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UNDERSTANDING AMERICA

THE ANATOMY OF AN
EXCEPTIONAL NATION

PETER H. SCHUCK AND
JAMES Q. WILSON, EDITORS



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*To the memory of Nelson Polsby:
a seminal scholar, renowned teacher,
and cherished friend*

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CHAPTER 13

Black Americans

Orlando Patterson

As sociologist Orlando Patterson explains, the history of American race relations is filled with paradox: a Declaration of Independence that proclaimed equality, a Constitution that condoned slavery, a Civil War waged to end it, a long period of legally and socially enforced segregation, and a civil rights movement that repudiated this segregation and extended the equality principle to many groups other than blacks. Patterson brings an immense body of data and analysis to bear in chronicling the enormous progress that has been made by blacks in almost every area of American life as well as the difficult challenges—in terms of family breakdown, dysfunctional attitudes among many inner-city youths, social isolation, and educational deficits—that remain if they are to take advantage of the expanded opportunities available for the upwardly mobile.

NO AREA OF AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE IS MORE EASILY misunderstood than the condition of blacks, and more generally, the nation's ethno-racial relations and policies. American history is a record of extreme oppression and near extermination of non-white peoples, yet also one of extraordinary effort and sacrifice on behalf of blacks, including a civil war in which thousands of non-blacks died. The American Declaration of Independence extolled the virtues of equality, yet its Constitution condoned slavery.

These paradoxes persist today. The civil rights movement and subsequent policies aimed at socioeconomic reform have resulted in

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the largest group of middle-class and elite blacks in the world, several of them leading some of the most powerful corporations in the nation and the world; yet the bottom fifth of the black population is among the poorest in the nation and, as Hurricane Katrina exposed, often live in abysmal third world conditions. Politically, blacks are a powerful presence and the most loyal members of one of the nation's two leading parties; yet, "race" still remains a central component of American politics and sustains its most fundamental regional and ideological alignments. Blacks have a disproportionate impact on the nation's culture—both popular and elite—yet continue to face major problems in the educational system and are badly underrepresented in its scientific and high-end technology. And although legalized segregation has long been abolished and antiexclusionary laws strictly enforced, the great majority of blacks still live in highly segregated communities. It is a record of remarkable successes, mixed achievements, and major failures. Trying to make sense of them is a formidable challenge to American social scientists and other analysts.

Defining Ethno-Racial America

Who are black Americans, how many of them are there, and where do they live? Answering these seemingly simple questions illustrates the perplexities and contradictions of ethno-racial relations in America. Ethno-racial classification and counts is the joint product of the U.S. Census Bureau's disturbingly named "Department of Racial Statistics" and of the policy analysts and activist groups who wish to challenge the department's prevailing classification. The government lists numerous ethnic groups that are supposed to belong to five "races": White or Caucasian; Black or African-American; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander. In addition, the officially designated pan-ethnic category of Hispanic Americans or Latinos adds that "Hispanics can be of any racial group."

There is no sociological, anthropological, or logical foundation whatsoever for this classification, which David Hollinger has dubbed the "ethno-racial pentagon." Asian Americans and Hispanics are both clearly pan-ethnic groups embracing a vast array of distinct ancestry groups. Ethnically, the Japanese have nothing in common with South Asian Tamils, Laotian Hmong hill people, or the Ifugao people from the Philippines, but once they land in America they all become members of the Asian American "race." Similarly, American-born Puerto Ricans in New York, Mexican farm workers in Texas and California, and professionals from Argentina and Chile share little, except that their ancestors were once part of the Spanish empire and spoke a common imperial language, but the same is true of English, Irish, Barbadian, Jamaican, and Ghanaian immigrants who do not thereby constitute a "race." Stranger still is the department's insistence that although Asian Americans are a "race," Hispanics "can be of any racial group." Why does Asian regional origin constitute a "race," but Latin American does not, given that the former exhibits, if anything, greater somatic and cultural variation? One may speculate that the presence of blacks in Latin America, and their absence from the Asian mix, partly explains the difference in treatment.

To complicate matters further, the department, under pressure from "mixed race" Americans, a small but growing and vocal group, recently discarded centuries of official views on racial purity in allowing Americans not only to self-identify their "race" but to choose as many races as they pleased. The second of these innovations created a nightmare for demographers and sociologists. For, as Table 13.1 indicates, there are now six different ways of identifying and counting blacks, as well as the four other "racial" populations in America, yielding a total of thirty racial categories! Thus, one may refer to the "Black or African-American alone," population, of whom there are 37.5 million. There is the "Black or African-American in combination" population, meaning people who listed themselves as black as well as one or more other "races," which results in the

largest population count and is strongly favored by black leaders. Third, there is the category of blacks who are not Hispanic or Latino. The "Not Hispanic" category exists mainly to distinguish traditional, mainstream whites of European ancestry from people designating themselves white who come from Latin America. Just why this distinction is needed is not entirely clear, unless some notion of the "truly white" still lingers from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the poverty and low status occupations of groups such as the Irish and southern Europeans made their claim to whiteness suspect.

The 2000 Census aroused much commentary on two apparent developments: that blacks had been displaced as the nation's largest

Table 13.1 Census Bureau's "Racial" Classification of the U.S. Population, 2004

Characteristics	Number (1,000)	% Total	% Change 2000–2004
TOTAL POPULATION	299,655	100	4.3
ONE RACE	299,217	99.85	4.2
White alone	236,058	78.8	2.5
Black or African American alone	37,502	12.5	5.0
American Indian or Alaska native	2,825	.94	6.0
Asian alone	12,826	4.3	16.0
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	506	.17	9.3
TWO OR MORE RACES	4,439	1.48	19.9
<i>Race Alone or in Combination</i>			
White	239,880	80.0	2.6
Black or African American	39,232	13.1	5.7
American Indian or Alaska native	4,409	1.49	4.4
Asian	13,957	4.65	16.2
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	976	.325	7.7
Race, Not Hispanic or Latino	252,898	84.4	2.5
ONE RACE	249,478	83.25	2.4
White alone	197,841	65.02	1.2
Black or African American alone	35,964	12.0	4.9
American Indian or Alaska native	2,207	.73	5.2
Asian alone	12,069	4.02	16.5
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	398	.13	8.5

Table 13.1 Continued

Characteristics	Number (1,000)	% Total	% Change 2000–2004
TWO OR MORE RACES	3,855	1.3	13.2
<i>Race Alone or in Combination</i>			
White	201,148	67.12	1.3
Black or African American	37,428	12.5	5.4
American Indian or Alaska native	3,574	1.2	3.4
Asian	13,580	4.53	16.3
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island	808	.27	6.8
Race, Hispanic or Latino	41,322	13.78	17.0
ONE RACE	40,739	13.6	17.0
White alone	38,217	12.75	17.5
Black or African American alone	1,539	.51	10.6
American Indian or Alaska native	618	.14	9.1
Asian alone	258		10.9
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	107		12.8
TWO OR MORE RACES	583	.19	18.7
<i>Race Alone or in Combination</i>			
White	38,732	12.9	17.5
Black or African American	1,806	.60	12.5
American Indian or Alaska native	835	.27	8.6
Asian	427	.14	13.8
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island	174	.05	12.0

SOURCE: Adapted from U.S. Census Bureau. *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2006. Table 13.

