



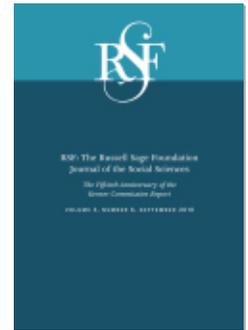
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Whither Whiteness? The Racial Logics of the Kerner Report
and Modern White Space

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Whither Whiteness? The Racial Logics of the Kerner Report and Modern White Space



MATTHEW W. HUGHEY

The Kerner report was, and is, unrelenting in its appraisal of the deleterious effects of racial inequality but opaque as to how whites functioned in that regime. Fifty years later, and in a moment of renewed urban unrest and rioting, whites continue to benefit from racial inequality within key social structures: education, employment, housing, and policing. To understand both the evaluations of the Kerner report and contemporary white interpretations of the social order, I systemically analyze the report alongside six ethnographies in all-white organizations across the United States. The analysis opens a window on similar racial logics in the report and among contemporary whites. These logics assist in the reproduction of white interests, even under the supposed best of intentions, legal remedies, and policy recommendations.

Keywords: identity, race, racism, riots, social structure, whiteness

Widely regarded as a biting inquiry into the causes of the 1967 race riots, the 1968 account from the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Commission, thus the Kerner report) stands as a scathing appraisal of U.S. race relations. Distinguished by its blunt language, the Kerner report uses phrases such as “white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it” (Kerner Report 1968, 1). The report is unrelenting in its appraisal of the del-

eterious effects of white dominance in four key areas: employment, education, housing, and police-community relations. Yet, it is simultaneously opaque as to how whites functioned—whether through anxiety, antipathy, or apathy—in that racial regime. Although the report makes frequent mention of whiteness, rarely is the cause of racial inequality and segregation à la whiteness and white people specified.

Fifty years later, when race riots and white dominance are still provocative issues, our racial realities beckon scholars to wrestle with

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two related issues. On one hand are the authoritative state interpretations of white people's place in the social order. On the other hand are white people's interpretations of their own place in the social order. Hence, based on a content analysis of the Kerner report and ethnographic study among six all-white organizations, I ask the following questions: First, how did the report describe the intersection of whites with the four noted areas? Second, how do whites today, across geographic areas, political persuasions, and socioeconomic divides, make sense of their intersection with these four areas? The results provide insight on the racial logics that further white interests, even under the supposed best of intentions, legal remedies, and policy recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The 1967 decision to formally investigate rioting—and to understand, in President Lyndon Johnson's words, "What happened? Why did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again and again?"—was neither a new nor prosaic concern.¹ Still, the report's underscoring of "white racism" captured attention. For the lay public, thirty thousand copies of the Bantam Books edition of the report sold out in three days while another 1.6 million copies sold between March and June of 1968 (Lipsky and Olson 1977). For academics, the notes and comments to the June 1968 issue of the *Social Service Review* asserted, "Not only did it [the report] attribute the disorders of recent summers to what it called 'white racism,' but it also denounced the movement toward a policy of separation" (261). The article concluded optimistically: "we know that white racism will

not disappear today or even tomorrow, we do know that change in action [referring to congressional feat] may bring change in attitude" (263).² Not all reviews were positive. In 1969, the *American Political Science Review* claimed the report's identification of "white racism" was overly abstract: "the report neglected to document (though ample documentation was available) precisely how white racism has engendered black grievances and frustration" (Fogelson, Black, and Lipsky 1969, 1270). Moreover, Gary T. Marx, himself a contributor to the report, deeply criticized the commission's use of "racism":

While I think the focus on racism is correct on both strategic and intellectual grounds, it could have been better documented and treated in a conceptually more sophisticated way. . . . The concept of racism as used is too abstract and general. Because it accuses everyone, it accuses no one. . . . What is needed is, if not a report that names names, at least one that names institutions and contrasts varying manifestations of racism. One looks in vain for an adequate discussion of who specifically profits in what ways from having a large black underclass. Just which white institutions created, maintain, and condone the ghetto? (1970, 83)

By 1971, critiques of the Kerner report's vague use of the phrase "white racism" continued. For example, Michael Lipsky argues, "it is noteworthy that an assertion concerning the responsibility of 'white racism' may escape such scrutiny because of its diffuse applicability. On the other hand, allegations of specific

1. Johnson made the remarks on July 29, 1967 while signing the order establishing the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. The commission shortly thereafter published *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society* (1967). Two other commissions were then established: the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, which published *To Establish Justice, to Insure Domestic Tranquility* (1969) and the President's Commission on Campus Unrest, which published the *Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest* (1970) (also known as the Scranton report).

2. Loessberg's interviews with key participants in the Kerner Commission illumines why white racism may be mentioned but never clearly defined in its systemic operation: "What the Commission was about to conclude was not only a major departure from convention, but it was doing so in a very powerful manner. [Commission member Fred] Harris recalls that when the Commission had earlier come to the conclusion that discrimination and racism were the cause of the problems that now threatened the nation, there was initially a hesitancy to use these words because of the harshness associated with them" (Loessberg 2017, 12).

racist behavior are subject to extremely high standards of proof, and are correspondingly absent from the Kerner Commission document" (1971, 79).

Despite these criticisms, the report became notable for its focus on racial inequality (concentrating on the black-white color line) across four major areas: employment, education, housing, and police-community relations. Chapter 17 under "Recommendations for National Action," directly addresses employment, education, and housing; and chapter 7 again highlights employment. The report calls attention to the intersection of race and policing throughout, with an additional focus in chapter 11, "The Police and the Community." Overall, the report identified these structures as contributing to the creation of a violent, segregated, and impoverished "racial ghetto" (1968, 1).

By 1992, both the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Kerner report and the Los Angeles riots made the report once again salient. However, the report's focus on whiteness and white people was not often present in the commemorative discourse. For example, the *North Carolina Law Review* held a retrospective symposium, in which contributing authors emphasized the parallelism of the 1967 Detroit and 1992 Los Angeles riots (Johnson and Farrell 1992), naivety of the Kerner report on racial integration (Rosenbaum et al. 1992), and the erratic development of welfare programs (Stoesz 1992). Overall, most presented a sobering view on how the "social and economic diagnoses of the Kerner Commission remain pertinent" (Boger 1992, 1293). However, most articles failed to examine the place of white people in the orchestration of the color line. One exception was John Calmore, who critically analyzed the role of whites in both housing discrimination and white "solutions" for that discrimination, concluding that "the invidious nature of the discrimination stemmed not simply from individual perpetrators engaged in the disparate treatment of individual blacks, but from a white group disposition to dominate and exclude blacks. . . . The white desire to exercise this power remains strong today, especially when directed to poor, urban blacks" (1992, 1499).

Despite some resurgence in scholarship on

the report after both the thirtieth and fortieth anniversary reports, most discussion was marked by political debates over racial trends since 1968. Now at the fiftieth anniversary, some attention turns once again toward whiteness. For example, Adolph Reed eviscerates the report for the "diagnosis that 'white racism' was the ultimate cause of the unrest [which] suggested at the same time that combating racism and its effects could be the necessary remedy" (2017, 35). He further argues that these recommendations were both misguided and neutered given that they were "separated from its specific policy recommendations" (35). In addition, I have elsewhere argued that the report's "failure to outline the specific sociological operation of white domination . . . beckon scholars to wrestle with how this state-issued report . . . both reflects and reproduces dominant assumptions about the 'race' concept, violence, and human nature" (Hughey 2018a).

This body of scholarship gestures toward a necessity to both engage in a systematic evaluation of the logics used in the Kerner report toward the place of white people within core social institutions and to compare—now a half-century removed—how whites today use similar logics to make meaning of those institutions and related policy and legal considerations.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

I undertook a three-tiered content analysis of 324 pages (approximately 250,000 words) of the Kerner report (all but the front matter, the appendices, and the index). First, I followed a deductive approach in which I searched for specific expressions and words related to as *white* (N = 966), education (N = 313), employment (N = 258), housing (N = 281), and police (N = 1222). Second, I inductively reexamined the Kerner report to identify "sensitizing concepts" related to these topics (Blumer 1954), which led to discovery and comparison of concepts that are neither "static and inflexible" nor quantitatively frequent, but qualitatively important (Altheide and Schneider 2013, 26). For instance, terms such as "white racism" (N = 4), "white repression" (N = 4), "white power" (N = 3), and "white terrorism" (N = 2) are only cursorily declared, yet their appearance denotes a principal focus within the report. Third, I organized the

