THINKING ABOUT ROBERT PUTNAM'S ANALYSIS OF DIVERSITY

Martin Kilson
Department of Government, Harvard University

Abstract

The article evaluates Robert Putnam's discussion of two differing concepts of the role of the diversity perspective toward inter-ethnic/inter-racial relationships in American society since the 1960s—namely, the "contact theory" and the "conflict theory." The former was initially formulated by Harvard social psychologist Gordon Allport in *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954). Putnam's analysis—published in the comparative politics journal *Scandinavian Political Studies* (Vol. 30, No. 2, 2007)—favors the "conflict theory," which holds that diversity sharpens "us-against-them" inter-ethnic/inter-racial interactions. Putnam's view opposes diversity-influenced public policies. By contrast, "contact theory" holds that diversity erodes "us-against-them" interactions and thus eventually democratizes such interactions, and thereby American society generally. "Contact theory" influenced the NAACP-led civil-rights movement's quest for desegregation public policies during the 1950s, 1960s, and onward.

Keywords: Robert Putnam, Contact Theory, Conflict Theory, Desegregation, Diversity

INTRODUCTION

In the Spring 2008 issue of the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*—the major academic organ of the status of African Americans in colleges and universities—the editors reprinted the following observation by Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard's Department of Government, alongside a photograph of Putnam:

> I think it's fair to say that most (though not all) empirical studies have tended . . . to support the so-called 'conflict theory,' which suggests that, for various reasons— but above all, contention over limited resources—diversity fosters out-group distrust and in-group solidarity. On this theory, the more we are brought into

physical proximity with people of another race or ethnic background, the more we stick to 'our own' and the less we trust the 'other.'

No doubt the editors of the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* were surprised, as I was, at Putnam's observation, so I turned to his article in the comparative politics journal *Scandinavian Political Studies* (Vol. 30, No. 2, 2007) in order to sort out the manner in which Putnam arrived at a fully conservative perspective toward diversity dynamics in American society since the 1960s. I also sought to fathom why my Harvard Department of Government colleague Robert Putnam prefers the "conflict theory" perspective to the "contact theory" perspective. The "contact theory" perspective, made famous in the 1950s by the liberal social psychologist Gordon Allport (who taught at Harvard and was teaching when I was a Harvard graduate student from 1953 to 1959) holds that diversity of ethnic-group relations facilitates the viable-and-democratic functioning of core secular institutions in the modern nation-state society (e.g., schools, colleges, factories, commercial institutions, political institutions, armed forces, etc.). Allport's original work—*The Nature of Prejudice* (1954)—formalized the proposition that a key means of reducing inter-ethnic prejudice was furthering contact between ethnic/racial groups.

PUTNAM'S PERSPECTIVE ON "CONTACT THEORY" VERSUS "CONFLICT THEORY"

This is how Robert Putnam puts the distinction between "contact theory" and "conflict theory" perspectives toward diversity: "Contact theory suggests that diversity erodes the in-group/out-group distinction and enhances out-group solidarity or bridging social capital, thus lowering ethnocentrism. Conflict theory suggests that diversity enhances the in-group/out-group distinction and strengthens in-group solidarity or bonding social capital, thus increasing ethnocentrism."

As I interpret the foregoing, Putnam is saying that, from the "conflict theory" perspective, diversity of ethnic-group interrelationships in our core institutions (schools/colleges, factories/commerce, health/medical, armed forces) sharpens the "us-against-them" social dynamics. Conversely, interpreting Putnam's language, Putnam is saying that the "contact theory" perspective—in its different versions from Gordon Allport's 1950s works onward—tells us that diversity of ethnic-group interrelationships in our core institutions helps to surmount the "us-against-them" social dynamics.

I might note here that during the last two of my Harvard graduate school years, Gordon Allport had produced several protégés in social psychology and sociology (e.g., Thomas Pettigrew, Harry Caudill, Peter Rossi, Roger Brown) who, in turn, generated social research and publications that favored the public-policy application of Allport's "contact theory" so as to alter and democratize broad areas of the racist patterning of American society and institutions (areas such as schools/colleges, housing, job markets, etc.). The most prominent such Allport protégé was Thomas Pettigrew, who taught in Harvard's Department of Social Relations throughout the 1960s until the mid-1970s, when he moved to the University of California. As I will point out below, Robert Putnam's new research argues that it was wrong to use Gordon Allport's "contact theory" to democratize racist patterns in American society and institutions.

In Putnam's overall analytical framework, there is a two-fold distinction between "conflict theory" and "contact theory" perspectives toward diversity of cultural/

ethnic groups' interrelationships. One is an empirical distinction, arrived at by Putnam and a large research team using data derived from a 30,000 person survey in 2000. A second distinction is an operational distinction, in which I am especially interested for my purpose of decoding Putnam's presentation of his antipathy to the "contact theory" perspective in his *Scandinavian Political Studies* article.

Operationally, adherents to the "conflict theory," such as Putnam, assert that diversity in our core institutions sharpens "us-against-them" social dynamics. In Putnam's words, "Conflict theory suggests that diversity enhances the in-group/out-group distinction and strengthens in-group solidarity or bonding social capital, thus increasing ethnocentrism." (p. 144) Put another way, "On this theory, the more we are brought into physical proximity with people of another race or ethnic background, the more stick to 'our own' and the less we trust the 'other.'" (p. 142)

Conversely, Putnam's presentation in his *Scandinavian Political Studies* article asserts that adherents to Gordon Allport's "contact theory" (which I am, I should say) assert that diversity in our core institutions produces a decline in or dispersal of "us-against-them" social dynamics. This means that diversity—when fostered via affirmative-action desegregation public policy—results in an eventual weakening of ethnocentrism. In Putnam's words, "Contact theory suggests that diversity erodes the in-group/out-group distinction and enhances out-group solidarity or bridging social capital, thus lower ethnocentrism."

