doctrine, had led to important increases in the resource base at historically black colleges and universities. More blacks thus began to receive better college educations. Moreover, the number and size of NAACP chapters in southern states rose as the number of blacks in the urban South rose. In short, according to McAdam, formidable changes in the power resources within black communities took place, particularly between the early 1900s and the early 1950s. The economic footing of black communities improved, and the institutional base for political action increased dramatically.

Indigenous Resource Mobilization

Morris carefully documents the patterns of social networks and organization building in black communities. For example, he shows the lines of communication among the newer, better-educated group of black ministers, epitomized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He also reviews the high level of internal financing that supported such organizations as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which directed the historic 1955–56 bus boycott. Networks, a new indigenous leadership cadre, and internal financial support were essential to the type of "local movement center," such as the MIA, which became a politicized umbrella organization linking black ministers and their congregations. Morris also points to the mass base of the protest movement that King came to spearhead and the extent to which targeted nonviolent social protest became a genuine power resource in the struggle for racial change. Critically, Morris documents how the increasing persecution directed at the NAACP in much of the South impelled the development of such new organizational forms as the MIA and, subsequently, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). To forge the link to McAdam's analysis more directly, Morris documents how larger trends in the economy and the resource base of critical black institutions discussed by McAdam were, in

turn, translated into organization building and sustained, effective mass protest at the grassroots level in black communities.

The ability to mount effective protest campaigns at the grassroots level in southern black communities reached its pinnacle after the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955. The boycott gave blacks a sense that they could effect political change through insurgent actions spearheaded and organized by existing black institutions and community organizations.

Following success in Montgomery, a series of interlocking networks linking several existing institutions and protest organizations coalesced and became the launching pad for targeted protest efforts designed to dramatize the second-class citizenship status of blacks. Using the black church as the central "coordinating unit," such groups as the SCLC, MIA, NAACP Youth Councils, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and black fraternities and sororities worked together to challenge Jim Crow segregation in the South.

Morris's discussion of the emergence and rapid spread of the sit-in strategy in the South during the late 1950s and early 1960s provides a clear picture of the intricate and deliberate formation of the networks. Disputing "myths" that the sit-in tactic was a spontaneous, independently conducted, and student-run operation originating in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960, Morris shows how such efforts actually grew out of existing institutions and organizations (e.g., the black church) composed of both veteran civil rights workers and student members in the late 1950s. The church served as the core of the network. Church ministers often wore more than one hat. On Sundays they not only preached the gospel but also often, as members and leaders of SCLC, CORE, and the activist wing of the NAACP, served as political activists, encouraging their congregations to donate to and participate in local protest activities to improve their standard of living in the here and now. Morris writes, "These ministers were not only in a position to organize and commit church resources to protest efforts, they were also linked to each other and the larger community via ministerial alliances. In short, between 1955 and 1960 a profound change in Southern black communities had begun. Confrontational politics were thrust to the foreground through new direct-action organizations closely allied with the church."[69]

Included in this new alliance were black colleges, fraternities, and sororities. According to Morris, the emergence and proliferation of the sit-in movement cannot be understood without acknowledging the interaction between black colleges and such local movement centers as the

church. Many of the student leaders were also church members and had learned whatever they knew about the civil rights movement and nonviolent protest from their local churches even before sit-ins were instituted as a protest strategy. The organizational base to launch and coordinate sit-ins thus stemmed from the church—with black college students, through their fraternities and sororities, serving as the foot soldiers. The actual organization, financing, and spread of sit-ins followed an elaborate pattern of coordination among a variety of groups. Morris describes the sequence:

> organizers from SCLC, NAACP, and CORE raced between sit-in points relaying valuable information. Telephone lines and the community "grapevine" sent forth protest instructions and plans. These clusters were the sites of numerous midday and late night meetings where the black community assembled in the churches, filled the collection plates, and vowed to mortgage their homes to raise the necessary bail-bond money in case the protesting students were jailed. Black lawyers pledged their legal services to the movement and black physicians made their services available to injured demonstrators. Amidst these exciting scenes, black spirituals calmed and deepened the participant's commitment.[70]

Collectively throughout the South, such activities served to create, sustain, and develop a mass church-based movement designed to dramatize the second-class citizenship status of blacks.

