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INTRODUCTION: ASSESSING CHANGES IN THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE AND ETHNICITY



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THE MEANING AND significance of race and ethnicity in the United States have been of enduring interest inside and outside the halls of academia. Early social scientific work focused on such concerns as dismantling notions of biological determinism, identifying the deleterious consequences of legal segregation and blatant racial prejudice for individuals, communities, and nations, and understanding the demographic patterns associated with the migration of African Americans from the South to the North (McKee 1993).

As we begin the twenty-first century, it is difficult to survey the landscape of race and ethnicity—both the research and the reality—without recognizing that its meaning and significance have fundamentally shifted. These shifts include changes in the demographics of the nation, in the meaning and boundaries of racial categories, and in how race and racism operate in the social world. Although the vestiges of earlier patterns and systems undoubtedly persist, we are now confronted with more subtle and complex causes and consequences associated with racial stratification, discrimination, and prejudice. This becomes apparent in the diverse areas where researchers direct their attention: some examine the patterns and causes of racial inequality across a range of social institutions, while others focus on how people perceive and understand racial and ethnic groups, while still others seek to understand race and ethnicity as a feature of identity and group formation. And these discussions are being shaped by and are reflective of a necessary shift from the “black-white” model that characterizes most earlier work to what is better described as a “prism” (Zubrinisky and Bobo 1996) in light of the increasing immigration from Asia and from Central and South America.

Spanning virtually all domains of interest to scholars who focus on race and ethnicity are the common themes of transition and change. Those studying racial attitudes have observed a shift from the blatant “Jim Crow” racism of the past to more subtle forms (see, for example, Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Forman 2001; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears 1988). Scholars who focus on structural and behavioral patterns and their manifestations in social institutions point to new forms of racial segmentation in the workplace (Anderson 1999; Collins 1989, 1993, 1997a, 1997b), new kinds of statistical and indirect discrimination, unconscious stereotyping (Forman, Williams, and Jackson 1997; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Reskin 2000), and more subtle employment and housing discrimination practices (Forman and Harris 1995; Myers 1993; Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991; Yinger 1995).

The boundaries of race and ethnicity themselves and the very terrain upon which racial struggles take place are also changing. Witness the social scientific and political struggles associated with the U.S. government’s attempts to assess racial identity in the 2000 decennial census, including the political and social struggles around the creation of multiracial categories and Arab American and Hawaiian attempts to be reclassified into different categories (Wright 1994). Not surprisingly, all of these changes have shifted the policy landscape, as controversies about racial profiling, zero-tolerance school policies, discrimination lawsuits, immigration policy, and anti-affirmative action referenda readily attest. It is essential for scholars not only to track these changes that have taken place in the real world but also to understand what is happening now and where we are headed (McKee 1993; Steinberg 1995).

In October 2001, a national conference convened at the University of Illinois at Chicago brought together prominent scholars to engage these issues directly. The conference, *The Changing Terrain of Race and Ethnicity*, assembled researchers who individually approach these issues from different angles but collectively push the boundaries of research on race and ethnicity. This volume grew out of that conference. As suggested by its title, the common thread across all of the chapters is an attempt to grapple with and push forward scholarship on race and ethnicity in this changing context. In part I (chapters 2 through 4), this takes the form of figuring out how to understand, measure, and interpret phenomena that have in many cases become more subtle and slippery. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on changes in racial attitudes, racial ideology, and racial politics, while chapter 4 reviews how race and ethnicity operate across a range of other social institutions. The two chapters in part II are the most explicit on the implications of the increasingly multiracial and multiethnic population of the United States. Both of these chapters call into question the very categories that are used to describe race and the boundaries that shape racial and ethnic identity. The four chapters in part III take a broader perspective and tackle the theoretical implications of contemporary racial and

ethnic patterns and transformations. Taken together, they provide a road map for conceptualizing future research on race and ethnicity.

