Preface

In November 2008, more than two centuries after this country's founding, Senator Barack Obama became the first American of color to win the U.S. presidency. He won nearly 53 percent of the national vote, compared to about 46 percent for his white opponent, Senator John McCain. Since Obama's election, the increase in emphasis on the United States being post-racial has been dramatic, especially among whites and in the mainstream media.

Like many media outlets, the national business newspaper the *Wall Street Journal*, framed Barack Obama's election as a great tribute to how democratic and non-racist the United States now is:

> A man of mixed race has now reached the pinnacle of U.S. power only two generations since the end of Jim Crow. This is a tribute to American opportunity, and it is something that has never happened in another Western democracy—notwithstanding European condescension about "racist" America.[1]

After the assertion of moral superiority over Europe, this white-framed editorial added: "One promise of his victory is that perhaps we can put to rest the myth of racism as a barrier to achievement in this splendid country. Mr. Obama has a special obligation to help do so."[2]

Writing from a common white viewpoint, this editorial writer called on President-elect Obama to lead an effort to kill the supposed "myth of racism." But did this important election really signal a major decline in U.S. racism? Even the election itself was revealing on this score. While it was not

as close as the two previous presidential elections, it was close enough that a shift of just 4 percent or so of the total voters from Obama to McCain would have given McCain a presidential victory. Significantly, one recent social science study examined the many racially charged Internet searches by people for the word "nigger" for most of the 200 U.S. media markets in 2008, and compared those searches (as a proxy for anti-black prejudice) to an area's votes for Obama. The researcher suggests from these data on racially charged searches that candidate Obama likely lost a significant percentage of 2008 white voters because he was black.[3] Indeed, if it had only been up to white voters in 2008, Senator McCain would have become the 44th U.S. president, for he won an estimated 55 percent of the white vote nationally, and a substantial majority of white voters in thirty-two of the fifty states. In contrast, more than two thirds of voters of color voted for Senator Obama.[4]

The United States came out of the 2008 presidential election as still quite racially polarized. Researchers have shown that about half of all the presidential votes cast in 2008 were in counties where Senator Obama or Senator McCain won by at least 20 percent of the total vote. The percentage of voters residing in these very polarized "landslide" counties grew substantially from 27 percent in 1976 to 48 percent in 2008. Even more striking was the racial polarization. Those counties where candidate McCain won with a landslide margin of 20 percent or more were overwhelmingly white, with the black and Latino voting age population averaging only a sixth of those counties' populations. Where Obama won a county, in contrast, the black and Latino population averaged about 43 percent of the voting age population. Paralleling this voter polarization, moreover, was the continuing and extensive residential and school segregation that is revealed in much research on U.S. towns and cities.[5] Even with the election of the first African American president in 2008, the harsh realities of institutional racism in major sectors of U.S. society have remained quite evident to the present day.

Today, those who do this significant research and analysis of U.S. racial patterns frequently make use of a disease metaphor, such as the idea that racism is a "cancer" in the "body" of society. In a recent search for phrases like "racism is a cancer" or the "cancer of racism" in published research papers and popular articles, I found thousands of uses of this strong metaphor. The commonplace idea is that racism is an unhealthy social condition, one stemming from pathogenic conditions in an otherwise healthy societal body. Yet, this view is inadequate. Our society was built from the beginning with racial oppression as a central part of its societal structure. In this sense, there never was a "healthy" societal body that the cancer of racism could invade.

A better metaphor is that of white-imposed racism as an important part of the structural "foundation" of the U.S. "house." Racial oppression was not added later on in the development of this society, but was the foundation of the original colonial and U.S. social systems, and it still remains as a U.S. foundation. This structural-foundation metaphor relates much better to the historical and contemporary reality of this country. I have searched hundreds of relevant scholarly papers and many Internet websites for phrases like "racial foundation of the United States," the "country's racial foundation," and the "nation's racial foundation," and not one such phrase appeared other than my own. In light of the historical and contemporary data assessed throughout this book, this structural-foundation metaphor captures the realities of this country's racism, past and present, better than a disease metaphor.

This societal reality is significantly different from that of other leading industrialized countries in the West. Countries like Great Britain and France were central to centuries of European colonialism, including the Atlantic slave trade and slave plantations in the Americas, but their early and later growth as nations was not built directly on an internal labor force of enslaved Africans or on local lands stolen by recent conquests of indigenous people.

