
Creating a New Racial Order: How Immigration, Multiracialism, Genomics, and the Young Can Remake Race in America by Jennifer L. Hochschild; Vesla M. Weaver; Traci R. Burch

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ries represent empirical reality. Nonetheless, that the book represents these different viewpoints does the field a great service, articulating disparate ideas into a set of (original) statements by many of the core interlocutors. And considering that the proliferation of the term shows no signs of slowing, this articulation, at a minimum, is an important start.


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Non-Hispanic white births are no longer the majority in the United States, marking a milestone that demographers had long projected due to continued immigration from Latin America and Asia, along with a growing multiracial population. Not only are we more diverse than at any point in our history, but young Americans are growing up in a country in which Barack Obama was elected president, the gaps in education among racial and ethnic groups are narrowing, heterogeneity within groups is increasing, and genomics are transforming the very meaning of race. These changes are transforming what Jennifer L. Hochschild, Vesla M. Weaver, and Traci R. Burch refer to as “the American racial order,” which Creating a New Racial Order defines as “the widely understood and accepted system of beliefs, laws, practices that organize relationships among groups defined as races or ethnicities” (p. 9).

The authors point to four main vehicles that are driving the change: immigration, multiracialism, genomics, and cohort change. For example, immigrants and their children account for about 23% of the U.S. population, and about 85% of today’s newcomers hail from Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean. Further complicating the racial order is the increasingly visible and growing multiracial population. While the proportion of Americans who identify as multiracial remains low, it has risen from 2.4% in 2000 to 2.9% in 2010—marking a 32% increase since the census first allowed Americans to mark one or more races to identify themselves or members of their households.

A sign of this population’s growth is its young age; in 2008, Americans under the age of 18 were three times as likely to identify (or be identified by their parents) as multiracial, up from two to one in 2000. Put differently, while less than a quarter of the American population is under the age of 18, nearly one half of the multiracial population is. Moreover, even among blacks (the group that has been historically and legally constrained from adopting a multiracial identification), the rate of multiracial reporting has increased, from 4.8% in 2000 to 7.4% in 2010.
Not only are younger Americans more likely to identify as multiracial, but they are growing up in a country in which racial attitudes have changed. Young whites are more racially attentive than older whites, and young blacks are less focused on racial issues than older blacks. Furthermore, the views of young blacks and whites are more similar than the views of earlier cohorts.

While these changes signal a transformation of America’s racial order, the authors balance their optimism by pointing to systematic blockages that will stall progress. Most critical are those that are structurally deeper, less visible, and less available for public contestation, such as wealth inequality (which is far wider and more persistent than income inequality), concentrated poverty, and the alarmingly high rates of incarceration among young African-American males who have not completed high school, which reached 37% in 2008. Not only does incarceration affect the life chances of these young men, but it also affects their families and the communities they leave behind, a point that Burch has underscored in other research.

Moreover, that there is more heterogeneity within group outcomes signals progress, but the authors warn that it also invites a new narrative that blames individuals for their lack of progress. For example, because Barack Obama has been elected to the highest office in the United States, some Americans draw on the exception to prove the rule that institutional racism and structural bias no longer exist. What is lacking, the authors argue, is a tangible concept or language to explain that increased heterogeneity and polarization within racial or ethnic groups does not mean that institutional bias against racial or ethnic minority groups has altogether disappeared. That we lack a clear framework to explain the increasing intragroup polarization has made it easier to blame individuals for their stalled mobility.

Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch convincingly argue that America’s racial order is changing while cautioning that deep-seated blockages remain that threaten long-lasting transformation. While they provide an excellent and measured analysis, their argument could have been strengthened in two ways. First, as political scientists, their analyses would have benefited from considering how American politics is (or is not) transforming the racial order. They acknowledge that while American politics is changing, it is not deracialized, but they do not elaborate much further. Given the ambivalence among Asian and Latino adults about both major political parties combined with their staggeringly low rates of political participation (especially among the foreign born), readers would benefit from the perspective of these three political scientists on how immigrants and their children will engage in the political process, and how their participation may affect the racial order.

Second, while the authors provide a great deal of data about the effects of immigration, multiracialism, genomics, and cohort change, readers would benefit from a more concrete synthesis about exactly how the racial order is being transformed. If the racial order is no longer a black-white binary, how would the authors describe it? Do they envision a white-nonwhite divide, a black-nonblack divide, a multiracial hierarchy, or a ra-
cial order based on phenotype and colorism? In other research, the authors have made more specific forecasts, but the major conclusion they draw in this book is that the United States is not and never will be color-blind, but social relations have become less constrained by color. Given their collective expertise in this area, readers may crave a stronger conclusion.

These comments aside, Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch have tackled the question of America’s changing racial order by introducing new data and new lenses through which to understand the various dimensions of change. As America’s diversity continues to increase, the question of America’s changing racial order will remain of empirical and theoretical interest for generations. Creating a New Racial Order is necessary reading that will easily find a place on syllabi for this and the next generation, to whom they dedicate the book, and on whom they are counting to work for a better racial future.


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At the beginning of the millennium the U.S. Census Bureau projected that the U.S. white population would become a numerical minority by 2050. In 2011, the census confirmed that more nonwhite than white babies had been born in the United States that year. To the birth of nonwhite babies can be added “recent large-scale immigration from Latin America” (p. 1), and we end up with demographic shifts. The changing demographics are leading to a fundamental change in both race relations and the way social scientists study race in the United States. In that sense, Edward Telles and colleagues’ Just Neighbors is a timely collection of qualitative and quantitative research in sociology and the political sciences, investigating contemporary manifestations of black-Latino relations.

The collection, however, entertains understandings about Latino-black relations similar to those developed by previous research: (1), scholars feel that Latinos must be understood in relation to their assimilation patterns (especially in relation to whites) and (2) Latino-black relations are primarily conceptualized in relation to perceptions of blacks about Latinos. Explaining the first point, the editors tell us: “Although it is clear that Latino immigrants, especially the undocumented, are racialized, and excluded on various ways, a nagging question remains about whether they will eventually assimilate the way the descendants of European immigrants did” (p. 5). In relation to the second point, they say: “The new political economy has resulted in growing systemic inequality and job insecurity. . . . This feeling can be heightened when African-Americans feel