

Why Racial Integration Remains an Imperative

by Elizabeth Anderson

In 1988, I needed to move from Ann Arbor to the Detroit area to spare my partner, a sleep-deprived resident at Henry Ford Hospital, a significant commute to work. As I searched for housing, I observed stark patterns of racial segregation, openly enforced by landlords who assured me, a white woman then in her late twenties, that I had no reason to worry about renting there since “we’re holding the line against blacks at 10 Mile Road.” One of them showed me a home with a pile of cockroaches in the kitchen. Landlords in the metro area were confident that whites would rather live with cockroaches as housemates than with blacks as neighbors.

We decided to rent a house in South Rosedale Park, a stable working-class Detroit neighborhood that was about 80% black. It was a model of cordial race relations. Matters were different in my place of employment, the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. At the time, a rash of racially hostile incidents targeting black, Latino, Native American and Asian students was raising alarms. Although overtly racist incidents got the most publicity,

they did not constitute either the dominant or, in aggregate effect, the most damaging mode of undesirable racial interactions on campus. More pervasive, insidious and cumulatively damaging were subtler patterns of racial discomfort, alienation, and ignorant and cloddish interaction, such as classroom dynamics in which white students focused on problems and grievances peculiar to them, ignored what black students were saying, or expressed insulting assumptions about them. I wondered whether there was a connection between the extreme residential racial segregation in Michigan and the toxic patterns of interracial interaction I observed at the university, where many students were functioning in a multiracial setting for the first time.

My investigations led me to write my book, *The Imperative of Integration*, which focuses primarily (but not exclusively) on black-white segregation. Since the end of concerted efforts to enforce *Brown v. Board of Education* in the 1980s, activists, politicians, pundits, scholars and the American public have advocated non-integrative paths to racial justice. Racial justice, we are told, can be achieved through multiculturalist celebrations of racial diversity; or equal economic investments in *de facto* segregated schools and neighborhoods; or a focus on poverty rather than race; or more rigorous enforcement of anti-discrimination law; or color-blind-

ness; or welfare reform; or a determined effort within minority communities to change dysfunctional social norms associated with the “culture of poverty.” As this list demonstrates, avoidance of integration is found across the whole American political spectrum. *The Imperative of Integration* argues that all of these purported remedies for racial injustice rest on the illusion that racial justice can be achieved without racial integration.

Readers of *Poverty & Race* are familiar with the deep and pervasive racial segregation in the U.S., especially of blacks from whites, which was caused and is currently maintained by public policies such as zoning, massive housing discrimination and white flight, and which generates profound economic inequalities. Segregation isolates blacks from access to job opportunities, retail outlets, and commercial and professional services.

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It deprives them of access to public goods, including decent public schools and adequate law enforcement, while subjecting them to higher tax burdens, concentrated poverty, urban blight, pollution and crime. This depresses housing values and impedes blacks' ability to accumulate financial and human capital. If the effects of segregation were confined to such material outcomes, we could imagine that some combination of non-integrative left-liberal remedies—color-blind anti-poverty programs, economic investment in disadvantaged neighborhoods, vigorous enforcement of anti-discrimination law, and multiculturalist remedies to remaining discrimination—could overcome racial inequality.

Non-Integrationist Remedies Are Insufficient

Such non-integrationist remedies are insufficient because they fail to address the full range of effects of segregation on group inequality. *The Imperative of Integration* documents three additional effects that can only be undone through integration: social/cultural capital inequality, racial stigmatization, and anti-democratic effects. These effects recognize that segregation isn't only geographic, and so can't be undone simply by redistrib-

uting material goods across space. More fundamentally, segregation consists of the whole range of social practices that groups with privileged access to important goods use to close ranks to maintain their privileges. This includes role segregation, where different groups interact, but on terms of domination and subordination.

Everyone knows that who you know is as important as what you know in getting access to opportunities. This idea captures the social capital effects of racial segregation. In seg-

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regated societies, news about and referrals to educational and job opportunities preferentially circulate within the groups that already predominate in a given institution, keeping disadvantaged groups off or at the back of the queue. Cultural capital also matters: Even when the gatekeepers to important opportunities do not intentionally practice racial discrimination, they often select applicants by their "fit" with the informal, unspoken and untaught norms of speech, bodily comportment, dress, personal style and cultural interests that already prevail in an institution. Mutually isolated communities tend to drift apart culturally, and thereby undermine disadvantaged groups' accumulation of the cultural capital needed for advancement. Integration is needed to remedy these inequalities.

