

Journal of Black Studies

<http://jbs.sagepub.com>

Economic Imperatives and Race Relations: The Rise and Fall of the American Apartheid System

Sherry Cable and Tamara L. Mix
Journal of Black Studies 2003; 34; 183
DOI: 10.1177/0021934703254098

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://jbs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/34/2/183>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Journal of Black Studies* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jbs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jbs.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations (this article cites 7 articles hosted on the SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):
<http://jbs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/34/2/183>

ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES AND RACE RELATIONS

The Rise and Fall of the American Apartheid System

SHERRY CABLE

University of Tennessee

TAMARA L. MIX

University of Alaska–Fairbanks

Drawing on secondary sources, the authors analyze how contemporary U.S. social institutions continue to produce racial differentials despite considerable pressures for institutional changes to reduce or eliminate those differentials. They argue that the post–Civil War industrial revolution brought economic imperatives that shaped the labor pool and created occupational segregation by race. The principle of racial segregation subsequently permeated other social institutions, most notably the political, educational, and residential institutions, to form the American apartheid system by 1918. Between the world wars, the United States strove for global economic dominance by a state collaboration with corporate interests to maintain the apartheid system. The apartheid system was the basis for the 1945 achievement of U.S. economic dominance. During the phase of unchallenged economic dominance, Black resistance combined with global criticisms of racism to dismantle the apartheid system. When U.S. global economic dominance faded in the 1970s and 1980s, a White backlash occurred against Black economic and political gains.

Keywords: *race relations; apartheid system; racism; economic basis of racism*

Considerable evidence demonstrates the persistence of racial discrimination in the United States. Analysts document the differential life chances of Blacks in areas such as income, education,

JOURNAL OF BLACK STUDIES, Vol. 34 No. 2, November 2003 183-203

DOI: 10.1177/0021934703254098

© 2003 Sage Publications

occupational status, political participation, exposure to environmental hazards, quality of health care, access to adequate public transportation, victimization by AIDS and homicide, homelessness, adolescent pregnancy and childbearing, and substance abuse (Bates, 1990; Braddock & McPartland, 1987; Cole & Foster, 2001; Department of Health and Human Services, 1985; Department of State, 2000; Farley & Allen, 1987; Flanagan, 1978; Frazier, 1964; Hacker, 1992; Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991; Pinkney, 2000; Watts & Wright, 1983; Willie, 1970). How do such racial differentials persist when civil rights laws prohibit them? The differentials are routinely attributed to the lingering effects of slavery that inhere in institutional operating routines, generating the outcome of institutional discrimination (Feagin & Feagin, 1986; Hamilton & Carmichael, 1967; Knowles & Prewitt, 1969). But such an attribution raises further issues. Social institutions undergo fairly frequent changes. Throughout U.S. history, social institutions have routinely discriminated against a variety of social groups, but the institutions eventually changed in ways that reduced or eliminated such discrimination. Why and how have institutions persisted in discrimination against Black Americans? The "why" has probably been addressed more often than the "how."

By about 1830, Native Americans were subordinated and Blacks remained enslaved, leaving a U.S. citizenry that was relatively homogeneous in national origins, religion, and skin color (Marger, 1991). Primarily of British and German backgrounds, these early immigrants erected the nation's major economic, political, and social institutions. Their perceptions were the basis for rank ordering the immigrant groups that came after them (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). Subsequent immigrant groups were expected to adapt to the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant exemplar. Successful adaptation brought the group cultural assimilation through adoption of language, diet, and so on; secondary structural assimilation by entrance into economic, political, and other institutions; and primary structural assimilation by entrance into close relationships such as residential, organizational, and matrimonial ties.

Analysts identify two key factors in accounting for the differential assimilation rates of immigrant groups: the manner in which the group enters the society and the group's physical and cultural visibility relative to the dominant group. Groups that entered the society involuntarily, were conquered, or whose territory was annexed tend to remain longer in subordinate positions and in conflictual contact with the dominant group. By comparison, voluntary immigrants were assimilated more rapidly and completely. Also, the greater the discrepancy between the elites' and the immigrant group's physical and cultural characteristics, the slower the rate and the less the extent of assimilation.

