

Surveying the Battlefield: Reflections on the Reproductive Dynamics of Racism

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Abstract

The sociology of racism is marked by a wealth of studies devoted to explicating the consequences of racism for individuals, organizations, institutions, and even the fundamental processes by which societies come to be constituted. Some of this work has informed concrete efforts to improve the life chances of subordinate racialized groups. In contrast, however, less research has examined, specifically and systematically, the ideational and material conditions that facilitate the reproduction of racism. Given this analytical deficit, the aim of this article is to illustrate— theoretically, conceptually and empirically—how racism is reproduced by dominant systems of belief; capitalist structural arrangements that foster scarcities while fettering redistributive measures; and key decisions and non-decisions of power elites. Scholars of racism, many of whom are concerned with the practical implications of their work, can enhance their contributions to progressive praxis by granting greater attention to questions regarding the reproducibility of racism—how it keeps going along—in addition to longstanding foci on racism’s effects and cognate areas of inquiry.

Introduction

Sociological studies of racism in the US, the UK, and elsewhere in the West constitute a highly differentiated field of inquiry in which auto-critique unfolds in vibrant and contentious ways. Without gainsaying the existence of camps and cliques characterized by little debate and much mutual backslapping, it is fair to say that in general the literature on racism respects virtually no axioms, save the well-worn one regarding the socially constructed character of race. Plausible reasons for this are several—a dearth of readily identifiable canonical texts, the preponderance of qualitative research (and its ‘less conclusive’ results vis-à-vis quantitative work), tools of analysis and conceptual schemas that either undergo reconsideration in response to social change or become ossified to the point of uselessness—and the effects become manifest in the words of scholars who, for example, embrace the task of challenging what they see as problematic aspects of thought in the field.

Illustrating this point is only difficult in that the range of illustrative possibilities leave one wondering where to begin and end, but here let us settle for two consonantal statements put forth to sensitize scholars (and others) to the need for specificity, for delimitation, when formulating arguments about the breadth of racism

Scholars and activists during the 1960s did not hesitate to denounce the United States as ‘a racist society,’ and this reflected an unprecedented willingness to confront the magnitude of the nation’s crimes against African Americans. Yet such a formulation lacks conceptual clarity about what aspects of the society need to be changed, what obstacles stand in the way of change, and how

these obstacles might be surmounted. (Steinberg 1995:185)

While institutional racism exists, such a concept loses practical utility if every thing and every place is racist. In that case, there is effectively nothing to be done about it. And without conceptual tools to distinguish what is important from what is not, we are lost in the confusion of multiple meanings. (Blauner 2001:199)

Such critical comments have a degree of import that transcends scholarly disputation and bears upon anti-racist praxis, for the “racist society” argument is, perversely, capable of producing political outcomes not unlike those generated by its polar opposite, the “post-racist” society claim. Unalloyed pessimism encourages immobilization; unbounded optimism breeds complacency, smug and otherwise. In one instance one (idly) wonders what can be done; in the other one “knows” that nothing need be done. For Blauner and Steinberg, therefore, processes of determining conceptual soundness entail assessments of actual or potential use-value, a position that may rankle the intellectual sensibilities of those wedded to the idea of value-free scholarship, while finding resonance in circles of organic intellectuals divorced from the production of seemingly self-justifying concepts and related flights of abstractionist fancy.

To make mention of these intra-field divisions and schisms will surely strike some as utterly banal—‘what social science field is *not* wrought and wrenched by functionally equivalent disagreements?’—yet key strands of the sociology of racism have come to circulate within and around largely extra-academic clashes of racist practice and anti-racist resistance (here racial profiling comes to mind), rendering considerations of internal debates non-trivial. Even more, the subject matter itself seems to encourage, though not guarantee, the adoption of implicit or explicit ethico-political stands on topics ranging from residential segregation to mass imprisonment. Also, of course, critical scholars have been responsible for a plethora of notable works on the specificity of racism in a host of ‘post’ eras (post-WWII, post-Civil Rights, post-Cold War), nationalism as racism, the political economy of racism, environmental racism, whiteness and white privilege, popular cultural racism—the list goes on and on.

Having said this, however, a careful survey of the sociology of racism reveals a relative lack of specific, sustained, systematic studies regarding the reproductive dynamics of racism. Elucidations of racism’s origins (slavery), referential shifts (biology to culture), sources (capitalism), manifestations (hate speech), and effects (working class disunity) are abundant, but a fair measure of neglectfulness has been the order of the day when it comes to questions about how racism is reproduced and what its (pre)conditions of reproduction happen to be. This is fairly commonplace: scholar X concludes, after careful viewing and analysis, that a particular film is racist, and ends all inquiry there, assuming that ‘we all know’ how racist films appeal to racist sub-audiences who engage in racist practices, one of which is the making of such films. Here, as in other instances, the lacunae are perhaps omnipresent—and hence taken for granted—to the point of invisibility. Insofar as bringing them into view is a worthy goal, we can start by citing a 1975 interview in which Foucault was asked “How do you see the intellectual’s role in militant practice?” and to which he gave this response

What the intellectual can do is to provide instruments of analysis...What’s effectively needed is a ramified, penetrative perception of the present, one that makes it possible to locate lines of weakness, strong points...In other words, a topological and geological survey of the battlefield—that is the intellectual’s role. (1980:61-62)

This statement is at least as ambitious as Foucault himself, and so these praxis-oriented requirements can hardly be met through the writing of a single article. Our more modest aim is to therefore analyse the reproduction of racism as it pertains to (1) dominant systems of belief, (2) the structural dynamics of capitalism, and (3) the volitional dynamics of power elites, all of which will be done in keeping with the spirit, if not the *exact* letter, of the challenge presented by Foucault.

Beyond Belief?: The (In)significance of Racist Ideas

What is the serious student of racism to make of the following three vignettes? A statistical study of police stop-and-search practices on a major interstate highway reveals staggering racial differences in patterns of who gets stopped and, concomitantly, who does not (Harris 2000:60-62); another project demonstrates the existence of a massive wealth gap between blacks and whites, traceable to a long and sordid history of dispossession imposed upon the former (Oliver and Shapiro 1997); and an experimental audit study of the entry-level job market suggests that blacks *without* criminal records fare worse than whites *with* criminal records (Pager 2003). Before answering one way or another, the demands of seriousness are such that, at minimum, careful attention be paid to ontological questions concerning the necessary conditions of racism. Less vaguely, is the reproduction of racism contingent upon the presence of racist ideas in the operating assumptions of institutions and the (conscious or subconscious) minds of individuals? Or does talk of entrenched racism, racism far removed from its incipiency, imply that it can soar along on autopilot in lieu of a sentient pilot? Understanding these questions as merely academic is a form of misunderstanding:

Whether disadvantage is the consequence of intentionality and a belief in the existence and inferiority of certain 'races,' or of the unintentional outcome of decisions or taken-for-granted processes by people who do not hold such beliefs, invites distinct interventionist strategies. In other words, if the determinants are different, so should be the responses to prevent them from occurring in the future. (Miles and Brown 2003:79)

Two perspectives, which we will call 'non-ideational' and 'ideational,' speak to this need for delineating different determinants of racism.

