The Evolution of Political Knowledge
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That race commands a place among the essays in this volume attests to its continuing influence and significance in American politics and society. Even more, it signals an obvious recognition of the continuing importance of these matters to the future of democracy both at home and abroad. These matters focus attention directly on both the theory and practice of democratic government and politics, posing problems that are clearly ripe and challenging for study by political scientists. We suggest that these are problems that remain in search of theory, extraordinary leadership, and principled resolution.

The central question we pose in this essay is how race and race relations have structured and in turn have been structured by American democracy or, better still, by our governance system. Posing this question allows us to consider the extent to which the general embrace of basic pluralist theory by mainstream political science advances, limits, or otherwise influences our understanding of the role of race in the nature and functioning of the American political system. Our review indicates that there are serious deficiencies within basic pluralist theory that limit its ability to accurately predict and explain the nature and functioning of American politics.

Severe socioeconomic divides persist, most of which can be drawn along the lines of race and ethnicity. Nonetheless, the current debate and research in the social sciences remains focused on whether these divides are in fact due to problems of race and racism or to other factors. While this debate has certainly spurred theory development, it seems clear that the empirical evidence accumulated over the years convincingly shows that the socioeconomic divide is due in large measure to sheer racism and current vestiges of slavery. It is not that such
research should continue, for it should. Yet, we believe that focused research and debate on these matters stand to expand the knowledge base that could both increase public understanding of the problems of race and racism as well as point the way to how to resolve them. Thus, to us the most challenging questions that now face political scientists, public and private leadership, and Americans generally, is not whether problems of racism exist—they do—but what, instead, to do about them. The stakes are too high to do otherwise. As Jennifer Hochschild so aptly put it, we as scholars should feel “embarrassed at how little [we] have to offer” toward resolving problems of racism (1995, 3).

At the outset, however, the broad sweep of the problem, plus the necessary limits of space, preclude an exhaustive review of relevant literature. We trust, however, that our analysis and arguments will in some small way serve as a predicate to such research and action. Rather, we attempt to cite examples of selective research that in our view seems likely to first, stimulate additional research; secondly, increase our understanding of the continuing persistence and significance of race; and thirdly, spur the kind of extraordinary leadership and actions needed to overcome these problems. Information and knowledge from extant scholarly research, if communicated clearly, stand to increase public awareness and guide policy leaders of the necessity and benefits of resolving these problems.

In Part I we present the argument and scope of the paper. Part II focuses on the nature and context of the problem of race and racism in America. Governance, as defined by March and Olsen (1995) represents both politics and government, and how together they set the framework within which citizens and government officials act as well as shape the identities and institutions of a civil society. Specifically, we consider how race and racial inequality have influenced and impacted our governance with respect to (1) the nature of the system and institutional structures, (2) electoral behavior and representation, (3) public opinion, and (4) the formation and implementation of public policy. In Part III we offer a broad overview of American governance in systemic and institutional perspective. Part IV considers the major thrust of the current debate in political science research involving public opinion, voting behavior and elections, and representation, and public policy.

We conclude in Part V with proposals for how political scientists might forge a new civil rights agenda geared toward resolving the problem. One of the most effective ways to increase public understanding and policy guidance is to focus dialogue and debate on concrete proposals designed to deal with these important matters. In this regard, we offer several proposals that we believe will stimulate such discussion and hopefully lead to the kind of resolution consistent with the basic principles and values of democracy and constitutional democratic government. Accordingly, as we discuss later, related to the matters under discussion,
we argue that we need to amend the Constitution in certain particulars to guarantee the right to adequate levels of health care and delivery and the right to a public education. We need to develop and offer concrete proposals to overcome persistent and gross inequities evident in the criminal justice system. Additionally, we need to work out a process of reparations that tangibly acknowledge grievous wrongs perpetuated against humankind, in this instance against Black Americans.

The Argument

It’s time to get back to basics. To some, passage of major civil rights legislation of the 1960s effectively moved race off the nation’s agenda. Thus, with clear evidence of notable progress, for a number of reasons, race and civil rights receded from the nation’s attention and headlines. To be sure intervening events and developments from time to time continue to thrust the matter of race back into the public debate, only to recede again under a claim of “racial victory” in achieving America’s new colorblindness. Trumped-up claims of colorblindness have taken the moral high ground from the pro–civil rights community. Such talk about America’s new colorblindness has also impeded efforts to overcome the continuing problems of race and racism, for as Claire J. Kim points out, such talk conflates prescription with description, i.e., “we should be colorblind . . . we are steadily moving toward colorblindness . . . we are very nearly colorblind!” (2000, 18).

We believe that the debate over the extent of racism and the legitimacy of affirmative action have served to divert attention from those causes that perpetuate the continuous cancerous effects of racism. It’s time to get back to basics. We suggest that getting back to basics will illuminate once again—for those who care to see—the continuous deleterious effects of race and racism that threaten the basic fabric of American democracy. Getting back to basics means that we must begin with a thorough airing of the nature and definition of the problem. It means that we must take a hard look at the functioning of that system in terms of both theory and practice. The “rules of the game” (constitution, laws, institutional structures and arrangements), after all, are not neutral. Rules advance certain interests and retard or inhibit others. We believe that by returning to the basics we can provide a more thorough understanding of the intricate and interactive nature of both the public and private sectors in our governing system. Such an approach will permit a deeper assessment of the capacity and limits of mediating structures (groups, parties, public opinion, elections) that fashion and organize the relative role, participation, and interaction of the people, and their elected and appointed representatives in the practical operation of democratic governance.
Getting back to the basics must necessarily entail a thorough airing of the tortuous road of black-white relations from slavery to the present. Such an approach requires that we take a look at how the black experience compares in various contexts with the experiences of other oppressed groups such as women, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Such an approach requires a careful description of changing demographics, as indicated by the latest census, and an exploration of what the new demographics suggest for our politics, governance, and overall socioeconomic order.

We contend that the effective implementation and realization of democratic government at home and abroad depends in large measure on our knowledge and understanding of these basics and the issues that flow from them. Clearly, of course, it depends on whether and to what extent we are able to deal with these issues peacefully and in a resolute and definitive manner. And based on our professional training and life-background experiences, we suggest that in the end these are matters and issues whose solutions in the final analysis depend upon extraordinary leadership that is fully and unconditionally committed to basic democratic principles.

Whether we are ready to admit it or not, we strongly believe that the resolution of these matters are of utmost importance, and could prove determinative to the future course of democratic government at home and abroad. We believe that openly discussing and debating, and attempting to solve issues that hold direct importance to large numbers of Americans (i.e., health care, education, criminal justice—all of which clearly effect the quality and vitality of our overall politics, governance, and society are efforts are clearly in the public interest. Similarly while reparations focus on a discrete group, the cancerous effects of America’s sordid history in the treatment of African Americans has continuously, repeatedly, and at times explosively illuminated the dire need to take concrete remedial action to overcome this situation. Taking such action will visibly and tangibly demonstrate, both to ourselves and to the entire world, a new and expansive commitment of the American people to the principles and practice of democracy and democratic governance.