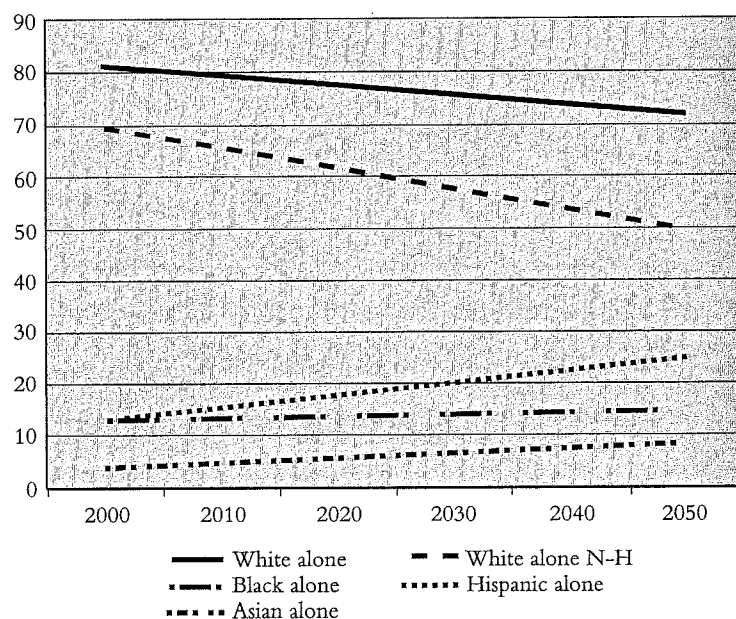
minority group by so-called Hispanics, and that the non-Hispanic white population was in sharp decline, with America well on the way to becoming a "majority-minority" nation. Thus, the Census Bureau recently announced that Texas had just joined California, Hawaii, and New Mexico as "majority-minority" states and that five other states, including Georgia and New York, were "next in line."¹

These claims are sociologically suspect and politically mischievous. Blacks and Hispanics are not comparable. Hispanics, as just noted, constitute a cluster of very varied peoples whom certain ethnic leaders, for political and economic reasons, are trying hard to construct as a single ethnic group. Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Guatemalans are distinct ethnic groups with very

different identities, socioeconomic statuses, and priorities. Blacks remain by far the nation's largest genuinely ethnic group.

The view that America is fast becoming a nation of ethno-racial minorities only makes sense if we insist on considering current non-Hispanic whites as the only mainstream whites of the future. In fact, as Figure 13.1 shows, the population that considers itself white is growing in absolute terms due to the massive infusion of white-identified people from the Hispanic cluster and is declining very slowly as a percent of the total population. In 2050, over 74 percent of the total population will still be white-identified. Given the high intermarriage rate of whites of the Hispanic cluster with non-Hispanic whites, and the strong tendency of the progeny of such unions to shed any Hispanic identity that leaders of their parents' generation attempt to impose on them, the native white population

Figure 13.1 Projected U.S. Population by Ethnicity: 2000–2050



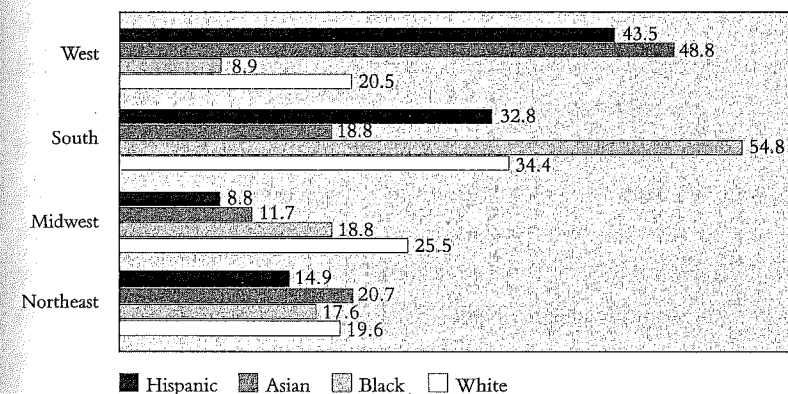
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004. "U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin," Internet release date: March 18, 2004.

is very unlikely to dip below 70 percent at any time during this century, and its share may well begin to rise again after 2050.

Second, the different groups are geographically dispersed. The current wave of immigrants and their children is concentrated in only a few gateway metropolitan areas of certain regions, and the black population has a distinctive regional distribution. Figure 13.2 shows that the great majority of Hispanic and Asian ethnic groups are located in the West and South of the country. While blacks are still disproportionately located in the South, the proportion that does has declined dramatically since the start of the twentieth century when 90 percent of blacks were still living in the South.

The northern migration entailed more than a south-to-north transition; it was also largely a change from rural sharecropping or impoverished own-account farming to urban proletariat life. Indeed, the urbanization of the black population and its concentration into urban ghettos—which also occurred in the South—was as important as the regional change. As late as 1940, over a half of the black population was still rural (52.4 percent); within a decade, 62 percent was urban, and by 1960 nearly three in every four. The 1960s, however, marked the end of the migration out of the South,

Figure 13.2 Region of Residence by Ethnicity and Hispanic Cluster, 2000



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, "Demographic Profiles, Census 2000."

followed by a reversal of the flow as blacks began to move back to the South. This "new great migration," as it has been called, has accelerated; between 1995 and 2000, a net flow of 346,546 blacks went south. The South—especially the newly industrialized and expanding metropolitan areas of southern states such as Georgia, North Carolina, Florida, Texas, and Virginia—gained blacks from all other regions of the country but especially from the northeastern metropolitan regions. College-educated blacks led this reverse migration, the direct opposite of the earlier migration north, when the migrants were typically less educated than blacks already in the North. The present southern flow has expanded the black middle class, who now find greater economic opportunities and a more congenial cultural and social climate in the growth centers of the South and Southwest. And because this reverse flow is urban to urban, the highly urbanized location of the black population persists.

We should view the projected leveling off of the black population at between 14 and 15 percent of the total American population within this demographic context. It means that blacks will remain by far America's largest meaningful minority ethnic group for the foreseeable future.

The Historical Background

Between the late fifteenth and late nineteenth centuries, some 9.9 million Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the Americas, of whom less than 10 percent went to what became the United States. Comparing enslavement in Latin America, the West European systems of the Caribbean, and the United States, the latter had the most distinctive system.

First, the United States had a large resident Euro-American population, which, with the exception of the Carolinas up to the end of the eighteenth century, greatly outnumbered the slave population. Second, American slavery's greatest period of expansion—prompted by the cotton-based system of the deep South—came after external sources of slave supply were cut off in 1808. Relatedly,

it was one of the few large-scale slave societies in world history in which the slave population reproduced itself. From the first half of the eighteenth century, native blacks outnumbered African newcomers, and blacks are among the earliest post-Columbian populations of the United States. Finally, the United States is distinctive in the severity of its restriction of manumission and its hostility toward those few slaves who managed to gain their freedom.

The most important common consequence of slavery was the experience of racism: the deeply held prejudice that people of African and slave ancestry were genetically inferior and could be justifiably discriminated against in economic and social life. A second major feature of slavery was the natal alienation of the slave, the view that they were deracinated persons with no civic existence. This engendered among non-blacks the ingrained view of blacks as people who did not belong to the society at large, only to individuals and private estates. That view was to persist, with devastating consequences, long after the formal abolition of slavery.

Another deleterious consequence of slavery is often overlooked: the fact that slaves could not own property—were themselves property owned by others—meant that the vast majority of them could never accumulate and pass on property to their descendants. Closely linked to the absence of material capital was the lack of accumulated mainstream cultural, including technical, resources. Slaves were very carefully screened off from all the advanced cultural resources of Western culture, the most important being the capacity to read and write. In several of the slave states, slaves were taught some of the more basic technical skills, but even this was not allowed to be passed on: one of the cruelest developments in postemancipation America was the often violent exclusion of skilled ex-slaves by working-class whites, many of them recent immigrants, and their associations. By the closing years of the nineteenth century, there were fewer skilled blacks than existed during the days of slavery.

Slavery also had certain devastating internal social consequences. The most important of these was the way it violated and distorted

familial and gender relations throughout the Americas. The slave master encouraged the development of reproductive units and these have misled a whole generation of revisionist historians in America to the view that stable families existed under slavery. This is a historiographic travesty.² More recent scholarship has reemphasized the continuities between slavery and the fraught gender relations and fragile familial ties that have plagued black life to this day.

