



The Diversity Advancement Project

THINKING CHANGE:

Race, Framing and the Public Conversation on Diversity.
What Social Science Tells Advocates About
Winning Support for Racial Justice Policies.

Prepared by The Center
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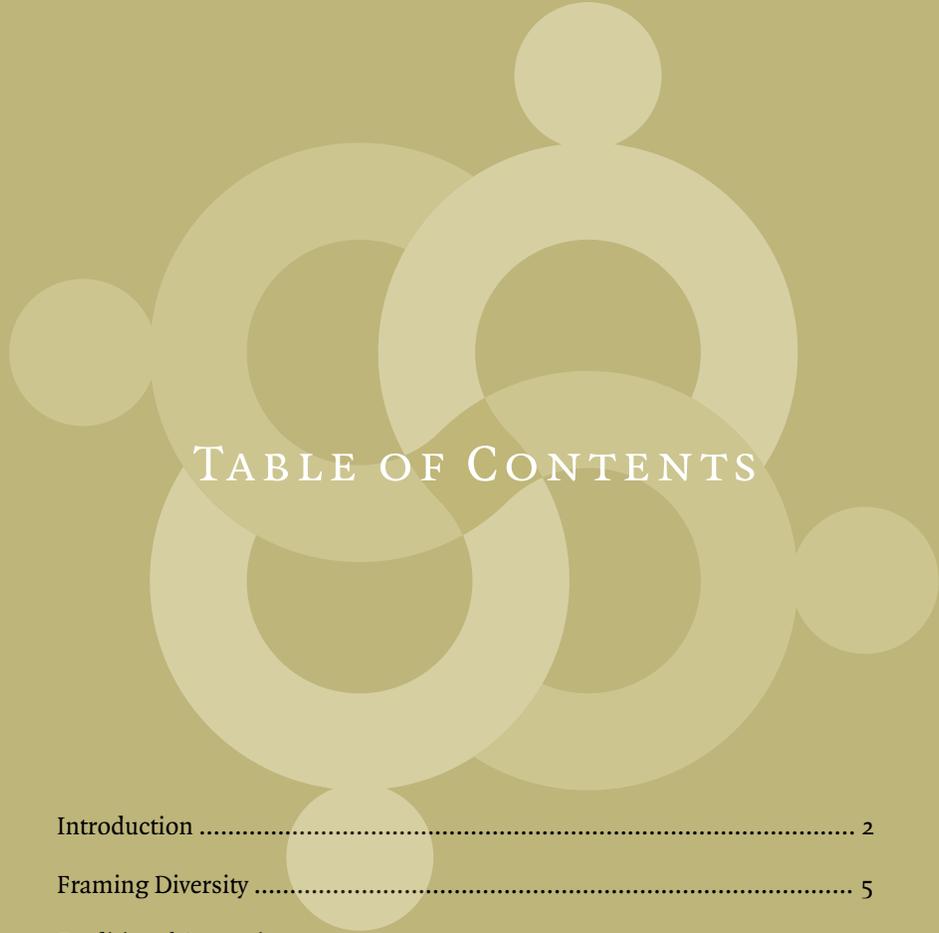


TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction 2
- Framing Diversity 5
- Traditional Strategies 9
 - 1. Views 10
 - 2. Campaigns..... 11
 - Traditional Communications 11
 - Short-Term and Long-Term Strategies 13
 - Demographic Context 15
 - 3. Race and Framing 15
- Context and Environment 17
- Conclusion 25

Introduction



Decades of research, practical experience and just plain common sense have yielded one irrefutable fact: Diversity is the engine that drives a healthy U.S. democracy and economy. Despite that fact, America's public and private institutions have not yet achieved full, meaningful diversity, and the gains that have been made are under continuous attack. That's in spite of the crucial 2003 Supreme Court decision approving the University of Michigan Law School's admissions system, which was designed to admit a "critical mass" of non-White male and female students and White female students. The law school's program was strongly supported in virtually every quarter of society, including the military, Fortune 500 businesses, educators and psychologists. They not only supported it, they articulated the importance of diversity to citizenship and the future of our country. The Court's ruling fell short, however, because it failed to require strategies to promote diversity, even as it formally recognized its importance to our country's well-being. That may be why foes of diversity have regrouped and are aggressively attacking scholarship and mentoring programs and other strategies to make colleges and universities more diverse.

If these attacks on higher education diversity programs are successful, the impact will extend beyond the realm of access to advanced degrees. It could turn back the clock on the progress America has made in creating a diverse workplace. With less diversity in education and

our workforce, our interpersonal contacts with people from different backgrounds will be even more fractured. Our society will be less harmonious and our democracy irreparably harmed. Yet the research shows that many Americans are ambivalent about supporting programs to achieve diversity.

This ambivalence most likely stems from the intellectually-flawed dialogues our society uses to debate diversity, a concept called "framing." Framing relates to how people think, which shapes how they process research and arguments.

We all have cognitive frames, or mental structures, that we use to process and interpret information.¹ Frames operate subconsciously, but are very powerful and difficult to alter. This is because frames consist of values, metaphors, symbols, language, messages, and messengers...and they may differ dramatically for each individual. Frames help us create meaning and they mediate our perceptions of reality. The frame is the core idea, or narrative.² A frame triggers a domino effect that unlocks other related ideas. Multiple frames form parts of larger packages – constellations of metaphors, catch-phrases, and other condensing symbols³ – what some refer to as meta-frames. Metaphors are an especially powerful frame element. They not only describe reality, but also construct it. Metaphors judge, influence, and persuade.

¹ GEORGE LAKOFF, *DON'T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT: KNOW YOUR VALUES AND FRAME THE DEBATE* xi-xii (Chelsea Green Publishing Co. 2004).

² William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani, *The Changing Culture of Affirmative Action*, 3 *RESEARCH IN POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY* 137, 143 (1987).

³ *Id.*

For example, affirmative action is currently framed around perceived merit, or lack thereof – and unfairness to Whites.⁴ Anti-affirmative action initiatives have mastered the use of co-opting civil rights language to confuse voters. This tactic obscures the benefits of diversity to key constituencies, like White women, and to society as a whole. When society and all its members fail to see the broad context of how and why race-conscious policies are created – ultimately ignoring the structural barriers to opportunity that many women and people of color still experience – it’s easy to understand how an individual could conclude that race- and gender-conscious programs seem unfair.

Couple that attitude with the lack of a public sensibility about the benefits of diversity in America, and the problem is only compounded. We must expand the public’s ability to recognize and acknowledge the nuanced ways in which structural barriers continue to hobble women and all people of color. Also, we have to stress the message that our society as a whole benefits when we expand opportunities to those who have been denied throughout history. Only then will we open up a public discussion that can nurture increased public support for dismantling the racial hierarchy that exists in this country, and promote an enlightened understanding of the need for

race- and gender-conscious programs. If the conversation remains unchanged, we will lose.

There is reason for optimism. Social science research tells us that it is possible to influence behaviors, attitudes and opinions. Experience tells us this, too. For example, over the past 40 years the Political Right has elevated the frames of individualism and limited government as part of a long-term strategy to reverse civil rights and public welfare programs. Recognizing that perception is stronger than reality and that emotion is a crucial element in manipulating perception, the late Lee Atwater, a Republican strategist and former head of the Republican National Committee, spoke the line that has become a mantra: “When we want your opinion, we’ll give it to you.”⁵ The Right’s success in championing individualism and limited government—often to the detriment of many vulnerable sectors of society—is based in part on the power of framing. They’ve also succeeded in embedding these frames so strongly in the American consciousness that they’ve caused people to change their attitudes and behavior around issues like diversity.

This report examines the debate around pro-diversity campaign strategy. It scrutinizes the tools we have typically used to advance these strategies and analyzes the pertinent social science research that could support

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⁴ Recent polls confirm this perception, showing that while many Americans support racial diversity, much fewer support affirmative action programs, which they see as preferences for non-Whites. See Will Lester, Poll Finds 80% Support College Diversity, But Only Half Consider Affirmative Action Vital, DETROIT FREE PRESS, March 8, 2003, available at http://www.freep.com/news/education/affirm8_20030308.htm (summarizing a poll conducted by ICR/ International Communications Research of Media, Pa. for the Associated Press, which found that 4 out of 5 adults and 80 percent of young adults polled think it’s important for colleges to have racially diverse student bodies; but also finding only 50 percent of adults and 60 percent of young adults think affirmative action programs remain necessary); see also U.S. EMBASSY, INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTER, Affirmative Action, at www.usembassy.de/usa/classroom/affirmativeaction.htm (reprinting the results of a January 19-21, 2003 NBC News/ Wall Street Journal national poll conducted by Peter Hart and Robert Teeter which found that of 500 adults polled, only 26 percent support the public universities’ “use of race as one of the factors in admissions to increase diversity in the student body”).

