

WHAT'S CLASS GOT TO DO WITH IT?

**AMERICAN SOCIETY IN THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

EDITED BY MICHAEL ZWEIG

ILR PRESS AN IMPRINT OF
CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS
ITHACA AND LONDON

Copyright © 2004 by Cornell University

"Across the Great Divide : Crossing Classes and Clashing Cultures" copyright © 2004 by Barbara Jensen

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or parts thereof, must not be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Cornell University Press, Sage House, 512 East State Street, Ithaca, New York 14850.

First published 2004 by Cornell University Press
First printing, Cornell Paperbacks, 2004

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

What's class got to do with it? : American society in the twenty-first century / edited by Michael Zweig.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8014-4259-1 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 0-8014-8899-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Social classes—United States. 2. Working class—United States. 3. United States—Social conditions—21st century.

I. Zweig, Michael, 1942—

HN90.S6.W43 2004

305.5'0973—dc22

2003023064

Cornell University Press strives to use environmentally responsible suppliers and materials to the fullest extent possible in the publishing of its books. Such materials include vegetable-based, low-VOC inks and acid-free papers that are recycled, totally chlorine-free, or partly composed of nonwood fibers. For further information, visit our website at www.cornellpress.cornell.edu.

Cloth printing	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Paperback printing	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

THE TANGLED KNOT OF RACE AND CLASS IN AMERICA

R. Jeffrey Lustig

A paradox haunts current considerations of class in America. Signs of class society appear all around us but the militant working class foreseen by traditional social critics is missing in action.

The living conditions of working men and working women deteriorate, on one hand, as companies downsize; low-paying, dead-end jobs proliferate; union rights are thwarted; the ranks of the poor expand; and the gap between rich and poor widens. One percent of the U.S. population now owns 42 percent of the nation's wealth and enjoys the power that comes with it.¹ Business exploits not only its workers but our environment and areas of social life—health care, schooling, the news media, even local government—that used to be protected from the profit motive.

On the other hand, the working class as an organized force and champion of other oppressed groups in society is absent from national politics. If class forces are those that challenge the basic structures of corporate production, then many doubt that even organized labor fills the bill. Activists and social critics in recent years have located the major social cleavages on lines of race, ethnicity, gender, or attitudes toward the environment, not class.

Already by the 1950s, many social scientists had begun to deny that America was any longer a class society. Struck by the absence of cutthroat individualists like Rockefeller or Carnegie, distracted by midcentury prosperity, and oblivious to new methods of corporate capitalism, they announced that the two-party system had given a "democratic translation [to] the class struggle"; workers were now integrated into the system as a nascent middle class; and interest-group competition now "guarantee[d] that the products of the society will not accumulate in the hands of a few power-holders."² Mirroring the old socialists' belief that class societies produce revolutionary struggle, these observers took the absence of

struggle to signal the disappearance of classes. They mistook the absence of the cure for the passing of the disease.

But class remains a stubborn presence, as Michael Zweig shows in this book's introduction. What obscures this fact and produces the paradox are two things: Americans' famous social mobility and their identification of themselves in unexpected terms. Geographical mobility and job shifts alter people's lives and confuse their understanding of their situations; but they do not usually produce a real shift in class position.³ More central in explaining the absence of an organized class movement is the unexpected self-identification of a major part of the workforce. This is clear, for example, in the support a majority of white working men have given the party that leads the fight against their interests *as* workers since the 1980s, the Republicans. Why do they do this? The answer is revealed by incidents like the Willie Horton ad in the 1988 presidential campaign, appealing to race prejudice while appearing to address crime, or California's Proposition 187 (discussed below), which coded race as illegal immigration. A majority of white workers currently identify themselves by race rather than class. And that has serious consequences not only for blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities but also for the white workers themselves and their efforts to achieve economic security.

Race and class are the "tangled knot" of American history.⁴ This chapter traces how those two forces have interacted to constrict the lives of working people and choke off the long-term struggle for democracy in the country as a whole. We need to examine that knot to understand how class works in America and how the idea of class might be rethought so that we can regain its power as a tool of social analysis. Examining that knot will also help us to understand how race works in America and, in particular, why the two most favored remedies for racism today, the goals of colorblindness, on one hand, and of recognizing "diversity," on the other, have proven so ineffective. The first of those remedies attempts to deny race, while the second seeks to accentuate it, but neither addresses the class basis of minority oppression. Neither acknowledges that ending racism requires neither affirming nor denying blackness but, as Joel Olson puts it, "abolish[ing] whiteness"—dismantling a peculiar permutation of class and social power.⁵ First, let's be clear about what we mean by "class."

TRADITIONAL CLASS THEORY

The language of class first emerged in England and France at the end of the eighteenth century to describe the new groups collecting around the emergent factories.⁶ Those groups contrasted with the previous ranks,

castes, and estates of the feudal era in that the earlier castes and estates had been parts of an organic hierarchical whole, defined by law and legitimated by custom. The new "classes," by contrast, were made up of atomized individuals, gathered by the accident of employment and bereft of customary rights and claims. The bourgeois fiction that everyone was an equal citizen released public officials from any obligations to or responsibility for the misery and degradation of these people, many of whom worked seventy-two-hour weeks in the brutal conditions described by Charles Dickens, Emile Zola, and, later, Upton Sinclair.

