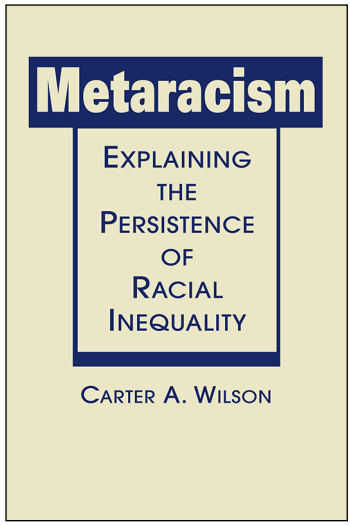
EXCERPTED FROM

Metaracism: Explaining the Persistence of Racial Inequality

Carter A. Wilson



ISBN: 978-1-62637-189-7 hc

LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

1800 30th Street, Suite 314
Boulder, CO 80301 USA
telephone 303.444.6684
fax 303.444.0824

Contents

1

What Is Metaracism?

The twenty-first century promises to be a paradoxical period in US race relations: an age of unparalleled progress, yet of unprecedented repression; an epoch of remarkable racial advancement, yet of persisting racial inequality; a season proclaimed to be one of postracial/post–civil rights politics, yet one of continuing racial strife. This paradox is not new. It has persisted throughout US history. It has just become more pronounced.

On the positive side of the ledger, African Americans serve in highly visible and prominent political positions. Barack Obama was elected the first black president in this nation's history and then reelected to a second term. Colin Powell became the first black man and Condoleezza Rice the first black woman to serve as secretary of state. Mo Cowan of Massachusetts and Tim Scott of South Carolina became the first two black men in history to serve simultaneously in the US Senate. Cory Booker was elected the first black senator from New Jersey. This is an age for the progress of black professionals, marked by a dramatic increase in the number of black physicians, black scientists, black university professors, black engineers, black attorneys, black chief executive officers (CEOs), and other black professionals. Indeed, between 1970 and 2008, the nationwide number of black physicians increased from 6,044 to 54,364, attorneys from 3,703 to 46,644, and college professors from 16,582 to 63,336.[1] This constitutes a period of visible and profound racial progress.

On the negative side, some consider this to be the new Gilded Age[2] and the new Jim Crow era.[3] This is a period in which the rich have grown richer; inequality has become more extreme; the black/white gap in income, wealth, and education has widened; equal opportunities have diminished; and upward mobility has declined. Incarceration rates among the poorer and darker citizens have soared, evoking complaints and condemnation

from international human rights organizations. Evidence of racial and class biases persists at every level of the criminal justice system. The minority voter suppression movement has intensified and the Supreme Court has struck down a part of the Voting Rights Act. Black poverty has increased and has become more concentrated and isolated in inner cities.

If African Americans have made tremendous progress, then why has the black/white gap in income, education, and wealth widened? If there is so much visible evidence of progress by black men, why are prisons massively overcrowded with them? What explains this regression in the face of what seems to be a period of progress?

In this book, I address these questions. I explain this paradoxical combination of progress and regression in terms of conflict between an egalitarian coalition and progressive political culture versus a conservative coalition and a reactionary political culture energized by a new form of racism—*metaracism*. The egalitarian coalition produced progress through the establishment of equal opportunity policies that emerged primarily during the 1960s and 1970s. The conservative coalition produced the regression not by reforming equal opportunity policies, but by assaulting, dismantling, dismembering, or shrinking them. The assault on equal opportunity policies contributed to the reversal of progress, an increase in racial repression, and the widening of the black/white gap in income, education, and wealth.

I examine the formation of metaracism, which arises out of concentrated urban poverty. Metaracism is associated with the development of a bifurcated black class structure, the rise of the black middle and professional class, and the growth of concentrated black poverty isolated in the inner city. Metaracism is a revised, refined, and subtle form of racism. As the originator of this concept, Joel Kovel, explains, "Metaracism is a distinct and very peculiar modern phenomenon. Racial degradation continues on a different plane, and through a different agency: those who participate in it are not racists—that is, they are not racially prejudiced—but metaracists, because they acquiesce in the larger cultural order which continues the work of racism."[4]

Metaracism is a form of racism without hateful bigots. It replaces biological determinism with cultural determinism. It no longer dehumanizes all blacks. It accepts the black middle class, but promotes dehumanizing images and stories of welfare queens, teenage girls having babies to get welfare, and black teenage thug culture. It involves the strategic use of race in the assault on progressive policies and the support of extreme inequality. It provides images and narratives that support and boost neoconservative and neoliberal ideologies and that energize reactionary political movements.

Metaracism can be seen in increasingly virulent antiblack rhetoric directed toward the president. Rather than signaling the end of racism and the emergence of a postracial/post–civil rights age, the election of President

Obama pushed to the surface a racism that had been lurking in the dark recesses of US culture. An article entitled "The Coon Caricature: Blacks as Monkeys" describes this resurgence of racism:

> Anti-black monkey imagery came back into the open during the 2008 campaign of Barack Obama. Several T-shirts and buttons were created and openly sold on the auction website eBay depicting Obama as a banana-eating monkey. . . . Though many Americans wanted to believe his election victory was a sign that the country had entered a "post-racial" era, the racist imagery associating the President with apes, and as a chicken and watermelon eating coon suggest otherwise. In fact, several public incidents have linked the proliferation of these images to elected officials in the Republican Party. . . . A Tea [Party] activist and Orange County Republican Party official Marilyn Davenport made headlines when it was revealed that she had sent out an email with the President depicted as the offspring of chimpanzees. The text of the email read, "Now you know why no birth certificate." She claimed to have not thought about the "historic implications" of the image, despite the fact that she had earlier defended a fellow Orange County Republican for having sent out an image of the White House lawn as a watermelon patch with the message, "No Easter egg hunt this year."[5]

Recounted in the same article is an incendiary political cartoon published in the *New York Post* in February 2009:

> Two officers, one with a smoking revolver in hand, stood over the corpse of an ape that [they] had just gunned down on the street. The ape, eyes open, tongue hanging out, several bullet holes in his torso, lay on his back in a large, splattered pool of his own blood. One cop is shown saying to the other, "They'll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill." While the cartoon was published in the wake of a high profile killing of a chimpanzee in Connecticut that had mauled its owner, the political nature of the caption, and common knowledge of the all-too-familiar incidents of police shootings of Black suspects, caused many to immediately recognize the old anti-Black monkey stereotype. And it seemed to be aimed squarely at President Obama.[6]

Just as sadly, other members of the first family have not been immune to discrimination and hate:

> In November 2009, a photoshopped, racist image of First Lady Michelle Obama made international news. . . . The image also reappeared on at least one blog, in which the author questioned why it was unacceptable to caricature the First Lady in this way, and yet it seemed to be acceptable that President George W. Bush was likewise caricatured. He re-presented numerous monkey comparisons of President Bush. . . . The blogger was attempting to justify racism using a variation on one of the common excuses, that it's okay to stereotype one group if others are likewise being stereotyped. . . . Ironically, this blog quickly drew in White Supremacists, who proceeded to completely undermine the blogger's original premise by unabashedly engaging in racist, hate-filled rants about the First Family in the comment section.[7]

The election of President Obama activated many racist images, epithets, and comments that percolated into the public space. Some people were unable to accept the president as a full-blooded American. It was evident in the birther and Tea Party movements, in the racially polarized elections, and in the racial polarization over the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman and Zimmerman's subsequent acquittal. It was evident in the use of expressions like "shuck and jive" by Rush Limbaugh and John Sununu to describe the president's decisionmaking style. A major feature of metaracism includes a shift away from blatant hard-core racism to a more subtle and softer form of racism, one that uses coded language.

Metaracism also accommodates the reality of the rise of the black middle class. It focuses on the black poor and a so-called culture of poverty. At the same time, metaracism denies the existence of racism. Indeed, conservative commentators compete with each other over the extent to which they deny the existence of racism and rationalize the racist attacks on the president.

What is new about the current paradox is the tremendous progress made by African Americans that coincides with persisting racial inequality and severe racial repression. Scholars have attempted to explain this paradox, but with little success. They often provide analyses that overlook contradictory cultural trends, grossly underestimate the persistence of racism, misdiagnose the nature of prejudice, miss the adaptability and changing forms of racism, and ignore the extent to which racism has been deeply imbedded in US society. At its core, racism is tied into the US economy, integrated into its dominant culture, and exploited by reactionary political leaders.

