3

The New Face of Race: The Metamorphosis of Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era United States

Amy E. Ansell

In recent years, there has emerged a claim from various quarters that we are living in a postracist society. Academics celebrate the end of racism, journalists and political pundits laud the emergence of the black middle class as evidence that racism is no longer a barrier to socioeconomic advancement, and so-called angry white males bemoan what they perceive to be their new victim status in a racial spoils system that disfavors them. When confronted with clear evidence suggesting the persistence of racial inequality, adherents of the postracism consensus attribute continuing patterns of black disadvantage to the failings or pathologies of black people/culture or, more troubling yet, assert that such inequalities are simply a reflection of natural racial differences.

But the United States is far from a postracist society; rather, it is a society in which the form and operation of racism has been transformed. The aim of this essay is to chart the ways in which racism has metamorphosed in the post-civil rights era, with a particular focus on the critical role that new players on the right wing of the political spectrum (what is referred to throughout as the "new right") have played in the reorganization of key elements of right-wing racial discourse. An understanding of these new forms of racial discourse is essential if those concerned about the growth of racism and right-wing power are to more effectively intervene in contemporary debates about controversial issues related to affirmative action, immigration, multiculturalism, welfare, and traditional/family values.

E-Racing Race

There can be little serious doubt that there is much that is new in the politics of race and racism in the contemporary United States. More traditional notions of race and racism, dependent as they were on notions of biological hierarchies of inferiority and superiority, are today largely in disrepute. The explicit rejection of equal opportunity and civil rights for people of color is now virtually an absent political discourse except at the very fringes of national political debate. Even the militia movements and the likes of David Duke, former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, avoid overt race-baiting in favor of a more sanitized

and coded challenge to the role of government in mandating racial equality.

The fact that our understanding of race and racism is fluid and ever-changing should not come as a surprise to those who have developed even the least bit of a sociological imagination. Shifts in language about race and racism reflect the deeper sociological truth that race is not an essence, not something fixed outside of history, but rather, in the words of Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986), "an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" (p. 55). Throughout history, racial ideologies have gone through important transformations, both in terms of their internal form and content and in terms of the role they play in the policy formation process.

The form that racism has taken in the present historical context has been labeled alternatively as the "new racism" (Ansell 1997; Barker 1982), "cultural racism" (Seidel 1986), "differentialist racism" (Taguieff 1990), "neo-racism" or "post-racism" (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991), "symbolic racism" (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986; Sears 1988), "modern racism" (McConahay 1986), "smiling racism" (Wilkins 1984), and even "anti-anti-racism" (Murray 1986). Four features of contemporary racial ideology can be identified that justify considering it a departure from racist ideologies of the past. These features are (1) a sanitized, coded language about race that adheres to more than it departs from generally accepted liberal principles and values, mobilized for illiberal ends; (2) avid disavowals of racist prejudice and intent; (3) rhetorical circumvention of classical antiracist discourse; and (4) a shift from a focus on race and biological relations of inequality to a concern for cultural differentiation and national identity.

Racialized political language is today much more sanitized and indirect when compared to racial ideologies of the past, and new right racial discourse very much reflects this trend. Racial discourse is, for the most part, no longer mean-spirited or derogatory in nature. In fact, the very category "race" is intentionally avoided so the contemporary right can distance itself from the racial extremism of the past. Code words revolving around ostensibly nonracial social categories—such as "welfare" and "crime"—have been mobilized to exploit the racial anxieties of white Americans without recourse to an explicitly racial discourse. In this way, the racial dimension of a range of social issues is effectively conveyed in an implicit racial subtext, without attacking the racial gains of previous decades directly. As is demonstrated subsequently, democratic discourse and illiberal effects are not mutually exclusive categories: The two can coexist symbiotically in racial discourse that denies that it is about race at all.

New rightists are keenly aware of the charges of racism commonly attributed to previous right-wing movements and consistently and proactively respond by insisting that their views do not represent racism but realism. The apparently benign nature and sanitary coding of their language superficially supports their claim of support for "true" "nonracism." Racism is understood by new rightists as an irrational attitude of racial prejudice held by the individual and, as such, condemned. Whether this condemnation is genuine is impossible to judge, and beside the point. The intentions of the speaker are less important to analyze than the effects of the speech, that is, the way in which the contradictory nature of the new forms of racialized political language both renders charges of racism difficult to sustain and provides ample scope for those supporters who wish to discover an implicit racist message.

The new forms of racialized political discourse work by circumventing classical antiracist discourse and appropriating it for the right. Popular civil rights movement slogans related to colorblindness and the necessity of judging persons by the "content of their character" and not the color of their skins have been co-opted by the right as part

of its effort to identify its vision of society as the true legacy of the civil rights movement against those who abuse it. It is a circumvention that rests on the new right's assertion that antiracist programs themselves are largely to blame for the continued oppression of black people, as well as the persistence and even intensification of racial animosities. Hostility is here shifted away from people of color themselves, as in conventional forms of racism, to the activities of antiracist bureaucrats. In this sense, the new racism is in some ways more appropriately labeled "anti-anti-racism" (Murray 1986).

