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## Introduction

### The Racialized Outcomes of Race-Neutral Policies

SAN DIEGO CITY AGENCIES examined the Chinese Mission and the Douglas Hotel—the major community and cultural centers for Chinese Americans and African Americans in the pre–World War II era of segregation—in the center of the downtown area and concluded in the 1980s that they were not historically or architecturally significant and could be demolished. Community mobilization managed to save the Chinese Mission, turning it into a museum, but the Douglas Hotel was razed. In the 1990–1991 New York City Council redistricting, a district was created to enhance the political power of Asian Americans in the Chinatown area, which had one of the largest concentrations of Asian Americans in the city. The districting commissioners believed that the district provided the best opportunity to elect an Asian American in a city that at that time had never elected an Asian American to the council. White voters dominated elections in the district, however, and had never elected an Asian American. After the 2000–2001 redistricting of the California state assembly and state senate districts, a *Los Angeles Times* editorial declared that the districts protected incumbents and that “the plans shatter the concepts of community of interest and compactness of districts . . . and largely thwart the desires of Latinos and Asian Americans to win additional seats” (*Los Angeles Times* 2001: B14). The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund filed a lawsuit charging that the redistricting plan diluted Latino political power, but the lawsuit was dismissed in the federal district court, with the judges ruling that no harm had occurred to Latinos.

I examine how race shapes politics and public policy using these three case studies involving economic redevelopment and historic preservation in

San Diego and redistricting in New York City and the Los Angeles region, with Asian Americans playing a central role in each setting. Three cases, in three separate communities, with two in Southern California and one on the East Coast in Manhattan. On the surface, redistricting has nothing in common with economic redevelopment and historic preservation, and the landscape of the sprawling and ever-growing suburbs of Southern California is the opposite of the dense, vertical, and established Manhattan neighborhoods. Examining the public discussion of these issues, however, reveals a common debate on race, and because the assumptions and understandings of race are directly translated into public policy, I suggest that this debate is crucial to the formation and implementation of public policy in the United States today.

A key issue is a reliance by policymakers on the development of race-neutral procedures, or, in the case of redistricting, on deemphasizing race, which represents a fundamental shift in public policy from the explicitly race-based policies that previously generated and supported inequality in society. Race-based policies were exemplified by slavery and the genocide of Native Americans in the 1800s and by other policies in the first half of the 1900s, such as the forced repatriation of Mexican immigrants, the incarceration of Japanese Americans in internment camps during World War II, and segregation in employment, schools, neighborhoods, and public facilities.

One of the main themes of this book is how individuals and groups supporting race-neutral policies may in fact be contributing to policies that have racialized outcomes. I contend that people who consider themselves free of racial prejudice can play a part in supporting racial inequality in society. Previous forms of systemic racism—such as racially restrictive covenants in housing or segregated educational or transportation facilities—were put into place by people who were actively and deliberately working to create and enforce racial inequality. Instead of these explicitly race-based policies, I examine contemporary racialized policies enacted by people who sincerely believe that the policies they create and support are free of racial bias.

Gunnar Myrdal (1944), writing in the first half of the twentieth century, talked about the “American Dilemma” in regard to the racism experienced by African Americans and the yet-to-be-fulfilled-ideals of democracy. I focus on racial minorities and the American dilemma of the twenty-first century (E. Park and Park 1999). Employment, income, and educational indicators clearly show improving circumstances in important but, I would argue, narrowly defined areas, because such data do not reveal the ways that race continues to shape

debate and policy, with unequal, racialized results in areas such as politics and economic development.

Analyzing the way policymakers view how race works in society is absolutely essential because such understandings serve to guide and legitimate policy formation. The case studies in this book demonstrate two opposing perspectives. On one side of the debate are those who support the effort to establish policies that strictly avoid race in their formation and implementation, leading to race-neutral policies. Two fundamental beliefs are incorporated into this perspective. The first belief is that the United States was founded on the principles of equality and democracy and that the history of the country is a movement toward realizing those ideals. As Alexis de Tocqueville (1969) concluded in his classic mid-nineteenth-century work on democracy in the United States, slavery was an aberration in a society striving for equality. Although racial discrimination was clearly a problem in the past, according to this view, discrimination has declined to the point where it has little effect on people's life chances and public policy in contemporary society.

