Beyond civil rights

What’s a Self-Respecting “Black” Intellectual To Do in the Face of Persistent Racial Inequality in the United States?

Glenn C. Loury / Merton P. Stoltz Professor of the Social Sciences
Brown University and CASBS-Stanford University
January 26, 2016
Outline of this presentation

• Tribute to My (“White”) Mentor – Thomas C. Schelling

• Motivation: What’s Next for the ‘American Dilemma?’

• Basic Facts About Persistent Racial Inequality in US

• The Incarceration Explosion: A Case in Point

• Social Capital + Racial Segregation = Racial Inequality

• Some Political Considerations:
  - A Tempting But False Analogy: Obama Was No King
  - What, now, are a “black” intellectual’s responsibilities?
What Is Meant by “Schelling-esque”

• Broad interests; playful mind; mastery of strategic analysis; elegant writing; imaginatively linking theory with policy.

• Taught “Public Policy in Divided Societies” with Tom in 1980s. Encountered writers like: Amartya Sen; Albert Hirschman; Erving Goffman; Leo Strauss; Kenneth Arrow; Robert Merton (Sr.); Howard Raiffa; Mancur Olson; Michael Spence; Harold Isaacs; Jon Elster; Thomas Pettigrew; Michael Walzer; Gunnar Myrdal; Thomas Kuhn ... (I got an education!)

• Our students investigated such topics as: the Roma in Europe; the indigenous in Central America; untouchability in India; slave maroon communities in the Caribbean; skin color caste in cities of New Orleans and Charleston; sign language vs. lip-reading among the deaf; name and accent changes to disguise ethnic/regional origins; collective punishment, pride, shame and reputation; racial profiling; stigma; sexual divisions of labor at home and in the workplace; endogamy and assortative mating ...
• We explored conceptual puzzles in lectures from that course about the workings of: rumors; seduction; riots; “passing for white”; anonymity; plausible deniability; signaling; strategic imprecision; group think; code words and dog-whistle politics; discursive taboos and naked emperors; knowledge of another’s state of knowledge; behavior in public; difference between promises, threats and bluffs.

• In short, I incurred an enormous intellectual debt to Tom in those years, one which I shall never be able adequately to discharge ... He forever altered my way of thinking about the intersection between economic theory, social policy and race – in the United States and throughout the world
Race: America’s Seemingly Permanent Dilemma

• This year we will mark sixty-second anniversary of U.S. Supreme Court’s fabled Brown decision. It’s ancient history...

• Reckoning with what Myrdal called the “American Dilemma” of race was the country’s biggest domestic challenge post-WWII.

• The large scale of non-European immigration since 1964 has transformed social/political landscape on racial inequality issues.

• So, concerning blacks, how are we doing? Problem solved?

• Not hardly! While “enormous progress has been made,” we have NOT solved this problem, are now in danger of losing our way.

• While still relevant, conventional notions of “racial bias” inherited from mid-20th century US are inadequate to the current problem.

• A focus on the remediation of the developmental disparities that are inhibiting blacks’ full participation in 21st century American society is now crucial.
Discussing “race” in the US has global significance. It’s important to get it right. (Proposed a framework in Anatomy of Racial Ineq. 2002)

- Concern not parochial: “Inextricable web of mutuality”
  - Consider Gandhi, King, Mandela: many mutual influences
  - Anti-Colonialism and Anti-racism struggles intertwine
  - Common to these struggles: the violent domination of non-white bodies

- Common themes of “recognition,” “redistribution” and “reparation” arise in many national contexts

- “Historical transition” and “intergenerational justice” problems also present in many contexts. Will focus here on this set of issues for the US.
Case in Point: Failed Transition to Racial Equality in the US:

1) African American Disadvantage Persists in 21st Century

2) Convergence to Parity Nowhere in Sight (the transition problem…)

3) Dr. King’s ‘Dream’ of Equality Has Yet To Be Realized

4) “But That’s OK Because We Got Us a Black President”?

