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on race

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Kenneth Prewitt

Racial classification in America: where do we go from here?

In its first national census, the young American republic not only counted its population; it racially classified it.¹ From 1790 to 1990, the nation's demographic base changed from one decennial census to the next, and so too did the racial categories on offer. Always, however, the government held fast to two premises: First, it makes policy sense to put every American into one and only one of a limited number of discrete race groups, with the decennial census being the primary vehicle by which the counting and classifying should take place. Second, when policy treats Americans differently depending on what race they belong to,

it should make use of this government classification.

The second premise depends on the first. Without a limited number of bounded groups, it is difficult to fashion policy with race as a criterion. This is easily seen in comparison. Since 1790 there have been policies based on age – who can vote, own property, be drafted, buy alcohol, and claim social security. These policies use a small number of age groupings with fixed and knowable boundaries. Though policy can draw the age boundaries differently as conditions change (eligible to vote at eighteen rather than twenty-one) there is no dispute about who is in a given age group. Using race as a criterion to define groups was never this straightforward, a fact implic-

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¹ This essay has been prepared with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which provided a grant for a working group on issues of racial measurement and classification. The group includes six of the authors represented in this issue of *Dædalus* – Ian Haney López, Victoria Hattam, Jennifer Hochschild, David Hollinger, Melissa Nobles, and Kim Williams – all of whom critiqued this paper and, more generally, substantially shaped my thinking on the issues here discussed. Katherine Wallman and Susan Schechter, both of the Office of Management and Budget, commented on earlier versions of this essay, but have no responsibility for the recommendations advanced here.

itly acknowledged by the government as its census added and subtracted categories from one decennial to the next and as different federal agencies used different taxonomies.

Not until 1977 did the government bring order to the country's racial categories. Acting under the influence of civil rights legislation, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directed all federal agencies to follow uniform standards in collecting racial data.² This achievement was impressive but short-lived. Changing political considerations led to major revisions only two decades later, when the logic of identity politics, with its stress on diversity, began to destabilize the older and more deeply entrenched American division between white and nonwhite.

What do these developments mean for racial and ethnic divisions in America, both today and in the future?

In the context of census 2000, I witnessed the demographic changes and the associated political pressures that make it difficult to define and refine categories focused solely on redressing past injustices rooted in race – the policy purpose that emerged after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In response to newer political pressures, the 2000 U.S. census was the first to permit respondents to record multiple racial origins. The 1997 revision of the OMB standards for racial classification allowed for “mark[ing] one or more” of the primary racial categories, leading to a census with sixty-three possible racial responses.³

2 Office of Management and Budget, Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, “Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting,” May 12, 1977.

3 “Mark one or more” appeared on the census form and I use it here, but statisticians normally refer to “select one or more” to encompass phone and personal interviewing. As discussed

In substantial ways the “mark one or more” option was an improvement over previous census formats, especially in forcefully rejecting the hypodescent presumption.⁴ At issue in this essay is whether, this improvement notwithstanding, the country has the statistical tools it needs to detect – and enable the government to redress – discrimination.

So where should we go from here? To address that question, it will be useful to recall how the United States ended up with such a complicated set of racial and ethnic categories in the first place.

The public face of America's official racial classification is its census, and has been so since the first decennial enumeration in 1790. The initial classification was implicit in two civil status distinctions: free or slave, taxed or untaxed. Applying these distinctions in the census generated a count of three ancestry groups (European, African, and [untaxed] Native American), which set the foundation for all racial classifications to come. From that starting point, the division of the population by race has been repeated in every decennial census, down to the most recent in 2000.

Across two centuries, particular categories have come and gone in response to an ever-shifting mix of political, scientific, and demographic considerations. In 1820, the category “free colored persons” was added to the census. In 1850,

below, in “Revised Standards for Maintaining, Collecting and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity” (October 30, 1997), the OMB designated five primary races: “American Indian/Alaskan Native,” “Asian,” “Black/African-American,” “Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander,” and “White.” The Revised Standards also allow the decennial census form to include a “Some Other” option, which does not appear in other federal statistical surveys.

4 See David Hollinger in this issue.

influenced by a pseudo race-science, the census separately counted mulattoes, a category it retained until 1930. In 1870 Chinese were first counted, and in 1890, Japanese. In 1920 Filipinos, Koreans, and Hindus appeared on the census form. Following Hawaii's statehood, in 1960 Hawaiians were added, though Alaskan statehood did not result in an effort to specifically identify Aleuts and Eskimos for another twenty years. Subcontinent Indians were counted as Hindu in three censuses (1920 – 1940), but as white in the next three censuses. In 1980 they were counted as Asian, a status they retain today. Until 1930 when they got their own census category, Mexicans were counted as white. The government of Mexico contested that change, and Mexicans went back to being counted as white until 1970, when Hispanic origin became a separate category – this time defined in terms of language and ethnicity rather than race.⁵

In the OMB standards first issued in 1977, there were four primary racial groups: Asian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black, and White. These standards held that all federal statistics on race should, at minimum, include those four groups as well as one ethnic group, Hispanic, whose members would also belong to one of the four racial groups.⁶

What political and policy purposes lie behind this continual shifting of the race categories?

In 1790, slaves were included in the census count (the three-fifths clause) because slaveholding states had made

5 For an instructive overview of racial categories in the U.S. census, see Melissa Nobles, *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000).

6 For more detail, see Victoria Hattam and Ian Haney López in this issue.

this a nonnegotiable condition for joining the Union. The result was a power bonus for Southern states in the new Congress and in the Electoral College. This bonus, as John Quincy Adams put it, led to “the triumph of the South over the North – of the slave representation over the purely free.”⁷ The nation's first decision about how to classify the population racially had immense policy consequences that lasted well into the twentieth century.

Without discarding the three-fifths clause, a new era of racial classification began in 1820 when the “free colored” were counted separately from slaves and free whites. This modification allowed citizenship and related civil rights to hinge on color rather than on condition of servitude, a policy that heralded nearly a century and a half of race-based policies focused on making it difficult, if not impossible, for nonwhites to vote, own property, marry across racial lines, enter various professions, seek advanced education, or do much else.

Meanwhile, imperialism and immigration were radically transforming the nation's demographic base.⁸ Wars and the purchase of territory added Mexicans, Native Alaskans, Caribbean Islanders, and Hawaiians to the U.S. population. Permissive immigration policies supplied factory, farm, and mine workers from China, Japan, and eastern and southern Europe. The newcomers were grudgingly tolerated, and policies were

7 Cited in Gary Wills, “The Negro President,” *The New York Review of Books*, November 6, 2003, 45. This essay is drawn from Wills's “*Negro President*”: *Jefferson and the Slave Power* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), a book that develops the “slave power” argument in impressive detail.

8 Aristide Zolberg, *A Nation by Design* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

designed to keep them in their place. The low point came in the 1920s, when the eugenics movement convinced the government to stop immigration of the racially undesirable. Census data were used to design the restrictive immigration laws.⁹

The long practice of applying racial and ethnic categories to policies of civic exclusion began to crumble with World War II, when members of every racial and ethnic group in America fought side by side to defend democracy. Remarkably, however, this monumental policy shift from exclusion to inclusion did not alter the two premises noted at the outset of this essay. Sorting the population into discrete racial groups to make policy still made sense – the trick was to turn the classification to the advantage of those minorities who previously had suffered from its imposition.

A key early step came in a 1947 report from President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights, which used statistics to compare health access and educational opportunities for whites and blacks, giving statistical underpinnings to the committee's broad argument that civil rights were being denied to blacks.

Across every sector of American life two political questions began to push forward: Which racial groups are underrepresented? Does underrepresentation point to discriminatory barriers targeted at racial, ethnic, or national origin groups?

When statistical proportionality came of age in the 1960s, a new policy era was born. Social justice policies formulated in response to statistical findings were widely accepted by the end of the 1960s, as the ideal of equal opportunity fueled a demand for more equal outcomes, and

9 Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), chap. 6.

as the negative goal of nondiscrimination turned into the proactive policy of redress that came to be called affirmative action.

Civil rights court cases were argued on the basis of racial differences in employment patterns, wage rates, college enrollments, and electoral outcomes. In a pivotal employment discrimination case, *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971), the Supreme Court reasoned that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act required the "removal of artificial, arbitrary, and unnecessary barriers to employment," and proscribed "practices that are fair in form, but discriminatory in operation." This reasoning shifted the emphasis in enforcement from individual motivation to statistically demonstrated consequences, from prejudice to institutional racism.¹⁰ Statistical disparity worked its way into policy and law.

Drawing on the categories employed in a 1950 government form, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1964 identified four minority groups: Negro, Spanish-American, American-Indian, and Asian.¹¹ The EEOC's record-keeping institutionalized the Civil Rights Act and in the process fixed in administrative practice a racial classification based on the four groups that had been most prominent in fighting racial discrimination for more than a century.

The 1970 census modified the EEOC classification by changing Spanish-American/Hispanic from a racial to an

10 Alan Freeman, "Antidiscrimination Law From 1954 to 1989: Uncertainty, Contradiction, Rationalization, Denial," reprinted in David Kairys, ed., *The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique*, 3rd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 296.

11 John D. Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 101–110.

ethnicity designation. This was formalized by OMB when, in the 1977 Standards, it directed that Hispanic be considered an ethnicity. Hispanics were also instructed to identify on the census with one of the primary race groups, now American Indian/Native Alaskan, Asian, black/Negro, and white. Other racial, ethnic, linguistic, descent, and national origin groups (for example, Korean, Haitian, Arab) would appear in official statistics only as subcategories of the primary races (in this example, Asian, black, and white, respectively).¹²

The classification adopted in 1977 and used in the 1980 and 1990 censuses seemed secure and capable of discharging its purposes in policy arenas. But by the middle of the 1990s, the political landscape was transformed by demographic changes, by the rise of multiculturalism, and by the multiracial movement. New political demands called into question the existing racial and ethnic categories – and also the public purposes they were thought to serve.

As noted above, the earlier OMB Standards linked Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders with the more general Asian race. The persistent Senator Daniel Akaka from Hawaii and the constituency he led saw matters otherwise. They felt the census should recognize Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders as a separate racial category. After the OMB held public hearings and examined research showing that Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders did differ from Asians more generally, it agreed to the separate category. This decision was in keeping with the rationale that classification should facilitate racially just policies. And so in the mid-1990s the official primary race groups went from four to five.

12 Congress has not involved itself in specifying America's race groups, preferring instead language such as "minorities historically dis-

The ease with which this change took place was consistent with the government's position that "classifications should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature . . . They have been developed in response to needs expressed by both the executive branch and the Congress."¹³ In the absence of science, classification decisions respond to strong voices expressing themselves in the political process. Native Hawaiians, a population group that had suffered discrimination and had the (statistical) scars to prove it, became the latest of the nation's official races.

That being so, how can we decide on the 'proper' number of races? Is five the right number? Why not six or seven? And what is the right number of ethnic groups? Why only one?

Leading up to the 2000 census there was pressure to reclassify persons of Middle Eastern origin from white to their own primary race category. This effort was unsuccessful in part because the advocacy groups that engaged the issue could not agree on whether the category should be Middle Eastern, a geographic designation, or Arab American, an ethnoracial designation. (The post-9/11 treatment of Arab Americans has since led many to doubt the political

criminated against." The exception to this occurred in 1976, when Congress mandated that information on Hispanics, who were defined as an ethnic and not a racial group, be collected by government agencies in order to "assist state and federal governments, and private organizations in the accurate determination of the urgent and special needs of Americans of Spanish origin or descent" (Public Law 94-311).

