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## Interpreting the Census: The Elasticity of Whiteness and the Depoliticization of Race

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I BEGIN WITH A BRIEF review of how whiteness was established as a norm and context for considering initial media reports of U.S. Census data on race released in March 2001. This is followed by reflections on the politically conservative ramifications of multiracialism and multiculturalism, which have had an exaggerated impact on popular interpretations of the census. As a preface, it should be noted that although we are, collectively, caught in the trap of using race as a noun, race should be understood as a verb—a predicate that requires action. People do not belong to a race but they are *raced*; in this context, race operates as a social fact with concrete material consequences for the manner in which experiences shape individual lives and their meaning.

Let us take note of an overlooked but rather obvious observation: *inequality is not distributed equally*. Therefore Americans of all colors and national origins need a constant reminder that Africans brought to the English colonies in the 1600s were strategically and explicitly excluded, by law and social custom, from the privileges and rights accorded English men. This is a critical factor in how U.S. history has been shaped. Emphasizing the unequal distribution of inequality underlines the continuities and clarifies the linkages between the past and the present. Beginning in the colonial period, being white was perceived and defined as having certain privileges and rights, including the right to citizenship,

to vote, to serve in the militia *and* bear arms, and to be a member of a jury. Most important of all was the right of self-possession—in other words, the right to be identified as a free person and to act on that right. Children of enslaved African females were legally designated as slaves and property of their masters, who often were also their biological fathers. As blackness quickly came to be associated with slave status, the law set the parameters within which, conceptually, people with African ancestors would be legally and socially identified as Negroes (Fields 1990).

In 1790, Congress passed a naturalization statute limiting citizenship to “free white persons” (Lopez 1996). After the Civil War, the Thirteenth Amendment passed, officially prohibiting involuntary servitude, followed by the Fourteenth Amendment, which formally extended citizenship to all persons born in or naturalized in the United States. Despite their general language, these amendments were formulated to guarantee the *civil* rights of people of African descent, not their *political* rights. To settle any future ambiguity, on 14 July 1870 an act amending the naturalization laws passed; it stated simply that “naturalization laws are hereby extended to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent.” From this moment, theoretically, people of African nativity or descent could become naturalized citizens; nevertheless, in the one and only documented case in which this was attempted the applicant was turned down because he was only one-quarter African.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1878 and 1952, applicants for naturalization from Asia, the Middle East, and Mexico tried to establish that they were white persons, thereby forcing the courts to provide reasonable arguments for rejecting or accepting their petitions.<sup>2</sup> With the introduction of the scientific term *Caucasian*, matters sometimes became quite complicated, as white skin color was rejected in favor of an ethnological definition of a Caucasian to deny a Japanese applicant, followed a year later by rejection of this definition as too inclusive in order to deny citizenship to a Hindu Asian.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of emigrants from Europe came per year, and by 1920 there were approximately 13.5 million people who were definitely not the Anglo-Saxon whites the 1790 legislators had in mind when they restricted naturalization to white persons. Irish Catholics, Eastern, and Southern Europeans—particularly Jews, Italians, and Sicilians—caused great anx-

iety among native Anglo-Saxon Protestants. During these years, the meaning of whiteness was debated as the capitalist need for labor competed with republican ideas about who was fit to be a citizen.<sup>4</sup> By 1924, a growing lobby against the immigrants culminated in passage of the Johnson-Reed Act, which closed the open-door policy that had permitted the mass entry of undesirable European immigrants. Despite Anglo-Saxon prejudice, between 1924 and 1960, the children and grandchildren of the immigrants were successfully assimilated: literally and metaphorically, the melting pot dissolved racial differences between the descendants of European immigrants and transformed them into white Americans. The most important factor in the creation and consolidation of generic or monolithic whiteness was the black-white color line, which placed the immigrants and their descendants squarely on the white side of the divide. The semantic transition of European immigrants from white *racial types* to white *ethnics* erased from the national collective memory all trace of the racial vocabulary and imagery so central to nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discourses of difference (Jacobson 1998).

