The Racial Retreat of Contemporary Political Theory

By Hawley Fogg-Davis

Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies. By Michael C. Dawson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 352 pages. $32.00 cloth, $20.00 paper.

Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line. By Paul Gilroy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. 416 pages. $36.00 cloth, $16.95 paper.

The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy. By Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. 392 pages. $27.95 cloth, $16.95 paper.

The Anatomy of Racial Inequality. By Glenn C. Loury. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. 240 pages. $22.95 cloth.

The Force of Prejudice: On Racism and Its Doubles. By Pierre-André Taguieff. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. 464 pages. $68.95 cloth, $24.95 paper.

Few contemporary political scientists would disagree that race has been a pivotal force in American politics since this country's founding. The magnitude and scope of its impact on current political life is, however, a matter of intense debate. Political theorists have conspicuously not been at the forefront of these race-specific discussions. This is not because political theory has ignored race per se. On the contrary, contemporary political theorists increasingly include race in their descriptive and normative analyses of democratic politics. Debates about identity politics, multiculturalism, the redress of invidious discrimination, and feminist discourse on intersecting social identifications have moved from the margin to the center of political theory and typically involve at least some attention to racial difference. But these discussions have for the most part not examined racial meaning in a sustained, focused manner. While there are exceptions, political theory, as a discipline, has not given theoretical priority to American race.[1]

Whether or not broad democratic political goals, such as the fair distribution of political and economic opportunities, mandate that race be given theoretical priority is a contested issue that spans academic disciplines and exceeds their borders. My objective in this review essay is not to provide a definitive answer to this elusive question, but instead to suggest that polit-

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ical theory methodology can and should be used to dig beneath the surface of formal politics to develop more comprehensive renderings of racial meaning. Social-scientific racial analyses provide the necessary empirical foundation for public policy and legal prescriptions concerning racial justice. But empirical methods alone cannot capture the intricacies of how race affects the multiple dimensions of life in a society predicated on racial categories. As a humanistic discipline (one that studies philosophy, history, literature, culture, and the arts), political theory is well equipped to explore less obvious sites of individual and collective racial formation, such as our personal relationships and cultural practice.[2] At the same time, the "political" in political theory distinguishes it from other kinds of theory, which may have political implications but are not methodologically primed for political investigation. Political theorists and other political scientists can and should work together, using their respective methodologies, to develop racial analyses that are informed but not limited by empiricism.

Americanists within political science have generated an impressive array of empirical studies measuring the effects of race on political preferences and behavior. Indeed, "race and American politics" now enjoys an institutional presence in most graduate programs as a subfield, or at least as a legitimate concentration. Much of this quantitative and qualitative work, however, lacks theoretical imagination. This is not so much a criticism of American politics as a field as it is a plea for political theorists to supplement these findings with descriptive and prescriptive theories about race that cannot be measured by a survey instrument. Abstract thinking about race must not float into political irrelevance, but should instead always be linked, somehow, to solving the political and ethical problem of racism. It is important—but not enough—to say that contemporary

political science is insufficiently driven by problems and overly determined by method.[3] Racism must be explicitly identified as a political problem worthy of both empirical and theoretical redress.

In his latest book, *Black Visions,* Michael Dawson answers this call by breaching the wall between theory and empirical survey research within political science. Here Dawson takes stock of contemporary black political preferences and seeks to understand how they are connected to various historical ideologies such as radical egalitarianism (e.g., Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells), disillusioned liberalism (e.g., W. E. B. Du Bois after 1930 and Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967 through 1968), black Marxism (e.g., Du Bois and Cedric Robinson), black conservatism (e.g., Booker T. Washington), black feminism (e.g., Anna Julia Cooper), and black nationalism (e.g., Marcus Garvey). Dawson adeptly employs both empirical and theoretical methods to elucidate the ideological beliefs motivating black political attitudes and behavior, but his theoretical explanation stops short of a full-tilt political theory of race.

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Ideology, for Dawson, refers to "a world view readily found in the population, including sets of ideas and values that cohere, that are used publicly to justify political stances, and that shape and are shaped by society" (4). Political theory denotes something more enduring—something independent of people's political preferences—that explores "the state, power, human nature, and the good life" (322). Dawson flags the need for a black political theory that can build a bridge between "our basic humanness" and black racial specificity. Whether such a theory can or should only be devised by blacks themselves is a question left unanswered by Dawson. He does say that such a theory should move past old notions of a homogeneous black community and must be truly "political." "We've had a black aesthetic, black power, and a plethora of black public policy pronouncements" (322). Now is the time for a black political theory that both describes and prescribes the bigger picture.