13 From the 1977 Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, cited in the *Federal Register* 59 (110) (June 9, 1994): 29834. See also Katherine K. Wallman, "Data on Race and Ethnicity: Revising the Federal Standard," *The American Statistician* 52 (1) (February 1998): 31–33.

wisdom of a separate identification for this population group.)

Other advocates urged a different disaggregation of the white category, pointing out, for example, that Greek Americans and Anglo-Saxons did not belong in the same general category. The failure of various efforts (other than the Native Hawaiians / Pacific Islanders) to add to the primary racial classification can be traced to incoherent arguments, insufficient political muscle, and failure to statistically sustain claims of significant past and continuing discrimination.

In the future, however, if the advocates of such efforts make more compelling arguments and apply more muscle and more convincing data, on what grounds will the federal statistical system declare that enough is enough – that four was wrong, but five is right?

There is no science to turn to, and in its absence it is difficult to arrive at a public consensus on how many racial and ethnic groups there are in America. The edifice of racial and ethnic measurement that emerged from the civil rights period was, as social scientists like to say, undertheorized.

The increase in the number of primary racial groups in the United States by 20 percent in the 1990s went largely unnoticed because there was a noisier battle underway. The politics of affirmation marched into the middle of census taking, waving the multiracial banner. Those tidy discrete census categories, whatever their number, missed a huge sociological truth: sex occurs across as well as within racial groups. The census had recognized this 150 years ago when it first counted ‘mulattoes,’ and then, in 1890, when ‘quadroon’ and ‘octoroon’ briefly entered the measurement system in service of the policy argument that racial mixing diluted the mental and

moral fiber of the nation. Later the census put the “other” category into the race question in an effort to accommodate multiracialism. But by the 1990s, multiracial rhetoric was prominent in public life, and its advocates were pressing for an explicit recognition of multiracialism in federal statistics.¹⁴

It is telling that the advocates of multiracialism barely made reference to civil rights. Instead, they brought to the fore demands for affirmation, recognition, choice, and identity. In congressional testimony, Project Race held that “not all Americans fit neatly into one little box” and that it is only right that “multiracial children who wish to embrace all of their heritage should be allowed to do so.” The Association of MultiEthnic Americans, though recognizing that the multiple-race option would make it harder to enforce civil rights law, nevertheless insisted on “choice in the matter of who we are, just like any other community.” This testimony found it ironic that “our people are being asked to correct by virtue of how we define ourselves all of the past injustices of other groups of people.”

Of course, correcting past injustices was what the traditional civil rights organizations were all about: their mission was thus threatened by talk of choice and identity. Self-expression, they insisted, was not a good reason to revise the government’s scheme of racial and ethnic categories. In its testimony, the NAACP pointed out that the current racial classification was fashioned “to enhance the enforcement of anti-discrimination and civil rights law,” and the NAACP worried that “the creation of a multiracial classification might disaggregate the apparent numbers of members of discrete minority groups, diluting benefits to which they are entitled as a protected class under civil rights laws

14 See Kim Williams in this issue.

and under the Constitution itself.” The National Council of La Raza, the powerful Hispanic organization, weighed in. It acknowledged that though concerns about self-expression were understandable, the purpose of racial classification is “to enforce and implement the law, and to inform lawmakers about the distinct needs of special historically disadvantaged populations.”¹⁵

The issue was joined. What is the policy purpose of racial and ethnic classification – to express identity or to enforce antidiscrimination law? Perhaps reflecting the fading power of the civil rights arguments so compelling forty years earlier, “mark one or more” was introduced under the OMB’s revised standards to the racial classification system in time for the 2000 census.¹⁶

This 1997 decision put to rest the view that race is a bounded and durable trait. It challenged the basic premises of racial classification that had held sway in the United States for two centuries. And it explicitly introduced claims for expressive affirmation into ethnoracial classification.¹⁷ Though using the census to express identity was itself not new, officially accepting this as a rationale was.

15 “Federal Measures of Race and Ethnicity and the Implications for the 2000 Census: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Information, and Technology,” April 23, May 22, and July 25, 1997. Serial No. 105-57 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), 309, 324, 382, 286.

16 The multiple-race option was to have been in place across the federal agencies by January of 2003, but as of this writing many agencies, including the Department of Education and the EEOC, have yet to adopt the 1997 revised standards in their compliance reporting programs. In August of 2004, the government announced a further six-month delay before it could produce reporting guidelines for how agencies were to implement the 1997 standards.

17 For a broad review of the census and identity creation, see Naomi Mezey, “Erasure and

At the same time, “mark one or more” created a new – and not entirely stable – statistical reality. In census data, it allowed for fifty-seven multiple-race combinations that, when added to the six single-race answers (white, the four minority races, and other), generated sixty-three possible racial identifications. Because for most purposes this classification is cross-tabulated by Hispanic/non-Hispanic, there are 126 ethnoracial groups in the 2000 decennial census data.¹⁸

The number of categories could be expanded still further. If a future census were to allow for mixed Hispanic/non-Hispanic descent (if in the census you can have a black mother and an Asian father, why not a Hispanic mother and a non-Hispanic father?) the number of ethnoracial groupings would jump from 126 to 189.

Even at the more modest 2000 level of 126 ethnoracial groups, we now know the “mark one or more” census statistics have a reliability problem; often the same individual will give different answers at different times. This problem was demonstrated when answers to the race question in the 2000 census were matched by household with answers in a follow-up quality survey a year later. Although the overall proportion giving a multiple-race answer was reasonably constant, the internal shifting was unexpectedly high. Forty percent of those who gave multiple-race responses changed their minds by the time of the follow-up survey. And many who gave

Recognition: The Census, Race, and the National Imagination,” *Northwestern University Law Review* 97 (4) (2003): 1701–1768.

18 Only the census is large enough to accommodate all these categories. Other government surveys – even the Current Population Survey, the largest among them – cannot provide detailed racial breakdowns.

single-race answers in the census declared a multiple-race identification in the follow-up survey. For example, nearly half (45 percent) of the single-race Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders in the census reported in the survey that they were really more than one race after all.¹⁹

From the perspective of self-expression, such shifting around is reasonable. The proponent of a “Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People” wants “the right to change my identity over my lifetime – and more than once.”²⁰ Popular culture daily reminds us that the blending and changing of identities has become fashionable among the young (the under-eighteen marked more than one race in the census at twice the rate of the over-eighteen). The race question in official statistics is thus being treated less as a demographic fact than as something closer to an attitude toward oneself.

Of course race has always had a subjective dimension but, as Melissa Nobles notes, “in the past, race appeared more fixed because there was a range of constraints – political, intellectual, and social. Undoubtedly, some unknown number of Americans questioned race and color as concepts and as identities, but there was not much public space for such questioning.” Race in census taking was until 1960 assigned by enumerators, whose judgment in such matters was constrained by instructions as well as by social and political realities. But today

19 Claudette Bennett, “Exploring the Consistency of Race Reporting in Census 2000 and the Census Quality Survey,” paper presented at the joint meetings of the American Statistical Association, San Francisco, Calif., August 3–7, 2003. The author is an analyst in the racial statistics branch of the population division of the U.S. Census Bureau.

20 Maria P. P. Root, ed., *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders at the New Frontier* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992), 7.

we ask individuals themselves for their views and, Nobles continues, “there are no laws, social mores, intellectual agreements, or general consensus about what constitutes a racial identity.”²¹

Self-classification poses potential problems within the policy arena – especially to litigation-prone race policy. Because only 6.8 million Americans (2.4 percent) gave multiple-race responses in the 2000 census, the agencies that enforce nondiscrimination law could devise collapsing rules that prevented disruptions to existing policy. Data reliability is not yet a major problem, but it will become one as the size of the multiple-race population grows. This growth will occur as rates of out-marriage among children of recent immigrants from Asia and Latin America approach those reached by Italians and Poles in the mid-twentieth century, and as multiracial identification, especially among the young, is increasingly accepted.

It is not far-fetched to expect opponents of race-sensitive policies to seize upon the low reliability of racial statistics and other data problems as a way to discredit the information that is meant to document continuing racial and ethnic discrimination.

Beyond the radical changes to measurement introduced in the 2000 census, a changing demography challenges the current classification. How will new groups of immigrants arriving in large numbers find their way into a classification system designed for a different demographic and policy moment?

Hispanic immigrants pose this question sharply. They have never found a comfortable home in the federal government’s scheme of racial and ethnic clas-

21 Melissa Nobles, personal communication, August 30, 2004.

sification. Labeling them an ethnic group does not work well, particularly for Mexican Americans who blend European with Native Indian descent. Many have tried to finesse the resulting awkwardness by taking advantage of the residual “other” line on the census form. Nearly half of the Hispanics did so in 2000, most of them Mexican Americans who were claiming their nationality as a race, a race not recognized in the official statistics.²²

Immigrant groups that cannot retreat to an ethnic category on the census form can be even more hard-pressed to locate themselves in the standard classification system. The recently arrived Islamic Ethiopian differs in culture, language, religion, and even skin color and facial features from those Americans who trace their origin to slaves brought from Africa’s Gold Coast. Many of today’s African immigrants have no wish to be counted as blacks, and some African American leaders do not welcome them in any case.²³

The Census Bureau currently has five Race and Ethnic Advisory Committees

22 See Ian Haney López in this issue.

23 In a front-page story on August 30, 2004, *The New York Times* noted that Alan Keyes, a black Republican running for the Illinois Senate seat, questioned whether his opponent Barack Obama, the son of a Kenyan father and a white American mother, was really an African American: “Barack Obama claims an African-American heritage. Barack Obama and I have the same race – that is, physical characteristics. We are not from the same heritage. My ancestors toiled in slavery in this country.” Mr. Obama retorted that living under white colonialism, as his father had, was not all that different from the experience of Keyes’s ancestors, and was actually more recent. In the meantime, the wife of the Democratic presidential candidate, Teresa Heinz Kerry, who is white, on occasion referred to herself as an African American, citing the fact that she was born to Portuguese parents in Mozambique.

representing the minority groups recognized in official statistics. If new immigrant groups want a say in matters of racial classification, they must either find their way into this preexisting structure or argue for their own advisory committee. To deny them their own advisory committee underlines the inconsistency between saying, as the Census Bureau does, that self-identification determines racial choice but that one’s choice has to fit into predetermined categories. New immigrants add a complexity and uncertainty to ethnoracial classification and to the policies that flow from it.

My cursory survey of American history suggests that there have been three loosely construed policy regimes facilitated by the nation’s changing schemes of racial classification.

The first used census counts to give slave-owning states extra seats in Congress and extra votes in the Electoral College, shaping power and policy for decades. The second used the data to exclude from civic life various racially defined groups. The third policy regime, fully instituted only in the 1960s, has used census data to reverse the policies of the second regime by extending civil rights to all equally, regardless of race.

Are we perhaps on the threshold of a new policy regime? The advent of the “mark one or more” option on the 2000 census suggests that the United States may well be at another historic juncture – and so does the trend of recent Supreme Court decisions.

