

Chapter 4 – The Fear That Has No Name

I tremble for my country when I reflect that . . . justice cannot sleep forever . . . The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust.

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XVIII (1984, 289)

Whites have feared the African-American population since before the United States formed, as Jefferson's quotation indicates. Indeed, fear of slave revolt helps explain why southern colonies were willing to join a national government funded by import duties in the first place.¹ Nor have racial tensions ever disappeared from American society completely since that time.

On the other hand, racial tensions have not remained constant. Sometimes they surge; sometimes they ebb. Sometimes they are widespread, infusing white culture, and sometimes they collect in pockets of racial resistance. Psychologically, the fear may manifest as guilt or shame (Schneiderman 1995, 128-36). It may appear as anger (Carter 1995) or frustration (Carlson 1981), defensiveness (Whitfield 1988, 27-30), moral righteousness (Sniderman with Hagen 1985, chap. 4), bittersweet nostalgia (Rieder 1985, 90-93), or the desire for order (Dionne 1991, 88).

Because the sense of "racial threat" somehow manages to be both unsteady and yet omnipresent, it doubly resists incorporation into a formal theoretical framework. Ubiquity hampers any attempt to observe variation on the grand scale. Instability, meanwhile, threatens social-science generalizations that are not highly contextual or informed by historical perspective. "Racial politics

¹ Madison cleverly dangled the threat of slave revolt over Southern heads during the fight for constitutional ratification, emphasizing in *Federalist* #43 that the new national government would protect against "an unhappy species of population abounding in some of the States, who . . . are sunk below the level of men" (Rossiter 1961, 277). This bond forged of fear, as Tocqueville recognized (Tocqueville 1969, 382), helped hold Southern states within the Union for decades despite odious tariffs and slipping political control. See Campbell (1995, 175-77) for a concise treatment of federal revenue sources before the 16th Amendment (i.e., 1913). The national government's reliance on tariff revenues was an unpopular feature in Southern states, which contained a rich agricultural sector but hardly any manufacturing.

must be understood in terms of particular groups at particular times in particular places” (Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989, 44). The shifting nature of race relations is an opportunity as well as a burden, however, because of the theoretical rigor it permits.

Few social scientists have capitalized on this awareness of historical contingency when studying geographical variation in racial conservatism, as indicated in chapter 3.² The literature claims repeated tests of a concept, the white-backlash logic (under various names), yet does so in widely varying settings with widely varying justifications—an approach that is operationally atheoretical. Political scientists should not continue to neglect the geographical richness implicit in political behavior, since methodological tools and high-quality data now available allow exploration of race relations from a deductive orientation. This research represents one attempt to bring the modern context systematically into race research.

A Formal Framework for Understanding Racial Conflict

Rather than try to falsify previous narratives describing contemporary race relations, turning them into hypotheses out of whole cloth, I am forced to mix and match the scraps until they form unique hypotheses with unique observable implications. My solution is to distill from the vast literature on racial conflict the most important distinctions that any set of categories must preserve, drawing in particular from two primary sources—Giles and Evans (1985, 1986) and Blalock (1967, chap. 5).

Giles and Evans (1985, 51; 1986, 470) constructed a “power approach” to intergroup conflict.

“The power model views racial and ethnic groups as participants in ongoing competition for control

² I am indebted to Stanley Berard (1998) for naming my appeal in favor of greater historical sensitivity, as introduced in Voss (1996a): the Historical Contingency Approach. Turner (1988, 15) points to a similar label, since he regards “the outcome of social struggles as contingent and historical.” However, my argument that racial competition changes across time, space and motive is not itself an hypothesis, let alone a *theory*, because it begs the question of what particular dynamic happens to be operating in any one situation.

of economic, political, and social structures and suggests that intergroup hostility and antagonism are natural products of that competition” (Giles and Evans 1986, 471). Their theory therefore preserves a central component of the white backlash logic: the distinction between *rational* and *psychological* sources of racial tension. A proper contrast to racial hostility built upon ignorance, suspicion and fear must be racial hostility built upon a tangible struggle for power—a distinction that, as I show in Chapter 5, prominent work on race relations has blurred.

However, I reject their decision to conflate multiple arenas of conflict, a conviction inspired by Hubert Blalock’s white backlash studies. Blalock’s early work on discrimination also treated white backlash as a rather generic reaction that would show up across all indicators—in prejudice, in tangible conflict and in discrimination (1956, 584).³ Yet his difficulty capturing nationwide economic discrimination forced Blalock to toy with nonlinear functional forms (Blalock 1956, 588), to treat Southern economic discrimination as a special case (Blalock 1957) and eventually to plumb theoretical distinctions among specific forms of interracial competition (Blalock 1967, chap. 5). In particular, he was fully conscious of the difference between economic and political competition, and shaped his approach around such distinctions, including shifting model specifications depending upon the underlying type of competition being modeled (Blalock 1967). Most of his efforts still ended in frustration, but he explicitly maintained the distinction among alternative *spoils of competition*, and I will do the same here. I not only break down the materialist alternatives, however; I also consider multiple ways to operationalize a “psychological” approach to racial conflict.

One other set of writings informs my approach. Recent research suggests that white expressions of racial conservatism will vary depending upon any given indicator’s level of political saliency

³ Even in this early study, though, Blalock (1956, 584) uses Metropolitan Statistical Areas as his unit of analysis rather than counties, suggesting sensitivity to the proper arena in which different sorts of competition occur (Voss 1996a, 1160-61).

(Glaser 1994; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995), the particular values that it invokes (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Sniderman and Piazza 1993), and the particular sort of community that one studies (Fossett and Kiecolt 1989; Giles and Buckner 1996; Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989; Voss 1996a). Regardless of whether one suspects that racial conservatism derives primarily from materialist or psychological sources, and regardless of which particular materialist or psychological orientation one embraces, each given approach to race relations should be theoretically distinct enough to produce a unique geographical pattern of observable implications across these various options.

This chapter therefore outlines a systematic vocabulary for approaching racial conflict, a categorization that will allow researchers to pull apart conceptually dissimilar phenomena. The goal is not to characterize how races or ethnic groups will interact in each hypothetical type of encounter, a herculean task that has eluded generations of scholars. It does not, that is, present a “theory” of race relations. But discussion of race has become so muddled that any meaningful empirical exploration of the topic requires some elaborated interpretive scheme—a categorical framework around which workable theory might be built, into which empirical investigations might be integrated, and for which policy solutions might be derived.

An Outline

This chapter builds up my framework in three sections:

1. **The Nature of Competition**—Racial polarization can vary by indicator. It passes through successive filters, from abstract racial attitudes to direct political competition. Social scientists should be careful to distinguish among findings operating at each level, since they will follow different logics. For this project, I favor the later filters, those with the more immediate political relevance, since such polarization thrives (especially in the U.S. South) even as

attitudinal racism has declined.⁴ However, my typical strategy is to compromise, concentrating on political indicators that are most likely to tap into specifically *racial* attitudes.

