

# Introduction

The refusal to acknowledge that a problem exists and persists does not mean the problem is not real and it certainly doesn't mean that it will somehow cease being a problem without one or more interventions. Refusing to adequately address enduring racial disparities on many issues results in a host of actual and metaphorical deaths, which may best be understood as death by denial. Far too many Americans have arrived at the conclusion that efforts to adequately compensate black people for the discrimination they faced (and continue to face) is unfair to present-day white people and/or "politically unfeasible" and is, therefore, not worth the fight. White privilege, some argue, is not experienced equally by whites, as evidenced in variations in outcomes by gender, for example. Moreover, poor white people, regardless of gender, and more affluent whites have little in common, others have claimed.

The idea of white disadvantage extends further; it extends to the idea that white people are actually one of the most at-risk groups in America. White people are believed to be at risk due to perceived black progress and external threats ranging from terrorism to illegal immigration, among other claims. This was on full display in Charlottesville in 2017 and the Unite the Right rally. Protestors gathered to contest the removal of a monument to Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The protests resulted in the death of Heather Heyer, who was killed when a supporter of the rally deliberately drove into a crowd of counterprotesters (Sweeny 2019). The belief that whites are at risk has seemingly increased over the past decade and has politically energized many white Americans, including around such themes as Make America Great Again.

The consequences of these developments are many and are not limited to upticks in overt manifestations of white supremacy, such as in the case of the burning of historic black churches, but also include a potentially

dangerous and harmful decline in commitments to speak truth to power when the issue is 1) clearly about race and 2) involves the experiences of black people in America.

Various groups ranging from white liberals to selected black scholars and black politicians are among the former freedom fighters that have seemingly thrown their hands up in surrender and tossed in the proverbial towel. Former advocates for the rights of historically disadvantaged groups appear to have traded in their social activist credentials for the opportunity to become proponents of programs and proposals that defy history, logic, and hundreds of years of scholarly research and embrace the existence or emergence of a race-fair America.

The types of programs and policies advocated by these performers—influential individuals promoting changes they claim are beneficial to black people but will actually set black people back—have been shown not only to do more harm than good to black people but also simultaneously provide additional benefits to already advantaged groups. Some black scholars have become closely associated with this latest iteration of colorblindness as demonstrated in their push for a program that would issue bonds to every newborn in America as a way to address persistent racial wealth inequality. The scholars are among a high-profile group claiming race-neutral policies and programs provide the greatest chances for the creation of a race-fair America. These claims persist despite decades of research that point to the role that antiblack sentiments had in creating, transforming, and perpetuating a racialized social structure that remains fully intact even today and will remain intact for the foreseeable future.

Black people continue to bear the brunt of the blame for enduring racial disparities in virtually every area of social life from wealth, education, health, to crime. Efforts claiming to address such issues, particularly those adhering to the idea of a race-fair America, tend to focus on pathology of blackness that is rooted in antiblack sentiment. Consequently, related solutions to racial disparities call for behavior modifications that will lead to conformity with mythical so-called white middle-class standards. At the same time, current so called race-fair solutions to racial disparities also direct attention away from the need for systemic changes and the need for the erasure of antiblack sentiments from both the American psyche and social fabric.

The road to a race-fair America is paved with universal programs, which are: 1) focused primarily on behavioral modifications, 2) open to

all, and 3) claim to benefit the common good. There are a number of problems with this line of thinking.

First, the root of America's race problem is the systematic exclusion of black people in all areas of social life. Second, the term *common* was never meant to (and still does not) include black people. Third, the material and nonmaterial harms done to black people that are still felt today must be acknowledged. Just compensation is long overdue. Fourth, the idea that programs that are available to all people will necessarily benefit black people has been shown time and time again not to be the case.

Millions of black people have been in (and are still caught in) a disadvantage feedback loop, whereby generations of black people suffer the effects of antiblack practices and policies. These practices and policies tend to enrich members of the dominant racial group both literally and figuratively. This exploitation and exclusion is not new, but it is a fact some wish to forget, or chose to ignore, for reasons unknown. Doing what is right is not something that any individual or group should give up so easily. The right thing to do is to be truthful about the origins of racial disparities in America on a host of sociological outcomes. The causes of racial disparities in wealth, education, and the criminal justice system in America are varied but tend to include one of two dominant narratives: culture versus structure.

