Chapter One

CONFIGURATIONS OF RACE AND STATE: THE POLITICS OF RACIAL INCORPORATION

Race—particularly the color line dividing white from black (or white from everything else)—has always been central to American political life. It has instigated our most harrowing political challenges, from sectional strife to Civil War, and inspired our proudest achievements, from emancipation to the civil rights revolution. Despite these achievements, however, racial division and inequality remain disturbingly present and disruptive forces in American political life—even more so today, in many ways, than in the bad old days of slavery or Jim Crow. Whereas once the color line was apparent for all to see, etched without irony or embarrassment on the nation’s lawbooks, on its maps, and in its customs and social codes, now it has shifted beneath the surface of American politics. Although few will openly acknowledge the color line, its effects are everywhere, in decaying inner cities, overcrowded prisons, and substandard public schools. What has made racial division such a persistent theme in American political development despite dramatic progress in American racial attitudes and institutional practices? How is it possible that these divisions remain when Americans seemed so decisively to have exorcised their racial demons more than a generation ago, and when so much progress has been made? This question and the profound challenge it poses to the American self-image of universal equality and opportunity lie at the center of this book.

In the past half-century, progress toward racial equality and integration has been nothing short of revolutionary. The immediate liberal integrationist aims of the civil rights movement have met with resounding and long-lasting success: formal, state-sponsored segregation has ended and discrimination has been outlawed across a variety of domains. Moreover, racism—the belief in the existence of biologically rooted racial categories and in the inferiority or historical underdevelopment of one or more racially defined groups—has declined dramatically in American life over the past half-century.
But this revolution in legal status and public attitudes has not meant unimpeded incorporation for African Americans into all spheres of American life. Within this generally upward trajectory (although from such a low starting point that downward was scarcely possible), progress has been, to say the least, uneven. In this book I zero in on one particularly jarring disjunction between the success and failure of racial incorporation in two related but distinct policy areas over the course of the twentieth century: welfare and employment. In the realm of employment, the civil rights revolution spawned, rather unexpectedly and almost despite itself, a deceptively strong and arguably successful approach to attacking employment discrimination—the cluster of policies and practices known collectively as “affirmative action.” The rise of affirmative action is all the more surprising because it emerged from a resolutely color-blind antidiscrimination law that seemed to prohibit precisely the kind of race-conscious enforcement measures that it spawned. Despite its shortcomings and the controversy surrounding it, American employment discrimination policy has proven one of the country’s stronger pillars of minority incorporation. By 2002, nearly one-fourth of employed blacks held professional or managerial jobs (compared to 35 percent for non-Hispanic whites), more than three times the proportion in 1960. And despite several decades of stagnation, the wage gap between black and white workers remains historically small. Large inequalities remain, but the American labor market is much more diverse and more protective of minority rights than at any time in history.

The American welfare state—by which I mean here principally cash income-support programs—has quite a mixed record of incorporating African Americans into structures of public social provision. Social insurance programs such as Social Security have grown in diversity over nearly seventy years. Expanding coverage and increasing benefits have both benefited African Americans, who now participate in Social Security at a rate nearly comparable to that of whites: one in seven African Americans aged fifteen or over receives some kind of benefit from Social Security (including survivors’ and disability benefits). The program, moreover, has incorporated minorities with surprisingly little friction or controversy and enhanced the economic prospects of a growing black middle class. At the same time, public assistance programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC; since 1996, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) have followed precisely the opposite path. The real value of AFDC benefits reached its peak in the early 1970s and has declined steadily ever since, in an era when the minority presence on the AFDC rolls has steadily increased. In contrast to social insurance, American “welfare” policies have consistently treated their disproportionately minority clien-
tele as excluded from the mainstream and posed barriers to their full incorporation in American life.

These policies, then, underscore my central question: why is there success in some areas of racial incorporation and failure in others? The lumpiness of racial progress in the post–civil rights era poses a puzzle and a challenge. The puzzle is to explain why the civil rights revolution failed to bring about the full-scale incorporation of African Americans into the full promise of American political, social, and economic life. What are the causes of racial progress and what are the barriers that stand in its way? The challenge is to devise policy strategies for addressing these persistent imbalances, which threaten to erode, if not to undermine completely, much of the progress of the last generation. What kind of policies will help achieve the full incorporation of minorities into American life? One approach is to target policies at minorities in order to make up for past discrimination, equalize opportunity, and ensure diversity in institutions such as schools and workplaces. But some critics charge that such race-conscious approaches to achieving equality threaten instead to undermine equality by highlighting rather than submerging group differences. If American society is to live up to its color-blind ideals, these analysts argue, it must stop treating people differently on the basis of race, ethnicity, or other group characteristics. This conflict between race-conscious and color-blind policy came to a head most recently in the lawsuits over admissions policies at the University of Michigan, in which a closely divided Supreme Court upheld the principle of race-conscious admissions for the purpose of ensuring diversity while restricting the range of acceptable applications. But the Michigan cases, however publicly and bitterly fought, were merely the latest skirmish in an ideological and political battle that has raged for a generation or more on extremely varied policy terrain—from affirmative action to voting rights and representation to a broad range of social policies.

The puzzle deepens when we consider that welfare and employment policy are connected in important ways. Both are aimed, broadly speaking, at mitigating inequalities generated by market forces, whether by providing benefits directly or by ensuring access to jobs. In the American welfare state, moreover, the labor market largely regulates access to social benefits; workers have access not only to generous social benefits such as Social Security and unemployment insurance but also to a range of tax-financed and private benefits such as health insurance and pensions, while nonworkers are relegated to public assistance programs that tend to be punitive, stingy, and politically weak. The American welfare state consequently tends to amplify rather than reduce labor market inequalities. We might expect, consequently, that policies that successfully reduce racial inequities in the labor market would have a similar multiplier effect in
helping to narrow racial gaps in the welfare state. Experience, however, does not seem to bear out this proposition. The rise of the policy commitment to equal employment opportunity coincided with growing class stratification among African Americans; some have argued, indeed, that affirmative action, which has tended to benefit relatively more advantaged members of minority groups, contributed to the growing gap between haves and have-nots among minorities.12

From one perspective, it is hardly surprising that racial incorporation is stronger in social insurance and employment discrimination than in public assistance. Antidiscrimination policy, ensuring what appears to be fair labor-market access, may simply substitute for more generous and inclusive social provision in the national policy mix, and thus on balance increase inequality by reinforcing the distinction between those who work and those who do not. Such, at any rate, is one prominent argument about the gender effects of the American welfare state, in which strong employment discrimination protection for women coexists with high levels of gender inequality in terms of class status and access to social provision.13 American welfare reform in the 1990s, which explicitly required work of (mostly female) public assistance recipients, underscored this argument.

