Race and Class in Political Science

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As a discipline, political science tends to have a split personality on the issue of whether the driving force behind political action is material or ideational. Put too crudely, White scholars tend to focus on structural conditions as the cause of group identity and action, whereas scholars of color tend to focus on group identity and conflict in order to explain structural conditions. More generally, the relevant debate within political science revolves less around Jacques Derrida versus Karl Marx (as in critical race studies) than around W. E. B. DuBois versus Thomas Hobbes—that is, whether "the problem of the twentieth [and other] centur[ies] is the problem of the color line" or whether people are fundamentally self-interested individualists whose social interaction is shaped by the opportunities presented in a given political structure.

This Essay examines those propositions by discussing important recent work by political scientists in several arenas, including ethnic conflict, nationalism, and a belief in linked fate. I then briefly discuss my own research on the relationship between race and class, and on the possible malleability of racial and ethnic concepts and practices, in order to show one way that identity-based and interest-based political analyses interact. I conclude that material forces drive most important political disputes and outcomes, but that politics is best understood through a combination of material and ideational lenses.

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INTRODUCTION

The discipline of political science tends to have a split personality on the issue of whether the underlying driving force behind political action is material or ideational. Put too crudely, mainstream (disproportionately White) scholars tend to focus on structural conditions such as laws or the economy, the self-interest of leaders or activists, political incentives, or even geography in order to explain ethnic identification and conflict.[1] Conversely, scholars who study racial politics (disproportionately people of color), tend to start from racial or ethnic identity and conflict in order to explain structural conditions, understandings of self-interest, or political incentives.[2] This generalization, like most, is indeed too crude, and one can immediately identify exceptions; but it is arguably accurate enough to be a good starting point for further exploration. I develop this argument, with reference to the most prominent work of political scientists in several subfields, in the next two sections below.

Few political scientists, and even fewer in mainstream, high-status departments, focus on discourse analysis growing out of continental European philosophy. Most who do are political philosophers whose central mission does not include explaining empirical phenomena.[3] As a result, the relevant debate within political science revolves less around Derrida versus Marx[4] than around DuBois versus Hobbes—that is,

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    1.   See discussion *infra*, in section on "Imagined Communities, Mountainous Terrain, and Party Mobilization."

    2.   See discussion *infra*, in section on "Linked Fate, Panethnicity, Racism, and the Racial Contract."

    3.   Important partial exceptions to this generalization include Anne Norton at University of Pennsylvania, William Connolly at Johns Hopkins University, and Bonnie Honig at Northwestern University.

    4.   JACQUES DERRIDA, OF GRAMMATOLOGY (Gayatri Spivak, trans., Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, corrected ed., 1997); KARL MARX & FRIEDRICH ENGELS, CAPITAL: A CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY (Samuel Moore & Edward Aveling, trans., Electric Book Co. 2001) (1867).

whether "the problem of the twentieth [and other] centur[ies] is the problem of the color line"[5] or whether people are fundamentally self-interested individualists whose social interaction is shaped by the oppor-tunities offered in a given political structure.[6]

This paper begins by examining and illuminating that proposition through discussion of important recent work by political scientists. I then briefly discuss my own prior work on the relationship between race and class, and use my current research to illuminate how tensions between identity-based politics and interest-based politics play out in academic political science as well as in actual political arenas. I conclude roughly where Richard Delgado does: that material forces and access to resources drive most significant political disputes and outcomes, but that politics is most fully understood through a combination of material and ideational lenses.[7]

I. IMAGINED COMMUNITIES, MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN, AND PARTY MOBILIZATION

What makes people identify with a nation or some other "imagined community" larger than any group they can know personally? When do nationalist antagonisms break out into civil war? How much does racial identity matter for mobilizing participants in a war or explaining who votes in peaceful electoral contests?

These questions represent several thriving subfields within political science. The scholars in these subfields do not engage much with each other, but they hold two sets of similar views. As the rest of this section shows, they generally treat racial or any other identity as an outcome rather than a cause, and they see identity or ideology as frequently less important than more material characteristics in explicating political action and outcomes.

Consider the vast, sprawling literature on the growth and practice of nationalism. One review article of major works analyzing nationalism, for example, points out that "in constructing an image of a nation, a large set of variables plays a role: religion, language, law, geographical isolation, economic considerations, bureaucratic decisions, colonial policies, and the like."[8] A similarly broad and authoritative review article asserts that "a structuralist likes to explain a 'nationalist' policy response as a reaction to deeply embedded stimuli located in the international economic division

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5.   W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, *in* WRITINGS 372 (selections by Nathan Huggins, ed., 1986) (1903).

6.   *See* THOMAS HOBBES, ET AL., LEVIATHAN (G.A.J. Rogers & Karl Schuhmann, eds., Thoemmes Continuum 2003) (1651).