This is a tall order, and it's not clear to me whether Dawson steps aside at this point out of modesty (after all, he is a social scientist, not a political theorist) or because he is overwhelmed by the scope of his own proposal. I'm also not sure that a political theory needs to be "black" in order to take into account the racial specificity of African Americans that drives Dawson's argument. Any U.S. political theory of race must recognize the institution of African slavery and its production of a white-black racial paradigm. At the same time, the lens of contemporary racial inquiry must be expanded to consider how other nonwhite racial groups such as American Indians, Asian Americans, and Latinos have been affected and are affecting this white-black dichotomy. Except for Pierre-André Taguieff's study of French racism, none of the books reviewed in this essay venture much beyond a white-black U.S. racial framework. Consequently, my discussion will focus on the situation of African Americans. My own prescription for a pragmatic political theory of race, however, intends to accommodate both the particular experiences of black Americans and the experiences of other racial groups.

Dawson's discussion of how black political attitudes intersect with various ideologies adds theoretical and historical context to the data but does not prescribe a theory of racial identity. Instead, Dawson's political theorizing is mostly limited to description. Taking his cues from feminist political theorist Nancy Fraser, he recasts Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative action to probe the development and expression of contemporary black political attitudes. Habermas's theory of a public sphere regulated by an ideal speech situation is the product of an unlikely marriage between a Marx-inspired critique of positivism (characteristic of the Frankfurt school of critical theory generally) and Immanuel Kant's notion of universal rules reached through a process of deontological individual moral reasoning. The ideal speech situation consists of individuals deliberating about politics apart from the pressures of the state and the economy. Simultaneously, the subjectivity of this interaction is to be moderated by a universal principle of rationality.[4] Habermas has been widely criticized for, among other things, overestimating the negative effects of mass media on the public sphere, underestimating the role that religion plays in shaping this discourse, and failing to acknowledge alternative public spheres that have emerged in response to the exclusion of, for example, women's voices in mainstream political dialogue.[5]

Dawson picks up on this line of criticism and extends it to the case of African Americans, arguing that blacks have consistently been excluded from the American "bourgeois public sphere" since the founding period. But rather than condemn the idea of a public sphere, Dawson follows Fraser's lead in calling for a more accurate reading of Western political history—one that acknowledges the existence of "alternative subaltern counterpublics" that "have developed in keeping with the fundamental constitutive stratification lines of a given society" (24). For Dawson, race is a fundamental principle of stratification in the United States, and that conclusion prompts him to advance the idea of a black counterpublic as a descriptive model of how political deliberation among blacks proceeds. Through this lens, Dawson interprets survey data depicting the ideologies invoked by blacks to discuss politics within the internal dialogical structures of black communities (e.g., black civic associations), as well as those ideologies blacks use to respond to the dominant public sphere.

Ideology and rationality are not mutually exclusive for Dawson as they are for Habermas. On the contrary, Dawson argues that the problem with today's black counterpublic is that it suffers from a crisis of ideological instability. A black political theory is needed to promote a more just development and expression of ideologies both within and without the black counterpublic. Certain historical trends in black political preferences remain,

such as low support for "small government" libertarianism and high support for what Dawson calls disillusioned liberalism. But a variety of social differences and intersecting identifications now being claimed by many African Americans generates situational support for ideologies such as black feminism, black Marxism, community nationalism, and radical liberalism. Ideologies such as black nationalism, black Marxism, and "the Cold War version of liberalism" are problematic for Dawson because they fail to adequately respect gender, sexuality, and class differences among black Americans (322). Black nationalism, for instance, has notoriously undermined the political participation of black women by enforcing rigid gender and sexual hierarchies based in black heterosexual male dominance. In contrast to those who would justify this arrangement as an innocuous form of gender complementarity,[6] Dawson unequivocally condemns such political preferences as violating the precept of moral equality.

Black feminism, in Dawson's estimation, has done and continues to do the best job of respecting social difference within black communities. Black feminism is not monolithic. But since black women's interests are not fully addressed by either a black, male-dominated civil rights movement or a white, female-dominated women's rights movement, black feminists have been forced to call for more complicated portrayals of "racial specificity." Subsequently, they signal the need for social movements capable of addressing multiple and intersecting sources of social and political injury.[7] "Pragmatic optimism" is a theme common to all black ideological visions, but Dawson hears its message most clearly from black feminists, whose intersecting social markers of race and gender (along with others) make their faith in American liberalism all the more tentative.

Pragmatic optimism turns out to be the normative kernel that Dawson derives from his description of black ideologies, but he never fully develops it. This idea merits elaboration; and while pragmatic optimism should take into account the historical legacy of a white-black racial divide, it should pull other racial categories into its critical ambit, too. Iris Marion Young's distinction between social theory and pragmatic theory offers some guidance for how a pragmatic political theory of race might proceed: "A social theory is self-enclosed, in the sense that it offers no particular purpose other than to understand, to reveal the way things are." Young rejects this as insufficient for the project of feminism, which seeks to ameliorate sexual injustice. She urges feminists instead to engage in pragmatic theory, by which she means "categorizing, explaining, developing accounts and arguments that are tied to specific practical and political problems, where the purpose of this theoretical activity is clearly related to those problems."[8]

Young takes up the political problem of rescuing a coherent definition of "women" from various anti-essentialist critiques generated by interdisciplinary feminist discourse over the past 20 years.[9] This is a pragmatic exercise insofar as it aims to strike a balance between Marxist and cultural feminist depictions of women as a tightly unified group,[10] and postmodern deconstructions of the term *women* into an infinite regress of difference and individuation that hinders feminist political organization and action.[11] Pragmatic feminist theory produces narratives of *how* women experience sexual subordination—in Young's case, as a passive "series" rather than a self-conscious group—with the intention of informing rather than determining actual public policy making. That this pragmatic feminist theory does not presuppose any particular political leaning allows it to function as a catalyst for broad-based democratic debate over the right ends.

