

## **ALL THINGS EQUAL?**

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**MICHAEL K. BROWN, MARTIN CARNOY, ELLIOTT CURRIE, TROY DUSTER, DAVID B. OPPENHEIMER, MARJORIE M. SHULTZ, AND DAVID WELLMAN**, *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-blind Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 349 pages, ISBN 0-520-23706-4, \$27.50.

**PAUL M. SNIDERMAN AND THOMAS PIAZZA**, *Black Pride and Black Prejudice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, 192 pages, ISBN 0-691-09261-3, \$24.95.

These two texts represent a somewhat unlikely pairing. What could an empirically detailed but wide-ranging, really indignant indictment of new right-wing homilies about racial politics—that’s *Whitewashing Race*—have in common with what inquiring minds want to know about *Black Pride and Black Prejudice*, a carefully stepping report of results mostly from a 1997 survey, posing and answering such questions as whether African Americans share the “larger culture’s” values, succumb to conspiratorial thinking, or are anti-Semitic? At the level of pure geography trivia, it so happens that all of the authors involved in generating these new books have some claim to Northern California roots or associations. But beyond that, do they have anything in common?

Well, yes. Their very different ideological starting points aside, these two texts are, at a minimum, markers of how and what we’re doing right now as we continue pursuing those two age-old questions, Does race still matter? Are we equal yet? As for their answers (and to slip into a rhetorical tic of Sniderman and Piazza, who very much like to snuggle up to their reader with the second person, as in, “if you look at figure 4.3, [reader], you will see. . .”) both books supply the conclusion, “more than you [reader] might think!” However, one book answers the first question, and the other, the second.

Brown and colleagues tell us that race still matters, a lot. Following the “racial realists”—Alan Wolfe’s label for mid-1990s writers like Jim Sleeper, Tamar Jacoby, Shelby Steele, Dinesh D’Souza, and the Thernstroms—Brown et al. make sweeping generalizations about the state of American racial politics a generation after the civil

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rights movement. But departing from the racial realists, they demonstrate that discrimination and systematic factors explain why racial inequality persists. Their analyses cover labor markets, education, political representation and more. Sniderman and Piazza, by contrast, turn away from the national problem to a far more narrowly focused interpretation of the mindset of its Black citizens. Like Brown and his co-authors, Sniderman and Piazza are also interested in racial discrimination, but in the possibility that African Americans are its sources, rather than its targets. For them, we're equal enough now to ask, when Blacks identify more with each other, do they then identify less with other Americans? Though the general conclusions of *Black Pride and Black Prejudice* are somewhat contradictory, the take-away point is that Blacks are devoted Americans and we're moving forward.

Though *Whitewashing Race* is coming from the left and *Black Pride and Black Prejudice*, as it were, from the right (or, forgive me, from the White), both books are, in different ways, trying to offer centering correctives. Thus, announcing where the argument is aimed is the first order of business. Sniderman and Piazza's target shifts a bit, but they're mainly taking on Black demagogues and White liberals: the former for stirring up resentment and suspicion in the Black community, and the latter for encouraging Black pessimism. But Sniderman and Piazza also seem to be arguing with themselves, or with "you," reader (the second person again), setting you straight if you assert too often that Blacks are racially prejudiced themselves, or in case you suspect that they don't subscribe fully enough to the American Creed.

Sniderman and Piazza's primary interlocutor is Michael Dawson (1994, 2001), whose books on the political views of African Americans are throughout a foil and a touchstone. (Dawson's work is referred to in the text far more frequently than the book's index suggests.) Where Dawson sees Blacks as critically engaged with American liberal politics, Sniderman and Piazza, however, see Blacks as either rejecting or embracing American values. Neither Black pride nor Black prejudice is conceptualized as a commentary upon or rejoinder to American values; instead, these Black phenomena are evaluated against, and found either in keeping with or contrary to, those values. More on *Black Pride and Black Prejudice* momentarily.

For Brown and colleagues, the target is much more easily identified, really all too clear: they want to counter the right wing's current domination of the rhetoric on race. Brown et al. are fighting contemporary ideological and political currents that attribute persistent racial inequality to the shortcomings of racial minorities. They're trying to bring empirical nuance and sophistication to a field where the simplistic interpretations of the "racial realists" have lately prevailed. Their thickest target, though, is the 1997 book *America in Black and White* by Abigail Thernstrom and her husband, Stephan (Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 1997). This text is packed—again, thickly—with easy truisms about complicated data and quick dismissals of inconvenient findings in order to assert, over and over, its main messages: racial discrimination has nearly disappeared; color conscious policies are the problem, not the solution; behavioral and cultural shortfalls, not distributional inequities, explain race-related poverty and crime; Black demagogues and White liberals fuel discouragement and conflict by calling racism the problem. Racism is so over, for the Thernstroms.