The non-ideational perspective on racism is largely an outgrowth of the recognition, rooted primarily in civil rights era struggles (though marginally existent at earlier points of the twentieth century), that hitherto dominant views of racism as belief in hierarchically arranged races could not account for the apparently puzzling tendency of liberalizing attitudes and legislative reform to have virtually no effect on gaps between the material well-being of whites and blacks. For the most part, the *absolute* gains (in income, for example) of the latter were matched or exceeded by the former, leaving the *relative* distance between the two groups intact. This empirical picture prompted much critical theorizing about the extent to which

processes that maintain domination—control of whites over nonwhites—are built into the major social institutions. These institutions either exclude or restrict the participation of racial groups by procedures that have become conventional, part of the bureaucratic system of rules and regulations. Thus there is little need for prejudice as a motivating force. (Blauner 2001:20)

It followed that tendencies toward the de-personalization of racism (the newly liberal white person having dinner at the home of a black friend) could, and did, co-exist with pronounced patterns of institutionalized racist exclusion (the location of the home in a highly segregated neighborhood).

Broadly distilled, the non-ideational view rests on three propositional pillars. First, racism is an interactive structural relationship in which racially defined groups are differentially situated, with whites enjoying a disproportionate share of social goods (i.e. resource-rich high schools) and racialized minorities enduring an over-abundance of social bads (i.e. dilapidated housing). As Al Szymanski declares, "the importance of seeing racism as essentially a relationship, and not as an attitude or idea, can not be stressed too heavily" (1985:110). Second, racism is reproduced not only actively, in the form of decisions, but also passively, in the form of non-decisions. This recognition of the double-sided character of racism's reproducibility is indebted to shifts in the sociology of power away from Weberian emphases on will-power in the face of resistance and toward appreciations of status quo reinforcing inaction as a

prerogative of the powerful. Far from a recent development, this critical turn was anticipated, if not initiated, half a century ago by C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite*: “their failure to act, their failure to make decisions, is itself an act that is often of greater consequence than the decisions they do make” (1956:4). Third, inferences about the operativeness of racism can be derived from observations of conditions that, in all likelihood, would not have emerged in the absence of racism. Here the emphasis is on effects, on outcomes, with no ironclad requirement to demonstrate racist intent on the part of, or uncover racist ideas in the minds of, individual social actors.

In the course of commenting on the “structural perpetuation of group disadvantage,” philosopher Charles W. Mills argues that “even when the overtly discriminatory patterns of the past have disappeared, the legacy of these practices continues so that the system is reproduced even with no racist intent” (1999:30). Perhaps the most compelling example of this phenomenon is the current US racial wealth gap, largely a product of past racist collusion and connivance—at the levels of state and civil society—which took the form of racially exclusionary government (Federal Housing Authority) provisions for home mortgages, restrictive covenants, the confinement of black-owned businesses to segregated markets, outright physical intimidation and violence, and so forth. The bitter for some/ sweet for others fruit of this web of mutually reinforcing practices is a present in which the median net worth of white households is almost twelve times that of black households. And since “the baby boom generation will inherit close to \$7 trillion over the next twenty-five years” (Oliver and Shapiro 1997:152) taken for granted processes of inter-generational asset dispensation virtually ensure that the color of wealth will remain other than black, absent the implementation of substantive redistributive measures.

Shifting from structural factors to individual actors, we find that non-ideational conceptions of racism are such that

in some cases behavior may be deemed racist on the basis only of its outcome. The mark of racism here will be whether the discriminatory behavior reflects a persistent pattern *or* could have reasonably been avoided. Thus, I...include as racist, for example, the behavior of nonprejudiced prosecutors who use their peremptory challenges to exclude blacks from juries in the trials of black defendants solely for the sake of securing a conviction. (Goldberg 1990:296; emphasis in original)

Here, of course, complete consonance of ideas, actions, and outcomes is non-existent—the racist results arise from the practices of individuals with no cognitive commitments to racist prejudice—yet conventional procedures suffice to suppress black input in the (sometimes life and death) decisions of the legal system. This is the banality of racism. Overtly racist exhortations by the courtroom equivalent of a David Duke are not needed to effect all of this, and, perhaps logically, the constellation of possible remedies ought not include racism awareness training, given the character of the prosecutors in this example. In fact, notwithstanding the presumption of innocence, some (though not Goldberg) might even argue that by maximizing conviction rates these prosecutors are acting as protective allies of black communities in which crime is overwhelmingly intra-racial. From this perspective they can be regarded as doubly non-racist.

To what extent, however, can one convincingly defend the argument that racist ideas are not necessary for the reproduction of racism? Goldberg’s non-prejudiced prosecutors strike prospective black jurors on the grounds that they are insufficiently inclined to convict black defendants, which apparently assumes the juridical decisions of blacks are driven by affective considerations—‘ah, the poor kid reminds me of my favorite nephew’—rather than rigorous and rational assessments of evidence and counter-evidence. Age-old antipodal metaphors are subtly at work here: instinct and affect are black, whereas reason and logic are white. And even without “knowing” these prosecutors it is probably fair to conclude that their peremptory challenges are racially asymmetrical in that no parallel attempts are made to exclude white jurors from trials involving white defendants. After all, white communities, unlike many of their black counterparts, are not stereotypically represented as spaces comprised of little more than (1)

criminals and (2) those who unjustifiably sympathize with criminals.

Still, this problematization of putative prosecutorial non-prejudice might itself be rendered problematic. First, one may ask, what if blacks *actually* are less likely than whites to convict black defendants? This is a fair question, to be sure, but it is underpinned by the normative centering of white decision-making as the epistemological gold standard against which others will be judged as either logical or pathological. If, for instance, white juries convict black defendants 90% of the time, while the corresponding figure for black juries is 80%, it is not self-evident that the higher percentage is more appropriate, especially if the ultimate goal of the justice system is to see that justice is done, rather than to churn out convictions in assembly line fashion by any and all legally allowable means. The production of convictions and the affirmation of justice are not necessarily synonymous, for more convictions could mean weaker justice (as former residents of police states can testify) and, obversely, greater justice could entail fewer convictions. Effacing or ignoring this reasoning is one of the means by which notions of white juror supremacy are sustained.

