W. E. B. Du Bois began The Souls of Black Folk with an immodest claim and a bold prophecy: "Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century. This meaning is not without interest to you, Gentle Reader; for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line." Du Bois wrote at the turn of the new century, with a fine sense of history, and he was right, twice over. His collection of essays remains an authoritative source on the black experience in America, and his prophecy accurately foretold the struggle for freedom that would mark the twentieth century. Du Bois was a perceptive analyst of American race relations, but we wonder now whether he cast his famous prediction far enough into the future. Du Bois, perhaps, was too optimistic.

In this final chapter, we review our findings on racial politics in America and place them in a broader context. We will say something both about the politics of race in contemporary American society (the way things are) and about how the character of our racial politics might be made more democratic (the way things might be).

INTERESTS AND OPINIONS

When we began, the general claim on behalf of self-interest seemed persuasive. Of course people support policies that promote their own material interests and oppose policies that threaten them. Opinions on public policy are a direct and immediate reflection of "primitive self interest" and little else, is how The American Voter put it. The presumption is strong, but the evidence is weak. In our analysis, whites who felt personally threatened by affirmative action policies, either at the workplace or in schools, were generally no more opposed to such policies than were whites whose personal lives were free from racial threat. Likewise, the perception of personal gain from affirmative action policies did not generally inspire more support for such policies among black Americans (if anything, the relationship ran the other way). Whites whose families were experiencing economic trouble were not any more likely to oppose federal programs and employment policies designed to help blacks; black Americans who had recently
run into economic difficulty or who expressed apprehensions about their economic future were not especially favorable toward government assistance. And on it went: we uncovered little empirical justification here for building a theory of public opinion upon the foundations of self-interest.

These results may seem surprising, but they are in fact consistent with the generally anemic effects of self-interest on public opinion reported in scores of investigations over the last decade or so. On such diverse matters as government health insurance, aid to education, racial busing for the purpose of school desegregation, employment policy, gun control, and more, self-interest turns out to be quite unimportant. Together, these studies suggest that self-interest packs much less political punch than commonly assumed. Public opinion resembles religion more than it does commerce.

If we have added anything to this conclusion, it comes from having pursued the implications of self-interest for black Americans as least as vigorously—as we have for white Americans. Up to now, research on self-interest and public opinion on race has been preoccupied with whites' racial fears. Thus the general collapse of self-interest in our various analyses, for white and black Americans alike, is news. Like whites, blacks do not appear to be single-minded seekers of advantage, even on matters that seem to engage their interests directly. As a result, the huge racial divide in opinion cannot be accounted for by what Hume once called the "universal passion" for personal advantage.

Contingent Self-Interest

We do not mean to imply that self-interest never makes a difference for public opinion. Such a conclusion would be contradicted by our own results, to say nothing of the broader empirical literature. While self interest is generally unconnected to public opinion, it can take on political significance under special conditions: when the material benefits or harms of a proposed policy are substantial; when benefits and harms are well publicized, so that citizens do not have to figure this out on their own; and when benefits and harms are virtually certain to take effect, should the policy pass.

This general formulation of the conditions under which self-interest influences opinion seems to fit our few cases of self-interest making a noticeable difference in public opinion on matters of race. For example, in our results, self-interest figured into white opinion only when whites were encouraged to think about affirmative action in terms of the harm that might befall them. Only then did self-interest emerge as a significant (if modest) predictor of opinion. Then those whites who believed that affirmative action was likely to set back the education of their own children were more likely to oppose the policy.

This result was induced by framing a survey question in a certain way, but we carried out this experiment and others like it in order to simulate the effects provoked by actual campaigns. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that while studies of public opinion set in the context of real campaigns for tax relief—contentious and expensive campaigns like that of Proposition 13 in California in 1978—show noticeable effects of self-interest, otherwise comparable studies that inquire about taxes in the abstract or about hypothetical changes in the tax code do not. These results point again to the importance of elite frames. Unless campaigns do for citizens what they seem disinclined to do for themselves—that is, first ascertain and then keep prominently in mind the personal price tags of proposed policies—self-interest is likely to remain politically insignificant.

Group-Interest and Public Opinion

In our preoccupation with self-interest, we should not forget that our results do support the importance of interests in public opinion—interests that are collective rather than personal. Many white Americans believe that affirmative policies threaten their collective interests, that powerful institutions cater to black Americans, and that it is now white Americans who operate at a disadvantage. This sense of group threat and disadvantage, moreover, is systematically related to opinion. White Americans who believe that black Americans threaten their collective interests are less supportive of policies designed to reduce racial inequalities. We take this result to mean that interests matter to whites' opinions on racial affairs, that group interests matter.

We also find group interest at work in black public opinion, though the results here are more complex. Black Americans believe that affirmative action generally works to their racial group's advantage, but they also express considerable skepticism that this happens very often; many blacks believe instead that American institutions discriminate against their racial group, some thirty years after the Civil Rights Act made it illegal to do so. Both these aspects of group interest registered an effect on black opinion. Black Americans were consistently more likely to support government policies on race if they believed that affirmative action programs enhance opportunities for blacks (not for themselves, but for blacks as a whole); and, independently, if they believed that racial discrimination obstructs the progress of blacks (not their own progress, but the progress of blacks as a whole).

Our results on group interest are consistent with the general finding that citizens are quite capable of distinguishing between their own experiences and interests, on the one hand, and the experiences and interests of their group, on the other, and that between the two, the latter appears to be the more important...
politically. Much of this work builds on the concept of relative deprivation, introduced by Samuel Stouffer and his associates in their landmark study, *The American Soldier*. In an effort to understand why soldiers who experienced the best conditions expressed the lowest morale, Stouffer argued that feelings of deprivation were relative, based less in objective condition and more in social comparison. Later, Runciman introduced the distinction between egotistical and fraternal deprivation: the first refers to a sense of personal relative disadvantage; the second refers to a sense of group relative disadvantage. This turns out to be not just a neat analytic distinction, but one with real political bite. Thus, to take one example, participation by black college students in the civil rights movement is predicted better by their anger over society's treatment of black Americans in general than by any discontent they felt about their own predicament. In this instance as in others, it appears that the political power of deprivation is located in the sense of collective disadvantage.

Our results are also consistent with the major positive finding to emerge from the quest for the ideological underpinnings of American public opinion. The positive finding is this: when Americans are asked to evaluate political parties and presidential candidates, they very often refer to social groups. Campbell and associates call this inclination "ideology by proxy," since there is little comprehension of "long-range plans for social betterment," or of basic philosophies rooted in postures toward change or abstract conceptions of social and economic structure of causation. The party or candidate is simply endorsed as being "for" a group with which the subject is identified or as being above the selfish demands of groups within the population. Exactly how the candidate or party might see fit to implement or void group interests is a moot point, left unrelated to broader ideological concerns.

However unsophisticated the reasoning, citizens nevertheless find political significance in collective benefits and deprivations, and such interests appear to shape their assessments of candidates and parties powerfully.