Finally, there was the tragic level of personal distrust that slavery created. It takes little imagination to understand how a slave population would come to view the slaveholding racial group with deep suspicion. Sadly, however, this distrust was directed also at fellow blacks and especially in male-female relationships. This lingers today in the fact that, by any measure, blacks express the lowest levels of trust in other persons and institutions of all ethnic groups.

The exclusion of blacks from the advanced and more public institutions of white society did have one major unintended effect that must surely rank as one of the great ironies of American civilization. This is the fact that blacks, drawing on their own invented resources, on those African cultural traditions that survived the middle passage and plantation life, and on those expressive and intimate areas of white cultures that they were exposed to, ended up creating one of the greatest, and perhaps the most distinctively American cultural traditions on the continent. Indeed, to the degree that America has a folk culture, it is that created by blacks, since all the other competing folk traditions—Appalachian, Cajun, Tejano, Chicano, Mountain, Okie, whatever—are either too local, too recent, or still too infused with their provenance to make such a claim.

Between Farm and City

Unlike other slave systems in the Americas, U.S. slavery only ended after a savage civil war which engendered deep bitterness in the Caucasian population that was taken out on the ex-slaves. Indeed, what emerged in the United States was a neo-doulotic sys-

tem in which the personal ownership of the master was ended but the culture of slavery persisted. The withdrawal of northern military presence after Reconstruction resulted in a seventy-five-year disaster: a vicious system of terror during which some five thousand African-Americans were slaughtered, many of them ritually burnt alive.³

As was untrue for Latin America, there emerged in the United States a binary conception of "race" more commonly known as the one-drop rule: the classification of all persons either as "white" or "black," including in the latter category all persons with any known African ancestry, however somatically light-skinned they may be. Although originally motivated by notions of racial purity, both blacks and whites came to accept this binary system, which, ironically, later worked to the benefit of blacks since it has forced successful blacks who looked Caucasian, and who in Latin America would have been defined out of the group, to identify with blacks and provide them with leadership. In Latin America, which recognizes a continuum between white and black, poverty integrates, while in North America it segregates. Above the middle classes of Latin America, however, there is a sharply demarcated ceiling, and elites are now far more exclusively white and racist than those of the United States, propagandistic talk of racial democracy notwithstanding.

The period between the end of Reconstruction and World War II witnessed important developments in black life, in spite of the unrelenting tyranny of the Jim Crow system and the hostility of northern labor and political elites. In the South, communities consolidated and various kinds of proto-political activities developed, ranging from the shrewd accommodationism of Booker T. Washington that shrouded a subversive cultivation of black pride and self-help, to the emigrationist or separatist nationalism of those who had given up on America. In the North, the emergence and growth of the NAACP laid the foundation of the biracial coalition that was to transform national politics later in the century. And the separatist Universal Negro Improvement Association, led by the Jamaican

back-to-Africa nationalist, Marcus Garvey, initiated the first mass movement of urban blacks, with surprising links to the rural South. In New York, more conservative West Indians—the generation that nurtured Colin Powell—paved the way in urban coalition politics. It is, nonetheless, an exaggeration to rebrand the subaltern and highly localized coalitions, solidarities, rumors, church meetings, and kin-based networks of the rural South as elements of a major political process that “decisively shaped the South and the nation,” as some revisionist historians have attempted.⁴

Politically thwarted by the violent white majority and a compliant judicial system, blacks turned their creative energies instead toward the cultural and spiritual arenas, with truly remarkable results. Within a half century, they had generated major cultural genres in music, folk arts, and dance and, as a growing body of cultural research indicates, had inaugurated a vibrant literary movement that reached its first high point in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. And while the black church was in large part pacific in relation to the white world, it quietly fashioned the institutional foundation as well as the rhetorical strategies upon which Martin Luther King and other leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference would later build.

From the Civil Rights Era to the Present: Achievements and Failures

The civil rights movement was transformative, setting in motion radical changes in the political, social, cultural, and economic life of blacks. Using 1964 as a base—the year of the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the high point of the movement—let us examine the degree to which the condition of blacks has changed and the problems that still beset the group. In absolute terms, there has been striking progress, but when compared to changes in the white population, the record is decidedly mixed, and in a few areas quite disappointing.

Most remarkable for a group that spent most of its history in brutal slavery is its integration into the nation's social, cultural, and

moral fabric. In less than half a human generation, America not only dismantled the entire infrastructure of Jim Crow but included black Americans as an integral part of any moral and political vision of what is American.

The black cultural and political presence in contemporary America is, if anything, out of all proportion to the size of the black population, leading many Americans, black and white, to wildly erroneous views about its actual size. As one of the base constituencies of the Democratic Party, blacks are now fully represented in the nation's political offices at all levels. Many of the nation's major cities have been led by black mayors. The Congressional Black Caucus is an important, if not always effective, force in national politics. With supreme historic irony, the first black to be elected governor held office in Richmond, the capital of the Confederate states; another was recently elected governor of Massachusetts. In the mid-1990s a black general, Colin Powell, stood a strong chance of becoming the Republican presidential candidate until he voluntarily withdrew from the primaries. Today, one of the nation's most popular senators, Barack Obama of Illinois, is a major contender for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Many of these blacks were elected by constituencies which were or are predominantly white. In addition to elected officials, blacks have been appointed to some of the highest appointed offices in the nation, including the head of the military and the secretary of state.

Paralleling this political transformation has been a cultural revolution. In all aspects of its high and popular cultures—music, art, literature, dance, fashion, education, sports, cinema, and television—the black presence is not only pronounced but in many areas dominant. American popular culture, in sharp contrast with the nation's political reputé, is now globally hegemonic, thanks in good part to black artists and athletes.

Behind these developments are undeniable changes in the racial attitudes of white Americans. Most competent students of public

opinion now agree that the great majority of whites reject traditional supremacist views and, in principle, favor integration and increased opportunities for blacks and other disadvantaged groups. Numerous polls also indicate that a majority of whites are tolerant about interracial unions. All surveys find an inverse relationship between age and liberality of racial views, with young people now favoring racial equality and interracial dating by wide margins. However, while favoring racial equality in principle, the views of whites are more complex and less uniformly interventionist in regard to the policies and practices, discussed below, that are aimed at greater equalization. For now, the point to note is that there has been a genuine sea shift in the attitude of the white majority regarding the civic inclusion of blacks and the provision of equal access to public institutions. Racism itself has not vanished; my own estimate, based on polling and voting behavior, is that about 20 percent of the white population still remains racist in the traditional sense. Furthermore, some negative stereotyping persists even among those who may reject traditional, supremacist racism. For example, a little over a half of all whites believe that blacks are more likely to prefer living off welfare, and police profiling remained a serious problem up to a decade ago.

What accounts for the striking changes in white attitudes? It is certainly true that economic, demographic, and other structural factors encouraged attitudinal and cultural changes, but I reject the priority given to materialist or structuralist factors by many sociologists. The most cursory examination of the comparative data on ethno-racial prejudice provides numerous instances of group progress independent of prejudicial attitudes toward them, as in the case of European Jews.

Among the factors leading to a change in attitudes toward racism was the Nazi holocaust, World War II, and America's emergence as a superpower. Nazism brought racial prejudice into tremendous disrepute. Closely related also was the fact that America's emergence as one of the two great superpowers in the postwar

era and its promotion of itself as the leader of the free world were greatly compromised by the existence of Jim Crow and the general condition of blacks throughout the nation, as Gunnar Myrdal's now classic report, *An American Dilemma*, made clear to the world. Of equal importance were the changes in the attitudes of blacks themselves. The wartime experiences of blacks, both in the military and in the greatly expanded job opportunities of the war economy, were powerful catalysts. But of equal importance were the previously noted reforms in black Christian doctrine and practice. The Ghandi-influenced non-violent doctrine of Martin Luther King, Jr., and his associates was no doubt influential in shifting white attitudes toward a national consensus that racism and the institutional constraints on blacks were morally indefensible and had to go.

