

THE CHANGING POLITICS OF COLOR-BLIND RACISM

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During the past decade, a range of scholars have analyzed “color blindness” as the dominant racial ideology for the defense of white supremacy (e.g., Carr, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003; Doane, 2003; Brown et al., 2003). In brief, “color blindness” incorporates a series of claims regarding the current nature of race relations in the United States, beginning with the assertion that as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and the decline of prejudicial attitudes among whites, racism is no longer a structural phenomenon and the only racism that persists in contemporary American society involves isolated “hate crimes” and other actions of the few remaining prejudiced individuals. This leads to the conclusion that race and racism no longer “matter” in American society with respect to social and economic participation. From this platform, it is then possible to argue that persisting racial inequality is either the result of happenstance or due to dysfunctional and socially pathological behaviors on the part of minority individuals and communities. Politically, “color blindness” has been employed to support the position that race-based policies for the amelioration of segregation or racial inequality are unnecessary, “unfair” to whites and in violation of basic principles of equal treatment in a democratic society.

My objective in this chapter is not to debunk the myth of “color blindness.” That has been done effectively elsewhere, most notably by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2001, 2003), Joe Feagin (2000), and the authors of

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Whitewashing Race (Brown et al., 2003). Instead, I will examine what I believe is the continuing *evolution* of "color-blind" racial ideology, as proponents refine their presentation to confront new challenges and pursue new political objectives. In my opinion, understanding the changing politics of "color blindness" is essential for both the sociology of race relations and the practice of anti-racist politics.

RACIAL IDEOLOGIES AND RACIAL DISCOURSE

Ideologies are the belief systems or mental models that individuals and groups use to interpret or explain their environment. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) observed in their influential book *Racial Formation in the United States* (p. 68), the racial understandings of society are constantly being transformed as a result of political struggle. Moreover, racial ideologies are grounded in "racialized social systems" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 37), where the political, economic, and social institutions of society are intertwined with hierarchically ordered racial categories. As racialized groups struggle to maintain or to challenge systems of domination, ideologies play a key role as individuals and groups seek to mobilize supporters, gain compatriots, and neutralize or discredit opponents.

One of the best vehicles for studying racial ideologies is *racial discourse*, which I define as the collective text and talk of society with respect to issues of race. Discourse provides a central connection between macro-level racial ideologies and the micro-level understandings of individuals. Elite, media, and social movement discourses shape the social and cultural environments in which individuals acquire knowledge and in which they attach meaning to situations (Gabriel, 1998; van Dijk, 1993). For individual actors, discursive frames shape the mental models or "common sense" beliefs through which individuals interpret social reality. With respect to racial issues, these individual mental models or social representations – whether or not they are clearly articulated – are used to "explain" causes of phenomena (e.g., segregation, racial disparities in poverty and incarceration) and shape individual political attitudes (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Yet this macro-micro relationship is inherently reciprocal. While individual beliefs are shaped by larger social forces, it is also true that the discursive acts of individuals and groups influence (i.e., reinforce or transform) larger level cultural understandings and political ideologies (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Consequently, the analysis of public discourse is essential to understanding racial ideologies and racial attitudes.

I contend that discourse is best understood as a contested process and as *political* conflict. As individuals and groups make claims about the nature of the racial order, they do not operate in a vacuum, but in a particular set of social and political circumstances or “political opportunity structures” (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Thus, claims about race occur in response to specific racial events – e.g., affirmative action cases, school desegregation cases, claims of police brutality, disasters such as Hurricane Katrina – or longer term social trends. Discursive acts represent the material and political interests of individuals and groups and are generally directed toward strategic goals. Discourses of dominant groups work to legitimize and reproduce dominance by minimizing the extent of inequality, marginalizing claims of subordinate groups, and moving to make dominant group understandings normative for the larger society (Doane, 1997). At the same time, dominant discourses are not unopposed, but may be challenged by subordinate groups and even by dissident factions within the dominant group. In this political conflict, each side attempts to define the terms of the debate and to frame issues in a manner that will advance their material interests and political objectives. As Anne Esacove (2004) observes, this creates a process of “dialogic framing,” where movements and countermovements respond to each other’s discursive strategies by adopting new tactics. In essence, we are left with an ideological and rhetorical chess match, where each actor’s move is influenced by the preceding moves of the opposition.