Consequently, a major reason why Black Americans have not been structurally assimilated and institutions have remained racially discriminatory is that Africans entered the society involuntarily and bear physical characteristics that make them highly visible. But how have social institutions resisted considerable pressure for changes that would reduce or eliminate racial discrimination? By what mechanisms has institutional discrimination been preserved? We argue that, because the industrial revolution arrived on U.S. shores after the Civil War, economic imperatives shaped the labor pool in a way that produced occupational segregation by race that subsequently spread to other social institutions. Our analysis of the historical connections between economic imperatives and race relations is derived from numerous written sources. Our contribution lies less in the discovery of new data than in our deployment of a wide variety of secondary sources to weave a logical argument and shed light on contemporary racial differentials in life chances. We first analyze the connection between U.S. efforts to achieve global economic dominance and the construction and operation of the American apartheid system. We then examine the phase of unchallenged U.S. economic dominance concomitant with the dismantling of the apartheid system that was followed by the fading of U.S. dominance and White backlash against Black economic and political gains. We close with some reflections on current race relations.

**U.S. ASCENT TO GLOBAL DOMINANCE:
THE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF
THE AMERICAN APARTHEID SYSTEM**

Between 1877 and 1918, the U.S. economy shifted from an agricultural to an industrial base. Elites' desire to contend for global economic dominance motivated the state to adopt actions that accommodated the economic imperatives of an industrial "wannabe" to expand production and compete with global powers. In this section, we describe the context of the emergence of occupational segregation, Northern and Southern forms of occupational segregation, and the spread of segregation to other institutions—political, residential, and educational—that forged a legal policy of racial apartheid that underlay the U.S. ascent to global economic dominance by 1945.

THE CONTEXT

The requisites for expanded production after the Civil War were a greatly enlarged industrial labor pool for Northern factories and a vast supply of Southern agricultural workers to replace the newly freed slaves. The state supported Northern industrialization through policies that augmented corporate privileges and increased the flow of immigrants. The state accommodated Southern labor needs through its nonenforcement of the civil rights amendments to the Constitution. These state actions in support of economic expansion created an atmosphere that was tolerant of racial and ethnic discrimination.

The state supported industrialism by extending to corporations legal rights that guaranteed the economic and political dominance of corporate elites. Public opposition to price and production control by corporate cartels pressured Congress in 1890 to pass the Sherman Antitrust Act. But the act was essentially nullified in an immediate series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions that progressively narrowed the interpretation of the 14th Amendment and perverted the amendment's intention from the protection of Black rights to the protection of corporate rights. Corporate attorneys

argued that the amendment entitled corporations to the same status and rights as individuals and that corporate money was therefore protected by the due process clause of the amendment. McAdam (1982) finds that, between 1868 and 1911, 576 of the 604 U.S. Supreme Court decisions involving the 14th Amendment dealt with corporate rights rather than Black rights. Of the 28 cases involving Black rights, rights were denied in 22. Thus, instead of serving as the constitutional foundation for the protection of Black rights, the 14th Amendment was distorted to consolidate corporate power and aid in the U.S. bid for global economic dominance.

With the infrastructure of a small industrial base already in place, the North was poised for rapid industrialization, but a large labor pool was required to keep wages down and profits soaring. The state responded with flexible immigration policies, through which the flow of immigration could be regulated to meet corporate requirements. A rapid influx of immigrants to the North quickly swelled workers' ranks: European immigration peaked between 1880 and 1917, when about 25 million non-Protestant, lower class, White ethnics arrived from southern and eastern European nations such as Italy, Russia, Poland, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Marger, 1991). The White ethnics expanded the labor pool, sharpened job competition, and depressed wages. Workers channeled their economic frustrations into conflict among themselves that heightened racist ideologies and that frequently erupted along racial and ethnic lines (Zinn, 1995).

State actions accommodated Northern and Southern labor needs by further weakening the foundation of Black rights. Legal challenges based on racial equity collapsed as U.S. Supreme Court rulings in support of racial segregation signaled the state's refusal to enforce post-Civil War amendments. In 1883, the Court declared that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional. The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision upheld a Louisiana statute mandating racially segregated railroad cars, ruling that the provision of separate facilities for Blacks and Whites was not a violation of constitutional rights. This decision established the "separate but equal" doctrine and constitutionally encouraged the passage of a comprehensive series of local statutes enforcing racial segregation

throughout the South. Tagged as Jim Crow laws from the plantation song refrain "jump, Jim Crow," the statutes eroded Black rights and legally sanctioned widespread segregation.

OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

The powerful combination of corporate economic and political dominance, intense and conflict-laden job competition, and federal tolerance of Jim Crow laws produced a legal and social environment in which occupational segregation by race was routinely accepted. Occupational segregation took different regional forms.

Northern segregated labor unions. The occupational segregation of Northern Blacks was effected through the segregation of industrial labor unions. Corporate and political elites' common goal to make the nation a global economic power drove them to exploit workers through low wages, long work days, and dangerous working conditions. Industrial workers resisted by forming a labor movement and mounted a series of nationwide strikes that peaked in 1886, when 500,000 workers engaged in 1,400 strikes (Zinn, 1995). Corporate elites hired Pinkerton and other private police operatives to quell the rebellions, but the strikes nevertheless achieved some advances for White workers in wages and working conditions.

