

# **RACISM: A MAJOR SOURCE OF PROPERTY AND WEALTH INEQUALITY IN AMERICA**

DERRICK BELL\*

Consider this film script:

RURAL TOWN GAS STATION—DEEP SOUTH IN THE MID-1960s.

*It is dusk, the end of a hot summer day. A half-dozen or so working class, white, "good ole' boys" are grouped around a bench in front of a run-down, two-pump gas station. An outdoor phone is attached to the wall. A faded sign over the station garage reads: Moultree's Oil, Gas, Repairs. The men, dressed in farmer's bib overalls and plaid shirts or in khaki pants and undershirts, are horsing around, drinking beer, and chiding a teenager, BUDDY, who refuses to drink with them.*

MOULTREE

*(The owner of the gas station, an older man, and a figure of authority, points his beer at the boy.)*

Com'on, Buddy boy. Jus' 'cause you finish high school and hopin' to go to that raggedyass state college over in Greenville, don' mean you can't join us with one of these beers.

BUDDY

*(Hangs his head, obviously not wanting to argue.)*

Mr. Moultree. This Coke is jus' fine.

GROUP

*(The others hoot at the remark. They joke about the benefits of not finishing school and boast about how little schooling each has.)*

ANDY

*(Fat redneck, beer-belly, a troublemaker and proud of it, looks at Moultree.)*

Guess you ain' tol' him, Moultree. Don' drink wit' the boys. Cain't work at Moultree's. And cain't work at Moultree's. Cain't afford to go to college.

J.T.

*(Tall, relatively slender in comparison with the others. Grimaces to*

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*show he doesn't like Andy's comment.)*

You wrong on both counts, Andy. My baby brother wants to work, but he got one of thos' whatcha call 'em, scholarships. An' it ain't at no state college. It's Ole Miss.

BUDDY

*(Frowns at his brother. Where he hopes to go to college was supposed to stay in the family until everything was worked out.)*

GROUP

*(Surprised and impressed by the news, they are also envious and even more anxious to cut Buddy down to size.)*

MOULTREE

*(In a dominating, almost threatening tone.)*

You better off at State, boy. Ole Miss ain't Ole Miss no more now the Feds done forced that nigger, James Meredith in there. Looks like white men can't have nothin' to 'emselves no more. Watch what I say, niggers goin' take over the whole damn state.

GROUP

*(Make faces expressing disgust and declare, cursing, that they are not going to let it happen.)*

J.T.

*(With vehemence, not wanting to be on the wrong side of this issue.)*

You right there, Clem. Mama an' Daddy wranglin' over this thing ever since Buddy got the letter. Daddy say no chile o' his'n goin' to no school that takes in niggers. Mama let him talk, but my money say, Buddy goin' to Ole Miss.

TOD

*(The elder of the group, with little hair, fewer teeth, sits on a barrel.)*

I tell you. Our Negras was happy 'till them Northern do-gooders come down here stirrin' em' up. My granpappy tol me same thing happened after the Confederacy. Northern do-gooders swarm in here like flies on horseshit, gave our darkies all manner o' big ideas. They got tired, after while. Left on their own—though we helped some git on back where they come from. Then we scared the niggers back into shape. Happen before, it'll happen again. Mark my word!

ANDY

Damn right, Tod. Way it suppos' to be. White man take what he want.

Niggers get the leftovers. Fair and square how I sees it.

BUDDY

*(Looks hard at Andy, then at the rest of the group. He speaks in a low voice but with some feeling.)*

Been readin' a lot and thinkin' a lot. Sure, we whites kin have what we want long as what we want's is drinkin' beer in the heat and dust 'round a two-pump station out in the country. That, and keepin' niggers down. None of us got much of nothin' worthwhile. Meantime, the fat cats runnin' the companies and gettin' themselves elected to high office livin' better 'n we ever dream. When we goin' to get smart?

J.T.

