

Race and Progressive Politics

A progressive politics must be inclusive of both race and class as critical points of inclusion, not as opposing or competing structures, but multiple constitutive elements of American life and politics.

The history of the U.S. has been and continues to be informed by race. Across the history of the U.S., political institutions, public policies and social arrangements are informed by race. To ignore this foundation as we create new political organizations and alliances would be to misunderstand the foundation of the state. At this point in our history, it is impossible to disentangle the effects of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and other differences that constitute the material conditions of American life. Every policy currently in existence is informed by these politics.

We must acknowledge the ways in which race continues to influence the life chances of individuals. While class significantly affects access to opportunity, it cannot fully account for disparities that exist explicitly along racial lines. Indeed, even across America's various classes, people of color remain disproportionately and specifically disadvantaged. The lowest income bracket, a typical class consideration, bears grossly disproportionate representation by African Americans and Latinos. The recent shift from the advocacy of race to class as a consideration in educational admissions and other affirmative action programs fails to account for the specifically racialized dimension of wealth and income. In fact, recent research demonstrates that African Americans and Latinos on the lowest rung of the economic ladder perform worse than whites in the same socioeconomic bracket. Both the racialized organization of income and wealth and the specifically racialized character of performance within class suggest that racism, not merely class disadvantage, is shaping these outcomes. An analysis of disadvantage in the African American middle-class makes the racial character of disparity even more clear. Despite economic security (an already tenuous claim), middle-class African Americans demonstrate poorer mental and physical health than whites, have fewer wealth-generating assets, have diminished access to the resources afforded by white neighborhoods because of persistent segregation, and, as in the case of low-income people of color, perform lower in standardized testing than whites in the same socioeconomic bracket. It is clear from these examples that an analysis of class alone is insufficient to address the specificity of the structured disadvantage experienced by people of color.

In our view, a progressive movement should attempt to bring to reality a life worth living for every human being. It should attempt to address the unjust inequalities impeding the achievement of a life worth living to many human beings. There is a diversity of unequal outcomes and causes and a progressive movement must remain open and flexible in order to respond to changing circumstances and contexts. Historical cleavages exist regarding race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and other differences which need to be confronted openly and directly in order to be addressed. In our collective utopian vision, all of these cleavages indeed become irrelevant. It would then be impossible to predict one's life chances based on any of these identifiers. Yet, we are far from such a reality which makes an open progressive agenda important and necessary. Such a utopian vision

becomes possible only with an open albeit persistent confrontation of these societal cleavages. Pretending that they do not exist or will just go away is not strategic but delusional.

Some argue that attention to race and its impact disrupts the potential unity of a progressive movement. Instead, race is often construed as a distraction from the central goal of improving the life chances of individuals regardless of demographic characteristics. Basically, this is a call for underscoring “class” as THE unifying and relevant cleavage. We question the assumption that a progressive movement should be cast in such either/or terms. The human condition has proven to be much more complex, and as such we must be prepared to address the multiplicity of cleavages that inform American life. It is true that our objective should be to eradicate any obstacles toward a life worth living for all human beings, but it is also worthwhile to take the time to think about any conflicts between underscoring race and advancing a generalized agenda.

As people of color tend to be worse off in many important life dimensions, and if genetics or biology is not the answer for those marked inequalities, we need to search elsewhere. What is impeding people of color as a group? We can only answer or begin to address this question by making race an explicit and important element of our progressive agenda. By understanding, identifying, and eliminating those stubborn obstacles impeding life chances for people of color, we contribute to the emancipation of the majority of humanity. Limiting the debate to an either/or discussion between the merits of race or class offers an incomplete analysis for a truly progressive agenda. These cleavages alone are limited. Instead, a truly progressive politics requires understanding the different interrelated cleavages that erect invisible, but tangible life barriers for many human beings. Sometimes the exclusionary dimension is race, gender, class, ethnicity, creed, sexual orientation, among others and any combinations among these. Our ultimate goal as progressives must be humanity’s emancipation in its entirety and against anything that might truncate the self-realization of any human being.