So interests have a part to play in public opinion, interests that are collective rather than personal, group centered rather than self-centered. In matters of public opinion, citizens seem to be asking themselves less "What's in it for me?" and more "What's in it for my group?" In this way, our findings sustain a line of analysis reaching back to Marx and Sumner and carried forward by contemporary group conflict theorists.

**Fears of the Imagination**

Empirical research has taken the origins of interests mostly for granted; its primary business has been to ascertain the effects of interests, not their antecedents. From the perspective of psychological research on risk and uncertainty, however, an equally interesting question is how people go about deciding whether they are threatened or safe. And on this question, our results suggest a large divorce between perception and reality. Connections between sense of threat, on the one hand, and actual conditions, on the other, were weak to nonexistent in our analysis. We found instead that the racial threats whites saw were almost entirely a consequence of the racial sentiments they felt. Whites experience racial threat because they are inclined to look at their social world that way; they feel threatened when others, in comparable circumstances, feel safe.

That racial fear is in an important way a fear of the imagination is also suggested by other investigations of American race relations. For example, the urban riots of the 1960s appeared to set off fears and apprehensions among whites that were disproportionate to the events taking place on the ground. So, too, did the Los Angeles uprising of 1992. The riots were scary, and for people caught up in their midst, terrifying and dangerous. But even suburban whites living far from the violence appeared to feel at risk.

A similar impression emerges from Jonathan Rieder's ethnographic exploration of Canarsie, a white ethnic community in Brooklyn undergoing racial change in the 1970s. Rieder argues that whites' perceptions of racial threat were rooted partly in social realities but were exaggerated by individual prejudice. "Racism," wrote Rieder, "primed whites to select fragments of reality that confirmed their prejudices." The sense of threat was amplified further by the spread of what Rieder called "grotesque incidents," horrific stories that collective the experience of danger. Taken all around, then, the perception of racial threat is best understood as "an amalgam of fantasy, truth, and rumor."}

Black Americans aren't exactly clear-eyed on the subject of threat, either. According to recent surveys, imposing proportions of black Americans subscribe to the contention that black elected officials are harassed and persecuted by their own government, that crack cocaine is distributed in black communities in order to immobilize them, or that HIV was created in order to exterminate the black race. One reason for the vitality of such "delusional" beliefs within the black community is history: the U.S. government has in fact harassed and persecuted black leaders, and has engaged in extremely dubious medical experiments with black subjects. That even paranoids have enemies is not only a joke.

These various accounts are reminiscent of an older racial fear. In the period leading up to the Civil War, white dread of slave revolts reached epidemic proportions. The extent to which slaves actually erupted in violence remains controversial, but there is little controversial in the conclusion that white fear of
slave rebellion was disproportionate to the actual incidence of violence. Rebellion in the face of massive asymmetries in power and with the virtual certainty of violent retaliation seems, from our historical vantage point, foolhardy, and probably was recognized as such at the time by slaves themselves. Rather than violent rebellion, resistance ordinarily took the form of small acts of defiance, employing the "weapons of the weak" in James Scott's phrase.

The prospect of black violence, however unlikely, nevertheless haunted the white southern imagination. Insurrection panics were frequent. Fear of a great bloodbath contributed to sentiment for secession. This apocalyptic frame of white southern imagination. Insurrection panics were frequent. Fear of a great bloodbath contributed to sentiment for secession. This apocalyptic frame of white southern imagination. Insurrection panics were frequent. Fear of a great bloodbath contributed to sentiment for secession. This apocalyptic frame of white southern imagination. Insurrection panics were frequent. Fear of a great bloodbath contributed to sentiment for secession. This apocalyptic frame of white southern imagination. Insurrection panics were frequent. Fear of a great bloodbath contributed to sentiment for secession.

The prospect of black violence, however unlikely, nevertheless haunted the white southern imagination. Insurrection panics were frequent. Fear of a great bloodbath contributed to sentiment for secession. This apocalyptic frame of mind is captured well by Freehling, when he wrote that the prospect of emancipation "conjured up grotesque specters of plunder, rape, and murder. The slave, too barbaric and degraded to adjust to freedom, seemed certain to declare race war the moment he throw off his chains." As the abolitionist movement gathered strength, racial fears multiplied. In New Orleans, when secession and war grew near:

The papers continued to demand increased police vigilance; municipal officials sought wider powers and additional arms from state governments; vigilante committees stood ready to quash the colored rebels. Yet no insurrection occurred. The blood bath feared by so many was never drawn. "Christmas is passed and we are not yet annihilated," the New Orleans Daily Crescent noted with relief in 1856.

Here again racial fear appears disproportionate to and largely disconnected from actual events. Winthrop Jordan argues that real threats were not irrelevant to such fears, but neither were they especially important. More significant were the anxieties and apprehensions entangled in the views whites held of themselves and their black slaves:

Presumably the principal reason for the colonists' fear of slave insurrections was a pardonable distaste for having their throats cut. Plainly, however, their fears were exaggerated far beyond the proportions of the danger and were in part a response to more complicated anxieties. The specter of Negro rebellion presented an appalling world turned upside down, a crazy nonsense world of black over white, an anti-community which was the direct negation of the community as white men knew it.

The specter of slave rebellions is an extreme case, but we suspect that racial conflict is typically accompanied by unrealistic and exaggerated threats, by fears of being overwhelmed or annihilated. Such threats can be detected in the anti-Semite's preoccupation with Jewish world domination; in the wild claims white
essay on The Wealth of Nations, George Stigler praises Adam Smith lavishly, as “widely read, widely traveled, superlatively observant” and characterizes the book itself as “stupendous palace erected upon the granite of self-interest.” But Stigler chastises Smith for not seeing the role of self-interest as preeminent in political undertakings as it was in commercial transactions. Stigler wants Smith to say that all legislation with important economic effect is the “calculated achievement of interested economic classes” and Smith does not. In Stigler’s reading, Smith “gave a larger role to emotion, prejudice, and ignorance in political life than he ever allowed in ordinary economic affairs.” This earns Stigler’s disapproval, but not ours. We prefer Adam Smith’s less parsimonious, but more realistic, account of public life to the one that Stigler imagines. Adam Smith, more than the modern-day practitioners of the economic approach to political analysis, would have appreciated the complexity of motives that give shape and meaning to contemporary American opinion.29

Prejudice (That Word Again) and Opinion

The idea of black inferiority is a deeply ingrained habit in America, but its characteristic expression is fluid. In our century alone, the private meaning and public form of racial prejudice have undergone two important transformations, one reflected in the decline of the doctrine of biological racism, the other provoked by the sweeping changes and turbulent events set in motion by the civil rights movement and the urban riots of the 1960s. As a consequence of these developments, animosity toward blacks is expressed today less in the language of inherent, permanent inferiority and more in the language of American individualism. In this view, the virtues of diligence, hard work, and determination are conspicuous by their absence from black life; blacks are unwilling even to try to make it on their own and all too willing to take what they have not earned. Racial resentment, expressed in such terms, seems to be thriving and is far and away the single most important ingredient in whites’ views on racial policies.

