

AFTER THE DELUGE

Publics and Publicity in Katrina's Wake¹

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I want to start with a story from the period of chaos that followed Hurricane Katrina. I am going to present some data as an entry into a brief discussion of how different publics evaluated the disaster, and the implications for how we think about civil society in the United States.

In the aftermath of Katrina, rapper Kanye West made the following now widely discussed remarks:

I hate the way they portray us in the media. You see a black family, it says, "They're looting." You see a white family, it says, "They're looking for food." And, you know, it's been five days [waiting for federal help] because most of the people are black. And even for me to complain about it, I would be a hypocrite because I've tried to turn away from the TV because it's too hard to watch. . . We already realize a lot of people that could help are at war right now, fighting another war—and they've given them permission to go down and shoot us! . . . George Bush doesn't care about Black people (Dawson et al., 2006, p. 27).

These remarks caused—not surprisingly, given the fame of the rapper, the notoriety of his genre, and the context of the hurricane—a publicity stir for a brief period of time. Two of my colleagues, Melissa Harris-Lacewell and Cathy Cohen, and I put Kanye's remarks on an opinion survey that we fielded during the fall of 2005. We asked Blacks and Whites if West's remarks were unjustified, and these were the percentages of respondents who answered "yes": Blacks 9%; Whites 56%.

That gap represents a huge difference of opinion in how Blacks and Whites evaluate the import of Katrina, and it is not an anomaly. Blacks and Whites fundamentally disagreed about the relationship between the hurricane and social problems in the United States. We also asked the following (a replication of a question from a Pew Research Center (2005) survey):²

In your view did this disaster show that racial inequality remains a major problem in this country, or don't you think this was a particularly important lesson of the disaster?

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The percentage of respondents stating that the disaster showed that racial inequality remains a major problem: Blacks 90%; Whites 38%.

We also asked directly about whether racial considerations played any role in the government's response to the crisis:

Most of the people stranded in New Orleans following the hurricane were African American. Do you think the government's response to the situation would have been faster if most of the victims had been White, or don't you think it would have made any difference?

The percentage of respondents reporting that the government response would have been faster if the victims had been White: Blacks 84%; Whites 20%.

A critical question that also exhibited this pattern was whether it was more important to take into account fiscal responsibility or to fully restore the city and return those displaced by the storm to their homes:

- (1) The federal government should spend whatever is necessary to rebuild the city and to restore these Americans to their homes.

or

- (2) Although this is a great tragedy, the federal government must not commit too many funds to rebuilding until we know how we will pay for it.

The percentage of respondents stating that the government should spend whatever is necessary: Blacks 79%; Whites 33%.

The deep Black-White divisions on the relationship between racial inequality and the aftermath of Katrina reflect a deep division between the great majority of Blacks and Whites in their understanding of how much progress has been achieved in securing racial equality for African Americans. For over a decade, various colleagues and I have been asking Americans about the prospects of Blacks achieving racial equality. Our results show that nearly four-fifths of Blacks (78%) believe that Blacks will either never or not in their lifetimes achieve racial equality in the United States. On the other hand, nearly two-thirds of Whites (66%) believe that Blacks have either achieved or will soon achieve racial equality.

While the gap between the respective mainstreams of Black and White perceptions is stunningly vast, we should differentiate between the nature of the gaps for the questions regarding Kanye West, the status of racial equality, and race as a reason for the slow federal response, on the one hand, and the policy question regarding the relative importance of restoration versus fiscal responsibility, on the other. The gap in the "restoration versus fiscal responsibility" question, while large, could easily be the product of ideology, partisanship, and/or perceptions of technical problems by people who share the same sets of public discourses, world views, norms, and general values. The gaps between the responses to the other questions, however, reflect different views about how the world is ordered, and what the real status of groups within society is—fundamentally, world views which across racial groups are incommensurate.³ I argue that these different world views are the result of Blacks and Whites sharing what Jürgen Habermas calls *separate lifeworlds* (Habermas 1992[1996]). These separate lifeworlds produce a fragmented civil society, racially separate publics and public spheres, which, when combined, I argue, are reflected in

large gaps between Blacks and Whites in their survey responses in the wake of Katrina.