## Culture versus Structure

### CULTURAL EXPLANATIONS

Culture arguments tend to focus on the need for behavior modifications for individuals and groups. A number of classic as well as contemporary research studies exemplify this approach to explaining historic and contemporary racial disparities on a host of sociological outcomes. Oscar Lewis's "The Culture of Poverty" is one of the most cited studies and, by his own account, one of the most misunderstood. Lewis attempted to explain why poverty persists and distinguishes simply being poor from living within a culture of poverty (Lewis 1966). In fact, Lewis made the argument that it would be easier to end poverty than to eliminate the culture of poverty. Lewis like many others focused on culture, centered whiteness, viewed blackness as pathological, and both acknowledged and minimized the

role of structure and structural processes. For example, although Lewis was engaged in research on Puerto Rican households in Puerto Rico and New York, he returned a number of times to discussions about black households as if the so-called culture of poverty was normative for black people; even if it was not normative for black people, Lewis understood that belief as part of the conventional wisdom held by the general (white) population and among (white) scholars. Lewis (1966) was concerned that some, particularly in the mass media, have misused the concept in such a way as to see a culture of poverty as a necessarily bad thing as opposed to perhaps a coping strategy for dealing with economic reality. Lewis (1966) did acknowledge the interaction of racial discrimination and economic disadvantage in his work and how those factors inform the black experience in distinctive ways, but he signaled that the best way to address poverty is through modifications in behavior as evidenced in his discussion about the role of social work and social workers.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan's (1965) report about the black family in the mid-1960s is another example of works that placed cultural explanations at the center of arguments about differences between black and white people in America. Indeed, Moynihan (1965) famously, or infamously, declared the state of the black family a national crisis. Moynihan (1965) tried to evaluate black families using what could be framed as ideal types of white families as the standard. Moynihan (1965) also (mis)used the work of black scholars, like black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, to support his claims that a deficient culture caused the disruption and disorganization of the black family in such a way that governmental intervention was required. Moynihan (1965), and others have cited Frazier's (1939) work on the black family and used it as a justification for claims of the existence of the pathology of blackness. It is clear that neither Moynihan (1965), nor many others misreading Frazier (1939), have read, or are even aware, of Frazier's 1927 work. In the late 1920s publication, Frazier (1927) described the pathology of prejudice. His focus was on the pathology of white people's prejudices and discriminatory actions toward black people. Frazier (1927) described how seemingly rational, law-abiding white people responded in the face of perceived black progress, for example. This publication should have been an early call for scholars to focus not on the perceived pathology of black families, and of blackness more broadly, but on whiteness, as Pattillo (2005) later suggests in her review of sociological literature on black middle-class neighborhoods.

Herbert Gans (1979) was another scholar whose work addressed the role of culture in understanding different outcomes by race. Gans's (1979)

focus was centered on a concept he called symbolic ethnicity. Gans (1979) argued that some scholars were misinterpreting and misusing concepts such as ethnicity and culture when they were actually addressing what he called class behavior. Gans (1979), in his exploration of how assimilation and acculturation functioned across generations, argued against the commonly shared wisdom of the day regarding ethnicity. Many scholars proclaimed that American society was in the midst of a revival of renewed interest in ethnicity. Gans (1979) made the argument that the acculturation and assimilation that white immigrants from places like Southern, Central, and Eastern Europeans arriving between the 1880s and early 1920s experienced were ongoing and that later generations of white ethnic groups were merely using ethnic symbols. Later generations had little use for ethnic cultures or ethnic organizations, which some scholars argued were central to the assimilation of earlier white immigrants into whiteness and thus into mainstream society. Gans (1979) further argued that the absence, or weakness, of similar institutions in nonwhite communities, including black communities, was responsible, at least in part, to their inability to assimilate.

Gans described the symbolic ethnicity among later generations as “an ethnicity of last resort” (1979, 1). He also argued that what some scholars have regarded as “ethnicity is largely a working-class style” (Gans 1979, 2). He further contended that black progress was viewed as threats to white working-class style, not ethnicity. For Gans, “ethnicity can sometimes serve as a convenient euphemism for anti-black endeavors” (1979, 2). Class interests, not ethnicity, compelled white ethnic groups to fight against black demands.

Ethnicity has become over time, for Gans (1979), more voluntary. Examples of ethnic symbols are rites of passage, holidays, and involvement in national and international political issues involving a country of origin. Gans (1979) described the old country as an identity symbol. Such symbols, and symbolic culture more broadly, function in service to practiced culture. “Ethnic behavior, attitudes, and even identities are, however, determined not only by what goes on among the ethnics but also by developments in the larger society” (Gans 1979, 15).

## STRUCTURAL EXPLANATIONS

Wilson’s (1978, 1987) works about the black middle class and the underclass led to a cottage industry of studies aimed at either supporting or refuting his major theses. Critics of his work tend to advance structural

explanations in understanding racial disparities on many sociological variables. Drawing upon structural arguments is not new. Surely, one can find notable scholars, such as W. E. B. Du Bois (1995), arguing that the experiences of black people in America were not due to the inherent inferiority of black people or because their socialization lacked the necessary cultural tools for success. While Du Bois (1995) certainly acknowledged differences in behaviors and attitudes among black people, and between black and white people, he understood them to be direct consequences of broader structural issues. Despite living in one of the nation's most violent times, Du Bois (1995) did not wholly concede to conservative untruths. Du Bois's many studies, including *The Philadelphia Negro* and others, pointed to the roles of public policies and private practices in understanding the experiences of black people.