Throughout this period, Mexicans, Chinese, and Japanese were also perceived as undesirable and faced racial prejudice. American Indians were pushed out of the picture altogether into reservations imposed through a series of coercive treaties. The drama of “manifest destiny” or westward expansion, which brought the United States into confrontation with Mexico, the 1882 and 1884 Chinese Exclusion Acts, Japanese internment camps during World War II—all speak to a history of racism that is integral to understanding the evolution of American culture. It is within this context that one needs to take into account the significance of the repeal of the 1952 racial prerequisites to naturalization, followed, in 1965, by the removal of quotas on immigration from Asia and Africa.<sup>5</sup> These acts have profoundly disturbed the black-white binary that has characterized the United States since independence. Opening the doors to a more diverse range of immigrants has disturbed—but not destroyed—the racial binary that structures the frameworks within which groups interact and are positioned. Black Americans were and remain the group that serves as the standard against which successful assimilation into white America is measured.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, we need to pay attention to the ways this has easily facilitated racial stratification, competition, and conflict within the so-called minority population.

Race categories may be social fictions without any scientific basis—but for the course of more than three hundred years, they have acquired the material reality and consequences of social fact. Unfortunately, the majority of Americans—in and outside the academy—are unfamiliar with historical documents (especially judicial opinions from the nineteenth and early twentieth century) that reference and underline a central and key historical fact: the question of *who* was white and *who* was black was always preceded by a reasoned discussion of *the meaning of* whiteness or blackness. Moreover, this deliberation always necessitated listing the privileges and rights exclusively available to white persons, who were consistently defined in opposition to blackness (Gross 1998; Elliott 1999; Pascoe 1996).

Consider an interesting excerpt from an 1854 judicial opinion. The case of *People v. Hall* involved “a free white citizen” of California convicted of murder on the testimony of a Chinese witness. George Hall successfully appealed the admissibility of such evidence before the Supreme Court of California. Judge Charles Murray delivered the opinion of the court, which overturned the conviction. Judge Murray wrote:

The word “black” may include all negroes, but the term “negro” does not include all black persons. . . . We are of the opinion that the words white, mulatto, Indian and black person, wherever they occur in our Constitution and laws, must be taken in their generic sense and that the words “black person” must be taken as contradistinguished from white and necessarily excludes all races other than the Caucasian. . . . In using the words “no black or mulatto person, or Indian shall be allowed to give evidence for or against a white person,” the Legislature, if any intention be ascribed to it, adopted the most comprehensive terms to embrace every known class or shade of color, as the apparent design was to protect the white person from the influence of all testimony other than that of persons of the same caste.<sup>7</sup>

The Chinese witness, Judge Murray concluded, was *generically* black; therefore his testimony was deemed inadmissible.

For the most part, American culture encourages selective amnesia about the past—in a culture that favors quick, disposable commodities, history is not a high priority, especially when it is sordid and complicated. But unless we vigilantly invoke the past, it is easy to forget that from the nineteenth century until passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act,

racial preferences were a conscious and conscientious intervention intended to maintain white dominance. The absence of color in upper-level and executive positions—from the academy to television—continues to evidence the pernicious effects of racial preference on behalf of white Americans. Yet, in a bizarre twist to the history of racial discrimination against blacks, conservatives have appropriated the language of civil rights groups to argue that remedial intervention intended to reverse the effects of racial preferences for whites is unfair, unconstitutional, and discriminatory against whites.<sup>8</sup> In fact, there is a relationship between the efforts to repeal affirmative action statutes and policies and claims that the collection of race data is no longer warranted. Not surprisingly, advocates for a multiracial category have played a significant role in dismissing the relevance of race categories. In addition, the media has helped generate a growing and false perception that whites are rapidly losing ground as the majority population.<sup>9</sup>

We are challenged today by a rhetorical and material elasticity of whiteness that obscures a black and not-black color line. This elasticity accommodates and assimilates individuals and certain groups on condition that they accept the terms of the new racial contract, which maintains *de facto* white privilege but no longer makes “persons” coextensive with “white.” White privilege today is articulated through appeals for the peripherality of race and racelessness (Mills 1997). This message is particularly salient in the majority of media reports on the race data from the 2000 Census.