Defeat of the Planter Class

To this picture, Bloom adds critical information concerning the old white planter aristocracy.[71] He maintains that the principal political accomplishment of the civil rights movement was the defeat of the power of the old planter elite. This group benefited most directly from Jim Crow ideology and practices. Correspondingly, it was this group that played a pivotal role in first launching the White Citizens' Councils (WCC) in reaction to the *Brown* decision's call for an end to the doctrine of "separate but equal." In speaking of the WCC, Bloom notes:

> The impetus, the organization, the leadership, and the control of this movement rested in the hands of the traditional black-belt ruling class that had emerged after Reconstruction. That class was still centered in the black belt, though in most cases now in small towns. Its members were businessmen and bankers in these areas, as well as merchants and landlords. . . . It was the old Southern ruling class that set state policy. It was, moreover, the Deep South states of Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and South Caro-

lina that, in addition to Virginia, made up the core of the resistance. In these states the old Southern ruling class remained the strongest. In almost every single case where the White Citizens' Council emerged, they were led and organized from the black belt.[72]

As Bloom points out, the WCC drew their leadership "primarily from the ranks of the white community's business, political, and social leadership. . . . these are the same people who made up the 'courthouse cliques' that ran the South, the 'banker-merchant-farmer-lawyer-doctor-governing' class."[73] The WCC used a variety of tactics to dissuade blacks who supported desegregation, for it was this old planter elite, still located in the cotton-producing "black-belt" areas, that most depended on the Jim Crow social order for their livelihoods. So vested were they in maintaining the racial status quo that they engaged in numerous acts of economic coercion, political manipulation, and ruthless violence. Only when these failed were efforts made to compromise with black leaders.

Economic coercion was one of the most common tactics used by the White Citizens' Councils. Any black who attempted to register to vote, sign petitions favoring school desegregation, or was a member of the NAACP faced economic pressures. According to Bloom, "Bankers would deny loans; black merchants couldn't get credit from wholesale houses or sometimes could not get supplies even with cash; insurance policies were canceled; employees were dismissed; renters evicted from their homes; mortgages recalled." Blacks were also forced to apply economic pressure to other blacks. "Blacks dependent on whites for employment or credit were often forced to boycott black ministers or doctors or craftsmen who were violating the racial etiquette."[74]

Another tactic took the form of political manipulation, where members of the WCC regularly redivided voting districts in an effort to limit the black vote. When redistricting was not enough, in several counties in Alabama, for example, blacks were summarily removed from voter registration rolls for such trivial excuses as spelling errors.[75] As if economic and political pressure were not enough, violence was readily perpetrated and became the most effective and oppressive force used against blacks.

Structural Change and Changing Attitudes

The declining importance of cotton to the U.S. economy and as a source of livelihood for blacks opened the door to tremendous economic and political opportunity for blacks. The product of these opportunities, stronger churches, colleges, and political organizations, culminated in a sustained movement of protest for racial justice. The movement and the organizations it created had indigenous leadership, financing, and a genuine mass base of support. Through creative, carefully designed, and sustained social protest, this movement was able to topple a distinct, epochal form of racial oppression that was no longer essential to the interests and needs of a broad range of American political and economic elites.

Widespread cultural attitudes endorsing elements of the Jim Crow social order, quite naturally then, began to atrophy and wither under a steady assault by blacks and their white allies. Segregationist positions were under steady assault and increasingly lacked strong allies. The end product of these forces, the decline of Jim Crow racism, is the broad pattern of improvement seen in whites' racial attitudes in the United States.

