Chapter 1

Why Is American Poverty Still Colored in the Twenty-First Century?

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In the United States, one of every three African American children and one of every four Latino children lives in poverty. For white children, the number is one in seven (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). Substantial progress for racial minorities has occurred over the last forty years, and yet the life chances of the average black or Latino child are still very different from those of his average white or Asian classmate. Will more and better education close these gaps? Is a renewed commitment to personal responsibility necessary? Can government fix this problem—or will government make it worse?

These questions are familiar to anyone—citizen, journalist, scholar, or politician—who has worried about poverty in the United States. But that these questions have persisted so long should give us pause. Despite excellent research into the causes and consequences of poverty, despite extensive evaluation of policies liberal and conservative, the same answers—education reform, individual effort, government attention—continually vie for precedence. Better answers are needed: answers that build on the knowledge gained from nearly half a century of fighting poverty, but that also suggest different approaches and models for progress.

The authors in this volume draw on all the social sciences—economics, history, anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology—to offer these answers. They consider what disciplines have learned about specific aspects of poverty, and how these connect to race. They propose new questions that need to be studied, and in some cases solutions that could be tried. But all of their essays lead to a common insight: that debates about the causes of racial and ethnic disparities, and about the best solution to them, are fundamentally misconceived. Fifty years of research into the various aspects of poverty and race point not to

one most important cause of poverty, but to a process: any type of disadvantage makes one vulnerable to more disadvantages, and the increased vulnerability reduces the probability that any single solution, however effective, will make an overall difference in a disadvantaged person's life. Like a hospital stay prolonged when a weakened patient keeps getting new infections, poverty has no root cause. The solution is not any particular cure. It is to figure out how to reduce vulnerability, to prevent disadvantages from cumulating.

Consider Jamal, now seven years old, a boy that one of us has known for the last two years. He is a black child in a school that is more than 75 percent white, and a poor child in a school where less than 15 percent of students receive free or reduced lunch. His teachers report that he has at least five siblings under the age of twelve, not all with the same father, that his home is not well maintained, that he frequently tries to get extra food during snack time, and that he sometimes comes to school dirty. Although his mother rarely attends school activities, and never comes to PTA meetings, everyone seems to know that she dresses, speaks, and interacts differently than the white and nonwhite middle class moms in the school.

At five, Jamal entered kindergarten. On class trips and activities organized by volunteer parents and college students, he quickly gained a reputation as disruptive, but also as artistic and engaged in the classroom. He was interested in learning and often tried to do the right thing. It seemed that despite his circumstances, Jamal might do well in school and avoid a future of economic instability. After all, he was in a school where teachers regularly volunteered to organize enrichment activities, where middle class parents and affluent children were accessible role models, and where college student volunteers provided frequent opportunities for one-on-one help.

By second grade, however, Jamal was increasingly having academic and social problems. His second-grade class had an unusually large number of boys, many of whom were extremely disruptive and encouraged Jamal's outbursts. He rarely completed homework assignments and could not depend on anyone at home to help with lessons he did not master in class. During the last two months of the school year, on a classroom visit and two field trips, we were struck by how different this Jamal was from the kindergartener of two years before. It was harder to see the good child inside Jamal—the boy who sometimes managed to do the right thing and who tried to be a learner. Instead, we saw a child who, though only seven years old, seemed angry, frustrated, and hardened. He was less engaged in his schoolwork and less interested in following classroom rules. He was physically and verbally aggressive toward other children. He did not listen to adults and challenged authority when reprimanded. Several times the teacher or one of the classroom aides physically restrained Jamal to prevent him from attacking a classmate or to keep him from running out of the classroom. Jamal was no longer a disruption. He was now a serious threat to the classroom community.

It is impossible to argue that Jamal's rapidly dwindling opportunities are the result of a school system that pays too little attention to the academic talents and needs of minority children. Jamal has had extraordinary teachers—the teachers

that affluent parents vie to have assigned to their own children. Additionally, during most weeks Jamal received individual attention from a speech therapist, a reading specialist, the school psychologist, a special education teacher, and in-class volunteers. The principal, who frequently stopped by to see Jamal, even reserved a spot in her office for him to regroup when he started to lose control in the classroom.

It is also not possible for us to argue that Jamal, at seven, made too many bad choices and is wholly responsible for the situation he is in today. We have seen Jamal work hard. Some of his classmates, equally disruptive but from more advantaged backgrounds, seemed to maintain promising trajectories despite their behavior and apparent disinterest in school.

