American Evangelicalism In The Post-Civil Rights Era: A Racial Formation Theory Analysis

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This article attempts to demonstrate that Omi and Winant's racial formation theory can be useful to sociologists studying racial discourses and practices in religious communities by providing a racial formation theory analysis of two major phenomena in American Evangelicalism. The article first explores evangelical racial reconciliation theology, explaining its emergence in the late 1960s, its transformation into a conservative racial project in the 1990s, and its recent popularity among white evangelicals. The article then explores the influx of Asian Americans into evangelical campus ministries, linking this phenomenon to popular racial images of Asian Americans and the racial ideologies of white evangelical leaders. The article concludes with a critique of the analysis of race in American evangelicalism that Emerson and Smith offer in their book Divided by Faith.

INTRODUCTION

Michael Omi and Howard Winant are responsible for one of the most influential schools of racial theory, known as racial formation theory. First put forward in response to reductionist theories that treated race as an epiphenomenon of class, ethnicity, or nation, racial formation theory has reshaped the sociological study of race. However, it has had only a limited influence on sociologists and other scholars engaging in the empirical study of religion. For example, a review of the emerging literature on the post-1965 new immigrant communities reveals that many of these studies have focused on issues of ethnicity and assimilation (issues that figure prominently in the older literature on European immigrant religion) while giving little attention to the ways in which these communities are affected by the ideological and structural dimensions of race (see for example Williams 1988; Palinkas 1989; Kim 1993; Chai 1998; Sullivan 2000).

This article will argue that racial formation theory can make an important contribution to the sociological study of religion by providing tools for analyzing the

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development of racial discourses and practices in religious communities.[1] I will attempt to demonstrate the usefulness of the theory by applying it to the case of American evangelicalism in the post-civil rights era. I will focus on two major racial phenomena in American evangelicalism—the development of racial reconciliation theology and the influx of Asian Americans into evangelical campus ministries. Finally, I will discuss how my analysis of evangelical racial ideology differs from that offered by Emerson and Smith (2000) in their book *Divided by Faith*.

A definitional note: I use the term "evangelicalism" to refer to the Protestant subculture that broke from fundamentalism in the middle of the twentieth century over the question of mission strategy (fundamentalists emphasizing the maintenance of doctrinal purity through separatism, evangelicals emphasizing engaging the broader society with their message), yet retaining much of fundamentalism's biblical hermeneutics. Its leaders originally referred to this religious subculture as "neoevangelicalism" before shortening the name to "evangelicalism." Evangelicalism has historically been predominantly white, and it remains so despite recent growth among racial minorities. The historically black churches, while doctrinally similar to evangelicalism, are generally considered by scholars to form a separate religious culture.[2]

RACIAL FORMATION THEORY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Racial formation theory is explicated in Omi and Winant's (1986 and 1994) two editions of *Racial Formation in the United States*, as well as in works by the individual authors (especially Winant 1994 and 2001). Omi and Winant (1994:55) define racial formation as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed." They attempt to chart a middle course between two extremes. The first extreme is an "essentialist" formulation that views race as "a matter of innate characteristics, of which skin color and other physical attributes provide only the most obvious, and in some respects most superficial, indicators" (Omi and Winant 1994:64). The other extreme is a view that trivializes the category of race, arguing that since it is a social construction, race will disappear if we simply ignore it. This latter view ignores the ways in which race has deeply structured Western civilization for the last 500 years.

Key to their perspective on the construction of race is the concept of the "racial project," which they define as "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and

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[1] This is not to deny that racial formation theory, like all social theories, has shortcomings. For a critique, see Bonilla-Silva 2001.

[2] For a thorough discussion of the complexities of defining "evangelicalism," see Dorrien 1998. The religious subculture that I focus on in this article is what Dorrien labels "fundamentalist evangelicalism."

redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (Omi and Winant 1994:56). Racial projects connect "what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning" (Omi and Winant 1994:56, italics original). They give the example of the neoconservative racial project that links what race means (it is not a morally valid basis for treating individuals differently from one another) with a specific conception of the role of race in the social structure (it can play no part in setting government policy). Competing racial projects are developed by elites, popular movements, state agencies, cultural and religious organizations, and intellectuals. Racial projects also operate at a micro-social level "not so much as efforts to shape policy or define large-scale meaning, but as the applications of 'common sense'" (Omi and Winant 1994:59).

Central to racial formation theory is Omi and Winant's interpretation of the "great transformation" in the American system of race. The authors describe the years stretching from the colonial period until the civil rights movement as a period of "racial dictatorship." Other than during the brief period of reconstruction following the Civil War, non-whites faced formidable barriers preventing effective participation in the political sphere, including legally sanctioned segregation, the widespread denial of the vote, and the inability to become naturalized citizens. The system of racial dictatorship was finally challenged by the civil rights movement that brought the entry of racial minority group members into the political process. The extension of voting rights, elimination of *de jure* segregation, and the reform of immigration laws were among the movement's major accomplishments.