The effectiveness of the NAACP's legal strategy challenging segregation, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 amounted to an authoritative legal and political rebuke of the Jim Crow social order. This rebuke, however, did not directly alter the socioeconomic status of blacks, especially those living in the northern urban areas. This rebuke also did not directly alter entrenched patterns of racial residential segregation that existed nationwide.[76] Nor did widespread attitudes of hostility toward blacks suddenly disappear.[77] The enormous and far-reaching successes of the civil rights movement did not eliminate stark patterns of racial domination and inequality that existed above and beyond the specific dictates of the distinctly southern Jim Crow system. Instead of witnessing genuine racial comity, we saw the rise of laissez-faire racism.

The Sense of Group Position and Changing Racial Attitudes

Students of prejudice and racial attitudes may have misunderstood the real "object" of racial attitudes. The attitude object, or perceptual focus, is not really the social category "blacks" or "whites," whether as groups or individuals. It is not neighborhoods or schools of varying degrees of racial mixture. Instead, as Herbert Blumer argued forty years ago,[78] the real object of "prejudice," what we are really tapping with our questions, is attitude toward the proper relation between groups: that is, the real attitude object is relative group positions. This sense of group position is historically and culturally rooted, socially learned, and modifiable in

response to new information, events, or structural conditions so long as these factors contribute to or shape contexts for social interaction among members of different groups.

What does this "group position" view of racial attitudes mean in the context of all that we have reviewed to this point? First, attitudes toward "integration" or toward "blacks" are, fundamentally, statements about preferred positional relations among groups. They are not simply or even mainly emotional reactions to groups, group symbols, or situations. Nor are they best understood as statements of simple feelings of like or dislike of minority groups and their members. Nor are they simply perceptions of group traits and dispositions. Instead, racial attitudes capture preferred group positions and those patterns of belief and feeling that undergird, justify, and make understandable a preference for relatively little group differentiation and inequality under some social conditions or for a great deal of differentiation and inequality under others.

In the case of changing white racial attitudes in the United States, increasing openness to the principle of integrated education does not mean a desire for greater contact with blacks or even an attachment to integrated education. From the vantage point of group position theory, it means declining insistence on forced group inequality in educational institutions. Declining support for segregated public transportation does not signal a desire for more opportunities to interact with blacks on buses, trains, and the like. Instead, it means a declining insistence on compulsory inequity in group access to this domain of social life.

Second, the group position view sees change in political and economic structures as decisively shaping the socially constructed and shared sense of group position. The sources of change in attitudes—changes in preferred group positions—are not found principally in changing feelings of like and dislike. Changes in the patterns of mass attitudes reflect changes in the structurally based, interactively defined and understood needs and interests of social groups. To put it differently, to have meaning, longevity, and force in people's everyday lives, the attitudes individuals hold must be linked to the organized modes of living in which people are embedded.[79] A demand for segregated transportation, segregated hotels, and blanket labor market discrimination increasingly rings hollow under an economy and polity that have less need for—in fact may be incurring heavy costs because of—the presence of a super exploited, black labor pool. When the economic and political needs of significant segments of a dominant racial group no longer hinge on a sharp caste system for effective functioning, the ideology that explained and justified such a caste system should weaken. It becomes vulnerable to change; its costs should become increasingly apparent—and be rejected.

Third, a key link between changing structural conditions and the attitudes of the public are those prominent social actors who articulate, and frequently clash over and debate, the need for new modes of social organization.[80] The claims and objectives of leaders presumably spring from their conceptions of the interests, opportunities, resources, and needs of the group at a particular point in time. Readily appreciated examples of the role of leaders include the justices' 1954 *Brown* decision, President Kennedy's speech following the effort to enroll two black students at the University of Mississippi, President Johnson's invocation of the civil rights slogan "We shall overcome," and perhaps most memorably Dr. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech.

Of course, not all leadership statements and actions were supportive of positive change. There were White Citizens' Councils, Ku Klux Klan rallies, and a wide variety of other forms of resistance to change. Indeed, Kennedy's speech, which the historian Carl Brauer credits with launching the Second Reconstruction,[81] followed on the heels of Alabama governor George Wallace's "Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever" declaration. In addition, there were powerful voices and forces on the Left activated by the civil rights movement that were demanding greater change than either Kennedy or Johnson was ready to accept. Our point is that the direction and tenor of change is shaped in the larger public sphere of clashes, debate, political mobilization, and struggle.