Black industrial workers did not benefit from corporate concessions to strikers because they were systematically excluded from the emerging labor movement. White ethnics were gradually assimilated into the dominant culture and institutions, but Blacks were not. Instead, they became a more focused target for White workers' competition-intensified racial animosities. White workers' marked racism was exacerbated by the corporate strategy to divide workers by using Blacks as strikebreakers. Early labor movement leaders recognized the greater pressure that could be applied on corporate interests by a racially united workforce, but their efforts failed to overcome workers' racism and integrate labor.

Foner (1974) and Zinn (1995) document the failure of attempts in the late 1880s and early 1900s to promote the transcendence of worker unity above racial antipathies and the consequent occupa-

tional segregation of Black workers in the North. Interracial labor efforts failed for two primary reasons. First, union efforts were inconsistent in pursuing worker unity because of the entrenched racism of rank-and-file members. White workers contended that job competition with Blacks was best eliminated by excluding Blacks from unions and driving them from the labor market. Many local affiliates, then, voted to adopt union charters that barred Blacks from membership. Although national union leaders publicly expressed values of racial unity, they refused to sanction their segregated local affiliates. Second, many Black leaders opposed interracial unions. Some were opposed to all unions and urged Blacks to work as strikebreakers, because they were otherwise routinely denied access to skilled jobs. Others charged that the unions' token resistance to racial exclusion actually encouraged the proliferation of segregated affiliates. Yet, other Black leaders predicted that union membership would eventually cost Black workers their jobs because they would be prohibited by union rules from accepting lower wages than Whites—employers, whose only reason to prefer Black workers was the lower wages, would replace them with White workers.

The failure of initial efforts to unite Black and White workers imprinted the labor movement with racism, establishing a norm that increased the likelihood that subsequent union-building would succumb to rank-and-file racism. The rigid segregation of labor unions produced occupational segregation and “created a privileged group of White workers at the expense of Black workers” (Foner, 1974, p. ix) that reinforced corporate labor control strategies and diluted labor union efforts to organize effectively in the major industries.

The Southern cotton tenancy system. Occupational segregation in the South was manifested in the cotton tenancy system. While the rest of the nation industrialized and either revolutionized agricultural methods or abandoned farming, the South remained “relentlessly rural, relentlessly agricultural, relentlessly cottonized, and relentlessly unmechanized” (Schwartz, 1976, p. 4). When federal troops were withdrawn at the end of Reconstruction, Southern large landowners' positions improved, but they confronted the

problem of forming a labor pool without slavery that was large and cheap enough to farm their land profitably. The remedy was the cotton tenancy system, described in detail by Schwartz (1976).

Under the cotton tenancy system, large landowners divided their holdings into small farms and rented them to tenants who paid either in cash or crops. Tenants and even small landowners seldom possessed cash to buy seeds, equipment, and food and, consequently, depended on obtaining credit from agricultural suppliers who were frequently the large landowners. The farm tenancy system was unique in using crop liens rather than real estate liens as collateral and in the stipulation that the tenant buy exclusively from one supplier, who then had first claim on profits from crop sales. If crop sales failed to pay off the loan, the lien was carried over to the next year's crop. The crop lien system produced debt peonage: The farmer was mired in debt to the supplier who extended credit to the farmer to buy only the barest essentials and the cheapest goods. A form of serfdom, the cotton tenancy system concentrated economic power and wealth in the hands of large landowners.

The cotton tenancy system fostered the occupational segregation of Southern Blacks under conditions of extreme poverty. Both White and Black tenant farmers were injured by the system, but Black farmers were disproportionately harmed. Reconstruction had provided Blacks neither land nor money as compensation for enslavement. Thus, they began tenant farming at a distinct disadvantage from their White counterparts. With little incentive to move North because the unions excluded them, vast numbers of Southern Blacks were forced to rent farms and borrow heavily. As a consequence, Black farmers "sunk quickest and became trapped first" in the cotton tenancy system (Schwartz, 1976, p. 10).

THE SPREAD OF OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS

Because of the overlap of social institutions, occupational segregation in the North and South infected other institutions and combined to forge a legal policy of racial separation. We focus particularly on the political, residential, and educational institutions.

