
POLICYMATTERS

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POVERTY AND RACE THROUGH A BELONGINGNESS LENS

By john a. powell

Policy Levers to Reduce Poverty and Build Prosperity
in the Upper Midwest and Pacific Northwest

INTRODUCTION

Prosperity is possible for all.

That bold idea has opened vistas of opportunity for generations of Americans. And it lies at the core of the Northwest Area Foundation's mission – to support organizations working to reduce poverty and build sustainable prosperity. Everything we do is rooted in our conviction that prosperity is possible for all. That spirit animates our strategies and informs our thinking as we reach out to partners with similar goals.

We believe people should have the opportunity to thrive, to build the future they want for themselves and their families. What we have learned in over 50 years of grantmaking is that achieving lasting prosperity – getting out and staying out of poverty – takes more than a steady income. It requires building assets as well: savings for homes, cars and education, and to buffer against emergencies; education and training for living-wage jobs and career advancement; and housing that's safe and secure.

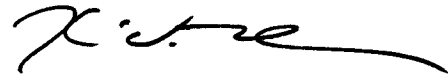
Opportunities for building assets and wealth are either advanced or stymied by public policies at the city, county, state and federal levels. That's why policy matters in people's lives. The significance of policy is the guiding principle of *PolicyMatters*, a series of issue papers underwritten by the Northwest Area Foundation.

Policy decisions shape the flow of the people's resources through government expenditures, with profound consequences in our communities. Public policy touches on issues as diverse as asset accumulation, early childhood and K–12 education, college access, housing, immigration, workforce development, tax and budget policy, and retirement security. In all of these areas and many more, the people's resources are flowing in patterns not shaped by some invisible hand, but by decisions made by human beings. A critical question is: Whose perspectives inform those decisions? Our Foundation cannot achieve its mission if the organizations with which we work – or the low-income people these organizations serve – are absent from the policy debates of our time.

PolicyMatters seeks to lift up voices from the field. We hope these perspectives will be useful to practitioners, advocates and decision-makers as they work toward policies to reduce poverty and build sustainable prosperity. Motivating us in this and all our endeavors is a vision for the future of the Northwest area:

- We see a region known for its highly skilled, well-educated population, its living-wage jobs, and its healthy, vibrant communities.
- We see a region characterized by thriving local economies within thriving ecosystems.
- We see a region whose strong public institutions, business community, and nonprofit sector collaborate to address pressing needs and help build pathways to prosperity for all residents.
- We see a region whose people are organized and empowered to lift their voices and actively shape the civic, social, political and economic life of their communities.
- Ultimately, we see a region whose rich culture of engagement and opportunity makes it a prized place to visit, to invest, and to live, and where all residents have a fair chance to live free of poverty.

Innovative public policies are essential if that vision is to become a reality. Let us know whether you find *PolicyMatters* helpful in spurring the development of such policies. *PolicyMatters* is intended to spark reflection, discussion and innovation. We encourage you to add your voice in what we hope will be a vibrant, ongoing public conversation about the future of your community and our nation. You can submit your comment at feedback@nwaf.org.



Kevin Walker
President and CEO

About the Northwest Area Foundation

The Northwest Area Foundation is dedicated to supporting efforts by people, organizations and communities to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable prosperity. Established by Louis W. Hill in 1934, the Foundation serves a region comprised of Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and the 74 Native nations that share the same geography.

We seek a future for this region in which those who have been impoverished and marginalized, whether in urban, rural, or American Indian reservation communities, share in real opportunity and lasting prosperity. We work toward that future by making grants and mission-related investments. We are also committed to sharing knowledge of what works, convening conversations about the region's progress, and advocating for change.

POVERTY AND RACE THROUGH A BELONGINGNESS LENS

By John A. Powell

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about how to address poverty in the United States. It is not so much prescriptive as it is focused on how transforming the narrative and structures related to poverty can help break our complicity with it. We often misunderstand what poverty is in our society and why it seems so intractable. While there have been many insightful policy proposals and even some limited success, such as reducing poverty for the elderly, overall poverty in our society has been difficult to tackle. There also is a growing call to rethink what we mean by “poverty” that goes beyond the official definition of poverty adopted by the federal government in the 1960s. The White House has exerted significant effort to redefine poverty. Although the official poverty line will still be based on food costs and a family’s cash income, a second rate will expand costs to include such expenses as housing, utilities, childcare and medical treatment.¹ Even those who find fault in this effort agree that the current thinking on poverty is flawed.

In a wealthy and mature democracy, poverty is largely about social exclusion and the lack of belonging, not material inequality. As an excluded group increases in size, the realities of exclusion seriously affect not only the target group, but the overall society as well. Historically, there are different categories used for this exclusion, including nationality, religion, gender, language, ethnicity and race. In the United States, race has been one, if not the primary, category for extreme exclusion. Native Americans make up another category. We should therefore expect race to be significant in understanding and addressing poverty. I do not claim that if we addressed racialized poverty all other forms of exclusion would be addressed. Instead, I suggest that if we better understood and addressed the dynamics

and meaning of exclusion related to race, it would have much broader implications and would help us better understand the mechanism of exclusion generally. In this report, I will explore the complexities of belongingness, the racialization of exclusion, and the promotion of inclusion through the policies that I recommend.

There are two dominant ways of thinking about and measuring poverty: absolute, and relative or relational.² Absolute poverty measures usually refer to some threshold of income or resources below which people should be deemed disadvantaged or poor.³ Because it is an absolute standard, it remains largely static over time in a given society. For example, if one does not have sufficient food or water, one does not thrive. This is as true today as it was 100 years ago and it is not society specific. Relative poverty measures, on the other hand, move beyond absolute deprivation to consider an individual’s or family’s relative deprivation – economic, social, and/or cultural – in relation to other people in a given society over time.⁴ In our society today, there is a strong assumption that, in an urban area, to be without a phone or a computer is a serious deprivation. We organize the operation of basic service organizations, such as police and fire departments, based on the assumption one will have access to phones. This form of measurement is consistent with the “capabilities approach” developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, in which deprivation is understood more broadly as encompassing the capabilities that one requires, some material and some not, to live a meaningful, flourishing life.⁵ One is poor if one does not have the things needed to be a respected member of society.⁶ One might claim that a physical structure of a home in an urban area is not necessary for a healthy life in some

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of our support – children, for example⁷ – others are not. As a result, we often exploit, marginalize, and segregate these others. We make meaning of their condition that is unflattering to them.

The stories we understand or tell ourselves about why people are poor matter. One story is their poverty is attributable to their failure and an alternative story is that outside factors such as a tight labor market are the cause of their poverty. Is poverty internal or situational? The way we answer will affect the standing of the targeted poverty group as well as our response. If the assumption is that the cause of poverty is attributable to the behavior of individuals or a group, they are seen as undeserving, and any remedial claim for social resources is weakened. Many conservatives work from this assumption and are generally unsupportive of policy interventions. But when poverty is seen as caused by external circumstances that are not

absolute sense, but it is clear that the lack of a home is a deprivation of well-being and standing in our modern society. In other words, when we ask whether someone is poor, we are actually concerned about her standing in society – whether she belongs, a key factor in how America treats its poor citizens. Although some categories of persons are almost always considered “deserving”

attributable to the targeted group, then there is a strong claim for policy intervention. This external cause might be natural (such as a flood) or social (such as one group excluding or discriminating against another). Liberals who consider the poor unfortunate, not undeserving, are more likely to operate from these assumptions and support policy interventions. Of course, there can be a mixed attribution. For example, segregation from opportunity and belonging can contribute to behavior in the disfavored group, which makes matters worse. Consequently, neither the less favorite group nor the larger society is absolved of their duties to address these conditions.

Choosing an approach to poverty is mainly motivated by how one sees the targeted group on the gradient of belonging. In fact, the sense of belonging or not will have an impact on assessment of deserving. The more distant from the center we locate the impoverished, the more likely we will attribute the cause of their condition to them. This assessment process is largely unconscious and fairly immune from facts. Rather, it is powerfully influenced by the stories that we embrace to allocate meaning, a power that can be more impactful than material conditions. And these stories can shift. Consider the role of a secretary. In the early days of industrialization, men were more likely to be secretaries and the position enjoyed higher status. But as women, the less favorite gender, came into the position, a new story relegated it to a lower status. What this signals is that to make advances in reducing poverty, we must be more deliberate about transforming the narratives that propel and accompany groups outside of the circle of human regard and belonging.