Race is not important in and of itself, but it was made important as it has been constructed and embedded into our social, political, and economic realities. Denying the past or wishing for a colorblind, de-racialized future will not make it happen. In order to realize a future in which race is no longer a determinate of one’s material condition or one’s destiny, we must work to achieve it. This requires assessing and addressing our disagreements through democratic discussion, coalition-building, policy advocacy, and electoral politics. In other words, an inclusive politics with multiple sites of resistance is required to create the reality of a life worth living for every human being.

The elimination of “race” from our progressive agenda would be detrimental because ultimately such concerns are driven by an instrumental fear of division rather than on a constitutive understanding and creation of a transformative, progressive movement.

Why Have De-Racialized Policies and Politics become so Attractive in the Post Civil Rights Era?

It can be argued that the civil rights movement has become a victim of its own success. While making advancements in racial and economic equality, its success – though extremely limited by many accounts – spawned a determined set of reactionary forces that have consistently sought to undermine its gains. At the same time that the civil rights movement enjoyed success in displacing elements of economic, political, and social white dominance, antagonistic forces devised strategies to craft these gains as an assault on white citizenship.

Indeed, the civil rights movement ushered in a new racial politics in which Americans adopted a new norm of racial equality. This norm of racial equality, as Tali Mendelberg and others have argued, has made it no longer acceptable for whites to display explicitly hostile racial attitudes. Nor is it acceptable for political strategists to capitalize on the use of explicit racist appeals for fear of falling outside the norm of equality. Nevertheless, the cultural and structural framework that supported white dominance has not been completely eroded even though Americans now adhere to the norm of racial equality. The nascent *new right* recognized this. Born in the campaigns of George Wallace and Richard Nixon's 1968 "southern strategy," the new right developed a subtextual approach to politics which involved "coding" whites' resentment of blacks and other minorities, women, and gays. Wallace showed that right-wing populism effectively appealed to white working-class racism throughout the country. With the success of the southern strategy, racial issues and race-centered policies and politics were viewed as an attack on whites, their economic interests, their social and symbolic standing and the political future.

The *neo-conservatives* – who had been the earlier Democratic northern, white, racial moderates supporting 1960s civil rights legislation – refused to engage in coded race-baiting, but still wanted to appeal to white, moderate or conservative voters. Their approach was centrist, on the right of the Democratic and on the left of the Republican Party. They saw the core political culture of the United States as defined by pluralism, consensus, gradualism, and centrism. The neo-conservatives opposed overt discrimination, but did not want an in-depth confrontation with the enduring benefits that race conferred on whites. This denial of the significance of race in American society is something that we still struggle with today and the left is still responding to the success of the southern strategy by abandoning direct discussions on race in keeping with the success of the southern strategy. Instead, our discussion of race and politics are disguised in discussions of affirmative action, welfare reform, neighborhood schools advocacy, demands for local community control, and advocacy for monolingualism in education.

Sociologist Howard Winant writes: "All around the world the momentum of the struggle against race is stalemated. The successes of anti-racist and anti-colonial movements in recent decades are being transformed into new patterns of racial inequality and injustice. The "new world racial system," in sharp contrast to the old structures of explicit colonialism and state-sponsored segregation, now presents itself as beyond race, color-blind, multicultural and post-racial. It seeks to render racism invisible: it attempts to dismiss race as a holdover from a benighted past, something now well on the way to

being transcended” (xiv). This approach fails to recognize ongoing structural racism and fails to acknowledge racial identities as a possible positive political rallying point.

What are the Embedded Benefits of Whiteness in a Colorblind Politics?

Whiteness often goes unrecognized, but is a key component of race politics. Our general failure to recognize whiteness in relation to racialized groups distorts the complexities of race in America. Moving to a class-based “colorblind” politics further obscures the effects of whiteness and the privileges that emanate from whiteness. In refusing to expand our understanding of whiteness and the institutional arrangements that benefit and protect whiteness, we are limited in our abilities to dismantle the structures that ensure inequality.