5) What Is to Be Done?? (An Unhelpful “Race vs Class” Debate)
Median Income of Households Headed by Native-Born Non-Hispanics (shown in constant 2007 Dollars)
HOME OWNERSHIP
Percent of Native-Born Non-Hispanic Households Owning their Residence
Median net worth by race

![Graph showing median net worth by race from 1995 to 2004. The graph compares White non-Hispanic and Non White or Hispanic groups. The net worth for White non-Hispanic shows a steady increase, while the net worth for Non White or Hispanic remains relatively flat.](image-url)
Percent college graduate by race
An Incarceration Explosion
Both Reflecting and Locking-in Racial Inequality

(I have addressed this massive mobilization of coercive resources in the US in my book, “Race, Incarceration and American Values: The Tanner Lectures,” M.I.T. Press 2008)
There are five key points to note about Imprisonment Trends in the United States 1970-2010:

1) US Imprisonment Dwarfs that in other Countries

2) Current High Rates Unprecedented in US History

3) Incidence Wildly Disparate by Race and Class

4) Rise Since 1980 Due Largely to Anti-Drugs “War”

5) Imprisonment Now Key Feature of US Social Policy
What can a self-respecting black intellectual do?

In last five years I have promoted two scholarly investigations of the causes and consequences of such high rates of incarceration in the US:

1) Study group at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences Daedalus (2010)
2) Expert panel reporting under auspices of the National Academy of Sciences (2014)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Glenn C. Loury &amp; Bruce Western</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incarceration &amp; social inequality</td>
<td>Bruce Western &amp; Becky Pettit</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Punishment's place: the local concentration of mass incarceration</td>
<td>Robert J. Sampson &amp; Charles Loeffler</td>
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<tr>
<td>The paradox of women's imprisonment</td>
<td>Candace Kruttschnitt</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The contradictions of juvenile crime &amp; punishment</td>
<td>Jeffrey Fagan</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell blocks &amp; red ink: mass incarceration, the great recession &amp; penal reform</td>
<td>Marie Gottschalk</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class, race &amp; hyperincarceration in</td>
<td>Loïc Wacquant</td>
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The growth of incarceration in the United States

National Academy of Sciences
April 25, 2014

Exploring Causes and Consequences
U.S. Incarceration rate 1925 - 1972

Note: Incarceration rate is state and federal prison population per 100,000
U.S. Incarceration rate 1925 - 2012

Note: Incarceration rate is state and federal prison population per 100,000.
Incarceration in the u.s. and europe 2012 – 2013
Per 100.000 population
Incarceration in the u.s. and europe 2012 – 2013
Per 100,000 population

- USA: 707
- United Kingdom (England & Wales): 148
- Belgium: 108
- Italy: 105
- France: 100
- Austria: 98
- Netherlands: 82
- Germany: 77
- Denmark: 73
- Sweden: 67

* Prison and Jail
Men’s Risk of Imprisonment by Age 30-34

- **1945-1949**
  - All: 1.4%
  - HS/GED White: 1.5%
  - Dropouts: 3.8%
  - All: 10.4%
  - HS/GED Black: 11.0%
  - Dropouts: 14.7%
Men’s Risk of Imprisonment by Age 30-34

- All HS/GED Dropouts
  - b. 1945-1949: 1.4, 5.4, 28.0, 11.0
  - b. 1975-1979: 1.5, 6.2, 3.8, 21.4

- White
  - All: 5.4
  - HS/GED: 1.5
  - Dropouts: 3.8

- Black
  - All: 8.0
  - HS/GED: 1.0
  - Dropouts: 2.4

- Men’s Risk of Imprisonment by Age 30-34
  - All: 10.4
  - HS/GED: 11.0
  - Dropouts: 26.8

- All: 14.7
  - HS/GED: 14.7
  - Dropouts: 68.0

Increased Imprisonment for Drug Offenses Leading Factor in the Growth of US Incarceration since 1980
Question: “But wasn’t rise in (black) punishment a reasonable response to increases in (black) crime?”

answer: “No, not really..!”
Crime vs Incarceration in the united states
From 1970 onward

