(Mis)Calculations, Psychological Mechanisms, and the Future Politics of People of Color

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Abstract: This essay comments on three questions about race, ethnicity, and politics in the contemporary United States—*How* did we get here? *Who* are we now? And, *where* are we going next? I grapple with these questions as a political psychologist steeped in the study of intergroup politics. In this capacity, I will argue that structural (mis)calculations have paved the road toward present intergroup relations, where identity politics reigns supreme. I then discuss America's current racial landscape, arguing that reality is more complex than before, especially as it concerns political relations between Whites and non-Whites. In this regard, I will claim that political psychology holds special insights to generate new knowledge about how (non-)Whites are navigating this changing racial landscape. Finally, I will advocate, strongly, for a greater sense of wonder about the multiplicity of identities that people of color hold. In particular, I will claim that by *relaxing* our assumption that race is the main identity that matters to people of color, we stand to better appreciate just how adaptive non-Whites are to their political surroundings, leading us toward new insights about the origins and nature of mass political engagement and involvement.

Keywords: Interminority politics, people of color, hierarchy.

> *"You can observe a lot by just watching."*
> —Yogi Berra, former New York Yankees catcher

For any political scientist with a pulse, 2020 has been a year replete with jaw-dropping observations. We have seen a raging global pandemic wreak

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havoc across Black and Latino communities (Oppel et al. 2020). We have also witnessed numerous, high-profile murders of Black, Latino, and other civilians of color at the hands of police (Bailey 2020; Mejia 2020). Moreover, we have witnessed a virulent rise in bald, unapologetic prejudiced behaviors and attitudes toward Asian Americans, Native Americans, and other communities of color (Reny and Barreto 2020; Walker and Cochrane 2020). And what are we learning from all this? Certainly not anything new that we did not know before as race, ethnicity, and politics (REP) scholars. Indeed, for all of the particulars of each and every one of these lamentable cases and others, the common spark behind them all, I would say, is the congeries of structures, beliefs, and attitudes that are designed to keep people of color "in their place" as minorities. While there was a time when such backlashes succeeded wildly, this time it feels different. And, as I will seek to persuade you in the rest of this essay, it *is* different (at least conceptually). All we have to do is follow Yogi Berra's dictum by looking for the correct signs in the continued unfolding of REP.

What I am suggesting to REP scholars is a conceptual hypothesis of sorts. Namely, that what is unfurling before us is *qualitatively* distinct from what we have observed in the past as far as the relations between non-Hispanic Whites and people of color are concerned. By this reasoning, the "null" in play here is simply more of the same—a state of affairs where Whites are the sole ascendant group in America's racial hierarchy, with people of color below in a common well of devaluation and with few political paths to remedy this lowlier station. I will prosecute my case against this null hypothesis by answering three conceptual questions about REP in the context of American politics: (1) *How* did we get to this precise moment? (2) *Who* are we, in the contemporary era? and (3) *Where* are we going next?

I will answer each of these questions in the only way I know how: as a political psychologist who is steeped in the study of intergroup politics. This means that much of what I have to say—and the evidence that I adduce for my claims—will come from a very narrow slice of our shared knowledge base in the social sciences. This should make it plainly obvious that anything I say in the pages that follow is *not* any more valid than the perspectives of others in this collection of essays. Alas, all science—including its political variety—is a cumulative, collective effort. From this angle, then, my insights are a drop in that enormous bucket. Nonetheless, I still want to suggest that a stronger focus on the psychology of intergroup relations can sensitize many of us further to

what I would characterize as "victories" in the long struggle for the greater political inclusion of people of color, broadly construed.

Thus having cleared my throat a little, allow me now to at least try to persuade you about some of this.

Arriving to the Current Moment Through Sheer (Mis)Calculations

In the wake of Donald Trump's election to the U.S. presidency in 2016, many mainstream political scientists have produced a torrent of scholarship that highlights the major role of intergroup dynamics in general (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016; Bartels 2018; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017), and the influence of racial identity politics in particular (e.g., Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2018a; Sides et al. 2017; 2018b). Yet, the sense of novelty and urgency behind this largely non-REP scholarship is likely to strike many REP scholars (including this one) as a sign of "being asleep at the wheel" until now. Long before the current era, the relevance of intergroup relations and identity politics to America's electoral dynamics has been one of *the* core insights that REP scholars have been clamoring about, often with minimal recognition by those outside of this specific subfield (cf. Hutchings and Valentino 2004; McClain and Stewart 1995). Yet, what both REP and non-REP scholars generally overlook in this scholarship are the *structural* roots of the identity politics we continue seeing playing out at the individual level. This effervescence in racial identities is not just "in people's heads." It is a consequence of a changing field of race relations (cf. Kim 1999)—a long-run effect driven by both deliberate and accidental actions at the institutional level. Let me illustrate with one crucial example.

