

# *Two Americas, Two Value Systems: Blacks and Whites'*

The situation of African Americans has been qualitatively different from that of any other racial or ethnic minority in the United States. African Americans did not come willingly to this country seeking reprieve from poverty or discrimination; they were, rather, forced into the status of an underclass facing racism from the start. Being defined either de jure or de facto as a caste for most of their history, blacks, like European workers, are much more likely than whites to respond to group-related, rather than individually oriented values. They are thus the great exception to the American Creed, to American ideological exceptionalism.

### TWO PEOPLES, TWO STRATIFICATION SYSTEMS

From its inception, the United States has been composed of two peoples differentiated by skin color whose values and outlook stem from radically different experiences. The dominant or majority position, as set forth in the American Creed and described by many foreign sociological observers of the country, emphasizes social egalitarianism, respect across class lines, and meritocracy, equality of opportunity. The minority situation, identified with the position of black Americans, has clearly been for most of American history a system of explicit hierarchy, of caste, of inequality related to hereditary origins. Curiously, many of the classic writings about the United States in the nineteenth century (even those written by people who were strongly abolitionist), which stressed its exceptional character as an egalitarian society, either ignored the position of blacks or cited it as a major exception that would invariably change as blacks were freed and were incorporated into the larger system.

A stress on achievement, on moving up in the class system, linked

with the widespread belief in individualism and equality of opportunity, has been greater in white America than elsewhere. On the public policy level, this can be seen most clearly in the early extension of public education to all, as well as the decision to try to give everyone a *common* (equal) education. Of course this goal did not include blacks, most of whom were slaves at the time.

The strength of this early American commitment to competitive achievement may be seen in the many writings which consciously rejected the European class-differentiated education system. To foster equality of opportunity, the educational reformers, as noted earlier, held up to scorn European academic high schools, the *Gymnasias* in Germany, the *lycees* in France, the public and grammar schools in England, which only served at most the top 10 percent of the population. American educators and politicians rejected this elitist model as fostering a rigid class society. Rather, they pressed for education in a common school. These trans-Atlantic variations continued long into the twentieth century, as many European countries maintained academically high-standard schools attended by a small privileged minority, who were destined for university.

The vitality of the early stress on meritocratic values is attested to by one of the most remarkable and curious developments in American history, the emergence in the late 1820s of the first political groups in the world to be known as Workingmen's parties, mentioned briefly in chapter Three. In New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and other cities, these parties received between 10 and 15 percent of the vote in local state elections. The Workingmen were not socialists; they believed in private property, and they wanted people to strive to get ahead and become rich precisely because they favored a more open, more competitive society. The New York party, as we have seen, rejected as inadequate the idea of common schools, proposing instead the creation of state-financed boarding schools. Attending the same school for five or six hours a day would not change the basic environment of children of diverse social origins. The only way to create the proverbial level playing field, the Workingmen reasoned, was by raising the young of all classes in a common atmosphere. They clearly linked class-based cultural advantage to the perpetuation of inequality.

Not surprisingly, the Workingmen did not gain power. They were, however, able to elect members to legislatures and city councils. The fact that a party with this radical plank could get 10 to 15 percent of the vote in New York City indicates that during the first half century of the republic, at the time of slavery, there was a strong commitment to

the value of equality of opportunity for whites which was associated with a belief in a competitive market economy.<sup>2</sup>

It cannot be stressed enough that much in contemporary attitudes and behavior may be explained by the cultural emphasis on achievement. Most Americans believe that hard work, rather than "lucky breaks or help from other people," is what enables people to move up. As noted, surveys taken by NORC from 1983 through 1992 found that around two thirds of respondents consistently agreed that "people get ahead by hard work." Much larger percentages said "ambition" is essential or very important (88%) "for getting ahead in life" than felt the same way about "coming from a wealthy family" (20%), or having well-educated parents (39%). According to a 1991 ABC poll, close to three quarters of American parents think their offspring will do better than they. As sociologist Robert K. Merton has noted, Americans have believed that everyone (which meant only white males until recently) should try to be a success, regardless of background.<sup>3</sup> Opinion poll data indicate that this value remains powerful, and that most white people now feel it applies to blacks and women as well. While understandably ambivalent about the promise of America, a majority of blacks also are committed to the belief that hard work and educational attainment will enable them to get ahead. A 1991 Gallup Poll found that "69 percent of whites and 68 percent of blacks say that African-Americans should focus most of their energy on improving [their] education".<sup>4</sup>

The strength of the achievement norm is related to another value universalism-that should be discussed in this context. Contrary to particularism or special treatment, universalism refers to the belief that everyone should be treated similarly without reference to traits stemming from birth, class, religion, ethnicity, gender, or color.

The treatment of blacks has been the foremost deviation from the American Creed throughout the history of the republic. If we count American history as starting around 1600, blacks have been here almost from 'the beginning. However, they spent their first two and a half centuries as slaves. For a hundred years after 1865 they largely served as a lower-caste group working under explicit or implicit Jim Crow policies, with little opportunity to gain educational or financial resources. Caste systems, whether slavery or segregation, were much more explicitly hierarchical and hereditary than European feudalism. Blacks have only been given a claim to political equality and economic opportunity since the 1960s.

Thomas Jefferson and George Washington were concerned about the way the treatment of blacks would impact on the future of Amer-

ica. Reacting to slavery, Jefferson wrote in 1781 that "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just."<sup>5</sup> Anticipating in 1791 the possibility that the country might break up because it could not resolve the problem, George Washington told a friend that if this happened, "he had made up his mind to move and be of the northern."<sup>6</sup> Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, felt-correctly as it turned out-that its proclamation that "all men are created equal" would undermine slavery, and that the idea of equality would have a continuing effect on American politics.

In 1944, following the logic of Jefferson's observation, Gunnar Myrdal noted in *An American Dilemma* that white Americans, including most southerners, believe they believe in the Creed even though their racist practices violate it. From this assumption he concluded that if blacks would organize to vigorously defend their rights and assert that they were mistreated, the whites would give in. Once they were forced to recognize that blacks were not treated equally, they would have to change their behavior if they wanted to maintain their belief in the Creed.' The political successes of the civil rights movement in the 1960s showed Myrdal to be right.

The white American value system has emphasized the individual. Citizens have been expected to demand and protect their rights on a personal basis. As we have seen, the exceptional emphasis on law in the United States as compared with Europe, derivative from the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, has stressed individual rights against the state and other powers. The experience of black Americans, however, has focused on group characteristics, on defining and treating people not according to their personal merits but according to their ancestry, their race, and their ethnic group. Postfeudal Europe was also organized in particularistic terms, that is, according to class background. However, Europe was less stringently stratified than the postslavery system in the United States. Thus pre-World War II America differed from Europe in two ways: (1) for its large white majority, it was much more egalitarian, individualistic, and populist; (2) for its black minority, it was much more hierarchical and particularistic, groupdefined, less free, and undemocratic.

### THE EUROPEAN COMPARISON

Stressing group characteristics encourages group solutions. In postfeudal Europe, the emphasis on the importance of one's station promoted

class-consciousness among the lower strata and, to some extent, a Tory sense of *noblesse oblige* among the privileged. To reiterate a point made earlier, upper-class conservative leaders, such as Disraeli in Great Britain and Bismarck in Germany, favored government efforts to improve the lot of the less affluent without necessarily changing their position in the social order, beliefs which encouraged the rise of a lower-class-based social democratic left. Americans, by contrast, have always put more emphasis on expanding individual opportunity through education. Comparative public opinion research documents that they are more likely than others to approve of greater expenditures for education than for increased welfare services. Comprehensive analyses of attitudes toward public policies over the past twenty years-mainly in the OECD countries-report that "the United States is consistently at the bottom in its support for different kinds of social welfare benefits." The one issue "on which Americans fare much better-and often the best-compared with other nations ... [is] educational opportunity, assistance and spending." And as Robert Shapiro and John Young note, these attitudes stem from "Americans' views and values concerning individualism and the equality of opportunity, as opposed to equality of outcomes for individuals."<sup>9</sup>

For much of this past century America has spent proportionately much more public money on education than Europe, while Europe has devoted more resources to welfare. The recent record bears out this generalization, which is discussed further in chapter Eight. As of 1981, about one fifth, 20.8 percent, of the American GDP was devoted to social expenditures, including education, as compared with over one quarter, 25.6 percent, as an average for all OECD countries. America spent 26.4 percent of its total social expenditures on education, compared with an OECD average of 22.7 percent.<sup>10</sup> Statistical reports for the mid-1980s reiterated this conclusion. In 1991, American educational expenditures amounted to 14.7 percent of all public spending; the average figure for the OECD countries for the same year was 11.8 percent.<sup>11</sup> The differences are even more striking when percentages of age cohorts who have been exposed to post-secondary education are compared.<sup>12</sup>

From early in the nineteenth century, the United States has led the world in the proportion of its population completing elementary and high school education. And while America also predominated in the ratio of those attending college and university, the numbers and proportions increased dramatically after World War II. In contrast to America, most European countries have devoted a much larger share of

their GDP and public funds to improving the living conditions of their working classes. Since the 1930s, the European Social Democrats have had frequent opportunities to hold office and have been able to follow through on improving the situation of the working class by emphasizing group improvement policies. But, until brought to a realization of the contrast with the United States, they preserved the elite high schools and failed to focus on the expansion of university education. The pattern may be illustrated by developments in the prototypical social democratic polity, Sweden. In office from 1933 until 1991 (except for six years) and again from 1994 on, the Social Democrats in their original hold on office greatly expanded the welfare state, but failed to recognize that their policies would have little influence on the achievement orientations of working-class youth, particularly on the proportions attending university or entering the professions. The situation in Sweden did not change until the American school desegregation decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, was announced by the Supreme Court in 1954. Up to that point, Sweden, like most other European countries, had a class-segregated high school educational system, with a privileged minority who attended the *nasia* leading them to university-level education, while the majority went to vocational schools that excluded the possibility of higher education. The Swedes, the British, and others began to integrate their high school systems in reaction to developments in the United States. They adopted policies designed to facilitate individual mobility by increasing the proportion of children from poorer families going to university. The ratios, however, are still much lower than in America.