As a foundation of the liberal philosophy under-girding American political culture, universalism has been understood as the ideal mode through which to achieve fairness, justice, and equality for the citizen-subjects of a polity. According to the philosophical tenet of universalism, because all humans share some essential characteristics (especially rationality), they are entitled to certain rights. Because each citizen-subject has access to these rights, it has been conceptualized as an entirely fair and neutral concept. Accordingly, universalism—in both its instantiation in law and its equitable application—has been a central theoretical concept in addressing racial politics in the U.S. Indeed, it was an appeal to the universal right to equitable education, regardless of race, that produced, in part, the outcome of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Despite the apparent neutrality of universalism in policy-making, not to mention some of the progress afforded by it, many scholars have suggested that universalism actually reinscribes whiteness as the hegemonic center, re-installing the same racialized power structures that have shaped American culture, rather than redressing them. According to Woody Doane and others, this phenomenon has emerged because of the ways in which racial categories developed and became entrenched. Whiteness and racialized otherness were/continue to be constructed relationally and are hierarchically ordered. Yet, it is only “minority” subjects that are marked as raced.

As an unmarked category, whiteness becomes entrenched as both normal and natural, shaping the hegemonic order for the benefit of whites. Yet, whiteness remains hidden precisely because of its normative status. Doane argues that what is overlooked—or deliberately masked—by philosophical concepts such as universalism is the persistence of racial stratification and the on-going role of social institutions in reproducing social inequality. While the philosophy may appear neutral, it is mapped onto a racialized landscape that continues to regulate and distribute economic, social, and political opportunity in very biased ways. A brief look at the contemporary failure of *Brown*, despite the instantiation of equity in law, reveals the problems of universalism.

While affirmative action policies made important inroads by accounting for specific histories of the racialized distribution of opportunity, the re-occurring discourse on “color-blindness” announces a return to universalism. The same political discourse under-girding *Brown*, now reconceived as “color-blindness,” has been fundamental in

overturning legal progress made in redressing racial injustice on the platform that redress laws do not universally benefit all citizen-subjects, but only specific groups. Perhaps most obvious is California's recent Proposition 209 which eliminated affirmative action programs in the state. It asserted that "race no longer matters except perhaps as a...private or symbolic identity vaguely linked to culture." In contrast, it argued that color-blindness "defines race as an illegitimate topic of conversation" (13). Understood as "too specific" within a political discourse rooted in universalism, the needs of racially marginalized people are perceived as "special." To fail to respond to "specificity," is to reinstall the benefits of normative whiteness.

Class and Race as Competing Self Interests or Whiteness as Symbolic Politics?

In the ever increasing discourse over the "red-state, blue-state" phenomenon, popular culture pundits, social scientists, political analysts, scholars, journalists and just plain folk are trying to make sense of the behavior of millions of working class Americans – mostly white – whose votes in the last presidential election appear to betray their own deeply vested self-interest. Popular author Thomas Frank dissects this phenomenon in his latest book, "What's The Matter With Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America" (Metropolitan Books, 2004). In an interview last year, Frank explains that Kansas is a metaphor for the rest of the country. What's wrong with Kansas is that it is becoming increasingly conservative and this pronounced slide to the right has caused the people of the state to vote against their own economic interests. Much of the state, Frank says, is "in deep economic crisis – in many cases a crisis either brought on or worsened by the free-market policies of the Republican party – and yet the state's voters insist on re-electing the very people who are screwing them, running up colossal majorities for George Bush, lowering taxes and privatizing and deregulating, even when these things are manifestly unhealthy for the state."