Another possible rejoinder is as follows. Even if the prosecutors work to minimize or eliminate the presence of blacks in the jury box on the basis of their verifiable race-specific disinclinations to convict black defendants, the non-prejudiced status of these prosecutors need not be thrown into question since they may regard blacks as justifiably sceptical of police testimony and, more generally, courts in which conviction probabilities sometimes have as much to do with a defendant's class position as with actual guilt or innocence. Given that anti-black racist policing is well-documented, and that blacks are disproportionately working class and 'underclass,' Goldberg's prosecutors, far from acting on the basis of racist ideas, actually view blacks as rational opponents of an irrational system. Ironically, then, their superior perceptiveness makes them undesirable jurors, jurors with reputations for being 'troublesome' in response to the troubles they have seen. So, does this interpretation save the prosecutors from the charge of being prejudiced? The short answer is no. The longer answer is that it validates the charge, because they *know* the system functions in racist ways (directly and indirectly) *and* they *knowingly* curtail the participation of those who have the will to counter the perpetuation of unjust results, such as wrongful convictions. Here the operative racist principle is clear: it is acceptable for an institution to reproduce racist outcomes without being challenged by those who are among its chief victims. In sum, contra the non-ideational perspective, racist conceptions of one type or another seem to be necessary in order for the special exclusion of black jurors to unfold as it does.

On the other hand, the non-ideational understanding of racism rests on much firmer ground when applied to the racial wealth gap, yet the smooth reproduction of white-over-black structural arrangements is not without its cultural dimensions, its constellation of racially inflected valuations of who deserves what, when, and why. Racist intent, narrowly conceived, is not needed to perpetuate extant distributions of wealth in the form of property and financial assets—business as usual will suffice. But if racism is an integral aspect of usual business in the US, then business as usual is not innocent or neutral. Racist contempt, rather than racist intent, is highly relevant in this regard, the sort of contempt that contributes to the easy acceptance of grossly racially skewed disparities of wealth, as if, for example, blacks have one-twelfth the net worth of whites because the latter are far superior—twelve times as superior?—in terms of education, work ethic, inclination to save, investment acumen, and so on.

According to Howard Winant, "inequality has to be 'policed', not only in the literal sense, that of controlling the opposition which injustice tends to stimulate, but also in the cultural sense. Inequality requires constant interpretation" (1994:270). This requirement obtains not only due to the fact that causes and concomitants of inequality are often oblique, and therefore open for debate, but also because some modes of interpretation are simply more establishment-friendly than others. At the risk of oversimplifying the explanatory possibilities associated with the wealth gap, most interpretive approaches can be categorized in accordance with the useful distinction between the "race effect" and the "racism effect" (Bonilla-Silva and Baiocchi 2001:125-126). Proponents of the "race effect" see race *itself* as irreducibly capable of determining social outcomes; those who emphasize the "racism effect" reject the suggestion that racially defined groups have immanent properties that can be causally linked to

differential academic performance, for example. The wealth gap, understood as an effect of racism, has no connection to supposedly elemental dissimilarities between whites and blacks, nor is it graspable by human capital postulations that do not acknowledge (1) 71 percent of the gap cannot be explained by differences in “wealth-associated characteristics” such as income, education, and occupation (Oliver and Shapiro 1997:134-135), and (2) a major effect of racism is that opportunities for acquiring human capital are not evenly distributed, are not equally available to all, in the first place.

But the demands of policing inequality are such that the “racism effect” is given short-shift, even ridiculed as wholly untenable, in mainstream circles of opinion, while the “race effect” finds prominent expression in the writings and speeches of Charles Murray, David Horowitz, Dinesh D’Souza and others, whose basic message is that blacks have as little as they deserve. People who are lazy, anti-intellectual, spendthrift, and dismissive of the value of home ownership cannot be expected to enjoy the same wealth as those—whites—with better genes (Murray) and cultural values (Horowitz and D’Souza). None of this is *necessary* for the continuing reproduction of racism in the form of the wealth gap, but it is highly serviceable for the task of policing, of cordoning off, the possibility of serious public consideration of measures that would reduce the gap, however modestly. In a brief discussion of reparations, for example, Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, authors of *Black Wealth/White Wealth*, note that “it may be a testament to the persistence of antiblack racial attitudes in America that the prospects for such compensation are minimal” (1997:189). Like Goldberg’s prosecutors, then, exponents of the “race effect” are engaged in some important preemptive work of their own.

Having attempted to pitch some challenges at the Achilles heel of the non-ideational perspective, we now turn to an explicit consideration of the ideational theorization of racism, which has come to garner support in the form of an intellectual mea culpa by Bob Blauner

I have been...reassessing the concept of racism. I now feel that it was premature to imply, as I did in my earlier writings, that its old-fashioned expressions—bigotry and discrimination—were on their way out, no longer necessary to maintain a racially stratified society that could rely better on a more impersonal institutionalized racism. During the 1960s and 1970s there was this strong tendency to highlight structural explanations of all types and to downplay—almost with scorn—the relevance of cultural values or the importance of racial prejudice. (2001:192)

And during the 1980s structural retrenchment in the form of Reaganomics was culturally facilitated by Reagan-optics, a lense through which quasi-social democratic government programs were seen as enriching undeserving blacks—the term ‘welfare queen’ became a staple of political discourse, of course—at the expense of honest, hardworking, self-sufficient ‘Americans’—understood, in wink-and-nod fashion, to be whites. So, although the Reagan era cultural turn in the social sciences has been disparaged as the work of scholars who bought into TINA, and therefore abandoned (or never took up) political economy, it might be otherwise viewed, in part, as a genuinely critical effort to apprehend the function of ideas in neo-racist relations of ruling.

The proposition that racist concepts and consciousness are essential elements of racism proper is the core of the ideational perspective, and from this core flow three cognate claims. First, racism is reproduced by conscious goal-directed activity, human agency, not amorphous structures that are autonomous to the point where they may as well be the products of alien interference in earthly affairs. Second, racially disparate outcomes of one sort or another do not, in themselves, qualify as *prima facie* evidence of racism. Much more is needed, in part because “defining racism by reference to consequences absolves the analyst (and activist) from the task of identifying the diverse processes that create and reproduce disadvantage” (Miles and Brown 2003:79). Third, the demands of distinguishing racism from other modes of oppression can be met only through the recognition and employment of an effective delimiter, in this case racist ideas. Putting some flesh on these somewhat skeletal points is best done by reference to the contention that

taken to its logical conclusion, the idea of an institutional racism split off from the consciousness of its agents leads to an unacceptable paradox, since it implies that the whole of the dominant group is both totally innocent and totally guilty. It exonerates everyone, since the system alone is responsible; it indicts everyone, since everyone derives benefit from it and participates in it. This is an untenable position. (Wieviorka 1995:65)

Furthermore, in correspondent terms, George Fredrickson speaks directly to the question of delimitation

I would insist that certain kinds of ideas and beliefs must be present, at some level of consciousness, in the minds of the practitioners of racism. If not, we would have no way to distinguish racism from classism, ethnocentrism, sexism, religious intolerance, ageism, or any other mode of allotting differential advantages or prestige to categories of people that vary, or seem to vary, in some important respect. (2002:153)