PUTNAM SCHEMA'S ANTIPATHY TO ALLPORT-INFLUENCED 1960S DESEGREGATION

Robert Putnam expresses his rejection of Allport-influenced 1960s desegregation policies early in his *Scandinavian Political Studies* article (pp. 141–142) and elaborates on his rejection towards the end of the article (pp. 159 ff.). Putnam points out that another post-World War II social psychologist at Harvard, Samuel Stouffer, contributed to "contact theory" in his book, *The American Soldier* (1949), which showed, among other things, that the policy of integrating Black soldiers in fighting units with White soldiers was opposed most strongly by "white soldiers who in fact had no [previous] contact with black soldiers," which is to say that World War II White soldiers were true believers in the American White supremacist ethos. The result was, of course, that Black soldiers fought and died in a viciously racist United States Army.

Putnam then turns to the 1950s research of Gordon Allport reported in his famous book, *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), and developed further by his protégés like Thomas Pettigrew. Putnam portrays the transition from Stouffer's findings to Allport's "contact theory" thus:

> In the theoretical toolkit of social science we find two diametrically opposed perspectives on the effects of diversity on social connection. The first, usually labeled the 'contact hypothesis,' argues that diversity fosters inter-ethnic tolerance and social solidarity. As we have more contact with people who are unlike us, we overcome our initial hesitation and ignorance and come to trust them more. Some of the most striking evidence in support of the contact hypothesis came originally from a famous study of the American soldier during the Second World War.
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> . . . Evidence of this sort suggested to social psychologists, beginning with Gordon Allport in the 1950s, the optimistic hypothesis that if we have more contact with people of other ethnic and racial backgrounds (or at least more

contact in the right circumstances), we will begin to trust one another more. (p. 141)

Following this skeletal presentation of the "contact theory" perspective's roots from Stouffer to Allport, Putnam then relates how it was eventually applied to fashioning the public policy of desegregation. Putnam thus relates this from-theory-to-policy transformation:

More formally, according to this [contact] theory, diversity reduces ethnocentric attitudes and fosters out-group trust and solidarity. If black and white children attend the same schools, for example, race relations will improve. This logic . . . was an important part of the legal case that [via the NAACP] led the United States Supreme Court to require racial desegregation in the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954. (pp. 141–142)

It is right after this characterization of the from-theory-to-policy transformation of the "contact theory" perspective that Putnam presents the paragraph I quote at the beginning of this article. As Putnam puts it: "For progressives, the contact theory is alluring, but I think it is fair to say that most (though not all) empirical studies have tended instead to support the so-called 'conflict theory,' which suggests that, for various reasons—but above all, contention over limited resources—diversity fosters out-group distrust ["us-against-them" dynamics] and in-group solidarity [high-level social capital patterns]. *On this [conflict] theory, the more we are brought into physical proximity with people of another race or ethnic background, the more we stick to 'our own' [favor "us-against-them" patterns] and the less we trust the 'other'.*" (p. 142, emphasis added)

Let me note here my disagreement with Putnam's idea that "contention over limited resources" is a major causal factor why "diversity fosters out-group distrust" ["us-against-them" dynamics]. Putnam's formulation is for me too *mono-materialistic*, shall we say. I would hypothesize, alternatively, that in modern democratic nations cultural or ethnic groups define their "in-group identity" (their "us" identity) owing more to normative and ideational factors (as these factors shape cultural boundaries among human groups) rather than materialistic factors such as "contention over limited resources," as Putnam puts it.

It is, then, from this conceptual vantage point on the generic character of "us-against-them" inter-ethnic dynamics in modern nation-state societies like the United States that the civil rights activist sector among the evolving twentieth century African-American intelligentsia eventually fashioned a public-policy nexus with the "contact theory" perspective toward diversity patterns. The goal of this interaction between the activist African American intelligentsia and "contact theory" discourse was this: Namely, to employ the public-policy arm of our democratic American state to fashion institutional mechanisms—mechanisms across a broad swath of American institutional life (education, factories, hospitals and healthcare, commerce, the professions, etc.)—that slowly but surely facilitated the inclusion of Black people.

In this connection, it is crucial to underline the fundamental importance of the "contact theory" perspective toward diversity to the blooming of progressive desegregation public-policy agitation among African American professionals in the post-World War II years, from the early 1950s onward. Although this African American intelligentsia anti-racism public-policy agitation preceded Gordon Allport's formulation of "contact theory" (commencing as this agitation did in the 1930s via African

American organizations like the New Negro Alliance Movement, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the National Urban League, the National Medical Association, the National Negro Congress), this public-policy agitation against segregation gained a new momentum in the post-World War II years when the civil rights activist African American intelligentsia linked with or embraced "contact theory."