*(Embarrassed at his brother's remarks that distance him from the only group he knows.)*

We goin' to get real smart after you finis' college, Buddy. You goin' smart us up real good. Right, boys?

GROUP

*(Laughs long and hard at Buddy's expense. Buddy lapses back into silence, staring at the Coke bottle in his hand.)*

TODD

*(Looks at Buddy hard. He is serious, not laughing.)*

Naw, J.T. He ain't gonna smart us up. White boys like Buddy go to college, get in line for good-payin' jobs, marry them trophy women with long hair, hands ain't never been in no soapsuds. Buddy go to college, won't have no time for the likes of us. Soon be one of them fat cats, treatin' us like we niggers. He too young to know. We ain't got no choice. Got to treat the darkies bad so they can't forget that they's on the bottom—not us.

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The characters in this excerpt from one of my stories<sup>1</sup> would seem highly unlikely culprits in the inequalities of wealth attributable to race. And yet their racial beliefs—as much a part of them as their southern drawls—are significant if not crucial to understanding the differences, disparities and ongoing discontent attributed to race. Young Buddy's observation that racism harms the hater as much as the hated sums up a phenomenon as old as the nation's history.

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1. DERRICK BELL, *GOSPEL CHOIRS: PSALMS OF SURVIVAL IN AN ALIEN LAND CALLED HOME* 103, 105-09 (1996).

The historian, Edmund Morgan, explains that plantation owners convinced working class whites to reduce Africans to life-term indentures (slavery) even though, without slaves, poor whites could never compete with the wealthy landowners who could afford them.<sup>2</sup> Slave holders appealed to working class whites, urging that because they were both white, they had to stand together against the threat of slave revolts or escapes. It worked, and in their poverty, whites took out their frustrations by hating the slaves rather than their masters who held both black slave and free white in economic bondage. Thus, even in that early time, race was the crucial lever through which wealthy whites shifted attention from their privileged status to Africans reduced to slavery.

While slavery ended, the economic disadvantaging of a great many whites—camouflaged by racial division—continued to obscure the real cost of their allegiance to whiteness. Formal segregation, a policy insisted on by poorer whites, simultaneously subordinated blacks and provided whites with a sense of belonging based on neither economic nor political well-being, but simply on an identification based on race with the ruling class and a state-supported belief that, as whites, they were superior to blacks. Racism's stabilizing force was not limited to poorer whites. Even for wealthier whites, their identities were unstable because they were intrinsically dependent upon an "other." White, racist antipathy belied the extent to which white people desperately needed and still need blacks in a subordinate status in order to sustain the myriad fictions of white, racial integrity.

This issue is identifying and analyzing the tremendous and growing gaps in income, wealth, and opportunity in this country. These disparities are not frequently mentioned by either major political party and, based on measures of public upset, they are not a matter of priority concern except as reflected by the sacrifices so many must make to pay for prescription drugs, by the poor quality of so many underfunded public schools, and by the lack of any health coverage for more than forty million people. The seriousness of these inequities becomes incomprehensible given the great wealth of this nation. And yet there is little challenge to the economic system that favors so few and burdens so many.

The evidence of a similar political apathy is painfully apparent in the wake of the Florida vote recount debacle that ended the presidential campaign of 2000. Law teachers across the political spectrum have expressed dismay over the Supreme Court's expropriation of the Presidential election.<sup>3</sup> A statement, signed by 660 law professors published in a full page ad in *The New York Times*, asserted that the five judge majority were "acting as 'political proponents for candidate Bush, not as judges.'"<sup>4</sup> Yale professor, Bruce Ackerman, agrees.<sup>5</sup> Given his status in the elite of constitutional law scholars, his condemnation of

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2. See EDMUND S. MORGAN, *AMERICAN SLAVERY, AMERICAN FREEDOM: THE ORDEAL OF COLONIAL VIRGINIA* 295-310, 344-45, 380-81, 386 (1975).

