RACIAL ATTITUDES IN THE 1990s

Continuity and Change

Edited by
Steven A. Tuch
Jack K. Martin

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Laissez-Faire Racism: The Crystallization of a Kinder, Gentler, Antiblack Ideology

Lawrence Bobo, James R. Kluegel, and Ryan A. Smith

Studies of racial attitudes in the United States present a difficult puzzle. On the one hand, several recent studies point to the steadily improving racial attitudes of whites toward African Americans (Steeh & Schuman 1992; Firebaugh & Davis 1988). These attitudinal trends are reinforced by many more tangible indicators, most notably the size, relative security, and potentially growing influence of the black middle class (Dawson 1994; Landry 1987). On the other hand, a number of social policies put forward to improve the status of African Americans and other minorities, such as affirmative action, are often contested if not ubiquitously unpopular (Bobo & Smith 1994; Kluegel & Smith 1986). Again, signs of negative racial attitudes are borne out by a number of tangible indicators, such as the burgeoning evidence of racial discrimination experienced by blacks almost irrespective of social class background (Bobo & Suh 1995; Kirschenman & Neckerman 1991; Feagin & Sikes 1994; Braddock & McPartland 1987; Waldinger & Bailey 1991; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff 1991).

These contradictory patterns open the door to sharply opposed interpretations of the real state of racial attitudes and black-white relations. Some scholars argue that antiblack racism, although not completely dead, plays only a delimited and, more important, diminishing role in politics (Sniderman & Piazza 1993; Roth 1990) and other spheres of social life (D'Souza 1995). With equal plausibility, some scholars argue that antiblack racism lives on, powerfully influencing politics (Sears 1988; Kinder & Sanders 1996), a wide array of other social outcomes (Massey & Denton

1993), and day-to-day encounters between blacks and whites (Feagin & Sikes 1994).

We aim to bring greater theoretical coherence to the hotly debated question of whether the racial attitudes of white Americans reflect less racism now than was evident 40 — or even 20 — years ago. We argue that in post–World War II U.S. society, the racial attitudes of white Americans involve a shift from Jim Crow racism to laissez-faire racism. As part of this change, we witnessed the virtual disappearance of overt bigotry, of demands for strict segregation, of advocacy of government-mandated discrimination, and of adherence to the belief that blacks are the categorical intellectual inferiors of whites. The decline of full-blown Jim Crow racism, however, has not resulted in its opposite: a thoroughly antiracist popular ideology based on an embracing and democratic vision of the common humanity, worth, dignity, and place in the polity for blacks alongside whites. Instead, the institutionalized racial inequalities created by the long era of slavery followed by Jim Crow racism are now popularly accepted and condoned under a modern free market or laissez-faire racist ideology.

Laissez-faire racism involves persistent negative stereotyping of African Americans, a tendency to blame blacks themselves for the black-white gap in socioeconomic standing, and resistance to meaningful policy efforts to ameliorate U.S. racist social conditions and institutions. Jim Crow racism was at its zenith during a historical epoch when African Americans remained a largely southern, rural, agricultural workforce; when antiblack bias was formal state policy (that is, separate schools and other public accommodations); and when most white Americans comfortably accepted the idea that blacks were inherently inferior. Laissez-faire racism is crystallizing in the current period as a new U.S. racial belief system at a point when African Americans are a heavily urbanized, nationally dispersed, and occupationally heterogeneous population; when state policy is formally race neutral and committed to antidiscrimination efforts; and when most white Americans prefer a more volitional and cultural, as opposed to inherent and biological, interpretation of blacks' disadvantaged status.

Our purpose in this chapter is threefold. First, we seek to clarify the concept of laissez-faire racism and to distinguish it from related notions, such as "symbolic racism." Second, we assess the record of change in whites' racial attitudes in the light of our concept of laissez-faire racism. Third, we develop the historical and theoretical basis for understanding laissez-faire racism as the core thrust of the modern U.S. racial ethos. Our argument draws heavily on the framework for understanding racial prejudice developed in the work of Herbert Blumer.

RACISM IN THE MODERN ERA

Is Racism an Appropriate Label?

The social science literature has put forward many different definitions of racism (Chesler 1976; See & Wilson 1988). For our purposes, Wilson offers a particularly cogent specification when he argues that racism is "an ideology of racial domination or exploitation that (1) incorporates beliefs in a particular race's cultural and/or inherent biological inferiority and (2) uses such beliefs to justify and prescribe inferior or unequal treatment for that group" (Wilson 1973, p. 32). Jim Crow racism readily fits within this definition of a racist ideological system. The express aim of the ideology was the domination and exploitation of African Americans; it mandated inferior treatment across virtually all domains of social life; and all of this was justified on the premise that blacks were the inherent biological inferiors of whites (Fredrickson 1971). Thus, the ideology was manifest in institutional arrangements, such as separate schools and voting restrictions, a variety of collective behaviors, such as lynchings, and readily expressed individual beliefs.

It is less apparent that the modern period is as fittingly termed "racist." Race relations and the status of African Americans have changed markedly in the post–World War II period (Jaynes & Williams 1989). Nonetheless, a strong case can be made that the United States remains a racially dominative society: We believe it appropriate to continue to speak of a racist social order in the United States. We use the phrase "laissez-faire racism" to emphasize, however, that the forms and mechanisms of that domination are now far more loosely coupled, complex, and permeable than in the past.

The basis for retaining the term "racism" is twofold. First, African Americans remain in a unique and fundamentally disadvantaged structural position in the U.S. economy and polity. This disadvantaged position is partly the legacy of historic racial discrimination during the slavery and Jim Crow eras. Even if all direct racial bias disappeared, African Americans would be disadvantaged because of the cumulative and multidimensional nature of historic racial oppression in the United States. Furthermore, racial discrimination continues to confront African Americans, albeit in less systematic and absolute ways in its current form. Rather than relying on state-enforced inequality as during the Jim Crow era, however, modern racial inequality relies on the market and informal racial bias to re-create, and in some instances sharply worsen, structured racial inequality. Hence, laissez-faire racism.

The unique structural disadvantage of African Americans is manifested in several ways. Despite important relative gains on whites recorded during the 1940s and the 1960s, the black-white gap in socioeconomic

status remains enormous. Black adults remain two-and-a-half times as likely as whites to suffer from unemployment. This gap exists at virtually each level of the education distribution (Jaynes 1990). If one casts a broader net to ask about "underemployment" — that is, falling out of the labor force entirely, being unable to find full-time work, or working full time at below poverty-level wage rates — then the black-white ratio in major urban areas has risen from the customary 2-to-1 disparity to very nearly 5-to-1 over the past two decades (Lichter 1988). Conservative estimates show that young, well-educated blacks who are matched in work experience and other characteristics with whites still earn 11 percent less annually (Farley 1984). Studies continue to document direct labor market discrimination at both low-skill, entry-level positions (Kirschenman & Neckerman 1991; Turner, Fix, & Struyk 1991; Waldinger & Bailey 1991) and more highly skilled positions (Feagin & Sikes 1994). A growing chorus of studies indicate that even highly skilled and accomplished black managers encounter glass ceilings in corporate America (Fernandez 1986; Jones 1986), prompting some analysts to suggest that blacks will never be fully admitted to the U.S. power elite (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff 1991). In contrast to an earlier era, however, black disadvantage in the modern labor market is more likely to flow from informal recruitment and promotion mechanisms than from a blanket racial exclusion or segmentation.