The fourth and final feature that justifies the characterization of new right racial discourse as "new" is the substitution of race with the ostensibly nonracial categories of culture and nation. This trend is particularly marked in studies of racial discourse in Europe, as explicit defenses of racial domination based on assumed biological hierarchies of inferiority/superiority have given way to the more benign notions of cultural difference and national identity (Barker 1982; Taguieff 1990; Wetherell and Potter 1992). For example, European anti-immigrant sentiment no longer relies on justifying the lack of civil/political rights of the black immigrant as it does on legitimating the "natural" desire of (white) Europe to remain "itself," to preserve the homogeneity of the nation's "way of life," and to exclude those who undermine the shared sense of customs, history, and language that constitutes national identity. This shift from race to culture is also evident in U.S. racial discourse, most often in the vein of debates over the so-called culture of poverty and the underclass. According to underclass warriors, the fatal flaws of people of color lie not in their genes, as asserted in traditional forms of prejudice, but rather in their antisocial behavior, pathological family structures, or dysfunctional value systems. Such a shift from genes to culture or nation is not only more rhetorically acceptable in the sanitized post-civil rights political culture; it also meaningfully elides the operation of power and domination in a way that justifies the pursuit of ever more brutal blame-the-victim strategies and illiberal policy initiatives.

Together, these four innovations in racial discourse render conventional antiracist politics problematic. The more sanitized forms of racial discourse and the circumvention of classic antiracist themes make charges of racism difficult to sustain, whereas definitions of racism linked to essentialist (or biologically bound) doctrines are incapable of challenging the new culturalist forms of racism championed by the new right (whereas, ironically, many factions of antiracists do operate on the basis of essentialist claims; Smith 1994). In this respect, analysis of the new forms of racialized political language demands that we rethink the very concept of racism and do so with a keen awareness of the connection between the newness of the doctrines articulated by the new right and the novelty of the historical and sociopolitical context which has given them purchase.

Racism without Racists

Tackling the issue of racism head-on is crucial for a project of this kind, although much of the literature on the subject of race and the right has managed to avoid doing so. Indeed, we have seen what is new about new right racial discourse, but the question that remains is whether these new features of racialized political language in fact constitute racism. Have the forms of racial discourse been modified to such a degree that they no longer deserve the label racism? Is what we are seeing a new racism without race or racists, or simply new forms of racialized political language that are not racist in form and content but nevertheless carry the potential of tapping into a latent popular and even state racism?

These questions are more complex than they first appear and surely will be the subject

of continuing debate—a useful debate, however, because the conventional definition of prejudice + power = racism is a product of the 1960s and now quite outdated. The goal of defining racism provides an opportunity to think through all sorts of analytic difficulties: Is it possible to define a political project as racist when participants deny it and speak the language of antiracism? Is it possible to define a political project as racist when the language is in accord with mainstream liberal values of tolerance and freedom? Is it possible to define a political project as racist when the language praises difference and the political practice includes various people and communities of color? In short, what does it mean to characterize a political project or ideology as racist?

For reasons of space, I attempt to simplify the matter by drawing a distinction between what I label the *restrictive* and the *dominance* approach to the study of racism and the right. Supporters of a restrictive conception of racism would take seriously new right disavowals of racism and point out that race is not even an explicit or primary concern for the new right movement as a whole.[1] New rightists themselves would certainly challenge claims that their movement is racist and would reserve the term instead for those political projects (such as black nationalism) or policies (such as affirmative action) that employ race either to discriminate against or give advantage to an individual on the basis of the color of his or her skin. However, the main contention of this restrictive conception is that racism must refer to a content with specific criteria so as not to become so broadly applied that its critical edge is blunted. This is the view of Omi and Winant (1986) in *Racial Formation in the United States*. Having evaded the issue of racism in the first edition, the authors attempt in the second to explain what it means to characterize a political project as racist by offering the following advice: "A racial project can be defined as racist if and only if it creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race" (Omi and Winant 1986:71).

By this standard, the new right's racial project is clearly not racist. Omi and Winant seem more comfortable in arguing that the current hegemonic racial project is about the retreat of social policy from any practical commitment to racial justice and the manipulation of white racial anxiety and resentment toward alleged "special treatment" of people of color. Although not racist because it does not rely on essentialist doctrines, this hegemonic racial project, they argue, nevertheless "exhibits an unabashed structural racism all the more brazen because at the ideological or signification level, it adheres to a principle of 'treating everyone alike'" (Omi and Winant 1986:75). Other works on race and the right influenced by the code word approach, such as *Chain Reaction* by Thomas and Mary Edsall (1991), also implicitly advocate a restrictive definition of racism by avoiding use of the term racism and instead focusing on the manner in which conservative right-wing politicians have mobilized the racial anxieties of the public for partisan and electoral ends. Writing in a comparative vein, Stephen Small (1994) argued that the right's development of more sophisticated forms of racialized political language and activity certainly contributes to racialized hostility but is not best described as racism. True, politicians fan the flames of popular racism that already exists independently "out there," but this political use of racism is quite distinct from arguing that the race-neutral political discourse of the new right is itself racist.