2. **The Spoils of Competition**—Racial polarization can vary by motive. Conflict is not a fixed phenomenon. Once two “races” become socially defined, they can compete over varying stakes, with each clash establishing different incentives for collective action. I break the motives for any particular “backlash” into three general categories: politics, economics, and culture. This distinction is useful and yet still parsimonious.
3. **The Role of Proximity in Southern Political Development**—Given that the rational incentives underlying racial polarization can vary by indicator and by motive, there is no reason to expect that a proximity pattern would characterize all types of conflict. I show, through a discussion of the Southern experience, that shifts in the motives underlying racial competition have indeed produced shifting geographical patterns. A generalization of the “backlash” logic seems necessary, one that reasons from the hypothesized type of conflict to the precise implications.

The Nature of Competition: Race Relations Through Successive Filters

Political-science research on race often treats hostility as an amorphous yet unique phenomenon, one that pops up in multiple forms but really amounts to the same basic pathology. Thus research on the white backlash hypothesis hopped smoothly from the voting data of V.O. Key’s day to the survey-dominated study of racial attitudes that followed, from studies of political discrimination by voter registrars to economic discrimination carried out by the entire private sector, without any lasting adaptation to the theory or its empirical expectations.

⁴ Although my emphasis and interest is on polarizing attitudes experienced among whites, interracial hostility of any sort could fit into the same approach. It is worth noting, for example, that racial polarization in the South includes two components: heavy Republicanism among whites, and almost unanimous Democratic affiliation among African Americans. Nor does the framework assume that the group studied is the aggressor or “guilty party” in a situation of racial polarization, only that attitudes vary in the face of a particular context.

Innovative survey work in the last decade has acknowledged this shortcoming, and worked to parse out different sorts of racial conflict. Glaser (1994, 24-25), for example, recognizes that racial hostility can take on a more psychological or a more political orientation. He finds that predicting prejudice and predicting political expressions of racial hostility require different variables. Similarly, Kinder and Mendelberg (1995) stress that white prejudice will not necessarily translate into political expressions of racial hostility. Chance events and enterprising leaders, for example, can focus (or dilute) psychological impulses, can aim them at racial discord or steer them away.

This trend in the literature is a healthy one. It draws on insights influential in other disciplines. Social scientists have long recognized intergroup conflict as a multi-tiered process, developing a complex vocabulary to distinguish different sorts of interethnic troubles (c.f., Pettigrew et al. 1980; Stone 1985, 28-29). Historians, as well as political scientists studying American political development (e.g., Skocpol 1992), have recognized the role political elites and institutions play in shaping social forces. There's no identifiable political force called "racism," so empirical work on the topic must adapt to the more complex, and more credible, interdisciplinary theories that are available.

In this section, I expand upon the earlier work, mapping the process that impulses must follow before they translate into institutional discrimination. Obviously, the model is different in detail, if not in spirit, for private (and especially personal) discriminatory acts. Racial views pass through a series of *filters*, each a distinct stage that follows a unique political logic. The filters are:

1. Racial Prejudice
2. Racial Attitudes
3. Political Affiliations
4. Elite Preferences
5. Racial Policy

Racial *prejudice* is, properly speaking, a psychological matter. It is a cognitive approach for estimating other individuals' abilities, traits and values (Pettigrew 1980, 6). Specifically, it accepts

ascriptive group membership as meaningful evidence for weighing someone up.⁵ Old-fashioned biological racism—the assumption that African Americans are genetically inferior—is only one example of racial prejudice. So-called symbolic racism, the presumption that blacks hold deficient cultural values, is another. What they have in common is the methodology: a willingness to estimate the probable behavior of an individual conditioned upon race, to interpret behavior differently depending upon race.

Prejudice does not necessarily confer a badge of inferiority. A prejudiced person may consider blacks better athletes because slave planters exercised “scientific breeding.” A prejudiced person may prefer jazz albums by black musicians, considering them inherently better at improvisational skills. A prejudiced German woman may travel to North Africa because she believes black men are better lovers than white men. Being considered a skilled athlete, musician or lover does not in itself condemn the victim of prejudice to ignominy. Usually, though, this social shorthand carries a veiled insult.⁶ It serves as a pigeonhole, a set of implied limits on the acceptable bounds of success. And even if a stereotype could carry no derogatory implications at all, it would still offend the individualism that historically dominates America’s political culture (Huntington 1981, 17; Lipset 1996, 115-16). As Ayn Rand writes (1964, 126), “It is a barnyard or stock-farm version of collectivism, appropriate to the mentality that differentiates between various breeds of animals, but not between ... men.”

The ambivalent nature of racial prejudice is not just a semantic matter. It means that prejudice does not necessarily imply any specific political orientation. A man could hold a bundle of

⁵ By calling race an “ascriptive” trait, I am treating the scientific debate over genetic racial differences as settled, even though the academic consensus recently suffered a high-profile broadside (Herrnstein and Murray 1994). That is, I accept the conventional wisdom that genetic variation within races so swamps variation across them that such categories are social constructs (Wright 1994). However, I am not sure that making this assumption really influences either the analysis or the findings of this manuscript.

⁶ Not the least to a black man who cannot measure up in the stadium, the speakeasy or the sack, yet holds few peers in the financial or scientific world.

prejudicial stereotypes about African Americans, some negative and some (at least superficially) positive, without considering those assessments politically or even socially relevant. Negative stereotypes could fuel political hostility, or just the opposite—they could breed altruistic or paternalistic impulses. Positive feelings, meanwhile, may not protect members of a racial group from discrimination when competition gets tight.

Prejudice, therefore, does not translate cleanly into racial *attitudes* (i.e., political attitudes involving racial issues). This is a prime insight featured in Paul Sniderman's recent work (see Chapter 5): Evaluation of racial policies such as affirmative action is mediated through values unrelated to racial prejudice. An individualist, for example, might chafe at affirmative action as a punishment for collective guilt, yet strongly back legislation equalizing educational opportunities. A devout Christian might condemn incidents of moral depravity among inner-city minorities, and therefore combat the skewed incentives constructed by welfare in racially charged language, yet see affirmative action as a just means for purging past white sins. Self interest, in particular, might filtrate prejudices. A Southern debutante might embrace integration, any costs of which will be born by lower-status whites, yet draw a line at the social privileges of the rich (Flake 1994, 193-94; Stone 1985, 101-102), and fight costly government programs whatever their goals.

Racial attitudes translate only loosely into political *affiliations*. Race may be more or less salient in American politics, a debate that still simmers in the literature (e.g., Abramowitz 1994; Carmines and Stimson 1989), but not even the most extreme interpretation of racial politics overlooks that parties and interest groups divide over multiple cleavages. A racist auto worker might face crosscutting pressures, his union pulling him toward the Democrats and his racial views yanking him toward the Republicans. An African-American duck hunter may contribute to the National Rifle Association, and therefore see her money go to race-baiting Southern senators because they are willing to oppose gun control. And pity Sniderman's conscientious white respondents, who are

terribly unlikely to find a group or candidate picking and choosing among race-based policies as selectively as they do. Pressure-group politics is seldom so discriminating.