Interestingly enough, Robert Putnam intimates that he has a slight understanding of this developmental interface between the desegregation public-policy activism among the post-World War II African American intelligentsia and "contact theory," when he introduces his support for the "conflict theory" with the phrase, "For progressives, the contact theory is alluring . . ." The crucial point to be made, however, is this: *"Contact theory" was not just "alluring," but was a crucial conceptual tool for that brilliant cadre of African American academics and professionals who contributed significantly to translating the "contact theory" into operational public policies that challenged the White supremacist juggernaut from the 1950s onward.* Among those seminal Black academics and professionals I have in mind were scholars of social psychology, sociology, and anthropology—scholars like Kenneth B. Clark, Mamie Clark, Irene Diggs, Allison Davis, Charles S. Johnson, Horace Mann Bond, Ira Reid, St. Clair Drake, Doxey Wilkerson, and Hylan Lewis; economic analysts like Robert Weaver, Abram Harris, and John P. Davis (Weaver and Davis did graduate studies at Harvard during the 1930s); and political analysts like Ralph Bunche, Robert Martin, John Aubrey Davis, and Robert Brisbane (Bunche and Brisbane did graduate studies at Harvard in 1930s and 1940s).

I also have in mind a fascinating cadre of first-generation African American civil rights lawyers (who were often scholars at African American law schools—especially Howard University Law School) like the great Charles Hamilton Houston (founder of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in 1929), George Johnson, James Nabrit (each was Dean of Howard Law School), Leon Ransom, Belford Lawsom, George Rycraw, Thurman Dodson, Edward Lovett, Elmer Henderson, William Hastie, and Thurgood Marshall, to mention just a few. As for Hastie and Marshall, Hastie became the first African American member of a federal court, and Marshall became the first African American member of the United States Supreme Court. In short, the finest intellectual talent among African Americans contributed overwhelmingly to both elaborating the analytical content of "contact theory perspective toward diversity" and to translating it into operational public policies that helped vanquish America's 20th century White supremacist juggernaut.

Without that cadre of African-American academics and professionals who advanced and applied the "contact theory" perspective toward diversity, the achievements in challenging America's racist patterns that are celebrated today (including Senator Barack Obama's nomination as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate) are, I submit, unthinkable. Robert Putnam's analysis of the interface of "contact theory" and "conflict theory" is, I suggest, devoid of a basic understanding of this. For a study of the formative development of the civil rights activism intellectual patterns among that brilliant cadre of 20th century African American social scientists and lawyers, see case-study chapters of the careers of Horace Mann Bond, sociologist, and John Aubrey Davis, political scientist, in Martin Kilson, *The Making of Black Intellectuals: Studies on the African-American Intelligentsia* (forthcoming, University of Missouri Press). It should be mentioned here that Professor Charles Ogletree of the Harvard University Law School founded in 2006 the Harvard University Charles Hamilton Houston Civil Rights Center in recognition of the contributions to American democracy of the above-mentioned group of twentieth-century African American civil rights academics and professionals.

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PUTNAM'S OPPOSITION TO CONTACT THEORY'S
POLICY DEMOCRATIZATION

Putnam's article in *Scandinavian Political Studies* contains some analytical confusion for the average reader of the article in regard to the author's antipathy to "contact theory's" historic role in producing public policies that challenged the racist marginalization of Black people in twentieth-century American society. This confusion results from the fact that Putnam's article has a two-layer diversity discussion, so to speak. On one layer, Putnam treats the contrasting notions of diversity as between "contact theory" and "conflict theory" perspectives. The former holds that diversity, through bringing together persons of different racial and cultural backgrounds, reduces "us-against-them" dynamics (ethnocentrism). The latter holds that diversity, through bringing together persons of different racial and cultural backgrounds, sharpens "us-against-them" dynamics or, in Putnam's words, "diversity enhances . . . in-group solidarity . . . thus increasing ethnocentrism" (p. 144).

On the other diversity-discussion layer that covers most of Putnam's article, Putnam treats the phenomenon of diversity in the cultural patterning of American communities as of 2000, paying particular attention to immigration. The article presents quantitative-data analyses of six variants of cultural patterning obtained from a sample of forty-one communities nationwide. Each of the six variants was found to contain a particular outcome regarding the interface between "contact theory" and "conflict theory" perspectives. For example, Putnam interprets the data for the sixth variant thus: "This figure clearly shows that ethnocentric trust is completely uncorrelated with ethnic diversity. Thus, it suggests that neither conflict theory nor contact theory corresponds to social reality in contemporary [communities in] America" (p. 148).

Putnam follows this observation with an overall formulation regarding the application of either the "contact theory" perspective or the "conflict theory" perspective to the cultural patterning of American communities: "Diversity seems to trigger not in-group/out-group ["us-against-them"] division, but anomie or social isolation. In colloquial language, people in ethnically diverse settings appear to 'hunker down'—that is, to pull in like a turtle."