I. BELONGINGNESS

In a legitimate democracy, belonging means that your well-being is considered and your ability to help design and give meaning to its structures and institutions is realized.⁸ Members are more than just individuals; they also have collective power and share a linked fate. Those who stand outside of the community have trouble making claims on it. It is not so much that they cannot speak as that they are not likely to be heard. This is what I define as poverty.

It is the state’s job to attend to the needs of its members. Perhaps the most important need that supports or retards all others is the belonging to the polity and making demands on the state through robust civic participation.⁹ This belongingness is the primary good that is distributed or withheld in a society. One key dimension is citizenship. Slavery was diluted from civil, social and political to merely political to minimize the inclusion of blacks.¹⁰ Another key dimension of belonging is the right to have one’s group recognized as legitimate.¹¹ The state’s failure to recognize a group inflicts on the group a stigmatic or symbolic harm, which is in itself an injustice. But group stigmatization through non-recognition works an even more pernicious harm because it generates contempt and aversion toward that group.¹² This, in turn, justifies segregation and opportunity hoarding, which produces or reinforces structural inequality.

If the exclusion behind this inequality is to be effective, it must take place across the many interacting domains, which can include the neighborhood (or reservation) in which people live, the value of their homes (or those in the neighborhood), the effect these factors have on the quality and resources of their schools, the types of jobs they hold (or have access to), and the availability of credit (which is often exploitative). Isolating groups geographically not only unevenly distributes groups; it also excludes them from opportunity and facilitates creating stories

about the character of the isolated group. The centrality of the cleavage of otherness in general, and race in particular, constrains our willingness to adopt an effective anti-poverty agenda. This unwillingness shows up in our institutional arrangements.

How far one is from belongingness is a gradient that places some groups into the extreme other. Some groups are merely disdained while those at the extremes are seen as non-human. A group’s position on this gradient is not stable and can change very fast under the right circumstance. After 9/11, the regard for Muslims shifted from disinterest to what I suggest is the most extreme category of isolation: demonization and hatred, which when combined can lead to attack. Because we now fear terrorist threats, real or not, and because we feel that our identity as Americans and/or Christians is at risk, we cast all Muslims as terrorists. This dangerous story incorporates a battle between their God who calls them to jihad, and the Christian God who calls U.S. citizens to fight back infinitely.

One can imagine the center of the circle and distance from the center until being outside of the circle. There are degrees of concern or belonging. Our distance from the center will have an impact on the form and intensity of exclusion. At the extreme level, a group falls outside of the circle altogether; such groups are despised and considered worthless and incompetent. At such extremes, one is no longer afforded human concern or recognition. To occupy such a space in society makes one marginal and subject to severe negative treatment such as extermination and imprisonment. Out of the circle, which can be called the circle of human concern, the targeted group is likely to be subject to super-exploitation or, even worse, marginalization. Marginalization is worse than exploitation because those who are exploited may not fully belong, but they are still seen as useful, while those who are considered

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marginal are seen as not having any value. Such a position exposes the targeted group to genocide. At different times, Native Americans, the disabled and the poor have been marginalizing in this extreme way. Today there is evidence that undocumented immigrants are, too.

The fence to be built along the California-Arizona border will exclude Mexicans even more than the ghetto excludes poor non-whites. Ironically, Arizona's hatred of the other has produced a ban on the teaching of ethnic studies, which is grounded in the belief that they foster hatred and division.¹³

People of color living in long-term poverty are also in danger of slipping into this category of extreme marginalization, if they are not there already, because disfavored traits can be cumulative. This phenomenon of exclusion helps explain the rise in incarceration rates of the black and brown poor where there is no corresponding increase in crime among them. A number of studies have shown a positive relationship with incarceration and violence, with an implicit association of the targeted group with apes, i.e., not humans. It also helps explain how these populations are treated after incarceration. Note that not all immigrants or blacks are marginalized to this extreme; some make up either subgroups or different groups. In all cases, exclusion is reflected in our stories and histories. Long watched by school districts across the nation, the Texas school board has sought to water down references to slavery and civil rights in its curriculum and remove hip-hop from its list of important musical developments.

Our narratives are also inclined to support structures and policies that segregate and confine the extremely marginalized, often assigning them blame. As a result, those furthest from the center will not be able to engage in the activities or

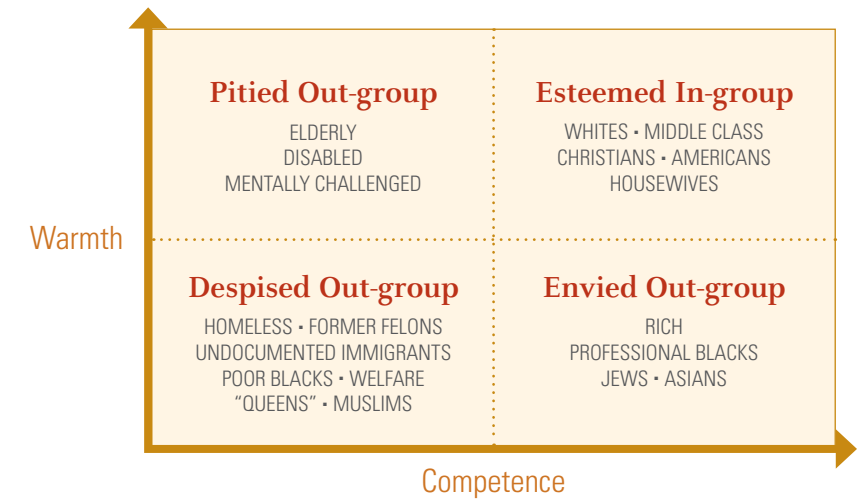
benefit from the accumulation of opportunities associated with belonging.

A number of models exist that attempt to capture these dynamics. One popular model employs the categories of in-groups and out-groups. This model comes up short because it ignores the different processes involved in being an outsider and the gradient that places some outside the circle of human concern. Consider the place of Irish-Americans, who in the 19th century were not viewed as full members of the American community. Today, that out-group status has largely changed and Irish-Americans are largely part of the in-group. This model also fails to capture the differences between those who make up the out-group. The in-group, out-group model suggests a binary. All out-groups should be the same, but this is not the case. Recent research shows that white aversion to blacks is much stronger than it is to Latinos and Asia-Americans. Maybe even more damning, the hostility toward blacks is not explained at all by in-group preference. What accounts for this is not in-group or out-group status, but learned social hostility directed at blacks. This is important because some have incorrectly tried to explain aversion and hostility in terms of our genetic or biological wiring, in which case there is little that could be done. But because this is a social function, there may be a social solution. One's location in the circle of human concern is not fixed. One difference is that some groups are more spatially and socially isolated than others. This isolation is intense when it comes to the segregation of non-whites, who are largely disdained. Women and the elderly are likely to be geographically and socially closer to the center. They are liked, but still pitied.

A model that more precisely captures these degrees of exclusion is "stereotype content" (See Figure 1). It was first proposed by Professor Susan Fiske, a leading expert in social psychology at Princeton, and then detailed by Douglas Massey in *Categorically Unequal*. This model posits that social cognition operates along the two independent axes of warmth and competence, which yields a map of "social space" with four

FIGURE 1

THE STEREOTYPE CONTENT MODEL



quadrants.¹⁴ Recent work by Fiske expands the emotions associated with social space through two gauges: disgust through envy along the bottom two groups, and pity through pride along the top two. She places various groups within this visual.