No one knows what will become of Jamal, but it is clear that he is on a disturbing path. Between kindergarten and second grade, adults and children at school solidified their assessment of Jamal as a "bad kid." Over the same period, Jamal seemed to have accepted that he would always get in trouble, and he slowly stopped trying quite so hard to do the right thing. Also over this period, Jamal was exposed to yet another two years of poverty. His less affluent home environment did not adequately prepare him for kindergarten, and did not enforce accountability or provide academic support. Nor did his parents use medical diagnoses to shield Jamal from the consequences of his impulses, as the parents of some of his more affluent classmates did. If left unchecked, this cascade of disadvantage will likely make it difficult for Jamal to graduate from high school, to avoid prison, to earn a living wage, to sustain a long-term romantic relationship, to guide his own children toward economic self-sufficiency, and to live a long and healthy life.

CASCADES

We offer Jamal's story to illustrate the core message of this book: disadvantages cascade. Difficult but solvable problems—the lack of dependable food, clothing, or shelter; the inability to control oneself; the presence of a disruptive peer group; a home environment that does not or cannot support learning—exacerbate and are exacerbated by other disadvantages. When multiple disadvantages exist, even solutions exacerbate problems: Jamal may receive extra help at school, but that extra attention also reinforces the teachers', the other parents', and his own belief that he is bad.

By contrast, advantages insulate. Being affluent does not guarantee parental attention, good behavior, academic support, or friends of good character. Doing well in school does not prevent job loss or guarantee a successful marriage. The presence of enough advantages, however, makes it easier to cushion the negative impact of single disadvantages. When problems come one at a time, or at least slowly enough to allow for solutions to create stability, bad choices or bad luck are less likely to result in a bad life.

Much previous writing about poverty was motivated by debates over the rela-

tive significance of different root causes: economic structure, mainstream and underclass cultures, or government capabilities and responsibilities. We start from a different position: that poverty may be rooted in many causes, but what matters is how it spreads and flourishes. Poverty reflects not single causes but cumulative disadvantages. Everyone is vulnerable to some of these, but some people are vulnerable to many, and each new disadvantage is made harder to overcome given the lingering effect of past ills. Thus fixing blame and attempting a remedy are doomed to fail if the solution does not also protect against new vulnerabilities—whether these be created by the economy, enabled by culture, or institutionalized by government.

Disadvantages do not cascade by accident. Within any society, resources, status, and opportunities are distributed through many different mechanisms. In the American context, one of the most important and consistent mechanisms is race. In the course of American history, the meaning of race—whether Irish are white, whether Asians are colored, and how many black ancestors make one black—has changed. What has not is the use of race to create categories that guide the distribution of opportunities. Over time, this means that it is not necessary to trace Jamal's actions to biological difference, or the actions of those around him to prejudice or hatred, to conclude that race has influenced Jamal's life. It is only necessary to see that Jamal's race creates a vulnerability to negative treatment, and thus a higher probability of experiencing and exacerbating the disadvantages he has already suffered.

Why focus on race, when nonracial vulnerabilities to poverty also exist? We put race at the center of any attempt to assess vulnerability to poverty because in the United States, our economy, our cultural frameworks and repertoires, and our government policies have been shaped by a history of racial relations and racially inflected decision making. As a result, our institutions, practices, and beliefs can foster racial disadvantage without any deliberate effort to discriminate. This remains true even as the changing racial and ethnic environment of the United States challenges historical precedents about who the targets of racial disadvantage are now, and who they may be in the future. The growing diversity of the American racial landscape spurs us to review the mechanisms by which race and ethnicity—white, black, Latino, Asian—are linked to advantage and disadvantage.

Together, the cumulative operation of disadvantage and the close connection between race and vulnerability demonstrate the need for a new framework for understanding the racial and ethnic disparities that characterize poverty in the United States. Our book provides this framework. Each chapter in this volume examines one area of social life in which disadvantage or vulnerabilities to poverty are embedded: discrimination, beliefs about inequality, culture, education, health, social networks, residential location, incarceration, and welfare policy. The chapters explain these vulnerabilities and show their links to race and ethnicity—not only because some groups do worse, but also because the connection of race to bad outcomes results in more vulnerability down the line. These vulnerabilities result in a system of advantages and disadvantages that explains why poverty is

substantially less common for whites and Asians than for blacks and Latinos. The authors also point out what still needs to be studied, and examine policy strategies to sever some of the connections between race and vulnerability, or to prevent disadvantages from cascading until they cannot be reversed. The result is a comprehensive assessment of racial disparities in poverty for the student, the scholar, the journalist, and the policy maker.

We group our examination of these systems of vulnerability into three categories. The first section includes those in which race influences perceptions, cognitive structures, and expectations: interpersonal and institutional discrimination, beliefs about economic inequality, and culture. The second focuses on social mechanisms in which race is a contributing, but implicit factor: education, health, and social networks. The third examines four policy areas in particular detail—residential segregation, incarceration, income support, and social services—to show how racial disparities have been embedded, consciously or unconsciously, in policy design and implementation.