In 1965, America's Congress passed the Hart-Celler Act: a piece of legislation aimed at removing the remaining vestiges of what lawmakers saw as America's racist past when it came to immigrant admissions (King 2000). More than half a century had passed since the time when the U.S. Congress had thought differently about all this, having instituted—in 1921 and 1924—formal quotas that expressly limited the entry of Asian foreigners and immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe (Ngai 2004), some of the main racial bogeymen of that era.

But it was the early 1960s now, and America was locked in a Cold War with the Soviet Union—and racial discrimination at home was one bat that Russian officials used regularly to beat the United States over the head in public settings and diplomatic circles (Parker 2009; Skrentny 2002; Yuen 1997). Thus, by removing any semblance of racial quotas

in immigrant admissions, the 1965 Hart-Celler Act aimed to tactically strike a symbolic victory against the Russians and other U.S. critics. Indeed, lawmakers who supported this act won over their skeptical colleagues by noting, *sotto voce*, that this policy change would be largely cosmetic, not really affecting the nature and content of immigration to the United States. It was considered an astute political move at the time (Tichenor 2002).

Time has revealed to us that this strategy was also pregnant with hubris. Through simple strokes of a pen, the removal of these quotas set into motion a cascade of immigration flows from countries that had, in years prior, anemically contributed to America's foreign-born population. Through sheer miscalculation, Asian and Latin American nations drove the growth in immigration from 1965 onward. In fact, we're still feeling those effects today. The panorama of non-White individuals in the United States now includes traditional groups, such as African Americans and Native Americans, but also "newer" groups such as Mexicans, Koreans, Salvadorans, Filipinos, Dominicans, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, Japanese, and Cubans. This multiplicity of groups has led some political entrepreneurs to weave together a variety of new categories with political purposes in mind. For example, political actors have threaded together Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, and others into what we now know as *Latinos*. Originally deemed artificial and incoherent (Beltran 2010; Mora 2014), this label has now become a fully-fledged identity with political effects under very specific circumstances (e.g., Barreto 2007; Manzano and Sanchez 2010; Pérez 2015a, b; Pérez et al. 2019; Valenzuela and Michelson 2016). Ditto with the transformation of Chinese, Korean, Japanese and other groups into *Asian Americans* (e.g., Kuo et al. 2017; Lien et al. 2004; Wong et al. 2011). And, as if this diversity of categories is not enough, many of these disparate, unique racial and ethnic groups have now coalesced— by design and through elite action—into a larger mega-group, with African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and others identifying, many times, as *people of color* (more on this below) (Pérez, forthcoming; Pérez 2020).

This imaginative spread of racial and ethnic groups that draws on the growing demographic diversity of our country underlines the power of political opportunity and its exploitation by elites in the study of intergroup politics. Let me illustrate this further with the case of *people of color* versus Whites. In objective terms, there are far and few points of immediately obvious commonalities between African Americans, Asian Americans,

and Latinos and their constituent subgroups. In fact, one could reasonably argue that these are communities with distinct histories, aspirations, and trajectories (not to mention the differences in treatment at the hands of U.S. authorities) (Skrentny 2002). But there is a basic reality about American politics that fails to escape the attention of many of its residents, including people of color. Namely, political power is responsive to large numbers, particularly when these are organized coherently. For many members of these disparate "minority" groups, then, these stark realities have encouraged many, mostly Black, leaders to highlight and thread together a unifying banner of identity on the basis of *shared* disadvantages and grievances as *people of color* (Pérez, forthcoming; Pérez 2020).

White Americans understand these broad developments, too, even if they cannot or will not admit to their particulars. How do we know this? I, for one, am confident in this assertion based on a simple empirical observation. Beginning in the early 2000s, many White Americans have changed their tune and temperament as a group. Many group members have gradually shifted from being a predominant majority that is securely privileged with more power, resources, and prestige, to a group that palpably senses its once sheltered foothold is loosening—and fast. In short, Whites are now also engaged in the politics of grievance, claiming that the America they see now is not the American they once knew (Danbold and Huo 2015; Jardina 2019; Knowles and Lowery 2012; Lowery et al. 2007; Pérez et al. 2019).