Brown and colleagues try to restore empirical sophistication and interpretive nuance to this discussion. What an unenviable task! Who wants, these days, to be in the position of saying, this is ever so much more complicated; to insist that it is necessary to look at more data, diachronically; and to look to government for solutions? Who wants to be the pessimist, documenting the persistence of racial discrimination? Yet these authors rise to this necessary challenge, persuasively, and elegantly. They probably won't convince any die-hard racial realists, but it is refreshing to see

how straightforwardly they address their target, and their formulations supply ammunition others will find useful. Especially in their willingness to hold government responsible for supplying resources and correcting distributional injustice, Brown and colleagues model a bracing refusal to let the right wing keep setting the terms of the debate.

Brown is a political scientist; his co-authors are legal academics (Oppenheimer and Shultz), sociologists (Duster and Wellman), an economist (Carnoy), and a criminologist (Currie). They speak from a wide base of social scientific expertise; many of the authors are skilled interpreters of large studies. The text delivers on its aim to introduce a breath of fresh air and scholarly competence into the debate racial realism has framed—and distorted.

In chapters on labor markets, education, crime, affirmative action, and voting rights, *Whitewashing Race* counters racial realism with descriptions of persistent racial inequality, attributable both to continuing racial discrimination by Whites and to the ongoing, cumulative effects of the nation's legacy of slavery and segregation. Especially persuasive in discussing assumptions in voting rights' cases, the authors explain how the normative presumption of colorblindness in fact protects White privilege. Though not itself the subject of a separate chapter, the authors discuss something many others ignore, namely, racial disparities in health care. Health is arguably the site where the legacy of racial discrimination is borne most harshly, upon the body; the only advanced medical procedure that Blacks receive far more frequently than Whites is amputation of a lower limb (Brown et al., 2003, p. 47). (The Thernstroms discuss health care a bit, but only to mention that during Jim Crow, hospitals were segregated—but not now.)

In different domains, Brown and colleagues show that racial bias and discrimination—effects of the often unintentional, but institutionally supported and consequential choices of individuals—still clearly matter. A study of car dealerships in Chicago, for example, found that salespeople offered better deals to White men; another showed that African Americans routinely pay more for car loans (Brown et al., 2003, p. 45). An experimental study showed that doctors recommended less aggressive treatment of Black women's cardiac symptoms (Brown et al., 2003, p. 48). In such cases, it is almost impossible to point to a "smoking gun of intentionality," even though some recent Supreme Court interpretations ask for one. Instead, the authors summarize, "the face of racial subordination today is residential segregation, unequal loan policies, differential police stops, divergent medical care and schooling, variation in criminal sentencing, and disparate administration of the death penalty" (Brown et al., 2003, p. 56).

These sorts of empirical demonstrations are critically important elements of the rhetorical challenge to the racial realists, who think that since Whites now rarely say overtly bigoted things, racial discrimination is a thing of the past. But the most powerful conceptual introduction of *Whitewashing Race* is the framework of "accumulation" and "disaccumulation" to explain durable patterns of racial stratification.

Just as small investments can produce large returns in the long run, minor disadvantages—and, indeed, small privileges—compound over time. Brown and co-authors apply the concept of disaccumulation not only to financial domains, such as the way that home ownership supplies fewer returns for American racial minorities and more for Whites in racially segregated real estate markets, but they also deploy the concept in non-economic domains, such as the criminal justice system (Chapter 4). Long-term structural disadvantages producing higher crime rates in Black communities combine, the authors argue, with practices such as racial profiling to produce more intensive monitoring and sentencing of minority youth, which in turn

reduces employment prospects and removes young men from families and communities and, in some states, from the voting booth. Small decisions by police and judges thus accumulate, even in the absence of overt racial stereotyping (though, to be sure, sometimes that is there too) to produce a “tragic downward spiral” (Brown et al., 2003, p. 152).

As Brown and colleagues frequently remind, the racial realists base their claim that racial discrimination is no longer an American problem on the fact that overt levels of White prejudice have declined. Thus, they urge us to reconsider the utility of a psychological paradigm for understanding racial inequality, and, as Oliver Cromwell Cox and Herbert Aptheker did when they criticized Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma*, or as Herbert Blumer did when he criticized the concept of prejudice, they suggest that individual psychology is quite often not the right unit of analysis. By turning to the novel possibility of Black prejudice, Sniderman and Piazza’s book also provides the opportunity to reconsider the prospects and limits of a psychologically oriented, individualist paradigm for measuring American progress towards racial equality.