‘Consciousness,’ ‘ideas,’ ‘beliefs,’ ‘agents,’ ‘practitioners’—these terms, taken together, are for some critical scholars deeply problematic in that they harken back to pre-1960s liberal emphases on racism as an eminently cognitional and volitional phenomenon. In fact, however, the concept of institutional racism, as originally formulated in 1967 by the authors of *Black Power*, is far from devoid of important immaterial constituents: “Institutional racism *relies* on the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes and practices. A sense of superior group position prevails: whites are ‘better’ than blacks; therefore blacks should be subordinated to whites” (Ture and Hamilton 1992:5; emphasis added). This is not to say that Ture and Hamilton were unquestionably right, for institutional racism is a working concept meant to be heuristically and politically useful, and, as such, refinement through application is the process it lives by: if the limits of its workableness are exposed when it is applied to empirical problems, then it should be (and has been) refined accordingly. This *is* to say, however, that postulations about the centrality of ideas, beliefs, agents, and so on should not be summarily dismissed as conceptual atavism. Insofar as anti-racism is informed by the adage about first knowing the dragon in order to slay it, one can applaud the efforts of Wieviorka and Fredrickson to encourage greater specificity in research on racism.

Nonetheless, the ideational perspective is itself vague to the extent that it posits an ontology with no corresponding methodology. Racist consciousness (or at least consciousness tainted by racist ideas) is a necessary condition of racism, we are told, and we are also cautioned to avoid the lazy trap of drawing conclusions about the existence of racism based on outcomes by which some are favorably positioned (in parliaments) and others are decidedly not (in penitentiaries). What remains untold, though, is how analysts can employ this or that method, or set of methods, to (1) verify the presence of racist ideas at ‘some level of consciousness’ in the minds of suspect social actors, (2) link the confirmatory results to institutional processes that effect negative consequences for racialized minorities (the same consequences which likely fostered suspicions in the first place), and, finally, (3) conclude that bona fide racism has been discovered. A daunting task, no doubt, especially in an era when few agents of institutional racism are willing to act as if they are possessed by the ghosts of Strom Thurmond or Enoch Powell.

Outcome-based conceptions of racism, guided primarily by statistical data and inferential reasoning, have come to the sociological fore over the past few decades precisely because the methodological individualism implied by the ideational perspective seems to lead directly into a strategic cul-de-sac, whereby anti-racist measures are precluded until the operativeness of racist beliefs is demonstrated conclusively. With little regard for speculation about the salience of racist consciousness, John Lamberth of Temple University produced a 1996 report, on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union, about the stop and search practices of the Maryland State Police along Interstate 95. Having demonstrated that blacks, who comprised 17 percent of the driving population, accounted for 72 percent of those stopped and searched, he acknowledges that “no one can know the motivation of each individual trooper in conducting a traffic stop,” but concludes the “disparities are sufficiently great that taken as a whole, they are consistent and strongly support the assertion that the state police targeted the community

of black motorists for stop, detention and investigation within the Interstate 95 corridor” (Harris 2002:60-62). Staying with the topic of criminal justice (or lack thereof), let us consider another set of numbers from a neighboring country. In Canada the incarceration rate of Aboriginals is 8.5 times that of non-Aboriginals; in Saskatchewan, the worst province in this regard, there is a *35 fold* incarceration rate difference between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals (Samuelson and Monture-Angus 2002:157). These specific figures, along with more general research on criminal justice as race-specific social control, and the related testimonies (written and oral) of blacks in the US and Aboriginals in Canada, constitute, for many, the evidential basis for solid inferences about the existence of institutional racism. In this view, if ‘it’ looks, smells, and acts like a dragon, then ‘it’ almost certainly is one, even if questions about ‘its’ ideas and consciousness remain unanswered.

Aside from methodological shortcomings, moreover, ideational theorizations of racism tend to under-theorize the ways in which consciousness relates to broader structural and institutional contexts. The following associational chain is reasonable enough: social structures imply institutions, institutions imply human agents, human agents imply consciousness. But one treads upon shaky terrain when one assumes that these mutually implicative elements must be fully congruous, lest one posit the untenable “idea of an institutional racism split off from the consciousness of its agents.” Absent the relative autonomy of structures and institutions vis-à-vis consciousness, there would be little scholarly discussion of racism as an entrenched, hegemonic phenomenon, for it would be as motile as the consciousness under which it is governed. Structural autonomy is a sociological fact, however, and Oliver C. Cox indicates as much in his comments about the initial stages of white supremacy in colonies and colonial settler states

In this early period there was a more or less conscious development of the exploitative system. In later years, however, the infants that were born into the developed society had, of course, to take it as they found it. The social system determined their behavior *naturally*; that is to say, the racial exploitation and racial antagonisms seemed natural and the *conscious* element frequently did not exist. (Cox 2000:31, 45n; emphasis in original)

Moving forward to the 21st century, Blauner himself observes that in the US “the decolonization of social and economic institutions, what sociologists call ‘structural change,’ has not kept up with changes on the interpersonal and attitudinal levels” (2001:243). In one case the naturalizing logic of racism renders its agents largely unconscious of their role in reproducing a system that was anything but natural, in the other case advances at the level of consciousness do not produce commensurate changes at the level of structure, and both cases unsettle certain assumptions embedded within the ideational perspective.

It is tempting, at this point, to propose the categorization of the non-ideational and ideational perspectives along lines that correspond with their differential explanatory power when applied to macro-level and micro-level racism. So, in this bifurcated scheme of things, the non-ideational view—which, again, contends that racist ideas and beliefs are *not* necessary for the reproduction of racism—is valid insofar as racism, understood as a macro-sociological intergroup relationship (of domination/subordination, enrichment/impoverishment, etc.), can be sustained by processes virtually immanent to societies in which wealth redistribution is structurally impeded. Indeed, “the same social system that fosters the accumulation of private wealth for many whites denies it to blacks, thus forging an intimate connection between white wealth accumulation and black poverty. Just as blacks have had ‘cumulative disadvantages,’ many whites have had ‘cumulative advantages’” (Oliver and Shapiro 1997:5). This clarifies the degree to which attitudinal change or “raised consciousness” among whites is laudable but simultaneously negligible when weighed against structurally generated asymmetries in the life chances of whites as opposed to blacks.