In the 1940s, Swedish sociologist and economist Gunnar Myrdal attempted to explain this paradox in terms of what he called "the American dilemma." Myrdal saw a moral struggle within each individual, a struggle between individual prejudices and higher moral values and ideals emanating from the American creed and Christian values. Myrdal believed that the possession of these higher moral values tempered racial prejudices: "The moral struggle goes on within people and not only between them. As people's valuations are conflicting, behavior normally becomes a moral compromise."[8] Rather than seeing a conflict of cultures, Myrdal saw a unity of culture and a conflict within the individual:

> The unity of a culture consists in the fact that all valuations are mutually shared in some degree. We shall find that even a poor and uneducated white person in some isolated and backward rural region in the Deep South, who is violently prejudiced against the Negro and intent upon depriving him of civic rights and human independence, has also a whole compartment in his valuation sphere housing the entire American Creed of liberty, equality, justice and fair opportunity for everybody. He is actually also a good Christian and honestly devoted to the ideals of human brotherhood and the Golden Rule.[9]

Myrdal's optimism and faith was misplaced. There was no unity of US culture. Neither the American creed nor Christian values mediated or tempered the brutality of the institution of slavery. The Southern fundamentalist brand of Christianity and a reactionary political culture supported the institution of slavery and other forms of racial oppression.

Another attempt to explain the paradox of the great progress made by African Americans but persistent racial inequality and racial repression comes from William Julius Wilson who wrote in the late twentieth century. Wilson identifies a paradox of tremendous racial progress and increasing concentrations of black poverty in urban areas. He observes that black poverty had become more concentrated even after an aggressive affirmative action campaign. He concludes that economic changes related to class subordination rather than racism produced the black poverty—that the significance of race was in decline relative to the power of social class.[10]

In yet another view, Nancy DiTomaso insists that black unemployment and poverty rates are substantially higher than white rates, but not because of racism. In her book *The American Non-dilemma*, a reference to Myrdal, she demonstrates that these higher black unemployment and poverty rates were the result of a structure or network of advantages that privileged whites and disadvantaged blacks. This structure includes networks of whites helping other whites get jobs, the location of white communities in areas of job growth, and the greater social capital and community resources within white communities. These advantages contrast with multiple and cumulative disadvantages of poor black communities: isolation from areas of job growth and inadequate social capital and community resources. Like Wilson, she concludes that racial inequality was increasing in spite of the decline of racial prejudice and antiblack hostility. However, unlike Wilson, she draws from a wealth of survey data that indicate that although whites rhetorically abhor racism, many operate with a large amount of misinformation and stereotypes of inner-city blacks.[11]

Wilson and DiTomaso are correct in their observations that racism is no longer as brutal and overt as it was in the past. However, it has not disappeared. It has adapted to profound changes in the black class structure, to the growing concentration of poverty in urban areas in the midst of the rise of the black professional and middle class, and to the rise of extreme inequality.

George Fredrickson, renowned scholar on the history of racism, captures this changing nature of racism: "The term racism is often used in a loose and unreflective way to describe the hostile and negative feeling of one ethnic group or 'people' toward another and the actions resulting from said attitude. . . . The climax of the history of racism came in the twentieth century in the rise and fall of what I will call 'overtly racist

regimes.'"[12] He insists that after World War II the old racist regimes based on blood and biological determinism declined because of their association with Hitler and Nazi Germany. He adds that newer racist regimes emerged based on cultural particularism. Nevertheless, he argues that cultural deterministic forms of racism were just as effective as the biologically deterministic forms, depending on how extreme and distorted its characterization of racial minorities. For example, he says, that "extreme racist propaganda, which represented black males as ravaging beasts lusting after white women, served to rationalize the practice of lynching."[13] He adds, "Deterministic cultural particularism can do the work of biological racism quite effectively as we shall see in more detail in later discussions of *volkisch* nationalism in Germany."[14] He demonstrates that current forms of racism tend to be grounded in cultural particularism and associated with various types of contemporary ideologies. Racism is therefore "a scavenger ideology, which gains its powers from the ability to pick out and utilize ideas and values from other sets of ideas and beliefs in specific historical contexts."[15] In other words, the old regimes of overt, brutal, and biologically based racism have ended, as newer culturally based and milder forms have emerged. The old racist frames have been replaced by a new, more subtle racist regime that has accommodated itself to contemporary social and economic realities. The new racism has adapted itself to the rise of the black middle class. It operates to legitimize the growth of concentrated black poverty and a repressive criminal justice system. The term *metaracism* best captures these features of the new racism.

Understanding the Dynamics and Forms of Racism

Like Myrdal, most people in the United States see the American creed and Christianity operating to extinguish racism. Most oppose blatant discrimination and hate speech. Most see racism as an individual phenomenon, involving the actions of a few uneducated, hateful, and prejudiced poor people; a few extremists in the Tea Party movement; or the rare and bizarre behavior of an eccentric basketball team owner. Most see racism as un-American, a marginal issue unrelated to mainstream US values and ideas. Racism is something they would like to forget and bury in the past. Most people are uncomfortable with discussing the subject of racism. Many are unfamiliar with the dynamics of racism because the study of racism has long remained outside the purview of traditional disciplines of literature, history, political science, and law. Even though it has been an integral part of US culture, the subject has only recently moved to center stage in many of these disciplines.[16]

Understanding the dynamics of past racism is critical to understanding contemporary metaracism. My review of the literature on racism underscores the following principles:

- Race and racism are historical and cultural constructs strongly associated with patterns of oppression and the drive to accumulate wealth.
- The constructions of race and racism typically present dominant and subordinate racial groups as binary opposites.
- These constructs function to legitimize patterns of oppression and to desensitize society to the suffering of the oppressed.
- The constructs of racism and race allow for the formation of white identity, which also functions to reduce class conflict and increase tolerance for extreme inequality.
- Racist perspectives have long been accepted as normal and valid precisely because these perspectives have been promoted, validated, and normalized by religious, intellectual, scientific, political, and media elites.
- While the dynamics of racism are similar, the forms of racism change as their structural, cultural, and political dimensions vary.
- "American exceptionalism" is a myth contradicted by a reactionary racist culture that has operated to sustain racial oppression and has periodically clashed with a progressive antiracist culture.

Racism as Historical and Cultural Constructs

Ancient Greek and Roman societies were devoid of the type of modern racism that is based on skin color and biology. In these ancient societies, differences in skin color meant nothing more than differences in variations in degrees of exposure to the sun.[17]

Race is a social construct and racism is a modern phenomenon that emerged out of the process of oppression. Oppression involves acts of violence, genocide, conquest, enslavement, exploitation, subjugation, or exclusion. Oppression also entails organized and systematic efforts that inhibit or obstruct the development of human potentials; arrangements that block access to food and nutrients necessary for adequate human growth; efforts that cut people off from educational and job opportunities; efforts that deny people living wages; and actions that dilute people's votes, silence their voices, and render them powerless in the political community.[18]

According to anthropologist Audrey Smedley, the word "race" entered the English language at the same time the English were conquering the Irish. The English conquest and treatment of the Irish was extremely violent. Men, women, and children were killed. Land was confiscated.[19]

This oppression of the Irish was associated with their racialization by the English. The English constructed negative images, stories, and ideas about the Irish that portrayed them as not just belonging to a different race but as being fundamentally different from and the binary opposite of the English. The English defined the Irish as savage, drunken, irrational, and immoral and themselves as civilized, sober, rational, and moral. A number of scholars insist that the English even characterized the Irish as apelike, much as they later characterized Africans and African Americans.[20] This portrayal of the Irish operated to legitimize the conquest. It desensitized the English to the suffering experienced by the Irish and made it easier for the English to live with themselves as good Christians while committing horrible atrocities on the Irish. This treatment and stereotyping of the Irish by the English set the stage for their violent treatment and stereotyping of Native Americans and African Americans.