#### GROUP-ORIENTED SOLUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, the caste-like conditions facing blacks became politically salient from the 1950s on and resulted, as in Europe, in efforts to find solutions at the group level. These have been characterized as "affirmative action." Originally used to describe early 1960s legislation, the term has had two meanings. The first, which emerged in the Kennedy-Johnson administrations, involved attempts to incorporate blacks into the meritocratic race for success. Perhaps the best statement presenting the logic of this policy was included in Lyndon Johnson's Howard University speech on June 4, 1965. He said that we want all Americans to engage in the race, but some are not able to do so

because they arrive at the starting line with shackles on their legs. He called for policies to remove these chains so that they could compete equally. Soon thereafter, he issued an executive order requiring all government contractors to "take affirmative action that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin." Subsequent initiatives became the War on Poverty, including greater spending for education through programs such as Head Start, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and other programs to strengthen the lower class, disproportionately comprised of black families. The programs were intended to increase opportunities for the poorest blacks and whites to enable them to enter integrated and better-financed schools, where they would acquire the skills needed to succeed.

These policies were reinforced by strong Fair Employment and Fair Housing legislation designed to eliminate discrimination and the effects of prejudice against blacks in the workplace, and the educational and housing markets, and eventually with respect to such castelike barriers in social relationships as club memberships. The programs were based on the assumption that equal education and the full extension of political citizenship to blacks, which came with Voting Rights Acts and judicial decisions, meant that blacks, like whites, could press for their legal rights as individuals in the courts and administrative tribunals.<sup>13</sup>

The concern that these policies, particularly those designed to reduce discrimination, were not working as quickly as was hoped, and the fact that racial barriers still operated in different arenas, led to the second meaning of "affirmative action." It emphasizes equality of result for groups rather than equality of opportunity for individuals, and assumes that the best way to improve the situation of blacks is through quotas or special preferences for jobs and educational opportunities. Affirmative action quotas were first introduced in 1969 by the Nixon administration by administrative fiat. Assuming that society imposed disadvantages on blacks-educational, motivational, and social-various Nixon appointees concluded that these could only be countered by giving blacks special advantages as a group.

The implementation of these policies did not primarily derive from specific demands made by blacks or the American left. Rather, they seemed to represent an innovative effort by segments of the white elite, initially the Republicans among them, to meet the civil rights movement's drive for equality." George Shultz, Nixon's first Secretary of Labor, and Leonard Garment, the president's counsel, concluded in

1969 that redress to courts and administrative agencies for anti-discrimination judgments would take too long and would not do much to open the discriminatory parts of the labor market to blacks. With the help of Labor Solicitor Lawrence Silberman, who wrote an extensive brief that racial job targets were legal exercises of presidential powers under the Fifth Amendment's due process clause, Shultz issued an administrative order which provided for hiring quotas for black apprentices, ironworkers, plumbers and pipefitters, electrical and other workers in the Philadelphia construction industry, an area in which employers and unions were cooperating to keep blacks out. The policy was soon extended to other cities." Similar programs were pressed with regard to faculty and students in higher education by other Nixon officeholders, with the approval of the president.<sup>15</sup> In explaining the origins of the policy, Silberman, subsequently a Reagan senior judicial appointee, wrote that he and his colleagues had been disturbed by the ambiguity concerning the order issued in the Johnson administration requiring " 'affirmative action' by government contractors to redress past employment discrimination. Appalled [and] ... uncomfortable with the image the party of Abraham Lincoln had developed, and most of all because the GOP was anxious to expand employment opportunities for blacks, we launched what I have come to see [by 1977] as a fundamentally unsound policy."<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, strong efforts were made to stop these policies by a Johnson appointee, Comptroller of the United States Elmer Staats, as well as by the trade union leadership, black civil rights leaders, and most congressional Democrats. They argued that the anti-discrimination clause of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Title VII, explicitly outlawed affirmative discrimination. Staats quoted Hubert Humphrey's pledge that nothing in the Act "will give any power to the [Equal Employment Opportunity] Commission or to any court to require hiring, firing, or promotion of employees in order to meet a racial 'quota' or to achieve a racial balance," and noted that its liberal Senate floor managers agreed that there would be no "consideration of color ... [in] the decision to hire or promote."<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, the AFL-CIO strongly opposed a quota policy, reflecting the views of "rank-and-file white workers who feared that such moves as the Philadelphia Plan would cost them jobs, and who saw themselves paying for social changes at the cost of personal and family security." "Unexpectedly, black civil rights leaders and Democratic congresspersons also rejected the quota plan as pitting black workers against white workers.

Congress defeated a rider to an appropriations bill which would have

explicitly banned quotas. Republicans voted against the rider by 124 to 41, while Democrats supported it by 115 to 84. President Nixon and Attorney General John Mitchell actively campaigned to achieve this result.<sup>20</sup> Nixon proclaimed: "The Democrats are token oriented-we are job oriented."<sup>21</sup> On the day Congress voted, December 23, 1969, the president issued a statement emphasizing that this would be "an historic and critical civil rights vote," and threatened to veto the appropriation measure if it included a section outlawing quotas.<sup>22</sup> George Shultz, speaking for the Nixon administration, attacked the civil rights leaders for their unwillingness to help the struggle for quotas.<sup>23</sup> They, in turn, criticized the president in partisan terms.

Clarence Mitchell, Washington lobbyist and director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), said ... that it was a "calculated attempt coming right from the President's desk to break up the coalition between Negroes and labor unions. Most of the social progress in this country has resulted from this alliance.

"Nixon's people are forcing employers to lay off workers and then telling them to put in a certain quota of blacks into these vacancies. It is a strategy designed to increase friction between labor and Negroes," said black Rep.

Augustus F. Hawkins (D-Calif.) in November 1970.<sup>24</sup>

George Bush, then a Republican congressman from Texas, backed the quota system, while liberal Democrat Ralph Yarborough, who represented that state in the Senate, fought it. When Bush ran for the Senate in 1970, he stressed his vote for a fair housing bill and his support of racial quotas in employment.<sup>25</sup>

The Nixon and subsequent administrations applied the principle of "communal rights" to other minorities, as well as to women. This effort, designed to guarantee equal results to groups, persisted through liberal and conservative administrations, even though opinion polls have repeatedly reported that overwhelming majorities of whites-both men and women-and often more than 50 percent of blacks, said that the principle of equal opportunity should apply to individuals only, that special preferences or quota guarantees should not be accorded to members of groups underrepresented in privileged jobs or educational categories. By 1972, Nixon had publicly dropped his approval of quotas and preferences, though his administration continued to enforce them. Ronald Reagan, of course, later emphasized meritocracy, but it should be noted that as recently as 1985, a majority of Republicans in the

Senate, led by Bob Dole, wrote an open letter to President Reagan insisting on the continuation of preferences. By 1995, most of them had seemingly reversed their position. Yet segments of American elites—including conservative jurists, such as Nixon appointee Supreme Court Chief Justice Warren Burger, who faced bitter opposition from archliberal justice William O. Douglas, and most Republican members of the Court, felt that the individualistic emphasis in the national creed should be amended to provide remedies for African Americans.<sup>26</sup> This concern has been extended to other groups who are perceived to lack equal rights because of ascriptive or biological traits: Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians (though the success of some of them has undermined their place), women, and the disabled.

### THE CASE FOR SPECIAL PREFERENCES

During the 1960s various analysts, most notably the black scholar Harold Cruse, argued that equality of opportunity and formal integration were not enough for blacks. Given their history of oppression and continued discrimination, blacks required recognition as a unique national minority and group rights above and beyond those sought by other minorities and the non-black poor. Cruse compared the black situation to that of the Jews, and argued that although Jews had faced great discrimination, all they needed was an end to discrimination and the application of meritocratic policies to themselves. Hence, he argued, this was what Jews demanded and ultimately obtained. Jewish organizations, however, have made individual rights and meritocracy into a fetish; they continue to emphasize the need to apply the American Creed to all immigrants, women, and minorities. But blacks, Cruse argued, must demand and obtain group rights because they are handicapped in open competition with whites by the continued effects of the institutionalized racism which has marked American history.<sup>27</sup>

African Americans are *the* minority group in the United States. They are better able than members of any other ethnic, religious, gender, or class category, except for Native Americans, to justify a claim for preferential treatment. Beyond the general emphasis on group-oriented policies is a demand for reparations. The argument is simple: white America profited greatly from the 250 years in which blacks were held as slaves and for most of the next 100 years during the Jim Crow period, when they continued to work in lower economic and caste posi-

tions as maids, unskilled workers in the cities, and stoop laborers in the fields. Parallels are offered to the acknowledgment by Congress of the obligation to recompense Japanese Americans for being incarcerated during World War II and by the German government to pay reparations to Jews and Israel.