Using the keywords “race categories” and “census” on the Lexis-Nexis database, I looked at three hundred articles and radio transcripts for the first two weeks of March, when the first reports were disseminated. Four themes feature prominently and repeatedly: Americans are more diverse, Hispanics/Latinos rival African Americans as the leading minority group, Asians have grown 48 percent since the last census, and many whites checked off an American Indian box, thus increasing the overall count of American Indians. There is a politics of language in discussions about racing people. White America was informed that the country is becoming more diverse, and indeed, *where* one is located shapes race-centered perceptions, for specific locations have an enormous impact on how one literally sees, experiences, and interprets these demographic changes—for instance, the New York City boroughs of Bronx and Queens are very different from Des Moines and Waterloo,

Iowa, and neither resemble Los Angeles, California, or Portland, Oregon. (Note too, the perfunctory impact of immigration in the Deep South, where the traditional racial binary and class hierarchy continue to characterize the social landscape.)

Concern about a significant decline in the white population is premature; instead, we should direct attention to the current conceptual and semantic transition the country is experiencing. The discourse on social demography resonates with the aftermath of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, which closed the door on undesirable racial types from Europe and absorbed their children and grandchildren into the white American landscape. In terms of percentages, people who self-identified on the 2001 Census *only* as white comprise 69 percent of the population, which does indeed represent a drop of 8 percent since 1990. But this figure does not take into account the 48 percent of respondents who checked Hispanic and identified their race as white.<sup>10</sup> It does not include the phenomenal increase in people who marked an American Indian category. Nor does it include the two-thirds (62 percent) of the 2.4 percent of people who identified themselves as biracial and also marked white. These abstract percentages emphasize what media headlines understate: the actual raw data collected from respondents is subject to multiple interpretations, and how it is disaggregated is entirely at the discretion of the user.<sup>11</sup>

Census Bureau officials were careful to caution the public that how one counts the total white population depends "on whether one defines the white population as those who described themselves as *white only* (212 million) or *white and another race* (217 million)." Despite sensationalist headlines announcing diversity and a rise in multiracial identities, 97.6 percent of the counted population identified only one race on the census. And out of a population of 281,421,906, *only* 69 million people did *not* identify as white. How this is articulated makes all the difference: one might confidently announce that *at least* 70 percent of the population is white or anxiously proclaim that *almost* 25 percent of the population is not white. In either case, there is merit in citing the comments of Justice John Marshall Harlan, the lone dissenter in the infamous 1896 Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*, who wrote, "The white race deems itself to be the dominant voice in this country and so it is, in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth and in power. So, I doubt not, it will continue to be for all time, if it remains true to its great heritage and holds fast to the principles of constitutional liberty."<sup>12</sup>

## MULTIRACIALISM

Here we might turn to the demand for a multiracial category on the Census precisely because this demand has confused personal identities with prescriptive identities and has ignored the relationship between public policy and identifiable communities. In other words, the demand for a multiracial category has completely eclipsed the broader issue of power by privileging individual rights rather than group rights. This is particularly salient in the multiracialist campaign's silence over the significance and importance of mapping out trends in coupling since the dismantlement of antimiscegenation laws in 1967. Fortunately, a multiracial category was not approved, although the Census Bureau authorized the selection of multiple racial designations and the issue is still on the Bureau's agenda for the next census in 2010. In a lecture on the state of relations thirty years after the 1967 Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Loving v. Virginia* (which overturned state antimiscegenation statutes), Harvard law professor Randall Kennedy noted the "continued social ostracism that continues to afflict African Americans" and pointed out the wide disparity between figures for interracial marriage between blacks and whites and those between whites and other groups.<sup>13</sup> Parenthetically, the majority of black-white unions were between black men and white women (Kennedy 1997). This pattern does not seem to have changed significantly over the last decade.