The socialists took the plight of the new working classes seriously, and their keenest analyst, Karl Marx, discerned that the workers' misery was due to the fact they were exploited and the products of their labor taken for the new factory owners' profits. The production of wealth in the new capitalist system, he saw, was also a simultaneous production of poverty. The capitalists' wealth did not come from clever trading in the marketplace (the realm of exchange), as they claimed, but from oppressing their workers in the factories (the realm of production). Because the new workers lived under economic conditions "that separate[d] their modes of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes," Marx predicted in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, they would develop different social values, create alternative institutions, and organize politically against those others to create a society in which no one had the power to systematically exploit others, and the wealth modern production provided could be enjoyed by all.⁷

Many societies have been divided into the haves and the have-nots. It was the contribution of class theorists to note that in capitalism the haves have because they take from the have-nots. Owners of production wealth have the power to determine what the society will and will not produce, and how it will produce it, and what will be left to the workers for their survival. Employees put up with this only because they have to in order to survive, their "labor contracts" disguising as voluntary agreement what is actually a form of coercion. Class analysts also saw that modern democracy harbors a system of domination at its heart, because the Bill of Rights stops at the plant gates. The wealth gained by capitalists through exploitation, finally, confers on them a private power that will rival, and eventually exceed, the public's power to govern itself.

The early class analysts thought that intermediate strata (farmers, small businessmen, artisans) would disappear as capitalism developed, and a homogeneous, unified working class would appear.⁸ They thought that the major social contradiction would acquire visible expression as the two major class formations became arrayed against each other: exploiters versus exploited, capitalists versus workers.

Most students of race relations and writers on economic development

agreed. They viewed racism as an obsolete holdover from the past, an epiphenomenon that would lose its force with time. In the 1940s, a decade before the civil rights movement, the sociologist Gunnar Myrdal concluded, "In principle, the Negro problem was solved long ago."⁹ Race seemed like a cultural accident, whereas class was structurally generated and fundamental.

Marx and others saw the working class emerging in the society's mines, mills, and factories, in short, as a social force that would put an end to exploitation, racism, and other forms of social oppression. Workers, coming to understand their exploitation, would become a "class-for-itself" and then transform the structures of their work and life in fulfillment of the communitarian values they had incubated on the shop floor and in their local institutions. They would prove to be a "universal class," "a class which did not claim *particular redress*, because the wrong which has been done to it is not a *particular wrong* but *wrong in general*," a class that would be "the dissolution of all classes" because it was in its interests to lay the groundwork for all people's liberation.¹⁰ Working people's values would lead them to spurn bourgeois selfishness in favor of solidarity and economic anarchy in favor of rational social organization. This would give rise to the demand not simply for higher wages but for a qualitatively different way of life,¹¹ not simply for a bigger piece of the pie but for a different pie altogether.

In this view workers were not only poor and not only kept poor despite their efforts but, more positively, were also the creators of social wealth, holders of strategic leverage, agents of collective action, and champions of general emancipation. In contrast to the recent notion of class that reduces it to a step on an income or status ladder, this larger theory saw class position as determined by ownership of *wealth*—producer (not consumer) wealth. Wealth confers individual power over life chances and social power over workers' lives, the nation's priorities, and the society's paths of development. ("Lack of income means you don't get by; lack of . . . [wealth] means you [also] don't get ahead.")¹² That class is a matter of power escapes those who focus attention on income gradients without taking time to examine the causes of the gradation.

In contrast to the view that reduces class to an income or status group, the broader theory also sees the relationship between classes as inherently conflictual. Businessmen concentrate their holdings and are constantly forced by the need for capital accumulation to try to cut wages and curtail workers' political rights in the effort to reduce them to the status of commodities. Workers, seeking stability and greater freedom for themselves and their families, are forced to resist. The antagonism and con-

tradition between the two survives even periods of quiescence and apparent truce.

Despite the accuracy of many of the older analysts' predictions, class formation and political organization in America have not occurred in the manner predicted. The political scientists Donald Kinder and Lynn Sanders found that class division was "fading . . . as a force in politics" — and in contrast, intriguingly, to the growing importance of race. By the 1990s, one Marxist scholar was forced to admit, "Class struggle . . . has disappeared from the scene." And the historian David Brion Davis concludes, "We have entered another era when race has preempted class."¹³

To see how this has come about and what it reveals about the shortcomings of traditional class theory it helps to look at what recent scholarship has revealed about the interconnected historical evolution of race and class in America.

THE LEGACY OF RACISM

When an emigrant population from a "multiracial" Europe goes to North America . . . and there, by constitutional fiat, incorporates itself as the "white race," that is no part of genetic evolution. It is . . . a political act."

— Theodore Allen, The Invention of the White Race

The first point to understand is that race and ethnicity affected class formation in America from the beginning. Already by the 1840s, organized "workers split themselves along ethno-religious lines. American-born Protestant workers participated in broad evangelical reform movements or more nativist groups, while immigrant Roman Catholic workers withdrew into insular ethnic communities. . . . Workers fractured politically."¹⁴

Capitalist employers exploited those ethno-religious distinctions in their efforts to break strikes and periodically cut wages. But it was the workers themselves who "fractured politically." The early craft unions often operated as protectionist guilds, for example, to exclude new immigrants from Ireland and southern Europe (who were not yet "white") from apprenticeships, jobs, and political influence.