Table 1. Frames, Themes, and Discourse from the Kerner Report

Frame (N = 592)	Theme (N = 250)	Discourse (N = 208)	Frequency/Category Total (Code Instance Percentage)
Education			134/592 (22.64%)
	White normativity in education		17/250 (6.8)
		Deprivational harm	8/208 (3.85)
		White structural invisibility	12/208 (5.77)
	Innocence of everyday white people		13/250 (5.2)
		Exceptional white terrorists	7/208 (3.37)
		Noncausal systems	9/208 (4.33)
	White ignorance and messianic import		37/250 (14.8)
		Paradoxical white flight	10/208 (4.81)
		Imagined communities	8/208 (3.85)
Employment			165/592 (27.87)
	Blackness of the culture of poverty		37/250 (14.8)
		Black family	6/208 (2.88)
		White immigrants from the past	7/208 (3.37)
		Invisible pathways to white affluence	9/208 (4.33)
	White control of resources		28/250 (11.2)
		Intertwining segregation and culture	10/208 (4.81)
		Self-fulfilling black perceptions	16/208 (7.69)
Housing			106/592 (17.91)
	Black underprivilege without white overprivilege		25/250 (10.0)
		Missing mechanisms for uplift	9/208 (4.33)
	Causality of white racist attitudes		29/250 (11.6)
		Hiding hidden practices	10/208 (4.81)
		Promoting white assimilation	12/208 (5.77)
Police-community relations			187/592 (31.59)
	Condemning attitudes and excusing behavior		44/250 (17.6)
		Police attitudes = white attitudes	37/208 (17.79)
		Administrative policy changes	7/208 (3.37)
		Police ignorance	19/208 (9.13)
		Lack of resources	5/208 (2.40)
	Deracializing internal police white supremacy		21/250 (8.4)
		Causality without measurement	3/208 (1.44)
		Double standards about double standards	4/208 (1.92)

Source: Author's compilation based on Kerner Report 1968.

deductively based and inductively refined coding schema into first-level frames, second-level themes, and third-level discourse. Frames are, as David Altheide and Christopher Schneider write, "the focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event"; secondary themes are "the recurring typical theses"; and tertiary "discourses" are specific talking-points within themes (2013, 53) (see table 1).

Each page served as the unit of analysis. Many of these coded elements were intimately linked; in instances in which more than one code appeared on a page, each was acknowledged: each scored a 1 for coinciding categories (0 = no, 1 = yes). The total frequency distribution included 592 frame instances, 250 theme instances, and 208 discourse instances (a total of 1,050 coding instances drawn from 347 pages

Table 2. Intercoder Reliability Measures

Frame (N = 592)	% Agreement	Scott's Pi	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha (Nominal)	N Agree	N Disagree
Education (N = 130)	93.8	-0.032	0	-0.028	122	8
Employment (N = 137)	89.8	-0.054	0	-0.05	123	14
Housing (N = 157)	90.4	-0.05	0	-0.047	142	15
Police-community relations (N = 168)	85.7	-0.077	0	-0.074	144	24

Source: Author's calculations based on Kerner Report 1968.

for an average of 3.03 codes per page). Intercoder reliability measures on the theme codings were conducted and reveal high levels of reliability (see table 2).

Multisite Ethnography

For this segment, I draw on data collected as part of multisite ethnographies (N = 6) of all-white organizational spaces. I engaged in the first two ethnographies in the U.S. mid-Atlantic over 2006 and 2007: a majority-male, white nationalist organization I call National Equality for All (NEA) and a majority-male, white anti-racist organization I call Whites for Racial Justice (WRJ). I conducted the next two in the U.S. Deep South over 2010 through 2012: an all-white, mixed-gender, young professionals group I call Mississippi Alabama Young Educated Professionals (MAYEP) and an all-white, mixed-gender, college alumni chapter of a large southern university I call Big State Alumni (BSA). The last two ethnographies were taken in the New England region of the United States between 2014 and 2017: an all-white, all-women, New England-based chapter of a patriotic lineage society I call the Daughters of Patriots (DOP) and an all-white, mixed-gender (predominately male), New England-based chapter of a civic association I call the Loyal Order of Benevolent Americans (LOBA) (see table 3).

I engaged in data triangulation of ethnographic fieldwork inclusive of meetings and informal activities; semistructured in-depth interviews (N = 204) with members of each group (NEA n = 24; WRJ n = 21; MAYEP n = 35; BSA n = 42; DOP n = 38; LOBA n = 44); content analysis of textual information such as paper and e-correspondence, archives, media advertise-

ments, official documents, and office memos; and comparative vignettes. To secure Institutional Review Board approval, all potentially identifying information is either unreported or replaced with pseudonyms. I gained access after attending informational and recruiting meetings held by the organizations, by meeting influential members of the groups, and through word of mouth. My relationship with each group was that of a known researcher. I selected these six groups by their relative proximity to one another (NEA and WRJ, MAYEP and BSA, and DOP and LOBA), their status as chapters of larger, national associations, and as either purposeful or de facto all-white groups. The data analyzed come from a larger investigation of the relationships between white racial identity formation, organizational racial homophily and homogeneity, and white racial stratification beliefs about major social structures.

FINDINGS

Findings are organized by education, employment, housing, and police-community relations. In each I present the content analysis of the Kerner report and then outline the patterns culled from the six ethnographic locations. I show a striking correspondence and relative stability in racial logics across time (from 1968 to 2018) and space (the six ethnographic locales), which in turn reveal several core assumptions about race in the United States.

Education

The Kerner report created a three-tiered ranking of grievances among "Negro communities" in which "inadequate education" was a "second

Table 3. Ethnographic Descriptives

	NEA	WRJ	MAYEP	BSA	DOP	LOBA	Totals
Organizational demographics							
Participants active (n)	24	21	35	42	38	44	204
Mean years active (median, SD)	3.29 (5, 2.77)	4.38 (5, 2.08)	3.83 (3, 3.18)	6 (4, 7.87)	10 (6.5, 9.51)	14.73 (15, 10.15)	
Mean age in years (median, SD)	37.18 (37, 8.19)	36.76 (35, 10.88)	26.29 (25, 4.72)	31.45 (28, 10.93)	45.95 (44, 12.83)	56.84 (56.5, 11.79)	
Age range in years	33 (25-58)	40 (22-62)	15 (20-35)	41 (21-62)	52 (25-77)	51 (33-84)	
Gender ratio male/female	23/1	19/2	15/20	24/18	0/38	35/9	
	95.8%/4.2%	(90.4%/9.6%)	(42.86%/57.14%)	(57.14%/42.86%)	(0%/100%)	(79.55%/20.45%)	
Religion							
Catholic	3 (12.5%)	2 (9.5%)	3 (8.57%)	5 (11.90%)	10 (26.32%)	18 (40.9%)	41 (21.08%)
Protestant	16 (66.6)	12 (57.1)	25 (71.43)	26 (61.90)	7 (18.42)	12 (27.27)	98 (48.04)
Jewish	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (9.52)	0 (0)	5 (11.36)	9 (4.41)
Atheist	1 (4.2)	1 (4.8)	2 (5.71)	1 (2.38)	7 (18.42)	0 (0)	12 (5.88)
Agnostic	2 (8.3)	2 (9.5)	3 (8.57)	4 (9.52)	9 (23.68)	0 (0)	12 (5.88)
Spiritual/other	2 (8.3)	4 (19)	2 (5.71)	2 (4.76)	5 (13.16)	9 (20.45)	12 (5.88)
Region raised							
Midwest	6 (25%)	2 (9.5%)	2 (5.71%)	3 (7.14%)	3 (7.89%)	4 (9.09%)	20 (9.8%)
North	3 (12.5)	3 (14.3)	3 (8.57)	5 (11.90)	30 (78.95)	25 (56.82)	69 (33.82)
South	14 (58.3)	16 (76.2)	27 (77.14)	28 (66.67)	4 (10.53)	9 (20.45)	98 (48.04)
West	1 (4.2)	0 (0)	3 (8.57)	6 (14.29)	1 (2.63)	6 (13.64)	17 (8.33)
Political orientation							
Democrat	2 (8.3%)	5 (23.8%)	5 (14.29%)	7 (16.67%)	25 (65.79%)	0 (0%)	44 (21.57%)
Green	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (5.7)	4 (9.52)	2 (7.14)	0 (0)	8 (3.9)
Independent	5 (20.8)	12 (57.1)	6 (17.14)	6 (14.29)	6 (15.79)	8 (18.18)	43 (21.08)
Libertarian	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (8.57)	2 (4.76)	0 (0)	7 (15.91)	12 (5.88)
Republican	9 (37.5)	1 (4.8)	13 (37.14)	19 (45.24)	3 (7.89)	23 (52.27)	68 (33.33)
None/no answer	8 (33.3)	3 (14.3)	6 (17.14)	4 (9.52)	2 (7.14)	6 (13.64)	29 (14.22)