I will now tell three stories about what the deep racial divide in opinion that we see in Black and White evaluations of Katrina indicates about the state of publics, counterpublics, and their relation to civil society(ies) in the United States. The first is the story of a bifurcated civil society that produces different publics and different world views—world views sufficiently distinct to undermine the basis for rational communication between members of the dominant public, on the one hand, and the subordinate Black counterpublic, on the other. The second story is about how the devastation of Black civil society by Hurricane Katrina is also leading to the demise of the local Black counterpublic in New Orleans, and maybe, for some unexpectedly, the ultimate destruction of Black political power in New Orleans. The mechanism for this destruction of political power is the curbing of a basic right due citizens in a liberal democracy—the right to vote. Another mechanism leading to the destruction of Black political power is the further isolation of the local Black counterpublic. The third story is about the weakening of the national Black counterpublic, and how it has proven relatively powerless to slow the dismantling of Black civil society, the Black counterpublic, and Black political power in New Orleans.

Let me start with the contention that an important way to understand racial groups, particularly as differentiated from ethnic groups in the United States, is that the former are associated with a social structure where race is the hierarchical organizing principle for the distribution of material and psychological resources, as well as a schema which assigns roles, scripts, behaviors, expectations, stereotypes, and normative evaluations based on citizens' racial assignment (Sewell 1992; Dawson 2001).⁴ One key aspect of the racial structure in the United States, I argue, is that it contains a racial hierarchy which orders not only status and honor, but distributions of life chances as well. In short, there is a racial order within the United States that structures and is structured by not only society, but also American politics, political institutions, and the state.

So what does the recognition that there is a racial order mean for our theoretical and empirical understanding of civil society? First, we recognize that, to use Habermas's language, Blacks and Whites are segregated into largely *separate lifeworlds*. By this we mean that if the lifeworld is seen as a basis for consensus, communicative action, shared comprehension, and therefore social integration and reproduction, then these are not shared between Blacks and Whites. Empirically, the consensus, shared comprehension, mutual understanding, and social integration that Habermas details as necessary in order for different groups to share lifeworlds is lacking in the racially hypersegregated society that is the United States. In turn, the absence of shared lifeworlds prevents a unified civil society, public spheres, and communicative action. Habermas argues,

communicative action . . . [is] embedded in lifeworld contexts that provide the backing of a massive background to consensus. . . From the very start, communicative acts are located within the horizon of shared, unproblematic beliefs; at the same time, they are nourished by these resources of the *always already familiar*. The constant upset of disappointment and contradiction, contingency and critique in everyday life crashes against a sprawling, deeply set, and unshakable rock of background assumptions, loyalties, and skills. . . The lifeworld forms both the horizon for speech situations and the source of interpretations, while it in turn reproduces itself only through ongoing communicative actions. . . As we engage in communicative action, the lifeworld embraces us as an unmediated

certainty, out of whose immediate proximity we live and speak (Habermas 1992 [1996], p. 22, emphasis in original).

By Habermas's definition, Blacks and Whites inhabit separate lifeworlds because they do not share the "unshakable rock of background assumptions" necessary for a shared "consensus." The responses on all but the policy-oriented Katrina question are evidence for fundamental differences between Blacks and Whites in how they view the world. Blacks believe that American society is unjust on matters of race and economics, that deep racial inequality is reflected in the government's response to national traumas such as the aftermath of Katrina, and that the prospects for racial and economic justice are dim. Whites, in contrast, believe that racial equality either has been achieved or will soon be achieved and that, however unfortunate and inept the response to Katrina, it was not indicative of deep racial disadvantage. These disparate world views reflect differences in the "contours of the lifeworld and not just the contours of opinion within the lifeworld."⁵ These separate lifeworlds are reproduced through separate secular and sacred voluntary associations, formal and informal social networks, oral traditions of race transmitted across generations at dinner tables, in bars and barbershops, as well as a multitude of other venues, and also through the messages of racially distinct informational networks.⁶

For Habermas, the problem of plural societies and different lifeworlds is "solved" by the system of rights under the law. But, of course, the problem is not "solved" if groups are excluded from the system of liberal rights or, as I argue, that inclusion comes only after nearly two centuries of exclusion without the type of redistribution of resources that might allow groups and individuals to compete "equally" under the law. It is this legacy of segregation, subordination, and consequent disadvantage, among other phenomena, that left Black civil society in New Orleans especially vulnerable in the face of a disaster.

The system of American apartheid known as "Jim Crow" established the social, political, economic, and moral foundations for the development of separate lifeworlds and a bifurcated civil society. Jim Crow was firmly established by the 1890s and

dictated where blacks could eat, which seats they could occupy in theaters and on buses and trains, which jobs they could perform, where they could live, which water fountain they could use, and which beaches and parks they could visit. In Florida, "after dark" laws even prohibited black sharecroppers from selling produce at night. Beginning where statutory restrictions ended, Jim Crow customs and racial etiquette seized every opportunity to belittle and humiliate African Americans (Chafe et al., 2001, p. 268).