In sum, the multiracial movement has *successfully* blurred the lines between two very different forms of identifying: public self-identification and personal or private plural identities.<sup>14</sup> From *Elle* magazine to *Seventeen* and ABC to MTV, the notion of mixed-race and multiracial identities is given positive visibility as a celebration of how much America is changing. Curiously, this multimedia arena has neglected a discussion of the limitations of a notion of multiracialism that refers only to children whose parents are raced differently. In fact, the campaign for a multiracial category completely obscures the fact that black or African American is *already* a multiracial category. Patricia Williams skillfully interprets this phenomenon when she writes, "what troubles me is the degree to which few people in the world, and most particularly in the United States, are anything *but* multiracial, to say nothing of *biracial*. The use of the term seems to privilege the offspring of mixed marriages as those 'between' races without doing much to enhance the

social status of all us mixed-up products of the illegitimacies of the not so distant past" (1997, 53).

Already in the 1920s, anthropologist Melville Herskovits concluded that, contrary to "the general belief that the 'pure' Negroes were the majority . . . almost 80% show mixing with White or American Indian, or both stocks," while in terms of ethnic diversity, an amalgamation of African groups had occurred among the slave population in the United States (Herskovits 1928, 10; Myrdal 1944, 1205; Meier [1949] 1992). Despite public rhetoric against amalgamation, sexual relations between white men and black slave women were tolerated throughout the slave period, as W. E. B. Du Bois poignantly remarked, "[t]he rape which your gentlemen have done against helpless black women in defiance of your own laws is written on the foreheads of two millions of mulattoes and written in ineffaceable blood" (Du Bois 1924, 106 cf. Myrdal 1944, 1187n. 14; see Kaplan 1949). The children of these interracial sexual encounters, though lighter in skin color than their mothers, were usually treated as property, not family, and socialized to identify with black people and their histories (Williamson 1980).

Historically, whiteness and blackness have been juxtaposed to signify the extreme ends of positive and negative attributes. Moreover, despite the tremendous diversity within the black community in terms of class, color, religion, and even national origin, blackness continues to be represented in social science literature and popular media with the poor, the uneducated, and the socially deviant while whiteness refers to the middle class, the educated, and the protocols of civility and propriety (duCille 1998).

The industry of popular culture reproduces and contributes to a racism in which *authentic* blackness is represented by the urban underclass, which replaced the rural (Southern) folk images invoked in the 1920s and 1930s by black urban intellectuals (Carby 1999; Favor 1999). But a careful reading of many mixed-race narratives indicates that sentiments of alienation and tension revolve around class issues. Racial identity has been reduced to performative criteria—the dramaturgy of blackness—and this, by the way, is what is revealing and reprehensible about Eminem as a phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> The racialization of class tensions, however, is not unique to the experience of being "mixed-race," and it challenges children of black professionals reared in predominantly white and middle-class environments as well as young Caribbean and

African immigrants (Dominguez 1997). For instance, the problem with the *Bill Cosby Show* was never that it was too white because it reflected an environment educated, affluent black professionals and their children could recognize. Rather, the problem was that the idyllic television world of the Huxtables erased all trace of interracial tension and glass ceilings experienced by their real-life counterparts.

As the results of the 2000 Census are disseminated to the American public, journalists, scholars, and everyday folk are challenged to acknowledge the absurdity of racial taxonomy. And as white America becomes comfortable with lighter-skinned Hispanics, well-behaved Asians, and middle- and upper-class multiracial people, the white side of the color line has been opening up to accommodate anyone who embraces a depoliticized celebration of diversity. This benign multiculturalism refuses to acknowledge its complicity in the continued exclusion of dark-skinned Latinos, poorly educated Asians, and low-income blacks from the new imagined and undoubtedly class-b(i)ased multicultural salad bowl. If we return to the census figures, in 1990, multiracial families of all combinations constituted *less* than 2 percent of the population, yet they received a significant amount of attention over the next decade. In this last census, 2.4 percent of respondents chose more than one racial designation, of whom 93 percent chose two race categories.