As the English settlers conquered the Native Americans, they defined them in oppositional terms. The English considered themselves as civilized and the Indians as savages. The same dynamics arose with African slaves. Black slaves were said to be biologically inferior, savage, irrational, impulsive, ignorant, dangerous, immoral, and repulsive. White English settlers were biologically superior, tame, civilized, rational, calculating, safe, moral, and acceptable. This portrayal of oppressed African Americans evoked strong emotional responses toward them—contempt, repulsion, and hostility—so deep that it shaped decisions and drove behavior sometimes unconsciously and in ways that defied reason and ignored facts.

The Social Functions of Racism: Desensitize Society and Sustain Oppression

As a cultural construct, racism incorporated a complex array of categories, language, symbols, images, narratives, and ideas—all of which served a number of social functions. Racist culture operated to legitimize, normalize, enable, or enforce patterns of oppression and extreme inequality. This culture desensitized society to the suffering of the oppressed. This point is graphically illustrated by Mark Twain in a passage from his book, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* where Huck is explaining the delay of a steamboat to Tom Sawyer's Aunt Sally:

> "It warn't the grounding—that didn't keep us back but a little. We blowed out a cylinder-head."
>
> "Good gracious! Anybody hurt?"
>
> "No'm. Killed a nigger."
>
> "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt."[21]

Through this brief dialogue, Twain shows the extent to which Southern culture dehumanized blacks. In other words, Southern racist culture had so alienated the African American from the human species that the sudden, violent, and traumatic death of a black man from an explosion meant nothing. Indeed, whipping a slave was not like whipping a human being. It was considered a good thing, like whipping an animal to teach it discipline for its own good.

Racist culture also provoked oppression. During the era of slavery, the portrayal of Africans as dangerous savages when unrestrained by slavery encouraged the enslavement and the physical abuse of black slaves. During the era of Jim Crow segregation, the portrayal of blacks as foul-smelling, chicken-thieving, ignorant, and repulsive fools encouraged and provoked their exclusion from white society.

White Identity, Class Conflict, and Increased Tolerance for Extreme Inequality and Repression

The cultural construction of race and white identity operated within several different historical and social contexts to undermine the American creed, reduce class conflict, and increase tolerance for extreme inequality. First, white identity contributed to the formation of what Alexander Saxon refers to as the white republic.[22] From 1787 to 1865, the white United States was like an oppressive settler nation besieged by Native Americans and threatened by potential slave revolts. These potential threats intensified the bond and security created by white identity.[23] "White republicanism" was the idea of a white nation in which citizenship was reserved for whites only.[24] This notion of a white republic was built into the Naturalization Acts of 1790 and 1795, which restricted naturalization to immigrants who were "free white persons" of "good character."[25]

Race and white identity enabled the formation of a strand of political culture that promoted a racially exclusive notion of citizenship and a political community open to whites only. This strand of political culture redefined the American creed and constitutional protections as applying to whites only. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney provides the best illustration of this strand of political culture in the *Dred Scott* decision. In this decision, Taney argues that "it is too clear to dispute" that the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and citizenship applied to whites only.[26] In regards to the Declaration of Independence Taney said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal. . . . The general words above quoted seem to embrace the whole human family. . . . But it is too clear for dispute that the enslaved African race were not intended to be included and formed no part of the people who framed and adopted this declaration."[27]

Taney makes the same argument in reference to the preamble of the Constitution. He insists that the expression "We the people" refers to people who were members of the political community that produced the Constitution. He claims that this community excluded blacks. He argues further that representatives to the Constitutional Convention passed laws restricting citizenship to whites. Specifically, he adds, "the first of these acts is the naturalization law, which was passed at the second session of the first Congress, March 26, 1790, and confines the right of becoming citizens 'to aliens being free white persons.'"[28] Taney concluded that blacks were not only excluded from citizenship and the political community, they were considered members of an inferior race that could be rightly and justly enslaved and denied rights granted to whites. Taney stated:

> But there are two clauses in the Constitution which point directly and specifically to the negro race as a separate class of persons, and show clearly that they were not regarded as a portion of the people or citizens of the Government then formed. . . . They [blacks] had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order; and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.[29]

Second, white identity gave poor European ethnic groups immigrating to the United States, especially Irish, Italians, Germans, and Eastern Europeans, a level of acceptance and entitlement that they would not ordinarily have. These immigrants faced prejudice and hostility from native-born white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) Americans who saw these immigrants as threats to their jobs and status. For example, if Irish immigrants staked a claim on skilled jobs as Irish, they would face fierce opposition from native-born WASP craft workers. However, by acquiring a white identity and adopting antiblack prejudices, European ethnic immigrants were able to deflect the prejudice and hostility toward them and gain a sense of acceptance among the WASPs.[30]

A number of scholars make this point illustrating the transformation of European immigrants from ethnics who are victimized by prejudice to people who defined themselves as white and who directed their hostility and frustrations toward people of color. For example, B. J. Widick states, "Using the odious term 'niggers' gave the foreign-born worker (mainly Polish) a sense of identity with white society, and by throwing the spotlight of prejudice on the Negro, he turned it away from himself."[31] Other scholars describe how the Irish changed from a group that identified with African Americans as an oppressed group to a group that defined itself as white and that directed its prejudice toward African Americans. Theodore Allen provides a detailed analysis of this transformation in New York City. He

focuses on the role of the Irish in the 1863 New York draft riot. During this riot, Irish participants targeted African Americans. Rejecting the idea that the Irish were provoked to riot by a fear that freed blacks would take their jobs, Allen says, "No European immigrants were lynched, no 'white' orphanages were burned, for fear of 'competition' in the labor market."[32]

Third, white identity created what W. E. B. DuBois refers to as a psychological wage that compensated for extremely low wages:

> It must be remembered that the white group of laborers, while they received a low wage, were compensated in part by a sort of public and psychological wage. They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness.[33]

Whiteness explained tolerance of extreme poverty in the South. It gave Southern whites a sense of privilege and superiority over people of color. No matter how downtrodden or severely poor a white person was, he or she was always above people of color in intelligence, morality, status, and social acceptance. Because white identity allowed poor whites to identify more with rich whites than with poor blacks this identity suppressed class-consciousness and increased tolerance for the extreme inequality in the South.

According to historian Howard Zinn, rich Southern landowners deliberately pitted poor whites against poor blacks in order to superexploit both. Zinn cites Tom Watson, a white Populist Party leader, warning poor whites and poor blacks of this use of racial antagonism to exploit them both. Speaking in 1890 Watson said: "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both."[34]

White racial identity retarded class consciousness and allowed for a level of superexploitation, extreme inequality, and repression not tolerated in nonracist societies. White identity and racial tensions allowed members of the dominant class to pit white workers against workers of color. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, mine owners deliberately used blacks as scabs to break strikes organized by white workers. As long as black and white mine workers fought each other, mine owners could suppress the wages of both, thus increasing their own wealth.

In a hierarchical labor market, white skilled laborers enhanced their status, privileges, and wages by excluding blacks. Historically, up until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, most skilled trade unions had clauses in their constitutions or charters that explicitly excluded blacks.[35]

White skilled workers found more in common with the white manager or owner of a production facility than with lower-wage unskilled black workers. In this sense, racism prevented the formation of the Marxist notion of class consciousness among the proletariat—black and white.

Finally, white identity allowed for the construction of nonwhite scapegoats. During economic crises that caused whites to lose their land, jobs, and livelihood, racial divisions provided them with scapegoats, which allowed the most destitute among them to shift their attention away from the dominant class and direct their rage and frustration to people of color. The history of race relations in the United States is filled with periods of economic crisis precipitating episodes of white rage and extreme violence directed at people of color. The recession of 1882–1885 was associated with white mine workers and railroad workers violently targeting Chinese workers. Opposition to Chinese workers led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred Chinese workers from entering the United States. The 1885 Rock Springs, Wyoming, massacre is but one of many examples of attacks on Chinese workers "where whites refused to work in the same mine with Chinese laborers; armed with rifles and revolvers, they invaded the Chinese section of town, shot Chinese workers as they fled, and burned the buildings."[36] The Panic of 1910–1911 and the depression of 1913–1914 were associated with the period of ethnic cleansing documented by Elliot Jaspin. Thousands of blacks were violently forced out of predominantly white counties throughout the Deep South and Midwest. The Great Depression of 1920–1923 was associated with several race riots in which white mobs destroyed entire black communities, most notably Rosewood, Florida, on which the movie *Rosewood* was based, and Tulsa, Oklahoma. In the Tulsa race riot, white mobs wiped out the "Black Wall Street," a strip in the downtown areas with a string of prosperous black retail businesses and black banks. The riot left over 10,000 African Americans homeless.[37]

White identity and racial tensions took a toll on society in other ways. As black laborers were pitted against white laborers, class solidarity collapsed and the wages and living standards of both blacks and whites declined. As white rage arising from economic crises was directed at people of color, attention was redirected away from the role of the dominant class in dismantling state programs designed to promote upward social mobility. Instead, programs were designed to enrich the wealthy. White identity accelerated the process of the rich becoming richer and poor whites becoming poorer.