Frank and other political observers are puzzling over the behavior of millions of white working-class voters in the states that won the White House for Bush. The perplexity stems from the prevailing hypothesis that voting behavior is driven by political attitudes and that political attitudes are formed, maintained and energized in direct relationship to an individual's assessment of material gain and wellbeing – variables like financial status, health, domicile, and family security - David Sears and his colleagues argue. Inherent in this hypothesis is the notion that "people develop or change attitudes which maximally satisfy their needs or serve their interests when incentive-contingencies change..." In other words, people adopt the position that maximizes their own gains over their own losses.

An alternative to the self-interest hypothesis is offered by Sears, Hensler and Speers who suggest that voter behavior may be driven more by "symbolic politics" than by self-interest:

By this line of thinking, people acquire stable affective preference through conditioning in their pre-adult years, with little calculation of the future costs and benefits of these attitudes. The most important of these are presumably some rather general predispositions, such as party identification, liberal or conservative

ideology, nationalism, or racial prejudice. When confronted with new policy issues later in life, people respond to these new attitudes on the basis of cognitive consistency. The critical variable would be the similarity of symbols posed by the policy issue to those of long-standing predispositions. Political attitudes, therefore, are formed mainly in congruence with long-standing values about society and the policy, rather than short-term instrumentalities for satisfaction of one's private needs.

These researchers tested the impact of self-interest vs. symbolic attitudes on responses to four policy issues; unemployment, national health insurance, busing, and law and order. The independent variables in this study are self-interest, symbolic attitudes and relevant demographic variables. Three significant symbolic attitudes were used; party identification, liberal or conservative ideology and racial prejudice. Generally, these researchers found that self-interest had little or no effect on voters' policy preferences, while symbolic attitudes had major impact. For example, findings indicate that no self-interest index significantly explained whites' opposition to busing. In contrast, all symbolic attitude variables had significant impact. "In all cases, liberalism-conservatism far outstripped any of the self-interest variables, and racial prejudice did so in two areas (busing and law and order) where it was relevant." Even when the order of entry of these three variables is varied in the regression analysis, "symbolic attitudes are consistently much more important than self-interest in determining policy preferences."

If we accept the premise that symbolic attitudes like party-affiliation and racial prejudice are more powerful drivers of political preferences and voting behavior than self-interest, how can we use this information to frame the dialogue of a progressive political agenda, to build support for liberal ideology and liberal political candidates? Within this context, will an appeal to class interests, absent a salient discussion of race and American racial politics, further this goal? These questions cannot be answered without an understanding of "whiteness," the need to maintain boundaries around idealized and tangible white space.

In considering the relative power of self-interest and symbolic attitudes in determining responses to political policies and ideology, it is important to note that symbolic attitudes operate in the domain of cognitive consistency theory. Theorists working in this area suggest that if a new issue is related to many other currently held attitudes, self-interest will have relatively little effect, particularly if self-interest would destabilize the dominant attitude.

In America, "whiteness" is a dominant symbolic attitude. Frankenberg defines whiteness as a structural location that confers exclusive privilege, "a standpoint from which to view and assess Self and Other, and a set of cultural practices that is usually unmarked, unnamed, and normatively given." Even among white ethnic immigrants, whiteness is salient in America. Frankenberg maintains that conflicts over the meaning of whiteness and Americanness precipitated by European immigrants have been resolved through processes of assimilation, not exclusion. Euro-ethnic mobility into whiteness, he suggests, was facilitated by shifts in social climate that the 1940s war effort engendered

by state policies and subsidies. According to Sacks, “the state institutionalized ‘an expanded notion of whiteness’ that secured white status for European immigrants...and their offspring.” Powell suggests that the development of racialized identity in America coincided with the historic development of the American psyche and that white Americans are heavily invested in maintaining the boundaries around whiteness that regulate the distribution of benefits.