At the same time, however, the substitution argument does not translate easily and precisely to the case of racial inequality. American welfare policy and employment policy alike have been severely constrained by the politics of race. The United States rejected the grand postwar Keynesian bargain that linked active full employment policies with generous social benefits; rather, in both policy areas, broader and potentially more racially inclusive policy options have been defeated by racially structured coalitions.14 This pattern suggests that racial barriers to inclusion cut across welfare and employment policies more generally and, consequently, that the puzzle of uneven incorporation remains unsolved; successes as well as failures need to be explained.

This account of policy outcomes hinges on the notion of “incorporation,” by which I mean the extent to which a group is accorded full membership in the national community, with fair and equal access to civil, political, and social rights. This formulation obviously owes a great deal to T. H. Marshall’s famous analysis of citizenship, which he decomposed into these same three components. But it also goes beyond Marshall’s essentially teleological account of citizenship, in which social rights—“from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society”—follow in an orderly and cumulative progression from the development of civil (legal equality) and political (voting) rights. Marshall’s influential formulation equates social citizenship with the existence of universal so-
cial policies that promise broad access to benefits as a counterweight to the stratifying effects of social class. But this conflation of policies and outcomes is too rigid to account for the ways in which apparently universal policies can introduce or reinforce other kinds of social stratification, along other axes of heterogeneity than class. Certainly the range of minority experience in American welfare and employment policy and the varying capacity of these policies to overcome racial stratification suggest that race, too, is a potentially important barrier to the full flowering of social citizenship.

The notion of incorporation is intended to specify more precisely the extent to which policies in fact offer benefits and protection to minorities and enable them to attain a measure of status within the national community. Incorporation is thus the obverse of the idea of “social exclusion,” a concept that denotes not simply chronic poverty or unemployment or even exclusion from social benefits but social marginality and isolation. Measuring minority incorporation in social policies thus has two components. First, it requires identifying, as far as possible, the extent to which minorities actually benefit from social policies. Second, it involves assessing the extent to which inclusion in those benefits enhances or stifles inclusion in other areas of the political economy. Consequently, my account of minority incorporation in welfare and employment policies will involve both data on minority access to benefits, capturing participation levels, and accounts of policy developments over time, capturing the propensity of policies to foster increasing inclusion.

Incorporation is more than just the lack of discrimination in awarding benefits and protecting rights; protection against deliberate, overt discrimination—differential treatment of individuals explicitly because of racial or ethnic characteristics—is a necessary but not sufficient condition for full incorporation. Incorporation also encompasses rules and procedures that allocate benefits, rights, and status. This may happen in such a way that some groups are systematically favored while others are systematically deprived. Such group imbalances may occur even in the absence of discriminatory intent through the unconscious operation of program administration, as when uniform, apparently race-neutral rules are applied unevenly to different groups. One group may be less inclined to seek benefits, for example, whether because of fear, lack of access, or cultural differences among groups. This kind of administrative discrimination also occurs within a political setting, and policies themselves can encourage such discrimination by shifting discretion over the rules and their application to lower levels of government and to front-line administrators or by adhering to standards of policy “success” that bias implementation and evaluation. Policies may thus be discriminatory even if they are applied in scrupulously neutral ways. The distinction between discriminatory
6  Chapter One

intent and discriminatory effects is an important one because they imply different causal mechanisms behind failures of racial incorporation. Both have operated powerfully in American social policy at various times and in different contexts. In an earlier time, openly discriminatory intentions frequently informed, and even dominated, American politics and policymaking. In the post–civil rights era unequal incorporation persists despite the absence of such open discrimination. Nevertheless, past patterns and practices of deliberate exclusion shape today’s more subtle and hidden limits to racial incorporation. A historical exploration of incorporation patterns is thus a necessary component of understanding and altering them.

Explaining Incorporation

Why this curious and maddening mixture of success and failure? Two factors have dominated recent scholarly attempts in the social sciences to answer such questions about the evolution and consequences of public policies: ideas and institutions. Despite their ample virtues as ways of explaining policy development, these approaches have complementary flaws that limit their ability by themselves to explain this puzzling dual outcome, in which incorporation has gone in dramatically different directions at the same time, in substantially the same ideological and institutional contexts. For the most part, however, social scientists have seen these approaches as alternatives; few, if any, have managed successfully to merge ideas and institutions into a single unified explanatory framework. An innovative approach to considering ideas and institutions together in more historically specific configurations, however, offers a more satisfying general account of seemingly contradictory incorporation outcomes.

The idea that matters most in attempting to explain incorporation is racism. Perhaps these outcomes simply reflect prevailing public beliefs and attitudes about the proper place of minorities in American society. Some observers believe that racism dominates white Americans’ beliefs and that the express desire to exclude African Americans and other minorities accounts for the persistence of racial inequality. More sophisticated versions of the racism thesis suggest that even though out-and-out racist expression is frowned upon, racial stereotypes remain a powerful framing device that can shape political behavior and policy debates, often in ways that remain hidden behind a norm of color-blind equality. Others suggest that racial prejudice per se is less important than other kinds of beliefs in shaping white Americans’ opinions about policies such as affirmative action and others that are designed expressly to benefit minorities.
What these perspectives share, despite their disagreements about the prevalence of certain kinds of racist beliefs, is the view that what matters in shaping political and policy outcomes is ideas—not just opinions but also more deeply rooted cultural beliefs that inform the goals and desires that people bring to the political world and, hence, the ways they define and express their interests; the meanings, interpretations, and judgments they attach to events and conditions; and their expectations about cause-and-effect relationships in the political world. This view has long pervaded the most sophisticated analyses of American race relations, from Gunnar Myrdal’s magisterial survey in the 1940s to President Clinton’s national initiative on race and The New York Times’s Pulitzer Prize–winning series on “How Race is Lived in America” in more recent years. It is undoubtedly true that over the course of American history, racist ideas about the inherent inferiority of racially designated groups have often played a decisive role in policy decisions. It might be the case, moreover, that modulations in American beliefs about race over time can account adequately for variations in race policies and outcomes. Moments of more racism, that is, might produce more exclusionary policies and lower levels of incorporation, whereas periods when racism abates might produce the opposite.