Remember what we have found here: racial resentment is a coherent and stable system of beliefs and feelings; whites express less of it in the presence of black Americans; racially resentful whites are much more likely to consider themselves and their families threatened by racial policies at work and school than are whites who express sympathetic views toward blacks—even though we can find virtually no evidence that they are in fact more threatened; white Americans who express racial resentment also subscribe to derogatory racial stereotypes (i.e., whites who say that blacks could be as well off as whites if they only tried are also inclined to believe that blacks are dangerous, lazy, and stupid); and, finally, racial resentment reveals a great deal about where white Americans stand on matters of race. When it comes to school desegregation or federal assistance or affirmative action, nothing explains variation in white opinion as well as racial resentment.

Whitewashing Prejudice

Our results run against a recent turn in scholarship on American racial attitudes, which tends to be impressed with improvements in American race relations and skeptical about the present-day political power of racism. Here we have in mind such notable and in many ways admirable works as Carmine and Stimson’s Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics; Huckfeldt and Kohfeld’s Race and the Decline of Class in American Politics; the series of prominently placed reports by Sheatsley and his colleagues based on NORC’s monitoring of white Americans’ racial attitudes, beginning in the 1940s and continuing on up to the present; Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo’s Racial Attitudes in America; Sniderman and Hagen’s Race and Inequality; and Sniderman and Piazza’s Scars of Race. In different ways, each of these works suggests that when it comes to understanding the political views of white Americans, race prejudice simply isn’t that important.

In Issue Evolution, Carmine and Stimson argue persuasively that race has transformed modern American party politics.30 They locate the turning point for this transformation, as we do, in Goldwater’s capture of the Republican nomination in 1964. So far so good. The difficulty begins, as we see it, when Carmine and Stimson call Goldwater’s opposition to federal intervention on civil rights, which was a centerpiece of his campaign for the presidency, “racial conservatism.” And this racial conservatism, according to Carmine and Stimson, must not be confused with racial prejudice. Racial conservatism is not racism; rather, it is the application of conservative principles to the (new) issues of civil rights. Goldwater and his band of ideological followers were not racist, according to Carmine and Stimson; their opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was rooted in “racial policy conservatism, not racism.”31 Acknowledging that racial conservatism might appeal to bigots, Carmine and Stimson maintain that “its origin in western Republican doctrine of conservatism was altogether different in situation, culture, and ideology from southern white racism. It was a new species.”32

Or consider Huckfeldt and Kohfeld’s analysis of the emergence of race as the major social cleavage splitting American politics today. Huckfeldt and Kohfeld aim to understand racial polarization: the fact that black Americans give their support overwhelmingly to the Democratic party and its candidates, while decisive majorities of whites support the Republican party. As we have
noted here, this racial divide dwarfs differences of class or religion or gender or indeed of any other social characteristic. Why? Huckfeldt and Kohfeld argue that racial polarization is a product of party competition. Polarization, they contend, is the natural culmination of the Democratic party’s dependence on the electoral support of black Americans, which in turn compromises the party’s ability to hold on to the support of working-class whites. Huckfeldt and Kohfeld concede that racism still exists, but in their political analysis it doesn’t play much of a role. Citing Schelling’s work on racial sorting, Huckfeldt and Kohfeld suggest that a little racism goes a long way; that “moderate levels of racial antagonism at the individual level are fully capable of fostering extreme levels of racial polarization at the corporate level.”

The withering away of prejudice is also the central theme running through the occasional reports based on the National Opinion Research Center’s ongoing project on white Americans’ racial attitudes. From the inaugural report in this series, issued in 1956, to the most recent, distributed in 1991, white Americans are portrayed as moving unswervingly toward enlightenment: early on in the series as repudiating “ancient beliefs about Negroes,” and now, as embracing ever-more completely the doctrine of racial equality. Inexorable progress is the main message of these bulletins, the “steady, massive growth in racial tolerance” their main result. Looking over the entire series, Smith and Sheatsley conclude that “a massive and wide-ranging liberalization of racial attitudes has swept America over the last forty years.”

We are impressed with these changes, too, but as Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo demonstrate in Racial Attitudes in America, the picture is actually more complex than Smith and Sheatsley’s reading suggests. Racial Attitudes presents a more comprehensive description of the evolution of racial attitudes than the NORC series by itself can provide. Schuman and his colleagues show that white Americans have become much more sympathetic to racial equality in principle, just as the NORC reports concluded. That blacks have the right to go to the same schools as whites; that blacks should have an equal chance to compete for jobs and promotions; that segregation by race on buses and in restaurants is wrong; that blacks have the right to live wherever they like—all such questions, white Americans have become dramatically more egalitarian, and all this in little more than a generation. At the same time, white support for racial policy, for steps the government might take to prohibit discrimination or diminish segregation or reduce racial inequalities, reveals an entirely different pattern. While white approval of the principles of equality and integration was steadily advancing over the last four decades, white support for the policies that might bring such principles to life was not—indeed, it was as likely to diminish as it was to increase.

While Schuman and his colleagues correct the overly optimistic reading of change in white racial attitudes suggested by the NORC series, they nevertheless participate in the demotion of prejudice as an explanation for political conflict. At the end of their book, after a meticulous and judicious presentation of the evidence on the transformation of attitudes on matters of race in the latter half of the twentieth century, Schuman and his colleagues (like the rest of us) are unable to resist a speculation or two. Given their findings, they were especially intrigued about why so many white Americans continue to oppose governmental efforts to reduce racial inequalities when they simultaneously favor equality and integration in principle. Prejudice, they suggest, provides no answer to this principle-policy gap. Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo are far more impressed with an explanation that portrays white Americans as responding realistically to the material threats that blacks pose to their collective interests—with group threat, as we would call it.

Perhaps the clearest example of this general scholarly turn toward disconnecting racial prejudice from white opposition to egalitarian racial policies is provided by Sniderman and Hagen’s Race and Inequality: A Study in American Values. Race and Inequality argues that what white Americans’ views toward public policies designed to diminish racial inequalities are understood best in terms of the values (or, as we would prefer, principles) that the policies evoke. Underneath the surface squabbles over employment opportunity or school desegregation are deep differences over fundamental American values, especially individualism. According to Sniderman and Hagen, it is the American commitment to individualism, not any remnant of American racism, that erodes white support for egalitarian policies.

This theme is carried forward in The Scar of Race, our final example of the diminished place of prejudice in much contemporary political analysis. Sniderman and Piazza would contend that our analysis of present-day race relations is mired in the past, too ready to detect prejudice behind opposition to contemporary policies of affirmative action or federal assistance. Their claim is not that racism has disappeared, but that it no longer dominates, as it did a generation ago, the racial policy preferences of white Americans. It is “simply wrong,” they conclude, “to suppose that the primary factor driving the contemporary arguments over the politics of race is white racism.”

