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**.  
  $\rightarrow$ whites and blacks in the plantation South
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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
“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.
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)
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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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:
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.