Fiske shows that pervasive scorn and envy arise when our natural tendency to compare ourselves with others collides with a society that is stratified from top to bottom by race, class, gender, etc. Fiske also shows that scorn and envy harm both the agents and targets of the negative effects. For example, powerful people who scorn demeaned out-groups are often willfully ignorant of other people's emotional lives, which lead them to miss important information. From the other direction, insofar as racism is often a direct expression of scorn, there is ample evidence of stress-related harms to health associated with experiencing racism. Because of the way this dehumanization creates social stratification, the despised out-group may be ripe for exploitation. Some neuroimaging studies even suggest that despised out-groups are "dehumanized at the neural level," i.e., the regions of the brain that are normally activated in social encounters are suppressed when a member of the in-group encounters members of the despised out-group.¹⁵ Recent work by Professor Phillip

Goff and others shows that black boys are often associated with gorillas, and this association correlates with more frequent arrest, police violence toward these boys and harsh sentences by the criminal justice system.

The injury associated with dehumanization is not limited to the target but also has an impact on the entire society, including our policies and our institutional arrangement. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Toni Morrison (author of *Beloved*, a Nobel Prize-winning novel about the effects of slavery) have both noted, extreme forms of oppression not only distort the being of the oppressed but also that of the oppressor – materially, socially and morally. Acknowledging that the moral distortion is seldom given its due in policy discourse, I am focusing on material and social concerns. In a well-documented book, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Society Stronger*, the authors show how extreme inequality reduces quality of life, life expectancy and social cohesion, which in turn increases rates of poverty and racial tensions.¹⁶ This is the case for the overall society, both the disfavored and the favored. The very working society depends on a level of social cohesiveness, caring and trust that, if lacking, can cause society to break down. It is what Robert Putnam calls general reciprocity.

With this general reciprocity, there is increased stress, crime, anxiety, fragmentation and a reluctance to support the public good.

John Rawls, perhaps the leading political thinker of the 20th century, can help us understand how exclusion hurts us all, although unevenly. In his *Theory of Justice*,¹⁷ Rawls claims that a fair society requires us to put ourselves in the other person's situation when making policy decisions. This entails recognizing the other as part of our community and maybe more. He also asserts that inequality can be justified only if it benefits the most marginalized in society, because societal resources belong to all of its members, not just individual ones. We cannot evaluate the fairness of society by looking at what people think but by scrutinizing the basic arrangements of its institutions and structures. When these arrangements work to create extreme exclusion, marginalization and disregard, the well-being of our entire society suffers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RACE IN EXCLUDING

As we examine belongingness and exclusion in the context of the circle of human concern, we are looking at a mechanism that is similar for all out-groups. As Massey asserts, in understanding this mechanism, it is useful to focus in detail on how it functions within a specific context. Race has been and continues to be a critical expression of this process, but the lesson can and should be applied more broadly. When we look at how race functions in our society, we must recognize the key role it plays in creating the broken structures that we all inhabit. While in some countries religion or national origin have been the major cleavage that underpins this fracturing, race has been and remains the primary one in the United States. In a careful study that looks at poverty and the support for anti-poverty programs in the United States, Alberto Alesina and Edward L. Glaeser document race as the single most important factor in understanding societal structures and the resulting disparities, as well as the anemic ability of our democratic system to address poverty.¹⁸

A number of historians and economists have documented how many of our foundational institutional designs were influenced by a desire to keep out the racial other or to have the other present in ways that severely compromised access to life opportunities and community membership.¹⁹ One of the central issues in the history of the country has been determining who belongs or who we are. Those who fall out of this imagined category also often fall outside of the circle of human concern. This is reflected in our policy and institutions as well as our national story. When we think of policies like the Jim Crow laws, the creation of reservations, and immigration exclusion laws, it seems clear that racial exclusion motivated many decisions about the configuration of opportunity. If one argues that this phenomenon occurred a long time ago and that we should move beyond it, a more careful examination of our current situation shows that these types of practices are much more prevalent than we acknowledge. Not only are we still living with the consequences of the early policies of exclusion, but we are also complicit in the current arrangements that exclude. When confronted with this uncomfortable reality, we create elaborate stories to mask its meaning.

A current example of excluding policies is located in our problematic dual credit market, which not only compromised non-whites but also produced the subprime crisis that continues to threaten the global economy. These market practices were centered in the black and Latino communities where the negative outcomes of policies such as redlining, steering and discriminating in lending in the '30s, '40s and '50s remain uncorrected. These communities are still starved for the credit on which white communities feed freely. Multiple audits in the '80s and '90s showed that, despite changes in the law, the practice of redlining never ended and in fact was institutionalized at another level.²⁰ The deregulation of banking, combined with the world being flush in capital, created a nearly perfect storm. Banks and brokers pushed money into communities of color, often under adverse and unsustainable terms that contradicted prudent practices.

It was a deep structural failure that built on the racialized system of the past and that has produced racialized conditions in the present. It is important to note that the more honest story, recounting how this fiasco was created by a systems failure, has not prevailed. Instead, we have resorted to a more familiar narrative that attributes the failure to the excluded. We trotted out the familiar story of the inadequacy of the black and Latino other; we focused once again on what was wrong with the communities and not on what was wrong with the credit system.

Our unwillingness to tell a different, more empathic story means that our structures have largely remained unfixed. We have convicted the wrong person(s), and the real criminal remains at large. Wealth, which plays a key role for helping one out of poverty, has been perpetually stripped away from our communities of color. What started as a wealth disparity of 1 to 12 between blacks and whites, and 1 to 10 between Hispanics and whites, has exploded to 1 to 20 and 1 to 18 respectively.²¹ We have heard virtually nothing about how to fix this from the White House or other political actors, while the structural dangers of the dual credit market remain intact. We can go further and say that whites also have been negatively exposed to the toxic market in great numbers. Dr. King eloquently reminded us of our linked fate, but we insist on excluding all but the favorite groups from belonging. It is not just denied in our stories and imagined identity; it is also denied in our structures and policies. The ideal of a United States and one people with many strains remains a distant reality for some and for others a terrifying possibility. As a number of pundits have noticed, our nation's growing diversity and our eroding ability to exclude the racial other has led to a dangerous increase in anxiety. This anxiety revolves not just around lost jobs or materials, while that might be important, but also around a sense of lost identity. This terror continues to underwrite the need to racially exclude. We could tell a story that meaningfully connected us and rejected the notion of the categorical other. In order for such a story to be effective, it would have to appeal to our unconscious and our better angels.

THE ANXIETY BEHIND RACIAL EXCLUSION

The idea that the racial cleavage of otherness has affected our institutional arrangements and compromised the effectiveness of anti-poverty policies may seem odd, given that a little more than two years ago much of the country was optimistic about America's future – especially regarding race relations. We appeared ready to adopt a new inclusive American narrative. While tepidly acknowledging problems in the past, we seemed well on our way to healing this cleavage. We were confident that their fears would prove unfounded. There was much talk about the progress our nation had made in electing its first black president. Terms like “post-racial” and “color-blind” became prominent in the media and in everyday talk. Except for hardened civil rights advocates and a few persistent racists, we asserted over and over again that the moral arc of America tended toward racial inclusion and fairness. After all, wasn't this new racial utopia already a lived reality for people under 40, a large number of whom had supported President Obama? Did not older folks proudly share stories of their “color-blind” children? Across ideological lines, the atmosphere of race relations polarized in a new way: between those stuck in the past, fighting a dying struggle against phantom racism, and those living in the apparently post-racial present.

But more recently, this optimistic position seems naive. A series of disturbing incidents swiftly revealed that racism persists, though perhaps in unfamiliar ways. Consider the following select events. Republicans turned the debate over health care reform into a referendum on President Obama's

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Although claims of racism are historically the province of the left, it seems that the political right is now more comfortable making claims of racial unfairness, having developed rhetoric that paints people of color and liberals as perpetrators of “reverse racism” against whites.

fitness to serve. The hysteria reached a fever pitch when President Jimmy Carter fingered white racial anxiety as the true source of opposition – a charge that Obama rejected. Or recall that the debate over Sonia Sotomayor’s nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court degenerated into endlessly parsing her “wise Latina” speech to determine whether she is, in fact, racist. And, in the middle of a deficit ceiling debate, a congressman referred to the president as a tar baby.