However, Omi and Winant do not view the civil rights movement as an unqualified success. Drawing upon the work of Antonio Gramsci, they describe the post-civil rights era as a period of "racial hegemony." Gramsci uses the term "hegemony" to describe a system in which the dominant class rules with a combination of coercion and consent, effectively co-opting oppositional political currents (Gramsci 1971). Omi and Winant apply this concept to the American racial order and argue that while certain goals of the civil rights movement were met, the more ambitious goals of economic equality and political power for racial minorities (goals that Winant identifies with the "radical democracy" racial project)[3] were actively resisted. Political conservatives affirmed the principle of racial equality, but reinterpreted (or "rearticulated") it to mean the establishment of "color-blind" policies by government and other institutions and an emphasis on individual rights. Attempts to combat racism by advantaging members of

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[3] Winant (1994 and 2001) refers to the goal of substantive rather than merely formal equality as "radical democracy" and identifies the radical democratic project with King (particularly in his later years), the Black Power movement, and later movements inspired by Black Power (Yellow Power, Brown Power, etc.). This term does not appear in either addition of *Racial Formation in the United States*, although Omi and Winant describe the phenomenon to which it refers.

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racial minority groups were attacked as "reverse discrimination." This reaction to the gains of racial minorities continued through the 1980s under the Reagan and Bush administrations. In the epilogue to the second edition of *Racial Formation in the United States*, Omi and Winant (1994) criticize the "neoliberal" project being put forward by a newly inaugurated Bill Clinton that, like racial projects on the right, avoided confronting the continued systems of racial inequality.

THE EMERGENCE OF RACIAL RECONCILIATION THEOLOGY

At this point I will turn to the first of two major racial phenomena in American evangelicalism that I will discuss in this article, racial reconciliation theology. Beginning in the late 1960s, a number of African American evangelicals came forward with what they saw as the solution to the racial problems plaguing the United States. Their main argument was that only through the common lordship of Christ was reconciliation between races possible. Proponents of this theology drew upon New Testament passages proclaiming that Jews and Gentiles had become one body in Christ (e.g., Ephesians 2:11-22 and Galatians 3:28) and argued that the same unity was possible for blacks and whites.

Among the early racial reconciliation theology advocates was Tom Skinner. In his book *How Black is the Gospel?* he argues:

> It is only at the cross of Jesus Christ, it is only through Jesus Christ, that the Stokely Carmichaels, the Eldridge Cleavers and the Rap Browns can hold hands with the Whitney Youngs and the Roy Wilkinses....It is only at the cross of Jesus Christ that a black man and a white man can stand together" (Skinner 1970:97).

John Perkins, another advocate of racial reconciliation theology, argued along similar lines:

> Man's reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ is clearly at the heart of the gospel. But we must also be reconciled to each other. Reconciliation across racial, cultural, and economic barriers is not an optional aspect of the gospel (Perkins 1982:54).

Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm (1970), the former black and the latter white, modeled racial reconciliation by co-authoring the book *Your God Is Too White*. These men criticized white American churches for their long history of reinforcing racism against African Americans. However, they also argued that true Christianity excludes all elements of racism and discrimination.

> On the basis of the universal redemption in Jesus Christ, any group that calls itself *Christian* and discriminates against a race or class is simply rejecting the biblical, Christian pattern. The New Testament church was not composed of nice, ticky-tacky, middle-class people. Rather, unity of faith overcame the potential divisions of social and racial barriers which were everywhere present (Salley and Behm 1970:98, italics in original).

It is significant that these early racial reconciliation advocates did not separate individual efforts at achieving reconciliation across racial lines from the call

for changing unjust structures of society. For example, Skinner (1970:81) wrote that he remained committed to the "black revolution" because "there are areas in the system that are diametrically opposed to the Kingdom of God, and that which is opposed to the Kingdom of God, I must oppose as God's son." Perkins, (1982:168) for his part, criticized the American free enterprise system for "increasing production for the rich, but continuing poverty for the oppressed," and he advocated the widespread establishment of cooperatives. While he was critical of the welfare system, Perkins supported government programs that provide the disadvantaged with such things as medical care, nutrition, education, job skills, and assistance acquiring home ownership. Salley and Behm (1970:105) issued a strong challenge to white Christians not only to remove institutional racism from their churches but to help restructure American society "so that blacks can participate as political, economic and human equals."