But, incarceration rose steadily from 1970 onward, while crime rates went up and down. Moreover, crime has been falling steadily for twenty years.
There Has Been a Massive Racial Disparity in the Incidence of Anti-Drugs Law Enforcement (relative to usage rates)
Marijuana possession arrests 1985 - 2008

Yet, Marijuana has been the target of much anti-drug policing. Why?
Basically We’ve Been “Punishing the Poor”

## Characteristics of State and Federal Prisoners in 2004

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>State Prisoners</th>
<th>Federal Prisoners</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proportion of prison population</strong></td>
<td>0.904</td>
<td>0.096</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.929</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proportion Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education attainment prior to admissions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.040</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle school</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>0.143</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some high school, no degree</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>0.374</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>0.195</td>
<td>0.214</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than high school</td>
<td>0.139</td>
<td>0.227</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Proportion Hispanic</strong></td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.251</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td>0.433</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.430</td>
<td>0.460</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.107</td>
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### Characteristics of State and Federal Prisoners in 2004

#### Age Distribution

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<tr>
<td>25\text{th} percentile</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>50\text{th} percentile</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75\text{th} percentile</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
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#### Age at first arrest

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<th>Percentile</th>
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<tr>
<td>25\text{th} percentile</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>50\text{th} percentile</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75\text{th} percentile</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
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#### Age first engaged in criminal activity

<table>
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<th>Percentile</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Federal</th>
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</thead>
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<td>25\text{th} percentile</td>
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<td>50\text{th} percentile</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75\text{th} percentile</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
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#### Health Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Federal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart problems</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>0.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney problems</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>0.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatitis</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.076</td>
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### Characteristics of State and Federal Prisoners in 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of mental health/substance abuse</th>
<th>State Prisoners</th>
<th>Federal Prisoners</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participated in alcohol/drug treatment program</td>
<td>0.605</td>
<td>0.649</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manic depression, bipolar</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizophrenia</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-traumatic-stress</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety disorder</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality disorder</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mental health problem</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any diagnosed mental health problem</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td>0.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever attempted suicide</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Program participation while incarcerated            |                  |                   |
| Vocational education/job                             |                  |                   |
| Training                                            | 0.273            | 0.314             |
| Education program                                   | 0.312            | 0.454             |
| Religious studies                                   | 0.302            | 0.312             |
The prison intersects with families and communities. (Note incarceration’s huge impact of black children. Source: Pettit and Western)
# Imprisonment and life course (Source: Pettit and Western)

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Whites</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Service</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imprisonment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What does this say about the quality of American Democracy?

• Prison/Jail Primary Venue for Government Engagement with African American Men. More important than schools, unions, military, or social service agencies.

• There are six times as many whites as blacks in the US, but there are twice as many black as white children with an incarcerated parent.
The American Path Chosen: Change in Numbers Incarcerated and Receiving Cash Aid: 1990-2000
Direct Causes:
Changes in Sentencing and Law Enforcement

- In the 1980s states and the federal government adopted mandatory guidelines and expanded mandatory prison sentences.
- Drug arrest rates increased significantly and drug crimes were sentenced more harshly.
- In the 1990s longer sentences were set particularly for violent crimes and repeat offenders (e.g., three-strikes, truth-in-sentencing).
Tough Sentencing Increased Incarceration and Contributed to Racial Disparity

• Growth of state prison populations, 1980 – 2010, is explained in roughly equal proportion by (a) the increased rate of incarceration given an arrest and (b) longer sentences

• Although incarceration rates increased across the population, racial disparities yielded high rates among Hispanics and extremely high rates among blacks
Underlying Causes:
Crime, Politics, and Social Change

- Crime rates increased significantly from the early 1960s to the early 1980s (e.g., murder rate doubled from 1960 to 1980)

- Decline in urban manufacturing, problems of drugs and violence concentrated in poor and racially segregated inner city neighborhoods

- Rising crime combined with civil rights activism, urban disorder, heightened public concern and tough-on-crime rhetoric from political leaders
Frontlash: Race and the Development of Punitive Crime Policy

Vesla M. Weaver, University of Virginia

... fear in turn seeks repressiveness as a source of safety. [1970]