This explanatory approach, however, faces a number of important challenges. First, racism has declined dramatically as a central force in American life. How is it, then, that incorporation has not steadily improved? Second, racial incorporation varies from policy to policy. Dramatic successes and catastrophic failures coexist. How is this possible if the general level of societal racism is the primary barrier to incorporation? We know a fair bit about how particular kinds of racial stereotypes contribute to policies that limit incorporation, as in welfare policy, or about how voters distinguish between general principles such as the idea of integrated schools and policies such as busing, which might actually enforce integration. What is generally lacking in such accounts, however, is an explanation of how Americans choose among competing ideas and beliefs, resulting in concrete political and policy choices—or “why,” as Sheri Berman puts it, “some of the innumerable ideas in circulation achieve prominence in the political realm at particular moments and others do not.”

The most robust challenge to ideas-based approaches to explaining policy outcomes stems from perspectives that focus on political institutions. Political analyses of policy-making typically and convincingly view policy choices as the consequences of institutions, a set of regularities in political life (such as rules and procedures, organizational structures, norms, or taken-for-granted cultural understandings), which shape political behavior, allocate power and regulate its exercise, and therefore affect political
CHAPTER ONE

outcomes. Institutional accounts of race in American politics typically focus on particular features of American politics—federalism and localism, pluralism, the fragmentation inherent in separated powers—to explain the persistence of racial inequality in American politics. Such works generally argue that these enduring features of American governing arrangements systematically shape the access of minorities to political power and thus affect political and policy outcomes that limit minority incorporation. From this baseline, however, the challenge for institutional approaches is to account for any progress at all.

Some institutional perspectives on American race politics and policy fare somewhat better at explaining the pattern of racial progress in the United States, particularly by pointing to changes in the institutional context of race policy both over time and across policy areas. Jennifer Hochschild, for example, argues that success has come most firmly and permanently when policies are relatively straightforward and self-enforcing and when they are promulgated by policymakers with strong institutional bases to induce others to change their behavior. Taking a somewhat broader historical view, Philip Klinkner and Rogers Smith have shown that certain historical conditions—wars requiring full-scale national mobilization, adversaries that inspire the invocation of America’s egalitarian liberal tradition, and social movements—have been necessary to produce racial progress throughout American history.

But even these more supple institutional works pose knotty analytical questions. First, how do we account for institutional changes that might, in some contexts, produce more favorable policies and prospects for minorities than the common patterns of American politics? With their emphasis on order, institutional models of politics are often better at explaining stability than at accounting for important change that goes beyond normal and regular variation. Second, institutional approaches are limited in their capacity to account for the substantive course of politics. Given the raw material—assumptions about actors’ beliefs, preferences, knowledge, understanding, and expectations—institutional theories can generate remarkably accurate predictions about which outcome from among a range of contemplated outcomes is likely to occur. But precisely because institutional approaches tend to take these things as given, they are often at a loss to explain the appearance at any given moment of any particular menu of substantive choices. Why, for example, when the institutional conditions for policy change obtain, do policymakers reach for color-blind or race-conscious strategies to address racial inequality and promote incorporation? And finally, the same fundamental question that challenges ideological approaches bedevils institutional theory as well: how to explain variations in outcomes even in the same institutional context.
These prevailing approaches to American politics, rooted in ideas and institutions, fall short of explaining both the unevenness of American racial progress and the profoundly troubling persistence of entrenched racial inequality. Substantively, patterns of racial ideas and policy-making institutions do not map cleanly onto policy outcomes. Sometimes policy developments occurring simultaneously—and thus by definition in the same ideological and institutional context—have gone in very different directions and produced divergent incorporation results, as in the 1960s, when employment discrimination policy took off just as welfare policy hit yet another roadblock. Some outcomes, moreover, seem to defy both ideological and institutional explanations. An example is the rise of affirmative action during the 1960s and 1970s. Both ideas (the apparent triumph of color blindness in the Civil Rights Act of 1964) and institutions (the apparent weakness and fragmentation of the American state) would lead us to expect anemic enforcement of employment discrimination law. What emerged, however, was a race-conscious policy backed by the strong and consistent arms of law and state. The general question that these and other episodes raise is how ideas and institutions, which separately tend to be associated with regularity and stability in politics, can combine to produce such different outcomes.

Coalitions and Configurations

The answer to this question lies in the idea of coalitions. Because policymaking involves simultaneous attention to multiple issues, policy often emerges from coalitions—often-unexpected conjunctions of political forces, the proverbial “strange bedfellows” of politics—rather than simple majority agreement on particular policy. Race policy is especially prone to this logic because it inherently pits minorities against majorities in situations where each group seeks its own advantage. Race, in fact, has at times emerged as a distinct dimension in American politics that commands the attention of policymakers not to the exclusion of other issues but in combination with them, and these are precisely the circumstances in which race policy change is most likely to occur. Analyses of American politics, however, tend to presume that race policy is a matter of moral suasion rather than strategic action. I depart from this view by exploring the role of such strategic coalition politics in the evolution of race policy and racial incorporation. Coalition building entails the convergence of purposive and strategic political actors operating under common rules on particular courses of action that are collectively decided on and implemented. The process of forming coalitions necessarily involves both ideas (actors’ goals) and institutions (the rules that bind them).
Ideas and institutions combine in particular configurations at distinct historical moments to shape the possibilities available to political actors to form and maintain race policy coalitions. Three factors combine to create the contexts for these processes of coalition formation. The first is the institutional setting of key policy decisions, especially the formal structures that organize policy-making: executives and legislatures, bureaucracies and courts. These institutions set the terms of legislative compromise that can shape policy outcomes and they influence patterns of implementation that can ultimately shape the capacities of states to incorporate minorities. But the formation of policy coalitions around issues of racial incorporation also entails questions about the relative capacity of minority groups themselves to participate in the process of coalition formation in order to influence policy, suggesting attention to such factors as group size, cohesion, and status; participation in electoral politics; patterns of political mobilization; and strategic alliance with other groups. A second factor, related to but distinct from the first, is the structure of linkages between racial groups and the state, which can encompass elements of the political system such as the party system, the nature of interest representation, and federalism, all of which can affect group mobilization and group-state relations. For racial minorities especially, distinctive histories of racial formation have been decisive not only in defining the political boundaries of group identities but also in shaping the links among different racially defined groups and between groups and national political institutions. These historically constructed political configurations—group-state linkages as shaped by political institutions—form another central axis of comparison. A third set of factors is the cultural repertoires on which political actors draw to understand the status of racial groups in society and to define what constitutes rational solutions to problems of racial conflict and inequality. None of these factors alone is sufficient to explain patterns of race policy; together, they point toward a convincing causal explanation of race policy and of the peculiarities of racial incorporation in the United States.

