



The Central Frames of Color-Blind Racism

The master defense against accurate social perception and change is always and in every society the tremendous conviction of rightness about any behavior form which exists.

—John Dollard, *Class and Caste in a Southern Town*

If Jim Crow's racial structure has been replaced by a "new racism," what happened to Jim Crow racism? What happened to beliefs about blacks' mental, moral, and intellectual inferiority, to the idea that "it is the [black man's] own fault that he is a lower-caste . . . a lower-class man" or the assertion that blacks "lack initiative, are shiftless, have no sense of time, or do not wish to better themselves";¹ in short, what happened to the basic claim that blacks are subhuman?² Social analysts of all stripes agree that most whites no longer subscribe to these tenets. However, this does not mean the "end of racism,"³ as a few conservative commentators have suggested. Instead, a new powerful ideology has emerged to defend the contemporary racial order: the ideology of color-blind racism. Yet, color-blind racism is a curious racial ideology. Although it engages, as all ideologies do, in "blaming the victim," it does so in a very indirect, "now you see it, now you don't" style that matches the character of the new racism. Because of the slipperiness of color-blind racism, in this chapter I examine its central frames and explain how whites use them in ways that justify racial inequality.

THE FRAMES OF COLOR-BLIND RACISM

Ideologies are about "meaning in the service of power."⁴ They are expressions at the symbolic level of the fact of dominance. As such, the ideolo-

gies of the powerful are central in the production and reinforcement of the status quo. They comfort rulers and charm the ruled much like an Indian snake handler. Whereas rulers receive solace by believing they are not involved in the terrible ordeal of creating and maintaining inequality, the ruled are charmed by the almost magic qualities of a hegemonic ideology.⁵

The central component of any dominant racial ideology is its frames or *set paths for interpreting information*. These set paths operate as cul-de-sacs because after people filter issues through them, they explain racial phenomena following a predictable route. Although by definition dominant frames must *misrepresent* the world (hide the fact of dominance), this does not mean that they are totally without foundation. (For instance, it is true that people of color in the United States are much better off today than at any other time in history. However, it is also true—facts hidden by color-blind racism—that because people of color still experience *systematic* discrimination and remain appreciably behind whites in many important areas of life, their chances of catching up with whites are very slim.) Dominant racial frames, therefore, provide the intellectual road map used by rulers to navigate the always rocky road of domination and, as I will show in chapter 6, derail the ruled from their track to freedom and equality.

Analysis of the interviews with college students and DAS respondents revealed that color-blind racism has four central frames and that these frames are used by an overwhelming majority of the white respondents. The four frames are *abstract liberalism*, *naturalization*, *cultural racism*, and *minimization of racism*. Of the four frames, abstract liberalism is the most important, as it constitutes the foundation of the new racial ideology. It is also the hardest to understand (What is *racial* about opposing busing or affirmative action, policies that clearly interfere with our American individualism?). Thus, I dedicate more space in this chapter to its discussion and to how it plays out in the color-blind drama.

In order to adequately understand the *abstract liberalism* frame, first we need to know what is liberalism. According to John Gray, liberalism, or “liberal humanism,” is at the core of modernity; of the philosophical, economic, cultural, and political challenge to the feudal order. Although he acknowledges that liberalism has no “essence,” he points out that it has a “set of distinctive features,” namely, individualism, universalism, egalitarianism, and meliorism (the idea that people and institutions can be improved).⁶ All these components were endorsed and placed at the core of the constitutions of emerging nation-states by a new set of actors: the bourgeoisies of early modern capitalism. When the bourgeoisie lauded freedom, they meant “free trade, free selling and buying”; when they applauded “individualism,” they had in mind “the bourgeois . . . the

middle-class owner of property”; “The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge.”⁷

Hence, classical liberalism was the philosophy of a nascent class that as an aspiring ruling class expressed its needs (political as well as economic) as general societal goals. But the bourgeois goals were not extended to the populace in their own midst until the twentieth century.⁸ Moreover, the liberal project was never inclusive of the countries that Spain, Portugal, France, Britain, the Netherlands, Italy, and later on, Germany used as outposts for raw materials and racialized workers (e.g., slaves). Although contemporary commentators debate the merits of liberal humanism as it pertains to current debates about race-based policies, multiculturalism, and “equality of results,”⁹ many seem oblivious to the fact that “*European humanism* (and liberalism) *usually meant that only Europeans were human.*”¹⁰ Philosophers such as Kant stated that the differences between blacks and whites were “to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour.” Voltaire, the great French philosopher, said on the same subject that “only a blind man is permitted to doubt that Whites, Blacks, and Albinoes . . . are totally different races.” Lastly, even the father of modern liberalism, John Stuart Mill, author of *On Liberty*, justified 19th-century colonialism and supported slavery in antiquity and in certain 19th-century colonial situations.¹¹ To be clear, my intent here is not to vilify the founders of liberalism, but to point out that modernity, liberalism, and racial exclusion were all part of the same historical movement.

The liberal tradition informed the American Revolution, the U.S. Constitution, and “the leading American liberal thinker of this period, Thomas Jefferson.”¹² And in the United States as in Europe, the exclusion of the majority of white men and all white women from the rights of citizenship and the classification of Native Americans and African Americans as subpersons accompanied the development of the new liberal nation-state.¹³ Specifically, racially based policies such as slavery, the removal of Native Americans from their lands and their banishment to reservations, the superexploitation and degrading utilization of Mexicans and various Asian groups as contract laborers, Jim Crow, and many other policies were part of the United States’ “liberal” history from 1776 until the 1960s.

Nevertheless, I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge that, in both Europe and the United States, disenfranchised groups and progressive politicians used the liberal rhetoric to advance social and legal reforms (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement, the National Organization of Women, Liberal parties in Europe).¹⁴ Thus liberalism, when extended to its seemingly logical conclusions (“Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all”) and connected to social movements, can be progressive. My point,

however, is less about social-reform liberalism (although I contend many reform organizations and many white reform-minded individuals¹⁵ have adopted color-blind racism) than about how central elements of liberalism have been *rearticulated* in post-Civil Rights America to rationalize racially unfair situations.

The frame of *abstract liberalism* involves using ideas associated with political liberalism (e.g., “equal opportunity,” the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (e.g., choice, individualism) in an *abstract* manner to explain racial matters. By framing race-related issues in the language of liberalism, whites can appear “reasonable” and even “moral,” while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto racial inequality. For instance, the principle of equal opportunity, central to the agenda of the Civil Rights Movement and whose extension to people of color was vehemently opposed by most whites, is invoked by whites today to oppose affirmative-action policies because they supposedly represent the “preferential treatment” of certain groups. This claim necessitates ignoring the fact that people of color are *severely* underrepresented in most good jobs, schools, and universities and, hence, it is an abstract utilization of the idea of “equal opportunity.” Another example is regarding each person as an “individual” with “choices” and using this liberal principle as a justification for whites having the right of choosing to live in segregated neighborhoods or sending their children to segregated schools. This claim requires ignoring the multiple institutional and state-sponsored practices behind segregation and being unconcerned about these practices’ negative consequences for minorities.