Judged against differences in wealth, however, black-white gaps in employment status and earnings seem absolutely paltry (Jaynes & Williams 1989; Oliver & Shapiro 1995). The average differences in wealth show black households lagging behind whites by a factor of nearly 12 times. For every one dollar of wealth in white households, black households have less than ten cents. In 1984 the median level of wealth held by black households was around $3,000; for white households, the figure was $39,000. Indeed, white households with incomes of between $7,500 and $15,000 have "higher mean net worth and net financial assets than black households making $45,000 to $60,000" (Starr 1992, p. 12). That is, whites near the bottom of the white income distribution have more wealth than blacks near the top of the black income distribution. Wealth is in many ways a better indicator of likely quality of life than earnings (Oliver & Shapiro 1995).

Blacks occupy a uniquely disadvantaged position in physical space, as well. Demographers Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1989) concluded that it makes sense to describe the black condition as hypersegregation — a condition wherein a group simultaneously scores as extremely racially isolated from whites on four of five standard measures of residential segregation. As contrasted to the conditions of Asian Americans and Latinos, African Americans are the only group, based on 1980 census data for large metropolitan areas, to rank as hypersegregated from whites

(Massey & Denton 1993). Although there was some modest decline in the level of racial residential segregation between 1980 and 1990 (Farley & Frey 1994), blacks remain hypersegregated (Denton 1994). What is more, housing audit studies show high levels of direct racial discrimination by realtors and landlords against African Americans (Pearce 1979; Turner 1992; Yinger 1996). There is mounting evidence that mortgage lenders discriminate against African Americans, with some of the more careful studies showing racial bias even after controlling for financial resources and credit history (Jackson 1994). Residential mobility has been a critical pathway to assimilation into the economic and social mainstream for other groups (Lieberson 1980). Yet it is clear that African Americans, including the black middle class, face formidable obstacles in the search for high-quality housing. Such segregation is consequential. Neighborhoods may vary greatly in services, school quality, safety, and levels of exposure to a variety of unwanted social conditions (Massey, Gross, & Eggers 1991). Indeed, a particularly troubling trend is the increasing overlap among suburban versus urban location, race, and distinct political jurisdictions. In the extreme case, a largely black inner city (for example, Detroit) is a municipal unit separate from the surrounding white suburban areas. This is a development that, if it continues, would weaken the basic structural interdependency presumed to exist between black and white communities (Massey & Hajnal 1995).

The problems of differential unemployment, wage differentials, disparities in wealth, and racial residential segregation place African Americans in a uniquely disadvantaged position in U.S. economy and polity. Adverse market trends, apparently race neutral in origin, have far more pronounced negative effects on African Americans as a result. Over the past two decades, the U.S. economy has undergone slow but modest growth, sharply rising inequality in wages paid to high- and low-skill workers (heavily favoring the former over the latter), and a generally sharp rise in the skill demands for workers made by employers (Danziger & Gottschalk 1995). These general trends, however, appear to have worsened the relative position of blacks in the labor force. The employment prospects of young black males relative to comparable white males declined during the 1980s, with the earnings of college-educated black males undergoing a particularly sharp drop during this period (Bound & Freeman 1992).

Similarly, the uniquely disadvantaged position of African Americans means that government policy retrenchments may also have disproportionate adverse effects. For example, it appears that the shift in federal support for higher education from outright grants and scholarships to loans hit African Americans particularly hard. There was a sharp decline, both absolutely and relative to whites, in the chances that a black high school graduate would go on to college beginning in about 1979 and

continuing through the mid-1980s (Jaynes & Williams 1989; Hauser 1993a). This occurred for both black men and black women and occurred largely across the class spectrum in the black community. The trend runs against other evidence of rising black achievement scores relative to whites and persistently high aspirations (Hauser & Anderson 1991; Hauser 1993b).

Our second reason for retaining the term racism is that these racial inequalities exist in a social climate of widespread acceptance of notions of black cultural inferiority. In the wake of the civil disorders of the 1960s, H. Schuman (1971) called attention to the pronounced tendency of white Americans to view the race problem as flowing from the freely chosen cultural behaviors of blacks themselves. The tendency to deny the modern potency of discrimination and to see a lack of striving and effort on the part of blacks as the key issue in black-white inequality has been confirmed in a number of subsequent investigations based on regional data sources (Apostle, Glock, Piazza, & Suelzle 1983; Sniderman & Hagen 1985) and national data sources (Kluegel 1990; Kluegel & Bobo 1993; Tuch & Hughes 1996). (With the publication of works, such as R. J. Herrnstein and C. Murray's *The Bell Curve* (1994) and D'Souza's *The End of Racism* (1995), one could argue that an incipient biological racism, no longer plainly on the margins, is reasserting itself.) We review more fully below and in a later chapter the evidence on the prevalence of belief in black cultural inferiority. The critical point is that sharp and, in some instances, worsening racial inequalities exist. Rather than constituting a problem widely recognized as justifying ameliorative social intervention, however, these conditions are comfortably accepted, if not in fact actively justified and explained, by many white Americans as a reflection of the choices blacks themselves have made.

We try to use the term racism in a delimited sense. We argue neither that racial discrimination is the only factor constraining black opportunity in the modern period nor that race is as central a factor in the life chances for any given black individual as it was in the pre–civil rights era (Wilson 1978). Indeed, we have emphasized the role of the market, the formally race-neutral and antidiscrimination posture of the modern state, the shift away from biological racist ideas, growing class heterogeneity among African Americans, and the informal, complex, loosely coupled, and more permeable character of the modern color line. Nevertheless, we use the term racism to characterize the modern period and common patterns of attitudes and belief. We do so because African Americans remain in uniquely disadvantaged positions despite greater class differentiation within the black community; because racial discrimination of both historic and a variety of modern types plays a part in the social reproduction of distinctly racial disadvantage; and because a large segment of white America attributes black-white inequality to the failings of black culture.

Does Laissez-Faire Racism Differ from Symbolic Racism?

We are not the first or only analysts to attempt to conceptualize the changing character of whites' attitudes toward blacks. One important line of research is that concerning symbolic racism. Although defined and ultimately measured in a variety of ways, the concept of symbolic racism proposes that a new form of antiblack prejudice has arisen in the United States. It is said to involve a blend of early learned social values, such as the Protestant ethic and antiblack fears and apprehensions. In a context where segregationist and biological racism are less in evidence, according to the symbolic racism researchers, it is this modern symbolic racism that plays a more formidable role (Sears & Kinder 1971; McConahay & Hough 1976).

Our concept of laissez-faire racism differs in two critical respects from the theory of symbolic racism as proposed by David Sears and colleagues (Kinder & Sears 1981). First, the theory of laissez-faire racism is explicitly based in a historical analysis of the changing economics and politics of race in the United States. Even in the most extensive theoretical statements offered after two decades of research (Kinder 1986; McConahay 1986; Sears 1988), the symbolic racism researchers have not satisfactorily explained why what they call old-fashioned racism went into decline or why symbolic or modern racism assumes the specific form and content that it now does. In some respects, this theoretical silence on the causes of the shift from old-fashioned to symbolic, or modern, racism is a virtual necessity of the logic of the theory. As originally formulated, the theory expressly denies that there is a significant material social basis to the formation of antiblack attitudes outside of processes of socialization and the operation of routine cognitive and emotional psychological processes (Kinder & Sears 1981; Sears, Hensler, & Speer 1979).