By the mid-1980s, the Supreme Court was limiting the impact of the reasoning advanced in its 1971 decision in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* In 1987, Justice Antonin Scalia argued that statistical disparities indicating discrimination are at most evidence of “societal discrimination,” and are not remedial under antidiscrimi-

nation law.²⁴ Although in the minority in that case, Scalia was soon to express similar views for the majority. Writing for the majority in a 1995 ruling, he asserted that “government can never have a ‘compelling interest’ in discriminating on the basis of race in order to make up for past racial discrimination.”²⁵ And in 2003, in a case involving the University of Michigan, the Court upheld the right of universities to consider race in admissions only by ignoring remedial racial justice arguments in favor of a diversity rationale – and only after the University of Michigan had defended its policies on qualitative, rather than quantitative, grounds. In an exchange with the Court, university officers said that though critical mass advanced the educational goal of diversity, critical mass was not something that should be reduced to numbers. This ‘you know it when you see it’ claim is a long way from the ‘you know it when you’ve measured it’ argument embraced in the 1970s.

So where do we go from here?

Despite the efforts of conservatives like Ward Connerly, who in 2003 funded a California proposition to prevent that state from collecting any racial or ethnic data,²⁶ I do not think we are headed toward a policy regime that is ‘color-blind’ and that will prevent the government from collecting data about race, ethnicity, or national origin. Powerful constituencies, notably in the public health and education fields, join with

24 Discussed in Freeman, “Antidiscrimination Law,” 302.

25 *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña*, 515 U.S. 200 (1995), 239.

26 This proposition, known as the Racial Privacy Initiative, was defeated in California’s special election in the fall of 2003.

civil rights groups to contest such policy changes. They will prevail because the politics behind the color-blind movement are viewed, fairly or not, as a throwback to the policies of exclusion that the majority of Americans have firmly rejected.

At the same time, it is increasingly doubtful that policies aimed at making America more inclusive will center, as they did in the 1970s, on numerical remedies using statistical disparities as evidence of discrimination or on affirmative action. Where, then, on the continuum from no numbers to only numbers will race-sensitive policy be fashioned? Two factors feature in an answer to this question.

First, the demand for recognition, choice, and identity expression as heralded by the multiple-race advocates will continue to reverberate in statistical policy making, especially as new immigrant groups find political voice. This will lead less to claims for strict statistical proportionality than to demands for visibility and representation. For example, if Vietnamese children comprise a quarter of a local school’s student body, parents will expect there to be at least a few Vietnamese teachers. New African immigrants will point to their growing population numbers and ask why they are not better represented in political office. And so forth.

Second, there remains a key question that reliable statistics alone can answer rigorously: How well are different groups doing? Here the focus increasingly will turn from large to smaller groups. If Hawaiians can break free from the Asian category, why can’t the new African immigrants break free from the black category, or indigenous Central Americans from the Hispanic category?

These groups are not large on the national scene, but they cluster in ways

that make them noticeable in many towns and cities across the country. It is in these local jurisdictions that questions arise regarding health care, performance in the classroom, and access to the ballot box.

Whether for purposes of self-expression or to detect barriers based on race, ancestry, ethnicity, or color, the United States will continue to have a racial and ethnic classification system. But is the one now in place the right one? In my view, not exactly – though of course there is no one ‘right’ classification.

There are sound reasons to hesitate before recommending measurement changes. Disrupting statistical series, especially in an area that has just had a disruption, is no small matter. Neither is the methodological challenge of assessing the consequences for data quality of even small changes, such as how a question is worded or where it is placed on a form. Few questions are more difficult to ‘get right’ than those inquiring of race or ethnicity. There are also political consequences that at the margins could increase or decrease a group’s numbers as recorded in previous statistics. I know that it is late in the day to expect a major change for the 2010 census.

Yet neither racial measurement nor policy that relies on it is in a settled state – and this provides a historical opportunity for fresh thinking, starting with the term ‘race’ itself.

There is a strong moral case for jettisoning the term ‘race’ altogether. Relevant data can be collected without ever using the term that echoes a discredited eighteenth-century science that took physiological markers as indicative of moral worth and intellectual ability. The government doesn’t have to ask what racial group we belong to; it could simply ask what population group we be-

long to.²⁷ This change, too long postponed, would break with hierarchical assumptions historically attached to fixed racial categories.

If this is considered too radical a change, the government should acknowledge that the term ‘race’ is anachronistic by using it interchangeably with ‘ethnicity.’²⁸ The census should replace the current question on race and ethnicity with one that is subtly but significantly different:

*What is this person’s race or ethnic group?
Mark one or more:*

American Indian or Alaskan Native
Asian
Black/African American
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
White.²⁹

Such a revised question would minimally disrupt statistical series. It would retain “mark one or more” and the victory for choice that option represents. It would allow the government to enforce the Voting Rights Act and other civil

27 The Hispanic ethnic question in the census is constructed without the term ‘ethnicity.’ It reads: “Is this person of Spanish, Hispanic or Latino origin?”

28 In its discussion of the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, the OMB notes that “There are no clear, unambiguous, objective, generally agreed upon definitions of the terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity.’ Cognitive research shows that respondents are not always clear on the differences between race and ethnicity. There are differences in terminology, group boundaries, attributes, and dimensions of race and ethnicity,” *Federal Register* 60 (166) (August 28, 1995): 44680.

29 This essay is not the place for technical discussion, and the exact wording of this reformed question would have to be field-tested. Alphabetizing the list would move away from current practice that lists “White” as the first

rights laws that center on the 1977 classification. It would improve data quality by not forcing many millions of the nation's Hispanics to make the kind of racial choice that has driven them to the "other" category. Commenting on the question format used in the 2000 census, the Census Bureau itself recognizes that "many Hispanics do not relate to the categories in the race question."³⁰

Although the Census Bureau is presently field-testing five new formats for collecting race and ethnicity data in 2010, the revision I am suggesting is not among them. I do not find the reasons given for this omission persuasive, and I strongly believe there are statistical as well as moral justifications for testing a question format that, optimally, discards the term 'race' altogether, or that at least does not hold to the statistically meaningless distinction between the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity.'³¹ The OMB and the Census Bureau have a historic opportunity to back away from the presumptively immutable color-coded categories inherited from Linnaeus and his stu-

option. The format also discards the many subcategories that appeared on the census form in 2000. It leaves out the residual "some other race" option, though, by congressional action in 2004, that is now a required category. This requirement was made in response to the concerns of Hispanic advocacy organizations speaking for a constituency that resists being forced to select among the other five options. However, incorporating "Hispanic" into a merged ethnicity and race question would obviate the need for "some other race."

30 Phyllis Singer and Sharon Ennis, "Census 2000 Content Reinterview Survey: Accuracy of Data for Selected Population and Housing Characteristics as Measured by Reinterview," U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Evaluation B.5, September 24, 2003, xxiii.

31 Such a question was tested by the Census Bureau in 1996 and it performed well. The large

dents writing in the middle of the eighteenth century.

The revised question could be paired with a second, open-ended question³²:

*What is this person's ancestry, nationality, ethnic origin, tribal affiliation?*³³

In the long run, this question or one similar to it should replace the race and

Racial and Ethnic Targeted Test used an experimental design to test the effects of eight questionnaire formats on race and ethnicity. One of these formats combined the race and the ethnicity categories. As measured by nonresponse, a key indicator of data quality, the combined format outperformed all alternatives, and for many groups by a substantial margin. See Charles Hirshman, Richard Alba, and Reynolds Farley, "The Meaning and Measurement of Race in the U.S. Census: Glimpses into the Future," *Demography* 37 (3) (August 2000): 381–393.

32 This question should only be included in the American Community Survey, which is a continuous sample survey administered to about 15 million households over a five-year period and designed to replace the census long form. In my view, the question should not appear on the 2010 census short form, which will go to all of America's households. Short-form data provide block level counts used to redraw congressional and other electoral districts after each census and to enforce the Voting Rights Act pursuant to whether redistricting reduces electoral opportunities for minority candidates. Only data required for these purposes should be made available at the block level. This does not include ancestry or national origin information. Having such data available at the block level can lead to mischief, perhaps serious mischief if the government feels compelled in the war on terrorism to repeat some version of the Japanese American internment during World War II, which made use of census information from small geographic areas.

33 This question is presently being field-tested by the Census Bureau. It is designed to accommodate as many as nineteen illustrative categories, a slight increase over the sixteen used in the 2000 census ancestry question.

ethnicity question altogether. That change would truly reflect that these are matters of self-identification, and that self-identification is inconsistent with forcing people into prescribed categories. But from the perspective of racial justice, it is premature to discard the official categories now used to administer antidiscrimination laws.

The open-ended question nevertheless points us to the policy frontiers of the twenty-first century.³⁴ Details of the sort provided by the open-ended question would show whether specific groups, especially recent immigrant groups, are experiencing discriminatory barriers to jobs, schooling, or home ownership – barriers that a nation committed to a policy of inclusiveness is obligated to remove. There remain strong reasons for official statistics that can detect patterns of discrimination, and our classification scheme needs to catch up with the ways in which discrimination occurs across a very diverse population.

Many thoughtful Americans, myself included, wish that antidiscrimination law were not necessary. We want a society that is truly color-blind. But if we are ever to create such a society, we need to know what is actually happening to various population groups across the country. Accepting inclusiveness as a central policy narrative for the nation requires statistics robust enough both to keep track of whether groups historically excluded are overcoming the legacy of official discrimination and to indicate whether more recently arrived groups are being unfairly held back. More than

two centuries after the Constitution started the nation down the road of racially classifying its population, there remain, unfortunately, compelling reasons to design the most policy-relevant classification scheme possible. On moral and methodological grounds, the classification used in census 2000 can and should be improved.

³⁴ Current data-capture technology can reliably record responses to such a question. Optical scanning and intelligent character recognition were very successfully used in the 2000 census, recording open-ended written responses at exceptionally high levels of accuracy.

David A. Hollinger

The one drop rule & the one hate rule

Two portentous practices within the public discussion of 'race' in the United States since the late 1960s are rarely analyzed together. One is the method by which we decide which individuals are 'black.' The other is our habit of conflating the mistreatment of blacks with that of nonblack minorities. Both practices compress a great range of phenomena into ostensibly manageable containers. Both function to keep the concept of race current amid mounting pressures that threaten to render it anachronistic. Both invite reassessment at the start of the twenty-first century.

The prevailing criterion for deciding who is black is of course the principle of hypodescent. This 'one drop rule' has meant that anyone with a visually discernable trace of African, or what used to be called 'Negro,' ancestry is, simply,

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black. Comparativists have long noted the peculiar ordinance this mixture-denying principle has exercised over the history of the United States. Although it no longer has the legal status it held in many states during the Jim Crow era, this principle was reinforced in the civil rights era as a basis for antidiscrimination remedies. Today it remains in place as a formidable convention in many settings and dominates debates about the categories appropriate for the federal census. The movement for recognition of 'mixed race' identity has made some headway, including for people with a fraction of African ancestry, but most governments, private agencies, educational institutions, and advocacy organizations that classify and count people by ethnoracial categories at all continue to perpetuate hypodescent racialization when they talk about African Americans.¹

This practice makes the most sense when antidiscrimination remedies are in view. If discrimination has proceeded on

¹ For a more extensive account of the historic role of the principle of hypodescent, see my "Amalgamation and Hypodescent: The Question of Ethnoracial Mixture in the History of the United States," *American Historical Review* 108 (5) (December 2003): 1363–1390, from which several paragraphs in this essay are drawn.

the basis of the one drop rule, so too should antidiscrimination remedies. But even when antidiscrimination remedies are not at issue, most Americans of all colors think about African American identity in either/or terms: you are black, or you are not. It is common for people to say, "I'm half Irish and half Jewish" without one's listener translating the declaration into terms other than the speaker's. One can even boast, "I'm one-eighth Cherokee" without causing the listener to quarrel with that fraction or to doubt that the speaker is basically a white person. But those who say things like "I'm half Irish and half black" are generally understood *really* to be black, and "I'm one-eighth African American" is not part of the genealogical boasting that infuses American popular culture.