7.   *See* Richard Delgado, *Crossroads and Blind Alleys: A Critical Examination of Recent Writing About Race*, 82 TEX. L. REV. 121 (2003).

8.   Yael Tamir, *The Enigma of Nationalism*, 47 WORLD POL. 418, 421 (1995).

of labor; voluntarists prefer to find their explanations in domestic upheavals."[9] These arguments point in different directions, but they are united in placing partial or complete emphasis on material conditions and political processes to explain the rise or practice of the quintessentially idea-based identity, nationalism.

Some prominent scholars of nationalism focus particularly on its development out of capitalist economies. Ernest Gellner, a Research Professor at the Central University, Prague, argues in *Nations and Nationalism* that nationalism results from the imposition of homogenizing industrialization onto societies previously characterized by small clans, tribes, or villages. As he puts it, "If an industrial society is established in a culturally heterogeneous society ... *then* tensions result which *will* engender nationalism."[10] This scholar has inspired an array of responses, including another volume dedicated to evaluating and critiquing his work.[11] One of his most eminent interlocutors, Benedict Anderson, takes issue with Gellner's particular arguments, but also explains nationalism in materialist terms. In Anderson's view, the growth of print capitalism—that is, the drive for profits from books and other printed material once new technology made printing easy and cheap—and the creation of a consolidated state or rationalized colonial system, in which bureaucrats moved frequently and developed close connections with one another, were the two forces that enabled people to "imagine" a "community" considerably larger than the one they could see.[12]

Political scientists tend to use materialist explanations to explain not only nationalism, but also the likelihood of conflict between nationalist groups. Two widely-cited explanations of civil war exemplify this tendency. First, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler argue that individuals make trade-offs between production and appropriation in deciding whether to join an ethnic (or other) rebellion.[13] In their view, wars are inefficient, but they occur because of "three interacting determinants: preferences, opportunities, and perceptions."[14] That is, if people think that they will gain more by fighting rather than growing crops or working in a factory, they will fight. Grievances—commitment to or identification with a group or nation—are only an excuse to justify appropriation rather than produc-

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9.   Ernst Haas, *What is Nationalism and Why Should We Study It?*, 40 INT'L ORG. 707, 713 (1986).

10.   ERNEST GELLNER, NATIONS AND NATIONALISM 108 n.1 (1983).

11.   THE STATE OF THE NATION: ERNEST GELLNER AND THE THEORY OF NATIONALISM (John A. Hall, ed., 1998).

12.   *See generally* BENEDICT ANDERSON, IMAGINED COMMUNITIES: REFLECTIONS ON THE ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF NATIONALISM 41–65 (1983).

13.   *See* Paul Collier & Anke Hoeffler, *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, 56 OXFORD ECON. PAPERS 563 (2004).

14.   Jack Herschleifer, *Theorizing About Conflict, in* HANDBOOK OF DEFENSE ECONOMICS, VOL. 1, 172 (Kevin Hartley & Todd Sandler, eds., 1995).

tion. The broader conditions that determine whether a rebellion will be sustained are also material; they include the strength of the state (measured by economic wealth), the rebels' ability to extract resources from local populations or attain them from diasporic sympathizers, the alternative opportunities offered by the economic structure (including, for example, the proportion of men with secondary schooling), and the accessibility of natural resources. Ideology or identity do not matter, or are (merely) overlays on the ways that interests interact with structures.

The equally influential scholars in the field of comparative politics, James Fearon and David Laitin of Stanford University, focus more on politics than on economics to explain the outbreak of civil war.[15] They agree with Collier and Hoeffler that people make rational calculations about when and whether to rebel, rather than being driven by nationalist fervor or identity-based loyalties. More particularly, in their view, people make judgments about the capacity of the state to punish them as compared with its capacity to enrich them. Variables such as the state's military strength, political instability, and the type of regime explain whether people think they can evade a state's punishment and therefore can start a civil war. My (and Laitin's) favorite element of their explanation is the terrain on which a war might be fought; the presence or absence of mountains, swamps, jungles, or other rough terrain in which insurgents can hide or swoop does a lot to determine whether a civil war will start, persist, and succeed.[16]

These are not the only explanations within political science for civil wars; at least some scholars insist that ethnic loyalties matter much more than these ruthlessly rational models suggest. Two recent examples are articles insisting, respectively, that there really are such things as ethnic wars, which are "fought between ethnic groups over issues that relate to ethnicity"[17] and that "a focus on dignity, self-respect, and recognition, rather than a straightforward notion of self-interest, is a better prism for understanding ethnic and nationalist behavior."[18] But the fact that two of our best young scholars felt the need to insist that identities matter in explaining political conflict between ethnic groups is a good indication of how much political scientists tend to argue the opposite.[19]

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15.   *See generally* James Fearon & David Laitin, *Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War*, 97 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 75 (2003); James Fearon & David Laitin, *Civil War Narratives*, 1–68 (Univ. of Cal., Los Angeles. Working Paper No. 27, 2005), *available at* http://repositories.cdlib.org/uclasoc/trcsa/27.