Naturalization is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences. For example, whites can claim “segregation” is natural because people from all backgrounds “gravitate toward likeness.” Or that their taste for whiteness in friends and partners is just “the way things are.” Although the above statements can be interpreted as “racist” and as contradicting the color-blind logic, they are actually used to reinforce the myth of nonracialism. How? By suggesting these preferences are almost biologically driven and typical of all groups in society, preferences for primary associations with members of one’s race are rationalized as nonracial because “they (racial minorities) do it too.”

Cultural racism is a frame that relies on culturally based arguments such as “Mexicans do not put much emphasis on education” or “blacks have too many babies” to explain the standing of minorities in society. This frame has been adequately discussed by many commentators and does not require much discussion.¹⁶ During slavery and Jim Crow a central rationale for excluding racial minorities was their presumed biologi-

cal inferiority. Even as late as 1940, a white newspaper editor in Durham, North Carolina, could confidently state that:

A Negro is different from other people in that he’s an unfortunate branch of the human family who hasn’t been able to make out of himself all he is capable of. He is not capable of being rushed because of the background of the jungle. Part of his human nature can’t be rushed; it gets him off his balance. . . . You can’t wipe away inbred character in one year or a hundred years. It must be nursed along. We look upon him for his lack of culture, as being less reliable, in business and unsafe socially. His passions are aroused easily.¹⁷

Today only white supremacist organizations spout things such as this in open forums. Yet, these biological views have been replaced by cultural ones that, as I will show, are as effective in defending the racial status quo.¹⁸ For example, George McDermott, one of the white middle-class residents interviewed by Katherine Newman in her *Declining Fortunes*, stated:

I believe in morality: I believe in ethics: I believe in hard work: I believe in all the old values. I don’t believe in handouts. . . . So that the whole welfare system falls into that [category]. . . . The idea of fourteen-year-old kids getting pregnant and then having five children by the time they’re twenty is absurd! It’s ridiculous! And that’s what’s causing this country to go downhill.

And as Newman poignantly comments, “George does not see himself as racist. Publicly he would subscribe to the principle everyone in this society deserves a fair shake.”¹⁹ Color-blind racism is racism without racists!

Minimization of racism is a frame that suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities’ life chances (“It’s better now than in the past” or “There is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there”). This frame allows whites to accept facts such as the racially motivated murder of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas,²⁰ the brutal police attack on Rodney King, the Texaco case,²¹ the 2005 lawsuit by black workers alleging that Tyson Foods maintained a “Whites Only” bathroom in one of their Alabama plants, the neglect and slow response by government officials toward a mostly black population during Hurricane Katrina, and many other cases and still accuse minorities of being “hyper-sensitive,” of using race as an “excuse,” or of “playing the infamous race card.” More significantly, this frame also involves regarding discrimination exclusively as all-out racist behavior, which, given the way “new racism” practices operate in post-Civil Rights America (chapter 1),

eliminates the bulk of racially motivated actions by individual whites and institutions by fiat.

Before proceeding to illustrate how whites use these frames, I need to clarify a few points about the data and how I present them. First, whites used these frames in combination rather than in pure form. This is understandable, since informal expressions of ideology are a constructive effort, a process of building arguments in situ. Therefore, the examples of how whites use a particular frame may be mixed with other frames. Second, the frames were verbalized by participants in various emotional tones, ranging from sympathy to absolute disgust and outrage toward minorities. This suggests whites with differing levels of sympathy toward minorities resort to the *same* frames when constructing their accounts of racial matters. I attempt to represent this range of emotion in the quotes. Third, because the college student and DAS samples represent two different populations, I present quotes from the two studies separately in the text. I do so to better identify differences in style or content among the two populations. Fourth, the quotes in the chapter were selected to embrace the variety of ways in which the frames are used by respondents. This implies that many outrageously racist quotes were left out for the sake of representing the variance in the samples. Fifth, the interviews were transcribed to be as close to what the respondents uttered as possible. Thus the transcripts include nonlexical expressions (umm, ahh, umhmm), pauses (indicated by ellipses when they are short and by a number in seconds in parentheses representing the duration of the pause, when they are longer than five seconds), emphases (indicated by *italics* or, for notations of the respondent tone, by italic letters in brackets), self-corrections (denoted by a short line, —), and other important discursive matters (laughs and changes in tone are indicated with italic letters in brackets). Whenever I have added words they appear in brackets; the interviewers' interventions appear in brackets and in italic letters. However, to improve its readability, I edited the material lightly.

ABSTRACT LIBERALISM: UNMASKING REASONABLE RACISM²²

Because of the curious way in which liberalism's principles are used in the post-Civil Rights era, other analysts label modern racial ideology "laissez-faire racism" or "competitive racism" or argue that modern racism is essentially a combination of the "American Creed" with antiblack resentment.²³ The importance of this frame is evident in that whites use it on issues ranging from affirmative action and interracial friendship and marriage to neighborhood and residential segregation. Because of the

pivotal role played by this frame in organizing whites' racial views, I provide numerous examples below.

Rationalizing Racial Unfairness in the Name of Equal Opportunity

An archetype of how white students use the notion of equal opportunity in an abstract manner to oppose racial fairness is Sue, a student at SU.

When asked if minority students should be provided unique opportunities to be admitted into universities, Sue stated:

I don't think that they should be provided with unique opportunities. I think that they should have the same opportunities as everyone else. You know, it's up to them to meet the standards and whatever that's required for entrance into universities or whatever. I don't think that just because they're a minority that they should, you know, not meet the requirements, you know.

Sue, like most whites, ignored the effects of past and contemporary discrimination on the social, economic, and educational status of minorities. Therefore, by supporting equal opportunity for everyone without a concern for the savage inequalities between whites and blacks, Sue's stance safeguards white privilege. Sue even used the notion of equal opportunity to avoid explaining why blacks tend to perform worse than whites academically: "I don't know . . . um, like I said, I don't see it as a group thing. I see it more as an individual [thing] and I don't know why as a whole they don't do better. I mean, as I see it, they have the same opportunity and everything. They *should* be doing equal."

College students are not the only ones who use this abstract notion of equal opportunity to justify their racial views. For example, Eric, a corporate auditor in his forties, and a very affable man who seemed more tolerant than most members of his generation (e.g., he had dated a black woman for three years, recognized that discrimination happens "a lot" and identified multiple examples, and even said that "the system is . . . is white"), erupted in anger when asked if reparations were due to blacks for the injuries caused by slavery and Jim Crow: "Oh tell them to shut up, OK! I had nothing to do with the whole situation. The opportunity is there, there is no reparation involved and let's not dwell on it. I'm very opinionated about that!" After suggesting that Jews and Japanese are the ones who really deserve reparation, Eric added, "But something that happened three God-damned generations ago, what do you want us to do about it now? Give them opportunity, give them scholarships, but reparations?"

Was Eric just a white with a “principled opposition” to government intervention (see chapter 1 for analysts who make this claim)? This does not seem to be the case since Eric, like most whites, made a distinction between government spending on behalf of victims of child abuse, the homeless, and battered women (whom whites deem as legitimate candidates for assistance) and government spending on blacks (whom whites deem as unworthy candidates for assistance). This finding was consistent with DAS survey results. For instance, whereas 64.3 percent of whites agreed that “we should expand the services that benefit the poor,” only 39.6 percent (as opposed to 84 percent of blacks) agreed with the proposition “The government should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks living in the United States.” Furthermore, whereas 75.2 percent of white respondents approved of increasing federal spending for the environment and 59.7 percent for social security, only 31.7 percent approved such increases for programs to assist blacks. And when the question dealt with government programs that were not perceived as “racial” in any way,²⁴ the proportion of whites supporting the program increased even more.