COLOR BLINDNESS AND U.S. RACIAL POLITICS

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, color blindness is currently the dominant racial ideology for the defense of white supremacy. While discussion of color blindness per se is a relatively recent phenomenon, its roots run deep. Color blindness has slowly emerged over the past three to four decades since the end of the Civil Rights Movement. From the vantage point of the present, it has become commonplace to assert that the Civil Rights Movement transformed racial politics in the United States. In addition to the dismantling of legal segregation and the passage of civil rights legislation, the Civil Rights Movement constituted a broad-based movement for racial justice and an attack upon the existing system of racial stratification in the United States. Such a challenge to the racial order did not go uncontested. Once the Civil Rights Movement changed its focus from segregation to economic inequality and de facto segregation, the political landscape began to change. As Omi and Winant (1986) and Stephen Steinberg (1995)

have observed, subsequent decades saw a shifting of racial politics, a "racial reaction" or "backlash" that sought to defend the structural advantages enjoyed by white Americans.

Yet such a conservative countermovement faced formidable challenges. One of the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement was the discrediting of traditional and overt expressions of racism. In the face of the institutionalization of civil rights and the ascension of a more egalitarian discourse, it was now no longer possible to defend the status quo by using direct assertions of white supremacy. What slowly emerged was the use of code words (e.g., "law and order," "neighborhood schools," "reverse discrimination"), general appeals to egalitarian principles, and the denial of racism that constituted the core of the color-blind frame. Such approaches were often coupled with more general conservative projects such as the attacks on "big government," welfare, and liberalism in general. This eventually made it possible to oppose racial equality without appearing to be "racist" – or at least being able to maintain a facade of plausible deniability. Even a resurgence of extremist and white supremacist groups served a purpose by enabling the white mainstream to buttress its anti-racist credentials by condemning their behavior and contrasting it with color blindness. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, this "backlash" or "reaction" continued to gain momentum to the extent that what we now call color-blind racism is the dominant racial ideology in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003; Brown et al., 2003).

I believe that the ascendancy of color blindness is a result of its resonance with a majority of white Americans. The claims that racism is a "thing of the past" and that "race no longer matters" are appealing in the post-civil rights era. To say that individuals are "color blind" and that "everyone is the same" makes it possible for practitioners to claim the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement (as evidenced by the usurpation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s well-known quote that he dreamed of a society where his children "would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character"). But color blindness is about more than good feelings. Adherence to this set of principles enables whites to maintain and defend significant social and economic advantages. Persistent residential and school segregation and economic inequality can be explained away as coincidence, natural choices, or even the failure of peoples of color to take advantage of the "equal opportunities" presumed to be available in color-blind America. Attempts to redress racial inequality may now be decried as violations of general principles of meritocracy and free choice (on "abstracted liberalism," see Bonilla-Silva, 2003, pp. 30–36) and the victimization of innocent

whites (Doane, 1996, 1997). In essence, color blindness is a package of what Joe Feagin and Hernán Vera (1995, pp. 13–14) termed the “sincere fictions” that make it possible for whites to act in defense of white privilege while responding with indignation to allegations of racism (Doane, 1996).

While color blindness may appear to be a platform from which whites can claim to act in race-neutral ways, the social realities are more complex. Clearly, there are times when whites are “raced” either through “momentary minority” status (Gallagher, 1997, p. 7) or during “racial events” such as the trial of Los Angeles police officers for the beating of Rodney King, the O. J. Simpson trial, the killing of Amadou Diallo by the New York Police, and the recently decided Michigan affirmative action cases (Doane, 2006, p. 259). Many white Americans may employ racist dialogue (Myers, 2003) or racialized cultural explanations for inequality. And as Heather Johnson and Howard Shapiro (2003) demonstrate, there are times when whites act in overtly race-aware ways such as when choosing neighborhoods and schools. Nevertheless, color blindness provides whites with “storylines” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) to rationalize their actions or to lay the ultimate blame on minority group members.