The fact is, America is *not* the same and is unlikely to return to this bygone era. Indeed, I would argue that the spasms we are witnessing at the top of the hierarchy are not reflections of a predominant group who is reasserting its position. Rather, this agitation is an indication of a group that has already lost its "usual" position and is now scrambling—worried, fearful, pessimistic—about new changes in the configuration of relations between racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Still not convinced? Then think of the recent reactions of some Whites to the high-profile murders of Black individuals at the hands of police (e.g., Bailey 2020; Berman et al. 2020). Unlike in previous moments like these, some individuals within the White community are actively listening, reflecting, and readjusting their attitudes and behaviors toward Blacks and other groups (Del Real, Samuels, and Craig 2020; Knowles and Lowery 2012), with some of these individuals openly expressing sympathy for (Chudy 2020, 2017), rather than antipathy against, various communities of color (cf. Kinder and Kam 2009;

Kinder and Sanders 1996; Ramirez and Peterson 2020). Let that sink in for a minute: some White individuals are now *genuinely* expressing sympathy for outgroups, with these sentiments bearing on how White Americans behave politically (Chudy 2020).

Each of these developments indicates the need to break strongly with our existing mental models of U.S. intergroup relations. As many REP scholars have previously noted, we often treat our racial landscape in binary and reductionist ways (Beltrán 2020; Dawson 2000; Kim 1999; Masuoka and Junn 2013). Some of this arises from scientific pressures to be parsimonious in our conceptualization and theory-building efforts. Yet, parsimony should not retard our collective efforts at "catching up" with current empirical reality. We need to develop stronger theories that can better anticipate our political future. To this end, I encourage REP scholars to further suspend their standing assumptions about U.S. racial politics in order to better engage with two points that follow from this discussion.

The first is a need to reformulate our understanding about the racial order that governs the relations between (non-)White groups today. To me, this entails greater exploration of the circumstances under which America's hierarchy can be appreciably transformed, such that the actual stations of non-White groups shift into new and lasting patterns. For example, the emergence of a broader *person of color* identity underscores the adage of "strength in numbers." If we subscribe to this view, then one task at hand for REP scholars is to clarify the circumstances under which the centripetal forces of broadly shared attachments like a *person of color* identity can overcome the centrifugal pressures of identifying with one's unique racial or ethnic group—all in order to produce collective action that meaningfully alters the racial *status quo*. This will involve lengthy and difficult conversations about what counts as non-trivial changes in America's racial hierarchy. Yet from where I sit, simply clinging to previous notions about the nature of America's racial hierarchy as durably unchanging seems to be no longer tenable in descriptive, conceptual, and empirical terms (Masuoka and Junn 2013; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Zou and Cheryan 2017).

The second implication in need of further attention concerns the balkanization of White opinion, especially about racial matters. It is my belief that we need to move beyond the broad narrative of White backlashes or similar efforts to reassert dominance or control within America's hierarchy (Sidanius et al. 1997; Sidanius and Petrocik 2001). At minimum, this involves grappling further with the possibility that Whites have already

lost their sense of dominance within the hierarchy and what this entails attitudinally and behaviorally among specific members of this group. For example, Jennifer Chudy's (2017, 2020) creative work on racial sympathy alerts us to the range of feelings that members of a majority group can feel toward an outgroup—a point that psychologists like Marilynn Brewer (1999) and other scholars (Jackman 1994) have made before to other audiences. But how much of this sympathy is an *adaptation* to changing circumstances in the relations between Whites and people of color? And *when* can sympathy from the ingroup produce tangible changes in the configuration of America's racial order for the *outgroup(s)*? These are crucial questions that cut to the heart of a hierarchy's functionality (Katz 1960): the idea that people are motivated to endorse an arranged set of relations between groups for basic psychological motives (e.g., need for certainty, clarity, etc.) (cf. Federico and Malka 2018; Jost and Liviatan 2007; Reid and Hogg 2005). REP scholars—particularly those with a political behavior focus—should be on the ready to better grasp these motivations for our subfield's sake. This is a long slog of an endeavor, with the upshot being greater opportunities for younger REP scholars to establish themselves and nurture productive careers.