The second belief is that racial minorities are experiencing integration into society, as demonstrated by rising educational levels, expanding occupational opportunities, and entrance into formerly all-white neighborhoods, and that considering race in public policy serves only to call attention to race and perpetuate its importance. Therefore developing race-neutral policies is the best way to eliminate the last traces of discrimination that remain. Supporting this perspective and discussing the history of race in the United States, historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. contends that "a cult of ethnicity has arisen . . . to denounce the goal of assimilation, to challenge the concept of 'one people,' and to protect, promote, and perpetuate separate ethnic and racial communities" (Schlesinger 1998: 20). The result of a focus on race, according to Schlesinger (1998), interferes with integration because it "exaggerates differences, intensifies resentments and antagonisms, drives ever deeper the awful wedges between races and nationalities" (p. 106).

The other side of the debate, and my viewpoint in this book, suggests the explicit incorporation of race into public policies as a way to address past and present forms of racial inequality in society. This perspective contends that, although the country's early leaders expressed the ideals of equality and democracy, such ideals applied only to a narrow segment of society, and racial inequality was the norm, rather than the exception, and was encoded in the country's constitution, laws, and practices. As a result, these laws and practices

have contributed to racial inequality since the founding of the United States, and race remains deeply embedded in our social, political, and economic institutions (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Haney Lopez 2003; Lipsitz 2006). As Joe Feagin explains, “U.S. institutions today reflect and imbed the white-over-black hierarchy initially created in the seventeenth century. . . . Systemic racism is not some unfortunate appendage to society that is now largely eliminated. Racial oppression persists as foundational and integral to society in the present day” (Feagin 2006: 8). To eliminate systemic racism in contemporary society, therefore, public policies must take race into account.

The analytical framework of this book is based on the perspective that recognizes continued inequality in society, and in the case studies I examined, two factors directly contributed to racialized outcomes. First, people working to enact and support race-neutral public policies may ignore the ways in which race is already present in the ideologies and practices of the larger society that shape the formation and implementation of policies. As a result, policies that appear race neutral may in fact be structured in ways that have racialized outcomes. This occurs because the policies do nothing to counter the ways in which race is already present, and thus the policies serve to reinforce racialized practices. Second, in the case of redistricting, policymakers viewed whites as a race-neutral group, despite evidence that whites actively worked to preserve their interests as a group through voting and redistricting. Failing to account for the racial actions of whites countered the attempts of redistricting to enhance the political effectiveness of racial minorities.<sup>1</sup>

Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro explained the effects of systemic discrimination on capital accumulation: “To understand the sedimentation of racial inequality . . . is to acknowledge the way in which structural disadvantages have been layered one upon the other to produce black disadvantage and white privilege” (Oliver and Shapiro 1995: 51). Similarly, redistricting, economic redevelopment, and historic preservation demonstrate how a range of factors, both explicitly racial and seemingly race neutral, constitute the sedimentation of inequality in public policy. Economic redevelopment and the demolition of a building or neighborhood take place within a history of explicit racial inequality. This inequality manifested itself as racial exclusion, which created concentrations of racial minorities in residential and commercial areas, federal mortgage policies and practices of private financial institutions that opened up home ownership to new segments of the white population while denying the same to racial minorities, urban renewal efforts that disproportionately destroyed

minority communities, policies of racial steering by real estate agents that support racial segregation, and historic preservation policies that ignore the social history of racial minorities. Redistricting and the creation of political districts occur within a history of literacy tests, poll taxes, grandfather clauses, white-only primaries, gerrymandering, racially polarized voting, and other race-based factors that have contributed to the disenfranchisement of racial minorities.