We argue that Jim Crow racist ideology reflected the economic and political needs, as well as the prevailing cultural ideas, of a specific historical period and set of actors. The setting was the post–Civil War South. The critical actors were the old Southern planter elite. The cultural trend was the rise and scientific legitimacy accorded notions of biological racism. As the economic and political power of these historic conditions and actors waned, as cultural trends turned against biological racism, and as the power resources of the black community rose, Jim Crow social structures and, ultimately, Jim Crow ideology were defeated. Rising from the collapse of Jim Crow racism, we argue, is laissez-faire racism. The latter set of ideas legitimates persistent black oppression in the United States, but now in a manner appropriate to a modern, nationwide, postindustrial free labor economy and polity. In effect, a significant segment of white America effectively condones as much black disadvantage and

segregation as the legacy of historic discrimination and modern-day free-market forces and informal social mechanisms can reproduce or even exacerbate. Understood in this fashion, the labels Jim Crow racism and laissez-faire racism are both more concrete and historically well specified than the vague terms old-fashioned racism and modern racism used in the symbolic racism literature.

Second, our theory of laissez-faire racism is expressly rooted in a sociological theory of prejudice. Below we elaborate on H. Blumer's classic statement on prejudice as a sense of group position (Blumer 1958), which places a subjective, interactively and socially created, and historically emergent set of ideas about appropriate status relations between groups at the center of any analysis of racial attitudes. The framework is one that takes seriously the imperatives that derive from both the institutionalized structural conditions of social life as well as from the processes of human interaction, subjectivity, and interpretation that lend meaning to social conditions and thereby guide behavior. Symbolic racism, in contrast, was explicitly premised on a sociocultural theory of prejudice (Kinder & Sears 1981). Such theories place central importance on social learning and the psychological-affective nature of racial attitudes (Allport 1954; Katz 1991; Sears 1988).

Under the group position theory, the crucial factors are: first, a sense among members of the dominant racial group of proprietary claim or entitlement to greater resources and status and, second, a perception of threat posed by subordinate racial group members to those entitlements. Together, the feelings of entitlement and threat become dynamic social forces as members of the dominant racial group strive to maintain a privileged status relative to members of a subordinate racial group. From this vantage point, as the economic and political foundations of the Jim Crow social order weakened, white privilege had to be justified and defended on new and different grounds. Jim Crow racist ideology lost its structural supports and, therefore, eventually lost its persuasive appeal to the mass of white Americans. Whites still enjoyed a substantially greater share of economic, political, and prestige resources than African Americans, however, despite important changes in the magnitude and permeability of the color line. Furthermore, many whites perceived black demands as threatening incursions on their interests and prerogatives. Hence, in our argument, laissez-faire racist attitudes emerged to defend white privilege and explain persistent black disadvantage under sharply changed economic and political conditions. It is the sense of entitlement and threat, as delineated in Blumer's group position theory of prejudice, that we believe gives us the greatest theoretical leverage in accounting for changes in whites' racial attitudes in the United States. The full import of this position we develop below.

PATTERNS OF CHANGE IN RACIAL ATTITUDES

The longest trend data from national sample surveys may be found for racial attitude questions that deal with matters of racial principles, the implementation of those principles, and social distance preferences. Questions about principle ask whether U.S. society should be integrated or segregated and engage in equal treatment of individuals without regard to race. Such questions do not raise issues of the practical steps that might be necessary to accomplish greater integration or assure equal treatment. Implementation questions ask what actions, usually by government (and, especially, the federal government), ought to be taken to bring about integration, to prevent discrimination, and to achieve greater equality. Social distance questions ask about the individual's willingness to personally enter hypothetical contact settings in schools or neighborhoods where the proportions of blacks to whites vary from virtually all white to heavily black (Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo 1985).

The Decline of Jim Crow Racism

The gradual retreat of Jim Crow racism is seen most clearly in the trends for questions on racial principles. These types of questions provide the largest and most consistent pool of evidence on how the attitudes of white Americans toward blacks have changed. With crucial baseline surveys having been conducted in 1942, trends for most racial principle questions show a steady increase among whites in support for principles of racial integration and equality. Whereas a solid majority, 68 percent, of white Americans in 1942 favored segregated schools, only 7 percent took such a position in 1985. Similarly, 55 percent of whites surveyed in 1944 thought whites should receive preference over blacks in access to jobs, compared with only 3 percent who offered such an opinion as long ago as 1972. Indeed, so few people were willing to endorse the discriminatory response to this question on the principle of race-based job discrimination that it was dropped from national surveys after 1972. On both of these issues, then, majority endorsement of the principles of segregation and discrimination have given way to overwhelming majority support for integration and equal treatment (unless otherwise noted, all percentages are taken from Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo 1985).

This pattern of movement away from support for Jim Crow toward apparent support for racial egalitarianism holds with equal force for questions dealing with issues of residential integration, access to public transportation and public accommodations, choice among qualified candidates for political office, and even racial intermarriage. To be sure, the high absolute levels of support seen for the principles of school integration and equal access to jobs (both better than 90 percent) are not seen for

all principle-level racial attitude questions. Despite improvement from an extraordinarily low level of support in the 1950s and 1960s, survey data continue to show substantial levels of white discomfort with the prospect of interracial dating and marriage.

Opinions among whites have never been uniform or monolithic. Both historical research (Fredrickson 1971; Jordan 1968) and sociological research (Turner & Singleton 1978) have pointed to lines of cleavage and debate in whites' thinking about the place of African Americans. The survey-based literature has shown that views on issues of racial principle vary greatly by region of the country, level of education, age or generation, and other ideological factors. As might be expected, opinions in the South more lopsidedly favored segregation and discrimination at the time baseline surveys were conducted than was true outside the South. Patterns of change, save for a period of unusually rapid change in the South, have usually been parallel. The highly educated are also typically found to express greater support for principles of racial equality and integration. Indeed, one can envision a multitiered reaction to issues of racial justice. At the more progressive and liberal end, one finds college-educated whites who live outside the South. At the bottom, one finds Southern whites with the least amount of schooling (Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo 1985).

Age plays a part, as well. Younger people are usually found to express more racial tolerance than older people. Differences in average levels of education across generations as well as socialization in more tolerant times help account for this pattern (Smith 1981).

The transformation of attitudes regarding the principles that should guide black-white interaction in the more public and impersonal spheres of social life has been large and sweeping. Those living outside the South, the well educated, and younger people led the way on these changes; however, change has usually taken place within all of these categories. H. Schuman, C. Steeh, and L. Bobo characterized this change as a fundamental transformation of social norms with regard to race. Robert Blauner's (1989) in-depth interviews with blacks and whites over nearly three decades led him to reach a very similar conclusion. He wrote: "The belief in a right to dignity and fair treatment is now so widespread and deeply rooted, so self-evident that people of all colors would vigorously resist any effort to reinstate formalized discrimination. This consensus may be the most profound legacy of black militancy, one that has brought a truly radical transformation in relations between the races" (Blauner 1989, p. 317).