The Problem, Its Nature, Context, and Importance

Problems of race and ethnicity have been endemic in our politics and society from the very founding of this nation. In fact, the disparate treatment of African Americans preceded the founding of the nation. Today most Americans, including scholars, agree that much progress has been made with respect to such matters. Even so, however, much other empirical evidence also reveals that many of the effects and vestiges of racial discrimination remain. This is put sharply yet simply by one commentator who said:
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In sum, racial discrimination continues to influence where blacks live, where they work (and indeed whether they work at all), and innumerable day-to-day encounters as they move through the routines of social living. That this discrimination no longer assumes the blanket form of complete exclusion, coarse insults, and uniform expectations of deferential and subordinate behavior does indeed indicate change, and positive change at that. But in the light of accumulating social science research, it simply is not tenable to assert that racial discrimination is a small or a nuisance issue in modern America. Antiblack racial discrimination is pervasive. It shapes the quality of life experiences and outlooks of African Americans quite profoundly. (Bobo 1997, 49)

The problem may be defined in two broad terms: individual and institutional racism. And perhaps nowhere has the distinction between the two been put more sharply than by Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) and Charles Hamilton in their 1967 classic treatise, *Black Power*:

Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two, closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual blacks, and acts by the total white community against the black community. We call these individual racism and institutional racism. The first consists of overt acts by individuals, which cause death, injury or the violent destruction of property. This type can be reached by television cameras; it can frequently be observed in the process of commission. The second type [institutional racism] is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life. The second type originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation than the first type. (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967, 4)

Knowles and Prewitt (1969) show the overarching reach of institutional racism, stating that:

[I]nstitutions have great power to reward and penalize. They reward by providing career opportunities for some people and foreclosing them for others. They reward as well by the way social goods and services are distributed—by deciding who receives training and skills, medical care, formal education, political influence, moral support and self-respect, productive employment, fair treatment by the law, decent housing, self-confidence, and the promise of a secure future for self and children. No society will distribute social benefits in a perfectly equitable way. But no society need use race as a criterion to determine who will be rewarded and who is punished. Any nation that permits race to affect the distribution of benefits from social policies is racist. (Knowles and Prewitt 1969, 6)
Individual racism may be reflected through both overt acts and through opinion reflected in attitudinal surveys. That the former is less prominent today does not lessen the random publicity and obvious sting that continues to accompany such behavior. Much greater attention and study, especially by scholars, have been given to survey opinion data that attempt to capture the attitudes and opinion of individuals toward racism and racial discrimination. We are not unmindful of the possible interrelation between individual racism and institutional racism. What individuals perceive or actually experience in their institutional settings might well reinforce or otherwise influence their individual attitudes and vice versa.

That institutional and individual racism remain widespread and go to the heart of theory and practice of democratic government is exemplified in the recent 1998 Report of President Clinton’s Initiative on Race. It is further exemplified more recently and rather dramatically in a Report of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2001) with respect to voting and election irregularities involving the 2000 Florida presidential election. This report sharply criticizes Florida officials, specifically Gov. Jeb Bush and Secretary of State Katherine Harris, as being “grossly derelict” and lacking “leadership” by choosing to “simply ignore the mounting evidence” that perpetuated “a pattern and practice of injustice, ineptitude, and inefficiency” that led to the disenfranchisement in the 2000 presidential election of many Florida voters, the brunt of which “fell most harshly on the shoulders of African Americans” (Seelye 2001, A12).

And though blacks continue to bear the brunt of such effects, these are matters that go beyond the traditional black-white context, and effect long aggrieved minorities including American Indians, Latinos, Asian Americans, and women.

**American Governance, Systemic and Institutional Perspectives**

Political scientists through their teaching and research are in an especially unique, perhaps enviable, position to more fully come to grips with this situation. That mainline political science only began to focus on race in more recent times is regrettable in terms of neglect of an important continuing characteristic of American politics and governance. On the other hand, however, the increasing efforts now being given to these questions by political scientists are indeed commendable and certainly appropriate. Indeed, failing to bring these matters into sharper focus in their teaching and research would be both irresponsible and unforgivable. Political science and the academy generally could unearth knowledge that could do much to promote the kind of understanding and stimulus needed to more effectively deal with the problems of race and racism. These,
after all, are problems that continue to seriously inhibit attempts to achieve and promote democracy and democratic government at home and abroad.

It's time to get back to basics. Specifically, the introduction and practice of slavery in North America and into American socioeconomic order, though well chronicled, is a story that must be told if we as political scientists who study race are to understand the total penetration of race and racism into our politics and society (e.g., Franklin 1947). It is not a pleasant story but one that is a part of America's past whose vestiges continue to influence the present. This is clearly reflected and encompassed in the very beginning by the nature and structure of our governing system, one that continues to militate against resolving and overcoming America's problem of race and racism. Debates and records from the Constitutional Convention indicate that the founding fathers knew exactly what they were doing when they enshrined the institution of slavery as they formed the Constitution. “Slavery intruded everywhere into the work of the American founding,” as Robinson (1994), in his penetrating article on “The Constitutional Legacy of Slavery,” states. As Judith Shklar (1991) put it in her presidential address to the American Political Science Association in 1990, “it is not too much to say that the United States embarked on two experiments simultaneously: democracy and tyranny.” She noted “that there were four political phenomena that distinguished American politics from its cultural neighbors: white adult male suffrage, federalism, judicial review, and chattel slavery.”

Indeed, such structures as separation of powers and federalism, although ostensibly devices to check governmental power, nonetheless hindered the kind of political change needed to overcome problems such as those involved with race and racism in this country (Barker 1994). Serving as safeguards against rapid fundamental change, these structures are protective of the status quo. Certainly, history suggests that we must consider the deleterious impact that states under the banner of federalism have had in dealing with the matter of race. It is this history which reveals the need for watchful scrutiny in the wake of recent trends toward devolution that have enlarged the role and scope of influence of states in areas that affect especially blacks and other minorities.

Moreover, in addition to states’ rights, the nature and structure of the Constitution enshrined property rights as a key feature, including the ownership of slaves. Although the word “slavery” does not appear per se in the original Constitution, the “bundle of compromises” which allowed for the development of the Constitution (“The Connecticut or Great Compromise,” “Three-Fifths,” “Commerce and Slave Trade”) insured that slaves and their descendants would be disadvantaged in our politics and society (Robinson 1994). Since the abolition of slavery, tremendous changes and progress have been made, and the nature and form of the battle against racism has changed over time. And yet, empirical evidence and common everyday observation clearly indicate that
while disadvantaged status of blacks has been ameliorated, it has not been effectively overcome.

There is an intimate and inextricable relationship between the public and private sectors influencing the nature and course of public policy, and indeed, the overall nature and functioning of our politics and society as identified by Charles E. Lindblom (1968) that critically shapes race relations as well. For example, the trends toward privatization that now, include major components of public education and the criminal justice system through which blacks and minorities are disproportionally processed and housed, require systematic research.

