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Racial Formation in the United States

Third Edition

**MICHAEL OMI AND
HOWARD WINANT**

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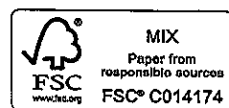
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Introduction: Racial Formation in the United States

Mic Check! Mic Check!

Can we talk about race and racism? They are just as prevalent as ever, though awareness of their presence is often suppressed. The racial present always needs to be studied and explained anew. Race and racism remain central in our lives, but they are changing too.

Let us introduce this book with the call-out “Mic Check!” a request to speak that is commonly associated with the Occupy movement, but is actually a couple of decades older than that.¹ This Introduction frames our major concerns in the book. We adopt the term “Mic Check,” because we see our work as a call-out, a demand that new attention be paid to the deepening crisis of race and racism in the contemporary United States.

Way back in 1993, funkmaster George Clinton (our favorite Clinton), urged folks to “Paint the White House Black” (Clinton 1993; see also Lusane 2011; Jeffries 2013). A mere 15 years later in 2008, what was a once a hip-hop racial fantasy became a reality with the election of Barack Obama.

In the immediate wake of the Obama victory, the claim that the United States was now a “post-racial” society enjoyed popular dissemination and acceptance. The “fact of blackness” in the White House was interpreted as resounding proof that the nation was moving “beyond race.” That a black man² could be elected to the highest post in the land was cited as a stunning testament to how far the nation had come in moving beyond the discriminatory racial attitudes and exclusions of the past.

But lest we lapse into a comforting scenario of advancing progress towards the eventual eclipse of racism, a bit of perspective is warranted. A reporter once told Malcolm X that the passage of key pieces of civil right legislation was clear proof that things were getting better for blacks. In response, Malcolm countered that it did not show improvement to stick a knife nine inches into someone, pull it out six inches, and call it progress. “But some people,” Malcolm observed, “don’t even want to admit the knife is there” (Malcolm X, quoted in Lipsitz 1998, 46).

The “knife,” the weapon and wound of racial disadvantage and dispossession, continues to be ignored today. Structural forms of racial inequality persist and in many cases have deepened. Empirical studies on health care access, educational opportunity, and incarceration rates demonstrate continuing inequalities along racial lines. The Great Recession that began in 2008 and was rooted in the subprime home

mortgage crisis had extensive racial dimensions. People of color were more than three times as likely as whites to have subprime and high-cost loans. Such loans accounted at one point for more than 55 percent of all black and Latin@ mortgages (Rogers 2008). The distribution of economic resources, the patterns of cultural consumption, and the organization of residential space are all social processes in which race operates as a fundamental organizing principle of inequality and difference. Americans may have "painted the White House black," but race remains a fundamental category of (dis)empowerment in the United States. As a nation, we appear deeply unable to challenge or even address the significance of race in our own lives, as well as the enduring forms of racism and the attitudes, policies, and practices that sustain them.

Persistent racial inequality and difference are rendered illegible in U.S. popular political discourse. Many people in the United States believe that the goals of the civil rights movement have been substantially achieved, that racial discrimination is a thing of past, and that we are rapidly evolving into a truly colorblind society. "Race thinking," it is argued, no longer significantly informs our perceptions, shapes our attitudes, and influences our individual, collective, and institutional practices. Indeed, it is said that the most effective anti-racist consciousness, policy, and practice is simply to ignore race. We are urged to see people as individuals only, not as persons or groups whose identities or social positions have been shaped and organized by race.

After Obama's January 27, 2010 State of the Union speech, MSNBC host Chris Matthews said of the President, "He is post-racial, by all appearances. I forgot he was black tonight for an hour" (Matthews 2010). But can anyone in the contemporary United States really ever "forget" race? Can we actually suspend how we immediately "see" and "read" people with whom we come into contact? Can we avoid categorizing people into existing racial categories? In short, can we actually transcend racial distinctions and meanings as we navigate our institutional and everyday lives? As Martha and the Vandellas once put it, "Got nowhere to run to, baby, nowhere to hide" (1965). The ubiquity of race is inescapable across nearly every social domain.

But race and racial meanings are neither stable nor consistent. Contradictions abound today, as they have in the past. Most overt forms of racial discrimination have been outlawed, but racial inequalities pervade every institutional setting. A professed desire to be colorblind bumps up against the ubiquity of race consciousness, both in political life and everyday life. Consider the problematic nature of racial identity itself. The U.S. Census employs a system of racial classification, but many individuals and groups cannot locate themselves within it. They cannot conveniently fit into any of the designated racial categories. A person's own sense of racial identity may differ significantly from how other people see and categorize her/him. Some individuals actively resist imposed categories by "performing" race in a subversive manner. A white person, for example, might take on the linguistic patois and stylistic gait we commonly associate with contemporary blackness. Over a person's life course, they may "switch" racial identities—or be transferred to a new racially defined group, as a result of changes in state-based racial classification, the emergence of new group definitions, or even a longing to claim a suppressed or long-abandoned identity, real

or imagined. For example, since the 1960 Census, there has been a dramatic increase in the American Indian population in the United States. (Passel 1996, 79). Such an increase is not driven by actual growth, but by increased numbers of Americans claiming Native identity.

Racial identity is a slippery thing. Given these many contradictions, how might we begin to grasp the overall meaning of race in the United States? In this book we discuss *the centrality of race in the organization of political life in the United States*. We attempt to develop an overarching perspective on both race and racism in this country. Our hope is to provide a coherent conceptual framework by which we can grasp the importance of race as a key category: of inequality, of difference/identity, and of agency, both individual and collective. Such a framework also seeks to understand racial change—how concepts and ideologies of race and racism evolve, transform, and shift over historical time. We engage in a deep interrogation of racial theory, both past and present. We try to understand and contextualize the race concept. We explore how race has both informed and been informed by prevailing political conflicts.