While this is ostensibly an "even-handed formulation" by Putnam regarding the relative analytical usefulness of "contact theory" versus "conflict theory" perspectives, I suggest that in final substance Putnam favors the "conflict theory" or a variant of it. Underscoring that his analysis is ultimately concerned with the quality of "social trust" or "social capital" (I prefer the term "civic efficacy"), he presents a concluding formulation regarding what might be called the "systemic role of diversity":

> . . . Inhabitants of diverse communities tend to withdraw from collective life, to distrust their neighbors, regardless of the color of their skin, to withdraw even from close friends, to expect the worst from their community and its leaders, to volunteer less, give less to charity and work on community projects less often, to register to vote less . . . and to huddle unhappily in front of the television. . . . Diversity, at least in the short run, seems to bring out the turtle in all of us. (pp. 150–51)

I interpret the foregoing concluding formulation by Putnam as apiece with his earlier antipathy to the transformation of Gordon Allport's "contact theory" perspective into public policies challenging American racism in the 1950s and onward. Interestingly enough, after presenting the foregoing conclusion, Putnam remarks:

"This conclusion is provocative . . ." Furthermore, as I'll discuss below, the provocativeness of the foregoing conclusion causes some analytical consternation for Putnam when he examines the status of African Americans in the last subsection of his article. Moreover, what Putnam dubs as his "provocative conclusion" (namely, that "Diversity . . . seems to bring out the turtle in all of us") was refuted by dynamics associated with what I dub today's "New Era Multicultural Pluralistic America." As I show below in the last two subsections of this article, *what I dub the "New Era" socio-cultural character of twenty-first century American society (shaped significantly by Gordon Allport's "contact theory" processes) facilitated enough "high-level civic efficacy" at the national level to enable the first-ever election of a Black citizen as president of the United States—namely, President Barack Obama.*

This historic American twenty-first century political-culture event is, I suggest, a refutation of Robert Putnam's core "turtle-in-all-of-us" argument. A variant of what might be called my "pro-contact theory" analysis of the political-culture meaning of the 2008 election of President Barack Obama, was recently presented by the Harvard political philosophy scholar Michael Sandel in an interview in the *New York Times* (November 1, 2009). As Professor Sandel puts it:

> Obama's election marked a shift—from politics that celebrated privatized concerns to a politics that recognized the need for effective government and larger public purposes. Across the political spectrum, people understood that national renewal requires big ambition, and a better kind of politics. . . You can't get nation-building without shared sacrifice, and you cannot inspire shared sacrifice without a narrative that appeals to the common good—*a narrative that challenges us to be citizens engaged in a common endeavor, not just consumers seeking the best deal for ourselves* (emphasis added).

Michael Sandel's understanding of the 2008 election of President Obama as representing "a narrative that challenges us to be citizens engaged in a common endeavor" is, I suggest, conceptually connected to the Allportian "contact theory" perspective toward diversity. The "contact theory" perspective offered new possibilities for expanding equalitarian dynamics in the American nation-state society, and the 2008 election of President Obama can be viewed as one of the "new equalitarian dynamics."

COMPARATIVE AMERICAN ACCULTURATION OF WHITES AND BLACKS

In the last subtopic treated in Putnam's article, "Becoming Comfortable with Diversity" (pp. 159–165), Putnam probes several issues relating to how Americans have reconstructed or redesigned key cultural attributes of what David Riesman, in his classic work, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), dubbed "the American character." Putnam discusses favorably the redesigning of religious identity among White Americans that has taken place from the 1950s onward: "Religious endogamy (the practice of marrying only within one's faith) has largely faded in America, at least among mainline Protestants and Catholics and Jews. In the 1950s, for the most important aspect of any adolescent's life—mating—it was essential to keep track of one's peer's religious affiliations. By the 1980s, religion was hardly more important than left- or right-handedness to romance. . . . Americans have more or less deconstructed religion as a salient line of social division over the last half century, even though religion itself remains personally important." (p. 160)

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Following this discussion, Putnam treats the topic of the overall American acculturation of non-WASP White ethnic groups (Irish, Italians, Jews, Poles, etc.) from the 1890s to the late twentieth century. Here's how Putnam relates the White-ethnic American-acculturation experience:

> A century ago America . . . experienced a large, sustained wave of immigration that massively increased our ethnic diversity in traditional terms, with the arrival of millions of immigrants of different 'races'—a term that then referred to the Italians and Polish Catholics, Russian Jews and others who were swarming into a previously White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP)-dominated society. . . . Yet fifty years later, the grandchildren of the WASPs and of the immigrants were comfortable in one another's presence. . . . The cultures of the immigrant groups permeated the broader American cultural framework, with the Americanization of St. Patrick's Day, pizza and 'Jewish' humor. In some ways 'they' became like 'us,' and in some ways our new 'us' incorporated 'them.' This was no simple, inevitable, friction-less 'straight-line' assimilation, but over several generations the initial ethnic differences became muted and less salient so that assimilation became the master trend for these immigrant groups during the twentieth century. (p. 162)

Right after this discussion of the White-ethnic American-acculturation experiences, Putnam turns to what strikes me as an incredibly short-shrifted discussion of the acculturation status of African American citizens. He introduces this discussion by noting that his *Scandinavian Political Studies* article needs to be supplemented by "a longer article [that] would also have to address the complicated racial dynamics raised by so-called 'Whiteness studies,' or in the words of one leading scholar [David Roediger]: 'how America's immigrants became White.' This accommodation of the immigrants is sometimes said to have coincided with increased prejudice and discrimination against African Americans, but was that link causally necessary or merely coincidental?" (p. 162)

I think it curious that Robert Putnam felt a need to qualify the informational directness of his observation that the American acculturation of White ethnic groups depended upon racist marginalization of African Americans. Or, in Putnam's words, the White-ethnic acculturation "is sometimes said to have coincided with increased prejudice and discrimination against African Americans, but was that link causally necessary or merely coincidental." As I decode these Putnam words, the phrase *"sometimes said to have coincided with"* racism, suggests that Putnam thinks genuine racism against Black people did not occur. So does Putnam's qualifying phrase *"was that link causally necessary or merely coincidental,"* intimating that a WASP/White-ethnic racist juggernaut did not operate historically as a purposeful—premeditated—Black-oppressive dynamic throughout most of twentieth century America. In this discussion I believe Putnam is squarely wrong, historically uninformed.