Northern and Southern occupational control of Blacks was augmented by devastating constraints on Blacks' electoral leverage. For several generations after Reconstruction ended, the Democratic Party dominated in the South and the Republican Party elsewhere (McAdam, 1982; Schattschneider, 1960). As a consequence, competitive party politics dramatically diminished; with few exceptions, political contests were so uneven that "voters had no significant choices" (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 85). In the North, the total Black population was too small to warrant consideration by the dominant Republicans, leaving Northern Blacks' political leverage negligible (McAdam, 1982). In the South, where a far larger proportion of the electorate was Black, outright disfranchisement nullified numerical superiority. Beginning in 1890 Mississippi, a series of statutes passed by Southern states and municipalities revoked Blacks' right to vote, employing a variety of measures such as poll taxes, residency requirements, literacy tests, and property ownership (Marger, 1991). The statutes produced nearly total Black disfranchisement in the South by the early 20th century and rendered Blacks with no political leverage against a Democratic Party dedicated to White supremacy. Without political power, Blacks had no legitimate avenue to oppose occupational segregation and its effects multiplied geometrically.

Occupational segregation led directly to residential segregation. Without reliable transportation, both Black and White Northern industrial workers tended to live close to their job sites in densely populated tenements. Because of racist ideologies, workers settled into racial and ethnic enclaves. Over time, most White ethnics were assimilated, achieving higher occupational positions that allowed them to move into higher status neighborhoods where they interacted with White Anglos. Blacks were not assimilated and remained segregated in deteriorating urban neighborhoods. In the rural South, Black tenant farmers were geographically dispersed in tightly segregated settlements. Residential segregation assured that the regular social interaction between Blacks and Whites that might have mitigated racist ideologies was severely curtailed and animosities maintained.

Educational segregation was a product of both residential segregation and Congressional mandate. Residential segregation assured educational segregation because schools were typically organized as neighborhood schools, leaving them separated by race, class, and ethnicity. The 1917 Smith-Hughes Act was intended to foster industrialization and increase U.S. competitiveness in world markets by providing federal support for primary and secondary vocational education (Rushing-Edwards, 1998). Advocating a class-based curriculum that differentiated vocational from academic training, the act endorsed race-based vocational education for agricultural, domestic, and low-skilled industrial workers (Spring, 1986). Educational segregation took slightly different regional forms.

In the North, corporate and state elites identified the non-Anglicized immigrant as the most serious impediment to U.S. economic dominance. Perceiving public education as the remedy, they urged educators to improve schools in ways that would make the American worker more productive and the nation more competitive in the global economic race. Educational leaders and school boards, made up primarily of professionals and business elites, adopted the factory model of production to organize schools (Spring, 1986). Blacks and immigrants received strikingly inferior educations to those of the rich, as their educations prepared them for positions as factory workers and domestics.

The South consistently lagged behind the rest of the nation in establishing tax-supported public schooling. Southern states in 1890 had the highest illiteracy rates and the lowest educational levels in the country (Rushing-Edwards, 1998). Black leaders promoted public schools as the path for advancing their position in society (Rushing-Edwards, 1998). But large landowners saw little benefit in public education and were committed, instead, to maintaining a cheap labor pool to support the largely agricultural economy (Wright, 1986). They were joined in opposition to public education by many poor Whites, who feared job competition with educated Black workers (Anderson, 1988; Wright, 1986). As a result, public schools were developed in the South that most suited the economic needs of the large landowners.

The consequence of public schools structured to fit economic imperatives was minimal education for Blacks (Ayers, 1992; Link, 1988). Northern schools focused on the integration of European immigrants and Black migrants into an industrial workforce, whereas Southern schools supported Black agricultural and domestic education. Education legitimated occupational segregation and reproduced the stratification system.

Permeating, reinforcing, and justifying the structures of racial segregation was a hegemonic cultural ideology that devalued all non-Anglos but particularly Blacks. Racist ideologies legitimating the denial of Black rights on the grounds of inferiority were supported, justified, and given scientific validity through Social Darwinism. Schools, churches, and the popular literature taught that individual achievement was due to racial traits, a sign of White Anglos' innate superiority. The racist rhetoric popularized by nativist movements made a patronizing, moral obligation of the imposition of Anglo culture on non-Anglos and the continued subordination of Blacks.

APARTHEID AND ECONOMIC DOMINANCE

Widespread segregation in the North and South by 1918 produced a new form of legalized Black enslavement, the American apartheid system. The characteristic structural overlap of social institutions carried occupational segregation, driven by the needs of economic expansion and legitimated by a hegemonic culture that endorsed racist ideologies, into other institutional realms and paved the way for a wider, deeper racial segregation. With disfranchisement nearly eradicating Black economic and political rights, statutes and customs in the North and South restricted Blacks in all areas of social life. Black Americans were routinely denied the vote, due process, and upward mobility; they were sequestered in inferior neighborhoods, schools, and public facilities. The racial stratification system qualifies as an apartheid system because it was an extreme form of legal, political-economic, race-based stratification in which the non-White minority was by law spatially and

socially separated and kept from equal opportunities in occupation, political participation, and education.