The second portentous practice is the treating of all victims of white racism alike, regardless of how differently this racism has affected African Americans, Latinos, Indians, and Asian Americans, to say nothing of the subdivisions within each of these communities of descent. When federal agencies developed affirmative action programs in the late 1960s, they identified Asian Americans, Hispanics, and Indians along with African Americans as eligible groups. As John Skrentny has shown, entitlements for nonblack groups were predicated on the assumption that such groups were like blacks in their social experience.² Other disadvantaged groups, including women, impoverished Anglo whites,

impoverished European ethnics, and gays and lesbians, were less successful in gaining entitlements during the so-called minority rights revolution because they were not perceived as victims of white racism. Yet the officials who designed entitlement programs for the purposes of remedying white racism often homogenized those descent groups colloquially coded as black, brown, red, and yellow. There was a good reason for this. White racism was real, had expressed itself against every one of these color-coded groups, and was a problem in American life that demanded correction.

The notion that all descent groups whose ancestry could be located outside Europe were like blacks, however, had not been prominent previously in the proclaimed self-conception of these nonblack minority groups, nor in much of what public discussion there was of their history and circumstances. The histories of each of these communities were almost always presented to their own members as well as to the society at large in terms that took their differences into account, including the specific ways in which whites had abused them. These histories, moreover, were usually about particular descent groups, such as Chinese Americans or Mexican Americans, rather than about what came to be called 'panethnic' groups, such as Asian Americans and Latinos.³ Japanese Americans

2 John D. Skrentny, *The Minority Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002). For a vigorous critique of this book, see Victoria Hattam, "The 1964 Civil Rights Act: Narrating the Past, Authorizing the Future," *Studies in American Political Development* 18 (Spring 2004): 60–69, followed by a generally convincing response by Skrentny, "Policy Making is Decision Making: A Response to Hattam," 70–80.

3 For two overviews of the development of 'panethnicity,' see Jose Itzigsohn, "The Formation of Latino and Latina Panethnic Identities," and Yen Le Espiritu, "Asian American Panethnicity: Contemporary National and Transnational Possibilities," in Nancy Foner and George Fredrickson, eds., *Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004), 197–216, 217–234.

had been subject to property-owning restrictions and had been incarcerated without due process during World War II, and all but a few immigrants from Asia had been denied naturalization until 1952. Immigrants from Mexico had always been able to achieve citizenship and were not included in the miscegenation laws that prevented nonwhites from marrying whites, but these immigrants and their descendants had been subject to other abuses, including school segregation and exclusion from juries in many jurisdictions until courts eliminated these practices in the decade after World War II. Mexican Americans, moreover, despite their overwhelmingly immigrant origins, did come from a country that had lost territory to the United States, and sometimes defined themselves as a conquered people, like the Indians. The Indians themselves had their own story, featuring deaths on a horrendous scale through disease and genocide. But beyond emphasizing these and many other differences, spokespersons for these nonblack groups sometimes partook of the antiblack racism of the white majority. As late as the early 1960s, for example, spokespersons for Mexican Americans in Los Angeles made a point of saying that their community wanted little to do with blacks in the same city.

Utterances of this latter kind diminished rapidly in the late 1960s as political alliances were forged between black advocacy organizations and organizations speaking for other descent groups. The idea that Asian Americans, Latinos, and Indians were indeed like blacks gained ground and was marked vividly with a designation especially popular in the 1980s: 'people of color.' The downplaying of the differences between nonblack minorities and blacks was practiced first by officials and then by activists who came to understand that by applying 'the

black model' to their own group they had a better chance of getting the sympathetic attention of officials and courts. White racism thus ironically came to be assigned the same capacity traditionally assigned to one drop of black blood: *the capacity to define equally whatever it touched*, no matter how the affected entity was constituted and what its life circumstances might have been. We have been living by a principle of white racist hypovictimization: we can call it the one hate rule, with the understanding that the colloquial use of 'hate' follows the language conventions of recent years, when we speak of 'hate speech' and 'hate crimes.'

Both the one hate rule and the one drop rule have recently come under increasing pressure. But before I take up these pressures and suggest some of the potentially deep changes in American race discourse they might produce, I want to clarify the historical circumstances that have endowed these rules with such force.

The property interests of slaveholders and the social priorities of Jim Crow racism are central to the principle of hypodescent. Keeping the color line sharp facilitated the enslavement of children begotten upon slave women by white men. The offspring of these couplings would grow up as slaves in a race-specific slave system. The principle was sharpened under Jim Crow, when opposition to social equality for blacks was well served by a monolithic notion of blackness accompanied by legislation that outlawed as miscegenation black-white marriages but that left less strictly regulated any nonmarital sex in which white males might engage with black females. Some slave-era and Jim Crow governments did employ fractional classifications, providing distinctive rights

and privileges for ‘octoroons,’ ‘quadroons,’ and ‘mulattoes,’ but this fractional approach was hard to administer, invited litigation, and blurred lines that many whites preferred to keep clear. ‘Mulatto’ was dropped from the federal census after 1920, and more and more state governments went the way of Virginia, whose miscegenation statute as revised in 1924 classified as white only a person “who has no trace whatsoever of blood other than Caucasian.”

The combination of these miscegenation laws with the principle of hypodescent consolidated and perpetuated the low-class positions of African Americans in much of the United States. By marking all offspring of white-black couplings as bastards, governments in many jurisdictions prevented these offspring from inheriting the property of a white father. Although the legendary Virginia statute, along with all other racial restrictions on marriage, was invalidated in 1967 by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Loving v. Virginia*, the one drop rule classically formulated in the Virginia statute was not affected in its capacity as a convention operating throughout American society. Traditional white racism perpetuated this convention, but so, too, did the social solidarity of an African American community whose borders had been shaped by that racism. It is no wonder that the officials, courts, and advocacy organizations that designed and defended affirmative action measures showed no interest in mixture. Even if ‘light-skinned blacks’ had sometimes experienced a less consistently brutal style of discrimination than that experienced by the darkest of African Americans, there was no doubt that any person perceived as having any black ancestry whatsoever was rightly included in the antidiscrimination remedies being developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

But what about nonblack victims of white racism? Awareness of the reality of discrimination against nonblacks led to the conclusion that all ethnoracially defined victims of white racism might as well be made the beneficiaries of the same new set of entitlements being developed in the civil rights era, even in the absence of anyone’s having lobbied for that result. (Indians, to be sure, were always subject to an additional, separate set of programs following from the distinctive constitutional status of Indian tribes.) When the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) designed its precedent-setting employer reporting form (EEO-1) in 1965, the EEOC included Indians, Asian Americans, and Latinos along with African Americans as the groups to be counted in relation to its mission. In fact, the EEOC was almost entirely concerned with African Americans: what percentage of those employable were actually employed in a given labor market? At the public hearing designed to collect reactions to this reporting form, no voice mentioned even in passing the situation of the nonblack minorities.⁴

Virtually everyone in power at the time assumed the nonblack minorities to be so tiny a part of the picture as to require no discussion and to entail no policy dilemmas for the future. Support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and for the specific mission and methods of the EEOC established under its terms was deeply informed by a popular understanding of the history of the victimization of African Americans in particular, and not by any comparably deep understanding of the acknowledged mistreatment of Latinos and Asian Americans. To call attention to this truth about the civil rights era is not to downplay the reality of white racism against nonblacks

*The one
drop rule
& the one
hate rule*

4 I owe this information to John D. Skrentny.

in American history right up to the time officials and courts acted. Rather, the point is that remedying the abuse of nonblacks was almost an afterthought to remedying antiblack racism.

Nothing illustrates this fact more dramatically than the lack of sustained public debate on the eligibility of immigrants and their offspring for affirmative action. This silence resulted partly because the Latino and Asian American populations were still small (about 4.5 percent and 1 percent, respectively, in the census of 1970), and because the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that eventually transformed the ethnoracial demography of the United States, and revolutionized the meaning of ethnoracially defined entitlements, was not expected to significantly increase immigration from Latin America and Asia.

Yet the numbers of Latin American and Asian immigrants mounted in the 1970s, yielding more and more nonblack Americans who were not the descendants of those Chinese American, Japanese American, and Mexican American families that had been abused in the United States, and who were thus less analogous than were nonimmigrant Latinos and Asian Americans to the descendants of enslaved Americans. Indeed, the number of new immigrants between 1970 and 2000 who were eligible for at least some affirmative action benefits came to about 26 million, the same number of eligible African Americans as measured by the census of 1980. More strikingly yet, many of the new immigrants and their children proved able, especially in the Asian American case, to make their way around racist barriers in education, business, and the workforce that continued to inhibit the progress of African Americans.

This emerging social reality might have triggered a rethinking of the one

hate rule and stimulated a genuine effort to confront the distinctive history and needs of the several nonblack groups on each group's own terms. But the system then in place created a huge disincentive for such a rethinking: the black model was working quite well. It helped get the attention of officials and courts, enabling them to recognize and understand the victimization of nonblack minorities. As early as 1968, the Chicano youth activists in Los Angeles were declaring "Brown and Black" to be one and the same. As the most careful scholar of that episode has observed, writers in the Chicano movement's magazine *La Raza*, even while surrounded by older Mexican Americans whose group advocacy had been based on the affirmation of white identity, "asserted that Mexican identity, when measured in terms of history, geography, oppressions, and dreams, was functionally black."⁵ Hence the one hate rule was quietly enacted by a variety of nonblack advocacy groups as well as by officials and courts.

Neither the EEOC nor anyone else designing and approving affirmative action programs predicated on the ideal of proportional representation seems to have anticipated what could have happened if one or another of the designated groups came to be overrepresented instead of underrepresented. In the late 1960s and very early 1970s, there were very few Asian Americans, Latinos, and Indians in most of the same employment and educational spaces in which African Americans were underrepresented in relation to their percentage in the total population. Instead of inquiring into the specific causes of the underrepresentation of the various groups, one could assume with some justice that behind all cases was white racism of one degree or

5 Ian Haney López, *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 167.

another. The one hate rule was good enough. At least for a while.

But as the numbers of Asian Americans increased dramatically through chain migrations in the 1970s and 1980s, and began to affect the public face of American society especially in California, a striking challenge to the one hate rule appeared. It became hard to overlook that Asian Americans, even if subject to discrimination as 'foreign' and thus 'not really American,' were over-represented rather than underrepresented in many universities and professions and among high-income householders. Well before the end of the 1980s, the Census Bureau reported that average family income for Asian Americans, even when the income for recently arrived immigrants from Southeast Asia was included, was higher than that for non-Hispanic whites. Asian Americans were quietly dropped from some private affirmative action programs (not from those operated by the federal government), but what public discussion there was of the success of Asian Americans was clouded by the problematic concept of 'the model minority.' The idea that African Americans, Latinos, and Indians had something wrong with them structurally – some genetic inferiority or deeply embedded cultural deficiency from which the wonderful Asians were free – was sometimes implied, and was of course vigorously contested.