Racial Theory

Race and racism in the United States have been shaped by a centuries-long conflict between white domination and resistance by people of color. Theories of race and racism have necessarily been molded by the same relationships. Informed to a large extent by the needs of dominant groups who required the nation-state they were building to be both organized and intelligible for the purposes of rule,³ racial theory for years served mainly the interests of the powerful—white settlers, slave owners, colonial and later national elites. Entire systems of rule—labor and political regimes among others—had to be organized, structured, regulated, and explained. The concept of race, developing unevenly in the Americas from the arrival of Europeans in the Western Hemisphere down to the present, has served as a fundamental organizing principle of the social system. Practices of distinguishing among human beings according to their corporeal characteristics became linked to systems of control exploitation, and resistance.

Since race and racism involve violence, oppression, exploitation, and indignity, they also generate movements of resistance and theories of resistance. The necessity to comprehend and explain the modern world extended beyond the oppressors to the oppressed, who sought to understand the calamities that had befallen them through conquest, kidnapping, mass murder, enslavement, exclusion, and genocide. While early resistance-based theories of race have largely been suppressed and hidden, the past is being excavated and examined in new and greater detail. We now have a large number of slave narratives to draw upon, for example. Recent work in African and Spanish colonial history, as well as work on indigenous and Arabic texts produced in the Americas, has increased our awareness of early resistance-based accounts of what we would now call race and racism.⁴

Despite the enormous legacy and volume of racial theory, the concept of race remains poorly understood and inadequately explained. This is true not only in everyday life but also in the social sciences, the humanities, law, medicine, and the biological sciences. Because race operates as a "common-sense" concept, a basic component of social cognition, identity, and socialization, everyone considers herself/himself an expert on the subject. Race seems obvious and in some ways superficial. What is there to explain? Race appears to be a given attribute, an ordinary "social fact." That one has a racial identity is thus no more problematic, no more worthy of interpretation, than that one has a head upon one's shoulders. That's just the way it is.

But when asked what race *means*, what the significance is of being black, white, brown, red, or yellow, difficulties rapidly set in. Over the ages these categories' meanings have varied a great deal: They have carried religious, scientific, political, and cultural weight. Race has been understood as a sign of God's pleasure or displeasure, as an indicator of evolutionary development, as a key to intelligence, and as a signifier in human geography, among many other things. Concepts of race have conformed to the exigencies of time and place. In rising empires, the imperatives of conquest have shaped ideas about racial hierarchy, with portrayals of the strong and superior occupiers contrasted with the weak and inferior natives. In periods of social dislocation and economic decline, race has come to mark those groups who signify corruption and dilution of the national spirit and purpose. When secularism and scientism have contended against religious dogma, efforts to classify, categorize, and rank humanity along racial lines have come to the fore. Today, we reject many (though not all) of the earlier incarnations, understandings, and uses of the race concept. Indeed, in the contemporary United States it is frequently claimed that race has become meaningless, that it is an outdated idea, a throwback to earlier, benighted times, an empty signifier at best. No wonder confusion reigns.

Race and the Social Sciences

Attention to race has risen and fallen in the social sciences, driven once again by racial "common sense." The great social theorists of the 19th-century, towering figures such as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber, were all consumed with analyzing the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and interpreting the dynamic forces shaping modern (i.e., 19th-century European) society. Although they shared this central intellectual concern, these thinkers could not agree on which structural relationships were the most important factors explaining the rise of that modern, capitalist society, with its "rational-legal" form of authority and complex division of labor. What they could agree upon, though, was the belief that racial and ethnic social bonds, divisions, and conflicts were remnants of a pre-industrial order that would decline in significance in the modern period.⁵ Marx and Engels, for example, predicted that as society split up into two great, antagonistic classes, social distinctions such as race and ethnicity would decrease in importance.

In fairness to Marx and Engels, they did consider race in their discussion of "primitive accumulation," the launching-phase of modern capitalism. Marx writes:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of blackskins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations with the globe for a theater. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain, assumes giant dimensions in England's Anti-Jacobin War, and is still going on in the opium wars with China.

(1967, 351)

Furthermore, in their support of the abolitionist cause they linked race to the working-class movement, both in Britain and the United States; Marx famously asserted in *Capital* that "labor cannot emancipate itself in a white skin where in a black skin it is branded" (1967, 329). Writing somewhat later, Weber and Durkheim were much less cognizant of the complexities of race.⁶

The "founding fathers" of American sociology (men such as Albion Small, William Graham Sumner, and Edward A. Ross) were explicitly concerned with racial hierarchy and racial classification, which they saw in terms of evolutionary theory.⁷ Social science was shaped, not only by the European founding fathers, but also by the Social Darwinist currents of the period. As did virtually all the early figures, these men adhered to the unquestioned white supremacy of their time. Their work contributed, sometimes inadvertently but often by intention, to the racist hysteria of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The epoch of the emergence of modern social science in the United States coincided with a sustained period of racial reaction, marked by the institutionalization of Jim Crow in the South, the success of the movement for Asian exclusion, and the rise of eugenics. Especially in this atmosphere, adherence to biologicistic perspectives on race severely limited innovation and social scientific interest in this field.⁸

As nearly every race-oriented U.S. social scientist pursued the chimera of "natural" racial hierarchy, a small number of scholars, almost all of them black, challenged mainstream (i.e., white) conceptions of race, and implicitly racism as well, although that term did not yet exist. Led by the protean intellectual and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, such scholars as Alain Locke, Kelly Miller, William Monroe Trotter, Anna Julia Cooper, and others created a social science of race and racism, refusing and refuting the biologicistic racism of their white contemporaries. These writers and activists were largely denied entrance to the whites-only universities of the time. Based in historically black colleges and universities like Howard, Atlanta (now Clark-Atlanta), and Fisk and active in community-based institutions and organizations, these people were the true intellectual leaders of their time, at least in respect to racial theory. Although

there were some minor lapses here and there, their work was premised on then radical understandings of the meaning of equality, political and social rights, and on a commitment to a fully democratic and racially inclusive U.S. society.⁹ Besides breaking new ground in racial theory, Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* virtually invented modern, empirically grounded sociology in the United States as well (Du Bois 1998 [1899]).