On the other hand, of course, the non-ideational view is less compelling once one descends from structural heights to organizational settings and (especially) individual practices, as we demonstrated in our reverse cross-examination of Goldberg’s prosecutors. The reproduction of racism at these lower level sites, and through these recurring performances, is therefore difficult to explain unless the ideational

perspective is taken into serious account. To use an obvious example, derived from the Lamberth study, two Maryland State police officers were found to have stopped and searched *nobody except for black drivers* along Interstate 95 (Harris 2002:62). Can such policing be other than the deeds of those committed to the materialization of racist ideas through coercive action? Some belief in blacks as anti-citizens or sub-persons is at work here; not only in the minds of two individuals, however, for the aforementioned aggregate statistics are indicative of an organizational culture in which anti-black racism enjoys de facto acceptability. At the supra-organizational level, moreover, the Fraternal Order of Police (with a membership of over 300,000) officially refers to racial profiling as “the so-called practice of racial profiling” and fights proposed federal bills that would require the collection of detailed stop and search data, thereby enabling the steady reproduction of racism in the form of profiling. In sum, the analytical validity of the ideational perspective is inversely proportional to the level of analysis to which it is applied: it has high validity at low levels of analysis (individual and organizational) and low validity at high levels of analysis (structural). The obverse is true of the non-ideational perspective.

Classifying and evaluating the two perspectives in this way seems to be in accord with the principle of parsimony, but may come across to some as too simplistic, formulaic, and mechanistic considering the thorny, essentially contested character of the subject matter. While an extended search for a potentially less objectionable approach would take us beyond the scope of this section, it is nonetheless feasible to briefly consider an alternative formulation, one guided less by the logic of dualism and more by a middle-range imagination, so to speak. To this end, John Rex, in his book *Race Relations in Sociological Theory*, offers a valuable insight: “it is quite possible that once a set of beliefs is effectively built into the system of social interaction, the need for its explicit formulation and announcement is less evident, in which case the theory will only be found in the practice” (1983:134). This diachronic understanding of racism, which evinces affinities with both the ideational perspective (beliefs and theories) and the non-ideational perspective (systems of social interaction), acknowledges the formative power of ideas (propounded by dominant groups) while recognizing that the shifting requirements of racial rule virtually demand the gradual subsumption of ideas to quotidian interaction, not to mention modern governance. As Rex explains

We live in a period in which the systematic theoretical justifications of intergroup hostility which were so prominent in the nineteen thirties have been nearly universally discredited, at least so far as official policy statements are concerned. But this does not by any means imply that the theory has not been built into the practice, and that the same policies are pursued against the same groups as those which used to be called racist. Thus for example, one would not expect leaders of the main political parties in Western Europe publicly to support racist theory. One may find nonetheless that they pursue the same policies towards minority groups but find different justifications and rationalisations for them. (1983:134)

Over the past quarter century the processes by which theory embeds into practice have led us into a twenty-first century wherein the color-line obscures its problematic nature by claiming to be colorless and denying its ability to demarcate anything or anybody. Consequently, a host of scholars are increasingly commenting on the development of “a racism that often claims not to be a racism” (Miles 1994:214), “racism that does not recognize itself as racism” (Guimaraes 1999:327), “racism which avoids being recognized as such” (Gilroy 2002:254), and slight variations therefrom. Insofar as less visible racism is less noticed, it is also less challenged—and hence more easily reproduced.

Structural Dynamics: Racism in the Context of Capitalism

Thus far we have granted some attention, here and there, to the relevance of structural arrangements as they bear upon the perpetuation of racism, particularly racism understood as a dominative, power-based set of asymmetrical relationships involving racially defined groups. Still, some readers will have noticed

that, aside from the introduction, no explicit reference has been made to the main structural fact of life in the US, the UK, and kindred social formations: capitalism. These about racism and capitalism—specifically, their affinities or lack thereof—have spoken to questions of origination (racism, a distinctly modern phenomenon, owes its existence to capitalism), functionalism (racism, a handmaiden of capitalism, functions to divide the working class), progress (capitalism, a modernizing force, emphasizes achievement over ascription, thereby fostering the gradual erosion of racism), human capital (capitalism, a profit-centred economic system, embraces the most productive workers regardless of race), and so forth. Beyond this propositional smorgasbord, some scholars readily acknowledge the frequent co-presence of racism and capitalism, but refrain from positing inexorable connections between them; the variability, contingency, and complexity of the social demands the repudiation of reductive formulations, in this view. Stuart Hall, for example, argues that “racism is not present, in the same form or degree, in all capitalist formations: it is not necessary to the concrete functioning of all capitalisms” (2002:59). Speaking about racism(s) and capitalism(s) in these plural terms should not be disparaged as pedantic hairsplitting, for, unless one produces work in grand theoretic fashion, context is critical.

Writing in the US context, Ture and Hamilton (1992:4) apprehend institutional racism as a phenomenon which “originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society.” So, given its stable and sanctified status, capitalism in the US could perhaps be damned by definitional fiat alone. More rigorously and specifically, the reproduction of racism is partially facilitated by the capitalist production of want in the arena of social goods, such as living wage jobs and decent housing

In a context of fluctuating and relative scarcity, where the total number of jobs within a nation state is less than the total population seeking paid work and where the number of skilled manual and non-manual positions is even less, exclusionary practices are structurally required, but may be effected by means of, for example, some combination of sexism, racism and nationalism as well as the formal possession of acquired skills. Similarly, in capitalist societies which are unable to provide sufficient and adequate housing for their populations, some mechanism of inclusion/exclusion is necessary to allocate people to housing of poor quality and racism is one amongst a number of such mechanisms. (Miles and Brown 2003:171)

Capitalism has been described as a “Judas economy” but, as this quote suggests, it does not effect “betrayal” in a race-blind fashion. If some groups must get the fecal end of the stick, the path of least resistance leads directly to them, and here the force of racism operates cyclically since (relative) powerlessness is both an effect and cause of exclusion: Aboriginals, for example, are powerless because they are excluded and excluded because they are powerless. It might be added that these Machiavellian dynamics have been identified as central, not marginal, to the durability of capitalism itself. As Philip Green observes in *Equality and Democracy*, “the best way to ensure that there will not be a general revolt against a system that multiplies demeaning work is to make certain that those who do the worst on the labor market tend to be a definable minority, such as a ‘racial’ or sexual minority” (1998:68). When anti-racist feminist thinkers refer to racialized and gendered labor markets, this is, of course, some of what they have in mind.

Having said this, a counterfactual line of thought would suggest that, notwithstanding ideational factors, if structural shifts in the direction of tight labor markets occur, then patterns of racist exclusion should become somewhat less pronounced. A factual instance of just such a development unfolded in the second quarter of 2000, as reported by Jeannine Aversa of the Associated Press in an article published on May 6, 2000. It begins by stating, “the supercharged economy pushed the U.S. unemployment rate to a 30-year low of 3.9 per cent last month. Blacks and Hispanics, with traditionally high unemployment, recorded their lowest jobless rates in history.” This departure from tradition, however modest, reduced official black unemployment to 7.2 percent, official Hispanic unemployment to 5.4 percent, and might have been universally applauded if purveyors of good faith conceptions of the US are correct when they speak about “a country where everyone wants everyone else to do well.” Beyond the purview of

pollyannaish pronouncements, Aversa's reportage demonstrates that influential analysts, both within and without the Federal Reserve, did more recoiling than clapping in response to the unprecedented figures

While strong job and wage growth is good for workers, economists and members of the Fed worry that the combination might worsen inflation. They fear that employers scrambling to find scarce workers will recruit them with big boosts in wages and benefits, increased costs that could be passed to consumers in higher prices.