But more than these discrete incidents, there is a growing sense of anxiety and frustration among Americans from all walks of life, including the many conservative whites who mobilized the Tea Party. This troublesome emotion is about race. The racial other – more particularly, the otherness of African-Americans – has been a sharp edge at work in America. Some have asserted that the opposition to the federal government has been stoked in part by having a black president in office and a fear of becoming a non-white country. Yet it is clear that we no longer have a national consensus or language to tell us when or how race matters in our individual or collective activities. In fact, although claims of racism are historically the province of the left, it seems that the political right is now more comfortable making claims of racial unfairness, having developed rhetoric that paints people of color and liberals as perpetrators of “reverse racism” against whites. Many liberals and centrists are either mute on issues of race or all too willing to assert, with diminishing credibility, that race does not matter. What looks like race, they say, is really class, culture or some other historical residue; in any case, it will fade into our color-blind future. Others know that race matters, but not why or how. Uncertainty is a breeding ground

for anxiety. A growing body of research suggests that our underlying and unarticulated anxiety has an impact on our behavior and policies, not just in obvious cases such as affirmative action and school integration, but also in areas such as health care and financial reform.²² There is growing evidence showing that even programs and policies that are race neutral on their face will be resisted by a significant number of right-wing whites if they think non-whites will substantially benefit.²³ There may be some disagreement about the centrality of race in this environment, but there is near consensus that there is more anxiety and we are more divided. While change and even uncertainty are inevitable, negative anxiety is not. When people see themselves in a positive relationship, moving to an uncertain but hopeful future, negative anxiety is abated. I suggest that we examine more closely the impact of anxiety and exclusion on an anti-poverty agenda.

THE EFFECT OF EXCLUSION ON THE VIABILITY OF ANTI-POVERTY POLICIES

In considering policies to address poverty, it is important to have a sense where populations are situated within our national imagination and structures. It is also important to understand what we are doing and how we are making sense of social boundaries. Given our current social and economic situation, there is a strong sense that we are struggling through a stagnant period. The general poverty rate is rising, but unevenly. We see much greater poverty and stress in non-white, marginalized communities. Any effective program must bear this in mind when strategizing about how to reduce poverty. We will not support a poverty program to help those outside of the circle. So, any effective strategy must take into account the location of the targeted group. We should expect very difficult times for any anti-poverty programs that target a less favorite group.

There have been a number of studies showing how Americans think about poverty.²⁴ If we think people are poor because of their own failures, we are less willing to support policies to address poverty. When the poor are from a group that

does not belong, there is a strong tendency to see them as lazy and undeserving instead of constrained by structural conditions. Even when presented with facts suggesting that their situation is the result of conditions outside their control, if these facts conflict with our beliefs about that group, we are likely to reject them in favor of our negative opinion. For many blacks, Latinos and Native Americans, the negative view of their group limits what the public will do to support them, but with different intensities. While Asians and Latinos have generally been viewed more favorably than blacks, the standing of Latinos has slipped substantially in the past several years. The standing of Native Americans varies by region, with more positive standings in areas without many Native Americans. There is generally a more favorable opinion of Asians, and as to be expected, whites. Again, these findings are consistent with the general sense of who belongs and how close they are to the center.²⁵

There will not be automatic support for groups inside the circle, but the closer they are to the center, the more likely policy programs for them will be supported. In assessing the likelihood of public support for anti-poverty policies for a group in the circle, one must also consider their cost. If the policy costs little in terms of material and cultural terms, it is more likely to gain support. This is one reason that when the economy is growing and there are new resources, it is easier to garner support for the policies. When a group is disdained and seen as extremely other, there will be little incentive to do anything for that group even if the cost is minimal. On the other hand, if a marginalized group is pitied, but not disdained, support may be more forthcoming, even with a small cost to a favorite group. But, in addition to disdain and exclusion, the dynamic of hoarding often prevents even this form of backing. Groups have a tendency to try to hold on to what they have. Even if a group is held in relatively positive light, but still considered other,

anti-poverty policies will be less viable if they call for a more favorite group to give up some of what it has. In times of relative low growth and decline, hoarding will make any anti-poverty policy that entails sharing resources much more difficult even without antipathy to the other. This says nothing about the policy or intervention itself, but about the perceived belongingness of the targeted group. In sharp contrast to Rawls’ vision of a just society, we cannot expect support for a social policy that helps disfavored groups if it requires material distribution away from the favorite group. Rawls would stress that societal resources do not belong to the favorite but to all members of the community.

In this sense, the viability of anti-poverty policies relates to the way that we view what is called public or private space. I have suggested that there are a number of whites with a strong sense of disaffiliation with the racial other. As non-whites have come to play more important roles in society, there has been an attack on public space and a reimagining of it as private. It is clear that some of the resistance to federal taxes resides in the concern over sharing resources with the disfavored other. The anxieties about the other affect our support for the public infrastructure and the role of the federal government in equalizing policies, such as anti-poverty ones. To put it differently, out of fear of the other, we withdraw support from public structures that would ameliorate and act as a bridge out of “poverty,” even if they benefit and bind together the entire society. One only has to look at our waning support on many issues – from schools to housing to employment. As our communities become more racially diverse, fashioning anti-poverty policies must attend to this public-private spectrum, as well as that of belonging and exclusion in order to be successful. Because of the strong link to race, having a better understanding of racialization will help us in this process.

II. RACIALIZATION AS EXCLUSION

America's long history and practice of racial

subordination stretch back to the founding era and continue into the present, albeit in very different modes. It is beyond dispute that racism and poverty are inextricably linked in this country. This section will focus on a model that enables us to better understand the dynamics of race today and how that informs our anemic response to poverty. In looking at contemporary and historical examples, it will become clear that the current way we think and talk about race serves us poorly; it neither helps us understand poverty among people of color nor accounts for the lack of strong anti-poverty programs. There are some indications that there is a new, emerging grammar that is more appropriate to the unfolding racial world and can help us address some of our frustration and anxiety. If we fail to develop a more appropriate and insightful racial language, we run the risk of undermining many of our current and future anti-poverty goals. If we better capture the reality of race in America today, we will have the opportunity to translate experience into practical consciousness and viable policy.

THE GRAMMAR OF DURABLE RACIAL INEQUALITY

Conventional understandings of race and racism work like this: Race is seen as the static property of individuals composed of genes, skin color, and culture (understood as the environment in which one is raised). Racism is understood as a set of negative, explicit beliefs or attitudes that inhere in individuals directed at a group based on physical or other ascriptive characteristics. When this attitude is reflected in behavior and policies, it becomes racial discrimination. But the psychological event must be conscious and explicit. This view sees someone as always racist toward a group or always not racist toward a group. There have been some efforts to modify this dominant view of race and racism by

discussing additional factors like unconscious racism or institutional racism. Still, this dominant grammar of race and racism does not seem to fit today's reality. Not only do we have a black president, but there is strong evidence that racial attitudes, especially among whites, have steadily improved over the past several decades. This has caused some to assert that we are post-racial. Still others point out the stubborn disparities that in some cases, such as the criminal justice area, are getting worse. How are we to make sense of this? What is needed is a different grammar that will better help us understand race and racialization in the 21st century and will show limits of current discussion. Are we still in the racism morass of the Jim Crow laws, or are we on the verge of a post-racial society? I employ a very different understanding of race and racial dynamic through the lens of what I call "racialization," which means "the set of practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements" that reflect, produce, and maintain racialized outcomes and meanings.²⁶

Racialization may include the definition from above, but it recognizes that racialized outcomes are not dependent on conscious racial animus. The shift from "racism" to "racialization" is a transition from an individualized, static understanding of race to one that is relational and dynamic. In the new grammar of racialization, impermissible racialized outcomes can be produced by conscious intent, unconscious attitudes or feelings, as well as the dynamics of structures and institutions. Not all of these domains need to be in line to produce negative outcomes. There is a growing body of literature that suggests that while conscious racial attitudes are improving, unconscious anxiety and bias, as well as the work of social structures, are producing negative racial results. It is grammar that allows for the reality of better conscious attitudes and worse racial outcomes.