As surely as the antebellum Southern plantation economy had been founded on slavery, so the U.S. ascent to global economic dominance was founded on the American apartheid system. State and corporate elites maintained the apartheid system to assure the occupational segregation that produced the large competitive labor pools that fueled rapid economic expansion. State intervention increased in economic and social policies to the point that a symbiotic relationship emerged between corporations and the state (Kolko, 1967).

World War I stimulated demands for war materials, requiring increased laborers in steelmaking, meatpacking, auto manufacturing, munitions, shipyards, mines, and transportation. The demand for a larger labor force coincided with an intense labor shortage, due to males' induction into the armed services and new restrictions on European immigration generated by widespread nativist sentiments. The labor shortage appeared to be a boon to Southern Blacks because it created new employment opportunities (Foner, 1974; Leiman, 1993). Hundreds of thousands of Southern Black workers migrated to the North between 1915 and 1918. But corporations and unions arrived at unwritten agreements that confined Blacks to low-level and menial occupations (Foner, 1974). At war's end, White soldiers returned and generated severe competition for even menial jobs that resulted in Whites' intimidation of Blacks. Massive numbers of Blacks were discharged and replaced by White workers. An industrial working class arose with the emergence of effective labor unions, but racial antipathy kept the unions segregated.

The October 1929 stock market crash precipitated a severe global economic crisis. Although the Great Depression bore some similarities to other economic downturns, it was unprecedented in its length and in the level of poverty it brought. The state significantly increased its active role in economic policy; government controls became more direct. The depression was a disaster for all workers—unemployment rose from 3 million to between 15 and 17 million (Foner, 1974, p. 189). But it devastated Black families more

than Whites because they lived closer to the margins of survival. In 1929, about one fifth of all Black industrial workers were unemployed, based on the principle of last-hired, first-fired (Foner, 1974). During the 1930s, from one third to one half of the Black labor force was unemployed—more than 50% higher than that for native Whites (Leiman, 1993) and significantly higher than for foreign-born Whites (Foner, 1974). Blacks lost jobs in the industrial, agricultural, and service sectors. In the North, White workers displaced Blacks even in common labor—building roads, digging ditches, and repairing railroad tracks. In the South where 68% of Blacks resided in rural areas and were employed in cotton farming, cotton crop production dropped substantially and cotton's dominant role in the Southern economy ended (McAdam, 1982). The absence of agricultural jobs drove Blacks to urban areas and northward (Foner, 1974). At lowered wages, Whites took over service jobs from Black waiters, hotel workers, elevator operators, and in nearly all areas. When Blacks did not peacefully surrender their jobs, vigilante groups were frequently organized to intimidate them (Foner, 1974, p. 189). In some sections of the country, 80% of the Black population was on public assistance (Pinkney, 2000). Under the American apartheid system, Black families felt the effects of the depression first and bore its heaviest burdens.

Roosevelt's New Deal policies for ending the depression had two primary purposes: the reorganization of capitalism to stabilize the boom-and-bust business cycle, and the provision of enough unemployment aid to reduce the appeal of radical groups. Foner (1974) argues that the New Deal generally acquiesced to race-based wage differences that divided the working class and hurt all workers by diminishing the chances of Black and White workers uniting in protest. But Pinkney (2000) asserts that, despite drawbacks, the policies offered Blacks benefits such as appointment to agency positions, increased unemployment benefits, and a more favorable political climate for the pursuit of Black civil rights. Whatever the costs and benefits of the New Deal for Black workers, occupational segregation was unabated, economic recovery came at the disproportionate expense of Blacks, and the apartheid system was maintained.

Discrimination in education continued between the world wars. Public education policy was vitally shaped in the first half of the century by industrial philanthropist families such as the Rockefellers and the Rosenwalds, who formed a network of institutional elites with interlocking directorates. The Rockefeller family's General Education Board, established in 1903, eventually acquired significant control of national educational philanthropy (Rushing-Edwards, 1998) and assured White control of Black institutions by routinely supporting White supremacy, separate and unequal funding for primary and secondary education, industrial education for Northern Blacks, and farming and home economics education for Southern Blacks.