In order to understand why racial reconciliation theology emerged at this time, we must examine the movement of racial ideologies in the larger society. By the end of the 1960s, Martin Luther King had been assassinated, and the movement that he had led lacked both a leader and a clear agenda forward. This void increased Black Power's appeal (Wilmore 1972). Heightened calls for black separatism and persistent urban riots increased whites' misgivings about continuing the push for racial justice. Finally, some white intellectuals were strongly insisting that the civil rights movement's goals had been accomplished by the legislation of the mid-1960s.

The early advocates of racial reconciliation theology were clearly critical of those who had declared victory in the war against racial discrimination, arguing instead that there was much work to be done to improve the lives of blacks. Their attitude toward the Black Power movement could best be described as ambivalent. As mentioned earlier, Skinner (1970) voiced support for "the black revolution" in *How Black is the Gospel?* Also, the book closed with a list of suggestions for further reading that included works such as *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton's *Black Power*. However, Skinner argued in the same book that the black revolution would fail unless it aligned itself with Jesus and followed his example. He compared many contemporary (non-Christian) black revolutionaries to the Jewish radical Barabbas, rightly recognizing the corruption of the system but employing corrupt means in the attempt to overthrow it. The result would be a new system as corrupt as the old.

Salley and Behm (1970) display a similar ambivalence toward the Black Power movement in *Your God Is Too White*. The authors expressed considerable sympathy for the Black Power/Black Consciousness critique of the dehumanizing influences of white society on blacks. They also believed that increased self-determination for the black community was essential. However, they saw black self-determinism not as a final goal but as a necessary step toward equitable relations between blacks and whites. Salley and Behm also saw the purely secular aims of Black Power to be incomplete, arguing that true freedom would require

"a genuine redemptive experience of God who has made himself known in Jesus Christ" (Salley and Behm 1970:83).

The early evangelical racial reconciliation movement can thus be understood as a distinct radical democratic project, one that was critical of both race "moderates" who believed that the civil rights movement had accomplished its aims and those black nationalists that advocated racial separatism. Note that there are significant parallels between this project and the late writings of Martin Luther King. King also strenuously criticized those who believed that the passage of the mid-1960s legislation marked the completion of the civil rights movement, arguing that significant work lay ahead to bring about economic justice. He also expressed ambivalence toward the Black Power movement. While recognizing the legitimacy of Black Power's call for black people to gain political and economic strength, King warned that "there is no separate black path to power and fulfillment that does not intersect white paths, and there is no separate white path to power and fulfillment, short of social disaster, that does not share that power with black aspirations of freedom and human dignity (King 1967:52).

Yet, the early evangelical racial reconciliation advocates departed from King in fusing radical democracy and a call for integration with the theology of American (neo)evangelicalism.[4] In so doing, they were engaging in "rearticulation," which Omi and Winant define as "the process of redefinition of political interests and identities, through a process of recombination of familiar ideas and values in hitherto unrecognized ways" (1994:163n.8).[5] Perkins, Skinner, and others attempted to make the case that evangelical Christianity, when properly understood and fully accepted, leads inevitably to a commitment to racial justice (understood in radical democratic terms). They wished to influence both evangelicals that were uncommitted to racial justice and supporters of the Black Power movement outside of the evangelical fold.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION THEOLOGY'S SECOND WAVE

The American evangelical subculture, like the broader American society, presently contains a wide range of racial projects. On one end of the spectrum are evangelicals associated with the "new right," a racial project characterized by a sub textual approach to politics—"coding" white resentment of blacks and other minorities and understanding racial (and feminist) mobilization as a threat to "tra-

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[4] One key theological difference between King and the early racial reconciliation advocates was the latter's religious exclusivism, which relegated non-Christians to having at best a marginal role in efforts to advance racial justice.

[5] Omi and Winant (1994:195n.11) offer a second definition later in the book: "Rearticulation is a practice of discursive reorganization or reinterpretation of ideological themes and interests already present in the subjects' consciousness, such that these elements obtain new meanings or coherence."

ditional values" (Winant 1994 and 2001). Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition would be an example of a new right evangelical leader. On the other end of the political spectrum is a social justice-oriented wing of evangelicalism (often referred to as the "evangelical left") that includes the early racial reconciliation advocates as well as figures such as Jim Wallis of the Sojourners Community and Tony Campolo of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. In between we find the center of gravity of American evangelical leadership reflecting the median racial values of the broader American society—support for formal legal equality for members of different races, but opposition to programs such as affirmative action designed to redistribute economic and political resources, views that have much in common with the neoconservative racial project. Mainstream evangelical leaders such as Billy Graham and Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney have downplayed the importance of political action in improving race relations and have instead emphasized individual Christians pursing relationships across racial lines.