⁵ Glenn Feldman, Ugly Roots: Race, Emotion, and the Rise of the Modern Republican Party in Alabama and the South, in BEFORE BROWN: CIVIL RIGHTS AND WHITE BACKLASH IN THE MODERN SOUTH 302, 268-309 (Glenn Feldman ed., University of Alabama Press 2004).

and advance our strategies. We begin with an overview of traditional strategies, their strengths and limitations, and what questions these limitations raise. Next, we'll examine previous campaigns and the tools used to make them successful. Then we'll review and analyze relevant social science research on opinions and how they are molded and influenced. The report concludes by quantifying the implications of the research, and offers a detailed look at current strategies for moving forward.

Taken together, research across a broad range of disciplines suggests the following:

- The concept of framing, or the ways ideas are shaped and presented to the public, is very powerful. Framing affects our response to data and research. Studies show that if the data and research do not fit the frame, people tend to reject the data and research, not the frame.
- Group identity shapes racial attitudes and behavior. Facts and self-interest are not as important as values and identity in influencing behavior.
- Context and environmental factors shape and shift our identity, attitudes and behaviors.
- How we construct the discussion around race can influence our behaviors and attitudes.

The good news is that the research also yields strategies for changing the public conversation. Because Americans are psycho-socially complex, and often juggle multiple identities in the workplace, home, and social realms, we need an array of strategies to promote meaningful support for diversity. This requires work on multiple levels, including medium and long-term cognitive framing and public education campaigns which influence

the behavior of public opinion leaders and others. It also requires short-term tactical strategies in states or localities where individual battles around affirmative action are joined, producing results that begin to shift the dominant frames.

These framing strategies must overlap and complement each other. They must be coordinated with targeted policy reforms and program agendas as a supportive foundation for race-conscious policy advocates. Framing, coupled with targeted public education and campaign strategies, must anticipate the contextual realities of different regions of the country. Also, different frames may be required to move different constituencies in different parts of the country. Developing and coordinating these multiple strategies would mark a new tactical frontier for advocates to build long-term support and sustainable change in public policy.

To accomplish this, we must cultivate a broader range of tools to engage target constituencies. Typically, focus groups and polling research have been our main strategies for creating and testing messages to influence the public on the importance of race-conscious policies. As important as these tools are, they have not helped us master the art of framing, or taught us to shape new identities and behaviors in ways that can significantly influence policy. We need to develop and use tools that incorporate contextual and environmental conditions, which will elicit a productive discussion around racial and gender hierarchy among target groups. With those tools, we will have the power to broker the conversation, which will enable deeper and more nuanced discussions about who we are and what opportunities we have.



FRAMING DIVERSITY

Framing Diversity



Decades of social science research help explain why advocates have such a difficult task influencing constituencies to support affirmative action. As a culture, Americans don't readily see how context affects our behaviors and decisions.⁶ In particular, many Whites in the U.S. adamantly refuse to recognize structural unfairness. This is a very important fact. Without the ability to recognize the central context – racial hierarchy and the privileges it confers on Whites – it is not possible to convince them to support affirmative action or other race-conscious policies or programs. They do not see them as fair to people of color and women, but as unfair to Whites.

Not surprisingly, when civil rights groups and political scientists poll Americans on their views of the relative status of African Americans, Whites firmly believe that African Americans are doing very well.⁷ They are ignorant of or choose not to see these disparities, even though periodic studies and analyses identify rampant persistent gaps in areas like access to health care, quality

of education, and ability to purchase real estate or secure loans. Strikingly, recent focus group research suggests that even self-described liberal Whites view affirmative action as unfair and aren't convinced it's still necessary in today's world.⁸ Political ideology may help inform the debate, but "liberal" politics do not readily translate into support for race-conscious policies and programs.

Research on *how* we think (as opposed to *what* we think) yields additional insight on strategic directions or "frames" pro-diversity advocates must consider if they want to effectively influence the diversity debate.

The way we think, and the power of frames in helping us think, explains why people reject powerful research on the benefits and necessity of affirmative action. No matter how accurate, if the conclusion of data or research does not match the cognitive frame we are using at the time we hear it, we will reject the data and research; not the cognitive frame.⁹ This explains why many Whites, even when presented with evidence to the contrary, reject the need for affirmative action. Empirical evidence does

⁶ See Richard E. Nisbett et al., *Culture and Systems of Thought: Holistic Versus Analytic Cognition*, 108 *PSYCHOLOGICAL REVIEW* 291, 297-98 (2001) (citing Takahiko Masuda and Richard E. Nisbett, *Culture and Attention to Object vs. Field* (2001) (unpublished manuscript, University of Michigan)).

⁷ MICHAEL K. BROWN ET AL., *WHITE-WASHING RACE: THE MYTH OF A COLOR-BLIND SOCIETY* 225 (Michael K. Brown et al. eds, University of California Press 2003) (summarizing a 2001 Washington Post poll indicating attitudes toward Black and Latino economic progress by race (Washington Post/ Kaiser Foundation/ Harvard University Racial Attitudes Survey, WASHINGTON POST, July 11, 2001)).

⁸ BELDEN, RUSSONELLO & STEWART, *Reintroducing Affirmative Action: Moving beyond Slogans to Find Common Ground* 15-17 (Nov. 2004) (Commissioned by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights) (on file with CSI).

⁹ LAKOFF, *supra* note 1, at 17.

not support anti-affirmative action frames, many of which actually defy logic.¹⁰ Affirmative action is often framed as “preferential treatment” for “unqualified beneficiaries” (usually African Americans). Affirmative action is portrayed and perceived by many as an affront to values of “fairness,” “colorblindness,” “merit” and “individualism” – an unfair system of racial preferences and quotas that creates victims of “reverse discrimination” (usually White males).¹¹

Additionally, these symbols, metaphors, value conceptions, and language of anti-affirmative action frames resonate so well because they reinforce and protect White identity. Sociologist David Wellman explains that the affirmative action debate is really about “disputes over advantage, power, and control.”¹² The debate over “fairness,” etc. is used to construct and express White identity, especially heterosexual male identity as “self-made, self-sufficient, self-reliant, independent, hard working, disciplined, and tough” and to denote racial otherness. Color marks students who are not qualified.¹³

Interview-based research with working- and middle-class Whites helps illustrate how frames of “individualism” are deeply entrenched among many

Whites, even though these frames deny the existence of privilege, and promote a flawed concept of “fairness” as something that is deserved or earned. Even when White interviewees identified the role that personal connections played in their success at getting jobs, they clung to the frame that no one helped them and they got jobs because of their individual efforts and merit. Many Whites are blind to structural unfairness precisely because of their structural advantages – access to social, cultural and economic capital “protect whites from having to face...the market forces that they so readily see as the solution to the disadvantage of blacks and other nonwhites.”¹⁴ Their frame of colorblind “equal opportunity” allows many Whites to see themselves as supporting racial equality, and even as part of the solution, while actually maintaining racial hierarchy and legitimating White privilege.¹⁵

These dominant frames around affirmative action flourish because they’re embodied by strategically-chosen messengers. For example, consider the lead plaintiffs in the Michigan affirmative action cases, Barbara Grutter and Jennifer Gratz. Both are White women, one from a working-class family.¹⁶ By choosing White women as the named plaintiffs, affirmative action foes took gender equality and

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¹⁰ David Wellman, From “New Political Linguistics” to Anti-Affirmative Action Minstrels, 26 *SOCIALIST REVIEW* 147, 148 (1996).

¹¹ *Id.* at 149; Laura Stoker, Understanding Whites’ Resistance to Affirmative Action: The Role of Principled Commitments and Racial Prejudice, in *PERCEPTION AND PREJUDICE* 146, 135-70 (Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley eds. 1998) (referencing previous research that suggests opposition to affirmative action is due to a “belief that blacks violate cherished American values” such as individualism, self-reliance, the work ethic, obedience and discipline).