It is particularly interesting how much attention 2.4 percent of the population received in the press, especially since 78 percent of this group did *not* mark a black category.<sup>16</sup> True, multiracial advocates lobbied intensely and in the process gained a wide audience and allies in high places. Yet perhaps the explanation lies with Columbia law professor Patricia Williams's observation that "[w]ith the pinning of racial hope upon blood mixtures in such a literal way, there comes a sneaky sort of implied duty to assimilate—the duty to grab on to the DNA ladder and hoist oneself onward and upward" (1997, 53). Any evaluation of the increase in people who self-identify as multiracial must be tempered by attention to the political consequences of public identities. This necessitates a careful return to the U.S. Census Bureau, which explicitly states that the purpose and guidelines of collecting and tabulating race data "ultimately must meet the needs of at least two groups within the Federal Government. . . . The first group is composed of those government officials charged with carrying out constitutional and legislative mandates, such as redistricting legislatures, enforcing civil

rights laws and monitoring progress in anti-discrimination programs. The second group consists of the staff of statistical agencies producing and analyzing data that are used to monitor economic and social conditions and trends."<sup>17</sup> The provision for a uniform standard for collecting data on race and ethnicity officially *and* unequivocally acknowledged that these categories are a sociopolitical construct intended merely for consistency and to enable federal agencies to carry out their responsibilities in enforcing civil rights laws enacted for the benefit of "populations that historically had experienced discrimination and differential treatment because of their race or ethnicity."

### MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY

Conversations about the census fold into discussions about both multiracialism and multiculturalism. These twin multi-isms complement each other, as both comfortably indulge the vision of a relatively homogenous white Christian society in which people of color and other religions can be included and managed without coercion. The boundaries of whiteness can tolerably be stretched when their parameters are identified as *cultural*. Attention and sensitivity to incorporating diverse music, cuisine, and fashion is relatively easy to attain—the problem is that this does not address issues of power and privilege. It does not address the issue of decision making or policies—who makes them, who enforces them. It is relatively easy to host a multicultural festivity that combines tacos, falafels, collard greens, and pizzas to the accompaniment of a band that includes a global repertoire of music. This benign diversity does not address the fact that in practical terms most white Americans still live and socialize in highly segregated environments. The racial divide in communication and perspectives was most apparent during the fury over both the Rodney King and O. J. Simpson verdicts. It underlines much of the underreported anger over the 2001 presidential elections in which many blacks felt that they had been deliberately deprived of the franchise.

Race matters today as much as ever, although open acts of racism are no longer tolerated and many Euro-Americans have been socialized to feel uncomfortable expressing racist thoughts. As multiculturalism and diversity became code words for "race," attention to the specific legacy of discrimination as it affects black Americans has been easily

eclipsed. The absence of color diversity in any given setting is an outcome of social engineering—not divine intervention—and needs to be addressed at a structural level as well as put into a historical context. Americans of African descent are central to the very discussion of diversity—conversations in which black people are absent easily obscure the manner in which new immigrants who disrupt the social order are contrasted and compared to the first racialized Other. We need to address the racial stratification and hierarchies that underlie and are institutionalized in discussions of "minorities." Blackness in America has historically been devalued—the further one moved from being associated with blackness, the closer one came to being socially accepted and entitled to privileges and rights.

### CONCLUSION

During his final Sunday sermon, delivered on 31 March 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. reminded his congregation of "the unhappy truth that racism is a way of life for the vast majority of white Americans, spoken and unspoken, acknowledged and denied, subtle and sometimes not so subtle—the disease of racism permeates and poisons a whole body politic. And I can see nothing more urgent than for America to work passionately and unrelentingly to get rid of that racism" (cf. Dyson 2000, 320).