Educational attainment									
No college	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (4.41%)
Some college	5 (20.8)	4 (19)	5 (14.29)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (13.64)	20 (9.8)
College degree or equivalent	14 (58.3)	7 (33.3)	23 (65.71)	33 (78.57)	29 (76.32)	25 (56.82)	0 (0)	131 (64.22)	11 (5.39)
Some graduate classes	0 (0)	3 (14.3)	2 (5.71)	4 (9.52)	2 (5.26)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4 (9.09)	33 (16.18)
Graduate degree	5 (20.8)	7 (33.3)	5 (14.29)	5 (11.90)	7 (18.42)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (13.64%)	29 (14.22)
Socioeconomic status (self-reported)									
Working class	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.8%)	2 (5.71%)	5 (11.90%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (18.18)	106 (51.96)
Lower middle class	2 (8.3)	3 (14.3)	11 (831.43)	5 (11.90)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	30 (68.18)	43 (21.08)
Middle class	12 (50)	8 (38.1)	21 (60.0)	27 (64.29)	8 (21.05)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (4.9)
Upper middle class	9 (37.5)	6 (28.6)	0 (0)	5 (11.90)	23 (60.53)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Upper class	0 (0)	3 (14.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (18.42)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Yearly income									
Less than 25,000	2 (8.3%)	1 (4.8%)	2 (5.71%)	3 (7.14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (6.82)	8 (3.9%)
25,000–49,999	9 (37.5)	9 (42.9)	28 (80.0)	20 (47.62)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (15.91)	46 (22.5)
50,000–74,999	11 (45.8)	9 (42.9)	5 (14.29)	14 (33.33)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	12 (27.27)	28 (13.73)
75,000–99,999	2 (8.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (11.90)	9 (23.68)	0 (0)	0 (0)	22 (50.00)	53 (25.98)
100,000 or more	0 (0)	2 (9.5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	29 (76.32)	0 (0)	0 (0)	39 (88.64%)	114 (55.88%)
Housing									
Own home	13 (54.2%)	10 (47.6%)	3 (8.57%)	16 (38.09%)	33 (86.84%)	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (11.36)	90 (44.12)
Rent	11 (45.8)	11 (52.4)	32 (91.43)	26 (61.90)	5 (13.15)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Source: Author's compilation based on multisite ethnographies.

level of intensity.” Most of the discussion on education centered on either racial disparities or the educational characteristics of rioters, but the place of whiteness in education was both implicitly and explicitly addressed.

White Normativity in Education

First, in the report, whites were the norm to which African Americans were most commonly compared. For instance,

The bleak record of public education for ghetto children is growing worse. In the critical skills—verbal and reading ability—Negro students are falling further behind whites with each year of school completed. . . . If existing disadvantages are not to be perpetuated, we must drastically improve the quality of ghetto education. Equality of results with all-white schools must be the goal. (1968, 12)

Attention to the achievement gap was paramount in the report. On the heels of *Brown v. Board*,³ the report assumes deprivational harm to the black psyche but submerges questions about white structural advantages (Carter 1990).⁴ For the commission, educational inequality meant an embodied inferiority in black students. As a result, the black student was more scrutinized than the underlying pathology of white supremacist control of resources. Whiteness was the invisible norm by which disparities were measured and the presumed pathology-free student par exemplar to which students of color should aspire.

Contemporary racial logics of educational white normativity are exemplified in a statement by a white nationalist I call Tim (counselor, age thirty-three, four years in NEA). Tim explained that educational integration was “unnatural” and would hurt white children:

Nonwhite children, people in general, need to be with their own. . . . integration is unnatural. . . . children are impressionable and

could soak up, well, they could learn habits and customs that are not up to our white standard, . . . they need to learn our culture, that’s the norm, white culture is the norm here. . . . nonwhites have a lower IQ and you want to put children with the smartest, not the dumbest, people in the room.

Such a white nationalist stance is to be expected. However, white antiracists often expressed similar rationales, such as one member named Sherrill (consultant, age thirty-five, eight years in WRJ):

I’m not saying integration is bad. . . . it’s the goal . . . but everyone has a different culture. . . . for better or worse, white schools have more of a Eurocentric style and that’s society’s norm. . . . I’m afraid that white children sometimes suffer because, it’s. . . . look, African American children are raised differently, there’s a different culture, and their schools can be more Afrocentric and . . . I believe in integration, but I don’t see how it’s pragmatic yet, like right now, . . . I just don’t think we need to fight these battles by using our children as the ammunition.

In groups not organized on the basis of white racial activism, such as the New England-based DOP, a member I call Emma (medical assistant, age forty-five, fifteen years in DOP) said,

Schools have curricula and standards. . . . those are based on European history and knowledge, and culture . . . white students learn more easily when around their own and are comfortable . . . Of course, not all white students get it, some people fail [Author: “White students?”] Yeah, some just don’t live up to their potential . . . but the schools are set-up for white students, I think, in particular, to succeed. [long pause] I’m not so sure about black students.

3. *Brown v. Board of Education of Tokepa*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

4. Gregg Lee Carter reanalyzes data from the Kerner report’s fifteen cities study and finds that despite a weak correlation between black grievances and deprivation, such a relationship did not link to riot activity, which leaves the report’s claims of a psychological sense of desperation and frustration without evidence (1990).

Here we see a racial logic that evokes both an intra- and interracial boundary, which demarcates a white racial ideal—the right type of white student succeeds in school, by virtue of their racial-cultural orientation and fit in the educational system, opposed to both deficient white students and students of color.

Appeals to white children's intellectual development, white children's pedagogical comfort, and white safety were frequent both in the report and among the white participants of these six organizations. For instance, in referring to school desegregation efforts, Lara told me that her children would not be "used as guinea pigs in some social experiment, even if I agree that's how things should be" (human resources manager, age forty-four, twelve years in BSA).

The Innocence of Everyday White People: White Violence Toward Desegregation

The Kerner report occasionally addresses violence toward desegregation efforts. For example, the following passage appears twice: "A climate that tends toward approval and encouragement of violence as a form of protest has been created by *white terrorism* [emphasis added] directed against nonviolent protest; by the open defiance of law and Federal Authority by state and local officials resisting desegregation" (1968, 5, 92).

Under this logic, some white people are singled out as, literally, terrorists who defy both the law and federal Authority. By framing white violence as the domain of a radical few, more commonplace and banal violent white activities by police and citizens were often marginalized. Even though the Kerner report finds that "Some 40 percent of the prior incidents [in Detroit over 1966 and 1967] involved allegedly abusive or discriminatory police actions" (1968, 69) and that "about 17 percent of the prior incidents [in Detroit over the same period] involved activities by whites intended to discredit or intimidate Negroes or violence by whites against Negroes" (70), this data did not sway the commission to posit white supremacy as a cause of the riots. Rather, the report stated that such episodes were "prior incidents" leading up to the violence and that none of the

events occurring before the riots (labeled final incidents) "were classifiable as racist activity" (70).

Members of these six organizations often used similar racial logics. For instance, violence was framed as a possible, even natural, repercussion of "forced integration." Barney (plumber, age thirty-one, ten years in MAYEP) said,

You can't tell people what to do. . . . if you force people, especially about their kids, then you're going to have resistance. . . . I wouldn't rule out violence, but when you're talking about people's kids, they are going to do whatever they have to do to protect them. . . . I don't care what kind of high-minded goal you got, but you know, if you go and, if you go and you start telling me what my children can and can't do and how they've got to learn, and I think it's bad, well just show me a parent that wouldn't do what they had to do.

Appeals to violence to "protect" white children from "unnatural" or "political" influences associated with school integration were common. Derrick (firefighter, age forty, seventeen years in LOBA) remarked,

OK, let me be clear. I think integration could be fine and, well, . . . but you have to admit, there are some natural differences between the races, and there's nothing wrong with learning among your own. . . . the desegregation agenda is too political, and I'd fight some politician, or cop, or whoever it is, I'm talking tooth and nail, if they tried to force my son into being some pawn in their political agenda. It's unnatural.

And similarly, Fiona (homemaker, age thirty-one, one year in DOP) explained,

I get that people want everyone to get along, but that's unnatural. . . . Listen, I'm not a violent person, but if someone tries to take my child and send them to some bad school that's full of, just, little criminals and delinquents . . . I, [a] real parent will stand up to

protect their child” [Author: “I’m sorry, who are the criminals and delinquents?”]. The kids, I mean, they are going to be soon. [Author: “The white kids in the integrated school?”] No, it’s, you know what I mean, it’s, listen, there are statistics that show that black, uh, African American students are more likely to commit crimes, . . . I don’t want my children around that, and I’d fight anyone, I mean, if I had to hit, punch, kick, scream, or like chain myself to the school-house door, if I had to, I would to, to protect my children.

White violence in defense of segregation qua children was used to construct the ideal white parent; a steadfast opponent of both “unnatural” integration and a protector from the “criminal and delinquent” characteristics believed natural to adolescent blackness.