The rise of race consciousness and the Redeemer period following the Reconstruction era illustrate this point. During the Reconstruction era, state governments had increased property taxes by as much as 400 percent. The additional resources were used to provide an adequate public education sys-

tem, to build roads, and to assist the poor blacks and whites. The state government also operated to ensure fair payment to sharecroppers.

The Redeemer movement emerged as an all-out assault on the Reconstruction programs. This movement was led by the dominant class in the South, which consisted of the Southern land aristocracy, merchants, mine owners, and mill owners. This class had formed an alliance with Northern industry and finance.[38] This dominant class was hell-bent on dismantling Reconstruction programs and using the state government for the benefit of the dominant class. When this class captured the state government, it used it to enforce a crop lien system and to take away voting rights from almost all blacks and most poor whites. This class reduced taxes, violently suppressed labor unions, and reallocated public education funds to the benefit of the dominant class and to the detriment of both poor whites and poor blacks. Jack Bloom illustrates this well: "The inequalities produced by this system were immense. The extremes are illustrated by two counties in Mississippi in 1907, one majority black, one majority white. The white county, Itawamba, had a per capita expenditure of $5.65 for whites and $3.50 for blacks. Washington County, whose majority was black, spent $80.00 per capita on whites and $2.50 on blacks."[39] Most of these Washington County whites represented the dominant landowning class.

The Role of Elites in Promoting, Validating, and Normalizing Racist Perspectives

Racist stereotypes, narratives, and perspectives come to be accepted by the public as normal and factual because of the role of political, intellectual, religious, and media elites. These elites play a key part in promoting racism. Chief Justice Taney was noted above as promoting the idea of black inferiority. Southern religious leaders often used the story of Noah's curse of Ham to argue that black slavery was endorsed by the Bible and ordained by God. Southern political leaders spoke openly about how the lack of intelligence in blacks made them suitable for slave labor. Historians lectured and wrote about the absence of civilization in an Africa that was ravaged by cannibals and black savages. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, an entire industry of scientific racism emerged in which academia was inundated with scholarly works promoting racism. Racism was promoted in the specialized disciplines of craniology, heredity, and eugenics. It was well established in the disciplines of biology, psychology, criminology, and sociology. Social Darwinism embraced a racist ideology as it attacked social programs intended to help the poor. In their works, Stephen Jay Gould[40] and Thomas F. Gosset[41] provide extensive reviews of this promotion of racism by the scholarly community and intellectual elites.

The problem of scientific racism was somewhat like the paradigm problem in natural science popularized by the research of Thomas Kuhn.[42] The scientific paradigm was a worldview and set of assumptions that structured the thinking of scientists and shaped their research questions, hypotheses, and conclusions. Gould demonstrates that racist paradigms biased the most conservative and exacting scientists. By promoting the old paradigms of biological- and genetic-based racism, intellectual elites not only normalized and legitimized racism—they popularized and privileged it. They gave it a heightened sense of credibility and validity. To a large degree, the paradigms of biological determinism have now been replaced by the paradigms of cultural determinism found in the culture of poverty and urban underclass literature. For example, the old paradigms claimed that blacks were biologically and genetically predisposed to commit violent crimes. The new paradigms claim that black values, black underclass subculture, and young black male thug culture predisposes blacks to commit violent crimes.

Structural, Cultural, and Political Dimensions of Racism

Racism takes different forms, even though the dynamics within each form are similar. The forms of racism change as their structural, cultural, and political dimensions vary. Understanding the structural, cultural, and political dimensions of past forms of racism illuminates the dynamics of contemporary metaracism.

The structural dimension. Racism initially emerged out of the drive to accumulate wealth, which led to conquest and exploitation. The structural component arose as the dominant class established a system of accumulating wealth through the organized and systematic exploitation of the subordinate classes. The structure of racism is its economic base: the dominant mode of production, the organization of production, the manner in which labor is exploited, and the way wealth is accumulated. As the economic base of racism changes, so does the form of racism. At least four different forms of racism, each with a different economic base, can be identified: dominative racism, dominative/aversive racism, aversive racism, and metaracism.

The economic base of dominative racism was the institution of plantation slavery. Racial animus did not produce this institution. Greed did. The drive of plantation owners to make money and accumulate wealth led to the construction of the institution of slavery. The organization of the Southern plantation system formed the economic base of a brutal and sadistic form of racism. Once the institution of slavery was established, plantation owners defined African Americans as fundamentally different from other people, as biologically inferior and subhuman.

The term *dominative* is appropriate because this form of racism involved a system of intense, sadistic, and direct control to produce the maximum or superexploitation of the slave. Dominative racism ended with the destruction of the institution of slavery in 1865. The economic base of dominative/aversive racism that came next was the coexistence of the sharecropping system of plantation labor with an emerging system of mills and other production facilities. Dominative/aversive racism was the Jim Crow system of Southern segregation. The sharecropping system was dominative because it involved some elements of the old slave system. The former master maintained ownership and control over the land. The dominant class in the South—landowners, merchants, and mill owners—superexploited sharecroppers through the crop lien system. Although most sharecroppers were white, they were thought of as mostly black in the public mind. This racializing of sharecroppers enabled a more intense form of exploitation and repression. The dominant class pressured blacks to remain on the land, excluded blacks from the mills, and imposed a rigid system of racial segregation in public spaces. The combination of domination and segregation made the term *dominative/aversive racism* appropriate. This system lasted from 1865 to 1965.

Aversive racism emerged in the North around the same time period (1880–1970), as Northern industries and urban areas exploded in growth. Organizationally, this form of racism was associated with racially segregated cities, resulting in racially segmented and hierarchical labor markets ranging from professional, elite skilled labor, semiskilled labor, and unskilled labor. Aversive racism was marked by a hierarchy of labor that concentrated blacks in the lowest paying, least desirable unskilled industrial jobs and excluded them from higher paying skilled jobs. Aversive racism also involved segmented labor markets and racially segregated residential areas.

The cultural dimension. *Culture* is the learned and shared language, images, narratives, myths, ideologies, and ways of thinking that operate to shape perceptions and influence emotions. The cultural component of racism has involved the social construction of racial groups and the use of culture in ways that legitimize and normalize racial oppression. The cultural content of racism has changed as the economic base of racism has changed. The culture of dominative racism characterized blacks as animals, biologically and genetically predisposed to plantation labor, needing to be tamed and whipped into submission. As noted above, this culture normalized, legitimized, and promoted the institution of slavery. The culture of dominative/aversive racism characterized blacks as repulsive with an offensive odor, childlike and passive when employed in heavy farm labor, but a dangerous would-be chicken thief or rapist when not con-

trolled. This culture normalized and encouraged racial segregation and an occasional lynching.

The culture of aversive racism depicted blacks as supermasculine menials, suitable for heavy physical labor and unsuitable for mental labor. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, racist cultural images and narrative overlapped with two opposing racist ideologies—eugenics and social Darwinism. Eugenics called for government intervention for the purpose of genetically breeding superior races and reducing the breeding of inferior races. Social Darwinism opposed government intervention in society, as it promoted laissez-faire capitalism and the notion of the survival of the fittest. Although the racist component is downplayed or denied by neo–social Darwinists today, social Darwinists envisioned rich white people as the superior species that would survive and become the dominant race while the inferior races, poor people of color, would eventually die out. The image of poor people as inferior people of color made it easier for social Darwinists to oppose public education, public assistance, and any other programs that would ease the suffering of the poor or assist in upward social mobility. Almost every aspect of the cultural component of racism functioned to legitimize oppression, exonerate society, and desensitize members of society to the difficulties and suffering of the oppressed.