The restrictive conception of racism has merit in the sense that it is anti-expansionist, that is, by linking racism with a particular content, the term retains its critical edge and so avoids the leveling effects of those who, as a function of focusing on structural outcomes, either ignore the study of meaning and discourse altogether or unwittingly conflate racism with mainstream meritocratic,

liberal ideology. There can be no racism without race, according to the restrictive conception, for this would obscure the real qualitative differences between the racist discourse of the political right during the Jim Crow era, for example, and the colorblind discourse of today's conservatives.

Those who advocate a dominance approach to the study of racism, as I do subsequently, object to the restrictive conception's focus on the content of new right discourse. Of course, it is important to study the ways in which the content of racial discourse has changed over time, but such a task is of limited value if we recognize the degree to which the changed content nevertheless serves to justify the same old exclusionary practices, albeit in a new form. Today more than ever it is imperative to explore the connections between race-neutral discursive practices and the maintenance of institutional relations of racial domination. If the changed content of racialized political language and the new right's avid disavowals of racist intent blind us to the dynamism of racism and the variety of discursive garbs in which it can appear, we will unwittingly abandon the study of the cultural and ideological (as opposed to the structural) dimensions of racism, except in its most exceptional forms, and so effectively absolve today's conservatives from blame for increasing racial inequality, prejudice, and violence, as Wetherell and Potter (1992) noted:

> Given this flexibility of the enemy, and the way the debates move on, it seems sensible not to commit oneself to one exclusive characterization of racist claims. There is a danger of being silenced when racist discourse continues to oppress but no longer meets the main characteristics of social scientific definitions of racism. (P. 72)

The dominance approach is grounded in a broader approach to the study of ideology that emphasizes not the false content of the ideas but rather the process by which meaning is mobilized in the service of power (Thompson 1990). With this compass of power in hand, it is possible to define racism in a way that avoids the pitfalls of the restrictive approach. According to the dominance approach, a discourse is racist to the extent that it establishes, justifies, and/or sustains practices that maintain systematically asymmetrical relations of racial domination. In this conception, there is no need to try to specify the propositional claims of ideology in advance. Most importantly, it allows for the operation of racist discourse without the category "race." The dominance approach locates the problem of racism not within the prejudiced mentalities of individuals but rather within the competing cultural frames and rhetorical resources available in a liberal society for articulating notions of the public good. Such an insight creates an analytic space for studying the ways in which the rhetoric of colorblindness and equal opportunity—for example, lacking anti-black affect—nevertheless replaces the ideological function of old-fashioned racism—the organization and defense of white privilege.

The dominance approach provides a way to overcome what David Wellman (1993) identified as a theoretical bifurcation in sociological studies of race and racism. In the updated introduction to the second edition of *Portraits of White Racism,* Wellman usefully summarized the literature as falling roughly into two camps: the *structuralist* camp, which explains the organization of racial privilege as a function of social location and economic organization, eschewing any concept of white racism; and the *ideological* path, which corrects the structuralist's neglect of the centrality of race by focusing on processes of racial signification and processes of racialization, but to the deficit of an understanding of the structural organization of racial advantage. Neither approach, Wellman quite rightly pointed out, is up to the task of understanding the new forms in which racism now appears. Sociological studies of race

and racism must aim to overcome this theoretical divide between structural and ideological accounts and, within one conceptual approach, seek to understand the link between cultural codes, meaning systems, and processes of signification and the establishment and maintenance of existing relations of racial domination. It is with this object in mind that I now turn to a critical discourse analysis of the new racism of the new right in the United States.

New Right Racial Discourse: A Critical Analysis

Defining *racism* as a dynamic sociohistorical symbol rather than a static set of prejudices implies the need to examine the internal forms of new right racial ideology via critical discourse analysis. My research agenda has been to identify the primary assumptions—or what I label "key categories of meaning"—that render coherent new right ideas on race. Toward this end, I collected hundreds of direct-mail letters, research papers, newspaper articles, and policy statements produced by the new right. Interviews with key new right personalities also were conducted. The key categories of racial meaning identified at the core of the new racism of the new right in the United States are colorblindness, equality, individualism, the "American way of life," and "reverse racism."