Segregation also stigmatizes the disadvantaged. When social groups diverge in material and social advantages, people form corresponding group stereotypes and tell stories to explain these differences. These stories add insult to injury, because people tend to attribute a group's disadvantages to supposedly intrinsic deficits in its abilities, character or culture rather than to its external circumstances. Spatial segregation reinforces these demeaning stories. Ethnocentrism, or favoritism towards

those with whom one associates, induces self-segregated groups to draw invidious comparisons between themselves and the groups from which they are isolated. They create worldviews that are impervious to counterevidence held by members of out-groups with whom they have little contact. They tend to view extreme and deviant behaviors of out-group members, such as violent crimes, as representative of the out-group. Role segregation also creates stereotypes that reinforce out-group disadvantage. People's stereotypes of who is suited to privileged positions incorporate the social identities of those who already occupy them. Occupation of dominant positions also tends to make people prone to stereotype their subordinates, because dominant players can afford to be ignorant of the ways their subordinates deviate from stereotype.

Popular understandings of racial stigma and how it works lead people to drastically underestimate its extent and harmful effects. We imagine racially stigmatizing ideas as consciously located in the minds of extreme racists. Think of the KKK member who claims that blacks are biologically inferior and threatening to whites, proclaims his hatred of them, and discriminates against them out of sheer prejudice. Most Americans despise such extremists, disavow explicitly racist ideas, and sincerely think of themselves as not racist. Most say that racial discrimination is wrong. It is tempting to conclude that negative images of blacks are no longer a potent force in American life.

Tempting, but wrong. While the old racist images of black biological inferiority may have faded, they have been replaced by new ones. Now many whites tend to see blacks as choosing badly, as undermining themselves with culturally dysfunctional norms of single parenthood, welfare dependency, criminality, and poor attachment to school and work. Since, on this view, blacks are perfectly capable of solving their own problems if they would only try, neither whites nor the government owe them any-

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thing.

These ideas don't have to be believed, or even conscious, for them to influence behavior. Mere familiarity with derogatory stereotypes, even without belief, can cause unwitting discrimination. No wonder that even people who consciously reject anti-black stereotypes have been found to discriminate against blacks. This is because stereotypes typically operate automatically, behind our backs. In addition, we need to multiply our models of *how* racially stigmatizing ideas cause discrimination. Pure prejudicial discrimination, as in the KKK case, offers just one model. Economists stress statistical discrimination, in which decision-makers use race as a proxy for undesirable traits such as laziness or criminal tendencies. But often stereotypes work by altering *perceptions*. For some white observers, that rambunctious black youth shooting hoops in the park looks aggressive and hostile, although if he were white, he would be perceived as harmlessly horsing around. Other times they work by making well-meaning people anxious. Nervous about appearing racist, whites may avoid blacks, or act stiffly and formally toward them. The very desire to avoid discrimination can cause it.

Racial stigmatization also harms blacks through paths other than discrimination. This is why *The Imperative of Integration* argues that the standard discrimination account of racial inequality needs to be replaced by a broader account, based on the joint effects of segregation and stigmatization. Negative effects of stigmatization not mediated by discrimination include "stereotype threat"—anxiety caused by the fear that one's behavior will confirm negative stereotypes about oneself—which depresses blacks' performance on standardized tests. In addition, stigmatizing images of blacks are not just in people's heads; they are in our culture and public discourse. TV news and police dramas disproportionately depict criminals as black and exaggerate the

extent of black-on-white crimes. Such taken-for-granted stigmatizing public images of blacks amount to a massive assault on the reputation of blacks, a harm in itself. They also generate public support for policies that have a disproportionately negative impact on blacks. White support for the death penalty jumps when whites are told that more blacks than whites are executed. White hostility to welfare is tied to the public image of the welfare recipient as a single black mother, even though most recipients are white.