16.   Fearon & Laitin, Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War, *supra* note 15, at 82–86.

17.   Nicholas Sambanis, *Using Case Studies to Understand Economic Models of Civil War*, 2 PERSP. ON POL. 259, 266 (2004).

18.   Ashutosh Varshney, *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Rationality*, 1 PERSP. ON POL. 85 (2003).

19.   *See also* Henry Hale, *The Makeup and Breakup of Ethnofederal States: Why Russia Survives Where the USSR Fell*, 3 PERSP. ON POL. 55 (2005); Kanchan Chandra, *Ethnic Parties and Democratic Stability*, 3 PERSP. ON POL. 235 (2005); Daniel Posner, *The Political Salience of*

If we move from a broad focus on nationalism and war to a nar-
rower focus on individual identities and peaceful political conflicts, we see
much the same emphasis on material and structural explanations rather
than ideational ones in the mainstream political science literature. The
most prominent analysis of political mobilization and voting argues that
Americans become engaged in politics for three reasons: they have suffi-
cient political resources (ranging from time to leadership skills to money),
they are mobilized by a political party or activist, and they have a strong
enough commitment to political engagement to overcome the inertia of
private life.[20] The latter variable is indeed based on ideas and values rather
than on resources and positions; it is comprised primarily of political in-
terest, political efficacy, political information, and partisanship. Thus
political ideas do not emerge from, or reduce to, resources and position in
this model—but they require them for the person to have any political
clout. As the authors put it,

> Interest, information, efficacy, and partisan intensity provide
> the desire, knowledge, and self-assurance that impel people to
> be engaged by politics. But time, money, and skill provide the
> wherewithal without which engagement is meaningless. It is
> not sufficient to know and care about politics. If wishes were
> resources, then beggars would participate.... The resource-
> poor are less politically active than those who are better en-
> dowed with resources.[21]

Most importantly here, these authors found almost no independent
effect of group consciousness on political activity. In their initial survey of
15,000 Americans, they asked women, African Americans, and Latinos a
series of questions about their closeness to other members of their group,
their sense of linked fate, and their sense of shared problems. In the fol-
low-up survey of 2,500 respondents (with oversamples of Blacks and

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Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi,
98 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 529 (2004) (all three agree that people have identities which make
them inclined to disagree intensely with people holding other identities, but all three
demonstrate that whether disagreement tips into physical conflict depends on political
boundaries and institutions, not on the nature or strength of identities).

A thriving theory in the subfield of international relations, known as constructiv-
ism, arose largely in reaction against the excessive materialism of earlier IR theories such
as realism and neo-liberalism. Constructivism in IR is the closest thing within political
science to the linguistic turn in critical race theory; I do not discuss it here because it has
so far had little to do with the study of race and ethnicity. An article that sets up essentially
the same contrast as I have here (i.e. do structures cause identities or do identities cause
structures?) is David Dessler & John Owen, *Constructivism and the Problem of Explanation*, 3
PERSP. ON POL. 597 (2005).

20.   *See* SIDNEY VERBA, ET AL., VOICE AND EQUALITY: CIVIC VOLUNTARISM IN AMERICAN
POLITICS (1995).

21.   *Id.* at 354–55.

Latinos), the authors asked further questions about group-specific policy preferences and experiences of discrimination. To their (and my own) surprise, "our efforts did not produce results. . . . None [of these measures] had an effect on political activity once measures of resources and other aspects of political engagement were included in the equation."[22] In short, race, gender, or ethnicity—and racial, gendered, or ethnic identification and perceptions of discrimination—do not explain political activity, at least in the United States in 1990.

Such a result is not unique to this exemplary study. Verba and his co-authors point to other studies that also found no connection between Black racial identity and political activism, once other variables were taken into account.[23] A more recent analysis found that, once one controls for life circumstances (income, education, age, English proficiency, and being foreign-born), presidential voting rates among Asian Americans and Latinos in California "are roughly equal to those of blacks and non-Hispanic whites."[24] Thus non-Anglos, at least in this study, vote for the same reasons and at the same rate as Whites if they have the same socio-economic characteristics; "native-born minorities have the same basic cost and benefit structure as the majority population."[25] Still another has determined that among African Americans in major cities of the United States, "the salience of race recedes with improvements in neighborhood quality."[26] These are all materialist models, or at least empirical findings that material conditions and institutional structures matter more than racial or ethnic identities and linguistic constructions in determining political action.[27]

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22.   *Id.* at 355.

23.   *Id.* at 356 (citing Lawrence Bobo & Franklin Gilliam Jr., *Race, Sociopolitical Participation, and Black Empowerment*, 84 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 377 (1990)); Katherine Tate, *Black Political Participation in the 1984 and 1988 Presidential Elections*, 85 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 1159 (1991).