Given the prior assumption that all ethnoracial minorities were more or less equally the victims of white racism, how could one talk about the success of Asian Americans without appearing to deny the power of white racism or to engage, however subtly, in a racist discourse against African Americans, Latinos, and Indians? That this pitfall could indeed be avoided was proved by a growing academic literature exploring with increas-

ing rigor the different historical circumstances of the various American ethnoracial groups popularly called 'minorities' or 'people of color.' That literature recognized, for example, the unique legacy of slavery and Jim Crow for African Americans, and assessed the pre-immigration social position and commercial experience for many Asian Americans.⁶ Bengali engineers and Chihuahuan agricultural laborers really did bring different pre-immigration experiences and skills to the United States. Not innate 'racial' characteristics, but empirically warrantable social conditions could illuminate the contrasting destinies of different descent communities in the United States. Yet public policy discussions did not take much advantage of the invitation offered by Asian American success to rethink the one hate rule. Far from it.

A mark of the persistence of the one hate rule is its dominance of President Clinton's Initiative on Race, as displayed in *One America in the 21st Century: Forging a New Future*, the 1998 report of the Initiative's advisory board. Although the impeachment of Clinton distracted attention from this document at the time of its release, it is the only major president-sponsored assessment of race since the Kerner Commission's report of thirty years before. The very banality of *One America in the 21st Century* renders that document all the more revealing a depository of publicly acceptable 'race talk' in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Central to that talk is the assertion that any differences between the particular varieties of 'racial' discrimination and

⁶ See, for example, Grace Kao, "Asian Americans as Model Minorities? A Look at Their Academic Performance," *American Journal of Education* 103 (February 1995): 121 – 159.

abuse are incidental to what those varieties have in common, and the assumption that the same set of policies can deal with virtually all those varieties of disadvantage. The advisory board does point (with a series of “signposts of historical episodes,” which they distinguish from the “comprehensive” history they disclaim) to a handful of particular experiences: the conquest of the Indians, the enslavement and segregation of black people, “the conquest and legal oppression of Mexican American and other Hispanics,” the “forced labor of Chinese Americans,” and the “internment of Japanese Americans.” Even “new immigrants” from Southeast Asia “continue to feel the legacy of discriminatory laws against Asian Pacific Americans because they continue to be perceived and treated as foreigners.” In keeping with this last observation, which incorporates the most recent of voluntary immigrants into the same frame with the descendants of slaves and of the conquered and ruthlessly slaughtered indigenous population, the advisory board offers the following summary of the salient history: “Each of the minority groups discussed above share in common a history of legally mandated and socially and economically imposed subordination to white European Americans and their descendants.”⁷

This perspective informs the entire document, especially the advisory board’s recommendations. All but five of the more than fifty recommendations are general to all victims of racism. Four of the five exceptions deal with the special problems of Indians and Alaskan natives, and the fifth calls for better data-gathering on nonblack minority

7 Advisory Board to the President’s Initiative on Race, *One America in the 21st Century: Forging a New Future* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1998), 37–38.

groups. Not a single one of the advisory board’s recommendations speaks to the specific claims of African Americans on the national conscience. Yet blacks, and blacks alone, inherit a multi-century legacy of group-specific enslavement and hypodescent racialization long carried out under constitutional authority in the United States.

The contrast between the Asian American experience in recent years and the African American experience during the same period is systematically deemphasized by *One America in the 21st Century*. Only in a footnote and in one easily missed chart does the advisory board acknowledge that by the end of the 1980s Asian Americans had achieved an average annual family income higher even than that of non-Hispanic whites, and almost twice that of blacks and Hispanics. Repeatedly, the advisory board tries to shoehorn the Asian American experience into the space prescribed for it by the one hate rule. In a single sentence, the advisory board praises law enforcement agencies for investigating both the decapitation of a black man in Texas and the death threats to sixty Asian American students at a campus in California. A statement in the text to the effect that “criminal victimization rates are significantly greater for minorities and people of color than for whites, especially with regard to violent crime,” makes no distinctions between the groups. But if one turns to the footnote documenting this statement, one learns that while the homicide rate is 58 per 100,000 for African Americans and 25 per 100,000 for Hispanics, it is only 8 per 100,000 for Asian Americans, which is close to the 5 per 100,000 for whites. Thus the proximity of Asian Americans to non-Hispanic whites in one statistical sector after another is downplayed, ignored, or concealed. Many of the charts

in the report that show inequality by ethnoracial group omit Asian Americans altogether. This is true of charts showing rates of college enrollment, median weekly earnings of male workers, and employment – all of which contrast whites to blacks and Hispanics.

The advisory board is understandably determined to refute the myth that “the problem of racial intolerance in this country has been solved,” but in its reluctance to particularize and measure the dimensions of this problem and to deal directly with the reasons why some Americans mistakenly believe the problem to be solved, it ends up weakening its case.⁸ Asian American success in overcoming the worst consequences of white racism is the elephant in the advisory board’s room.

At stake is the more precise location of the barriers that inhibit Americans of various communities of descent from participating more fully in the life of the nation. The more confident we can be about the social location of those barriers, the more likely we are as a nation to develop policies that target remedy to wrong in the effort to achieve a more equal society. If economic and social conditions antecedent to immigration are significant factors in explaining the relative success many Asian American groups have achieved, that suggests that white racism does not always have the same effect on everything it touches, but rather affects those objects differently depending on how those objects are constituted.

Even *One America in the 21st Century* approaches this insight when it distinguishes between the different destinies of Asian American groups, noting in a footnote that while 88 percent of Japanese Americans between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine have a high

school diploma, only 31 percent of Hmong Americans do.⁹ How recent the immigration and how strong or weak the class position of the group prior to immigration clearly make an enormous difference. This is true not only for Asian Americans but also for Hispanics. For instance, sociologists have explained repeatedly that recent illegal immigrants from Mexico encounter the United States and its white racism differently than do Cuban Americans whose families have been in the country for several decades, or than do descendants of earlier generations of migrants from Mexico who have more opportunities to learn English and to take advantage of whatever educational opportunities are at hand.

So great is the variety of experience among Hispanics that the Census Bureau would do well to think carefully about the basis for continuing to treat Hispanics as a single category at all. The census might drop this quasi-racial category and count instead those inhabitants who identify with descent communities from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and other such defining points of origin. Instead of counting ‘Asians,’ the census might count people who trace their descent to China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, India, Iran, the Philippines, Pakistan, Lebanon, Turkey, etc. Any public or private agency that wished for any reason – including the design and implementation of antidiscrimination remedies – to treat all Hispanics or Asians as a single group could easily reaggregate the groups counted separately by the census. Or a given agency might conclude, on the basis of what it learns about the social and economic circumstances of particular descent communities, and on the basis of its analysis of where responsibility for

8 Ibid., 46, 48, 65, 71–72, 75, 81, 128, 131.

9 Ibid., 126.

a given case of disadvantage lies, that some groups need affirmative action and others do not. Breaking down Hispanic into the actual descent groups that exist in the United States would facilitate this. So, too, with Americans of Asian descent. Neither Hispanics nor Asian Americans have an experience as unified as that of African Americans, and the Census Bureau needs a better justification than it has offered until now for the use of these panethnic, 'racial' categories. By rejecting racial and quasi-racial categories, the census can liberate itself from de facto responsibility for deciding who is eligible for this or that program.¹⁰

Analysis of different segments of the black population, too, yields more precise information about the location of the barriers to full participation in American life. Black immigrants from the Caribbean and their descendants are more likely than the American-born heirs of the Jim Crow system to advance in education and employment and to marry outside their natal community. So too are black immigrants from Africa, as the public has recently been reminded by the remarkable career of Illinois politician Barack Obama, elected to the U.S. Senate in 2004.¹¹ Moreover, Dalton

¹⁰ This suggestion about the census is a variation on proposals made during the 1990s by a number of demographers and social scientists. See, for example, Margo Anderson and Stephen E. Feinberg, "Black, White, and Shades of Gray (and Brown and Yellow)," *Change* 8 (1) (1995): 15–18, esp. 18. The substitution of the racial categories with more specific demographic categories would provide individuals greater opportunity to declare their cultural identity while also enabling public and private agencies to pursue antidiscrimination remedies on more empirically warranted grounds.

¹¹ Obama, the keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention in July of 2004, is the son of a black immigrant from Kenya and a white mother from Kansas. His life story and

Conley has found that when blacks and whites with the same property holdings (as opposed merely to the same income, which is a less substantial indicator of economic position) are compared, the gap between black and white performance on Graduate Record Examinations and in several other arenas of achievement diminish to a point of statistical insignificance.¹² Class position, when accurately measured, makes a formidable difference. What our social science is telling us today is not that white racism has disappeared, nor even that it is unimportant, but that it interacts with a variety of other realities to create the patterns of inequality that social policy must address.

It is in the context of these social scientific findings that the status of 'underrepresented minorities' invites reexamination with an eye toward better understanding those patterns of inequality. When the ideal of proportional representation entered affirmative action directives and jurisprudence in about 1970, a major objective was to get beyond 'intentional' discrimination in order to confront prior, structural conditions producing inequality. But by promoting the idea that the mere fact of underrepresentation constituted evidence of discrimination, however indirect, officials and courts deflected attention from any and all possible specific expla-

the questions that story raises about black identity and the dynamics of black progress in the United States today are explored in Scott Malcomson, "An Appeal Beyond Race," *The New York Times*, August 1, 2004, IV, 5, and William Finnegan, "The Candidate," *The New Yorker*, May 31, 2004, 32–38.

¹² Dalton Conley, *Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth, and Social Policy in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

nations for why a particular descent group might be underrepresented in a particular employment or educational sector. What was lost in the process was an ability to deal forthrightly with the appearance of Asian Americans as an overrepresented minority.

Underrepresentation and overrepresentation constitute a logical syndrome. Should we not expect the same principles of causation to apply to both sides of the phenomenon? Might what we learn about the overrepresentation of particular descent groups – Korean Americans and Jewish Americans, for example – help us to understand the underrepresentation of others, and vice versa? This might seem obvious, but the analysis of overrepresentation, and of the historical processes by which ethnoracial groups that were once underrepresented have become overrepresented, usually stops with the white color line. The Irish, the Italians, the Poles, and the Jews, we say, became white. But invoking whiteness does not carry us very far. Appalachian whites are not overrepresented in the medical profession and in the nation's great universities, and some 'people of color' – Chinese Americans and South Asian Americans, for example – are.

Jewish experience since 1945 is the most dramatic single case in all American history of a stigmatized descent group that had been systematically discriminated against under the protection of the law suddenly becoming overrepresented many times over in social spaces where its progress had been previously inhibited. The experience since 1970 of several Asian American groups is a second such dramatic case. These cases of success invite emphasis and explanation in relation to explanations for the social destiny of other descent-defined groups. What explains the overrepresentation of

Jewish Americans, South Asian Americans, and Japanese Americans in the domains of American life where African Americans and Latinos are underrepresented? The failure to pursue this question implicitly strengthens largely unexpressed speculations that Jews and Asians are, after all, superior genetically to African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians – the groups whose underrepresentation is constantly at issue.