Political affiliations translate only loosely into political *institutions*. America's single-member, simple-plurality election system necessarily filters expressions of racial polarization. As much as 50% of a district electorate's views may remain unexpressed by the victorious candidate. Meanwhile, the arrangement of district lines can pack or dilute popular impulses; the same collection of race-driven preferences thus can produce diametrically opposed results at the legislative level. Different districting lines will encourage different candidate strategies—from race baiting to building biracial coalitions. Plus, voters do not enjoy complete control over either the candidate recruitment process or the way candidates choose to package themselves.

The 1948 Dixiecrat rebellion illustrates this filter. Thurmond's stunning success in four Deep South states, and paltry showing elsewhere in the South, was not merely a product of varying voter preferences. Thurmond's name appeared under the Democrat's rooster symbol in the states he won; he fell behind even the marginalized Republican party in six of the seven Southern states where he ran as an independent (Heard 1952, 25). Conservatives dominated Florida's Democratic state committee numerically, but liberal forces associated with Claude Pepper held the crucial leadership roles, so the Dixiecrat sympathizers could not even get unpledged presidential electors on the ballot there (Price 1957, 90). The aftermath of that election also illustrates the filter. Although white racial views may have altered somewhat between 1948 and 1952, such slight fluctuations cannot explain why the race revolt of 1948 fell dormant just four years later. Voter attitudes did not change that much; the Democratic party's strategy did. In general, candidates may inflame or ameliorate racial hostilities. Electoral arrangements also strongly influence both voter choice and the shape of electoral competition (Canon 1978).

Finally, elite alignment on racial issues is filtered through political institutions that can shape,

especially in the short term, its expression into racial *policy*. The antebellum “Southern Veto,” kept alive in the U.S. Senate through repeated compromises on slavery, ensured that a united South could block hostile legislation despite dwindling voting strength in Congress. The Democratic Party’s 2/3 Rule, in place through 1936, ensured that the South could block potential presidential nominees who were hostile to regional institutions. After World War II, senior Southern committee chairs in the U.S. House and filibustering Southerners in the U.S. Senate were able to stall the “second Reconstruction” for two decades. More recently, a liberal judiciary has been able to dampen racial conservatism in the political branches. Racial policies are thus not a reliable expression of elite racial sentiment, even if the two tend to track each other over time. Little prejudice could produce serious discrimination, while heavy prejudice might not.

This is a more complex model than operating in most political-science research, and yet is still too simple for some purposes. Feedback works in the opposite direction too. Policies certainly influence all levels of racial sentiment. A candidate like Barry Goldwater can catalyze the realignment of party commitments. Partisan cleavages shape the political identification of voters. Strong opposition to particular racial policies, or repeated political conflict with another race, may catalyze prejudicial beliefs. But the procedural direction I emphasize here makes the most sense (Bobo and Kluegel 1993, 454), and anyway viewing these behavioral levels as a linear process is only a heuristic. The key insight is that racial polarization may appear at any of five different levels, each governed by its own logic, shaped by its own rules. Racial measures from one level are not just noisy proxies for those at another, they are systematically different.

What are the implications for political science? The choice between aggregate electoral data and surveys of political attitudes, for example, is not just a choice between two measurement techniques. It also represents a choice between racial polarization at an issue or affiliation level, and that at the level of expression. Findings at one level need not agree with those at another, and

differences may be politically interesting. Scholars should be more careful about drawing connections between evidence collected at one level and discussions operating at another.

Of course, studying any particular racial filter has its drawbacks. Racial prejudices and attitudes have the benefit of lower complexity; few non-racial matters intervene when a survey respondent must decide whether “black people are lazy.” They suffer, however, for their remoteness from practical politics. The more concrete filters are the ones that operate most prominently within the American political system, yet underlying racial orientations are only a small part of most results one would be liable to explain, such as presidential voting or social welfare policy.⁷

Different forms of racial conflict may rage simultaneously in American society, but expressed unevenly across this Filter Model. The rise and fall of polarization at different levels is a dynamic process. The arrangement of forces within a political system might muffle racial antagonisms, or they could shape relatively mild racial hostility into abiding discriminatory impact (Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989). Racial polarization can be severe at the electoral level even when improving at the attitudinal level.⁸ This observation is particularly important for contemporary politics, because declining white prejudice has not simultaneously lessened political polarization. Indeed, in the South, partisan polarization is at its worst level in decades (McDonald 1999).

My solution, for most of this dissertation, is to take a compromise position. I will evaluate the later filters, especially electoral behavior, but in elections particularly likely to polarize voters racially. That way I am studying neither the regular role of race in American politics, nor raw racial attitudes, but a potentiality (only occasionally realized) between those two. That is, I will get as close as I can to how much race *could* matter, if for example a political realignment brought racial

⁷ Gilens (1995, 1,000) studies the connection between racial attitudes and issue preferences. Even the connection with an explicitly racial issue like affirmative action only turns up a correlation of .32.

⁸ The U.S. Supreme Court acknowledges this distinction by excluding motive from the determination of vote dilution. If minorities consistently fail to elect their candidate of choice, and they would be able to do so with reasonable alterations to districting lines, then they have a legitimate constitutional claim. Which social process produced this circumstance is legally irrelevant (Grofman and Handley 1995, 233).

polarization to the fore. The electoral system's filters, such as varying turnout rates and partisan loyalties, still operate in most of the data I will study, but to a lesser extent than usual. The data accentuate racial attitudes, but not to the point of pretending that voters have no competing impulses. This seems a valuable niche neglected by most mainstream attitudinal and electoral studies, and fertile ground for developing and exploring a framework to understand racial competition.

The Spoils of Competition

Fear contributes heavily to white backlash. Racist whites typically loathe African Americans because they feel threatened, if not by blacks themselves, then at least by conditions for which the blacks serve as a convenient representation (Pettigrew 1957, 683). But fear is a psychological reaction, not a concrete social phenomenon in itself. We cannot assume, just because some whites fear members of another race, that their anxieties have a rational cause. We cannot assume that whites are defending tangible privileges that blacks appear to threaten, let alone assume what those stakes might be.

The backlash approach to intergroup conflict stands out not simply because of its focus on proximity, but also because of its materialist emphasis (Giles and Evans 1986, 470-71). Under this view, racial prejudices emerge to provide ideological justification for promoting a group's self-interest, a concept that enjoys reasonable historical support (Wilson 1973, chap. 3). However, outward expressions of fear may not connect directly to any particular underlying clash over resources. Once racism roots itself in a culture, infusing its symbolic vocabulary, then those symbols may be available subsequently to structure an otherwise unrelated conflict. They can take on a life of their own, cut off from contemporary social conditions—at best a symptom, and perhaps just the scar, of an historical illness (Genovese 1968, 59-60).