While much of the discussion of color-blind racial ideology focuses upon its content and effects, it is important to recognize that color blindness has not just emerged from social interaction, *it has been deliberately produced!* Beginning in the 1960s, new right and neoconservative politicians and intellectuals launched a multipronged attack upon liberal policies, an endeavor in which race played both a direct (busing, affirmative action) and an indirect role (Omi & Winant, 1986; Steinberg, 1995). By virtue of access to media and adeptness in framing issues (e.g., developing catchphrases such as “reverse discrimination” and “quotas”), this elite discourse was tremendously successful in shaping public understandings regarding racial issues. We have also become increasingly aware of the role of conservative foundations and think tanks in funding legal attacks on affirmative action, media campaigns, the activities of conservative authors such as the Thernstroms and Dinesh D’Souza, and, of course, Ward Connerly’s American Civil Rights Institute and similar organizations (Stefancic & Delgado, 1996; Alterman, 1999; Cokorinos, 2003). In sum, much of color blindness is a political project.

Although color blindness has received the most analytical attention, it is important to emphasize that it is not the only ideology employed in contemporary racial discourse. Color blindness is opposed by what I have described (Doane, 2006) as *systemic racism* ideology. In general (although it has many variants), systemic racism ideology has emerged from past challenges to the U.S. racial order, including the Civil Rights Movement. At the

core of systemic racism ideology is the assertion that racism is institutional and pervasive in American society. Proponents also often claim that anti-racist social movements and substantial institutional changes are necessary in order to achieve a more racially just society. While systemic racism is the most significant oppositional ideology, color blindness is also opposed by minority nationalist or separatist ideologies and by white supremacist ideologies (cf. Berbrier, 1998; Daniels, 1997; Ferber, 1998). Contemporary racial politics, then, involves contestation between these opposing ideologies, with color blindness in a hegemonic position.

THE EVOLUTION OF COLOR-BLIND RACIAL IDEOLOGY

As I noted above, ideologies or social understandings are dynamic in nature. They are created strategically in an attempt to frame problems and outline solutions. They evolve in response to changing circumstances and opposing discourses. Color blindness is no stranger to this process, as its major claims and modes of articulation evolve in accordance with the exigencies of racial politics and in response to competing claims about race.

There have been consistent patterns in color-blind racial discourse. The frames of color blindness rationalize (explain, deny, obscure) the existence and nature of racial inequality in the United States. Strategically, they seek to make it impossible to make a case for systemic racism or to strive (with any legitimacy) for changes in the existing racial order. Claims of racism are either deflected or dismissed. The frames and storylines of color blindness have been well-mapped out elsewhere (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003); consequently, my objective in this chapter is to highlight what I see as two important new trends in the evolution of color blindness: the escalating attack on the concept of race and the "demonization" of diversity.

ATTACKING THE CONCEPT OF RACE

Given that the dominant message of color blindness is that race no longer matters in the United States, it is not surprising that color-blind ideology would include an attack on the idea of race. If race can be removed as a legitimate subject of conversation or object of analysis, and if the concept of race itself can be made invalid, then opposing discourses are placed beyond

the pale of acceptable political discourse (and lumped along with claims of white supremacy and biological superiority). We might also expect that such a frame would have some resonance with larger publics, as discrediting race is very compatible with the notion that race no longer matters and "we are all the same." As I follow the evolution of this frame, I find three overlapping themes: (1) the claim that racial categories are racist; (2) the appropriation of the idea of race as a social construct; and (3) the belief that racial ambiguity makes race irrelevant.