The extremely long and complex process of public policy formation and implementation involves many routine and institutionalized procedures as well as numerous individuals, community groups, and government committees and agencies. The established procedures and participants' assumptions about race—whether acknowledged or not—frame and influence the outcomes. As a result, race-neutral policies are only one part of a long chain of events that contribute to racialized consequences.

### **Race and Society: Assimilation Versus Systemic Racism**

In the enduring debate in the United States about race and public policy, studies incorporating assimilation theory and the integration of racial minorities into society and studies on racial formation and the continued existence of systemic racism offer contrasting views of race and society. Assimilation theory provides the foundation for race-neutral policies, whereas racial formation theory frames the call to include race in policies to address racial inequality in society.

Social scientists developed assimilation theory in the early 1900s to explain the incorporation of new groups into a society undergoing massive transformation as a result of domestic and international migration, industrialization, and rapid urbanization (R. Park and Burgess 1967). Studies on assimilation examine the integration of immigrants and their descendants into society and conclude that integration is the inevitable route. In early versions of assimilation theory, Robert Park (1950) and Milton Gordon (1964) emphasized the gradual assimilation of all racial and ethnic groups into the American “mainstream,” which Gordon (1964) suggested was defined by the customs and standards of European Americans. Assimilation occurred as newcomers learned how to adapt to American society and as discrimination gradually declined. Recognizing the historical importance of racial barriers, Gordon (1964: 78) noted that African Americans faced “unusually marked discrimination” compared to other groups in society, but he believed that the “emergence of the middle-class” was evidence that “the effect of discrimination will be seen to have been a delaying action only.”<sup>2</sup>

Critics of assimilation theory note that adaptation is depicted as a linear and

irreversible process, and the theory fails to take into account the contemporary development and reaffirmation of ethnic and racial identities (Espiritu 1992).<sup>3</sup> Critics also point out that assimilation theory was based on the experiences of European immigrants and was applied inappropriately to immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, who, these critics contend, face a fundamentally different experience in the United States because of their categorization as racial minorities. Where Gordon saw discrimination as “a delaying action,” others saw race as a fundamental and established divide in society (Lipsitz 2006).

Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003) offer a contemporary analysis and reformulation of assimilation theory. Alba and Nee (2003) critique the normative assumption and the implicit “hierarchy of racial and cultural acceptability” it contains: that all groups aspire to discard their old cultures and work to assimilate into the mainstream. Alba and Nee suggest that groups can retain an ethnic and/or racial identity, even though they attain high levels of integration into society along economic, education, and residential indicators.<sup>4</sup>

For Alba and Nee (2003), assimilation has occurred for the descendants of European and Asian immigrants whose ancestors came to the United States many generations ago. Four decades after Gordon’s prediction that African Americans would achieve structural assimilation, Alba and Nee offer a more cautious assessment, although they recognize that African Americans have made great gains and that the possibility of future assimilation exists. Alba and Nee (2003) suggest that “there will be a black group for the foreseeable future, and membership in it will continue to be associated with disadvantages and discrimination” (p. 291).

Even with these words of caution, in general, from the perspective of assimilation, society operates in a fair, open, and meritocratic fashion, and the general trend in society is toward the incorporation of groups into the mainstream. Alba and Nee offer a hopeful view about the openness of society and, commenting on such groups as Japanese Americans during World War II, who faced extreme levels of intolerance, note the eventual assimilation of racial minority groups.

Liberal individualism, with its emphasis on the individual rather than on the group, offers an analytical focus distinct from assimilation, but the two views are related because they share assumptions regarding the reduced importance of race and the possibility of the integration of racial minorities into society. From the perspective of liberal individualism, the importance of race is understood in terms of individual rights, actions, and experiences. The impact of race on society and of racial discrimination is thus portrayed as the result of the actions of individuals and as an atypical occurrence in society (Thernstrom

and Thernstrom 1997). According to this view, racial discrimination, although not completely eliminated, has declined to the point where it is no longer a major determinant of one's life chances and should be eliminated in the formation of public policy (D'Souza 1991; Steele 1990). Works on assimilation and liberal individualism conclude that the integration of racial minorities into society will occur without major changes in society to address discrimination.