In these different policy contexts, ideas and institutions have interacted differently to shape race policy coalitions. These policy coalitions emerge from conflicts over ideas about the legitimacy of race as a political category, the place of racial identities and groups in national political life, and the role of the state in addressing racial conflict and inequality. These ideological debates, in turn, occur in institutional settings that shape actors’ strategies in pursuit of their goals, privilege certain actors over others, and influence policy choices. It is these processes of coalition formation that ultimately determine the paths that race policy follows: color-blind or race-conscious, coercive or voluntary, unified or fragmented, backed by strong or weak state authority. How, then, did coalitions form
around particular solutions to common racial challenges, at particular moments, in a variety of settings? Accounts of these processes of coalition formation, maintenance, and change and their consequences for racial incorporation are the hinge that connects ideas and institutions in a broader causal argument about change and variation in race policy.

Forming policy coalitions involves collective and authoritative decision-making in a context where potential participants in the decision might not only disagree about the preferred outcome but might approach the situation with altogether different motives. As thus, explaining the formation of coalitions requires an account of both the motivations of the disparate actors who come together to back particular outcomes and the decision-making structures and processes that allow them to do so. As in a criminal investigation, familiar to readers of mystery novels or viewers of police dramas, this means finding motive and opportunity: ideas, which underlie the goals and interests of political actors, and institutions, which shape how they can and must act to realize those goals.

As I have already suggested, neither ideas nor institutions adequately accounts for the full range of variation in race policies or incorporation outcomes. Ideas, especially widely shared and often taken-for-granted cultural beliefs about public affairs, surely shape the beliefs, understandings, and goals of citizens and policymakers and help to frame public problems and determine which policy solutions seem reasonable and rational in a given situation. Much of the most prominent and convincing work on race politics and policy in the United States (and elsewhere) has taken this approach. But ideas and cultural dispositions by themselves are not decisive in explaining political and policy outcomes, especially in race policy, which generally involves conflict and contestation among competing ideas—particularly between varieties of race consciousness and color blindness. The question for race policy is which among these competing ideas win by being enacted into policy or otherwise carried into action by states; and these are questions that cannot be resolved simply by understanding the substantive content of national approaches to race. Ideas, in short, give us motive but not opportunity.

Political institutions provide the opportunity, by constraining political behavior through the operation of rules, norms, and organizational settings, as well as by structuring political openings for group mobilization and the articulation of interests. Institutional analysis typically begins with basic structural features of national governing arrangements—separated powers or parliamentary government, federalism or centralization, and the like—that frame strategic possibilities for political actors seeking particular goals. But actors’ goals, while often adjusted to fit institutional circumstances, are likely to be products primarily of enduring national cultural and ideological patterns as well as shifting political and policy
circumstances. Precisely because institutional approaches tend to take these things as given, they are at something of a loss to explain the appearance of any particular set of substantive choices. Institutions, then, can provide opportunity but fall short on motive.

The need to connect motive and opportunity in a more complete explanation suggests viewing policies not merely as the projections of national culture or as the mechanical outcomes of institutional forces but as the results of political conflicts in which particular elements of national cultural and ideological repertoires are mobilized and enacted into policy. These political struggles take place within historical and institutional contexts that shape policy-making not simply by organizing power but also by acting as gatekeepers for political ideas and cultural dispositions. Policy-making in democratic government is not simply a process of optimizing the choice of policy instruments to solve readily identifiable social problems. Rather, it entails the formation of coalitions among actors who represent both interests vying for power and diverse policy ideas.

Race policy in particular fits this profile. It involves a clash of interests between majorities and minorities, and its outcomes hinge on matters of access to power and group cohesion, mobilization, and strategy—in short, the stuff of institutional politics. But race is also, by common assent, a cultural phenomenon, a socially and politically constructed set of categories that has often been nurtured and maintained by ideological beliefs and cultural consensus. The majorities and minorities that struggle over race policy, then, are almost by definition on opposite sides of the defining cultural dimension: color blindness. Thus the intersection of race with politics and policy-making necessarily entails a coalition-building process that combines what Hugh Heclo has called “powering” and “puzzling”—clashes of both power and culture between majorities and minorities.

**American Race Politics in Historical and Comparative Perspective**

This approach to explaining racial incorporation in the United States, however, suffers from at least one potential serious limitation. At the broadest and most general level, the problem is that the basic factors that shape race policy and incorporation—federalism, the separation of powers, the liberal tradition—are constant and so cannot explain variations in policies or their consequences. But even allowing that in their real operation these factors are not so constant—federalism and separated powers work differently as times and conditions change; and liberalism is under constant challenge from rival traditions—it is difficult to separate out the effects of ideas and institutions within the confines of a single national
example. If both ideas and institutions seem to point toward the same outcome, which is the more fundamental explanation? Are both required to enhance (or suppress, as the case may be) incorporation prospects for minorities? In the 1960s, for example, both ideas (the decline of racism and the rise of liberal integrationism) and institutions (the relaxation of the Southern stranglehold on policy-making through Congress and the party system, for example) could be said to point toward more inclusionary race policy. Without examining a wider range of situations in which ideas, institutions, and outcomes vary, it is impossible to disentangle these potential causal threads.

To get around this analytical quandary, we need strategies to expand variation along all of these dimensions—ideas, institutions, policies, and incorporation outcomes—in order to find the causal connections between ideas and institutions, on the one hand, and policies and patterns of incorporation, on the other.¹ I deploy two such strategies: history and comparison. History is important to the argument for several reasons. First, all the elements of the argument vary over the broad span of time that the study covers (most of the twentieth century). For example, although American political culture and discourse have always been especially race conscious, the precise modes of expressing ideas about race and of squaring them with liberal ideals have changed dramatically. Levels of tolerance for explicitly racist ideas have also fluctuated in American political life. Similarly, although the American constitutional framework has remained basically unchanged for more than two centuries, the workings of its institutions—Congress, presidency, courts, bureaucracy, party system—have changed dramatically. Thus, snapshots of policy-making at single slices of time reveal only limited views of the politics of racial incorporation. Race policy-making under Jim Crow, Southern Democratic dominance, and the Conservative Coalition may not altogether resemble race policy-making in a less racist era of homogeneous and polarized parties, for example, even though the underlying national structures are the same.