In a similar spirit, Ashley Jardina's (2019) path-breaking work on White identity politics translates for REP scholars a point that many psychologists have long understood and made (Ellemers et al. 1997, 2002): namely, that (White) identity is a matter of degree, not a type. A fuller appreciation of this range of racial identification among Whites can, in my view, yield additional and sharper predictions about the motivations driving White politics toward people of color. While much of the action consuming our collective attention has been driven by the exclusionary reactions of high-identifying Whites (for whom being White is central to their sense of self) (Leach et al. 2008; Pérez 2015a, b), low-identifying Whites are incredibly ripe for closer scrutiny. These are individuals for whom being White reflects weakly on how they see themselves, which, in theory, leaves them more open to a range of calls and entreaties to remedy political problems their group may disagree with (on average), but which they personally find appealing (see Ellemers et al. 2002). Greater inspection of this range of "being White" can further solidify our understanding about why some White people do, and do not, engage in vigorous efforts to improve racial inequality—one of the main byproducts of America's racial order (cf. Knowles and Lowery 2012; Lowery et al. 2007).

Who are We? More than One Thing–and Perhaps Several Things at Once

If we want to answer the query *who are we?* by strictly availing ourselves of prior REP work, then the resounding answer is that who we are is, largely and regularly, defined by our racial or ethnic identities. By this metric, a person's sense of being *African American*, *Asian American*, *Latino*, etc. colors one's everyday existence, in general, while underwriting their political expressions and behaviors, in particular. Nobody here is putting in doubt the crucial role that racial/ethnic identities play in the politics of non-White individuals. What is debatable, however, is the extent to which non-Whites operate, unerringly, on the basis of their unique racial/ethnic identities alone, especially in politics. Why? Because unless we wish to make the more questionable claim that non-Whites are some unique human sub-species, the conceptual reality is that "minorities," too, possess a multiplicity of attachments that they enjoy access to—a full repertoire of identities (Chandra 2004; 2012; García-Ríos et al. 2018; Pérez 2015a, b; Pérez et al. 2019; Sen and Wasow 2016).

Who we are, then, largely depends on who else is around us and what is at stake, with the latter encompassing both material and status-based considerations (cf. Tajfel et al. 1971; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner et al. 1987; 1994; see also Sidanius et al. 1997; Sidanius and Petrocik 2001). That, at least, is what reams of psychological studies teach us. I think this hallowed insight matters because failure to wrestle more aggressively with the rich identity repertoires of non-Whites exposes REP scholars to a few unforced errors. The most prominent one, to my mind, is that we risk attributing various political opinions and behaviors to racial and ethnic identity when these acts are really driven by other attachments—or some combination, thereof—that are stored in one's repertoire. This omission matters qualitatively and quantitatively. To claim that racial/ethnic identity is responsible for "minority" politics when it is not is to miss out on the very heterogeneity that we all recognize characterizes these communities (e.g., Abrajano and Alvarez 2010; Beltran 2010; Dawson 1994; 2001; Garcia 2012; Lien et al. 2004; White and Laird 2020; White, Laird, and Allen 2014; Wong et al. 2011). Simply put, our conceptual scope is unnecessarily narrowed, leading us to collectively miss out on conceptual and theoretical innovations. This can influence the array of literatures that are amplified and ignored, with lasting consequences for the creation and circulation of fresh ideas from REP scholars, especially junior ones.

But this omission also matters statistically. If racial identity is stored in one's repertoire—a fancy word for a particular slice of one's long-term memory (LTM)—then it means that racial identity keeps close company with other distinct attachments (cf. Collins and Loftus 1975). In fact, given the associative architecture of LTM, group identities that we consider distinct are actually robustly correlated with others, thus urging REP scholars to think about "omitted" identities in their statistical analyses (Lodge and Taber 2013; Pérez 2016; see also Tourangeau et al. 2000).

Let me illustrate some of these pitfalls and opportunities with two examples.

The first case is the overwhelming Democratic partisanship of African Americans. Scores of published studies have sensitized many an REP scholar to the chronic and powerful role of racial identity in Black political behavior (e.g., Allen et al. 1989; Dawson 1994; 2000; Hajnal and Lee 2012; Tate 1991; White 2007). But if the outcomes that fascinate us are political, then why isn't a more *political* identity responsible for these effects, rather than a social identity, like being African American? Indeed, the most obvious suspect here is partisan identity—an expressly political form of attachment, and one that also defines many African Americans as strongly identified Democrats (Hajnal and Lee 2012). So which one is it: racial or partisan identity?