In contrast to a focus on the individual and incorporation into society, with theories calling attention to systemic racism, racial discrimination remains a key factor in the organization of society for all racial groups. Whiteness studies, which examine the history of racial inequality in the United States, emerged in the 1990s, and key investigations (Jacobson 1998; Lipsitz 2006; Roediger 1994, 2007) looked at how racial hierarchy and racial privileges that favor whites and the systemic practices that support hierarchy and privilege became central features of U.S. society and remain so today. Directly contesting the principles of liberal individualism, Lipsitz (2006) explains that "conscious and deliberate actions have institutionalized group identity in the United States, not just through the dissemination of cultural stories, but also through the creation of social structures that generate economic advantages for European Americans through the possessive investment in whiteness" (p. 2). Federal legislation that advanced racial equality and changing racial attitudes among whites regarding race in the 1960s certainly marked important changes in society. According to research examining whiteness and structural inequality, however, race remains a major factor in society and is embedded in social, political, and economic institutions, thus contributing to systemic racism in society (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Feagin 2006; Feagin and Vera 1995).

In summary, research on assimilation measures the integration of racial minorities into American society through such indicators as income, intermarriage, and educational attainment and views racial inequality as a still troubling but disappearing factor in society. Research on whiteness and systemic racism, in contrast, emphasizes the continuing importance of racial discrimination based on deliberate and planned racial inequality. I certainly concur that such practices remain an important part of American society. However, in my examination of how public policies contribute to systemic racism, I am not directly addressing these forms of deliberate race-based discrimination. Instead, as revealed in my case studies, I investigate how public policy is racialized in the absence of racial prejudice and efforts to create racial inequality, an area ignored by assimilation theory and not a major focus of work on systemic racism. The focus of this

book is the unintended racialized results of race-neutral public policy based on the assumptions of assimilation theory and liberal individualism. I document and analyze how the discussions and practices connected to policy formation and implementation contribute to the meaning and importance of race and, at times, result in racial hierarchy and privilege, with whites at the top and racial minorities in a subordinate position, as suggested by whiteness studies.

### Understanding Public Policy Through Racial Formation

The three cases in this book illustrate the social construction of race and public policy in terms of the continuous struggle and negotiation over the meaning and consequences of racial categories, an essential aspect of what Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) called racial formation in the key explanatory work on the process. I draw on Omi and Winant's (1994) conceptual framework and on related works on race to highlight three areas regarding the social construction of race in contemporary society and how these processes contribute to the racialization of public policy.

First, the meaning and importance of racial categories in society are continually contested and redefined rather than fixed and static through time. As a result, understandings of race are fluid and are given significance because of their links to a variety of rights and privileges upon society. For example, local and federal policies directly conferred privileges upon whites and European immigrants regarding naturalization, voting, and the ability to own land while denying these privileges to Asian immigrants (Ngai 2004; E. Park and Park 2005). Through time and political struggle, each one of these privileges was eventually extended to Asian immigrants.

Second, racial formation emphasizes the importance of the way ideologies support public policies. As Stuart Hall (1995) explains, an ideology includes "images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence" (p. 18). Thus a key aspect of racial formation is the struggle over competing ideologies and how particular ideologies become the established way of understanding race and the basis for shaping public policy (Vargas 2006). The history of urban areas in the United States shows how local governments have strategically manipulated and used such racial images as "slums" and "ghettos" to label communities in order to justify economic development plans that would eradicate neighborhoods and displace residents, and how these images and the consequences of race vary through time and place according to the purposes they serve (Gans 1995).