The most overarching category identified is that of colorblindness. The notion of colorblindness implies the belief that government should disregard race as a factor when determining policy, a position taken by Charles Murray, neoconservative author of *Losing Ground* and, most recently, coauthor of (1984) *The Bell Curve:*

> My proposal for dealing with the racial issue . . . is to repeal every bit of legislation and reverse every court decision that in any way requires, recommends, or awards differential treatment according to race. . . . We may argue about the appropriate limits of government intervention in trying to enforce the ideal, but at least it should be possible to identify the ideal: Race is not a morally admissible reason for treating one person differently from another. Period. (P. 223)

The Director of the Free Congress Foundation, Paul Weyrich (1991), commented on the 1991 Civil Rights Act:

> The time is right to seize the initiative and chart a new course for the future. That course should be a bold policy agenda of opportunity based on a foundation of nondiscrimination. America must say no once and for all to the notion that race is a legitimate basis for decisions in employment, government benefits, housing, education and the like. Discrimination on the basis of race is immoral, and if it is morally wrong, it cannot be politically right. (P. 35)

The colorblind approach rests on the argument that in order for racial discrimination and inequality to be eliminated, it is necessary that government policy treat individuals qua individuals, that is, on the "content of their character," not the color of their skin. This means that, in formulating policy, rewards must be based on personal merit—and penalties according to the lack of it—irrespective of the individual's race. The implicit assumption of the colorblind approach is that racism is the product of individual prejudice. It follows from such an attitudinal definition that to combat racism, government need only guarantee individual equality of opportunity.

The colorblind approach is conceived by the new right as the opposite of color consciousness. The color-conscious approach shares the colorblind vision of the good society wherein racial differences will be of no significance or consequence, but it differs over the question of the means to achieve such a society. For the advocate of color-conscious policies, it is necessary to pay at-

tention to race as a means of eradicating it as a differentiating factor, that is, only when policies are pursued that positively aid subordinated racial groups in achieving parity with their white counterparts will the material basis for the perception of racial difference—a perception that itself helps to maintain the system of racial inequality—be eliminated. Thus, rather than being based on the absence of the ability to see color, the color-conscious approach emphasizes presence—that is, the ability to view an individual as part of a racial group. Only with such an ability, argues the advocate of color-conscious remedies, is it possible to address compelling social needs (i.e., the elimination of racial inequality).

The appropriation of colorblind discourse is ironic, indeed. Although the undeniable intention of the colorblind demand in the decades prior to the civil rights era was to eliminate the institutional and legal barriers to racial inclusion, the function of that colorblind demand in recent decades is arguably to put at least some of those obstacles back in place. This is the import of the new right insistence that the government's commitment to pursue equality for subordinate racial groups has gone too far in making real this commitment via the pursuit of equal results or statistical parity. True to the spirit of the new racism, the rhetorical tool of anti-discrimination, absent anti-black sentiment or prejudice, allows new rightists to oppose key items on the black agenda and to adhere to dominant constitutional principles and cultural codes.

Closely linked to the key category of colorblindness is that of equality. New rightists in the United States make what they consider to be a crucial distinction between contending interpretations of the concept. The need for government to equalize individual opportunities for all is affirmed, yet so-called preferential treatment for blacks is opposed. A distinction is thus drawn between *equal treatment* defined in terms of individual opportunity and *equal outcome* defined in terms of group rights for black people.

This distinction forms the basis of the position elaborated by the Heritage Foundation in its 1981 publication titled *Mandate For Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration* (Heatherly and Pines 1980). In this document, an argument is put forward that it is correct for government to seek to protect the civil rights of black people as legislated in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, yet it is misguided for it to strive for racial parity via the redistribution of economic, political, and/or educational resources as mandated by the 1965 Executive Order 11246 (i.e., affirmative action). New rightists insist that the duty of government is to remove the barriers obstructing the road to racial equality, not guarantee that racial equality be achieved in fact. As Charles Murray (1984) quipped, "Billions for equal opportunity, not one cent for equal outcome" (p. 233).

New rightists believe in a society in which individuals rise and fall in the social hierarchy on the basis of individual merit. Indeed, the acceptance of inequality as a social inevitability, even a social good, is a definitive hallmark of the right wing. Irving Kristol (1977), another leading neoconservative social critic and editor of *The Public Interest*, warned, "The kind of liberal egalitarianism so casually popular today will, if it is permitted to gather momentum, surely destroy the liberal society" (p. 42). In *The Bell Curve*, Herrnstein and Murray (as quoted in Wellman 1996) wrote, "Affirmative action, in education and the workplace alike, is leaking poison into the American soul.... It is time for America once again to try living with inequality, as life is lived" (p. 1).

It is from this wider perspective that the new right opposes affirmative action guidelines that impose quotas, goals, or timetables, and that thereby deem underuse or underrepresentation sufficient proof of discrimination. The point of such guidelines is to en-

sure effort on the part of employers, but new rightists charge that such guidelines run counter to the ideal of equal protection. According to Tom Wood (as quoted in *The American Experiment* 1995), head of the California Association of Scholars and co-architect of the California Civil Rights Initiative, "Affirmative action fundamentally violates the principle that everyone deserves equal protection under the law without regard to membership in any group" (p. 8).