The most imaginative answer I have seen on this yet can be found in *Steadfast Democrats: How Social Forces Shape Black Political Behavior* by Ismail White and Chryl Laird. This volume provides a compelling account about racial identity, partisan identity, and the interface between both (emphasis on the *interface* part). White and Laird (2020) contend that the overwhelming Democratic partisanship of Black Americans can be best understood as emanating from a variety of social pressures that cement the political unity, cohesion, and power of their racial group. By this account, African Americans' enduring experiences with racial discrimination have taught them that collective political action is one avenue to improve their social status. Yet, such action requires unity in light of political heterogeneity among African Americans, with some leaning ideologically to the left, some leaning ideologically to the right, and plenty of others in between. In order to speak with a more unified voice, Black Americans close ranks by policing the conservative members of their racial group, thus transforming them into a steadfast segment of the Democrats' electoral coalition.

The empirics in support of this theoretical framework are firmly impressive, consisting of surgically precise experiments that trace the effects of

social pressure on the political compliance of Black partisans. But the real victory here, in my mind, is a conceptual one. Think of it this way. Before the fresh and imaginative insights of White and Laird (2020), there were at least two prominent ways to interpret Black politics in light of their steadfast allegiance to the Democratic party. One is to view the political cohesiveness and electoral reliability of Black Democrats as a manifestation of political capture (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989; Frymer 1999). By this view, the political potency of Black Democratic voters is taken for granted by elites and manipulated by them toward political ends that sometimes may not fully align with Black preferences. Another, more statistically inclined view is that Democratic partisanship among Blacks is empirically uninteresting because there is so little variation to exploit or explain (roughly 9 out 10 Black adults are self-identified Democrats). Together, these interpretations construe Black Americans as lacking political will or nuance. Yet by illuminating the interface between racial and partisan identity, White and Laird (2020) erect a new framework highlighting that Black Americans possess more agency, more complexity, and more identities than typically assumed. I count this as a firm victory in our collective efforts to deepen our conceptual understanding of intraminority politics.

Another example comes from my own work on non-Whites' identification as *people of color*. In a forthcoming book titled *Diversity's Child: People of Color and the Politics of Identity*, I argue that many non-White individuals in the United States have a new entry in their identity repertoires—that is, many of them now identify as *people of color*. This new attachment is related to, but distinct from, their sense of identification with their own racial and ethnic groups. In fact, this relationship is rooted in a particular configuration between *people of color*—a type of category that psychologists call a superordinate identity—and racial and ethnic identities—categories that psychologists dub as subordinate attachments (Gaertner et al. 1989; Transue 2007). Once again, the interface between identities is important (cf. Pérez, Deichert, and Engelhardt 2019). My basic proposition is that a person's sense of being African American, Asian American, or Latino is *nested under* this broader category, *people of color*. This nesting occurs when, in individuals' environs, there is a clear frame of reference. For many African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos, this frame of reference is often Whites—a group whose relatively stronger position in America's racial order reminds many "minorities" about who is responsible for their shared devaluation.

The key to this conceptual renovation is not that non-Whites have forgotten that they are *Black*, *Asian*, or *Latino*, but rather, that under some circumstances, their perspective is shifted toward a wider panoramic view. When this occurs, any spirit of generosity, support, or benefit of the doubt that a Black person would grant to other Black individuals, or that Asians would normally extend to other Asians, or that Latinos would offer to other Latinos, is now held out to other *people of color*. That is, non-Whites come to see themselves as interchangeable exemplars of the same shared group. Hence, "your" political battle is "my" battle because we are all *people of color* (Pérez 2020).

Indeed, across in-depth interviews with 25 carefully selected *people of color*, as well as more than 13,000 Black, Asian, and Latino participants in multiple polls, survey experiments, and lab experiments, I find that stronger identification as a *person of color* produces greater support for policies and measures that affect the general well-being of non-Whites, even if these initiatives don't have direct or immediate implications for members of one's own racial or ethnic group. As but one example, I find that higher levels of PoC ID reliably and substantially boost support for the Black Lives Matter movement, not only among African Americans, but among Asian Americans and Latinos—and by similar margins, to boot. This effect emerges from a sense that members of each racial community share a broader group in common. In fact, a loss in this perceived similarity reduces the winds behind PoC ID's sails. The moment that a Black, Asian, or Latino individual senses that the larger group ignores the unique experiences and challenges of their narrower group, this political unity behind Black Lives Matters falls apart.

Again, the victories I see here are conceptual ones, for we arrive at a deeper understanding about what underpins, psychologically, both conflictual and cooperative relations between distinct minority groups—an understanding that is based on acknowledging the rich identity repertoires that non-Whites possess. It also throws new light on some of the pathways behind possible transformations in the racial order. And by transformations, I mean *objective* changes in the stations of non-Whites within the racial order (e.g., Horowitz 1985; Tajfel 1981).