For most of American history, even when there was close physical proximity, neither Blacks nor Whites had access to the voluntary organizations of the other. One consequence documented by Chafe, Kelley, and other historians is that Whites had relatively limited access to the beliefs, attitudes, and norms of Black civil society—what political scientist James Scott (1990) refers to in part as the "hidden transcript" common to oppressed subordinate groups (see also Chafe et al., 2001; Kelley 1994, 2002).

Today, our neighborhoods remain hypersegregated, despite Black and Latino suburbanization, and the same is true of our schools. Sadly, the main hour of worship in the United States, 11 a.m. on Sunday morning, remains (as it has been called) the most segregated hour of the week. Debates over reparations, the 2000 U.S. presidential election and evaluations of President Bush, the Simi Valley verdict that

acquitted the police officers involved in the Rodney King affair, and, in another era, the trial of subway vigilante Bernard Goetz and the evaluation of the Black Panther Party, all illustrate that, except during periods of exceptional national emergencies such as September 11, Blacks and Whites not only have completely different views of the political and social world, but are amazed at each other's stances. Further, the meanings of concepts are often not the same among Blacks and Whites. For example as Aberbach and Walker demonstrated thirty years ago, for a large majority of Blacks, *Black power* meant *Black pride or fairness in the distribution of goods between races*. For a strong majority of Whites, however, *Black power* meant *replacing White supremacy with Black supremacy* (Aberbach and Walker, 1970). Words such as *equality* often have significantly different content between the races, with an economic component being attached to the meaning within even moderate Black political thought, a component which is explicitly rejected within mainstream American political thought (Condit 1993; Dawson 2001; Horton 2005).⁷ This phenomenon is symptomatic of the lack of "mutual understanding" and understanding based on common "presuppositions" necessary for rational communication between Blacks and Whites. As I have argued elsewhere (Dawson 1994, 2001), this has led to a separate Black counterpublic that not only has had less power to gain access to, influence, and oppose the state and public policy, but also was largely excluded from oppositional counterpublics, such as those of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century labor movement, the suffragette movement, and the late nineteenth-century farmer alliances (the antiwar and feminist counterpublics historically have provided only partial exceptions to the last point).

The isolation of the Black public sphere(s) means that it is much more difficult for Blacks to influence state power. Civil society is on the periphery of the circulation of power, according to Habermas (1992[1996]).⁸ But Blacks, I contend, are not a part of that circulation because, in Habermasian terms, during most periods of U.S. history, including this one, Blacks have not been, by and large, a part of the opinion-will formation process.

Habermas identifies a small set of assumptions as necessary for a group to be a part of opinion-will formation—to be able to use the opinion of the public to influence policy, legislation, and governance. One of his key assumptions is that the public in question has the capacity to both identify and *thematize* societal problems and their potential political solutions, and the ability to inject "them via parliamentary (or judicial) sluices into the political system in a way that *disrupts* the latter's routines" (Habermas 1992[1996], p. 358, emphasis in the original). African American publics have generally had robust capacity to identify and thematize social problems and their solution (Dawson 2001). They have had difficulty, however, during many periods (including the current one), as a result of the largely segregated nature of civil society in the United States, in interjecting the thematizations of their perceptions of problems and the problems' solutions into political discourse and policy channels. The voluntary associations of civil society, Habermas states in *Between Facts and Norms* (1992[1996]), become the mechanism by which the public sphere is connected and able to *disrupt* the politics of governance. It is the frequent isolation of Black counterpublics that renders them ineffective in influencing politics.

In the current period, this isolation and weakness of Black counterpublics is particularly dangerous for what Iris Young (2000) calls the "self-organizing component" of civil society. Associational life has been and continues to be largely separate. There are separate Methodist and Baptist churches for Blacks and Whites, separate Greek fraternities and sororities, separate civic associations such as the Elks and Masons. If both the public sphere and self-organizing components of civil society are

segregated by race and have little quotidian contact with each other, to what degree does it make sense to talk, either theoretically or empirically, about a single *American civil society*? Or does it make more sense to discuss overlapping but distinct *civil societies* with their separate associational life, public spheres, and counterpublics; their shared consensuses, norms, values, and political discourses? This is an empirical question as well as a theoretical question. The empirical evidence so far suggests that racially segregated patterns of life have stubbornly persisted for more than a generation after the passage of the major civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s. If such patterns continue to hold, then it does make sense, both theoretically and practically speaking, to describe civil society and its associated publics and counterpublics as *racially fragmented*.