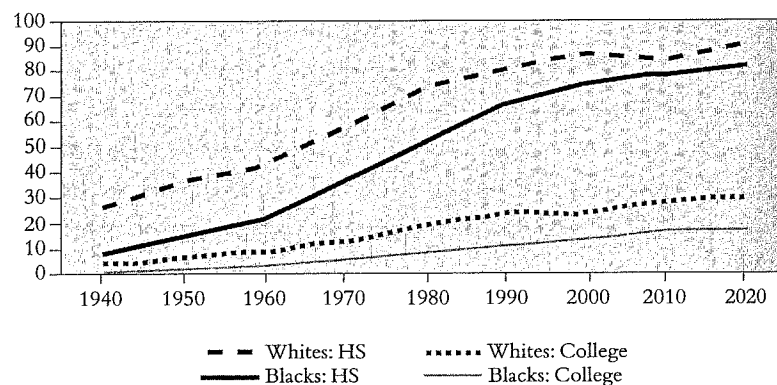
Material Progress

Changes in the material condition of blacks have been facilitated most by the greatly improved opportunities for education. However, these impressive improvements should be considered in relation to the greater changes in white attainment.

As Figure 13.3 shows, blacks have made striking progress in high school completion rates, especially between 1960 and 1980, substantially reducing the gap between blacks and whites. Nonetheless, the official statistics may fudge the true rates, in part because of political and economic pressure to show good results. For example, completion rates are given only for students who become seniors, not for all students who ever enrolled. The true rate, according to some studies, is more like 78 percent for whites and 56 percent for blacks, twice the gap indicated by the official figures.⁵

The substantial gap between the groups in college graduation rates may be widening. Of special concern is the gender gap among blacks that is now growing wider each year. Nonetheless, the quintupling of college graduation rates from 3.5 percent of the twenty-five to twenty-nine age group to almost 18 percent has propelled what may be the most significant socioeconomic development over

Figure 13.3 Educational Attainment by Ethnicity, Persons Age 25 and Older, 1940–2005

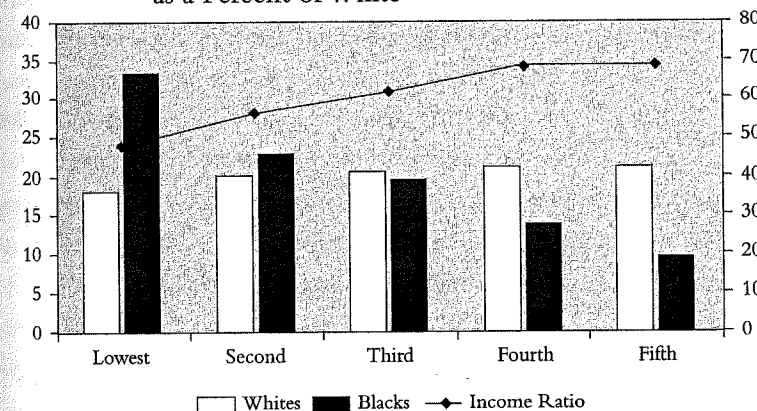


SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2006.

the past forty years: the growth of a substantial black middle class. Evaluating middle-class status is a complex matter, too often treated superficially in simple income terms. Being middle class entails a mix of income, wealth, education, occupational status, and, to some degree, lifestyle.

The American median household income in 2003 (expressed in 2005 dollars) was approximately \$46,000. If we take \$50,000 as the bottom end of middle-class family incomes, 34 percent of blacks, compared with 59 percent of whites, earned income at or above this figure. Many analysts would place the middle-class income bar for households somewhat higher, more in the \$75,000 or more range. Only 17.4 percent of blacks fall into this income category, compared with 37.7 percent of whites.⁶ A realistic estimate would fall somewhere between these two—roughly a quarter to 30 percent of the black population. This is well above the 12 to 14 percent of black households that qualified in 1972 using similar measures, but in relative terms the situation has improved only slightly and in the last few years the gap has widened. In constant dollars, the white median household income inched up only slightly (by \$130) be-

Figure 13.4 Income Quintiles and Black Mean Quintile Income as a Percent of White



SOURCE: Composed from U.S. Census Bureau, *Annual Demographic Survey*, March Supplement, 2006, Table HING-05.

tween 2003 and 2005 to \$49,554, while that of blacks declined significantly by \$552, down to \$30,954 annually.

Another, perhaps more accurate, way of assessing the relative income status of blacks is to look at household income quintiles (see Figure 13.4). By most measures, the third and fourth quintiles would constitute the broad range of middle-income families. A third of black households fall into this category, compared with 41 percent of whites. Note that there are over twice as many whites in the fifth quintile as blacks. This figure indicates another important feature of black income distribution: it is more unevenly distributed than that of any of the other major groups. Over a third of all black households are in the lowest quintile. But the relative quintile distribution tells only a part of the story. In each quintile the mean income of whites is substantially more than that of blacks. The mean income of the bottom quintile for whites is \$16,440, compared with the lowest black mean of \$7,869. For the other quintiles the white means are \$37,036, \$57,867, \$84,155, and \$169,871. The line graph shows the black mean for each quintile as a percentage of these white means. It indicates that better-off blacks earn a somewhat

higher ratio of the mean white income, but this rises only to 68.5 percent for the top quintile. Furthermore, the historical trend in these ratios (not shown) is discouraging. The mean income of the top quintile has remained the same percent (68) of its white counterpart between 1967 and the present. The third and fourth quintiles showed modest improvements, moving up between 8 and 10 percentage points. However, the bottom quintile's ratio has gotten much worse. It is now 48 percent of what the bottom fifth of whites earn, compared with 54 percent in 1967. Thus, in both relative and absolute terms, the black poor have lost out badly in relation to the white poor as well as in relation to the black middle and upper classes. Given the growth of income inequality in America, this situation is likely to get much worse in coming years. A recent study shows that 54 percent of African-American children of parents in the lowest quintile remain in the bottom, in contrast with 31 percent of the poorest white children.⁷

The relative fragility of the black middle class's base becomes apparent when we shift from income to net worth, a more complete picture of economic status. In 2000 the median net worth of non-Hispanic whites was \$79,400, which was 10.5 times that of black householders, estimated at \$7,500. This enormous gap is growing. Since 1996 the median wealth of blacks has been declining while that of non-Hispanic whites and people in the Hispanic cluster have been increasing, a gap widened by the economic downturn that began in late 2000. As of 2002, the median net worth of non-Hispanic whites was \$88,000, which was 14.5 times greater than that of black householders, which went down to \$6,000.⁸

What accounts for this enormous gap? Differences in education and other forms of human and social capital only partly explain it because a substantial gap remains even after controlling for these factors. Asset difference matters most, capturing "the historical legacy of low wages, personal and organizational discrimination, and institutionalized racism."⁹ Home ownership is the single most important source of wealth for most Americans, and many

middle-class whites acquired homes either through inheritance or with the help of their parents. Until as late as the 1960s, U.S. government housing policies actively discriminated against blacks and favored whites in mortgage and other housing policies. The suburbs in the postwar era also discriminated against blacks who were either deliberately kept out as a result of naked racism or disqualified on other terms that Oliver and Shapiro refer to as the "sedimentation of racial inequality."¹⁰ Housing in segregated neighborhoods is worth substantially less than similar units in white or non-segregated neighborhoods.