Imagination tempered by realism is what I take Young's conception of pragmatic theory to mean. I am not suggesting that political theorists can or should try to avoid partisanship or activism, but a general pragmatic political theory of race should be elastic enough to encompass a range of perspectives—including liberal, conservative, socialist, and progressive ones. A key virtue of political theory methodology is the mental exercise of stepping back from the world as it is, in order to imagine the world as it might be. Difficulties arise, however, when political theorists step so far back from practical realities that they lose sight of race altogether. This racial retreat is symptomatic of the dominant paradigm of liberal neutrality at the heart of contemporary Anglo-American political theory. For political liberals following in the footsteps of John Rawls, fairness requires envisioning a set of political institutions that do not disadvantage individuals based on "accidents of birth" such as race and sex, and class in the case of children.[12] The liberal self, at least for the purposes of political deliberation, is a self "unencumbered" by these morally arbitrary differences.

Yet even when liberal political theorists tackle matters of group difference, they often evade race in general and the case of African Americans in particular. On the subject of multicultural challenges to liberal neutrality, for instance, political theorists tend to focus on minority groups with high levels of cultural cohesion, such as the Amish, French Canadians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The ties that bind African Americans together are more opaque than language and religion. Black cultural practices are diverse and often overlap with white cultural practices. A long history of cultural interplay between blacks and whites has produced art forms like jazz and hip-hop that are better described as American than specifically African American. At the same time, many social scientists argue that models of white ethnic pluralism fail to capture the anomalous historical trajectory of black Americans.[13] Instead of using this anomaly to rethink liberalism, many political theorists simply relegate African Americans to a footnote or overlook them altogether.[14]

Even though racialism—the premise "that all the members of [a race] share certain [heritable] traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race"— is false,[15] there still exists a pragmatic need to invoke racialism as a means of understanding and addressing the moral problem of racism, by which I mean the invidious treatment of people based on racialism. How much and what sort of attention ought to be given to racialism is the pivotal question tackled by all five books reviewed in this essay. Paul Gilroy, now a professor of sociology and African American studies at Yale, acknowledges racialism but sees it as anathema to humanism (by which he means our common humanity) in our present post–civil rights circumstance. Whereas Dawson wants to bridge our common humanity with the racial specificity of blackness, Gilroy sets out

to eradicate racialism from our understanding of what it means to be human.

Against Race, as the title suggests, is a heavy-handed denunciation of race as a source of first-person identity and third-person identification. Gilroy examines the impact of cultural artifacts such as hip-hop, black fraternal organizations, and black cultural nationalism on the idea of individual freedom for people of African descent. He argues that these and other modes of "black culture" promote a racial self that is destructive of the liberal self at the core of democratic theory. Gilroy finds proof of this destruction in the use of racialism by fascist movements of the twentieth century. Although he is careful to distinguish the fascism of the Third Reich from "black fascism," he believes that both variants of fascism harbor the dangerous pretense of racial innocence, which "seeks to shield its beneficiaries from the effects of the complex moral choices that define human experience and . . . insulate them from the responsibility to act well and choose wisely" (230).

Gilroy has a partial point here. There is no getting around the fact that race is sometimes used by blacks to deflect moral responsibility for personal failings that should not be attributed to racism. Such deflection runs the ideological gambit from Justice Clarence Thomas's description of his confirmation hearings as a high-tech lynching to those who would claim societal racism as the sole explanation for a black student's poor academic performance. These and other misappropriations of racism are morally wrong not only because they allow people to shirk responsibility for their actions, but for the more socially corrupting reason that playing the "race card" precludes conversation—and we desperately need to talk to one another about race and racism. Racial identity can and should serve as a pragmatic coping device, but it should never be worn as a shield against moral responsibility. This sort of moral failing is by no means commensurate with fascism, however, so it calls for a response far less drastic than the annihilation of all race-based thinking.

Gilroy's past criticisms of racial thinking are much more subtle. His 1993 book *The Black Atlantic* presents a fluid notion of black cultural practice that aims to avoid the fallacy of racial authenticity. The metaphor of ships crisscrossing the Atlantic Ocean illustrates the dynamic flow of people of African descent back and forth across the Atlantic to various locations in the African diaspora (the Middle Passage, immigration, work, education, tourism), and their concomitant crafting and exchange of cultural products in an ongoing process of hybridization. Gilroy's decision to label this process "a black Atlantic cultural politics"[16] indicates a desire to conserve racial meaning, albeit in a very loose sense. One could use this notion of race-linked cultural process to construct a pragmatic political theory that is race-conscious or race-sensitive without succumbing to a fixed biological or cultural notion of race. I use this malleable sense of race and culture in my own theorizing about personal and interpersonal racial navigation in family formation. If black culture is not a static bundle of practices to be automatically placed in the hands of those persons identified as African American, then black individuals retain some degree of individual agency in developing their own life plans in a race-conscious society. Racial navigation refers to our pragmatic

need to be aware of how others see us, while at the same time guarding against the passive absorption of this racial imposition.