I sense there is a tendency to make crime in the streets synonymous with racial threats or the need to control the urban Negro problem. [1968]

—Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, sociologist whose doll studies were instrumental in showing that separate was not equal in Brown v. Board of Education
Civil rights cemented its place on the national agenda with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, fair housing legislation, federal enforcement of school integration, and the outlawing of discriminatory voting mechanisms in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Less recognized but no less important, the Second Reconstruction also witnessed one of the most punitive interventions in United States history. The death penalty was reinstated, felon disenfranchisement statutes from the First Reconstruction were revived, and the chain gang returned. State and federal governments revised their criminal codes, effectively abolishing parole, imposing mandatory minimum sentences, and allowing juveniles to be incarcerated in adult prisons. Meanwhile, the Law Enforcement Assistance Act of 1965 gave the federal government an altogether new role in crime control; several subsequent policies, beginning with the Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 and culminating with the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, ‘war on drugs,’ and extension of capital crimes, significantly altered the approach. These and other developments had an exceptional and long-lasting effect, with imprisonment increasing six-fold between 1973 and the turn of the century.¹
Collapse of segregation

New Norm of Racial Equality

Riots

Crime

Problem Definition:
Synthesis of Racial Discord & Crime

Losers of Civil Rights seeking to preserve power

Strategic Pursuit

Issue Capture

Conservative Control of Key Committees

Punitive Legislation

Erosion of Civil Rights Agenda
NAS/NRC Committee’s findings on impact of incarceration on crime

• Increased incarceration may have reduced crime but most studies indicate a small effect.

• Either through incapacitation or deterrence, the incremental effect of increasing lengthy sentences is modest at best.
NAS/NRC Committee’s findings on Social and economic effects

- Prisons became more overcrowded and offered fewer programs, but lethal violence in prison declined.
- Men and women released from prison experience los wages and high unemployment.
- Incarceration is associated with the instability of families and adverse developmental outcomes for the children involved.
- Incarceration is concentrated in poor, high-crime neighborhoods.
NAS/NRC Committee’s Main conclusion

“The U.S. has gone past the point where the numbers of people in prison can be justified by any potential benefits.”

According to the best available evidence:

• The social and human consequences may have been far-reaching

• The crime reduction effect is highly uncertain
Policy recommendation of NRC Committee

“The United States should take steps to reduce incarceration rates”

This requires:

• Sentencing Policy: Reexamining policies for mandatory sentences, long sentences

• Prison Policy: Improving the conditions of incarceration, reducing the harm to the families and communities

• Social Policy: Assessing community needs for housing, treatment, and employment that may increase with declining incarceration
But what about this counter-argument?

1) “Racial differences in punishment are not really ‘inequality’ since people can always choose not to “do the crime,” in which case they needn’t “do the time.”

2) Besides, huge differences by race in rates of criminal offending reflect aspects of “black culture” – like unwed motherhood, paternal abandonment and a proclivity to violence. Such cultural deficiencies are a problem over which public policies can exert little beneficial effect…
Answering the counter-argument (1)

But “culture” among poor is not a fixed thing independent of social structure and policies.

The question is, are we observing “endemic” or “systemic” effects here? Poverty and social exclusion exert powerful effects on “choices” (criminal and other) of the poor.

“Biased Social Cognition” (Loury 2002) is the tendency to attribute what are systemic racial inequalities to racially endemic causes.
In my own work over four decades I have developed an alternative social-scientific framework for understanding the transition problem in the U.S. (See posted interview)

Persistent Racial Inequality Stems not from “Black Culture” but rather from Combined Effects of Racial Stigma and of Social and Geographic Segregation by Race and Class?
Social capital: its origins and Applications in Modern society

Alejandro Portes
Department of Sociology, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey 08540

KEY WORDS: social control, family support, networks, sociability

ABSTRACT
This paper reviews the origins and definitions of social capital in the writings of Bourdieu, Loury, and Coleman, among other authors. It distinguishes four sources of social capital and examines their dynamics. Applications of the concept in the sociological literature emphasize its role in social control, in family support, and in benefits mediated by extrafamilial networks. I provide examples of each of these positive functions. Negative consequences of the same processes also deserve attention for a balanced picture of the forces at play. I review four such consequences and illustrate them with relevant examples. Recent writings on social capital have extended the concept from an individual asset to a feature of communities and even nations. The final sections describe this conceptual stretch and examine its limitations. I argue that, as shorthand for the positive consequences of sociability, social capital has a definite place in sociological theory. However, excessive extensions of the concept may jeopardize its heuristic value.
Race and class-based spatial segregation is a persistent feature of the structure of American cities.