Only in the 1920s did mainstream sociology even begin to catch up to these pioneering black efforts. Led by Robert E. Park, the "Chicago School of Sociology" began after World War I to rework social scientific approaches to race, and eventually reinvented much of the wheel that Du Bois had created two decades earlier. Park had earlier been a publicist and ghost-writer for Booker T. Washington; in his later years he taught at Fisk, having been invited there by Charles S. Johnson, a former student and major sociologist of race in his own right (Johnson 1996 [1934]), who had become the university's president.

Park and other progressive white thinkers largely succeeded in mainstreaming a socially grounded, if not political, concept of race, and countering the racial biologism that had dominated racial theory in an unbroken fashion throughout U.S. history. Chicago sociology would shape the dominant theoretical and methodological assumptions about race for the greater part of the 20th century and beyond. That black scholars could not have achieved this result is a bitter but obvious truth that speaks directly to their marginalization in the field. Just as black popular music—blues and jazz—could only gain popular currency when white musicians played it, black racial theory could only begin to make headway in the "mainstream" social sciences when reframed and advanced by white scholars.¹⁰

Chicago School racial theory still left a lot to be desired. It was deterministic and resolutely apolitical. Park's "race-relations cycle," for example, still widely regarded as one of the most important contributions to the field, understood its subject as moving through four stages—contact, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation—leaving such matters as collective action and political agency out of the picture, and postulating assimilation (presumably into whiteness) as the positive end-state of "race relations." Park proposed the cycle as a theoretical law of historical development, a way of analyzing group relations and assessing a "minority" group's progress along a fixed continuum.¹¹

Beginning with Park's concepts, a set of assumptions have gradually come to characterize the field and serve as guides for social scientists investigating the nature of race in the United States. Blauner discusses these assumptions as follows:

First, the view that racial and ethnic groups are neither central nor persistent elements of modern societies. Second, the idea that racism and racial oppression are not independent dynamic forces but are ultimately reducible to other causal determinants, usually economic or psychological. Third, the position that the most important aspects of racism are the attitudes and prejudices

of Americans. And, finally, the so-called *immigrant analogy*, the assumption, critical in contemporary thought, that there are no essential long-term differences—in relation to the larger society—between the *third world* or racial minorities and the European ethnic groups.

(2001 [1972], 2; emphasis original)

These assumptions are as much political as they are theoretical. They neglect both the institutional and ideological nature of race in America, and the systematic entrenchment of racial dynamics in such spheres as education, art, social policy, law, religion, and science. They focus attention on race as an irrational construct, a product of individual "attitudes and prejudices" rather than a social structure deeply rooted, not only in ideas and beliefs, but also in institutions, fundamental patterns of inequality, social geography, and the exercise of political power.¹² Such assumptions make it impossible to grasp the specificity of racism and racial conflict in the United States. They lead the analyst toward evolutionary models that optimistically predict the gradual absorption of racially identified groups into the (implicitly white) mainstream of American political, economic, and cultural life.¹³ Racial theories based on these assumptions—launched in the 1920s and reaching down to the present—reveal as much about the prevailing state of racial politics and racial ideology when they were produced as they do about the nature of race relations.

The Trajectory of Racial Politics

At any given moment, we are in a particular phase of the *trajectory* of racial politics. Our idea of trajectory refers to a political process, in which rising phases of mobilization are followed by declining phases. From the long-run standpoint, the trajectory of racial politics is a process of "cumulative and cyclical development"¹⁴ taking place over centuries: the *longue durée*. To consider seriously the depth and variety of racial rule and of resistance to it is to contemplate the genealogy of race and racism (Martinot 2002) in the United States and on a global scale. Over the centuries, we see North America as a terrain both for populating (with settlers) and depopulating (the removal and genocide of the original inhabitants). Over the centuries, we see the United States as both a key part of the slavery system and as a locus for abolitionism and "abolition democracy" (Du Bois). Over the centuries, we see the United States as—always and simultaneously—an anticolonial and colonial nation-state.

While past racial atrocities are now commonly acknowledged, optimistic observers of our nation's recent history offer a vision of a society trying to live up to democratic and egalitarian principles by slowly extending and applying them to the gnawing issues of race. We are in the midst, so it is claimed, of a period of enlightened progress—an unfolding drama of racial incorporation that will not be thwarted or reversed. A truly colorblind society, it is argued, will eventually emerge. How did we get to this point and where might we be headed?

A cursory glance at American history reveals that far from being colorblind, the United States has always been an extremely race-conscious nation. From the very inception of the republic to the present moment, race has been a profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location in the labor market, and indeed one's sense of identity. The hallmark of this history has been racism. While groups of color have been treated differently, all can bear witness to the tragic consequences of racial oppression. The United States has confronted each group with a unique form of despotism and degradation. The examples are familiar: Native Americans faced removal and genocide, blacks were subjected to racial slavery and Jim Crow, Latin@s were invaded and colonized, and Asians faced exclusion.¹⁵ While the ethos of equality has been invoked quite frequently, this has usually served merely to justify blatant inequality and mistreatment.