Yet the grounds for avoiding talk about the overrepresentation of Jewish Americans and some groups of Asian Americans diminish, if not disappear, once the relevant statistics are explained by taking full account of the conditions under which the various descent communities have been shaped.¹³ Avoiding the forthright historical and social-scientific study of the question perpetuates the mystification of descent communities and subtly fuels the idea that the question's answer is really biological, and if made public will serve to reinforce invidious distinctions between descent groups. The open discussion of overrepresentation will not be racist if it proceeds on nonracist assumptions. We will not understand patterns of inequality in the United States until overrepresentation and underrepresentation are studied together and with the same methods. The one hate rule is an obstacle to such inquiries. But if the overrepresentation of African American males in prisons can be explained, as it often is, with reference to slavery, Jim Crow, and the large-

13 For an exploration of this terrain, see my "Rich, Powerful, and Smart: Jewish Overrepresentation Should Be Explained Rather Than Mystified or Avoided," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94 (Fall 2004): 596–602. The most ambitious and convincing study of Jewish success is Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

er history of the institutionalized debasement of black people, so, too, can the overrepresentation of Jewish Americans and Korean Americans in other social spaces be explained by historical conditions.

So the one hate rule, however sensible it may have seemed when informally adopted in the 1960s and 1970s, is increasingly difficult to defend. And the less blinded we are by it the more able we are to see the unique invidiousness of the one drop rule, its ironic twin. The practice of hypodescent racialization has entailed an absolute denial of the reality of extensive white-black mixing. It has embodied a total rejection of blackness and it has implied a deep revulsion on the part of empowered whites. This variety of white racism was cast into bold relief in the 1980s and 1990s by the dramatic upsurge of immigration from Latin America and Asia. The first of these immigrations displayed from the start an acknowledged and often celebrated mixture of European and indigenous ancestry, and produced children who married Anglos at a rising rate and who were not subject to hypodescent racialization as Latinos. The new immigrants from Asia married Anglos at a considerably higher rate than Latinos did, and their offspring were not socially coerced to identify as 100 percent Asian.

Only a few years earlier, when affirmative action and the allied initiatives that eventually came to be called 'multiculturalism' got started, the assumption had been that all the standard minority groups were clearly bounded, durable entities, kept in place by the power of white racism and by the internal adhesives of their communities of descent. But the experience of nonblack minorities was sufficiently different from that of African Americans that the hypode-

scendent racialization of the latter came to be more widely recognized as an index of the unique severity of antiblack racism in the United States. No wonder some frustrated African American activists campaigned for group-specific reparations. Hence the weakening of the one hate rule and the development of a critical perspective on the one drop rule proceeded dialectically. The more fully we understand the unique invidiousness of the principle of hypodescent as applied to 'blacks,' the weaker the hold of the one hate rule; and the weaker the hold of the one hate rule, the more able we are to confront at long last the exceptionally racist character of the one drop rule.¹⁴

14 For critical suggestions based on an earlier draft, I am indebted to Victoria Hattam, Jennifer Hochschild, Joan Heifetz Hollinger, Ian Haney López, Rachel Moran, Robert Post, Kenneth Prewitt, John Skrentny, Werner Sollors, Eric Sundquist, and Kim Williams. For other assistance I want to thank Jennifer Burns.

Jennifer L. Hochschild

Looking ahead: racial trends in the United States

In April of 2004, the quarterly newsletter *Migration News* summarized the most recent data on race and ethnicity from the U.S. Census Bureau: “In 2000, the racial/ethnic makeup of US residents was: White, 69 percent; Hispanic and Black, 13 percent each; and Asian and other, six percent. By 2050, these percentages are projected to be: 50, 24, 15, and 13.” For anyone who has been studying racial trends in America these figures weren’t surprising.¹ But the newsletter’s

conclusion certainly was: “It is possible that, by 2050, today’s racial and ethnic categories will no longer be in use.”

Migration News is a scholarly publication that “summarizes the most important immigration and integration developments.”² It is produced by Migration Dialogue, a group at the University of California, Davis, that aspires to provide “timely, factual and nonpartisan information and analysis of international migration issues.” *Migration News* cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as fanciful or ideological – and yet in the middle of a summary of census data its authors produced the astonishing prognosis that “by 2050, today’s racial and ethnic categories will no longer be in use.” If *Migration News* is correct, residents of the United States will, within the lifetime of many readers of this issue of *Dædalus*, no longer talk of blacks, whites, Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans, but will instead speak of – what?

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1 This essay is part of a joint research project with Traci Burch and Vesla Weaver, both Ph.D. students at Harvard University. I thank them for their contributions to our shared enterprise. The views expressed in this essay are my own, and not necessarily shared by these coauthors of the larger project.

2 <<http://migration.ucdavis.edu/>>.

This essay explores possible answers to that tantalizing question. By looking backward at racial and ethnic constructions and practices in the United States over the past century, we will be better situated to project possible racial and ethnic constructions and practices over the next one. *Migration News* might well be right – although, as I will argue, that is a far cry from predicting that the old shameful racial hierarchies will disappear.

The idea of ethnicity did not exist in 1900; the term ‘ethnic’ was invented around World War I and came into widespread use in the 1930s. The term ‘race’ did much of the work that we now assign to ‘ethnicity’; phrases such as ‘the Irish race,’ ‘the Yankee race,’ and ‘the Hebrew race’ were common and uncontested. But race meant a lot more than ethnicity. Edgar Allen Poe wrote of “the race of Usher,” Charles Dickens, of “the race of Evrémonde.” Biologists measured cranial capacities and developed intelligence testing in order to make what they perceived to be scientific determinations of the biological differences among races of humans. In 1939 Carleton Coon, a physical anthropologist at Harvard University, published *The Races of Europe*, a textbook that named eighteen races that were spread across the continent, including “Partially Mongoloid,” “Brunn strain, Tronder etc., unreduced, only partly brachycephalized,” “Pleistocene Mediterranean Survivor,” “Neo-Danubian,” and so on. Meanwhile, the Negro and Indian races were routinely distinguished from the white race.

A century later we retain the term ‘race,’ but only in the last of these usages, that is, distinguishing a few major groups from each other. A family is described by ancestry, lineage, or descent –

not by race. The Irish are an ethnic group; to identify someone as a Yankee is to evoke a regional or cultural distinction; Jews are an amalgam of religion, ethnicity, and perhaps culture. Anthropologists no longer make racial distinctions among Europeans; in fact, current research in the field of cultural studies typically identifies all Europeans, from Swedes to Arabs, as a single race distinguished by its whiteness.

The biology of race has also changed dramatically. A century ago, biologists held that there were many races, that races could be distinguished from one another in objective and quantifiable ways, and that less measurable but nonetheless real differences in intelligence and emotional maturity were closely associated with measurable differences in skull size or proportion of white ancestry. Some still held that races had different origins or were even different subspecies. By the middle of the twentieth century, however, the number of commonly recognized races had shrunk to a few (in grade school, I learned about Caucasoids, Mongoloids, Negroids, and Indians). And by the end of the century, conventional wisdom, at least among scholars, held that a race was a purely social construction with no notable biological differences.

The wheel may be turning again, however. That well-known exemplar of post-modern deconstructionism, the U.S. census, is leading the way in proliferating racial identities: the census now recognizes 126 ethnoracial groups (or a mere 63 racial groups!) and, as Kenneth Prewitt points out, many more could come in quick succession. At the same time, some scientists and medical doctors are contesting the view that race is nothing but a social construction; as Neil Risch and his coauthors put it, “a ‘race-neutral’ or ‘color-blind’ approach

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to biomedical research is neither equitable nor advantageous, and would not lead to a reduction of disparities in disease risk or treatment efficacy between groups.”³ People of different races or ethnicities may react differently to particular medications, may be especially susceptible to specific diseases, or may have bone marrow or kidneys compatible only with some co-ethnics. Most new biological research has been purified of the old eugenicist motivations; even the dean of Howard University Medical School has endorsed a major initiative to collect DNA samples from his hospital’s (mostly black) patients for medical research on diseases to which African Americans are especially prone, such as high blood pressure, asthma, and prostate cancer. By 2050 the historical seesaw between biology and social constructivism may be superseded by genomic research that disaggregates individuals at levels far below any groupings by race, ethnicity, geography, or culture.

In parallel with the changing meanings of race, we have witnessed the rise and perhaps fall of the concept of ethnicity. That concept was invented partly in opposition to the idea of race, since it was taken to denote possibly malleable culture rather than biologically fixed characteristics. It was elaborated as a way to make distinctions within a given race, usually among whites; Michael Novak wrote in 1972 of “the rise of the unmelt-able ethnics” within various European nationalities. Some analysts continue to insist that the two terms should be defined in opposition to each other. I, like other undergraduate lecturers, have taught my students that Latinos have a common ethnicity shared among multi-

ple races, whereas Pacific Rim Asians are a single race with multiple ethnicities.

But scholars and activists are now working to confound the distinction that was developed over most of the past century. Ian Haney López, for example, wrote in 1997 that “conceptualizing Latinos/as in racial terms is warranted The general abandonment of racial language and its replacement with substitute vocabularies, in particular that of ethnicity, will obfuscate key aspects of Latino/a lives.”⁴ Four in ten of those who identified as Hispanic or Latino on the ethnicity question in the 2000 census rejected all the racial categories offered to them in the next question, in favor of “some other race.” Whether that represents a principled refusal to distinguish race from ethnicity, or just respondents’ confusion with the census form, as the Census Bureau interpreted it, remains to be seen. David Hollinger has pointed out one of the more resonant ironies of American racial politics: the same federal government that separates Hispanic ethnicity from race in the census treats Hispanics as legally equivalent to African Americans in antidiscrimination policies such as affirmative action, voting rights, and minority set-asides.

Residents of the United States began the twentieth century by not distinguishing a race from an ethnicity; they spent most of that century elaborating the differences between the two concepts; and they appear now to be collapsing the distinction. The number of recognized races shrank drastically and is now expanding again. When the century began, the concept of race was tightly connected with the biological sciences; that bond was almost snapped but now may be regaining strength. I am

3 Neil Risch, Esteban Burchard, Elad Ziv, and Hua Tang, “Categorization of Humans in Biomedical Research: Genes, Race, and Disease,” *Genome Biology* 3 (7) (2002): 1–12.

4 Ian Haney López, “Race, Ethnicity, Erasure: The Saliency of Race to LatCrit Theory,” *California Law Review* 85 (5) (1997): 1143–1211.

not making a simple cyclical argument: the proliferation of races through multiple self-definitions is very different from the mapmaking of a physical anthropologist, and the biology of eugenics is unconnected with the biology of the genome project. Nevertheless, the transformations of the past century show that *Migration News's* casual suggestion that by 2050 today's racial and ethnic categories may no longer be in use is not as farfetched as it initially appears to be.

Definitions and usages of concepts such as race and ethnicity matter because they help us to understand the practice of racial and ethnic interaction. If immigrants are regarded as a race apart, biologically distinct from the rest of us, they will be treated very differently than if they are regarded as belonging to another ethnicity, similar in crucial ways to all the others. The structure of racial hierarchy will be different if races are conceived as discrete and insular (i.e., one can be black or white but not both) rather than if they are conceived as occurring along a continuum. The degree to which such conceptions and practices have changed over the past century can give us hints as to how they are likely to change over the next one.

Consider immigrants first. Ever alert to its responsibility as the newspaper of record, *The New York Times* reminded readers in the 1880s of "a powerful 'dangerous class,' who care nothing for our liberty or civilization, . . . who burrow at the roots of society, and only come forth in the darkness and in times of disturbance, to plunder and prey on the good things which surround them, but which they never reach." This is, the *Times* proceeded to warn, "the poorest and lowest laboring class . . . [who] drudge year after year in fruitless labor . . . [but] never rise above their position . . . They hate the

rich . . . They are densely ignorant, and easily aroused by prejudice or passion." The members of this class "are mainly Irish Catholics."