In the past, the special advantages given to war veterans probably have constituted the most important qualification to the emphasis on meritocracy. Veterans have been given special preference when applying for civil service jobs. Even if a veteran is clearly not equal to a nonveteran in test scores, experience, or skill, he or she may get the job. Veterans also have been given advantages with respect to higher education opportunities and obtaining home mortgages. These policies are designed to make up for the disadvantages imposed on them by their service in the military.<sup>28</sup>

Particularistic values operate to handicap the socially depressed in all societies. People everywhere tend to hire and to give special preference to those with whom they have ties, relatives and members of the same ethnic, religious, communal, or cultural groups they themselves belong to. To a large extent, blacks have not fitted into privileged networks.

Most institutions do not publicly acknowledge such special preferences. Universities, though meritocratic and universalistic in their explicit values, have had admission policies which provide for particularistic advantages. Many, if not most, of the private universities, including distinguished ones like Harvard, Chicago, and Stanford, have given preference (all other things being equal or, sometimes, even not close to equal) to the children of alumni, faculty, and to athletes.<sup>29</sup> Universities also award special scholarships and fellowships which are limited to applicants from particular regional, gender, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. Some, but not all, of these are now illegal.

In 1963, I noted: "Perhaps the most important fact to recognize about the current situation of the American Negro is that *equality is not enough to assure his movement into the larger society.*"<sup>30</sup> And it is important to remember that women and most other minorities have required genuine equality of opportunity, not special help; this has certainly been true for the Jews, as well as most Asian and European immigrant groups. The Jews, the "Confucian" Asians, and the East Indians have done better on average than old-stock white Americans. In any case, immigrants generally have no claim on American society for preference or special advantage. Whatever handicaps some have as a result of inadequate education, lack of skills, or lack of socialization to the ways

of the cities are clearly not the fault of American society. Immigrants, including Hispanics and West Indians, are doing better economically after fifteen years in the country than persons born in the United States with the same social characteristics." Although many of them were not born here, roughly 40 percent of Mexican Americans are in white-collar or higher employment positions today."

Lawrence Fuchs has argued that the evaluation of proposals for preferential treatment in the occupational system should be linked to the "problem of standards," that is, the difference between jobs which require competence and those which demand special ability and training. While it is possible to recognize higher levels of performance in almost all occupations, in many, if not most, competence is what employers require. Seniority rights in business, government, and education, and legislation outlawing compulsory retirement ages are justified by assumptions about generalized competence, not superior achievement, as sufficient qualification for employment. Hence the contention that giving preference to blacks or other historically underprivileged groups is particularly relevant to competence jobs, assuming that other conditions are equal or close to equal. But it is argued that positions for which high achievement levels are necessary, such as scholarship, the arts, medicine, sports, airline pilots, and managers, should not be subject to quotas and special preference policies. A study determining the reasons for "the high rate of attrition of African Americans training to be pilots and navigators in the armed services concluded that ... those who graduate from college with less than a strong proficiency in verbal and quantitative skills would probably have difficulty keeping up with the rigorous curriculum and rapid pace of flight training `whether they are blacks or whites.'" Fuchs concludes that affirmative action programs, whether for Navy flyers or ballet dancers, are "necessarily limited to special recruitment and training efforts." However, he argues, efforts to increase the number of minority workers among the less skilled such as "firefighters, machinists, computer operators, and candidates for dental school" can include numerical goals, while permitting "race to be counted as one of many factors in attempting to meet them, along with insisting on basic qualifications.""

Whatever the merits of the distinction between competence and achievement in occupations, those in the less privileged positions—whether firefighters, police officers, dental technicians, or assemblyline workers—do not accept inherently disparaging estimates of their worth and skills. Poll after poll finds that white workers see no reason

for meritocratic standards and universalistic rules not applying to them. Conversely, it is the elite highly educated whites, whose positions and skill capital give them much more economic and status security than their lower-status racial counterparts, who are more disposed to favor or at least more willing to accept special preferences for minorities.

#### AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION

Mass opinion remains invariably opposed to preferential treatment for deprived groups.<sup>34</sup> Whites are fairly consistently and overwhelmingly in opposition; they favor meritocracy and individual competition. Blacks, however, vary in their reaction when queried in national polls. They are invariably more supportive of group rights, quotas, or special preferences than whites, but they differ in their response pattern depending on how the question is posed. More often than not, however, a majority or plurality supports meritocratic principles, though usually by a much smaller percentage than whites. African Americans are pulled to favor group rights, but as Americans they still respond favorably to the individualistic ethos. The Gallup Poll has dealt with these issues over time more frequently than any other survey organization. It repeated the same question six times between 1977 and 1991:

Some people say that to make up for past discrimination, women and minorities should be given preferential treatment in getting jobs and places in college. Others say that ability as determined by test scores, should be the main consideration. Which point of view comes close to how you feel on the subject?

In each survey, only 10 or 11 percent of respondents said the minorities should be given preferential treatment, while 81, 83, or 84 percent replied that ability should be the determining factor. When the 1989 answers were differentiated by the respondents' race, blacks were somewhat more supportive of preferential treatments than whites (14% to 7%), while a majority of the African Americans (56%) favored "ability, as determined in test scores." Women, it should be noted, responded in an identical way to men; 10 percent supported preferential treatment, and 85 percent ability.<sup>35</sup> Princeton Survey Research Associates, working for the *Times-Mirror* Center, presented the issue somewhat differently eight times between 1987 and 1994: "We should

make every effort to improve the position of blacks and other minorities even if it means giving them preferential treatment." This formulation was supported more strongly than the more complex one cited earlier. In 1987, 24 percent of respondents agreed, rising to 34 percent in 1992, then falling to 29 in 1994. Blacks were more positive than whites by 62 to 25 percent in 1994. As with the other Gallup questions, there was little difference between the gender groups. The great majority of white women opposed preferences in each poll. While over four fifths of identified Republicans are against preferences, so are two thirds of the Democrats. A relatively high proportion of those who identify themselves as "strong liberals," 43 percent, "endorse preferential treatment," but they constitute only 10 percent of the total sample.<sup>36</sup> The same question was also put by the NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll eight times between May 1987 and September 1994, with comparable results. Favorable responses appear to have moved up somewhat during the 1990s, reaching a high point of 34 percent in 1993, but dropping off to 29 percent in September 1994. The gap between blacks and whites grew considerably.

Preferential treatment does somewhat better when it is justified as making up for specific past discrimination, when ability is not posed as an alternative, and when it is limited to blacks and applies only to institutions that have actually discriminated. *The New York Times/CBS* national poll has asked repeatedly since 1985: "Do you believe that where there has been job discrimination against blacks in the past, preference in hiring or promotion should be given to blacks today?" In 1985, 42 percent answered yes, 46 percent no. Most recently, in 1993 and February 1995, support sentiment had dropped to 33 percent, while 55 percent rejected justified preferences.

The opposition to preferences does not mean that whites think blacks have attained equality or that the government should not outlaw discrimination. In February 1993, Gallup found that 72 percent of all whites said society does not treat people of all races equally. In August 1994, the same organization found that 44 percent of whites agreed that "in the past few years there hasn't been much real improvement in the position of blacks in this country," down 10 percentage points from 1992. And the June 1993 NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll reported that 63 percent of their sample agreed that "Racial discrimination still exists and the government should pass laws to eliminate it." The majority of both whites and blacks will support a policy described as "affirmative action" if the question does not mention quotas, as the ABC News/Wall Street Journal poll found in July 1990. Two thirds of whites

(66%) and 84 percent of blacks responded favorably to the question: "All in all, do you favor or oppose affirmative action programs in business for blacks, provided there are no rigid quotas?" The Harris Organization reported somewhat similar results to a comparable query repeated a number of times during the 1980s, as did CNN/Gallup in January 1992 and September 1994, asking about "strengthening affirmative action laws for women, blacks and minorities" (49% in favor, 43% opposed in 1994).

## PREFERENCES AND THE AMERICAN CREED

It is interesting to note that two other beneficiaries of affirmative action preferences, white women and Latinos, are less supportive of quotas as a remedy for past discrimination than blacks, women much less so. Most of the evidence for Latinos comes from surveys of Californians. These find a range of responses during the 1980s supporting special treatment or preference for minorities and women running between 55 and 67 percent among blacks and 37 and 45 percent among Latinos, with Asians at 15 to 20 percent favorable." In 1995, *The Field Poll* queried Californians on how they would vote on the "California Civil Rights Initiative," a measure which respondents were told would "prohibit state and local governments from granting preferential treatment to any individual or group or using race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin as a criterion for hiring, promoting, granting admissions to college, or selecting public contractors." The overwhelming majority, 60 percent, said they would vote yes, while 35 percent replied no. "White men and white women responded almost identically, 65-65 percent, yes. Blacks and Hispanics also were very similar, 42 and 49 percent yes." When asked specifically about job preferences for Hispanics, the Latinos divided evenly, 46 percent for and 43 percent against."