Recent U.S. racial history has followed a more complex and contradictory path. The country has experienced successive waves of racial turbulence and quiescence. Political challenges to the U.S. racial regime have been followed by containment of such challenges, sometimes through reform and sometimes through repression. Reforms that were supposed to diminish the depth and extent of racism have undoubtedly had some positive effects, but overall they have produced contradictory, even ironic results. Racial injustice and racial inequality, exclusion, violence, and neglect, are all so deeply rooted in the nation that just reducing them "moderately"—while presumably preferable to exacerbating them or treating them with "benign neglect"—may *itself* have baleful consequences. Inadequate and vulnerable civil rights measures, after all, have also served to ratify and reinvigorate the underlying racial regime.¹⁶

By the 1960s, because of the upheavals and challenges that developed during and after World War II, race occupied the center stage of American politics in a manner unprecedented since the Civil War era a century earlier. Civil rights struggles and ghetto revolts, as well as controversies over state policies of reform and repression, highlighted a period of intense conflict in which the meaning of race was fiercely politically contested. Civil rights laws and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 enfranchised millions whose democratic rights had long been denied. Congress also sought to curtail discrimination in the labor and housing markets. A long-overdue reform in U.S. immigration law (the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965) laid the foundation for the massive demographic shifts that were to follow over the next decades. However limited some of these legislative and judicial reforms would turn out to be, the decade saw the greatest expansion of democratic rights in the nation's history. As virtually all observers agree, the political and policy-oriented transformations of the 1960s were driven by massive popular mobilization, notably for civil rights and racial equality.

There was a moment, a spark of recognition before the assassinations and upheavals of 1968, when it was recognized that the accomplishments of the black movement had opened up a broader prospect for radical democratic transformation in the United States. The black movement at that moment was deeply torn between radical and centrist currents; black power politics were particularly under attack: by

the state, the right-wing, and the "moderates" as well. The "long hot summers," the restive ghettos across the country, were a particular target for attack. But at that point the movement was still active and growing; the Black Panther Party was galvanizing the ghetto and its example was influencing Native American, Latin@, and Asian American organizing as well. The Poor People's Movement was being built by SCLC and its allies, so a transracial movement of the poor was at least imaginable. Even at the state level, adjustments to the new domestic balance of forces were underway: The War on Poverty and the Great Society were promising redistribution as J. Edgar Hoover was killing Panthers (Haas 2011). In the streets, the anti-war movement and the developing "second-wave" feminist movement were coming into their own.

The spark of radical democratic hope was brief indeed. It was murdered with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis on April 4, 1968, with Robert F. Kennedy in Los Angeles on the night of June 5, 1968, in Chicago at the Democratic Party convention in late August of 1968, and in hundreds of other setbacks as well. Indeed, after King was killed more than 100 cities went up in flames.

It seems reasonable to argue that the containment of the movement began with those killings and riots and burnings. Still it required an extended process, a comprehensive reordering of U.S. political life, to block the advance of the black movement and its allies toward greater equality and "participatory democracy." We have experienced nearly half a century of reactionary racial politics since that peak moment in the late 1960s.

Yet the movement has not been destroyed. Its accomplishments live on as a gift from earlier generations of activists and thinkers to later ones. Yes, the reforms it achieved have been largely neutralized by state-based reaction, by authoritarian populist movements, and by colorblind racial hegemony as well. But racial reaction could not destroy the increased awareness, the enhanced race consciousness, and the profoundly politicized identities that sprang from the black movement and its feminist, working-class, anti-imperialist, and queer allies. The epochal confrontation between the post-World War II anti-racist movement—what we call the Great Transformation—and the racial reaction that succeeded it, has generated a new type of crisis in U.S. society.

"[C]risis," Gramsci famously wrote, "consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass" (1971, 276). Using the Gramscian formula, we suggest that in the U.S. there has developed, during the extended declining phase of the political trajectory of race, an enormous and chronic crisis. "Chronic" is not a word usually associated with the term "crisis," which usually signifies an acute problem, not an extended one. But, as Dr. Dre reminds us, we have not yet emerged from this ongoing pattern of racial contradiction, the chronic racial dilemma we are still in. It is quite mind-boggling, when looked at as a whole: On the one hand, the old verities of established racism and white supremacy have been officially discredited, not only in the United States but fairly comprehensively around the world. On the other

hand, racially informed action and social organization, racial identity and race consciousness, continue unchecked in nearly every aspect of social life! On the one hand, the state (many states around the world) now claims to be colorblind, non-racialist, racially democratic; while, on the other hand, in almost every case, those same states need race to rule. Consider in the United States alone: race and electoral politics, race and social control, race and legal order...

Why don't our heads *explode* under the pressures of such cognitive dissonance?

Looking Forward in this Book

Despite all the upheaval we have experienced in recent years, the outcome of contemporary racial conflict remains uncertain and unresolved. The continuing ebb and flow of racial politics, and the intense contradictions it evokes, beg for a new interpretation. This book developed from our desire to comprehend the centrality of race in U.S. life and to understand how ideologies of race have changed over the past 50 years. Our discussion is divided into three parts. First, we survey how the concept of race has been interpreted in the main currents of social scientific thought. Then, we propose our own account of the race concept and racial politics. Finally, we trace how ideologies of race have shifted over the past 50 years in order to discern the overall political trajectory of race and racism in the present-day United States.

Now that we have introduced our approach and theoretical premises, we turn to a brief chapter outline in the remaining part of this Introduction.