In the rest of this introduction, we discuss each of these sections. In doing so, we illustrate why an approach that takes the cumulative impact of disadvantage seriously is different from thinking about each of these mechanisms as an independent cause of racial disparities in poverty. We start, however, by explaining what race has become in twenty-first century America, and why it still matters.

ASSIGNING DISADVANTAGE BY RACE

In 1965, the coattails of the civil rights movement made possible a little-known piece of legislation with far-reaching effects. Until then, immigration quotas were explicitly fixed to replicate the racial and ethnic distribution in the America of the 1890 census. Thus, in 1960, 75 percent of the foreign-born came from Europe, and less than 15 percent came from Latin America and Asia combined (Gibson and Lennon 1999). But the 1965 Hart-Celler Act abolished these quotas, instead allowing families and employers to sponsor new immigrants. Hart-Celler was not intended to change the racial makeup of the United States: if all citizens had immediate family who wanted to leave other countries for America, and if employable migrants were equally distributed across countries, the racial and ethnic balance of the United States would have remained constant. But because Asian, Latin American, and African workers were more likely to desire migration, and newer citizens were much more likely to sponsor family members than long-settled ones, Hart-Celler set the stage for a racial and ethnic restructuring of American society.

The most obvious aspect of this restructuring is the change in racial composition. In 1960, whites were 88.6 percent of the American population, and blacks 10.5 percent; other racial groups made up less than 1 percent, and Hispanics were not systematically counted (Gibson and Jung 2002). By 2000, the white population had dropped nearly 18 percent; the black and Hispanic populations were virtually equal to one another, at 12.4 and 12.5 percent respectively; and Asians had

reached 3.6 percent. This change was almost entirely fueled by immigrants, more than 50 percent of whom were from Latin America, and more than 25 percent from Asia (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

The change in numbers has been accompanied by a change in the way Americans think about race. In the 1960s, a belief in racial inferiority was still acceptable, even as the civil rights movement questioned the legality of embedding these beliefs in state practice. Nearly fifty years later, it has become common to point to the many successful African Americans, Asians, and Latinos in American life as proof that no reasonable person could any longer believe in the inherent inferiority of a particular racial group. These examples of successful individuals, however, have their own consequences. They delegitimize conversations about group success and failure, which seem to mock Americans' ideas about individual merit (see Bullock, chapter 3, this volume). They divert attention to attitude and perseverance as solutions for economic difficulty or social prejudice, and in doing so obscure the operation of any other mechanisms. They impede the creation of multiethnic alliances between America's new immigrants and its settled residents, by providing the accusation that group-based organization is an effort to obtain illegitimate group rights.

The increasingly diverse racial landscape also complicates the analytical meaning of race and draws attention to the historically specific ways it has been used in the United States. Race is often a synonym for disadvantage, yet today's new immigrants are concentrated at the top as well as the bottom of the educational distribution, and Asian Americans have a higher median household income than any other racial group (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Mills 2004). Race implies a shared history and culture, yet Asian immigrants—even from the same country—may not share the same language, and Latino immigrants from South America have a very different history than those from Central America or Mexico. Race implies a sense of solidarity, yet black immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean may feel quite different from African Americans who have been in the United States for generations. Indeed, even the definition of race is more a government artifact than an empirical recognition of groupings that people might have chosen, or that they might recognize. Indians, Koreans, and Filipinos are all considered Asian despite the fact that the Asian countries they came from had very little historical relationship. Arabs are recoded as white even when they check Other and name themselves as Arab or Middle Eastern, or when they give a Middle Eastern country of origin on the U.S. Census (Grieco and Cassidy 2001). Hispanic is considered an ethnic rather than a racial category, even though in practice scholars, policy makers, and the media implicitly reject this distinction by distinguishing between non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, and Hispanics (Hirschman, Alba, and Farley 2000).

Thus the first task facing a volume on racial and ethnic disparity is to examine how connections between race, privilege, disadvantage, and achievement are constructed. The chapters on discrimination, attitudes, and culture do just that. In chapter 2, Devah Pager assesses the major social scientific approaches to the measurement of discrimination: surveys asking for self-reported experiences of un-

equal treatment, or of self-reported attitudes of distrust or dislike; statistical analyses of large-scale socioeconomic datasets; and experimental approaches testing differences in treatment related to race, gender, or ethnicity. Though each has advantages and disadvantages, all suggest that "overt forms of prejudice and discrimination have declined, but . . . subtle and unconscious forms of bias persist. Unfortunately, these unconscious sources of discrimination remain among the most difficult to identify, legislate, and change" (chapter 2, this volume). Structural forms of discrimination, including the social patterning of opportunity and the spatial distribution of resources, can aggregate over time and across different social spheres, so that even small inequalities can have substantial effects over time and space. Chapter 2 also illustrates the power of social categories to affect social outcomes, even when those categories are inconsistent with how individuals see themselves.