So, if “whiteness” is a dominant symbolic attitude in America and symbolic attitudes are more powerful than individual self-interest in shaping responses to political ideology and policies, how effective can a unified class-based appeal be in energizing a progressive political agenda without openly acknowledging the fundamental ideological and opportunity differences between white Americans and Americans of color. Salient definitions of whiteness suggest that whites go about the business of maintaining white space, energizing race-based power differentials, maintaining racialized arrangements, and reinforcing racialized disparities in the distribution of opportunity without an explicit reference to race or racism. By implication then, a political agenda that does not speak openly about race and racial disparity in America will, by default, reinforce prevailing attitudes of whiteness. This is problematic because whiteness and white privilege are dominant symbolic attitudes and research shows that symbolic attitudes trump self-interest in determining individual response to political policies.

Research conducted by Kinder and Winter suggests that there is a huge difference in public opinion between whites and blacks on policy issues related to race. They maintain that the racial divide over such policies as school integration or affirmative action is mostly a story of political principles and social identity. Their analysis suggests that if differences of principle and identity could be eliminated, the racial divide would be drastically diminished. The Republican Party has capitalized on this ideological gap by openly opposing school integration and affirmative action. It would be unwise for progressives to think that the ideological differences between whites and blacks can be nullified by avoiding a dialogue on these race-based issues. As a powerful symbolic attitude which directs political behavior, whiteness will be reinforced and reconstituted even without a dialogue on race; theoretically, if left unchallenged, this power will continue to align with the political party from which it gains the greatest energy.

If we accept the premise, as conservative politicians have, that whiteness and white privilege are powerful symbolic attitudes capable of overpowering deep-seated self-interest in economic gain, family security and other tangible rewards, then it is imperative that progressives conceive of ways to counteract this power. Two strategies seem salient: First, expose and confront the underlying notions that support the ideology of whiteness – notions like racial and cultural superiority and fear of the “racialized other.” Second, energize another powerful symbolic attitude to counteract the effect of whiteness on political thinking and behavior. Social justice, with racial and gender equality as sub-texts, may have adequate symbolic power to accomplish this. However, without a dialogue on race in the progressive political agenda, neither of these strategies can be achieved.

What Do We Gain from a Race Inclusive Politics? Structural Racism as an Analytical Framework

Structural racism is a powerful framework that helps us to understand the persistence of racialized outcomes and disparities. Bell asserts that racism is a permanent fixture of American life. Thus, the strategy becomes unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations. We advocate a structural racism approach as a useful framework for understanding the complexities of race while mitigating the fears associated with individuals being termed racists in such dialogues. A structural racism approach attempts to reveal the ways in which even policies and institutions that appear on the surface to be race-neutral, promote racial hierarchies that continue to privilege whites over communities of color, and it illuminates the extent to which race is entrenched in the fabric of America. A *structural racism* approach considers the ways in which the networked operations between historical legacies, individuals, and institutional arrangements produce unequal and hierarchical racial outcomes, and devises strategies to respond to the interactive and dynamic reality of what is at stake.

Structural racism refers to the interrelated role of institutions in producing unequal outcomes and pronounced racial hierarchies. This definition recognizes that institutions, like individuals, exist in a complex web with other institutions in which they impact and interact with each other. We can not meaningfully understand how institutions produce racialized outcomes by examining a single institution or its cumulative effects. Rather, we must adopt a strategic and dynamic understanding of these interactive cumulative relationships. A structural racism analysis offers a shift in perspective, a move away from considering racism as individual or even institutional, to acknowledging how unequal outcomes emerge from the more subtle, intangible arrangements and interactions between institutions.

Structural racism not only shifts the focus from individual actors to institutional outcomes, it also shifts the focus from individuals to groups being impacted by the interactive and interrelated patterns. Structural racism is often the result of many individuals and institutions engaging in routine activity that, when observed independently, may not appear racially determined. Structural racism situates causation in the collective acts of multiple individuals and multiple institutions and the arrangements and interaction between these individuals and institutions including the meaning related to such actions. This analysis then may call for a set of interventions that challenge the collective routine actions of individuals interacting within a set of normal institutional arrangements.