PUTNAM'S ANALYSIS NEGLECTS THE HISTORY OF RACISM

I consider Putnam's above-mentioned qualifying comments dubious because of the incontrovertible historical evidence *that African American parity of American-acculturation with White ethnic groups (Irish, Italians, Jews, etc.) was systematically and systemically restricted and thus delayed.* This evidence should be familiar to a political science scholar in American politics, especially a top-level scholar like Robert Putnam.

I have in mind two senses of "systemic restriction" associated with Black people's longstanding struggle for parity with White ethnic groups. One sense of "systemic restriction" relates to the fact that agricultural production depended in the South heavily upon massive and often cruel exploitation of African American labor.

To document this, I turn to an early 1950s work on Black people's massive role in twentieth-century agricultural production, a study by the Marxist economist Victor Perlo titled *The Negro in Southern Agriculture* (1953). As Perlo informs us:

> The importance of Negro labor becomes more apparent if attention is concentrated on the large commercial farms and plantations—less than 5% of the total [farms]—which account for roughly 60% of the value of marketed farm production. These decisive farms depend mainly on wage laborers and croppers. . . . The Negro people supply almost two-thirds of this basic labor force. . . . *Not only do the Negro people supply the majority of the labor for commercial agriculture in the South, but they are the most exploited, and supply an even greater portion of the total profit.* . . . If agriculture is the leading industry in the South generally, it is peculiarly the leading industry of the Negro. . . . (pp. 14–15) (Emphasis Added)

Furthermore, for a vividly graphic picture of the massive slave-labor-like cruelty (via institutionalized peonage labor) associated with the dominant role of African American laborers in America's twentieth-century agricultural production in the South from the 1880s through the 1950s, I suggest the recent historical study by Douglass Blackmon titled *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (2008). Blackmon is the Atlantic Bureau Chief for the *Wall Street Journal* and grew up among the Mississippi White bourgeoisie, which suggests that in producing this seminal historical work he had an epiphany regarding the role of Southern power-class Whites' peonage labor practices in generating a major part of twentieth-century America's national wealth creation. What Blackmon's *Slavery by Another Name* relates more broadly than earlier studies of peonage labor is that for nearly three-quarters of a century, the Southern peonage labor system was economically extensive and viciously and massively oppressive. In short, Southern peonage labor from the 1880s into the 1950s amounted to Gulag-type labor practices, involving horrific physical violence against and dehumanization of Southern African Americans. Only David Oshinsky's *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (1996) matches Blackmon's book in this regard.

The second sense of "systemic restriction" I have in mind is at least mentioned by Putnam, albeit hesitatingly. This restriction relates to what scholars such as Noel Ignatiev, David Roediger, and Peter Kolchin have uncovered in the field of American racial history—namely, that *White ethnic groups collaborated with the WASP-dominated White supremacist juggernaut* in the marginalization-pariahization-oppression of Black people. Moreover, WASP/White-ethnic alliance was executed typically via a combination of machine-type electoral/political power, on the one hand, and on the other hand vigilante-cum-bureaucratic violence against Black people (e.g., race riots, lynchings, police brutality, etc.). This, then, is fundamental to understanding why, here in the first decade of the twenty-first century, our country has not obtained African American parity of American status-acculturation with White ethnic groups.

What's crucially important about studies by Ignatiev, Roediger, and Kolchin—and this Putnam's analysis ignores—is the cynical history of the multi-layered modes

regarding how White ethnic groups like Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Polish Americans, and others joined ranks with existing WASP-dominated racist patterns for the "systemic restriction" of African American citizens. In return for such cynical White-ethnic collaboration in WASP-dominated racist dynamics in the American system, Irish, Italians, Poles, Jews and other White-ethnic groups (e.g., Hungarian Americans, Ukrainian Americans, Greek Americans, Armenian Americans, etc.) acquired a faster and broader American systemic-inclusion process.

Above all, through their acquisition of a racial-caste skewed acculturation-parity with the dominant WASP cultural group (and note how Putnam's language celebrates and even fetishizes this), such White-ethnic groups as Irish Americans, Italian Americans, Polish Americans, Jewish Americans, etc. *helped to reinforce America's White-supremacist juggernaut*. It might be mentioned, in this context, that among American academic historians there was produced a curious body of historical literature that amounted to what might be called "scientized historiographic celebration" of what I call "racial-caste skewed acculturation-parity" among White American groups. This literature was a kind of "historiographic celebration" of the historical dynamics that shaped the *WASP/White-ethnic racial-caste skewed acculturation parity*, which is to say, an acculturation-parity *over-and-against Black people's legitimate quest for parity of American acculturation*. This literature was produced by historians like Oscar Handlin, Crane Brinton, Henry Steele Commager, Daniel Boorstin, and others. Note, in this connection, Robert Putnam's deferential summary version of this "scientized historiographic celebration" of WASP/White-ethnic historical racist collaboration:

> . . . The cultures of the immigrant groups permeated the broader [WASP-dominated] American cultural framework, with the Americanization of St. Patrick's Day, pizza and 'Jewish humour.' In some ways 'they' became like 'us,' and in some ways our new 'us' incorporated 'them.'