The parallels between the neoconservative and the mainstream evangelical racial projects are considerable and worth exploring in detail. The neoconservative project originated with a group of intellectuals that had been supportive of the civil rights movement through the passage of major legislation in the mid-1960s (the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964, the *Voting Rights Act* of 1964, and the *Immigration Act* of 1965). However, these individuals strongly objected to further demands by civil rights activists for action by government and other institutions to redistribute economic and political resources in favor of racial minorities. Nathan Glazer (1975), one of the leading neoconservative voices, argued in *Affirmative Discrimination* that history reveals the steady realization of "an American ethnic pattern" based on distinctly American democratic ideals. First, the entire world would be allowed to enter the United States. Second, the government would give no formal recognition to ethnic groups, but would treat all individuals equally as American citizens. Third, the government would do nothing to prevent ethnic groups from organizing on a voluntary basis. Glazer argued that the major civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s marked the complete realization of this ethnic pattern, and the demand by racial minorities for formal group recognition represented a betrayal of American ideals.

Later writings by neoconservatives have stressed the failure of liberal-backed government initiatives to improve the lives of racial minorities. The welfare system in particular has been blamed for deteriorating conditions in inner cities (Murray 1984). Furthermore, neoconservatives have pointed to the academic and economic success of Asian Americans as evidence that the American system rewards those minority groups that value discipline and achievement (Glazer 1985).

It is noteworthy that the ranks of neoconservatives include a small number of blacks and other racial minorities, with Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, and Glenn Loury (early in his career) being among the most prominent examples. At the top of the black neoconservatives' agenda is a critique of their fellow black Americans for placing too much blame for their economic and social problems on white racism and for failing to take responsibility for their own destinies.

Rather than expecting government assistance in the form of welfare or affirmative action, they argue, blacks should emphasize hard work, self-discipline, and familial stability. We should also note the attempt by black neoconservatives, like American conservatives generally, to portray Martin Luther King as a supporter of "color-blind" government policies, completely disregarding King's radical democratic commitments; Shelby Steele's (1990) *The Content of Our Character* provides one example of this practice. Cornel West (1994) argues that the rise of "the new black conservatism" points to the failure of the liberal black establishment to adequately address their community's economic and social problems, though West does not believe that these conservatives offer an improved vision.

The mainstream evangelical racial project, like the neoconservative project, affirms the early goals of the civil rights movement, including the major civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s. Many mainstream evangelical leaders are also critical of liberal-backed efforts to attack racism through an activist government, arguing that such efforts have only produced failure. But while neoconservatives place their faith in American democratic ideals, a common American identity, and the free enterprise system, mainstream evangelical leaders look to Christ as the only solution to the nation's racial problems. According to these evangelicals, racism is primarily a *spiritual* problem reflecting the problem of sin and therefore demands spiritual solutions—repentance, forgiveness, and unity through a common identity "in Christ." This solution proceeds through the lives of individual believers—changed hearts rather than changed laws. The unity envisioned by evangelicals does not involve the eradication of racial and ethnic differences, but rather diversity-in-unity.

No organization has done more to promote the mainstream evangelical racial project than the Promise Keepers. While better known for its neo-patriarchal views on gender relations, the Promise Keepers have devoted substantial attention to racial issues. Among the promises that men joining this organization pledge to uphold is, "A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity" (Janssen and Weeden 1994:153).

Promise Keepers' co-founder Bill McCartney, former coach of the University of Colorado football team, recalls being awakened to the problem of racism in the mid-1980s while attending the funeral of Teddy Woods, a former player who was African American. McCartney realized that the mournful singing of the mostly African American congregation was expressing not only their grief over the loss of Woods, but also their suffering as a people at the hands of American racism. McCartney's concern for racial issues was further deepened during the first Promise Keepers conference in Boulder, Colorado in 1991 when he realized that the crowd was almost entirely white. Confronting racism was then added to the Promise Keepers' agenda (McCartney 1997).

The Promise Keepers' strategy for addressing racism involves forming small fellowship groups with men of different colors who can experience racial *reconciliation*. This reconciliation comes through the confession of sins (related to racism) and the acceptance of forgiveness, succeeded by mutual support as the men attempt to live

godly lives. Missing from the Promise Keepers' agenda are attempts to combat racism through action in the political, educational, or corporate spheres. In fact, Promise Keepers' leaders argue that attempting such solutions to racism is futile.[6] As Porter and England (1994:169) argue in an essay in *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*:

> Alone we can't change much; you can't, either. But together with a million other broth-ers—committed Promise keepers—we can influence a nation. We can demonstrate that what history, the political process, and the legal system could not do, faith, obedience, repentance, and unity in Jesus Christ *can* change (italics in original).

It is significant that the Promise Keepers' leadership includes some racial minorities, including its chairman of the board Phillip Porter, a bishop in the historically black denomination the Church of God in Christ. In *Let the Walls Fall Down*, Porter (1996) recalls working for the Colorado Civil Rights Commission in the early 1960s and quickly becoming frustrated with the limits of the government's ability to combat racism. He eventually concluded that the only way to change people was to change their hearts. He then quit his job with the CCRC and went into full-time ministry.