I offer this pragmatic theory of race as a rejoinder to those who oppose transracial adoption on the grounds that white parents cannot transmit a proper black cultural identity to black children. White parents of black children should be race-sensitive, but black children should be treated as active navigators, fashioning their own racial identities as they mature. Conversely, blacks should be permitted, even encouraged, to adopt white children as a way of breaking racial stereotypes of who can care for whom, as well as rethinking what it means to develop a white identity.[17] Interracial families do not guarantee that a person will critically examine his or her racial identity, but the presence of racial fissure is likely to at least stir racial questioning. Separating positive racial meaning from the negative genesis of race is no small feat and, in some cases, may prove extremely difficult. The constant threat of racial awareness degenerating into racism remains a potent counterargument to those of us who wish to maintain race as a viable aspect of personal identity. Can the modern political ideal of individual human freedom ever blossom in the midst of racial categories derived from a tortured history of brutal racism?

Answers to this dilemma turn on how one conceptualizes the relationship between racial identity and a race-based social structure. Gilroy now argues that all contemporary appeals to racial identity express the dangerous fiction of biopolitics, the false belief that a person's identity is based solely in his or her body. He argues that the attainment of formal or political racial equality through legislation enacted during the 1950s and 1960s has shut down fruitful contemporary public discussion about new forms of race-based cultural dictates that snuff out individualism and a sense of shared humanity. African Americans have retreated into a private, culture-based conservative state of civic withdrawal. What is needed, according to Gilroy, is race-blind integration into the public sphere, not self-segregation along the lines of race-based cultural practice.

A pragmatic political theory of race should retain color-blind humanism as an ideal, but pragmatism necessitates noticing the existence of racial categories in the here and now. Gilroy ignores the possibility that race can serve as a means of navigating personal identity, leaving the reader with a lopsided, negative picture of race. By zooming in on hip-hop and the Nation of Islam as two purveyors of black fascism, Gilroy also gives the misleading impression that all African Americans, or at least the vast majority of them, support and/or participate in these practices. Furthermore, it is insulting to the intelligence of those blacks that do listen to hip-hop or find something attractive in the Nation of Islam to imply that these actions necessarily deplete one's capacity for autonomous thought and action. Hip-hop for Gilroy is "a gloomy presentation of black humanity composed of limited creatures who require tradition, pedagogy, and organization. This seems to go hand in hand with a fascistic fear and contempt of the masses" (206). Might it be possible that the fast cars, flashy jewelry, and sexual explicitness found in rap videos are more the result of youthful rebellion and its timeless marketability than the consequence of something doomed to destroy "black humanity"? Yes, many hip-hop videos are full of misogyny and homophobia,

but so are many rock videos and other products of U.S. popular culture. These matters ought to be addressed on their own terms because they are endemic to U.S. culture generally, not because they are isolated attributes of blackness.

Ironically, Gilroy's hand-wringing over the ostensible retreat of blacks from race-blind civic participation ends up shoring up the very conservatism he criticizes. At one point, Gilroy bemoans the loss of older forms of black culture, which celebrated black love, in contrast to newer forms of music that offer nothing more than sex stories. One hears echoes of Cornel West's critique of black nihilism in the early 1990s, and his subsequent call for a return to a black love ethic as a cultural corrective.[18] Dawson, too, yearns for an earlier time in the twentieth century when black civil society experienced an "ideological flowering" (321). Indeed, Dawson believes that some of the dialogical richness of the past should be resuscitated and made more just. The past can be a source of inspiration for contemporary reform. But we should always be mindful of selective memory and its tendency to simplify and romanticize complex historical phenomena such as the black counterpublic under the heel of Jim Crow and the class diversity of urban black communities prior to suburbanization.

Gilroy's nostalgia for a kinder and gentler black culture inspires not reform but renunciation. The logic here is flawed. One would think that Gilroy's endorsement of race-blind humanism would call for a thoroughgoing repudiation of *all* race-based culture, even that of the past. Moreover, it is a stretch to suppose that all "black love songs" prior to the onset of hip-hop in the late 1970s were purely linked to civil rights objectives. And yet this seems to be the only historical justification for the expression of black race-consciousness:

> Perhaps the retreat into the spurious certainties that were once the exclusive stock in trade of European raciological thinking itself conveys the extent to which political tactics produced in the struggle against racial slavery, for democratic political rights and beyond those rights for a measure of social autonomy and cultural recognition, have become utterly exhausted (221).