3. See *Bush v. Gore*, 121 S. Ct. 525 (2000).

4. David Abel, *Bush v. Gore Case Compels Scholars to Alter Courses at U.S. Law Schools*, BOSTON GLOBE, Feb. 13, 2001, at A1.

5. See Bruce Ackerman, *The Court Packs Itself*, AM. PROSPECT, Feb. 12, 2001, at 48.

the court is particularly noteworthy. Agreeing with dissenting Justice John Paul Stevens, a jurist noted for his sobriety, that *Bush v. Gore* has shaken “the Nation’s confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law,”<sup>6</sup> Ackerman writes:

We are not dealing with the normal disagreement on principle that attends every important Supreme Court decision. Justice Stevens is saying that the majority’s decision to halt the Florida recount is a blatantly partisan act, without any legal basis whatsoever. . . .

After a careful study of the Court’s opinion, I have reluctantly concluded that Stevens is right. I say reluctantly because this view goes against the grain of my entire academic career, which has been one long struggle against the slogan that law is just politics.<sup>7</sup>

The political significance of these developments has shifted attention from an underlying question of relevance to the discussion of the contemporary role of race in understanding wealth and inequality. Why did so many middle-class and working-class voters, the great majority of them white, vote for the Republican candidate given the party’s rather obvious priority for protecting the already privileged?<sup>8</sup> Many issues come to mind—a large tax cut favoring the wealthy, repealing the estate tax, favoring business over the environment, reforming health care, undermining social security—that should have the working class outraged instead of captivated.<sup>9</sup>

The fact is, of course, that both major-party candidates, beyond their rhetoric, had a right-leaning agenda in which there was hardly any mention of some of the most serious problems confronting the nation: opposition to the death penalty, the war on drugs, inadequate minimum wage, targeting drug companies for high cost of prescription drugs, and meaningful reform of election financing. Only Ralph Nader took a strong position on each of these issues.<sup>10</sup>

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6. *Bush*, 121 S. Ct. at 542 (Stevens, J., dissenting).

7. *Id.*

8. In races across the country, Bush took more than half the white vote. See Richard Benedetto & Jessica Lee, *Race Reflected Political Divisions*, USA TODAY, Nov. 8, 2000, at 8A (noting that most whites voted for Bush, while nine out of ten blacks voted for Gore); Jim Galloway, *Georgia’s Decision: Rural Areas Deliver Bush Victory*, ATLANTA J. & CONST., Nov. 8, 2000, at 7E; Laura Meckler, *Divided America Went to the Polls*, AP ONLINE, Nov. 8, 2000, available at 2000 WL 29039203; Terry Spencer, *Bush, Gore Kept Parties’ Traditional Bases in Florida*, AP NEWSWIRE, Nov. 8, 2000.

9. See Janet Hook, *Drive to Kill Estate Taxes Loses Steam*, L.A. TIMES, Feb. 15, 2001, at A1; Judy Keen, *How the White House Was Won . . . and Lost*, USA TODAY, Nov. 8, 2000, at 15A.

10. See Megan Garvey, *Campaign 2000: Nader’s Different, He Says, and He’s Happy to Explain Just How*, L.A. TIMES, Nov. 3, 2000, at A26; Associated Press, *Views of Nader and Buchanan*, AP ONLINE, Nov. 1, 2000, available at 2000 WL 29036695; see also Gary Maveal, *At the Core, Nader’s Issues Have a Broadbased Appeal*, DETROIT NEWS, Nov. 7, 2000, at 11; (noting wide-spread Nader support among political centrists); Larua Meckler, *A Look at How America Voted*, AP ONLINE, Nov. 7, 2000, available at 2000 WL 29038794 (stating about half of the Nader

And yet, I doubt that very many people would dispute that the Republican vote by working class whites was based in substantial part on the belief that the party would better protect them against inroads by minorities. And why not? While feigning interest in black voters, the Republican Party has come to power by parlaying the willingness of whites to blame blacks for the nation's ills and their own anxieties. From the message Reagan sent to whites by opening his campaign for the presidency with a speech in Philadelphia, Mississippi, near the site where the three civil rights workers were murdered,<sup>11</sup> to the elder Bush's use of the Willie Horton commercial,<sup>12</sup> Republicans have hidden their massive redistribution of the wealth upward by gleefully cutting social programs while assuring whites that they were restoring the racial balance through their opposition to affirmative action and their all but open hostility to black people.