Not only words were invoked to control the dangerous classes. Of the 1,713 lynchings in the decade after 1882 (the first year for which accurate records exist), half of the victims were white (largely Jewish or Catholic); in the succeeding decade, a quarter were. 'Hunkies,' Italians, and Russian Jews could live and socialize only in a 'foreign colony' in an undesirable part of town. Unless there was a substantial black population in the area, most new immigrants occupied the lowest-skilled and lowest-paying jobs in the lowest-status industries. When able to attain jobs that required more expertise, they were paid less than their northern European counterparts.

Eventually, however, the despised races became the celebrated white ethnics. The reasons included genuine assimilation, the desire to become white in order not to be black, the almost complete cessation of new European immigration after World War I, upward mobility in a growing labor force, and political incorporation through party machines. By the 1960s, Irish Catholic families enjoyed on average \$2,500 more than the national average family income.⁵ An Irish Catholic has been president of the nation, and during his presidential campaign John Kerry was coy about the fact that he is not Irish. Intermarriage rates among white ethnics are so high that demographers have largely given up trying to trace socioeconomic differences among nationalities. In short, the ethnic boundaries at the turn of the twentieth

5 Andrew Greeley, "Ethnic Minorities in the United States: Demographic Perspectives," *International Journal of Group Tensions* 7 (3 and 4) (1977): 64–97. See table 5-C for data.

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century that were sometimes etched in violence have mostly dissolved into shades of whiteness.

The transformation of the status of Asian immigrants has been even more phenomenal. In 1877, a U.S. Senate committee investigating Chinese immigration to California concluded that “the Chinese do not desire to become citizens of this country, and have no knowledge or appreciation for our institutions An indigestible mass in the community, distinct in language, pagan in religion, inferior in mental and moral qualities, and all peculiarities, is an undesirable element in a republic, but becomes especially so if political power is placed in its hands.” Until the middle of the twentieth century, members of most Asian nationalities were prohibited from immigrating, becoming naturalized citizens, or owning certain types of property. Most Japanese Americans were interned in World War II, although few German Americans or Italian Americans were.

But now Asian Americans are perceived, often to their chagrin, as the ‘model minority.’ Elite private universities are rumored to use informal quotas to keep too many from beating out their non-Asian competitors. At the most prestigious state universities in California, where no such restrictions hold, Asian American students typically fill two-fifths of the student seats (in a state whose population is 12 percent Asian American). Almost half of adult Asian Americans have a college degree or more education, compared with three in ten Anglos, two in ten African Americans, and one in ten Latinos. A *Newsweek* cover story lauds the sex appeal of Asian men; analysts report that “Anglos living in close proximity to large Asian populations are more likely than racially and ethnically isolated Anglos to favor in-

creased immigration.”⁶ As of 1990, a fifth of the children who had one Asian parent also had a parent of a different race; that proportion is surely much higher now. In the same year, 30 percent of Asians who married wed a non-Asian American, and that figure too is rising. While discrimination persists, virulently at times, and the label of ‘foreigner’ sometimes seems impossible to escape, it is not crazy to think that Asians may by 2050 have followed the path of Irish Catholics and Polish Jews into the status of ‘just American.’

Conversely, another group of immigrants – Mexican Americans, or Latinos more generally – might become more sharply differentiated from other residents of the United States over the next few decades. Samuel Huntington argues that the “extent and nature of this immigration differ fundamentally from those of previous immigrations, and the assimilation successes of the past are unlikely to be duplicated with the contemporary flood of immigrants from Latin America. This reality poses a fundamental question: Will the United States remain a country with a single national language and a core Anglo-Protestant culture?”⁷ In this view, Latinos will follow the opposite trajectory from that of the Irish and Asians: Latinos, once perceived as part of an ethnicity with an identifiable but permeable culture, are becoming a race with increasingly defined boundaries.

The research evidence is completely mixed on this point. U.S.-born children

6 M. V. Hood III and Irwin Morris, “¿Amigo o Enemigo?: Context, Attitudes, and Anglo Public Opinion Toward Immigration,” *Social Science Quarterly* 78 (2) (1997): 309–323.

7 Samuel P. Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2004): 30–45.

of Mexican parents consistently receive more education than their parents, speak English better, earn more at higher-status jobs, move away from gateway cities more frequently, marry more non-Mexicans, and vote more. However, discrimination and subordination persist, and scholars such as Richard Alba and his coauthors find “no convincing sign of convergence in the educational attainments of later-generation Mexican Americans and Anglos.”⁸ That is, after the second generation, assimilation may lose its momentum. Sociologists even point to the possibility of a reversal, such that children and grandchildren of poor immigrants may lose ground economically, disengage politically, and end up with poorer health, higher rates of crime, or greater family instability than their ancestors or counterparts in their native country.

Huntington articulates a deeper anxiety: that the sheer magnitude of immigration and the high birth rates among Latinos who share a language, religion, and background and who mostly live in a distinct section of the United States are creating “a de facto split between a predominantly Spanish-speaking United States and an English-speaking United States.” In my view, this concern is unwarranted; the culture of the United States is certainly changing in response to massive immigration from Latin America, but the immigrants are changing just as much, if not more. From the perspective of African Americans, in fact, the danger may be altogether too much assimilation rather than too little – creating once again a society in which

8 Richard Alba, Dalia Abdel-Hady, Tariqul Islam, and Karen Marotz, “Downward Assimilation and Mexican Americans: An Examination of Intergenerational Advance and Stagnation in Educational Attainment,” University at Albany, SUNY, Albany, N.Y., 2004.

immigrants get to become American by stepping over the only group that cannot, and does not want to, attain whiteness (or at least nonblackness).

Beyond the empirical complexities, I cannot forecast whether today’s racial and ethnic categories will no longer be in use with regard to immigrants in 2050, because of a crucial but unpredictable feature of immigration: the level and composition of immigration is largely a matter of political choice. U.S. immigration has not been drastically curtailed after forty years of increase, as it was in 1924 after about fifty years of a proportionally similar increase. But will it be? On the one hand, there are few signs of an impending cutoff. So the long period of incorporation with few newcomers that the United States experienced from 1920 until 1965 is unlikely to be repeated in the near future.

On the other hand, the war against terrorism may yet dramatically affect immigration laws and the treatment of immigrants. So far only a small segment of the population has been significantly affected. But arguably precedents have been set that could have powerful and, in my view, terrible consequences for the United States’s treatment of ‘foreigners.’ And with a few more terrorist attacks, residents of the United States could develop a powerful nativism tinged with religious and ethnic hostility and fueled by a genuine and warranted fear. The effect such developments would have on the racial and ethnic categories of 2050 is anyone’s guess.

For most of the twentieth century, the boundary between black and white was as firmly fixed in law and self-definition as it was blurred in practice. This boundary did not always exist; in the 1600s, the Virginia legislature had to outlaw interracial marriages because too many

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white indentured servants were marrying black proto-slaves. Interracial sexual activity persisted, of course, and government policy in the centuries since then has shifted from counting mulattoes, quadroons, and octoroons to establishing “one drop of blood” laws in thirty states by 1940. In some states or legal jurisdictions, not only blacks but also South Asians, Chinese and Japanese Americans, and Mexican Americans were forbidden to marry European Americans. Opponents used rumors of interracial sex to try to discredit Abraham Lincoln, the Populist movement, labor unions, New Deal agencies, desegregation in the Army, and the civil rights movement. The Supreme Court refused to take on cases of interracial marriage in the 1950s for fear of evoking uncontrollable anger; Justice Harlan is reported to have said, with Thurgood Marshall’s concurrence, that “one bombshell at a time is enough.”

Most of that sentiment has disappeared, or at least gone underground. Multiracial identity is now a point of public pride and private assertion; a social movement built around multiracial identity has shown surprising strength. In 1958, only 4 percent of whites endorsed interracial marriage; the most recent Gallup poll shows that 70 percent now do. A recent cover of *Parade* magazine is adorned with smiling, adorable children under the headline of “The Changing Faces of America”; Mattel has introduced Kayla, whom it describes as “Barbie’s racially ambiguous playmate”; *The New York Times* showcases “Generation E.A.: Ethnically Ambiguous”; *Newsweek* shows yet another set of adorable children in a story on “The New Face of Race.” Whatever motives one attributes to the marketing of racial complexity, the fact that multiracialism now has commercial appeal shows how far it has

moved from connotations of mongrelization and degeneration.

How much actual multiracialism there is in the United States is indeterminate. The answer depends on what one defines as a race (is a marriage between a Mexican American and a European American interracial?), whether interethnic marriages are factored in (how about a marriage between a Korean and a Japanese?), how far back one goes in a person’s ancestry to determine multiraciality, and what individuals know or acknowledge in their own family history. Nevertheless, it is probably safe to say that intermarriage is rising, along with the number of children who are, or who are recognized as being, multiracial. Up to 12 percent of youth can now readily be called multiracial, and plausibly by 2050 about 10 percent of whites and blacks and over 50 percent of Latinos, Asians, and American Indians will marry outside their group.

Since families are comprised of more than only parents and children, a single intermarriage can have a wide impact. As of 1990, “one in seven whites, one in three blacks, four in five Asians, and more than 19 in 20 American Indians are closely related to someone of a different racial group. Despite an intermarriage rate of about 1 percent, about 20 percent of Americans count someone from a different racial group among their kin.”⁹ And those calculations include neither marriages between or offspring of a Latino and a non-Latino, nor individuals with multiracial ancestry who consider themselves to be members of one racial group.

These changes in sentiment and behavior may grow even stronger over the

9 Joshua R. Goldstein, “Kinship Networks that Cross Racial Lines: The Exception or the Rule?” *Demography* 36 (3) (August 1999): 399–407.

next few decades, as Latinos' celebration of *mestizaje*, the mixing of races, as a cultural identity and social environment, rather than as a description of an individual's ancestry, spreads across the nation. Similarly, the census's invitation to identify with more than one race may spread, for simple bureaucratic and non-ideological reasons, to schools, state governments, corporations, hospitals, the criminal justice system, the military, and other far-reaching institutions. A frequently repeated offer to "check one or more" may encourage people to think of themselves as 'more than one.' If the trajectory of multiracialism persists, *Migration News's* speculation that today's racial and ethnic categories will no longer be in use in a few decades seems even less farfetched.

We cannot evaluate the impact of the unstable meanings of race and ethnicity, the fluctuating status of various immigrant groups, and the evolving connotation of multiracialism without considering African Americans. They are the perennial losers in the hierarchies of status, wealth, and power in the United States. The boundaries around blackness have been the most stringently monitored, first by oppressors and now perhaps by African Americans themselves; their relations with white Americans have been and continue to be the most fraught. If we knew how much the meaning of being black in the United States will change by 2050 – or more contentiously, whether racial oppression will be significantly undermined – we would know how seriously to take the speculation that our current racial and ethnic categories may become outmoded.

The standing of African Americans has changed dramatically over the past century: Republican President Roosevelt

was widely criticized for once entertaining Booker T. Washington in the White House; Republican President Bush has entrusted two of the most important cabinet-level positions to African Americans. The highest paid corporate executive on Wall Street in 2003 was black; some African Americans hold high elective office or judgeships; some are esteemed socially and culturally. Overall, using criteria that encompass roughly half of the white population, about a third of American blacks can be described as middle class. Affluent African Americans can now pass their status on to their children, so a fully developed class structure has emerged in the black community.