Heather Bullock follows in chapter 3 with an examination of American attitudes about wealth, poverty, and achievement. Reviewing literature from social psychology, sociology, and political science, she shows that beliefs in individualism and upward mobility intersect with beliefs about the relative worth of different races. This intersection gives legitimacy to existing hierarchies of wealth and social status, and justifies stereotypes about blacks and Latinos. Rather than try to separate so-called true beliefs in merit from ostensibly disguised racism, sexism, or classism, Bullock concludes that it is more important to see how the combination of these beliefs affects important public policy domains, especially those related to education and income support. Central to her discussion is the evidence that poor and nonpoor, white and nonwhite, all share these beliefs. Thus change in racial and ethnic disparities is not simply a matter of increasing understanding, awareness, or appreciation across different groups. Instead, it requires deliberate efforts to recognize stereotypes that usually go unquestioned, and context-specific attempts to challenge them.

Finally, in chapter 4, Michèle Lamont and Mario Small explain how early discussions of the relationship between poverty and culture essentialized specific beliefs and behaviors by attributing them to the history or the circumstances of specific racial groups. Instead, they propose six alternative approaches to the concept of culture: frames, repertoires, narratives, cultural capital, symbolic boundaries, and institutions. All of these turn the analyst's focus away from a particular race or ethnicity, and instead toward smaller venues: families, neighborhoods, peer groups, policies, or political movements. Each also shows that numerous choices exist within cultures, so that cultural processes never produce outcomes in a deterministic way. Poverty can reproduce itself through culture, but the way to break this cycle is not by changing a culture of poverty. Instead, cycles are broken when the link between culture and a specific set of circumstances produces its own set of possibilities for change.

One of the most important implications of Lamont and Small's analysis is that by turning away from approaches that equate culture to an entire race, scholars and policy makers often find that the same values are shared across racial groups, by both the poor and the nonpoor. In acting on these values, however, people in

advantaged and disadvantaged circumstances, under conditions of racial privilege or racial vulnerability, will have different options. This suggests that assessing the options available under different conditions is more likely to explain individual behavior and group outcomes than simply assuming that because particular options are chosen, they must have been preferred. A black single mother in a closely knit community, and a white middle class mother who moves into a less affluent neighborhood after divorce, will have different options. The white mother may not be able to get her ex-husband to take responsibility for their child without a court order; the black mother, with fewer resources to navigate the court system, may rely instead on ongoing relationships with the father and his family. These differences in behavior would not be the result of different preferences, but rather of the availability of different pathways to achieving a common goal.

These chapters provide an important foundation for the rest of the volume, and for future explorations of the connections between race and poverty. They draw attention to the importance of looking for the mechanisms that connect group identity to group outcomes, rather than looking only at disproportionate representation. They also show that the intersection of race and poverty has a reciprocal effect on practices, attitudes, and habits. Current disparities in neighborhood quality, employment rates, school achievement, access to resources, single parenthood, and imprisonment create expectations and coping mechanisms that may guide future behavior, even if the original gaps are closed. Disadvantages cascade because disparity is enabled through discrimination, attitudes, or culture, and the resulting disparity then serves to justify future discrimination, new attitudes, or cultural adaptations.

Each of these authors makes clear that discrimination, attitudes, and culture do not exist only in the mind. Rather, they are best understood within specific venues and in conjunction with specific policies. The next set of chapters in this volume thus explores three areas—education, social networks, and health—where initial, tiny disparities between groups can develop into large and seemingly insurmountable differences. These differences in human capital, social capital, and physical and psychological well being have been exhaustively studied, and they often serve as the target of simple, group-specific interventions: more education, better peer support, or more access to medical care. Our chapters show, however, that the mechanisms in each of these areas are complex, interactive, and stubborn; they suggest that the first goal of policy should not be to remedy inequality, but to avoid concentrating it.

ANALYZING DIFFERENCES BY RACE

The chapters on discrimination, attitudes about achievement, and culture make clear that the close association of race and disadvantage is deeply rooted in the assumptions and experiences of both the poor and nonpoor. But these associations are not the only explanation for their connection. Indeed, race is often considered

only incidental to other causes of poverty: inadequate education, poor social connections, health problems and the lack of health care. Even if one believes that racial discrimination is primarily responsible for consigning racial minority groups to bad schools, bad neighborhoods, or inferior medical care, it might not be necessary to address discrimination before creating better schools, better neighborhoods, or accessible health insurance. In other words, the best way to overcome racial disparities could be to look past race, focusing instead on the correlates of poverty.