The political dimension. The political component of racism has involved struggles over power and ideas; that is, conflicts between political interests opposed to racial oppression and those supportive of racial oppression. Because racial oppression has involved economic exploitation, supportive interests have generally included the dominant economic class.[43] This point is well illustrated by the extreme aggression in which Southern plantation owners defended the institution of slavery.

The struggles over ideas have involved conflicts between progressive and reactionary ideologies. Progressive ideology argues for using the powers of the state to ameliorate oppression, to protect the weak and vulnerable, to promote equal opportunities, and to improve the quality of the lives of all citizens. Reactionary ideology argues in support of economic and political arrangements that benefit the dominant economic classes, and against the use of state powers for the protection and benefit of subordinate classes or oppressed races.

These struggles over the power and ideas that shape US politics have been obscured by the myth of American exceptionalism, which denies both the existence of this struggle and racism. These struggles have also been obscured by compromises and alliances, and by the dominance of one political ideology over the other.

Nevertheless, these struggles explain the paradox of progress and regression. They explain episodes of political polarization, the most severe of which erupted into the Civil War. They explain major shifts in political regimes: the shifts from the slavery regime, to the Reconstruction regime, to the Redeemer regime, and to other regimes throughout history. Indeed, the outcome of these struggles have determined whether the state will operate to promote or ameliorate racial oppression.[44]

This perspective on US politics contradicts the notion of American exceptionalism. Exceptionalism insists that the United States is great and exceptional because of its revolution against a monarch, its rejection of centralized governmental powers, its lack of a feudal past with hereditary upper classes and titles of nobility, its possession of an open frontier, and its promotion of Christian values. These exceptional experiences allegedly explain the absence of class struggle and US commitment to equality, freedom, limited government, state's rights, individualism, and free and open markets. The myth of exceptionalism assumes that all of the founding fathers had the same values and vision, which produced a homogeneous and distinct political culture. Racial oppression and conflicting political cultures are excluded from this myth.

However, these conflicts and racism were an integral part of US history and politics. The struggle between progressive and reactionary political movements is a major feature of US history from the American Revolution to today. Understanding this struggle is critical to understanding the racial politics of the twenty-first century.

Thomas Paine and Progressive Ideology

Thomas Paine promoted progressive ideology. His ideas inspired the American Revolution, spawned the abolitionist movement, and gave full expression to a progressive political culture from the Revolution to today. For Paine, governments were established to protect the most vulnerable from the most powerful, to ameliorate oppression, to end poverty, to promote equal opportunity, and to improve the quality of the lives of all of its citizens beyond what it would be before the establishment of government.

Paine accepted natural inequality—that arising from differences in talents, skills, frugality, work effort, and luck. However, he was appalled by unnatural and extreme inequality. He argued that extreme and unnatural inequality arose from "landed monopoly" and was "the greatest evil." He added that "the contrast of affluence and wretchedness continually meeting and offending the eye, is like dead and living bodies chained together."[45] He insisted that, since the accumulation of wealth can occur

only within society, the rich owed a debt to society. This debt was to be paid through taxes. He believed in taxing the rich to redistribute resources to the poor. Indeed, he believed that taxation was the price of civilization (a view often attributed to Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Homes). According to Paine,

> To understand what the state of society ought to be, it is necessary to have some idea of the natural and primitive state of man. . . . There is not, in that state, any of those spectacles of human misery which poverty and want present to our eyes in all the towns and streets in Europe. Poverty, therefore, is a thing created by that which is called civilized life. It exists not in the natural state. . . .
>
> Taking then the matter upon this ground, the first principle of civilization ought to have been, and ought still to be, that the condition of every person born into the world, after a state of civilization commences, ought not to be worse than it if he had been born before that period.[46]

For Paine, freedom was not freedom from government or its powers. This concept of freedom was negative freedom, truncated freedom and reactionary freedom (as will be demonstrated later). For Paine, freedom required a positive role of the use of governmental resources and powers to improve the quality of the lives of its citizens beyond what it would be in the state of nature. Whereas many scholars attribute this positive concept of freedom to Franklin Roosevelt, it originated with Paine. It was part of a progressive, antiracist culture from the time of the Revolution to today. Paine's ideas not only inspired the Revolution, but they influenced other Revolutionary leaders, abolitionists, civil rights leaders, and progressive leaders throughout history and provided the foundations for modern liberalism.[47]

Paine's legacy was not without some controversy. Rogers Smith claims that he ascribed to male privilege and was biased in favor of Europeans.[48] However, Christopher Hitchens describes Paine's passionate defense of Native Americans against the theft of their land and the use of the Bible to justify conquest and slavery. Hitchens also notes Paine's opposition when Thomas Jefferson allowed slavery to expand into the Louisiana Territory. Paine had urged Jefferson to allow free African Americans to migrate into this territory. According to Hitchens,

> As the 19th century progressed, Paine's inspiration resurfaced, and his influence was felt . . . in the agitation against slavery in America. John Brown, ostensibly a Calvinist, had Paine's books in his camp. Abraham Lincoln was a close reader of his work, and used to deploy arguments from the Age of Reason in his disputes with religious sectarians. . . . The rise of the labour movement and the agitation for women's suffrage saw Paine's example being revived and quoted. When Franklin Roosevelt made his great speech to rally the American people against fascism after the attack on Pearl Harbor he quoted an entire paragraph from Paine's *The Crisis*.[49]

Reactionary Ideology

Paine may well have been the most exceptional intellectual leader of the American Revolution. Few of the other leaders of the Revolution or the new nation were as committed to the ideals of freedom and equality as Paine.[50] At the same time, none were reactionary—all were concerned with building a workable government. But they were divided on many issues, particularly the proper allocation of governmental powers between the states and the federal government. Jefferson initially opposed the US Constitution for shifting too much power to the federal government. He believed in states' rights and limited federal powers. In contrast, Alexander Hamilton had a vision of a strong federal government that maintained a central banking system and promoted the rise of a modern industrial state.[51]

All of the intellectual leaders of the Revolution opposed the institution of slavery. However, because the economy depended on this institution, these leaders were constrained to tolerate slavery. The constraints of this institution and the drive of the nation to accumulate wealth eventually pulled the entire nation down into the pit of reactionary politics. Later, support for slavery gave rise to reactionary ideology.

If Paine gave full expression to the American creed, Jefferson provided the Southern compromise that allowed for the formation of reactionary ideology. While in his early years as a revolutionary, Jefferson opposed slavery and promoted the ideas of equality. In his later years, he supported slavery and the notion of the racial inferiority of blacks.

Although he promoted these ideas in reaction to the excessive and abusive use of federal powers in enforcing the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, Jefferson promoted the notion of states' rights and (with James Madison) introduced the concepts of nullification, interposition, and secession. These same ideas were historically used by Southerners to defend slavery and Jim Crow segregation from federal restrictions and encroachments.

Reactionary and racist ideology emerged as political leaders defended slavery and conquest. For example, John Calhoun, Andrew Jackson's vice president, claimed that slavery was good for US society, good for whites, and good for blacks. He insisted that slavery was the basis of US wealth and civilization: "There never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not, in point of fact, live on the labor of the other."[52]

Although he is portrayed in US history as a common self-made man of modest background and with a disdain for the air of superiority and exclusivity that had defined the Southern aristocracy, Jackson was also a slave owner. He started with a small cotton plantation with 9 slaves; at the height of his career, he owned over 1,000 acres of land and over 150 slaves. As

president, he supported the institution of slavery and used the US Army to forcibly remove the Cherokee Indians from their homeland.[53]

Most antebellum presidents were slave owners who openly supported slavery. John Tyler believed that slavery brought Christianity and civilization to the slave. James Polk, the president who conquered half of Mexico and acquired land for the expansion of slavery, claimed that masters must discipline their slaves before showing them any regard or respect. Zachary Taylor, another slave owner, claimed that the South must defend slavery with the sword.[54] As political leaders became more comfortable in supporting slavery and conquest, they became more aggressive and uncompromising in promoting their right to accumulate wealth.