A second African American leader with the Promise Keepers is Wellington Boone, who presents his vision of racial reconciliation in *Breaking Through*. In language reminiscent of that of black neoconservatives, he paints a bleak picture of life in the inner city and blames the black community's dependence on the government. "The parallel between the disintegration of the black family and the emphasis on civil rights and government handouts is undeniable" (Boone 1996:50). According to Boone, the solution to the black community's problems lies with God alone. "The black community still looks for a white man, a government, a Farrakan, to be their deliverer.... Jesus Himself is the only deliverer" (Boone 1996:79). Finally, it is important to note that Boone attempts to identify Martin Luther King's agenda with his own. Referring to a Promise Keepers rally in the Detroit Silver Dome, Boone (1996:5) argues, "If Martin Luther King would have seen that meeting in action, he would have seen his color-blind vision in action."

EXPLAINING THE MAINSTREAM EVANGELICAL RACIAL PROJECT

From the discussion above, it would appear that the racial project advanced by the Promise Keepers and other mainstream evangelical leaders is the result of a complex process of rearticulation. On one level, these leaders appear to be rearticulating the early racial reconciliation theology into conservative form, stripping it of radical democratic components and placing exclusive focus on

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[6] This exclusive focus on the personal level separates the Promise Keepers' racial reconciliation agenda from that of the evangelical left. Editorials in *Sojourners Magazine*, which has regularly covered the Promise Keepers since its inception, have argued that the Promise Keepers' efforts on racism are a positive step but a limited one.

individual-level action. At another level, this racial project appears to be a rearticulation of the neoconservative and related center-right projects into an evangelical form. The neoconservative faith in the American systems of constitutional democracy and free enterprise to solve racial disparities is replaced with faith in Christ to bring racial reconciliation, but the neoconservative condemnation of liberal elites and "big government" solutions remains.

Until now I have discussed evangelical leaders rather than rank-and-file members. However, there is evidence that the racial project advocated by mainstream evangelical leaders has received considerable, though not majority, support among ordinary evangelicals. Emerson and Smith (2000) discuss the spread of the "popularized" version of the racial reconciliation message to a white audience in the 1990s. Their interviews with white evangelicals revealed that a significant minority were interested in racial reconciliation, generally seen as involving individual-level responses such as expressing forgiveness and making friends across racial lines. Interest was greater among "strong" evangelicals— "those who assented to all evangelical hallmarks and said their main or only religious identity was evangelical" (Emerson and Smith 2000:179)—than among those more marginally attached to evangelicalism. Bartkowski (2004:127) argues in his study of the Promise Keepers that the active participants who he interviewed "feel that the Promise Keepers' emphasis on racial reconciliation has brought about palpable changes in their lives." For the whites who he interviewed, this has involved organizing and/or participating in efforts by their churches to reach out to local black churches, in some cases resulting in interracial worship services.[7] However, Bartkowski cautions that it is not clear whether such collaborations will lead to long-term structural change.

While we can find some discussion of racial reconciliation by white evangelical leaders in the 1970s (including in *Christianity Today*, the flagship magazine of American evangelicalism), racial reconciliation did not achieve the large grassroots following among white evangelicals until the early 1990s. This raises the question of what social factors during the latter time period would have created demand for this racial project. Winant (1994) offers some clues in his discussion of the "crisis of white identity" in the post-civil rights era. According to Winant, the increased racial and ethnic diversity caused by recent immigration threatens white Americans' ability to constitute a clear majority and exercise unquestioned racial domination in a variety of institutional settings. The easy elision of white identity with "racelessness" is fading as white Americans undergo a process of "racialization" (cf. Alba 1990). Yet, recent research suggests that many whites lack a clear sense of

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[7] Interaction between white evangelical churches and churches associated with historically black denominations would be aided by doctrinal similarities between their respective traditions, owing to their common roots in nineteenth century evangelicalism (Hatch 1989). What is less clear is how participants in such interactions would address differences in political ideology, with black churches being more likely to favor structural approaches to confronting racism.

ethnic culture or identity (e.g., Waters 1990). Finally, whites hold increasingly ambivalent attitudes toward racial minorities. Many whites are resentful of affirmative action programs that they perceive as giving unfairly favorable treatment to minorities. At the same time, many whites experience stigma and/or guilt as their historical role as the "oppressors" of other races is more openly discussed.