The second point is that, from the beginning, worker identity in America included a racial identification. Coming to consciousness of their standing in a society that preserved racialized chattel slavery, members of the new working class often drew the distinction between themselves and the slaves more sharply than that between themselves and their bosses. Whiteness became an integral part of the new identity, "worker." This

identification was particularly important given that the workers, aspiring to dignity and independence, were constantly threatened with status demotion by common law master-servant precedents that treated them as less than full citizens.¹⁵ Membership in the "white race" provided status and recognition and a shoring up against this threatened derogation. In the South, as W. E. B. DuBois famously noted, poor whites were paid "a sort of public and psychological wage" in social standing in return for helping police and coerce blacks, offsetting the sense of their own inferiority and distracting them from their own degrading job conditions.¹⁶

The subsequent struggle to create unions and workers' political associations in the late nineteenth century became in important ways a racial project, as Saxton has shown. The workers' clubs and political parties did not simply attract like-minded people; they *created* a propensity in their members for racializing those, like the Chinese in California, who looked different.¹⁷ Not incidentally, this helped create a sense of belonging among people who themselves were strangers in a strange land. Part of learning to be a "worker" for dominant sectors of the American workforce became learning to seek group advantage by racializing fellow workers and scapegoating them for problems not of their making. That assured access not only to scarce jobs but also to increasingly scarce dignity in the context of emerging class antagonisms.¹⁸

This history, thirdly, reveals something important about whiteness. It reveals that that quality did not derive from a common ancestry, for there was none. French, Germans, Irish, and Eastern Europeans all eventually became "white" along with English people. Nor did whiteness refer to a common physiognomy, for the same reason. Nor, despite many people's claims, did it denote a common culture, there being little to unite Irish Catholics with Scandinavian Lutherans (or with Hungarian Catholics, for that matter), or impoverished sharecroppers with plantation bourgeoisie. What it did denote was membership in the white race, a sociological group that was "neither a biological nor a cultural category, but . . . a *cross-class alliance* between the capitalist class and a section of the working class."¹⁹

The precondition for membership in that race was what people were *not*—they were not black, the hue of the now-paradigmatic Other. "Without the presence of black people in America, European-Americans would not be 'white,'" Cornel West observes; "they would be only Irish, Italian, Poles, Welsh, and others."²⁰

Blackness for its part drew its meaning, Chief Justice Taney candidly admitted in his notorious *Dred Scott* opinion, from the fact that whites had "stigmatized them . . . with deep and enduring marks of inferiority and degradation."²¹ It had become a "badge of servitude" not, that is, because

of anything intrinsic to African heritage but because of the physical oppression to which African Americans had been subjected for economic purposes. Negroes wound up not just as noncitizens but as "*anticitizens*,"²² the Other against whom citizenship defined itself. And race, since its origins, has thus been an artifact of economic oppression and political decision (like the *Dred Scott* decision itself). Guinier and Torres acknowledge this with their idea of "political race."²³

Fourth, the creation of the white race alliance critically affected working class formation in America. Class distinctions among whites were not ended "but secured by it," as Olson notes.²⁴ The fact that in the years after Reconstruction the dominant sectors of the working class were defined in racial terms served to blunt white workers' efforts to plumb the real sources of their degradation on the job and before the law, discouraging them, in contrast to Europeans, from taking their own *wage* slavery seriously.²⁵ This is not to say that the period lacked for class struggle. The Haymarket, Homestead, and Pullman strikes epitomized a long series of conflicts that shook the country at the end of the century. But the reluctance of workers to acknowledge the real character of their subordination prevented them, on balance, from analyzing their working conditions in a way that transcended traditional terms. "The chains that bound the African-American thus also held down the standards of the Irish-American slum-dweller and canal-digger as well."²⁶

Fifth and last, racism would become part of the institutional reality of American society. The segmentation of the labor market epitomized by slavery continued in other forms and for other subordinated peoples. By mid-twentieth century, even social scientists who ostensibly denied the significance of class inadvertently acknowledged that "there are two working classes in America today," a white one and a Negro, Puerto Rican, and Mexican one—the former of which "benefit[s] economically and socially from the existence of these 'lower castes' within their midst."²⁷ Segments of organized labor unfortunately played a role in maintaining this situation.²⁸

This labor market segmentation is the keystone in an arch of institutions—economic, educational, legal, and political—that function systematically to disadvantage racialized groups and to advantage the racializers. The processes in different social sectors interact so as to create a system of institutionalized racism. It is not difficult to see how this works. To consider a simplified model: we know that a bad job pays poor wages; poor wages can pay for only cheap lodgings; areas of cheap housing offer poor schooling; poor schooling in turn prepares people for only bad jobs; bad jobs pay poor wages . . . and the cycle continues.²⁹

Racism, then, is part of the institutional and material, not simply the

attitudinal, reality of the society. Differential racial opportunities are churned out as part of the society's normal workings, and are not simply residues of an unfortunate past. Nor are they dependent on overt acts of prejudice.³⁰ Without having asked for special favors, white people acquire what George Lipsitz terms a "possessive investment in whiteness"—an accumulation of assets gained from unequal educational access, job access, housing advantages, eligibility for bank loans, and access to insider networks.³¹ While most may not be conscious racists, in the absence of a larger vision or shared purpose they oppose any effort to devalue those investments. Ending racism in America would require a breaking up of that cycle and enactment of broad social-structural reforms, something more substantial than an appeal to tolerance or weekend "diversity" retreats.