Where does this confidence come from? We quite agree that the opinions of white Americans on racial issues are not reducible to racial resentment alone: that a comprehensive explanation of public opinion on racial questions must take into account principles and interests as well. And we agree that revolutionary changes have taken place in white Americans’ racial attitudes: in contrast to a generation or two ago, most whites now reject the idea of permanent, bio-
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logical inferiority, and they accept equal rights and opportunities as matters of principle. But we also believe that resentments rooted in racial difference continue to shape American opinion powerfully.

It is one thing to worry over, as we have done here, whether the current form of racial animosity is conceived of better as prejudice or resentment. It is quite another to conclude that conservative positions on issues of race these days are entirely a matter of realistic group threat or American values; that racial conservatism is merely conservative principles applied to questions that just happen to be about race; that prejudice is no longer important; that race itself has somehow been removed from the politics of equal opportunity and affirmative action. To this our results say, emphatically and unequivocally, think again.

Racial Resentment and Ethnocentrism

Perhaps our most striking result is the long reach of racial resentment into diverse aspects of American opinion. We found racial resentment to be implicated in whites' views not just on affirmative action or school desegregation, but on welfare, capital punishment, urban unrest, family leave, sexual harassment, gay rights, immigration, spending on defense, and more.

In part, this result is a reflection of how racially coded our political thinking has become. Consider welfare reform as an example. Simply raising the issue may invoke among many whites the assumption that most people on welfare are black and could make it on their own if they only tried. In fact, white Americans exaggerate the proportion of the poor who are black, and those whose picture of poverty is most distorted in this way are least supportive of federal spending on welfare.37 White Americans may exaggerate the proportion of the poor who are black at least in part because the press does, too. Mainstream news magazines—Time, Newsweek, US News and World Report—portray the poor as substantially more black than is in fact the case.38 Of course, black Americans are more likely to be poor than whites, just as they are more likely to be arrested and incarcerated, just as they are more likely to be on welfare. But the media pick up and amplify these differences. In telling their stories, news media rely, as Epstein once put it, on cultural icons with symbolic power and, in the process, both reinforce derogatory racial stereotypes and underwrite the racialization of public opinion.39

That racial resentment is implicated in white opinion across a wide range is in part a matter of racial coding, of the silent conversion of ostensibly non-racial issues into issues of race. But this line of interpretation can carry us only so far. Racial coding is no explanation for the role of racial resentment in defense spending, or in issues of gay rights, or in immigration policy. In assessing resentments directed specifically at black Americans, we seem to have tapped into a broader reaction to social difference, one that might be called "ethnocentric."

In this way, our results recall those reported by Adorno and his colleagues in The Authoritarian Personality, the famous and monumental study of anti-Semitism carried out in the United States in the 1940s. Its purpose was to explain the nature and origins of anti-Semitism, and to understand the implications of anti-Semitism for democratic society, tasks made urgent by the emergence of fascism and the ongoing extermination of Jews in Europe. We take the major discovery of The Authoritarian Personality to be that anti-Semitism was just one aspect of a person's broader outlook on society and politics. Fear and contempt for Jews, it turned out, were often accompanied by fear and contempt directed at blacks, criminals, Japanese-Americans, conscientious objectors, immigrants, and "foreign ideas"—in short, by an ethnocentrism of a very general sort. It is precisely this result that our findings on racial resentment's long reach call to mind.

When The Authoritarian Personality was published, it was greeted with widespread acclaim, and then, in the space of a few years, buried under an avalanche of criticisms.40 The critics were right to point out the study's defects, and they were persuasive. But it is important to keep in mind that the powerful critical literature provoked by The Authoritarian Personality established only that the study failed to prove its conclusions, not that its conclusions were incorrect. This is an important distinction, one that seems to have been missed in the methodological battering the study received. And it seems to us that research over the last few decades, though it has come in a trickle, nevertheless sustains Adorno and company's insistence that there is an underlying coherence to the variety of ideas that make up an individual's outlook on society, economics, and politics.41

From the point of view of the psychodynamic theory that Adorno and his associates favored, attitudes like anti-Semitism and ethnocentrism are manifestations of a unitary personality and must be analyzed in that way. Prejudice reflects not direct experience with the outgroup, not the tangible threats the outgroup might realistically pose, but rather the twisted expression of largely unconscious and otherwise unresolved personal conflicts. In this style of explanation, anti-Semitism and ethnocentrism serve the authoritarian well. Jews, blacks, and other outgroups become convenient and safe psychological targets. Through displacement, Jews and blacks absorb the hostilities originally provoked by the authoritarian's parents; through projection, Jews and blacks...
take on forbidden qualities—unbridled power, liberation from the demands of work, free and easy sex—those things that the authoritarian secretly wants but cannot have.

We find this too psychological. People may well differ from one another in the tendency to see difference as threatening. Adorno and his associates were probably right to claim that “the prejudiced individual is prepared to reject groups with which he has never had contact; his approach to a new and strange person or culture is not one of curiosity, interest, and receptivity but rather one of doubt and rejection. The feeling of difference is transformed into a sense of threat and an attitude of hostility. The new group easily becomes an outgroup.” Ethnocentrism is not the expression only of neurotic personality, however. To reduce ethnocentrism entirely to personality ignores the role played by elites and institutions in the creation and promotion of ethnocentric ideologies. It is oblivious to the economic, social, and political conditions that give rise to ethnocentrism. And it is blind to the part that leaders and parties play in the mobilization of ethnocentrism for political purposes.43

The Activation and Suppression of Racial Resentment

In our results, the power of racial resentment is far from uniform: often it is huge, but sometimes it is modest. Our purpose in this section is to suggest the conditions that determine the prominence of racial resentment in whites' political thinking. Conceding as we do that racial resentment is unlikely to disappear any day soon, how might its political consequences be diminished?

The prominence of racial resentment in white public opinion seems to depend on the nature of the issue itself. Of the six race policy questions that we examined in greatest detail, the issue of quotas for black college students elicits racial resentment the most. Why?

First of all, this does not appear to be something special about affirmative action. Giving blacks preferential treatment in hiring and promotion is an instance of affirmative action, too, but it does not evoke racial resentment to any unusual degree. We suspect instead the terminology of “quotas,” present in this question uniquely. “Quotas” is a highly charged and contentious term, used often by the opponents of affirmative action policies and programs, and it appears three times in our question on college admissions. It calls up an odious history of discrimination, exclusion, and even genocide. “Quotas” is a rallying point, a powerful symbolic weapon in the rhetorical war against affirmative action, and it appears to work, by our analysis, at least in part by activating whites' racial resentments.

On the other end of the spectrum, school desegregation elicits racial resentment the least. This cannot be because school desegregation is a problem of the past, or because it evokes equality so powerfully, since it shares both of these features with fair employment policy, where racial resentment looms much larger. It certainly isn’t anything special about the realm of education, because preferential admissions for black college students activates racial resentment most of all. Perhaps what is special about this policy, instead, is its concern for black children. The issue, remember, is whether the federal government “should see to it that white and black children go to the same schools.” Perhaps many whites are inclined to regard black children as promising and full of potential, or as innocent victims of circumstance. Either construction diminishes the relevance of the individualistic form of racial hostility that plays such a prominent role in other racial policy questions.