Certainly an approach like this has much to recommend it. College graduation rates, for instance, vary greatly by race: 31 percent of whites have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 18 percent of blacks and 12 percent of Hispanics. By contrast, nearly 50 percent of Asians hold a bachelor's or advanced degree (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). This suggests that if preparation for and access to college were made more available to everyone, all groups would benefit and racial gaps in both education and income would decrease. To take another example, in 2001 black infants were more than twice as likely as Asian, Hispanic, or non-Hispanic white babies to die before their first birthday. Indeed, black infant mortality was higher than infant mortality in most developed countries, and higher than in many less developed countries—Cuba, the Russian Federation, Bulgaria, and Chile, to name just a few. But given that infant mortality has dropped between 40 and 70 percent for all racial groups over the past twenty years (National Center for Health Statistics 2005), the solution is presumably obvious; better prenatal and well-baby care simply need to be more widely implemented.

Another argument for non-race-specific approaches is that the coincidence of race and disadvantage can be misleading. The last section laid out the tremendous change that immigration has created in the racial makeup of the United States: about 40 percent of Hispanics and 70 percent of Asians are foreign-born, compared to fewer than 7 percent of non-Hispanic whites and blacks (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). This suggests that racial disparities in income, education, or opportunity may be caused not by factors related to race or ethnicity, but simply by being new members of society. If so, any gaps might disappear as immigrants, and their children and grandchildren, blend into American society; and policies might be directed, not at decreasing discrimination or ensuring equal treatment, but at aiding integration and Americanization.

Racial and ethnic disparities might even be a source of advantage for some groups. Some scholars of immigration have argued, for instance, that though poor blacks in highly segregated neighborhoods have limited chances for upward mobility, the segregation (voluntary or involuntary) of immigrants into ethnic enclaves and social networks can buffer them from the effects of concentrated poverty and societal prejudice. Their customs and cultures, though sometimes an obstacle to integration in America, can serve to cement social ties among coethnics and lead to mutual aid. Their expectations for success are nurtured by comparisons with their home country, which makes hardship easier to bear. And though some immigrants come with very little, others migrate with resources, or may be

able to draw on transnational resources to ease their transition and invest in future success (Zhou 1997).

Any discussion of racial and ethnic disparities in poverty must therefore confront two important arguments: that racial disparities will disappear as the causes of poverty are addressed, and that some racial disparities result from the strengths of a group and cannot, or should not, be redressed. Our chapters on education, health, and social capital consider these issues. In chapter 5, George Farkas looks at the results of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a policy that chose to address racial gaps in academic achievement by implementing school reform focused on universal standards. In chapter 6, David Williams and Selina Mohammed use the California Health Interview Study (CHIS) to examine the relative contribution of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, country of origin, and immigrant status to health status. Finally, in chapter 7, Lincoln Quillian and Rozlyn Redd assess the voluminous literature on social capital to consider the extent to which social networks, especially those linked to race and ethnicity, might explain both poverty and economic success.

If education alone could help to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in poverty, one would expect to find that differences in poverty rates could explain why black and Latino children fare less well in school, with corresponding difficulties in later life. George Farkas's chapter, however, begins with a startling fact: both race and socioeconomic status affect vocabulary skills well before children turn three years old. Thus black and Latino children enter pre-school at a substantial disadvantage to their white playmates, and do not catch up. Through an examination of studies on early childhood achievement, Farkas finds that parental income, marital status, education, and interaction with children not only influence what children know before they start school, but also create strategies that will determine the ability tracking that children will experience. Put another way, racial and ethnic disparities that affect adults are passed down to their children, and at present formal education does comparatively little to redress these. Farkas concludes that without consistent attention and support throughout their schooling, directed at helping children who are most at risk, racial disparities in academic achievement will remain intact even if the overall level of education improves.

The multifaceted picture of education that Farkas draws is in many ways similar to the story that David Williams and Selina Mohammed tell about health in chapter 6. Their analysis shows that while poverty has severely detrimental effects on health—one study suggesting, for example, that the effect size is comparable to that of cigarette smoking (Hahn et al 1995)—race does as well, over and above the effect of socioeconomic status (SES). Compounding both is that illness and its correlates (obesity, stress, disability) also cause socioeconomic disadvantage such that "the relationship between SES and health status is dynamic and reciprocal" (Williams and Mohammed, chapter 6, this volume). Williams's and Mohammed's discussion of the CHIS data also shows, however, that the relationship between race and health is by no means straightforward. Looking within race at the experiences of national origin groups shows considerable variation, especially among Latinos and Asians. For instance, Puerto Rican, Filipino, Chinese, and

Vietnamese health does not improve as economic status improves, a result that has also been observed for some measures of black health. Immigrants can have better health than whites, presumably because those who anticipate arduous migration circumstances are likely to start with fewer chronic conditions and better than average health. On the other hand, stress linked to migration, adaptation, and SES can produce lower levels of emotional health for some but not all national-origin groups of Latinos and Asians. The upshot is that race proxies, often imperfectly, for a wide variety of vulnerabilities that improvements in SES alone cannot overcome.