“The Most Qualified . . .”: A Meritocratic Way of Defending White Privilege

Another tenet of liberalism whites use to explain racial matters is the Jeffersonian idea of “the cream rises to the top,” or meritocracy (reward by merit). And whites seem unconcerned that the color of the “cream” that usually “rises” is white. For example, Diane, a student at SU, expressed her dissatisfaction about providing blacks unique opportunities to be admitted into universities: “I don’t think you should admit anyone. It’s gotta be, you’ve gotta be on the level to do it. If they were prepared beforehand to handle the college level to succeed in it, then there you go, anyone can.” Diane then added, “They’ve gotta have the motivation to do well before you get there, I mean, I can’t imagine being unprepared to go [to college] like just barely getting by in high school and then coming here to take the classes, you just can’t go, ‘OK, we want to put minorities in here so put anyone in, you know.’” Diane also used the notion of meritocracy to explain her opposition to affirmative action.

That’s so hard. I still believe in merit, you know, I still believe in equality, you know. If you did have two people with the same qualifications, one’s minority and one’s not, you know, I’d want to interview them and just maybe a personality stands out that works with the job, I don’t know. Just find something other than race to base it on, you know? Let that not be a factor if they qualify.

How could Diane maintain these views and remain “reasonable”? Diane could say these things and seem reasonable because she believes discrimination is not the reason why blacks are worse off than whites. Instead, she relied on the cultural racism frame to explain blacks’ status. This view can be seen too in her response to a question on why blacks fare worse academically than whites: “I don’t know why. Mine was a personal motivation so, you know, I don’t know. I don’t want to say they weren’t personally motivated to get good grades, but that’s what it was for me.” Diane expanded on this matter and said, “maybe some of them don’t have parents to push them or . . . maybe the schools are not equal.” She also speculated, “maybe, you know, they’ve got in their mind that they can’t succeed because they’re a minority and they don’t try, you know, no one there to tell them ‘You can do it, it doesn’t matter who you are.’”

Whites from the Detroit metro area used the meritocratic frame as extensively as college students. For instance Jim, a thirty-year-old computer software salesperson from a privileged background, explained in the following way his opposition to affirmative action:

I think it’s unfair top to bottom on everybody and the whole process. It often, you know, discrimination itself is a bad word, right? But you discriminate everyday. You wanna buy a beer at the store and there are six kinda beers you can get, from Natural Light to Sam Adams, right? And you look at the price and you look at the kind of beer, and you . . . *it’s a choice*. And a lot of that you have laid out in front of you, which one you get? Now, should the government sponsor Sam Adams and make it cheaper than Natural Light because it’s brewed by someone in Boston? That doesn’t make much sense, right? Why would we want that or make Sam Adams eight times as expensive because we want people to buy Natural Light? And it’s the same thing about getting into school or getting into some place. And universities it’s easy, and universities is a hot topic now, and I could bug you, you know, Midwestern University I don’t think has a lot of racism in the admissions process. And I think Midwestern University would, would agree with that pretty strongly. So why not just pick people that are going to do well at Midwestern University, pick people by their merit? I think we should stop the whole idea of choosing people based on their color. It’s bad to choose someone based on their color; why do we, why do we enforce it in an institutional process?

Since Jim posited hiring decisions are like market choices (choosing between competing brands of beer), he embraced a laissez-faire position on hiring. The problem with Jim’s view is that discrimination in the labor market is alive and well (e.g., it affects black and Latino job applicants 30 to 50 percent of the time) and that most jobs (as many as 80 percent) are obtained through informal networks.²⁵ Jim himself acknowledged that

being white is an advantage in America because “there’s more people in the world who are white and are racist against people that are black than vice versa.” However, Jim also believes that although blacks “perceive or feel” like there is a lot of discrimination, he does not believe there is much discrimination out there. Hence, by upholding a strict laissez-faire view on hiring and, at the same time, ignoring the significant impact of past and contemporary discrimination in the labor market, Jim can safely voice his opposition to affirmative action in an apparently race-neutral way.

“Nothing Should Be Forced upon People”: Keeping Things the Way They Are

A central tenet of liberal democracies is that governments should intervene in economic and social matters as little as possible because the “invisible hand of the market” eventually balances states of disequilibrium. A corollary of this tenet, and part of the American mythology, is the idea that social change should be the outcome of a rational and democratic process and not of the government’s coercive capacity.²⁶ During the Jim Crow era, the belief that racial change should happen through a slow, evolutionary process in “peoples’ hearts” rather than through governmental actions was expressed in the phrase “you cannot legislate morality.”²⁷ This old standpoint has been curiously reformulated in the modern era to justify keeping racial affairs the way they are. These ideas appeared occasionally in discussions on affirmative action, but most often in discussions about school and residential integration in America.

Sonny, a student at MU, explained in typical fashion her position on whether school segregation is the fault of government, whites, or blacks. As almost all the students, Sonny first stated her belief that school integration is in principle a good thing to have: “In principle, yeah, I think that’s a good idea because like with, like with people interacting, they will understand each other better in future generations.” But Sonny also, as most students, was not too fond of government attempts to remedy school segregation or, in her words, “I, I don’t—I mean, it should be done if people want to do it. If people volunteer for it, and they want that part of their lives, then they should do it, but the government should not force people to bus if they don’t want that.” When asked to clarify her stance on this matter, she added, “I don’t think the government should impose any legislation thinking that it will change people’s hearts because people have to change them on their own. You can’t force them to say ‘Well, OK, now that I have to bus my kid there, I like it.’”

DAS respondents were as adamant as students in arguing that it is not the government’s business to remedy racial problems. For example, Lynn, a human resources manager in her early fifties, explained why there has

been so little school integration since the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision:

I don’t and that’s another one. *I do not believe in busing.* The reason I don’t believe in busing, you know, I said I don’t. I didn’t encourage my children to play with the neighborhood kids. I still felt that going to school in your community was the key to developing a child’s sense of community and I still believe that. One of the reasons, another reason I moved from where I was [was] that I didn’t want my children to be bused. I didn’t want to have them got on a bus, especially me working. So I don’t think that is an answer. I think the answer is education and helping people learn to make a life for themselves and, you know, any type of social program that interacts, that provides interaction between races I think is excellent. But I’m just not a busing person.

Lynn wants equal opportunity in education as well as community schools, a position that sounds perfectly reasonable. However, one would expect Lynn to support doing something to make sure that communities throughout America are diverse, a policy that other things being equal would guarantee school integration. Yet, Lynn took a very strong laissez-faire, antigovernment intervention stance on this matter. Lynn answered as follows the question, “America has lots of all-white and all-black neighborhoods. What do you think of this situation?”

I don’t have a problem with all-white and all-black neighborhoods if that’s the choice of the people, the *individuals*. But, if it’s *forced* either way, if I’m a black person and I’ve come into the neighborhood and I want to live here and selectively denied that option, that’s wrong. But, again, there still has to be some type of social interaction for growth and if the social interaction takes place then, the cross-integration will take place, I think.