¹² Wellman, *supra* note 10, at 153.

¹³ *Id.* at 149-51.

¹⁴ Nancy DiTomaso, Rochelle Parks-Yancy, and Corinne Post, White Views of Civil Rights: Color Blindness and Equal Opportunity, in *WHITE OUT: THE CONTINUING SIGNIFICANCE OF RACISM* 190, 189-198 (Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva eds., Routledge 2003).

¹⁵ *Id.* at 190.

¹⁶ See Maryanne George, Rejected Applicants to University of Michigan Join Discrimination Lawsuit, *DETROIT FREE PRESS*, March 25, 2003.

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societal benefits out of the debate and reinforced a frame that was solely about race and racial preferences. The Right has also reinforced a racialized frame by using people of color as messengers. For example, Ward Connerly, a Black businessman, has been the public face for most anti-affirmative action ballot initiatives throughout the country.

Although the current dominant frames in our public discourse don't support race-conscious policies and programs, like affirmative action, the research offers reason for hope. It signals the existence of multiple and competing frames. This suggests that given the right contextual and environmental factors, the frames people use can change. For example, George Lakoff suggests that Americans tend to have both a strict father frame and a contradictory, competing nurturant parent frame.¹⁷ According to the strict father frame, competition is necessary for a moral world, those who are moral should be in power, and

lack of success indicates lack of moral strength and self-discipline. The nurturant parent frame, on the other hand, emphasizes empathy and social responsibility, and favors social policies that ensure people's well-being such as access to health care and education.¹⁸ While the strict father frame is dominant now, Lakoff argues that it is possible to cultivate a shift to the nurturant parent frame. Also, certain constituencies tend to cling to particular dominant frames, (e.g. working-class Whites and the individual responsibility frame on equality), highlighting the importance of strategically choosing target constituencies for frame-shifting. The nurturant parent frame may not be the answer to the question about what frames will support race-conscious policies. People of color may not often be seen by Whites as a part of the family. Nonetheless, linguists, psychologists and sociologists have pointed to reframing or frame-breaking as a necessary ingredient in any recipe for moving public opinion.

¹⁷ LAKOFF, *supra* note 1, at 20-21.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 6-13.



TRADITIONAL STRATEGIES

Traditional Strategies

I. Views

Framing has not been a part of the strategies supporters of race-conscious policies and programs have used to get support for diversity, although they often discuss elements of frame. Pro-affirmative action advocates, academics, policy makers and community leaders have expressed a wide-ranging set of views about the best way to win the hearts and minds of the American public. Some have tried to avoid confronting the issue of racial hierarchy, at least initially. For example, some have suggested using the less controversial approach of promoting a class-conscious strategy, through programs that use poverty as a proxy for race. Others have explored “race-neutral” messages and communications strategies designed to gradually introduce complex dialogue on race-conscious programs with Whites.

Still others argue that the heart of the battle lies within the meaning of race, suggesting only in that realm will the ultimate victory occur. At the center of this debate is the issue of “messaging.” Some advocates defend the use of terms such as “affirmative action” (which some focus group and polling research suggest many people flatly reject compared to terms like “diversity”). They believe efforts should center on changing the way the media defines the term. Others suggest developing a language around alternative terms, like “opportunity” and “fairness,” when discussing the need for race-conscious programs.

Proponents of race-neutral strategies point to how successfully they were embraced by focus groups or to polls where race-conscious messages have been rejected – particularly by White participants. On the other hand, advocates who promote a more confrontational approach about race base their conclusion on the way media is structured and stories are framed. They argue that in their experience, stories that exploited tensions surrounding race, i.e. “playing the race card,” received

much more attention, as opposed to strategies where race was downplayed.

There are many real world examples that arguably support both views. For example, Californians approved Proposition 209, the referendum ending affirmative action in public education and government contracting. Statewide, many of the anti-Prop 209 coalition members used a race-neutral strategy. On the other hand, affirmative action advocates in Los Angeles succeeded in defeating Prop 209 locally by using a racially explicit strategy. In yet another example, Houston voters defeated a measure similar to Prop 209. The coalition defending against the attack on Houston’s support of affirmative action in contracting programs adopted an approach which reminded people that ending these programs would mean a return to the “old boy” network. People understood this language in race and gender terms, but it was a more subtle approach. The coalition’s strategies appealed to notions of fairness in a way that could resonate with African Americans, Latinos, and Whites.

Advocates of racial justice claim an important win on California Proposition 54, which would have prohibited the state from gathering data by race. That win suggests how the affirmative action debate may produce different responses than those caused by other race-conscious programs. Racial justice advocates defeated Proposition 54 with a racially explicit message that emphasized its potential harm to Blacks and Latinos. Ultimately, protecting the health of the citizenry was a more dominant theme or “frame,” one that voters could easily embrace.¹⁹ Also, unlike affirmative action, the Proposition 54 data collection debate did not tap into perceptions of group-based competition.

If the goal is to educate the public about racial and gender unfairness to create long-term support for race- and gender-conscious programs, the evidence seems to

¹⁹ Stephen Magagnini, *How Foes Defeated Race Data Initiative: Their Unified Campaign Made a Practical Appeal Based on Health Issues*, SACRAMENTO BEE, October 9, 2003, at <http://www.sacbee.com>.

suggest that race-neutral strategies will fail. Messages that ignore how race is often a seminal part of barriers to opportunity may not resonate with communities of color. They may also prevent Whites from seeing the need for race-conscious programs. Instead, the values diversity supporters express and the messages they use should be closely scrutinized. The messengers may vary, and the approach may not need to be “in-your-face.” Contextual aspects like demographics, local experiences and events should help shape this strategy.

2. Campaigns

Traditional Communications Strategies

Traditionally, campaigns focus their communications strategies around “messages” that will resonate with the electorate. Typically, those messages are identified and tested through focus groups, polling and surveying. These methods can tell us what people think, but not how they think. For example, White Americans generally believe we live in a colorblind society. They believe that civil rights laws have “leveled the playing field” and that today poverty is evidence of personal failure, not structural barriers to opportunity. Understanding how people think demonstrates why they adopt the colorblind society myth, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

According to social psychologists, people are

unaware of what motivates them, even if they think they know. Asking them is not a reliable way of determining what motivates them.²⁰ Focus groups and polls can tell us where people are at a given moment, but not necessarily how to move them. They are static and do not reflect real world environments. As a result, they may or may not help us identify what social and emotional contexts might trigger support for race-conscious policies. Therefore, messages based primarily on public opinion data can’t yield nuanced insight about how to shape strategies for different real world settings. Polling data appears to have limits in its ability to resonate widely with target constituencies.

For example, efforts to win White women’s support for affirmative action in Washington and California centered on messages developed in focus groups. These messages identified how White women benefit from affirmative action.²¹ Tim Wise and others have suggested that this kind of narrow self-interest message failed to reap the intended results.²² It appears that many White women made their decisions based on a broader “self-interest” – they considered not only their own goals, but their perceptions of the program’s negative impact on their husbands and sons.²³

In predominantly White localities, the most successful communications strategies occurred when affirmative action advocates used a few clear and consistent messages – and the right messenger.²⁴ For example,

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²⁰ See Axel Aubrun and Joseph Grady, Cultural Logic LLC, *Thinking About Race: Findings from Cognitive Elicitations 2* (August 2, 2004) (on file with CSI) (stating, “some of the attitudinal challenges faced by advocates stem from patterns of reasoning that individuals do not articulate directly, and may not even be entirely aware of”).

²¹ Sumi Cho, *Understanding White Women’s Ambivalence towards Affirmative Action: Theorizing Political Accountability*, 71 UMKC L. REV. 399, 399 (2002).

²² Tim Wise, *Is Sisterhood Conditional? White Women and the Rollback of Affirmative Action*, NWSA Journal, Volume 10, Number 3 (1998), available at <http://iupjournals.org/nwsa/nwsa10-3.html>; Prop 209 was approved statewide by 54% to 45%. Only 42% of White women voted to retain affirmative action. Cho, supra note 21, at 400 (citing Mark DiCamillo, The Field Institute, *A Review of Voting and Political Demography in 1996*, CALIFORNIA OPINION INDEX, Feb. 1997, at <http://field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/COI-96-97-Feb-Voting.pdf>). In the end, I-200 garnered 58% of the vote, with approximately 51% of White women supporting its passage. *Id.*

²³ Cho, supra note 21, at 409; Wise, supra note 22.