PART I: THE CHANGING MANIFESTATIONS OF RACE IN ATTITUDES AND INSTITUTIONS

When racial attitudes were first measured in the 1940s, researchers focused on the important questions of the time: Do whites believe segregation should continue? Do whites believe blacks are innately inferior? At the time, explicitly—and often legally—sanctioned practices of exclusion restricted the opportunities of racial and ethnic minorities across a range of social institutions. These served to maintain strict patterns of segregation and ensured unfair and discriminatory treatment toward people of color. Researchers at the time were intent on measuring levels of support for or dissent from such policies and practices. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, many of the laws and statutes that created *de jure* segregation had been overturned and few Americans endorsed the blatant prejudices of the 1940s. Despite this seeming progress toward racial equality, racial attitude surveys and investigations of social institutions still highlight the continuing significance of race and the continuing presence of negative racial attitudes. For example, despite evidence of persistent discrimination across a number of different social arenas, the majority of whites believe that racial discrimination has ceased to be a problem and that racial inequality comes from a lack of motivation among nonwhites. In addition, though many whites support basic principles of racial equality, their support for race-targeted policies that would facilitate progress toward racial equality is much weaker (Herring and Amissah 1997; Schuman et al. 1997; Steeh and Krysan 1996; Williams et al. 1999).

Several new theoretical perspectives seek to explain these divergent patterns within racial attitudes, challenging our existing conceptions of racial attitudes and responding to changes in U.S. racial norms over the past half-century. Both Lawrence Bobo (chapter 2) and Tyrone Forman (chapter 3) argue, in essence, that the decrease in traditional prejudice does not mean that racial prejudice has disappeared. Rather, its form and expression have changed. Both of these chapters offer theories that challenge traditional notions of racial prejudice, offer a framework for understanding contemporary forms of prejudice, and draw attention to important methodological (Forman) and real-world implications (Bobo).

Bobo argues that we must attend to three key points if we are to understand race and attitudes in the contemporary United States. The first is a recognition of the crystallization of a new type of racism—*laissez-faire* racism. This form of racism operates in less formal structures than Jim Crow racism, but it reproduces, sustains, and rationalizes black-white inequality in much the same way that the Jim Crow laws of the twentieth century did. Second, race and racism remain powerful levers in American national politics, both in terms of their role

in campaigns and in their impact on the likely success of a candidate depending on his or her racial background. In short, race and politics are deeply intertwined. Bobo then shines the spotlight on academia itself, arguing that scholars on both the left and the right have contributed to the problem of “race” by failing to come to grips—both theoretically and methodologically—with the conditions of embedded white privilege and the importance of black agency.

While Bobo takes on politics and the academy, Forman’s perspective is social psychological. He begins with a discussion of color-blind racism. Intended to capture the pattern of many whites expressing their racial views in non-racial language, the term “color-blind racism” describes popular color-blind claims that are not accompanied by the alleviation of persisting racial inequality. Public officials, politicians, and average citizens often draw on the language of the civil rights movement when they declare that they no longer see color and simultaneously declare that discrimination is all but gone in the world at large. This claim allows them to regard themselves as not prejudiced, even as they endorse the currently unequal status quo. Forman uses color-blind racism as a theoretical lens but develops a new construct, racial apathy, which he argues is an especially good way to capture one manifestation of racial prejudice in the post-civil rights era. Racial apathy refers to indifference toward societal racial and ethnic inequality and a lack of engagement with race-related social issues.

Drawing on survey-based data, Forman shows the increase in whites’ indifference about racial matters generally and argues that those interested in understanding contemporary racial attitudes must grapple with whites’ passive support for the racially unequal status quo. Labeling whites’ indifference “racial apathy,” he argues that by ignoring the social reality of race in a racialized social system, whites and others sustain a system of inequality that restricts opportunities for many racial and ethnic minorities.

In chapter 4, Amanda Lewis, Maria Krysan, Sharon Collins, Korie Edwards, and Geoffrey Ward shift the focus away from attitudes and ideology specifically and examine how race is shaping social institutions. In particular, they emphasize the impact of race on opportunities and outcomes in these social institutions, changes in the mechanisms by which race operates in them, and what the future holds. They consider five key social institutions: housing, education, labor markets, criminal justice, and religion. Throughout the discussion of each of these institutions, we see the impact of the changing demographics of the United States and the increasingly subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) ways in which race and ethnicity are played out in contemporary American society.