In Part I, *Paradigms of Race: Ethnicity, Class, and Nation*, we examine recent racial theory in the United States. We argue that this theory is encompassed by three paradigmatic approaches to race and racism—approaches based on the categories of ethnicity, class, and nation. These approaches are *paradigms*,¹⁷ in the sense that they have particular core assumptions and highlight particular key issues and research variables. Racial paradigms have implicit and explicit policy and political action orientations; they also serve as guides for research and education about race and racism.

There are, of course, limitations to this approach. We do not suggest that these three paradigms encompass all the racial theories generated during the period under consideration, but we do think that they embrace the vast bulk of them and demarcate the major lines of debate. Specific theories, and the paradigms themselves, are treated as *ideal types*: That is, our concept of paradigms is a distillation for the purpose of analysis of complex and variegated theoretical arguments. A qualification to our approach, therefore, is the recognition that often a specific viewpoint, concept, or study cannot be neatly classified in one or the other paradigm. In many cases particular analyses of race—political, jurisprudential, or academic, say—which we locate in one paradigm, contain arguments that resemble those suggested within another paradigm. We discuss each of these main currents in racial theory, devoting a chapter to each. While these theoretical approaches all contributed to our understanding race in the United States, each was flawed in its own way, limited by its particular

need to *reduce* race to a manifestation of some other, supposedly more fundamental, sociopolitical concept. To overcome this reductionism is a key objective of our racial formation approach.

Chapter 1 examines *ethnicity* theory—a perspective that arose in the post-World War I years as an insurgent challenge to the religious doctrines and biologicistic accounts of race that prevailed at that time. From its initial efforts to explain the social upheavals brought about by vast waves of immigration to the United States around the turn of the 20th century, ethnicity theory focused on U.S. processes of incorporation such as assimilation and cultural pluralism. The early concerns of ethnicity theory involved inclusion and its obstacles in respect to different European immigrant groups. At this time, the acceptance and integration of Europeans was still in doubt, while that of immigrants of color was highly restricted, and groups of color were subject to overt discrimination.

From the end of World War II through the 1960s, however, racial conditions changed. The emphasis on incorporation was extended to the situation of blacks and other groups of color who continued to be marginalized and excluded. Drawing analogies to the assimilation and integration of European immigrant groups, ethnicity scholars were initially optimistic regarding the integration of blacks and other groups of color. The rise in the late-1960s and early-1970s of radical social movements based in communities of color caught ethnicity theorists by surprise. Movements rejected the assimilationist and pluralist visions that were central to ethnicity theory by demanding group recognition and political rights, resource redistribution, and broad cultural transformation. In response to the perceived radical threat, ethnicity theorists moved rightward, gravitating to neoconservative positions that emphasized individualism, not “groupism,” and embracing colorblind racial policies and practices.

Chapter 2 considers *class* theories of race, accounts that afford primacy to economic structures and processes. Class theories render race legible by examining economic inequalities along racial lines. Within the broader class paradigm, we examine three general analytic orientations to race. We designate these as the market-, stratification-, and class conflict-based approaches. These three currents of the class paradigm are grounded in different economic spheres: exchange relationships (markets), systems of distribution (stratification), and conflict over labor exploitation (in Marxist terms, conflict over the “social relations of production”).

Efforts to interpret racial inequality as a consequence of economic relationships obviously have an important role to play in understanding race as an overall phenomenon. Yet these efforts uniformly fail to account for the role of race as a *cause* of existing economic relationship. Both market-based and stratification-approaches tend to detach economic life from social and political life. Class conflict theories (generally Marxist) admirably recognize race-class interaction more comprehensively, but they still reduce race to a subset of labor-based conflict in which class trumps race. While inequality is certainly an important dimension of race and racism, we argue that race cannot simply be reduced to an economic matter. Politics, culture, and

many other other social factors shape economic life as much as they are shaped by it; these are all eminently racial matters.

Chapter 3 considers *nation*-based theories of race. These have their origins in the imperial seizures of territory and the settler colonialism of the modern era. Since the imperial dawn, the ideas of race and nation have been deeply connected through concepts of *peoplehood*. Both as North American colonies of European empires, and then as a nation-state of its own, the United States identified as white. This identification as a white nation remains visible in the associations with whiteness that are visible across extensive historical time in such concepts as "the American people" and in U.S. nationalism more generally.

The concept of peoplehood, however, did not operate only among the ruling whites. It was present from the start among the racialized "others" as well. Africans and their descendants, Native Americans, Latin@s and Caribeñ@s subject to conquest and settlement, and immigrants who were not white (or not yet white) understood their identity collectively in terms of peoplehood: For them, the concept was born out of resistance. Many were drawn toward insurgent nationalisms, as the possibilities of inclusion and full citizenship were consistently denied them. Thus nation-based concepts of race became rooted, not only in the dominant group, but also in subordinate ones. The production of racial otherness generated not only the mark of oppression but also the mark of resistance. While the nation-based paradigm supplies a valuable concept—peoplehood—to the overall corpus of racial theory, it is still reductionist vis-à-vis race. Nation-based theories treat race as a mere manifestation of the presumptively deeper concept of "the nation," and project "internal" colonial relations of domination and resistance forward into the present.

In Part II, *Racial Formation*, we advance our own theory of racial formation, departing from ethnicity-, class-, and nation-based understandings. We do not repudiate these paradigms across the board, but criticize their limitations and seek to incorporate them in a larger, more realistic, and in our view more practically radical account, based in our theory of racial formation.