"Yes, we know Bell, you have been telling us for a long time that racism is permanent in this country."<sup>13</sup> True, but that statement has been more provocative

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voters said they would have voted for Gore in a two-way race while about one in three would not have voted).

11. In 1980, Ronald Reagan opened his winning campaign tour speaking at a county fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi, a city known for its anti-integrationist posture. There, Reagan introduced the nation to his political philosophy of original intent, states rights and traditional deference to the principles of federalism. Not inconsequentially, it was in Philadelphia on June 16, 1964 that civil rights activists Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney fell victim to a white lynch mob claiming allegiance to "state's rights." Reagan's speech in Philadelphia followed his refusal to accept an invitation to speak at the annual convention of the NAACP. See Jamin B. Raskin, *Is There a Constitutional Right to Vote and Be Represented? The Case of the District of Columbia*, 48 AM. U. L. REV. 589, 675 (1999); see also FLORENCE MARS, WITNESS IN PHILADELPHIA 235 (1977) (discussing the lynching of Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney); Douglas E. Kneeland, *Reagan Campaigns at Mississippi Fair*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 4, 1980, at A11.

12. Professor Joseph E. Kennedy describes the Willie Horton controversy of the late eighties as "[p]erhaps the single most politically influential crime story of recent years." Joseph Kennedy, *Monstrous Offenders and the Search for Solidarity Through Modern Punishment*, 51 HASTINGS L.J. 829, 887 (2000). Horton was a convicted first-degree murderer serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole when he was released on furlough by Massachusetts' governor Michael Dukakis. While out of prison, Horton raped, robbed, and terrorized a white suburban couple. His crimes made the furlough program a national issue during Dukakis' presidential bid in 1988. As the Republican candidate, George Bush ran anti-Dukakis commercials flashing Horton's mug shot to portray Dukakis as "soft on crime." Many commentators charged that by flashing the mug shot of an African-American man in connection with a crime story, the commercials appealed to America's deep seeded racial fears, thus contributing to Dukakis' ultimate defeat. See *id.*; KATHY RUSSELLET AL., THE COLOR COMPLEX: THE POLITICS OF SKIN COLOR AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS 38 (1992) (suggesting that Bush intentionally chose to use Willie Horton in the ads because of the suspicion that blacks are more criminally dangerous); Dennis Love, *Black and White: Walking a Fine Line, What Does "Racism" Mean? And Can We Live with It in Our Midst?*, ARIZ. REPUBLIC, Nov. 25, 1990, at E1 (noting the popular perception that George Bush played on racial fears when he spotlighted Willie Horton in the television ads).

13. See generally DERRICK BELL, *FACES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL: THE PERMANENCE*

than instructive. Racism is far more complex than blatant bigotry. It is far more like the supposed secret ingredient in Coca Cola, its presence felt more than tasted, its effect addictive while seemingly benign.