Racial Categories are Racist

The claim here is simple: that it is racist to classify people by racial categories or to suggest that race matters in human interaction. This claim appears to have deeper historical roots. Ronald Takaki (1987, p. 231) cites Reagan era Attorney General Edwin Meese by saying that "counting by race is a form of racism" in a speech attacking affirmative action. In a study of a debate over racial balance in a school district in the 1990s, I (Doane, 1996, p. 39) recorded one participant making the following claim:

Now it is clear that our School Board's agenda goes beyond equitable distribution of our town's educational resources. Their agenda categorizes us, the people of the town of West Hartford, by the pigment of our skins, by the amount of money that we make, by the language our parents speak, and then gerrymanders our school districts to create their misguided version of what is meant by equal access – homogenized ratios.

To some of us who believe that people should be judged on their strength of character, and who believe that racism will not be eliminated until our nation, states, and towns become color blind, this agenda is repugnant.

The core of the writer's claim is that it is inappropriate ("repugnant") to be conscious of race or to employ racial categories in public policymaking (in this case, school desegregation).

The claim that racial categories are racist was extended further in an "op-ed" column by radio commentator Judy Jarvis (1997, p. A13) in which she criticized the inclusion of racial and ethnic questions in the 2000 United States census:

But discrimination is no longer the worst problem we face in trying to get along and get ahead on our diverse country. The constant focus on our differences is. Children are being taught that they have more that divides them as Americans than unites them: from the Census Bureau's adding racial and ethnic categories, to universities' obsession with segregated dorms and social clubs; from state laws that ask employers to count color, to disastrous bilingual programs that ensure failure for so many students who are placed in them.

Why don't we cry out against these bigoted policies? Why don't we tell the politicians who support them that more harm than good comes from well-intentioned programs based on color, sex, and ethnic counting?

For Jarvis, racism (bigotry) is not only to take race into consideration in policymaking, but also even to *count* by race or ethnicity or to collect racial data. Moreover, this type of racism is, in her opinion, a more serious problem than discrimination (which is assumed to be minimal) as it promotes a focus on differences and foments racial conflict.

Jarvis' claim that the use of racial categories was "racist" foreshadowed subsequent developments in U.S. racial politics. In 2001, Ward Connerly and the American Civil Rights Coalition initiated a campaign to promote a California state ballot initiative, Proposition 54, which if passed would forbid California state and local government agencies (with a few exceptions) from classifying citizens or collecting data using categories based upon race, ethnicity, and national origin. When he introduced this campaign, Connerly (2001a) asserted that

Race classifications have never helped anyone. The Holocaust, South African apartheid, India's caste system – every time a country has adopted these divisive race classifications they have only served to suppress the group out of favor. It is time California learned this history lesson and became truly colorblind.

Similar claims were made by other supporters of Proposition 54. During the final days of the campaign, one op-ed writer (Custred, 2003) argued that

Passing Proposition 54 will be the beginning of the end for the racial classification system that has plagued this country since its founding. Beginning in the 17th century, the government divided citizens by race to perpetuate slavery. In the 19th century, America was torn apart in a war to determine how much say the government had over a person based on his skin color ... Every time the government has recognized our skin color, it has led to evil consequences. Proposition 54 is a chance to end this historical stain and take the first, measured step toward a colorblind government that has no place for race in American life or law.

In both cases, the problem is framed as race consciousness or the use of racial categories, and the claim is made that racial categories are a root cause of such historical evils as slavery and apartheid. The proffered solution is a "truly color-blind" society where race is no longer taken into account. While Proposition 54 was defeated by California voters in October 2003, the issue of banning the use of racial categories remains alive. Connerly has announced plans to propose a revised initiative in California (Schevitz, 2003) and non-compliance with racial data collection is becoming increasingly widespread (Jenkins, 1999). This has significant political implications. If the collection of racial data is eliminated, then it will become

difficult, if not impossible, to provide credible evidence of patterns of discrimination or even to assess the relative degree of racial inequality. Claims of racism could then be dismissed as having no factual basis. As a result, white advantages will become unassailable – a position made possible by a discourse employing the language of “color blindness” and antibigotry.