Likewise, for all of the work connecting Frazier (1937) and Moynihan (1965) to the pathology of black culture arguments, Frazier's body of work includes several studies where he stresses the role of structure over culture. In 1937, Frazier published his study about black people living in Harlem and how the city developed into various zones based in part on the socioeconomic status of the inhabitants. His book *Black Bourgeoisie* showed how the black middle class had a distorted view of itself and its importance to black people, and to the broader American society. Frazier (1957) cited some structural barriers that kept the black middle class from separating themselves from poorer black people and kept them from assimilating into (white) mainstream society. Frazier's (1957) focus on limited access to certain financial markets, his understanding of how even historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were funded and how their curriculum was designed, demonstrated his understanding about the significance of the social structure and black people's place in it.

Robert Blauner, in *Racial Oppression in America*, advanced structural explanations for understanding why race still mattered in the country at the time of his writing. Blauner (1972) made the provocative claim that one could understand the relationship between black and white people in the United States much like that of the relationship between an empire and a colonized nation. According to Blauner (1972), as in the conventional definition, the dominant racial group in America used such things as military force, infusions of capital, and so on, to dominate every aspect of black life. The only difference was that the two groups were occupying the same physical space. Blauner (1972) referred to the relationship as internal colonialism. Mario Barrera (1979), author of *Race*

*and Class in the Southwest*, extends Blauner's work in his examinations of Chicanos in the Southwest region of the United States from the period following the Mexican-American War through the first three quarters of the twentieth century.

In a similar sense, Ture and Hamilton (1992), authors of *Black Power*, highlighted how the structures of institutions yield differences in access and differences in rewards by race. Ian Haney López (2000) built upon the idea of institutional racism by focusing on what some scholars call "new institutionalism" (1723). This concept "rejects the rational action theories that animate so much of the social sciences. Instead, new institutionalism posits that frequently repeated but largely unexamined social practices and patterns at once structure and give meaning to human interaction" (Haney López 2000, 1723). In other words, structure matters and *may* include "both cognitive and cultural components" (1723). Haney López (2000) stressed the importance of a continued focus on structural forces to understand the enduring racial divide in America. "To talk of *institutional* racism may be to engage in dry analysis, but to posit institutional *racism* places at center stage our responsibility to address largely unrecognized processes of organizational and social life that harm our society" (Haney López 2000, 1844).

Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) offered a new way of theorizing about race and understanding enduring black-white differences in the early 1990s with the publication of their book *Racial Formation in the United States*. Omi and Winant provided a thorough and helpful review of race theories, over time, beginning with the ethnicity paradigm. This paradigm experienced three major phases. The first phase came as a response to biological views about race. The second was dominated by themes of assimilation and cultural pluralism. The third phase was in defense of what Omi and Winant (1994) categorized as conservative egalitarianism against radical assaults on group rights.

Omi and Winant (1994) cautioned against the treatment of race as merely a by-product of ethnicity, or as the same as ethnicity. Instead, Omi and Winant understood race as "a concept, which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of bodies" (1994, 55). Racial formation, which Omi and Winant described as a two-step process, involved "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed (1994, 55). The first step includes "projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized" (Omi and Winant 1994, 55). The second step links racial formation to the evolution of hegemony.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva had high praise for the work of Omi and Winant, and for other sociologists studying race, but also offered important critiques regarding previous scholarship on race and race relations in America. In "Rethinking Racism," Bonilla-Silva (1997) said theories about racism stressed social and systematic qualities of racism and the structured nature of whiteness but did not account for racially stratified societies. Moreover, Bonilla-Silva (1997) argued that racial formation gave a lot of attention to political, ideological, and cultural processes. Bonilla-Silva (1997) attempted to develop a structural theory of racism that addressed the limitations of existing works about race. He cited seven important limitations. First, racism was not understood as an integral part of the foundation of the social structure. Second, racism was far too often considered as psychological and studied at the individual level. Third, racism, argued Bonilla-Silva, was framed as unchanging, such that rearticulation of racism was viewed as reductions, or as declines. Fourth, racism was defined as irrational. Additionally, racism was thought to only manifest in overt ways. Sixth, some scholars, argued Bonilla-Silva, had mistakenly treated racism as a historical artifact. Seventh, still other scholars had set-forth circular arguments whereby "racism is established by racist behavior, which itself is proved by the existence of racism" (1997, 469).

Bonilla-Silva (1997) presented the idea of the racialized social system, which described societies that were structured, at least in part, by grouping actors by racial groups and the racial groups were socially based. Racial phenomena are the expected outcome of a racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Racism can change in nature and may be overt or covert. Racial behavior, contended Bonilla-Silva (1997), was rational and the reproduction of the racialized social system was connected to contemporary structures and not just to the past. Bonilla-Silva (1997) held that his structural theory of racism could account for the emergence, transference, and disappearance of such things as stereotypes.