Take, for example, a common stereotype held of African Americans: the Black Beast.⁹ This grotesque creature has a long history in American myth—an elemental force dedicated to instant gratification, a bundle of omnivorous appetites, a sexual predator and a thief (Finkenstaedt 1994, chap. 9). Slavers initially used this degrading image to justify their dominance. Consider Thomas Jefferson's (1984, 265) relatively genteel ruminations in Query XIV of the *Notes on the State of Virginia*:

A black, after hard labour through the day, will be induced by the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight, or later, though knowing he must be out with the first dawn of the morning. They are at least as brave, and more adventuresome. But this may perhaps proceed from a want of forethought, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present . . . They are more ardent after their female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation.

This was a convenient myth. If individuals of African descent were fundamentally similar to whites, then they would fall under Enlightenment natural rights theories that forbid slavery (Locke 1980, 17-18). The interest of a planter such as Jefferson therefore was to set them apart. All white men might well be created equal, a maxim to which even Southern planters usually paid lip service (George Fitzhugh notwithstanding), but the Black Beast was something else altogether (Huntington 1981, 19; Kolchin 1987, 173).

The Black Beast reared his head again at the dawn of the 20th century. Decades of experience with African Americans as legislators, as successful merchants, and as skilled workers had not purged the lore. This time, however, the stereotype was employed to remove people of African descent from civil society, and especially from the political arena. Blacks, the forces of racial reaction explained, were not capable of self-rule, because they would sell their votes for a nip of moonshine.

The Beast would lurk within the minds of whites throughout the Jim Crow period, and appear

⁹ The hyper-sexual "Nigra" of lore bears remarkable similarity to certain Jewish stereotypes common in Europe. The sexual neuroses that contributed to Hitler's Anti-Semitism, for example, are notorious (Fest 1970, 12).

when that system staged its final defense after World War II. Consider the following rhetoric, attributed to segregationist Leander Perez: “Don’t wait for your daughters to be raped by these Congolese. Don’t wait until the burr-heads are forced into your schools. Do something about it now” (Haas 1974, 270). The monster adapted to modernity better than the planters who created him.

An expression of fear or hatred—even if illustrated empirically—therefore does not represent a particular social phenomenon. It does not identify a particular form of political conflict between races, nor does it distinguish particular institutional or behavioral consequences. Diagnosing “racism” implies no particular policy solution. We need to understand more before the insights become useful.

Correlating fear or racism with the presence of a numerically large minority may assist more complex diagnoses, but the task hardly ends there. As Kinder and Mendelberg (1995, 420) write, “Proximity represents the possibility of everyday commerce and exchange between whites and blacks. It is not the same as threat, and should not be confused with it.” A numerically large minority could represent any of a number of “threats,” or no real threat at all. Because the various sources of racial hostility are not functionally equivalent, we need to ascertain which among a complicated bundle of motives drive white fear.

Following Max Weber (Bendix and Lipset 1966), and tracking the terminology of Turner (1988, 15-16),¹⁰ a simple model would be to break racial conflict into the battle for three sources of social advantage:

- **Economic:** The more blacks in a labor market, the more they may seem to threaten white job opportunities (Blalock 1967, 147-50). The more blacks able to move into a particular neighborhood, the more they seem to threaten white property values. The more blacks enrolled in social welfare programs, the more that government spending saps the economy and decimates

¹⁰ Turner (1988, 16) actually uses the term “symbolic” to refer to cultural conflict. I will pick up this conception in the next chapter, but avoid it for now to prevent confusion with the “symbolic racism” literature.

the paycheck.

- **Political:** The more blacks in an election district, the more discrimination and white mobilization needed to maintain white power (Key 1984; Matthews and Prothro 1963b; Blalock 1967, 150-54). If black voters dominate an election, that could mean fewer spoils of office for whites, less attentive police protection, less responsiveness from government bureaucracies, and less influence over legislation. It also might spur government to address social discrepancies among different races (Fording 1997), a condition from which whites otherwise benefit (Glenn 1963).
- **Cultural:** Racial conflict might revolve around cultural exclusiveness intended to reinforce status distinctions (Bourdieu 1986). Debates frequently emphasize “cultural capital”—the value attached to cultural traits that are unequally distributed across racial groups—rather than directly economic or political issues (Merelman 1994, Sowell 1994). Whites may wish to preserve dominance over the values promoted in cultural and educational institutions. They may be defending, or in some spheres trying to *restore*, the status advantages of whiteness. They may be fighting to preserve a cherished way of life, such as values that minorities seem to threaten (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 108-114; Wong and Strolovitch 1996, 4-6).

This simple categorization is parsimonious yet useful, since many seemingly unrelated goods pass through some combination of these channels: the power to purchase, the power to appropriate, the power to legitimate. Consider, for example, the oft-discussed role of genetic competition. Racist whites are thought to betray a severe neurosis. The common infatuation with black potency, appetite, or physiological endowment purportedly reflects an obsession with maintaining white sexual privileges (Dollard 1937; Whitfield 1988, 6). Black activists during the civil rights movement, meanwhile, enjoyed a particular satisfaction from conquest with white females—yet

guarded access to black women jealously (McAdam 1988, 93-96). Sexual competition may seem outside of class, power or cultural status. But the means of competition are not. To the extent appeal derives from social position, the competition for mates or sexual partners still might follow an economic, cultural or even (given the aphrodisiacal nature of power) a political logic. To the extent whites and blacks struggle to redefine what traits are considered appealing, meanwhile, that conflict is over cultural valuation.

Crime poses another stickler for this categorization. Many whites offer black-on-white violence, or just black-on-anybody violence, as their justification for racial hostility. Neither the source of this perception, nor the source of actual criminality, is a matter of scholarly consensus. To whatever extent whites misperceive black crime rates, it is because they view the issue through some sort of cultural filter: the stigma of blackness, the stereotypes passed down within families, the distortions produced by journalistic norms (Entman 1990; Gilliam et al. 1996). That is, misperceptions are an outgrowth of cultural phenomena.

But real black crime is not so simple. Numerous explanations for black criminal behavior are available to whites, including:

- Biological: genetic predispositions toward violence.
- Cultural/Moral: less value placed on human life (or white life).
- Socioeconomic: a natural outgrowth of socially induced poverty or ignorance.
- Political: an individualized and inchoate form of political protest (e.g., Cleaver 1968).

Even within the shared conventions of liberal social science, which would rule out the first and (to a lesser extent) second explanations, no single conclusion suggests itself. Yet precisely because of uncertainty over the causes of crime, the real issue is whether society treats crime as a racial issue at all. When someone is victimized or accused, does reaction to the event change with the races involved? When framed this way, the racial aspect of the conflict is still cultural.