Our account of these differences is speculative, not least because the policies that we have been discussing differ from one another in a variety of ways. Variation of this sort can be investigated with greater precision through experiments, as we did in Chapter 7. There we discovered, among other things, that the impact of racial resentment on white opinion depends importantly on how the issue is framed.

In Experiment I, when whites were reminded that government assistance to blacks could be thought about in terms of whether blacks deserved special assistance, the impact due to racial resentment increased. In Experiment II, framing opposition to affirmative action as unfair advantage brought racial resentment to center stage; framing it as reverse discrimination demoted racial resentment to a lesser role. In Experiment III, when we shifted from a race-neutral to a race-conscious frame, the effect of racial resentment on white opinion increased sharply. And in Experiment IV, white Americans were much more enthusiastic about policies that would benefit the poor than they were about the identical policies aimed at blacks alone, with the part played by racial resentment diminishing correspondingly. All these results suggest that in choosing how to formulate the public debate on issues of race, elites have some say over the extent to which white opinion is laced with racial resentment. The devil is in the details: the nature of the issue and how the issue is framed both matter a lot.

What also seems to matter is whether the issue comes up at all. This point is illustrated best by our analysis of the 1988 presidential campaign, a near-perfect example of what can happen when the political parties succumb to what we have called the electoral temptations of race. Who could have imagined, before the campaign got under way, that Bush and his advisers would choose to invest so much of their time and money in the story of Willie Horton?

This was a choice; there was nothing inevitable about it. Bush, Atwater, Ailes, Teeter, Baker, and company did not create racial resentment in 1988, but
in deciding to exploit it for political purposes, they brought it to center stage. That they needn't have is strongly suggested by the experience of 1992. For a variety of reasons, perhaps most of all the Perot candidacy, the 1992 presidential campaign was much less preoccupied with matters of race than was its predecessor, and as a consequence, the decisions made by white voters were less a product of racial resentment. The contrast between 1992 and 1988 suggests, once more, that the prominence of racial resentment in the public realm depends on choices made by elites. Are racial tensions to be exploited or are they to be left alone?

**Principled Opinions**

Public opinion in the affairs of race is also a matter of principle. White and black Americans derive their opinions on equal employment opportunity and federal assistance at least in part from broader views on equality and limited government. In this way, they reward Aristotle's insistence that politics and morality are inseparable.

Principles are thus part of the story of public opinion on race, but only a part, and sometimes a rather small one. The modesty of our results, and their contingency, don't fit very neatly the common portrayal of the American Creed as an unstoppable, triumphant force. Perhaps most surprising in this respect was the quite thoroughgoing failure of economic individualism. For whites as for blacks, faith that hard work brings success had very little to do with opinions on matters of race. This result moves against the common contention that contemporary debate over affirmative action and welfare reform is first and foremost a discussion about the virtues of hard work and individual responsibility. Much more, as we have seen here, it is a debate on the question of whether or not black Americans deserve help.

Of the three principles we examined, equality emerges from our results as the most impressive. We say this partly because differences of opinion on topica! matters of race can often be traced to differences over the desirability of equality, but also because the strong connections we see in the domain of race appear to reflect an abstract commitment to equality in principle, for blacks and whites alike. We know this because views on equality turn out to be important for redistributive and rights policies generally, not just for policy questions in the realm of race. Thus equality appears to be more than just sympathy for a particular group; it seems to be a principle.

Even in the case of equality, however, we see evidence of contingency and specificity, and we see this even within the realm of racial policy itself. Equality is enormously important when it comes to the issues of school desegregation and fair employment, two issues at the vanguard of the struggle for equal rights and opportunities carried forward by the civil rights movement, but quite unimportant for the more contemporary issue of affirmative action, where, it would seem, both opponents and supporters can enlist equality as justification for their views.

Specificity is also the rule outside the racial realm. While various groups seem to be included in the American hope for a more egalitarian society—blacks, women, the elderly, the poor and working class, gays and lesbians, and perhaps children—this yearning does not extend to those who wish to become Americans. Egalitarians, black and white, are deaf to the "clamor at the gates." Those who favor equality most do not support easing immigration restrictions, nor are they more opposed to the establishment of English as an official language. For now at least, equality seems to mean equality for us, not for them.

Finally, the prominence of equality in public opinion on race depends partly on how the issue is framed. No doubt the most striking instance of this is supplied by Experiment II. Under the unfair advantage frame, whites who endorsed the principle of equality tended to support affirmative action; under the reverse discrimination frame, whites who supported equality tended to oppose affirmative action. Thus equality facilitated affirmative action in one case and stood in its way in the other. This result supports Gans's contention that affirmative action's ideological battleground centers on the idea of equal opportunity and that partisans on both sides lay claim to it.45 To its supporters, affirmative action is required to bring true equality of opportunity to life, whereas to its opponents, affirmative action, by treating some groups better than others, violates equal opportunity for individuals.

These results suggest that principles like equality are in fact bundles of complex ideas. Their complexity makes them malleable, available for more than one purpose, relevant at more than one time. If the modesty and contingency of our results disappoint those who yearn for a politics of ideas, others may be surprised that ideas count at all.

**Origins of Principles**

If principles are important—at least some principles, for some issues, on some occasions—where do they come from? How is it that some Americans attach higher priority to equality than others do? Why are certain Americans so much more suspicious of government authority than others are?

We know remarkably little about this. In the empirical study of political principles, the question of origins seldom comes up, and when it does, it is not taken very seriously. For example, Stanley Feldman, who has done splendid empirical work demonstrating the importance of principles for public opinion, suggests that there is little mystery about it, that ordinary people pick up prin-
principles simply by going about their business: "The public may easily absorb the major elements of the political culture through processes of socialization and continual reinforcement by the norms of society and the language of political debate." Feldman and Zaller make much the same point in their exploration of American opinion on social welfare policy. They argue that there exists in the United States a common, shared heritage of values to which all Americans have ready access. After demonstrating that Americans often justify their policy views by referring to one or another principle, Feldman and Zaller conclude that "most Americans can draw with apparent ease upon several elements of the American political tradition," that "nearly all Americans have absorbed the principal elements of their political culture."46

What these arguments overlook is this: whereas ideas of equality or limited government may be familiar, some Americans subscribe to them wholeheartedly, others are not so sure, and a few reject them altogether. That elements of the American Creed are readily available does not mean that everyone adopts them. Indeed, if this were true, principles would be of no use to us here. If everyone lined up with uniform inspiration behind the idea of equality, then equality could tell us nothing about why some Americans favor school desegregation while others oppose it. But everyone is not equally enthusiastic about equality, and the mystery is why?