Consider the relationship between local property taxes, zoning, and the distribution of benefits and burdens under this arrangement. Racialized outcomes, including the inequitable distribution of opportunity, is well documented. The inability to understand this dynamic by a single cause often leads to both a sense of naturalness and inevitability to a perpetuation of these results. Structural racism eschews the claim that illegitimate racial outcomes require the identification of a set of racist actors, a single cause or even a

single institutional culprit. Structural racism suggests not only a different way to address racial hierarchy but also a different way of understanding racial retrenchment.

Who Benefits from a Race-Inclusive Politics?

An underlying contention present in the discussion to abandon race is the idea that only specific race groups benefit from race-inclusive politics. We argue that a broader understanding of race-inclusive politics be adopted. In taking into account the racial implication of politics and policy, not only do specific racial groups benefit, but the least among us reap substantial benefits. In other words, the benefits of race-inclusive politics extend beyond specific race groups. Consider the argument of Guinier and Torres which moves beyond an essentialist understanding of race. These authors advocate the notion of “political race” arguing,

We use the word ‘race’ in multiple ways within our political race project. First,...the term race is an empirical diagnostic to assess the material conditions of a group of people. Second, the term describes those who identify with the struggles of racialized groups, usually including people conventionally defined as racial group members but not limited to them. For us, the term connotes those who have made a concrete choice – or whose material conditions can encourage such a choice – to engage in transformative struggle. (*Miner’s Canary*, 106)

This understanding of “political race” makes it impossible to argue that it would create divisions within a progressive movement because it is based on a more inclusive foundation and moves beyond the notion that the sole beneficiaries of social change are people of color. People of color would serve as a starting analytical and proactive point because they would make evident the most unjust qualities of our arrangements. Gutmann (1996) asserts that America must move beyond a color blind analysis in favor of color consciousness in public policy. Gutmann argues that in order to treat individuals fairly— the ultimate goal of a just society—it will sometimes be necessary to enact color conscious policies that recognize the extent which race continues to influence the life chances of citizens.

A Politics Beyond the Quest for the White Male Voter? A Strategy for Building a New Race-Inclusive Progressive Movement

Some argue that recent electoral politics have been centered on which political party will capture the all elusive white male voter. Conservative strategies aimed at uniting white men against the so called gains of minorities and women reflect the quest to attract a solid white male voting bloc. Progressives too have sought to attract white male voters by backing away from or quieting commitments to racial and gender equality. Both camps are profoundly interested in acquiring the support of white male voters, both those who are angry about the decline of their middle class stature and those who are angry about the declining availability of working class jobs and opportunities because of increased globalization.

Engaging in the battle to attract white male voters, progressives may be neglecting their political base and the political values and commitments their base holds. Minorities

represent an important percentage of the votes for the Democratic Party. In the 2000 presidential election, 12.5 percent supporters were Latino voters and 12.4 percent were black voters (Judis and Teixeira, 2002, p. 59). Although with different rationales, both black voters and Latino voters have historically supported the Democratic Party. The black community is influenced by economic criteria, yet their vote tends to be more sociotropic rather than egocentric. That is, they are influenced by the perceptions of the economic fortunes of blacks as a group and of the nation as a whole (Welch and Foster, 1992). Latinos, on the other hand, have a more explicit economic rationale, viewing the Democratic Party as the party of economic opportunity and security. Also, growing union membership among Latinos has expanded the base support for the Democrat Party. Thus, including race in the progressive political agenda, may represent an opportunity to build a conceptually strong coalition of racial ethnic minorities and progressive whites.

In building a progressive movement, attention to the movement's base is necessary for creating a winning coalition. Rather than focus on transforming the deep- south, instead a focus on border- states of the south and those states with increasing minority populations might prove most rewarding. Further, progressive political strategists might be better served by forming stronger arguments around the core values of progressive politics, rather than placing considerable energies in attracting disillusioned white males of the deep- south who have committed to a politics of racial scapegoating.