When pressed about what she thought could be done specifically to increase the mixing of the races in neighborhoods, Lynn restated that this could only be achieved “through educating (people) and encouraging businesses.” Lynn was not alone in having this abstract view on school and neighborhood integration. Only one of the white respondents who opposed busing in the interviews (69.7 percent of whites opposed busing in the survey) provided a specific proposal that if implemented would increase residential as well as school integration.²⁸

Individual Choice or an Excuse for Racial Unfairness and Racially Based Choices?

Individualism²⁹ today has been recast as a justification for opposing policies to ameliorate racial inequality because they are “group based” rather

than “case by case.” In addition, the idea of individual choice is used to defend whites’ right to live and associate primarily with whites (segregation) and for choosing whites exclusively as their mates. The problem with how whites apply the notion of individualism to our present racial conundrum is that a relation of domination-subordination still ordains race relations in the United States (see chapters 1 and 4 in my *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*). Thus, if minority groups face group-based discrimination and whites have group-based advantages, demanding individual treatment for all can only benefit the advantaged group.³⁰ And behind the idea of people having the right of making their own “choices” lays the fallacy of racial pluralism—the false assumption that all racial groups have the same power in the American polity. Because whites have more power, their unfettered, so-called individual choices help reproduce a form of white supremacy in neighborhoods, schools, and society in general.

Lynn, a human resources manager, used the notion of individualism in a very curious way. Although Lynn expressed her support for affirmative action because “there’s still a lot of discrimination,” she thinks that “there isn’t as much discrimination as there used to be.” Lynn also acknowledged white males have advantages in society and said “the white male is pretty much instilled” and “very much represses . . . um, people and other minorities.” Nevertheless, when it came to the possibility of affirmative action affecting her, Lynn said:

Um, because affirmative action is based on a group as a whole, but when it comes down to the individual, like if affirmative action were against me one time, like it would anger me. I mean, because, you know, I as an individual got ripped off and, you know, getting a job.

DAS respondents also used individualism to justify their racial views and race-based preferences. For example, Mandi, a registered nurse in her thirties, said she had no problems with neighborhood segregation. She justified her potentially problematic position by saying that people have the right to choose where and with whom they live.

Umm, I think that people select a neighborhood to live in that they are similar to and people, you know, whatever similarities they *find [louder voice]*, you know, it’s race, economical level, religion, or, you know, whatever. When you are looking at somebody you don’t know what, what denomination they are or what political preference they have, but you can tell right off in race. I think that they choose to live in a neighborhood that is their race.

NATURALIZATION: DECODING THE MEANING OF “THAT’S THE WAY IT IS”

A frame that has not yet been brought to the fore by social scientists is whites’ naturalization of race-related matters. Although the naturalization frame was the least used frame of color-blind racism by respondents in these two projects, about 50 percent of DAS respondents and college students used it, particularly when discussing school or neighborhood matters, to explain the limited contact between whites and minorities, or to rationalize whites’ preferences for whites as significant others. The word “natural” or the phrase “that’s the way it is” is often interjected to normalize events or actions that could otherwise be interpreted as racially motivated (residential segregation) or racist (preference for whites as friends and partners). But, as social scientists know quite well, few things that happen in the social world are “natural,” particularly things pertaining to racial matters. Segregation as well as racial preferences are produced through social processes and that is the delusion/illusion component of this frame.

The importance and usefulness of this frame can be illustrated with Sara, a student at MU who used the frame on three separate occasions. Sara, for example, used the frame to answer the question on black self-segregation.

Hmm, I don’t really think it’s a segregation. I mean, I think people, you know, spend time with people that they are like, not necessarily in color, but you know, their ideas and values and, you know, maybe their class has something to do with what they’re used to. But I don’t really think it’s a segregation. I don’t think I would have trouble, you know, approaching someone of a different race or color. I don’t think it’s a problem. It’s just that the people that I do hang out with are just the people that I’m with all the time. They’re in my organizations and stuff like that.

Sara also used the naturalization frame to explain the paltry level of school integration in the United States.

Well, I also think that, you know, where you are in school has to do with the neighborhood that you grow up in and, like, I grew up in mainly all-white communities so that community was who I was going to school with. And if that community had been more black, then that would be, I guess, more integrated and that would be just fine. I don’t know if there’s any way you can change the places in which people live because I think there *are* gonna be white communities and there are gonna be black communities and, you know, I don’t know how you can get two communities like in the same school system.

The interviewer followed up Sara's answer with the question, "Why do you think there are white communities and black communities?" Sara's answer was: "Maybe like I said before, if people like to be with people that they're similar with and it means, you know—well, I don't think it has anything to do with color. I think it has to do with where they. . . ." Sara did not complete her thought as a light seems to have clicked on in her mind. She then proceeded to change her answer and acknowledged that race has a bearing on how people select neighborhoods: "Well, I guess it does [*laughs*]." The interviewer asked Sara if she thought her parents would move into an almost all-black neighborhood. Sara employed all sorts of rhetorical maneuvers (see chapter 3) to defend her parents by conveying the idea that racial considerations would have never been a criterion for selecting a neighborhood.

Finally Liz, a student at SU, suggested that self segregation is a universal process or, in her own words: "I do think they segregate themselves, but I don't necessarily think it's on purpose. I think it's that, you know, *we all try to stay with our own kind* so, therefore, you know, *they get along better with their own people* or whatnot [my emphasis]." By universalizing segregation as a natural phenomenon, Liz was able to justify even her own racial preference for white mates. When asked if she had ever been attracted to minority people, Liz said:

Um no, just because I wasn't really attracted to them, you know, I'm more attracted to someone that's like kinda more like me. But, you know, and I wouldn't say that, I mean, I like if he's good looking or not, you know, it's not that, it's just I'm more attracted to someone white, I don't know why [*laughs*].

DAS respondents naturalized racial matters too, but in general did it in a more crude fashion. For instance, Bill, a manager in a manufacturing firm, explained the limited level school integration:

I don't think it's anybody's fault. Because people tend to group with their own people. Whether it's white or black or upper-middle class or lower class or, you now, upper class, you know, Asians. People tend to group with their own. Doesn't mean if a black person moves into your neighborhood, they shouldn't go to your school. They should and you should mix and welcome them and everything else, but you can't force people together. If people want to be together, they should intermix more. [*Interviewer: OK. So the lack of mixing is really just kind of an individual lack of desire?*] Well, individuals, its just the way it is. You know, people group together for lots of different reasons: social, religious. Just as animals in the wild, you know. Elephants group together, cheetahs group together. You bus a cheetah into an elephant herd because they should mix? You can't force that [*laughs*].

Bill's unflattering and unfitting metaphor comparing racial segregation to the separation of species, however, was not the only crude way of using the naturalization frame. For example, Earl, a small-time contractor in his fifties, explained segregation in a matter-of-fact way.

I think you're never going to change that! I think it's just kind of, you know, it's going to end up that way. . . . Every race sticks together and that's the way it should be, you know. I grew up in a white neighborhood, you know, most of the blacks will live in the black neighborhood. [*Interviewer: So you don't think there's anything wrong?*] No. Well, they can move, they still have the freedom to move anywhere they want anyway.