Latinos, like most Asians, seemingly see themselves as immigrants and accept the society's emphasis on opportunity for them as individuals, not as members of oppressed groups. This orientation helps explain the attitudes of Latinos toward learning and speaking English. Two-fifths, "41 percent, of California Hispanics voted in support of a successful 1986 ballot initiative amending the state's constitution to designate English the state's official language; and ... in an opinion survey two years later, 58 percent favored 'making English the official language of California.'"<sup>39</sup> Upon reviewing a variety of studies, Peter

Skerry finds that "when Mexican Americans are faced with a choice between English and Spanish, or when that choice is somehow constrained, most seem to opt for English."<sup>40</sup>

Many of the inconsistencies in American racial attitudes point to a deep contradiction between two values that are at the core of the American Creed: individualism and egalitarianism. Americans believe strongly in both. One consequence of this dualism is that political debate often takes the form of one consensual value opposing the other. Liberals and conservatives typically do not take "alternative" positions on issues of equality and freedom. Instead, each side appeals to one or the other core value. Liberals stress the primacy of egalitarianism and the social injustice that flows through unfettered individualism. Conservatives enshrine individual freedom and the social need for mobility and achievement as values "endangered" by the collectivism inherent in liberal nostrums. Both sides treat as their natural constituency the entire American public. In this sense, liberals and conservatives are less opponents than they are competitors, like two department stores on the same block trying to draw the same customers by offering different versions of what everyone wants.

Much of the progress in the early years of the civil rights movement was made by breaking down the "compartmentalization" of the American mind and forcing the public to see that the country's attitudes and institutions fell outrageously short of our egalitarian ideals. It is the egalitarian element in the American Creed that helped to create the

consensus behind the civil rights revolution of the past thirty years. But the more recent focus of the civil rights movement, with its emphasis on substantive equality and preferential treatment, has forced the country up against the individualistic, achievement-oriented element in the Creed.

The poll data reveal a "positive" pro-civil rights agreement when only egalitarian questions are at stake, but a "negative" anti-civil rights consensus when an issue also infringes on basic notions of individualism. Thus, on the central issues involving racial discrimination and Jim Crow practices, American public opinion is powerfully against discrimination. Expressed attitudes on these issues have been consistently "liberal," and even the white South has joined the national consensus. The general agreement dissolves, however, when compulsory integration and quotas are involved. Many whites deeply resent such efforts, not because they oppose racial equality, but because they feel these measures violate their individual freedom. Liberals are quick to point out the inequalitarian consequences of de facto segregation, but the data

show that most whites favor individual freedom over compulsory social egalitarianism in racial matters.

Most whites, and many blacks, continue to feel that it is better for disadvantaged groups to work out their problems through individual improvement and mobility than to press collective demands for all members of the group. Most Americans approve of concrete federal programs to help the disadvantaged and combat racial discrimination. Given a choice, however, between government intervention to solve social problems and "leaving people on their own" to work out their problems for themselves, the public always chooses the latter option .<sup>41</sup>

Affirmative action policies have forced a sharp confrontation between egalitarian and individualistic values. Most Americans oppose the notion of special treatment for blacks, even when it does not refer to quotas or preferences, since such treatment also violates the notion of equality across racial lines. Thus in an October 1989 ABC *News/Washington Post* poll, 64 percent of whites and 44 percent of blacks disagreed with the statement: "Because of past discrimination, blacks who need it should get some help from the federal government that white people in similar economic circumstances don't get."

There has been a vast improvement in white American attitudes toward blacks, women, and other minorities since the 1950s.<sup>42</sup> Today, their claims to full equality are widely accepted.<sup>43</sup> There can be no doubt that a large majority of white Americans have come to believe that discrimination is wrong and that government should guarantee the application of the competitive merit or achievement principle to all, blacks and whites. More surprisingly, perhaps, the 1991 Gallup/*Newsweek* poll reports that "72 percent of blacks and 52 percent of whites said that they would prefer to live in a neighborhood that was racially 'half and half-more on both sides than felt that way three years ago.'" Over two thirds of whites and four fifths of blacks claim to "know many members of another race well," and almost half of the former (47%) and 63 percent of the latter say they "socialize regularly with members of another race." A 1994 NBC *News/Wall Street Journal* poll finds that four fifths of blacks and seven tenths of whites say they "have a close friend whose race is different." And over four fifths of blacks and three fifths of whites answer "very often" in reply to the query, "How often do you come into contact with people of other races and ethnic groups ... ?" Gallup indicates that almost no whites (6%) report that they would feel "uncomfortable working with members of another race" or "for a boss of another race."<sup>44</sup> The NBC *News/Wall Street Journal* poll reported in 1994 that 65 percent of

whites, up from 61 in 1992, 45 in 1988, and 43 in 1987, agreed that "it's all right for blacks and whites to date each other." Agreement by blacks was even higher, 88 percent in 1994, up from 72 percent in 1987.

Americans make a critical distinction between compensatory action and preferential treatment. Compensatory action involves measures to help disadvantaged groups catch up to the standards of competition set by the larger society. Preferential treatment involves suspending those standards to admit or hire members of disadvantaged groups who are unable to meet the same standards as white males. Relatively few object to compensation for past deprivations in the form of special training programs such as Head Start, financial aid, and community development funds. Such programs meet with approval from the population because they are consistent with the notion that race and sex have in the past been "imperfections" in the market of free competition, that is, unjustifiable grounds for denying equality of opportunity to certain categories of individuals.<sup>45</sup>

To return to the image of the shackled runner, Americans are willing to do more than remove the chains. They will go along with special training programs and financial assistance for previously shackled runners, enabling them to catch up with those who have forged ahead because of unfair advantages. But most Americans draw the line at predetermining the results of the race.

Policies favoring quotas and numerical goals for integration produce a creedal response since they contradict traditional conceptions of the meaning of equality of opportunity. Americans will accept the argument that race and sex, like poverty generally, are disadvantages deserving of assistance, just as the majority of Americans approved of the New Deal as a justifiable intervention in the free market. They will accept remedial policies up to the point where it is felt that mobility resources have been roughly equalized and the initial terms of competition are once again fair. But the data show that every attempt to introduce any form of absolute preference meets with stiff and determined resistance from the vast majority of Americans, including women and, to a somewhat lesser extent, racial minorities.

In some measure, the distinction between "compensatory action" and "preferential treatment" parallels the distinction drawn between "equality of opportunity" and "equality of results." Compensatory action is probably seen as a way to enhance equality of opportunity. Because blacks have been discriminated against in the past, it is fair to give them special consideration so that they will get a better break in

the future. Preferential treatment, on the other hand, probably sounds to most whites like an effort to force equality of results by predetermining the outcome of the competitive process.

The strongest support for preferential treatment seems to come from the liberal intelligentsia, the 5 to 6 percent of the population who have gone to graduate school, plus those who have studied liberal arts in college. It is also strong among the political elite, particularly Democrats, but many Republicans as well. Prior to the 1994 elections, the Democrats in Congress increasingly supported these policies, changes which may flow from the fact that the proportion of Democratic members who can be classified as liberal on the basis of their voting record has increased steadily since the 1960s.<sup>46</sup> Although recent court decisions have gone against the enforcement of quota policies, universities continue to press for numerical goals or special preferences. In so doing, they attest to the documented greater strength of political liberalism within them than in other institutions. And not surprisingly, the most extensive application of numerical targets in higher education can be found in the humanities and "soft" social sciences, the most left-disposed fields in academe.

### **BLACK PROGRESS-A CONTENTIOUS ISSUE**

Government policies in the context of the largely positive economic situation since World War II have resulted in considerable improvements for blacks. Though they remain behind whites with regard to income and levels of employment, as a group they are much better off than they were before the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the adoption of various remedial programs, including affirmative action. Writing in 1994, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., head of Harvard's African American Studies Department, notes that "never before have so many blacks done so well."<sup>47</sup> Economist Peter Drucker sums up the post-World War II changes: "In the fifty years since the Second World War the economic position of African Americans in America has improved faster than that of any other group in American social history-or in the social history of any country. Three fifths of America's blacks rose into middle-class incomes; before the Second World War the figure was one twentieth."<sup>48</sup>

Awareness of such gains is not widespread, however. This is partly because the leadership of blacks, women, and Hispanics generally do not admit to significant progress. Opinion polls taken in the mid-1980s

indicate that three fifths of the black leaders told pollsters that the situation of blacks was "going backward," while two thirds of a national black sample said they were "making progress."<sup>49</sup> In early July 1990, an NBC *News/Wall Street Journal* poll reported that 60 percent of all blacks said that, compared to ten years ago, blacks in America were "better off," while 29 percent reported they were "worse off." Not surprisingly, the 1991-92 recession led to more pessimistic views among whites and blacks. Thus, the percentage of the latter polled by *Newsweek/Gallup* who felt that "the quality of life for blacks [has] gotten worse ... over the last 10 years" increased from 36 percent in June 1991 to 51 percent in March 1992.<sup>50</sup> But a March 1993 Roper survey found a considerable increase among African Americans and whites in their positive evaluations of "Conditions for black people today with regards to housing, education, job opportunities, social acceptance by whites, etc as compared to 10 years ago." Over half, 53 percent of black and 66 percent of white respondents, said conditions are "good" or "excellent" today, as compared to 13 and 21 percent giving the same responses about ten years ago. Only 6 percent of whites and 13 percent of blacks said conditions are "poor" as of 1993, while 35 percent of the former and 45 percent of the latter felt that way about the situation a decade earlier. Both groups were much more optimistic about the way things will be ten years from now. And in the same month, the *New York Times/CBS News* Poll reported that 62 percent of blacks and 64 percent of whites agreed that "there has been significant progress toward Martin Luther King's dream of racial equality."