This fact has significant consequences for social outcomes affecting the members of different racial groups.
Poverty’s potential effect on crime through developmental pathway

Concentrated Poverty’s potential effect on crime

Persistent Racial Inequality in US Due to Social and Geographic Segregation by Race?

Consider Some Evidence
Residential Segregation in Manhattan: Income vs. Race

Source: Sethi and Somanathan
JPE, 2004 (working paper version)
“Neighborhood Racial Tipping” in Chicago (from Card, Mas and Rothstein, QJE, 2008)
(Whites flee neighborhoods where blacks more than 10% of population)

Figure 1. Neighborhood change in Chicago, 1970-1980
(First and Second-Generation Non-Whites Avoid Living Near Blacks)

Neighborhood Racial-Composition Preferences: Evidence from a Multiethnic Metropolis

CAMILLE ZUBRINSKY CHARLES, University of Pennsylvania

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Neighborhood Racial Composition Preferences

Now I'd like you to imagine an ideal neighborhood that had the ethnic and racial mix you, personally, would feel most comfortable in. Here is a blank neighborhood card like those we have been using. Using the letters A for Asian, B for Black, H for Hispanic, and W for White, please put a letter in each of these houses to represent your ideal neighborhood, where you would most like to live. Please be sure to fill in all of the houses.

The matching colors White, black, green, red, and orange above, used in the

Figure 1 • Multi-Ethnic Neighborhood Experiment Showcard. Source: 1993–94 Los Angeles Survey of Urban Inequality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
<th>Asians</th>
<th>$f/\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean %</strong></td>
<td>49.21%</td>
<td>23.67%</td>
<td>28.42%</td>
<td>32.98%</td>
<td>87.82***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Whites</td>
<td>0.24%</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
<td>12.39%</td>
<td>7.24%</td>
<td>208.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Whites</td>
<td>11.16%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.44%</td>
<td>.52%</td>
<td>192.03***</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Blacks</strong></td>
<td>16.15%</td>
<td>37.41%</td>
<td>13.76%</td>
<td>11.05%</td>
<td>182.83***</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Blacks</td>
<td>18.91%</td>
<td>0.72%</td>
<td>31.66%</td>
<td>39.94%</td>
<td>258.33***</td>
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<td>All Blacks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.76%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>93.36***</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Latinos</strong></td>
<td>17.07%</td>
<td>21.32%</td>
<td>41.23%</td>
<td>15.57%</td>
<td>146.63***</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Latinos</td>
<td>17.05%</td>
<td>8.55%</td>
<td>2.76%</td>
<td>26.42%</td>
<td>220.52***</td>
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<td>All Latinos</td>
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<td>6.60%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Asians</strong></td>
<td>18.04%</td>
<td>17.77%</td>
<td>17.06%</td>
<td>40.98%</td>
<td>86.00***</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Asians</td>
<td>15.88%</td>
<td>15.57%</td>
<td>22.43%</td>
<td>0.54%</td>
<td>78.09***</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>7.06%</td>
<td>233.32***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Out Groups</strong></td>
<td>51.26%</td>
<td>62.72%</td>
<td>59.22%</td>
<td>59.60%</td>
<td>18.35***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Out-Group</td>
<td>11.16%</td>
<td>2.76%</td>
<td>6.60%</td>
<td>7.06%</td>
<td>45.12***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Out-Group</td>
<td>0.24%</td>
<td>.72%</td>
<td>2.76%</td>
<td>.54%</td>
<td>43.51***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N            | 818    | 1,082  | 982     | 1,027  |
(Note the extent of racial in-group “bias” in patterns of social affiliations for this district!)