Policies and outcomes themselves also change, and it is important to understand not just the consequences of particular configurations of ideas and institutions but also how the society moves from one state of affairs to another. Simply showing that the underlying causal conditions (ideas or institutions) have changed, producing a concomitant change in policy or incorporation outcomes, is not a sufficient account of policy change, for it begs the more fundamental question of why the conditions changed in the first place. It may, in fact, be the case that some idiosyncratic and exogenous shock to the system, such as war or depression, alters political ideas and institutional processes enough to bring about significant policy change. But it may also be the case that ideas and processes that are
internal to the system may themselves combine to effect large-scale change. The civil rights transformations of the 1950s and 1960s, for example, might be not only the products of external events such as World War II and the Cold War but also outgrowths of the very ideological and institutional structures that constitute the American political tradition: an ideology of equal rights; political mobilization and organization; pressure on policymakers through the courts, elections, and other institutional venues.39

History is important, furthermore, because a large part of the motivating puzzle is the emergence over time of very different policies and incorporation outcomes from parallel exclusionary origins. Resolving this puzzle demands attention to the way policies developed over time—how events at one time shaped later circumstances, how particular sequences of events generated self-reinforcing processes that constrained available options at subsequent times, and how these processes intersected other events and processes that made significant change possible. Thus, the analysis revolves around historical narratives, organized to focus on such historically situated moments of coalition-formation. The narratives also emphasize alternative explanations for patterns of policy development, particularly “purer” applications of ideas- or institutions-based arguments, by considering alternative policy paths that might have come about. The narratives deploy several strategies toward this end in addition to the most obvious one—the comparison of historical processes. One is simply the careful historical reconstruction of the strategic choices available to political actors at key moments: how did they understand and articulate their goals and how did they perceive and exploit the political opportunities available to them? A second is the judicious use of counterfactual reasoning, asking “what if” questions about the possible consequences of choices foregone that can help reveal the causal importance of particular factors in a historical sequence.40

Finally, history is important because of slavery and its legacy. Appealing to the legacy of slavery is a common and intuitively appealing keynote in accounts of current patterns of racial inequality in America, in both scholarly and popular discourse (witness the recent controversial movement for the payment of reparations for slavery to African Americans).41 Slavery has doubtless cast a long shadow over American political development—beginning in the earliest decades of European settlement in North America and persisting even after emancipation in the social and legal codes of the Jim Crow South and in the political and economic subordination of African Americans (and others whose racial identity was deemed suspect) in the class and political battles of the urban North. “As much as anything,” writes Andrew Hacker, “being ‘black’ in America bears the mark of slavery. And in our own time, must it be admitted at the close of
the twentieth century, that residues of slavery continue to exist? The answer is obviously yes.\textsuperscript{42}

But beyond such vague assertions, it is far from clear what the legacy of slavery actually means for incorporation prospects today. Claims about the legacy of slavery in American politics tend to be long on rhetoric but short on analysis. While true at the broadest and most obvious level, they are generally deficient in two respects. First, they commonly fail to identify convincing causal mechanisms by which the “residues of slavery” have been transmitted over time to shape present-day patterns of inequality and incorporation. A variety of possible mechanisms are on offer in the vast literature on race in American life—psychological, sociological, economic, and even political.\textsuperscript{43} These accounts, however, generally sidestep the question of how the impact of slavery can linger over long spans of time, outlasting former slaves and slave owners, and how particular patterns of racial domination and inequality persist even when the original structures and conditions of racial domination have long since fallen away. How, in short, was the racial hierarchy of slavery encoded in enduring structures—institutionalized—in ways that had long-term effects on politics, policy, and ultimately on the prospects for the political and social incorporation of racially defined minorities?

But the United States is hardly alone as a nation divided by race, and as a second and complementary analytical strategy, the book compares the American experience with that of two other countries, Great Britain and France. Comparative analyses of American politics are rare, and of American race politics rarer still. Historical and institutional analyses of American politics, moreover, are frequently implicitly comparative, advancing propositions about the causal importance of particular and often distinctive characteristics of American politics—the separation of powers, federalism, or the liberal tradition, for example—without really testing those propositions in other national settings. Much is lost, however, in the failure to treat the American challenge of racial incorporation comparatively. Building on the few outstanding examples of comparative race studies that include the United States, however, I offer a new comparative approach to understanding American race politics.\textsuperscript{44} This strategy not only further expands the pool of observations of race policy and incorporation patterns but also permits the basic ideological and institutional background of race policy-making to vary. Britain and France, while sharing certain important characteristics with the United States, embody both different cultural approaches to race (in terms of their commitment to color blindness) and fundamentally different policy-making institutions. Setting the United States within this comparison, alongside countries that face similar race policy challenges and parallel dilemmas of racial division, thus allows us to trace the path of race politics and policies in
national settings with different configurations of culture and institutions, the better to assess how our own distinctive political culture and state structure have shaped the fortunes of America’s racial minorities.45

A brief survey of contemporary European politics easily debunks the notion that American racial conflict is unique. Moreover, the United States is not even the only country in which the processes of state- and nation-building revolved critically around racial distinctions. As Anthony Marx and others have shown, a comparison of the United States with other postcolonial, postemancipation societies such as South Africa and Brazil, among others, suggests that American racial history has close parallels elsewhere.46 In particular, race was present at the creation of the American welfare state, limiting its scope and reach in critical ways. As with more general state-building processes, the United States was not alone in forging its welfare state in a racially heterogeneous political context. In his foundational work on the origins of the welfare state, the sociologist Harold Wilensky offered the hypothesis that such social heterogeneity—whether racial, ethnic, religious, or linguistic—might have limited or delayed welfare state growth.47 Thus there is a firm basis for treating the United States as part of a comparative set of countries that trace their institutional roots to formative, racially structured political conflicts.

In fact, many countries were racially or ethnically heterogeneous in one way or another at the founding of their welfare states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among Western industrial (or industrializing) countries, this heterogeneity took a variety of forms. The United States in this period had not only a large population of African Americans—former slaves and their descendants—but also an even larger population of immigrants, many from Southern and Eastern Europe, who were considered racially distinct from “white” Americans (those of Anglo-Saxon and other Northern European descent) in the social, economic, and political hierarchies of the era.48 Some countries, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, had substantial aboriginal populations. Others—particularly Britain, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands—ruled over extensive colonial empires in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, whose populations were deemed racially distinct from Europeans. Still others faced substantial heterogeneity among their own “native” populations along lines of religion, language, or other significant cleavages that took on almost racial characteristics—Switzerland, for example, but also Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium again.49 Other European countries that also began to construct welfare states around the same time—Germany, Austria, and the Scandinavian countries, for example—were more homogeneous along racial, ethnic, linguistic, or religious lines.