In the study of intergroup dynamics, transformations occur in the stable arrangements that govern relations between groups when the outgroup "takes the fight" to the ingroup, what is formally described as *social competition* (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Accordingly, those groups on the outs become less restrained by a sense of impertinence and actively press for changes and improvements in how they are treated and how

much power they actually enjoy. Rather than being sudden and destructive, these efforts are often slow, incremental, and largely non-violent (e.g., Lee 2002; Parker 2009). Viewed from this angle, then, a *person of color* identity becomes one tactic for non-Whites to feel better about themselves despite their continued stigmatization (Pérez, forthcoming), while also facilitating greater collective action at opportune political moments (Pérez 2020). This does not mean that PoC ID, alone, will topple America's hierarchy. But it is to say that this broad-based attachment can help dislodge previous assumptions about how well-organized and credible the political entreaties of non-Whites are, especially as people of color completely shed their "minority" status.

Where Next? Toward a Firmer Grasp of Intergroup Relations in Every Sense of the Word

In my graduate school years at Duke University, I clearly remember Paula McClain, my Ph.D. advisor, once remarking during a seminar that most articles and books aiming to study U.S. racial attitudes were, upon very close inspection, really studies of *White* attitudes toward race. That observation has always stuck with me. Indeed, I find it fantastically impressive that even today, so much scholarship examines racial attitudes or questions of race from the strict vantage point of Whites, with scattered, limited, and uneven attention to the views of people of color (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Gilens 1999; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sniderman and Carmines 1997). There is nothing wrong with this perspective, of course. It is an essential piece of a larger story we are all partaking in. But my point here is that—salesmanship and profit-incentives notwithstanding—this type of focus is a ruse that sometimes helps to reify many of the inequalities that exist between mainstream political scientists and those from REP, most of whom are from underrepresented groups. I know this because, if I were to characterize my own research on, say, people of color, as a study of *American* opinion toward race relations, I highly doubt many readers would be convinced about the scope of this work.

I highlight all this in order to call closer attention to a limitation in current work that needs immediate rectification going forward. *If* we want to truly understand intergroup politics in the United States (and beyond, actually), then we need to engage more seriously with the *inter* part of this word. This involves more aggressive conceptual, theoretical,

and empirical efforts in our research. For instance, on the conceptual side of things, all groups should manifest and display the same "moving parts" as others, even if there is meaningful variance in how these "essentials" operate for different groups. Otherwise, comparisons are futile (Sartori 1970). Let me highlight a concrete example here. When I teach my graduate seminar on political psychology, I am regularly struck by our often bifurcated understanding of (non-)Whites' political motivations in intergroup settings. By standard accounts, White politics are primarily motivated by their outgroup attitudes (e.g., Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears and Henry 2005), yet the politics of non-Whites are generally construed as being driven by their concerns about their ingroup (e.g., Dawson 1994; Kuo et al. 2017; Pérez 2015a, b). This makes for a conceptually awkward situation where each type of group is missing some key aspect of human nature (cf. Brewer 1999). Alas, all racial groups, irrespective of their social status, possess *ingroup* and *outgroup* attitudes—with the degree of correspondence between the two being looser and more modest than REP scholars typically presume (e.g., Kinder and Kam 2009). Indeed, as the social psychologist Marilynn Brewer (1999, 430) reminds us, "ingroup love can be compatible with a range of attitudes toward corresponding outgroups, including mild positivity, indifference, disdain, or hatred."

Now, lest you think this is a no-brainer, consider the rapid shift in treatment of White people in the study of racial politics, from *individuals* who sometimes *personally* manifest pathological attitudes toward a variety of "others," to a growing focus on Whites as members of a group with a specific station in society, just like other non-White groups. In 2006 (which is really yesterday), Sears and Savalei (2006) wrote in an influential piece that "whites' whiteness is…no more noteworthy to them than breathing the air around them. White group consciousness is…not likely to be a major force in whites' political attitudes today." Fast forward less than 15 years later, and Ashley Jardina (2019, 213) now teaches us that "White racial solidarity does factor into whites' political thinking, primarily with respect to polices that whites see as benefiting or harming their in-group." The arc connecting these two perspectives is breathtaking and a welcome development in my notebook. For we cannot have concepts in intergroup politics that only some actors seem to understand or use.