Third, racial formation occurs relationally, with racial minorities compared and ranked with one another as well as with whites (Almaguer 1994). Natalia Molina (2006), for example, documents how public officials in Los Angeles during the early 1900s viewed Mexican immigrants as assimilable, whereas Chinese and Japanese immigrants were deemed the opposite; the public officials used this judgment as a basis for incorporating Mexicans into public health programs while excluding Asians.<sup>5</sup>

The forces of racial segregation have worked to form communities in which racial minorities share the same neighborhoods, and as a result, residents analyze and construct the meaning of race and racial identities in relation to one another as well as to whites. Research that focuses on minority-white relations, ignoring minority-minority relations, excludes the reality of multiracial communities. In Monterey Park, California, for example, the first city in the continental United States with an Asian American majority population, some Asian Americans and Latinos sided with whites in the city's slow-growth movement in the 1980s. Other Asian Americans and Latinos, however, saw the movement as anti-immigrant and anti-Chinese, because development was primarily led by Chinese immigrants, and attempted to devise nondiscriminatory policies (Fong 1994; Horton 1995).

This understanding of the way racial minorities are compared to one another in the process of racial formation and the shared experiences arising from multiracial communities contribute to the possibility for racial minorities to interpret and explain their historical and contemporary experiences in ways that support an understanding of a common subordinate position as racialized minorities in a racial hierarchy (Pulido 1998, 2006). In this manner, coalitions form around policy issues through an explicit evocation and analysis of race and a recognition and interpretation of their linked racialized experiences, not through a deracialized strategy that erases race in favor of other factors, such as class, citizenship status, or place of birth (Jung 2003, 2006). In the case studies on redistricting in this book, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latinos formed alliances based on their understanding of common interests.<sup>6</sup>

### **From Racial Inequality to the Civil Rights Movement and the Rise of White Ethnicity**

The transformation of racial ideology and government policies in the post-World War II era, moving from state support of racial inequality to the era of civil rights legislation, framed the contemporary dialogue on race and the move to race-neutral public policies. Beginning in the 1970s, deindustrialization and

the loss of jobs in the United States contributed to economic uncertainty, especially in the lives of people in the lower economic levels. The rise of white ethnicity in response to changing political and economic conditions and attacks on policies meant to address racial discrimination illustrate the malleable character of racial identities and how ideologies that serve to explain and legitimate such identities are directly linked to public policy.

The civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s and the black power movement in the 1960s initiated and reflected a transformation in race relations by challenging the legitimacy of racial inequality in society and government policies that contributed to racial discrimination (McAdam 1999; Morris 1984). Domestic pressures at home from the civil rights movement and concern over the American image internationally as the leader of the democratic world in the cold war contributed to the federal government's response (Dudzian 2000). Landmark federal legislation, including the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the 1965 Immigration Act, the 1968 Fair Housing Law, and government programs to address inequality, such as affirmative action and school busing to achieve integration, emerged during this time.<sup>7</sup>

The 1970s marked the beginning of major restructuring of the U.S. economy. Growing international competition and rising oil prices played a role in falling corporate profits. Corporations seeking to cut production costs contributed to the globalization of the production process and deindustrialization in the United States, as companies closed factories and shifted production to other countries, resulting in a massive loss of manufacturing jobs.<sup>8</sup> Economic restructuring led to a "hollowing of the middle," as corporations sent these jobs overseas, leading to a growing bifurcation in employment, with the expansion of low-technology, low-skill jobs with low wages and high-salary jobs requiring high levels of education and skills. From the end of World War II to the beginning of the 1970s, incomes grew across the board, but as a result of the restructuring of the economy, beginning in the mid-1970s, wages began to drop and the middle class began to shrink as income inequality rose (Harrison and Bluestone 1988; Levy 1998).

### *The Rise of White Ethnicity*

As the United States emerged from the turmoil and massive social and economic changes of the 1960s and 1970s, one response among whites was the reemergence of white ethnicity. Countering the belief in the United States as a melting pot, Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (1970) called attention to the persistence of racial and ethnic identities in New York City in the 1960s.

Glazer and Moynihan (1970) suggested that cultural pluralism and the existence of distinct ethnic and racial groups in society, rather than assimilation, better described the racial situation in America.