24.   Wendy K. Tam Cho, *Naturalization, Socialization, Participation: Immigrants and (Non-)Voting*, 61 J. OF POL. 1140, 1147 (1999).

25.   *Id.* at 1150.

26.   Claudine Gay, *Putting Race in Context: Identifying the Environmental Determinants of Black Racial Attitudes*, 98 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 547 (2004).

27.   For yet more analyses by political scientists showing that institutions and conditions largely determine racial identities and actions, *see* IRA KATZNELSON, BLACK MEN, WHITE CITIES: RACE, POLITICS, AND MIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1900–1930 AND BRITAIN, 1948–1968 (1973); ROBERT C. LIEBERMAN, SHAPING RACE POLICY: THE UNITED STATES IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE (2005); ANTHONY MARX, MAKING RACE AND NATION: A COMPARISON OF SOUTH AFRICA, THE UNITED STATES, AND BRAZIL (1998); JOHN DAVID SKRENTNY, THE MINORITY RIGHTS REVOLUTION (2002); Paul Frymer, *Racism Revised: Courts, Labor Law, and the Institutional Construction of Racial Animus*, 99 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 373 (2005); Desmond King & Rogers Smith, *Racial Orders in American Political Development*, 99 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 75 (2005).

II. LINKED FATE, PANETHNICITY, RACISM, AND
THE RACIAL CONTRACT

The main areas of political science in which one finds fine-grained attention to racial or ethnic identity as a primary cause of political action lie in the study of linked fate or racial (ethnic) group consciousness, and of racism. Non-Anglo scholars have conducted much of this research, especially on racial consciousness. The central figure in this scholarship is Michael Dawson of the University of Chicago. In *Behind the Mule*, Dawson uses a 1984–'88 survey of African Americans to show that many Blacks perceive that their own lives are largely shaped by the collective fate of their group.[28] In his view, that is a rational perception and one based on self-interest, because despite the recent growth of a genuine class structure in the Black population, race still profoundly affects Blacks' life chances. This "black utility heuristic" leads to electoral preferences and policy views that are much more determined by race than by income or education, despite the fact that they vary somewhat by class. Dawson's argument is still firmly rooted in expectations derived from material conditions. But his emphasis on the importance of the perception of linked fate as an intervening variable between class and political views or actions moves this work a long way toward an ideational view.

Other scholars have followed up on the idea of linked fate, and found similarly that a sense of strong racial connection explains much about Blacks' political behavior.[29] A few have found a similar sense of linked fate (often articulated in terms of panethnicity) with corresponding political impact among Asian Americans,[30] and among Latinos.[31] More generally, political scientists in this genre study or produce "works that explore racial/ethnic group attitudes that have clear implications for the prospects of conflict and cooperation" or "works that look more broadly at how ideology, power dynamics, and racial hierarchy shape patterns of conflict and cooperation."[32] Three things are noteworthy about that sentence

28.   MICHAEL DAWSON, BEHIND THE MULE: RACE AND CLASS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICS (1994).

29.   KATHERINE TATE, FROM PROTEST TO POLITICS: THE NEW BLACK VOTERS IN AMERICAN ELECTIONS (1993); Darren Davis & Ronald Brown, *The Antipathy of Black Nationalism: Behavioral and Attitudinal Implications of an African American Ideology*, 46 AM. J. OF POL. SCI. 239–52 (2002); Robert Brown & Todd Shaw, *Separate Nations: Two Attitudinal Dimensions of Black Nationalism*, 64 J. OF POL. 22 (2002).

30.   *See* YEN LE ESPIRITU, ASIAN AMERICAN PANETHNICITY: BRIDGING INSTITUTIONS AND IDENTITIES (1992); PEI-TE LIEN, THE MAKING OF ASIAN AMERICA THROUGH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (2001); Claire Kim & Taeku Lee, *Interracial Politics: Asian Americans and Other Communities of Color*, 34 PS: POL. SCI. & POL. 631 (2001).

31.   IAN HANEY-LÓPEZ, RACISM ON TRIAL: THE CHICANO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE (2003); Matt Barreto, *Ethnic Cues: The Role of Shared Ethnicity in Latino Vote Choice*, Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL (2004).

32.   Kim & Lee, *supra* note 30, at 631.

for this Essay. First, this genre reverses the causal presumptions of the work discussed earlier about nationalism and civil war, by assuming that racial attitudes affect or even create conflict rather than that conflict creates racial commitments. Second and associated, the genre leaves more room for "attitudes"—that is, for ideas as causal forces—than do the works described earlier, although typically even attitudes are part of a list that includes more material phenomena, such as power and hierarchy. Third, most although not all of the scholars who study linked fate and panethnicity, and who trace the implications of these group identities, are themselves non-Anglos. That fact says nothing about the veracity of their arguments, or about the validity of the arguments of those who focus on material conditions and institutional structures as causal agents. But it does provide one more confirmation of the old saw that where you stand depends on where you sit.