²⁴ Political analysts have also suggested that change in the ballot wording, from references to preferential treatment to a statement that indicated that the ballot if passed would end affirmative action programs, made the difference in the vote outcome. SCRIPPS HOWARD TEXAS POLL (taken October 27 through November 7, 1999) (showing almost 50% support generally among Texans for affirmative action policy contrasted with almost two-thirds of Houston residents opposing race or gender preferences).

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Houston's mayor, Bill Lanier, a White man, urged voters to reject Proposition A, the anti-affirmative action ballot initiative, because it would preserve the "old boy network." He and others reinforced this message by repeating a single set of statistics: "Anglo male contractors got between 95 percent and 99 percent of the business before the affirmative action program got started 12 years ago. Today, they still get 80 percent."²⁵ Though Houston's population is predominantly African American and Latino, this message had a universal appeal without being racially explicit. It tapped values of fairness in a way that would resonate not only with African Americans and Latinos, but particularly with White women. It also emphasized the notion of racialized unfairness implicit in a White old boys' network.

Another reason for the Houston campaign's success may have been because it avoided triggering group-based competition. The Houston Chronicle suggested that "losing one's job or a spot at a university [may be] more dramatic and newsworthy than occasionally losing out on a bid." Affirmative action fights which revolve around access to higher education may backfire by allowing anti-affirmative action forces to highlight more sympathetic and symbolic examples of "victims" of "reverse discrimination."

The pro-diversity messages used in the statewide campaigns against California's Prop 209 and Washington's I-200 differed from the strategy in Houston. In both campaigns, affirmative action proponents developed

a laundry list of messages with no apparent unifying theme, including many equivocal frames, such as "mend it, don't end it." The underlying theme of those messages was an admission of flaws with the affirmative action program. This may have unintentionally reinforced the anti-affirmative action messages.²⁶ In Washington, polls showed that many Washingtonians believed wrongly that the affirmative action ban would reform, not end, affirmative action programs.²⁷ Unlike the anti-Prop 209 campaign in California, the Washington state campaign presented a unified front, had editorial support from local press, substantial financial support from major corporations, and key state Democrats as spokespeople. Still, it couldn't effectively drive home the message that I-200 would end affirmative action, or convince enough voters that affirmative action was still necessary.

Neither the Washington nor California campaigns to defend affirmative action used racially explicit messaging. The Washington strategy emphasized gender, focusing on women as primary beneficiaries and highlighting the negative consequences if I-200 passed. Even so, White women tended to view affirmative action as a minority program that was no longer necessary.²⁸ The same thing happened in California. When messages did focus on race, they tended to be equivocal, conceding flaws in affirmative action while arguing for its necessity to end racism and sexism.²⁹ It's also not clear if either campaign used credible messengers whose status could influence Whites, particularly women, as did the Houston campaign.

²⁵ BERKELEY MEDIA STUDIES GROUP, *A New Debate on Affirmative Action: Houston and Beyond* 5, 13 (January 1998) (on file with CSI) (quoting Mayor Bob Lanier, THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE, Oct. 26, 1997, at 5C).

²⁶ See Tom Brune and David Postman, *Seattle Times Washington Poll – Initiative 200 – What Do Voters Say?*, SEATTLE TIMES, July 13, 1998, at A1; see also BERKELEY MEDIA STUDIES GROUP, *Talking Back: The Affirmative Action Debate* 5-8 (Certain Trumpet Program September 1996) (on file with CSI) (identifying primary messages being used by pro-affirmative action advocates in the California campaign, including "necessary medicine" that appeared in over 40% of 221 news pieces on Prop 209 from March to May of 1996).

²⁷ Tom Brune, *Poll: I-200 Passage Was Call for Reform*, SEATTLE TIMES, Nov. 4, 1998, at A1.

²⁸ Tom Brune and David Postman, *Women's Vote Key in I-200 Campaign*, SEATTLE TIMES, July 13, 1998, at A1.

²⁹ See BERKELEY MEDIA STUDIES GROUP, *supra* note 26.

The bottom line? Strategy and infrastructure matter. In both Washington and California campaigns, the Right has fostered a long-term media strategy. The Right has honed and nurtured its media influence for decades, in part by co-opting widely familiar Civil Rights language to confuse the public about the intent and impact of affirmative action ballot initiatives and legislative strategies. In that kind of rhetorical atmosphere, racial justice opponents also tend to get to the media first.³⁰ Moreover, media coverage tends to be de-contextualized.³¹ Typically, anti-affirmative action positions are quoted without context or deeper investigation that might challenge the facts, values and stereotypes imbedded in anti-affirmative action messages. Journalists insert a few pro-affirmative quotes to contest facts and dominant frames and leave it at that.³²

While the Right's resources and media access pose serious challenges for racial justice advocates, they have not always prevailed. Challenges to affirmative action have been beaten back not only in Houston, but in Colorado as well. While the American public is leery of affirmative action, it still appears to value the fairness that is embodied in America's theme of equal opportunity. These facts strongly suggest that if pro-diversity forces develop long-term strategies, while honing their ability to quickly tackle short-term challenges, we will win. Winning requires both a cogent media strategy and a constituency-building strategy that acknowledges regional, racial and class components. Both require clear themes, simple, strong messages, effective messengers and in-depth public education.

Short-Term and Long-Term Strategies

Choosing the best strategy should be based on whether we believe our work is long-term or short-term. The bulk of the debate about successful strategy has centered on targeted campaigns, such as attempts to defeat California's Prop 209. But this view may distort our understanding of what changes behaviors and attitudes. In short-term campaigns, there is little time to develop frames, experiment with different messages, or do in-depth community education. Short-term campaigns make it difficult to incubate strategies to build infrastructure and win the war, because their focus is so narrow and tuned to achieving a more immediate result. Moreover, cash-strapped advocates with insufficient resources may rely too heavily on a few focus groups or some polling to test messages. However, polling alone can't really measure with any depth or nuance how a particular message affects policy in the short or long-term. A poll highlighting support for principles in the abstract does not readily translate into actual policy support. Also, polling captures an opinion held in a specific moment. It can't tell us how people's attitudes and behavior led them to adopt that opinion.

Campaign successes and failures should also be considered in the context of referenda laws. Anti-affirmative action advocates often target states and cities for ballot initiatives where they believe they can easily manipulate the discourse.³³ Those localities provide direct access to arenas for mobilizing mass opinion. Opponents have succeeded with local initiatives by focusing their

While the American public is leery of affirmative action, it still appears to value the fairness that is embodied in America's theme of equal opportunity.

These facts strongly suggest that if pro-diversity forces develop long-term strategies, while honing their ability to quickly tackle short-term challenges, we will win.

³⁰ See LEE COKORINOS, *THE ASSAULT ON DIVERSITY: AN ORGANIZED CHALLENGE TO RACIAL AND GENDER JUSTICE* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003).

³¹ See Janine Jackson, *Affirmative Action Coverage Ignores Women—and Discrimination*, EXTRA! (Jan./ Feb. 1999), available at <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=1442> (analyzing six months of coverage on affirmative action).

³² Id.

³³ Local ballot initiatives remain key tactics in anti-civil rights strategy of the Right. Early diversity opponents recognized that policy success could be obtained at the local level, even in the face of a national pro-civil rights mood. See COKORINOS, *supra* note 30 (discussing divergence of local support from national support in the context of California's proposition 14, which sought to repeal California's Fair Housing Act of 1963). In 1964, California voters, who supported Lyndon Johnson for President 59.1% to 40.8%, also overwhelmingly endorsed the passage of a discriminatory ballot initiative (Proposition 14) 65.9% to 34.1%. Proposition 14 allowed real estate owners to discriminate in the sale or rental of housing. See *id.*

energies on swaying a largely uninformed public, rather than appealing to a legislative process requiring debate.³⁴ In addition, most anti-affirmative action and anti-racial justice ballot initiatives are designed to stoke racist attitudes and reinforce group-based tensions and competition.³⁵

Affirmative action advocates have found it extremely difficult to prevail in this context. Often anti-affirmative action state campaigns are connected to a highly-coordinated and well-funded network of legal, political, research, organizing, media, education and training structures, which the Right has been developing for the last four decades.³⁶ This forces affirmative action advocates to use most of their energies reacting to false charges and misinformation, so they are unable to set up an authoritative public debate.