In short, a tremendous progressive trend has characterized whites' racial attitudes where the broad principles of integration, equality, and discrimination are concerned. Those who believe that the United States is making progress toward resolving the "American Dilemma" point to this evidence as proof that Americans have taken a decisive turn against

racism. As R. G. Niemi, J. Mueller, and T. W. Smith argue: "Without ignoring real signs of enduring racism, it is still fair to conclude that America has been successfully struggling to resolve its Dilemma and that equality has been gaining ascendancy over racism" (1989, p. 168). The potency of this trend is suggested by claims from the former Klansman, David Duke, in his failed run for the Louisiana Governor's office, that he was no longer a racist. Whether this claim is true is less important than the fact that Duke apparently felt constrained to take such a public position. In a more positive vein, the recent groundswell of support, more so among whites than blacks, for the prospect of General Colin Powell entering the 1996 presidential contest is further evidence of the reach of this change. Some ideas — state-imposed segregation, open support for antiblack discrimination, and claims that blacks are inherently inferior to whites — have fallen into profound disrepute. The reach of this change appears to include taking seriously the prospect of a black man as a presidential nominee.

Opposition to Progressive Social Policy

If trends in support for racial principles are the optimistic side of the story, then the patterns for implementation questions tell the first part of a more pessimistic story. It should be noted that efforts to assess how Americans feel about government efforts to bring about greater integration and equality or to prevent discrimination really do not arise as sustained matters of inquiry in surveys until the 1960s. To an important degree, issues of the role of government in bringing about progressive racial change could not emerge until sufficient change had taken place at the level of the basic principles involved.

There are sharp differences in level of support between racial principles and policy implementation. This is not surprising insofar as principles, viewed in isolation, need not conflict with other principles, interests, or needs that will often arise in more concrete situations. The gaps between principle and implementation, however, are large and consistent in the domain of race relations. For example, in 1964 surveys showed that 64 percent of whites nationwide supported the principle of integrated schooling; however, only 38 percent felt that the federal government had a role to play in bringing about greater integration. The gap had actually grown larger by 1986. At that time, 93 percent supported the principle, but only 26 percent endorsed government efforts to bring about school integration.

Similar patterns emerged in the areas of jobs and housing. Support for the principle of equal access to jobs stood at 97 percent in 1972. Support for federal efforts to prevent job discrimination, however, had only reached 39 percent. Likewise, in 1976, for housing, 88 percent supported

the principle that blacks have the right to live wherever they can afford; however, only 35 percent of whites said they would vote in favor of a law requiring homeowners to sell without regard to race.

There are not only sharp differences in absolute levels of support when moving from principle to implementation, but also differences in trends. Most strikingly, there is a clear divergence of trends in the domain of school integration. From 1972 to 1986, when support for the principle of integrated schooling rose from 84 percent to 93 percent, support for government efforts to bring about integration fell from 35 percent to 26 percent. It should be noted that this decline is restricted almost entirely to individuals living outside the South. Indeed, this trend reverses the multitiered tolerance effect we described earlier. By 1978, the difference in support for federal efforts to help bring about school integration between college-educated whites outside the South and Southern whites who had not completed high school was virtually zero.

Several complexities are worthy of note. A couple of implementation issues do show positive trends. The most clear-cut case involves whether the government has a role to play in assuring blacks fair access to hotels and public accommodations. This may be the only instance in which parallel questions on principle and implementation undergo roughly parallel positive change. A somewhat similar pattern occurs in the case of residential integration and support for an open housing law; however, even as recently as 1988, barely 50 percent of white Americans endorsed a law that would forbid racial discrimination in the sale or rental of housing.

Antiblack animus is not the only source of opposition to government involvement in bringing about progressive racial change. H. Schuman and L. Bobo (1988) have shown that whites are equally likely to oppose open housing laws whether the group in question is blacks, Japanese Americans, or other groups. There appears to be a real element of objection to government coercion that influences attitudes in this domain. At the same time, Schuman and Bobo (1988) also found that whites express a desire for greater social distance from blacks than they do from other groups, a pattern confirmed in other recent examinations of attitudes on racial residential integration (Bobo & Zubrinsky 1996; Zubrinsky & Bobo in press).

Level of education, region, and age typically have much less to do with who supports or opposes implementation of racial change than is true of racial principles. Weak to nonexistent effects of education and age in particular suggest that we are unlikely to see much positive change in the future on these issues.

Comparatively few trend questions speak directly to affirmative action policies. Many different questions have been asked, beginning in the mid- to late 1970s. These results point to the complexity of affirmative action policies themselves and of public response to them. Support for affirmative action varies dramatically depending on exactly which type of policy is proposed (Kluegel & Smith 1986; Lipset & Schneider 1978). Policies that aim mainly to increase the human capital attributes of blacks are comparatively popular (Bobo & Kluegel 1993). Policies that lean toward achieving equal outcomes, preferences for minorities that ignore merit considerations, as powerfully symbolized by the term "quotas," elicit high levels of opposition among whites (Bobo & Smith 1994).

CONVENTIONAL EXPLANATIONS OF THE TRENDS

Several attempts to explain change in racial attitudes can be found in the research literature. For our purposes, these attempts can largely be grouped into one of three categories: demographic lag theories, the Myrdalian guilt hypothesis, and the cultural turn against biological racism argument.

Demographic Lag

Seen in descriptive rather than explanatory terms, the progressive trend in racial attitudes can be traced to one of two sources. First, part of the rise in racial liberalism on matters of principle can be credited to cohort replacement effects. As older, less tolerant individuals fall out of the population and are replaced by younger, more tolerant individuals, a progressive trend would result. Second, part of the progressive trend can be traced to individual change. Persons who once advocated segregation and discrimination might undergo soul-searching and a change of heart, coming instead to see the case for integration and equality.

Research suggests that the process of change itself may be changing. During the 1950s and 1960s, there is evidence of both a large measure of individual change and cohort replacement contributing to change. During the 1970s, the relative balance of the two began to change to a more even mixture of the two. In addition, the distance between younger and older cohorts began to narrow, strongly suggesting that the engines of change are cooling off. Analyses by G. Firebaugh and K. E. Davis (1988) show that the mixture of cohort replacement effects and individual change is increasingly issue specific and region specific. For example, on the issue of racial intermarriage there has been no evidence of individual change between 1974 and 1984. Furthermore, most of the change seen in the South after 1974 is attributable to cohort replacement effects. Whatever the mix of forces that propelled the progressive movement in whites' attitudes on racial principle issues, it appears to be slowing, particularly in the South.

Despite these patterns there is no evidence of a broad backlash in racial attitudes. Many have expressed special concern that young adults, those who underwent critical socializing experiences during the Reagan-Bush years, are the source of a racial backlash. Work by C. Steeh and H. Schuman (1992) indicates no distinctive backward movement among younger white adults, who continue to be a bit more liberal than their immediate predecessors. What evidence there is of backward movement is quite issue specific. During the 1980s, most whites, regardless of age, became less supportive of policies seeming to call for racial preferences for minorities.