We are of course as guilty as the rest. Up until now, we have ignored the question of origins, too. Like others, we have been much more interested in the consequences of political principles than their antecedents. At this late moment, we can remedy this imbalance a bit by reporting in summary fashion the results of our analysis of the origins of equality and limited government, based in the 1990–92 NES panel study. We must unfortunately restrict this analysis to whites alone, since too few blacks show up in the panel to warrant statistical analysis.47

When it comes to explaining variation in support for equality and limited government, we find that many standard variables matter not at all. Education, occupation, income, homeownership, employment status: each is completely irrelevant to white views on equality and limited government. These results contradict the contention that expressions of support for American values are a cover for class interests. According to our analysis, political principles and social class are completely disconnected.

Of the various considerations that we examined, just three showed up clearly for both principles. The first of these is political engagement: everything else equal, those most attentive to politics are both more egalitarian and more suspicious of government power. This result is consistent with the line of argument that the American Creed is expressed most clearly in an official political culture, and that citizens are most apt to subscribe to elements of the creed insofar as they are paying close attention to those expressions. Citizens who spend their time in politics are most likely to encounter arguments that celebrate American political pieties.48

We also found that how important equality seems, and how dangerous government appears, depend in part on change in economic welfare. Specifically, those whose family's economic position was deteriorating were more likely to support equality and less likely to worry about an intrusive government. These relationships suggest, again, that principles are not some eternal and permanent representations of the American political experience. In the context of an improving family economy, the demand for equality seems less pressing, and government intervention seems less necessary. When the family's economic condition suffers, equality and government intervention take on higher priority, perhaps because the experience of economic trouble close at hand induces sympathy for those suffering a similar misfortune in the nation at large.

Finally, and most prominently, our analysis revealed connections between American principles, on the one hand, and sentiments toward various subordinate social and political groups, on the other. White Americans who provided favorable evaluations of the poor, of blacks, and of the women's movement were more egalitarian and less concerned about the dangers of government. By this analysis, principles arise out of sympathy for others' misfortunes. Those who expressed the most sympathy were simultaneously most concerned to ensure that opportunities really were equal, and most likely to see the federal government not as a dangerous Leviathan but as a helpful instrument for social and political change. Principles are not merely expressions of social sympathy, of course, but these results suggest in still another way the importance of social groupings to public opinion.

The American Creed

Tocqueville's conclusion that America was fundamentally democratic, in firm possession of egalitarian values, required some artful dancing. He did not ignore the problem of race—indeed, he regarded the presence of blacks on American soil "the most formidable evil threatening the nation's future." Still, in the large sweep of his analysis, he relegated blacks (and Native American Indians) to a marginal place. He obscured the intellectual respectability of racism and thereby underestimated its power and persistence. To Tocqueville, the problem of race was an aberration in an otherwise successful experiment with democratic government.

A century later, Myrdal concluded his famous investigation of American race relations in an oddly optimistic frame of mind. Myrdal was far from blind
to prejudice and discrimination, but in his view they would be no match for the inexorable onward march of the American Creed, where “the American thinks, talks, and acts under the influence of high national and Christian precepts.”

Myrdal’s capacity to see blue sky among the threatening clouds is matched by many contemporary scholars on race relations, as we noted earlier in this chapter. There is conveyed in this body of work a sense of dramatic progress, of the withering away of racism and discrimination, of a new politics of race, one that is about “mere” interests and, especially, noble and lofty principles. In the rush to establish the importance of principles in public opinion, we must not deny a place to less savory considerations, racial resentment conspicuous among them. The American political tradition is both glorious and repulsive, a point that accounts of public opinion too often overlook.

**Democratic Discussion**

Public opinion is not only a matter of individuals privately assembling their views; it is a political process as well. In this political aspect of public opinion, we have been especially interested in the interplay between elite constructions of political issues, on the one hand, and public understanding, on the other. Elite frame issues in particular ways, thereby providing citizens with recipes for how issues should be understood.

Framing is a likely feature of democratic politics—indeed, perhaps it is inevitable. Public issues are always complex and multifaceted; they can always be understood in more than one way. Verba and his colleagues make this point nicely, writing about issues of equality:

> In the real political world issues of equality do not emerge in neat analytical form. Any equality issue encompasses many dimensions and represents many analytical distinctions. The issue of government mandated quotas in institutions of higher education for people of a disadvantaged ethnic background is many issues at once. It is about a particular valued good (education), the standards of access to that good (membership in a group rather than individual achievement), the equality criterion (opportunity or results), equality for a particular group in relation to the rest of society (the chosen disadvantaged group rather than some other disadvantaged group), as well as the extent to which the government ought to intervene to create conditions of equality.

If, as we say, public issues are *always* “many issues at once,” then there is always room for framing.

At the same time, citizens are generally capable of thinking about any issue in more than one way; they have interests and attitudes and principles all of which could be engaged. Which considerations turn out really to matter depends on what comes to mind. And this is what frames do: they spotlight some considerations and neglect others, thereby altering the mix of ingredients that citizens consider as they form their opinions.

Framing, then, is inescapable: public issues are complicated and political thinking is fluid. Our purpose here is to consider the implications of our results on framing for the conversation that is or should be at the center of democratic politics.

**Frames and Democratic Discussion**

A persistent theme in democratic theory is the importance of cool and reasoned discussion. John Stuart Mill, to take one prominent and influential example, placed debate over the common good at the heart of democracy. Even majority rule, often thought to be the defining feature of democracy, faded into the background in his treatment. The majority’s vote is important less because it has any right to rule, and more because it offers an effective way to discover the best policy:

> Unless opinions favourable to democracy and to aristocracy, to property and to equality, to co-operation and to competition, to luxury and to abstinence, to sociality and individuality, to liberty and discipline, and all the other standing antagonisms of practical life, are expressed with equal freedom, and enforced and defended with equal talent and energy, there is no chance of both elements obtaining their due; one scale is sure to go up, and the other down.

Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites, that very few have minds sufficiently capacious and impartial to make the adjustment with an approach to correctness, and it has to be made by the rough process of a struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners.

Critics of liberal democracy have often savaged it as mindless chatter, and celebrated instead the cult of action, the heroic leader who firmly grasps what needs to be done. Mill explains why we should want there to be endless talk, in and out of the legislature, and especially between legislators and citizens. Without it, we simply cannot grasp what might be worth doing, nor can we learn from our previous mistakes:

> There must be discussion, to show how experience is to be interpreted. Wrong opinions and practices gradually yield to fact and argument; but facts and arguments, to produce any effect on the mind, must be brought before it. Very few facts are able to tell their
own story, without comments to bring out their meaning. The whole strength and value, then, of human judgement, depending on the one property, that it can be set right when it is wrong, reliance can be placed on it only when the means of setting it right are kept constantly at hand.

Deliberation is also at the center of the distinction drawn by Hamilton in The Federalist Papers, between the public’s “temporary delusions,” on the one hand, and its more considered judgments following “cool and sedate reflection,” on the other. In Hamilton’s view, government should respond only to the “deliberate sense of the community,” not “to every sudden breeze of passion or to every transient impulse which the public may receive from the arts of men who flatter their prejudices to betray their interests.”