In the last few years, the attempt to circumvent the meaning of liberal egalitarianism has given way to a frontal assault on the very notion that equality should be an aim of public policy, thus exposing the morbid underside of the new right's defense of equal opportunity. The publication of *The Bell Curve* by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray is only the most extreme example of the argument that intellectuals and policymakers have overlooked the role intelligence plays in determining wealth, poverty, and social status. Although the so-called dependency culture previously served as the ideological articulator of the conservative assault on the welfare state and its associated democratic values, now it is the alleged genetically constituted intelligence deficit of the black and Hispanic underclass that is justifying more aggressive policies of benign neglect. Evoking what he calls a "wise ethnocentrism," Murray (as quoted in Morganthau 1994) cheerily imagined "a world in which the glorious hodgepodge of inequalities of ethnic groups . . . can be not only accepted but celebrated" (p. 50).

Although conservatives like Ronald Reagan and Barry Goldwater opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act on the ground that it trampled individual rights, today's new right opposes liberal race equality policies with the same argument. The new right interprets civil rights legislation as granting rights to individuals and not social categories. Indeed, within the individualistic logic of the American Constitution, such an interpretation makes perfect sense. The corollary to the new right insistence that individual citizens (not groups) possess rights is that individuals should be judged on the basis of merit and not group membership, as explained by Carl Cohen (1979), Professor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan:

> Rights do not and cannot inhere in skin-color groups. Individuals have rights, not races. It is true, of course, that many persons have been cruelly deprived of rights simply because of their blackness. Whatever the remedy all such persons deserve, it is deserved by those injured and because of their injury; Nothing is deserved because of the color of one's skin. (P. 44)

Ironically, it is the new right that has succeeded in presenting itself as heir to Martin Luther King's call that society judge an individual by the content of his character, not the color of his or her skin, as seen by quota critic Frederick Lynch (1990), author of *Invisible Victims: White Males and the Crisis of Affirmative Action:*

> The academic and intellectual communities which once embraced Martin Luther King's call to judge an individual by the content of his character, not the color of his skin, now do precisely the opposite. They bow reverentially to the gods of tribalism. (P. 44)

This is the central thesis of the national bestseller written by Shelby Steele (1990) titled *The Content of Our Character.* Steele, a prominent black neoconservative, wrote, "Race must not be a source of advantage or disadvantage for anyone" (p. 17).

New rightists urge that we stop looking to white racism as an explanation for black poverty and instead focus on the behavior and attitudes of black people themselves. Walter E. Williams (1980), a black neoconservative and Hoover Institution scholar, wrote, "Somebody should tell the emperor that he has no clothes on. For years now, black 'lead-

ers' have been pretending that all the problems of black people can be attributed to white racism" (p. 3). In *The End of Racism,* Dinesh D'Souza (1995) goes one step further by arguing that black deviancy perpetuates what he regards as a rational form of white racism.

> Nothing strengthens racism in this country more than the behavior of the African American underclass which flagrantly violates and scandalizes basic codes of responsibility and civility.... If blacks as a group can show that they are capable of performing competitively in schools and the workforce, and exercising both the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship, then racism will be deprived of its foundation in experience. (P. 268)

In the context of the failure of black self-development, D'Souza (1995) argued, "The prejudice is warranted.... A bigot is simply a sociologist without credentials" (p. 268).

Although it is in all ways valid (and certainly not racist) to call attention to manifest patterns emerging in poor communities of color, such as low educational achievement or rising crime rates, new rightists of all stripes do so without relating such patterns to material circumstances, the objective opportunity structure, or the continued reality of institutional racism. In this way, through the symbolic construction of individual blame and responsibility, the key category of individualism enables the new right to oppose affirmative action and other items on the black agenda without appearing to be mean-spirited racists. Relations of class and racial inequality are thereby legitimated at the same time as the pursuit of larger, more structurally oriented political solutions are foreclosed. In all of this, the new right affirms its conviction that color-conscious antiracist initiatives run counter to individual freedom and thus counter to the "American way of life."

Individualism coexists in new right ideology with the apparently contradictory category of the American way of life. In other words, not only does the new right portray society as an aggregate of isolated individuals (as in the neoliberal category of individualism) but also as a social whole that requires social order, authority, and the viability of traditional units such as the family, neighborhood organizations, and ethnic communities. Such concerns form the heart of the neoconservative category of the American way of life.

In the recent past, new right discourse regarding national values has tended to focus less on the invasion of outsiders, as in European right-wing anti-immigration discourse, and more on the domestic threat posed by progressive educators and liberal "new class" bureaucrats. Indeed, American new right discourse on the "enemy within" has been most successful in the arena of education, specifically involving the alleged subversive intentions of liberal educators with concern to such controversial issues as school busing, "political correctness," school textbooks, multiculturalism, and affirmative action admission policies. The new right's campaign against political correctness (PC) in the late 1980s and early 1990s is especially revealing of the link between the myriad educational campaigns in which the new right is involved and the politics of the new racism. According to anti-PC ideologues, it is not racism (or sexism) that is the real threat to tolerance and freedom on campus, but rather the creed of political correctness itself. On the one hand, political correctness is presented as being totalitarian in character. In an article denouncing multicultural education as a form of political correctness, neoconservative author Irving Kristol (1991) asserted, "Multiculturalism is as much a 'war against the West' as Nazism and Stalinism ever were" (p. 15). On the other hand, political correctness is presented as being a tool of the revolutionary left, as seen in the writing of Walter Lammi