Clearly, Bonilla-Silva (1997) and other scholars acknowledged the importance of understanding the ways in which society is structured and structured along racial lines as significant in explaining the experiences of black and white people in the United States. Bonilla-Silva's (1997) willingness to unapologetically confront conservative untruths was much appreciated and likely accounts for his continued popularity among critical sociologists. Although, as previously stated, Wilson (1991) called upon scholars to be brave and make structural arguments, he wanted to soften the blow by conceding to a more conservative thesis even when

the research did not bear it out. Surely, the process of publishing and being part of the national debate on any subject matter is political, but popularity should not dictate the important work sociologists must do.

### Cultural and Structural Arguments Combined

In *The Declining Significance of Race*, William Julius Wilson (1978) focused on how structural and economic changes, particularly after the civil rights movement, impacted the black population. One impact was the extent to which class increased in importance as a determinant of the life chances and life opportunities of black people. According to some of Wilson's (e.g., 1987) later writings, he regretted not devoting more attention to what he called the underclass and offering related policy recommendations. The underclass was a term Wilson (1987) used to describe a relatively large group within the black population at the bottom of the American social structure with relatively low levels of education and low wages. Wilson's (1987) book *The Truly Disadvantaged* was an attempt to address the oversight. Wilson made the argument in *The Truly Disadvantaged* that the problems facing inner cities "cannot be accounted for by the easy explanation of racism" (1987, ix).

Before the 1960s, Wilson argued, inner-city communities, which are disproportionately black, were areas where there was "positive neighborhood identification, and explicit norms and sanctions against aberrant behavior" (1987, 3). Due to the loss of jobs and a mass exodus out of the inner city by working- and middle-class black role models, those left behind had to deal with the social situation into which they were born and adapted to it in ways that created self-perpetuating pathology, said Wilson (1987). Wilson's arguments about black people and the role that culture played in understanding racial disparities are reminiscent of Lewis's work on the culture of poverty.

Wilson (1987) also commented about the impact of Moynihan's (1965) scholarship about race and the role of culture in understanding black and white differences on a host of social issues. Wilson made the case that reactions to the Moynihan report scared many scholars away from focusing on culture as the dominant explanation for understanding the overrepresentation of black people among the poor and on other negative sociological outcomes. The effects were, according to Wilson, felt for more than ten years. Conservative explanations about the absence of

group values and the impact of government programs on individual and group behavior became dominant in discussions about black people without more nuanced discussions about the complexity of culture. Black families and individuals existed outside the mainstream American occupational system for Wilson. These folks, argued Wilson, “lack training and skills and either experience long-term unemployment or are not members of the labor force, individuals who are engaged in street crime and other forms of aberrant behavior, and families that experience long-term spells of poverty and/or welfare dependency” (1987, 2).

Although Wilson (1987) seemed to understand the role that structural factors played in the experiences of people living in inner-city communities, particularly black people, he nevertheless portrayed economically disadvantaged black people, at best, as deviant and at worst as criminals. Wilson’s default argument was one that privileged culture. Wilson called upon more liberal scholars and thinkers to be more proactive and bolder about their claims that cultural values emerge as the result of a particular set of social circumstances and life chances, and life opportunities reflect one’s class and racial position. Wilson (1987) was willing to make some concessions to become part of a national conversation and contribute to public discourse about the linkages between cultural values, race, and class. One major concession involved the participation of scholarship and dialogue that reflected both liberal and conservative views more equally. Wilson was, in essence, telling liberal scholars and thinkers that if they wanted to be heard then they have to be willing to concede that there are merits to the conservative thesis and address what he considered “the dynamic interplay between ghetto-specific cultural characteristics and social and economic opportunities” (1987, 18). Wilson assessed the political landscape and conceded that it was not only politically feasible to dismiss conservative views, in many ways he embraced them. Wilson’s (1978) work has arguably had more of an impact on the field of sociology and beyond since the publication of *The Declining Significance of Race* than any sociologist in America on the subjects of cultural values, race, and class.

Mark Gould (1999) saw the problem of disciplinary flip-flopping—acknowledging structural explanations about race but privileging cultural explanations—on issues not only among people like William Julius Wilson but also scholars such as John Ogbu. Ogbu is well known for his research about race and education (Gould 1999). Gould showed how both scholars routinely made structural arguments to explain racial phenomena

but regularly returned to culture of poverty arguments. Gould (1999) attributed this intellectual dance to a failure on the part of Wilson, Ogbu, and others to distinguish between normative and cognitive expectations. Gould (1999) flat out refuted Wilson (1987) when he stated, “Inner-city blacks are not enmeshed in a ‘culture of poverty’” (1999, 172). He further noted, “Wilson apparently wants to both reduce ghetto-specific culture to the social situation that produces it, thus making it malleable to the face of situational change, and to see it as self-perpetuation in the face of structural change” (1999, 174).