Race untangles the paradox of a nation built on free market economy and popular democracy. Here, I owe much to the work of Professor Amy Chua,<sup>14</sup> who reminds us that political theorists and economists like Adam Smith, James Madison, and Thomas Babington Macauley warned that the combination simply could not work. Markets would produce enormous concentrations of wealth in the hands of a few, while democracy, by empowering the poor majority, would inevitably lead to convulsive acts of expropriation and confiscation.<sup>15</sup>

Professor Chua notes that this conflict has been more or less successfully negotiated throughout the developed world. "Defining the terms broadly, markets and democracy have coexisted quite healthily in the United States for two hundred years, and at least a dozen other developed countries," despite fears that the electoral powers of numbers would overwhelm the economic power of property, "have remained continuously capitalist and democratic for the past half-century," a phenomenon Chua calls "one of the great surprises of modern history."<sup>16</sup>

In explanation, she points out that material redistribution, the most obvious accommodation made by the market economies of the developed world to the demands of the less well-off, consists of material compensation. In other words, the less prosperous have to a certain extent been "bought out," in part through market-generated material prosperity, but also in significant part through redistributive institutions of the kind that Jurgen Habermas refers to as "the welfare state compromise."<sup>17</sup> To a surprising degree, the gaining of reasonable wages and benefits that enable the purchase of a home, car and other of the accoutrements of well-being, is sufficient to cause a number of working class people to identify with conservative economic and political policies that on even cursory examination will not further their interests.

I think Professor Chua would agree, though, that notwithstanding its tremendous wealth, there is less social support in this country than in other less wealthy countries. Providing one explanation, economist Robert L. Heilbroner suggested that in many more homogeneous countries with nothing like our wealth, advocates for social reform can point to the less well-off and argue that "there. but for the grace of God, go I."<sup>18</sup> In America, where race is the major

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OF RACISM (1992):

14. See generally Amy L. Chua, *The Paradox of Free Market Democracy: Rethinking Development Policy*, 41 HARV. INT'L L.J. 287 (2000) [hereinafter Chua, *Paradox*]; see also Amy L. Chua, *Global Capitalism and Nationalist Backlash: The Link Between Markets and Ethnicity*, TRANSNAT'L & CONTEMP. PROBS. 17 (1999); Amy L. Chua, *Markets, Democracy, and Ethnicity: Toward a New Paradigm for Law and Development*, 108 YALE L.J. 1 (1998).

15. See Chua, *Paradox*, *supra* note 14, at 288.

16. *Id.* at 289 (internal citations omitted).

17. *Id.* at 295 (citations omitted).

18. See Robert Heilbroner, *The Roots of Social Neglect in the United States*, in IS LAW DEAD?

factor in our heterogeneity, opponents of reform argue that social programs needed by many will help undeserving blacks.

Thus, while the persons who suffer most from social neglect in America are disproportionately black, the merging of the racial issue with that of neglect serves as a rationalization for the policies of inaction that have characterized so much of the American response to need. Programs to improve slums are seen by many as programs to “subsidize” blacks; proposals to improve prisons are seen as measures to coddle black criminals; and so on. All too often, the fear and resentment of blacks take precedence over the social problem itself. The result, unfortunately, is that the entire society suffers the results of a failure to correct social evils.

Another factor is that popular democracy, the theoretical challenge to a free enterprise economy has often been more heralded than a reality in this country; its potential seriously diminished by voter restrictions and restraints. Only a relative few could vote initially, and even after universal suffrage for white males, poll taxes, exclusion of paupers, and other restraints restricted the vote. Women until the early Twentieth Century could not vote at all. And the Fifteenth Amendment lay dormant for the better part of a century before its meaningful implementation enabled blacks and other people of color to vote in substantial numbers.

Despite the reforms led by civil rights advocates, the rhetoric of “one person, one vote,”<sup>19</sup> is undermined by powerful economic interests that are able to exert disproportionate political influence to capture the state apparatus, using it to their advantage. Particularly in the South, the tactics used to deny the vote to blacks have often reduced the voting power of whites as well. In addition, the impact of wealth on campaigns and those who are elected is by even conservative estimates, tremendous.

Professor Chua sketched out additional market-compatible ideologies that seem to further explain the compatibility of free enterprise economies with popular democracy.<sup>20</sup> In this country there is the deeply held belief in upward mobility—the ideology holding that anyone can move up the economic ladder, as long as he or she is talented, hard-working, entrepreneurial and not too unlucky. This theme explored in countless novels and films is a key component of our secular religion with quite sacred overtones.