We must consider even further how this lack of representation relates to changing demographics, where, in fact, these groups in the future will constitute much of workforce in our society as well as much of the student population throughout our educational system. It must not be overlooked that blacks and minorities bear the brunt and are disproportionately hurt by the pains of poverty, and inadequate health, housing, and educational systems. And these are areas where major public policies have and can help even further to alleviate. One must remember, however, that the American political system—including its areas of administration and implementation—promotes incremental change and works against the kind of fundamental change needed to deal with these major problems. In short, our politics and society are so structured as to protect established entrenched interests—the “haves,” and militate against aspiring emerging interests—the “have-nots.” At bottom, the “haves” as opposed to the “have-nots” have advantages in access to every aspect of our governing system that enables them to promote and protect their interests and status.

We must consider even more basically the gross lack of representation of blacks and minorities in key positions throughout our entire socioeconomic order, including law, politics and government, the communications and information industry, business and the professions, and our own venue of higher education. By now there is clear evidence that those who occupy these key positions largely determine what policies and decisions come out of these institutions and groups, and this includes the courts, as well (Fried 1991; Lyles 1997). Marc Galanter’s (1972) classic article on the courts, “Why the ‘Haves’ Come Out Ahead,” as well as writings by others (e.g., Rosenberg 1991), clearly do much to debunk, or at least temper, the notion that the law and reasoned arguments rather than wealth and access are the key determinants of decisional outcomes.

Exposing the institutional shortcomings of the judicial system is not to suggest, however, that courts cannot prove instrumental and provide leadership on issues such as race, because they have. Their differential role, nature of selection, and life tenure allow them a relative measure of independence and insulation not enjoyed by elective-political institutions. Courts can at times go against prevail-
ing public opinion at the time and dominant governing coalitions. Hence, the Supreme Court for example has attempted to steer the country in certain directions on race ranging from the infamous 1857 *Dred Scott* decision which said that “blacks have no rights which the white man is bound to respect,” all the way to 1954 *Brown* decision which in effect suggested that racial segregation and discrimination is constitutionally invalid. But sooner or later our system provides ways in which dominant governing coalitions can bring courts back into line.

To counter this tendency, Fraga and de Valasco (2000) argue that a “rights-based” strategy, as exemplified by Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP through the courts, must be complemented by a “policy-based” strategy, as exemplified by Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement through the legislature—the Congress. A “policy-based” strategy, as opposed to a “rights-based” strategy, represents a “broader [based] public interest by building coalitions and consensus across diverse groups.” A policy-based strategy, write Fraga and de Velasco, “respects majoritarian legitimacy, a fundamental principle of the American political process.” A policy-based strategy, they contend, when successful, is more enduring as it is achieved through consensus rather than by judicial force.

Nevertheless, as much as a body of literature attests to the limits of the judiciary in American politics, its power cannot be overlooked. The Court’s 2000 ruling in *Bush v. Gore* seems to have gone considerably beyond the kind of judicial force mentioned above, and was indeed somewhat unique in American history. That decision, in context of the particular situation, served to determine the very outcome of an election, and hence determined the very nature and composition of the presidency and executive branch at least for the presidential term commencing in 2001. In addition to this historically unique act of in effect deciding a presidential election, *Bush v. Gore* broke the Court’s own line of precedents in taking on the responsibility of interpreting state law, a task it long reasoned State Supreme Court jurists could well and reasonably undertake under its concept of judicial federalism. Though it has received some support, in general the decision has been brutally criticized inside and outside the Court. In a bitter dissent, for example, Justice John Paul Stevens said: “Although we may never know with complete certainty the identity of the winner of this year’s Presidential election, the identity of the loser is perfectly clear. It is the Nation’s confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law.” For us, we find the decision particularly disturbing in view of the crucial functions the judiciary can serve in constitutional democratic government. Yet because of the court’s institutional legitimacy, its ruling was peacefully accepted. Thus, given the strong attachment of Americans to the rule of law, in fact, we believe that courts could prove a positive and instrumental force in resolving America’s racial problem.

Leadership in democratic governance, as E. E. Schattschneider (1960) and others have long pointed out, is critically important. Indeed, given the nature
and structure of our constitution and governing system, it is clear that outstanding extraordinary leadership is needed to forge the kind of fundamental change required to effectively overcome the continuing cancerous problems of racism in this country. And in this regard we are not without examples of leadership from the courts and from the executive branch. Witness, for instance, President Truman’s civil rights posture reflected by his 1947 Civil Rights Commission Report and by his stance in the 1948 presidential election. Witness, moreover, Chief Justice Warren’s leadership in the Brown decision, and President Kennedy’s and more clearly President Johnson’s leadership in securing passage of major civil rights legislation (Graham 1990). Witness even more importantly, the initial stimulus for such developments by the outstanding leadership of minority leaders as exemplified by Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP litigation campaign, Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, and countless others in Baton Rouge, Nashville, and Montgomery (Morris 1984; McAdam 1982). It might well be reasoned, however, there were unique situations or crises that gave rise to such leadership. This certainly is suggested by two political scientists who concluded that meaningful actions in civil rights came about “only in response to serious pressure or outright crisis, for only crisis can normally greatly speed the incremental process” of major policy change (Rogers and Bullock 1972, 211–13; Klinkner and Smith 1999).

We suggest that this type of crisis-generated change poses unpredictable threats to the fragile nature of democracy and democratic government. Notably for President Clinton to launch his “Initiative on Race” during a relative period of peace and prosperity was an admirable exercise of presidential leadership with respect to the one problem that could explode at any time and could really deepen racial and ethnic divisions in this country. It had the potential to set the framework for the exercise of extraordinary leadership at a time when nations around the world are searching for ways to deal with such racial and ethnic conflict that threaten the stability and development of democratic government. Unfortunately, though conceptually well based, for various reasons Clinton’s race initiative did not live up to its transforming promise and potential.

Determining the factors giving rise to innovative, imaginative, and determined leadership with respect to these matters remains a critical enterprise. In fact to say that there is a dearth of such leadership in this area might really overstate the case, and this applies to black and minority groups as well. While certain traditional civil rights groups such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, are clearly on the decline, others such as the NAACP and National Urban League seem on the ascent, though not as visibly aggressive relative to the problems involved. Especially given the pluralistic nature of our politics, leadership and activity from such groups are clearly needed.
Overall, and given the nature and dynamics of our politics and governing system, we suggest that such leadership must come from both the public and private sectors. Indeed, we are encouraged to find that a number of scholars and commentators, even of diverse points of view, likewise cite the need for leadership. Among other things, this is because leadership frames political debate and shapes public opinion (Dawson 2000, 347). We agree and would go one step farther; we believe that in dealing with and finding solutions on matters so crucial to the nature and well-being of our overall politics and society, such leadership can and should come from scholars as well as presidents.