American historical scholarship had to await the rise of African American historians like Carter G. Woodson, John Hope Franklin, Benjamin Quarles, and Rayford Logan (and the next generation of Black historians like Gerald Horne, Quentin Taylor, Sterling Stuckey, Nell Painter, Vincent P. Franklin, Dennis Dickerson, Joe W. Trotter, etc.) to critique such "scientized historiographic celebration" of the dynamics of the racial-caste skewed WASP/White-ethnic acculturation-parity alliance. And I should mention another set of scholarly works that critique "scientized historiographic celebration" of WASP/White-ethnic racist collaboration—namely, works by progressive White historians, such as Philip Foner, Richard Hofstadter, Elliott Rudwick, Herbert Shapiro, Kenneth Kusmer, Leon Litwack, Eric Foner, and George Frederickson, among others.

For a recent and brilliant historiographic alternative to what I call "scientized historiography" vis-à-vis the WASP/White-ethnic racial-caste skewed acculturation-parity alliance against African-Americans' quest for American acculturation, see the Princeton University historian Nell Painter's *Creating Black Americans* (2006). For an equally brilliant but earlier historiographic alternative to "scientized historiography" regarding the WASP/White-ethnic racist-skewed acculturation-parity alliance against Black people, see the Vanderbilt University historian Dennis Dickerson's *Out of the Crucible: Black Steelworkers in Western Pennsylvania*, *1875–1980* (1986). Dickerson's pioneering study of the struggles surrounding the settlement of urban Black working-class communities in the industrial cities and towns of Western Pennsylvania offers detailed characterization of a century of vigilante-cum-

bureaucratic violence against African Americans, executed by the WASP/White-ethnic alliance.

A PLURALISTIC NATION-BUILDING LESSON FROM AMERICA'S PAST

I: Prologue

On the last two pages of his *Scandinavian Political Studies* article, Robert Putnam ruminates about the need for "a longer article" that would address a broader subject than does the *Scandinavian Political Studies* article. His suggestions for the contents of "a longer article" are as follows:

> Such an article would explore the effects of 'Americanization' in public schools, as well as the transition in American nationalism during the 1930s and 1940s from 'ethnic nationalism' to 'civic nationalism.' . . . It would explore the role played by political parties and religious institutions, especially the Catholic Church. It would grapple with the divergent meanings of assimilation. . . . It would weigh the potential differences between the twentieth- and twentieth-first-century waves of immigration. . . .
>
> And most fundamentally and most controversially, that longer historical analysis would need to re-open one of the questions that I earlier set aside: To what extent are the two different forms of diversity in America today (i.e., that involving recent immigrants and that involving African Americans) really analogous? . . . . Within the U.S. does diversity in the workplace or in church or in school have the same effects as the neighborhood diversity I have examined in this article? (pp. 162–163)

II: Analytical Schema Alternative to Robert Putnam's

As I attempted to interpret what might be called *the overall American nation-building pattern* suggested in Robert Putnam's *Scandinavian Political Studies* article, I arrived at an analytical schema alternative to that suggested by Putnam. My analytical schema posits that during the period from the 1880s to the mid-1960s, the American nation-state comprised a distinct socio-cultural pattern that I'll call "American System I." And from the mid-1960s to 2008 the American nation-state comprised another distinct socio-cultural pattern that I'll call "American System II."

American System I might also be called "Old-Era Multicultural Pluralist America," existing, say, from the 1880s to the 1960s. The other, *American System II*, might be called "New-Era Multicultural Pluralist America," existing, say, from the mid-1960s to today. Following is a brief discussion of my analytical understanding of the five-generation time-period metamorphosis from *American System I* to *American System II*, which is to say from the "Old-Era Multicultural Pluralist America" to today's "New-Era Multicultural Pluralist America."

From the 1880s into the 1960s, there prevailed, within the historical transition from *American System I* to *American System II*, what might be called a "primary-developmental phase" and "secondary-developmental phase" of America's multicultural community patterning. In the primary-developmental phase, the major cultural constituents were racially White. They were defined in terms of juridical-political interrelationships along nationality lines (e.g., Irish American, Italian American, Polish American, etc.) or along denominational lines (e.g., Catholic American, Lutheran American, Jewish American, etc.).

What there were in the way of racially non-White cultural constituents in the "primary-developmental phase," such cultural groups (e.g., Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, African Americans, American Indians) experienced what might be called "caste-status demarcation." They experienced status stigmatization. Thus, the non-White groups were systemically controlled through restricted political-status and restricted socio-cultural boundaries within what was officially dubbed "democratic America."

Put another way, the non-White groups had imposed upon them, by a combination of state practices and ideological propaganda (a process executed through a WASP/White-ethnic alliance), an illegitimacy status resulting in a marginalized, pariahized, oppressed subsystem for non-White groups within numerous socio-political spheres of American democracy. Moreover, this stigmatized racial-caste status was sustained via widespread disenfranchisement, lynchings of non-Whites, vigilante riots, and police brutalities.

During the primary-developmental phase of *American System I*, social studies of an evolving modern pluralistic American society that commenced at universities like the University of Chicago and Columbia University provided the first systematic knowledge and understanding of *American System I*. The first crop of such studies was produced between the 1920s and 1940s, and included R. A. Schemerhorn's *These Our People: Minorities in American Culture*; Robert Park's *Old World Traits Transplanted*; Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto*; W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*; Harold Foote Gosnell's *Machine Politics: Chicago Model*; Robert and Helen Lynd's two classic works *Middletown* and *Middletown in Transition*; William Whyte's *Street Corner Society*; David McKean's *The Boss*; and August Hollingshead's *Elmstown's Youth*, to mention just a few. Further studies were produced from the late 1940s onward, such as Arthur Mann's two-volume work *LaGuardia*; Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?*' Milton Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life*; John Higham's *Strangers in the Land*; David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*; and C. Wright Mills' *White Collar*.