Similarly, Ogbu, according to Gould (1999), characterized the seeming lack of academic success among black youngsters as an adaptation to lower social and occupational positions as adults. In essence, Ogbu suggested “that the caste system imposes on blacks culturally constituted motives adaptive to their status positions,” which undermined Ogbu’s prior structural argument (Gould 1999, 176). Moreover, Gould (1999) outlined four components of the social structure that Ogbu missed in his analysis: real opportunity structures, cognitive expectations that emerge in adaptation to opportunity structure, normative expectations, and the nature of the culture. The value commitments of inner-city people, including black people, were in line with mainstream values, Gould (1999) contended, and the cognitive expectations created as a result of opportunity structures are both accurate and functional.

### *Washington v. Davis*

The implications of dismissing or minimizing the centrality of race in American society are massive. One example is evidenced in the 1976 *Washington v. Davis* case (Haney López 2000). The historic case has had a long-lasting impact on American society. In many ways, the case ignored the importance of a racialized social structure in producing racial disparities. The case involved a lawsuit brought against a police department in Washington, DC. To become a police officer in Washington, DC, applicants had to participate in a seventeen-week physical training, meet certain character standards, complete high school or equivalency, and score at least 40 out of 80 on a written exam. The court ruled that laws or procedures that do more harm to one group than they do to others, but on the surface were race neutral and did not directly intend to discriminate any group, were valid under the equal protection clause

of the Fourteenth Amendment. The fact that a law or policy, in this case, application, to become police officers in the nation's capital had a disproportionate effect on black applicants was not enough evidence. This is particularly interesting given that many scholars, as mentioned earlier, point precisely to racial disparities in many social institutions as evidence of discrimination by the government, individuals, and so on. The ruling, in this case, implied that race had nothing to do with the process despite different outcomes by race. Moreover, the ruling also highlighted the court's lack of understanding about what racial discrimination looks like and how laws, policies, and procedures can on the surface appear race neutral but discriminate.

Although four times as many black people failed the required Test 21 as did white test takers is not in and of itself proof that the test is meant to keep black people off of the police force, claimed the court in the *Washington v. Davis* case. The plaintiffs argued the test had nothing to do with the job performance of officers and that there was no evidence the test in any way predicted success on the job. Some scholars have noted that the court has a habit of not asking the right questions. Angela Onwuachi-Willig (2019) made this point in her article about the connection between the *Washington* case and the *Loving v. Virginia* case. The *Loving* case challenged longstanding laws against miscegenation. The court in the *Washington* case did not ask important questions about the department's actions and whether they made sense given the purpose of the test. Instead, Onwuachi-Willig said the "Court essentially assumed the good faith in hiring a diverse police staff on behalf of the police department" (2019, 314). Moreover, "the Court blindly accepted the Department's claim that it was actively engaged in efforts to become a more diverse police force," or what Onwuachi-Willig aptly called the "we're trying" defense (2019, 314).

The court also implied that even the increased presence of black people in the department would somehow diminish the occupation, much like beliefs that the very presence of black people in all-white neighborhoods and schools, for example, would somehow ruin the institutions and the association of both as white space. The court said, regarding the elimination of the test, the police department "should not be required on this showing to lower standards or to abandon efforts to achieve excellence." Adding to the opinion of the court, Associate Justice John P. Stevens stated that the distinction between discriminatory purpose and

impact was not as obvious as some may think. Conversely, Justice Brennan, writing the dissent along with Justice Marshall, said the decision could lessen the effectiveness of measures to safeguard against discrimination. As has been the history of the nation, the burden was unduly placed on the historically marginalized group to prove intent (Sullivan 1981). The court in the *Davis* decision offered an “extremely narrow meaning of the word intent” (Onwuachi-Willig 2019).

The court behaved in a way that members of the dominant racial group in America have acted in the past when confronted with issues about inequality and race. The court chose to ignore the facts. Historically, the court and members of the dominant racial group, more broadly, have chosen to ignore facts about the unequal treatment black people receive that don't fit their version of history or dominant narrative. Their version of history provides an orientation in the world for them. It justifies the privileges and benefits they continue to receive without any accountability and responsibility for the harms they may cause.

### *Takao Ozawa v. United States*

Again, the court, speaking in one voice, did and said what the court had done in the past. For example, consider the case *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922). Ozawa was born in Japan and lived in the United States for two decades. He sued the United States because he wanted to become a citizen under the Nationalization Act of 1906. However, the act stated that only free white persons and persons of African ancestry could naturalize. Ozawa argued that Japanese people were white. He lost the case. A year later, Bhagat Singh Thind, a man of Indian ancestry, filed a petition for naturalization using some of the very language the justices used in the *Ozawa* case to disqualify his petition. Thind lost his case too. The court ignored the very facts it presented in the *Ozawa* case and justified doing so based upon the perspective of the so-called *common man*. Whiteness was what the common white man and white woman defined it. Neither Ozawa nor Thind were considered by white people as white, no matter what the science of the day claimed. In the *Washington v. Davis* (1976) case, as in the cases of *Ozawa* and *Thind*, the courts dismissed facts in evidence to rationalize the unequal treatment of nonwhite people in the country.