White Ignorance and Messianic Import

The assumption that whites had a lack of racial understandings runs throughout the Kerner report. For example, “What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it. white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it” (1968, 1). In an often quoted line, the report places both blame and salvation of ghetto conditions in white knowledge. Following this logic, the report concludes that intercessions into ghetto conditions could be addressed via better communication with whites:

In addition to establishing a foundation for needed legislative measures, these hearings would constitute a visible demonstration of governmental concern for the problems of ghetto residents. They would also provide a most useful means of bridging the communications gap, contributing to an improved understanding in the white community about the conditions of ghetto life. (1968, 152)

Although it is conceivable that some whites are unaware of their involvement in the creation and maintenance of inner-city social problems that hold disproportionate negative

impacts on African Americans, the report’s mention of white condonance (the acceptance, approval, or sanction of these conditions) betrays such a conclusion. This contradiction is apparent in the Kerner report’s focus on white racial beliefs as “one of the major causes” for white migration away from inner cities (known as white flight). For instance,

As the whites were absorbed by the larger society, many left their predominantly ethnic neighborhoods and moved to outlying areas to obtain newer housing and better schools. . . . Yet most Negro families have remained within predominantly Negro neighborhoods, primarily [*sic*] because they have been effectively excluded from white residential areas. . . . Another form of discrimination just as significant is white withdrawal from, or refusal to enter, neighborhoods where large numbers of Negroes are moving or already residing. . . . Once this happens, the remaining whites seek to leave, thus confirming the existing belief among whites that complete transformation of a neighborhood is inevitable once Negroes begin to enter. Since the belief itself is one of the major causes of the transformation, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy which inhibits the development of racially integrated neighborhoods. (1968, 119)

The report does not resolve this contradiction—a kind of “Schrödinger’s whiteness” (Hughey 2018b)—that is simultaneously mindful of and oblivious to white involvement in black ghetto conditions and segregation. On the one hand, whites are simultaneously unaware of condoning ghetto conditions (and thus need better communication about them and their role in their creation, maintenance, and condonance), but on the other are all too aware of these conditions and explicitly leave them (thus both condoning African Americans to exclusively live in them while having “effectively excluded [African Americans] from white residential areas” [1968, 119]).

Temporarily ignoring white racial consciousness, the Kerner report places the cause of this supposed white ignorance at the feet of mass media:

They [the media] have not communicated to the majority of their audience;—which is white—a sense of the degradation, misery, and hopelessness of living in the ghetto. They have not communicated to whites a feeling for the difficulties and frustrations of being a Negro in the United States. They have not shown understanding or appreciation of—and thus have not communicated—a sense of Negro culture, thought, or history. (1968, 10, 210)

The report concludes that the media has crafted white ignorance in the collective consumption of newspapers and television:

If what the white American reads in the newspapers or sees on television conditions his expectation of what is ordinary and normal in the larger society, he will neither understand nor accept the black American. By failing to portray the Negro as a matter of routine and in the context of the total society, the news media have, we believe, contributed to the black-white schism in this country. (1968, 211)

Media representations and narratives have been a part of whites' lack of "understanding or appreciation" in racial matters. However, it seems spurious to both insinuate, first, whites were not aware of the "negative" conditions they were fleeing to put their children in "better schools" free of African American children suffering from "disparities" (as well as excluding blacks from white suburban schools) and second, that a sudden realization of negative "ghetto conditions" would lead to a sea-change in white support for educational integration and equality.

The Kerner report is adamant that racial inequality and segregation is largely due to whites' ignorance and inaccuracy of them, but ethnographic data reveals that whites in fact seem to be hyperaware of these issues. As Michael (banker, age thirty-six, 4.5 years in WRJ) said, "I believe in integration, but I don't want to send my child to a black school because they're underfunded and troubled. . . . That's what segregation has done to black schools. . . . Integration is important, but I'm not going to

sacrifice the well-being of my child." As Bianca (landscape architect, age thirty-eight, ten years in DOP) told me,

I grew up close to Bridgeport [CT]. . . it was dangerous, with a police presence and surveillance, the poverty, the broken-down and underfunded schools. I knew it was because they were black. My school wasn't like that . . . that's "white privilege" [makes air quotes]. It's all because of race. And I think that's why most whites don't want to move there or send their kids there. . . I'm not going to either. . . in the end, what kind of parent would I be if my child doesn't get the best education?

Without difficulty, members of these six groups told me plainly about educational disparities across the color line and that those inequities were a (if not the) reason they would not send their children to "those" (black or Latinx) schools. Many did not seem ignorant as to the causes, extent, and mechanisms by which such educational segregation and inequality were reproduced, and none were unclear as to their consequences. Rather, discussions about schools always came down to the quality of the school that was measured with the proxy of race. From these interviews and witnessed discussions, it was clear that the ideal white parent would protect their child from the "dangerous" black schools, thereby delivering that child safety, innocence, and education.

Both the report and contemporary whites use a similar logic whereby white consciousness and benefaction will remedy educational inequality: "today's problems can be solved *only* [emphasis added] if white Americans comprehend the rigid social, economic and educational barriers that have prevented Negroes from participating in the mainstream of American life" (Kerner Report 1968, 95). The logic is that a cadre of kindly, white benefactors who, newly and acutely aware of educational segregation and inequality, will suddenly work to undo the system that continues to prop up their educational advantages. Such an assertion—and reliance on an idealized white savior figure—would be laughable if it were not the

very real racial reasoning used in both the report and among varied whites today.

Employment

Rates, trends, and descriptions of a rioter's profile were the most common reference points for employment. Nevertheless, the Kerner report is replete with both implied and overt references to the intersection of whiteness and employment. Contemporary whites also hold these logics.

The Blackness of the Culture of Poverty

Describing black residents of the ghetto, the report states, "This pattern reinforces itself from one generation to the next, creating a 'culture of poverty' and an ingrained cynicism about society and its institutions." On the same page, the report continues, "The culture of poverty that results from unemployment and family disorganization generates a system of ruthless, exploitative relationships within the ghetto . . . an environmental jungle characterized by personal insecurity and tension" (1968, 130).

Such a logic fails in distinguishing the differences between the "cultures" of white and black that supposedly keep the latter in a "pattern [that] reinforces itself from one generation to the next" (1968, 130). However, one passage compares current black realities with past white immigrant experiences, and critiques white historical romanticism:

Finally, nostalgia makes it easy to exaggerate the ease of escape of the white immigrants from the ghettos. When the immigrants were immersed in poverty, they, too, lived in slums, and these neighborhoods exhibited fearfully high rates of alcoholism, desertion, illegitimacy and the other pathologies associated with poverty. Just as some Negro men desert their families when they are unemployed and their wives can get jobs, so did the men of other ethnic groups, even though time and affluence has clouded white memories of the past. (1968, 145)

The Kerner report acknowledges a strikingly similar form of pathologies across black and white communities, but addresses neither the nature of the affluence gained by white immigrants nor how affluence is achieved. White structural assistance is unmentioned while the report alludes to white immigrants simply giving up their pathologies and miraculously landing in economic affluence.⁵ The report's pages drip with an implicit conflation of whiteness with a dysfunction-free culture, whereas African American culture fails to value work because, *circulus in probando*, African American people are underemployed.

Like the Kerner report, the evocation of black and Latinx pathologies and dysfunctions were frequent across these six organizations. For instance, Franklin (sales associate, age thirty-seven, five years in NEA) told me that

Biological differences explain much of today's racial conflict. . . . Genetics makes clear that there is a connection between race and intelligence where the more melanin you have the less intelligent you are, you know, the less mental capacity you possess. . . . DNA and genetics are proving what we knew all along really. Blacks, Hispanics, darker-skinned people are more aggressive and dangerous. . . . It's not racist, it's a fact.

Franklin's interpretation is lockstep with NEA propaganda. However, this logic is not reducible to the political orientations of white nationalism and was shared by members of other white organizations.

Kenny (professor, age fifty-seven, thirteen years in BSA) explained his perspective: "The inner cities were destroyed after the Great Migration. . . . it's all vice there now. . . . Harlem looks like a war zone. . . . what kind of white people would live in a place like that?" Kenny admitted that he never has set foot in Harlem, but his self-assuredness was shared by many others, inclusive of the New England born-and-bred Haley (lawyer, age sixty-one, thirty-one years in DOP) who told me this:

5. Throughout much of the 1900s, whites had exclusive racialized access to bank loans, land grants, unemployment compensation, the minimum wage, labor unions, and the G.I. Bill during a segregated military.

I don't know if it's biology or just the way that blacks are socialized, or what it is really. . . . all I know is, and people don't want to admit this, but crime rates, drug use rates, mental illness, domestic violence, you name it, really, all of those, those . . . you sociologists call them "social problems," all those things are overrepresented in black, uh, African American communities and families. . . . some white people have it, too, though. I guess we'd call them "white trash" . . . the white people that don't, don't have their life together and have adopted some values from black people or from their native countries that don't fit here.

Both Kenny and Haley demonstrate a logic that relies on inter- and intraracial boundaries toward the pursuit of an ideal whiteness. First, spaces of color (for example, Harlem, African American communities and families) are framed as a "war zone" and as rife with "crime," "drug use," and "mental illness" alongside unnamed "white space" free of these dangers (Jackson 1999; Moore 2008; Anderson 2015). Second, whites who venture into these areas are somehow racially deficient (for example, "what kind of white people would live in a place like that" or "white trash" that "don't have their life together") and do not reflect the pursuit or attainment of the white hegemonic ideal.

It might be tempting to dismiss such remarks as the product of political leanings or generational cohorts, but many younger white self-reported Democrats and Independents voiced similar opinions in the company of their all-white organizations. Patrick (writer, age twenty-eight, two years in WRJ) said, "Blacks and Latinos, I don't know . . . they just, let's be honest, they can't seem to get their stuff together. . . . you just want to say, 'Stop smoking crack, get a job, and, you know, stay in school!' . . . yes, there is racism, but that's often an excuse." As Talia (retail sales, age twenty-two, one year in MAYEP) told me,

Black-on-black crime is what's really holding black people back. . . . they blame white people for not getting along with them? Come on! . . . if they got an education and a job, and

stayed with it, then in a generation or two, there would be equality. . . . Most white people can do it, except for like rednecks and other losers who don't have an excuse [Author: "What do you mean, 'don't have an excuse?'"] Oh, well, because they're white [said matter-of-factly].