Whereas Paine and progressive ideology called for government to use its powers to ameliorate oppression, reactionaries defined "tyranny" as governmental powers interfering with the right to accumulate wealth through the oppression of others. This concept of tyranny became part of an aggressive, uncompromising, and sometimes violent reactionary ideology and movement.[55]

This reactionary concept of tyranny drove the Texas independence movement. Although most people romanticize this movement in the stories of Davy Crocket, Jim Bowie, and the Alamo, this independence movement was precipitated largely by a Mexican government that opposed slavery after winning independence from Spain. Richard Parker points out that the movement was initiated by slave plantation interests to separate Texas from Mexico in order to protect and expand the institution of slavery:

> However, Mexico's sudden independence from Spain in 1821 brought a new government both decidedly hostile to slavery and keen to control its most northern province which was filling up with Americans. Mexico restricted slavery and eventually abolished it, though at the pleading of Stephen F. Austin. . . . Texans gained narrow exceptions. Austin himself vacillated, alternately encouraging plantation owners to come, pleading with Mexico for leniency and questioning whether slavery was worth it, though he ultimately came down in favor of slavery, declaring, "Texas must be a slave country." Mexico in turn banned immigration from the United States. Texans retaliated by declaring independence. Slavery became legal and Austin himself purchased a male slave that year for $1,200, for no apparent purpose. By the end of the 1830s the Texan slave population had blossomed to 5,000.[56]

Thus, the state of Texas was born out of an independence movement provoked by slave owners who believed in their right and freedom to own slaves. For them, tyranny was the Mexican government interfering with their right to own and exploit slaves.

This reactionary concept of tyranny played a major role in the Southern secessionist movement and the Civil War. The Confederacy was not a rebel movement born out of the ideas of states' rights and individual freedom; it was an aggressive and uncompromising movement led by the dominant

planter class that was determined to expand slavery. The political leaders of these states were driven by their uncompromising support for slavery, by their drive to expand into other territories, and by their unwavering belief that it was tyranny for any government to block this expansion or to regulate slavery. Despite President Abraham Lincoln's efforts to compromise, the Southern states seceded from the union.

The Constitution of the Confederate States of America reflected this obsession with the defense of slavery. It contained numerous provisions providing strong and clear support for the institution of slavery: provisions that prohibited the Confederate government from passing any "law denying or impairing the right of property in negro slaves," that guaranteed the rights of slave owners to travel throughout any state without interference from any state government, and that upheld the rights of slave owners in any federal territory.

This reactionary ideology, with its reactionary concept of tyranny is reemerging today. It is reflected in the Tea Party charges that President Obama is a tyrant for enacting the Affordable Care Act and the economic stimulus bill. It is evident in Southern political leaders calling for secession.

Struggle and Progress

Progressive and reactionary movements have clashed periodically throughout US history. As noted above, the most severe clash produced the Civil War. When the Southern reactionary forces were defeated, the Reconstruction regime emerged. This regime reflected the ideals of Paine: ameliorate oppression, protect the vulnerable from the powerful, alleviate the pain of poverty, and improve the quality of the lives of people beyond what it would have been in a state of nature.

The two movements clashed again in the period following Reconstruction. The Redeemer movement emerged to redeem the glory of the Old South. This aggressive and uncompromising movement was dedicated to overthrowing the Reconstruction regime. Once it succeeded, it established the racial caste system of the South that lasted until 1964.

Progressive and reactionary movements coexisted during the New Deal era. This coexistence produced progress and regression. Progress came through the New Deal programs and later through industrial production during World War II. Whereas blacks suffered severe repression in the South—extreme poverty, exclusion from job markets, and lynchings—they made gains from some of the New Deal programs, even though racial discrimination restricted their benefits. President Franklin Roosevelt took bolder stands against discrimination with the formation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission in 1941.

African Americans progressed with the collapse of the Southern sharecropping system, with the expansion of war production, and with their mass

migration from rural to urban areas. This progress was accelerated by the emergence of the equal opportunity regime of the 1960s, which was created by several political movements and political coalitions: civil rights, civil liberties, and antipoverty. These coalitions joined the New Deal coalition and formed one of the most progressive and powerful coalitions in US history. The New Deal, civil rights, antipoverty, and civil liberties coalitions constituted an egalitarian coalition, which produced the equal opportunity regime. This regime produced a flood of progressive policies.

During the 1930s, the New Deal had established a plethora of programs in several areas: income transfer (social security benefits, unemployment benefits, Aid to Dependent Children, Aid to the Blind, and Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled), public service jobs (Civilian Conservation Corps, Public Works Administration, Works Progress Administration); improved working conditions (minimum wage, National Labor Relations Board); agriculture (Agricultural Adjustment Act); and financial regulations. These policies contributed to the improvement in the quality of the lives of most US citizens, black and white.

Progress continued during the 1960s with the civil rights, antipoverty, and civil liberty movements. The civil rights movement produced the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, Fair Housing Act of 1968, and many others. The antipoverty movement produced food stamps, Medicaid and Medicare, the National School Lunch Program, the Head Start Program, Upward Bound, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (now No Child Left Behind), and others. It also included the expansion of Aid to Dependent Children to Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The civil liberties movement brought about the liberalization of criminal justice policies.

Like a tsunami, this flood of progressive policies swept aside the old racist regime, ushered in a new progressive era, and produced the equal opportunity regime. This regime did much to ameliorate racial oppression in the United States. The egalitarian coalition and the progressive political culture suppressed racial prejudices. Racist culture was under siege. Blatant racial prejudices became unpopular, rejected, and despised within popular culture in the United States. Aggressive affirmative action programs emerged. African Americans experience remarkable progress. A strong and educated black middle class emerged. But the equal opportunity regime came under attack by the end of the 1970s.

The Emergence of Metaracism

Several factors contributed to the ascension of metaracism in the early 1980s. First, the structural situation of African Americans changed. In the

1950s, most black families lived below the poverty line. Blacks had experienced great progress during the 1960s and 1970s, so that black/white gaps in education, income, and wealth declined. By the end of the 1970s, most blacks had moved out of poverty and the black middle class had increased substantially due to black migration out of poor rural areas, to their movement out of sharecropping and into industrial and professional jobs in urban areas, to the success of the public programs of the 1960s, and to a dramatic increase in black education. With the rapid rise of the black middle class, a biologically based racism defied reality and made no sense. Old racism declined as it no longer fit contemporary reality. But this progress came to a halt in the 1980s. The manufacturing sector contracted. Manufacturing jobs declined. Unemployment and urban poverty increased. As the black middle class moved out of inner cities, urban poverty became more isolated and concentrated. This isolated and concentrated poverty emerged as the structural basis for metaracism.

A second factor that contributed to the rise of metaracism had to do with the decline of progressive ideology and interests and the emergence of reactionary ideology and interests. Reactionary interests attacked the equal opportunity regime. However, because this regime was well established and enjoyed strong public support, the attacks involved more subtle racist innuendos and code language. A new form of racial politics emerged involving racial euphemisms, innuendoes, and code words. As Stephen Steinberg suggests,

> What is all the more remarkable is that racial issues have dominated recent elections with scarcely any mention of race in general or of African Americans in particular. . . . If race were given explicit mention, this would invite charges of "racism" which not only arouses opposition among sympathetic whites, but runs the risk of antagonizing blacks and setting off a race war. Through these code words it is possible to play on racial stereotypes, appeal to racial fears, and heap blame on blacks without naming them. Thus, in this cryptic vernacular we have a new and insidious form of race-baiting that is so well camouflaged that it does not carry the political liabilities that were evident, for example, in David Duke's abortive campaign for the United States Senate in 1990.[57]

Political leaders began to exploit these subtle biases in politically expedient and strategic ways.

Ian Lopez traces this strategic use of racism back to George Wallace, Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, and others. He notes that, when George Wallace first ran for governor of Alabama, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) endorsed him and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) endorsed his opponent. Wallace had a reputation for treating all people fairly, regardless of race. He even campaigned among workers and spoke of the welfare of the poor. His opponent was a blatant racist.