Such impacts of racial stigmatization on democratic policy formation

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reinforce the anti-democratic effects of spatial and role segregation. Democracy isn't only about the universal franchise. It requires a trained elite, institutional structure, and culture that is systematically responsive to the interests and voices of people from all walks of life. This requires that people from all walks of life have effective access to channels of communication to elites, and that they be able to hold them accountable for their decisions. Segregation blocks both communication and accountability. There is nothing like face-to-face confrontation to force people to listen and respond to one's complaints. Out of sight, out of mind: Segregated elites are clubby, insular, ignorant, unaccountable and irresponsible. The history of the Civil Rights Movement demonstrates how mass disruptive protests were needed to teach segregated elites, and whites at large, fundamental lessons about democracy and justice that they were incapable of learning on their own.

Racial Segregation: A Fundamental Cause of Racial Injustice

So racial segregation is a fundamental cause of racial injustice in three

ways: It blocks blacks' access to economic opportunities, it causes racial stigmatization and discrimination, and it undermines democracy. It stands to reason that racial integration would help dismantle these injustices. We can think of integration as taking place by stages. We start with formal desegregation: ending laws and policies that turned blacks into an untouchable caste by forcing them into separate and inferior public spaces. This is an essential step toward destigmatization. While stigma still exists, blacks' public standing is better now that they can no longer be forced to the back of the bus. Next comes spatial integration, in which racial groups actually share common public spaces and facilities. This enables blacks to get access to many of the public goods—notably, safe, unblighted, relatively unpolluted neighborhoods with decent schools and public services—that most whites enjoy. Studies of integration experiments involving low-income families, from Gautreaux to Moving to Opportunity, show that spatial integration yields important material and psychic benefits to formerly segregated blacks, notably better housing, lower stress and greater freedom for children to play outdoors.

The next step is formal social integration: cooperation on terms of equality in institutions such as schools, workplaces, juries and the military. This is where some of the biggest pay-offs of integration occur. Extensive interracial cooperation on equal terms expands blacks' social and cultural capital, leading to better education and job opportunities. Sustained formal social integration under moderately favorable conditions, including institutional support and cooperative interaction, also reduces prejudice, stigma and discrimination, often to the point of promoting informal social integration—interracial friendship and intimate relations.

Formal social integration also improves the responsiveness of democratic institutions to all social groups. Racially integrated police forces are less violent toward blacks and more

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responsive to community concerns than racially homogeneous ones. Integrated teaching staffs are less punitive toward black students and less likely to consign them to lower educational tracks. Integrated juries deliberate longer, take into account more evidence, make fewer factual mistakes, and are more alert to racial discrimination in the criminal justice process than all-white juries. Part of the greater intelligence of integrated juries is due to the diverse information provided by blacks, who are more likely to raise critical questions, such as the reliability of whites' eyewitness identification of blacks. Deliberation in an integrated setting also makes whites deliberate more intelligently and responsibly: They are less likely to rush to a guilty judgment, and more likely to raise and take seriously concerns about discrimination in the criminal justice process, than in all-white juries. The need to justify oneself face-to-face before diverse others motivates

people to be responsive to the interests of a wider diversity of people. In public opinion polling, too, whites express more racially conciliatory positions when they think they are talking to a black pollster.

The Imperative of Integration argues that the evidence on the positive effects of racial integration, combined with theory and evidence that these effects cannot be achieved in other ways, provide a powerful case for re-instituting racial integration as a policy goal. Integration needs to be pursued on multiple fronts, including housing

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vouchers to promote low-income black mobility into integrated middle-class neighborhoods, abolition of class-segregative zoning regulations, adoption of integrative programs by school districts, extension and aggressive enforcement of differential impact stan-

dards of illegal discrimination to state action, and deliberate selection for racially integrated juries. I also argue that voting districts should be integrated in such a way that politicians cannot be elected without running on platforms with multiracial appeal. This will correct a serious downside of majority-minority districting, which is that remaining districts tend to favor race-baiting politicians running on a politics of white racial resentment. In many parts of the U.S., race relations have relaxed enough to enable blacks, even when a minority in their district, to elect their preferred candidate in coalition with a critical mass of racially tolerant whites, Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans.

The Imperative of Integration also argues for alternative models of affirmative action. Right now, discussion of affirmative action is dominated by two models: diversity and compensation. The diversity model stresses the supposed connections between racial diversity and diversity of cultures and ideas. It doesn't do much to support affirmative action in industries such as construction and manufacturing, where the culture and ideas of most employees make little difference. Nor does it explain why selective schools should preferentially admit African Americans and Latinos, as opposed to foreign students. The compensatory model portrays affirmative action as making up for past discrimination. This encourages people to believe that racial inequalities are due to long-past deeds, overlooking the powerful continuing causes of racial injustice rooted in current segregation and stigmatization. It also supports public impatience with affirmative action. No wonder the Supreme Court, even while upholding affirmative action in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, expressed the view that affirmative action will no longer be needed in 25 years.