The claim that democracy requires or should aspire to orderly and widespread discussion receives extensive attention in contemporary writing as well. Consider, as prominent cases in point, Robert Dahl’s democratic criterion of “enlightened understanding,” the requirement that democratic institutions provide citizens with adequate and equal opportunities for discovering their own interests; or the utopian proposal of Habermas on behalf of “ideal speech,” where discussion is free and equal and virtually endless, and where consensus emerges only as the result of the force of better arguments; or Manin’s argument that a democratic regime achieves legitimacy in so far as its decisions result from full and open deliberation, where participants come to the discussion without definitive views, ready to modify their opinions in light of new information and persuasive arguments offered by others; or, finally, Fishkin’s recent recommendation of the “deliberative opinion poll,” a device for guaranteeing reasoned discussion a more prominent place in the American presidential selection process. In short, deliberation is very widely embraced. Rational discourse over common problems supposedly enhances mutuality, builds a sense of community, and fosters individual autonomy.

If democracy depends mightily upon conversation—if it is “government by discussion,” as Bagchi once wrote—then issue frames take on special importance. For frames might offer at least a partial solution to the persistent complaint that democracy requires citizens more than they can supply. Schumpeter argued against democracy on this ground: the average citizen, according to Schumpeter, “is impatient of long or complicated argument,” “is in possession of ‘weak rational processes,’ ” is “not all there.” “Because citizens are likely to succumb more readily to prejudice and manipulation than to rational argument, and indulge in crude excess when they assemble, Schumpeter concluded that the typical citizen “drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again.”

Schumpeter argued without systematic evidence in hand, but his complaint has been reinforced by empirical investigations, most notably by Converse’s analysis of national surveys carried out from 1956 to 1960. Converse concluded that qualitative, perhaps unbridgeable differences distinguished the political thinking of elites from the political thinking of citizens. His results suggested that leaders and citizens think about public life in fundamentally different ways, and they questioned whether citizens are capable of participating in a political discussion at all. As Converse put it, the fragmentation and concretization of everyday political thinking “are not a pathology limited to a thin and disorganized bottom layer of the lumpenproletariat; they are immediately relevant in understanding the bulk of mass political behavior.”

Frames cut into this problem, though in a double-edged way. On the positive side, frames appear to provide a common vocabulary, one that enables elites and citizens to take part in the same conversation. Frames allow elites to speak clearly to citizens. Indeed, it would be odd if it were otherwise, since frames are created with this aim prominently in mind. Through frames, democratic discussion between leaders and citizens seems less intractable than where Converse’s analysis left things.

The creation and dissemination of frames may be a mixed blessing for democratic conversation, however. One worry is that frames may actually discourage real deliberation. In The Rhetoric of Reaction, Albert O. Hirschman identifies a small set of formal arguments against progressive policies that have been trotted out, again and again, over the last 200 years. According to Hirschman, opponents of proposals to extend various civil, political, and economic rights have argued either that (1) however well-intentioned, such policies will actually make things worse (the perversity thesis), or (2) oblivious of some deep and powerful social force, such policies will have no chance of altering society (the futility thesis), or (3) while perhaps desirable in and of themselves, such policies would have disastrous consequences not foreseen by its supporters (the jeopardy thesis). The recurrent and stereotyped use of such arguments—and the progressive side to the various debates come off no better—Hirschman takes as evidence of precisely how not to argue in a democracy. Time worn, unamended for the special cases to which they are automatically applied, these arguments are, in Hirschman’s judgment, “contraptions specifically designed to make dialogue and deliberation impossible”; their ritualistic invocation produces “a dialogue of the deaf.”

But perhaps the strongest apprehension set off by our results has to do with manipulation, the possibility that citizens may be led one way or another.
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

through artful appeals. We have suggested that by sponsoring and promoting rival opinion frames, political elites alter how issues are understood and, as a consequence, influence what opinion turns out to be. This is manipulation, but of a particular sort. It is not that frames induce citizens to act against their interests or principles. It is rather that frames define which of their interests and principles take precedence. If this is not manipulation in the classic sense, it is still both practically important and democratically unsettling.

The struggle among elites over whose frames shall prevail in public debate is an important part of a larger process that Riker calls the "political mobilization of tastes." Riker adroitly places this mobilization at the center of politics. In Riker's scheme, new issues arise because leaders are constantly preoccupied with assembling a winning coalition, and see in a new issue, or in a new way of framing an issue, a way to achieve it. Riker argues that leaders in voting bodies may be likened to entrepreneurs in a market. Entrepreneurs succeed by offering new products, and so it is with leaders. Of course, entrepreneurs often fail, offering products no one wants. So also with voting leaders. New alternatives, new issues, are like new products. Each one is sponsored as a test of the voting market, in the hope that the new alternative will render new issues salient, old issues irrelevant, and, above all, will be preferred by a majority to what went before.41

To Riker, this is the "art of politics." It is the restless and relentless search for winning issues and alternatives that lends democratic politics its dynamism. We see this clearly in the 1988 presidential contest and, more generally, in the electoral temptations organized around race. In 1988, having written off the votes of black Americans, the Bush campaign attempted to assemble a winning coalition by persuading racially conservative Democrats to vote their way. The work was done through coded racist appeals: an elaborate, well-orchestrated, and artful activation of racial resentment—and it succeeded handsomely.

It is the art of politics that our experiments on framing attempt to illuminate. In all four experiments, the prominence of racial resentment in white public opinion was shown to be contingent on how the issue was framed. Under certain frames—those that reminded whites that the issue in question was really a matter of whether or not blacks deserved help—the issue was converted into a referendum on black character. Then racial resentment became the dominant ingredient in public opinion: other considerations were shunted to one side. Under alternative frames, however—those that suggested that race policies should be thought of as conflicts of interest or as assistance to minorities in general or as help to the poor—the power of racial resentment was reduced, while principles, interests, and the claims of other groups all came more visibly into play. Under these frames, the interior debate that might be said to go on within the minds of individual citizens appeared to be richer, more complex, and perhaps healthier, for democratic deliberation and public opinion alike.

This general result is important for what it suggests about elite's ability to control the extent of racial resentment in public opinion, but it takes on additional significance within the context of democracy seen as discussion. Democratic discussion means that everyone talks, and everyone listens. But when racism is injected into campaigns, some voices are devalued, effectively silenced, and the mutual respect that real discussion requires is undermined. In the embrace of deliberation as a democratic ideal, it is striking that a basic issue has been overlooked: namely, that such conversations are routinely marked by vast differences in status, power, and privilege. How might more of the people who routinely speak less, because of impoverished resources or deep alienation from conventional politics, be encouraged to take part and be heard in democratic discussions? How might those who typically dominate such discussions be induced to attend to the views of others? Answers to these questions are far from obvious, but giving racial resentment a legitimate place in political debate is no way to start.42

TWO SOCIETIES?

In the spring of 1967, as race riots were decimating the nation's cities, President Johnson appointed a commission headed by Governor Otto Kerner of Illinois to identify the causes of the violence and to suggest policies that might prevent its repetition. Published in March 1968, the Kerner Commission report interpreted the riots as a sign of a deep and perhaps permanent racial rift. It began with the famous and ominous warning that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."43 To what extent does the evidence we have in hand today justify the Kerner Commission's pessimistic prophecy?