## Whiteness and the Myth of a Postracial Society

Placing the burden on racial and ethnic minorities to prove their oppression and the source(s) of their oppression is an important element of whiteness. This is not only an important element, but I would consider it central to the maintenance of whiteness. It seeks to dismiss the idea that throughout much of American history white people have been beneficiaries of a system that negatively impacts people of color, particularly black people. Efforts to protect such a mischaracterization of whiteness are effective, so much so that historically, and continuing into the present, scholars, including black and white scholars, have retreated from advancing and promoting research that shows how the racialized social structure produces and reproduces inequalities by race. Additionally, some elected officials have embraced and introduced public policies that avoid addressing the structural factors underpinning racial phenomena.

Efforts to expose the continuing significance of race are often met with a great deal of what can best be described as white rage (Finley, Gray, and Martin 2020). For example, members of the dominant group have responded to claims of black disadvantage and unequal treatment with what some have described as religious fervor (Finley, Gray, and Martin 2020). They hope to drown out any voices that might be brave enough to speak out against ongoing racial injustices, including professional athletes like former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick and his supporters (Martin 2018).

Let us now turn our attention to some of the research on whiteness to better understand what the term means and how I apply it in *America in Denial: How Race-Neutral Policies Reinforce Racial Inequality in America*. Then, we will examine how members of the dominant racial group have succeeded in muting, or drowning out, the voices of those with opposing viewpoints.

While many contemporary scholars are only beginning to explore whiteness as a way of understanding why racial differences persist in America, people like W. E. B. Du Bois ([1921] 1975) were thinking and writing about whiteness in the early part of the twentieth century. In chapter 2 of *Darkwater: Voices Within the Veil*, Du Bois described the origins of what he called personal whiteness. Du Bois wrote that personal whiteness was a relatively recent phenomenon. Personal whiteness, for Du Bois emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He described the onset as occurring relatively quickly. Du Bois wrote, “The world in

a sudden, emotional conversation has discovered that it is white and by that token, wonderful" ([1921] 1975, 30). Through the idea that "whiteness is the ownership of the earth," came this "new religion of whiteness" (Du Bois [1921] 1975, 31–32).

For Du Bois, white people from diverse backgrounds consolidated around whiteness. There was a universal pride among white people that Du Bois argued back then could be seen in "the strut of the Southerners, the arrogance of the Englishman amuck, the whoop of the hoodlum" ([1921] 1975, 31). Du Bois declared, "The title to the universe claimed by white folk is faulty" ([1921] 1975, 31). The normalization and privileging of whiteness made members of the dominant group and others believe the myth "that every great soul the world ever saw was a white man's soul; that every great thought the world ever knew was a white man's thought; that every great deed the world ever did was a white man's deed; that every great dream ever sang was a white man's dream" (Du Bois [1921] 1975, 31).

Centering whiteness was purposeful, argued Du Bois ([1921] 1975). What Du Bois described first as comedy, and later tragedy, became particularly salient when nonwhites, but especially black people, insisted on the recognition of their human and civil rights. Resistance to antiblack sentiments led to the consolidation of white people from philanthropists and white Northerners who turned their backs on black people in the North and declared "that the South is right" (Du Bois [1921] 1975, 32). The consolidation of whiteness manifested itself (and still does) in sometimes violent ways from which neither black man, black woman, or black child could escape. Du Bois described this fervor as "drunk and furious with ungovernable lust of blood; mad with murder, destroying, killing, and cursing; torturing human beings because somebody accused of crime happened to be the same color as the mob's innocent victims and because that color was not white" ([1921] 1975, 33).

Whiteness has historically conceptualized black people as dark in skin color but also in the mind. Thus, the contention held by many people in the dominant racial group that "everything great, good, efficient, fair, and honorable is white . . . and the devil is black" (Du Bois [1921] 1975, 44).

Many scholars have drawn upon the work of Du Bois ([1921] 1975) on whiteness, in whole, or in part, to address the marginalization of important voices, including the voices of black women. The critique of whiteness, and the privileges associated with it, is considered an important stage in the study of whiteness. Indeed, the latest, or third wave of whiteness studies appears to claim Du Bois as one of its chief founders

(Twine and Gallagher 2008). However, one of the key characteristics of the latest wave of whiteness studies is the claim that not all white people are beneficiaries (Twine and Gallagher 2008). Claims of Du Bois ([1921] 1975) as a founder notwithstanding, this view of whiteness represents a departure from Du Bois and his work on whiteness. Du Bois clearly saw racial imperialism as critical to understanding the United States and the global society and his discussions about capitalism often addressed its impact on black people and other people of color throughout the world to the near exclusion of the white worker. On the contrary, Du Bois frequently addressed the implications of antiblack sentiments by white working-class folks toward black workers, and black people more broadly.