In recent years, one of the most popular explanations for vulnerabilities of this sort has been social capital, that is, contacts, knowledge, and support gained from peers. Because the advantaged are likely to know people who are also advantaged, the contacts, knowledge, or support they gain from their acquaintances are likely to be useful in raising their income, finding good jobs, or increasing their health, education, and other resources. By contrast, the poor may also have close ties and relationships, but their peers are also likely to be poor and thus unable to provide information or contacts that could improve their friends' economic and social well being. This type of sorting, known as homophily, "contributes to the advantage of the advantaged and the disadvantage of the disadvantaged" (Quillian and Redd, chapter 7, this volume). The tendency of people of the same race to associate, or their forced association through racial segregation or bias, exacerbates the effects of class homophily: if the poor primarily associate with others who are poor and of their own race, the range of social capital that they can access is even narrower.

Quillian and Redd explain this process in chapter 7 and then examine the evidence for four social capital explanations most commonly applied to persistent racial gaps in poverty: that limited job search networks cause differential rates of employment, that neighborhoods are more likely to be plagued with crime when residents distrust each other and the police, that immigrants are able to draw on coethnic sources of socioeconomic support to assist their economic mobility, and that school friendship networks play an important role in academic achievement. They find evidence that high levels of social capital can result in safer neighborhoods, more prosperous immigrant communities, and slightly higher school achievement, but not that social capital influences the probability of getting a better job. These conclusions are further evidence that racial disparities in poverty are not only a by-product of the human tendency to prefer people similar to oneself. Although higher levels of social capital can provide some protection from the disadvantages of poverty, they do not address many of the other vulnerabilities that this volume describes. Increasing access to contacts of a higher social class, or to resources and information that those contacts provide, is not a solution to racial disparities. The pathways through which race allocates opportunity and concentrates disadvantage need closer attention.

The final section of the book brings together the arguments of the previous two sections—that race and poverty are deeply intertwined in the beliefs and expectations of Americans, and that increasing the human or social capital of the poor is

not enough to overcome racial disparities—by showing that public policy is, in and of itself, a primary contributor to racial vulnerability in the United States. Housing, crime, and antipoverty policies continue to concentrate advantage and disadvantage, exacerbating the legacy of policies that fostered racial discrimination, and undercutting their own stated goals to improve the well being of all Americans, including the poor. These chapters show that it is simply shortsighted to argue that Americans have gotten beyond race, or to assume that policies are race-neutral because they do not mention race. Creating a race-blind society requires that we pay attention to the effects of race, and not that we seek to forget it.

ENSHRINING DISADVANTAGE THROUGH POLICY

After the Civil War and through the first half of the twentieth century, poverty in the United States had many faces and many colors. Black and white sharecroppers in the American South, Midwestern farmers chased off their farms by bank failures and drought, American Indians on reservations, and immigrants in city tenements—"the wretched refuse" of Europe's "teeming shores"—all bore the face of poverty, and public sentiment alternately condoled with their precarious economic conditions or vilified their shiftlessness, ignorance, or cultural failings. Racial prejudice was ubiquitous. Indian children were removed from their parents to be civilized; Chinese and Japanese immigrants were the target of riots, deportation, and internment; Southern and Eastern Europeans were spoken of as biologically inferior to their Northern European counterparts; and rights that blacks had supposedly been guaranteed after the Civil War were systematically stripped away by Jim Crow laws in the South and de facto segregation in the North.

Yet, as these examples suggest, the institutions that created vulnerability to poverty and reinforced inferior status were different for each group. And, over time, through political action and coalition building, through political necessities wrought by the Great Depression, two world wars, and America's changing role in the world, many of these institutions changed as well. As a result, by the second half of the twentieth century, the face of poverty was more and more often a black face (see chapters 3 and 11, this volume). Despite occasional attention to other groups, such as whites in Appalachia, race and poverty became intertwined in public perception and policy.

President Lyndon Johnson made this connection clear. In a commencement speech at Howard University, he famously said that the next stage of the battle for civil rights was to seek "not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and equality as a result." Inequality, he said, had two aspects: "inherited, gateless poverty" exacerbated by living without "training and skills. . . in slums, without decent medical care," and "the devastating heritage of long years of slavery; and a century of oppression, hatred, and injustice." Thus freedom, "the right to share, share fully and equally, in American society—to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school" was a start, but not enough. "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up

to the starting line of a race and then say, "You are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair" (Johnson 1965, 635–40).

The civil rights policies enacted in this period attempted to address these fundamental inequalities between whites and blacks by dramatically changing the conditions of political participation, the social mores of public places, private choices about friendship and marriage, and the composition of American schools, workplaces, and leisure activities. But necessary as they were, these changes only began to remove the chains that had hobbled blacks. They did not address the ways in which race was embedded in American law and society through institutions and outcomes: through the neighborhoods that blacks lived in, the laws that defined criminal behavior, or the poverty that far too many blacks experienced. Equally important, the civil rights victories of the 1960s failed to address a policy-making process and a set of policy preferences that, though not race-specific, had racial impacts. Without intent to discriminate, and with every intent to honor American principles such as majority opinion, federalism, and personal responsibility, American social policy after the 1960s has continued to disadvantage blacks, and in some cases Latinos, relative to whites.