The flip side of racial or ethnic linked fate is the study of racism as an individual or group attribute. There is a long tradition of scholarship among sociologists and social psychologists, joined by some political scientists, seeking to understand the origins and consequences of Whites' negative attitudes toward Blacks and other non-Whites. This literature has four main strands: racism is a consequence of combined racial animosity and democratic ideals;[33] racism grows out of a strong "social dominance orientation;"[34] racism emerges from group interests;[35] and what is often perceived to be racism is actually principled ideological conservatism.[36] The four positions are closely associated with particular scholars, and they emerge from long and often rather acrimonious interactions among the advocates of one or another position. They can sometimes be discerned in the same data sets even though the various analysts insist that the positions are almost mutually exclusive.[37] For my purposes here, two things matter most: none of these scholars thinks that individual self-interest has much impact on racial animus,[38] and only one of the four strands focuses on any

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33.   DONALD KINDER & LYNN SANDERS, DIVIDED BY COLOR: RACIAL POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC IDEALS (1996).

34.   JIM SIDANIUS & FELICIA PRATTO, SOCIAL DOMINANCE: AN INTERGROUP THEORY OF SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND OPPRESSION (1999) (Social Dominance Orientation is defined as the degree to which individuals desire and support group-based hierarchy and the domination of "inferior" groups by "superior" groups).

35.   Lawrence Bobo, *Group Conflict, Prejudice, and the Paradox of Contemporary Racial Attitudes, in* ELIMINATING RACISM: PROFILES IN CONTROVERSY (Phyllis Katz & Dalmas Taylor, eds., 1988).

36.   PAUL SNIDERMAN & THOMAS PIAZZA, THE SCAR OF RACE (1993) (arguing that what is perceived as racism is sometimes conservative political ideology).

37.   *See* DAVID SEARS, JIM SIDANIUS, & LAWRENCE BOBO, RACIALIZED POLITICS: THE DEBATE ABOUT RACISM IN AMERICA 1–43 (2000).

38.   David Sears & Carolyn Funk, *Self-interest in Americans' Political Opinions, in* BEYOND SELF-INTEREST (Jane Mansbridge, ed., 1990).

sort of interests at all. This is a sharply different view from those described earlier which seek to explain civil wars and nationalism.

The strongest version of the argument that racial ideas cause institutions and material outcomes is expressed by a scholar who is neither White nor a political scientist. Charles Mills, in *The Racial Contract*, argues that "White supremacy is the unnamed political system that has made the modern world what it is today."[39] The drive of Whites to attain and retain moral, political, and economic supremacy has led them to conquer non-White areas of the world, invent structures that permit domination, and design an epistemology that hides their control from themselves as well as from most non-White subjects. Mills insists that his claims are empirically based and testable, but his view of causation and of the relationship between ideas and material structures is about as far from, say, that of Fearon and Laitin as one can get. It is not shared by many political scientists.[40]

III. FIXITY AND FLUIDITY IN RACIAL AND ETHNIC HIERARCHIES

Rather than continue this sweep through the political science literature, let me draw several interim conclusions, and then turn to my own strategy for reconciling material and ideational frameworks. First, political scientists focus much more on material causes and structures than does the new generation of critical race theorists; even scholars who conceive of race-based attitudes or ideologies as causes place attitudes within a list that also includes class and power. Second, few political scientists spend much time thinking about the linguistic connotations of or conceptual boundaries around "race" or "ethnicity," or much time debating the legitimacy of categories such as Black, Latino, or Asian. Most simply use the terms as either independent or dependent variables depending on the nature of their analysis. Third and paradoxically, many political scientists are just as much or even more social constructivists as the new generation of critical legal scholars. The difference is that the former see race as constructed from material conditions such as the spread of literacy or industrialization, the location of state boundaries and mountains, the nature of federalism and the constitutional structure, or the level of economic development. Identities are constructed from *structures*—not from language, values, or personal or legal interactions.

Finally, most research in political science lacks the self-conscious ideological edge that lies at the center of critical legal studies. Material conditions, structures of power, and the distribution of resources are invoked to explain important phenomena, but not usually as the basis from which to argue that the institutions and distributions ought therefore to be changed. Work that starts from race and seeks to explain material con-

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39.   CHARLES MILLS, THE RACIAL CONTRACT 1 (1997).

40.   *See generally id.*

ditions typically does have a more critical edge built into it, since most authors perceive a high level of racial or ethnic hierarchy which they deplore. But here, too, political scientists usually strive for a tone of objectivity or neutrality, and their research is often rigorously quantitative, so it lacks the tone of revelation and resistance which lies at the core of most critical legal theory.