Wallace lost the election, but he learned how to use racism strategically. He ran again four years later on a promise to maintain segregation. In 1963, he stood in front of the door of the main building at the University of Alabama to defy a court order to allow blacks to register for the university. Wallace avoided blatant racist statements; he couched his opposition in terms of the "illegal usurpation of the power by the Central Government."[58] Lopez notes that Wallace received over 100,000 telegrams and letters from all over the country in response to his opposition to desegregating Alabama public universities. Ninety-five percent of them praised him for his courage to standing up to the federal government. Lopez suggests that Wallace learned the lesson of using racism strategically without the use of racist language:

> At his inauguration, Wallace had defended segregation and extolled the proud Anglo-Saxon Southland, thereby earning national ridicule as an unrepentant redneck. Six months later, talking not about stopping integration but about states' rights and arrogant federal authority—and visually aided by footage showing him facing down a powerful Department of Justice official rather than vulnerable black students attired in their Sunday best—Wallace was a countrywide hero. "States' rights" was a paper-thin abstraction from the days before the Civil War when it had meant the right of Southern states to continue slavery.[59]

Lopez insists that Wallace had become a pioneer of a new soft form of racism in which he could exploit racial fears without mentioning race. Wallace focused on arrogant and excessive federal powers, states' rights, crime, and welfare.

However, this color-blind, dog whistle racism predates Wallace. It was quite evident in "The Southern Manifesto," a document written in 1956 and signed by nineteen US senators and eighty-two representatives in protest of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.[60] The document condemned the Brown decision as a form of tyranny, an excessive and unconstitutional exercise of federal judicial powers in violation of the reserved powers of the states. It said nothing about preserving racial segregation, nothing about white supremacy, and nothing demeaning about blacks. It mentioned race only in the context of explaining how this liberal decision disrupted the racial harmony of the South and precipitated racial conflict. Indeed, the whole idea that the use of federal powers to protect the rights of oppressed minorities constitutes a form of tyranny has long been a part of Southern reactionary and racist culture.

To some degree color-blind, dog whistle politics was evident in the Redeemer movement's assault on the Reconstruction regime. Leaders of this movement claimed that the Reconstruction regime overtaxed wealthy farmers, allowed illiterate and irresponsible voters of bad character to vote, and overextended state budgets, spending too much money on public pro-

grams and driving state governments to the brink of bankruptcy. These leaders insisted that the Reconstruction regime gave too much power to blacks at the expense of whites. They used seemingly innocuous language as they promoted laws to mandate racial segregation. They claimed that segregation was needed to maintain racial harmony and to secure public safety. See *Plessy v. Ferguson*.[61]

The Redeemer movement was a reactionary movement because it revolted against a progressive regime. Indeed, the entrenchment of the Radical Republicans (members of Congress who were most passionate in their promotion of social justice and their opposition to racism, racial segregation, and Ku Klux Klan violence)[62] may have constrained the racism of the Redeemers. It is quite feasible that the entrenchment of the equal opportunity regime and the egalitarian coalition may be constraining the blatant racism of the reactionary movement today.

Wallace, Nixon, and Ronald Reagan all used color-blind, dog whistle, racial politics, but they did so in different ways and for different reasons. Wallace and Nixon were both opportunists because they used dog whistle politics strategically. They both had populist sides: neither opposed the New Deal and both supported white labor. Wallace supported white labor unions and jobs programs but, at the same time, he opposed the entire civil rights agenda.

President Nixon used dog whistle politics in a more limited, opportunistic, and two-faced manner. That is, he used it primarily as his "Southern strategy" to expand his political base in the South and win over Southern voters. Nixon campaigned in the South on a promise to oppose court-mandated busing and to promote law and order. Overall, he was moderate by today's standards. He continued most of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. He combined many of the War on Poverty and urban renewal programs into block grants, creating for example, the Comprehensive Employment Training Act, the Community Development Block Grant, and others. Block grants gave state and local governments more flexibility and discretion over federal programs. Nixon created the General Revenue program, which operated like President Obama's economic stimulus bill; it allocated federal money to state and local governments to assist them during downturns in the economy. Nixon also introduced the Philadelphia Plan, the first federal set-aside program for minority business enterprises.

President Reagan was different from Wallace and Nixon. He was more like the Redeemers in the sense that he supported the rich at the expense of the poor. He was decidedly pro-business, pro–upper class, and antiunion. He substantially cut taxes on major corporations, businesses, and the rich; pursued pro-business and anti-labor policies; and attempted to cut spending on programs for the poor. Like Wallace, Reagan used subtle racial signals strategically. He told stories that contrasted hardworking taxpaying whites

with lazy welfare-cheating blacks. Lopez quoted Reagan as telling the story of the "Chicago welfare queen [with] eighty names, thirty addresses, [and] twelve Social Security cards [who] is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over $150,000." [63] Lopez added,

> More directly placing [the] white voter in the story, Reagan frequently elicited supportive outrage by criticizing the food stamp program as helping "some young fellow ahead of you to buy a T-bone steak" while "you were waiting in line to buy hamburger." This was the toned-down version. When he first field-tested the message in the South, that "young fellow" was more particularly described as a "strapping young buck." The epithet "buck" has long been used to conjure the threatening image of a physically powerful black man often one who defies white authority and who lusts for white women. When Reagan used the term "strapping young buck," his whistle shifted dangerously toward the full audible range.[64]

The strategic use of racial politics combined with the growth of concentrated poverty contributed to the formation of metaracism. Metaracism was different from and similar to earlier forms of racism. It was different in the sense that it was not hard-core racism. It was not as blatant, egregious, or hateful as earlier forms. It rejected the biological and genetic determinism, the mythology of pure blood and pure races, the extreme hostility, and the revulsion characteristic of old style racism. Metaracism no longer tolerated racial exclusion or racial prejudices; it was racism without visible racists.

Metaracism was similar to earlier forms of racism. It exhibited some of the same dynamics and functions of older forms of racism. Like them, metaracism has particular structural, cultural, and political components. Its structural component is associated with the growth of concentrated poverty and extreme inequality. It is related to the expansion of black poverty, the spatial concentration and isolation of the black poor, a split between the black poor and the black middle class, and the rise of mass incarceration, with more black men in jail and prison than ever before in US history.

Metaracism is compatible with the rise of the black middle class and black professionals. It depicts the black middle class favorably. It accepts and applauds people like Herman Cain (former presidential candidate and president of the National Federation of Restaurants), Condoleezza Rice (former secretary of state), Clarence Thomas (associate justice of the US Supreme Court), Benjamin Carson (brain surgeon and Fox News commentator), and other blacks who reinforce its view of exceptionalism and neoliberalism.

Metaracism is well integrated within an emerging reactionary political culture. This culture characterizes real US citizens as believing in small government, individualism, and self-reliance. It portrays blacks as being dependent on government, having a sense of entitlement, and feeling that government and society owe them something—jobs and acceptance into prestigious universities—not through hard work like everyone else, but through affirmative action.

The new metaracism is a hodgepodge of new and old stereotypes, images, narratives, and ideologies. It supports neoconservatives and neoliberalism and conflates race, ideology, and nationalism. Joel Kovel argues that "metaracism exists wherever the ends of the large-scale system of the modern Industrial State are considered more important than the human needs of men."[65]

The most malicious and oppressive aspect of metaracism arises in the space where race and class intersect. In this space, metaracism demonizes the black poor as being trapped in a culture of poverty and hostile to education and hard work. It portrays concentrated poverty areas as inhabited by a dangerous, predatory, and repulsive underclass and infested with hyperviolent, wild youth gangs that have no regard for human life.

Like older forms of racism, metaracism continues to be associated with patterns of oppression and the drive to accumulate wealth. It continues to desensitize society to the pain and suffering of the oppressed, to legitimize and enable oppression, and to present dominant and oppressed groups in binary oppositional terms. It portrays the black poor as the binary opposite of the white middle class. It rationalizes concentrated poverty and extreme inequality. It is promoted by the dominant economic class in order to divide lower-class whites and blacks to superexploit both. It enables and encourages an exceedingly repressive and racially biased criminal justice system. It has shifted the blame for concentrated poverty to the poor themselves and provided a strong ideological basis for shrinking or dismantling the equal opportunity state.