Two important implications for racial-justice action follow from this shift. First, attempts to reverse unfair racial outcomes must be attentive to, if not directly address, all scales of social configuration. We care about implicit racial bias at the scale of the brain as well as the institutional level, and in lending markets, for example; indeed, the two are related. Second, racialized outcomes, now understood as a historically specific, dynamic process of racialization, are a mercurial moving target. Novel forms emerge, and old forms, rather than disappearing completely, reappear in new guises. While each form of exclusion has its own history and expression, there are some deep, structural-cultural patterns that are similar.

Poverty in the United States has two remarkable features: It is racialized, and it is durable.²⁶ Non-whites are disproportionately poor, and they have been for a long time. But even the poverty that is experienced by non-whites is very different from the poverty normally experienced by whites. Wilson has noted, for example, that most whites who are poor do not experience inter-generational poverty. In this sense, poverty is a form of what Charles Tilly calls "durable inequality"²⁷ – a pattern of inequality "that is reproduced across time and between generations."²⁹ Among approaches to poverty, Tilly's focus is remarkable in a number of important ways. He not only carefully examines the production and maintenance of poverty, but also looks at durable (instead of transitory) and group-based (instead of individual) poverty. According to Tilly, there are four primary processes that produce durable inequality: exploitation, opportunity hoarding, emulation and adaptation.³⁰ Exploitation occurs when a group commands resources that it mobilizes to extract value from another group while simultaneously preventing it from realizing returns from its efforts.³¹ Opportunity hoarding refers to a group's acquiring access to a valuable resource, then using it for its own benefit while excluding others from it.³² Emulation is copying or transplanting existing social relations from one setting to another, and adaptation occurs when social relations are elaborated on the basis of categorically unequal structures.³³

As Tilly explains, "Exploitation and opportunity hoarding favor the installation of categorical inequality, while emulation and adaptation generalize its influence."³⁴ For our purposes, we can say that exploitation and opportunity hoarding initiate structural racial inequality, which emulation and adaptation translate into a variety of domains to produce systematic racial inequality.

These four processes embed inequality in dynamic structures that distribute resources and opportunity unequally to different groups over time. The first two processes – exploitation and opportunity hoarding – are particularly important in our discussion of belongingness, because they constitute a form of what Max Weber called "social closure," which occurs when a group gains access to an important set of goods, then closes its ranks, excluding outsiders from the goods and fiercely regulating transactions between the in-group and out-group.³⁵ As discussed below, the history of racialized poverty in America can be understood as an extended process of social closure by whites, in which they hoard opportunity from people of color.

FROM DURABLE INEQUALITY TO STRUCTURES

Tilly's account of durable inequality is analytically powerful, but some revisions are necessary. First, the list of four primary processes should be expanded to include violence, political power (mediated by laws and state policies) and the psychological mechanisms that underlie group relations.³⁶ Second, although Tilly focuses exclusively on material deprivation, other forms of group inequality, such as marginalization, powerlessness and group stigmatization, also matter.³⁷ These forms of group inequality

There is a growing body of literature that suggests that while conscious racial attitudes are improving, unconscious anxiety and bias, as well as the work of social structures, are producing negative racial results.

More than a decade of research in the field of social cognition . . . suggests that many Americans harbor pervasive, unarticulated, and unconscious racial biases, and that these biases drive behavior. Further, even when we shed explicit racial beliefs, traces of racism persist at the unconscious level.

are discussed in the previous section as a function of belonging. What emerges from an expanded version of Tilly's approach to durable inequality is a form of "combinatory structuralism," in which types of social relations, primarily race, for our purposes, interact with inequality-producing processes to yield racialized durable inequality.³⁸ I call this process "structural racialization."

To begin, it is important to identify the sheer number of structures and their inter-structural interactions that produce cumulative, durable racial inequality over time. Because structures are dynamic, one must be careful not to assert that a single or permanent cause creates inequality or that only non-whites are captured. Rather, there are many pathways to achieve the outcome of exclusion and poverty. This complexity should not deter us from identifying primary causes in a certain context and at particular times. For example, at one point the cause might be the Jim Crow laws. But the use of these laws served a deeper value: exclusion and marginalization. When we look at laws in isolation from other factors, we might wrongly believe that abolishing the Jim Crow laws would mean that we have fully remedied exclusion. In today's context in our post Jim Crow world, much of the work of racialized opportunity and exclusion is done by the reality of housing segregation and mass incarceration. One could easily add racialized education and cultural representation. But rather than enumerating a list of structures, it is more important to understand the relationship between these structures such as housing and school segregation.

Segregation in the housing market disproportionately concentrates people of color

in minority schools and away from life-enhancing resources. It also helps create and maintain their otherness. Children in these schools accrue few of the advantages of their wealthy peers: They are more likely to drop out of high school and become incarcerated, and less likely to complete high school or attend college, which all reduce the likelihood of success in the labor market.³⁹ And given the patchy nature of a social safety net in the United States, lack of employment then exposes these young people to poorer health outcomes. The structures involved in this fairly simple example include the housing market (itself a complex amalgam of government regulation and private enterprise), the education system, the penal system, labor markets and health care coverage. A complete account of racialized durable inequality in America must take account of these types of structures across domains and beyond. Each domain is itself an important engine of inequality, but the ways in which interactions among them combine to exclude people of color from belonging and opportunity are devastating.

We must also account for what Tilly calls the psychological mechanisms behind racialization. The conventional view of racism holds that racial attitudes are explicit and discrete. One either has them or one does not. More than a decade of research in the field of social cognition and implicit bias explodes this conventional view. This research suggests that many Americans harbor pervasive, unarticulated, and unconscious racial biases, and that these biases drive behavior.⁴⁰ Further, even when we shed explicit racial beliefs, traces of racism persist at the unconscious level.

Take a well-known field experiment,⁴¹ in which researchers Bertrand and Mullainathan randomly assigned otherwise comparable résumés with different black- and white-sounding names. The authors found that identically qualified job applicants with white-sounding names were able to obtain an interview after sending out 10 résumés, whereas applicants with black-sounding names had to send out 15 on average, a difference of 50 percent.⁴² One inference from this study is that the résumé readers were primed by the

perceived racial differences in the names, which triggered implicit racial bias and caused them to favor white-sounding résumés and candidates over black-sounding ones. Another possible explanation is that the employers engaged in statistical discrimination – the idea that actors use race as a statistically relevant heuristic for making decisions.

These research findings should dramatically alter both the way we understand belonging and the anti-poverty remedies we propose to ameliorate it. As I will discuss in the next section, we must intervene at the structural level. But a key feature of structures is that they are populated with human agents – agents who share collective stories about who belongs and who doesn't. Structures and policies that are adopted explicitly or implicitly to exclude the racial other from belonging from the community and from accessing material opportunities are unfair.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY RACIALIZATION

The next section revisits two key moments in the production of racialized poverty in the United States: how slavery and the Jim Crow laws were designed to isolate blacks from opportunity structures and dispossess them of belonging; and how the New Deal was a profoundly racial social contract that owed its existence to the systematic exclusion of blacks from its benefits. Following this is a most recent reiteration of structural racialization in our criminal justice system.