Class prejudice and discrimination are intimately linked to racism, and this is evident when examining how poor whites are often represented as less than white. This is encapsulated in the ugly phrase "poor white trash"—dirty, garbage, disposable.<sup>18</sup> Poor whites remain America's hidden population; because they do not live in highly visible, segregated urban neighborhoods but rather are congregated in mobile homes and rural sectors far away from the national news offices, they do not get the media coverage that they should. By the end of his life, Martin Luther King, as a Southerner, was well aware of how racializing the poor into opposing groups would keep them from organizing along class lines that transcended race and thus really threatened corporate interests, which rely on a divide-and-conquer strategy. Acknowledging the importance of class discrimination, however, should not overshadow the unique legacy of racism that does affect black Americans of all classes, differently than any other group. When a police officer stops a

black driver in an expensive car, he does not ask to see his academic credentials or her stock portfolio.

It is important, therefore, to pay attention to what is happening in the legal arena, where gains made by the civil rights movement fewer than fifty years ago are slowly being rescinded. In a departure from the direction set by the U.S. Supreme Court 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* toward civil rights legislation, the courts have moved away from protecting the rights of historically disadvantaged groups.<sup>19</sup> This is evidenced by court-ordered repeals of affirmative action policies that confuse invidious discrimination with remedial racial preference. The demise of legal racism has severely limited options for protest, and challenging institutional racism has therefore become more difficult.

The conservative momentum is picking up speed, and we urgently need to find innovative ways to raise public awareness about the fact that strategic intervention to promote racial and color diversity is more than a game of numbers and statistics—whether in housing, in the award of contracts to small business, and especially in institutions of higher education, which produces the teachers, professionals, and politicians of the future. Ultimately, changes in the composition of the population need to be reflected in both political representation at the national level (the House of Representatives and the Senate) and a more equitable distribution of resources of the country if they are going to have positive social, economic, and legal significance. In the final analysis, diversity cannot have any transformative political meaning without being distinguished for its intellectual and cultural value to *everyone*, including those whose life experience has been shaped by the normativity of whiteness. This necessarily presupposes a candid and explicit recognition that the absence of racial diversity, which at this juncture can only be measured by using statistical data culled from the impersonal and nonscientific racial categories, is a disadvantage and, of equal importance, a sign of intellectual and cultural impoverishment—for *all* Americans.

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## NOTES

1. In 1938, a New York district judge ruled that the applicant whose mother was half-African and half-Indian and whose father was full-blooded Indian did not qualify because he did not meet the standard of Africanness intended by the statute: "in order for the petitioner to qualify under the statute, his African descent must be shown to be at least in the affirmative quantity, and not a neutral thing as in the case of the half blood, or a negative one as in the case of the one-quarter blood For these reasons, the petition must be denied." In re Cruz 23 F. Supp 774 (E.D.N.Y. 1938).
2. See John Tehranian for a discussion of naturalization litigation. He maps out the manner in which performative criteria were used to adjudicate claims of whiteness and determine the ability of immigrants to assimilate into Anglo-American culture (2000).
3. The term *Caucasian* was coined by naturalist Johannan Friedrich Blumenbach. For an overview of the history of racial taxonomy and the history of the science of race see Smedley 1999; for a discussion of the meanings invested in the concept of race, see Malik 1996. *Ozawa v. United States*, 260 U.S. 178 (1922), *United States v. Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923).
4. Mathew Frye Jacobson (1998) offers an insightful discussion of the relationship between republicanism, which emphasized the imperative of responsible citizenship and therefore tended to oppose unrestricted immigration, and capitalism, which inherited an insatiable appetite for cheap labor provided by the mass influx of foreigners.
5. For a discussion of the continuation of racial discrimination in immigration policies see Kevin R. Johnson, "Race, the Immigration Laws, and Domestic Race Relations: A 'Magic Mirror' and into the Heart of Darkness." *Indiana Law Journal* 73 (fall 1998): 1111.
6. Philosopher Lewis Gordon perceptively articulates this point: "in the context of the United States, the black/white dichotomy functions in a far more determining way than is acknowledged in the current rhetoric of equal opportunity discrimination. This is because, in the United States, *racism* means *antiblack racism*. All other groups are assessed and ultimately discriminated against or favored in terms of the extent to which they carry residues of whiteness or blackness. Thus to articulate the racial situation in the United States without focusing on blacks leads, ultimately, to *evading* American racism" (1995, 42; see also Morrison 1993).
7. *People v Hall*, Supreme Court of California 4 Cal 399 (1854).
8. See Clegg (2001).
9. One sensationally headlined article, "California Census Confirms Whites Are in Minority," offered its readers a selective composition on population data that easily leaned, at best, toward misrepresentation or, at worst, misinterpretation (Purdum 2001).