Careful study of how long-term coalitions are formed appears to be the best way to beat back attacks on affirmative action. In places where affirmative action proponents prevailed, such as Los Angeles and Colorado, affirmative action advocacy was part of long-term coalition work. Colorado Unity's record of affirmative action and civil rights advocacy well preceded the 2004 attempt by state senators to pass a bill banning affirmative action in public education, hiring and contracts.³⁷

A comparison of the statewide and Los Angeles campaigns to defeat California's Prop 209 also yields crucial

insights about the importance of advocacy married to long-term strategy. The LA campaign differed significantly from the statewide coalition strategy. The statewide coalition was divided into two camps: one advocating a de-racialized strategy that focused on women; the other advocating a strategy emphasizing racial justice and fairness.³⁸ The former succeeded by deploying a strategy primarily driven by gender-based messaging, with little discussion of continuing racial discrimination and how Prop 209 would impact people of color. Primary opposition groups chose to de-racialize the debate from the outset of the campaign in 1995.³⁹

On the other hand, affirmative action advocates in Los Angeles pursued a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy that included intensive grass roots action. For example, AGENDA, the group that led the LA campaign against Prop 209, was an existing community-based organization with a history of multiracial organizing around racial justice issues.⁴⁰ They combined strategic communications, education, and organizing, with clearly-defined geographic and cross-sector outreach goals.⁴¹ Specifically, they coordinated efforts and developed joint campaigns with community-based organizations, civil rights groups, neighborhood and professional associations, labor, the religious community, youth, and the business community. This organic approach also used racial justice framing.⁴² They did not ignore gender but

In places where affirmative action proponents prevailed, such as Los Angeles and Colorado, affirmative action advocacy was part of long-term coalition work.

³⁴ See Gamson and Modigliani, *supra* note 2, at 143 (pointing out, "Every policy issue is contested in a symbolic arena frame."). The fact that the anti-affirmative action proposal in Colorado was state legislation may have contributed to its defeat, since it was a small group of senators and not the broader Colorado public that had to be persuaded.

³⁵ E.g., Cho, *supra* note 21, at 401 (noting attempts by Connerly and his allies to pit Asian Pacific Americans against other racial groups by painting them as poster children affirmative action victims).

³⁶ See COKORINOS, *supra* note 33.

³⁷ Karen Rouse, *Summit Defends Affirmative Action*, DENVER POST, Jan. 18, 2004 (noting that Colorado Unity, a coalition of civil rights, women's, labor and business groups, formed in 1996 to defend affirmative action and civil rights). Colorado is a somewhat distinct example from other past campaigns given that the target group was state senators, particularly Republican Senator Lew Entz, whose one vote was the key vote. In other words, it may not have been important in this instance to mobilize public support. COLORADO PROGRESSIVE COALITION, *Rare Victory for Civil Rights as The State Capitol Senate Defeats Affirmative Action Attack*, HISPANIA NEWS, Mar. 31, 2004, at <http://www.hispanianews.com/archive/2004/03/31/05.htm>.

³⁸ Magagnini, *supra* note 19.

³⁹ Wise, *supra* note 22.

⁴⁰ Telephone Interview by Ellen Braune, Consultant, Strategic Communications Services with Elsa Barboza, Campaign Coordinator, Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE) (March 3, 2005).

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

emphasized racial justice themes: e.g. “affirmative action is a key weapon in fighting racism and sexism,” “California cannot afford to go backward,” “Prop 209 threatens children’s education,” and “eliminating affirmative action would weaken the fight against racial profiling and hate crimes.” To communicate these themes, advocates tailored messages to the different constituencies. They were successful because they had already established relationships and built credibility within the communities they worked. Advocates expanded the communities they talked to and increased voter turnout, thus prioritizing constituent education, mobilization, and participation.⁴³

Demographic Context

Demographic differences in various regions of the country also appear to influence the outcome of campaigns, because local context influences whether or not a frame will resonate with voters. For instance, the racial demographics of both Los Angeles and Houston probably helped yield the victories for racial justice advocates. Both cities have significant populations of people of color.⁴⁴ In LA, Prop 209 was voted down 54% to 45% for the greater metropolitan area, which has a majority people of color. The count was 60% to 40% in the city, which has an even greater proportion of people of color. And in South LA, which is overwhelmingly Black and Latino, 90% of voters rejected Prop 209.⁴⁵ One poll estimated that in LA, 76% of Asian Americans supported affirmative action.⁴⁶ Because

of LA’s racial demographics, frames and messages that emphasized racial justice may have been pivotal to the local victory. In Houston, people of color comprised 60% of the city population.⁴⁷ Political analysts credited the defeat of Prop A to the record turnout by African Americans who voted 9 to 1 to keep affirmative action, while Whites supported the ban by a 2 to 1 margin.⁴⁸ Additionally, polling also showed 75% of Latinos supporting affirmative action.⁴⁹

Demographic trends may have been key factors in statewide fights, as well. In Colorado, the Republican Senator with the tie-breaking vote against the anti-affirmative action bill may have been swayed, in part, by the large percentage of Latinos in his district.⁵⁰ By contrast, in Washington State, which is 86% White, affirmative action advocates failed.⁵¹

3. Race and Framing

Framing isn’t everything. But it is vital. Some advocates are searching for “meta-frames” or master frames that resonate across different groups. Such universal framing or “mass communication” would reduce individual differences as much as possible. It seeks the most common element across communities. This is a framing approach which, if successful, could reap huge benefits in our efforts to impact the public debate. It also represents a distinct strategic and conceptual choice – cross-community frames.

However, there is a caveat: Both the nurturant parent frame and the mass communications strategy may

Demographic differences in various regions of the country also appear to influence the outcome of campaigns, because local context influences whether or not a frame will resonate with voters.

⁴³ Id.

⁴⁴ In 2000, people of color comprised about 53% of the Los Angeles population (11% African American, 10% Asian, and 32% other races (many Latino)). U.S. CENSUS BUREAU 2000.

⁴⁵ Telephone Interview with Elsa Barboza, *supra* note 40.

⁴⁶ Jerry Kang, *The Passage of 209: Its Meaning and the Future*, available at <http://www.law.ucla.edu/kang/Scholarship/Race/Editorials/Passage209/passage209.htm> (referencing a poll of over 950 Asian Pacific Americans, both English and non-English speakers, in Southern California conducted by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California).

⁴⁷ Tom Brune and Lynne K. Varner, *The Future of Affirmative Action – What Do Whites Want? – No Matter What It's Called, Whites Are Voting It Down*, SEATTLE TIMES, July 7, 1999, at A1.

⁴⁸ Id.

⁴⁹ SCRIPPS HOWARD TEXAS POLL, *supra* note 24.

⁵⁰ COLORADO PROGRESSIVE COALITION, HISPANIA NEWS, *supra* note 37.

⁵¹ Cho, *supra* note 21, at 400 (citing Sam Howe Verhovek, *In a Battle Over Preferences, Race and Gender Are at Odds*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 20, 1998, at A1).

under-estimate the power of race in our society. Race itself may exist as a frame or, at least, be deeply embedded in all existing frames. Reframing or frame-breaking work may be useless if it ignores race. The research suggests other approaches which may permit effective communications strategies around race. We discuss this in the next section.

Mass communications strategy development relies heavily on focus groups and other tested responses to alternative messages. Participants in focus groups often resist talking about race in any meaningful way, regardless of their own race. This leads some advocates to conclude that reframing messages should not be racially explicit. This conclusion, however, does not mesh with the predominant psychological research.

Psychologists understand emotion as the confluence of many principles that help create the “self,” such as complexity, connectionism, and information processing.⁵² Racially explicit dialogue is emotionally volatile and psychologically difficult for all racial groups. Psychologists who study emotions suggest that the strong emotional or avoidance responses race evokes emphasize the need to confront it.⁵³ A therapist who detects her patient’s unwillingness to talk about her father recognizes the need to explore that reaction, not avoid it entirely. Similarly, focus group results showing only grudging engagement in race discussions do not prove that race is an undesirable entry point for a discussion. Those findings may, however, be enormously valuable in strategically designing a way to broach the subject. It’s crucial to find ways to enter the conversation constructively, rather than shut it down before it has a chance to begin.