(1991), National Association of Scholars member:

> According to the theorists of curriculum change, the real purpose of education for difference is not academic success but "empowerment." Empowerment means learning how to struggle relentlessly against the oppression of the "dominant culture," in other words, Western civilization, capitalism, and almost every aspect of mainstream American culture and politics. (P. 37)

Lammi concluded with a plea of tolerance for the people of the West, reminding his readers that tolerance means accepting people of all cultures. Armed with this double move, the symbolic construction of the PC enemy has allowed new rightists to erode progressive antiracist gains in the sphere of higher education while speaking in the name of tolerance and free speech.

Interjecting itself into the middle of the culture wars in the mid-1990s is what could be regarded as a shift from the project of eroding liberal policies such as multiculturalism in the name of constitutional principles of fairness to a more bold defense against challenge of the dominant (white) culture. Signaling a convergence of sorts with European new right discourse about the "alien wedge," new rightists in the United States are beginning to address the conflation of race and nation head-on, even to celebrate it. In the policy arena of multiculturalism, new rightists no longer simply attack liberal educators as enemies of tolerance but rather assail the very assumption that all cultures are equal, all the while holding up the ideal of white culture as the standard by which all others are judged, as seen in *The End of Racism* by D'Souza (as quoted in Walker 1995):

> The pathologies of black culture suggest that the racists were right all along. . . . What blacks need to do is to act white . . . to abandon idiotic back-to-Africa schemes and embrace mainstream cultural norms so that they can effectively compete with other groups. (P. 9)

Indeed, the new right is engaged in an attempt to reconstruct white as a nonracist cultural identity.

A constituent element of this new narrative of whiteness is a fresh boldness on the part of a certain faction of the new right coalition to take on the issue of immigration. The paleo-conservative faction of the new right coalition in particular is demonstrating a new willingness to introduce into the public debate the question of the racial and ethnic composition of the United States. A number of paleo-conservative intellectuals—most notably John O'Sullivan (editor of *National Review*) and Peter Brimelow (senior editor of *Forbes*)—have begun to lay the bases for a new ideological war that transcends conservative policy proposals to combat illegal immigration and instead challenges the heart of the national creed of America as a nation of immigrants. Sounding suspiciously similar to right-wing populists in Europe, such paleo-conservatives warn that, in the context of census projections that the majority of the U.S. population will become "nonwhite" by the year 2050, current high levels of black and Hispanic immigration will drastically alter the U.S. national identity and, in fact, lead the United States down the road to national suicide (Brimelow 1995). In warning against this "alien nation," Brimelow and others advocate a new willingness to embrace an identity defined in explicitly racial and ethnic terms.

Despite this attempt on the part of paleo-conservatives to bridge the new/far right divide, support for anti-immigrant initiatives such as Proposition 187 (successfully passed on the 1994 ballot in California) remains a minority perspective in the new right coalition as a whole. Demonstrating the continuing tension between those new rightists concerned with liberal free market policies and limited government and those who ad-

vocate cultural conservatism and a racial-nationalist agenda, deep internal divisions within the new right coalition over the issue of immigration signal a likely strategy of evasion in the near future. This means that the enemies of the "American way of life" will probably continue to be "illegals" who break the law and the impersonal liberal social policies such as welfare that destroy the fabric of society, and the racially coded symbol of the black and/or Hispanic immigrant will remain subtextual, there for those who wish to discover it.

The final key category of meaning identified within American new right discourse is what is alternatively identified as "affirmative racism," "reverse discrimination," "reverse racism," or "affirmative discrimination" (Glazer 1975; Murray 1984; Allen 1989; Cohen 1986:24–39). The argument that antiracist initiatives constitute a new form of racism—that is, against white people—is especially prevalent in neoconservative discourse on the subject of affirmative action.

In making the argument that antiracist policies discriminate against white people, neoconservatives play on the central contradiction that although such policies are social in conception (in that they are geared to address a compelling social need), they are necessarily individual at the point of implementation. This is a real contradiction that deserves serious attention. The neoconservative critique of affirmative action (and other policies) cannot therefore be convincingly written off as simply a code word or semantic strategy to hide alleged racist intent. Neoconservative opposition to affirmative action as a form of reverse racism is, in fact, a logical culmination of the set of key categories of meaning outlined previously.

According to new rightists, positive action for people of color beyond the guarantee of individual equality of opportunity (1) discriminates against the (white) majority and so constitutes "reverse racism"; (2) creates a special class of people protected by the law and so makes black citizens more equal than others; (3) harms the very groups that it sets out to help; (4) perpetuates, rather than diffuses, racial conflict and polarization; and (5) fuels the tyranny of the new class of government bureaucrats.