These studies revealed numerous dysfunctional characteristics associated with what might be called "low-level civic efficacy" patterns (Putnam calls this "social capital" patterns) in the social system of White ethnic groups during *American System I* (1880s–1950s). The Putnam "conflict theory" perspective toward diversity (that diversity sharpens the "us-against-them" dynamics) suggests that the resulting weak "social capital" patterns (I prefer the term "civic efficacy" patterns) are unique to the Allportian-influenced "New-Era Multicultural Pluralist America"—*the American System II* (1960s–2008). Putnam's analysis is mistaken in this regard, however. In the above-mentioned studies of White ethnic groups' development during *American System I*, can be found a plethora of weak "social capital" patterns ("low-level civic efficacy" patterns as I call it).

Consult, for example: studies on working-class Italian Americans and their high intra-ethnic criminality and violence (e.g., Whyte's *Street Corner Society;* Nelli's *Italians in Chicago*); studies on working-class Irish Americans and their high-level political corruption, high-level theft of public resources, and violence (e.g., McKean's *The Boss*, based on Jersey City-Hudson County, New Jersey); and other studies, too, such as on working-class Polish Americans (Thomas-Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*), and on working-class Jewish Americans (Wirth's *The Ghetto* based on Chicago). Harold Foote Gosnell's *Machine Politics: Chicago Model* warrants special mention here. Gosnell studies the role of autocratic/oligarchic party-machine processes ("Boss Rule" which was pathologically corrupt and violent) among Chicago's proletarian Irish Americans, Italian Americans, and Polish Americans between the two World Wars. Such studies inform us that Robert Putnam's overly present-

focused conception in his "conflict theory" perspective on diversity results in an analysis that is lacking in an adequate historical dimension.

Furthermore, these studies also reveal that the historical metamorphosis between *American System I* and *American System II* generated socio-political dynamics that produced what the social theorist Seymour Martin Lipset, in seminal works like *The First New Nation* (1979), called "cross-cutting socio-political processes." During the metamorphosis between *American System I* and *American System II*, such "cross-cutting processes" intertwined nationality-religious-language attributes of White ethnic groups in ways that, first, dissolved the WASP-bigotry dynamics under *American System I* (owing partly to the electoral clout of party-machines) and second, thereby fostered new socio-cultural and socio-political patterns which shifted America toward a unified nation-state system.

In short, a significant transition within White-ethnic communities from low-level civic efficacy to high-level civic efficacy was a crucial dynamic that facilitated tectonic changes in the character of *American System I*. For example, we see changed ideological character associated with WASP-bigotry patterns vis-à-vis White-ethnic groups. Also changed were liberal-reform and social-welfare oriented federal governance mediated by the New Deal, etc.

These changes, in turn, laid the groundwork for what might be called a socio-cultural systemic metamorphosis toward an *American System II*. It is noteworthy, as already suggested, that high-level civic-efficacy processes eventually occurred most prominently in big cities (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Chicago, Detroit, Gary, Kansas City Missouri, etc.). But this process slowly occurred, too, in mid-size cities (Newark, N.J., Chester, PA, Wilmington, DE, etc.), where high-level civic efficacy eventually contributed to the metamorphosis toward a unified American national polity. And this kind of high-level civic efficacy process also occurred in factory towns like the Pennsylvania textile-mill town of 4,000 (mainly working-class Italians but also Irish and Poles and African Americans) where I grew up during the 1930s and 1940s. WASPs owned the asbestos textile mill and dominated the professions, and practiced WASP-bigotry toward the non-WASP groups from the 1880s (when the factory commenced) into the World War II era.

Returning our discussion to the national level, starting with the New Deal Era, voluntary associations, advocacy organizations, public schools, liberal clergy, and above all the electoral process—political parties, politicians and officeholders—were crucial in performing what Lipset dubbed "cross-cutting" socio-political functions. By the end of World War II and owing importantly to the "cross-cutting" war-related dynamics, these socio-political functions resulted in what can be called "cross-ethnic systemic nation-state assimilation dynamics." These dynamics were crucially aided by the unique socio-cultural chemistry associated with World War II, resulting in a mature American nation-state system.

However, keep in mind above all that our post-World War II mature American nation-state society predominantly benefited White Americans. For example, the extensively upward-mobility-inducing G.I. Bill enacted in 1946 discriminated massively in allocating benefits between White Americans (WASPs and White-ethnics), on the one hand, and non-White Americans on the other hand. It short-changed African American veterans massively, as well as Chinese American, Japanese American, and Native American veterans. Yet despite these important limitations, the World War II-induced socio-political and socio-cultural systemic changes were stepping stones into a mature American society. They facilitated a qualitative metamorphosis out of an *American System I* (an "Old-Era Multicultural Pluralist America") and into an *American System II*. Today, in the first decade of the twenty-first

century, we inhabit a society that can be dubbed a "New-Era Multicultural Pluralist America."