The Appropriation of the Idea of Race as a Social Construct

For more than half a century, anti-racist social scientists have sought to attack biological racism and claims of racial superiority–inferiority by advancing the notion that race is not a valid scientific classification system and that it only has meaning as a socially constructed category. From the seminal work of Ashley Montagu (1997[1942]) to the recent television series “Race: The Power of an Illusion” (California Newsreel, 2003), this argument has been successfully employed to undermine traditional racist ideology. In addition, the notion of racism as a social construct has then been employed to emphasize that race has a *sociological* reality – that it is embedded in social structures and used by dominant groups to maintain systems of racial stratification. This view of race has increasingly been used to challenge the racial status quo.

More recently, the core anti-racist claim that race has no biological reality and is socially constructed has been appropriated within the “color-blind” frame that race no longer “matters.” The crux of the argument is that since race is a fiction and has no scientific validity, racial categories and race-based policies are absurd and divisive. For example, in a syndicated newspaper column, Jeff Jacoby (1999) uses examples of the different numbers of racial categories cited by racist scientists (e.g., Bernier, Linnaeus, Blumenbach, Coon, etc.) to suggest the absurdity of the U.S. Census race question. He then goes on to assert that

The difference between ancestry and race is that one is real and one is largely fiction. Race is a social construct, not a biological fact. The genes of whites, blacks, and “native Hawaiians” are indistinguishable. Of course there are physical variations among populations that originated at points far apart on the globe. But the idea that those variations are racial is a relatively recent one.

Thus, the problematic nature of racial science becomes part of the “color-blind” argument.

This argument is also apparent in claims proffered by Debra Dickerson (2004) in her book *The End of Blackness*. As part of a manifesto for black self-help and the need to change group values, she incorporates the claim

that race is a "bankrupt scientific and social construct." The conclusion is clear: absent the idea of race (or blackness), the problem of racism will disappear. The failed science of race becomes further ammunition for the attempt to remove race as a valid topic for public discourse.

The appropriation of race as a social construct was extended by Ward Connerly (2001b, emphasis added), who in an op-ed piece warning the British against using a race question in their census, asserted that

There were other Americans, among whom I count myself, who wanted to scrap our system of racial classifications. We wanted our government to recognise that *race is a social construct conjured up by politicians and social activists, to prop up a dying regime of preferential treatment and victimhood*. There racial categories, we argued, no longer reflect the reality of our existence, and worse, they exacerbated the conflicts that exist in society.

If we examine this argument closely, it is evident that Connerly is not only maintaining that race is a social construct, but he is also asserting that race is created (or at least maintained) by leaders who presumably benefit from the "regime of preferential treatment and victimhood." In other words, if we did not have "politicians and activists" raising questions about race, then race would no longer exist.

Racial Ambiguity Makes Race Irrelevant

Historically, the existence of racial ambiguity has also been used to highlight the social construction of race (e.g., Davis, 1991). The lack of logic in assigning multiracial individuals to a particular race and the existence of multiple social protocols for classification of multiracial individuals has long been used to undermine "scientific" notions of race. As is the case with the idea of race as a social construct, this issue has also been "flipped" by proponents of color blindness to buttress their arguments. This argument has two main thrusts: that the existence of multiracial individuals highlights the absurdity of racial categories and that the expanding multiracial population is making race irrelevant in social interaction.

A prime focus for this frame was the decision by the United States Census Bureau to permit individuals to check off more than one box (category) in responding to the race question on the 2000 Census. The existence of 63 racial categories and combinations, and the fact that many respondents rejected all of these to select "other," is given as further evidence of the futility of racial categories and classification (Kicklighter, 2001). This is used to buttress further the claim that the social construction of race makes race

meaningless. Furthermore, the increasing number of multiracial persons and "soaring rates of interracial friendship and dating" (Jacoby, 2001) are eliminating any meaningful racial distinctions. In a syndicated article, "The Rise of the Blended American," Jeff Jacoby (2001) approvingly quotes Ben Wattenberg's claim that the separatists are being "defeated in the bedroom." The implication is that as intermarriage rapidly expands, race will fade away.