There is also little sign that whites' understanding of the causes of black-white economic inequality will change in favorable ways. How whites perceive and explain the black-white socioeconomic gap is an important input to whether they will support or oppose policies designed to improve the position of blacks (Kluegel & Smith 1982, 1986). The more individualistic the attributions made for black-white inequality (for example, blacks do not try hard enough), the less open to supporting government intervention on behalf of blacks an individual is likely to be. The more structural the attributions made for black-white economic inequality (for example, blacks face racial discrimination), the more open to supporting intervention an individual may be. As Kluegel's cohort analyses (1990) have shown, however, there has been little or no change in the denial of discrimination or in the prevailing tendency to attach individual blame for the black-white socioeconomic status gap.

These cohort studies are valuable, but they are also limited. All of these analyses of cohort replacement or individual change as sources of the sweeping increase in support for racial equality and inequality are not explanatory. The analyses provide a statistical decomposition of trends, not substantive accounts of the roots of the change.

Myrdal's Hypothesis

One possibile explanation of the change is Myrdal's (1944) guilt hypothesis. He proposed that the discomfort and internal tension created by the ever-raging conflict in the hearts of white Americans would increasingly be resolved in favor of racial equality. Any number of direct efforts to test Myrdal's hypothesis have failed. Even in the 1940s and 1950s, few whites felt that blacks were unfairly treated (Hyman & Sheatsley 1956; Williams 1964). Those who acknowledged differences in treatment were quick to offer justifications for it (Westie 1963). Even more recent and novel tests of Myrdal's idea produced no support for it (Cummings & Pinnel 1978). The empirical research literature provides no support for the Myrdalian hypothesis at the individual level.

To reject Myrdal's guilt hypothesis does not mean embracing the position that in the main, whites' racial attitudes reflect undifferentiated hostility toward blacks. First, at a societal level, the American creed was clearly an important cultural and ideological resource used by civil rights activists in the struggle for social change. In this more societal but causally delimited sense, Myrdal's analysis seems more telling. Second, an argument closely related to Myrdal's formulation can be called the ambivalence hypothesis. There is evidence of internal complexity and ambivalence in the views on race held by many white Americans. Indeed, Katz and Hass (1988) proposed that whites' racial attitudes are profoundly ambivalent, mixing both aversive and sympathetic tendencies. The inclination that predominates in thinking is a function of immediately salient contextual factors. Using college student subjects in experimental settings, Katz and colleagues have shown that contextual cues that make individualism, hard work, and self-reliance salient will also incline whites to focus on blacks' shortcomings in these areas. Contextual cues that reinforce egalitarianism and humanism, in contrast, tend to elicit a more sympathetic response to blacks.

The ambivalence theory, however, fails to specify whether there is a predominant tenor to whites' racial attitudes, nor does it well specify how these ambivalent feelings are likely to play out in concrete social settings. Perhaps most important, the theory seems unable to explain the persistent and substantial opposition to a range of social policies aimed at substantially improving the material conditions of African Americans.

The Decline of Biological Racism

A second substantive explanation of the broad progressive trend is the possibility that key beliefs in the case for racial segregation and discrimination suffered a direct cultural assault and quickly eroded. Surveys showed that popular acceptance of the belief that blacks were less intelligent than whites went into rapid decline in the post–World War II period. In 1942, 53 percent of white Americans nationwide expressed the opinion that blacks were less intelligent. By 1946 this number had declined to 43 percent, a 10-percentage-point drop in only four years. By 1956, fully 80 percent of whites nationwide rejected the idea that blacks were less intelligent; this is rapid change. It is especially telling that this change occurred well before the height of the civil rights movement and thus presumably before the larger national climate shifted decisively in favor of protecting the civil rights of African Americans.

What seemed the bedrock belief in the case for a racially segregated and discriminatory social order had undergone a precipitous drop in acceptance. Consequently, it is less surprising that support for racial segregation and discrimination in schools, in housing, and the like would

also gradually decline. Fighting a war against racism, the considerable contribution of blacks in the war effort, and the continued trend in academe away from accepting notions of biologically given and hierarchically ordered racial groupings all contributed to this process of rapid change (Bobo 1988b).

Yet, as an account of the larger progressive trend in racial attitudes, this explanation is lacking. It begs the question of why popular acceptance of biological racism, an attitude in its own right, went into decline. What is more, there are strong grounds to believe that negative stereotypes of African Americans remain widespread. In 1990 the General Social Survey employed a new set of questions intended to measure social stereotypes. Previously, the simple questions drawn from surveys first launched in the 1940s asked respondents to agree or disagree with blunt categorical statements. Now, respondents used bipolar trait-rating scales. Respondents were called upon to rate the members of several racial minority groups — blacks, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans — as to whether they tended to be rich or poor, hard working or lazy, intelligent or unintelligent, preferring to live off welfare or to be self-supporting, and so on. If a respondent wished to assert no difference between groups, he or she could do so. If an individual wanted to credit their own group with positive traits and out-groups with all negative traits, he or she could do so. Individuals could also offer more qualified views. Crucially, the format of the questions did not force one to merely accept or reject a simplistic statement. Measured in this manner, negative stereotypes of African Americans remain common among whites, and quite consensually so on some specific traits (Bobo & Kluegel 1991).

For example, some 56 percent of whites rated blacks as less intelligent than whites, using the bipolar trait-rating format (two-and-a-half times the rate suggested by older, closed-ended format survey items). Fully 78 percent rated blacks as more likely to prefer living off welfare than whites. Largely similar patterns — though not as extreme — were found in a recent survey in the Los Angeles County area (Bobo, Zubrinsky, Johnson, & Oliver 1994).

Whatever else one might say about the progressive trend in racial attitudes, it has not brought an end to negative stereotyping of African Americans. Instead, the character of the stereotypes has changed. What were once viewed as categorical differences based in biology now appear to be seen as differences in degree or tendency (Jackman & Senter 1983). Furthermore, these differences in degree appear to be understood as having largely cultural roots (Bobo 1988b). Thus, we do not accept the view of declining negative stereotypes about blacks as a crucial source of the broader shift in views on issues of racial segregation, discrimination, and the principle of equal treatment. Negative stereotypes persist.

THE EMERGENCE OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE RACISM

If these other explanations, including Myrdal's guilt hypothesis, are not convincing explanations, what then accounts for both the momentous positive changes in attitudes that occurred between the 1940s and the present and the persistence of negative stereotypes and opposition to social policies favorable to African Americans? We believe that structural changes in the U.S. economy and polity that reduced the importance of the Jim Crow system of exploited black agricultural labor to the overall economy lies at the base of the positive change in racial attitudes. In short, the structural need for Jim Crow ideology disappeared. Correspondingly, though slowly and only in response to aggressive and innovative challenge from the black civil rights movement and its allies, the political and ideological supports for Jim Crow institutions finally yielded. It is precisely the defeat of Jim Crow ideology and the political forms of its institutionalization (for example, segregated schooling and public facilities, voting hindrances) that are the principal accomplishments of the civil rights movement. The defeat of this particular form of social oppression, however, fell well short of elevating blacks to a status of genuine economic, political, and social equality.

We do not advance a purely materialistic interpretation that would, perforce, render popular racial attitudes of little social import. Such theorizing at once misunderstands the role of human agency and subjectivity and the highly contingent nature of the critical events and actions that helped to bring about the shift from Jim Crow racism to laissez-faire racism. Nor do we advance a purely ideational account of changing racial attitudes of the sort advanced in the symbolic racism research. The strictly material and the strictly psychological accounts are, we believe, needlessly extreme and flawed.