Both the inter- and intraracial divisions are quite clear in Talia's logic: whites have no excuse for unemployment because of the supposedly inherent value they place on work, whereas if people of color became more like whites, then they would have similar outcomes.

White Control of Resources

The Kerner report often mentions the lopsided white control of resources, acknowledging the role that segregated white communities and organizations played in excluding African Americans from economic opportunities. For example,

Segregation played a role here too. The immigrants and their descendants, who felt threatened by the arrival of the Negro, prevented a Negro-immigrant coalition that might have saved the old political machines. Reform groups, nominally more liberal on the race issue, were often dominated by businessmen and middle-class city residents who usually opposed coalition with any low-income group, white or black. (1968, 144)

The report singles out racial segregation rather than culture of poverty as the causal variable for low occupational attainment, but often it intertwines the two. Hence, when it does address how white discrimination in employment and the economy are likely to drive the low socioeconomic status of blacks, the report often pivots toward renderings of white discrimination not as an objective reality (but rather a conclusion drawn from frustrated and dysfunctional black perceptions):

Significant grievances concerning unfair commercial practices affecting Negro consumers were found in 11 of the 20 cities studied by the Commission. The fact that most of

the merchants who operate stores in Negro areas are white undoubtedly contributes to the conclusion among Negroes that they are exploited by white society. (1968, 139)

In this light, the riots of the 1960s were not a product of white repression, but of black perceptions of white repression. The report states that

Much of the violence in recent civil disorders has been directed at stores and other commercial establishments in disadvantaged Negro areas. In some cases, rioters focused on stores operated by white merchants who, *they apparently believed* [emphasis added], had been charging exorbitant prices or selling inferior goods. Not all the violence against these stores can be attributed to “revenge” for such practices. Yet it is clear that many residents of disadvantaged Negro neighborhoods believe they suffer constant abuses by local merchants. (1968, 139)

Paradoxically, consensus shifted among the members of these six white groups regarding white control of economic resources. Despite agreement that whites hold more resources on average than people of color, members drew from a shared racial logic, attributing such dominance rarely to exploitation or unearned privileges but instead to hard work, cultural values, and natural ability. Yet, at other moments, members shared the reasoning that resources were being unfairly stripped from whites because of a “politically correct” system marked by “reverse racist” preferences for people of color. For instance, I once entered the meeting place of LOBA to find Aaron (contractor, age fifty-seven, nineteen years in LOBA), Eddie (mechanic, age fifty-nine, fifteen years in LOBA), and Rob (maintenance, age thirty-eight, one year in LOBA) in conversation:

AARON: “Obama’s new tax plan is going to have a racial re-dis-trib-u-tive [said with punctuated emphasis] component, where they tax whites more than blacks and Mexicans and Asians. . . . they are going to fund affirmative action and welfare that way.”

EDDIE: “How are they going to even measure, or uh, track that, I mean it’s . . . ?”

ROB: [interrupting] “The census, man! Why do you think they started taking down people’s race? They want to track the money to fund the handout programs.”

AARON: “I heard they might merge the IRS and the census anyhow.”

EDDIE: “Oh, that’s that new box on the 1040 and 1099 I heard they are going to use, where they can garnish your income directly into jobs specifically for black people.”

[AUTHOR: “How do you feel about all this?”]

AARON: “It’s not fair. It just ain’t right. . . . I worked hard, my daddy worked hard. . . . my money shouldn’t go to some lazy nigger. [Aaron locked eyes with me] Look, I’m sorry, but that’s who they are. . . . I got a job, worked hard . . . I was taught the right values. . . . this is how you start a revolution, I tell you. Taxation without representation.”

This conversation, and what ensued, was rife with discussions of whites’ superior work ethic, worldview and values, and natural ability relative to people of color.

The same rationalizations were shared across the six white organizations. I would commonly ask members of these groups: “What makes white people different from other races?” Giving perhaps the most direct and brusque answer, Kylee (small business owner, age forty-three, three years in DOP) stated,

We work harder, faster, and better. It’s biological. It’s cultural. It’s taught. Just everything. It’s . . . look, I’ll be honest with you, I read these studies by sociologists like you who document inequality. . . . I don’t doubt the measurements. . . . White people come out on top in most areas. But the issue I have is with your explanations. You go out of your way to not say the obvious: White people are superior. . . . I don’t like to advertise that opinion, because people will say I’m a racist. . . . here’s a common-sense reason why I don’t hire black people: . . . white people work harder.

Kylee's worldview is overt, but was shared in more polite and nuanced forms by others. For instance, as Lance (postal worker, age twenty-eight, four years in BSA) told me,

I graduated from [Big State] and couldn't find a job for a while. I didn't apply for welfare. I'm not some bum. . . . But I couldn't get a job in my field [marketing] because they were only hiring black people because of affirmative action. . . . it's everywhere, especially in federal jobs I finally found a job here with the local post office. [Author: "How did you get federal job with all the affirmative action you mention?"] Well, I just kept trying. Hard work pays off. I didn't give up or wait for some hand out, like I told you.

Housing

As it does for employment and education, the report concentrates on descriptive demographic variables such as fertility and mortality rates and migration patterns to emphasize white flight and black urbanization in the ghetto. Yet, racialized logics were often couched in between quantitative reports of trends and disparities.

Black Underprivilege Without White Overprivilege

Both the report and white group members engaged in one-sided appraisals of race relations whereby black disadvantage somehow existed without white advantage. For example, the report states that

Social and economic conditions in the riot cities constituted a clear pattern of severe disadvantage for Negroes compared with whites, whether the Negroes lived in the area where the riot took place or outside it. . . . Although housing cost Negroes relatively more, they had worse housing—three times as likely to be overcrowded and substandard. When compared to white suburbs, the relative disadvantage was even more pronounced. (1968, 4)

When white upward social mobility in housing was mentioned, the specificity of assistance programs and structural disadvantage was un-

named. Consider the following Kerner report passage:

But the later phases of Negro settlement and expansion in metropolitan areas diverge sharply from those typical of white immigrants. As the whites were absorbed by the larger society, many left their predominantly ethnic neighborhoods and moved to outlying areas to obtain newer housing and better schools. Some scattered randomly over the suburban area. Others established new ethnic clusters in the suburbs, but even these rarely contained solely members of a single ethnic group. As a result, most middle-class neighborhoods—both in the suburbs and within central cities—have no distinctive ethnic character, except that they are white. (1968, 119)

Here, white upward mobility occurred through assimilation via absorption even as the existence of white ethnic enclaves are dismissed and the racial advantages of whiteness go unnamed.

The respondents in the six all-white organizations rarely mentioned housing issues on their own. I often introduced the topic to gauge their understanding. Once presented, additional prompts were unnecessary. For instance, in asking Harry (lawyer, age thirty-eight, six years in NEA) about his choice of where he bought his home, he responded,

"Location, location, location," that's what they say right? . . . quality of schools and the resale value were primary considerations. [Author: "What about race?"] Well, yeah! That goes without saying. I live in a nearly all-white neighborhood and I wasn't going to even think about living in an integrated neighborhood. . . . I wanted to leave my doors unlocked and windows open sometimes. . . . you need a crime-free, white neighborhood to do that. . . . whites won't, I mean, they just won't . . . I mean, almost never break into your home.

Harry, a white nationalist, repeats a commonly held belief about crime and neighbor-

hood racial composition and frames whites as essentially innocent and nearly incapable of housing break-in. Others employed varied racialized logics to rationalize their choice to live in all-white neighborhoods. A member of a white antiracist organization, Philip (store owner, age fifty-three, five years in WRJ) told me,

I know how it works and I'm not going to throw away my money. . . . if there's any "white flight" in the neighborhood then my property value is going to drop. . . . I'm not going to move into an integrated neighborhood where that's likely to happen or is already happening. . . . I believe in integration, but I can't go broke.

Most of the white members of these six organizations evoked similar overt racially or economically motivated rationales as Harry and Philip. Quick to point out the supposed disadvantages of living close to people of color, they were unable to address the advantages that both lead to and result from all-white segregated housing, instead dismissing such dynamics as either fictitious or inconsequential. For instance, at a BSA meeting, members admitted that "housing integration" might "artificially deflate" the value of homes, making even whites who favor neighborhood integration to be motivated by economic disincentives, as Alda (receptionist, age twenty-one, one year in BSA) remarked,

I'm starting out having just graduated [from Big State] last year, and all I can afford are homes in integrated neighborhoods . . . but I'm going to wait to save to buy in a white neighborhood because I can't risk pouring money into a home that's going to lose money over time. I see a home as a place to live *and* [said with elongated emphasis] a financial investment, like a 401K.

I shortly thereafter remarked, "If the entrance of people of color into neighborhoods artificially deflates the value of homes, would not the entrance of white people into neighborhoods artificially inflate the value of homes, so

that any resale profit is generated from racial exclusion and discrimination?" My comment was summarily dismissed:

BRANDI (retail sales, age twenty-one, one year in BSA): "I don't think I quite get it, I mean, so, home values are just home values. Integration brings them down from where they should be normally, based on the market, so, I mean, I don't think I see what you're saying."