IV. FACING UP TO THE AMERICAN DREAM: MATERIAL CONDITIONS INTERSECT WITH IDEOLOGIES

My 1995 book, *Facing Up to the American Dream*, analyzed how material conditions and resources interact with African Americans' attitudes and values, and how those interactions have changed over time.[41] I examined the beliefs of the best-off and worst-off third of African Americans about the ideology of the American dream, racial discrimination and hierarchy, and optimism about and desire for racial integration from the early 1960s through the mid-1990s. Using public opinion surveys and qualitative evidence, I found that by 1995 poor Blacks had more faith in American society and in Whites than did well-off Blacks, which was a reversal from the 1960s—despite the fact that the situation of well-off Blacks had dramatically improved over those three decades while the situation of poor Blacks had arguably worsened. In short, attitudes and values did not track material conditions; in fact, in this case they moved in the opposite direction.

I described that pattern in the first few chapters. The rest of the book was devoted to trying to interpret and explain it, and to draw implications for the practice of American politics. I ended up arguing that perceptions, measured against expectations, were the key to poor Blacks' relative satisfaction with their dismal lot and well-off Blacks' increasing disaffection with their improving circumstances. Unlike 50 years ago, poor African Americans now live in circumstances in which it is very hard to see White or societal oppression; if you live in a public housing project such as the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, what you now see are Black (or possibly Latino) building supervisors, teachers, police, alderman, sometimes mayor, social workers, doctors, ministers, employers, bankers etc. You might know that your life is miserable and that your children have little chance to achieve their dreams, but the people who are shooting them or not teaching them or not giving you a job are usually no longer White. Class conflict and racial hierarchy are hard to perceive if they are not present in one's daily life and if one has a poor education and gets information mainly from the mass media—so poor Blacks end up

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41.   JENNIFER HOCHSCHILD, FACING UP TO THE AMERICAN DREAM: RACE, CLASS, AND THE SOUL OF THE NATION (1995).

relatively optimistic and satisfied, more by default than by any appropriate interpretation of their circumstances.

Affluent African Americans, in contrast, have all too many chances to see racial discrimination and possibly material exploitation. They now live and work more and more among Whites, and encounter daily abrasive hurts. More particularly, they perceive that at least some Whites still want to deny competitive success to African Americans, even if Whites will now permit absolute or relative success to members of their race. That is, most members of White society will now tolerate Blacks' becoming wealthy or even powerful, so long as they do not take over positions or statuses previously reserved for Whites. Whites exaggerate the "threat" coming from successful Blacks; conversely, successful Blacks perceive slights and rejections and disrespect even where Whites do not intend it. Both sides are excessively sensitive to competition from the other, and both have good reason, from their own vantage point, to fear being dominated by the other. In short, class conflict and racial hierarchy are altogether too visible to affluent and well-educated African Americans who hope to be treated as the successes they are, expect to be treated unfairly, and encounter unfairness often enough to reinforce their expectations rather than their hopes.

For the purposes of this Essay, the main point is that material conditions and political structures of hierarchy set the terms of the research in *Facing Up to the American Dream*—but attitudes and beliefs comprised the content. For that project, examining neither ideologies nor structures would have made sense without looking at the other and at the ways that they intersect.

V. FROM RACE TO SKIN COLOR, FROM RACIAL TO MULTIRACIAL: RACIAL HIERARCHY INTERSECTS WITH RACIAL CATEGORIES

My current research moves deeper into the analysis of both materially-based hierarchies and the linguistic or social construction of race and ethnicity. If it works as I hope, it will engage more fully with Delgado's concern that we examine "the material components of race, and the way these shape the country's agenda," as well as with "how we talk about, conceptualize, and narrate these issues."[42] My co-authors[43] and I are examining how the United States' racial/ethnic taxonomies and the practice of racial and ethnic hierarchy are—and are not—changing as a consequence of high levels of immigration and rapid demographic change, the recent growth of the Black middle class, the improved standing of Asian Ameri-

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42.   Delgado, *supra* note 7, at 11.

43.   I am writing this book with Traci Burch and Vesla Weaver. They are Ph.D. students in the Government and Social Policy Program at Harvard University, and are not responsible for anything in this Essay.

cans, the persistent but largely unarticulated impact of skin color on life chances, the growth of a multiracial political and cultural movement, and other shocks to older understandings of racial boundaries. Our starting premise is that these phenomena reveal, and are helping to create, significant changes in the United States' racial and ethnic structure, while simultaneously revealing and possibly helping to preserve some aspects of the old hierarchies and hostilities.