As problematic as segregation is in this realm of civil society, Black institutions such as the church, Masonic halls, business, etc., which historically provided the foundation for activities of survival and resistance, are at one of their weakest historic moments. The weakness is due to the collapse of the political economy as well as local government services in the nation's poorest urban neighborhoods. Rampant unemployment, mass incarceration, and rising levels of poverty have undercut the social and economic bases that provided the foundation for what Drake called the "Black metropolis" (Drake and Cayton, 1962; Wilson 1980; Bobo 2004). Thus the Black counterpublic and associated social movements are weaker still, due to the weakening of the voluntary associations and networks which were built on top of the already weakened social base. Resistance in the past was more widespread and militant than in the present period. Further, the impact of the decline of the political economy over the past thirty years, the massive and violent intervention of the state in attacking the more militant elements of Black civil society a generation ago, the self-destructive tendencies within Black progressive movements, the substantial absorption of much of the Black political elite into the Democratic Party—and with it a consequent growing lack of accountability to the most disadvantaged segments of Black communities—as well as growing class, gender, and generational differences, have all served to weaken even further the institutional base of Black civil society (Dawson 2001; Reed 1999). One consequence of this last trend has been a narrowing of the ideological alternatives within the Black counterpublic. During the second half of the twentieth century, ideologies such as radical egalitarianism, Black Marxism, Black nationalism, and Black feminism strove with each other to win adherents, but today the number and strength of contending ideological voices is greatly attenuated (Dawson 2001; Kelley 2002). So, not only has the Black counterpublic become more isolated from the levers of politics, it has been less able to identify and thematize the severe problems that face African Americans—particularly the most disadvantaged ones—in the early twenty-first century. The internal weaknesses of Black civil society serve to increase both its isolation and its relative and absolute powerlessness. One outcome of this isolation has been the production of different norms for White civil society and Black civil society.

Thus, both the first story, about a racially fragmented civil society and a Black counterpublic that formed in response to a dominant public producing systematically different distributions of beliefs, norms, and assessments of life in America, as well as the second story, about the consequences of Katrina's aftermath for Black civil society and the Black counterpublic in New Orleans, have their roots in the relative political, economic, and social powerlessness that African Americans have known historically and continue to have in this era. Indeed, as Nancy Fraser (1989) and Michael Warner (2002) both argue, counterpublics are by their nature subordinate to their dominant counterparts (in this case, subordinate to White-dominated civil

society, public spheres, and counterpublics) and, as Fraser argues, have subaltern status.

The relative powerlessness and lack of resources that disadvantaged the Black community of New Orleans were manifest in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Residential patterns structured by the intersection of race and poverty tended to confine Blacks to poor and vulnerable neighborhoods. The same lack of resources made it more difficult for African Americans to leave the city and arrange for substitute housing, whether they stayed or left. The immense racial wealth gap that disadvantages the Black middle class makes it more difficult for middle-class African Americans not only to restart small businesses and rebuild residences, but even to contemplate how to return to their city.

The one public hospital that serviced not only poor Black communities but the medically indigent of all colors was itself in an area vulnerable to flooding, and early in the aftermath it was no longer able to function. According to a *New England Journal of Medicine* report, “Fred Lopez, vice chair for education at Louisiana State University (LSU) School of Medicine, observed, ‘The desperate week we spent inside Charity after Katrina is the one that everybody saw on CNN, but that was the easiest week of the last six months.’” The report goes on to say:

Many believe that mortality has also increased substantially, although specifics are difficult to obtain—the Louisiana Department of Health is still struggling to complete the compilation of 2005 data. As a crude indicator, there were 25 percent more death notices in the *Times-Picayune* in January 2006 than there were in January 2005 (Berggren and Curiel, 2006).

And, as we know from the work of social analysts at the New Vision Institute, the elderly were more likely to die, and the Black elderly were disproportionately more likely to die as a result of the storm (Sharkey 2006). The aftermath of the storm cruelly illustrated Habermas’s admonition that “The capacity of the public sphere to solve problems *on its own* is limited,” and the same can be said of civil society more generally (Habermas 1992[1996], p. 359, emphasis in the original). But in the aftermath of the hurricane, the state failed in its responsibility to its citizens, and those who were poor and Black suffered the consequences of the state’s failure disproportionately.