But differences in wealth accumulation over a single generation for blacks and whites with similar incomes and education may partly reflect different lifestyle choices. International comparisons indicate, for example, striking variations across Europe in homeownership. In Bulgaria, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, 80, 74, and 68 percent, respectively, of homes are owner-occupied, whereas Switzerland, perhaps the world's most prosperous country, had a rate of only 34.6 percent in 2000. Parisians, with a rate of only 29.6 percent, make blacks, with a rate of 48 percent, seem like conservative burghers. The Swedish economist Mikael Atterhog observes that "different people may attach different importance to these [homeownership] values and these value orientations may differ between populations (nations) and between groups within a population."¹¹ He also notes disadvantages to homeownership that may influence different groups in different ways: it restricts residential mobility, and it may trap people in poorly maintained buildings or neighborhoods and impose substantial opportunity costs and debt risks. Sadly, his analysis has proven prescient in light of the sub-prime mortgage crisis of 2007 in America. African-Americans were between 6 and 34 percent more likely to receive a higher-rate sub-prime loan with a prepayment penalty than similarly financially situated white borrowers.¹² Largely as a result of this, there was a projected net loss to foreclosures of 9 percent of all homes purchased or refinanced by African-Americans in 2005.¹³

In a recent study of interactions between different black communities,¹⁴ Mary Pattillo-McCoy disputes the view, made popular by William Julius Wilson, that the black middle class has withdrawn from the lower classes into their own suburban enclaves, thereby denuding the other group of leadership and role models. She found just the opposite: that these enclaves are themselves highly segregated and either adjoin or overlap with lower-class ghetto areas and become a kind of buffer between the black poor and the white middle class. They share many neighborhood facilities with the black poor and only partly succeed in limiting the encroachment of the black lower class and its problems. Even in very stable communities, networks promote access both to positive role models and to the "criminal temptations" and other pathologies of lower-class black life. Middle-class black youth are especially vulnerable to these temptations. Pattillo-McCoy's work highlights a tragic irony: the major source of black culture's outsized influence in the nation's popular culture and sports is the problem-ridden urban lower class. Successful entertainers and athletes from the ghetto are heavily promoted by the national media, providing middle-class black youth "a fashion and behavioral manual for deviance" while scoffing at "the ordinariness of middle-classdom."

The black middle class, limited in the pre-civil rights era, always had to deal with a socially deviant but culturally creative lower class. But earlier generations of middle-class parents managed to better protect their children from the problematic aspects of lower-class black life. They had strong help from the black church, which then embraced all middle-class youth, and they did not have to compete with a powerful mass media that relentlessly undermined their authority by celebrating the most deviant expressions of "gangsta" culture. This problem, combined with persistent (albeit greatly lessened) labor market discrimination, the black middle class' fragile wealth base, social and residential isolation from the dominant white majority, lower quality education and children's segregation, and the strain of coping with real and imagined racial slights

and prejudice, may account for startling recent findings concerning inter-generational mobility from black middle class status. A joint Pew Foundation/Brookings Institution study reports that "a majority of black children of middle-income parents fall below their parents in income and economic status" and, more alarmingly, that about a half of the children of middle class African-Americans "end up falling to the bottom of the income distribution, compared to only 16 percent of white children."¹⁵ These findings are consistent with those of other recent studies.¹⁶

All of which bring us to the less successful and failed aspects of post-civil rights America. Persistent residential segregation ranks among the most important failures. In their frequently cited work, *American Apartheid*, Massey and Denton described segregation in the 1970s and 1980s as a form of apartheid caused by deliberate racial practices and policies by the private sector and government. America today remains highly segregated residentially.

Table 13.2 indicates a black-white dissimilarity index of 58.7—meaning that almost 60 percent of blacks would have to move to realize a distribution across neighborhoods that reflected their actual proportion of the population—for all metropolitan areas, compared with 42.9 for Asians and 42.2 for ethnics of the Hispanic cluster. Both the level of segregation and the extent to which it is changing vary considerably by region. The highest segregation rates in metropolitan areas are, surprisingly, in the "liberal" regions of the Northeast and Midwest: Gary, Indiana; Detroit; New York; Newark; Milwaukee; and Chicago. Southern metropolitan areas have significantly lower dissimilarity rates than the Northeast. The lowest rates are found mainly in the Western states.

Recent trends, however, are modestly encouraging. Segregation between blacks and whites throughout the nation is clearly declining. The same is true of white-Asian segregation, which had been increasing up to 1980. White-Hispanic segregation has increased a bit, due largely to the massive growth of the Hispanic immigrant population. Declines in segregation are greatest in the newer, smaller,

Table 13.2 Mean Indices of Dissimilarity with Whites, 2000, and Changes for Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics (Metropolitan Areas)

Indices of Dissimilarity versus Whites*									
Metro Category									
	BLACKS VS. WHITES			ASIANS VS. WHITES			HISPANICS VS. WHITES		
Mean Index N**	Change 1990–2000	Percent with declines		Change 1990–2000	Percent with declines		Change 1990–2000	Percent with declines	
All Metropolitan Areas									
Mean Index N	58.7 287	-4.7 93%		42.9 236	-3.8 83%		44.2 281	1.7 43%	
Region									
Northeast N	66.0 44	-3.3 93%		46.4 36	-1.4 69%		54.0 42	0.0 48%	
Midwest N	63.2 65	-5.1 95%		46.6 57	-5.6 93%		42.9 66	1.0 52%	
South N	58.8 125	-4.6 91%		42.6 88	-3.9 86%		42.9 109	2.7 38%	
West N	46.7 53	-5.8 94%		37.6 55	-3.2 80%		41.1 64	1.7 36%	
Size									
1,000,000 and over N	65.9 61	-4.1 97%		44.5 61	-0.8 61%		51.0 61	4.5 18%	
250,000–999,999 N	58.8 112	-4.9 93%		42.6 111	-4.3 94%		44.7 116	1.5 41%	
Under 250,000 N	54.7 114	-4.7 91%		42.1 64	-5.6 89%		39.6 104	0.2 58%	

* Whites, blacks, and Asians pertain to non-Hispanic members of these groups; non-Hispanic persons who identified as more than one race in 2000 were proportionately allocated to these groups (see text).

** Metropolitan areas with at least one thousand members of race-ethnic group in 1990 and 2000.

SOURCE: William H. Frey and Dowell Myers, "Racial Segregation in U.S. Metropolitan Areas and Cities, 1990–2000: Patterns, Trends, and Explanations" (Population Studies Center, University of Michigan, Report 05–573, April 2005), Table A1, 38.

faster-growing metropolitan areas of the South and West with small but growing black populations and considerable housing construction. Areas with declining segregation are also multi-ethnic: diversity seems to increase white tolerance for a higher proportion of black neighbors.¹⁷ In addition, the higher the ratio of black household income to that of whites, the lower the predicted level of segregation, which strongly suggests that class explains much segregation.¹⁸

Why, then, does the black middle class remain so segregated? Sociologists maintain that white racism remains the main culprit, but this ignores the preferences of black middle-class householders. Surveys show that while blacks would prefer integrated neighborhoods, they do not wish to live in areas where their proportion is under 40 percent, which is more than triple their proportion of the nation's population, whereas most whites say they are comfortable with a black share of about 30 percent, more than twice the black population share.

A famous model of residential segregation, developed by economist Thomas Schelling, holds that even a very small difference between the size of whites' preferences for living with fellow whites and the size of blacks' preferences for living with fellow blacks will trigger a tipping point leading to total segregation. However, there is no empirical foundation for this model. Recently, the economist William Easterly has shown that, contrary to the model's predictions, more white flight occurred from neighborhoods with large initial white population shares than from mixed neighborhoods and that the demographic history of neighborhoods that did change or tip did not accord with Schelling's tipping point theory.¹⁹ In the vast majority of neighborhoods studied, Easterly found no pattern of acceleration of white decline, no evidence of a sudden, extreme exodus at the fabled tipping point but instead a steady, almost constant decline in the proportion of whites from one decade to the next since the 1970s. Moreover, the typical neighborhood that did change from being more white to more black in this period still had

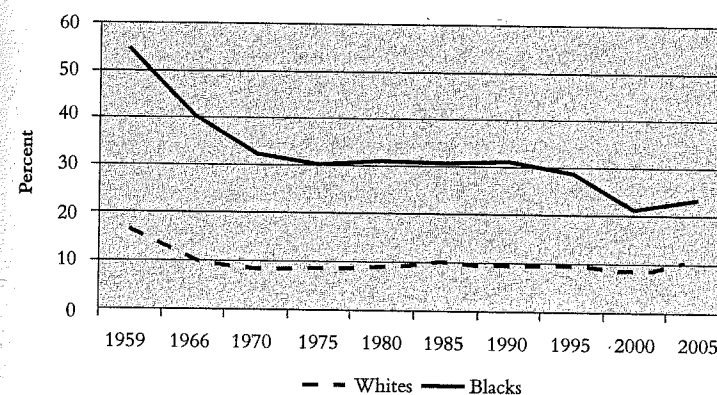
a significant proportion of whites living in it, in sharp contradiction to Schelling's model.