RACE, CLASS, AND AMERICAN POLITICS

The Struggle for Social Citizenship

The knot of race and class has left its permanent mark on American politics, blocking the path toward democracy. Democracy requires formal rights, like those enumerated in the Bill of Rights to free speech, free conscience, free association, trial by jury, and so forth. But beyond the formal statement it also requires that those rights be actually usable. And for people to have rights that are usable and *effective*, certain material preconditions have to be secured—a job, physical safety, an education, adequate housing, medical care. Without those preconditions the formal rights are a dead letter. They can't be exercised. This struggle for substantive (not merely formal) democracy is a struggle for *social* (not merely political) citizenship.³² For a brief period after the Civil War, white and black workers both expected to secure this citizenship. Blacks looked to enforcement of the new Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments and the promise of "forty acres and a mule" (i.e., the acquisition of producer wealth). White workers hoped that the labor movement, the Homestead Act, and other measures would give them a starting stake. The betrayal of Reconstruction, however—the gutting of the Fourteenth Amendment and defeat of a divided labor movement—ended such hopes for sixty years.³³ A solid South resting on that cross-class alliance, the white race, providing only minimal security for poor whites, was permitted to consolidate itself.

Sixty years after Reconstruction this bloc came back during the New Deal to thwart poor whites' renewed effort to attain the material preconditions for equality and citizenship. The southern elites, constituting the

hidden power in the Democratic Party, made up the "reactionary core . . . at the heart of the New Deal coalition" that stopped the New Deal in its tracks and "prevented all Americans from securing the boon of social citizenship." The southern Bourbons successfully weakened the efforts to provide national unemployment and full old-age insurance, erect labor protections for all (including agricultural and domestic workers), fashion an effective Fair Labor Standards Act, and put teeth into the Employment Act of 1946.³⁴ While the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s succeeded in ending legal segregation and overt discrimination, they did not return to this older struggle for substantive democracy.

As we enter the twenty-first century American society still reveals the disregard for working people's interests (opposition to their right to organize, for example, or absence of low-cost housing), the subordination of their needs to the interests of capital (as with plant closures and job loss), the failure to provide decent wages or unemployment insurance, and the depleted public services (deteriorating schools and mass transit, shuttered libraries) characteristic of a class society. But the anxiety and dismay produced by such dislocations expresses itself in other than directly economic terms. Pain travels.

And American racism endures and evolves. It continues to justify the displacement of capitalism's human costs onto the weak. It provides a way for whites still suffering insecurity and poverty to shore up scarce status and dignity. And by providing a lightning rod for ultimately class-based fears and worries, it masks the major causes of social inequality and makes it seem "natural." It, of course, does other things as well. Race in America has always had its own character, dynamics, psychologies, and approach to social control—along with the positive beauty and richness of ghetto and barrio cultures. It would be a mistake to reduce race *to* class. But it would also be a mistake, we see, to try to understand it *without* class.³⁵ Race is a political and economic, and not just a cultural and psychological, phenomenon.

Further Twists in the Knot

Understanding the knot of race and class makes it possible to also understand the outbreak of race and immigration politics during the 1990s that heralded a distinctly undemocratic turn in national politics.

California is often regarded as the bellwether of developments in the rest of the country, and events in that state are instructive about this turn in national politics. A new punitive mood had become apparent in the Golden State already back in 1986, when voters, ignoring their state's bilingual origins and booming immigration rate, passed an initiative

(Proposition 63) that declared English to be the state's official language.³⁶ That mood took on breadth and force during the economic downturn of the early 1990s, as voters, blaming the scarcity of jobs and state monies on an alleged generosity toward immigrants and prisoners and on affirmative action benefits for minorities and women, passed further retributive measures.

Proposition 184, the "three-strikes" law that mandated prison sentences of twenty-five years to life for criminals convicted of a third felony, passed in 1994. Considering the demographics of those convicted and sentenced, many saw it as part of a coded racial agenda. Proposition 187, passed in the same election, sought, more importantly, to annul the rights of undocumented immigrants (now construed as criminals) to social services, nonemergency health care, and public schooling. The measure, which also required social service providers to report suspicious applicants to authorities, inadvertently created a new Insider in the process of fashioning a new Outsider—the citizen as informer to match the noncitizen as criminal welfare cheat. The sentiments kindled during its controversial passage helped persuade the federal government to later cut benefits for *legal* immigrants in the welfare reductions of 1996.

A spate of antiminority measures followed. The Regents of the University of California banned racial preferences in college admissions in 1995. By spring of that year ten anti-affirmative action bills moved through the state legislature. These were lumped into Proposition 209, prohibiting the use of race, ethnicity, or gender in public university admissions and public sector hiring and contracting. This proposition became a constitutional amendment in 1996, also effectively outlawing any voluntary public-sector efforts to break up the mechanisms of institutional racism unless ordered to do so by the court as remedy for past discrimination.³⁷

In 1997 the state's Industrial Welfare Commission also abolished a rule dating back to the Progressive Era requiring most nonfarm workers who put in more than an eight-hour day to be paid overtime. And in 1998, state voters passed Proposition 227, drafted and financed by a Silicon Valley executive, outlawing bilingual education and requiring that foreign students be immersed in English-speaking classes.

These were serious measures, rekindling xenophobic and exclusionist sentiments and recasting the terms of social membership, even if key provisions of Proposition 187 were later overturned by the courts. A physical wall began to be built through a binational society at the Mexico–United States border at the same time walls were being torn down in Berlin and South Africa. Such drastic measures were defended by only the flimsiest of pretexts. The half-billion dollars spent on social services

for people without papers hardly accounted for the massive \$14.3 billion state budget shortfall of 1991–1992 and multibillion dollar deficits thereafter. Many studies indicated that the newcomers actually made a net contribution to the state's finances.³⁸ In fact, undocumented immigration had long been part of the state's policy for precisely that reason, to fuel profits for agribusiness and for marginal firms in Los Angeles. Nor had affirmative action or bilingual classes provided significant preferences given the institutionalized pattern of advantage and disadvantage noted above.