Yet race and racism have become so interwoven and engrained in our politics and society that it is proving frustratingly difficult to disentangle and overcome their damaging effects. In the main, however, political science research has circumvented, minimized, or otherwise ignored this profound and dynamic relationship between race and governance. This results in part from a theoretical construct—pluralism—that interprets American democracy in terms that belie the actual nature and functioning of our political system, and especially so with respect to race. This lack of frank recognition of the integral role of race in our politics and society hardly advances the cause of education of our youth and the public generally. Nor does it advance the cause of scholarly research or democratic government. Rather it leads to erroneous beliefs and actions that make it more difficult to reweave the basic fabric upon which the nation was founded and continues to function. And this is particularly salient with respect to the perpetuation and continuing significance of problems related to race and racism. To be sure, these are matters fraught with peril and emotion. But they are also matters that hold untold opportunities and benefits that far outweigh the costs involved.

Fundamentally, no matter how much some may try, we suggest that it is difficult to accurately explain the nature and functioning of American politics without fully taking race and racism into account. Hopefully it is becoming increasingly clear that pluralism on which much of our description and research on American politics is based, does not do so. In terms of social inquiry, frames of reference such as pluralism serve as lenses and as blinders. Pluralists assume that there is an automatic process by which minority or disadvantaged groups are gradually integrated in American politics and society as equals. Embracing this process, they are at the same time rejecting a competing view that the struggle for inclusion may be conceptualized in terms of group conflict with one group seeking to maintain its dominant position and other aspiring groups (African Americans) seeking to overturn that hierarchy (Barker, Jones, and Tate 1998, 6–8).
As Rodney Hero asked in his study of Latino politics “are the concepts, methods, and measures of the study of politics able accurately, adequately, and appropriately to address questions of Latino politics?” (Hero 1992, 10). The same might be asked with respect to blacks and other minorities. Very directly, models and constructs, and subsequent research that adheres to basic pluralist theory to explain American politics, and race politics in particular, should be rigorously scrutinized, lest they portray a less than accurate picture of the nature and functioning of American politics.

For us a more accurate picture might be gleaned from several classics on the nature and functioning of American politics, some of which fortunately are being resurrected even in basic American Politics courses offered, including at the graduate level. For example, the title of Schattschneider’s succinct but penetrating treatise, The Semi-Sovereign People (1960), in many ways conveys a dynamic description of the nature and functioning of American politics. At base he discusses the relative role of the people in relation to those who govern, and how this all meshes with respect to the needs and requirements of democratic government. Politics is conceptualized as the contagion of conflict; how conflict arises and the nature and scope of conflict; and whose game do we play; “the rules of the game” determine the requirements for success; the scope and bias of the pressure system; the importance of how issues are defined and framed and by whom; the limits of the political system and nature of voting and nonvoting; and hence the need for leadership, organization, and competition in the body politic. All these factors, he reasons, determine the nature and quality of democratic government. He shows how these are lacking in our political system.

As to pluralist theory, political scientists have developed various permutations in attempts to accommodate the theory to the actual nature and functioning of American governance. These permutations include plural elitism, parallel pluralism, two-tiered pluralism, and preferential pluralism, and other modifications in the theory, including those made by the leading pluralist scholar, Robert Dahl. “Parallel pluralism,” in Hero’s words, might well relate to blacks who, “out of various historical reasons and necessities . . . developed parallel institutions” or such institutions were developed for them, e.g., black colleges and universities (Hero 1992, 199). Relevant here also is Michael Dawson’s current project on black civil society which we see as clearly a very creative, imaginative and promising collaborative research effort. The central question that drives the Dawson project is whether we can speak of a single civil society in this country with respect to race, or whether in fact we really have two separate civil societies in this country.

Clearly the theory and policy implications of the project are enormous in terms of what it might suggest about our overall understanding (or lack of understanding) of American politics and society. It certainly might revise the way
in which we think and theorize about the nature of our democracy and why it continues to stumble with respect to matters related to race. And clearly it has relevance to pluralist theory, perhaps leading to additional modifications or even new theories. It certainly holds important implications with respect to the theory and practice of democratic government. In any event, permutations of pluralist theory as discussed above, might turn out to be a viable framework in which to accurately capture the real nature and functioning of American democracy.

Indeed, there remains considerable disquiet over how mainline political science portrays the nature and dynamics of our governing system especially as applied to race. In more recent times this criticism of prevailing research and thinking on American politics has become particularly salient among black and minority scholars who find serious flaws of pluralist explanations of American politics in general and black and minority politics in particular. These critiques, in a sense, reveal something of a “racial divide” between black, Latino, and Asian American scholars on the one hand, and white scholars, on another hand, along a number of dimensions in their research and study of American politics generally and on the politics of race in particular. Analyzing publications from 1866 through 1990 and 1906 to 1990 presented in two of the oldest disciplinary journals: *The Political Science Quarterly*, and *The American Political Science Review* respectively, the central question the authors address is “why have political scientists in general and the discipline as a whole not studied race and the African American political experience in a comprehensive and systematic way?” The answer that they advance is that such research efforts represents a form of “social danger” (Walton and McCormick 1997, 230). Social danger is a concept they describe as having three components: personal, political, as well as professional.

In another instance, Michael Dawson suggests that the “effects of the racialization of both the research process and the subject matter (obviously) must be taken into account when evaluating research on racial attitudes and racial policy preferences. . . . The “racial structuring of the research communities also affects our research . . . in ways that we are much less willing to admit.” Dawson advances this argument as follows:

[T]his is true as well . . . of the research community that studies the contemporary effects of race within the United States (historians assure me that this is true of historians as well). By and large, there are racially separate research communities with some, but not abundant crossover. Black researchers are concentrated in the study of blacks; whites relatively rarely study black opinion, and when they do, they do not normally use extensive and excellent black-pioneered research studies. Latino scholars have pioneered the study of Latino public opinion. Even within the single disciplinary gatherings, such as the APSA annual meetings, these research communities are usually found at different panels. Different questions, norms, and
Priors are often found embedded within the respective research traditions. Formal modeling, for example, is viewed with a great deal of distrust among those who study African Americans, while urban case studies are often belittled among ‘mainstream’ political scientists. Historically, for example, there is a tendency for black researchers to cite structural reasons to explain group conflict and racial difference, while whites have been more willing to adopt psychological theories for explaining the same phenomena.” (Dawson 2000, 355–56)

Put yet another way, our review of relevant political science research shows that race research and theory development must be done from the bottom up, not from the top down. In the first instance, for example, this means that such development should take considered account of the significant role of race and racism from the very beginning until the present in the shaping of our politics and society. We believe that such research, when pursued in historical context, will illuminate more clearly the basic nature of our overall politics and society, unearthing aspects of the system that we might prefer to minimize, circumvent, or ignore altogether. More directly, such basic research should also help us to illuminate how the system actually serves to perpetuate, or at most moderate, rather than overcome certain basic problems that pose continuous threats to democratic government. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in how this country has dealt with the problems of racism and racial discrimination. The thrust of these observations are reflected by one commentator who said that “pluralism seems to want to make groups fit the theory, rather than have the theory fit the groups,” adding “this . . . is simply wrong, empirically, theoretically, and ideologically” (Hero 1992, 19).