White ethnicity among working-class and lower-middle-class Americans of Irish and southern and eastern European descent arose, in part, as a reaction to government programs—such as busing and affirmative action—that attempted to improve the condition of urban racial minorities while ignoring, white ethnics believed, the real needs of their communities (Novak 1996). According to this view, the politics of the 1960s differentiated between “‘legitimate’ minorities,” such as African Americans, and the “‘less favored’ minorities,” the white ethnics (Novak 1996: 356). White ethnics believed that they had to bear the inequitable burden imposed by race-based policies created and implemented by the economic and political elite. These burdens included competition exacerbated by affirmative action, with racial minorities competing for jobs in an economy transformed by deindustrialization; sending their children to schools affected by busing, which they believed created a threat to the safety and education of their children; and efforts to integrate neighborhoods, which threatened the racial “stability of their neighborhoods” (Rieder 1985: 57).

Matthew Frye Jacobson (2006: 19) explains that only after African Americans started to work for their rights “as a group” and with the achievements of the civil rights movement did the “dominant discourse of national civic life acknowledge the salience of group experience and standing.” This “group-based mobilization” and record of legislative success provided a “model of action” for white ethnics (Jacobson 2006: 19). Questioning the melting pot model and embracing their white ethnicity, white ethnics stated that they supported the idea of civil rights and equality, but they also believed that they were being held responsible for problems caused by others, because their ancestors did not own slaves or enact the Jim Crow laws of the South. White ethnics explained that their ancestors had also suffered discrimination but had overcome these problems through their own efforts, not through government programs and subsidies (Glazer 1987; Greeley 1971; Waters 1990). From their perspective, taxes to fund programs for racial minorities hit their pocketbooks and racial integration negatively affected their housing values, placing an unfair burden on the working and middle classes (Edsall and Edsall 1992). Talking about the history of discrimination encountered by their ancestors allowed white ethnics to discuss race and oppose efforts to end racial inequality—such as school and neighborhood integration and affirmative action—in ways that they believed focused on fairness for all.

The rise of white ethnicity occurred during a fundamental shift in the national discussion on race from government-sponsored segregation to integration and equality. Understanding this change, embracing the group model of white ethnicity, allowed whites to adopt a new, supposedly antiracist rhetoric while defending their group rights. The end of colonialism and apartheid abroad and the changes brought about by the civil rights movement at home dramatically altered the national conversation on race (Edsall and Edsall 1992; Winant 2001). As Winant (2001) argues, “The upsurge of anti-racist activity . . . constitutes a fundamental and historical shift, a global rupture or ‘break,’ in the continuity of worldwide white supremacy” (p. 2). As a result, Omi and Winant (1994) explain that since the 1960s, “it has been impossible to argue *for* segregation or *against* racial equality” (p. 140, emphasis in the original).

### *Culture of Poverty*

In the 1980s and 1990s, even with government programs to address inequality, racial differences in economic, social, and political life persisted, and in fact, some problems grew rapidly worse. Public attention focused on African Americans, and although occupational mobility and increasing incomes led to a growing middle class that benefited from the policies of the civil rights era, at the same time levels of poverty, unemployment, and crime increased among those in the lower economic levels (Wilson 1987). The views of social scientists and public opinion varied greatly regarding the causes of these problems and possible remedies. With overtly racist explanations based on biological inferiority no longer part of the mainstream racial dialogue, public discussion on economic and social differences among racial groups examined a range of possible causes. Consistent with the idea of liberal individualism, culture and personal responsibility provided one possible explanation.

The culture of poverty, a theory first developed in the 1950s and 1960s, provided an explanation of racial group differences that meshed with the beliefs of liberal individualism. Oscar Lewis (1966: xlv) developed his version of the theory in his study of Latinos in the United States and Latin America. Lewis explained how people developed a set of values, attitudes, and behaviors to adjust to a life as “poor” and “marginal” in society. One of the major consequences of the culture of poverty, according to Lewis (1966), is that it tends to perpetuate poverty from generation to generation. This occurs because those who have acquired such a culture lack the ability to pull themselves out of poverty and take advantage of opportunities that may arise.<sup>9</sup>