More recent studies about whiteness in sociology are considering how the development of an integrated approach to studying race and ethnicity might combat white supremacy and finally end the debate about what matters more, structure or culture. Zulema Valdez and Tanya Golash-Boza (2017) offered an intersectionality of race and ethnicity approach. The scholars argued that race and ethnicity are not the same but often revert to such claims in their work. Valdez and Golash-Boza (2017) also made the argument that an intersectionality approach to race and ethnicity will explain more about enduring divides and be more nuanced than other approaches. I note that Valdez and Golash-Boza (2017) did not specify how this might be accomplished. They also did not show specific flaws in existing studies, which they contend do not explain very much and are not nuanced at all. Furthermore, Valdez and Golash-Boza (2017) asserted that it is important to build a bridge between race and ethnicity scholars. The scholars did not give careful thought or consideration to whether scholars at either end of the race/ethnicity spectrum felt the need for a bridge. Moreover, Valdez and Golash-Boza's (2017) use of the term intersectionality in their article is problematic. Unfortunately, the term intersectionality is often misused. In this case, what Valdez and Golash-Boza (2017) were calling an intersectional approach was more like what W. Carson Byrd (2017) called an integrative approach.

It is important to note that intersectionality and integration are not the same things. It is also important to note Valdez and Golash-Boza's (2017) preferred approach will not end whiteness, or white supremacy, but instead may succeed in reifying both. George Yancy's (2000) article about feminism as a subtext of whiteness is illustrative of how this happens. In integrating two entities there is an underlying assumption that one group is moving from the margins only to join another group in part because

that group has hoarded all the valued resources (i.e., power, property, prestige). Minority groups may be closer in physical proximity to the dominant group but continue to be far away politically and economically, for example. Integration often brings with it an illusion of inclusion, which would be the case in an integrative approach to combating whiteness.

The proposed integrative approach is a veiled attempt by ethnicity scholars to gain greater legitimacy and relevance harkening back to a time when the ethnic paradigm was dominant and studies about race and understanding new technologies of whiteness were marginalized (Gray, Finley, and Martin 2019). Zulema Valdez and Tanya Golash-Boza (2017) want to use the concept of a racialized social system as a connector between race and ethnicity scholarship when the concept is already commonly accepted and widely used in studies about race. Ethnic studies would benefit from such a move.

Perhaps the use of the term “ethnoraciality” is most telling about what an integrative approach to combating whiteness through sociological studies about race and ethnicity is really about—the erasure of race, particularly antiblackness, as central and foundational to understanding whiteness historically and in contemporary times. The term and the proposed integrative approach serve to minimize and obfuscate race. Valdez and Golash-Boza’s (2017) approach is essentially a race-neutral or race-fair approach to studying that is doomed from the start.

Again, Yancy’s (2000) work on whiteness and feminism is important here. The proposed integrative theory will, like whiteness in feminism, marginalize the voices and political concerns about race, especially black people in the United States. Similar to feminism as a subtext to whiteness, ethnicity as a subtext to whiteness “assumes to speak with universal authority and truth” (Yancy 2000, 156). Moreover, the suggested integrative approach to combating whiteness “assumes to think and to speak for the entire world” (Yancy 2000, 157). This “‘transcontextualized’ conception of experience . . . is philosophically bankrupt and dismissive of particular experiences” (Yancy 2000, 157). No one group, or approach, “possesses the theory or methodology that allows it to discover the absolute ‘truth’ or, worse yet, proclaim its theories and methodologies as the universal norm evaluating other groups’ experiences” (Yancy 2000, 165).

It is not a coincidence that when practices that are associated with antiblackness are extended to and experienced by other nonwhites, questions arise about whether the group represents the “new n\*\*\*\*er,” or the “new folk devil.” Race matters. Race trumps ethnicity. Race-neutral

and race-fair approaches to addressing whiteness and the resulting racial disparities only serve to buttress antiblack, anti-nonwhite sentiments.

There are many reasons that some scholars and elected officials, including some black scholars and elected officials, have gravitated more toward the idea that race-neutral and race-fair policies and scholarship are possible and necessary. For one, the backlash experienced by black scholars who dared confront whiteness in their classrooms, in their research, and in public, particularly on various social media platforms, has resulted in these scholars finding themselves the subject of virtual mobs with little protection from the administrators for whom they work (Finley, Gray, and Martin 2018).

Several recent events highlight how antiblack sentiments continue to frame the experiences of people in the United States whether they identify as black or not. The election of President Obama is an oft-cited example. It's not a coincidence that the number of hate crimes against black people increased during President Obama's tenure (Bigg 2008). The antiblack sentiment aimed at Obama and other black people led to the passage of seemingly race-neutral programs and policies with the exception of the My Brother's Keeper program. However, the program was designed in such a way that it did more to promote than undermine dominant narratives about young black men as deviant. The Obama administration missed many opportunities to directly address racial disparities in America.