A significant number of DAS respondents naturalized racial matters in a straightforward manner. For example, Jim, a thirty-year-old computer software salesperson for a large company, naturalized school segregation as follows:

Eh, you know, it's more of the human nature's fault. It's not the government's fault, right? The government doesn't tell people where to live. So as people decide where to live or where to move into or where they wanna feel comfortable, [they] move to where they feel comfortable. We all kinda hang out with people that are like us. I mean, you look at Detroit, we have a Mexican village, why do we have a Mexican village? Why aren't Mexican people spread out all over on metro Detroit? Well, they like being near other Mexican people; that way they could have a store that suited them close by the, you know, those sort of things probably together. So, it's more human nature that I would blame for it.

Despite whites' belief that residential and school segregation, friendship, and attraction are natural and raceless occurrences, social scientists have documented how racial considerations affect all these issues. For example, residential segregation is created by white buyers searching for white neighborhoods and aided by realtors, bankers, and sellers.³¹ As white neighborhoods develop, white schools follow—an outcome that further contributes to the process of racial isolation. Socialized in a "white habitus" (see chapter 5) and influenced by the Eurocentric culture, it is no wonder whites interpret their racialized choices for white significant others as "natural." They are the "natural" consequence of a white socialization process.³²

"THEY DON'T HAVE IT ALTOGETHER": CULTURAL RACISM

Pierre-André Taguieff has argued that modern European racism does not rely on an essentialist interpretation of minorities' endowments.³³ Instead,

it presents their presumed cultural practices as fixed features (hence he labels it as the “biologization of racism”) and uses that as the rationale for justifying racial inequality. Thus, Europeans may no longer believe Africans, Arabs, Asian Indians, or blacks from the West Indies are biologically inferior, but they assail them for their presumed lack of hygiene, family disorganization, and lack of morality.³⁴ This cultural racism frame is very well established in the United States. Originally labeled as the “culture of poverty”³⁵ in the 1960s, this tradition has resurfaced many times since, resurrected by conservative scholars such as Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead, liberals such as William Julius Wilson, and even radicals such as Cornel West.³⁶ The essence of the American version of this frame is “blaming the victim,” arguing that minorities’ standing is a product of their lack of effort, loose family organization, and inappropriate values.

Since there is little disagreement among social scientists about the centrality of this frame in the post-Civil Rights era, I focus my attention on highlighting what this frame allows whites to accomplish. I begin my illustration of this frame with two, clear-cut examples of college students who used it. The students agreed with the premise of the question, “Many whites explain the status of blacks in this country as a result of blacks lacking motivation, not having the proper work ethic, or being lazy. What do you think?” The first student is Kara, an MU student.

I think, to some extent, that’s true. Just from, like, looking at the black people that I’ve met in my classes and the few that I knew before college, not like they’re—I don’t want to say waiting for a handout, but to some extent, that’s kind of what I’m like hinting at. Like, almost like they feel like they were discriminated against hundreds of years ago, now what are you gonna give me? You know, or maybe even it’s just their background, that they’ve never, like maybe they’re the first generation to be in college, so they feel like just that is enough for them.

The second quote is from Kim, a student at SU:

Yeah, I totally agree with that. I don’t think, you know, they’re all like that, but, I mean, it’s just that if it wasn’t that way, why would there be so many blacks living in the projects? You know, why would there be so many poor blacks? If they worked hard, they could make it just as high as anyone else could. You know, I just think that’s just, you know, they’re raised that way and they see what their parents are like so they assume that’s the way it should be. And they just follow the roles their parents had for them and don’t go anywhere.

When cultural racism is used in combination with the “minimization of racism” frame, the results are ideologically deadly. If people of color

say they experience discrimination, whites, such as Kara and Kim, do not believe them and claim they use discrimination as an “excuse” to hide the central reason why they are behind whites in society: their presumed “laziness.”

Although Kara and Kim used the cultural racism frame in a crude form, most students did not. They articulated their culture of poverty views in a gentler, at times even “compassionate,” way. For example, Ann, a student at WU, inserted the frame in her answer to a question about why blacks as a group fare worse than whites academically.

Um, I guess I would have to say primarily family structure. Maybe it’s not [being] able to support the child and, you know, in school and really encourage. It might be that it’s a single-parent family and it’s necessary [for them] to get out and get a job, you know, a full-time job and work a part-time job and still try to go to school. Maybe it’s not encouraged as much for, like long term, it’s mainly survival. I don’t know, something, income; if the family is really skimping by it would be really far fetched, well, it wouldn’t be probably necessarily the first thing that a child from [such] a family would think of, you know, expensive college rather than paying the rent, you know what I mean [laughs]? So, I mean, you know, the priorities are different.

Although Ann’s arguments seem “reasonable” (poor people may have a different set of priorities than other people based on their economic situation), her explanation is wanting because it avoids mentioning the institutional effects of discrimination in the labor, housing, and educational markets and the well-documented³⁷ impact that discrimination has on middle- and upper-middle-class blacks. More significantly, Ann’s failure to recognize how old- and new-fashioned discrimination affects blacks’ life chances is not an argumentative slip, but the way in which most whites construe the situation of blacks, as evidenced by how respondents in both samples used similar arguments in answering questions about blacks’ status.

This kinder and gentler way of using the cultural frame was the preferred choice of students. For example, Jay, a student at WU, explained as follows why blacks have a worse overall standing than whites:

Hmm, I think it’s due to lack of education. I think because if they didn’t grow up in a household that afforded them the time to go to school and they had to go out and get jobs right away, I think it is just a cycle [that] perpetuates things, you know. I mean, I can’t say that blacks can’t do it because, obviously, there are many, many of them [that] have succeeded in getting good jobs and all that.

Jay, as most whites, admits to the “exceptional black.” However, Jay immediately goes back to the gentle cultural argument:

So it's possible that the cycle seems to perpetuate itself because—I mean, let's say they go out and get jobs and they settle down much earlier than they would normally if they had gone to school and then they have kids at a young age and they—these kids—have to go and get jobs and so.

How did DAS respondents use this cultural frame? They relied on this frame as often as students did but were significantly more likely to use it in a straightforward and crude manner. The following two cases exemplify how most DAS respondents used this frame. First is Isaac, an engineer in his fifties. In response to the question comparing blacks' and whites' overall standing, Isaac argued that few blacks have the education to work as engineers. This led to the following exchange between Isaac and the interviewer:

Interviewer: So you feel maybe there's a lack of interest in education that black people have?

Isaac: They want to get a short cut to make money. There's no urgency to get education. They want to make, to get money faster than whites. They don't want to take the time to get educated, they want to get money fast.

Interviewer: So they also don't put the time into developing their educational skills?

Isaac: Yeah the way you learn, the way you grow, is the way you become.

Interviewer: Some people say that minorities are worse off than whites because they lack motivation, are lazy, or do not have the proper values to succeed in our society. What do you think?

Isaac: Right now I think our minorities are lazy. They don't have the patience to keep going.

Ian, the manager of information security at an automotive company, explained why blacks are worse off than whites as follows:

The majority of 'em just don't strive to do anything, to make themselves better. Again, I've seen that all the way through. "I do this today, I'm fine, I'm happy with it, I don't need anything better." Never, never, never striving or giving extra to, to make themselves better.