The fears about jobs and personal stability were real enough, but their causes lay elsewhere. They lay in a national recession, cutbacks in defense spending, job loss as capital encouraged by tax laws sought super profits in other nations, and a frayed public safety net caused by the *structural* budget crisis that began to appear after Proposition 13's tax cuts of 1978.³⁹ In the era of corporate capital, wealth wrested from workers in factories is no longer enough. Wealth must also be siphoned away from public programs and the limited reforms of the New Deal dismantled. Public controls on capital must also be removed to increase its freedom of maneuver (as with Enron), and convert the state into a vehicle of *corporate* welfare. The causes, that is, were largely class causes.

Affirmative action is essentially a rationing system that attempts to offset the operation of the nation's primary system, which is rationing by wealth and the cultural literacy wealth provides. It seeks to make up for minorities' lack of a real starting stake and to make genuine equality of opportunity possible. Wealth, cultural literacy, and the economic patterns described above, not some pristine "merit," are what allocate scarce education, health care, housing, and legal resources in our society. (That's why one researcher can say, "Tell me the zip code of a child, and I will predict her chances of college completion.")⁴⁰

But the real question posed in the 1990s had less to do with methods of rationing than with why rationing is necessary in the first place. It had to do with that preexisting scarcity. Why should the material conditions of citizenship be scarce? Why in the wealthiest nation in the world *are* jobs and housing and health care hard to get? Given the record salaries of the biggest CEOs and increases in wealth of the richest citizens in the 1990s at the same time that massive reductions caused a *disinvestment* in education, hospitals, and social infrastructure, this is a question about the power of private profit to work its will against social needs. It is a class question.

It cannot be recognized as such, however, and class questions cannot be raised politically as long as people stick to the racial terms in which issues and social conditions are currently presented. Nor can the power of business to siphon off more jobs and degrade working conditions be

checked, nor the public's power to rebuild higher education and public health facilities be restored. Nor, finally, can white workers and their families see that they too will suffer from the continuing fragmentation of popular power.

Class questions cannot be raised because the groups that might raise them remain divided between racializers and racialized, fighting in a box without questioning the existence of the box itself. And despite the hopes of many, those divisions are not diminishing. All too many blacks "are more deeply mired in poverty and despair than they were during the 'separate but equal' era."⁴¹ And the difference between blacks and whites on many public issues is "greater today than in any other period for which we have data," political scientists Kinder and Sanders report.⁴²

The social construct of "whiteness" also remains intact. Indeed, California's politics in the 1990s are to be understood not primarily as expressions of nativism or exclusionism but as efforts to hang on to the privileges of whiteness in unstable times. Whiteness remains, first, in those socially conferred privileges noted above. Even the poorest whites can avail themselves of at least some "wages" of status and opportunity. Whiteness remains, second, as an assumed commonality with the powerful, a fictional likeness that blinds people to the fragility of their own hold on economic security and the ways the game is rigged against them. Whiteness remains, finally, as that most basic of benefits enjoyed by a dominant order, the privilege of thinking oneself normal, of taking one's own position for granted and not having to reflect on one's relations with or responsibilities to others. The color of power is white.

The tangled knot remains. In order to deal with class we will have to overcome race. But in order to deal with race, as David Brion Davis suggests, Americans will have "to confront the underlying reality of class division in America and the destructive myth of a classless society."⁴³

CLASS RECONSIDERED

It will help in clarifying this underlying reality if we understand that the ordeal of race in America not only disproves the predictions of older class theorists but also identifies elements of class theory that need to be rethought and reformulated if we are to comprehend the character of social power and the plight of other groups in addition to African Americans. We can summarize these points before concluding this chapter.

First and most obviously, the continued salience of race disproves the prediction that working people would develop a single homogeneous identity and that the social structure would become simplified over

time.⁴⁴ Working people in all industrial societies remain differentiated beyond race by skill level, urban or rural location, industrial sector (white collar versus blue collar), and divisions based on new job categories (e.g., new technologists versus high-tech workers). These factors provide different bases for group identification and rivalry.

Second, then, the experience of racism warns against assuming that people's interests can be deduced directly from their positions in the economic structure and that objective laws can be deduced about them. Human beings are not physical objects or stimulus/response mechanisms about whom scientific laws can be formulated. Between stimulus and human response, consciousness intervenes; and consciousness is a product of history and politics.⁴⁵ This is where America's famed social mobility plays a role—not disposing of class, but constantly disrupting the cultures that might help us to understand class situations and roles over time. Without this focus many workers may, on the basis of their histories or of current politics, choose, as we have seen, to trace their troubles to workers of color, or immigrants, or even the government.

Third, in light of these different social divisions, the very idea of "identity," with its implications of singularity, may be misleading. People possess multiple, overlapping self-conceptions. They may simultaneously identify with their job, their region, their ethnic group, the nation (as patriots), the middle class (as consumers), or the working class (as producers). "Class," Aronowitz writes, "never appears in pure form."⁴⁶ Which of these aspects acquires priority depends on the issues at hand and how they are framed. Rather than objective positions producing "interests," the way a political struggle is defined and explained often determines how people identify themselves.