10. See *Newsweek's* special report, "Redefining Race in America," for the headline and caption of one article: "America 2000: A Map of the Mix": "As the country becomes more and more diverse, three states and the capital city have seen non-whites gain majority status," reporting that *white non-Hispanic* population for California is 49.9 percent, for New Mexico is 47 percent, and for Hawaii, 29 percent (18 September 2000, 48). In general, reports and commentaries in the print media, television, and radio persistently understated that Hispanic/non-Hispanic is an *ethnic* category (the only category designated as ethnic) that represents a problematic language or geographic category and that respondents were expected to marked a race category. Nor do headlines and lead paragraphs emphasize the high percentage of Hispanic and Latino respondents who self-identified as white for their race.
11. Jorge del Pinal, assistant chief of the Census Bureau's population division, notes: "we collect the data. We don't always have to give the interpretation. It will depend on how the users want to interpret it." "Minorities Fueled Growth in Last Decade, Census Says: Hispanic Population Has Grown by 13 Million." *St. Louis Dispatch*, 13 March 2001, A1 (Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe).
12. *Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (1896). Dissent by Justice John Marshal Harlan, 18 May 1896. See Thomas 1997 for a collection of documents from this landmark case.
13. *Loving v. Virginia* 388 U.S. 1 (1967).
14. On three different visits to the pulmonary clinic at the University of Iowa Medical Center, the registration clerks have entered "white" or "other" into their database for my white-looking daughter, despite the fact that I had written "Black/African-American" on the registration form. Evidently the information I initially supplied was invariably edited after we left, for at each visit we repeated the same ritual of clarifying the race category information. The irony is that the asthmatic symptoms for which my daughter was being monitored were inherited from either or both my Ashkenazi Jewish grandmother or my Afro-Cuban Jamaican father. The claim that there is scientific merit for a multiracial category in medical research ignores the reality that the genealogy of most people reflects diverse geographical and national points of origin, each of which have their own racializing inscriptions of difference (see Young 1995).
15. Spike Lee's thought-provoking *Bamboozled* (40 Acres & a Mule Filmworks, 2000) skillfully captures this insidious phenomenon in the character of Dunwitty (played to perfection by Michael Rapaport).
16. See Martin Kasindorf and Haya El Nasser (2000).
17. See the website of the Office of Management and Budget, U.S. Census Bureau for OMB (1999), concerning the revision of Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting.
18. The reader can think back to derisive media characterizations of ice skater Tonya Harding that, unsatisfied with merely reporting her alleged crime, dispatched contemptuous representations of trailer park residents and their lifestyles (Krause 1998).
19. *Brown v. Board of Education*, 345 U.S. 483 (1954), overturned segregation in public education and served as the precedent for the annulment of separate but equal legislation.

**Racial Liberalism and the Politics  
of Urban America**

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*To the two women in my life, Julie M. Stokes and Rosa Lee Linnen.*

*Curtis Stokes*

*To my parents, Antonia and Alfonso Meléndez, the inspiration for all my work.*

*Theresa Meléndez*