Ian's perception of blacks as lazy emerged from his understanding of blacks as culturally deficient. This view was clearly expressed in his response to the question, "Do you think that the races are naturally different?"

Well I think that genes have something, some play in this, but I think a lot of it is past history of the people and the way they're brought up. You look at Chinese, if you're gonna get ahead in China, you've gotta be very intellectual and you've gotta be willing to, uh, to fight for everything that you're gonna get. Ja-Japan is the same way. For a kid just to get into college, they gonna

take two years of going through entrance exams to get in. Then you kinda look at the blacks' situation. It's like, "Well, because of slavery, I ought to be given this for nothing, so I don't have to work for it, just give it to me." So culture and their upbringing is the big part of this.

Although Ian came close to the old biological view ("Well, I think genes have something, some play in this"), overall he made use of the cultural frame to explain blacks' status (Asians do well because they "gotta be intellectual," whereas blacks believe that because of slavery they do not have to work).

MINIMIZATION OF RACISM: WHITES' DECLINING SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE THESIS

When William Julius Wilson published *The Declining Significance of Race* in 1978, he made many whites in academia feel good about themselves. Wilson's main claim—that class rather than race was the central obstacle for black mobility—was an argument that had been brewing among whites for quite a while. Yet, whites believe that discrimination exists. For example, when white and black respondents in the DAS survey were given the statement, "Discrimination against blacks is no longer a problem in the United States," a high proportion of *both* groups (82.5 percent of whites and 89.5 percent of blacks) "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with that statement. Although whites and blacks believe discrimination is still a problem, they dispute its salience as a factor explaining blacks' collective standing. Thus, in response to the more specific statement, "Blacks are in the position that they are today as a group because of present day discrimination," only 32.9 percent of whites "agreed" or "strongly agreed" (compared to 60.5 percent of blacks). This means that in general whites believe discrimination has all but disappeared, whereas blacks believe that discrimination—old and new—is alive and well.

College students were more likely than DAS respondents to give lip service to the existence of discrimination. Because students for this study were taking social science courses at the time of the interviews, they may have become sensitized to the significance of discrimination as well as to the new character of contemporary discrimination. However, despite this sensitization, few believed discrimination and institutionalized racism are the reasons minorities lag behind whites in this society. In general, the students articulated their declining significance of race thesis in three ways. A plurality (18 of 41) used an indirect strategy of denial set by one of the following two phrases, "I am not black" or "I don't see discrimination" (see chapter 3 for an analysis of the functions of these phrases), oth-

ers (9 of 41) minimized racism directly, and yet others (7 of 41) argued minorities make things look racial when they are not.

The following example illustrates how students used the indirect strategy of denial. The response of Mary, a student at SU, to the statement, "Many blacks and other minorities claim that they do not get access to good jobs because of discrimination and that when they get the jobs they are not promoted at the same speed as their white peers," was:

I think before you really start talking about hiring practices and promotion practices, you have to look at credentials. I mean, you know, I've only really had one job. I worked for a general contractor so it was basically me in the office all day with him, my boss. But I, in fact, you have to look at credentials. I mean, I don't know if, you know, a white person gets a job over a minority, I can't sit here and say "Well, that's discrimination" because I don't know what the factors were. This person got a master's degree versus a bachelor's degree, or more in-depth training than this person, you know? I mean, I definitely do not doubt that [discrimination] happens, that minorities get passed over for promotions and that they are not hired based on their race. I have absolutely no doubt that it happens. I think that before you can sit there and start calling a lot of things discrimination, you need to look into the background, the credentials behind it.

Rather than stating "I don't believe minorities experience discrimination," Mary suggested they may not get jobs or promotions because they lack the credentials. And although Mary, as most whites, recognizes discrimination exists ("I definitely do not doubt that [discrimination] happens"), she clearly believes most claims are bogus ("I think that before you can sit there and start calling a lot of things discrimination, you need to look into the background, the credentials behind it").

The next example is of students who minimized the significance of racism directly. Andy, a student at WU, answered a question on whether discrimination is the central reason why blacks are behind whites today by saying, "I think they do." Yet his answer was wanting, since he could not provide a meaningful explanation of how discrimination affects minorities' life chances. More importantly, Andy's answers to the other questions minimized the salience of racism. For instance, his answer to the question of whether or not discrimination affects the chances of minorities getting jobs and promotions was, "I think that there's probably less than it used to be, but that it still happens. It's just in isolated places or, you know, it happens in different places, but in most jobs, I think it probably does not happen." When asked to elaborate, Andy stated he believes the reason why blacks do not get good jobs is, "if anything, it's probably education" because "you can't apply for certain jobs without a lot of education."

The last example is of students who argued blacks make situations racial that are not. Janet, an SU student, answered all the questions on discrimination by denying that discrimination is a salient factor in minorities' life chances and suggesting alternative interpretations. For instance, Janet's answer to the same question, on whether or not discrimination is the central reason why blacks lag behind whites was: "I would say it depends on the individual. I'm sure there are some . . . that do and others [that] don't, so. . . ." When asked to clarify, she said, "Right. But I would say for the most part, most of them don't unless they make it out to be the case." When the interviewer asked Janet if she thought most claims of discrimination by minorities were a perception issue, she replied: "If they looked at it as a different way or something, they might see—might not see it as racism, you see what I'm saying? [Interviewer: You are saying that they are seeing more than is actually out there?] Right." When asked about discrimination in jobs, Janet answered in a blunt fashion.

I would say that's a bunch of crap [laughs]. I mean, if they're qualified, they'll hire you and if you are not qualified, then you don't get the job. It's the same way with, once you get the job, if you are qualified for a promotion, you'll get the promotion. It's the same way with white, blacks, Asians, whatever. If you do the job, you'll get the job.

DAS respondents used similar argumentative strategies to deny the significance of discrimination. The strategy they used the most was direct minimization (18 of 66), followed by outright denial (13 of 66), stating that minorities make things racial (11 of 66), and indirect minimization (3 of 66). The remaining respondents (20 of 66) include a few who sincerely believe discrimination is important (see chapter 7) and others who denied the centrality of discrimination in their own peculiar way.

The first case exemplifies DAS respondents who minimized the significance of discrimination directly. Joann, a poor white woman in her fifties who works in a large chain store, answered the direct discrimination question by stating, "I don't see any in the store." When asked about discrimination against minorities in general, Joann said:

I don't think it's as bad as it was. It probably needs improvement. What [society] needs is a knowledgeable crew and I think that is the truth there. I think that the work will have to be done up continually until we're all one big happy family. [Interviewer: Do you foresee that happening?] It wouldn't surprise me. My great granddaughter might marry a black, I don't know. I have no idea!

The next case is an example of respondents who denied discrimination outright. It is worth pointing out that all the DAS respondents who used

this strategy were from working- or lower-class backgrounds. Scott, a twenty-three-year-old drafter for a mechanical engineering company, answered the direct question on discrimination as follows:

I don't—nowadays I don't, I don't really feel that way, I really don't at all. Maybe like when I was younger I would notice it, but right now I don't really feel that there's too much segregation anymore. If it is because of the person, you know, from their past experience. And, I mean, if you got a record, you're not gonna go too far, you know. So then they might feel like "Just being held back just because, you know, just 'cause I'm black."