Thus, fourth, we need to reimagine the sort of body that can give voice to class issues. A class-for-itself is not an objectively given entity. Nor will future class issues be formulated or struggles undertaken on the lines traditionally predicted. Class issues will most probably be raised by an alliance or bloc of forces, the elements of which experience class in different ways. And class issues will become politically significant only to the extent that working people reforge the connection with the community severed by modern industry, and remember that class consciousness is not an exclusive product of the shop floor or the union movement. That consciousness, as Thompson emphasized, is also a product of larger community institutions engaged in struggle. (The success of the Justice for Janitors' and hotel employees' struggles in Los Angeles in the late 1990s was due to their appreciation of this fact. They understood the threats posed by Proposition 187 and other measures and successfully recruited their larger communities to their struggles.)

The variability of group identification warns us, lastly, against assuming the automatic leadership or universal role of any group in the broader community institutions. Different oppressed groups face different forms of injustice, and they seek different remedies. Ridding the society of systematic economic exploitation is a necessary condition for overcoming racism, and ethnic prejudice, and sexism, and neocolonial pretensions; but it is not the only condition. It is perfectly legitimate and desirable that different groups will give different issues priority. The cultures of such groups may even provide the qualitatively different values and communal forms that traditional class analysis recognized as necessary for real social change.

Creating unity between different subordinated groups, developing different forms of class consciousness in each, and framing an alternative vision that can unite them will not be achieved by any preexisting "universal class." These are tasks that can only be accomplished through political struggle. And such a vision, to truly appeal to a majority of people, would have to be built up out of their current identities and the different ways they live class now.

CONCLUSION

After three centuries of bond labor, Jim Crow laws, and segmented labor markets, race is an established part of American life, part of its "material" reality and not just a cultural epiphenomenon. It is the social formation that openly manifests among other things the society's class contradictions.

That's why the struggle against it holds a central place in the larger struggle for democracy and against the concentration of power and the suppression of human possibility characteristic of class societies. The class character of American race also explains why it is that the current remedies for racism have been so ineffective in their results. One of these remedies, we noted, seeks to achieve colorblindness. It attempts to attain equality before the law, but without acknowledging that lacking the material conditions of citizenship, this will not provide equality of opportunity or any other meaningful parity. It fails to recognize the truth of Justice Blackmun's dissenting opinion in *Bakke*: "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. . . . In order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently."⁴⁷

The contrasting appeal, to "diversity," takes its cues from identity politics and our differences rather than any underlying commonality. The proponents of black (or brown, or feminist, or gay) politics have made

genuine contributions to our understanding of social injustice and identified forms of exclusion formerly denied by both mainstream and radical politics. But in recent years they have moved away from broad social critiques and ceased to look for the deeper causes of their inequalities. And they have ceased to present qualitative alternatives to current arrangements and a larger social vision that could unite their struggles with others'.⁴⁸ They therefore risk reducing the call for diversity to a call only to get more members from their own groups in corporate headquarters and state legislatures. They risk limiting themselves to the call for a larger share of the spoils of a game still rigged to exclude the majority of their fellow-citizens.

Neither of these approaches addresses the reality of institutional racism or its deeper class character. Neither addresses the need to confront the class conditions of racial minorities' lives. And neither acknowledges that whiteness, as the visible sign and mask of a system of power, is not something to be emulated or treated on par with other ethnicities. It is the sign of a cross-class bloc of power that needs to be dismantled. And that can only be done by creating a cross-racial alliance among working people.

It will help in this if white workingmen and workingwomen remember two truths learned by our forbears in earlier struggles. The first is that democracy is not provided by official documents or large armies sent overseas but by political activity on the part of all, having secured the material bases for a citizen's life. Racializing minorities and scapegoating outsiders does nothing to accomplish this, and raises barriers against it instead. The second is that freedom is ultimately a matter of mutual care and social solidarity, not of private possessions and separate group fortunes. We are dependent on each other, "members one of another," as the old Puritan phrase put it. Social obligations precede political rights.

At the beginning of a new century things look worrisome for both the racializing and racialized sectors of the workforce. Both are on thin ice in their job rights and living standards. We are entering another period in which white workers will be divested of gains they thought they'd won, and minorities cheated of advances they thought were coming their way. Security in the job is gone, public services are starved, the quality of life is declining. We know from understanding how capital works that pressures to deprive workers of decent job conditions and social rights will increase. We also know that the political party on which both groups depended in the past is no longer seriously interested in their plight. There is nothing, then, to prevent the pressures from breaking through the thinning ice in the next decade.

Nothing, that is, except working people's own political struggle. Will

we react to coming reverses by fracturing again on racial lines, whites and would-be whites turning on the weak, as anticipated by California's Proposition 187? Or will we get out of this historical rut, attempt a cross-race alliance, and resume a common struggle for democracy? The answer will depend not on outside forces, economic trends, or national leaders but on the character of our own political leadership and organizing.

Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America, 2 vols. (London: Verso, 1994 and 1997).

2. Lerone Bennett Jr., *The Shaping of Black America* (New York: Penguin, 1993).
3. J. Sakai, *Settlers: The Myth of the White Proletariat*, available from Crossroad Support Network, c/o Spear and Shield Publications, 5206 S. Harper, Chicago, IL 60615.
4. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1905; repr., New York: Modern Library, 2003).
5. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*.