In chapter 8, Michael Stoll illustrates the racial impact of the policies shaping the American landscape. There is perhaps no more common belief about poverty than that it is a problem of the urban ghetto. Stoll's discussion of place, however, shows that this easy generalization can be misleading: although central cities contain heavily black and poor neighborhoods, rural poverty rates are higher than metropolitan poverty rates, and poverty within suburbs is growing, especially for Latinos and Asians. The role that discriminatory mortgage lending, public housing practices, and racial steering played in the creation of poor black neighborhoods is well known (Allard, chapter 9, this volume), and Stoll summarizes the evidence that overt racial housing discrimination still exists, helping cause racial segregation in suburbs as well as in cities. But he also points to other factors—suburban sprawl, development and zoning regulations, and immigration to non-traditional destinations—that do not originate in the desire for racial segregation, but often create or exacerbate it. Moreover, the resulting segregated neighborhoods also impose significant economic disadvantages, in particular distance from job opportunities and mass transportation alternatives. In other words, the suburban and rural poor also suffer from the spatial mismatch between residence and jobs that scholars have identified as a problem for the urban poor. If policy makers fail to notice either that racial segregation and economic disadvantage coexist in places other than the central city, or the disproportionate racial impact of policy decisions about sprawl, local development, or immigrant settlement, the United States could unintentionally recreate the kinds of racial disadvantage previously caused by deliberate racial segregation.

The racial consequences of the tight connection between place and poverty are made even clearer in chapter 9, where Scott Allard discusses the availability of social services. Such services—providing help with employment-related needs such as job training, child care, or transportation; meeting basic needs through food

and clothing pantries or emergency cash assistance; or addressing problems such as substance abuse and domestic violence—are commonly thought of as services for the poor. Indeed, the welfare reforms of 1996 shifted funding away from income support toward services, in the expectation that services could help recipients permanently leave the welfare rolls. Allard finds, however, that in both rural and urban areas, services are more likely to be accessible to those living in low-poverty census tracts, and especially likely to be inaccessible in census tracts with high concentrations of blacks. Put another way, those in high poverty, highly black neighborhoods are least likely to find accessible services even though they might need them the most. Hispanics, who are less segregated than blacks, experience more uneven accessibility: generally, the more mixed-race the area, the more accessibility Hispanics have. However, even Hispanic neighborhoods located near one another can have very different access to services, and the increasing presence of Hispanics in poor rural areas bodes ill for their future access.

Racial disparities in policy are not only caused by the lack of access to benefits; they also include a greater vulnerability to sanctions. The most obvious case, of course, is that of criminal sanctions, and—in particular—imprisonment. Due in large part to changes in penalties for drug offenses, the reduced use of parole, and the spread of mandatory minimum sentencing, the number of people in American prisons today is more than ten times greater than in 1974. The consequences are especially stark when examined by race: the rate of incarceration for black men is more than seven times greater, and for Hispanic men nearly two times greater, than that for whites. In chapter 10, Darren Wheelock and Christopher Uggen trace this disparity to different types and rates of offending as well as to different treatment by the criminal justice system. Both can result from policy choices that correspond with other correlates of racial disparity: poverty, the drug economy, and greater emphasis on policing and enforcement, for instance, are all more common in black and Hispanic neighborhoods.

Wheelock and Uggen, however, are most interested in the results of this disparity for the future life chances of ex-prisoners and their families and communities. They document a wide variety of collateral consequences that affect ex-prisoners after release, such as restrictions on employment, jury duty, financial aid for college, public housing, and income assistance. All of these are likely to limit income, civic participation, and social mobility, not only for prisoners but also for their families and communities. Moreover, they raise the probability of continued disparities in incarceration: with less income, fewer opportunities for education, less influence on convictions, laws, and penalties, and a greater probability of living in neighborhoods with many ex-offenders, blacks and Hispanics are more likely to commit crimes, more likely to be arrested when they do, and more likely to be imprisoned as a result.

In chapter 11, Joe Soss and Sandy Schram place the potential for policy to perpetuate racial disparities in its broader historical and political context. Like Allard, they explore welfare—the paradigmatic case of poverty policy. But instead of focusing on the distribution of benefits, they examine the impact of welfare reform on civic disparities—"how recent policy changes position different groups

vis-à-vis major institutions of the state, market, and civil society" and "organize governance and establish terms of membership in distinctive ways for different racial and ethnic groups." Welfare policy, for instance, has depended heavily on state and local regulation since its inception, and states with the highest concentrations of African Americans have also had the least expansive and most punitive programs. In effect, blacks are thus disproportionately denied not just benefits, but also the guarantee of equality that characterizes federal programs with uniform eligibility standards. Similarly, a major change in welfare eligibility in the 1996 reforms reduced the membership rights of immigrants. Despite their legal status, all new permanent residents were denied eligibility for both family and old-age assistance, and states were allowed to choose whether pre-1996 immigrants who had not become citizens would be kept on the rolls.