Source: “Race, School Integration, and Friendship Segregation in America.” American Journal of Sociology 107(3) 679:716; Moody, James.

(This diagram was generated via the so-called “Spring Algorithm”)

The Social Structure of “Countryside” School District

Points Colored by Race

- White
- Black
- Mixed/Other

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This article reveals the grounds on which individuals form perceptions of disorder. Integrating ideas about implicit bias and statistical discrimination with a theoretical framework on neighborhood racial stigma, our empirical test brings together personal interviews, census data, police records, and systematic social observations situated within some 500 block groups in Chicago. Observed disorder predicts perceived disorder, but racial and economic context matter more. As the concentration of minority groups and poverty increases, residents of all races perceive heightened disorder even after we account for an extensive array of personal characteristics and independently observed neighborhood conditions. Seeing disorder appears to be imbued with social meanings that go well beyond what essentialist theories imply, generating self-reinforcing processes that may help account for the perpetuation of urban racial inequality.
Economic Theories of Persistent Racial Inequality

Three Conceptual Models That May Help To Explain Persistent Racial Inequality

(Examples motivated by Yale sociologist Elijah Anderson’s ethnographic study of Philadelphia, as reported in his 1999 book, *Code of the Streets*)
Three Conceptual Models

1) “Tipping” and Multiple Equilibrium

2) A Reputation Game and “Rational Aggression”

3) Segregation, Behavioral Spillovers and Persistent Social Inequality
1) Schelling’s “Tipping” Phenomenon

Multiple Equilibria: One Reason Why It Is Difficult to Distinguish “Culture” from “Structure” When There Is Significant Social Segregation by Race
Fraction of population electing to carry a gun at date $t+1$

$f(x) = \text{fraction of population with a "gun carry threshold" no greater than } x.$

Multiple Equilibrium, “Tipping” Effects and Dynamic Social Decisions within Some Community about Weapons Possession
(2) “Campaigning for Respect”

A Little Bit of Game Theory to Help Explain Why It May Be Rational to Acquire a Reputation for Violence
The Reputation Game models an ethically significant the interaction between Bob and John. (See diagram below.) In this dynamic game of incomplete information, John can be either of two types – soft or tough (one thinks of Elijah Anderson’s “decent” vs. “street” distinction.) Bob chooses whether to Attack or Not; John responds, choosing whether or not to Fight. (The game is ‘ethically significant’ because it shows that the link between character and behavior depends on the social context.) The payoffs (specified in parentheses in the diagram) are such that both the soft and the tough versions of John would much prefer not to be attacked, though if attacked a soft John would want not to fight and a tough John would want to fight. (This is reflected in the fact that both soft and tough versions of John receive payoff = +1 from not fighting, while fighting gives soft John a payoff = -1 but tough John’s payoff from fighting =+2.) Also, the payoffs indicate that Bob wants not to attack if will be fought (payoff = -1 versus 0), and wants to attack if he will not be fought (payoff = +1 versus 0).
THE REPUTATION GAME

Bob

"Challenge"

don't Challenge

(0,4)

John

fight

(-1,-1) or (-1,2)
if John "soft"
if John "tough"

don't fight

(1,1)

Payoffs = (Bob, John)
If this interaction between Bob and John were to occur only once, then rational agents would play as follows: if attacked, a tough John fights and a soft John does not. So, Bob computes the average of his payoffs over the outcomes that could obtain, and attacks only if he thinks the probability that John is tough is less than $\frac{1}{2}$. The soft and tough types of John react naturally. The game is trivial.

But, should these players interact twice in succession, the outcome of the game is more interesting. Now, John’s action at the first stage can serve as a signal to Bob about his type, thereby affecting how the second stage is played. John knows this. Bob knows that John knows, John knows that Bob knows that he knows…, etc.

Given this structure, we make the following two claims:

**Claim 1:** In the twice-played game it is inconsistent with rationality for the soft John never to fight when first attacked.