There are inevitable connections between economic and political structures, on the one hand, and patterns of individual thought and action, on the other hand. As the structural basis of longstanding group relations undergoes change, there is a corresponding potential for change in the ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that had previously been commonplace and that had wrapped group relations in a cloth of social meaning and coherence. The collapse of Jim Crow ideology was not the inevitable outcome of the related demographic and economic shifts that foreshadowed changing patterns of belief. The political defeat of Jim Crow was a hard-fought struggle that required sustained collective action; it also involved deliberate efforts to transform consciousness in both the black and white communities.

Our analysis of the sources of change in racial attitudes rests principally on three important sociological works analyzing the emergence, dynamics, and impact of the civil rights movement. D. McAdam's book,

Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970 (1982), provides a rich analysis of how socioeconomic and demographic shifts fundamentally altered the level of power resources of the black community. Aldon Morris's *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (1984) reveals in detail the internal organizational dimensions of strategies used by black communities and leadership as they mobilized the growing resource base in their own communities for political and economic gain. J. M. Bloom's book *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (1987) helps pinpoint the great success of the civil rights movement as the political defeat of the old planter aristocracy, whose economic fortunes were most dependent on the Jim Crow strictures that had locked many blacks in a condition of poverty and agricultural labor. Taken together, these works provide a rich sociological analysis of how the interweaving of the economy and polity resulted in changes in the status of blacks and set the stage for the emergence of a new U.S. ideology on race.

Growing Power Resources in Black Communities

As long as blacks remained a heavily oppressed, poorly educated, Southern and rural labor force, they were unlikely to be able to mount effective political resistance to the Jim Crow social order. According to McAdam, four factors presage the emergence of a sustained and potent civil rights movement. A series of reinforcing economic and demographic changes led to expanded political opportunities for blacks. These transformations increased the potential within black communities to develop stronger indigenous organizations. When coupled with a more receptive political climate at the national level in the post–World War II period, a major transformation of political consciousness within the black population took shape. The end result was a sustained and effective movement of protest for social change.

During the Jim Crow era, core institutions of the black community that would later become engines of the civil rights movement — the black church, black colleges and universities, and organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) — were fledgling versions of what they would become. From roughly 1880 through 1930, not only did the black church espouse an other-worldly theology of waiting for better treatment in the afterlife, but also black congregations tended to be small, the churches were financially strapped, and ministers were often poorly educated. Black colleges at the time were sorely underfunded, providing little more than a high school–equivalent education. The NAACP, founded in 1909–10, was principally a Northern organization, still crafting its long-term legal strategy for change.

The position of blacks as an impoverished and heavily oppressed agricultural labor force began to shift decisively with the decline of "King Cotton." Increasing foreign competition, the introduction of new technologies and of synthetic fibers, the boll-weevil infestation, and the declining centrality of cotton to the U.S. export economy began to push more and more blacks away from the rural South in order to earn a living.

According to McAdam, "the factor most responsible for undermining the political conditions that, at the turn of century, had relegated blacks to a position of political impotence . . . would have to be the gradual collapse of cotton as the backbone of the southern economy" (1982, p. 73). When measured by the amount of cotton acreage harvested and the average seasonal price of cotton per pound, the decline in cotton as the backbone of Southern economy was enormous. The price of raw cotton took a nosedive "from a high of 35 cents per pound in 1919 to less than 6 cents in 1931" (McAdam 1982, p. 75). From 1931 to 1955, the price of raw cotton actually rose; yet during this same period, in an attempt to increase the demand for cotton, the total amount of cotton harvested significantly decreased.

In addition, with World War I and the cessation of heavy European immigration, there was a growing need for black labor in the industrial North. The combination of these and other forces led to one of the greatest internal migrations of all time. Upwards of 200,000 blacks migrated to the North in the first decade of the century, while the next decade saw the largest black outmigration at more than 500,000 (McAdam 1982, p. 74). The migration of blacks reduced the number of Southern black farm operators. From a high of slightly more than 915,000 in 1920, the number of black farm operators plummeted to a low of 267,000 by 1959 (McAdam 1982, p. 95). Blacks thus shifted from a largely rural and Southern population to a heavily urban and increasingly Northern population.

These changes had the concomitant effect of altering the resource base of critical black institutions, such as the church, black colleges and universities, and the NAACP. The rise in the numbers of blacks in urban settings had the effect of increasing black economic resources while reducing the level of intimidation and violence used to repress blacks. Urban black church congregations tended to be much larger and to have more substantial financial support, which facilitated the hiring of better trained and better educated ministers. These forces, coupled with greater political latitude afforded blacks in urban settings, contributed to a shift in the theological emphasis within many black churches toward an increasing concern for justice in the here and now.

The growing success of the NAACP legal strategy, which initially sought to force Southern states to live up to the doctrine of separate but equal, had led to important increases in the resource base at many historically black colleges and universities. Thus, more blacks began to receive

better college-level educations. In addition, the number and size of NAACP chapters in Southern states rose as the number of blacks in the urban South rose. In sum, formidable changes in the power resources within black communities took place, particularly between the early 1900s and the early 1950s. The economic footing of black communities improved. The institutional base for political action also increased dramatically.

Mobilizing Black Power Resources for Change

Morris carefully documents the patterns of social networks and organization-building that existed in black communities. For example, he shows the lines of communication between the new, better educated group of black ministers, epitomized by Rev. Martin Luther King. Morris also reviews the high level of internal financing that supported organizations such as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which directed the historic 1955–56 bus boycott. Internal networks, a new indigenous leadership cadre, and internal financial support were essential to the type of local movement center, such as the MIA, that became a politicized umbrella organization linking a number of black ministers and their congregations. Morris points, moreover, to the mass base of the protest movement that King came to spearhead and the extent to which targeted nonviolent social protest became a genuine power resource in the struggle for racial change. Critically, Morris documents how the increasing persecution directed at the NAACP in much of the South impelled the development of new organizational forms such as the MIA and, subsequently, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Where McAdam identifies the broad demographic and economic trends affecting black institutions, Morris shows how these increasing power resources were translated into concrete organization-building and sustained, effective mass protest at the grassroots level within black communities.

The ability to mount effective campaigns at the grassroots level within Southern black communities reached its pinnacle after the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955. The boycott gave blacks a sense that they could effect political change through actions directed by preexisting black institutions and community organizations. According to Morris: "The Montgomery bus boycott was the watershed. The importance of that boycott was that it revealed to the black community that mass protests could be successfully organized and initiated through indigenous resources and institutions" (1981, p. 751).

Morris's discussion of the emergence and rapid spread of the sit-in strategy in the South during the late 1950s and early 1960s provides a clear picture of the intricate and deliberate formation of black political networks. Dispelling myths that the sit-in tactic was an entirely spontaneous, student-run operation that originated in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960, Morris shows how such efforts actually grew out of preexisting institutions and organizations such as the black church. As such, they drew on both veteran civil rights workers and student members.

Included in this new alliance were a host of black colleges, fraternities, and sororities. The emergence and proliferation of the sit-in movement involved interaction between black colleges and local movement centers often based in the church. Many of the student leaders were also church members and had learned about the civil rights movement and the tactic of nonviolent protest from their local churches even before sit-ins were instituted as a protest strategy. Thus, the organizational base to launch and coordinate sit-ins stemmed from the church — with black college students, through their fraternities and sororities, serving as the foot soldiers.