Formal democratic political rights for blacks have been achieved, but these rights have failed to produce substantive racial equality for large numbers of African Americans. It is no longer the case that *most* blacks are poor, but blacks continue to be overrepresented among the poor, to face racial discrimination in housing markets, and to be less likely than whites to own a home, to name just a few indicators.[19] Color-blind liberalism will not improve such racial disparity, because it fails to see racism as a factor in creating and sustaining social and economic inequality.

Gilroy is more convincing when he turns his critical eye to the provincialism of most U.S. race theory. Indeed, a global wake-up call seems to be his primary purpose in embracing race-blind humanism with such vigor. He is right to chide U.S. race theorists for not paying enough attention to global political issues such as the widening chasm between overdeveloped and underdeveloped countries, debt forgiveness for developing countries in Africa and South America, and increasing economic divisions within black communities the world over. One could add to this list the increasing presence of black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean as a further strain on the tethers of African American racial solidarity.[20] Issues of social and economic diversity among blacks in a global context warrant attention. But these issues involve race and thus call for a pragmatic political theory that is race-conscious rather than race-blind.

The analogy Gilroy draws between racial solidarity and fascism is, of course, not original. Richard Wright, for instance, drew parallels between Nazism and black racial unity, and Gilroy quotes him at length: "I encountered and recognized familiar emotional patterns. . . . I am not speaking of the popular idea of regimenting people's thought; I'm speaking of the implicit, almost unconscious, or pre-conscious, assumptions and ideals upon which whole nations and races act and live" (207). Only race-blind humanism can cure black fascism, because it postulates a prepolitical ideal and thus a vision of a world unscarred by racism; it stresses reason and autonomy—rather than race-dependent human attributes—as universal. It is this sense of universality that Gilroy believes will rescue blacks from cultural isolation, thereby connecting them to the rest of the world.

This passion for race-blind humanism may betray Gilroy's British background. Pessimism or realism runs through much U.S. race theory—a perspective that Dawson characterizes as "disillusioned liberalism." Outside observers, dating back to Alexis de Tocqueville's U.S. tour (1831–1832) and Gunnar Myrdal's observation of the American "Negro Problem" (1944), have played a critical role in highlighting the peculiarities of American race as well as its continuities with more far-flung patterns of racial domination.[21] Gilroy criticizes black American culture and politics from a black British perspective. His faith in humanism reflects an optimism that is rare (but not unheard of) among blacks native to the United States. Antiblack racism certainly exists in Britain and other Western democracies, but the historical experience of colonialism abroad differs from the legacy of slavery at home. During its colonial rule, Britain's nonwhite "colonial subjects" remained at a physical distance in the colonies. Yet, as cultural critic Stuart Hall puts it, "in the very moment when finally Britain convinced itself it had to decolonize, it had to get rid of them, we all came back home. . . . [T]hey had always said that this [London] was really home, the streets were paved with gold, and bloody hell, we just came back to check out whether that was so or not."[22] Hall is obviously being sardonic here. But all sarcasm contains some truth, and the grain of truth here may be that the physical distance between the colonies and the metropole may engender some hopefulness—at least prior to the disappointment of "returning home" to London's ordinary streets.

Colonial return figures prominently in the historical trajectory of French racial politics too. Taguieff, a French philosopher, considers French nativism and its counter-use by immigrants from former French colonies such as Algeria and Morocco, as well as by French Jews with historical roots in France. His book *The Force of Prejudice* is a dense and somewhat repetitive philosophical meditation on what an American might call reverse racism—the redeployment of racist language and action by the oppressed to vilify his or her oppressor. Taguieff shares Gilroy's belief that race-blind humanism is the only hope for escaping this

nefarious linguistic bind and dissolving racism once and for all. The shift in geographical perspective is extremely helpful in sorting out general race trends from their nationalized variations. In France racism did not emerge from a white-black historical divide, but developed instead as a tension between "authentic" native French citizens and ethnic outsiders, arriving mostly from former French colonies. Yet even in this ethnically diverse racial scenario, equality and racial difference can never be synthesized, according to Taguieff. The only way to prevent the double effect of reverse, or antiracist, racism is to adopt "deideologized humanism."

This approach parallels Gilroy's argument against race. Taguieff shows that much of the graffiti produced in reaction to French nativism during the 1980s recycled the racist language of bestiality, pollution, filth, and criminality: "[Jean-Marie] Le Pen, dirty buttfucking Breton, not even French." "Dirty French people out! France for those who deserve it (École Polytechnique)." "Indigenous French people out! France for the Jews who make it prosperous and proud" (33). For Taguieff this replication marks a common human desire to manufacture a flawless enemy, one that is clearly demarcated as other. When we use racist discourse to condemn the other, we end up misunderstanding both the "racist other" and ourselves. "For, being content with fictionalizing the Other, even the *racist* [emphasis in original] Other, one is condemned to miss him: not to know him at all, never to reach him except in forms filtered by uncriticized preconceptions" (34).