For example, the Great Recession harmed black people in ways it did not harm others, due in large part to the fact that before the Great Recession black people were experiencing higher rates of unemployment, predatory lending practices, insecure employment, among other challenges, than white people. Despite the evidence of racial disparities before and after the Great Recession, programs to save the nation from what many people considered certain economic doom were not at all race specific. Some of the programs that were part of the recovery efforts passed during and after the Great Recession enhanced the policing and hypersurveillance of black people. Some banks and financial institutions were deemed too big to fail and received financial assistance as part of recovery efforts. The loss of black wealth, which was already dismal before the Great Recession, was not considered important by the Obama administration and nothing was done specifically for black asset owners.

Not wanting to fan the flames of antiblack sentiments is part of the reason that then presidential candidate Barack Obama chose Joe Biden as a running mate. Many Americans did not think the country was ready

for a black president. Surely, the country was not ready for people from historically disadvantaged groups at the top of the Democrat ticket. However, Biden should have been considered a problematic choice for several reasons. For instance, Biden, a former opponent of Obama, once described Obama as *clean* and *articulate*. These terms are coded terms about the intelligence and cleanliness of black people more broadly. Also, Obama chose a man as his running mate who admittedly collaborated with segregationists and revictimized Anita Hill, who alleged sexual harassment by Clarence Thomas.

Another example of President Obama's failure to directly address race in substantive ways involved noted black scholar Henry Louis Gates. This example also points to the role of Biden to mute Obama's race. In July 2009, Gates was arrested after a confrontation with a white officer after someone called police claiming he was breaking into a home. The home belonged to Gates. Commenting on the arrest of one of the most respected scholars in the country, President Obama said the officer acted stupidly. Many white Americans swiftly rebuked Obama's comments. In America, the police are considered gods and Obama's criticism of the officer was viewed as a criticism of all police officers and of the whiteness police departments represent more broadly (Gray and Finley 2015). His words were considered sacrilegious. The message at the center of the rebuke of Obama's comments was clear—whiteness is always right and blackness is always a potential, perceived, or actual threat. Obama's solution to this racial issue was to hold a beer summit for those involved. Joe Biden, representing whiteness in the administration, attended the beer summit with the arresting white officer, Gates, and the president.

Responses to public protests about unnatural black deaths are also responsible for a shift toward race-neutral or race-fair policies, proposals, and research. Reactions to protests by Kaepernick and protests under the Black Lives Matter umbrella are two examples. What happens when an elite black athlete playing in a professional league that is governed by majority white CEOs and supported primarily by a historically white male fan base decides to use his status to draw attention to racial inequalities in America by kneeling instead of standing during the playing of the national anthem? Like many athlete-activists before him, Colin Kaepernick could not find work and there was an even broader backlash.

In response to the protests, restaurant owners who normally rely on sports fans as patrons refused to show National Football League (NFL) games. Fans, mostly white, demanded refunds from their cable providers.

Even President Trump got involved. The president insulted the players and their mothers on social media. President Trump also criticized the CEOs for not exerting more control over the players. Many white people boycotted Nike for supporting Kaepernick's right to protest. Nike stood behind Kaepernick again when the sneaker giant discontinued a shoe bearing the 1776 version of the American flag. Some people protested the design because that time period did not have the same meaning for everyone. While white people were celebrating their independence, black people were still in physical bondage.

Responses to protests by individuals and groups directly and indirectly associated with the #Black Lives Matter movement are another example of how whiteness consolidates when threatened. The killing of young Trayvon Martin sparked the onset of what some have described as a movement. The killing a few years later of Alton Sterling exposed further tensions between law enforcement and the black community. It was then that declarations that All Lives Matter and Blue Lives Matter most reached their zenith. In Baton Rouge, the site of Sterling's killing, blue ribbons went up on mailboxes and on houses in predominately white neighborhoods. Black and blue flags signifying solidarity with the police flew in the backs of trucks or were converted to magnets and stickers to adorn cars and trucks, including police vehicles, which are purchased with public funds. White runners in races from 5ks to half marathons ran the distance supporting law enforcement. In fact, legislators succeeded in passing a Blue Lives Matter law, making officers a protected class along with groups whose ancestors experienced enslavement, exclusion, segregation, expulsion, and near extermination.

It is no wonder that some individuals are retreating from the fight for the ongoing black liberation struggle, but the dangers of this trend continuing may have consequences for generations to come. Relative silence by some during the confirmation of Justice Clarence Thomas, for example, has impacted court decisions, including those impacting people of color for decades. Failure to place pressure on President Obama and others to introduce and administer race-specific initiatives was met with worsening conditions for many people of African ancestry in the United States, where such indicators as asset ownership, education, and contact with the criminal justice system are concerned. Fear of taking on more conservative theses, such as those put forth by Moynihan (1965) and others, has negatively impacted the scholarly and public discourse around issues of race, particularly as they relate to antiblack sentiments and related out-