Conclusion

Racism Old and New

Can we now share the faith and optimism that Gunnar Myrdal expressed in 1944? Or are the bleak depictions offered by Andrew Hacker and Derrick Bell more accurate analyses? We cannot share Myrdal's optimism, although we resist pessimism and despair.

The long and unabated record of sweeping change in racial attitudes that national surveys document cannot be read as a fundamental breakdown in either racialized thinking or antiblack prejudice. Instead, we have witnessed the disappearance of a racial ideology appropriate to an old social order, that of the Jim Crow South. A new and resilient laissez-faire

racism ideology has arisen in its place. As a result, America largely remains "two nations," with African Americans all too often viewing the world from the "bottom of the well."

Jim Crow racism went into decline partly because of a direct and potent assault on it by the civil rights movement. Jim Crow practices and ideology were weakened by an interlocking series of social changes—the declining importance of cotton production to the U.S. economy, limited immigration from Europe, black migration to urban and northern areas—which dramatically increased the power and resources available to black communities. The economic basis for Jim Crow racism had eroded; its political underpinnings were gradually undone by the *Brown* decision, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and other political successes of the civil rights movement.

If racial attitudes reflect the structural conditions of group life,[82] then it is no surprise that Jim Crow attitudes in the public, such as near consensual support for strict segregation and open discrimination—all premised on the assumed biological inferiority of blacks and necessary for the Jim Crow cotton economy—would eventually and steadily ebb in popular acceptance. Jim Crow racism was no longer embedded in American economic or political institutions, and because of the civil rights movement, most of its ideological tenets came to be widely understood as inconsistent with American values.

Despite these monumental changes, blacks and other people of color remain racially segregated and economically disadvantaged. These social conditions continue to prompt many white Americans to feel that they stand to loose something tangible if strong efforts are made to improve the living conditions of people of color. Persistent socioeconomic inequality and residential segregation provide the kernel of truth needed to regularly breathe new life into old stereotypes about putative black proclivities toward crime, violence, and welfare dependency. Viewed in this light, the gap between increasingly egalitarian racial principles and resistance to strong forms of affirmative action is not paradoxical at all. Both are products of changes in the American social structure and politics that successfully deposed Jim Crow institutions but left large numbers of blacks victims of discrimination and residents of poor, isolated ghetto communities.

The end product of these conditions and processes is a new racialized social order with a new racial ideology—laissez-faire racism. Under this regime, blacks are blamed as the cultural architects of their own disadvantaged status. The deeply entrenched cultural pattern of denying societal responsibility for conditions in many black communities continues to foster steadfast opposition to affirmative action and other social policies that might alleviate race-based inequalities. In short, many Americans have become comfortable with as much racial segregation and inequality as a putatively nondiscriminatory polity and free-market economy can produce. Such individuals also tend to oppose social policies that would substantially improve the status of blacks, hasten the pace of integration, or aggressively attack racial discrimination. Enormous racial inequalities thus persist and are rendered culturally palatable by the new laissez-faire racism.

Waiting for the Next Myrdal, King, and Third Reconstruction

The current historical juncture is one of unclear trajectory. A number of conditions, the positive legacy of the civil rights movement and the Second Reconstruction, are salutary. The black middle class is larger and has more resources than at any previous point in American history.[83] It also has the potential of accomplishing greater residential mobility.[84] These positive accomplishments can be seen most clearly in the cultural realm, where black writers, artists, musicians, entertainers, and movie makers have risen to prominence. At the same time, the movement has had a limited impact on the economic conditions of large segments of urban black communities. The circumstances of many poor ghetto communities are difficult at best and are even deteriorating.[85] Along with this deterioration comes the potential to intensify popular negative images of blacks as a dangerous male criminal element or as female welfare cheats exploiting overly generous social programs and wasting the hard-earned tax dollars of working middle Americans.[86]

Because of these conflicting trends, it is not possible to make a simple forecast about the next stage of race relations. On the one hand, the positioning and accomplishments of the black middle class can be read as foreshadowing an era when it would no longer be appropriate to describe the United States as racist or perhaps even as a racialized social order. On the other hand, the social and political response to signs of pathology in poor black communities foreshadows a hardening of both social outlooks and social policy in ways that have an unmistakable racial component. The sharp turn against affirmative action in California and Texas also signals a hardening climate of race relations.