PART II: CHANGES IN RACIAL CATEGORIES AND BOUNDARIES

Whereas chapter 4 highlights how the growing presence of racial and ethnic minorities is reshaping various institutions, both chapters in part II explore the

shifts in the very definitions of existing racial categories and their boundaries—in both official racial designations and in the larger understanding of the racial system in the United States. Population dynamics over the past generation—including but not limited to immigration and intermarriage—have profoundly affected the racial topography of the United States. Whereas a generation ago racial boundaries in the United States were largely drawn along a dichotomized “black-white” axis—where “black” was understood fundamentally as “not white”—today the rapidly growing presence of Latino or Hispanic and Asian immigrants and the resurgence of Native American identification have greatly complicated cultural and official racial mapping. It is now possible for Americans to identify themselves—and indeed, to be classified by some official entities—as neither white nor black. Official boundaries and categorizations are being contested almost continuously now: some groups argue to be shifted from one category to another (for example, Native Hawaiians want to be included with “Native American” rather than “Asian or Pacific Islander”), and some argue for more options (for example, multiracial categories). Some Latinos or Hispanics—whom the U.S. census classifies in a separate “ethnicity” item but not as a “racial” group—have pushed for a racial classification that would uniquely identify them.

In chapter 5, Reynolds Farley uses the history of collecting racial data in the United States and the official racial designations as a vantage point from which to view the changes in racial identity and categorization. The complexity of racial and ethnic identity is highlighted by the social movement, which he describes in detail, that led to the most recent substantial change in how the census collects racial data: the multiracial movement of the 1990s. These efforts resulted in a new race question for the 2000 census that allowed people to indicate that they identified with more than one racial group. Farley connects this discussion of racial categorization in federal statistics to the larger context of race and ethnicity when he notes that the earliest racial data were collected to help *maintain* segregation and to *disadvantage* minorities, but that after the 1960s the data were used to help *overcome* traditional segregation practices. The move in the 1990s to permit Americans to identify themselves as multiracial represents a major shift in the collection of racial data that complicates the collection and analysis of data but also has the potential to shape how we as a society think about race. Farley then conducts a demographic analysis that answers the question: who marked all categories that applied? Based on these findings, Farley argues that while the multiracial movement has been successful in changing the way the government collects racial data, it is not clear that it has shifted how people think about race or how racial data are actually used. But this substantial change in how government agencies gather data on different racial groups may have significant consequences for the ability to understand, define, and characterize the experiences of different racial and ethnic groups in the United States.

Moving away from statistical agencies and self-reports of racial identity, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Karen Glover focus in chapter 6 on the larger racial stratification system. They ask critical questions about how Latino and Asian immigration challenge the centuries-old understanding of race in the United States and argue that the racial system in America is moving from a biracial to a more complex triracial system because of demographic changes, specifically the fact that most new immigrants are people of color. Bonilla-Silva and Glover argue that the triracial system will place “whites” (Euro-Americans, new whites, assimilated Latinos) at the top, “honorary whites” (white middle-class Latinos, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, Asian Indians, Arab Americans) in the middle, and “collective blacks” (Filipinos, Vietnamese, dark-skinned poor Latinos, blacks, African immigrants, and reservation-bound Native Americans) at the bottom. America is headed in this direction, they suggest, because (1) an intermediate group is needed to buffer racial conflict; (2) with some newcomers labeled white, whites will retain their majority status; and (3) if most new immigrants are labeled “black,” they will be unable to enjoy the full benefits of American citizenship.

PART III: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE CHANGING TERRAIN OF RACE AND ETHNICITY

Spanning several academic disciplines, the authors of the four chapters in part III highlight three key issues—citizenship, structural racism, and white privilege—that are only briefly referenced in the earlier chapters in the volume. Each chapter offers a general theoretical perspective on race and ethnicity by identifying concepts and ideas that are important in the new landscape of race and ethnicity but are, as yet, underdeveloped or underacknowledged.

In chapter 7, Evelyn Nakano Glenn argues that we can understand how race relations have been constituted and contested in the United States by examining citizenship rights, defined broadly. In our exploration of these issues, she maintains, we cannot speak simply of race and ethnicity but must pay attention to the way race and ethnicity are gendered phenomenon that have quite different impacts on different race and gender groups. Glenn’s central thesis is that citizenship has been used to draw boundaries between those included as members of the community (often defined along race and gender lines) and therefore entitled to respect, protection, and rights and those who are excluded and thus denied recognition and rights. Key to her argument is the idea that ultimately it is subtle everyday practices that reinforce exclusion more than the formal structures that have been put in place to delineate citizenship. She calls for a more sociological conception of citizenship as a product of both rhetorical and material practices, the latter including the everyday interactions that enforce and contest the boundaries of community.