How much might the understanding and practice of race and ethnicity change in the United States in the foreseeable future? That, of course, is unanswerable; but the scope of possibility is revealed by the bland statement of the rigorously neutral, ruthlessly empirical newsletter called *Migration News*.[44] In the middle of a report of Census Bureau projections of racial and ethnic categories over the next few decades, the anonymous reporter added, "It is possible that, by 2050, today's racial and ethnic categories will no longer be in use."[45] I do not know just what that writer had in mind, but it is an astonishing idea, at least until one looks at the long sweep of American history, in which the terms and their referents have indeed changed considerably.[46]

Let us briefly consider two aspects of the unstable racial taxonomy. Skin color has always been differentiated in important ways within, as well as across, racial and ethnic groups. In most cases, the lighter the better; western colonialism reinforced but did not create skin color hierarchy in Asian and African nations.[47] In the United States, for example, my co-authors and I analyzed the National Survey of Black Americans, conducted in 1979–80.[48] In a year when Blacks averaged about ten years of schooling, there is a gap of almost two years between the schooling of the darkest and lightest African Americans. The same survey showed that dark-skinned Blacks earned less than seven-tenths as much as light-skinned Blacks—during a year in which Black families' mean income was

44.   *Migration News, Census, Welfare, California, New York City*, available at http://www.migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=2994_0_2_0.

45.   *Id.*

46.   *See generally* GEORGE M. FREDRICKSON, RACISM: A SHORT HISTORY (2002); MATTHEW FRYE JACOBSON, WHITENESS OF A DIFFERENT COLOR: EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS AND THE ALCHEMY OF RACE (1998); DAVID R. ROEDIGER, WORKING TOWARD WHITENESS (2005); Jennifer Hochschild, *Looking Ahead: Racial Trends in the U.S.*, 134 WINTER DAEDALUS 70 (2005).

47.   *See* Hiroshi Wagatsuma, *The Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan, in* COLOR AND RACE 129 (John Hope Franklin, ed., 1968) for an example of a Japanese proverb that asserts, "white skin makes up for seven defects."

48.   James S. Jackson & Gerald Gurin, *National Survey of Black Americans, 1979–1980* (Computer file). Conducted by University of Michigan, Survey Research Center. ICPSR ed. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (producer and distributor), 1999.

just over six-tenths of that of White families. Results are similar within
the Latino population of the United States.[49]

The fact that people with light skin typically have better social, cul-
tural, political, and economic outcomes suggests that racial and ethnic
hierarchy goes even deeper than most scholars of racial structure have real-
ized. However, most people do not recognize their responses to skin color,
do not recognize the impact of skin color on their own lives, or vehe-
mently reject the idea that skin color has or should have any impact on
racial or ethnic politics and commitments.[50] The ideology goes in one di-
rection; the reality goes in another. In short, our research on skin color
effects is showing that the material structures of racial hierarchy have an
impact way beyond what is included in virtually any idealist understanding
of race.

Multiracialism shows some of the same effects. The values placed on
multiracial identity are at present completely mixed, even contradictory and
mutually hostile. Some people of color (and Whites) embrace the new poli-
tics and culture of multiracialism as a means of breaking down the old rigid
color lines, as a way to enable people to recognize and identify with their
full heritage, as a necessity for good medical care, or as a new frontier for
civil rights advocacy.[51] Others see the embrace of multiracialism as merely
one more attempt by outsiders to undermine Black or Hispanic solidarity,
as a strategy to disrupt litigation or legislation around civil rights, voting
rights, and employment discrimination, or as an underhanded way to dis-
tance oneself from Blackness (or Latino identity).[52] Still others see it as a
pragmatic reality, given rates of immigration and intermarriage, that politi-
cal actors must accommodate as well as they can.[53] Regardless of how one
feels about it, there is growing evidence that the fact of being multiracial
has important consequences for one's life chances. For example, the socio-
econonomic status of biracial children falls, consistently between that of

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49.   Jennifer Hochschild, et al., *Effects of Skin Color Bias in SES on Political Activities
and Attitudes,* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Associa-
tion, Chicago IL (Sept. 2, 2004).

50.   Jennifer Hochschild, *When Do People Not Protest Inequality?: The Case of Skin
Color Discrimination,* 73 SOCIAL RESEARCH (forthcoming 2006); Jennifer Hochschild, et al.,
*Skin Color, Perceptions of Discrimination, and Racial or Ethnic Identity: What Are the Links, and
Why?,* Presented at the Harvard University Political Psychology and Behavior Workshop,
Cambridge MA (Dec. 11, 2003).

51.   Jennifer Hochschild & Vesla Weaver, *Racial Classification and the Politics of Inequal-
ity,* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association,
Washington D.C. (Sept. 1, 2005); Kimberly DaCosta, *Multiracial Identity: From Personal Prob-
lem to Public Issue, in* NEW FACES IN A CHANGING AMERICA: MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY IN THE
21ST CENTURY (Loretta Winters & Herman DeBose, eds., 2003).