The actual organization, financing, and spread of the sit-in clusters followed an elaborate pattern of coordination among a variety of groups. Morris provides a vivid description of the sequence:

> Organizers from SCLC, NAACP and CORE raced between sit-in points relaying valuable information. Telephone lines and the community "grapevine" sent forth protest instructions and plans. These clusters were the sites of numerous midday and late night meetings where the black community assembled in the churches, filled the collection plates, and vowed to mortgage their homes to raise the necessary bail-bond money in case the protesting students were jailed. Black lawyers pledged their legal services to the movement and black physicians made their services available to injured demonstrators. Amidst these exciting scenes, black spirituals calmed and deepened the participants' commitment. (Morris 1981, p. 759)

Throughout the South, activities such as these served to create, sustain, and project the new-found power of a grassroots, church-based movement designed to dramatize and change the second-class citizenship status of African Americans.

Defeating Jim Crow

To this picture, Bloom (1987) adds critical information concerning the old white planter aristocracy. He maintains that the principal political accomplishment of the civil rights movements was the defeat of the power of the old planter elite. This group benefited most directly from Jim Crow ideology and practices and were the central actors in the erection of Jim Crow social arrangements. Correspondingly, it was this group that played a pivotal role in first launching the White Citizens Councils (WCCs) in the wake of the NAACP's legal success in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. As Bloom explains:

> The impetus, the organization, the leadership, and the control of this movement rested in the hands of the traditional black-belt ruling class that had emerged after Reconstruction. That class was still centered in the black belt, though in most cases now in small towns. Its members were businessmen and bankers in these areas, as well as merchants and landlords. . . . It was the old Southern ruling class that set state policy. It was, moreover, the Deep South states of Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and South Carolina that, in addition to Virginia made up the core of the resistance. In these states the old Southern ruling class remained the strongest. In almost every single case where the White Citizens Council emerged, they were led and organized from the black belt. (1987, pp. 101–102)

It was this old planter elite, still heavily located in cotton-producing black-belt areas, that most depended on the Jim Crow social order for their livelihoods. As such, leadership of the WCCs was often drawn from the upper classes. The WCCs drew their leadership "primarily from the ranks of the white community's business, political, and social leadership. . . . These are the same people who made up the 'courthouse cliques' that ran the South, the 'banker-merchant-farmer-lawyer-doctor-governing class'" (Bloom 1987, p. 102).

The WCCs directed both economic and political intimidation at blacks who attempted to challenge their subordinate status. Indeed, although the leaders of the WCC were drawn from the ranks of the most respected leaders of the South, they were not above committing or sanctioning acts of violence against blacks to protect their interests. Although violence against blacks was more frequent in an earlier era and more commonly associated with the tactics used by the Ku Klux Klan, subsequent to the Brown decision, violence against blacks on the part of the WCCs became an effective tool, particularly in discouraging blacks from voting. Murders sprang up all over the South, most noticeably in places such as Mississippi, with the effect of causing terror in blacks throughout the region. After economic pressures failed, for example, a leader of the NAACP was wounded by a shotgun for not giving up his right to vote; a black minister who promoted black voting was murdered; and a black political leader who sought to teach blacks how to vote by absentee ballot to avoid violence at the polling booth was murdered. Perhaps the most noteworthy case was the murder of Emmit Till, the 14-year-old boy who was "kidnapped from his grandfather's home in the middle of the night, pistol whipped, stripped naked, shot through the head with a .45 caliber Colt automatic, barb-wired to a 74 pound cotton gin fan, and dumped into twenty feet of water in the Tallahatchie River" for having reportedly "wolf-whistled" at a white woman (Bloom 1987, p. 101).

Such extreme acts of violence meant that the eventual dismantling of Jim Crow loomed large in the minds of many whites. In desperation, some whites embarked upon a campaign of terror. As Bloom explains:

"These killings, by no means the only ones, were acts of terror designed to force blacks back into their place. They were part of the larger process of violence and intimidation in that period" (1987, p. 101). One study reported that upwards of 530 cases of murder against blacks occurred within a three-year period, between 1955 and 1958. The major effect of such terror was a precipitous drop in registered black voters throughout the South. For example, in Mississippi, prior to the Brown decision, "there had been 265 registered black voters in three black belt counties . . . by later summer in 1955 there were only 90. In the whole state the number of black voters declined from 22,000 to only 8,000 between 1952 and 1956" (Bloom 1987, p. 101).

The efforts of the WCCs and others committed to the Jim Crow social order did not succeed. The civil rights movement achieved pivotal victories — victories that crushed the institutionalized basis of the Jim Crow South. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Jim Crow social order, the political power of the older planter elite, and the arrangements they had created lay in ruins.

The Link to Mass Racial Attitudes

The declining importance of cotton to the larger U.S. economy and as a source of livelihood for blacks opened the door to tremendous economic and, ultimately, political opportunity for African Americans. These opportunities — stronger churches, colleges and universities, and political organizations — produced a sustained movement of protest for racial justice. The movement and the organizations it created had indigenous leadership, financing, and a genuine mass base of support. Through creative, carefully designed, and sustained social protest, this movement successfully toppled a distinct, epochal form of racial oppression; a system of oppression of African Americans that was no longer essential to the interests and needs of a broad range of U.S. political and economic elites.

Quite naturally then, widespread cultural attitudes endorsing elements of the Jim Crow social order began to atrophy and decay under a relentless attack by blacks and their white allies. Segregationist positions were under steady assault and increasingly lacked strong allies. We suggest the end product of these forces, the decline of Jim Crow racism, is seen in the broad pattern of improvement in the racial attitudes of whites in the United States. Public opinion shifted decisively against the principles of segregation, antiblack discrimination, and the bedrock premise of the Jim Crow social order that blacks were the innate intellectual inferiors of whites.

Although monumental accomplishments, the Brown decision, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 primarily secured

the basic citizenship rights of African Americans. The successes of the civil rights movement did not end racialized social identities among black or white Americans (Sheatsley 1966); they did not eradicate sharp black-white differences in social and economic status (Duncan 1968; Lieberson & Fuguitt 1967; Siegel 1970); and they did not undo nationwide patterns of racial residential segregation (Taeuber & Taeuber 1965). That is, the enormous and far-reaching gains of the civil rights movement did not eliminate stark patterns of racial domination and inequality that existed above, beyond, and irrespective of the specific dictates of the distinctly Southern Jim Crow system.

In the wake of the collapse of Jim Crow social arrangements and ideology, the new ideology of laissez-faire racism began to take shape. This new ideology concedes basic citizenship rights to African Americans; however, it takes as legitimate extant patterns of black-white socioeconomic inequality and residential segregation, viewing these conditions, as it does, not as the deliberate products of racial discrimination, but as outcomes of a free-market, race-neutral state apparatus and the freely taken actions of African Americans themselves.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE RACISM AND THE SENSE OF GROUP POSITION

This analysis casts studies of racial attitudes in a different light. Students of prejudice and racial attitudes may have misunderstood the real object of racial attitudes. The attitude object, or perceptual focus, is not really the social category of blacks or whites; it is not neighborhoods or schools of varying degrees of racial mixture. Instead, as Herbert Blumer (1958) argued, the real object of prejudice — what we really tap with attitude questions in surveys — is beliefs about the proper relation between groups. The real attitude object is relative group positions. This attitude of sense of group position is historically and culturally rooted, socially learned, and modifiable in response to new information, events, or structural conditions, as long as these factors contribute to or shape contexts for social interaction among members of different groups.