JOEL (insurance sales, age thirty-five, twelve years in BSA): "That's not right. . . . In actuarial science there's no measure of white inflation of home values, so, I think, I mean, I'm sorry, but that just sounds like something that someone made up."

JOY (medical assistant, age thirty-four, seven years in BSA): "That's what I was thinking, 'cause there's no way white people just simply moving in makes the housing values magically jump up a few thousand dollars. . . . the market value is based on the worth of the home, not the worth of the people living in it."

AUTHOR: "So, how do the values of homes fall when black people move into them?"

JOEL: "That's different, I mean, yeah, that's because of discrimination, but that's what we're saying, it brings the value down from where it naturally is. . . . There's no white housing value inflation or whatever you want to call it."

The Causality of White Racist Attitudes

The Kerner report uses the logic that individual, racist whites (in their attitudes that drive their actions) are the culprit for housing segregation and black disadvantage. For instance, "Within the cities, Negroes have been excluded from white residential areas through discriminatory practices. Just as significant is the withdrawal of white families from, or their refusal to enter, neighborhoods where Negroes are moving or already residing" (1968, 6). Furthermore, the report reads,

Their exclusion has been accomplished through various discriminatory practices, some obvious and overt, others subtle and

hidden. Deliberate efforts are sometimes made to discourage Negro families from purchasing or renting homes in all-white neighborhoods. Intimidation and threats of violence have ranged from throwing garbage on lawns and making threatening phone calls to burning crosses in yards and even dynamiting property. More often, real estate agents simply refuse to show homes to Negro buyers. (1968, 119)

In summarizing the relationship of race to housing, the report asserts that

the concentration of Negroes in central cities results from a combination of forces. Some of these forces, such as migration and initial settlement patterns in older neighborhoods, are similar to those which affected previous ethnic minorities. Others—particularly discrimination in employment and segregation in housing and schools—are a result of white attitudes based on race and color. (1968, 120)

However, the “subtle and hidden” practices and exact operation of “white attitudes” are not specified. And when factors are mentioned, such as exclusionary zoning, the cause of those practices stems from white cognitive racial prejudice or ignorance rather than systemic practices, laws, customs, and habits. In these passages, the report renders invisible the mechanisms that promote white advantage and posits these dynamics as a normative (read nonracial) process. The specific factors that created and maintained the “ghetto”—such as southern farming industrialization that increased the pace of the black Great Migration to northern urban centers, banking-mortgage denials to blacks, sundown towns, restrictive covenants in white suburbs, and redlining—were all but ignored, or only cursorily mentioned.

With a logic dismissive of white overprivilege in housing segregation, members of all-white groups did acknowledge the maintenance of all-white neighborhoods, and cite white racist attitudes as causal. However, such

nods to attitudes were decoupled from actual discriminatory practices. For instance, while attending a DOP meeting, I raised the topic of white-only Federal Housing Act (FHA) loans, redlining, steering, and other housing discrimination mechanisms and was told the following:

BIANCA (landscape architect, age thirty-eight, ten years in DOP): “Okay, I mean, sure that happened, but, still, that was the past, and how much of a legacy, or an effect, I mean, that’s not making segregation today. That was then, this is now.”

WENDY (public relations manager, age forty-three, three years in DOP): “That’s right. That was back when Jim Crow was the law of the land. Housing discrimination doesn’t happen anymore. . . . the laws have changed, even if attitudes haven’t.”

CHARLOTTE (tax accountant, age forty-four, eight years in DOP): “Yeah, that’s sad but uh, that doesn’t happen anymore, and besides, I, I, well, it’s just, that you, you have to just work hard in the face of adversity, so, so, when people are committed enough, they can, can overcome. . . . I always remember this quotation from Frederick Douglass that uh, it goes something like, uh “The limits of tyrants are controlled by the endurance of the oppressed”⁶ which, uh, means, uh, to me it means that you can’t be oppressed any more than you let yourself. . . . if people want to really want to buy a house they can with a persistent attitude.”

For many members, white racial attitudes (as a causal factor in the creation of segregated neighborhoods) could only exist in their most overt form. For instance, Mark (corporate sales, age thirty-three, seven years in WRJ) told me, “Sure, there are some crazy Nazis out there that oppose integration.” Such logic was employed by Ian (firefighter, age thirty-nine, one year in LOBA): “If you’re a white supremacist Klan member who is using racial slurs every day, sure, that kind of racist attitude is surely going

6. The actual quotation is “The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress” (Douglass 1857).

to stop you from wanting a black person in your neighborhood . . . or would cause you to move if one moved in.”

Akin to the Kerner report, members of these six organizations also told me that housing segregation, and the creation of all-white and majority nonwhite enclaves, was the result not only of bad intentions, but also of either non-racial factors or ignorance. For example, Faith (counselor, age thirty-three, five years in MAYEP) said this:

I can admit that segregation occurs, but sometimes that's just normal. . . . Aren't there bound to be segregated neighborhoods from place to place, on average? . . . and just because some people are prejudiced, that doesn't mean that they going to act on it Let's be fair, segregation occurs because of a variety of nonracial factors . . . when there's what you call white flight then can't that happen out of ignorance rather than because of prejudice? . . . maybe whites leave neighborhoods that blacks are moving into because they don't know any better, rather than any kind of bad intention.

Police-Community Relations

Police, and their relationship with communities of color, are mentioned frequently in the Kerner report and among the white ethnographic settings. Various racial logics are used to rationalize and legitimate an ideal form of white identity and behavior.

Condemning Attitudes and Excusing Behavior

The report places great emphasis on the racist attitudes of white law enforcement. Toward the beginning, the report addresses a then commonly held assertion: the police were merely a spark that lit the already assembled kindling of riot-ready urban spaces:

The police are not merely a “spark” factor. To some Negroes police have come to symbolize white power, white racism, and white repression. And the fact is that many police do reflect and express these white attitudes. The atmosphere of hostility and cynicism is reinforced by a widespread belief among Negroes

in the existence of police brutality and in a “double standard” of justice and protection—one for Negroes and one for whites. (1968, 5)

Such police attitudes were on par with how the Kerner report views white attitudes generally: “the most fundamental [cause] is the racial attitude of white Americans toward black Americans. Race prejudice has shaped our history decisively in the past; it now threatens to do so again. White racism is essentially responsible for the explosive mixture which has been accumulating in our cities since the end of World War II” (1968, 203).

However, the report does not blame police-African American tension on white racist attitudes among the police, or white racist attitudes more generally, but instead all of society: “The abrasive relationship between the police and minority communities has been a major—and explosive—source of grievance, tension, and disorder. The blame must be shared by the total society” (1968, 8). The report suggests resolution to this tension not through legislation but rather by administrative policy changes within police departments. This is a curious solution, given that the report's prior evocation of racism among “the total society” is to be somehow remedied by additional administrative changes amid already white-dominated police leadership.

Furthermore, the report often explains away or excuses white racist behaviors on the part of the police. Although white racist attitudes are the cause of discrimination for whites in general, the report suddenly provides another explanation for police: discrimination by police becomes the result of limited knowledge or a lack of adequate personnel. First, the supposed limited knowledge of police officers:

In a number of cities, the Commission heard complaints of abuse from Negro adults of all social and economic classes. Particular resentment is aroused by harassing Negro men in the company of white women—often their light-skinned Negro wives. “Harassment” or discourtesy may not be the result of malicious or discriminatory intent of police offi-

cers. Many officers simply fail to understand the effects of their actions because of their limited knowledge of the Negro community. (1968, 159)

Here, “harassment” is destabilized with scare quotes and is assumed not “the result of malicious or discriminatory intent” but rather the “limited knowledge of the Negro community.” The report is vague on what knowledge is needed to avoid an intersecting patriarchal-colorism-racial harassment. Second, the report addresses the supposed inadequacies of personnel to respond to African American complaints in a timely way:

The strength of ghetto feelings about hostile police conduct may even be exceeded by the conviction that ghetto neighborhoods are not given adequate police protection. This belief is founded on two basic types of complaint. The first is that the police maintain a much less rigorous standard of law enforcement in the ghetto, tolerating there illegal activities like drug addiction, prostitution, and street violence that they would not tolerate elsewhere. The second is that police treat complaints and calls for help from Negro areas much less urgently than from white areas. . . . Recent studies have documented the inadequacies of police response in some ghetto areas. . . . In a United States Commission on Civil Rights study, a review of police communications records in Cleveland disclosed that police took almost four times as long to respond to calls concerning robbery from the Negro district as for the district where response was next slowest. The response time for some other crimes was at least twice as long. (1968, 161–62)

Even with this evidence that the Kerner report itself supplied, the report continues that

Because a basic problem in furnishing protection to the ghetto is the shortage of manpower, police departments should review existing deployment of field personnel to ensure the most efficient use of manpower.