If We Build It They Will Come - Underestimating Communities of Color

It cannot be assumed that a progressive movement built exclusively on class- based politics and interests will attract a varied community of actors. By not including race explicitly, what messages are sent to communities of color? Certainly, progressives must anticipate the ways in which such a strategy alienates communities of color. Essentially, this strategy requires communities of color to abandon their well entrenched political identity as well as the claims made on the state in the name of that identity in exchange for an unspecified, unrecognizable, undefined identity in American politics-- a class-based identity. Racial identities have been forged over time and in conjunction with organized movements, namely the civil rights movement, and through these movements these communities have made claims on the state. Such a mass political movement on the basis of class has never reached fruition in the U.S. and, as a result, such identities have not been constructed around class nor have claims been made on the state by communities according to class. With this in mind, we must examine what communities of color are being asked to sacrifice. Further, as some authors suggest (Williams, *The Constraints of Race*), we must not take for granted that communities of color would be willing to engage in a progressive political agenda that neglects the major component of their political identity, which is race.

The Most Opportune Time for a New Progressive Movement

Silencing a discussion on race will have detrimental consequences in the movement to build a progressive agenda. Though we are silent, race remains present in the conversation and by remaining silent we give credence to a conservative political agenda first instituted by conservative strategies to win the south by making race, not class, the

most salient issue in American politics. That agenda appeals to the fear of the “racialized other.” If we refuse to talk about race and racial politics, that agenda may gain strength.

We advocate building a political coalition consisting of racial and ethnic minorities and progressive whites. The building of a progressive movement takes place through partnerships. Such a movement calls upon those benefiting from white privilege not to ignore the role of race in American society by advocating seemingly colorblind approaches cloaked in the politics of class, but instead to engage in a constructive dialogue about how to redistribute the benefits of whiteness to all by creating a prescription for human dignity. Throughout U.S. history, when radical moments of resource redistribution have occurred, particularly moments in which the racial hierarchy was called into question, progressive whites have united with people of color to propel social change.

In this era of globalization, what is most certain is the uncertainty of our collective future. In such a moment, we can retreat from the challenges presented by such uncertainties or we can accept the challenges before us. As Barlow argues, the crisis of the middle class and the endangerment of the social mobility narrative in the wake of globalization offer a unique opportunity to redefine what constitutes the so called “good life.” This moment also presents an opportunity for progressives to articulate a politics that is cognizant of societal cleavages, yet bold enough not to be seduced by their familiarity. In this moment of great instability we can create a politics that is governed by traditional fears or we can act with audacious courage and demand an alternative politics that is governed by principles of growth, not retrenchment; inclusiveness, not exclusiveness.

As Linda Williams argues in *The Constraints of Race*, moments of deep challenge to the foundations of social order in America have produced “windows of opportunity” that have called into question the authority of those with the greatest political power and created a crisis in state legitimacy. At these moments of uncertainty, people of color along with their risk-taking white allies have been able to produce social change. Perhaps the challenges of globalization, along with the threat of increased terrorism, a declining middle class, and our general confusion regarding what it means to be an American citizen is the ideal moment to act in bold new ways to move closer toward ensuring human dignity for all. Barlow argues that we can see this as a moment of regression or as a moment of possibility.

Throughout this essay we have argued that white privilege affords both poor and middle-class whites a sense of security that is psychologically comforting, symbolically useful, materially beneficial and socially advantageous. This multiplicity of benefits offered by whiteness makes it all the more difficult to encourage its beneficiaries to abandon it. Yet, this is precisely the call that progressives must make in order to realize a socially just world. In many ways, the forces of globalization, increased terrorism driven by deep global inequalities, and the rapid decline of the middle class are all factors that are poised to strip at least poor and middle-class whites of their access to some of the privileges of whiteness. While this may very well occur, as Barlow argues, if nation states continue on their current paths, a progressive movement governed by a goal of a more socially just

world must be proactive. We are called to answer the question, what will replace the privileges of whiteness in a world in which not all whites have equal access to its benefit? Such a proactive politics requires that we offer a meaningful alternative to both poor and middle-class whites and people of color alike that is not limited but built on the foundation of inclusiveness.

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