If there are signs of progress in desegregation, the same cannot be said of the seemingly intractable problems of poverty; relatively high unemployment; extraordinarily high incarceration rates for black men; extremely high levels of criminal victimization; high levels of impoverished female-headed households and paternal abandonment, and extremely fraught gender relations resulting in low rates of marriage and high rates of marital disruption; and a growing AIDS epidemic, itself reflective of poor health and low life expectancy.

In 2005 nearly 23 percent (22.8) of all black families and 25.6 percent of all black individuals were in poverty; the general national rate was 12.6 percent, with individual whites having a rate of 10.4 percent and households 7.5 percent. As Figure 13.5 shows, between the late 1950s and mid-1970s, the black rate declined dramatically, from 55 to 30 percent, but the trend since then has been disappointing. Unemployment and underemployment are the main culprits. The overall rate has remained twice that of whites from the early 1970s, even while falling to historic lows of under 10 percent in the late 1990s and again in 2006 when it stood at 8.8 percent, compared with the white rate of 3.8 percent. But an increasing proportion of the impoverished are working people who, because of inadequate skills and education, cannot earn enough to rise above the poverty line. And general unemployment rates conceal the exceedingly high youth unemployment rate of 37 percent among young black men. The true rate, however, is even higher because it neglects the substantially lower labor force participation rate among young black men and the astonishingly high proportion of young black men in prison or jail, who are not included in the unemployment figures.²⁰

As of June 2005, approximately 25 percent of the 2.2 million persons incarcerated in U.S. prisons and jails were black men between twenty and thirty-nine years of age. Twelve percent of all black men between twenty-five and twenty-nine were incarcerated, compared with 3.9 percent of Hispanics and 1.7 percent of white

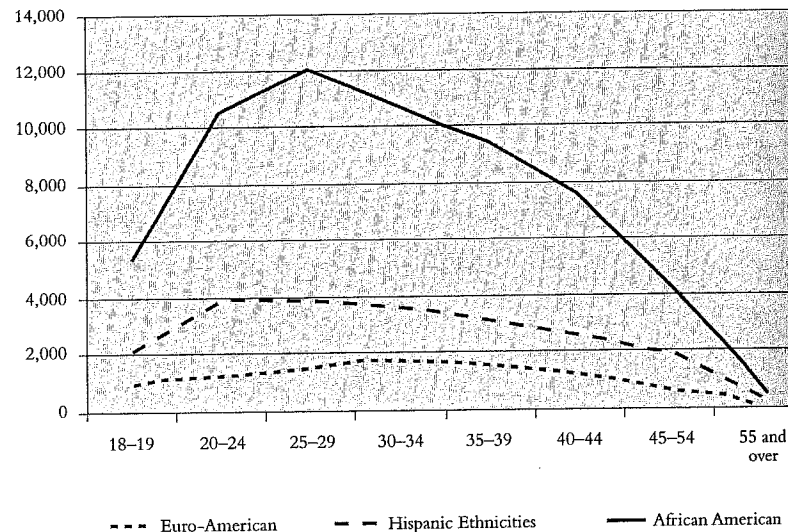
Figure 13.5 Black and White Poverty Rates, 1959–2005



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Poverty Tables," www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov2.html.

males of that age group.²¹ Figure 13.6 shows the grimness of this explosive growth since 1990 when the black rate was 6.3 times that of whites. The only news that is not utterly bleak is the fact that the black rate has gone down from 6.3 times the white rate to 4.8 times—but this is because the white rate nearly doubled. This high rate is correlated with poor educational attainment. Western observes that six of every ten male high school dropouts in their thirties have an average prison record of approximately twenty-eight months.²² It is not clear, however, how much the *growing* incarceration rate is explained by education. Dropout rates have remained fairly constant over the past thirty years at a time when the crime and incarceration rates have oscillated wildly. More tellingly, the black dropout rate of 13.1 percent (calculated as the proportion of people ages sixteen to twenty-four out of school without a high school certificate) is less than half that of the Hispanic rate of 27.8 percent, not to mention the horrendous dropout rate of 44 percent for immigrants from Latin America. Yet, as we have seen, people in the Hispanic cluster are substantially less likely to be incarcerated than blacks.

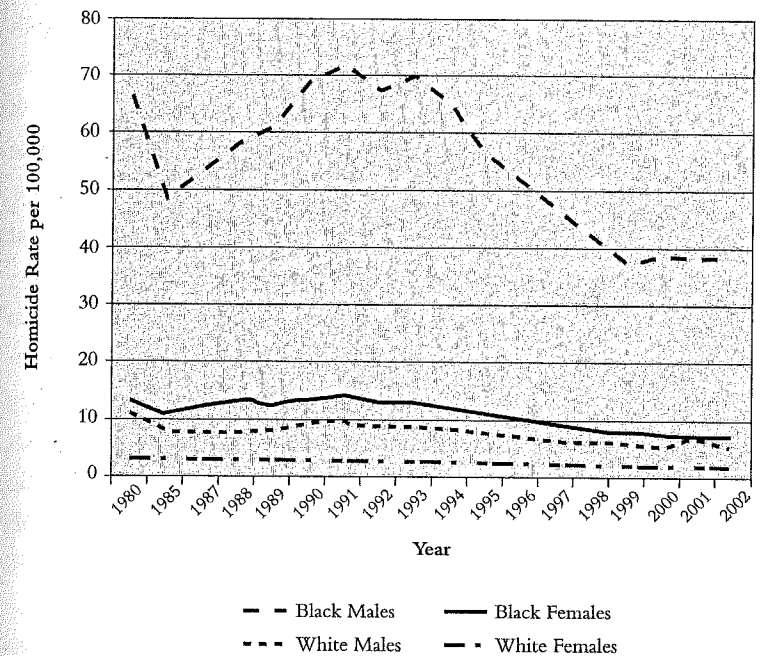
Figure 13.6 Incarcerated Male Population per 100,000 Residents by Age and Ethnicity



SOURCE: Based on data from U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2005," Table 13, U.S. Department of Justice, 2006.

A better explanation is the epidemic of drug use and sale in the ghettos since the 1970s and the draconian laws passed in the so-called war on drugs. These laws disproportionately affect black youths by meting out far more severe punishment for the kinds of drugs that they are more likely to use. But the war on drugs can explain only a part of the extremely high crime and incarceration of blacks. As the liberal criminologist Michael Tolnay concludes, the evidence points to a simple explanation: young, poor black men are incarcerated at far higher rates because they commit far more imprisonable crimes.²³ The statistic for homicide is immune from the charge of racism. Figure 13.7 shows the tragic facts, and one need only add that almost all the victims of this carnage are fellow blacks, and that the black female homicide rate is actually higher than the white male rate.

Figure 13.7 Homicide Rates by Ethnicity and Gender, 1980-2002



SOURCE: Erika Harrell, *Black Victims of Violent Crime* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007).