The Police Task Force of the Crime Commission stressed the need “to distribute patrol officers in accordance with the actual need for their presence.” Communities may have to pay for more and better policing for the entire community as well as for the ghetto. (1968, 162)

This response lays bare the logic of excusing the police from racism, and is clear that no shortage of manpower exists for districts that are not “Negro.” Rather, the key is not whether police manpower is adequate, but how that manpower is unequally distributed across racialized communities. Once equally distributed, one could then accurately ascertain whether a manpower problem exists.

Across these six all-white organizations, members regularly asserted that the police hold attitudes that are unhelpful in their interactions with the public, and most expressed the belief that the attitudes of law enforcement toward people of color are worse than those toward whites. As Lisa (secretary, age thirty-six, two years in NEA) told me,

Sure, the police are racist. I think they attract all kind of prejudiced people within their ranks. It’s like saying, “Hey, want a badge, stick, and a gun with a license to go bully people without consequence? Here’s your chance!” . . . only psychos are attracted to that offer. . . . but that’s what the police do, I mean, I guess every cop is a little bit prejudiced, some more or less, but all together more than you’d find on average.

Akin to the Kerner report, along with the admission of the prejudicial attitudes of the police, many simultaneously remarked that racially biased law enforcement behavior toward people of color—particularly African Americans—is the product of underfunded precincts, inadequate numbers of officers employed in nonwhite areas, and low or inadequate standards for police training, rather than a systematic program predicated on racialized surveillance. For instance, in addressing the New York Police Department (NYPD) stop-and-frisk program (most active between 2003 and 2013),

most members of these organizations were of one accord. Kam (waitress, age twenty-five, two years in BSA) stated, “Black people commit more crime than whites, that’s just a fact. . . . some might think profiling isn’t nice, but it works.” Even the white antiracist member Duncan (corporate sales, age thirty, 2.5 years in WRJ) said,

Yes, yes, yes, the police are racist. We know this. . . . at the same time, I think that it’s fair to say that while there are racist cops, there are also criminals. . . . I think it’s true that black people consume more drugs and commit more violent crimes than whites, so it’s not a zero-sum game. . . . lots of police are racist and lots of black people engage in crime.

In the midst of the NYPD stop-and-frisk program, most research concluded that “Whites were stopped on suspicion of possessing a weapon at a rate lower than their weapon-possession arrest rate [while] Blacks were stopped on suspicion of possessing a weapon at a rate greater than their weapon-possession arrest rate” (Ridgeway 2007). Stop-and-frisk “generated a high volume of unproductive police stops that had little crime reduction benefit” (MacDonald, Fagan, and Geller 2016). The logic of white innocence and black guilt appeared to consistently trump facts about racism and policing.

This framing was rationalized via the logic that if people of color acted in more calm, disciplined, and obedient manner, then such prejudiced officers would not act on those prejudices. Joseph (lawyer, age fifty-two, twenty-eight years in BSA) explained it this way: “underneath those statistics are a lot of variables that are not measured, like one’s attitude and disposition, you know? . . . if black people didn’t walk and talk like they do, I think there would be less of a problem.” This stance was often bookended by a converse logic. In this second rationale, the racially prejudiced attitudes and behaviors of the police should be excused because they are simply ignorant of the norms, customs, and culture of communities of color. Hailley (lawyer, age sixty-one, thirty-one years in DOP) was adamant that

African Americans should be more patient with the police. . . . they need to work harder to educate them as to the differences in their culture. . . . maybe what a white cop thinks is threatening is to them [African Americans] a kind of posture or stance that means something else completely. . . . I don’t see why they don’t just sit down and talk about how their culture is with the police. . . . the police are so unfairly demonized and not appreciated for what they do. . . . I’m sure they would want to do some kind of training where they learn the different black norms so that they can better avoid the constant claims that they have done something “racist.”

Similarly, Martin (grant writer, age forty-four, one year in LOBA) matter-of-factly remarked

the police have different customs and so do black people. . . . if black people want to stop being harassed, and, I know, I agree it’s not all fair or deserved, then, why don’t their leaders tell the police about their different cultural differences.” [Author: “How do you think this works with police of color? With black police officers?"]. I guess that [long pause], I think the cops just have a different culture, and most cops are white and so, you probably wouldn’t have to teach black cops about the things they already know.

In both cases, the prejudicial attitudes and behaviors of the police are excused because of the implicit whiteness of the law. In the former, whiteness is not shown deference. People of color’s actions are interpreted as strangely foreign and threatening; they must alter their behavior to bring them into a different focus under white eyes. In the latter, whiteness should be shown patience to learn how to clearly view racial Others through the opaque filter of non-white culture.

Deracializing Internal Police White Supremacy

The Kerner report finds disproportionate white administrative control within the police precincts where rioting had occurred. After identifying a systemic racial bias within policing, the report then reads, “In a number of cities,

particularly larger ones, police officials are not only willing but anxious to appoint Negro officers. There are obstacles other than discrimination. While these obstacles cannot readily be measured, they can be identified" (1968, 166). Here is an instance in which the report a priori assumes phenomena to be obstacles, but without evidence. That is, it is untenable to assume a phenomenon an obstacle to a goal without, first, measuring the concept and, second, gauging if the phenomenon functions as an obstacle. The report did neither. Nevertheless, the report continued to identify several nonracial "obstacles" to hiring black police officers:

One is the relatively high standards for police employment. Another is pay; better qualified Negroes are often more attracted by other, better paying positions. Another obstacle is the bad image of police in the Negro community. There also are obstacles to promotion apart from discrimination, such as the more limited educational background of some Negro officers. (1968, 166)

Even if we assume the report's criteria (1 = high standards in policing; 2 = low pay in policing; 3 = bad images of the police, and 4 = limited educational backgrounds of African Americans) are in fact real obstacles to hiring black police officers, never does the Kerner report explain first, how or why the high standards function in a racialized pattern to exclude blacks but include whites. This first point is even more puzzling when considering the report's own discovery of particularly low standards of performance and behavior among white police officers. Second, the report is silent on how or why low pay attracts whites rather than blacks to policing. Third, the report does not address how or why the bad images function as an exclusionary mechanism. Fourth, the report fails to examine why or whether limited educational backgrounds limit black police participation, especially in lieu of low educational levels among already employed white police officers. Moreover, even if these supposed obstacles were overcome, the report never addresses how the hiring of black officers would result in their promotion and rise in the ranks to become leaders and administrators

within policing. Overall, the double standards identified by "the Negro community" find reproduction in the Kerner report's discussion of those same double standards. In the end, systemic white supremacy in police hierarchies is left both unexamined and unchallenged.

Rarely was the internal racial dynamics of police mentioned across the six all-white groups. However, four police officers were members in three of the organizations. Paige (age thirty-four, five years in MAYEP), Micah (age twenty-five, four years in BSA), Robert (age thirty-four, five years in NEA) and Paul (age forty-nine, five years in NEA). They spoke bluntly when I interviewed them. Paige informed me, "I've never had a supervisor who wasn't white." When I asked her why, she responded, "I think because law enforcement gets such a bad rap, that a black or Latino captain would be biased toward other white officers . . . they would try to overcorrect." Micah, who majored in criminology and dreamed of being a police officer, remarked,

We have a hard time recruiting people of color to be police . . . and it's not for everyone. . . . there's a lot of racist jokes in policing culture. . . . I don't think black or Latino supervisors happen often for that reason [Author: "What reason?"] Comfort. Fit. I guess there's some bias, but, I mean, [laughing] where isn't there?

The two white nationalist police officers (Robert and Paul) were the most adamant. After multiple conversations about confidentiality and a couple no-so-veiled threats that they, as police officers, could "make my life difficult," they told me the following as we sat in the corner of a bar in a Washington, D.C., suburb:

PAUL: "There are plenty of us [white nationalists] in law enforcement . . . local, state, federal. We've always been there. I'm not going to let some Afro American into my department if I can do anything about it . . . sure as hell are not going to get promoted."

ROBERT: "I feel the same. Look, we're being honest and you want to know so, . . . white people are genetically, the most civilized and intelligent. . . . white civilization has to

be defended and so many white people, like you, sorry, but you asked, are diluting and selling out our people. . . . other races need to be kept in check and stopped from corrupting white culture. . . . we invented a culture of law and order.”

PAUL: “Well put.”

For these police officers, the law defends civilization and civilization is white. Although Paige and Micah would have shunned the white nationalist label, they evoked a similar logic.

DISCUSSION: HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?

In addition to the Kerner report discourse and ethnographic case studies, the online appendix to this article⁷ outlines the larger trends of racial logics related to employment, education, and housing.⁸ Drawn from the General Social Survey, such generalizable data—held in companion with the explanatory data from the content and ethnographic analyses—indicates the resiliency of white comfort with both the racial logics we might deem racist or white supremacist as well as deeply unequal and segregated conditions (Smith et al. 2017; compare Homans 1974). For example, although housing segregation across all racial groups in major U.S. metropolises has declined over the past century, levels of black-white housing segregation remain significantly high (on the overall decline, Massey and Tannen 2015; on high black-white rates, Lichter, Parisi, and Taquino 2015). Recent white retreats into ever more racially homogeneous suburbs exacerbates such segregation (Logan and Zhang 2011). Answering the question of “How far have we come?” requires that

we both temper optimism and abandon untenable teleological assumptions about the supposed decline of racial consequence and instead engage with the “homeostatic principle of the entire system of racial domination” (Patterson 1989, 480).