Equally fundamental, perhaps, especially if we think about the rights of liberal citizens, is the massive disenfranchisement of African Americans in New Orleans as a result of May’s municipal elections. Brown sociologist John Logan has estimated that, of those who were eligible to vote in the May 2006 election, 102,000 African Americans, as opposed to 48,000 Whites, were scattered outside of the state (Clark-Flory 2006; Logan 2006). Furthermore, only an estimated 31,000 African Americans from New Orleans were scattered within the state, as opposed to 92,000 of the White citizens of New Orleans. All in all, New Orleans may lose up to 80% of its Black population. Logan has characterized the current in-city electorate as distinctly White and middle class—a complete reversal of the city’s recent electoral demographics. The state provided just ten locations around the state of Louisiana (in addition to absentee ballots) to “accommodate” the displaced voters.

The stakes are huge. Much of the discussion on how to rebuild the city has been delayed until the new administration is in place. There have been calls by both some newspapers’ editorial voices and some business interests to dramatically reshape the city in such a way that “the unwanted element” does not return. One example is an October 17, 2005, *Baton Rouge Advocate* editorial, which opens by stating:

It is time to think rationally, not politically: New Orleans and Louisiana would be better off if the state does not rebuild Southern University in New Orleans. . . Its existence has always been more about racial politics than education policy (*Baton Rouge Advocate* 2005).

The editors go on to suggest that the students of this historically Black university could “attend community colleges.”

Given the weakness of the Black counterpublic, the New Orleans Black community was in danger of being frozen out of having any voice in the rebuilding of New Orleans, regardless of whether Nagin or Landrieu won the mayoral election. As many observers reported, there was little difference in the actual platforms and programs of the two Democratic candidates. The precariousness of the situation of poor Blacks, in particular, can be seen in the viewpoints of the old White ruling class of the city. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that James Reiss, a wealthy (so wealthy that in the aftermath of Katrina he “helicoptered in an Israeli security company to guard his Audubon Place house and those of his neighbors”) New Orleans shipbuilder who was the Nagin administration’s chairman of regional transportation district, bluntly stated:

Those who want to see this city rebuilt want to see it done in a completely different way: demographically, geographically and politically. . . I’m not just speaking for myself here. The way we’ve been living is not going to happen again, or we’re out (Cooper 2005).

Many business and political leaders wanted to ensure that the majority of poor Black New Orleans citizens would not return.

In *American Citizenship* (1991), the late political theorist Judith Shklar argued that two key components of one’s standing as a citizen in this nation are the right to vote and the opportunity to earn. Both have been undermined in the wake of Katrina—and the result is being politically engineered just as the more general disenfranchisement of African Americans in the South was engineered a century ago. The mechanisms are not so different: carefully crafted election rules, often capitalizing on Blacks’ relative lack of material resources, which disproportionately disadvantage Blacks. I would argue that the rules for this election share at least a family resemblance to mechanisms such as the poll tax which proved so successful at the turn of the previous century. The pleas of organizations such as the NAACP and many others have fallen on deaf ears, as both state officials and federal judges have found the current rules adequate to ensure a “fair” election, and have refused to revise the rules by, for example, setting up out-of-state polling places or delaying the election until more residents could return and/or more inclusive election rules could be crafted.

The devastation of the associational base of Black civil society in New Orleans and the consequent severe undermining of the Black counterpublic was a predictable consequence of the hurricane’s aftermath, given the lack of resources and power possessed by the local Black community. The intersection of the disadvantages, or the intersection of race and class, ensured that, while even relatively affluent classes of Blacks in New Orleans were disproportionately more devastated than their White counterparts, the Black poor suffered a disaster of monumental proportions. This intersection of race and class accounts for the racialized character of the hurricane’s aftermath and the persistent racial divisions in U.S. society, more generally.