Different advocacy outcomes also demonstrate that we can succeed by using race openly. Past campaigns, such as AGENDA’s anti-Prop 209 campaign in Los Angeles, suggest that if campaign work is connected to other pro-diversity strategies, such as public education and framing work, it can be effective. Strategies must be multi-layered, simultaneous, and should build on existing organizational resources.

Still there are important caveats that should always be considered. While campaigns are necessary, the mixed success of past pro-affirmative action campaigns, coupled with the relentless efforts of racial justice opponents, require constant analysis of our strategies. There will always be campaigns, but we should be considering strategies that make them more successful. This includes understanding that while focus groups and other public opinion research are important and useful, they cannot tell us how to change behaviors. While polling data can help identify the most flexible constituencies, it should not be the sole engine for strategy development, or even the primary basis of message development.

Advocates may need to develop proactive strategies, like ballot initiatives, to contest anti-diversity initiatives. Because anti-affirmative action forces target states in which they can manipulate the debate with muddy, pro-civil rights language, pro-diversity advocates must consider reshaping the debate based on their own terms. Along with focused short-term campaigns, we must develop larger frames for moving public opinion. We must also develop targeted strategies for particular constituencies, including unique messages, metaphors and different messengers.

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⁵² Luc Ciompi, *Reflections on the Role of Emotions in Consciousness and Subjectivity from the Perspective of Affect-Logic*, CONSCIOUSNESS & EMOTION 181, 184-85 (2003).

⁵³ See *id.* at 192-93 (discussing how different emotional states influence the content of people’s consciousness and attitudes and the importance of considering the impact of emotion on thinking and attitudes).



CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT

Context and Environment



The research and advocacy required to frame the diversity debate demonstrate that any advocacy strategy to advance structural diversity goals has to involve a major reworking of the framing strategy. Yet, as powerful as this work is, reframing alone may not be enough to win broader public support. The frames we're likely to use at a particular moment are influenced by context and other environmental factors. Who we are has to be considered when developing a successful formula for impacting the public debate. Our identities impact the choices we make, including the policies we support, and people can present different identities in different contexts.

To make life easier, we create “in-group” and “out-group” categories. We attribute negative qualities to the out-group, and view them as stereotypes stripped of all context. At the same time, the research shows that identity is multiple, fluid and changes with context. This means that though we can't eliminate the human need to categorize, we can look for opportunities to re-define categories and

cultivate identities that support race-conscious policies.⁵⁴ Local demographic, political, and social realities in different parts of the country impact identities and frames differently. Advocates need to develop approaches that consider these regional, contextualized attitudes.

Group racial identity is important, because it helps to explain why people often support policies that are harmful to their individual self-interest. Group self-interest generally trumps individual self-interest, even when the two are in conflict.⁵⁵ A sense of shared fate often makes individuals view their self-interest in the context of their group interest.⁵⁶ One of the most important factors driving the racial policy attitudes of individual White Americans is the long-term fate of White America as a group.⁵⁷ For example, social science research concludes that working-class Whites oppose race-conscious policies because they believe they benefit Blacks by excluding working-class Whites from similar opportunities to advance.⁵⁸ Working- and lower-middle class Whites may believe that their very

Our identities impact the choices we make,
including the policies we support, and people can present
different identities in different contexts.

⁵⁴ PAUL L. WACHTEL, *RACE IN THE MIND OF AMERICA* 139 (Routledge 1999).

⁵⁵ See David O. Sears et al., *Race in American Politics: Framing the Debates*, in *RACIALIZED POLITICS: THE DEBATE ABOUT RACISM IN AMERICA* 1-43 (Sears et al. eds., University of Chicago Press 2000).

⁵⁶ Lawrence Bobo and James R. Kluegel, *Opposition to Race-Targeting: Self-Interest, Stratification Ideology, or Racial Attitudes?*, 58 *AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW* 443, 445 (1993).

⁵⁷ See Jim Sidanius et al., *It's Not Affirmative Action, It's the Blacks: The Continuing Relevance of Race in American Politics*, in *RACIALIZED POLITICS: THE DEBATE ABOUT RACISM IN AMERICA* 191-235 (David O. Sears et al. eds., University of Chicago Press 2000).

⁵⁸ Bobo and Kluegel, *supra* note 56, at 459; see also James R. Kluegel and Eliot R. Smith, *Affirmative Action Attitudes: Effects of Self-Interest, Racial Affect, and Stratification Beliefs on Whites' Views*, 61 *SOCIAL FORCES* 797, 811 (1983).

Local demographic, political, and social realities in different parts of the country impact identities and frames differently. Advocates need to develop approaches that consider these regional, contextualized attitudes.

role in society is undervalued by the middle and upper strata, their labor under-rewarded, and their problems ignored by the government in favor of the poor, Blacks and other minorities.⁵⁹ Even when Whites (e.g., White women) would benefit from affirmative action, they tend to withhold support because of the perceived threat affirmative action poses to Whites as a group.⁶⁰

Non-Whites are also influenced by racial group identity. Some social scientists believe this is why Blacks are generally more supportive of race-conscious policies and race-neutral welfare policies than are Whites of similar socioeconomic status.⁶¹ Latino attitudes toward policies are also shaped by racial identity, which can shift between pan-ethnic or nationalistic, depending on personal characteristics and the particular policy.⁶²

Why and how do we form group identities? Research shows that all humans have a strong tendency to favor our own “group” even when there’s no intergroup conflict or hostility.⁶³ In other words, the mere perception of belonging to two distinct groups (a process known as social categorization) is enough to trigger discrimination fueled

by an “our group” versus “that other group” mentality.⁶⁴ Experiments have found that even non-racialized random group assignments make people view in-group members more favorably than out-group members across a range of traits. People disproportionately attribute failures by in-group members to external situations out of their control, but view out-group members’ failures as caused by individual flaws.⁶⁵

Part of why we view the in-group so much more favorably is because we think of out-group members being highly homogeneous. People see their own groups as more complex than members of other groups.⁶⁶ We use schemas to do this. Schemas are one type of categorical structure that help us process incoming information. They bias what we see, how we interpret it, encode it, and store it in our memories. Prominent aspects of an event or situation will activate the relevant schema. In other words, if we see a member of the out-group only in terms of a stereotype (a type of schema), that person’s complexity means nothing to us because those complexities aren’t relevant to our group. This can lead to subconscious, unintentional discrimination.⁶⁷

As one group of social scientists put it “[stereotypes] are not individual attitudinal predilections, but deeply embedded, shared mental representations of social objects.” We construct them and change them communally, not individually.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ Cho, *supra* note 21, at 399 (referencing the theories of Nancy Ehrenreich, Professor of Law, College of Law, University of Denver).

⁶¹ Donald R. Kinder and Nicholas Winter, Exploring the Racial Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy, 45 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE 439, 450 (2001) (explaining racial group interest as implicated in “both the political principles that Blacks and Whites endorse and the group attachments and resentments they feel”).

⁶² Michael Jones-Correa and David L. Leal, Becoming “Hispanic”: Secondary Panethnic Identification Among Latin American-Origin Populations in the United States, 18 HISPANIC JOURNAL OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES 214, 230-32 (1996).

⁶³ Michelle Adams, Intergroup Rivalry, Anti-Competitive Conduct and Affirmative Action, 82 B.U. L. REV. 1089, 1102-03 (2002) (basing her analysis on a review of the social science literature on group identity and racial inequality).

⁶⁴ Sears et al., *supra* note 55, at 23-24 (referencing Vanneman and Pettigrew 1972); Linda Hamilton Krieger, The Content of Our Categories: A Cognitive Bias Approach to Discrimination and Equal Employment Opportunity, 47 STANFORD LAW REVIEW 1161, 1192-93 (1995).

⁶⁵ Krieger, *supra* note 64, at 1192.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 1194.

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 1190.

Groundbreaking psychological research shows that negative and positive attitudes can be influenced by contextual cues.

Not surprisingly, the more one is exposed to different groups of people, the greater one's awareness of the complexities that make up individuals within that group.

There's no avoiding the fact that human beings frequently use stereotypes to categorize people.⁶⁸ As one group of social scientists put it “[stereotypes] are not individual attitudinal predilections, but deeply embedded, shared mental representations of social objects.”⁶⁹ We construct them and change them communally, not individually.⁷⁰ Stereotypes, like other schemas, are very resistant to change because they are fundamental in helping us process information.