How to explain the rugged persistence of racial problems relates directly to issues involving both the theory and practice of democracy and democratic government, clearly issues on which social science scholars routinely and robustly study. Even so, however, such research has not been as forthcoming as assumed (see McClain and Garcia 1993; Dawson and Wilson 1991; Tate 2001). One reason is that scholars view race relations through a “‘gradualist’ liberal bias,” in which the race problem will ultimately resolve itself through integration and assimilation of racial minorities as well as through the disappearance of white racism (Tate 2001).

Indeed, and more generally, this reluctance to explore and investigate such issues has characterized the academy no less than other social institutions. Similarly, not unlike progress in other areas, at least initial increases in scholarly and academic attention to such matters have been stimulated primarily by protests, demonstrations, and crisis situations. One salient effect of such disruptive activity is to endanger the kind of stable, peaceful, and tranquil environment in which scholars and the academy especially, and society generally, can best carry on
their respective functions. Relevant here is the situation which McClain and Garcia describe with respect to our own profession:

The obstinacy of the discipline to the inclusion of black politics as legitimate political science sparked an intellectual as well as political battle. The intellectual battle, sparked by Ralph Bunche and the first generation of political scientists in the 1940s, continued into the 1980s, culminating in the recognition of black politics as a field of study on the American Political Science Association listing of specialties. The political battle erupted at the 1970 meetings of the American Political Science Association in Los Angeles over the role of black political scientists and their research within the discipline. The on-site boycott of the meeting resulted in the creation of the Committee on the Status of Blacks in the Profession within the American Political Science Association. Moreover, the 1970 boycott led to the official formation of National Conference of Black Political Scientists as a separate organization. (McClain and Garcia 1993, 248)

Subsequently, the Executive Committee of our Association has created similar committees for other minority groups, e.g., Latinos, gays, and lesbians.

A review of relevant research literature suggests to us the need for more rigorous theory development with respect to the dynamics of race and governance. Very importantly, stronger theory development would clearly structure the kind of research questions that need further investigation. And data, information, and insights derived from theory and research development in turn would structure the important teaching and curriculum development that are sorely needed at both the graduate and undergraduate level, and in fact in elementary and high schools as well. Political scientists especially have much to contribute to the education of all Americans.

The Focus of Mainline Research on Race

In the divide between the institution and the individual, the greatest share of political science research on race has concentrated on the individual. And within this subfield, its largest part is devoted to the empirical study of how racial attitudes influence the policy attitudes of Americans. The topic, in fact, remains controversial (for recent reviews, see Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000; Tate 2001). Very briefly, the debate centers on the degree to which whites’ opposition to affirmative action and racial programs aimed at improving the socioeconomic standing of blacks is based on American principles and values, such as individualism and a limited government, or racial prejudice. While there remains sharp disagreement over the extent of racial prejudice in public opinion, one common point of agreement has satisfactorily emerged that both factors are at play in
public policy attitudes. Thus, racial policy attitudes reflect a “bundle of considerations” (Sniderman and Piazza 1993), or a “blending” of fundamental American values and racial intolerance as symbolic racism proponents David Sears and Donald Kinder (1971), long ago, originally described it.

Empirical work has also focused on how racial intolerance feed into non-racial public policies attitudes, including partisanship and government welfare programs. Still controversial, Huckfeldt and Kohfeld (1989) argue that racial resentment toward blacks in the aftermath of the civil rights struggle explains the great movement of southern Democrats to the GOP (see also Glaser 1996). Most recently, Martin Gilens’s (1999) important research establishes that antiblack attitudes and stereotypes explain Americans’ resistance to antipoverty programs. Gilens (1999) shows that antiblack attitudes also strongly shape Americans’ perceptions about the deservedness of welfare recipients. Several scholars have shown that whites will not support programs that assist blacks if they believe the system to be fair and that blacks themselves are not working hard enough to get ahead (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Beliefs about the fairness of the rewards system turns importantly on one’s racial group membership, as Jennifer Hochschild (1995) has recently documented. Yet, scholars of American public opinion continue to ignore racial attitudes as important components of public policy attitudes as evidenced by otherwise strong empirical studies of public support for welfare policies (e.g., Cook and Barrett 1992; Feldman and Steenbergen 2001).

We are less concerned, however, with the debate over “how much” does race structure public opinion or political behavior, than the matter of “why”—the latter being a more elemental concern than the former. Within the racial politics literature, there are two strikingly different accounts of the origins of this infusion of racial beliefs with the political in American public opinion and behavior. One set of scholars has consistently attributed racial politics to culture and to political socialization (e.g., Kinder and Sears 1981). Racial prejudice is a learned behavior that is stubbornly rooted and reinvigorated through racial segregation and the media. Indeed, one of the brilliant qualities of Gilens’s new book is his documentation of the racialization of poverty by the news media from the 1950s to the 1990s. Coverage of poverty disproportionately focused on blacks on welfare, which Gilens contends, created this racially based opposition to government welfare programs in the United States. The media, therefore, is a prime socialization agent that teaches Americans to blame blacks for America’s racial inequality.

As the major alternative to socialization, other scholars claim that realistic group conflict accounts for white opposition to public policies (Sears, Hetts, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). As blacks challenge their subordinate position in society, whites resist, developing and articulating an ideological justification to defend existing patterns of racial inequality. “Laissez-faire” racism is what Bobo and Smith call it. They write that this is a “new form
of racism developed to defend whites’ dominant position within the changed economic context, in which blacks became participants in the broader national economy that is based on free-market capitalism. Laissez-faire racism therefore consists of two major components: the continued negative stereotyping of blacks and the placing of responsibility for the socioeconomic racial gap on blacks themselves. In this form, blacks’ primary shortcoming is no longer some inherent inferiority, but their cultural resistance to the work ethic” (Sears, Hetts, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000, 25). Indeed, again as put elsewhere, “laissez-faire racism is not a new brand of racism, but instead reflects the transformation of whites’ group interests and their continued defense of those interests.”

Both accounts carry clear and direct policy implications. The socialization perspective implies that race relations would be improved through less stigmatization of blacks by the media and greater social interaction. Such improvements would not be easy and could only be achieved over the long haul. Thus, write Donald R. Kinder and Nicholas Winter, most recently, for example, “if American society were to move in the direction of greater racial interaction, then the racial divide should contract. We do expect this to happen, though not quickly” (Kinder and Winter 2001, 451). Underlying such claims is an “inevitability” of positive racial change. The racial group conflict proponents, in contrast, infer no inevitability of improvements in race relations. Race relations are not static, however, the underlying premise of a racial order implies that such groups will always be ranked. This is the perspective boldly put forth by James Sidanius and his colleagues in the formulation of their social dominance theory that assumes that human societies tend to be structured as group-based social hierarchies.

Both socialization-theory and group-dominance accounts need to develop and incorporate a more dynamic formulation of the process, in which public opinion and behavior reflect and refract the larger political process. More specifically, as suggested in Part III on systemic and institutional perspectives in American governance, greater attention needs to be directed toward these key elements of the political process: (1) institutions and the changing sociopolitical context, (2) elite political behavior, and (3) minorities as agents of change within the political environment.