**Proof:** If soft John were never to fight when first attacked, then because tough John always fights, John’s first stage action would be a perfect signal of his type: “fight at the first stage” would mean he’s tough, “not fight” would mean he’s soft. But then,
Bob’s rational response to this situation is to attack at the second stage only if he is fought at the first stage. Yet, this response on Bob’s part means that soft John could avoid being attacked at the second stage by fighting at the first stage which, if he is rational, he would want to do since (-1+4)—his payoff from fighting and thereby avoiding subsequent attack, exceeds (1+1)—his payoff from not fighting at either stage. This contradicts the supposition that he never fights when first attacked.

Claim 2: In the twice-played game it is inconsistent with rationality for Bob to always attack at the second stage after being fought at the first stage.

Proof: If Bob always attacks after being fought, soft John can gain nothing by fighting at the first stage and so, being rational, soft John would never fight when first attacked. But, Claim 1 asserts that this can’t occur when the players are rational.
Taken together, Claims 1 and 2 imply that the only outcome of the twice-played game consistent with player rationality has soft John mixing his behavior at the first stage between fighting and not fighting, while Bob mixes at the second stage between attacking and not, given that he has been initially fought. (If Bob is not fought at the first stage then he knows John is soft and so definitely attacks at the second stage.) Indeed, if $P < 1/2$ is Bob's assessment of likelihood that John is tough, then the unique equilibrium of the twice-played game entails soft John fighting when first attacked with probability $P/(1-P)$, and Bob attacking at the second stage if fought at the first with probability $1/3$. John's personal "values" may reflect a disdain for fighting (soft John), and yet his rational adaptation to his circumstances lead him to behave in a way that is inconsistent with those "values."
(3) How Segregation Can Cause Racial Inequality to Persist

A Simple Model with Social Interactions and Behavioral Spillovers to Illustrate How Segregation Can Lead to Persistent Racial Inequality When There Are No Real Differences of “Culture”

(based on Bowles, Loury, Sethi, JEEA, 2013)
A Dynamic Model of Persistent Group Inequality

• Society extends over an indefinite number of periods, consisting of people belonging to social groups A or B. Think of B’s as being disadvantaged. People live for two periods; generations overlap.

• Young people adopt either “decent” or “street” orientations. The orientation adopted depends on the earnings of the old people by whom a young person is socially influenced (perhaps because old people earn higher wages if they had been “decent” when young.)

• Each young person has ties to a large number of older people, and the fraction of “out-group” ties depends on degree of segregation.

• A demographic parameter $\beta \in (0,1)$ denotes the relative number of group B agents in each generation. (So if $\beta < 1/2$ then disadvantaged are a minority of the overall population, etc.)
• A segregation parameter $\eta \in (0,1)$ denotes the probability that a young person’s social tie is to some old person drawn at random from within his same social group. And $1-\eta$ is the chance a tie is drawn at random from overall old population. ($\eta=1$ implies total segregation.)

• The quality of a young person’s social influences is represented by the symbol $\sigma \in (0,1)$, which denotes the share of “decent” older people among a young person’s social influences.

• **Key Behavioral Assumption**: There exist a quality threshold $\sigma^* \in (0,1)$ such that a young person adopts the “decent” orientation if and only if the quality of his social influences, $\sigma$, exceeds this threshold.

• How does the “decent vs. street” conflict evolve over time in this model, given demographic/segregation parameters $\sigma$ and $\eta$? Note that “everybody decent” and “everybody street” are both stable behavioral configurations in this society. More interesting is that “all A’s decent, all B’s street” is also stable behavioral configuration if $\eta$ is big enough!
SOCIAL STRUCTURE

* We assume that the quality of an agent’s social network depends on group identity and generation of birth.

* Specifically, an agent born at date $t + 1$ has a large number of social ties to generation $t$ agents.

* Each of these ties is, with probability $\eta \in [0, 1]$, drawn at random from the agent’s social group (A or B).

* With probability $1 - \eta$ the associate is drawn at random from among the general population of agents without regard to group identity.