Take a hypothetical case: a black person stabs and kills a white person. Calling this “cultural” conflict may seem absurd; the white is dead. By extension, white fear of real black crime (or, for

that matter, Jesse Jackson's fear of black crime) would seem to reflect, at a societal level, a genuine interest in self preservation rather than a symbolic concern. But let's step back for a second. Just by relating the anecdote in this way, I've imposed a cultural filter: I've treated the race of victim and perpetrator as salient, but no other vital statistics. This parallels the way society interprets social deviance. A host of demographic traits no doubt correlate—either causally or incidentally—with crime, but people generally do not attempt to identify these categories, and almost never guide their decisions using them.¹¹ The comparative risk posed by blacks, relative to whites, in any given neighborhood is dwarfed, for example, by the risk posed by males relative to females. Yet how many people fight to keep families with teenage boys out of their neighborhood, or move if the male-female ratio reaches a “tipping point”? Placing importance on racial differences in crime rate is itself a symbolic process, so racial conflict over the topic is too.

No doubt these conceptual distinctions often break down in practice. Conflict in one sphere may spill over into others, and some conflictual encounters just do not lend themselves to a particular pigeonhole. For example, Alexander Heard applies all three spheres when characterizing the Jim Crow South. “Southern one-party politics,” he (1952, 145) writes, “originated in the resolve of white southerners to hold Negroes to a well-defined economic, social, and political place.”¹² Giles and Evans (1986, 471) and Blumer (1958, 4) toss all three into their general versions of the group-threat hypothesis. However, the conceptual distinctions are useful, as others studying Southern politics have found.

Herbert Blumer (1965), for instance, portrays white racial hegemony as a series of ramparts

¹¹ Shakespeare has Caesar warn against the “lean and hungry look of ambition” that he sees in Cassius. Yet how many journalists today treat fat content as a relevant piece of information about a potential leader or suspected criminal? Many possible correlates of crime are not even collected, and many others are only gathered incidental to crime-prevention concerns, such as a convict's body weight.

¹² Yet he recognizes the primacy of political calculations, and therefore is firmly within Key's orientation. The one-party South's impetus was “excluding Negroes from effective political action, and *indirectly* from economic and social opportunity” (Heard 1952, 146). Emphasis mine.

defending a citadel; as each falls, whites can retreat to the next line of defense. Black and Black (1987, 77-78) draw on Blumer's scheme in their treatment of the civil-rights movement, specifying three arenas of conflict:

- **Outer color line**—Access to the public arena, the easiest yielded by whites. Civil-rights activists broke through this resistance by the late 1960's.
- **Intermediate color line**—Access to economic opportunities, to which Martin Luther King Jr. turned his attention late in life.
- **Inner color line**—Access to broad-based social status, such as the possibility of intimate friendships or even marriage with whites.

These ramparts correspond closely to my distinction among political, economic and cultural spheres of influence. The main difference is that their perspective carries extra baggage: the conclusion that social influence will be more difficult to achieve than economic influence, that one inherently precedes the other. Cultural equality (or even dominance) has sometimes been more accessible to blacks than economic integration, as represented by the heavily minority underclass sequestered within American cities. Whites listen to rap music, wear inner-city styles, idolize sports figures who emerged from such neighborhoods—but will not sacrifice privileges to create more widespread economic opportunity.¹³ Mixed marriages, mixed dating and mixed parenting have grown apace, with no organized resistance for decades, whereas policies intended to mix or equalize schools still evoke deep-seated resistance. African-American cultural advancement may be easier, that is, because it does not require a collective change of heart. In general, though, what all Weberian

¹³Many criticize white patronage of black entertainers as a form of colonization. Sure, whites are willing to cheer for them, laugh with them, or groove to them, but just try to bring one home. Yet the willingness to idolize individual black public figures also involves a huge redirection of resources, enriching individual African Americans (and the corporations that promote them). Michael Jordan's advertising revenues represent real money. Books by Dennis Rodman cost real money. Boyz II Men and Puff Daddy recordings circulate in white suburban schools, and those cost money. So whatever partitioning whites impose, the cultural success that these developments represent holds up in the market, and therefore is deeper than dismissive criticism implies.

approaches share is an assumption that these spheres are distinct and socially meaningful if we wish to understand racial conflict (Stone 1985, 37).

A fourth possibility, of course, is that racial conflict has no rational basis at all. Racial feelings are not strictly environmental. Two sisters can end up adults with divergent racial views. They may share the same upbringing, the same family example, the same involuntary experiences of childhood. Yet one pivotal event, seemingly small, may set them on different courses. Or their emotional needs may not be identical, for either genetic or birth-order reasons. The end result is a variation in racial sensitivity that not even the finest social-science measurement will be able to explain or predict. No one quite knows why Aunt Mathilda is a civil-rights activist but Aunt Mildred collapses in fits whenever she sees a racial minority, but there it is.

One influential statement of this general perspective is the “authoritarian personality” paradigm that dominated social psychology for a while after World War II. This approach, associated with the Frankfurt School (Adorno et al. 1950), stresses that racial prejudice appeals to certain personality types. It fills psychological needs for order and unearned superiority, a drive that many do not possess. Looking back, it is obvious the extent to which cultural assumptions and class biases guided the Authoritarian Personality literature: anyone who desired traditional social structures was a closet fascist. Thus it is not clear that the theory adequately parsed out psychological variables from materialist ones. But the more general insight, that much of racial hostility is idiosyncratic, still warrants attention as a fourth possibility in this parsimonious model.

In sum, this section outlined a simple categorical distinction: whether races battle over political, economic, or cultural resources—or nothing at all. When I turn to identifying the observable implications of these ideas in contemporary data (see Chapter 5), the possibilities are too complex for only four options to characterize them. Nevertheless, this parsimonious model is sufficient to illustrate why distinctions are necessary. In the next section, I explore Southern history to show that

geographical patterns of racial trouble have changed depending upon the white interests at stake.

The Role of Proximity in Southern Political Development

The idea that proximity breeds hostility developed through the study of Southern politics. Furthermore, as Chapter 3 shows, the concept performs poorly outside the region. Even its occasional successful application in other data often relies on the historically distinctive racial conservatism of Southern whites compared to other Americans. Thus most names applied to the concept are far too ambitious; evidence militates against either a generic “white backlash” hypothesis or “group threat” hypothesis based upon proximity. About the only incarnation that can claim consistent success is the “Black Belt” hypothesis, which properly indicates its regionally contingent nature.

Even that version’s success, however, only applies within the bounds of postwar political science. Stepping back, historically, it becomes clear that not even this regionally constrained proximity argument survives unscathed. Southern counties with the greatest black density have not been consistently more “conservative” on racial matters. They have not consistently supported political candidates or social movements most hostile to black ambitions, or most favorable to white supremacy. They have not exhibited the most destructive racial pathologies. This contrary pattern generally does not result from any particular generosity of spirit, or endorsement of egalitarianism, but from the complicated nexus of interests evoked by particular racial issues. Whites generally have responded to the incentives they faced at any given time—political, cultural or economic. Where they stood on “racial” issues often depended upon pressures with only an indirect racial component.