Soss and Schram argue, however, that the best evidence for racial disparities in welfare reform lies in its implementation. They show that states with higher proportions of African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to impose sanctions and to choose more restrictive policies. States with more African Americans are also likely to devolve authority to counties and other local jurisdictions, increasing the probability that implementation will vary by geography. The result is that local differences cumulate, nationwide, to a welfare regime in which the majority of white recipients experience the most generous welfare programs and the majority of black recipients experience the most restrictive. They also find that Hispanics and Asians, who are more likely to have language difficulties, are especially vulnerable to the effects of "work-first" policies. Soss and Schram then situate these findings in the larger question of government regulation of the lives of its citizens, arguing that both welfare reform and the rise in incarceration leave blacks and Hispanics under significantly more supervision and intervention in their choices. Moreover, these differences also create potential divisions between poor and middle class minorities, which could end in the middle class refusal to acknowledge racial vulnerability.

THE PERSISTENCE OF RACIAL DISPARITY

Soss and Schram's analysis brings the volume full circle, to the question we posed at the beginning. Why focus on race, when nonracial disparities in poverty also exist? Will racial disparities in poverty persist as the definition of race in America expands beyond black and white? The chapters clearly show that racial disparity characterizes American beliefs about poverty and achievement, the indicators and mechanisms of social mobility and well being, and the policies that disproportionately affect the poor. Read together, they also show that disadvantages in one area create disadvantages and vulnerabilities in others, cascading to stymie attempts to find the independent effects of individual factors. Finally, a clear pattern emerges across these chapters, with disadvantages more likely to be experienced by Latinos, and especially blacks, than Asians or whites.

We believe that cumulative disadvantage provides the most compelling expla-

nation for why racial disparities in poverty are difficult to understand and influence. The increased racial diversity of American society, the economic and social stability that people of all races have achieved, and the growing rejection of overt racism remove many of the historic barriers to racial equality in the United States. But the implication of cumulative disadvantage is that racial disparities yield only slowly to overall improvement in equality, because any remaining disadvantages increase one's vulnerability to other disadvantages. Meanwhile, segregation in schools, social networks, and neighborhoods means that the advantaged are unlikely to see the consequences of inaction, or to understand how a complex web of forces and choices act to keep them comfortable while the poor are desperate.

For too long, the policy debate has been dominated by the search for magic bullets, policies that address one determinant of economic success. Welfare reform was seen as the solution for the economic, cultural, and social deficiencies of the poor: make expectations for employment clear, and recipients will respond by adopting a work ethic, earning enough money to educate their children, and abandoning their social isolation to enter a society of workers. No Child Left Behind was seen as a solution for intergenerational poverty: hold schools accountable for teaching students basic skills early, and they will be able to find work, go to college, and improve their lives. Certainly welfare reform and NCLB have been the cause of necessary improvements in welfare and education. But, as the chapters by Allard, Soss and Schram, and Farkas show, these programs also created new forms of racial disparity and failed to address others. Rather than adopt a holistic approach to the causes of poverty, welfare reform did not address the effects of limited education, inaccessible services, and other impediments to work, and NCLB fails to address the role that families play in the development of their children's skills.

Affirmative action and other equal opportunity policies represent yet another type of magic bullet: if blacks and Latinos are able to go to the good schools that Asians and whites attend, to get the good jobs that their networks make available, or to live in their neighborhoods with access to services and employers, racial disparities will dissipate. We disagree. Although equal opportunity removes some disparities, it does not address those that are embedded in race-neutral policies, or correct for differences in locational, economic, intergenerational, and racial privilege that affect one's ability to take advantage of opportunities.

This book does not promote a set of policy proposals to replace the magic bullets we have criticized. Many of the chapters highlight innovative programs focusing directly on racial disparities, and we applaud these. They should be understood, however, as building blocks of the comprehensive solutions necessary to deal with cascades of disadvantage. The most important message to take from this book is that, to succeed, our policies need to be explicit in confronting race and holistic in their scope.

Jamal's story, which opened this chapter, illustrates the human cost of abandoning the problems of racial inequality to luck, pluck, or political posturing. To wait is to implicitly conclude that providing our own children with every possible op-

portunity, showering ourselves with ever more luxuries, financing yet another military action, and keeping taxes on the wealthy a little lower are more important than helping a new cohort of Jamals live up to their true potential. The problem of poverty in the United States is also a problem of color. Admitting, understanding, and working with this fact are necessary steps in changing it.

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