This formulation borrows heavily from the existentialist dialectical structure advanced by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.[23] But unlike the Marxist existentialists, Taguieff does not believe that the self-other dialectic will produce a temporary racialism on the road to a raceless conclusion or synthesis.[24] Rather, the assent to racial difference, no matter what form, traps one in a never-ending cycle of racism. The most destructive consequence of this replication is that it robs the term *racism* of its critical value. This descriptive point is useful, but like most fans of race-blindness, Taguieff falters when it comes to the question of what is to be done. In the final chapter, he implores the reader (1) to make a conscious effort to fight the urge to sustain "ethnocultural" groups, and (2) "to distinguish authentic universalism from its instrumentalizations by Western ethnocentrism— in short, no longer to confuse the legitimate critique of the simulacra of the universal with the nihilist rejection of every requirement for universality" (305). This second point is important for avoiding the racism of assimilation, something that Gilroy fails to address. But Taguieff gives no practical pointers about how to avoid this immense problem. U.S. race scholars are, for the most part, aware of this problem, and it is precisely why so many buttress their hopes for "authentic universalism" with a dose of racial pragmatism.

Ideals are important, but only if one feels as though he or she has some chance of attaining them. My dissatisfaction with both Gilroy's and Taguieff's arguments is that they do not give serious consideration to the possibility that a certain kind of racial self-identification, flexible racial navigation, can be consistent with the principles of moral equality and shared humanity, and may even further aspirations to self-determination and individualism.

Racial navigation rejects the idea that race is an adequate description of one's humanity, but it also recommends an acute awareness of racial norms and their origins; it toggles between personal and public conceptions of identity and identification, with the intention of striking a compromise between the theoretical extremes of race-blind humanity and a static definition of race based in biology or culture.

In *The Miner's Canary,* Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres are also in search of a definition of race that avoids these extreme destinations. Their concept of *political race* is cognizant of the personal dimensions of race, but focuses strictly on political activism and coalition building in a post–civil rights era. Political race is not a description of people's lives; instead, it functions as an invitation to everyone, regardless of racial classification, to band together in a grass-roots political movement aimed at remedying a long list of social inequalities that we might not recognize as being connected to racial injustice. Race is therefore important, not as a coping device or source of pride, but because racial minorities, and blacks in particular, are the most obvious victims of farther-reaching, more intricate webs of social inequality. African Americans serve a diagnostic function: they are metaphorical canaries in the mine, signaling the health of the broader polity. In essence, political race seeks to overcome the practical obstacle of racial self-interest. In lieu of liberalism's top-down, oppressor-victim model of power, Guinier and Torres opt for Michel Foucault's formulation of power as a vast, historically dependent maze that implicates everyone in the perpetuation of social hierarchies. We fail to notice that "race camouflages unfair resource distribution among whites as well as blacks" (20).

Guinier and Torres champion the "Texas 10 percent plan" as an example of how transracial coalition building at the grass-roots level can achieve race-based objectives without resorting to the jaded language of race-based affirmative action. In 1996 the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit declared unconstitutional the use of race in admission to the University of Texas School of Law, a ruling that extended to other colleges and universities in the state system. Faced with imminent declines in black and Mexican American enrollment, a multiracial grass-roots activist coalition convinced the Texas legislature to adopt a bill that guaranteed the top 10 percent of each graduating high school class in the state admission to a flagship college within the state system. A key breakthrough "occurred when the advocates of reform revealed that some counties in West Texas had *never* sent a high school graduate to the University of Texas" (73). It soon became clear to conservative politicians representing poor rural white districts that economic stratification and geographic isolation had damaged their constituents' educational opportunities. What initially seemed like a narrow debate over racial preferences emerged as something symptomatic of more broad-based regional economic disparity within Texas.

Economist Glenn Loury shares Guinier and Torres's enthusiasm for the "Texas 10 percent plan" as well as similar measures adopted in Florida and California, but on different theoretical grounds. Whereas Guinier and Torres invoke race solely as a catalyst for political action via coalition building, Loury's *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* is more interested in the cognitive

matter of how individual actors think about race across a wide array of public and private venues. His prescription for race egalitarianism is intended as a broad-based moral project that encompasses but also goes beyond formal politics. This moral depth brings Loury's theorizing in line with the disciplinary conventions of political theory. Nevertheless, his analysis stops short of being a comprehensive, pragmatic political theory of race because it fails to explore the idea of first-person racial identity in any depth. Loury trains his attention instead on the activity of third-person racial identification, namely processes of racial stereotyping and racial stigmatizing. In our current post–civil rights moment, Loury contends that the anatomy of racial inequality is more deeply nestled in cognitive psychology, by which he means the mechanisms we use to absorb and interpret information.