To illustrate this claim, we can begin with the antebellum period. The institution of slavery was, of course, abhorrent. It violated every principle upon which the United States was founded: the right to mastery over one’s own life, the right to be free from bondage, the right to own and enjoy

property, the right to sell one's own labor, the right to equality before church or state. But it would be a mistake to confuse the moral repugnancy of a racist institution with the behavior of individuals living under that system. The evidence is widespread of slave owners plagued by guilt, such as Thomas Jefferson in the quotation beginning this chapter. The evidence is widespread that owners and slaves experienced the full range of mutual emotions, including respect, affection, even love. For every sadistic slave owner, the historical record offers others who took pains to treat their servants with every kindness permitted by social propriety, who even violated the strictures of slave society when they could do so furtively.

One is struck, for example, by the multiple privileges Frederick Douglass enjoyed once his "masters" recognized his intelligence (McFeely 1991): long absence from his putative owner (29), being taught to read (29), forgiveness for trying to escape (56), encouragement at developing skills and selling his own labor (64-66). McFeely (1991, 23) describes Douglass' owners as "perplexed and limited people struggling to respond to the needs of an unusual boy who was also a slave. Somehow, that boy had made them feel that he must be specially provided for, but the society in which they lived—in which slavery was so firmly fixed—gave them no satisfactory room in which to do so." They were not willing to buck the evil social system in which they operated, but they also did not stand out as particularly hostile because of proximity. Moody (1924, 78-89), in a study of Louisiana sugar-cane growing, describes the big celebrations that often followed grinding season on a plantation: free booze, dances at the "big house," prizes given to the best workers. Holidays usually preceded the rigorous season as well. Slaves fed on fish, received generous rations of flour and molasses, and could drink as much coffee as desired. Unhappy or unhealthy workers were bad workers, and the sugar-cane industry required dedicated effort—so white planters had to behave paternalistically.

Those with little connection to the "peculiar institution," on the other hand, often could express

virulent racism. Tocqueville writes at length on how much better Southerners treated blacks than did Northerners. "Race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those states where it exists, and nowhere is it more intolerant than in those states where slavery was never known," he writes (1969, 343). "In the South, where slavery still exists, less trouble is taken to keep the Negro apart: they sometimes share the labors and the pleasures of the white men; people are prepared to mix with them to some extent; legislation is more harsh against them, but customs are more tolerant and gentle."

Contrary to Tocqueville's dire prediction (1969, 344) that "prejudice rejecting the Negroes seems to increase in proportion to their emancipation," the pattern did not end immediately after the Civil War, or even once Bourbon Democrats took over after Reconstruction. Woodward (1974, 42-43) writes:

A frequent topic of comment by Northern visitors during the period was the intimacy of contact between the races in the South, an intimacy sometimes admitted to be distasteful to the visitor. Standard topics were the sight of white babies suckled at black breasts, white and colored children playing together, the casual proximity of white and Negro homes in the cities, the camaraderie of maidservant and mistress, employer and employee, customer and clerk, and the usual stories of cohabitation

Within the South, it was often whites who owned few or no slaves who were most vicious, either because they resented job competition with unpaid labor, or because they wished to salve their own marginal social status—a pattern that also survived through Reconstruction and Redemption.

Let me be clear. I am not praising the comparative virtue of living in slavery,¹⁴ or even paid servitude, nor am I attempting to turn mild personal kindnesses into an encompassing beneficence. Owners often were solicitous regarding the safety and even happiness of their chattel, but the slave was lucky if this regard reached the level reserved for a faithful hunting dog, which might receive similar regard. These were seldom egalitarian relationships (aside from the occasional illicit

¹⁴ Ideologists for the slave system often took advantage of poor living conditions faced by Northern laborers, comparing slavery favorably to industrial "wage slavery." Of course, this is a silly comparison; the psychic importance of freedom does not conform to the needs of a cost-benefit analysis.

marriage, perhaps). They represented rule by an iron hand, concealed under a velvet glove when slaves “knew their place.” Humane treatment generally had a rational purpose, which is that social control is most effective when it does not rely on force.

Yet this is exactly the point. The rational group interest for slavers, for those in closest proximity, was not to be meaner than everyone else, but in a sense to be kind in the midst of an inhumane institution that one did not challenge. Familiarity did not necessarily breed contempt, despite contact under severely imbalanced power resources—before or after Emancipation. “What the Northern traveler of the ‘eighties sometimes took for signs of a new era of race relations was really a heritage of slavery times, or, more elementally, the result of two peoples having lived together intimately for a long time—whatever their formal relations were” (Woodward 1974, 43).

Certainly whites in heavily black states fought fiercely to defend slavery, especially those from Black Belt counties where economic incentives encouraged activism. At the same time, they did not give the greatest support to firebrand Southern politicians before the Civil War (Lipset [1959] 1981, chap. 11). State secession conventions also call into question any behavioral assumptions contained in the proximity logic. A detailed volume by Ralph Wooster (1962) shows that pro-slavery war hawks were not consistently those who grew up among blacks, or even those who lived in the heavily black areas. In Mississippi, for example, the Yazoo-Delta counties of the Black Belt tended to oppose secession (Wooster 1962, chap. 3). In Georgia, secessionists were distributed fairly equally around the state, and one’s slave holdings did not predict preferences (Wooster 1962, chap. 6). The ardent secessionists in most Southern states often did not even come from the region! In Alabama, natives tended to support cooperation with the North, while those from Northern states unanimously endorsed secession (Wooster 1962, chap. 4). The same was true in Florida, where Northern slave counties tended to oppose secession; the county’s population proportion in slavery bore little relationship to the vote (Wooster 1962, chap. 5).

In Louisiana, barely half of the natives voted for immediate secession, 25-22, compared to a tally of two-thirds, or 49-25, among others (Wooster 1962, chap. 7). The immediate secessionists included four native Irishmen, a Frenchman, six New Yorkers, and at least seven more from outside the secessionist South. Sugar planters, who benefitted from national tariffs, showed very little enthusiasm for separating from the Union (Wooster 1962, 264). It would be a mistake to conclude that living among slaves produced greater belligerence among whites, or greater fear of political equality imposed by the Union, beyond the dictates of what material self-interest demanded.