The idea of the end of race has also found its way into popular culture. Recent writers (La Ferla, 2003; Arlidge, 2004) have touted the emergence of "Generation EA: Ethnically Ambiguous" in marketing and media. The proliferation of multiracial models and the ascendancy of celebrities such as Jessica Alba, Tiger Woods, and Vin Diesel is combined with the "currently fashionable argument that race itself is a fiction" (La Ferla, 2003) to herald the dawn of a new era. Under such circumstances we hear respondents make statements such as "the salience of color across society is reducing" and "the barriers between black and white are really coming down" (Arlidge, 2004). In the EA world of fusion and crossover appeal, race is no longer relevant.

DEMONIZING DIVERSITY

Over the past 25 years, the word "diversity" has become a ubiquitous catchphrase with almost iconic status in American society. Following the Supreme Court decision in the *Bakke* case, which included Justice Powell's decision that affirmative action plans were permissible when there was a "compelling interest in promoting diversity," the idea of the positive value of "diversity" became a lynchpin of public racial discourse. During the past two decades, "diversity training," "workforce diversity," and "diversity awareness weeks" have become part of the social mainstream. The general acceptance of this idea was evident in the wide range of *amicus* briefs filed by corporations and even the military in support of the University of Michigan's affirmative action programs in the 2003 Supreme Court cases (*Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*).

As a catchphrase, "diversity" has enjoyed a number of political advantages. While it is often assumed to refer to increasing the presence of peoples of color, its vagueness has allowed it to be defined and interpreted in ways convenient to speakers and audiences. From a "packaging" standpoint, I believe that the widespread acceptance of "diversity" reflects its positive connotations (inclusion as opposed to desegregation) and its relative innocuousness (promoting diversity does not require a commitment to structural

change or addressing racial inequality). Beyond the fact that it "feels good," diversity has been successfully promoted as beneficial to everyone and creating more positive work and educational environments. It is no exaggeration to say that "diversity" has been *the* most successful catchphrase created by those claiming to be racial progressives.

Not surprisingly, the "success" of "diversity" has made it a target for advocates of color blindness. This is undoubtedly particularly due to its use as a rationale for the maintenance of affirmative action programs, but it also reflects its success and visibility in programming. As innocuous as "diversity" may seem, the positive valuation of difference is in direct conflict with the color-blind credo that race no longer matters. At the same time, the broad appeal of "diversity" has made it difficult to attack, especially as it has not been used to present any meaningful challenge to the racial status quo.

Over the past few years I have identified a range of strategies that have been used to undermine the political popularity of diversity. One technique has been the use of pejorative labels, such as the "diversity industry" or the "cult of diversity" to attempt to cast diversity in a more negative light. There have also been attempts to dilute diversity (by expanding its parameters beyond race) or to co-opt the term. The former was reflected in a Department of Justice diversity initiative that stressed geographic and economic diversity. The latter is evident in attempts by conservatives to claim that the paramount diversity issue is political or intellectual diversity – especially on college campuses (cf. Hebel, 2004; Horowitz, 2004; Briggs, 2003; Steyn, 2003). Thus far, these tactics have had limited impact.

More interesting, however, have been a range of attempts to re-frame diversity from the color-blind perspective by condemning it for calling attention to race. These strategies can be classified as follows:

1. *Diversity = Racism*. This is an attempt to frame diversity as racism because of its emphasis upon race. Sometimes this is in the form of a general attack ("once called Jim Crow, today diversity"); other times there is the more specific implication that proponents of diversity are engaging in racist essentialism. For example: "The overriding message of 'diversity,' transmitted by the policies of a school's administration and by the teachings of a school's professors, is that the individual is defined by his race" (Schwartz, 2003). In essence, diversity is being attacked for violating the norms of color blindness.
2. *Diversity is Racism against Whites*. This is an attempt to frame diversity in the same vein as "reverse discrimination" – one of the most successful catchphrases of the racial backlash. For example: "Diversity is a code

name, a euphemism for a racial preference system where chosen minority groups are given preferences because of their skin color. The gentle veneer of the world 'diversity' shrouds an illegal, dishonest, and hypocritical racial agenda" (Diversityblows.com, n.d.). In some cases, the charge is more direct: "during the past 30-odd years we have lived in an overtly racist society – racist against whites. In the sociocultural game of musical chairs, whites are left standing. This is true in academia and in the job market. This is Marxism 101 in action. 'Diversity actually means replacement at any cost'" (Briggs, 2003). And from David Duke's website: "Let us put it bluntly: to 'celebrate' or 'embrace' diversity, as we are so often asked to do, is no different from *deploring an excess of whites*" (Jackson, n.d., emphasis in the original). The common theme in each quotation is the redefinition of diversity as discrimination against whites.

Strategically, to re-frame "diversity" as racism or to dilute it by emphasizing "diversity of ideas" or "intellectual diversity" is to make it into a "contested concept" (Doane, 1996). If the attack on diversity is successful and it can be cast in negative terms as divisive or "racist," then the logical solution would be to advocate dropping any emphasis on diversity in favor of color blindness – as was advocated by several opponents of diversity. Likewise, if diversity is cast as one of many forms of diversity, along with diversity of geography, economic position, and ideas, then it loses whatever efficacy it has had as a tool for anti-racist mobilizing (or at least keeping racial issues on the radar of the larger society). In any event, the ongoing attacks on diversity are part of the continuing evolution of racial politics in the United States.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE POLITICS OF COLOR BLINDNESS

Racial ideologies in general – and color blindness in particular – are dynamic. They constantly evolve in response to changing circumstances and to the ebb and flow of racial politics. I have argued that color blindness is part of a larger process of racial backlash dating back to the 1960s – a rearticulated defense of white benefits in face of the challenges and successes of the Civil Rights Movement. Color blindness is successful because it resonates with the hopes and fears of white Americans, and because it requires no action (all one has to do to retain the façade is to continue "not being racist"). I have also asserted that color-blind racism has been deliberately produced. This is not to create a "conspiracy theory," but to recognize that color blindness did

not evolve organically – it was produced by conservative academics, intellectuals, and activists well funded by conservative foundations.

In the course of this chapter, I have outlined what I believe are several emerging discursive strategies – the attack on racial categories, the appropriation of the claim that race is a social construct, and the use of the new racial “ambiguity” – to buttress the claims that race no longer matters in the United States. Each of these represents a new strategic tack by the proponents of color blindness in their quest for advantage in the ongoing political struggles around racial issues. In the same vein, the attacks on diversity represent an attempt to neutralize what has been an effective weapon on the part of those seeking greater racial inclusiveness. The common theme running throughout these arguments is that the ultimate solution to America’s racial problems is the adoption of the color-blind platform: the elimination of racial categories, the abandonment of any race-based social policies to address persistent segregation or racial inequality, and the eventual removal of race from public discourse. Carried to its extreme, color blindness creates a one-dimensional context in which it becomes increasingly difficult to conceptualize, let alone challenge, the continuing significance of institutional racism – much in the manner that the government of Oceania in George Orwell’s *1984* (1961[1949]) sought to eliminate “thought crime” by eliminating any challenging vocabulary.

I do not believe that the defeat of Proposition 54 is the end of attacks on the collection of racial data. While a majority of Californians rejected the measure, 36% of the electorate voted in support of the initiative. Similarly, I am not necessarily encouraged by the observation that many of the quotations presented above come from outside of mainstream media and political discourse. It is but a short journey from the extreme to the mainstream. If we have learned nothing else from the study of the racial backlash and conservative political movements in general, we should remember that they are well funded and able and willing to take the long view in promoting their political agenda. Consequently, it is critical to keep tracking the changes in racial discourse.

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