If Winant's arguments are correct,[8] the spread of the mainstream evangelical racial project among white Americans could be interpreted as a response to the crisis of white identity. Defining racism as a spiritual problem that is immune to secular solutions gives whites licence to oppose affirmative action, welfare, and other divisive government programs. Furthermore, whites who are nostalgic for a sense of ethnic attachment can treat evangelical Christianity as a quasi-ethnic identity, a move that is encouraged by evangelicals' sense of themselves as an embattled religious minority in the contemporary United States (Smith, Emerson, Gallagher, Kennedy, and Sikkink 1998). Finally, whites can respond to their history as "oppressors" by cathartic acts of repentance, as well as by assertions that Christian identity transcends race, while fully retaining the fruits of white privilege.[9]

As discussed above, the rise of black neoconservatives can be seen as a response to the inadequacy of the liberal black establishment. The small number of blacks who have embraced the mainstream evangelical racial project could represent a similar disenchantment with liberalism.

ASIAN AMERICANS AND EVANGELICAL CAMPUS MINISTRIES

While evangelical racial reconciliation efforts involving blacks and whites have attracted media attention, an equally significant racial phenomenon in American evangelicalism has been quietly occurring: the large influx of Asian Americans. Hurh and Kim (1984) have reported on the rapid growth of evangelical Protestant churches among the post-1965 Korean immigrants, while Yang (1999) has reported on evangelical Protestantism's popularity among recent Chinese immigrants. Even more significant for the future shape of American evangelicalism is the growing presence of American-born Asian Americans in predominantly white evangelical institutions, including major campus ministry organizations.

The story of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is illustrative of this trend. The InterVarsity chapter at the University of California at Berkeley began major efforts to recruit Asian Americans during the early 1980s. By the early 1990s the

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[8] It is not necessary for a majority of white Americans to fit this profile for the concept of the crisis of white identity to be useful. Even a sizable minority of whites feeling a sense of crisis can be the catalyst for social action.

[9] The 1990s witnessed a startling upsurge in acts of repentance and apologies related to the issue of racism, with the Southern Baptist Convention and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) being only two examples of Christian denominations that issued apologies for their past treatment of African Americans.

chapter was two-thirds Asian American (mostly Korean American and Chinese American) and also contained significant numbers of African American and Latino members.[10] Other InterVarsity chapters eventually reported significant racial and ethnic diversification with Asian Americans making up the largest racial minority block. At the 2000 meeting of InterVarsity's tri-annual Urbana Missions Conference, roughly a quarter of the American attendees were of Asian descent (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship 2001).[11]

No single factor can account for the influx of Asian Americans into evangelical campus ministry groups. The growth of theologically conservative Asian American immigrant churches, which often turn to American evangelical publishers for music and religious literature for their English-speaking youth, means that many second-generation Asian Americans arrive on campuses having been previously socialized into the culture and doctrine of contemporary American evangelicalism. From the "supply side" perspective, it is significant that major evangelical organization such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade for Christ, and the Navigators have devoted considerable resources to reaching Asian American college students. Still, this influx of Asian Americans suggests that campus evangelical groups are offering something that a disproportionate number of Asian Americans find appealing.

A further look at InterVarsity offers some clues. Like The Promise Keepers, InterVarsity has rejected a "melting pot" assimilation model in favor of the "salad bowl" diversity-in-unity model. An analysis of articles on cultural diversity in InterVarsity's *Student Leadership Journal* reveals that ethnicity is affirmed and viewed as an aspect of human life that is to be redeemed by God rather than jettisoned when one makes a commitment to Christ. Furthermore, InterVarsity has affirmed the value of ethnic-specific fellowships alongside multi-ethnic fellowships, provided that the former avoid separatism by engaging in regular activities with Christian groups with other ethnic backgrounds.

The leadership of InterVarsity is more diverse in its political orientations than that of the Promise Keepers, as the former includes figures such as Tony Campolo identified with the evangelical left. However, InterVarsity's leaders have kept the organization's focus primarily on evangelism and Christian discipleship (Hunt and Hunt 1991). When approaching the issue of racial reconcili-

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[10] This information comes from personal observations and conversations at the Berkeley InterVarsity chapter while I was an undergraduate.

[11] The official conference report breaks down attendees by racial heritage (26.9% of whom reported Asian heritage), as well as by country, denomination, and gender. Unfortunately, there is no separate racial breakdown for attendees from the United States. However, given that Americans made up the overwhelming majority (77.20%) of the attendees and that the two Asian countries reporting the most attendees, Korea and Japan, accounted for only 1.86% and 0.89% of the conference respectively, it is safe to estimate that roughly one quarter of the American attendees were of Asian descent.

ation, they have emphasized individual-level action rather than social-structural change. This orientation is evident at the local/campus level. A steady stream of articles in *Student Leadership Journal* written by leaders of campus chapters report various attempts at inter-racial dialogue. Issues related to political action are peripheral to or absent from these accounts.