More surprising, some might argue, has been the demonstrated weakness of the national Black counterpublic. This weakness has been demonstrated in at least two major ways. First, if we reflect on the data I presented above, it is clear that the interpretive framework of many African Americans—according to which the aftermath of Katrina demonstrated the still existing deep racial inequalities in this country, and the government’s slow and inept response was due at least in part to racially induced indifference to the victims—was rejected by a majority of White Americans. It is particularly surprising that the proposition that Katrina exposed once again the deep racial inequalities that plague this nation was rejected, given that at the time of the disaster much of the mainstream media, including *CNN*, *NBC*, and the other major networks, explicitly promoted such a framework in much of their coverage. Yet, by the time our survey entered the field, in late October of 2005, that frame had already been rejected by a majority of Whites. By January of 2006, columnist Cathy Young of the *Boston Globe* was labeling discussions of the disparate racial impact of Katrina as “racial paranoia,” while James Taranto of the *Wall Street Journal* was labeling Black opinion on Katrina as misguided and “unhelpful” at best. The national Black counterpublic was not powerful enough to insert the framework for analysis that was represented in the overwhelming majority of Black opinion as a legitimate framework for consideration. Michael Warner has argued that “Dominant publics are by definition those that can take their discourse pragmatics and their lifeworlds for granted, misrecognizing the indefinite scope of their expansive address as universality or normalcy” (Warner 2002, p. 122). But the effect of this misrecognition is that alternative discourses become marginalized and, in this case, have real consequences for the shape of political power and the distribution of life chances in post-Katrina New Orleans.

The second way that the weakness of the Black counterpublic was manifested was in its inability to mobilize sufficient political power to influence the rules of the election game—and, as a result, the future shape of the city being rebuilt. But this was not for a lack of sympathy or concern among Blacks, including the Black middle class. Black professional associations raised generous funds, and Black students across the nation organized to spend their vacation time in rebuilding efforts. However, much of the Black leadership has bought into the neoliberal ideology that defines organizational activity as lobbying, which is built on individualist leadership models and emphasizes civil society as the sole route to group advancement. And, unlike a century ago, the range of contrary voices within the Black counterpublic is more constrained than it has been at any time since the Civil War. The result is that the ability to mobilize politically is weaker than it has been since World War I.

As righteous as the protests of the NAACP leadership may be, they stand in pale contrast not only to the hundreds of thousands of people who have hit the streets in support of immigrant rights, but also to the vigorous, militant mobilizations of the last century, which emerged out of and were produced by Black civil society *and* the Black counterpublic. The important lesson seems to have been forgotten by some, that political power and political mobilization are needed not only to win rights, but to safeguard them as well. The work of Black civil society has never proven to be sufficient to secure Black rights but must be paired with active, mass, and independent political action. What Katrina has to teach us, neoliberal fantasies aside, is that, while much has changed with the status of African Americans, that status is still precarious enough that vigorous mass political action remains a necessity, not a luxury. I’ll conclude with the words of Frederick Douglass from 1857:

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to, and you will have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words, blows, or both (Douglass cited in Dawson 2001, p. 259).

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NOTES

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2. The data is from the 2005 Racial Attitudes and the Katrina Disaster Study: Principal Investigators Michael C. Dawson, Melissa V. Harris-Lacewell, and Cathy J. Cohen (2006). The study was in the field from October 28 through November 17, 2005, with a total sample of 1252: 703 Whites, 487 Blacks, 52 Latinos, 10 Others. The Pew questions were taken from the 2005 report on their polling about Katrina.
3. It is also the case that the racial gap in the responses can help us, despite the real limitations of survey research and the skepticism of its critics such as Habermas (1992[1996]), outline the contours of the opinions of publics, public spheres, and counterpublics.
4. As William H. Sewell, Jr., (1992) argues, structures have both an instrumental and an ideational component. The latter incorporates, among other things, phenomena such as schema, norms, and *identities*. I have applied his definition of *structure* to the idea of a racial order in the United States (Dawson 2001).
5. I would like to thank Patchen Markell for highlighting this distinction as well as for the specific language.
6. I develop the idea of “Black information networks” in *Behind the Mule* (1994) and elaborate it in *Black Visions* (2001). The basic idea that has been shown to be empirically powerful is that African Americans over several generations have developed a semi-autonomous, rich, and robust information network (including newspapers, magazines, and artistic products), which provides news and analyses that often vary considerably from that which is found in the mainstream media.
7. For a variety of treatments of this theme, see Dawson (2001) for a discussion of American liberalism and Black ideologies; Horton (2005) for a general discussion of race and American political thought; and Raboteau (2004) for a discussion of this theme in the context of antebellum religious practices.
8. There is more than one Black public sphere or counterpublic; when I refer to “the” Black public sphere or counterpublic, I am referring to the national Black counterpublic within which debate about the future of the struggle for racial justice has occurred. Consequently, this sphere is envisioned as encompassing the myriad of local, regional, and specialized Black counterpublics.

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