Slavery and Jim Crow: Exploitation, Segregation and Exclusion

Slavery is a complicated phenomenon fraught with historiographical debates. In America, it has always been viewed as unfree labor coupled with a particular kind of ideology: white supremacy. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that slavery is a generic institution that is the highest form of exploitation on one hand and dehumanizing on the other. Human beings are transformed into property, dominated, at the mercy of their masters, and severed from family and social ties. Slavery is, in Orlando Patterson's phrase, a form of "social death."⁴³

But slavery and the socio-legal regimes that justified it were about more than just exploitation – they were also primarily a means of excluding blacks from the polity, a means to ensure that they did not belong to America, except as the property of whites. I have argued that the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Dred Scott v. Sandford* was not about slavery so much as "whether Black people could ever become citizens and members of the political community."⁴⁴ It stood for the proposition that no African-American – free or enslaved – could ever be a member of the American political community. As Chief Justice Taney put it, African-Americans had "been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit."⁴⁵

The Civil War at once changed everything and almost nothing for blacks in America, and in the South particularly. Although the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments ended slavery and guaranteed formal equality across domains of citizenship, protection of the laws, and voting, first the Black Codes and later the Jim Crow laws reinstated the pure exploitation in the form of a caste system of segregation that operated through law and custom.⁴⁶ In the South, Jim Crow worked particularly harsh results through exclusion from the political process (through poll taxes, literacy tests and the like), through the operation of a white-dominated criminal justice system, and through the concentration of blacks in the lowest stratum of the labor market. Of course, this does not even begin to describe the extent of the spatial segregation in the South, in which the races were separated in schools, public transportation, etc. In the North, practices of exploitation and opportunity hoarding were more informal and private forms of Jim Crow (rather than formal and public), but no less devastating. Residential segregation was the "lynchpin of racial inequality in the North."⁴⁷ In much the same way as the practice continues to subordinate blacks today, it excluded blacks from opportunity

structures like good schools, functioning labor markets and much more. The New Deal, which laid the groundwork for generations of white Americans to benefit from opportunity, foreclosed the same opportunity to black Americans and still reverberates today.

The New Deal

In the wake of the Great Depression, Congress, in conjunction with President Roosevelt, enacted a series of economic and social programs designed to help pull millions of Americans out of poverty and put them on the path to recovery. The New Deal and the set of social welfare packages passed during this era represent the most significant investment in the American people in our country's history. Across a variety of domains, from education and employment to Social Security and veterans' benefits, our government laid a path to opportunity and financial security for many Americans. Unfortunately, blacks were systematically excluded from this investment; in fact, according to Ira Katznelson, the New Deal must be understood in a new light as a project of racial exclusion that would not have passed had deals not been struck to exclude blacks. One of the costs of the New Deal was to reassert what is called the color line. Here it could be understood as reinscribing the circle of human concern.

Consequently, the New Deal created the most productive and inclusive middle class in the history of the world at that time. Despite the large investment in human capital, the GI Bill of Rights quickly paid for itself in increased productivity and revenue, despite its flaws. It also supported an incredible drop in poverty and transformation of working-class white men from cogs in a downtrodden class to more respected members of society. This same regard and investment was fully extended to women.⁴⁹ We were the first major country to educate them, which allowed us to better use a nation's most important resource: members. When a country fails to include over half of its members, it is dragged down by members who contribute less and deprived of what they would otherwise have contributed. Paul Krugman describes the creation of the middle class in such a short period of time "the great

compression."⁵⁰ Inequality in the United States moved to an all-time low, aided by strong unions and a progressive tax system, all of which created a sense of shared destiny.

However, all of the disparate programs instituted under the New Deal had one damning thing in common: They were "carefully crafted to exclude blacks from coverage or, failing that, to delegate to the states the authority to exclude, yielding . . . 'discrimination by design.'"⁵¹ Consider the Social Security Act (SSA) and the creation of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). The SSA intentionally excluded certain occupations from its coverage, including agricultural and domestic workers, who were disproportionately black, especially in the South. As a result, 65 percent of African-Americans were locked out of the Social Security beneficiary pool.⁵² Similarly, the FHA insisted that the federally subsidized mortgages it underwrote were not to be given to blacks.⁵³ Through development maps, the FHA also facilitated the practice of redlining, which "color-coded" neighborhoods and rendered a non-white racial composition as ineligible for federal funding.⁵⁴ As noted above, similar stories can be told about *all* New Deal programs.

A key part of this discussion is that the New Deal programs are not conventionally understood to embody racialization. On their face, they look like neutral programs designed to connect Americans to opportunities in work, housing and education. But in design and implementation, the New Deal was a project of racial exclusion in which whites closed ranks around opportunity and kept blacks out. We continue to struggle with the legacy of New Deal racism today in the very same areas. Therefore, remedying past harms must focus on connecting blacks to these same opportunity structures from which they were systematically excluded nearly 70 years ago. Current iterations of racial exclusion are not hard to identify."

The American Criminal Justice System

The American criminal justice system is an excellent case study that exemplifies contemporary racialized poverty. I include it for two reasons. First, as Michelle Alexander

puts it, the American penal system (particularly the phenomenon of mass imprisonment) is "The New Jim Crow"⁵⁵ – the dominant form of social control and belonging in the lives of black males. It relegates black men to the status of an "undercaste" of individuals who are permanently excluded from belonging in mainstream society by law and custom.⁵⁶ The most remarkable feature of this new caste system is felon disenfranchisement, which systematically marginalizes black male felons by barring them from participating as full citizens in our democracy. For many members of the black community, including family members and neighborhoods, the penal system is also the most significant engine of social and economic inequality.

In a remarkable work of scholarship that attempts to speak truth to power and spur a new social movement against mass incarceration, Alexander argues that the prison system should be viewed as just that – a system.⁵⁷ As it pertains to African-American men, the system has three major components, which she calls the roundup, the period of formal control and the period of invisible punishment.⁵⁸ During the roundup, unchecked racial biases interact with unfairly enforced drug laws to bring large numbers of black men into the system. Formal control takes hold when these men are brought into the prison's fold in the form of incarceration, probation or parole. Finally, the men experience a long period of invisible punishment outside the prison during which they are barred from many of the institutions that are hallmarks of mainstream, opportunity-laden American life.⁵⁹

To begin with, felons – many of whom come from poor communities saturated with public housing – are barred from receiving public housing assistance for five years, if not longer, upon returning home.⁶⁰ Assuming that they find a job, most states permit employers to force them to disclose their felon status, which they use to discriminate.⁶¹ Furthermore, the jobs least likely to ask them to "check the box" – those in the construction and manufacturing sectors – are least likely to be located in their

urban neighborhoods. This results in a spatial mismatch between ex-felons and access to employment.⁶² If an ex-felon does find a local low-paying service-sector job, the minimum-wage salary will not feed his family. He also meets legal discrimination in receiving governmental assistance because TANF, the federal program that provides cash assistance to needy families, permanently bars its aide from individuals with drug-related felony convictions.⁶³ Discrimination in education will plague them as well. Finally, and perhaps most egregiously, most states deny prisoners the right to vote while they are in prison, and many restrict the right once they are released for periods ranging from one year to life.⁶⁴ Alexander observes that these obstacles will prevent the vast majority of convicted offenders from ever integrating into white society. Most will eventually return to prison and be released again, caught in a "closed circuit of perpetual marginality."⁶⁵

The social and economic disadvantage that the penal system wreaks on the lives of these young black men is particularly egregious because it is also invisible, cumulative and intergenerational.⁶⁶ It is invisible because the incarcerated are disproportionately concentrated in segregated communities. It is cumulative because it follows them for long periods after they leave prison, especially into the labor market. It is intergenerational because it causes high rates of divorce, leaving women and children subject to poverty and instability.

The structural-material effects on felons are profound. But, as Alexander details, beyond the material deprivation imposed on young black men and their families, the mass incarceration system also sends them a crystal clear message: "You don't belong!" First, prisoners are spatially isolated when they are removed from their

The social and economic disadvantage that the penal system wreaks on the lives of these young black men is particularly egregious because it is also invisible, cumulative and intergenerational.

own communities and transported to distant prisons. Then, upon return, they are excluded from virtually all the structures that make life worth living, which makes it difficult to make a life worth living. Finally, ex-prisoners are impeded from “buying in” to their communities and translating their hopes and dreams into political reality. According to Western and Pettit, the “redrawing of American social inequality by mass incarceration amounts to a contraction of citizenship,” which in T. H. Marshall’s words, denies “full membership in society.”⁶⁷

It is worth emphasizing that incarceration is itself highly concentrated in poor, minority

communities.⁶⁸ We disproportionately lock up poor African-Americans, which as noted above, locks them into lives of poverty. As Western and Pettit note, “serving time in prison has become a ‘normal life event’ for young black men who drop out of high school.”⁶⁹ Robert Sampson and Charles Loeffler summarize their findings this way: “Hot spots for incarceration are hardly random; instead, they are systematically predicted by key social characteristics” like “poverty, unemployment, family disruption, and racial isolation....”⁷⁰ The overall dynamic is a negative feedback loop in which place-based disadvantage feeds crime and incarceration, and vice versa.⁷¹

III. ANTI-POVERTY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AS INCLUSIONS

Having conceptualized racialized poverty

as a lack of belongingness and explored its historical and current iterations, we now turn to three less traditional anti-poverty approaches that should increase inclusion and decrease this form of inequality. The first is “communities of opportunity.” It draws on work done at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and is a framework for connecting neighborhoods, cities, and regions to the opportunity structures that contribute to individual well-being.⁷² The second is “targeted universalism.” It provides an alternative to both liberal and conservative rhetorics of color-blindness and false universalism through the development of policies that benefit both targeted marginalized groups and the larger community.⁷³ The last is “widening the circle of concern.” It collects strategies for creating belongingness and full participation in society, a necessary step in the eradication of poverty.