The refusal of some black leaders to admit improvement is understandable. The heads of groups seeking more from society and from the state justify their demands by referring to the way in which existing institutions and policies work against them. The worse things appear, and the greater the discrepancy seems between themselves and others, the more they can demand. Yet the repeated emphasis on how little progress has been made serves to sustain the argument that purposeful social action designed to benefit blacks simply does not work, that there are factors inherent in the black situation which prevent them from getting ahead. Not only most whites, but many blacks have absorbed such negative self-images. Americans believe that what determines success or failure is hard work, regardless of whether a person is black or white. Hence if blacks fail, it follows that it is largely their own fault. Reacting to the dilemma, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes: "We need something we do not yet have: a way of speaking about black poverty that does not falsify the reality of black achievement; a way of

speaking about black advancement that does not *distort* the enduring realities of black poverty."<sup>51</sup>

The data are consistent in this area. NORC found that during 1985-89, 62 percent of whites and 36 percent of blacks agreed that the reason blacks on average have worse jobs, incomes, and housing than white people is that "most blacks just don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves out of poverty." An ABC *News/Washington Post* poll taken in October 1989 found that 60 percent of whites and 60 percent of blacks agreed with the statement: "If blacks would try harder, they could be just as well off as whites." The same survey found 52 percent of blacks and 56 percent of whites accepting the view that "discrimination has unfairly held down blacks, but many of the problems blacks in this country have today are brought on by blacks themselves." A Gallup Poll conducted in December 1989 reported similar results in response to the question: "Who do you think is more to blame for the present conditions in which blacks find themselves—white people or blacks themselves?" A small majority (55%) held blacks responsible, while only 18 percent said whites, and the same percentage, 18, "feel that whites and blacks are equally to blame for their current situation. . . . However, *even among blacks it is more common to blame blacks themselves (34 percent) than it is to blame whites (22 percent).*"

<sup>52</sup> In July 1993, Gallup posed the issue differently:

"On average, blacks have worse jobs, income and housing than white people. Do you think this is mostly due to discrimination against blacks, or is it mostly due to something else?" Almost three quarters, 73 percent, of white respondents replied "mostly something else," but half, 49 percent, of the blacks chose the same response; only 44 percent said their deprived situation was "mostly due to discrimination."

Such beliefs have negative consequences. First, they reinforce racist attitudes and stereotypes. Whites increasingly seem to believe that they, or their officials, have done a great deal for blacks, but since the situation does not appear to be improving there must be something wrong with them. In early January 1991, NORC released the results of a survey taken in 1990. It indicated that most whites believe blacks to be less intelligent, lazier, more violence-prone, and more inclined to prefer to stay on welfare than whites and four other ethnic groups listed.

The same set of beliefs also undermines black morale and ambition. Reports of little improvement, even of retrogression, tell blacks they cannot succeed. Black youth are told that the society is against them and that there is therefore no point of trying to work hard or study.

Large numbers of blacks develop or retain the same invidious stereotypes about themselves as many whites do. These feed into feelings of self-hatred.

The damage is compounded by the news media's relentless focus on the social pathologies of the ghettos, which creates the impression that most blacks live wretched existences. Stories pour out emphasizing the disproportionate presence of blacks in urban crime and among the homeless, as well as the considerable percentage they form of the imprisoned, their high infant mortality, adult illness and early death rates, and so forth. Yet social scientists estimate that the underclass, both black and white, is small. William Julius Wilson, the social scientist most responsible for the focus on the urban underclass, now identifies the ghetto poor, a term he prefers, as those living in "areas of extreme poverty, that is, those in which 40 percent of the people are poor."<sup>53</sup> He estimates these comprise a sixth of the blacks, who are "truly disadvantaged, a sort of destitute population."<sup>54</sup> The Urban Institute reaches a lower figure, noting that "if one uses multiple criteria such as being persistently poor, living in a poor neighborhood, and being engaged in dysfunctional behavior ... most of the available estimates suggest the underclass [black and white] is small—probably in the neighborhood of 2 or 3 million people in 1980."<sup>55</sup> About two thirds of them are black, a fifth are Hispanic.<sup>56</sup> Paul Peterson also concludes that metropolitan census tracts marked by deep poverty contained "little more than one percent of the U.S. population in 1980."<sup>57</sup> Still the number living in such underclass areas is growing, even if the total remains small.<sup>58</sup>

The media-driven impressions that most blacks are in the underclass are clearly wrong, a fact acknowledged by Richard Harwood, the ombudsman at *The Washington Post*. Recognizing that most blacks are in "middle- and upper-income classes ... [or] are part of the broad working class where children, because of increasing white-collar job opportunities, are headed for middle class lives," Harwood believes that media bias, including that of his own influential paper, strongly contributes to the negative picture of black America. "There is another factor ... our traditions of muckraking journalism, which are especially strong at *The Post*. It looks at society from the bottom up in the hope of reforming and changing it.... Of necessity, misery and failure are its preoccupations. . . . [R]eportorial imbalance ... creates demeaning stereotypes of blacks as a race."<sup>59</sup>

To borrow Ralph Ellison's phrase, the "invisible man" of the 1990s is the successful black working- and middle-class suburbanite, not inter

acting with ghetto blacks and largely ignored by whites.<sup>60</sup> Ironically, as Richard P. Nathan writes, the identification of the black situation with the ghetto poor stems from the fact that "members of racial minority groups who are educated, talented, and motivated can assimilate in ways that a generation ago would have been thought inconceivable." Few note the blacks who "make it."<sup>61</sup> Yet the record is clear. "The black suburban population grew by 70 percent during the 1970's, fed primarily by an exodus from central cities. This trend has continued into the 1980's as the number of black suburbanites swelled from 5.4 million to 8.2 million. Between 1986 and 1990, 73 percent of black population growth occurred in the suburbs."<sup>62</sup>

Seeking a better quality of life, blacks and other minorities have moved to the suburbs as a reflection of their new middle-class status. "Minority suburbanization took off in the 1980s," University of Michigan demographer William H. Frey notes, "both as the black middle class came into its own and as more assimilated Latinos and Asians translated their moves up the socioeconomic ladder into a suburban lifestyle."<sup>63</sup> However, there are significant differences in migration rates between these minority groups. While the black suburban population grew by 34.4 percent from 1980 to 1990, Hispanics and Asians registered gains of 69.3 and 125.9 percent, respectively. These patterns continue to provide evidence for the long-term immigrant success story in the American experience, indicating that the divide between what I call the two Americas is largely limited to whites and blacks, not whites and people of color.

It is important to recognize that the situation of a major portion of black America was improving during the sixties and seventies. While there is a great deal of debate about the definition of poverty, census data indicate that the percentage of blacks living in poverty declined from 55 percent in 1959 to 33.5 percent in 1970. The rate has fluctuated somewhat since then, depending on the state of the economy. It moved up in the early 1980s, then fell during the Reagan prosperity, down to 30.7 percent in 1989. It then increased during the recession of the early 1990s to 33.1 percent in 1993, still much lower than during the pre-civil rights era."

The stability in the poverty rate figures conceals significant changes within the African American population, which has produced a sizably better-educated and more affluent sector. The proportion of blacks ages 25 and over who are high school graduates increased from 51 percent in 1980 to 73 percent in 1994. During that same period, the white cohort reached 82 percent.<sup>65</sup> According to the Census, "The annual

dropout rate for Blacks declined from 11 percent in 1970 to 5 percent in 1993. In 1993, there was no statistical difference in the annual high school dropout rate of Blacks and Whites .66

Economists James P. Smith and Finis R. Welch, analyzing changes in the situation of blacks since World War II, concluded in 1986 that "the real story of the last forty years has been the emergence of the black middle class," which "as a group ... outnumbers the black poor."<sup>167</sup> These blacks are married or in stable long-term relationships. The income of married blacks is 77 percent of that of comparable whites, which is again a considerable increase from well below 60 percent two decades ago.