Racial stigma is morally worse than racial stereotype because the former connotes essentialism and occurs at a deeper (less conscious) psychological level than do stereotypes, which derive from reasonable anticipation. One explanation for why race continues to plague U.S. society is what Loury terms self-confirming stereotypes. He argues, for example, that it is reasonable for loan officers to expect that blacks are statistically more likely than whites to default on commercial loans (stereotype). It is not, however, reasonable for loan officers to blame this probability on the belief that blacks are innately inferior to whites (stigma). Exogenous causal factors are at play—whites selling their houses when blacks move into a neighborhood, for instance, and white loan officers' *expectations* that racial differences will exist. Yet Loury is cagey about what, if anything, should be done to break this vicious cycle of self-confirming racial stereotype: "I am arguing neither 'for' nor 'against' stereotypes. I seek merely to grasp their consequences; to fathom how racial stereotyping creates the facts that are its own justification; to understand how reasonable people, who base their surmises on hard evidence, can nonetheless hold the pernicious idea that blacks are different from others in some deeper (than race) way that accounts for their lowly status" (36).

For Loury, the term *racism* is not useful in addressing racial stigma, because of its association with "looking through government statistics for evidence of racial discrimination" (88), an activity that diverts attention away from more entrenched and thus more powerful mechanisms of racial bias. Racial stigma produces "spoiled collective identities," (59) which prevent black access to social capital. This diminishes employment prospects and career advancement, which in turn hinders one's ability to accumulate wealth,[25] all of which conspire to create the false impression that whites are ipso facto superior to blacks. Loury praises the "Texas 10 percent plan" not because it tackles these deeper racial problems, but because it circumvents the superficial and self-defeating framework of antidiscrimination law, epitomized by the affirmative action controversy. Although he has said for many years that "a modest degree of affirmative action in higher education could be justified,"[26] he also believes that such policies promote self-confirming racial stereotypes because they create two different standards (167). When candidates are aware of these different levels of expectation, they are likely to adjust their efforts accordingly. In the end, "the initial belief by admissions officers—that different standards were necessary to achieve enough diversity—may have been a self-fulfilling prophecy" (33).

Guinier and Torres interpret this "self-fulfilling prophecy" differently. Aligning themselves with the scholar-activist movement of critical race theory, Guinier and Torres blame structural inequalities for racial discrepancies on standardized tests such as the SAT and the LSAT. In Guinier's research with Susan Sturm, "[t]est scores tended to correlate better with parental income (and even grandparents' socioeconomic status) than actual student performance in college or law school" (68). One of the central claims of critical race theory is that color-blindness does not equal antiracism. Standardized testing, often touted as an objective assessment tool, favors those fortunate enough to have wealthy parents who can afford expensive SAT and LSAT prep courses. Since wealth and family history of college and graduate school attendance correlate heavily with race, one can deduce that university reliance on standardized testing may not be race-neutral after all. Our complacent acceptance of what Guinier and Torres call a "testocracy" exemplifies the continuation of a general conservative retreat from race-based government aid that was set in motion during the Reagan-Bush years.[27]

Critical race theory began taking shape during the 1980s in response to this "racial retrenchment."[28] Critical race theorists (race crits) value the political and legal gains of the civil rights movement, but view law as a limited strategy for bringing about substantive racial equality in, for example, education, employment, and housing. The critique of liberal legal theory used by civil rights leaders is a modified extension of the leftist critical legal studies movement (crits) forged in the 1960s and 1970s. Picking up where the legal realists of the 1920s and 1930s left off, the crits invoked postmodern theory to challenge law's claim to objectivity. Politics infected the crafting and interpretation of legal categories to such an extent that race and rights were little more than malleable social constructions to be manipulated by elites to maintain their status. In the eyes of race crits, this "trashing" of the language of racialism and rights undermined the strategic and symbolic importance of rights for black Americans in the fight against racism. In short, "[w]here classical liberalism argued that race was irrelevant to public policy, these crits argued that race simply didn't exist."[29]

Loury is neither a race crit nor a crit. On the contrary, his beliefs in religious tradition and the ideology of "small government" libertarianism have led him to feel more at home in the conservative intellectual movement than in the "disillusioned liberalism" popular among so many African Americans. Black conservatives such as Loury, Shelby Steele, Thomas Sowell, and John McWhorter are often suspected by black liberals of being the opportunistic pawns of white conservatives. Sometimes this suspicion rings true, but Loury's conservatism is more thoughtful. He was an ardent supporter of the Republican Party's economic and crime policies during the Reagan and Bush administrations, but he has never denied the existence of racism as an obstacle to black achievement.[30] Moreover, and especially of late, he has pushed white conservatives to acknowledge their moral responsibility to do something proactive about racial inequality: "We need a morally astute, politically mature conservatism that

acknowledges personal responsibility as one part of the social contract but also understands the importance of collective responsibility. 'Those people' who now languish in America's central cities are 'our' people, and 'we' must build relationships with them. We cannot simply abandon them or leave them to their own devices."[31]

Some degree of government intervention may be needed, but the more serious racial problem for Loury lies in psychological processes of racial stigmatization that cannot be reached via legislation. Racial stigma and stereotyping constrict the freedom and thus the opportunities of black individuals. The exploration of this dynamic, especially from an economist's perspective, is a valuable intellectual exercise. While I find his distinction between racial stereotype and racial stigma intriguing, I disagree with Loury's conclusion that we can never dismantle the latter by chipping away at the former. I agree that racial stigma operates at a deeper cognitive level than does racial stereotyping, but the deployment of racial stereotype operates to drive racial stigma even farther underground. There is intellectual value in keeping these two concepts theoretically distinct, but there is a corresponding moral and social value in seeing their intimate connection.

