

Political Science 17.20

Introduction to American Politics

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Race and Racism

Lecture 25 (May 14, 2013)

Outline

- 1 Race as a Social Identity
- 2 From Jim Crow to Civil Rights
- 3 Race and Contemporary Public Policy
- 4 Race in the Age of Obama

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Social Identities

- Group identities are fundamental to social life:
 - **Cognitive**: simplify by categorizing (schemas, stereotypes)
 - **Motivational**: self-worth through positive differentiation
- Identities are socially **constructed** and partially **elective** (choosable)

Realistic Interests

- Minimal group paradigm characterizes social identity as easily altered, but is this realistic? Why are certain distinctions/groups salient while others are not?
- Groups have **real differences in interests**.
→ whites and blacks in the plantation South

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The Jim Crow South

- Post-slavery, the Southern economy was still organized around **plantation agriculture**, in which white plantation owners had a strong interest in **subjugating and controlling** their black labor force.
 - Disfranchisement
 - Denial of rights and opportunities (e.g., education)
 - Segregation
- Not just individual racism, but reinforced by **law** as well as violence and social and economic pressure.

The Civil Rights Revolution

- 1940s–1960s: Federal government slowly dismantled the legal apparatus of Jim Crow
- Libertarians (Freedman/Becker): Racial discrimination is not economically rational, so removal of legal enforcement would cause it to wither away.
- But racial discrimination and disadvantage may be self-reinforcing, not least because of the long legacy of previous disadvantage, requiring active state intervention
→ affirmative action

Racial Resentment

- “Old-fashioned racism” has almost completely disappeared, even in the South
- But some argue that racism persists in more subtle and symbolic forms
- **Racial resentment** = anti-black affect (feelings) plus conservative values:
 - 1 Blacks no longer face much **discrimination**.
 - 2 Black disadvantage is due to poor **work** ethic.
 - 3 Blacks **demand** too much, too fast.
 - 4 Blacks have gotten more than they **deserve**.

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Affirmative Action

- Slippery meaning due to changes in form (from quotas to extra recruitment) and in justification (from remedying wrongs to promoting diversity).
- “Affirmative action” is not popular among whites (or Asian-Americans). Is this because of racism?
- Kuklinski et al. argue that racism persists and can explain some but not all white opposition to affirmative action.
- Conflict with core elements of American political culture, such as individualism and equality of opportunity (not equality of outcome)

Racialized Public Policies

- The influence of racial attitudes extends to ostensibly non-racial policies, which have become **racialized** (opinions shaped by racial attitudes).
- **Welfare:** Programs most closely associated with blacks (e.g., Aid to Families with Dependent Children) are the least popular because their (stereotypically black) beneficiaries are seen as **less deserving** (e.g., unwilling to work).
- **Crime:** Racial code words and images designed to **prime** racial attitudes.
- The role of the media

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The Spillover of Racialization

- In the age of Obama, priming is less important because racial attitudes are **chronically accessible**.
- Opinion toward Obama is substantially more racialized (i.e., predicted by racial resentment score) than previous presents (duh?).
- Racialization has “spilled over” onto people, policies, and symbols associated with Obama, such as health care or (during the primary) Hillary Clinton.

Change in Democratic Vote, Kerry to Obama

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To see a map illustrating the U.S. Presidential Election Voting Shifts from 2004 to 2008, go to:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:US_Election04-08shift.png

The Two Sides of Racialization

- The downside of racialization is clear: people high in racial resentment are more likely to oppose Obama than to oppose other Democrats.
- But there is also an upside: racial liberals offer especially high support for Obama.
- Hard to say whether racialization is a net positive or net negative, given that there is no clear reference or neutral point.

The Future of (Multi-)Racial Politics

- Black–white dichotomy that used to dominate racial politics is breaking down in favor of a more complex multi-racial dynamic.
- Rise in new racial/ethnic groups (Hispanics, Asian Americans)
- Obama exemplifies the new mixed-race and possibly “post-racial” America.

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