I would add that the upward mobility belief system is nourished by consumerism and the facilitation of the same by credit card debt that enables the shopping for and acquisition of things that it is hoped will satisfy the need for that which material possessions cannot provide. The substitution of buying things for real economic and political power literally consumes financial resources with debt while simultaneously disempowering any protest inclinations. The average American uses seven credit cards and owes over \$7000

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288, 296 (Eugene V. Rostow ed., 1971).

19. See *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533, 566 (1964).

20. See Chua, *Paradox*, *supra* note 14, at 301-08.

on a continuing basis.<sup>21</sup> Debt burdens of this size serve to discourage protests of conditions at either the workplace or in the streets.

Chua also mentions, among other factors, the spirit of self-reliance that holds a person's chief concern ought to be his "independence and particularly his ability to meet his own economic needs" and those of his family without outside assistance.<sup>22</sup> This pioneer spirit is real but not very realistic. That is, the individual who thinks that only the undeserving accept welfare payments or food stamps has no problem deducting taxes and interest payments on his home mortgage, a government subsidy without which many Americans could not afford to purchase their homes.

Professor Chua supports my view that the ideology of racism in the United States and some other developed countries has been a "powerful force fracturing the 'lower class' and inducing large numbers of the less well-off majority to vote in defiance of what might be expected to be their rational economic self-interest."<sup>23</sup> In her view,

racism has likely operated in service of market capitalism in two different ways . . . . [R]acism (and the creation of a large racial underclass) has arguably made poor and working-class whites feel better about their relative plight, giving them a consoling sense of superiority and status vis-a-vis African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and other groups of color perceived (in many senses correctly) as "the sediment of the American stratificational order."<sup>24</sup>

In addition, racism hinders the formation of political alliances between either poor and working-class whites or poor and working-class minorities, explaining the absence of a powerful working-class political party in the United States.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, race was a major facilitator of the acculturation and assimilation of European immigrants during late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century. Horribly exploited by the mine and factory owners for whom they toiled long hours under brutal conditions for subsistence wages, the shared feeling of superiority to blacks was one of the few things that united them. The blackface and racially derogatory minstrel shows of that period helped immigrants acculturate and assimilate by inculcating a nationalism whose common theme was the disparagement and disadvantaging of blacks, rather than uniting across racial lines to resist the exploitation and deprivation that, then as now, does not respect any color line.<sup>26</sup>

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21. See Mick Zawislak, *Credit Crazed Americans Expected to Put Record Amount of Holiday Spending on Plastic This Year*, CHIC. DAILY HERALD, Dec. 7, 2000, at 1.

22. Chua, *Paradox*, *supra* note 14, at 303.

23. *Id.* at 305.

24. *Id.* at 306 (citations omitted).

25. See *id.*

26. See, e.g., KEN EMERSON, DOO DAH! STEPHEN FOSTER AND THE RISE OF AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE (1997).

This history serves as a guide to understanding the present.<sup>27</sup> The ideology of whiteness continues to oppress whites as well as blacks. Now, as throughout the American experience, it is employed to make whites settle for despair in politics and anguish in the daily grind of life. Somehow, they link the facts that both a majority of America's population is white and that most power positions are held by whites with a sense that, as whites, they are privileged and entitled to preference over people of color. Over time, these views have solidified into a kind of property in whiteness. The law recognizes and protects this property right based on color, like any other property.