Finally, as I argued earlier in this article, the "New-Era America" owes a fundamental debt to the Gordon Allport-induced progressive discourse regarding diversity—a debt to the "contact theory" of diversity. Allport's "contact theory" clearly facilitated the metamorphosis from *American System I* to *American System II* between the late 1950s and 2008. Allport's "contact theory" assisted the growth of what might be called *multiculturalized political-culture forms* in today's America.

Accordingly, thanks to Gordon Allport's "contact theory," we have witnessed here in the early twenty-first century two unprecedented political-culture outcomes in 2008. First, our new multiculturalized political-culture modalities produced the successful Obama campaign for the 2008 Democratic Party Presidential Nomination. Second, on Election Day, November 4, 2008, our new multiculturalized political-culture modalities produced the election of the first-ever African American President of the United States, President Barack Obama. Between January 2008 and October 2008, I produced a series of eleven case-study analytical articles that probed in real time the development of the Obama campaign for the Democratic nomination and for election as president. They were published in the Online magazine, *Black Commentator.com*, between January 17, 2008 and October 30, 2008.

A CONCLUDING NOTE

Towards the end of Putnam's *Scandinavian Political Studies* article, Putnam refers to an important African American status-acculturation advancement over the century-old White supremacist patterns in American life. Note the following reference by Putnam to one such African American status-acculturation advancement—namely, the full-fledged status-acculturation of African Americans in the United States Armed Forces:

> . . . The United States Army today has become a relatively colour-blind institution. Systematic surveys have shown that the average American soldier has many closer inter-racial friendships than the average American civilian of the same age and social class. . . . Something that the army had actually done during the last thirty years has had the effect of reconstructing social identities and increasing social solidarity in the presence of ethnic diversity. Strict enforcement of anti-discrimination and anti-defamation policies is a key part of the story. . . . (p. 161)

Now the foregoing is, for me, a somewhat curious observation by Putnam on the U.S. Army's successful vanquishing of racist practices. I find it curious because Putnam's observation never mentions that the "something that the army has actually done . . . strict enforcement of anti-discrimination . . . policies" connects back across a half-century to Gordon Allport's "contact theory."

Had Putnam made this connection explicit, he would have given credence to the fact that top-down Armed Forces elite authority-backed routing of White supremacist patterns among U.S. soldiers, amounted to "affirmative action policy" at its best. This, in turn, has resulted in important systemic advances in the multicultural and interracial character of American life today. By 2000 nearly two-fifths of non-commissioned officers in the U.S. Marines were African Americans. Furthermore, owing to affirmative action practices in higher education and in many businesses during the post-Civil Rights Movement era, there has been the development of an unprecedentedly broad-based African-American professional/business/technical class.

Moreover, from the 1980s to the early twenty-first century, the existence of the new "African American P-B-T class," let's call it, has contributed to new systemic-political capabilities within the ranks of the African American upper stratum. These new political capabilities we witnessed on Election Day 2008, with the election of Barack Obama as the first African American President of the United States. At the same time, we also witnessed a crucial example of how Allport's "contact theory" perspective toward diversity has been borne out by early 21st century American society.

Thanks to African American professionals' civil-rights activism and the enormous upheaval associated with it, Gordon Allport's "contact theory" was morphed into progressive public policies, such as desegregation, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and affirmative action. And, in turn, these "Allportian-policies," let's dub them, eventually contributed to democratizing ethnocentrist and racist "us-against-them" inter-ethnic patterns. Robert Putnam's analysis of the interface of "contact theory" and "conflict theory" perspectives toward diversity does not help us understand the crucial historical dynamics associated with democratizing ethnocentrist and racist "us-against-them" inter-ethnic patterns in twentieth-century American society.

One last thought: I felt that Putnam's article exhibited a limited understanding of what I consider an important fact regarding how liberal or progressive socio-political advancement takes place in democratic polities—especially socio-political advancement that spawns processes which, in turn, reform what might be called "deformed authoritarian subsystems" that prevail for many generations within otherwise democratic nation-states like the United States. I have in mind, above all, the "deformed authoritarian subsystem" of racist marginalization, pariahization, and oppression of African Americans from the 1880s to the 1960s. I also have in mind the late nineteenth into the twentieth century "deformed authoritarian subsystem" of oligarchic-capitalist oppression of unorganized White-ethnic proletarians and their trade-union rights.

The systemic liberal reformation of such "deformed authoritarian subsystems" within democracies requires, I submit, more than academic-based social theories. Popular social movement activism is also required, which is precisely what the twentieth century African American civil rights movement was all about, and what it continues to be about here in the early twenty-first century. In 2009, we Americans celebrate three important events associated with the long road of social movement struggle against those "deformed authoritarian subsystems" that hobbled American democracy.

First, we celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, whom many historians consider the greatest American President owing to his brilliant presidential leadership that spawned the end of American slavery through the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation and the defeat of the Confederacy by the Union Army in 1865. Second, we celebrate the Inauguration of the first African-American President of the United States. And last but not least, we celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the NAACP and the visionary leadership of one of its key 1909 founders—W. E. B. Du Bois, a graduate of Fisk University and Harvard University and author in 1903 of that quintessential text of twentieth-century African-American progressivism, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The NAACP was the great warhorse of Black people's freedom struggle, and without its one-hundred year civil rights movement leadership role the election of President Barack Obama could not have occurred.

Corresponding author: Professor Martin Kilson, Department of Government, Harvard University, Knafel Hall – E304, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Martin Kilson

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