Still, perhaps a third of African Americans remain at the bottom of the various hierarchies in the United States. Compared with all other groups, poor blacks are more deeply poor, for longer periods of their life and from earlier in childhood; they are more likely to live among other poor people. Black children who begin their education with roughly the same knowledge and skills as white children lose ground in the public school system. Blacks are more likely to be victimized by crime than any other group, and black men are much more likely to be incarcerated and subsequently disfranchised for life than are white men.

More generally, we cannot dismiss the possible persistence of what Orlando Patterson once called the "homeostatic principle of the entire system of racial domination," in which racial subordination is repressed in one location only to burst forth in another.¹⁰ Regardless of their income, African Americans are overcharged for used cars, less likely

10 Orlando Patterson, "Toward a Study of Black America," *Dissent* (Fall 1989): 476 – 486.

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to receive appropriate treatment for heart attacks, and less likely to receive excellent service from realtors and bankers. Blacks have drastically less wealth than whites with the same earnings. Whites seldom vote for black candidates when they have an alternative, and even less often move into substantially black neighborhoods, schools, and churches.

I am not sure what would count as persuasive evidence that the racial hierarchy in the United States is on a certain path to extinction. Certainly a strong black class structure that persists across generations would be essential (although it may merely substitute one hierarchy for another). A sense among African Americans that they can let down their guard – that embracing multiracialism is not just a way of inching closer to whiteness, that racism is only infrequently part of the explanation for a failure, that a commitment to racial solidarity need not take precedence over values such as feminism or patriotism or simple idiosyncrasy – would also be good evidence. And changed behavior by nonblacks, such as choosing a home or a child’s school because of its quality rather than its racial composition, or repudiating implicit as well as explicit racial appeals by political candidates, or recognizing and disavowing the privileges that come with being the apparently raceless norm in U.S. society, would also be necessary.

Until we can be clear on what it will take to abolish racial hierarchy in the United States, and on how far we have moved toward that abolition, we cannot say whether by 2050 today’s racial and ethnic categories will no longer be in use. If racial hierarchy persists, so will the categories of black and nonblack. Multiracialism and the history of American racial politics over the past few de-

CADES are on balance encouraging, but they are not dispositive.

I turn finally to discrimination by skin tone, which may be the deepest and most tenacious form of racism in the United States. The connection between lightness and virtue is at least as old as Shakespeare, whose Timon of Athens learned too late that enough gold “will make black white, foul fair, wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant.”

Europeans have not always denigrated dark-skinned people in favor of light-skinned ones, as Werner Sollors shows in *An Anthology of Interracial Literature*, but by the mid-nineteenth century, few residents of the United States publicly contested the view that lighter was better. Skin-color hierarchy held a fortiori across what we now call races; northern European whites were dominant, southern Europeans and Latinos held intermediate positions, and blacks were subordinated to all. But skin-color hierarchy also obtained within racial and ethnic groups, as phrases like ‘the black Irish’ and ‘the brown paper bag test’ and the advertising jingle asserting that ‘blonds have more fun’ attest.

The history of each racial or ethnic group includes its own variant of skin-color ranking. Spanish and Portuguese colonizers of Latin America elaborated rules for ranking according to a complex mixture of race, physical appearance, wealth, cultural heritage, and enslavement:

Whites generally have a superior status. People of Indian racial background whose cultural practices are mainly of Portuguese or Spanish derivation . . . would be next on the social ladder. Mestizos, people of mixed indigenous and white background, would have a higher rating than those of largely Indian background. At the

bottom of the social pyramid would be Afro-Americans, with mulattos occupying a higher social status than blacks.¹¹

My research (conducted with Traci Burch and Vesla Weaver) suggests that skin-color ranking has had an equally powerful impact on African Americans. Compared with their darker-skinned counterparts, lighter-skinned black soldiers in the Civil War's Union Army were more likely to have been skilled workers than field hands before they entered the service. Sergeants and lieutenants were most likely to be light-skinned, and black soldiers with light skin were more likely than their darker-skinned counterparts to be promoted while in the Army. They were significantly taller (a measure of nutrition) and – most striking of all – the lightest members of the black regiments were significantly less likely to die in service.¹²

Asian societies are not immune from the bias of skin-color ranking. An ancient Japanese proverb holds that “white skin makes up for seven defects,” and Indian newspapers and websites carry personal ads for women whose parents boast of their daughters' purity and light skin in order to attract a husband. European Americans hold light skin in the same regard, as elucidated by that noted sociologist F. Scott Fitzgerald in *This Side of Paradise*. During a conversation about the virtues of strenuous exercise, Fitzgerald's Byrne suddenly observes,

11 Robert J. Cottrol, “The Long Lingering Shadow: Law, Liberalism, and Cultures of Racial Hierarchy and Identity in the Americas,” *Tulane Law Review* 76 (November 2001): 11 – 79.

12 These data are drawn from Jacob Metzger and Robert A. Margo, *Union Army Recruits in Black Regiments in the United States, 1862 – 1865*, computer file, University of Michigan, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1990.

“Personal appearance has a lot to do with it.”

“Coloring?” Amory asked eagerly.

“Yes.”

“That's what Tom and I figured,”

Amory agreed. “We took the year-books for the last ten years and looked at the pictures of the senior council . . . It does represent success here [at Princeton University] in a general way. Well, I suppose only about thirty-five per cent of every class here are blonds, are really light – yet *two-thirds* of every senior council are light . . .”

“It's true,” Byrne agreed. “The light-haired man is a higher type, generally speaking. I worked the thing out with the Presidents of the United States once, and found that way over half of them were light-haired, yet think of the preponderant number of brunettes in the race.”

They go on for several more paragraphs in the same vein, apropos of nothing in the book's plot.

Such examples range across several centuries because the importance of skin tone has changed relatively little, despite the growth of a black cultural aesthetic, the Latino celebration of *mestizaje*, and the Asian drive for panethnic unity. Surveys from the 1990s show that lighter-skinned African Americans and Hispanics continue to enjoy higher incomes and more education than their darker counterparts. They are more likely to own homes and to live among white neighbors, and less likely to be on welfare. Darker blacks and Latinos have higher rates of incarceration and unemployment; dark-skinned Mexican Americans speak less English and are less likely to be unionized if they are workers. Dark-skinned black men convicted of a crime receive longer sentences than lighter-skinned counterparts. Both blacks and whites attach more negative and fewer positive attributes to images of dark-skinned, compared with light-skinned, blacks.

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Controls for class background reduce but do not eliminate these differences. That is, light-skinned people are more likely to come from a well-off family – reflecting the historical advantages of light skin – and they are more likely to be treated well by police, employers, teachers, and other citizens. The magnitude of these effects is impressive. One study found complexion to be more closely connected than was parents’ socioeconomic status to blacks’ occupation and income; another found that “dark-skinned blacks suffer much the same disadvantage relative to light-skinned blacks that blacks, in general, suffer relative to whites.”¹³ Even if racial and ethnic categories change drastically by 2050, one cannot assume that skin-color hierarchy will do the same.

Over the past century, the meaning of race and ethnicity has changed a lot, as have the status of most immigrants and the connotations of multiracialism. Skin-color hierarchy has changed little, and the subordination of African Americans has been challenged but not yet overturned. Combining these dynamics in various ways and with varying degrees of emphasis permits us to envision at least six possible futures:

- The United States might persist in a structure of black exceptionalism, or an updated Jim Crow. In this scenario, skin tone and ethnicity would matter, but the main divide would continue to be between those identified as black and all others. That is, race as we now

13 Michael Hughes and Bradley R. Hertel, “The Significance of Color Remains: A Study of Life Chances, Mate Selection, and Ethnic Consciousness Among Black Americans,” *Social Forces* 68 (4) (1990): 1105 – 1120; Verna Keith and Cedric Herring, “Skin Tone and Stratification in the Black Community,” *American Journal of Sociology* 97 (3): 760 – 778.

understand it would trump skin tone and ethnicity among blacks, even if skin tone or ethnicity complicates the meaning of race for all other residents of the United States. Biracial individuals would be treated as simply black or nonblack, and would mostly identify according to that binary, rather than become a liminal or new category.

- A similar possible scenario is white exceptionalism. Here too, skin tone and ethnicity would continue to matter, but the main divide would be between those identified as white and all others. Skin tone and ethnic identification would continue to matter little among European Americans, who would all share to a greater or lesser degree in white privilege. Appearance and ethnic groupings might matter a great deal for sorting the rest of the population, but only within a shared subordinate status.
- Alternatively, the United States might move toward a South African model. That would combine the first two scenarios, producing a nation sorted into three groups: whites and ‘honorary whites’ (most Asians, some Latinos, and some biracials), coloreds (some Asians, most Latinos, some biracials, and a few African Americans), and blacks and almost-blacks (indigenous Latinos, many Native Americans, and some biracials, as well as African Americans). Levels of affluence, status, power, and vulnerability to discrimination would on average vary accordingly, with wider variations between rather than within the groups.¹⁴

14 For more on this scenario, see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “We Are All Americans!: The Latin Americanization of Race Relations in the United States,” in Maria Krysan and Amanda Lewis, eds., *The Changing Terrain of Race and*

- Perhaps the United States will sort along a more complex set of racial and ethnic dimensions, with new understandings of race and ethnicity. One possibility is sharper regional divides. Thus the Northwest would mingle Asians, Native Americans, and Anglos; the Southwest would mix Latinos, Native Americans, and Anglos; the Midwest would remain largely Anglo; the South would continue to hold mostly separate populations of blacks and Anglos, and so on. These regional divides could develop important political and cultural implications, even if not at the level of the antebellum North, South, and West as described by Anne Norton, among others.¹⁵ Or the nation might divide along lines of nativity, so that the most salient characteristic is whether one is foreign- or native-born. Perhaps class lines or intensity of religious commitment or isolationism would cut across lines of race, ethnicity, and skin tone alike.
- The United States might be moving toward the eventual elimination of distinct racial and ethnic groups in favor of a skin-color hierarchy, *tout court*. Socioeconomic status, prestige, and political power would in that case depend on one's location on that continuum; identity, beliefs, and perceptions would eventually follow. Whether such a continuum would improve the United States's racial order by substituting fluidity for rigidity, or worsen it by disguising persistent racial stigma through a series of small gradations, remains to be seen.

- Finally, the United States might blur distinct racial and ethnic groups into a multiracial *mélange*. The logic of multiracialism differs from that of skin color since the former is not inherently hierarchical: black/white individuals have the same standing qua 'multiracials' as do Asian/Latino individuals. The crucial divide in this scenario would be between those who identify as monoracials and seek to protect cultural purity and those who identify as multiracials and celebrate cultural mixing. Skin tone, along with conventional distinctions of race and ethnicity, would recede in importance.

Prediction is a fool's game. The future will be partly controlled by political and policy choices not yet made, perhaps not yet even imagined. Furthermore, as others discuss in detail in this issue of *Dædalus*, the very categories that we employ to measure racial and ethnic change will themselves affect the direction and magnitude of that change. The census is not a neutral bean counter; Heisenberg's principle holds for the social as well as the physical world. Nevertheless, I will venture a guess: skin tone will continue to be associated with invidious distinctions; African Americans will remain a distinct although not always subordinated social grouping; and everything else in this arena – our understandings of race and ethnicity, our treatment of immigrants, our evaluation of people and cultures that cut across formerly distinct categories – is up for grabs.

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Ethnicity (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004): 149–183.

¹⁵ Anne Norton, *Alternative Americas: A Reading of Antebellum Political Culture* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1986).