To some degree, current theories of race and politics are sensitive to the sociopolitical environment, as emphasis is placed on the degree of racial integration present in society as well as economic and social disparities between blacks and whites. The most recent work has moved beyond the black-white dichotomy as the U.S. draws greater numbers of Latino and Asian immigrants. While blacks remain in many parts of the country “hypersegregated” cities are slightly less segregated since the 1970s (Farley, Danzinger, and Holzer 2000). Although many social commentators have expressed the hope that the transformation of the U.S. from majority-white European to a heterogeneous “people of color”
population may improve race relations and spur the residential and social integration of American blacks, the structure of race relations has not been radically transformed by the new immigration (Bobo, Oliver, Johnson, and Valenzuela 2000). Survey research finds that blacks still remain at the bottom of the racial order in terms of preferences as potential neighbors and the group most negatively stereotyped. Whites remain at its top.

As a major proponent of group conflict theory, Lawrence Bobo has argued that change is possible through courageous and innovative political leadership. Without it, he predicts the maintenance of racially oppressive relationships. Clearly the political elite can directly influence public attitudes. The Brown decision, made well in advance of majority support for racial integration or equal opportunity for blacks, set into motion a chain of events that ultimately caused political attitudes to change. Congressional debate and presidential leadership along with the dramatic events taking place in the civil rights movement were also all important agents of change in public opinion on civil rights. The public opinion effects of framing can be quite powerful as established by Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky’s (1982) seminal wording experiments. Other researchers have found the same wording effects for affirmative action policies. Different descriptions about affirmative action can trigger different responses.

To fully grasp the political context, the third area that we believe needs shoring up is more systematic opinion research on blacks and other racial and ethnic minority groups. There are, of course, exceptions, including Jennifer Hochschild’s recent work (1995) that finds that even many economically and socially advanced blacks continue to feel disadvantaged relative to whites and excluded from the promise of the “American Dream.” Updating this work, one finds new and intriguing trends in black public opinion. Since the 1970s blacks have begun to back away from the position that the federal government should be directly involved in ensuring that blacks have equal opportunities in employment and racial balance in schools (Tate and Hampton 2000).

An unmistakable collapse in black support for government aid to improve the economic and social positions of blacks and minorities has occurred as well over this thirty-year period. For example, during the early to mid-1970s, a solid majority of blacks (68 percent) favored government aid for blacks and minorities in the early to mid-1970s. By the 1989 to 1992 period, black support for minority aid was cut to become short of a majority to 43 percent. Since 1992, further erosion in black support for minority aid has occurred. Support for minority aid among blacks has declined evenly among all black subgroups such as education, income, age, and gender. This equal drop across subgroups points to a “period effect.” Blacks have become less supportive of federal intervention during what has amounted to a successful conservative backlash against racial programs and liberal welfare policies. Indeed, toward this end, a 1996 national
survey of blacks found that a majority favored ending the federal government’s guarantee of financial assistance for poor families after five years of support. An interesting question is whether and to what extent these changing attitudes suggest that blacks, no less than whites, have become adjusted or more tolerant of the current “state of things.” Or could it be that these changing attitudes are in part due to an apparent lack of more effective definition and articulation of issues by black leaders and civil rights groups? Whatever the answers may be, any assumption that black opinion is exogenous to the sociopolitical environment is wrong. Minority attitudes and political behavior need to be part of the analysis of race relations, the racial order, and of politics in the United States more broadly.

Related to this conservative trend in black policy attitudes is the decoupling of race consciousness and black policy attitudes and, possibly, behavior. Gay and Tate (2000) find that, while in 1984 race identification was significantly related to black opinion on four of the eight policy measures, including government aid for blacks and minority groups and government spending on the food stamps program by 1996, its effect was limited to only two of the policies, notably those most overtly racial, minority aid and affirmative action. At the same time, they report that race identification among blacks in 1996 remains as strong, if not somewhat stronger, than in 1984. Similarly, Verba et al. (1995) reported that they could find no connection between political participation and their measures of race consciousness among blacks. It is assumed in the racial identity literature that all policies recognized as part of the black civil rights agenda will be supported by race-conscious blacks. But then who presently is defining the black civil rights agenda, and under what set of constraints do black opinion leaders presently operate? In this regard, and related to the essentially group-based nature of American politics, this indicates the dire need for effective civil rights leadership from minority leaders and from relevant interest groups (e.g., NAACP, Urban League).

Ultimately, public opinion scholarship must recognize the boundaries on which public policies are debated. This leads us to the second line of research on race and politics that has focused on the role that political institutions play in the social construction of race and its role in U.S. politics. There is significantly less political science here. We believe, in fact, that a concentrated focus on the role of institutions in the production of United States racial politics will be extremely controversial. As suggested in our discussion of systemic and institutional perspectives in American politics, it is one thing to attribute racial politics to individuals and groups, and quite another to point the finger at political institutions, electoral arrangements, and the rules of the game, which are typically hidden from view and purportedly race neutral in and of themselves.
Among the first institutional linkages made is between racial identities and government. While sociologists and social psychologists contend that racial categories are socially constructed, Rogers M. Smith (1997) has shown how in the United States racial identities have been politically constructed through U.S. laws covering immigration, state laws that defined race, the U.S. census, affirmative action guidelines along with legal and political discourse. Comparative race studies have emerged, underscoring the role that state policies play in the construction of race (Marx 1998). Sociologists have begun analyzing the new 2000 census and its explosion of racial categories, but we think political scientists should also be weighing its consequences on race relations and U.S. politics. For sure, some interest groups as well as big-city mayors have expressed concerns about the impact of the census results on intergovernmental transfers. Republican members of Congress as well as the Bush administration have through directives as well as litigation successfully blocked sampling techniques that would yield better estimates of the minority population. Whether the creation of the overlapping and “other” racial categories will have large political ramification or not is a question we think is worthy of pursuing. After all, identities are not only rooted in the need to belong, or to simplify, but are products of laws and democratic practices (March and Olsen 1995).

While we think it still correct to argue that institutionally based race studies are new and emerging, there nevertheless is an entire and well established subfield that examines the ways that electoral arrangements and practices negate minority votes (e.g., Kousser 1999; Grofman and Davidson 1992). The evidence is overwhelming that under the single-member district (SMD) system, the vast majority of black and Latino officeholders have been elected in districts where they represent the voting majority. The SMD system has profound effects on candidate behavior, as race baiting in elections involving black or minority candidates become strategic.

There are other political consequences of the SMD system. One new study of race and the political representation of blacks has led the researcher to conclude that SMD greatly encourages constituents to seek and value descriptive representation (Tate 2002). This scholar writes that because members of the House are elected from districts, the policies that they promote reflect not only universal concerns but strongly particularistic ones as well. By particularistic concerns, she means not only “pork barrel” legislation, but symbolic legislation, including acts by Congress to give public recognition to key groups and individuals in society. Her empirical study that focuses attention on descriptive and symbolic representation bolster the recent spate of empirical studies establishing that the race of the elected representative also influences his or her substantive legislative agenda. Black members are more likely to introduce and advocate issues pertinent to race and the material interests of blacks (Whitby 1997;
Canon 1999; Hall 1996). These studies taken together strongly and empirically rebut claims about the irrelevance of race in determining how interests are represented in the United States (e.g., Swain 1993; Thernstrom 1987). Race matters critically with respect to which groups are heard in Washington and which groups are not, and it matters critically in the distribution of public goods.