The Tangled Knot of Race and Class in America—R. Jeffrey Lustig

1. Orlando Patterson, *The Ordeal of Integration* (New York: Basic Civitas, 1997), 24.
2. Seymour M. Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1960), 230, 439.
3. See, for example, Stanley Aronowitz, "Does the United States Have a New Working Class?" in *The Revival of American Socialism*, ed. George Fischer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).
4. William Forbath's apt metaphor in "Caste, Class and Equal Citizenship," 98 *Michigan Law Review* 1 (October 1999): 3, 5.
5. Joel Olson, "DuBois and the Race Concept: Toward a Political Theory of Race" (paper presented at the Western Political Science Association annual meeting, Long Beach, CA, March 2002), 18; and "The DuBoisian Alternative to the Politics of Recognition" (paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Washington, DC, September 2000), 20. Also Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, 2 vols. (London: Verso, 1994 and 1997).
6. Asa Briggs and John Saville, *Essays in Labor History* (London: Macmillan, 1960); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), xv.
7. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 480, 485; Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 124.
8. Marx and Engels, "Communist Manifesto," 476, 481–83.
9. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 11. On the view of racism as a passing epiphenomenon, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1994), 9, 35.
10. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 64; and Marx and Engels, "Communist Manifesto," 482, 491.
11. Williams, *Culture and Society*, 325.
12. Ray Boshara, "Poverty Is More Than a Matter of Income," *New York Times*, September 29, 2002, section 4, p. 13. On wealth and income, see Michael C. Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 7; and Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, *The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 44–49.
13. Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, *Divided By Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 90; Etienne Balibar, "Class Struggle to Classless Struggle?" in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Immanuel Wallerstein and Etienne Balibar (London: Verso, 1991), 156; David Brion Davis, *In the Image of God: Religion, Moral Values, and Our Heritage of Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 357.
14. Melvyn Dubofsky and Foster R. Dulles, *Labor in American History*, 6th ed. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan-Davidson, 1999), 73.
15. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Work-*

ing Class (New York: Verso, 1991), chaps. 3–4. See also Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

16. W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 700–701; Olson, “DuBoisian Alternative,” 2; and Forbath, “Caste,” 12.

17. Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), chap. 4. Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Faultlines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 3, 154, 210.

18. Almaguer, *Racial Faultlines*, 3, 181, 205. “It is to the eternal shame of the American labor movement that . . . it always favored Euro-American racist solidarity over worker solidarity.” Patterson, *Ordeal of Integration*, 7.

19. Olson, “DuBoisian Alternative,” 15.

20. Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 156; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 95.

21. *Dred Scott vs. Sanford*, 19 How. 393; 15 L. Ed., 691 (1857).

22. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 57.

23. Guinier and Torres, *Miner’s Canary*, 12, 294–98.

24. Olson, “DuBoisian Alternative,” 20. In Forbath’s words, black subordination bound “white Americans together as ‘equals’ across unacknowledged breaches of class” (“Caste,” 3).

25. Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 69. I discuss here only the dominant elements in organized labor. There were also serious attempts at cross-racial organizing during these years, both by southern unions and by the Knights of Labor. These were eventually defeated, however, and the emerging AFL took a decidedly racist tack.

26. Allen, *Invention*, 1:198. Guinier and Torres make the point in the present context: “The mechanisms that make it so hard for black people to accumulate assets in a way that changes their life chances are the same mechanisms that keep poor whites poor” (*Miner’s Canary*, 49). Also see Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 87, 178, 182.

27. Seymour Martin Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 106.

28. Many unions discriminated against blacks and other minorities up through the 1970s, admitting them when ordered by the court, but often denying them voting or other membership rights, adequate grievance representation, and access to high-prestige jobs. Herbert Hill, *Black Labor and the American Legal System: Race, Work and the Law* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

29. “The black man’s career in any one subordinate subsector establishes preconditions for him to get inferior results from any other sector. . . . The racial functions of the different institutional sectors reinforce one another.” Harold Baron, “The Web of Urban Racism,” in *Institutional Racism in America*, ed. Louis L. Knowles and Kenneth Prewitt (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 160. A fuller model would take into consideration other institutions as well—welfare, the criminal justice system, the military, etc.

I focus on African Americans in this discussion because blacks are the paradigmatic racial formation in America. “Ethnic” groups, while also discriminated against, are regarded and treated differently, though there have also been attempts to racialize them historically. Blauner identifies one cause of the differences between race and ethnicity in the contrasting ways groups initially encountered American society—via violence and coercion (blacks and Indians) or voluntary choice (Europeans, Asians, and current Hispanic immigrants). Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 52.

30. David Wellman titles a chapter “Prejudiced People Are Not the Only Racists in America” in *Portraits of White Racism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Also see Baron, “Web,” 142.

31. George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), vii–viii and chap. 3 (on Proposition 187).

32. Forbath presents a fuller discussion of the concepts of social citizenship and material conditions of citizenship in “Caste, Class and Equal Citizenship.”

33. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*; and Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

34. This interpretation follows Forbath’s analysis. “Between the [New Deal’s] constitutional mandate and its enactment fell the shadow of Jim Crow and the betrayal of Reconstruction.” “Caste,” 5, 26, 41–42. Michael Brown et al. extend this analysis into housing, urban renewal, labor, transportation, and agricultural policies. *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), introduction.

35. Thus Almaguer writes that “race, rather than class, [has] served as the key organizing principle of hierarchical relations” but also adds that the capitalist context shaped this racializing process. Almaguer, *Racial Faultlines*, 3, 7, 170–72. Also see Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 34, 66.

36. One-quarter of all immigration to the United States in the 1980s came to California, for a population increase reaching four hundred thousand a year, legal and illegal, late in that decade. Peter Schrag, *Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 230. California’s first constitution in 1849 was published bilingually, in English and Spanish.