At issue is the question of the legitimate means to redress racial inequality. Armed with the set of assumptions previously discussed, new rightists deem racial discrimination (defined in an individualistic rather than institutional manner) as a thing of the past, that is, as eradicated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It follows from this assumption that the only legitimate means for the redress of inequality in a liberal society is to ensure the individual right to compete in a "fair" system. The demand for more than this in the form of positive action is understood by new rightists as being not about the elimination of institutional racism but about power—about the power of (black) special interests as against those of whites or universal interests.

In breaking with the principle of color-blindness, so the argument goes, color-conscious policies create in their wake new victims of racial injustice. According to new right ideologues, affirmative discrimination is tantamount to saying "no whites or males need apply." In making such an argument, quota critics are exploiting very powerful sentiments. Indeed, social scientific evidence suggests that there is a growing sentiment on the part of relevant social groups that the white male is being treated unfairly at the hands of women and people of color—that is, that the men are in fact the new victims of discrimination.[2] Such symbolic construction of victimhood on the part of white males and the blatant hypocrisy it evokes was captured in an editorial cartoon published in June 1995 following a series of Supreme Court decisions limiting affirmative action. The cartoon showed a white man bounding down the steps of the Supreme Court shouting "Free at last. Free at last. Thank God almighty, free at last" (Carr 1995:5).

In advancing the claim that white males are the new victims of reverse racism, the new right is not simply disguising racist attitudes now in disrepute but rather addressing the important question of the meaning of equal protection of the law in a multiracial society. New rightists answer this question in a way that makes symmetrical and ahistorical that which is profoundly asymmetrical and historical—relations of racial dominance—so that the politics of antiracism is equated with the politics of the old racism (i.e., against people of color). For example, in an article appearing in *Conservative Digest* titled "The New Racism Is the Old Power Grab," William Allen (1989) equated the racism of Jim Crow with that of affirmative action and concluded, "The racism of racial preference remains the same old racism, whether it places American whites at the top of the scale, or at the bottom" (p. 17).

The new right's brand of anti-anti-racism has allowed conservatives to claim moral authority on the subject of civil rights and to bash the Democrats as racist because they are race-conscious. For example, Rush Limbaugh (1994) taints the Democrats as bigots for opposing the California Civil Rights Initiative (or Proposition 209 as it was labeled on the 1996 California ballot):

> This is such a great thing because it points out the truth here about who's racist and who's not, who's bigoted and who's not. And guess who it is that's sweating this out, guess who it is that's biting their nails? . . . It's Democrats. . . . What are we going to call them? Bigots. They will be bigots. The people who oppose ending discrimination.

The symbolic construction of the key category of meaning of reverse racism allows new rightists to deny the systemic and continued reality of racism in American society by directing attention to both the (alleged) new victims of reverse racism (i.e., white males) and the new enemies of racial equality (i.e., the antiracist new class). In so doing, new rightists present themselves as the true champions of equality and individual liberty, and they present the set of policy proposals that they advocate as true "nonracism."

Conclusion

As this essay has demonstrated, racial ideology is less explicit today than it was in the past and is submerged beneath a broader range of issues. Most important, racial ideology today has less to do with the articulation of a set of prejudiced attitudes, coded or not, than with the rearticulation of very general philosophical tenets long found in the American liberal tradition. The new racism is not so much an aberration from prevailing ideologies or the result of the infiltration of individuals with racist ideas aligned with the far right than a modified variant of widespread and generally accepted beliefs already in circulation in U.S. society and politics. Identification of the new racism therefore need not entail a search for the bizarre, the meanspirited, or the irrational. Quite the contrary, as this essay has revealed, the most basic and apparently common sense underlying cultural and political assumptions has become a key stake of symbolic conflict.

The new racism enables new rightists and their supporters to justify the benefits that they historically have derived, and continue to derive, from institutional relations of racial inequality without significantly appearing as mean-spirited racists. It allows them to reconcile their commitment to an idealized version of a liberal-democratic society with their fear of the challenge to their socioeconomic and cultural position posed by a militant "underclass," one that is profoundly racialized in the popular political imagination. It is precisely this combination of supporters" respect for existing institutions and dominant values with the perceived threat to their economic and social status posed by minority demands that produces an authori-

tarian, and in this case specifically racialized, response. New right symbolic conflict over the meaning of race provides a legitimate means to rationalize the denial of social rights to people of color as well as to justify supporters' own positions of relative advantage.

It is precisely because the new racism is characterized by public disavowals of racist prejudice and avoidance of overt discriminatory practices that outcomes-orientated public policies such as affirmative action are so needed in the post-civil rights era. If racial equality is to be pursued as a societal goal, then it is more essential than ever to address ideas and practices that are fair in form but discriminatory in operation. If public ire, government policy, and judicial action are targeted exclusively on combating more traditional forms of racism and discriminatory exclusion, as recent evidence suggests is the case, then the silence that speaks so loud in the face of the new forms of racism and indirect exclusion will facilitate a deterioration into an increasingly undemocratic public arena more interested in protecting the nonracist self-image of the dominant society than in building a truly open, nonracist, democratic society.