The nod to consumer concerns is marginal—virtually all consumers are workers, first and foremost, after all—but the main thrust of this observation is in close accord with any number of Marxist dissections of unemployment as a structural imperative of capitalism; the Associated Press finally meets Pathfinder Press. Critical race theorists, furthermore, consistently emphasize that structural racism is normal, not anomalous, one reason why “traditionally high unemployment” among blacks and Hispanics is unremarkable, whereas abnormality—in the form of record lows—is cause for consternation followed by action, such as boosting interest rates to de-charge a supercharged economy. The social fallout, linked to restoring the full force of structural exclusion, can be partially managed by increased admissions to the prison system, an apparently less unsettling means of lowering official unemployment than job provision.

Going back another three to four decades, with a focus on precursory developments, we find that powerful structural fetters limited the civil rights movement in ways that paved the way for the reproduction of racism, materially and ideologically, that obtains in the present. Given the legislative victories of the movement, it is commonly assumed that progressive *de jure* outcomes constituted the totality of what the movement sought to achieve. And, to be sure, some figures in the struggle engaged in the politically expedient articulation of means and goals by reference to little more than legal reform—at least publicly. On the other hand, when one considers critical wo/man-on-the-street comments of the era—“yes, I can sit in the same restaurant as whites but I can barely afford anything on the menu”—or the prognostications of Martin Luther King Jr.—“justice for black people will not flow into society merely from court decisions” (quoted in Singh 2004:13)—it becomes clear that movement aspirations were more radical than popular accounts suggest. Insofar as *de jure* advances left *de facto* material inequalities intact, a civil rights *revolution* would have entailed the insurance of rights *and* the fulfilment of obligations: the remedial obligations of the state to execute major redistributive measures. But this, of course, was not to be. As George Lipsitz (1998:175) argues, “the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 were attempts to insulate the civil rights challenge to the narrowest possible terrains, not the fulfillment of the movement's goals,” while Howard Winant contends that “substantive equality would have meant massive redistribution of resources; it would have clashed with fundamental capitalist class interests; such dramatic social change was never even on the table” (1998:95). So the management of crisis through containment, rather than the effectuation of social justice, was a dominant achievement of the period.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, a number of mainstream narratives arose presenting the hopes of the civil rights movement, narrowly and distortedly conceived, as having come to fruition. At present, therefore, “freedom at last,” the freedom to succeed materially based on character content, means that racial inequality is anything but structural. In one view, with a rather teleological feel, the recency of the post-civil rights era is such that blacks—who endured over 300 hundred years of pre-1960s indentured servitude, slavery, and segregation—are still catching up to whites, but, undoubtedly, catch up they will. Proof of this sure and steady progress consists of a few carefully selected social indices (i.e. high school completion rates), not to mention several rich and/or famous black athletes, entertainers, television personalities, businesspeople, political officials, and star academics. Powerful counterevidence, such as the racial wealth gap, is either unknown or known but unmentioned, so that “absolutely nothing” becomes the answer to the question, “what is to be done?” This is the pernicious underbelly of post-civil rights liberal optimism-as-indifference.

Farther to the right, though not exclusively so, the valorization of the status quo and the denigration of blacks forge two sides of the same high currency coin. Beginning with the assumption of a

now meritocratic US, some commentators argue that cultural pathology among blacks must account for any remaining racial inequality, a view that seems to be held by much of the lay public. As various opinion polls demonstrate, or at least suggest, notions of blacks as lazy and unambitious are far from marginal (Massey and Denton 1993:95; Feagin, Vera and Batur 2001:187-190). The same polls address the dubious question of race-specific intelligence, and, as is well known, black intelligence has been thrown into question by proponents of the view that the relatively low social standing of blacks is rooted in their allegedly inferior biological constitutions. It is here that connections between anti-redistributive structural imperatives and the reproduction of racism become salient. Writing at the height of the *Bell Curve* debates, Stephen Steinberg declared: "To state the obvious, if this nation had followed through on the promise of the civil rights revolution, and enacted the changes that would have established a basic parity between blacks and whites in socioeconomic status and living standards, we would not today be debating whether black subordination is a product of genes" (1995:217). Instead, again, policing inequality calls for the ongoing use of hegemonic interpretive frames—of the "race effect" variety, for example—that commonly produce two main conclusions: (1) the prevailing order is fundamentally sound, and (2) blacks are fundamentally flawed.

Adding some nuance to this analysis entails, moreover, an appreciation of the extent to which racism's reproducibility is enabled by structurally generated hardships experienced by some segments of the white population. Scholarly discussions of white privilege have enriched the sociology of race and racism, no doubt, but such privilege is relative rather than absolute; the disproportionate accrual of social goods to whites does not override the obvious fact of major intra-racial class divisions. For example, despite white possession of *average* levels of household net worth that blacks, on average, can only dream about, 16 percent of white households have less than \$1000 in net worth and 21 percent have poverty level (less than \$11,612) incomes (Oliver and Shapiro 1997:102). This translates into tens of millions of economically downtrodden children and adults, given that 70 percent of the US population is classified as white, though, in itself, this state of affairs does not reproduce racism in a linear, deterministic fashion. More is needed, and racially-driven representational schemas fulfill some of this need: "The ability of the right to represent class issues in racial terms is central to the current pattern of conservative hegemony" (Winant 1993:119). The basic message to poor whites from Reagan onward, and perhaps even Barry Goldwater before him, is this: if your refrigerator is empty it is not due to unemployment sustaining, wealth concentrating capitalism, but rather pro-black tax-and-spend welfarism. In a land where blacks have for centuries been vilified as 'a problem,' especially from 1865 to the present, such racist disparagement is resonant. In response, while grasping the ways in which inequality is ideologically and culturally mediated, some key thinkers have proposed the need for a thoroughly materialist approach to reducing racism among non-affluent whites. According to Blauner, the white working class needs a "a thriving economy and full employment so that economic anxieties and class-based resentments are not channeled toward people of color" (2001:221). Consonantly, on the other side of the Atlantic, A. Sivanandan contends that in the UK

the white working class...is racist precisely because it is powerless, economically and politically, and violent because the only power it has is personal power. Quite clearly, it would be hopeless to try and change the attitudes and behaviour of the poorest and most deprived section of the white population without first changing the material conditions of their existence. (1985:29-30)

Interestingly, for a short time, not long ago, a certain segment of the US white population did enjoy official full employment. Writing in the *Financial Times* in May 2000, the aforementioned supercharged economy period, Gerard Baker reported, "among white males over 20 years of age, unemployment has all but disappeared: the rate was just 2.8 percent last month." One does not want to exaggerate the significance of what occurred during that anomalous April (asset-poor white households certainly did not disappear) but one might wonder whether the sustenance of official full employment for white males could have meaningfully undermined the "angry white male phenomenon." Given the structural

dynamics of US capitalism, one can perhaps do little more than wonder.