Each of these heterogeneous societies developed a welfare state that deviated in important respects from the solidaristic, social democratic
model, which entails generous universal benefits based on the rights of citizenship. All of these states, by contrast, restrict access to social benefits in significant ways, whether through the labor market or through other means of stratification, with important consequences for minority incorporation. These alternative welfare regimes arose principally because the conditions for social democratic coalition building—robust labor organization, working-class formation, and a state structure that fostered cross-class alliances—did not prevail. Social heterogeneity, racial or otherwise, tended to impede labor organization and working-class formation and shape the party systems of diverse countries, limiting the possibilities for fully inclusionary welfare states. Thus, such diversity poses a coalition-building challenge when demands for social and political solidarity across class lines coexist with demands for exclusion along some other axis.50

These considerations suggest a relatively narrow range of countries against which to compare the United States if we are interested in understanding the American trajectory from radical racial exclusion toward partial and halting incorporation. First, the comparison should include countries whose formative experiences of state building (and welfare-state development) occurred in racially heterogeneous political settings—and consequently for whom racial incorporation and exclusion have posed long-standing political challenges. This criterion excludes countries that face acute contemporary problems arising from growing racial and ethnic diversity but lack such a history: Germany, particularly, but also Sweden and Denmark, both of which are increasingly racially divided societies. Second, it should include countries where racial diversity remained a key political issue over the course of the twentieth century, thus excluding countries such as Belgium, for whom nineteenth-century colonialism did not translate into extensive twentieth-century multiracialism.

Finally, the comparison should involve countries that have included racial minorities as presumptive citizens—either automatically by birth or with minimal requirements—at least nominally (even if not always in practice) entitled to the full array of civil, political, and social rights available to full members of their societies, or at least entitled to inclusion under the broad umbrella of social protection. Thus, not suitable are countries that explicitly excluded certain racial groups from coverage. Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (“the showcase of progressive politics in the 1890s,” according to one historian) all restricted old-age pensions to persons of European descent and excluded aboriginal natives from coverage in the early twentieth century. In South Africa, pensions were by law more generous for whites than for those designated “Colored,” while native Africans were excluded altogether. The United States, to be sure, has not always lived up to this standard, especially in the case of immigrants from Asia and Latin America (to say nothing of Native
African Americans, however, were nominally guaranteed citizenship, equal protection, and political rights from Reconstruction onwards; they were, that is, presumptive citizens, whose actual incorporation into social protection policies could not be directly denied but nonetheless became a subject of intense political conflict, struggle, and negotiation. This point precisely identifies the main comparative issue: the persistence of exclusion in the face of an explicit liberal democratic commitment to inclusion.

Race in Three Countries

Along with the United States, Great Britain and France meet these criteria almost uniquely. Britain and France may not, at first blush, seem like natural comparative foils for an examination of American race politics. In recent years, to be sure, they have experienced a rising tide of racially charged politics—race riots in Britain in 2001 and Jean-Marie Le Pen’s surprising and disturbing performance in France’s 2002 presidential elections being only the most recent manifestations. But in the broader sweep of British and French history, such events seem small, and they do not appear to bespeak a deep historical engagement with racial division, hierarchy, and domination, as American politics so self-evidently does. The history of American race relations, after all, is a catalogue of apparently distinctive features—a long history of racial diversity at close quarters, slavery, involuntary migration, periodic and convulsive racial violence—that seem to distinguish it decisively from the French and British cases, where racial diversity seems more recent, more voluntary, and less incendiary. But to assume and assert that these differences matter without asking why and how is to miss the point. The pertinent question is how we can understand the consequences of such factors as longevity, slavery, and violence precisely by contrasting the United States to other countries where these historical patterns vary.

Despite these important differences, however, the United States, Britain, and France are in fact well suited to a comparison of race politics and policy. First, they are among the most racially diverse of the developed countries. Racial minorities comprise 8 percent of the population of Britain and at least 6 percent in France, compared to 13 percent African Americans and more than 20 percent total nonwhites in the United States. In each country, minorities are growing in size and political importance. Second, these countries share a history of rule by Europeans over others; in each case an official ideology of racial superiority was backed by state power and often violent repression, not only in recent years or even in the twentieth century but dating back to the earliest encounters between
Europeans and Africans, Asians, and others. This form of rule differed significantly: the French and British empires kept colonial subjects far removed from most metropolitan citizens while in the American South politics and society were defined by the very proximity of the races (although this occurred at some remove from the lives and sensibilities of most Northern Americans). Still, France and Britain ruled large numbers of non-Europeans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in all three cases the definition of nationhood coalesced, in part, around exclusionary, racially defined identities.\(^34\)

More important even than these similarities, however, are the common political traditions of these three countries. Uniquely among the great powers of the West, these countries share long-standing liberal democratic regimes, characterized politically by contested and decisive elections, increasingly broad citizen participation and popular sovereignty, and respect for the rule of law.\(^35\) Ideologically, these political traditions share commitments to the protection of individual rights, political equality, and a universal model of citizenship that is, at least in principle, based on a set of shared civic norms rather than on blood or kinship.\(^36\) In each of these countries, moreover, nonwhites migrated in large numbers during the twentieth century—from colonies to the European metropoles and from South to North in the United States—and in all three countries, these migrants arrived as presumptive citizens, ostensibly entitled to full membership in the national community.\(^37\)

What makes these countries especially suitable for the comparison, however, is that against these background similarities, Britain and France differ from the United States both in the key factors that shape incorporation—ideas and institutions—and in the outcomes themselves—patterns of incorporation over time and across policy areas. To consider ideas first, within their broad regime similarities, these three countries have converged on very different varieties of liberalism and, within that ideological variety, on different political and cultural understandings of race. Britain’s tradition of liberalism led it to recognize the legitimacy of subnational identities such as race and ethnicity and consequently to embrace multiculturalism as a policy framework. French republicanism, on the other hand, emphasizes the supremacy of French nationality as a political identity and eschews intervening attachments or group identities, leading it to adopt assimilation as the guiding principle of race policy (and also to prohibit the collection of racial data about the population, making the study of race in France particularly challenging). In the United States, liberal individualism has coexisted with republican and racist traditions, leading to an ambivalent embrace of race-conscious multiculturalism in the context of an aspiration toward color blindness. These ideological and cultural differences have led these countries to frame racial issues
differently and consequently to adopt different kinds of race and integration policy. French policy emphasizes the assimilation of minorities and the ending of racism, while British policy is designed to promote the peaceful coexistence among groups through antidiscrimination measures, largely on the American model (although Britain has not gone as far toward creating affirmative action).\textsuperscript{58}