The U.S. entrance into World War II and the consequent demand for the production of war materials generated in a wave of widespread prosperity that the nation rode to postwar global economic dominance. Southern Blacks moved North to work in war industries. Although Blacks serving in the military were rigidly segregated, discrimination in war industries abated when the threat of a massive march by Blacks in Washington, D.C., pressured Roosevelt to issue an executive order barring racial discrimination in industries with government contracts. The United States's military leadership role in World War II and the postwar transition from war production to peacetime production readied the nation's economic take-off and its replacement of Great Britain as the number one economic power in the world. This pinnacle was achieved because of the American apartheid system, which assured conflict among laborers and buried Blacks at the bottom of a hierarchy that was perpetually reproduced through political and educational institutions.

ECONOMIC DOMINANCE, ECONOMIC DECLINE: FROM LIBERATION BACK TO SEGREGATION

We have argued that economic imperatives led to occupational segregation and the construction of the American apartheid system. In this section, we briefly track changes in economic imperatives

from 1945 to the present to examine their continuing effects on race relations and the fate of the apartheid system.

ECONOMIC DOMINANCE AND THE FALL OF APARTHEID

In the postwar period, the United States experienced unparalleled economic prosperity and achieved world economic dominance. Between 1945 and 1970, global redistribution of the production of goods and services promoted U.S. economic development: U.S. workers produced most of the manufactured goods and U.S. farms produced most of the food consumed in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan (Schaeffer, 2003, p. 20). State intervention in the economy expanded further to promote and maintain continuing economic growth, facilitating capital accumulation via policies favorable to business. The multinational corporation arose in a “most forceful convergence of state and corporation” (Marger, 1987, p. 118).

The explosion in U.S. production and wealth that occurred between 1945 and 1970 altered the stratification system. Economic prosperity fostered the emergence of an urban middle class of White business and professional families. Expanded production significantly increased the demand for labor. As a consequence, the wages and working conditions of most industrial laborers were considerably improved (Rothman, 1999). Although labor unions continued racist practices and policies (Foner, 1974), jobs were so plentiful that large numbers of Black workers were able to enter more skilled industrial jobs and technical careers. A substantial Black middle class emerged for the first time in U.S. history. As wages rose and economic growth continued to expand, the apartheid system fell. Its demise, like its creation, was closely linked to global economic processes. Two forces combined to bring down the American apartheid system: internal pressures from Black activists and external pressures from U.S. trade partners.

Effectively blocked from conventional political participation, Blacks had consistently struggled against the apartheid system through social movement activities (Jalata, 2002). Perhaps the

most prolonged and ultimately successful movement began in the early 20th century and bore fruit in the postwar era. This critical effort focused on educational segregation. Many Black leaders rejected Booker T. Washington's assimilationist plan for Blacks' gradual acquisition of citizenship rights as they proved their worth to Whites through vocational industrial education. W.E.B. DuBois and others emphasized education that promoted political action and, in 1909, they founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), calling for desegregation, access to equal educational opportunities, the right to vote, and the enforcement of the 14th and 15th Amendments (Pinkney, 2000). The NAACP began an aggressive, long-term strategy of legal challenges to educational segregation.

Beside the internal pressures from Black resistance, external criticisms from other nations influenced state actions on the apartheid system. In the postwar era of global anticommunism and the decolonization of non-White nations, the American apartheid system became an obstacle to U.S. efforts to promote democracy over communism (Horne, 1996; Lyman, 1991; McAdam, 1982; Rushing-Edwards, 1998; Skrentny, 1998). Western European trading partners and allies, Soviet detractors, and newly decolonized Third World governments pressured the United States to eradicate White supremacy at home to fortify and legitimate its foreign policy efforts and maintain its world leadership role. U.S. leaders responded. Truman in 1946 created the first national committee on civil rights and, in 1948, issued an executive order that banned racial segregation and discrimination in the military. The U.S. Supreme Court began in 1946 to issue rulings against segregation in various venues.

External criticisms of U.S. racism in 1954 converged with the NAACP's legal strategy of challenging segregated schools to generate the beginning of the end of the American apartheid system. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools was inherently unequal and a violation of the 14th Amendment. The *Brown* decision forcefully struck down the "separate but equal doctrine" and established the legal basis for two decades of Black insurgency

aimed at shattering the apartheid system. McAdam (1982) identifies specific periods of subsequent Black insurgency. *Brown* inspired the first period, from 1955 to 1960, in which insurgency characterized by petitions, sit-ins, and the bus boycott was led by Black churches, historically Black colleges, and Southern local NAACP branches. The peak of Black insurgency from 1961 to 1965 featured the founding of dozens of Black liberation movement organizations; massive demonstrations; countless sit-ins at all-White lunch counters, barbershops, laundromats, and train stations; voter registration drives; economic boycotts; and court actions. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Black insurgency then declined between 1966 and 1970, after successfully unraveling the American apartheid system of de jure discrimination. Thus, economic imperatives significantly contributed to both the construction of the apartheid system and its demise.