Beginning with the hypothesis—not much supported by any data the authors report—that Black pride fuels Black prejudice, especially Anti-Semitism, Sniderman (a political scientist) and Piazza (a statistician) offer a detailed, if not precisely nuanced, account of the Black political thinking reflected in some recent survey data, in particular, what over seven hundred African American Chicagoans said in 1997. They do a superb job of preserving a sense of exploration, openness, and surprise as they clarify their hypothesis, and then report on what they found in their data analysis. This openness should not be mistaken for naivety or innocence in approach, but instead taken at face value and treated as an honest account of intellectual presuppositions, origins, and designs. It is the signal strength of this book.

In addition, the analysis of survey data is clear, straightforward, and generally well documented (in a curious lapse, however, Sniderman and Piazza seem to fail to report that almost two-thirds of their 1997 Chicago sample is female). Reinforcing their general spirit of scholarly integrity and inquiry, the primary dataset is readily and freely available online through the Survey Research Center at the University of California, Berkeley (<http://sda.berkeley.edu:7502/src/>). Sniderman and Piazza invite you to think things through with them, and they go out of their way to clarify how they were thinking, how they built their study and drew their conclusions. They insist—responsibly, laudably—upon opening the way to further inquiries by readers. In spite of their second-person inclinations, Sniderman and Piazza don’t explicitly announce that “you can analyze our data, too!” Yet, in fact, you can.

So this approach of saying here’s what we’re thinking, here’s where we’re going, here’s how you can get there too, reader, has more than a little appeal. Certainly, like Sniderman and Piazza, many White Americans are profoundly curious about and puzzled by Black political thinking, and Sniderman and Piazza’s successful adoption of a tone of readiness to see what the data say is a very important model of constructive political engagement with social science.

Yet the text is also curiously oblique or disengaged from previous scholarship. Though Dawson is cited frequently, the historical context for Black political thinking supplied in both his 1994 and 2001 texts is mostly lacking in Sniderman and Piazza’s rendition. Indeed, at some points, it is explicitly rejected. Perhaps the plea for context is misplaced: in some ways, *Black Pride and Black Prejudice* is more a monograph than a book; it is a very detailed rendition of analysis, primarily from one study (though the authors include comparisons to other studies, especially to a 1991 survey they also designed). But perhaps not.

When *Black Pride and Black Prejudice* seems narrowest, it is as if, until they decided to run a survey, the authors' main acquaintance with Black political thinking arrived only via the most extreme renditions of African American political thought, especially variants of Black nationalism, available in the media. Leonard Jeffries's infamous reference to "Sun" and "Ice" people is revisited (Sniderman and Piazza, 2002, p. 44). Steve Cokely—the Chicago follower of Louis Farrakhan and aide to interim Mayor Eugene Sawyer, who reportedly said that Jewish doctors injected Black babies with AIDS—is mentioned as often as W. E. B. Du Bois (each once; p. 89 and p. 178). Sniderman and Piazza neglect to supply anything like a broader historical, scholarly context for the ideological currents they remark upon before their very last chapter, and then, it's really not much more than a quick sweep (Sniderman and Piazza, 2002, p. 178).

So is it fair to criticize *Black Pride and Black Prejudice* for not supplying a broader context? I think, on balance, it is, partly because, however contained the reach of this book, however ready its authors are to concede they're looking mainly at one survey from one city, they do advance some broader claims about African American political thought, and, after all, this is supposed to be a scholarly text. Thus, for example, it seems entirely within bounds to ask that a claim like "part of the history of blacks in America is a chronicle of charismatic figures preaching a fantasized version of the history of blacks" (Sniderman and Piazza, 2002, p. 33) be accompanied by at least a footnote. It's not.

Sniderman and Piazza are quite willing to criticize fantasized history, but not nearly so willing to engage real history. This poses a problem of inconsistency: They are willing to suggest that some African Americans might find Steve Cokely credible, but repeatedly dismiss the idea that the memory of the Tuskegee experiments (where, in the name of science, a government-sponsored study withheld penicillin from African American men infected with syphilis) might fuel conspiratorial thinking (Sniderman and Piazza, 2002, pp. 56, 167, 173).