These drastic social and economic changes have led to growing differentiation within the black community. As a National Academy of Sciences panel, writing in the late eighties, noted:

Conditions within the black community began to diverge sharply in the 1970s. This divergence can be seen *very* clearly in the experience of young men. By the early 1980s, black men aged 25-34 with at least some college, earned 80-85 percent as much as their white counterparts. They also achieved some gains in private-sector white-collar positions. In terms of education, these black men represented the top one-third of their age group. At the other end of the group were the one-quarter of black men aged 25-34 who had not finished high school and who could not compete in the stagnant 1970s economy. An increasing number dropped out of the labor force altogether .... 68

The two largest groups in the black class structure, the authors say, are now "a lower class dominated by female-headed families and a middle class largely composed of families headed by a husband and wife."<sup>69</sup> The problem is that most black *adults* live in stable family and economic situations while most black *children* do not. They are the offspring of the large number of black women who are single mothers neither living with nor supported by a male head of household. Recent statistics indicate that well over half of all black births are out of wedlock. The proportion of black children born in female-headed households was 23 percent in 1960, 28 percent in 1969, 45 percent in 1980, and 62 percent at the start of the nineties.<sup>70</sup> The increase in the rate is, in large part, a function of married blacks having fewer children." Middle-class married black fertility is now below the point necessary for the maintenance of the population .<sup>72</sup> Incomes for the black female-headed households are well under those of married blacks. "The poverty rate for

two-parent black families with children was 12.5 percent in 1988, for single-parent families with children, the poverty rate was 56.3 cent."<sup>73</sup> Victor Fuchs's analysis of the relationship of gender to poverty demonstrates that the large proportion of women in single-parent situations accounts for much of the continue disproportionate presence of poverty among blacks .<sup>74</sup> Yet as Margaret Simms, the director of Research Programs for the (African-American) Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, notes, Census Bureau data indicate that "contrary to the image of a population locked into welfare dependency, more than three-fourths of single black mothers held jobs,"<sup>75</sup>

It is important to recognize that the magnitude of black illegitimacy is grossly exaggerated. The increase in the rate is more a function of a decline in legitimate births than of an increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies.<sup>76</sup> Christopher Jencks calculates that if married black women had borne as many babies in 1987 as they did in 1960, "the proportion of black babies born out of wedlock would have risen only from 23 percent in 1960 to 29 percent by 1987."<sup>77</sup> And a 1994 Census Bureau Report on *Characteristics of the Black Population* indicates that "the rate of babies being born to unwed black teenagers-about 80 per 1,000 unmarried teenagers-remained virtually the same from 1970 through 1990," while that for unmarried whites increased.<sup>78</sup>

Whatever the causes of childhood poverty, affirmative action is no remedy for this group. Preference policies or quotas are not much help to an illegitimate black ghetto youth who grows up in poverty and receives an inferior education. "Black [young] men with less than a high school degree consistently earned the smallest proportion of their white counterparts' income."<sup>79</sup> Many do not have marketable skills which would enable them to be considered for well-rewarded positions. In any case, the federally enforced contract compliance program has "raised demand for black males more in highly skilled white-collar and craft jobs than in the blue-collar operative, laborer, and service occupations." Litigation efforts using the anti-discrimination section of the Civil Rights Act (Title VII) have led to considerable gains in white-collar positions, especially in professional and managerial employment." Jonathan Leonard notes: "The percentage of black men in the professional and managerial occupations rose from 4 percent in 1949 to 13 percent in 1990."<sup>81</sup> But as William Julius Wilson has emphasized, "affirmative action programs are not designed to deal with the unique problems of the black poor-problems which have devastatingly affected the makeup of underclass families."<sup>82</sup> The policies are much more likely to benefit

minority individuals from the most advantaged families ... [who are] most qualified for preferred positions-such as higher-paying jobs, college admissions, promotions and so forth. Accordingly, if policies of preferential treatment for such positions are conceived not in terms of the actual disadvantages suffered by individuals but rather in terms of race or ethnic group membership, then these policies will further enhance the opportunities of the more advantaged without addressing the problems of the truly disadvantaged."

Comparisons of the relationship between educational and economic attainments within each racial group indicate that the advantage of college attendance is much greater among blacks. And a study of education, occupational mobility, and earnings from 1974 and 1981 of young males (ages 18-35) also found that "black college graduates obtain more prestigious posts than their white counterparts," a result attributed by the researchers to "employer sensitivity to affirmative action requirements," as well as to the "concentration of educated blacks in the public sector."<sup>84</sup> O'Hare et al. report that the median income of families headed by young black college graduates is on average almost as high as for comparably educated whites, \$54,400 compared to \$58,800. "Average incomes for white families headed by single women who are college graduates are no higher than for black families."<sup>85</sup> Defining "affluence" as an income of \$50,000 or more, the "number of affluent black families increased from 266,000 in 1967 to just over a million in 1989. . . ." These rates of change, however, declined during the recessions of the early eighties and nineties and the halts in the growth of government employment.<sup>86</sup> College-educated black women continue to do well, but equally trained males with degrees do not.

The implication that there is relatively little reverse discrimination for lower-skill positions is sustained by the result of an Urban Institute study which sent equally qualified whites and blacks to apply for general labor, service, retail, and clerical positions in Chicago and Washington, D.C., in 1990. It reported that whites were treated better in job interviews in 20 percent of the cases, compared to 7 percent for blacks, and were more likely to be hired. One finding of this research is heartening; there was no discrimination in three quarters of the interview situations. But blacks are still much more likely to suffer from racism in working-class job markets than whites are to experience reverse discrimination.<sup>87</sup>

## POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

As the United States approaches the twenty-first century, the debate over affirmative action continues. This phenomenon should not be surprising since the issues involve efforts to maintain or change some of the core values of the nation-individual versus group rights-and affect feelings about opportunity and security for both races.

Prior to the 1992 and 1994 elections, the arguments surrounding quotas or preferences were increasingly seen as strengthening the Republicans, who vigorously emphasized meritocratic standards.<sup>88</sup> Their earlier support for quotas had been forgotten. Most Democrats were uneasy as to how to deal with the issue. They were faced with a dilemma: how to respond to pressure from civil rights groups and the intelligentsia on the one hand, and on the other, how to deal with the fear that a continuing identification with quotas would alienate the party's traditional base of white working-class support. In this connection it is interesting to recall that in 1965, in private White House discussions about civil rights programs, Lyndon Johnson said: "We have to press for them as a matter of right, but we also have to recognize that by doing so we will destroy the Democratic party." He anticipated that significant sections of the white South and the white working-class in the North would defect on racial issues.<sup>88</sup> The record indicates that this happened, particularly in presidential elections from 1968 to 1988 and in the 1994 congressional contests. A *New York Times*/CBS News poll conducted in mid-year 1991 found that 56 percent of Americans said the Democratic Party "cares more about the needs and problems of blacks," while only 15 percent replied that the Republicans do. When asked the same question about "the needs and problems of whites," 45 percent answered the Republicans care more, only 19 percent said the Democrats do, and 14 percent said both parties care.

How salient is white concern over affirmative action? We know that in 1990 Jesse Helms won in North Carolina while using this issue, and ex-Klansman David Duke emphasized it in Louisiana and received a majority of white votes. Pete Wilson focused on Dianne Feinstein's earlier espousal of quotas in government employment and beat her for governor of California in 1990. The polling evidence suggests that the debate hurt the Democrats. Many less affluent whites responded to the argument that the number of jobs available for them declined as a result of preference for blacks.<sup>90</sup> Two studies undertaken in 1985 and

1987 by Stanley Greenberg, then of the Analysis Group and subsequently Clinton's pollster, commissioned by the Michigan Democratic Party to investigate white male blue-collar defections from the party, found that negative reactions to affirmative action had played a major role there. A summary of the reports notes:

Much to the surprise and dismay of both Greenberg and his sponsors, white fury over affirmative action emerged as a top voter concern in Greenberg's 1985 report and in a second report in 1987. Quotas and minority preferences were a primary source of anti-government, anti-Democrat anger among white blue-collar voters. Democratic campaign themes such as "fairness," "equity," and "justice" had been perceived-not without justification-as code words for quotas. Therefore, white voters had become in Greenberg's terms, "de-aligned" from the Democratic Party.<sup>91</sup>

A Democratic pollster's study of voters in Louisiana found that racial issues played an important role in the election there. Geoff Garin writes that the response to one statement distinguished Duke voters more than anything else: "Qualified whites lose out on jobs and promotion because blacks get special preference due to affirmative action hiring goals." A majority of Duke supporters, 52 percent, said this happens "a lot," as compared to 25 percent who felt this way among those who backed his opponent.<sup>92</sup> National polls indicate the same concern. Two surveys, one conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research in 1986 and the other by NORC in 1990, found large majorities of whites replying that it is "very likely" (28% in both) or "somewhat likely" (48 and 42%) "that a white person won't get a job or promotion while an equally or less qualified black person gets one instead." The 1986 study indicated that two fifths of the whites believed that they personally or someone in their family would experience job discrimination. In June 1991, the *New York Times/CBS News* poll asked a national cross section: "When preference in hiring or promotion is given to blacks, do you think in the long run this helps whites, hurts whites, or doesn't affect whites much one way or the other?" A plurality, 47 percent, replied it does not affect whites, but two fifths said it does hurt them. A March 1995 *Washington Post/ABC News* poll found that 51 percent of all Americans (57% of white males) think that "affirmative action programs giving preference to women, blacks and other minorities result in less opportunity for white men." Thirteen percent of whites reported having been denied a job or promotion for racial reasons. A report of an earlier 1991 poll sponsored by

the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights also stated "that many white voters believe there is pervasive reverse discrimination in the work place and that civil rights leaders are more interested in special preferences than in equal opportunity." The Civil Rights Act of 1991, which passed in slightly modified form and was signed by President Bush after much publicized misgivings, was, according to its proponents, designed to facilitate lawsuits for remedial action by individuals claiming discrimination.