ECONOMIC DECLINE: WHITE BACKLASH AND DE FACTO OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

In 1971, just as Blacks began to experience more parity in occupational and educational opportunities and to anticipate greater equality in all societal sectors, the United States posted a modest trade deficit. The deficit was the first since 1893, but it signaled the loss of a significant share of U.S. manufacturing and a trend toward the globalization of production (Schaeffer, 2003). Between 1970 and 1979, U.S. global economic dominance waned as Western European and Japanese corporations doubled their share of world manufacturing (Schaeffer, 2003). The deindustrialization of the 1970s was followed in the 1980s and 1990s by changes in U.S. monetary and trade policies that encouraged U.S. corporations to reorganize production. Reorganization was accomplished in manufacturing and service industries by merging with other firms, deploying technologies that automated less skilled work, and laying off workers (Rothman, 1999; Schaeffer, 2003). Consequently, U.S. industries regained markets in the 1990s, when Japanese and Western European economies slumped.

Deindustrialization significantly reduced the proportion of manufacturing jobs. The corporate downsizing that accompanied reorganization further reduced jobs and lowered wages. A major consequence of deindustrialization and downsizing was the channeling of the labor force into high-skill and low-skill employment (Rothman, 1999; Schaeffer, 2003). New, high-skill jobs with above-average wages were created, but they were typically organized around specialized expertise, such as computers, and required a minimum of a college education. Low-skill jobs—cashiers, janitors, retail salespersons, waiters—brought low wages and few benefits. A hole appeared in the traditional occupational structure with the disappearance of a stable sector of the economy that had previously provided skilled jobs (Rothman, 1999).

These economic shifts after 1970 intensified job competition and brought an abrupt return to race-based, occupational segregation—a de facto occupational segregation. Progress halted in the reduction of the earnings gap between White men and Black men, stagnating at about 75% since the 1980s (Bennett, 1995). In the dichotomization of the occupational structure, Black workers were disproportionately left in low-skill jobs and reduced to part-time work (Rothman, 1999). The new occupations requiring college training did not benefit working-class Black workers who were unable to attain such training.

The occupational segregation of Blacks again promoted segregation in other social spheres. By the late 1970s, inflamed racial sentiments erupted in a White backlash against Black economic and political gains. Whites protested affirmative action programs with claims of “reverse discrimination.” The seminal legal case is the *Regents of the University of California v. Allan Bakke* (1978), in which a White applicant denied admission to medical school sued the school for giving preferential treatment to minorities. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1977 that the university’s admissions program violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

That and subsequent similar rulings legitimated the view of many Whites that racial parity had been achieved and that further attempts would discriminate against Whites. With *Bakke* as legal precedent, many quota systems, affirmative action programs, and

busing-for-school-segregation were subsequently abandoned across the country. Black workers were once again relegated to low-paid and dead-end jobs, segregated in dangerous neighborhoods with poor public services, and forced to send their children to understaffed, underequipped schools. With fewer opportunities for upward mobility, greater numbers of families fell into an underclass disproportionately made up of Blacks (Massey, 1990).

REFLECTIONS

Economic imperatives drive the structure of the labor market in capitalist societies. Many analysts have asserted the relationship between economic trends and race relations. A few have empirically documented the relationship for specific time periods. Our contribution in this article is the presentation of a panoramic sweep of U.S. history that indicates the continual penetration of economic imperatives into other social institutions. A competitive labor market is necessary to keep wages down and profits up. Someone must be at the bottom of the labor heap and dark skin is an easily identifiable mark: Skin color matters. Occupational segregation pierces and shapes social institutions to segregate Black Americans at the bottom of all social hierarchies.