Sniderman and Piazza are strong critics of extreme Black rhetoric; remarks like "much of contemporary black thought is first-rate" (Sniderman and Piazza, 2002, p. 44) don't really offset the fact that they reiterate and reinforce this rhetoric in their instrumentation and decontextualize it when presenting their survey results. Their defense, of course, could very well be that they are determined to investigate the possibility of Black anti-Semitism, or that conspiracy theories are reflected in some Black rhetoric, and that African Americans themselves may be gullible or credulous, internalizing the extreme public rhetoric of some activists (Chapter 2). Yet, even though the possibility that African Americans adopt the thinking styled in extreme rhetoric is not implausible, it seems fair enough to ask Sniderman and Piazza to follow Dawson further, and to supply a richer context when considering Black political thought.

What does Sniderman and Piazza's careful, if not quite carefully contextualized, presentation have to tell us? Their findings mix relief, worry, and celebration. They're relieved that Black pride is not the source of Black prejudice, even though some elements of Afrocentrism are associated in their study with conspiratorial thinking and with anti-Semitism. They're seriously worried about what they call the "blunting of standards of critical judgment" (Sniderman and Piazza, 2002, p. 173) in the African American community, even though they concede that, apparently, plenty of Americans believe the government is hiding information about UFOs (Sniderman and Piazza, 2002, p. 24). And they celebrate African Americans' "genuine commitment to a common American society and culture" even though "[t]hey do see much that remains unfair" (Sniderman and Piazza, 2002, p. 155).

So, where are we? Are all things equal? In some ways, these two texts replay a very old contrast between psychological or individualist, and structural or materialist, paradigms. When the modern civil rights movement took off around the Second World War, so too was the modern social scientific enterprise of investigating America's racial problems launched. Already at mid-century, scholars had embarked upon the racially inflected interpretative contest we know today: individualistic, psychological, and moral explanatory paradigms were set against structural, economic, and distributional models. Over the decades, the individualistic perspective began to seem more optimistic, pointing to future possibilities, not pessimistically reminding us of the further past's fact of slavery, the more recent past's fact of Jim Crow, or the persistent racial inequalities that were the distributional legacy of chattel slavery. Structural interpretations acquired the cast of gloom, sourness, and bitterness; individualist ones, that of openness, promise, foresight.

Of course, eventually this opposition acquired a racial cast: Whites were the ones who seemed inclined to consider mind over money, and non-White analysts to remind us of material inequality. The tracings of these racial inflections are with us today, even though exceptions abound. To be sure, there are plenty of White Marxists or at least structuralists, and more than a handful of Black psychologists, individualists, and even moralists. Yet the generalization seems fair enough: the dualisms between psychology versus economics, individuals versus structures, behavior and culture versus material inequity, optimists versus pessimists, the future versus the past, often enough map onto the distinction between White and Black. Though most of the authors who drafted the texts under discussion are White, there is clearly a racial distinction in the direction of their sympathies.

Where these dualisms become most problematic, however, is when they set those who uphold American values against those who don't quite, when the contrast contains signals of not only ideological, but also patriotic, commitments. One might plausibly claim that on American liberalism's own terms, the system's dynamic critics, not its static, reactionary defenders, have been the truest American liberals. Yet, especially in today's political climate, it's the (White-leaning) individualists, not the (Black-leaning) structuralists, who claim the mantle of the Nation's Creed. In asking whether Blacks fully subscribe to the "common culture," indeed, by asking whether it might not be time to ask whether Blacks, not Whites, are prejudiced, *Black Pride and Black Prejudice* sometimes draws perilously close to this implication.

However, it is important to note that, my own implications notwithstanding, pointing out distributional injustice does not at all require abandoning psychological approaches or, indeed, deciding not to analyze the actions of individuals. *Whitewashing Race* demands that we attend to the fact of durable and persistent racial inequality, but not that we turn away from psychology. Their second chapter, which both lays out the authors' analytical approach and spells out the problem of persistent distributional inequality that they will explain, begins with an epistemological assertion. Like fish blind to the water they're swimming in, Whites literally do not see racial privilege or notice how their individual choices perpetuate it. The book is an attempt—against the tide of racial realism—to get Whites to notice patterns, to see unintended consequences, to acknowledge how apparently innocent individual choices add up to the problem of accumulated racial disadvantage. At bottom, this is a psychological argument—an attempt to make a cognitive intervention if you will—with profound material and policy consequences. If Whites notice the problem, maybe they will be more willing to direct government resources toward addressing it. And the problem is neither pride nor prejudice, but instead, that we're not equal yet.

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