A pragmatic political theory of race can and should elucidate this cognitive connection, as well as the many links between personal and public racial meaning. Ultimately, such a theory should do more than merely describe our social and political world; it should recommend a mode of racial identity that is consistent with some vision of the good life. Racial navigation answers this call by theorizing a dynamic process of racial identity that mediates between the experiential realities of being an individual person and being seen by others as belonging to a racial group. I intend for this normative notion of racial identity to supplement rather than supplant social-scientific racial analyses. As such, racial navigation is just one piece of a larger theoretical puzzle concerning the impact of race on our political world. There are competing arguments about the normative personal and political value of race, some of which have been reviewed in this essay.

What can a political theorist bring to the study of race that a cultural critic or economist cannot? All of the theories discussed above have political implications and therefore would appear to fall under the canopy of political theory. What makes political theory methodologically special, however, is the imaginative power it can draw from its disciplinary proximity to social-scientific political science. Political theorists have the opportunity to use qualitative and quantitative studies of race as springboards for imagining the normative dimensions of race. This teamwork need not be official in the sense of shared authorship, but can instead inculcate a division of intellectual labor that produces pragmatic solutions to the various political problems associated with the ethical wrong of racism.

As a final thought, Dawson's pragmatic vision for political theory bears repeating: "[A] *black* political theory has to embody a theory of the state, power, human nature, and the good life. And such a theory must be based on the hope for and potential of the improvement of human nature while recognizing the wickedness of the world" (322). Although I would substitute "racial" for "black," Dawson is absolutely right to bring a sense of racial realism to bear on questions that have been treated as racially neutral by so many political theorists. The task at hand is to make lofty philosophical questions, such as what constitutes the good life, relevant to those who must struggle to create and sustain their life projects within the confines of racial categories.

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Notes

1 See, for example, Balfour 2001; Appiah and Gutmann 1996; Young 1990.

2 I borrow the term *racial formation* from Omi and Winant 1994.

3 Green and Shapiro 1994.

4 Habermas 1984.

5 Calhoun 1992; Fraser 1989.

6 Maulana Ron Karenga, quoted and discussed in White 1995.

7 See, for example, King 1995; Hill Collins 1998; Lorde 1984.

8 Young 1995, 192.

9 See, for example, Barvosa-Carter 2001; King 1995; Phelan 1997; Spelman 1988.

10 For an example of cultural feminism, see Chodorow 2000; for Marxist feminism, see Firestone 2000; MacKinnon 1989.

11 See Cixous 1981; Irigaray 1985.

12 See Rawls 1971.

13 See Omi and Winant 1994; Waters 1990.

14 Michael Walzer writes in a footnote, "A historical and empirical account of the place of blacks in the 'system' of American pluralism would require another essay, a different book." Walzer 1996, 44–5.

15 Appiah 1992, 13.

16 Gilroy 1993, xi.

17 Fogg-Davis 2002.

18 West 1993.

19 In 2001, 22.7 percent of black Americans were poor, as compared with 7.8 percent of whites; 47.7 percent of blacks were homeowners, as compared with 74.3 percent of whites. U.S. Census 2001. Poverty rates by race and Hispanic origin: 1959–2001 (Figure 3). Standard errors for homeownership rates by race and ethnicity: 2001 (Table B-7). On contemporary housing discrimination, see Levin 2003.

20 Rogers 2000 argues that the political incorporation of Afro-Caribbean immigrants in New York City differs in some subtle respects from that of European ethnic groups and native-born African Americans.

21 Tocqueville 1945; Myrdal 1962. On Tocqueville's impressions of race in America, see Smith 1993; Outlaw 2002.

22 Quoted in Brown 1995, 52.

23 Sartre 1995; de Beauvoir 1973.

24 Michael Walzer interprets Jean-Paul Sartre as recommending temporary multiculturalism (Jewishness) on the road to achieving no-culturalism, which is really just a call for assimilation to Frenchness. Preface to Sartre 1995.

25 For a sociological study of black wealth, see Conley 1999.

26 Loury 1997.

27 For example, the Supreme Court deemed unconstitutional race-conscious governmental efforts to correct for racial disadvantage. *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.* 1989 and *Adarand Constructors v. Pena* 1995.

28 The term belongs to Crenshaw 1988.

29 Crenshaw et al. 1995, xxvi.

30 Loury stated, "I have gladly joined the Republican side on some highly partisan policy debates: on federal enterprise zones, on a youth opportunity wage, on educational vouchers for low-income students, on stimulating ownership among responsible public housing tenants, on requiring work from able-bodied welfare recipients, on dealing sternly with those who brutalize their neighbors." Loury 1995, 20.

31 Loury 1997.