* Let $x^t_i$ be the fraction of generation $t$ agents in group $i$ who become high skilled, and let $\sigma^{t+1}_i$ denote the quality of the social network of a generation $t + 1$ agent in group $i$. Then:

$$\sigma^{t+1}_i = \eta x^t_i + (1 - \eta)[(1 - \beta)x^t_a + \beta x^t_b]$$
Thus, once adopted, a behavioral configuration in this society where all A’s adopt a “decent” orientation and all B’s adopt a “street” orientation would tend to persist across the generations whenever $\alpha_{1} > \sigma^{*} > \alpha_{0}$.

* So, the probability that an associate of a group A agent belongs to group A equals

$$\eta + (1 - \eta)(1 - \beta) \equiv \alpha_{1}$$

* While, the probability that an associate of a group B agent belongs to group A equals

$$(1 - \eta)(1 - \beta) \equiv \alpha_{0}$$
Theorem 1: There exists a minimal degree of in-group bias in associational behavior, $\eta(\beta, \sigma^*)$, such that whenever $\eta > \eta(\beta, \sigma^*)$ ("social segregation") then the initial condition of group inequality $(x^0_a, x^0_b) = (1, 0)$ is a stable steady state equilibrium. Moreover,

$$\eta(\beta, \sigma^*) \equiv \text{Max}\{1 - \frac{\sigma^*}{1 - \beta}; 1 - \frac{1 - \sigma^*}{\beta}\}$$

Furthermore, when $\eta < \eta(\beta, \sigma^*)$ ("social integration") then the system converges, from the initial state $(x^0_a, x^0_b) = (1, 0)$, in one period to a steady state with group equality. This steady state is "skill-enhancing" (relative to the initial condition) when the disadvantaged group is not too big ($\beta < 1 - \sigma^*$) and it is "skill-reducing" when $\beta < 1 - \sigma^*$. 
Figure 2. Effects of segregation and population shares on persistent inequality.

\[ c(\sigma_b) > 0, c(\sigma_w) < 0 \]

(A’s lose from more integration when \( \beta \) large)
Conclusions from B-L-S Model of Social Interactions:

This conceptual exercise suggests that:

- Group inequality can persist with no fundamental group differences
- Group inequality can emerge from initially group egalitarian structures
- Attempts at equalization may be futile or invert existing hierarchy
- Group incentives may be aligned rather than opposed
- The size of the elite matters
SOME POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

ON THE LIMITS OF ETHNIC POLITICS
What Has Rise of Obama To Do with Problem?
My radical answer: *Next to Nothing (not his fault)*

1) Our first black President dared not speak directly and forcefully of racial inequality and racial subordination.

2) He (rightly) feared losing legitimacy in the eyes of the voting majority were he to do so. (racial stigma)

3) Ironically, he appealed openly for Hispanic or gay votes, but could not (need not) be seen to be trying to help blacks, as such.

4) Ironically, blacks’ interests may have gotten less explicit political attention under Obama than they would under a prospective President Hilary Clinton
What Has Rise of Obama To Do with Problem?
My radical answer: *Next to Nothing (not his fault)*

5) But, I wish to argue that the current situation is actually much worse than that!

6) It is not only that black officials atop the US government are unable/unwilling to address the leadership challenges posed by persistent African-American subordination in the society.

7) What is worse is that the ascendancy of blacks to such high office has fostered a false narrative of racial equality undercutting possibilities for change.

8) (More Radically) Their rise also threatens to neutralize a *prophetic social critique* of US politics and policy – both domestic and foreign -- that is naturally rooted in the heroic legacy of the black freedom struggle!
One Man’s Conclusion

A Self-Respecting Black Intellectual (ME?) Oughtn’t to Allow That To Happen!

But That Is Easier Said Than Done!

Consider, e.g., the Politically Naïve Analogies Being Drawn between Barack Obama and Martin Luther King, Jr.
A Simplistic and False Narrative Has Emerged
Equating the Political Programs of These Men
Living the dream, 2009
President Barack Obama: Fulfilling the dream
A fist pump across the generations!

Note: The ‘fist bump’ is a popular greeting among young African-Americans
And, my personal favorite

You're shittin me!

And his name's Barack?! Sweet.
‘brother’ cornel west – scolding, circa 2011

There has always been a push-back against the ‘dream’ analogy.