In 1992, Bill Clinton, running as a New Democrat and advised by Greenberg, rejected and even criticized the special preference or quota policies identified with his predecessors. In office, however, he seemingly returned to and extended them, by stressing racial, ethnic, and gender "diversity" in his political appointments.<sup>93</sup> Polls continued to reveal popular disdain for quotas, now presented by President Clinton as "diversity," attitudes which appeared to have contributed to the president's low approval ratings in 1994, particularly among men, and to the severe electoral defeats experienced by the Democrats in the midterm congressional elections. Republicans moved to a substantial majority position in both houses after four decades in the minority.

In interpreting the election, Thomas Edsall of *The Washington Post* emphasized the role which considerations of reverse discrimination played in determining the outcome. Many white males reacted to a belief that as a group they were suffering from reverse discrimination. He called attention to the votes of "White men who feel devalued and displaced everywhere from the service sector to the ranks of middle management, who see the rights revolution on behalf of women and blacks moving beyond a level playing field to a system of exclusionary favoritism and who see a future (and present) of sharply declining wages and status. White men voted Republican by a margin of 63 to 37 percent."<sup>94</sup>

Edsall's analysis is congruent with a variety of recent poll data which indicate that white men are particularly concerned about and opposed to special preferences for "qualified blacks" to remedy "past discrimination." Thus, Gallup found in March 1993 that only 15 percent of white males favored such policies; 83 percent were opposed, as contrasted to 24 percent supportive and 72 percent against among "others," i.e., women and minorities. The same survey inquired whether "white males are paying a fair penalty or an unfair penalty for advantages they had in the past-or don't you think white males are paying a penalty?" Almost half of the white males thought they were paying an "unfair penalty," while 29 percent replied "no penalty." Only 9 percent said

they were paying a fair penalty. And a January 1995 poll taken by *Time/CNN* found that 77 percent of a national sample thought that affirmative action "sometimes or frequently discriminates against whites. Even among black respondents, 66% answered the same way."<sup>95</sup> In April, two-thirds of those interviewed by the *New York Times/CBS* Survey agreed preference "results in discrimination against whites."

These findings do not imply increased attitudinal backing for discrimination. Rather, as Edsall notes, Americans continue to show "strong support for basic equalitarian principles, including equality of opportunity and the obligation of employers to give everyone a fair chance." There is "strong opposition to discrimination practices based on race, gender, age or disability." However, as the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights survey indicated in 1991, "civil rights laws are seen by a substantial number of voters as creating unfair advantages, setting up rank or class privilege in the labor market."<sup>96</sup> Commenting on the same study, a black *Washington Post* columnist, William Raspberry, emphasized:

White Americans ... do not see themselves as racists, or as opponents of equal opportunity and fundamental fairness. What they oppose are efforts to provide preferential benefits for minorities....

They aren't buying. How could we [blacks] expect them to buy a product we have spent 400 years trying to have recalled: race-based advantages enshrined into law?<sup>97</sup>

Two surveys conducted by Gallup for CNN and *USA Today*, one at the start of the Clinton administration in February 1993 and the second in December 1994, provide further evidence that concerns with minority preference contributed to the Democratic debacle. Gallup inquired: "How often does it happen these days that a less qualified black person gets a job or promotion, only because of affirmative action?" White males were more disposed to reply "very often" than the sample as a whole or white women. The percentage of the entire sample who so answered increased over the twenty-two months of the Clinton administration, from 26 to 34 percent, while white men went up from 29 to 38 percent. The change was comparable to the shift in their vote from 1992 to 1994.

These findings are reinforced by changes reported by the *Los Angeles Times* and *Newsweek* polls. In a September 1991 survey by the former, 24 percent of the national sample and 32 percent of the white

male respondents agreed that "affirmative action programs designed to help minorities get better jobs and education go too far these days." (Thirty-seven percent of the total and 16 percent of the white men said they "don't go far enough.") Three and a half years later, in January 1995, 39 percent of all those interviewed and fully half, 49 percent, of the white males thought affirmative action goes too far, an over-50 percent jump among the latter. *Newsweek* inquired in 1987 and 1995, "Have we gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country?" Perhaps because the sympathetic phrase "designed to help minorities" was not in the question, more whites agreed than in the *L.A. Times* poll, 54 percent in 1995, up from 42 percent in 1987.

There is also evidence to suggest that there is widespread belief that African Americans no longer need affirmative action policies. A March 1995 *Newsweek* poll found that 46 percent of the sample believe that "blacks' status in the workplace would stay about the same without affirmative action." Thirty percent thought it would get worse, and 19 percent believed it would improve.

## CONCLUSION

Special racial, ethnic, and gender-based preferences have introduced a new approach to promoting equality in American life. The old approach, initially implied in the Declaration of Independence, emphasized equality for *individuals*, equality of opportunity. The new one focuses on equality for *groups*, equality of result. It is the collision of these two views on equality that has underscored the growing public controversy over affirmative action and quotas, and that is symbolic, in some ways, of the larger friction between the black situation and the American Creed. In order to understand how these perspectives fit into the American debate, this chapter has examined their origins in the diverse historical experiences of whites and blacks. It was the potentially complementary egalitarian and individualistic elements in the American Creed that created the consensus behind the civil rights revolution which began in the 1960s. But the more recent focus of the civil rights movement, with its emphasis on substantive equality and preferential treatment, explicitly conflicts with the individualistic, achievement-oriented element in the Creed.

It is important to recognize that white opposition to various forms of special governmental assistance for blacks and other minorities is in part a function of a general antagonism to statism and a preference for personal freedom in the American value system. The American Creed,

as we have seen, subsumes classical liberalism, which strongly distrusts the state and emphasizes competitive meritocracy.<sup>98</sup>

Public opinion research indicates that the vast majority of Americans, including most blacks, believe that this is still a land of opportunity. They not only believe in meritocracy; they think that it exists. As of 1987, according to NORC, 72 percent of Americans said that they have a good chance of improving their standard of living, many more proportionately than Italians (45%), Germans (40%), British (37%), or Dutch (26%).<sup>99</sup> Although more Americans go to college than people in any other country, close to two thirds of Americans (65%) say that the opportunity to go to college should be increased. This figure is higher than among the British (55%), the Germans (31%), or other Europeans and Japanese. These views tie in with the greater propensity of Americans than Europeans to believe that "ambition is [essential or very important] for getting ahead in life."<sup>100</sup> When asked, however, how government should provide financial assistance to college students, more Americans than Europeans respond through loans (by 57 to 31%), and more Europeans favor government grants (by 51 to 31%).<sup>101</sup>

The findings of comparative survey research completed in the early 1980s and repeated in 1990 in the World Values Surveys, discussed briefly in chapter Three, imply that the contemporary opposition to preferential treatment for blacks or other underprivileged minorities is not primarily a result of racial prejudice. The results point to varying attitudes about equality of result in the United States, Canada, and eleven West European countries. Interviewees in each country were told:

I'd like to relate an incident *to you* and ask your opinion of it. There are two secretaries, of the same age, doing practically the same job. One of the secretaries finds out that the other earns 20 dollars [100 marks, Kroner, etc.] a week more than she does. She complains to her boss. He says, quite rightly, that the other secretary is quicker, more efficient and more reliable at her job. In your opinion, is it fair or not fair that one secretary is paid more than the other?

The question is clearly and intentionally biased in favor of obtaining the reply that the more productive secretary should be paid more, and large majorities in North America and Europe answered this way. However, twice the proportion of Europeans (39% in 1981, 27% in 1990), as of Americans (18% in 1980, 15% in 1990) said that it is unfair to pay more to the more efficient and more

Americans are clearly more likely to believe in distinguishing by merit. Canadians fall between the two; 25 percent in 1980 and 18 percent in 1990, said it was unfair.<sup>102</sup>

The same studies found comparable cross-national difference with respect to statements which emphasize personal liberty and individual initiative versus a reduction of class differences. Respondents were asked:

Which of these two statements come closest to your own opinion? I find that both freedom and equality are important. But if I were to make up my mind for one or the other, I would consider personal freedom more important, that is, everyone can live in freedom and develop without hindrance.

Certainly both freedom and equality are important. But if I were to make up my mind for one of the two, I would consider equality more important, that is, that nobody is underprivileged and that social class differences are not so strong.