What Worked and What Did Not Work?

Since 1968, rollback and attack on the most progressive policies, laws, and practices the Kerner report suggests have been considerable. For instance, the report proposed six million new and existing housing units between 1968 and 1973 for low- and moderate-income families (targeting African American families). These were never realized. The report also suggested a “comprehensive and enforceable federal open housing law to cover the sale or rental of all housing” (1968, 13), partially realized two months later in the FHA (part of Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968). However, even with the 1989 amendments to the act,⁹ the FHA provides few tools to compel compliance and relies on aggrieved home-seekers to file complaints with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and then sue if HUD fails to obtain “voluntary compliance.”¹⁰ The orientation of such laws, like the FHA, places the recognition of discrimination, burden of evidence, and related costs on the racial underclass.

Among the dominant racial class, such laws assume an increasing desire for, and willingness to pursue, integration and equality. The white worldviews culled from the ethnographic data (and in the online appendix) indicate such assumptions are unfounded. Since 1990, an average of 25 percent of white U.S. residents op-

7. Available at: <https://www.rsfjournal.org/doi/suppl/10.7758/RSF.2018.4.6.04>.

8. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva writes, “Traditional survey research is rooted in methodological individualism and assumes that racial beliefs are pathological (that is, that ‘racists’ are ignorant or crazy people). . . . In contrast, the racial ideology paradigm is rooted in the notion that the races constitute different social groups with distinct interests, and interprets the ideas, views, and affects of actors on racial matters as their social representations of how the world is and how it ought to be” (2003, 78). I see the General Social Survey research as representative of white groupness and white racial interests rather than an aggregate of individual attitudes.

9. Amendments extended the time to file housing discrimination complaints, covered attorney’s fees and court costs for prevailing plaintiffs, and empowered judges to award greater compensation.

10. The Fair Housing Act mirrored the language of the Kerner report’s suggestions that parties engage in desegregation via “voluntary community action” (1968, 263).

pose living in a neighborhood where half of the neighbors are black (see table 3B in the online appendix). Additionally, in 1968, the homeownership rate for African Americans was approximately 42 percent. Fifty years later, in January 2018, it remains at 42 percent, thirty points behind the white homeownership rate of 73 percent (which saw modest gains over the same period).¹¹ Here we see a reproductive feedback loop; white worldviews are both product and producer of hypersegregated white spaces. Many of the Kerner report's proposals were doomed because they relied on white efforts to voluntarily desegregate but took few actions to break apart the segregated white spaces that incubate white worldviews.¹²

What Are the Implications for the Twenty-First Century?

The Kerner report's discussion of whiteness and the ethnographic case studies together reveal how racialized logics supportive of inequality and segregation in employment, education, housing, and policing continue to resonate with whites over the past half-century. What might first appear as arbitrary lines in a government report or atomistic attitudes from various actors are, when aggregated and analyzed, illustrative of deep-seated and "common-sensed" white racial logics. The preceding analysis gestures toward a sobering conclusion: we will not have effective policies or practices to address racial inequality and segregation in so long as these logics remain dominant. Together, these nine themes reveal several core presuppositions that must be dislodged to address racial inequality and segregation in the twenty-first century.

First, the two themes of "the blackness of the culture of poverty" and "deracializing internal police white supremacy" reveal the inference of antiblackness via beliefs in dysfunction,

abnormal, and criminal values and behavior. Consider the Kerner report's descriptive section titled "The Jungle" or the preceding passage that reads "many ghetto children spend the bulk of their time on the streets. . . . The image of success in this world is not that of the 'solid citizen,' . . . but rather that of the 'hustler' who promotes his own interests by exploiting others" (1968, 129).¹³ Such condescending language, coupled with the strategic omission of white behaviors that pursue "interests by exploiting others," is also witnessed in contemporary white worldviews. Judgmental condescension and paternalism—what the sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois aptly described as being measured "by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (1903, 7)—leaves public policy and legal recommendations to address racial inequality and segregation bereft: as long the state treats people of color as less than solid citizens, good faith policies, laws, and practices are not possible.

The themes of "white normativity in education," "the innocence of everyday white people," "causality of white racist attitudes," and "condemning attitudes and excusing behavior" together indicate the second presupposition of white normativity—the taken-for-granted ideas and practices that make whiteness appear natural, logical, and moral. If the "primary goal must be a single society, in which every citizen will be free to live and work according to his capabilities and desires, not his color," then assimilation is the report's recommended method to achieve that goal (1968, 11). As long as policies and laws rely on black engagement with assimilation to prove their worth via the acquisition of the prerequisite skills, education, and cultural mores somehow deemed appropriate, the United States moves not toward equality, but masks an iron fist of domination within a velvet glove of paternalism.

11. In March 2018, HUD Secretary Ben Carson moved to strike the word *inclusive* and the phrase *free from discrimination* from HUD's mission statement, indicating further rollbacks of HUD Fair Housing Act enforcement.

12. Recall Senator Walter Mondale's 1967 comments, a month after the Kerner Commission was established, that exhibited faith in white people to engage in fair housing: "I think that there is a crucial debate under way in American ghettos, and that debate involves a dispute about the basic decency of white America" (U.S. Congress 1967, 2).

13. The sociologist Steven Steinberg contends that the Kerner report is "a white document, written by white writers, and aimed at a white audience—*about* [emphasis in original] black people" (2007, 93).

In this vein, the Kerner report presents “three choices open to the Nation” (1968, 10). The first is the “present policies choice” in which the United States would stay the course and endure a continuation of riots and inequality. Second, the “enrichment choice” (or the “gilding the ghetto” option) calls for federally backed manpower training and expanded War on Poverty programs to develop black capitalism and abandon racial integration. Third is the “integration choice” in which residential and educational segregation were identified as key limitations toward black employment opportunities and central variables increasing the likelihood of rioting. Favoring the third option, the report dismisses the second option: “This premise has been vigorously advocated by Black Power proponents. . . . This argument is understandable, but there is a great deal of evidence that it is unrealistic” (1968, 223). Hence, the report calls for “policies which will encourage Negro movement out of central city areas” (1968, 10), ostensibly to assist in black integration into white-dominated neighborhoods, schools, jobs, and police forces. However, in 2018, just as in 1968, such assimilation is resisted, implemented half-heartedly or not at all, and ill equipped to offer equal access to resources.

The third presupposition is white entitlement. Revealed in both the content analysis and ethnographic data, whites are rarely expected to change their behaviors. The themes of “white ignorance and messianic import,” “white control of resources,” and “black underprivilege without white overprivilege” show a concerted effort to label some whites as racist bad apples or alternatively to issue a vague condemnation of white society. Rarely are white practices, or institutions (that benefit whites to the exclusion of people of color), specifically identified for either divestment or demolition. Refusal to both name and remove white domination in corporations, universities, courts, political bodies, cultural life, and other social collectives warrants their continuation. Neither equality nor integration are possible so long as policy and law refrains from asking “whither whiteness?”

What could be done differently? The United States cannot effectively redress discrimina-

tion, segregation, and inequality until recognition of the interrelated impact of antiblackness, white normativity, and white entitlement. Without confronting these central presuppositions, discrimination appears irrational and atypical rather than systematically methodical and banal. To confront these primary traditions systematically, antidiscrimination laws would be proactive rather than remedial, attuned to conditions rather than individually focused, and counterhegemonic. That is, rather than waiting for individuals to recognize and report overt discrimination, laws would actively search for violations, immediately dismantle the hypersegregated white spaces that rationalize and legitimate discrimination, and have broader reach in combating hate-speech and antiblack propaganda. I am skeptical of such an orientation without a new constitutional convention; the United States will fail to either systematically sanction or change discrimination and segregation because such proposals may run afoul of the First Amendment. Without such a radical departure, the United States will have more riots, more reports, and fewer results.

CONCLUSION

The article has addressed, first, how the Kerner report described the intersection of whites with education, employment, housing, and police-community relations, and, second, how whites today across geographic areas, political persuasions, and socioeconomic divides make meaning of their intersection with these four areas. It has demonstrated the existence of specific racial logics in both the Kerner report and the ethnographic data. Such racialized reasoning legitimates white advantage and appears stable and robust over both space (varied all-white locales) and time (between 1968 and 2018).

In light of this analysis, future research on both state reports and modern white-dominated organizations would be well served to focus on variations in racialized logics, their common denominators, and the contexts of racial homogeneity and homophily that may constrain or enable the rationalization and legitimation of those logics. We know little about the precise reproductive mechanisms within the feedback loop between logics and condi-

tions. Without more attention to how intersubjectively shared racial logics create path dependencies of action and order (particularly toward the promotion of specific white racial interests), and how unequal and segregated white spaces promote the creation, maintenance, and defense of racial logics, social science runs the risk of missing the key apparatus and social processes by which larger inequities reproduce. With more knowledge of social reproduction in the commonplace ways of speaking and interacting, we can better understand (and possibly dismantle) the logics and spaces that function as co-constitutive barriers to practices, policies, and laws to address inequality and segregation.

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