Attitudes toward integration or toward blacks are, fundamentally, statements about preferred positional relations among racial groups. They are not simply or even mainly emotional reactions to groups, group symbols, or situations. Nor are they best understood as statements of simple feelings of like or dislike toward minority groups and their members, although certain measurement approaches may fruitfully aim at such specific constructs. Nor, in addition, are they simply perceptions of group traits and dispositions, although stereotypes are also key dimensions of prejudice. Racial attitudes capture aspects of the preferred group positions and those patterns of belief and feeling that undergird, justify, and make understandable a preference for relatively little group differentiation and inequality under some social conditions, or for a great deal of differentiation and inequality under others.

By this logic, decreasing advocacy of the principle of segregated schooling does not mean a desire for greater contact with blacks or even a positive value attached to integrated education. From the vantage point of group position theory, it means declining insistence on forced group inequality in educational institutions. Declining support for segregated public transportation does not signal a desire for more opportunities to interact with blacks on buses, trains, and the like. Instead, it means a declining insistence on compulsory inequality in group access to this domain of social life.

Under the group position theory, change in political and economic regularities of social life decisively shape the socially constructed and shared sense of group position. The sources of change in attitudes — changes in preferred group positions — are not found principally in changing feelings of like and dislike. Changes in the patterns of mass attitudes reflect changes in the social structurally based, interactively defined and understood, needs and interests of social groups (Bobo & Hutchings 1996). To put it differently, in order to have meaning, longevity, and force in people's everyday lives, the attitudes held by individuals must be linked to the organized modes of living in which people are embedded (Rabb & Lispet 1962). As such, the demand for segregated transportation, segregated hotels, and blanket labor market discrimination increasingly ring hollow under an economy and polity that has less and less need — in fact may be incurring heavy costs — as a result of the presence of a super-exploited, racially identifiable labor pool. When the economic and political needs of a significant segment of a dominant racial group no longer hinge upon a sharp caste system for effective reproduction of the advantages of race for members of that dominant group, then the permeative acceptance and effects of that ideology will weaken and take new form.

A key link between changing structural conditions and the attitudes of the mass public are those significant social actors who articulate, and frequently clash over and debate, the need for new modes of social organization (Blumer 1958). The claims and objectives of the visible leadership elements of groups presumably spring from their conceptions of the identities, interests, opportunities, resources, and needs of the group at a particular time. That is, the direction and tenor of change are shaped in the larger public sphere of clash, debate, political mobilization, and struggle.

In that regard, following on the heels of the Reagan-Bush years, the new system and ideology of laissez-faire racism would now appear to be crystallizing. Although a full analysis of the current political context is beyond the scope of this paper, it is evident that the assault on affirmative action policies has intensified. The University of California Regents voted

to eliminate their affirmative action efforts. Predictions are that this will result in a reduction in African-American and Latino undergraduate enrollments anywhere from a minimum of 50 percent to possibly as high as 80 percent. The effect on law school enrollments has been especially severe. The number of black students admitted to the UCLA law school declined by 80 percent, falling from 104 in the 1996–97 school year to just 21 for the 1997–98 school year. A similar decline ws recorded at UC-Berkeley, where black law school admissions fell from 75 students to 14 (Weiss 1997). After a highly racially polarized campaign, voters in California passed the California Civil Rights initiative effectively banning all affirmative action efforts by elements of state government. Parenthetically, these transformations immediately make it clear that there are real group and individual interests at stake in the politics of affirmative action, not merely symbolic resentments as some would maintain. Even a Democratic president, elected with substantial black support, has called for a reevaluation of and reduction in affirmative action commitments. Supreme Court rulings and other actions taken by the Republican-dominated Congress may soon reduce the number of blacks holding congressional seats. Funding for the Congressional Black Caucus has been eliminated. Fundamental reductions in the range of welfare state commitments are on the agenda of the new Congress. All of these events tend to signal the consolidation of a new understanding about race relations. We believe this new understanding is aptly described as laissez-faire racism because it stands in the face of substantial and widening racial economic inequalities, high levels of racial residential segregation, and persistent discrimination experienced across class lines in the black community.

CONCLUSIONS

The long and unabated record of sweeping change in racial attitudes that national surveys document cannot be read as a fundamental breakdown in racialized thinking or in antiblack prejudice. We have witnessed the disappearance of a racial ideology appropriate to an old social order: that of the Jim Crow post–Civil War South. A new and resilient laissez-faire racism ideology has emerged and has apparently begun to crystallize.

Jim Crow racism went into decline, in part, because of a direct and potent assault on it by the civil rights movement. Jim Crow practices and ideology were made vulnerable by an interlocking series of social changes — the declining importance of cotton production to the U.S. economy, limited immigration from Europe, black migration to urban and Northern areas — all of which dramatically increased the power resources available to black communities. The economic basis for Jim Crow had been weakened. Its political underpinnings were gradually undone by the Brown

decision, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and other political successes of the civil rights movement.

Because racial attitudes reflect the structural conditions of group life (Rabb & Lipset 1962), it is no surprise that Jim Crow attitudes in the mass public — such as near-consensus support for strict segregation and open discrimination — all premised on the assumed biological inferiority of blacks, would eventually and steadily ebb in popular acceptance. Jim Crow racism was no longer embedded in U.S. economic or political institutions with the centrality that it had once enjoyed. In response to the challenge posed by the civil rights movement and its allies, most of the ideological tenets of Jim Crow racism came to be widely understood as inconsistent with U.S. values.

African Americans, however, remain economically disadvantaged and racially segregated despite growing class heterogeneity within the black community and despite the successes of the civil rights movement. These social conditions continue to prompt many white Americans to feel both morally offended and apprehensive about losing something tangible if strong efforts are made to improve the living conditions of African Americans (Bobo 1983, 1988b). Furthermore, sharp black-white economic inequality and residential segregation provide the kernel of truth needed to regularly breathe new life into old stereotypes about putative black proclivities toward involvement in crime, violence, and welfare dependency. Viewed in this light, the gap between increasingly egalitarian racial principles and resistance to strong forms of affirmative action are not paradoxical at all. Both are the result of changes in U.S. social structure and politics that at once successfully deposed Jim Crow institutions but simultaneously left much of the black population in a uniquely disadvantaged position.

The end product of these conditions and processes is the emergence of a new racialized social order under a new racial ideology: laissez-faire racism. Under this regime, blacks are still stereotyped and blamed as the architects of their own disadvantaged status. The deeply entrenched pattern of denying societal responsibility for conditions in many black communities continues to foster steadfast opposition to affirmative action and other social policies that might alleviate race-based inequalities. In short, a large number of white Americans have become comfortable with as much racial inequality and segregation as a putatively nondiscriminatory polity and free market economy can produce: hence the reproduction and, on some dimensions, the worsening of racial inequalities. These circumstances are rendered culturally palatable by the new ideology of laissez-faire racism.

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II

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