Notes

1. This is the view of Sara Diamond, for example, as communicated to the author in several personal interviews.

2. For examples of this evidence in that sociological literature, see Sniderman and Piazza (1993). For examples of this evidence as propounded by new rightists, see Lynch (1990, 1991).

References

The American Experiment (Spring, 1995), p. 8.

Allen, William. 1989. "The New Racism Is the Old Power Grab." *Conservative Digest* July/August:16–21.

Ansell, Amy E. 1997. *New Right, New Racism: Race and Reaction in the United States and Britain.* New York and London: Macmillan/New York University Press.

Balibar, Etienne and Immanuel Wallerstein. 1991. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities.* London: Verso.

Barker, Martin. 1982. *The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe.* London: Junction.

Brimelow, Peter. 1995. *Alien Nation: Common Sense about America's Immigration Disaster.* New York: Random House.

Carr, Leslie. 1995. "Colorblindness and the New Racism." Presented at the 1995 American Sociological Association annual convention, August, Pittsburgh, PA.

Cohen, Carl. 1979. "Why Racial Preference Is Illegal and Immoral." *Commentary* 67(June): 40-52.

———. 1986. "Naked Racial Preference." *Commentary* 81(March):34–39.

Dovidio, J. F. and S. L. Gaertner. 1986. *Prejudice, Discrimination and Racism.* San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

D'Souza, Dinesh. 1995. *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society.* New York: Free Press.

Edsall, Thomas with Mary Edsall. 1991. *Chain Reactions: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics.* New York: Norton.

Glazer, Nathan. 1975. *Affirmative Discrimination: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy.* New York: Basic Books.

Heatherly, Charles L. and Burton Yale Pines, eds. 1980. *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration.* Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation.

Kristol, Irving. 1977. "Thought on Equality and Egalitarianism. P. 35-42 in *Income Redistribution,* edited by C. D. Campbell. Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute.

———-. 1991. "The Tradegy of Multiculturalism." *Wall Street Journal,* July 31, p. 15.

Lammi, Walter. 1991. "Nietzsche, the Apaches, and Stanford: The Hidden Agenda of Education for Difference." *Academic Questions* Summer:37.

Limbaugh, Rush. 1994. *The Rush Limbaugh Show,* September 14.

Lynch, Frederick, R. 1990. "Surviving Affirmative Action (More or Less)." *Commentary* August:44–47.

———. 1991. *Invisible Victims: White Males and the Crisis of Affirmative Action.* New York: Praeger.

McConahay, John B. 1986. "Modern Racism, Ambivalence, and the Modern Racism Scale." Pp. 91-125 in *Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism,* edited by J. F. Dovidio and S. L. Gaertner. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Morganthau, Tom. 1994. "IQ: Is it Destiny?" *Newsweek,* October 24, p. 50.

Murray, Charles. 1984. *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950–1980.* New York: Basic Books.

Murray, Nancy. 1986. "Anti-Racists and Other Demons: The Press and Ideology in Thatcher's Britain." *Race and Class* 3(Winter): 1-19.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. 1996. *Racial Formation in the United States.* New York: Routledge.

Sears, David. 1988. "Symbolic Racism." Pp. 54-58 in *Eliminating Racism,* edited by P. Katz and D. Taylor. New York: Plenum.

Seidel, Gill. 1986. "Culture, Nation and 'Race' in the British and French New Right." Pp. 107-135 in *The Ideology of the New Right,* edited by R. Levitas. Leeds, UK: Beyond the Pale Collective.

Small, Stephen. 1994. *Racialised Barriers: The Black Experience in the United States and England in the 1980s.* New York: Routledge.

Smith, Anna Marie. 1994. *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Sniderman, Paul and Thomas Piazza. 1993. *The Scar Race.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Steele, Shelby. 1990. *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America.* New York: Harper Perennial, p. 17.

Taguieff, Pierre. 1990. "The New Cultural Racism in France." *Telos* 83(Spring):109–122.

Thompson, John B. 1990. *Ideology and Modern Culture.* Cambridge, MA: Polity.

Walker, Martin. 1995. "Right, White, and Prejudiced." *Guardian,* October 11. P. 9.

Wellman, David. 1993. *Portraits of White Racism.* 2d ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1996. "Minstrel Shows, Affirmative Action Talk, and Angry White Men: Marking Racial Otherness in the 1990s." Presented at the American Sociological Association annual convention, August, New York.

Wetherell, Maragaret and Jonathan Potter. 1992. *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Weyrich, Paul. 1991. "Civil Rights at a Crossroad." *New Dimensions* July, p. 35.

Wilkins, Roger. 1984. "Smiling Racism." *The Nation* 239(November 3): p. 437.

Williams, Walter. 1980. "The Emperor Has No Clothes." *Moral Majority Report,*" November.

Ansell:

1. Ansell asks whether what we are seeing is a new racism without race or racists or simply new forms of racialized political language. Given what you have read, how would you answer this question?
2. Why, according to Ansell, is "prejudice + power = racism" an outdated conception of racism?