The institutional features of the two-party system, according to Paul Frymer (1999), provide electoral incentives to party and elected officials to selectively ignore the political demands of blacks for racial fairness. Black civil rights successes, he argues, were won not merely through political integration of blacks in the Democratic party but were rather achieved through outside political agitation. Majoritarian procedures, both electorally as well as governing chambers including the U.S. Congress, thwart blacks’ efforts toward civil rights goals as well as weaken public support for such goals. Frymer’s work is illustrative of the growing subset of new political studies explicitly coupling the institutional features of government to the changing order of race relations and racial politics. But such “new political studies” are in many respects really not that new: these features have long characterized research and writing on such matters, especially the work of black scholars (e.g., Walton, Holden, Walters, Barker, Jones, and Tate).

An institutional perspective is vital to achieving a basic understanding of America’s racial order and its politics. To quote Knowles and Prewitt, “To ignore the network of institutional controls through which social benefits are allocated may be reassuring, but it is also bad social history. [Racist] policy will be changed when we are willing to start the difficult task of remaking our institutions” (Knowles and Prewitt 1969, 14). Nevertheless, we recognize that it is possible to exaggerate the power of the institution in society, and overinterpret its role in race relations specifically. In promoting future such studies, we hope not to commit this sin, but rather, we seek a balancing of both individual and institutional perspectives in the study of race and politics.

Finally, an institutional perspective is vital if we are to overcome a sort of “path dependence,” where small inequalities flowing from the set pattern of rules over time widen dramatically. Once set, such dynamics are difficult to change (Pierson 2000). Public education is a clear illustration of entrenched and widening flow of social inequalities that spread from intergovernmental structures and bureaucratic practices. This institutional research would necessarily move the scholarship on race and politics from an almost exclusively behavioral approach to a cross-comparative, historical one.

**Political Science and A New Civil Rights Agenda**

We challenge mainline political science generally to more fully inculcate the central thrust of this story into our understanding, research, and teaching in basic
American government and politics courses, and into our curriculum generally. If not in major texts, there certainly are supplementary texts, mainly by black and minority authors, that might be used for this purpose (e.g., Barker, Tate, and Jones 1998; Hero 1992; McClain and Stewart 2001; Walton and Smith 2000). After all, political science is often selected as the major area for those who go to law school, become lawyers, and disproportionately hold leadership or otherwise influential positions in both the public and private sectors.

A central underlying thrust throughout this essay is that the major focus of political scientists and relevant others should now center on not whether racial or, if you will, socioeconomic divides exist, but rather what must be done to overcome them. We believe that the data are so overwhelming that such divides do exist that scholars (and others) regardless of ideological bent or other inclinations must perforce acknowledge that such conditions do exist. And though much of the divide can be drawn along lines of race and ethnicity, current debates in relevant research do involve whether such divides can be attributed mainly to racism or to other factors or a combination of them. We have no doubt but that such debates will and should continue among political scientists and others. Indeed, there remains the need for basic research on such issues for though their present benefits and use may not be readily apparent, we never know how important and relevant findings from such research might prove in the future.

Even so, and while additional research might prove helpful, let us reemphasize that we believe that in the meantime and on the basis of what we know now, the essential focus of our efforts should be redirected to what can be done to overcome such divides. Toward this end, and again, given the compelling weight of the data, scholars as well as others might well develop proposals or other suggestions geared to overcome such racism or divides that now clearly exist. Based on our review of selected relevant literature, and on our own professional backgrounds and life experiences, we suggest the following.

1. Studies of race and politics must pay closer attention to the nature, development and implications of structures, rules, and procedures for democratic states and for American governance in particular, in order to understand how and to what extent they facilitate or impede efforts to overcome a deeply racially stratified society.

Michael Dawson makes much the same point in relation to the institutional context for racial attitude formation. He suggests that “more intensive historical work would provide a firmer foundation” on which to ground “both the modeling and the various empirical and normative claims that [are] made” by various researchers (see Dawson 2000, 351). More generally, in addition to other mat-
ters suggested in this paper, we need to give increased attention to how such matters as systems of representation, structure of elections and campaign finance reform, and the manner of judicial selection might serve to “facilitate or impede efforts to overcome a deeply racially stratified society.”

2. We suggest that more efforts be directed toward collaborative research and related conferences dedicated to concrete proposals to resolve the racial (social) divides that are overwhelmingly indicated by the data as shown over time by research and various reports from official and unofficial agencies. These efforts might very well and should involve persons holding varied positions as to why such divides exist, but whose research and other efforts are nevertheless directed toward developing strategies and proposals to close and overcome such divides.

3. Related to the above, we suggest particularly that continuous efforts be made to overcome the racial divide that clearly exists in research outlooks and perspectives on race, and within our various professional meetings. That divide clearly could be lessened by the focused recruitment, training, and recruitment of black and minority graduate students, and recruitment of black and minority faculty. This should include such focused recruiting by all departments, including the ranking or so-called elite departments. It is from these departments, of course, that these same departments are most likely to recruit their faculty.

We strongly suggest that all graduate departments make focused and sincere efforts to recruit, support, and retain black and minority graduate students. The Bunche Institute operated by our own Association provides guidance in this direction, although departments should take more such initiatives on their own. We also strongly encourage that similar efforts be made to recruit, support, and retain black and minority faculty, and on this point we include all faculties, including community and junior colleges, undergraduate colleges, and more comprehensive state and private universities.

4. We suggest that efforts be made to inculcate in our graduate and undergraduate curriculum more accurate descriptions of the actual nature and dynamics of American politics and governance. More precisely, a focus on the central question addressed in this essay: how race and race relations have structured and in turn been structured by American democracy, or better still, by our governance system.

Several developments have come to our attention in this regard. First, and importantly, we welcome the decision of the Duke University political science
department to make race and politics one of the major areas of concentration in their Ph.D. program. Second, in addition to current texts in the market, we support the continued development of relevant texts and materials by political scientists for use in relevant mainline courses. Several of such projects have been brought to our attention (e.g., Lyles 2002).

5. We suggest that concrete proposals should be developed and put forth by political scientists and other scholars designed to facilitate the education and awareness of the wider public of the rationale and need to resolve the serious racial (social) divides that exist in this country. Accordingly, we suggest the following:

a. The need to propose amendments to the Constitution that would guarantee the right to health care and right to a quality education.

As political scientists, we need to assess the nature and efficacy of initiatives in this regard being taken by Representative Jesse Jackson Jr., and others. Additionally, we need to assess the nature and efficacy of the various methods used to propose and ratify constitutional amendments. Certainly the nature of the subject matter involved as well as the process itself are matters of importance in their own right. In general, the substantive benefits resulting from such amendments would spread to wide segments of the population, which though disproportionately blacks and minorities, also include large number of whites as well. Even more, the guarantee and shoring up of such benefits will in turn shore up some of the very basic foundations upon which democracy and democratic governments can best function.

b. The need to assess and offer concrete proposals to overcome gross inequities evident in the criminal justice system.