Most people in the United States, 74 percent in 1981 and 71 in 1990, favored personal liberty over class equality (23 and 24%, respectively). In fourteen European countries surveyed by the World Values Survey in those two years, 56 and 58 percent favored freedom and 37 percent equality. Independent of race or ethnicity considerations, citizens of the United States are significantly less favorable to equality of income or class position than Europeans, or it may be noted Canadians, although the difference with the latter is somewhat smaller (65 to 32% and 61 to 34%).

Although Americans are less willing than Europeans to use government as an instrument of income distribution, their egalitarian values lead them to approve of programs providing more opportunities for blacks. They favor more expenditures on education, special schools, and other intensive programs such as Head Start. But opinion surveys taken in various developed countries indicate that Americans are much less prone than Europeans and Canadians to endorse measures to help the underprivileged generally. Thus, as noted in chapter Two, in 1987, only a fifth (21%) of Americans agreed that "the government should provide everyone with a guaranteed basic income," as compared with 50 percent or more in Austria, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and the Netherlands. Comparable cross-national differences were reported with respect to statements dealing with the government's

of living for the unemployed," and to reduce sharp income differences." In 1991, the *Times-Mirror* Survey, conducted by the Gallup Poll, asked respondents in thirteen countries to react to the statement: "It is the responsibility of the state (or government in the U.S.) to take care of very poor people who can't take care of themselves." Over 60 percent of those polled in Britain, France, Italy, and Spain agreed, as did 50 percent of all Germans, as compared to but 23 percent of Americans." Various questions that have been put to national samples of Americans in the eighties and early nineties concerning the responsibility of government to provide jobs and economic opportunity or "help people when they are in trouble" have found majorities opposed to government action.<sup>105</sup>

The interpretation that American opposition to governmental enforcement of group rights for blacks is more a reflection of general principle than of racism is reinforced by the findings of a study of attitudes toward government efforts to assure free residential choice.<sup>106</sup> Comparing attitudes toward enforcing rights of blacks, Japanese Americans, Jews, and Christians "to live wherever they can afford to," Howard Schuman and Lawrence Bobo found little difference in reactions to the various ethnic and religious groups. Those "who oppose enforcement of housing rights [do so] regardless of the racial or religious group affected, so that the principle of government enforcement in this area seems to be critical rather than opposition to any particular group."<sup>107</sup>

The recurrent conflict between different versions of equality, between emphasis on the individual and on the group, will continue in all free societies. The countries which have most thoroughly enshrined group quotas into their basic law—India, Pakistan, and Canada—are strongly organized on group lines, the first two caste, the third, separate linguistic cultures.<sup>108</sup> Affirmative action quotas in India for the scheduled (untouchable) castes go back to the 1920s. They were introduced in a few provinces in colonial India, and have been enlarged and expanded considerably by independent India and Pakistan. The Canadian Constitution has always contained provisions to protect linguistic and religious minorities, and has been somewhat more limited in protection of individual rights than ours. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was added to the Constitution in 1982, specifically authorizes programs and activities directed to "the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."<sup>109</sup> Canada and its provinces have explicitly defined more than thirty such groups as worthy of spe-

cial treatment, behavior which conforms to its founding decision to emphasize the protection of groups rather than individuals.

The same logic has been used by various analysts to account for the absence of significant socialist movements and the low level of class politics in the United States and the converse patterns in Europe. As we saw in the previous chapter, the evidence and arguments suggest that the European developments reflect the influence of postfeudal relationships which explicitly structured the social hierarchy according to fixed social classes, requiring the lower-stated to show deference to their class superiors. Consequently, the emerging working class there reacted to the political world in class terms. Conversely, white America—the purest bourgeois and classically liberal society in the world—has treated class as an economic construct. Social classes have been of limited visibility compared with the situation in Europe. Hence, class-conscious politics and socialist demands for equality of results have been limited in scope.

The failures of different varieties of socialism and the greater acceptance of the market as the dynamic force underlying economic growth have led to a revival of market liberalism in Europe, emphasizing competitive meritocracy and individualism. Conversely, the increased awareness and better organization of the blacks in America have given more support here to group-linked efforts to reduce inequality.

The black situation in America is analytically comparable to that of the European underprivileged strata. The post caste situation has, in fact, been even more explicit in limiting the economic, and social opportunities of the socially oppressed than the postfeudal ones. It is not surprising, therefore, that American blacks are more group-conscious than European workers, or that many support a version of the old socialist emphasis on equality of results. Ninety percent of American blacks vote

Democratic, much more than any other ethnic group or trade union members. At least three of the Democratic black members of Congress are openly socialist, a phenomenon found for only one white.

Poll data support these generalizations. Blacks are much more disposed than whites to favor state intervention rather than to emphasize individual initiative as the way to improve their situation. The National Election Studies conducted every two years have posed the choice between government help to minorities and individual initiative in the following terms:

Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every possible effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks and

other minority groups. Suppose these people are at one end of the scale, at point 1. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minorities because they should help themselves. Suppose these people are; at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between. Where do you place yourself on this scale?<sup>110</sup>

The survey has found repeated and consistent differences of 35 to 50 percent between black and white respondents. The majority of African Americans say the government should "make every possible effort" to improve the "position of blacks and other minority groups." The most popular position among whites is that minorities "should help themselves." Most blacks, in effect, favor a socialist group solution, most whites a laissez-faire, individualist one.

Civil rights leaders, liberals, and Democrats are faced with the negative reactions by most whites to their identification with quotas, special preferences, and reverse discrimination. Opinion polls indicate that not all blacks are favorable to these policy alternatives, a reaction that goes back more than a century. During the Reconstruction period, in 1871, the celebrated black abolitionist and civil rights leader Frederick Douglass ridiculed the idea of racial quotas suggested by African-American Union Army officer Martin Delany as "absurd as a matter of practice," noting that it implied blacks "should constitute one-eighth of the poets, statesmen, scholars, authors and philosophers." Douglass emphasized that "natural equality is a very different thing from practical equality; and ... though men may be potentially equal, circumstances may for a time cause the most striking inequalities."<sup>12</sup> On another occasion, in opposing "special efforts" for black freedmen, Douglass argued that they "might 'serve to keep up very prejudices, which it is so desirable to banish' by promoting an image of blacks as privileged wards of the state."<sup>11</sup> One hundred years later, at the start of the 1970s, black leaders like Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP feared and opposed quotas because they anticipated these would lead to the loss of white working-class support for civil rights.

Shelby Steele, a contemporary black writer once active in Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, has concluded that "affirmative action has shown itself to be more bad than good and that blacks ... now stand to lose more from it than they gain." Like Douglass, he rejects the idea of leaping "over the hard business of developing a formerly oppressed people to the point where they can achieve proportionate representation on their own. . . ." He sees affirmative action quotas as undermin

ing black morale, contributing to "an enlargement of self-doubt," for racial preferences imply that successful blacks have not earned their positions, that they are inferior to whites at their achievement level."<sup>11</sup>

The American left from Jefferson to Humphrey stood for making equality of opportunity a reality. By a supreme irony, the man most hated by contemporary Democrats, Richard Nixon, created a situation which has placed them on the wrong side of the issue from national values and electoral standpoints. The leadership of some of the party's strongest bases of support, blacks and other minorities, feminists, liberals, and the intelligentsia, all strongly endorse numerical preferences, targets, and quotas. But a considerable majority of Americans, including most Democrats, oppose them.

To rebuild the national consensus on civil rights and racial justice, affirmative action should be refocused, not discarded. It is clear, for example, that quotas or special preferences will not help the poorly educated and unskilled to secure good jobs. As the American economy undergoes a major structural transformation in eliminating a large proportion of blue-collar, less skilled jobs, the less trained and less educated of all races are pressed out of the labor market or into lowly paid positions. To succeed in postindustrial society requires good education. Extending and vastly improving education in the ghettos, from very early Head Start Programs, to financial incentives for students, teachers, and successful schools, to expanding apprentice programs that combine classroom instruction and on-the-job training, are the directions to be followed for children and school-age youth. As William Julius Wilson urges, such programs should be offered to all less privileged people, regardless of racial and ethnic origins.

The experience of blacks in the military suggests an option for young adults. Prior to the downsizing of the military following the end of the Cold War, the armed services offered blacks career training and a chance for stable employment and upward mobility. The whole society can learn from the success of this performance-oriented institution in integrating blacks and offering real incentives to succeed.<sup>116</sup> That record argues in favor of a large-scale national service effort, more extensive than the one enacted in 1993. If all youth are encouraged to volunteer for duty in national service, those with inadequate education and skills can be trained for positions that are in demand, while helping to rebuild publicly supported infrastructures or deliver social services. Studies of the experience of the economically disadvantaged in the military could shed much light on the subject.

Moving away from policies that emphasize special preferences need

not-indeed, must not-mean abandoning the nation's commitment to guaranteeing equal opportunity for disadvantaged citizens. The concept of individual rights remains integral to the American Creed. Yet, racial injustice and castelike divisions have constituted a contradiction to the organizing principles of the nation. The American dilemma is still with us, and with it a moral obligation to ensure that race is neither a handicap nor an advantage. Until black Americans are absorbed fully into the economy and society, we should, in Jefferson's words, continue to fear a just God.