Knowing North American racial history is important for making sense out of the current realities of this society. For many years, I have been researching this history in an attempt to analyze accurately the major impacts on U.S. culture and institutions of this country's foundation in systemic racism. The United States is a country with systemic racial oppression—centuries of genocide, about 246 years of slavery, and about ninety years of Jim Crow, altogether most of our history.

In this book I am especially influenced by the long tradition of black countersystem analysis—such as that of Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, Kwame Ture, Derrick Bell, and Angela Davis—that has regularly highlighted the institutional and systemic character of racial oppression over these centuries. Following in this tradition, and drawing on others critically analyzing societal oppression, we will examine here numerous lasting legacies of past racial oppression in our contemporary patterns of racism. We will assess the evidence of systemic racism in the colonial and U.S. economic, legal, and political systems, to the present day. As in the past, *systemic racism* today includes:

1. the complex array of recurring exploitative, discriminatory, and other oppressive white practices targeting Americans of color;
2. the institutionalized economic and other social resource inequalities along racial lines (the racial hierarchy); and

3. the dominant white racial frame that was generated to rationalize and insure white privilege and dominance over Americans of color.

Systemic here means that the oppressive racist realities have from the early decades been well institutionalized and manifested in all of this society's major parts. Break a three-dimensional hologram into separate parts and shine a laser through any one, and you can project the whole three-dimensional image again from that part. Much like this hologram, major parts of this society—such as the economy, politics, education, religion, and the family—reflect in numerous ways the fundamental reality of systemic racism.

In this book I focus mainly on systemic racism's harsh reality as it operates in and through what I call the *white racial frame*—the dominant racial frame that has long legitimated, rationalized, and shaped racial oppression and inequality in this country. This white racial frame is a centuries-old worldview that has constantly involved a racial construction of societal reality by white Americans. I explain this frame in detail in the next chapter, but let us consider a brief example of it in everyday use. In a recent research study of black pilots with major airlines, one senior pilot noted well how the white racial frame plays out in his life:

> At the hotel, I can be standing there waiting for the van to take us to the airport and [white] passengers have come up and dropped their bags at my feet on more than one occasion. I was flying with a black captain and we were waiting in the lobby, in full uniform, and a white guy walked up to him and said, "Can you get my cab for me?" The captain looked at him and said, "The only thing we know how to do is fly airplanes." The man said, "I understand that, but can you get my cab for me?" He just couldn't get it through his mind that he was talking to a pilot.[6]

In this recent incident a white man actively reveals his racially stereotyped framing of black men. He does not "see" the uniforms of these black pilots or the possibility that they are indeed major airline pilots, but rather only observes them as *black men*. Even after being corrected, the white man does not "get it." This racial framing is firmly fixed in his mind.

Throughout this book I discuss many aspects of the white racial framing of numerous important U.S. groups, including not only white Americans and African Americans, but also Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. My analysis of the framing and experiences of these groups will be integrated into various chapters, but I pay more attention to the framing and experiences of African Americans. In addition to spatial limits in this

short book, a main reason for this emphasis is that social science research shows that most whites have a much more developed and detailed racial framing of black Americans than they do of other Americans of color. The contemporary Native American, Latino, and Asian American subframes of the dominant white frame are, as we will see, quite important and very damaging, but seem on the whole less fully developed than the black subframe of the dominant white frame. After centuries of continuing white oppression of African Americans in most regions, and centuries of racial framing rationalizing that oppression, African Americans today remain very central to the dominant white racial frame. Whites have made this to be so.

For the period of North American development from the seventeenth century to the present, I track in this book the character, persistence, impact, and evolution of this well-developed white racial framing. I accent its holistic and gestalt character. As I will show, this omnipresent white frame encompasses much more than verbal-cognitive elements, such as racial stereotyping and ideology, concepts emphasized by many analysts. Considered more comprehensively, the white racial frame includes a broad and persisting *set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, interlinked interpretations and narratives, and visual images*. It also includes *racialized emotions* and *racialized reactions to language accents* and *imbeds inclinations to discriminate*. This white racial frame, like most social frames, operates to assist people in defining, interpreting, conforming to, and acting in their everyday social worlds.

Today, as in the past, this dominant racial frame is taught in many different ways to people young and old—at home, in schools, on public playgrounds, in the media, in workplace settings, in courts, and in politicians' speeches and corporate decisions. This frame rationalizes and structures the racial interactions, inequalities, and other racial patterns in an array of societal settings. It routinely operates in both the micro (interpersonal) and macro (institutional) areas of society.