The central content of the stereotype usually rules our thinking – for example, whether Whites think Blacks are lazy or Latinos are prone to theft. But the content of the stereotype is not as important as the reasons people use stereotypes. Stereotypes often justify hierarchy and preferential treatment for “our” group. They can function the same way, even as content changes over time. For example, the Japanese have gone from being stereotyped as industrious to nefarious and back to industrious. But in every instance, the stereotype has been used to exclude them. People even use conflicting stereotypes in the same conversation to justify certain things (e.g., “Blacks are lazy

and they are taking all our jobs”), because what is relevant is that “we” should have the jobs, not “them.”

Groundbreaking psychological research shows that negative and positive attitudes can be influenced by contextual cues. For example, the research of Claude Steele and his colleagues has found that the way students are informed about the importance of their performance on standardized tests often influences how well or poorly they do on the tests. For example, Black students' performance improves dramatically when told that a standardized test will not impact their future success, but declines when told that their future depends on the outcome.⁷¹ White males and women who are told respectively that Asians or males perform better than them, do worse on tests than those who are not told this.⁷²

Political scientists studying the racial identity of Latinos have found that context shapes identity, political attitudes and policy support. While Latinos appear to self-identify primarily through national labels, and secondarily through pan-ethnic labels, these identities also shift depending on factors like age, education and when they immigrated. Pan-ethnic identities are more relevant on issues such as bilingual education.⁷³

But a significant body of social science research

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 1188-90.

⁶⁹ Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov, *Ethnicity as Cognition*, 33 *THEORY AND SOCIETY* 31, 39-40 (2004).

⁷⁰ WACHTEL, *supra* note 54, at 136.

⁷¹ Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, *Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans*, 69 *JOURNAL OF PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY* 797, 805-06 (1995).

⁷² Joshua Aronson et al., *When White Men Can't Do Math: Necessary and Sufficient Factors in Stereotype Threat*, 35 *JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY* 29, 37-38 (1999), available at <http://www.idealibrary.com>; Steven J. Spencer, Claude M. Steele, and Diane M. Quinn, *Stereotype Threat and Women's Math Performance*, 35 *JOURNAL OF EXPERIMENTAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY* 4, 12 (1999), available at <http://www.idealibrary.com>.

⁷³ Jones-Correa and Leal, *supra* note 62, at 229.

concludes that people are more likely to oppose race-conscious policy when a scarcity frame, or zero-sum outcome is highlighted. If we tailor our operative frames using context and environmental factors, we can make a significant impact. This appears to be especially true for working-class White males, but also among some people of color. Perceptions of scarcity influence how individuals view the opportunities of their racial group. People who perceive their racial group as receiving unfair treatment in the larger social order are more likely to view members of other racial groups as competitive threats.⁷⁴ For example, public support for race-conscious policies depends on who is perceived to benefit the most. Especially in times of economic decline, the more programs are perceived as benefiting one particular group, the less support they receive from the public.⁷⁵

Research consistently shows that Whites are most likely to feel hostile about policies that benefit Blacks.⁷⁶ They support programs for women slightly more. Programs to improve the social and economic position of Blacks and other minorities elicit greater support than programs for Blacks alone.⁷⁷ Other research shows that the larger the size of the local Black population, the

more Whites oppose equal outcome and opportunity enhancement policies, especially outside of the South.⁷⁸ Whites are less sensitive to the size of the local Asian American or Latino/a populations.⁷⁹

At first glance, the fact that many Whites are hostile towards policies perceived to benefit other racial groups is very disheartening. However, the research suggests that this hostility occurs mostly among working-class Whites, again highlighting the importance of targeting groups and sub-groups that may be more ambivalent than completely resistant. In other words, if we can identify relevant environmental factors, we can influence people to shift their frame to a more supportive stance. Among groups of color at least, those who see their groups as disadvantaged are more likely to perceive other groups as disadvantaged.⁸⁰ Not only do principles, interest and group identity matter, who we are talking to impacts what we say we believe. Recent research by political scientists Donald R. Kinder and Nicholas Winter found that more integrated settings produce moderation in opinion from Blacks and Whites.⁸¹

Advocates should analyze social and cognitive psychology for useful tools to craft strategies that change people's minds about affirmative action. To summarize the

Perceptions of scarcity influence how individuals view the opportunities of their racial group. People who perceive their racial group as receiving unfair treatment in the larger social order are more likely to view members of other racial groups as competitive threats.

⁷⁴ Lawrence Bobo and Vincent L. Hutchings, *Perceptions of Racial Group Competition: Extending Blumer's Theory of Group Position to a Multiracial Social Context*, 61 *AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW* 951, 956 (1996).

⁷⁵ Lawrence Bobo and James R. Kluegel, *supra* note 56, at 445 (quoting WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON, *THE TRULY DISADVANTAGED: THE INNER CITY, THE UNDERCLASS, AND PUBLIC POLICY* 118 (University of Chicago Press 1987)).

⁷⁶ JON HURWITZ AND MARK PEFLEY, *PERCEPTION AND PREJUDICE* 146 (1998); Charlotte Steeh and Maria Krysan, *Affirmative Action and the Public, 1970-1995*, 60 *THE PUBLIC OPINION QUARTERLY* 128, 137 (1996).

⁷⁷ Steeh and Krysan, *supra* note 76, at 137.

⁷⁸ The South may be different. Because there have always been large numbers of Blacks in the South, southern Whites may be less sensitive to large numbers of Blacks.

⁷⁹ Marylee C. Taylor, *The Significance of Racial Context*, in *RACIALIZED POLITICS: THE DEBATE ABOUT RACISM IN AMERICA* 119, 118-36 (David O. Sears et al. eds., University of Chicago Press 2000).

⁸⁰ Paula D. McClain and Steven C. Tauber, *Racial Minority Group Relations in a Multiracial Society*, in *GOVERNING AMERICAN CITIES* 128 (Michael Jones-Correa ed., Russell Sage 2001).

⁸¹ Kinder and Winter, *supra* note 61, at 444.

To summarize the work of Harvard Psychologist Howard Gardner, changing minds requires seven types of activities and events that can motivate conscious mind change:

- 1) reason (rational approach/argument);
- 2) research (data/evidence to support argument);
- 3) resonance (feels right);
- 4) representational redescrptions (multiple forms of representing the idea(s));
- 5) resources and rewards (incentives for mind change);
- 6) real world events (wars, hurricanes, depressions, legislation, which affect many individuals); and
- 7) understanding and addressing resistances to mind change.

work of Harvard Psychologist Howard Gardner, changing minds requires seven types of activities and events that can motivate conscious mind change: 1) reason (rational approach/argument); 2) research (data/evidence to support argument); 3) resonance (feels right); 4) representational redescrptions (multiple forms of representing the idea(s)); 5) resources and rewards (incentives for mind change); 6) real world events (wars, hurricanes, depressions, legislation, which affect many individuals); and 7) understanding and addressing resistances to mind change.⁸² Similarly cognitive framing would involve reason, resonance, representational re-descriptions and resistances. Dominant frames that dismiss the need for affirmative action, such as “individualism,” resist reason, research, resonance and re-descriptions – the data and the various methods of communicating the ideas around diversity, as well as the need for affirmative action. Successful framing strategies include multiple approaches identified by cognitive scientists like Gardner.

The need for resources and rewards and the impact of real world events are important factors in

changing minds, according to Gardner. That’s why context and environment for racial justice advocates are so vitally relevant. Social psychology research adds yet another layer in understanding the relevance of context and environment and strategies for impacting behaviors and therefore attitudes. It concludes that “norms,” or widely shared expectations about how groups should and will interact, are integral to the environment and have a profound impact on how groups actually interact. Social psychologists have developed many experiments on how to change behaviors, which in turn changes attitudes. Most importantly, they have concluded that the best way to change attitudes is to change behavior. Attitudinal change tends to follow behavior change.⁸³

Racial segregation has been a norm in the U.S. for several generations. Those norms were often widely sanctioned. For example, Blacks and Whites who challenged or broke White supremacy norms were harshly punished by society, often with violence.⁸⁴ At the same time, conflicting racial norms flourished. For example, Black and White soldiers interacted equally on some levels

⁸² HOWARD GARDNER, *CHANGING MINDS: THE ART AND SCIENCE OF CHANGING OUR OWN AND OTHER PEOPLE’S MINDS* 7-19 (Harvard Business School Press 2004).