52.   Hochschild & Weaver, *supra* note 51.

53.   KIM WILLIAMS, RACE COUNTS: AMERICAN MULTIRACIALISM & CIVIL RIGHTS
POLITICS chapter 6 (forthcoming 2005).

their lower status parent and that of their higher status parent.[54] Thus, on the one hand, the fact of having mixed racial or ethnic ancestry has real, material, consequences for one's life—independent of the language with which we understand that fact.[55] But on the other hand, the growth of and contestation around a multiracial movement show that the mere fact of having parents of different races is politically and personally very different from the claim of a multiracial identity and community.[56]

It is not clear at this point whether our linguistic conventions ("Black", "White," etc.) will or should keep the structures of second-order discrimination based on skin color mostly submerged. It is equally unclear, conversely, whether the impact of skin color will help to generate a new and more flexible language of race (e.g. "dark-skinned Black" or "light-skinned Asian"). Nor can we tell whether greater attention to variation within racial and ethnic groups by skin color is more likely to have harmful effects on racial practices in the United States (by undermining group solidarity), or beneficial effects, by drawing attention to the position of the worst-off.

Similarly, we cannot predict whether the increasing attractiveness of multiracial identity, combined with the structural changes caused by immigration and intermarriage, will confirm the prediction that "by 2050, today's racial and ethnic categories will no longer be in use." If that does happen, its effects could be beneficial or detrimental from the perspective of racial equity. The optimistic prediction is that loosening the conceptual and behavioral bounds around "Blacks," "Whites," or "Latinos" will liberate some individuals and benefit us all. After all, flexibility and malleability usually open more options for change than do rigid categories; genuinely treating race as a changeable social construction might generate material improvements for those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The pessimistic prediction is that loosening the conceptual and behavioral boundaries around each group will diminish racial solidarity in disadvantaged groups as people scramble to escape them, with severe costs to those left behind (or choosing to remain behind). In this view, insisting that race is a social construction may increase the chances that racial hierarchy will be more fine-grained and complicated, but will do nothing to improve the material conditions of the worst-off or change the underlying structure of disadvantage.

Thus in my own research, the material bases of racial and ethnic inequality are even more tightly interwoven with the conceptual categories in

54.   David R. Harris & Jeremiah Sim, *Who Is Multiracial? Assessing the Complexity of Lived Race*, 67 AM. SOC. REV. 614 (2002).

55.   David R. Harris & Jeremiah Sim, *An Empirical Look at the Social Construction of Race: The Case of Mixed-Race Adolescents* 1–19 (Population Studies Center, University of Michigan, Research Report No. 00-452, 2000), *available at* http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/pubs/.

56.   Kimberly DaCosta, *All in the Family: The Familial Roots of Racial Division, in* THE POLITICS OF MULTRACIALISM (Heather Dalmage, ed., 2004).

which we understand race and ethnicity than in my previous work about the intersection of race and class. Richard Delgado is right to insist that we should attend much more to "the material components of race," and even more correct when he agrees, somewhat grudgingly, that "all of these issues have a discourse dimension, of course."[57]

CONCLUSION: RACE VERSUS CLASS?

Political scientists arguably pay too little attention to ideas when analyzing the causes and consequences of group identity and conflict; critical race theorists arguably pay too little attention to material structures and differences in power that shape or even create these identities and conflicts. Exhorting scholars in each group to shift their focus is probably a waste of time, although exhortations might have an impact on new entrants into each field. My own research focuses on the interactions between the two central paradigms, in an effort to avoid one more set of boundaries and blinders. But, except occasionally, I am under no illusions that I have discovered the right mix of emphases or right causal paths—and others have told me in no uncertain terms that this new line of research is deeply wrongheaded.

The most interesting question here is when and how a polity ends up attending primarily to one dimension of cleavage at the expense of others. Why do politics and identities in the United States revolve mainly around race or ethnicity; why do Americans so vigorously deny that they live in a class-based society? Why do the Irish kill each other over religion, whereas for several centuries Americans hated the idea that other citizens were Protestant or Catholic but seldom went to war over that fact? Why do Tutsis suddenly decide that Hutus must be slaughtered, or vice versa, when they were deeply intertwined through marriage and social life for many generations? Why did some European nations but not others develop a robust socialist movement through much of the twentieth century (and why has it largely died)? Perhaps most interestingly, is Stanley Fish right in asserting that over the next century, "religion ... will succeed high theory ... and race, gender, and class as the center of intellectual energy in academe"?[58] Will religion supersede group-based identities in politics as well? If so, a materialist analysis will have no more purchase in young critical race scholars' choice of research topics than it does now—but that will not mean that materialism is unimportant, any more than it does now. We live in interesting times, perhaps to everyone's detriment except those of us safely perched in universities.

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57. Delgado, *supra* note 7, at 151–52.
58. Stanley Fish, *One University, Under God?*, CHRON. OF HIGHER ED., Jan. 7, 2005 at C4.