In Chapter 4, *The Theory of Racial Formation*, we stress that race is a social construction and not a fixed, static category rooted in some notion of innate biological differences. The construction of race and racial meanings can be understood as part of a universal phenomenon of classifying people on the basis of real or imagined attributes. We all engage in "making up people" (Hacking 2006, 1999) as a way to navigate in the social world—to situate ourselves and others in the context of social hierarchies, to discern friend from foe, and to provide a guide to social interactions with different individuals and groups. Race is not unique as a category of difference. Gender, class, age, nationality, and culture have all been invoked to capture, and in many cases explain, difference. This process is not benign. It involves "othering," which is used to justify subordinate status, unequal treatment, to structure oppression and exploitation in numerous ways. It is important to note, on the flip side, that resistance to such oppressive practices also involves the creation of social categories of difference.

To say that race is socially constructed is to argue that it varies according to time and place. Concepts and ideologies of race have shifted over historical time and differ according to the sociohistorical conditions in which race is embedded. There are many examples. Consider the Irish and the Jews, groups who were not considered racially "white" earlier in the U.S. history, yet eventually became white (Ignatiev 1995; Brod-kin 1998).¹⁸ Consider Asian Americans, who have been popularly regarded as either a "yellow peril" or a "model minority" depending on the historical period in question, the configuration of racial hierarchy in the United States, and the prevailing tenor of United States-Asia relations (Okimoto 1994; Jun 2011). Widening the scope beyond the United States, it is apparent that what race means in different regional and national settings is highly variable. What race means in Brazil, Japan, or in South Africa is dramatically different from what it means in the United States. This underscores the fact that race is a fluid and flexible social concept (Fredrickson 1997).

While acknowledging the inherent instability and socially constructed characteristics of race, we argue that there is a crucial *corporeal* dimension to the race-concept. Race is *ocular* in an irreducible way. Human bodies are visually read, understood, and narrated by means of symbolic meanings and associations. Phenotypic differences are not necessarily seen or understood in the same consistent manner across time and place, but they are nevertheless operating in specific social settings. Not because of any biologically based or essential difference among human beings across such phonemic variables as "color" or "hair texture," but because such sociohistorical practices as conquest and enslavement classified human bodies for purposes of domination—and because these same distinctions therefore became important for resistance to domination as well—racial phenotypes such as black and white have been constructed and encoded through the language of race.¹⁹ We define this process as *racialization*—the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group.

We also advance the concept of *racial projects* to capture how racial formation processes occur through a linkage between structure and representation. Racial projects are efforts to shape the ways in which human identities and social structures are racially signified, and the reciprocal ways that racial meaning becomes embedded in social structures. We see racial projects as building blocks in the racial formation process; these projects are taking place all the time, whenever race is being invoked or signified, wherever social structures are being organized along racial lines. Racial formation is thus a vast summation of signifying actions and social structures, past and present, that have combined and clashed in the creation of the enormous complex of relationships and identities that is labeled race.

Chapter 5, *Racial Politics and the Racial State*, focuses on the political sociology of race, the social organization of power along racial lines. A central concern here is the historical development and contemporary orientation of the U.S. racial state. We stress the porous boundary between state and civil society, especially where race is concerned. The racial state inhabits us, so to speak; it is within our minds, our psyches,

our hearts. At the same time we shape and reshape the state, identifying with it or against it, carrying out the signifying action that is the essence of political life, both collectively and individually. In this chapter, we stress the shift from *racial domination* to *racial hegemony* that has taken place in the post-World War II period. We highlight the trajectory of racial politics, the first rising and then declining path of the anti-racist movement that has taken shape up to now (we are writing this in 2013). We argue that the anti-racist movements that arose in the 1960s dramatically expanded the political space available for challenging racism by ushering in the *politicization of the social*. The chief achievement of the black movement and its allied new social movements was the enlargement and deepening of U.S. politics. Issues previously regarded as private and therefore outside the realm of formally defined politics were now embraced by an expansive politics of identity. Such an expansion of the terrain of politics by race-based social movements, and then by gender-, anti-imperialist, queer-, and other movements as well, represents a radical and permanent shift. It is a shift, however, that cannot be regarded as an exclusively progressive transformation. In the wake of the left-wing politicization of the social at the hands of the black movement, feminist movement, and gay movement, a racial reaction took shape. Right-wing movements proved themselves capable of rearticulation as well, reframing the emancipatory politics of the black movement and its allies, first as threats to whites, then as "reverse racism," and finally seeking an erasure of race itself through colorblind racial ideology.

In Part III, *Racial Politics Since World War II*, we apply our racial formation approach to recent racial history. The post-World War II period, up to the present historical moment, is our central concern: The transformation of U.S. racial despotism in the period up to about 1970, and then the containment of those democratic and transformational movements during subsequent decades, is the overarching theme of these chapters.

Movements rise and fall, both on the political left and the right. The civil rights era can be seen in terms of rising and declining phases of a political trajectory or cycle: proceeding from the relative abeyance of racial justice movements before World War II, and then moving through a phase characterized by the dramatic rise and impact of the civil rights, black power, and allied movements in the 1960s. This "rising phase" of the cycle culminated in the achievement of partial movement victories during the 1960s. It was quickly followed by incorporation and containment of the movement challenge, starting in about 1970. In Chapter 6—*The Great Transformation*—we consider the development of the anti-racist movement, focusing particular attention on the 1960s. We trace the transformation of the black movement from an inclusion-oriented reform movement seeking to end segregation and achieve full political citizenship for blacks, to a broader radical democratic movement allied with the other social movements that collectively sought the redistribution of resources, an end to U.S. imperialism, and social citizenship not only for blacks but for other excluded and oppressed groups as well. It was this expansive radical potential, combined with these allied movements' inability to attract majority (mainly white) support, that led to their containment and prolonged decline.