These inequities range from the nature and development of criminal law and the nature, culture and functioning of basic institutional structures, to the recruitment and quality of system personnel (prosecutors, defense counsel, police), to initial encounters with law-enforcement officers all the way to incarceration, sentencing, and the imposition of the death penalty. Relevant data and research show convincingly that these inequities fall disproportionately hardest on the poor and minorities. We are seemingly reminded daily, for example, at how such inequities particularly affect African Americans. And though the disastrous social consequences that flow from such inequities affect poor and minority directly, they also affect us all. Even more, they do serious damage to the basic democratic tenet of according equal justice to all regardless of color, station, or
material wealth. On the basis of what we now know exists, we suggest that political scientists and other scholars should intensify both their study of criminal justice as well as suggest corrective measures that may be taken to overcome these inequities.

c. The need for the country to seriously consider remedial actions in the form of reparations.

We see the increasing reparations movement as symbolically and substantively vital toward educating and otherwise reminding all Americans of an embarrassingly sordid past (and to some extent an uneasy present) which we should openly acknowledge and for which we should make amends. Certainly we need to assess more systematically the continuous initiatives with respect to reparations being made by Congressman John Conyers of Michigan. Growing interest in this movement, at least in some circles, is reflected well by the increasing volume of support coming from commentators in both lay and academic circles. 4

Reparations as used here, of course, refers to the heinous and inhumane treatment of African Americans during slavery, the legacy and “responsibility for which,” as Henry Louis Gates recently put it, “is carried forth from the past to the present in the form of wealth” (Gates 2001, 5). And despite the Civil War and the amendments that followed (Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth), in a relatively brief afterward there ensued a sustained period of rigid racial segregation brutally enforced under color of law, and supported by moblike informal sanctions including lynchings, and other terrorist actions directed against blacks solely because of their color. Chief Justice Taney’s description of the status of blacks in Dred Scott (1857) characterized well the status African Americans even far into the current century, viz., “that the black man had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.”

The tide in this long struggle began to turn through the leadership of Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP; the strong stance of President Truman on civil rights; the 1954 Brown decision emanating from the Warren Court; the growing civil rights movement; and the extraordinary leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. The crisis situation that ensued as a result led to passage of major civil rights legislation in the 1960s spearheaded by President Kennedy and the uncommonly strong presidential leadership of President Johnson. Certainly much constructive progress has resulted from these actions. But a series of factors has slowed—even stymied—such progress, once more reminding us of the continuing problems of racism that remain in this country. In many ways these factors—judicial and political—are clearly and succinctly discussed by Wasby in his article on “Civil Rights and the Supreme Court: A Return of the Past” (in Holden 1994, 49).
The reparations movement seems appropriate and timely. In a period of reconciliation and atonement for past wrongs, and given the serious social and economic divisions that affect us at home and abroad, it is altogether appropriate for the presumed world leader (the United States) to reaffirm and to exemplify concretely its deep attachment and continuing commitment to very basic principles of democracy and democratic government. Strategies for achieving this goal might well differ. Even so, that some key leaders of the reparations movement have decided to pursue a litigation strategy through the courts, not unlike that of Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP, seems to us altogether appropriate given both the nature of the issue involved, and the overall systemic political-social context in which the battle must be fought. Under our system, courts are forums where presumably the law and reasoned argument rather than numbers, wealth, and status are expected to be the basis for decision making (Barker 1967).

The judiciary might, as it did in the 1950s, once again remind our leaders and Americans generally, of the need to remedy and resolve the one problem that continues to threaten and tarnish the very constitutional democratic principles on which this country is based.

In a 2001 Op-Ed on the current and increasing interest in slavery, one commentator has written that "behind the interest in slavery is the crisis of race. The confluence of the history of slavery and the politics of race reveals that slavery has become a language, a way to talk about race, in a society in which blacks and whites hardly talk to each other at all. In slavery, Americans have found a voice to address some of their deepest hurts and the depressing reality of how much American life—jobs, housing, schools, access to medical care, to justice, and even to a taxi—is controlled by race." The commentator concludes by stating that, "At the beginning of the twenty-first century, almost a century and a half after Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, Americans are again struggling with slavery, and in doing so hope to vanquish slavery’s legacy: the burden of race. The films, re-enactments, museums and books, as well as the politics, are part of that struggle. In turning to the past to understand the present, it has become evident that Americans will not be, in Lincoln’s words, forever free until they have mastered slavery, as slavery once mastered them" (Berlin 2001, A19).

In terms of nature, authority, and function, the judiciary can exercise a leadership role in dealing with this issue that stands to shore up not only our commitment to democracy at home, but increase the authority and credibility of our efforts to enhance and develop democratic societies around the world. This, of course, would not be unlike the importance we attached to the Court’s decision in the 1954 Brown case, where the government itself acknowledged that the outcome in that case could certainly affect our standing and credibility in international and foreign affairs. However, just as in the school segregation cases, such court decisions to be effective need support from elective-political institutions as well.
Conclusion

The words of one of the past presidents of this association, Matthew Holden, though written in his 1973 classic volume on The Divisible Republic, remain most relevant to our situation today. “Race schism, though muted (and even reduced in some ways) remains a fact in American politics. And that fact also remains the one (emphasis ours) fundamental domestic threat to the viability of the political system. The latent tensions between groups of younger people—in situations as various as universities, military facilities, high schools, and prisons—are a straw in the wind. The psychological and structural materials of future conflict are all about us. The question is how we should think about current problems, anticipating a future when the present superficial quiescence shall have worn off and racial dispute once more have become volatile” (Holden 1973, xv).

Overall, and regardless of the particular area of research, we strongly urge members of our discipline to spearhead the study, debate, and development of concrete proposals to overcome the seemingly intractable problems of racism. The greatest challenge for us as scholars and political scientists is to accept this challenge. Finding cures for the social cancers of racism and ethnic conflict, through systematic research, experiments, and concrete actions here at home, can do much to enhance the integrity and credibility in advocating democratic government abroad. This is indeed a challenge that demands imaginative research and scholarship, courageous leadership, and principled resolution.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Dominique Apollon at Stanford University for his assistance, and Kevin L. Lyles at the University of Illinois, Chicago, for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.

2. Please see One America in the 21st Century: Forging a New Future: The President’s Initiative on Race, the Advisory Board’s Report to the President (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998).

3. See, for example, Alan Dershowitz’s seething criticism of the decision in Supreme Injustice (2001); but also see Breaking the Deadlock (2001), in which Richard Posner offers support for the decision. As to both books, see Ethan Bronner’s resourceful and succinct review of the Posner and Dershowitz volumes (Bronner 2001, 11).

4. These include Randall Robinson’s The Debt (2000) that presents both a readable and interesting case for reparations, and a number of well-researched and detailed articles now surfacing in law reviews. See, e.g., Eric Yamamoto (1988); Robert Westley (1988, 429); and Tuneen Chisolm (1999).