U.S. economic dominance established the conditions under which apartheid was dismantled. But, just when Black liberation seemed most promising, economic decline brought a return to racial business-as-usual. Success and failure were achieved at nearly the same historical instant. High expectations were met with closed doors; efforts at upward mobility were met with hate crimes, racial profiling, and the grotesque and lethal mutilation of an ordinary Black family man in Jasper, Texas. Are we entering another cycle of Black enslavement and resistance? If so, the cycle is unlikely to be stopped again by forces accompanying economic dominance—global economic processes are unlikely in the near future to result in one nation's dominance. One might reasonably wonder if the greatest current threat to U.S. security is the continuing exploitation of Black Americans for the sake of economic growth.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, J. D. (1988). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Ayers, E. L. (1992). *The promise of the New South*. New York: Oxford.
- Bates, T. (1990). *The role of Black enterprise in urban economic development*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.
- Bennett, C. (1995). *The Black population in the United States* (Current Population Reports, Series, pp. 20-480). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Braddock, J. H., & McPartland, J. M. (1987). How minorities continue to be excluded from equal employment opportunities: Research on labor market and institutional barriers. *Journal of Social Issues, 43*, 5-39.
- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, U.S. Supreme Court, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
- Cole, L. W., & Foster, S. R. (2001). *From the ground up: Environmental racism and the rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. New York: NYU Press.
- Department of Health and Human Services. (1985). *Report of the secretary's task force on Black and minority health*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. (2000). *Initial report of the United States of America to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Farley, R., & Allen, W. (1987). *The color line and the quality of American life*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Feagin, J. R., & Feagin, C. B. (1986). *Discrimination American style: Institutional racism and sexism*. Malabar, FL: R. E. Krieger.
- Flanagan, R. J. (1978). Discrimination theory, labor turnover and racial unemployment differentials. *Journal of Human Resources, 13*, 187-207.
- Foner, P. S. (1974). *Organized labor and the Black worker, 1619-1973*. New York: Praeger.
- Frazier, E. F. (1964). *The Negro church in America*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Glazer, N. P., & Moynihan, D. P. (1970). *Beyond the melting pot* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hacker, A. (1992). *Two nations: Black and White, separate, hostile, unequal*. New York: Scribners.
- Hamilton, C., & Carmichael, S. (1967). *Black power*. New York: Random House.
- Horne, G. (1996). Race for the globe: U.S. foreign policy and racial interests. In B. P. Bowser & R. G. Hunt (Eds.), *Impacts of racism on White Americans* (pp. 88-112). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jalata, A. (2002). Revisiting the Black struggle: Lessons for the 21st century. *Journal of Black Studies, 33*, 86-116.
- Kirschenman, J., & Neckerman, K. (1991). "We'd love to hire them, but . . .": The meaning of race for employers. In C. Jencks & P. E. Peterson (Eds.), *The urban underclass* (pp. 203-234). Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Knowles, L. L., & Prewitt, K. (Eds.). (1969). *Institutional racism in America*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kolko, G. (1967). *The triumph of conservatism: A reinterpretation of American history*. New York: Free Press.
- Leiman, M. M. (1993). *The political economy of racism: A history*. London: Pluto Press.
- Link, W. A. (1988). Privies, Progressivism, and public schools: Health reform and education in the rural South, 1909-1920. *Journal of Southern History, 54*, 4.

- Lyman, S. M. (1991). The race question and liberalism: Casuistries in American constitutional law. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 5(2), 183-247.
- Marger, M. N. (1987). *Elites and masses*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Marger, M. N. (1991). *Race and ethnic relations: American and global perspectives*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Massey, D. S. (1990). American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the underclass. *American Journal of Sociology*, 2, 329-357.
- McAdam, D. (1982). *Political process and the development of Black insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pinkney, A. (2000). *Black Americans*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Plessy v. Ferguson, U.S. Supreme Court, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).
- Regents of the University of California v. Allan Bakke, U.S. Supreme Court, 438 U.S. 265 (1978).
- Rothman, R. A. (1999). *Inequality and stratification: Race, class, and gender*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Rushing-Edwards, W. (1998). *Mediated inequality: The role of governmental, business, and scientific elites in public education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Tennessee-Knoxville.
- Schaeffer, R. K. (2003). *Understanding globalization: The social consequences of political, economic, and environmental change*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Schattschneider, E. E. (1960). *The semisovereign people*. Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press.
- Schwartz, M. (1976). *Radical protest and social structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and cotton tenancy, 1880-1890*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Skrentny, J. D. (1998). The effect of the cold war on African-American civil rights: America and the world audience, 1945-1968. *Theory and Society*, 27, 237-285.
- Spring, J. (1986). *Education and the rise of the corporate state: The American school*. New York: Longman.
- Watts, T., & Wright, R. (Eds.). (1983). *Black alcoholism: Toward a comprehensive understanding*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.
- Willie, C. V. (Ed.). (1970). *The family life of Black people*. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Co.
- Wright, G. (1986). *Old South New South: Revolutions in the Southern economy since the Civil War*. New York: Basic Books.
- Zinn, H. (1995). *A people's history of the United States: 1492-present*. New York: HarperCollins.

Sherry Cable is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Tennessee. She recently published articles on environmental justice in Human Ecology Review and Sociological Spectrum. In progress is an article with Tamara L. Mix and Donald W. Hastings on environmental racism in the federal government's nuclear weapons facility in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

Tamara L. Mix is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. Her current work examines cross-class coalitions in the Environmental Justice Movement and worker perceptions of environmental risk exposures.