Reconstruction brought to the former slaves temporary rights, including the vote. Black politicians served in state legislatures, in Congress; Louisianan P.B.S. Pinchback even enjoyed a short stint in the Governor's Mansion. Naturally the loss of white influence was greatest where blacks were most populous, so Black Belt areas became particularly strong in their resistance to the Republican party, and denizens played prominent roles when the South was "redeemed" (Kousser 1974, 16-17). However, the policies enacted by plantation-area patricians were more oriented toward fiscal conservatism than racism. As long as blacks bowed to white supremacy, most of their civil rights would continue to be acknowledged—a *quid pro quo* agreement that the Louisiana Unification Movement of 1873 even tried to make explicit (Williams 1966, 20-21).¹⁵

These conservatives were proud of their (often exaggerated) protector role for former slaves (Percy 1941, 227-28). Many defended black suffrage, while Democratic governors in South Carolina and Louisiana appointed African Americans to many offices (Cobb 1992, chap. 3; Woodward 1974, 51-55). Post-slavery paternalism was rooted in rational self-interest, as always—planters needed a stable labor force (Cobb 1992, 61-65)—but it was far more pleasant than the "revolt of the rednecks" that followed (Kirwan 1951; see also Woodward 1974, chap. 3). The

¹⁵ The Unification plan failed, but the opposition bore little relationship to racial proximity. Those in the Protestant northern half of the state opposed the plan regardless of black density in their county, whereas even Southern planter types endorsed the plan in the Catholic southern portion (Williams 1966, 41).

whites who fought hardest for Jim Crow segregation, including the whites who populated the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan, often flourished in regions with the fewest blacks (Cobb 1992, 146; Wade 1987, 57; Whitfield 1988, 44). The backlash certainly responded to a competitive threat: the success plantation whites enjoyed with black votes (which black *voters* may or may not have cast themselves). It did not, however, uniformly produce a proximity pattern.

Once the Jim Crow system took root, it quickly stabilized in many Southern counties. The situation seemed so hopeless, and so deadly, that challenges to white supremacy were unlikely without outside assistance. Indeed, when the Klan rose up again after the turn of the century, inspired by the phenomenal popularity of D.W. Griffith's *Birth of A Nation* and masterminded by professional public-relations experts, the Deep South states showed relatively little interest (Gerlach 1982, 13-14; Wade 1987, book II). Reliable comparative estimates of membership in a secretive organization of course are not possible, especially because those numbers fluctuated widely during the early 1920s, but the historical record strongly leans against any proximity effect. The Klan's strongest organization appeared in Indiana, despite a limited black population, and the only big Klan strongholds in the South were peripheral states: Texas and Arkansas (Lipset and Raab 1978, chap. 4). Utah's Klan organization conspired to run the only black man out of Salt Lake City (Gerlach 1982, 34-35). The evidence of a "group threat" effect is, obviously, rather thin.

Of course, the Klan upsurge of the 1920s was not primarily a racial movement. It was a rear-guard effort in defense of small-town Protestant morality, against secularism (Blee 1991; Gerlach 1982, 141; Lipset and Raab 1978, chap. 4; Moore 1991; Wade 1987, 169-71). Catholic and Jewish immigrants posed much more of a "threat" than Southern blacks, who after all often subscribed to the same moral code as their white neighbors. Even in Greenville, a Mississippi Delta town, Klan organizers apparently targeted Catholics rather than blacks (Percy 1941, 234), an effort that the community repudiated. Yet close proximity to immigrants did not really predict the phenomenon

either. Like much of racial conflict (Blumer 1958, 3-4), it was driven by media communications—newspapers plus the movie—and took on whatever form appealed to a particular locality (Wade 1987, 155-56). Indiana contained relatively few target-group members, for example (Wade 1987, 218-20). Utah's ethnic immigrants already tended to be segregated, and no concentrated attempt was underway to alter that situation. The Klan organization in Castle Gate burned a cross on the lawn of the only Catholic in town (Gerlach 1982, 97). If group density mattered, it was only at the state level, where Protestants battled against cosmopolitan politicians and cultural diversity.

One practice that did thrive in the South was lynching. "Uppity" African Americans might disappear in the night, and appear the next morning a bloody corpse. But most African Americans brought up in the Jim Crow South were acculturated to the racial caste system, so lynchings were relatively rare in the Black Belt counties. Such occurrences commonly clustered in counties where the social system was less stable (Pettigrew and Cramer 1959, 62-63; Reed 1972, 356), unless an unfortunate black visitor ran afoul of local expectations (Whitfield 1988, 6).¹⁶ Once again, no Black Belt effect appears.

The Rise and Fall of Localism

The Jim Crow South was a specific, complicated social and economic system that structured interracial hostilities. The national parties played a role in Southern politics that they no longer serve. The Southern economy was notably more agricultural, Southern cities less dominant. Transportation and communications technologies were less developed. The service sector was less

¹⁶ I do not buy Reed's proposal that researchers should adjust the lynching rate for the number of whites available to commit the crime (Reed 1972, 357). This would be appropriate if, say, we were simply studying white-on-black crime, and wanted to see whether the figures deviated from randomness. But a lynching is a fairly specific sort of event, almost always premeditated and carried out by a group—a response to violations (or purported violations) of locale mores. Many catalysts for lynching did not rely on chance encounters, especially because the sheriff and the voter registrar were uniformly white.

uniform, national corporations less influential in daily life. The need for international trade was less imposing. All told, defense of the “Southern way of life” was primarily a local concern, critical to people in heterogeneous counties but largely irrelevant even to Southern whites living where people had not owned slaves before the Civil War.

At the time, the demands of civil-rights activists were modest. Even the most basic political rights were not available to blacks in many counties. The resources for which they contended were primarily local ones: participation in the political process, access to the local schools, the end of demeaning segregation in the communities where they already lived. To the extent pursuing these social goals infringed on anyone’s power or status, it was only in the places with a large African-American population already present—and there the stakes were often terribly high. To whites in wealthy neighborhoods, or in counties with no history of slavery and therefore small black populations, the costs of the Second Reconstruction were light. In fact, breaking the Black Belt political monopoly promised to benefit regions of the South poorly represented in the political process, such as peninsular Florida. The geographic pattern of past civil-rights opposition follows logically from this social setting: strident where African Americans were many, more lenient where they were few. This is the historical origin of the Black Belt proximity pattern that so many scholars have noted.

Today the wall guarding what Black and Black (1987, 99) call the “outer color line” has been reduced to rubble. African Americans generally are able to vote if they so desire. They have elected mayors, sheriffs, and even a governor in the former Confederacy. The 104th Congress included 17 black Democrats from the South, due in part to Justice Department enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which has created majority-minority districts where feasible. With the exception of several obtusely drawn congressional districts, these political advances enjoy widespread legitimacy and are unlikely to disappear. Therefore, whites in diverse communities have little or no hope of

restoring their unchallenged dominance in political affairs.

African Americans now enjoy the legal right to use all public accommodations. Even the most racist white Southerner has, by now, adapted to the free flow of black patrons in and out of desegregated facilities such as restaurants, banks, government buildings, and public transportation. The insulting “whites only” signs of the Jim Crow era no longer hang, except in a nook here and a cranny there if at all, and very few people seriously expect to put them back.