By the twenty-first century, metaracism had emerged with a corporate-centered coalition and a new reactionary ideology. This coalition, fueled by metaracism and neoliberal and neoconservative ideology, is leading a reactionary movement and an assault on the equal opportunity state. This assault has produced public policy changes that have contributed to a rise in racial inequality and racial oppression. In this book, I examine metaracism and this reactionary political movement.

The rest of the book is organized as follows. In Chapter 2, I focus more closely on the structural dimension of metaracism, the rise of concentrated urban poverty, and economic insecurity. In Chapter 3, I examine the culture of metaracism, the racialization of the poor, the social construc-

tion of the black underclass, and images and stories of young poor black men as dangerous street criminals. In Chapter 4, I analyze the rise of the corporate-centered conservative coalition: the alliance among corporate leaders, multibillionaires, conservative think tanks, the religious right, and the Tea Party movement. Then, I discuss the growth of inequality in Chapter 5. I cover the dismantling of the welfare state and the superexploitation of the working poor in Chapter 6. I look at race and the criminal justice system in Chapter 7. I describe the minority voter suppression movement in Chapter 8. Finally, in Chapter 9, I sum it all up and portray US politics at a crossroads.

Notes

1. Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith, *Still a House Divided: Race and Politics in Obama's American* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 271.
2. Paul Krugman, "Why We're in a New Gilded Age," *New York Review of Books,* May 8, 2014; Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).
3. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010).
4. Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 211.
5. Authentic History Center, "The Coon Caricature: Blacks as Monkeys," July 20, 2012. authentichistory.com/diversity/African/3-coon/6-monkey/.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper, 1944), p. xlvii.
9. Ibid.
10. William J. Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: From Racial Oppression to Economic Class Subordination* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), p. 151; William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 1–10.
11. Nancy DiTomaso, *The American Non-Dilemma: Racial Inequality Without Racism* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2013), pp. 241–255 and 304–308.
12. George Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 1–2.
13. Ibid., pp. 1–2.
14. Ibid., p. 8.
15. Ibid.
16. There is indeed a large body of literature on the study of race and racism going back to the time of W. E. B. DuBois, including a list of scholars too long to mention. However, only since 1984 has it been argued that it is impossible to understand US history, culture, literature, and politics without an understanding of the role of race. A few deserve mention such as Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). Some of the associations between race and the understanding of mainstream US literature are made in Kovel, *White Racism*. This connection of race and US politics and political culture is made by Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideas: Conflicting*

Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Aziz Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

17. Frank Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970). See also Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); W. E. B. DuBois, *The World and Africa* (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1976). In Greek mythology, the god Helios (the Titan, rather than Apollo, the Olympian) let his son, Phaethon, drive the sun chariot. When he drove the chariot too close to the earth, people turned darker. They turned lighter when he drove too far away from the earth. See Thomas Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Schocken, 1971), p. 6.

18. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* trans. Myra B. Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1993); Iris M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 39–63.

19. Smedley, *Race in North America.*

20. Louis Kushnick states, "In a development very similar to that adopted earlier vis-à-vis the Irish Catholics whose land and freedom had been stolen by England, all of the victims of these processes, whether they were Irish or Africans, were defined as apelike, less than human, savage." Quoted in Louis Kushnick, "The Political Economy of White Racism in the United States," in Benjamin Bowser and Raymond Hunt, eds., *Impacts of Racism on White Americans* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), p. 51. See also Michael Hechter, *The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Bill Rolston, "The Training Ground: Ireland, Conquest and Colonization," *Race and Class* 34, no. 4 (1993): 13–24.

21. Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Random House, 1996/1885), p. 281.

22. Alexander Saxon, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990).

23. Aziz Rana makes this argument. See Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom*, pp. 114–120. See also Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debts, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006); Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

24. See Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic.*

25. Ian Lopez, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

26. *Dred Scott v. Sanford,* 60 U.S. 393 (1857).

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (New York: Verso, 1994); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Branko J. Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 28.

31. Widick, *Detroit*, p. 28.

32. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, p. 197.

33. W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1969/1935), pp. 700–701.

34. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), p. 291.

35. Philip Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619–1981* (New York: International, 1982); Herbert Hill, *The AFL-CIO and the Black Worker: Twenty-Five Years After the Merger* (Louisville, KY: National Association of Human Rights Workers, 1982); Herbert Hill, *Black Labor and the American Legal System: Race, Work, and the Law* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

36. Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 248.

37. Elliot Jaspin, *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

38. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America.*

39. Jack Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 55–56.

40. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasurement of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996).

41. Thomas F. Gosset, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Schocken, 1971).

42. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

43. See Carter A. Wilson, *Racism from Slavery to Advanced Capitalism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996).

44. See Noel Cazanave, *The Urban Racial State: Managing Race Relations in American Cities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011). Cazanave identifies different forms of the racial state, ranging from ameliorative to oppressive. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci,* Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith, ed. and trans. (New York: International, 1980).

45. Thomas Paine, "Agrarian Justice," in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* (New York: Citadel Press, 1969), p. 617, quoted in Robert Lamb, "Liberty, Equality, and the Boundaries of Ownership: Thomas Paine's Theory of Property Rights," *Review of Politics* 72, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 483–511.

46. Thomas Paine, "Agrarian Justice," in Jessica Kimpell, ed., *Peter Linebaugh Presents Thomas Paine: Common Sense, Rights of Man and Agrarian Justice* (New York: Verso, 2009), pp. 299–300.

47. See Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt, 2004).

48. See, for example, Smith, *Civic Ideals*.

49. Christopher Hitchens, "Bones of Contention," *The Guardian,* July 15, 2006. Excerpt from Christopher Hitchens, *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man: A Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 2006).

50. Rana identifies William Manning as sharing Paine's views of freedom. Rana, *The Two Faces of American Freedom*.

51. See Alexander Hamilton, "Report on Manufacturers," December 5, 1791.

52. Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York: Vintage Books, 1948), p. 81.

53. Ibid.

54. Melvin Steinfield, *Our Racist Presidents: From Washington to Nixon* (San Ramon, CA: Consensus Press, 1972).

55. *Webster's Dictionary* defines a *tyrant* as an oppressive or cruel ruler. John Locke defined tyranny not as concentrated governmental powers, but as governmental powers used in the self-interest of the ruler and against the interest and to the detriment of the people. See John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (New York: New York University Press, 2002). Garry Wills in his introduction to *The Federalist Papers* claimed that James Madison saw tyranny arising when a faction or majority took over the government. See Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers,* with an introduction and commentary by Garry Wills (New York: Bantam Classic, 2003 [1787–1788]), p. xxi. Of course, the implementation of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 constituted a form of tyranny. However, this new concept of tyranny reflected the perspective of the slave-owning class of the South of which James Madison and Thomas Jefferson were members. In this new concept, tyranny became federal powers that interfered with their right to own slaves and to oppress and exploit subordinate groups.

56. Richard Parker, "Sam Houston, We Have a Problem," *New York Times,* January 31, 2011.

57. Stephen Steinburg, *Turning Back: The Retreat from Racial Justice in American Thought and Policy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), pp. 213–214.

58. Ian Lopez, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 15.

59. Ibid., p. 16.

60. Howard Smith of Virginia, chairman of the US House of Representatives Rules Committee introduced "The Southern Manifesto," US Congress, Congressional Record, 84th Cong., 2d Sess., 1956, 102, pt. 4: 4515–4516; Senator Strom Thurmond was the principal author. *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, et al.* 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

61. *Plessy v Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

62. Radical Republicans reflected the ideas of Thomas Paine. They were former abolitionists, passionate in the promotion of racial inequality and racial segregation. Examples of the Radical Republicans include James Ashley, a nemesis of Chief Justice Taney, who considered slavery a violation of the Constitution prior to the Civil War; Charles Sumner, who had campaigned to racially integrate Boston public schools before the Civil War; Thaddeus Stevens, who was so committed to racial integration that when he died he was buried in a predominantly black graveyard. See Rebecca Zielow, *The Forgotten Emancipator: James Mitchell Ashley and the Ideological Origins of Reconstruction* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996); Hans Trefousse, *Thaddeus Stevens: Nineteenth-Century Egalitarian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

63. Ronald Reagan, "'Welfare Queen' Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign," *New York Times,* February 15, 1976, quoted in Ian Lopez, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 58.

64. Lopez, *Dog Whistle Politics,* p. 59.

65. Kovel, *White Racism,* p. 218.