The remaining three chapters in part III emphasize two key concepts that are in need of additional theoretical and empirical attention—the structural components of racism and white privilege. Joe R. Feagin and Manning Marable draw attention to the often-neglected material conditions that help to shape—and are shaped by—racism. Charles Mills argues that to fully understand racism in the United States, not only must we examine the manifestations and nuances of the oppression of people of color and the experiences of the subordinate groups, but we must turn this question on its head and give equal attention to the nuances and manifestations of white privilege.

In chapter 8, Feagin argues that past theorizing about racial and ethnic matters in the United States has placed too much emphasis on the ideological construction of racial meanings. He argues that racism is not just about the construction of images and identities but is centrally about the creation, development, and maintenance of white privilege and power. As such, theorizing about race must account for the material, social, educational, and political dimensions of racism. In developing his ideas, Feagin introduces several key concepts: systemic racism, exploitation, unjust enrichment and impoverishment, the social reproduction of enrichment and impoverishment, rationalizing oppression in racist ideology, and resistance to racism.

Focusing on a similar set of ideas but taking a slightly different approach, Manning Marable argues in chapter 9 that the central problem of the next century will be the problem of “structural racism,” which he defines as the deeply entrenched patterns of inequality that are coded by race and justified by racist stereotypes in both public and private discourse. He uses the vast disparities in material resources and property between racial groups as evidence of structural racism. Marable attributes the existence of structural racism to the cumulative effects of four hundred years of white privilege. He develops this concept, reviews how African Americans have responded to the evolving domains of structural racism, and then suggests what can be done to challenge it. Among these suggestions are developing a richer theoretical and historically grounded understanding of diversity, establishing resistance organizations, and engaging issues related to the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and class. Finally, Marable emphasizes the need to understand the global context of racism so that we can understand what is happening in the United States and gain perspective on how the U.S. system influences—and is influenced by—other systems around the world.

The themes of material conditions and white privilege emerge once again in chapter 10, where Charles Mills takes on what he labels “liberal” tendencies in both philosophy and other disciplines. Specifically, mainstream social and political theorizing about race has constructed racism as an anomaly. But this is an inappropriate characterization, Mills argues. Rather, we need a theory of race that properly captures the systemic and material components of racism—a subject on which mainstream American disciplines have heretofore

remained silent. To do this successfully, a conceptual framework that is better formed and historically contextualized is necessary. Among other tasks, analysts must retrieve and build on the concept of white supremacy and develop an understanding of specifically *racial* forms of exploitation.

The ten chapters of this volume lay out a set of pressing challenges for those studying racial dynamics in the United States in the years to come. All of the authors are concerned with persisting racial inequalities and the social dynamics that are either exacerbating or mitigating these patterns. The research agenda that emerges reminds us to remain attentive to changes in social organization and social processes (to recognize, for instance, when innovation in methodological strategies is required) while also being cognizant of the social and historical contexts within which such changes are taking place. Without such contextual awareness, analyses can provide only attenuated understandings of social problems. All of these authors also remind us to recognize the interplay between racial ideologies, attitudes and understandings, and real life outcomes.

Although much of the volume is focused on racial dynamics in the United States, we recognize that there is much to be learned by expanding our comparisons to other nations. This is evidenced not only in Marable's reminder that globalization is as much a racial phenomenon as a class one but also in Bonilla-Silva and Glover's characterization of race in the United States as Latin Americanized. Still, racial dynamics vary considerably across different national racial landscapes (to the extent that they are still bound by national borders), and the United States presents us with abundant challenges to address and understand.

One of the key messages of this volume to all of us (policymakers, scholars, and citizens) is that racial dynamics continue to change but change does not always mean progress toward greater racial equality. In fact, some of the contributors—among whom are scholars who have been studying these issues for upward of three decades—express pessimism about what the immediate future holds. Whether our overall trajectory is good or bad—or perhaps more accurately, whether it reflects progress on some fronts and retrenchment on others—the point to stress is that if we are to assess the situation with accuracy, we must be attentive to shifting demographics and meanings.

The chapters that follow remind us that in everything from our research designs to our public policy recommendations we must be attentive to how racism is manifested structurally; to the intersections of race with other ascriptive categories (such as gender); to new and often subtle expressions of racial antipathy; to the role of whites as racial actors and the role of white privilege in shaping life outcomes; to the importance of indifference or apathy as an affective dimension of prejudice; and to the powerful effects of these issues on people's everyday lives. We hope that this volume inspires new research and reinvigorates existing efforts.

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