Once we understand that current racial inequality is rooted in current racial stigmatization and segregation, affirmative action can be understood differently. *De facto* segregation creates referral networks that exclude blacks from information and recom-

Further Readings

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mendations to job openings in firms that employ few blacks. Role segregation within firms creates stereotypes of qualified workers that mirror the identities of those who already occupy those roles. Non-stereotypical workers are therefore *perceived* to be unqualified for such roles even when they could fill them successfully, and so are excluded even when managers believe they are hiring on merit. Affirmative action within firms serves to block these and other racially exclusionary practices. This is *discrimination-blocking* affirmative action. *Integrative* affirmative action explicitly adopts racial integration as an institutional goal, in the name of promoting democratic responsiveness to the full diversity of people whom the institution is supposed to serve, overcoming racial inequalities in social and cultural capital, and breaking down racial anxieties, prejudices and stereotypes through integrated, cooperative work teams.

Any argument for restoring racial integration to a central place in the public policy agenda must address three objections. Conservatives oppose integrative policies on grounds of color-blindness. In *The Imperative of Integration*, I argue that the color-blind principle is conceptually confused, because it conflates different meanings of race and different kinds of racial discrimination. It is one thing to discriminate out of pure prejudice against a group with a different appearance or ancestry, or to treat race as a proxy for intelligence or other merits; quite another to take race-conscious steps to counteract racial discrimination and undo the continuing causes of racial-based injustice. Affirmative action, properly administered, does not compromise but rather promotes meritocratic selection. Some on the left oppose integrative policies because they fear the destruction of autonomous black institutions and cultural practices in the name of as-

similation and object to the psychic costs of integration on blacks. I argue that integration is distinct from assimilation, since its aim is not to erect white practices as the norm, but rather to *abolish* white exclusionary practices and replace them with practices inclusive of all. And, while integration is stressful, as people learn to cooperate across racial lines the psychic costs of integration decline. Finally, readers of *Poverty & Race* will be familiar with the argument that integration is an unrealistic fantasy. We know, however, that the experience of integration is self-reinforcing: people of all races who grew up in more integrated settings tend to choose more integrated settings later in life. So we should not foreclose all hope. After all, only a few years ago the idea of a black president was regarded by many Americans to be an unrealizable dream. □

Resources

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Race/Racism

- *The Imperative of Integration*, by Elizabeth Anderson (246 pp., 2010), has been published by Princeton Univ. Press. [12763]
- *Angels of Mercy: White Women and the History of New York's Colored Orphan Asylum*, by William Seraile (287 pp., 2011, \$27.95), has been published by Fordham Univ. Press, 212/743-8337, justyna.zajac.oup.com [12779]
- **Greenboro, NC Massacre:** A CNN story about Greensboro's civil rights history and demography that also includes within a link to a video interview with Nelson

Johnson on the Greensboro Massacre is available at <http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/06/07/greensboro.race/> [12788]

- *Finding Our Way* is a 90-min., 3-part 2011 documentary by Giovanni Attili and Leonie Sandercock on the still unresolved conflict between indigenous people in north central British Columbia and the government of Canada. Inf. at mailbox@movingimages.ca, www.movingimages.ca, <http://www.facebook.com/FINDING.OUR.WAY>. thefilm [12795]

- "Faces of Racial Profiling: A Report from Communities Across America" (81 pp., Sept. 2010) is available (no price

listed) from The Rights Working Group (a project of the Tides Center), 1120 Conn. Ave. NW, #1100, Wash., DC 20036, 202/591-3300, www.rightsworkinggroup.org [12804]

- "The Persistence of Racial and Ethnic Profiling in the United States," a 98-page, Aug. 2009 follow-up report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, published by ACLU and The Rights Working Group, is available (no price listed) from the latter org., 1120 Conn. Ave. NW, #1100, Wash., DC 20036, 202/591-3300, www.rightsworkinggroup.org [12806]

- *The Dream Is Freedom: Pauli Murray and*