COMMUNITIES OF OPPORTUNITY⁷⁴

It bears repeating that although racialized structures may seem impossibly unwieldy, they usually operate at more manageable scales: neighborhoods, cities and regions. But all the entities collected within a region, including people, institutions and environments, share a linked fate embedded in “structures of opportunity” – the ingredients that add up to well-being in a particular place and success in life. These structures include schools; grocery stores that stock affordable, healthy food; health care facilities that accept new patients with a variety of insurance plans; labor markets that match willing job-seekers with meaningful, sustainable employment; green space; and much more. Unfortunately, the racialized others are too often isolated from these realities.

Although it is just one kind of opportunity structure, housing is the keystone that locks families into or out of all the other opportunity

structures. It is the relational or spatial hub. This form of deprivation was exacerbated by structural changes in the economy that created an acute spatial mismatch between black workers and employment opportunities. Jobs that had previously guaranteed a middle-class existence moved to the suburbs, and black men in particular found themselves stuck in the city working low-paying service-sector jobs or no jobs at all. As opportunity fled, so did tax revenues, devastating inner-city education systems. Increasingly grim prospects for education and legal employment led many young black men to invest their time elsewhere. Illicit employment, especially selling drugs, connected them to a thoroughly racist criminal justice system, thus locking them and their communities into deeper poverty.

The “communities of opportunity” framework proposes two primary strategies to remedy this situation: investing in the opportunity structures (in particular, communities) and moving people to opportunity through housing mobility. Broadly speaking, the first strategy is place-based, the second people-based. The place-based strategy argues that conventional community development must be focused on opportunity structures that serve the needs of the community. Particular place-based interventions range from fostering equitable investment in public infrastructure, especially transportation; supporting homeownership and mixed-income housing; and developing high-performing magnet schools that attract students from different parts of the city. What these interventions have in common is that they view community development through the lens of opportunity. They will be judged as successes if they connect neighborhood residents to the opportunity structures that improve well-being and pave the path to success in life.

The people-based strategy recognizes that in many metropolitan areas, high-opportunity and

Widening the circle of concern is an anti-poverty policy, which in turn can increase the viability of other policies, including communities of opportunity, targeted universalism and more traditional ones. The result would be a more robust and successful anti-poverty agenda.

low-income areas are starkly polarized. The proximate cause of this polarization is the long-standing federal policy of building new low-income housing in low-opportunity, inner-city neighborhoods. A variety of interventions must be employed to correct this misguided policy. Inclusionary zoning, for example, requires new-build housing developments to include a certain number of affordable housing units. Other

programs, modeled broadly on the federal government's Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment, use vouchers or other subsidies to give African-American families who live in concentrated poverty the option to move to higher-opportunity areas. The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program also incentivizes the construction of affordable housing in these areas.

TARGETED UNIVERSALISM⁷⁶

As noted earlier, American policy discourse on race and poverty is dominated by two equally unhelpful frameworks: conservative race blindness and liberal post-racialism. Race blindness is a normative view that race should not be visible in matters of law or public policy preventing race-based interventions. Post-racialism claims that race doesn't matter much in contemporary America, and in the places where it does, a frontal, explicit attack on racism is divisive and unproductive. What both positions share is a belief Americans are largely beyond race.⁷⁷

One response to the failure of race blindness and post-racialism would be to adopt race-neutral, universal policy interventions. The animating principle behind a universal poverty-alleviation program, for example, would be that all poor people – whites and people of color – would

be lifted. I characterize this universalism as false, for two reasons. First, we have a history in this country of developing allegedly universal programs that in fact have a very targeted impact, as we saw with the New Deal, which amounted to affirmative action for white men. And second, universal programs operate on the assumption that the beneficiaries are similarly situated. They are not. As far back as Gunnar Myrdal's time, sociologists have noted that poor blacks and poor whites exhibit different features and live in different contexts.⁷⁸

I urge that we move beyond these unhelpful frameworks and instead adopt what I call "targeted universalism," a strategy "that is inclusive of the needs of both the dominant and the marginal groups, but pays particular attention to the situatedness of the marginal group."⁷⁹ Targeted universalism moves us beyond "formal equality that would treat all people the same as a way of denying difference" to an approach that "incorporates difference and evaluates the outcome as well as the intent."⁸⁰ This approach brings all of us under the same tent, which can relieve racial resentment and anxiety, but it also helps us recognize that we don't shed our particularities when we cross the threshold together.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA or "the stimulus plan") is a poverty-reduction strategy that provides a perfect example of a universal policy whose positive impact on marginalized populations could be enhanced through targeting. One of ARRA's universal goals is to stimulate job growth through investment in infrastructure spending. The logic of this laudable goal is that the federal government gives money to the states, which then hire contractors, who in turn hire more workers for infrastructure projects, thus reducing unemployment. The problem with this logic is that it is blind to the racially uneven, white-dominated process of public infrastructure contracting that exists in most states and which is commonly hostile to people of color. To further aggravate matters, many courts have severely restricted the ability of state and local governments to employ affirmative-action

measures to benefit minority contractors and small firms. This racializing process compromises ARRA's job growth because people of color are unlikely to benefit. To remedy this presumably unintended outcome, a targeted universalist approach would suggest that the federal program must take notice of racial discrimination in public contracting and *specifically target* minority contractors to ensure that they share in ARRA's promise: a fair recovery for all Americans.

Indeed, this approach should be taken with all poverty-reduction programs, especially those that operate on a large scale. Common goals would be to raise the minimum wage, expand the Earned Income Tax Credit, increase childcare assistance, and provide health care coverage to all Americans.⁸¹ It is common sense among advocates that implementing these programs helps reduce poverty, but historically the benefits from these universal programs have not trickled down toward ameliorating racialized poverty. This could be remedied with targeted universalism. It is important, however, that targeting program design be discussed from the start, not "tacked on" once the uneven impacts of programs are detected. It appears that a period of fiscal austerity is coming to America, which will hurt poor people most. Employing targeted universalism could ensure that any forthcoming poverty-reduction programs also attack the impoverished, racialized other. Unfortunately, this approach may be less effective if the targeted groups or subgroups are not too far outside the boundaries of belongingness and the circle of concern. Therefore, widening this circle is essential to the success of any anti-poverty policy.

WIDENING THE CIRCLE OF CONCERN

There are several approaches to widening the circle of concern that ensure that no group is demeaned, despised or decidedly excluded. The first is quite evident: exposure to the other, including the racial other. Jennifer A. Richeson and J. Nicole Shelton suggest that because interracial contact tends to become less stressful the more one experiences it, "promoting racially and culturally diverse environments whenever

and wherever possible, as early as possible, may be the best prescription for the development of positive interracial contact experience" for both majority and minority groups.⁸² But these experiences are far more impactful if they are accompanied by a common purpose. Interracial contact between servicemen and servicewomen is supported by their military orders and their ethic of never leaving the other behind. These types of enhanced interactions also occur in the arena of sports, where the goal of winning and the ethic of teamwork bring about mutual concern. Note, however, that episodic concern for the other, such as our empathy toward black residents of New Orleans after Katrina, is unproductive and unsustainable. In fact, this magnanimity was compromised by negative stories of the black residents that ensued: The white victim wading through the water with store goods was "fending for his family" while the black one was "looting." More troubling was the actual narrowing of the circle of concern toward Muslims that followed 9/11. There, the despised other had greater competence (recall Fiske and Massey's model of social cognition) than the blacks of New Orleans, so our reaction was more severe: attack and fight. We have yet to create a story to counter the current Islamophobic one. This illustrates that exposure and contact can only widen the circle of concern if the proper story and remedial structures support them.