Our theories, too, should be on this chopping block, not with the aim of eliminating them from the record, but by dissecting them and reconstituting them into broader, more unified theories that capture the complex field of race relations that I alluded to earlier. There is much merit in developing and testing theories pertaining to specific groups (Barreto

2007; Dawson 1994; Hajnal and Lee 2012; Kuo et al. 2017). But it is now increasingly untenable, scientifically speaking, to keep these frameworks in silos away from each other. What is needed, instead, are frameworks that, in explanation and scope, are more unified and more widely applicable to multiple racial and ethnic groups. At a fundamental level, this entails a shift in frame of reference, from theories about the behavior of proper nouns (e.g., *African Americans*, *Asian Americans*, *Latinos*, *Muslim Americans*, *Native Americans*, etc.), to more generic theories about broader sociopolitical phenomenon (e.g., intergroup politics). This can be, and should be, a constructive endeavor. And there are signs already that it works, with a boon of insights for us all (and budding junior careers for some).

As but one example of this, consider the racial position model (RPM) developed by Zou and Cheryan (2017) within social psychology. Many an REP scholar is well-versed in the trailblazing insights of political scientist Claire Jean Kim (1999; 2003), who developed a theory of racial triangulation to explain the structural subordination of Asian Americans in between Whites and other people of color—a move that results from the systematic stereotyping of Asian Americans as a "higher status" but "forever foreign" group. Building on this insight, Zou and Cheryan's RPM stipulates that Whites are still the most valorized group in America's racial order. Yet, major shifts have emerged in the rankings of communities of color. In particular, the RPM re-conceptualizes non-Whites as falling along two major axes of subordination.

The first of these is the familiar *superior–inferior* dimension that has shaped many political scientists' thinking (e.g., Carter and Pérez 2016; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Sidanius et al. 1997). Here, Whites are construed as the most *superior* group—that is, the group with the most cachet or social prestige. Punching right below Whites are Asian Americans: a racial group considered to be higher-status than Blacks and Latinos, but not as socially esteemed as Whites. This liminal station is a resounding recognition of Asian American's complex status within the racial order (Kim 2003; Xu and Lee 2013).

The second axis of subordination, in turn, involves the ranking of groups in terms of how *American* or *foreign* they are considered to be. Once again, Whites occupy the most advantaged position along this corridor as the most *American* group, which is evidenced by their regular efforts to limit others' entry into this highly valorized category (cf. Danbold and Huo 2015; Knowles and Lowery 2012; Pérez et al.

2019). But what about people of color? Here, the jockeying for position along this axis reflects the complex and unique ways in which different racial minority groups experience their subordination. For example, African Americans are positioned here as a relatively more *American* group than Asians and Latinos, who contain substantial numbers of immigrants in their ranks. That is, in comparison with Asian Americans and Latinos—two groups who are regularly construed as "foreign intruders"—Black individuals are considered *relatively more American* than this pair of communities (Carter 2019).

This revised hierarchy is visually represented in Figure 1, which I reproduce from Zou and Cheryan (2017). The simple two-by-two reveals some interesting insights and, with additional brainstorming, can yield more precise predictions about intergroup *politics*. Notice that each group's position is relative to the other. In other words, it is very nearly impossible to understand, say, the position of Asian Americans without also appreciating where African Americans, Latinos, and Whites are located on this plane. For what it is worth, I believe that this relational arrangement will prove essential in our further development and testing of hypotheses about interminority politics (cf. Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner et al. 1987). As but one example, in collaborative work with Enya Kuo (Yale University, Department of Psychology), we demonstrate that the precise location of non-Whites within America's racial hierarchy motivates their political reactions to other people of color (Pérez and Kuo, n.d.). Using the case of political attitudes toward Latinos, we show, experimentally, that Black adults are threatened by Latinos' demographic growth *only* when it is framed as having implications for Blacks' sense of what it means to be *American*. In contrast, Asian American adults are only threatened by Latinos demographic growth *if* it is framed as dragging down the quality of *immigrants* to the United States, which Asian individuals draw a sense of *superiority* from (i.e., the dimension most relevant to them). This work shows how African and Asian Americans can express hostile political attitudes toward Latinos (e.g., greater opposition to immigration), but for fundamentally different psychological motives that are rooted in their station within the very racial hierarchy they all share.