The postwar racial trajectory, then, entered its declining phase in about 1970; Chapter 7—*Racial Reaction: Containment and Rearticulation*—discusses the development over time of a center-right power bloc capable of counterattacking and curtailing the influence of the radical democratic movements that had developed through the 1960s. The racial reaction moved on various fronts simultaneously, using violent tactics of repression and assassination as well as seeking to *rearticulate* movement demands and the emancipatory politics of identity in individualistic, repressive, and reactionary ways.

The declining phase of the movement, brought about largely by racial reaction, has continued until today, achieving a new racial hegemony based upon the concept of *colorblindness*. In Chapter 8—*Colorblindness, Neoliberalism, and Obama*, we argue that colorblind racial ideology underwrites the neoliberal accumulation project in the United States, and that neither colorblindness nor neoliberalism would be politically feasible without the other. We also consider the deep contradictions between colorblindness and race-consciousness as both ideology and practice. "Painting the White House Black" under Obama, it turns out, deeply heightened the tensions of colorblind hegemony, even though Obama tried hard to minimize the anti-racist commitments that were always at least implicit in his presidency.

In sum, after World War II a system of racial *hegemony* was substituted for the earlier system of racial *domination*. It took a great amount of blood, sweat, and tears to accomplish these limited reforms, this "Second Reconstruction." To do away with official Jim Crow, to end the 1924 McCarran-Walter immigration restrictions, as well as ending the Vietnam War and legalizing abortion, were enormous triumphs, but they were not definitive. They were generally vulnerable, not so much to "backlash" and rollback, as to erosion and subversion, what we have termed rearticulation. To outlaw *de jure* segregation did not prevent the preservation of segregation *de facto* by other means. To overturn the highly restrictive immigration policies that had lasted from the 1920s to the 1960s did not prevent the continuity, and indeed the increase, of a draconian system of immigrant deportation and imprisonment that continues to this day.

The success of racial reform policies—the various civil rights acts and court decisions of the 1960s—worked to incorporate and thus defuse movement opposition. This incorporation required that tangible concessions be made without altering the underlying *structural racism* that was characteristic of the United States. It also required the marginalization and, in some cases, destruction of those sectors of anti-racist opposition that were more recalcitrant about accepting limited (aka moderate) reforms. Once reforms had been enacted and legislated, once some movement demands and movement activists had been incorporated, a subsequent stage of the hegemonic racial project was the rearticulation of racial meanings in a series of steps that culminated in colorblind racial hegemony. Unsteady, limited, and contradictory, the colorblind concept of race will retain its hegemonic perch until it can be challenged or rearticulated yet again.

We live in racial history. The racial instability that has characterized the whole of American history continues unabated. The unsettled meaning of race, and the continuing elusiveness of a genuine, substantive racial democracy in the United States, presents the country with both countless problems and limitless opportunities. In this book's conclusion—*The Contrarities of Race*—we highlight some of the dilemmas that the country, and perforce the reader, face today. We pose such questions as: What do you want *your* race-consciousness to be? What do *you* consider a democratic and just racial policy in the United States?

To recognize that race is historically and politically constructed is not only to see it as a "moving image," as something we make and remake over time; it is also to acknowledge our power, both collective and individual, to transform the meaning of race. We created this meaning-system and the social order it supports. We can change it as well.

Notes

1. The earliest use of this term that we can find is a track with that title located on a 1999 Rage Against the Machine record, *The Battle of Los Angeles*.
2. The depth and degree of Obama's blackness was widely debated. On the far right, he was branded an African revolutionary, enacting his father's anticolonial revenge fantasies (D'Souza 2012). In the black community, Debra Dickerson and Cornel West, among others, cast Obama's blackness—his authenticity—into serious doubt (Dickerson 2007; on West see Thompson 2011; see also Lowndes 2013). Others worried that electing a black president would defuse whatever reform-oriented demands the black movement could muster (Bobo 2008). In various statements, Obama somewhat inconsistently wrestled with his blackness: discussing his growing recognition and acceptance of it in his youth, his own encounters with prejudice and discrimination, and in his most comprehensive political analysis of racism ("A More Perfect Union"—3/18/2008), the contradictions and limitations of U.S. democracy in respect to race.
3. On "intelligibility" and domination, see Scott 1998.
4. Some key slave narratives are collected in Gates, ed. 2002. On Spanish colonialism in the North American Southwest, see Gutiérrez 1991. Enslaved Africans included many Muslims, some of whom were literate in Arabic. On Muslims and Arabic-language accounts of slavery and the slave trade, see Opoku-Agyemang et al., eds., 2008; see also Thornton 1998. On indigenous views, see Thornton 1987.
5. Blauner writes: "[T]he general conceptual frame of European theory implicitly assumed the decline and disappearance of ethnicity in the modern world; it offered no hints in the other direction. Without significant alteration, American sociology synthesized this framework into its models of social structure and change" (Blauner 2001 [1972], 4). See also Schwendinger and Schwendinger 1974, 39.
6. Weber's treatment of the concept of *ethnie* under the rubric of "status" (a relational category based on "honor") is in some ways a social constructionist approach; but in Weber's voluminous output there is no intensive consideration of the modern imperial phenomenon, and there are numerous instances of European chauvinism (especially during the World War I years, when Weber was somewhat afflicted with German nationalism—see Weber 1994, 131;

Weber 1996, 255). In fairness, Weber also recognized racism, notably anti-black racism in the United States. See his remarks on U.S. racial attitudes in Gerth and Mills, eds., 1958, 405–406. Weber's sensitivity to U.S. racial matters may be attributed, at least in part, to the orientation provided him by Du Bois. See Lewis 1993, 225, 277.