Another approach to circle widening involves humanizing the other. For example, generalizing about the segregation of the poor in a prosperous Midwestern city is somewhat incredulous and may illicit blame. But sitting next to a young woman of color who is trying to get out by joining your university becomes a transformative story. In this context, the media could play a larger role in the humanization process. The ability to imagine the civil rights activist and blacks in general as the sub-human other was greatly weakened by television pictures of civil rights workers, many of whom were children being attacked by dogs and water hoses.

We can also attempt to widen the circle of concern by exemplifying higher-order love. Dr.

King had the ability to win over the oppositional other through friendship and love, not hatred.⁸³ This was the love that the “good Samaritan” exhibited in the Christian narrative when he cared for the beaten Jew who despised him.⁸⁴ His circle of concern expanded in the reverse direction. Certainly, the Christ of the Gospel stories demanded an all-inclusive belongingness: the tax collector, leper, prostitute, unclean and poor. The biblical tradition also embraces a personalism based on the belief that humankind is created in God’s image, which calls humans to find dignity in every person.⁸⁶ Dr. King noted that Gandhi was probably the first person to lift the love ethic of Jesus to a social force on a large scale.

Closely related to this higher love is the concept of interbeing, or *Tiep Hien*, a concept developed by Thich Nhat Hanh, founder of the Buddhist order of the same name in Vietnam. Built on the notion of non-duality, the claim of interbeing is “I am; therefore you are. You are; therefore I am. We inter-are.”⁸⁶ There is no such thing as an individual under this inclusive system. Archbishop Desmond Tutu embraced a similar

African concept, *ubuntu*, which emphasizes the relatedness of the human family: “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.”⁸⁷ This circle-widening effort was largely behind South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which contributed to the dismantling of one of the most exclusionary policies in the world’s history: apartheid. These transformative approaches to expanding belongingness and widening the circle of concern certainly differ from traditional equalizing policies such as communities of opportunity and targeted universalism. But as the South African experience has shown, they are realizable and can transform the stories we tell about the racial other and the resulting structures we construct in the most dramatic and challenging ways. As such, widening the circle of concern is an anti-poverty policy, which in turn can increase the viability of other policies, including communities of opportunity, targeted universalism and more traditional ones. The result would be a more robust and successful anti-poverty agenda.

CONCLUSION

An anti-poverty agenda must begin with a new understanding of poverty as being primarily about belongingness. Racialization has been central to how our stories, structures and policies exclude. The racial other can be situated at different distances from the center of concern, depending on his or her group or subgroup, eliciting responses from the favorite varying from envy, pity and disgust. The situatedness of the marginalized other can also change over time, suggesting that unique strategies are needed to foster inclusion. To the extent that what is being asked of the favorite groups requires the sharing of scarce resources, the viability of anti-poverty policies will be compromised by this perceived status of the other. The very affiliation with a despised group can be seen as an untenable request. If some positive regard for out-groups exists, then the policies that focus on communities of opportunity and targeted universalism will be more likely to effect change. But where the targeted group is seen as extremely other, maybe even non-human, virtually no policy prescription will work.

Therefore, the first priority of an anti-poverty agenda must be to bring the imagined other

back into the sphere of community and circle of human concern. This approach radically differs from many of the more traditional policy efforts. It focuses on deep values and the stories and imagines we trade. It requires looking at the work our structures and boundaries are doing as well as communicating with the unconscious. It calls upon us not just to develop good policies but to spiritualize our policies in public. We must understand that much of the work of racialization and other is about exclusion and meaning. Addressing racial exclusion just at the conscious level is not enough. We must also engage both the unconscious anxiety and bias as well as the work of structures. Unfortunately, much of the anxiety that our country is currently dealing with risks pushing more people and groups beyond the circle’s boundary. Our efforts will succeed only if we fashion new inclusive stories while addressing issues of racialized language and structures. If successful, we will have already changed poverty and created space for the transformative policies that I have described, and for other more familiar ones. Creating belongingness will help eradicate poverty, and eradicating poverty will help create belongingness. This is what creates and sustains a true democratic community.

ENDNOTES

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6. This could be called poverty of membership, but it should not be seen abstractly. Sen, for example, has noted that mass starvation is deprivation of democracy, not food. I would reframe this in terms of deprivation of membership. When a whole society is poor but membership is equitably distributed, scarce resources will be used to try to address such poverty. In contrast, when only parts of a society are poor but membership is unequal, those who are not considered members will be disregarded.
7. That said, despite the moral salience of children’s deprivation, millions of children still lack basic health insurance in this country.
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26. Powell, “Post-Racialism or Targeted Universalism?” 785. See pages 785–87 for the advantages of “racialization” as an analytic term.
27. Poverty is multifaceted: For example, it is also gendered. See the discussion on “Engendering Inequality” in Massey, *Categorically Unequal*, 211–41.
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29. Massey, *Categorically Unequal*, 6.
30. Tilly 10.
31. Tilly 10. See also Massey, *Durable Inequality*, 6.
32. Tilly 10. See also Massey, *Durable Inequality*, 6.
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34. Tilly 10.
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55. Alexander.
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57. Alexander 180.
58. Alexander 180–181.
59. Alexander 180–181.
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74. This section draws on powell et al., “Communities of Opportunity.”
75. Other strategies include supporting anchor institutions like public universities and hospitals in existing urban neighborhoods, leveraging public funds to attract private investment to low-growth areas, targeting vacant properties and brownfields for redevelopment, supporting wealth creation and asset building to cushion the impact of future hardship for residents in low-opportunity areas, employing community benefits agreements to ensure that redevelopment and opportunity-building benefit current residents, and fostering civic engagement and membership. powell et al., “Communities of Opportunity,” 8.
76. This section draws on the work presented in powell, “Post-Racialism or Targeted Universalism?”
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78. powell, “Post-Racialism or Targeted Universalism?” 796.
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BIOGRAPHY

As of January 1, 2012, Professor john a. powell is Director of the Haas Diversity Research Center (HDRC) and Robert D. Haas Chancellor’s Chair in Equity and Inclusion at the University of California, Berkeley. From 2003 to the end of 2011, he was Executive Director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University and Gregory H. Williams Chair in Civil Right and Civil Liberties at Ohio State’s Moritz College of Law. Under his direction, the Kirwan Institute has emerged as a national leader on research and scholarship related to race, structural racism, racialized space and opportunity. He has been a leader in developing an “opportunity-based” housing model that provides a critical and creative framework for thinking about affordable housing, racialized space, and the many ways that housing influences other opportunity domains including education, health, health care, and employment.

Professor powell is an internationally recognized authority in the areas of civil rights and civil liberties and the intersection of race with a wide range of issues including housing, education, poverty, democracy and identity. He has written extensively on a host of topics related to race including structural racism, social justice, corporate power, implicit bias, regionalism, concentrated poverty and urban sprawl, opportunity based housing, integration, affirmative action in the United States, South Africa and Brazil, racial identity, and the needs of citizens in a democratic society. He is highly regarded as a public speaker.

Previously, Professor powell founded and directed the Institute on Race and Poverty at the University of Minnesota. He also served as Director of Legal Services of Greater Miami and was National Legal Director of the American Civil Liberties Union where he was instrumental in developing educational adequacy theory. He has taught at numerous law schools including The Ohio State University, Harvard University and Columbia University. He earned an undergraduate degree in psychology at Stanford University and the Juris Doctor at the University of California, Berkeley (Boalt Hall).

Professor powell has worked and lived in Africa, where he was a consultant to the governments of Mozambique and South Africa. He has also lived and worked in India and has done work in South America and Europe. He is one of the co-founders of the Poverty & Race Research Action Council (PRRAC) and serves on the board of several national organizations.



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