These countries also differ in the kinds of institutions through which they organize the exercise of political power (still within the broad confines of liberal democracy) and consequently the means by which minorities came to be connected with national politics. In the United States, state power is notoriously fragmented and decentralized, characterized by separated powers; a locally representative congress; decentralized, patronage-based nonprogrammatic political parties; a weak bureaucracy; federalism; and strong and relatively independent courts. The multiple veto points that inhibit coalition formation combined with the radically localized nature of linkages between African Americans and the state have often frustrated the political aims of minorities, who have frequently sought the protection of the national state against the depredations of local majorities.\textsuperscript{59} In Britain and France, by contrast, state power is more concentrated and centralized—in parliamentary majorities and cabinets in Britain’s system of party government, and in a strong executive and an often-imperious administrative state in France’s Fifth Republic.\textsuperscript{60} These systems of political institutions offer fewer (or at least differently configured) veto points, but also correspondingly fewer points of access, for those who would influence political deliberations and policy outcomes.\textsuperscript{61}

These national configurations of ideas about race and political institutions, however, have produced puzzling and paradoxical incorporation outcomes in all three countries. Cultural ambivalence and institutional fragmentation in the United States have produced weak welfare incorporation and strong antidiscrimination policy. British race-consciousness has combined with relatively centralized, unitary political institutions to produce stronger welfare incorporation and weak antidiscrimination enforcement, in defiance of a strong law that actually invites something like affirmative action. In France, color blindness and a centralized state have combined to generate a mixed record of welfare incorporation and particularly anemic antidiscrimination enforcement. The central question, posed initially about the United States, presents itself again on a wider stage: why success in some areas of racial incorporation and failure in others? But viewing these outcomes across several countries deepens the conundrum even further. Clearly, race policies and incorporation outcomes have not been consistent within countries or even within policy areas. Nor do policies and outcomes seem to follow directly from
particular cultural or institutional patterns. But it is precisely these outcomes as they developed and unfolded over the twentieth century that I seek to explain.

Cautions and Limitations

Several confounding factors pose potential problems for the comparison of the United States with Britain and France. Most important is the close connection among race, citizenship, and immigration that distinguishes European from American race relations. Unlike African Americans, who are mostly native-born citizens (although their access to the rights of citizenship was until recently severely limited), most nonwhites in Britain and France are either immigrants or the descendants of post-1945 immigrants, and many are not citizens. Thus differing levels of racial incorporation may result from political processes that make distinctions on the basis of citizenship or nativity rather than race or ethnicity per se. But in all three countries, citizenship is based primarily on residence (jus soli) rather than descent (jus sanguinis), and most immigrants or their children are able to naturalize. Moreover, incorporation is in many ways weakest (or at least no stronger than elsewhere) in the United States, where citizenship is the highest, suggesting that citizenship is not a sufficient explanation for the level of incorporation.

Nevertheless, it may be the case that the fundamental problem in France and Britain is one of immigrant incorporation. Like the United States, France has historically absorbed and assimilated immigrants from many different countries, and it is plausible to suggest that France and Britain might follow the ethnicity model of assimilation, in which successive waves of immigrants successfully adapt themselves to the host society. But just as the process of racial formation in the United States has called the ethnicity model into question, there is evidence that North Africans in France and their descendants are facing steeper barriers to assimilation and naturalization than earlier groups of European immigrants, suggesting that factors other than immigration and citizenship may be playing a role. Moreover, national citizenship has become less important as a basis for incorporation in recent years, as immigrant communities have grown in size and prominence in the Western world and international norms of human rights and have increasingly defined access to civil, political, and social rights. In all three cases, the presumption behind policy, at least since the 1970s, is that immigration is a prelude to permanent settlement and ultimately to citizenship. These countries share a common goal of incorporation across lines of race, ethnicity, and even nationality,
although they differ sharply in the ideological frameworks in which they embed this common aim.63

Another difference is the nature and distribution of racial and ethnic group identities. Although differentiation among multiple racial groups has always been an important part of American racial history, what is comparatively striking about the history of race in the United States is the dominance of a single racial cleavage. Until the very end of the twentieth century, African Americans were by a wide margin the single largest racial or ethnic minority group in the population. American social politics has largely revolved around the black-white divide, and the link between African Americans and the welfare system remains a central issue today.64 In Britain and France, by contrast, the racial minority population comprises multiple and shifting groups of different origins and identities without a single dominant one. In Britain, nonwhites made up 7.9% of the total population in the 2001 census: of this group, 23% were of Indian background, 16% Pakistani, 12% Caribbean, 11% Black African, 6% Bangladeshi, and 5% Chinese. Moreover, nonwhites also comprised a set of distinct religious communities; a majority of nonwhites were Muslim, Sikh, or Hindu.65 In France’s 1999 Census immigrants made up 7.4% of the population, and the proportion of immigrants from North Africa grew over the 1990s. In 1990, however, more than 10% of the population lived in households headed by immigrants, suggesting a larger minority population than that captured by immigration statistics; in 1999 this figure was nearly 12%. Of this latter group, a majority had non-European origins and one-third were from North Africa. Among African immigrants and their descendants, many are Muslims, although ranging widely in levels of belief and practice, suggesting that religion and culture may be at the root of racial conflict and exclusion in Europe, a possibility that events since 11 September 2001 seem tragically to have borne out.66

In both countries, the concentration of Muslims has had important consequences for minority incorporation. In France, religion has been particularly important as a perceived challenge to the resolutely secular public schools, as in the long-running controversy over whether Muslim girls would be allowed to wear headscarves in school; in Britain, Islam has increasingly been a focal point of cultural conflict, especially since the controversy over Salman Rushdie’s novel, The Satanic Verses. It is possible, then, that differences among racial and ethnic groups within these countries might affect their prospects for incorporation. But it is not clear how intraethnic diversity might affect incorporation. On the one hand, political elites might find a single dominant minority group more threatening and respond with exclusion and even repression, as in the pre–civil rights American South. On the other hand, diversity might produce fragmentation among minority groups, weakening prospects for broad mobi-
lization to demand incorporation. Which of these processes is invoked depends not simply on the unity or diversity of minority groups but on the political mechanisms that structure interactions among groups and the state. To resolve this puzzle, then, understanding the interlocking institutional and cultural mechanisms of incorporation is crucial.