Here, where property is viewed as a measure of worth, many whites—with relatively little property of a traditional kind (e.g., money, securities, land)—view their whiteness as a property right.<sup>28</sup> Professor Cheryl Harris asserts:

[T]he valorization of whiteness as treasured property [takes place] in a society structured on racial caste. In ways so embedded that it is rarely apparent, the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white have become a valuable asset that whites sought to protect . . . Whites have come to expect and rely on these benefits, and over time these expectations have been affirmed, legitimated, and protected by the law.<sup>29</sup>

That political advantage over blacks, though, makes it difficult for whites to identify with blacks even on matters that transcend skin color. To give continued meaning to their whiteness, whites are drawn to identify with whites at the top of the economic pile, not with blacks with whom—save color—they have so much in common. It is for these reasons that racism may not be something that can be overcome and may be a permanent part of the American social structure.

The barriers to moving beyond reliance on an out group for social stability are monumental in a nation where whites of widely divergent stations are able to make common cause through their unspoken pact to keep blacks on the bottom. No other aspect of social functioning has retained its viability and its value to general stability from the very beginning of the American experience down to the present day. Because of this fixation, I agree with Professor Jennifer Hochschild's assessment that racism is not an anomaly, but a crucial component of liberal democracy in this country.<sup>30</sup> The two are historically, even inherently

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27. See DAVID R. ROEDIGER, *THE WAGES OF WHITENESS: RACE AND THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS* (1991).

28. See, e.g., NOEL IGNATIEV, *HOW THE IRISH BECAME WHITE* (1995); JANE LAZARRE, *BEYOND THE WHITENESS OF WHITENESS: MEMOIR OF A WHITE MOTHER OF BLACK SONS* (1996); IAN F. HANEY LOPEZ, *WHITE BY LAW: THE LEGAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE* (1996); TONI MORRISON, *PLAYING IN THE DARK: WHITENESS AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION* (1992); ERIC J. SUNDQUIST, *TO WAKE THE NATIONS: RACE IN THE MAKING OF AMERICAN LITERATURE* (1993); HOWARD WINANT, *RACIAL CONDITIONS: POLITICS, THEORY, COMPARISONS* (1994).

29. Cheryl I. Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, 106 HARV. L. REV. 1707, 1713 (1993).

30. See generally JENNIFER L. HOCHSCHILD, *THE NEW AMERICAN DILEMMA: LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND SCHOOL DESEGREGATION* (1984).

reinforcing. In effect, the apparent anomaly is an actual symbiosis.

The extreme inequality of property and wealth in America is the direct result of the historic and continuing willingness of a great many, perhaps most, white people to identify with and attempt to emulate those at the top of the economic heap while comforting their likely permanent lowly state by disidentifying and refusing to join with blacks and other people of color.

This may not be a curable defect in our societal structure. Rather, it is likely a key component in the stability of a nation built on the seemingly contradictory standards of a free market economy, where wealth percolates to the top, and popular democracy, where the universality of voting should serve as a continuing challenge to the wealthy.

And that is what the young Buddy tried to tell the older men back in Mississippi.

Sure, we whites kin have what we want long as what we want's is drinkin' beer in the heat and dust 'round a two-pump station out in the country. That, and keepin' niggers down. None of us got much of nothin' worthwhile. Meantime, the fat cats runnin' the companies and gettin' themselves elected to high office livin' better 'n we ever dream. When we goin' to get smart?<sup>31</sup>

There is some positive news. The economic and political role of whiteness is now being identified and challenged by a host of writers and in a growing number of courses and workshops. Enlightening white people as to the real benefits and the great cost of their property in whiteness will require a herculean task that, in substantial part, must be undertaken by knowledgeable whites.<sup>32</sup>

Its success, though, would pose a serious threat to the inequality of wealth and property which, as much as we would like to eliminate the horrific disparities, may be the major component in the nation's stability. Social reforms, though, usually lead to the revelation of new problems, new challenges. That fact should spur, not discourage, our efforts to recognize the injustices before us now, try to correct them, and hope that those who follow us will do the same.

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31. BELL, *supra* note 1, at 108.

32. See, e.g., BEVERLY DANIEL TATUM, WHY ARE ALL THE BLACK KIDS SITTING TOGETHER IN THE CAFETERIA? (1997).