How would a racial formation analysis of evangelicalism account for the influx of Asian Americans into InterVarsity and other evangelical campus ministry groups? First, it is important to understand the particular way in which Asian American racial identity has been constructed by the dominant society (including the media and political leaders) in recent decades—as the "model minority" whose values of hard work and self-discipline have led to success in academic and occupational realms (Takaki 1989).[12] Accordingly, the "success" of Asian Americans affirms that the United States is the land of opportunity for those who work hard. By implication, minority groups that do not experience similar advancement—i.e., blacks and Latinos—have only themselves to blame and are not deserving of government assistance. Furthermore, as the battle over affirmative action in higher education heated up, conservatives increasingly cited Asian Americans' "success" in their arguments for abolishing such programs (Takagi 1992).

Alongside the model minority stereotype is the image of Asian Americans as "unassimilable" and "perpetual foreigners." This image, which can be traced back to the nineteenth century, is continually reborn in mass media portrayals of Asian Americans (Hamamoto 1994). And as Tuan (1999) found, even middle-class Asian Americans whose families have lived in the United States for three or more generations are often treated as foreigners.

Against this backdrop, we can see that many Asian Americans have faced a less than hospitable environment on college campuses. Both whites and other racial minorities resent the presence of Asian Americans, who are seen as "invading" campuses and bringing unwelcome competition for grades. In such a racially charged atmosphere, it is not surprising that many Asian Americans would be drawn to evangelical fellowships that proclaim "all (races) are one in Christ" and discuss racial reconciliation without reference to nettlesome political issues, thus providing a safe haven from racial antagonism (Busto 1996).

Evangelical campus fellowships also help Asian Americans deal with their image as foreigners. One phenomenon that stands out in ethnographic accounts of second-generation Asian American evangelical ministries is the frequency with which these individuals juxtapose their religious and their racial/ethnic identities and give primacy to the former—saying, for example, "My identity in Christ supercedes my identity as an Asian" (Alumkal 2003:83; see also Kim 1993 and Chai 1998). From the standpoint of some assimilation theorists (e.g., Herberg

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[12] As Takaki (1989) has argued, the model minority image renders invisible the many Asian Americans living in poverty.

1955), this embracing of evangelical Christianity can be seen as an attempt to move toward the mainstream of American society. However, Asian American evangelicals do not see things this way. Like their white counterparts, Asian American evangelicals believe that "Christians" (i.e. evangelicals)[13] are a minority in a society that is increasingly hostile to the gospel of Christ (see Marsden 1991 and Smith et. al. 1998 on white evangelical attitudes). However, the flipside of being a religious minority—an outsider with respect to the larger society—is being part of a divinely favored people—an insider with respect to the Kingdom of God. Embracing evangelicalism does not cause Asian Americans to see themselves as joining the mainstream of American society, but rather gives them an alternative— and preferable—way of understanding their marginality (cf. Moore 1986).

Evangelicalism therefore leads to a transformation rather than an abandonment of minority identity. Asian American evangelicals accomplish this by rearticulating evangelical racial reconciliation theology from their particular racial position. While white evangelicals may affirm "all are one in Christ" in response to ambivalent feelings about their dominant racial position, Asian Americans affirm the same discourse in response to discomfort associated with being "model minorities" and "perpetual foreigners," infusing the discourse with a new set of meanings.

The analysis above focuses on factors that have received little or no attention in many previous studies of second-generation Asian American evangelicals. Some studies (e.g., Kim 1993; Chai 1998; Goette 2001) focus on issues of ethnic culture and assimilation while providing little analysis of race. Other studies (e.g., Chong 1998; Chai 2001; Park 2001) that do give significant attention to race nonetheless fail to analyze the connection between how race is interpreted in these ministries and racial ideologies in the larger American evangelical subculture.[14]

DIFFERENCES WITH EMERSON AND SMITH'S *DIVIDED BY FAITH*

In the final section, I would like to discuss how my analysis of race in American evangelicalism differs from the analysis put forward by Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith in their book *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (2000). Emerson and Smith begin with an overview of the history of race relations in American evangelicalism from 1700 to 1964. They then turn to the origins of racial reconciliation theology and its subsequent transformation as it became "popularized" by white evangelical leaders.

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[13] In this exclusivist use of the term "Christian," those that attend Christian churches but that are not "born again" and/or do not accept the tenants of evangelicalism are referred to as "nominal" Christians, in contrast to "true" Christians.

[14] Two studies that look at both the construction of Asian American racial identity and the production of racial ideology in the larger evangelical subculture are Busto 1996 and Jeung 2002. It is notable that both scholars have been influenced by racial formation theory.