Volitional Dynamics: Racism and Elite Agency

To recognize that ordinary people are subjected to structural constraints, and are therefore unable to exercise agency in an unfettered manner, is not to imply that these basic facts of life do not apply to people who are extraordinarily situated, that is, political and corporate elites. Indeed, “those who run the show” are largely run by the show, an entrenched set of interlocking institutions that predate the ascension of current elites, so, for instance, any sane CEO knows that she cannot decide, willy-nilly, to relegate profit maximization to low-priority status in the name of advancing more humanistic ends. The logic of capitalism as an economic system is such that individuals are “selected” on the basis of their system-enhancing skills and capacities (while the logic of racism grants criterial significance to race), not to mention their willingness to act in accord with extant and emerging rules of the capitalist game. So far so true, but these conditional constraints are less than totalistic, as Michael Parenti explains

A structural analysis, as I understand it, maintains that events are determined by the larger configurations of power and interest and not by the whims of happenstance or the connivance of a few incidental political actors. There is no denying that larger structural trends impose limits on policy and exert strong pressures on leaders. But this does not mean that all important policy is predetermined. Short of betraying fundamental class interests, different leaders can pursue different courses, the effects of which are not inconsequential to the lives of millions of people. (1996:185)

Elite agency is bounded by structure but the power of structure to limit such agency is not boundless. To contend otherwise is to simultaneously divest human affairs of human agency and invest structural realities with otherworldly inevitability. More specifically, for our purposes, any positing of a purely structural perspective on the reproductive dynamics of racism takes racism beyond the grasp of politics—it becomes a meta-political phenomenon—and thereby renders anti-racism chimerical. For these reasons and others, volition matters; accordingly, that which follows deals with matters that are at least partially volitional.

To begin with, Stephen Steinberg (1995:219) states, “racial oppression has always originated at the top echelons of society,” an observation that is not only empirically supportable but also deducible from core elite interests. Chief among these interests is the perpetuation of surplus inequality, that is, “inequality above and beyond the necessary inequalities of a complex division of labor, existing primarily to enhance the power and well-being of some people at the expense of others” (Green 1998:69). Aside from various statistics on economic polarization at the overall societal level, the superfluity of inequality in the US is often illustrated through international comparisons of CEO to average worker remuneration ratios; compared to countries such as Japan and Germany, for example, US ratios are massive. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, dominant narratives construe inequality as surplus-free, as wholly attributable to the workings of time-tested capitalist markets, the weighing of credentials on a meritocratic basis, and the vagaries of natural differences in human abilities. But if surplus inequality is non-existent, then all inequality is necessary, including racial inequality. In a structurally sound social order in which elites do not act in ways that elevate inequality beyond required levels, all racially defined groups are appropriately positioned, socially and economically. If their relative positions are grossly disparate, the top echelons of society are blameless—place the blame on some of sort of ‘race effect’ instead. Given this narrative, and the chain of inferences that flow from it, one can reasonably argue, in accord with Paul Gilroy (2002:259), that “racism, like capitalism as a whole, rests on the mystification of social relations.”

The task of dissipating this ontological fog entails, first and foremost, foci on the ways in which major policies either stabilize or exacerbate racism in the form of unequal life chances. Such an approach takes as its point of departure the observation that “Blacks’ life chances are significantly lower than those

of Whites, and ultimately a racialized social order is distinguished by this difference in life chances. Generally, the more dissimilar the races' life chances, the more racialized the social system, and vice versa" (Bonilla-Silva 1997:470). Our contention is that regardless of the intentions of elites, policies that render life chances less unequal or more unequal are, *in effect*, anti-racist or racist, respectively. In theory this means a white conservative governor could outdo a black liberal mayor in terms of anti-racist governance, though in practice this is unlikely. When speaking about policy, furthermore, we are referring to decisions and non-decisions that are often politically expedient, but not inevitable by-products of capitalist structural arrangements. Interstices do exist—the system is not all-constraining—and their existence implies conditions within which volition can be exercised. That which follows is a brief consideration of how elite volition reproduces racism in the areas of education, (un)employment, and criminal justice.

If the allocation of educational resources to different segments of the population can be taken as a rough index of who elites value or disvalue, then blacks have good reason to be critical of school systems wherein blackness, compared to whiteness, seems to range from worth less to worthless. Lofty political rhetoric about leaving no child behind is belied by practices to the contrary, and, as Patricia Hill Collins illustrates, neither past legislative reform nor present assertions about merit as *the* engine of upward mobility have amounted to much

Despite the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision outlawing racial segregation in public schools, large numbers of working-class and poor African American children in particular remain warehoused in poorly funded, deteriorating, racially segregated inner-city schools. Regardless of *individual* merit, these children as a *class* of children are seen as lacking merit, unworthy of public support and are treated as second-class citizens. (2001:21, emphasis original)

Approximately two decades before the *Brown* decision, the Federal Housing Authority set upon the task of engineering the residential segregation that is today captured by the (literally) colorful distinction between "chocolate cities" and "vanilla suburbs." School segregation presupposes residential segregation (Goldberg 1998:18) and both modes of seclusion enable elites to make (dis)investment decisions that generate costs for blacks and benefits for whites. The power of white self-interest, combined with the physical and political isolation of blacks, means that elites can undermine black communities—perhaps in the name of "fiscal restraint"—without having to contend with countervailing forces in the form of black-white political coalitions (Massey and Denton 1993:153-160). Corporate media pundits can also smooth things over by lamenting the academic performance of black students—"if only their grades and SAT scores were higher..."—while obscuring the connection between funding decisions that cut resources for chemistry classes and boost resources for chemical weapons.