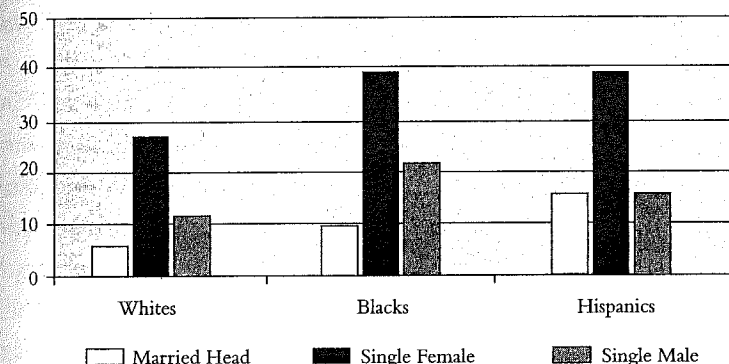
We get closer to a genuine causal explanation by considering household composition, especially within the wider framework of gender relations and marital status. Blacks marry at far lower rates than any other ethnic group. In 2004 only 28.4 percent of black women over fifteen were married and living with their spouse, while 42 percent had never married, compared with 54 and 21.5 percent of white women, respectively. When blacks do marry, their divorce rates are substantially higher than other groups: after ten years, 47 percent of first marriages among blacks are dissolved, compared with 32 percent of whites and 34 percent of Hispanics. And after first divorce, a much lower proportion of black women remarry: ten years later, there is only a 50 percent probability of

remarriage; the probability is nearly 80 percent among white women and 68 percent among Hispanics.²⁴ Consequently, black adults, especially women, are far more likely to live without adult company: 72 percent of black women are on their own, including even many of those who are formally married but whose husbands are away, compared with 46 percent of white women and a half of all Hispanic women.

These figures, seldom mentioned, underscore the fact that blacks are among the most isolated of Americans—isolated collectively in their segregation from other groups but also isolated from basic human companionship in their lack of stable, durable adult relationships. They are also the loneliest. The common notion that they have wide friendship patterns and enriching communities that compensate for their absence of dyadic bonds is a complete myth: network data on the group indicate that they have the fewest friends and relatives to turn to for material and emotional help.²⁵

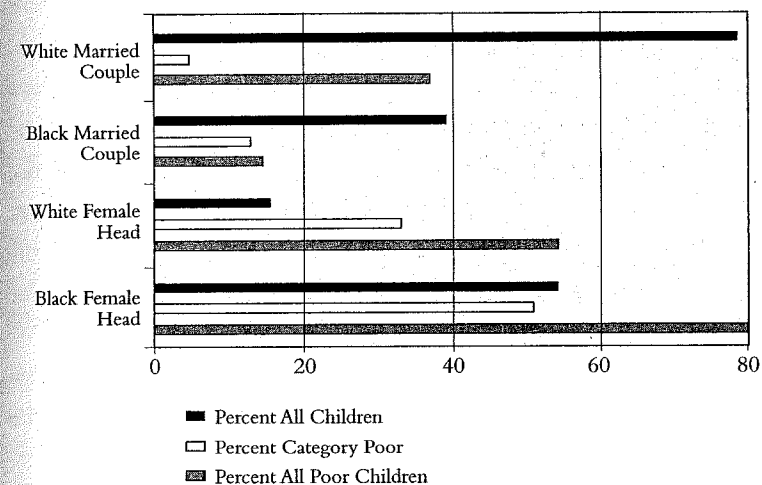
The other major consequence of blacks' low rate of stable unions is more often commented on: the high proportion of households headed by a single woman and its deleterious consequences. An almost equal number of black families are headed by a single female (44.7) as a married couple (46.5 percent), compared with white families, 82 percent of which are headed by a married couple and only 13 percent by a single woman, or Hispanics, among whom the rates are 71 and 20 percent, respectively. The much higher risk of poverty in female-headed households thus partly accounts for the higher poverty rates of blacks. As Figure 13.8 shows, the risks of poverty are substantial for all groups, but there is an important additional difference between blacks and other groups that the figure masks: a much larger proportion of blacks, and especially their children, live in these households with consequences that go well beyond the already harsh realities of income poverty. Figure 13.9 demonstrates what I mean.

Figure 13.8 Poverty Rate by Family Type and Ethnicity, 2005



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, *Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, 2006.

Figure 13.9 Distribution of Children in Family Type by Poverty Status, 2005



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, *Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, 2006.

Note first that over half of all black children are poor, compared with 12.5 percent of whites. Second, most black children are being raised in households headed by a single woman—54.4 percent compared with 39.4 percent of white kids. Now while poverty *per se* undoubtedly has many disadvantages for children, a growing body of research suggests that its effects are surprisingly modest.²⁶ Of equal concern is the fact that 80 percent of all poor children are being brought up by single mothers, compared with 54 percent of poor white children. This distribution is important. The disadvantages of being brought up by a single mother go beyond the risk of being poor: being raised by a single mother also increases the risk of lower educational attainment, higher delinquency, poorer health, and becoming an unwed parent.²⁷ Thus, children who are poor but are being brought up in stable families headed by a couple have substantially better life prospects than those being brought up by a single parent. The single most important contrast between whites and blacks, then, is the fact that there are three and a half times as many children being brought up by single mothers among blacks (54 percent) than among whites (15.5 percent). Furthermore, black female-headed families differ from their white counterparts in that the vast majority of the former originate in unwed pregnancies, while the majority of the latter originate in divorce. Thus, the white child growing up with a single mother is less likely to have been exposed to poverty in early childhood before the parents divorced, when the effects are likely to be most harmful, especially for cognitive development.

Further complicating the situation of the black poor is the large influx of immigrants that began to pour into America from the mid-1960s. There were 35.7 million foreign-born persons in America in 2005, to which should be added at least another 10 million unauthorized persons, substantially above the 38 million black (alone) population that year. Economists are deeply divided about the impact of this inflow on the native population and especially on

blacks.²⁸ Most immigrants are located in areas of the country with a smaller proportion of blacks. However, there are major overlaps in several of the gateway metropolitan areas such as New York, Chicago, and Miami, and here the weight of evidence does suggest a modest depression of income for unskilled natives and even greater employment consequences. Even so, immigrants seem not to be competing directly with most blacks in these areas. Middle-class and secure working-class blacks occupy occupational niches in the public sector that are largely closed to immigrants.²⁹ And, by increasing the size of these metropolitan populations, immigrants enhance the demand for public services, thereby benefiting the black middle class. On the other hand, immigrants increasingly dominate the low-end service jobs and a surprising number of better-paid service occupations in these areas, just the kind of jobs the unskilled black poor need. There is some evidence that some blacks may have been pushed out of these jobs by immigrants, who are often preferred by employers.³⁰ There is evidence, too, that immigration is changing the nature of employment for unskilled labor, creating an off-the-books, contractor-dominated informal labor market that has a disproportionately adverse effect on the black working poor.³¹

Another serious problem of the black population is its disproportionate and growing health risks. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention documents this crisis:

[T]he infant death rate among blacks is still more than double that of whites, heart disease death rates are more than 40 percent higher, and the death rate for all cancers is 30 percent higher and for prostate cancer more than double that for whites. Black women have a higher death rate from breast cancer despite a mammography screening rate that is nearly the same as for white women. The death rate from HIV/AIDS for Blacks is more than seven times that for whites; the rate of homicide is six times higher.

Life expectancy at birth is the best index of a group's overall health and physical life prospects. For blacks, it is 72.7 years—69 for men and 76.1 years for women—compared with 78 and 80.5 years for white men and women, respectively. Remarkably, the black rates are lower than those of the Third World countries of Jamaica (75 years) and Barbados (74 years), even though the three populations have nearly identical regional provenance in Africa and thus are subject to the same kinds of genetically determined diseases such as sickle cell anemia and high rates of prostate cancer.

What, then, can explain the lower life expectancy? The answers are found partly in differences in access to, and willingness to use, health care at all levels of income; partly in cultural and behavioral practices; and partly in the psychological stress of living as a racial minority. Blacks have poorer access to adequate health care, but the reasons for this are still not clear. Racial bias in the health care profession is generally not considered a major factor.³² The disparity remains when income is held constant; indeed, differences persist even when controlling for insurance coverage. Cultural and behavioral factors are obviously implicated.