Finally, it should be clear that my purpose is not to develop a general and complete theory of either the political effects of racial heterogeneity or the political causes behind racial incorporation or its limits. Heterogeneity is only one of many routes through which states have arrived at the modern condition of limited capacity to build political (to say nothing of human) solidarity across racially constructed lines. Rather, my purpose is to suggest how racial politics can be “built into” the structure of social policy through the construction of certain kinds of barriers to incorporation. Even when the original conditions and logics of racial conflict and exclusion have given way to new political circumstances that appear more favorable to incorporation, these historically determined patterns can still prove influential in shaping political responses to new challenges. These patterns matter not because they embody primordial and timeless racial conflicts but because they affect the political possibilities available to subsequent actors, both those who wish to protect the status quo and those who seek to challenge it. Thus, although the argument applies directly only to the narrow range of historically divergent, liberal democratic states on which it is built, its conclusions about the cultural and institutional ingredients of coalition building in diverse societies may be more broadly useful in pointing the way forward not only for the United States but also for other countries that aspire to build more just and equal societies.

A Look Ahead

To investigate how these factors contributed in combination to defining distinctive national paths toward racial incorporation, I present a comparative historical exploration of the evolution of racial incorporation in the three countries, in welfare and employment discrimination policy, over the course of the twentieth century (with an emphasis on the post–World War II era). At the study’s center is a historical account of the divergent paths of American race policy over the past half century, drawing on a combination of primary archival sources, quantitative data drawn principally from government statistics, and the work of other scholars. Running alongside the American story are historical accounts of the British and French experiences, which are organized and presented to show the analytical parallels across all three countries.
The argument that emerges from this comparative historical analysis is that political conditions favoring racial incorporation have arisen not from constant institutional or ideological forces but from fruitful combinations and configurations of these factors that have appeared at particular historical junctures in each country. The most successful instances of incorporation presented here—laws against employment discrimination in the United States and welfare in Britain—in fact appear to share few pertinent characteristics: while American affirmative action developed in an ambivalent ideological context (between race consciousness and color blindness), with weak institutional support and a high level of minority mobilization and organization, British welfare policy evolved in an increasingly race-conscious political context and in a relatively centralized state with moderate levels of minority mobilization. Similarly, the political circumstances of the most conspicuous failures—American welfare incorporation and French employment discrimination policy—seem to have little in common.

The more successful instances of incorporation, whether in the United States or elsewhere, share common historical circumstances. Incorporation tends to succeed when political institutions either support the adoption and implementation of inclusive and egalitarian policies that overcome historical inequalities or provide opportunities for mobilized groups to challenge prevailing policy models and push particularly for more race-conscious approaches. These institutional processes, however, have depended on the presence of particular kinds of policy ideas and often on the organized pressure of racial minorities themselves. Thus, the possibilities for incorporation depend not on institutions or ideas alone but on historically specific, convergent configurations of ideas, institutions, and opportunities. Such openings for movement toward greater incorporation are especially wide when configurations of ideas and institutions are discordant—both with each other and with received structures of exclusion and inequality. These circumstances generate new imperatives for political actors to break out of familiar and settled habits and seek new paths.

Chapter 2 begins the story by describing the emergence of the American welfare state in a racially heterogeneous political context. In the United States, race posed a steep barrier to the construction of a national, cross-class social policy coalition because the imperatives of racial rule constrained the possibilities available to policymakers. In particular, the need to include the South on its own racial terms affected both the substantive and structural features of the welfare policies that emerged from the New Deal. Different ideological and institutional configurations of racial rule, in the form of colonialism, also shaped social reform in Britain and France in the early twentieth century, affecting the nature of cross-class coalition building and producing both ideologically and structurally different wel-
fare states that encoded historical patterns of racial domination in varying ways—centralization or decentralization, solidarity or division, direct or indirect claims on the state for social benefits and protection.

The next four chapters trace the subsequent development of the American welfare state and its variable capacity to incorporate African Americans, who increasingly sought entry into the national political economy. Chapter 3 describes in detail the institutional and ideological characteristics of the racially exclusionary American welfare state as it emerged from the New Deal, characteristics that seemed to bode ill for the future of minority incorporation. Chapter 4 examines two dramatic mid-century transformations that reshaped the possibilities for incorporation: welfare reform, particularly the American failure to expand the scope of its welfare state in the post–World War II years, and the mass migration of blacks from South to North. Contrasted with parallel development in Britain and France—more extensive welfare reforms and similar minority migrations from colonies—these developments reveal the particular configurations of institutions, group-state linkages, and cultural repertoires that would shape postwar patterns of minority incorporation in social provision.

The next chapters then chronicle these paths of incorporation in the American welfare state. Rather then covering all three countries in each chapter, I juxtapose first social insurance and then public assistance with the case that best illuminates the configuration of institutions and ideas that shaped incorporation in each sector. Chapter 5 focuses on Social Security, whose national institutional structure allowed it to overcome its racially exclusionary origins. Social Security is compared with the case of social insurance in France, where institutional and ideological differences limited minority incorporation. Chapter 6 turns to American public assistance, where institutional fragmentation and intense race consciousness severely limited the potential for minority incorporation. The contrast here is with Britain, where institutional centralization promoted stronger incorporation. Taken together, chapters 3 to 6 highlight how cultural and institutional factors constructed by early welfare state politics—particularly the tensions between color blindness and race consciousness, the divergent structural foundations of welfare policy, and the resulting processes of coalition building—combined to produce often surprising patterns of minority incorporation into the national provision of social benefits.

The next two chapters turn to employment discrimination policy. Chapter 7 explores the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and particularly the coalition-building compromise that produced an ideologically color-blind and institutionally fragmented antidiscrimination law. When contrasted with the British and French laws (and the coalitions that produced them), the Civil Rights Act seemed to create very infertile ground
for strong minority incorporation in the labor force. Chapter 8 then shows how color blindness and institutional fragmentation gave way precisely to an active, race-conscious program of antidiscrimination enforcement in the form of affirmative action, while the British and French antidiscrimination efforts foundered despite their nominally stronger state apparatuses.

In addition to drawing general lessons about the cultural and institutional determinants of race politics and policy, chapter 9 returns to the particular challenge with which I began: the persistence of racial division in American society and the variable success of racial incorporation of African Americans (and other groups) in the United States. It also suggests future policy directions for Americans (and others) who seek to negotiate the universal dilemma of race politics, how to spin the flax of race consciousness into the gold of color blindness and move modern societies toward true racial equality.