Despite initial resistance to the Supreme Court’s unanimous 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision requiring desegregated education, public institutions have succumbed to national pressure in favor of integration. For white Southerners to keep their kids apart from black children, they either must pay costly private-school tuition, or they must reside in a homogeneous white community. Almost no Southerner seriously expects to live in a racially mixed setting, and yet send children to a lily-white public elementary school.

In sum, the traditional white-backlash phenomenon was historically contingent, a predictable pattern for racial conflict that grew out of the Solid South’s slow collapse and the interests it engendered. Before the Solid South period, whites in proximity with African Americans were *not* consistently more likely to exhibit racial pathologies, so there’s no reason to presume that proximity would generate racial tensions today. Incentives have changed. Most civil rights goals with a geographically concentrated impact have been realized, and the white South is aware that most of these social changes are permanent. Political competition has receded in importance, especially because legislative districts often separate whites and blacks who live very close to each other, but also because some black politicians have shown that they can satisfy a conservative white constituency (U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop and former U.S. Rep. Mike Espy spring to mind).

What sort of conflict now dominates race relations? Racial conflict, in the South no less than elsewhere in the United States, revolves around a new set of issues, those embodied by the

intermediate and inner color lines: economic status, job discrimination, representation in cultural institutions, the power to define cultural values. The economic conflict is less politically prominent, contrary to the implicit rank ordering in this “color line” model. White and black financial resources have remained stubbornly far apart (Oliver and Shapiro 1995), but black worker incomes have been rising steadily while white incomes have stagnated. To the extent black poverty is a political problem, it cannot be solved through attempts to remove price discrimination, which skilled black labor no longer faces to any appreciable degree (Loury 1995, 97).¹⁷ Rather, lingering racial differences result from the statistical impact of a large, marginalized black underclass that does not find employment at all (Chandra 2000; Loury 1995, 138-39). Breaking apart this concentrated ghetto population, either through housing desegregation or through redistribution of financial resources, has not been a serious political goal of activists on the right or the left. Not even civil-rights leaders, who are predominantly middle class, show much interest (Marable 1995).

To the extent economic issues do appear in the contemporary debate over race, it is in the guise of affirmative action, which primarily benefits higher-status African Americans (Loury 1995, 109). Affirmative action predominates not in working class job markets, but in professions such as academia, journalism, and management, and among businesses that accept government contracts. These occupational categories are not localized in a mobile society. Rather, they unite a regional, even a national, market—spreading “threat” around widely. An ambitious journalist who currently works in Gary, Indiana, is no more likely to be squeezed by the *Washington Post*'s affirmative-action policy than a similar reporter working in Missoula, Montana. The same is true with access into the professions. A white high-school student applying from South Carolina faces roughly as much “threat” from an elite university's affirmative-action policy as one applying from Vermont. The

¹⁷ One ironic fact: Blacks from the West Indies enjoy a comparable economic position as whites, despite the double whammy of race and immigrant status (Loury 1995, 137). By coming from the outside, they are insulated from the institutional barriers that limit black achievement. I also suspect that the cultural barriers work in their favor, such as how whites perceive Jamaican accents compared to black ghetto accents.

backlash pattern should not apply.

More common is racial tension over the cultural battleground (Green, Strolovitch, and Wong 1998, 375; Wong and Strolovitch 1996, 6). Whites perceive a threat to cherished values, including those central to their vision of American society (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 108-14). Consider how frequently race-tinged debates ultimately revolve around *cultural* stakes. Whites resent collective economic strategies, which they perceive as circumventing traditional paths to prosperity—citing the example of parents or grandparents “who were poor but never asked for handouts from anyone.” Blacks supposedly undermine “middle-class values,” such as hard work and financial self-sufficiency, by seeking institutional favoritism. Blacks seem to threaten “family values,” breeding out of wedlock at a faster rate than they can support offspring, and with multiple partners, an irresponsible behavior that (infuriatingly) does not lessen the sex appeal attached culturally to urban black males. Their influence in schools substitutes the “three R’s” with multiculturalism, patriotism with cynicism, the classics with trendy leftist scribblings such as those by Franz Fanon, and objective tests with feel-good ideological screening.

Middle-class blacks use their influence in academia and journalism to undermine American prestige, “turning everything into a racial issue” and defining themselves as an oppressed caste despite professional success that many Americans can only envy (Loury 1995, 54). Their influence in Hollywood and in the music industry results in violent and sexist entertainment, including vulgar rap music, which corrupts otherwise nice white (and black) kids. Disproportionate black criminality and hatred of whites makes cities and towns unsafe, sharply curtailing the freedom of action that law-abiding Americans once enjoyed.¹⁸

¹⁸ Just to be extra clear, I am not claiming that blacks genuinely pose a cultural threat, or otherwise endorsing the perspective summarized by these two paragraphs. Nor do the scholars who have popularized the “symbolics politics” approach necessarily see a genuine cultural conflict, aside from a serious divide over how to deal with race in America (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 29-30). Rather, this is a cultural conflict because turning even unambiguously bad things, such as murders or out-of-wedlock births, into racial issues represents a battle over dominant symbols.

White resolve to participate in this cultural struggle, and to view it in racial terms, thus should not necessarily respond to proximity. Enough has changed to warrant a new assessment of the old backlash logic. In particular, it is worth considering whether cultural conflict does not veil an underlying struggle over instrumental power (Finkenstaedt 1994, 19).

Conclusion

We know that whites often fear the American black population. Fear does not carry particular political content, however, nor does it betray a single social pathology. If the study of “group threat” will continue to hold value, we need to engage in a bit of phenomenological archeology. Threat passes through multiple filters between thought and expression, with the political system’s output a mixture of numerous impulses. Threat can fixate on different stakes, perhaps rational and materialistic, perhaps strictly psychological. Different routes to material advantage—political, economic, cultural—play out quite differently.

Research thus should clarify which impulse is under investigation, and not simply cite the long but contradictory backlash literature as justification for throwing group density into a regression equation. If this remonstrance seems obvious, the question remains why published research seldom meets the standard. Perhaps the culprit is lack of a formal vocabulary for carrying out the discussion, or lack of a structure around which to hang incremental contributions to the empirical agenda. I therefore proposed, in this chapter, a relatively simple framework for that purpose. Any theory of race relations should be able to fit within this framework: first clarifying the hypothesized “threat,” in terms of its contextual imperatives, and tracing that threat to its logically deduced observable implications in a given data source, with consideration for the filters through which it has passed.

One promising avenue, because of the many opportunities for inexpensive testing, is to translate hypotheses into geographical patterns. The next chapter takes up that task for white behavior in

contemporary American politics, and especially Southern politics. After showing that most theorizing on racial attitudes does not translate cleanly into geographical hypotheses, I offer alternative narratives that might capture the underlying nature of racial conservatism. Some are materialist, some psychological, but all follow through to observable implications that I can test in Part II.