This is particularly true with the extremely high incidence of AIDS among black men and women. Half of all new AIDS cases in the nation are among blacks, and in 2004 the disease was diagnosed ten times more often in blacks than in whites. Black women were diagnosed at twenty-three times the rate for white women. The disease ranked among the top three killers of black men aged twenty-five to fifty-four, among the top four causes of death among women in this age group, and as the main cause of death among black women between twenty-five and thirty-four. A major reason for the high rate of the disease among black women is the "down low" behavior of bisexual gay black men who conceal their sexual orientation from their wives and female lovers and are often themselves unaware of the fact that they are infected, thereby becoming an infectious "bridge" between gay men and heterosexual women. An increasing

number of young black women live in fear of catching the disease in this way.

Policies and Prospects

The positive changes we have identified are the combined result of blacks' individual and collective agency as well as bitterly contested and hard-won public policy and legal transformations aimed at creating a more favorable environment for them. The two programs that have generated most controversy were mandatory busing to achieve school integration and affirmative action.

Busing failed to achieve its goal of integrating the nation's public schools. Indeed, the typical black and Latino child now goes to a school that is more segregated today than in the late sixties.³³ The failure was largely a reflection of the persisting spatial segregation of blacks from whites, now reinforced by growing economic inequality and ethnic preferences. But it was not entirely in vain. To the degree that the struggle resulted in improved school quality for blacks, it very likely had significant payoffs for them measured in terms of increased earnings after leaving school, regardless of changes in achievement levels, as David Card and Alan Krueger have shown.³⁴ (See also chapter 14 in this volume.)

If busing and school integration are now largely spent controversies, the same cannot be said of affirmative action. It is one of the most ethnically divisive policies in America, pitting white and black elites against each other and dividing the liberal establishment that so strongly supported other civil rights measures. Ironies abound in the history of affirmative action, as John Skrentny has shown.³⁵ Affirmative action came about in the late 1960s without any lobbying, debate, or controversy. Elite bureaucrats—largely conservative, establishment white men—instituted it simply and quietly. Initially, black civil rights leaders viewed the policy with some skepticism; at one point, the White House had to lobby them to support it. The person most responsible for it was none other than President

Richard Nixon, who anticipated—and welcomed—the strong reaction and resentment from white males. He used affirmative action as a Republican wedge policy that would help to destroy the Democratic Party's century-long hold on working-class white males and the South and to create a historic realignment leading to the Republican ascendancy. It also guaranteed that race would remain a central element in American politics, even as blacks made strong gains as participants, legislators, and officeholders in the system.³⁶ Although improvements began from the 1960s, affirmative action was critical for black entry into the elite professions and classes, especially via increased enrollment in elite colleges and professional schools³⁷ and recruitment by the nation's top firms.³⁸ For demographic, historical, racial, and ethno-cultural reasons, color-blind recruitment to elite jobs will nearly always result in an all-white executive suite and this is true even for high-achieving Asian Americans, who remain grossly underrepresented in the elite jobs of firms other than those they founded themselves.³⁹ Affirmative action and the broader diversity management programs of companies effectively leveled the corporate and educational playing field for qualified blacks and women as well as Asian Americans.

Nonetheless, the program may have begun to run its course, in good part because it has succeeded in its goal of seeding the nation's elites and middle classes with individuals of black ancestry. Chief Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's proposal of another fifteen years of legal life for affirmative action is not off the mark. Costs—measured in terms of white male hostility and an understandable sense of grievance about affirmative action's fairness and in terms of the political support it provides for forces arrayed more broadly against positions advocated by black leaders—are now simply too high and may well erode white support for other policies. Maintaining the program too long may harm blacks themselves by encouraging them to take preferential treatment for granted in recruitment and promotion and to relax their efforts. Reflexive support for affirmative action has become, in some quarters, the measure of middle-class

black solidarity, exposing black critics to charges of racial treachery. Like other government preferential programs, and like affirmative action programs in other countries, the program could evolve into a permanent ethnic entitlement.

Black leaders' decision to shift the program's rationale from compensation for centuries of black deprivation to the promotion of diversity was misguided. Properly conceived, diversity is a worthy goal, but it embraces all Americans and inevitably expands the number of groups claiming preferences, many of them immigrants and their children who could claim no history of persecution or discrimination in America. This understandably alarmed white males, the one group unambiguously excluded from such preferences.

Nor has diversity lived up to its nobler expectations. Too often it has promoted ethnic distinctiveness and pride in one's difference. For blacks, this has been a two-edged sword. At a certain period in their struggle for inclusion, it was vital that blacks develop a positive self-image. Collective ethnic pride was also a powerful mobilization tool in the civil rights movement. Studies of collective self-esteem all indicate that blacks have successfully rid themselves of what used to be called the "marks of oppression" and now have a healthy view of themselves as black people.⁴⁰ And as already noted, the great majority of whites have embraced the inclusion of blacks in their vision of America. Yet, blacks remain socially isolated, cut off from the vital social networks and cultural capital that account for success in America's hypercompetitive economic environment. Their celebration of difference, to the degree that it reinforces this separation, works strongly against their best long-term interests.

Conclusion

The color line, which W. E. B. DuBois presciently espoused as the problem of the twentieth century, had a dual character. One part was the near complete exclusion of blacks and other non-white minorities from the upper echelons and leadership of American society and from its public life and national identity. The other was the

segregation of blacks from the intimate, social, communal, and cultural life of white Americans. In the second half of the century, America struggled mightily with, and largely resolved, the first part of its ethno-racial problem and is today a model for all other advanced multi-ethnic nations in the sophistication and effectiveness of its civil rights and antidiscrimination laws, the diversity of its elite, the participation of blacks and other minorities in the direction of its polity, its great corporations, its public cultural life, and in the embrace of the black presence as an integral part of the nation and what it means to be an American. But, paradoxically, this triumph of public integration was correlated with, and may even have worsened, the private isolation of blacks who today are nearly as segregated from whites as at the start of the twentieth century. Compounding this paradox is the simultaneous growth of a thriving black middle and upper class with an impoverished lower class in the ghettos of the inner cities whose crippling sociocultural problems have defied most public remedies.

While public policy still has an important role, the major problem of the new century will be the reformation, by all parties, of those ethnic preferences, intimate networks, cultural practices, and other ingrained habits of the heart that separate blacks, Hispanic groups, and whites and largely sustain persisting gaps in achievement. The main question today, then—especially for blacks who have most to lose from inertia in this area—is, assuming continued complementary changes in white attitudes, whether they are prepared to meet the challenges of internal lifestyle and interethnic changes and to do the cultural and interpersonal work required for integration into the private sphere of the “beloved community” for which Martin Luther King, Jr., so often yearned.

CHAPTER 14 Education

Paul E. Peterson

The American elementary and secondary education system, the envy of the world as recently as 1960, has become mediocre compared to those of other advanced societies. This deterioration, political scientist and education researcher Paul Peterson points out, has occurred despite parents' higher educational attainment and increased per capita expenditures on students. The strains placed on the system by broad cultural changes, desegregation, legal challenges to the authority of teachers and school administrators, immigration, disability rights, litigation over funding, and collective bargaining have all played their part. The burgeoning “excellence movement” emphasizes accountability and transparency, incentives to attract better teachers, and increased parental choice to force performance-based competition among schools. But it is by no means clear that these reforms will succeed.

IN 1960, THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM WAS THE ENVY OF the world. Though it had many warts—southern schools were racially segregated, disabled students were excluded from schooling, and facilities varied widely from one part of the country to another—a larger proportion of the next generation was attending school for a more extended period of time than in any other major industrial country. That system, which had evolved over the preceding century and a half, had helped propel the United States from a developing country to one of the world's superpowers.

As Figure 14.1 shows, Americans were moving toward a universal system of education in the period immediately following World