In my view the best social science is interpretive, searching for complex webs of meanings connecting individuals and their groups and larger institutions, and thoroughly empirical, bringing relevant data to bear on important societal questions. Here I use a broad interpretive approach that examines complexities of interpersonal and intergroup meanings and relationships in our racialized institutions and that brings much empirical data, historical and contemporary, to bear on critical questions about how this society works in its everyday racialized operations.

Overview of Revisions and the Chapters

Responding to students and other readers, I have added throughout this edition numerous revisions and updates to the chapters. I have included

much new interview material and other data on framing issues related to white, black, Latino, and Asian Americans, and on society generally, from recent research studies.

Throughout the book I have clarified and expanded important points about the white racial frame, counter-frames, and home-culture frames, and I have added additional analysis of related concepts such as white character structure and collective memory in regard to U.S. racial history.

In Chapter 6 I have added an extensive new discussion of the impact of the white frame on popular culture, including on movies, video games, and television programs.

In Chapter 7 I have added a major new discussion of the white racial frame's significant impacts on public policymaking on immigration, the environment, health care, and crime and imprisonment issues.

In the concluding Chapter 9 I have also added a substantial new discussion of contemporary anti-racist groups and their often successful educational and other activist strategies.

Here is a brief overview. Chapter 1 explains why we need a new social science perspective that goes beyond conventional approaches accenting traditional non-systemic concepts such as prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination by bigots. I assess the Eurocentric and white-centered perspectives of classical and contemporary social scientists, and then explain the concept of the white racial frame and its dimensions. After assessing the importance of white groups in perpetuating the frame, I examine the concepts of home-culture frames and counter-frames, those developed by Americans of color to cope with the dominant white frame.

Chapter 2 examines the development of this country's system of racial oppression, including its racial hierarchy and racialized capital, over centuries of European colonialism, land theft, and African American enslavement. I assess this history of material oppression and unjust enrichment for Europeans and European Americans, especially as it has been supported by, and integrated into, this country's major legal and political institutions.

Chapter 3 assesses the rationalization and legitimation of this North American exploitation and oppression in the emerging white racial frame, with its pro-white and anti-others subframes. I explore the background of the white frame in "great chain of being" framing and analyze early negative framing of Native Americans and African Americans. Then I highlight the central role of elite whites in generating and maintaining the important elements of the dominant racial frame.

Chapter 4 examines the development of the white racial frame from the late eighteenth century to the twentieth century. I give attention to the early

racist framing of white founders and later leaders, racism in popular culture, the white obsession with black Americans, and the extension of the racial frame to other Americans. Later sections assess the role of powerful whites in perpetuating the white frame through the Jim Crow era.

Chapter 5 moves to an examination of the contemporary white racial frame, with attention to new variations and the persistence of old pro-white and anti-others elements. I analyze how the contemporary frame is learned, its colorblind variation and emotions, and its continuing preoccupation with the negative framing of black Americans. I also assess the continuing white racist framing of Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans and provide a conclusion evaluating the impact of some racist framing in the contemporary physical sciences.

Chapter 6 provides numerous examples of the routine implementation of white framing in contemporary white actions, including in backstage settings such as racist parties and in frontstage interactions with Americans of color. I examine important cases of pro-white and anti-others racial framing in popular culture, especially in video gaming and movies and television programs. I conclude with an examination of the impact of whites' racist framing and actions on Americans of color.

Chapter 7 examines the impact and operation of the white racial frame in important U.S. institutions, including legal, political, and economic institutions in the past and present. I evaluate the impact of the white frame on contemporary public policymaking in regard to immigration, the environment, health care, and criminal justice, as well as for U.S. foreign policy. I also examine other global impacts of the white frame.

Chapter 8 assesses in detail the counter-frames and home-culture frames developed and implemented over the centuries by African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans to cope with and resist the messages and impacts of the white racial frame.

Chapter 9 reviews pressures and possibilities for moving beyond systemic racism and its white frame to a truly democratic and egalitarian society. I give significant attention to racial change issues—deframing and reframing away from the white frame, teaching whites to listen to people of color, education on dissent, and how anti-racist groups have sometimes been successful in working for change. Concluding sections examine the need for reparations for those suffering from the impact of centuries of racial oppression, the societal costs from persisting oppression, and the societal benefits likely to result from major changes in the social justice direction.

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