Yet we do not believe that positive change in the future is impossible. Given all that we have argued above, however, another major wave of positive change in racial attitudes and ideology in the United States will

hinge on four types of factors. First, economic conditions must favor chances for redistribution. An expanding economy has been an essential ingredient of black progress in the past, and that pattern is likely to hold true in the future.[87] If most white Americans view the economic pie as shrinking, they are less likely to welcome any form of pressure to share that pie more generously with others.[88] Second, a sympathetic and widely shared interpretation of the conditions and dynamics of the status of African Americans must take root, at least at the level of cultural elites. In the absence of a convincing analysis of both the social barriers black communities face and appropriate responses to them that a wide spectrum of social and political elites take seriously, the cultural climate is much less likely to be receptive to another wave of large-scale change. Necessary changes in attitudes and opinions among the mass public will therefore be much harder to accomplish.

Third, new forms of organizing, directing, and applying the political resources of black communities are likely to be needed. In short, another Martin Luther King and the dynamic social forces he came to spearhead and symbolize may be needed. Whether the charismatic leadership, lofty rhetoric, and protest politics seen during the civil rights era will be necessary is unclear at best. What is clear is that institutionalized inequalities and the patterns of thinking and behaving that reconstitute them each day are likely to be undone only when challenged directly and in a sustained manner. Fourth, if economic conditions, predominant outlooks among elites, and the political strategies of black communities and their allies meet these conditions, we may witness a "third reconstruction." Another wave of relatively coordinated political reform involving the judicial, legislative, and executive branches of government may emerge under this scenario and thereby open the way to profound changes in the status of African Americans.

We have sketched an extraordinarily complex and improbable sequence of events. Furthermore, even if these events were to come about, they might result in the emergence of a "new racism" tied to some future configuration of race, economy, and politics. Only if racial identities, racialized social conditions (e.g., segregation), and the commitment to group position that such identities and conditions foster are directly reshaped would we avoid merely reconstituting racial inequality in a fashion that parallels the shift from Jim Crow racism to laissez-faire racism. Two encouraging trends in this direction are the rising rate of black-white intermarriages and the growing critical examinations of whiteness and white identity.[89]

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> First let us face what the Negro question is. It is an economic question; it is a political question; yes, so it is; but it is primarily a question of human relations, but not in the common sense of those words. . . . That is where we must begin. There is involved here a revolution in relations comparable only to the revolution which will emancipate labor and the revolution which will emancipate women.
>
> —C. L. R. James, *American Civilization*

> A belief in humanity is a belief in colored men.
>
> —W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*

9 Toward an Effective Antiracism

Nikhil Pal Singh

At the dawn of the twentieth century, in the shadow of the failure of Reconstruction in the United States, W. E. B. Du Bois stood before the first Pan-African Congress in London and presented a startling formulation, one that established racial hierarchy and colonial domination as aspects of the same historical condition. "The problem of the twentieth century," he stated, "is the problem of the color line."[1] A few years earlier, in front of the American Negro Academy, Du Bois delivered what became his celebrated and widely known paper "The Conservation of Races" (1897). Addressing his audience in unequivocally nationalist accents, Du Bois spoke for "his people," those with whom he was "bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh"; those he would later describe as living within the Veil.[2] Without attacking the global problems of racism and empire directly, Du Bois emphasized another point, that "the Negro people *as a race*, have a contribution to make to civilization and humanity which no other race can make."[3]

As he composed his most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), a few years later, Du Bois deftly combined these two distinct appeals in his searching examination of the racial condition of the United States in the post-emancipation era. Advocating neither assimilation, and conse-