⁸³ Thomas F. Pettigrew, *Intergroup Contact: Theory, Research, and New Perspectives*, in *HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH ON MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION* 773 (James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks eds., Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2d ed. 2004).

⁸⁴ Thomas F. Pettigrew, *Prejudice and Discrimination on the College Campus*, in *CONFRONTING RACISM: THE PROBLEM AND THE RESPONSE* 268 (Jennifer Eberhardt and Susan T. Fiske eds., Sage Publications 1998).

during World War II on the battlefield, but they conformed to the norms of segregation and racism off the battlefield. Even when White soldiers experienced positive behavior change towards Blacks, most aspects of Army life remained highly segregated.⁸⁵ Social psychology has shown that contact between in-groups and out-groups (e.g., Whites and Blacks) can reduce prejudice, including the threat or fear that the in-group feels toward the out-group. Rarely does interaction between groups heighten prejudice, although there are studies which suggest that low-income Whites' prejudice is not necessarily reduced by living with African Americans. Thus, contextual realities, including opportunity for inter-group interaction, influence the heightening or reduction of prejudice.⁸⁶

Contact theory developed by social psychologists provides some hopeful examples for opening up productive conversations and developing educational strategies around race that can challenge widely shared expectations. For instance, in their work with youth, social psychologists Michelle Fine and María Torre of the CUNY Graduate Center were able to create constructive, multi-racial spaces to discuss racial hierarchy and White privilege. They have developed structures for group discussions that value different kinds of knowledge in the room – some of which even encourage dissent and legitimize unpopular

views.⁸⁷ Fine and Torre's work suggests that it's not just that people can't or don't want to talk about racial issues. Rather, important environmental and psychosocial factors prevent people from discussing them.⁸⁸ Creating a setting that includes a non-competitive environment, a sense of community, and a commitment to creative analysis of difference, power, and privilege, however, can help people discuss racial issues by changing how they think about race.⁸⁹

Contact theory proves that being exposed to information about the “out-group” can lead to the formation of emotional ties, change behavior and cause the “in-group” to reappraise itself. This means that “in-groups” like Whites can ultimately learn that their norms and customs may be bad or wrong.⁹⁰ For example, Fine and Torre have been using participatory action research that helps individuals see privilege and racial hierarchy in institutional settings, and even to ultimately change the way they operate in those settings.⁹¹ They use this approach to create social spaces, or “contact zones,” for integrated groups through which participants can recognize their differential access to power and systems of privilege.⁹²

Through their “Opportunity Gap” Project, Fine and Torre brought together New York and New Jersey high school students from diverse racial, gender, privilege, and experiential backgrounds to study racial inequity in education. By deliberately involving the youth researchers in

Social psychologists have developed many experiments on how to change behaviors, which in turn changes attitudes. Most importantly, they have concluded that the best way to change attitudes is to change behavior. Attitudinal change tends to follow behavior change.

⁸⁵ See Pettigrew, *Intergroup Contact*, *supra* note 83, at 774.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 776-77.

⁸⁷ WHAT KIDS CAN DO, *Recognizing the Knowledge of Young People: An Interview with Michelle Fine and Maria Elena Torre on Youth Action Research*, YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT 3, at <http://www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/2004pdfs/interview.pdf> (last viewed 1/26/05).

⁸⁸ *Id.* at 4.

⁸⁹ María Elena Torre, *The Alchemy of Integrated Spaces: Youth Participation in Research Collectives of Difference* (forthcoming) (manuscript at 2, on file with CSI).

⁹⁰ Pettigrew, *Intergroup Contact*, *supra* note 83, at 773.

⁹¹ WHAT KIDS CAN DO, *supra* note 87. “[A]ction research” describes the work of social scientists who get involved in community work and social action; participatory refers to “tap[ping] the knowledge of those directly affected by the issue or struggle, and invites them to shape the questions, the research, the knowledge, and the products. . . .” *Id.* at 1.

⁹² Michelle Fine and María Elena Torre, *Re-membering Exclusions: Participatory Action Research in Public Institutions*, 1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN PSYCHOLOGY 15, 18-19 (2004).

Contact theory developed by social psychologists provides some hopeful examples for opening up productive conversations and developing educational strategies around race that can challenge widely shared expectations.

the development and methodology of the project, the youth were empowered to come up with their own re-frames of the problem. This included identifying the project as being about “opportunity gaps” as opposed to “achievement gaps.”⁹³ The youth researchers helped Fine and Torre re-conceptualize what influences educational achievement, from race and ethnicity to tracking. The research did not dismiss the fact that disparities are disproportionate for racial minorities (including across class). Instead, it more accurately located the source of the disparity as academic tracking – and more rigorously challenged the presentation of racial inequities as natural.⁹⁴ The project created a space where all participants could safely challenge norms about racial inequities in public education.⁹⁵ It enabled White members to change the way they thought about racial inequality and see their privilege. White youth who came to the project thinking they would be doing “charity work” to help minority youth began to see their work as a community

contribution, by way of combating disparities in schools.⁹⁶

Other social psychology work with groups has yielded similar, equally promising behavior change. Advocates need to understand that national identities are vague and not stable, but local identities are more defined and rich. Even though the “us against them” dynamic is central to human nature, the way people bond to their community can change. People have been able to form personal connections and networks in their communities that mobilize them to check their assumptions.⁹⁷ For example, the advocacy work of Reverend Nelson Johnson and other community leaders in North Carolina around K-Mart labor practices succeeded in creating an “us” that included both Blacks and Whites. Race was at the forefront of the discussion of labor practices that also harmed Whites. Johnson and others were able to frame the issue as a community issue and created a stronger connection between the Black community and White union.⁹⁸

Contact theory proves that being exposed to information about the “out-group” can lead to the formation of emotional ties, change behavior and cause the “in-group” to reappraise itself. This means that “in-groups” like Whites can ultimately learn that their norms and customs may be bad or wrong.

⁹³ *Id.* at 20-21.

⁹⁴ *Id.* at 22-23.

⁹⁵ *Id.* at 23-24.

⁹⁶ See Torre, *supra* note 89, at 10.

⁹⁷ Presentation by Professor Tamra Pearson d'Estrée, Henry Luce Professor of Conflict Resolution, University of Denver, DIVERSITY ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, Minutes from November 15, 2004 Convening (on file with CSI) (summarizing the relevant social psychology literature); see also Tamra Pearson d'Estrée et al., *Changing the Debate about “Success” in Conflict Resolution Efforts*, NEGOTIATION JOURNAL 101, 106-08 (April 2001).

⁹⁸ LANI GUINIER AND GERALD TORRES, *THE MINER’S CANARY: ENLISTING RACE, RESTING POWER, TRANSFORMING DEMOCRACY* 131-32 (Harvard University Press 2002).



CONCLUSION



We hope this comprehensive analysis of the multi-disciplinary research offers renewed energy and hope for racial justice advocates. It signals that we must all work to better understand the contexts which fuel identities before we can elevate strong arguments for diversity. We now realize that we cannot move public support solely by amplifying pro-diversity messages and research. How we think is too complex, and our identities are too influenced by contextual and environmental triggers. Advocates must learn to engage the public in debates about diversity on multiple, nuanced levels.

For decades, we've been asking ourselves what information needs to get into the public domain to nurture support for affirmative action. Now is the time to stop asking and embrace the answers that are staring us in the face. We must also elevate the values and themes that we share as a nation, and which help us redefine and broaden our group identities. We must target constituencies that are at least minimally open to a discussion. We must do a better

job of recognizing the frames, messages, messengers, metaphors, and research necessary to change the minds of target groups. And we must engage in long-term strategies and interventions at local levels that promote contact and produce behavior change. This will shift community norms to create lasting changes in attitudes on race and opportunity.

This requires us to always remember that while campaigns, framing and psycho-social education are works in progress, strategic coordination between different sectors is a non-negotiable element of pro-diversity work. Campaigns, framing, and education are only individual parts of the strategy to influence the public discourse. Although advocates have achieved some success adopting those strategies, each approach is extremely limited in its ability to create widespread and long-term change. A diverse and equitable society is possible, if we work together with a coordinated and long-term strategy to advance that change.



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