This is followed by a discussion of rank-and-file white American evangelicals, whom the authors questioned via survey and interviews about their beliefs concerning racial issues. The authors argue that white American evangelicals sincerely desire to end racial division and inequality. However, their "cultural tool-kits"[15] lead them to view the world in individualistic terms and prevent them from understanding the structural dimensions of racism. Specifically, the American evangelical worldview is informed by "accountable freewill individualism" (the belief that individuals exist independent of structures and institutions, have freewill, and are individually accountable for their actions), "relationalism" (a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships, influenced by the belief in the necessity of having a "personal relationship with Christ"), and "antistructuralism" (the inability to perceive or unwillingness to accept social-structural influences). Thus, limited cultural resources, rather than prejudice or the conscious desire to protect self-interest, are primarily what lead white American evangelicals to oppose affirmative action and other programs designed to benefit racial minorities.

While I recognize that Divided by Faith is a path breaking work that makes a significant contribution to our understanding of American evangelicalism, I see at least two major shortcomings in the book. The first major shortcoming is that the authors offer only a thin discussion of how the two main versions of racial reconciliation theology relate to the other systems of racial ideology that formed their contexts. For example, the authors mention that Martin Luther King influenced the early advocates of racial reconciliation theology, but they do not discuss why the early post-civil rights era would have encouraged the creation of new racial projects. They also fail to discuss how the Black Power movement influenced these early advocates. While Emerson and Smith correctly describe how white evangelical leaders abandoned the social-structural emphasis of the early racial reconciliation advocates, they offer few clues why white evangelicalism would prove fertile ground (in spite of significant resistance) for a racial reconciliation movement in the 1990s. Finally, Emerson and Smith are silent about the connections between the racial ideology of white evangelical leaders and the mobilization of the political right in the post-civil rights era.

A second major shortcoming of the book is the authors' decision to conceptualize race in binary terms. As Emerson and Smith (2000:11) argue:

> When we speak of the racialized society, we mean primarily the black—white divide (or in some cases, the black—non-black divide). This is not to suggest that other races and ethnicities in the United States do not matter, only that the gulf between American blacks and whites is generally more vast and the history longer in comparison to others.

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[15] The term comes from Swidler's (1986) article "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." Emerson and Smith (2000:76) summarize Swidler's argument by stating, "culture creates ways for individuals and groups to organize experience and evaluate reality. It does so by providing a repertoire or 'toolkit' of ideas, habits, skills, and styles."

They then attempt to support this argument by citing data on intermarriage, residential segregation, income, and wealth, arguing that the gap between whites and blacks in these areas exceeds the gap between whites and any other race.[16]

What this largely quantitative discussion overlooks is that different minority groups are racialized in *qualitatively* different ways. Recent waves of anti-immigrant sentiment, while reflecting a racialized social structure, have primarily victimized Latinos, Asian Americans, and Arab/Middle Eastern Americans (each in somewhat different ways) rather than blacks. And while segregation has characterized the black experience in the United States, Native Americans have alternately faced extermination and forced assimilation (Takaki 1979).

This binary racial framework also misses the way in which processes of racialization are interrelated. That is, the racialization of each individual racial group is influenced by the racialization of other racial groups. As discussed earlier, the current Asian American model minority stereotype has its roots in efforts to deny resources to blacks and Latinos. Furthermore, the 1992 Los Angeles Riots demonstrated how a conflict ostensibly between whites and blacks could quickly turn into a multi-racial phenomenon involving whites, blacks, Asian Americans, and Latinos.

Any study seeking to understand how race operates in American evangelicalism (or any other American subculture) must take into account that racialization proceeds in complex ways within the multiracial United States. As I have demonstrated, the racial formation framework provides tools for analyzing this situation of "multi-racialization."

CONCLUSION

As I have demonstrated, racial formation theory provides a versatile framework for analyzing racial ideologies in American religious communities. Using this theory I was able to offer explanations for racial reconciliation theology's development in the late 1960s, its relationship to the civil rights and Black Power movements, its transformation into a conservative racial project in the 1990s, and its recent popularity among white evangelicals. In so doing, I was able to significantly expand the analysis offered by Emerson and Smith in *Divided by Faith*. My analysis of the influx of second-generation Asian Americans into evangelical ministries connects this phenomenon to both the construction of Asian American racial images and the racial ideologies of white evangelical leaders, factors missed by most other scholarly treatments.

Many other racial phenomena in American religion—the growth of Hispanic Pentecostalism, the racial diversification of Catholic parishes, the influx of white Americans into Buddhist and Hindu organizations, to name only

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[16] Emerson's more recent work on multiracial congregations moves away from the binary racial paradigm that I criticize here. See Emerson and Kim 2003.

a few—could be studied with tools provided by racial formation theory. And given that Winant's most recent work *The World Is a Ghetto* (2001) expands racial formation theory to account for race in a global context, scholars can potentially apply this framework to religious movements throughout the world.

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