Finally, if we are to expand our conceptual and theoretical range, it stands to reason that our data-collections must also follow. There was once a time when collecting data for non-White groups was prohibitive in terms of finances, time, and effort. Many of these barriers to entry
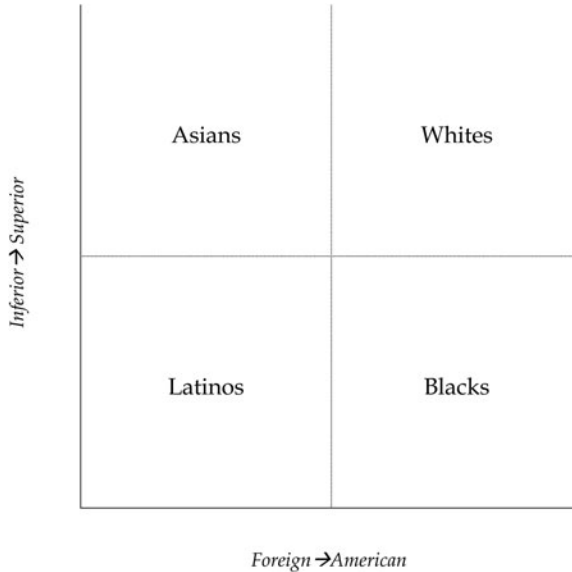
FIGURE 1.   Two axes of subordination (Zou and Cheryan 2017).

have now been lowered, with the rise of online data collection and other creative approaches to data-collection (e.g., labs with PoC-rich participant pools). Moreover, new methodologies and techniques are emerging to further reduce these obstacles and allow more effective use of data on non-Whites, such as the formal organization of multi-investigator studies and meta-analyses to analyze pooled samples of non-Whites (Goh et al. 2016; Hopkins et al. 2020). Let me illustrate what is possible here with some of the work being done in my lab at UCLA.

In 2018, upon arriving to UCLA, I launched the Race, Ethnicity, Politics & Society (REPS) Lab. One of the main goals of this space was to serve as a data-collection platform for social and political psychologists who study intergroup politics and relations through experiments. While many political scientists are consumed with questions about generalizability when it comes to experiments, one major lesson that often escapes critics is that with any experiment, the inferences are over the treatment, not the units themselves (Druckman and Kam 2011). Thus, whether a finding replicates and extends across settings, participants, outcomes, and operationalizations of a treatment is a question of external validity—a question that requires *multiple* data-collections (Campbell and Stanley 1963).[1]

Seizing on this insight, the REPS Lab coordinates a quarterly study that draws on the diversity of undergraduates at UCLA and UC Riverside, thus offering REP scholars (mainly doctoral students) the opportunity to run experiments with African American participants, Asian American participants, Latino participants—or with participants from all three groups (and others). For example, in my book on identifying as a *person of color* (Pérez forthcoming), I conducted a handful of lab experiments to bore down into the psychology behind this identity, generating insights that I was able to test further in studies outside of the lab. The point here is that the REPS Lab, and outfits similar to it (see Cortland et al. 2017; Kirby et al. 2020), aim to reduce barriers to data-collection so that REP scholars and others can continue to develop and test insights about the political attitudes and behaviors of (non-)Whites in the United States, an area of research of utmost intellectual and practical significance, and one that should allow younger REP researchers to establish and distinguish themselves going forward.

A Final Thought

In the end, none of what I have discussed in this essay is easy and I regret not being able to throw more "soft pitches" our way. Taking these active steps is going to continue being a hard, time-intensive effort with high-risks. But I would also say that these efforts are suffused with potentially massive rewards, for they stand to clarify how a growing and substantial portion of our polity actually engages in politics. It is also, to draw on Yogi Berra's insight one last time, a way for us to avoid being passive observers and becoming more active protagonists in how we understand ourselves and others in a political system that we all have to share in. This optimism on my part stems from taking comfort in the fact that, at a raw level, REP scholars have the deep expertise, the motivation, and the need to accomplish this feat for themselves and their field. Our shared area of expertise began from a sense of exclusion and an equally deep sense that the perspectives of those we study mattered just as much as those from "mainstream" America (e.g., McClain et al. 2016; McClain and Garcia 1993). Those two sentiments were true in years past. And they are even more true today. We have in our hands, then, an opportunity and obligation to further thread these perspectives, validate them empirically, and place them in flagship journals, if for the simple reason that people of color are a major segment under that broad canopy that we call American politics.

NOTE

[1] Indeed, by this metric, even a "gold-standard" survey experiment that is representative of a population is still prone to the critique of displaying low external validity, since it comprises a "one-shot" study.

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