Notwithstanding the capacity of the US military to provide job opportunities, a free society is presumably one in which civilians have the choice to remain civilians *and* secure decent employment. In a racially stratified society, however, some have more choices than others, and the most powerful among the 'some' can and do make decisions that reproduce the Other status of the 'others.' This power dynamic is especially salient in an "undersized" labor market that ensures employment will not be open to everyone—but everyone does not mean anyone. Unemployment in the US is patterned along racial lines, as we have discussed, and this patterning is attributable to more than current structural forces acting upon the outcomes of past discrimination. In their critical reflections on immigration policy, for example, both Blauner (2001:241) and Steinberg (1995:185-95) argue that elites have fostered the influx of millions of workers from abroad as a means of not having to disturb a longstanding feature of the economic landscape: high black unemployment. Consider the following set of questions posed by Steinberg

If the rationale behind immigration has to do with declining fertility rates and an anticipated decline in new labor force entrants, then why is policy not directed at addressing the scandalously high rates of black unemployment? Why is there no crash program to provide job training for

minority youth whose detachment from the job market has so many deleterious consequences for themselves as well as the rest of the society?...Why are there no incentives or mandates to induce employers to hire and train unemployed youth? (1995:192)

If elites were confronted with these questions, and if they happened to be in perfectly candid moods, they might respond with some questions of their own: Why spend money training blacks born and raised in the US when we can simply bring in people whose training costs have been borne by another country? How is the goal of profit maximization through wage minimization compatible with lower levels of immigration? Why should employers settle for young blacks who are quick to assert their rights when more pliable workers are there for the hiring? And so on. On a more ideological level, moreover, elite hostility to 'big government' (excluding police, prisons, armed forces, corporate subsidies, etc.) is informed by an anti-sociological imagination in which the personal is apolitical. The concomitant project of framing unemployment, especially black unemployment, as rooted in laziness and unambitiousness would be thrown into question if the left hand of the state were to demonstrate otherwise by stimulating employment through various programmatic means. Ultimately, however, Steinberg answers his own questions by reference to the cold logic of racial *Machtpolitik*

The job crisis in black America is allowed to fester for one basic reason: because the power elites of this nation regard these black communities as politically and economically expendable. They can afford to do so as long as they are not under great countervailing pressure, either from a mobilized black protest movement or from spontaneous ghetto uprisings. This is a situation of politics-as-usual so long as poverty and joblessness manifest themselves as 'quiet riots'—that is, as crime and violence that can be contained through a criminal justice system that currently has a prison population exceeding one million people. (1995:203)

By 2006 the status quo was marked by a combined prison and jail population of 2.2 million, making the US the world leader in locking people up for the stated purpose of crime control. To be sure, crime control is *one* reason for prevailing levels of incarceration, but, as numerous penological studies have shown, other factors are at least as important. In her recent book *The Prison and the Gallows*, Marie Gottschalk contends that "today's policies of mass imprisonment are undeniably about race and social control" (2006:15) and goes on to provide a striking illustration of who these policies have targeted and how the statistical outcomes compare with those of a now defunct white supremacist regime

About half of the growth in U.S. incarceration since the early 1970s has been fueled by removing more African Americans from their communities...The United States is currently imprisoning black men in state and federal prisons at about five times the rate that black men were incarcerated in South Africa in the early 1990s on the eve of the end of apartheid. (2006:19)

It is important to recognize, moreover, that although spending on prisons and jails increased 531 percent—\$9.57 billion to \$60.4 billion—from 1982 to 2001 (Jacobson 2005:109), the crimes deemed most serious by law and order pundits (murder, robbery, aggravated assault) did not increase by a factor of five during the 1980s and 1990s. Rather, the practices of finding bodies to fill cells and building cells to accommodate bodies have been largely enabled by a "war on drugs" characterized by much emphasis on inner-city blacks and Hispanics and little emphasis on suburban whites; much emphasis on drug arrests and little emphasis on drug treatment; and, as elites would have it, a reluctance—even a refusal—to direct law enforcement efforts toward powerful interests, say, a banking industry that handles significant amounts of drug money. That illegal drugs remain readily available and regularly used is evidence of the failure of the 'war on drugs' only if one assumes, with mainstream opinion, that its officially articulated objectives—reducing drug distribution and consumption—exhaust the possibilities of what constitutes failure or success. If, however, Gottschalk and others (Chomsky 1992:114-121; Parenti 1999:45-66) are correct in arguing that racio-social control is a key imperative of the criminal justice system, then the

following set of extrapolations will not be worrisome to all: “Based on current rates of first incarceration, an estimated 32% of black males will enter State or Federal prison during their lifetime, compared to 17% of Hispanic males and 5.9% of white males” (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2006). Although black males are not 5.4 times as likely as white males to commit crimes punishable by imprisonment, the system functions as if they do, thereby reducing black employability, family cohesion, voting power, and overall social standing. Such outcomes are far from inevitable, for “politics and policy always involve choice and decision-making and the possibility of acting otherwise” (Garland 2001:139). They are, instead, testaments to the volitional power of elites who continue to act as if nothing is amiss.

Conclusion

What, then, is the character of the battlefield upon which racism is reproduced? First, the perpetuation of racism takes place in contexts marked by the presence of racist ideas, but these very contexts feature long established structural arrangements capable of regenerating racism in ways that are relatively autonomous vis-à-vis ideational forces. As the magnitude of the units of reproduction decrease—from structures to organizations to individuals, for example—the relevance of racist ideas tends to increase. This is not to say, however, that such ideas are commonly articulated in ostentatious ways, for the ‘maturation’ of racism has entailed the insinuation of racist ideas into practices that are today executed, and even celebrated, as non-racist. Second, capitalism facilitates the material reproduction of racism by generating scarcity that is partly manageable through the use of racism as an allocative mechanism; by precluding the emergence and stabilization of tight labor markets that would reduce joblessness among racialized minorities; and by structurally circumscribing whatever possibilities may exist for egalitarian redistributive measures. The ideological concomitants of these material realities include discourses that invoke cultural or biological inferiority on the part of blacks to “explain” the highly asymmetrical socio-economic positions of blacks and whites. Still, white privilege is no guarantor of class privilege (white casualties of capitalism run into the tens of millions) so ideology also acts in service of structure by framing economic hardship among whites as, inter alia, an effect of state subsidies for blacks. Third, racial inequality, a subset of surplus inequality, is partially attributable to the decisions and non-decisions of elites. Past and present policies pertaining to education, unemployment, and criminal justice have reproduced racism—in the form of relatively dismal life chances for blacks—above and beyond the degree that would prevail if the only factors were structural forces.

Taken together, these pieces of the racial picture suggest the importance of determining the operativeness of racist ideas, not in an a priori manner, but following serious research and reflection; conducting genealogical studies of ostensibly non-racist practices—especially those of governmental bodies—that produce racist effects; going beyond broad indictments of capitalism by specifying the capitalist imperatives and processes that energize the reproduction of racism; recognizing (and, if possible, rectifying) the limitations of ‘race only’ identity politics that elide class analysis; exploring the extent to which sociological studies of elites can critically inform the sociology of racism, and so forth. Through it all, furthermore, we can profit from the sage advice-by-analogy of George Fredrickson who states

the responsibility of the historian or sociologist who studies racism is not to moralize and condemn but to understand this malignancy so that it can be treated more effectively, just as a medical researcher studying cancer does not moralize about it but searches for knowledge that might point the way to a cure. (2002:158)

Comprehending and explaining the reproductive dynamics of racism is a critical aspect of this commitment.

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