37. Schrag, *Paradise Lost*, 239.

38. In 1991 the state spent \$1.8 billion on undocumented residents, according to U.S. government reports, \$1.3 billion of which went for schooling, their right under the Fourteenth Amendment (*Plyler vs. Doe*, 1982), not a social service per se. Taking into account the undocumented workers’ federal income taxes, state taxes (\$732 million in fiscal year 1992, in sales, property, and income taxes), their direct expenditures, and the spending generated by them, the Urban Institute calculated that they made a net contribution to the state of \$12 billion annually. Jeff Lustig and Dick Walker, *No Way Out: Immigrants and the New California* (Berkeley, CA: Campus Coalition for Human Rights, 1995); “The Immigration Blame Game,” *Los Angeles Times* editorial, November 11, 1992; Jeffrey Passel, Rebecca Clark, and Manuel Garcia y Griego, “How Much Do Immigrants Really Cost?” (Riverside, CA: Tomas Rivera Center and the Urban Institute, 1994); and Jeffrey Passel et al., “Fiscal Impacts of Undocumented Aliens: Selected Estimates for Seven States” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 1994). Also see Lipsitz, *Possessive Investment*, chap. 3.

39. Wells Fargo Bank economists reported a “hemorrhage” of a half million jobs from the state in 1991–1992, totaling almost 5 percent of the workforce by 1994. “Special Report: Defense Cuts and the California Economy,” *Wells Fargo Monitor*, April 30, 1992; “The California Economy: A Mid-Year Review,” *Wells Fargo Monitor*, June 30, 1992; “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back,” *Wells Fargo Monitor*, July 31, 1992. By February 1994, California’s unemployment rate was two points above the national rate (8.7 compared to 6.4 percent). Sam Stanton, “Hard Times Driving Governors’ Race,” *Sacramento Bee*, February 27, 1994. During the 1980s the gap between rich and poor widened and the poverty rate nearly doubled. The income of the wealthiest fifth increased 15 percent, that of the middle-income group gained 3 percent, and that of the bottom fifth plummeted by 8 percent. Center for Budget and Policy Priorities findings, reported by R. G. McLeod, “Income Inequality Worsening,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 28, 1992, A9. The gap between rich and poor in California widened primarily because of a “precipitous drop” in male earnings (20 percent in 1994 dollars, from 1967 to 1994). Between 1969 and 1989, California moved from the twenty-first to the sixth most income-polarized state. Deborah Reed, M. G. Haber, and Laura Mamesh, *The Distribution of Income in California* (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 1996), vi, viii.

40. Howard Gardner, "Paroxysms of Choice," *New York Review of Books*, October 19, 2000, 49; Frank Webb, "Zip Codes Shouldn't Determine Our Students' Future," *CTA California Educator*, May 2001, 6–8. "The pertinent debate concerning black hiring is never 'merit vs. race' but whether hiring decisions will be based on merit influenced by race-bias against blacks, or on merit influenced by race-bias but with special consideration for minorities and women." West, *Race Matters*, 78.

41. Derrick Bell, "Racial Realism," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberle Crenshaw et al. (New York: New Press, 1995), 306. The important measure, again, is wealth. While middle class African Americans made up 9.2 percent of the nation in 1995, they held only 2.9 percent of its wealth, including a mere 1.3 percent of its financial assets. Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro, *Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 103. Also see Spencer Rich, "Whites Ten Times Wealthier Than Blacks, Hispanics," *The Washington Post*, January 11, 1991; Guinier and Torres, *Miner's Canary*, 44–47; and Brown et al., *Whitewashing Race*.

42. Kinder and Sanders, *Divided By Color*, 32.

43. Davis, *In the Image*, 357; also see Blauner, *Racial Oppression*, 28–29.

44. Balibar, "Class Struggle," 161–62, 178.

45. This was the central thesis of E. P. Thompson's magisterial *Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963): "The making of the working class is a fact of political and cultural, as much as of economic history" (194). Aronowitz similarly emphasizes "the primacy of social time over social space: spatial arrangements are sedimented outcomes of struggles over class formation and, since social time is not reversible, are marked by contingency." *How Class Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 56.

46. Aronowitz, *The Politics of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 72. David Halle describes the multiple identities of his fellow workers in *America's Working Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). See also Gary Gerstle, *Working Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

47. *Regents of the University of California vs. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978), dissenting opinion.

48. "The 'politics of identity' . . . fail[s] to recognize that interests and identities are constructed upon a terrain of inegalitarian distribution of social and economic power." Joseph Schwartz, "Reconstructing the Left in an Age of Globalization and Social Differentiation" (paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Washington, DC, September 2000), 3.

Neoliberalism and Anticorporate Globalization as Class Struggle — William K. Tabb

1. On keywords see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983). For such usage as applied to globalization and a discussion of definitions of globalization see William K. Tabb, *Unequal Partners: A Primer on Globalization* (New York: New Press, 2002), chap. 1.

2. William K. Tabb, *Economic Governance in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

3. Naomi Klein, "Revolt of the Wronged: Argentina Was a Model Student. And It's Still Suffering as a Result," *Guardian* (London), March 28, 2002, Internet edition.

4. See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), in which the former chief economist at the World Bank, Nobel Prize winner in economics, and chair of President Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers offers a not dissimilar evaluation.

5. John Williamson, "What Washington Means by Policy Reform," in *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* ed. John Williamson (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1990).