The interviewer followed up Scott's answer with the question, "So you don't think that discrimination is a factor in most blacks lives nowadays?" His answer was: "It might be just because of their past and their attitudes toward life. But if you just took it as everyday life and just went with it, no, I don't feel it at all, I don't see it. I don't practice it and my friends, all my friends [don't] practice it."

Next are examples of respondents who argued blacks make things racial that are not. Sandra, a retail salesperson in her early forties, explained her view on discrimination as follows:

I think if you are looking for discrimination, I think it's there to be *found*. But if you make the best of any situation, and if *you don't use it as an excuse*. I think sometimes it's an excuse because people felt they deserved a job, whatever! I think if things didn't go their way I know a lot of people have tendency to use prejudice or racism as whatever as an *excuse*. I think in some ways, *yes* there is people who are prejudiced. It's not only blacks, it's about Spanish, or women. In a lot of ways there [is] a lot of *reverse* discrimination. It's just what you wanna make of it.

Finally, I provide an example of respondents who used the indirect minimization strategy. Dave, an engineer in his forties who owns a small-time employment agency, answered the direct question on discrimination by saying: "[*laughs*] I don't know any blacks so I don't know. But, in general, I probably have to say it's true." When asked for clarification, Dave stated:

Oh that's a hard one to just, well, I guess it comes down to stereotypes though like I said earlier. It just—some people may try to say that some blacks don't work as hard as whites. So, in looking for a job they may feel like they didn't get the job because they have been discriminated against because they were black, that's very possible. That may not really be, but as a person, they make the assumption.

Dave explained blacks' inferior status as compared to whites by suggesting that it "really comes down to individuals" and that he has "especially noted that if you want a job, there's jobs out there." In this reply Dave intimates his belief that racial discrimination is not a factor in the labor market since "there's jobs out there."

The last case is of DAS respondents who did not fit the overall strategies and used *sui generis* arguments to deny the significance of racial discrimination. Henrietta, a transsexual school teacher in his fifties, said the following in response to the question on discrimination:

[9-second pause] Trying to be an unbiased observer because as a transsexual I am discriminated against. I think if people act responsible they will not be discriminated against. People who are acting irresponsible, in other words, demanding things, ah, "I need this" or "You did this because of my skin color" yeah, then they will be discriminated against. People who are intelligent present themselves in a manner that is appropriate for the situation and will not be discriminated against.

Thus, Henrietta suggests that blacks who experience discrimination deserve so because they act irresponsibly or complain too much.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I illustrated how whites use the four central frames of color-blind racism, namely, abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. These frames are central to the views of whites, young (college-student sample) and old (DAS respondents), and serve them as an interpretive matrix from where to extract arguments to explain a host of racial issues. More significantly, together these frames form an impregnable yet elastic wall that barricades whites from the United States' racial reality. The trick is in the way the frames bundle with each other, that is, in the wall they form. Whites, for example, would have a tough time using the abstract liberalism frame if they could not resort to the minimization of racism frame as well. Precisely because they use these frames the way children use building blocks, whites can say things such as "I am all for equal opportunity, that's why I oppose affirmative action" and also say "Everyone has almost the same opportunities to succeed in this country because discrimination and racism are all but gone." And if anyone dares to point out that in this land of milk and honey there is a tremendous level of racial inequality—a fact that could deflate the balloon of color blindness—they can argue this is due to minorities' schools, lack of education, family disorganization, or lack of proper val-

ues and work ethic. In short, whites can blame minorities (blacks in particular) for their own status.

But what if someone pokes holes in whites' color-blind story by pointing out that whites live mostly in white neighborhoods, marry and befriend mostly whites, interact mostly with whites in their jobs, and send their children to white schools or, if they attend mixed schools, make sure they take most of their classes with white children. Whites have two discursive options to avoid the potentially devastating effects of these arguments. They can resort to the abstract liberalism frame and say something like "I support integration, but I do not believe in forcing people to do anything that they do not want to do" or "People have the right to make their own individual choices and no one can interfere." Alternatively, they can naturalize the whiteness in which they live ("Blacks like living with blacks, and whites like living with whites . . . it's a natural thing"). As I documented in this chapter, whites mix and match arguments as they see fit. Therefore, someone can say, "Segregation is a natural thing" but also say that "I believe that no one has the right of preventing people from moving into a neighborhood." These frames then form a formidable wall because they provide whites a seemingly nonracial way of stating their racial views without appearing irrational or rabidly racist.

But if the ideological wall of color-blind racism were not pliable, a few hard blows would suffice to bring it down. That is why the flexibility of the frames is so useful. Color-blind racism's frames are pliable because they do not rely on absolutes ("All blacks are . . ." or "Discrimination ended in 1965"). Instead, color-blind racism gives some room for exceptions ("Not all blacks are lazy, but most are") and allows for a variety of ways of holding on to the frames—from crude and straightforward to gentle and indirect. Regarding the former, almost every white respondent in these studies mentioned the exceptional black ("Well, Robert, my black friend, is not like that"), agreed in principle with racially progressive notions ("I believe that school integration is great because we can learn so much from each other" or "Gee, I wish I could see the day when we have the first black president"), or even joined Martin Luther King Jr. in the dream of color blindness ("In two or three generations race will disappear and we will all just be Americans"). Regarding the latter, whites used the color-blind frames in crude ways displaying resentment and anger toward minorities ("Blacks are God-damned lazy") or in compassionate ways ("It is terrible the way they live in those neighborhoods, with those schools, without fathers, with crime just around the corner . . . it saddens me whenever I see all that on TV").

The pliability of the color-blind wall is further enhanced by the style of color blindness. For instance, if whites find themselves in a rhetorical

bind, such as having disclosed a personal taste for whiteness or a dislike for blackness, they can always utter a disclaimer such as, "I am not prejudiced," or "If I ever fall in love with a black person, the race thing will never be an obstacle for us getting together." They can tiptoe around the most dangerous racial minefields because the stylistic elements of color blindness provide them the necessary tools to get in and out of almost any discussion. I examine these tools in detail in the next chapter.

NOTES

1. John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, 2d ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1949).
2. For discussions on the "defensive beliefs" that supported Jim Crow, see Dollard, *Caste and Class*; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1944); Allison Davis et al., *Deep South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941); and Charles S. Johnson, *Patterns of Negro Segregation* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1943).
3. This is taken from the title of conservative commentator Dinesh D'Souza's book, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (New York: Free Press, 1995). This book is, among other things, a crude example of color-blind racism.
4. J. B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1984).
5. All ideologies aspire to be hegemonic, to rule the hearts of rulers and ruled. However, only those that incorporate elements of the "common sense" of the oppressed (albeit in partial and refracted manner) can truly become hegemonic.
6. See John Gray, *Liberalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
7. All these quotes are from *The Communist Manifesto*. See David McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982). For a detailed intellectual assault at the farce of liberalism, see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International, 1985).
8. For a marvelous discussion of this point and of "racial capitalism," see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
9. Good examples of this trend are Andrea T. Baumeister, *Liberalism and the "Politics of Difference"* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), and Patrick Neal, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). Although Baumeister skillfully shows the tensions in traditional liberal discourse that foreshadow some of today's debates and provides a reasonable philosophical resolution based on "value pluralism," she fails to point out the exclusionary character of liberalism and the Enlightenment. Neal's account produces two interesting modifications of liberalism: the idea that liberal states cannot be neutral and the notion of "modus vivendi liberalism," which entails an open liberal approach to social issues. Yet, like Baumeister, Neal is silent about the racism of

the founding fathers of liberalism and the meaning of their racial exclusions for today's liberal project.

10. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 27.

11. The quotes by Kant and Voltaire as well as the views of Mill on slavery and colonialism can be found in chapter 2 of David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Blackwell, 1993). See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

12. Richard Bellamy, "Liberalism," in *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, edited by Roger Eatwall and Anthony Wright (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1993), 23–49.

13. See Dana D. Nelson, *National Citizenship: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), and chapter 5 in Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980).

14. From a social movements perspective, "liberal groups are those that attempt to reform social systems for the purpose of giving all groups equal opportunities." Margaret L. Andersen, *Thinking about Women: Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 299.

15. For a scathing critique of color-blind "radicals" such as Todd Gitlin, Michael Tomasky, Richard Rorty, Jim Sleeper, Barbara Epstein, and Eric Hobsbawm, see chapter 4 in Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon, 1997).

16. The classic statement on the subject still is William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim* (New York: Vintage, 1976).

17. Charles S. Johnson, *Racial Attitudes: Interviews Revealing Attitudes of Northern and Southern White Persons, of a Wide Range of Occupational and Educational Levels, toward Negroes* (Nashville, Tenn.: Social Science Institute, Fisk University, 1946), 153.

18. It is important to note that cultural racism was part and parcel of European and American racisms. My point is that this theme has supplanted biological racism in importance and effectiveness.

19. Katherine S. Newman, *Declining Fortunes: The Withering of the American Dream* (New York: Basic, 1993), 168.

20. James Byrd was a black man murdered by three white supremacist ex-convicts in 1998 in Jasper, Texas.

21. High-level Texaco executives were caught on tape saying some racially insensitive things about blacks and other minorities a few years back, which led them to settle a lawsuit brought by minority employees accusing the company of racial discrimination in pay and promotion.

22. I borrow the phrase "reasonable racism" from Jody David Armour, *Negrophobia and Reasonable Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

23. The former label is used in the works of Lawrence Bobo and his coauthors (see introduction) and the latter by Philomena Essed, in *Diversity: Gender, Color, and Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

24. When the question at hand could be perceived as racial, white support declined significantly. Thus, for example, only 21 percent of whites agreed with the proposition to increase welfare spending.

25. The specific citations for these facts can be found in the introduction, or the reader can consult my chapter, coauthored with Amanda E. Lewis, "The 'New Racism': Toward an Analysis of the U.S. Racial Structure, 1960–1990s," in *Race, Nationality, and Citizenship*, edited by Paul Wong (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999).

26. Bringing about social change in this country has never been a rational, civilized feat, particularly when racial considerations have been involved. Force and resistance have accompanied the most significant changes in America's political and racial order. We used force to achieve our independence from Britain, to keep the Union together, and to end state-sanctioned Jim Crow. An excellent little book on this subject is Irving J. Sloan, *Our Violent Past: An American Chronicle* (New York: Random House, 1970).

27. Southern sociologist Howard W. Odum took William Graham Sumner's idea of "mores" and suggested that racial conflicts must be solved through an evolutionary approach that he labeled "racial adjustments." In a similar vein, northern sociologist Robert E. Park argued that race contacts went through "race cycles" that ended in racial assimilation. See Howard W. Odum, *American Social Problems* (New York: Holt, 1939), and Robert E. Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1950).

28. One respondent suggested a tax incentive policy to stimulate residential integration.

29. Despite its elitist origins in American history (see chapter 5 in Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*), the notion of individualism has been used by social reform movements such as the Jacksonian democracy movement of the nineteenth century, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s ("one man, one vote"), and the Woman's Suffrage Movement of the early 20th century ("one person, one vote") to advance truly inclusive democratic agendas.

30. David Ingram, *Group Rights: Reconciling Equality and Difference* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

31. For a review, see chapter 4 in my *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, Colo.: Rienner, 2001).

32. On all these matters, see Beverly Daniel Tatum, "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations about Race" (New York: Basic, 1997).

33. Most of the work of this important French scholar has not been published in English. A few of his pieces have appeared in *Telos* and, fortunately, the University of Minnesota Press translated his *La Force du préjugé: Essai sur le racisme et ses doubles*. Pierre-André Taguieff, *The Force of Prejudice: Racism and Its Doubles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). See also Pierre-André Taguieff, ed., *Face au racisme, Tome II: Analyse, hypothèses, perspectives* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991).

34. See my "'This Is a White Country': The Racial Ideology of the Western Nations of the World-System," *Research in Politics and Society* 6, no. 1 (1999): 85–102.

35. The culture of poverty argument was formally developed by anthropologist Oscar Lewis. His claim was that the poor develop a culture based on adaptations to their poverty status, which is then transmitted from generation to generation

and becomes an obstacle for moving out of poverty. Although Lewis formulated his thesis as a class-based one, because the characters in his famous books, *The Children of Sánchez* (1961) and *La Vida* (1965), were Mexican and Puerto Rican, respectively, it was almost impossible not to interpret his argument as especially pertinent for understanding minorities' well-being in America. Lewis's argument was roundly condemned by many of his contemporaries, but it stuck in scholarly policy circles as well as among conservative politicians and a few "liberals" such as Senator Patrick Moynihan.

36. Charles A. Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980* (New York: Basic, 1984); Lawrence M. Mead, *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Free Press, 1986); William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon, 1993).

37. See Sharon Collins, *Black Corporate Executives: The Making and Breaking of a Black Middle Class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Ellis Cose, *The Rage of a Privileged Class* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995); and Joe R. Feagin and Melvin Sikes, *Living with Racism: The Black Middle Class Experience* (Boston: Beacon, 1994).

3



The Style of Color Blindness

How to Talk Nasty about Minorities without Sounding Racist

Subscribing to an ideology is like wearing a piece of clothing. When you wear it, you also wear a certain style, a certain fashion, a certain way of presenting yourself to the world. The style of an ideology refers to its peculiar *linguistic manners and rhetorical strategies* (or *race talk*),¹ to the technical tools that allow users to articulate its frames and story lines. As such, the style of an ideology is the thread used to join pieces of fabric into garments. The neatness of the garments, however, depends on the context in which they are being stitched. If the garment is being assembled in an open forum (with minorities present or in public venues), dominant actors will weave its fibers carefully ("I am not a racist, but . . .") and not too tight ("I am not black, so I don't know"). If, in contrast, the needlework is being done among friends, the cuts will be rough and the seams loose ("Darned lazy niggers").

I examine in this chapter the basic style of color blindness. At the core of my analysis is the idea that because the normative climate changed dramatically from the Jim Crow to the post-Civil Rights era, the language of color blindness is slippery, apparently contradictory, and often subtle.² Thus, analysts must excavate the rhetorical maze of confusing, ambivalent answers to straight questions; of answers speckled with disclaimers such as "I don't know, but . . ." or "Yes and no"; of answers almost unintelligible because of their higher than usual level of incoherence. This is not an easy task and the analyst can end up mistaking honest "I don't know" for rhetorical moves to save face or nervousness for thematically