In some respects, the Kerner Commission's prediction of two societies, separate and unequal, seems all too real. Certainly economic and social inequalities continue to divide Americans along racial lines. Even with postwar progress taken into account, large racial differences in employment, income, and wealth remain. Blacks are twice as likely to be unemployed, they earn less when they are employed; the average black household commands less than one-tenth the financial assets of the average white household; black children are more likely than not to be born into poverty, and on it goes.44 These inequalities seem su
ficiently glaring both to sustain the Kerner Commission’s language of two unequal societies and to guarantee the persistence of political conflict over race into the foreseeable future.

Johnson’s presidential commission warned also of separate societies—one black, the other white—and on this point the evidence is, if anything, more discouraging. The persistence of racial segregation, the sheer fact of profound physical isolation, is stunning. In neighborhoods across the country, blacks and whites are separated more completely now than they were at the turn of the century. In the typical American city today, fully 80% of blacks would need to set in new neighborhoods in order to achieve racial balance in the city as a whole. Well-educated and affluent blacks are just as segregated from whites as are impoverished and ill-educated blacks. When blacks move to the suburbs, they move to black suburbs, or to black enclaves within predominantly white suburbs adjacent to the central city. Segregation by race declined modestly between 1970 and 1980, and again between 1980 and 1990. Even should this trend continue, however, another fifty years would have to pass before the level of black-white residential integration would match the levels already attained by Asian and Hispanic Americans. And if neighborhoods continue to reflect the tenacious power of the color line, then do schools, churches, workplaces, friendship circles, and marriages. To a remarkable extent, white and black Americans live physically separate lives.

It would be miraculous if racial segregation, as tenacious and complete as it is, turned out to be a neutral fact, merely a description of how American society happened to be organized. It is not: segregation has had pernicious consequences for the welfare and aspirations of black Americans, and it is arguably a prime ingredient in the generation of a black urban underclass.

Though less dramatic, segregation has political consequences as well. For one thing, segregation reduces incentives for coalition building. When political jurisdictions are racially homogeneous, programs and services that benefit blacks may benefit blacks alone; withholding programs and services harms the interests of blacks and blacks alone. This arrangement diminishes the opportunities for blacks and whites to join together to press for common goals and encourages the view of racial politics as competitive. In this way, segregation reinforces racial divisions in politics.

Racial separation may also encourage whites to respond in a stereotyped way to policy proposals on race. Segregation leaves whites without any grounding in interpersonal experience, unable to accumulate information that might challenge the racial stereotypes that were a likely part of their upbringing. When asked about policies to provide assistance to blacks or to protect blacks from discrimination, such whites have only their stereotypes to fall back on. Under these typical circumstances, the chances for compassion and sympathy seem slim.

Racial segregation also encourages, or at least makes possible, the presentation of systematically different points of view to the two communities. A case in point is provided by the 1988 presidential campaign, where it could be said that black and white audiences witnessed different campaigns. Coverage of the campaign in the black press revolved around Jesse Jackson; in mainstream coverage, the dominant black figure instead was Willie Horton. Similar differences are apparent as well in coverage of the Los Angeles riot or uprising that followed the acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King. We say riot or uprising advisedly: it was a riot in the pages of the Los Angeles Times, and an uprising in the pages of the Los Angeles Sentinel.

This point returns us to the observation that served as our empirical point of departure: to the racial divide in opinion. To us, the most arresting feature of public opinion on race remains how emphatically black and white Americans disagree with each other. On the obligation of government to ensure equal opportunity, on federal efforts to assist blacks, and on affirmative action in employment and schooling, a huge racial rift opens up. Blacks and whites also disagree sharply over policy questions that are racial only by implication. They differ over how generous the American welfare state should be and over the integrity of American political institutions. They differ enormously in their partisan loyalties: blacks are now the most loyal members of what remains of the New Deal coalition. Blacks and whites also differ on matters of principle: black Americans are much more attracted by the claims of equality and much less apprehensive over the intrusions of the federal government than are white Americans. And they differ fundamentally in their view of race and American society. Whites tend to think that racial discrimination is no longer a problem, that prejudice is withering away, that the real worry these days is reverse discrimination, penalizing innocent whites for the sins of the distant past. Meanwhile, blacks see racial discrimination as ubiquitous: they think of prejudice as a plague; they say that racial discrimination, not affirmative action, is still the rule in American society.

Political differences such as these are simply without peer: differences by class or gender or religion or any other social characteristic are diminutive by comparison. The racial divide is as apparent among ordinary citizens as it is among elites. It is not a mask for class differences: it is rooted in race itself, in differences of history. The racial divide in opinion widens when whites talk with whites and blacks talk with blacks, itself a sign of the tensions associated...
with race in American life. Divisions by race are nothing new to American politics, but if anything, they are more prominent now than they were a generation ago. Such differences reflect a deep and perhaps deepening racial alienation, one that seems completely in keeping with the Kerner Commission’s warning.

In the spring of 1989, a twenty-nine-year-old white woman who worked as an investment banker for Solomon Brothers in downtown Manhattan went for a run through Central Park after work. There in the dark she was set upon, viciously beaten, raped, and left for dead. By the time she awoke from coma, six black and Latino teenage boys had been charged with her assault and rape; eventually they would be convicted. In Joan Didion’s analysis, reactions to the case exposed radically different points of view about contemporary society and racial conflict:

What people said when they talked about the case of the Central Park jogger came to seem a kind of poetry, a way of expressing, without directly stating, different but equally volatile and similarly occult visions of the same disaster. One vision, shared by those who had seized upon the attack of the jogger as an exact representation of what was wrong with the city, was of a city systematically ruined, violated, raped by its underclass. The opposing vision, shared by those who had seized upon the arrest of the defendants as an exact representation of their own victimization, was of a city in which the powerless had been systematically ruined, violated, raped by the powerful.

Differences like these admit no common ground. They suggest, if we can make use of an overworked term, that black and white Americans have taken possession of distinct paradigms. In the extreme, blacks and whites look upon the social and political world in fundamentally different and mutually unintelligible ways. As Thomas Kuhn emphasized the profound difficulties scientists encounter in attempting to speak across different theoretical paradigms, white and black citizens appear to have a terrible time talking to one another about race.

Is democratic discussion across the racial divide impossible? No, not impossible, but it is hard. Given the tragic nature of our history—“Deep rooted prejudices entertained by whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained,” as Jefferson put it—it could hardly be otherwise. But democratic debate need not sink to the covert and cunning mobilization of racial resentment among white Americans, on the one hand, or lapse into silence and evasion where black Americans are concerned, on the other.

Democratic politics could be the place where we learn a language of mutual respect and begin to work out our differences. We should insist on it, for the stakes are high. Race, Du Bois chastened us, is “merely a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic.” As it was in the beginning of the twentieth century, so it is now at the end.