Durkheim too ranks the world eurocentrically, distinguishing rather absolutely between "primitive" and "civilized" peoples based on the limited ethnology available to him; he also muses in abstractly racial ways: Racial categories are employed as "social types" in *Suicide*, for example.

7. They were also "liberal Anglo-Saxonists," as John H. Stanfield (1982, 189–190) has termed them. See also Winant 2007.
8. "After a promising start in the early period, the study of race and ethnic relations suffered.... With little room for ethnic and racial phenomena in the macroscopic models of social structure and process, the field was isolated from general sociological theory and particularly from those leading conceptual themes that might have provided coherence and useful lines of inquiry: stratification, culture, community. The study of race relations developed in a kind of vacuum; no overall theoretical framework guided its research and development" (Blauner 2001 [1972], 5).
9. In a series of five lectures given at Howard University in 1915, Alain Leroy Locke, who had been the first African American Rhodes Scholar and had attended the London Race Congress in 1911, presented a very worked-out and extremely "modern" theory of race, an account fully compatible with social constructionist views, and one deeply politically engaged as well. Locke had been greatly influenced by Du Bois, as were all the leading resistance scholars of the time (Locke 1992). The remarkable Anna Julia Cooper, writer, educator, and activist, more or less founded black feminism. Born a slave in 1858, Cooper was the principal of the M Street High School, a prestigious, segregated black institution in Washington D.C., at the time of the publication of her still-influential book *A Voice from the South: By A Woman from the South* in 1892 (Cooper 1998; Guy-Sheftall 2009). William Monroe Trotter, a black journalist and activist, was a Harvard graduate and one of the founders of both the Niagara Movement and the NAACP. Supposedly a descendant of Jefferson through Sally Hemings, Trotter challenged Woodrow Wilson in a White House meeting, and defied Booker T. Washington's accommodationist racial politics when the latter gave a speech in Boston (Fox 1971). Kelly Miller, Professor of Mathematics at Howard University, founded the Sociology Department there in 1895 and taught at Howard until 1935 when he retired as Dean of Arts and Sciences. A prolific author, Miller's book *Race Adjustment* (1908) sought to reframe the dispute between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. In a review of economist Frederick L. Hoffman's *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, one of the leading eugenics-based works to argue for the innate inferiority of African Americans, Miller used census data to argue that Hoffman's claims were statistically flawed (Miller 1897; see also Stepan and Gilman 1993).
10. On the Chicago sociology of race, see Bulmer 1986; Steinberg 2007.
11. Lyman notes: "It [the race-relations cycle] was ideology too, for Park believed that once the racial cycle was completed, the social arena would be cleared of those racial impediments interfering with the inevitable class struggle" (1972, 27).
12. The concept of "institutional racism," often conflated with that of "structural racism," was first floated in Ture/Carmichael and Hamilton 1992 (1967); see also Knowles and Prewitt, eds. 1969.

13. As early as 1967 Pierre van den Berghe wrote that
in spite of the claim of many social scientists that detachment and objectivity are possible and that they can dissociate their roles as scientists and as private citizens, much of the work done by North Americans in the area of race has, until the last three or four years, been strongly flavored with a great deal of optimism and complacency about the basic "goodness" of American society and with the cautious, slightly left-of-center, reformist, meliorative, gradualist approach of "liberal" intellectuals.... The field has been dominated by a functionalist view of society and a definition of the race problem as one of integration and assimilation of minorities into the mainstream of a consensus-based society. (1967, 7)
14. This concept is taken from Myrdal (1963, 1962 [1944]). See also Winant 2001.
15. This is an introductory formulation. We shall have more to say later about the numerous variations (ethnic, national, class-based) possible within racial identity. Among Latin@s, for example, the Puerto Rican, Central American, and Cuban cases all retain distinct aspects; among Asians, Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians, South Asians and Filipinos all have particular histories in the United States. There are those whose racial category is ambiguous at present (e.g., Middle Eastern and South Asian Americans-MEASA, Sami, Persians, Uighur). Further still, racial classification, as we shall argue below, is always flexible, a process without an end point or finality of any kind.
16. *Bush v. Gore* (U.S. Supreme Court 2000), let it be remembered, was decided as a voting rights case. Many Supreme Court decisions favoring corporate elites have also been grounded in civil rights laws. The best-known example of this is *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* (U.S. Supreme Court 1886), which afforded "personhood" status to corporations, anticipating a host of later decisions including *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (U.S. Supreme Court 2010). See also Beatty 2007, 172.
17. The concept of a *paradigm* in scientific or scholarly investigation gained currency after the appearance of Kuhn 1970. Our usage of the term is slightly at variance with Kuhn's. A racial paradigm, in our view, is an assumed theoretical category that classifies racial phenomena. Today, there is a strong reluctance in social scientific circles to indulge in "race-thinking" (undoubtedly due to the legacy of biologism with which pre-World War II scholarship encountered issues of race). This is yet another incentive to understand race in terms of other, supposedly more fundamental or objective, social scientific categories.
18. Not entirely, of course. There are black Irish and black Jews in the United States today, Latin@s who consider themselves Irish or Jewish, and numerous other variations on these identities as well.
19. Walter Johnson writes of the buyers in the New Orleans slave market:
As the experienced guided the inexperienced [in the slave marketplace], slaves' bodies were made racially legible. The buyers' inspections, the parts they fingered, the details they fetishized, and the homosocial connections they made with one another gave material substance to antebellum notions of "blackness" and "whiteness" and outlined for observers the lineaments of a racial gaze. Out of the daily practice of slavery, they reproduced the notions of race that underwrote the system as a whole. (2001, 161)

Paradigms of Race: Ethnicity, Class, and Nation