

Crises, Race, Acknowledgement: The Centrality of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics to the Future of Political Science

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The United States, and the world, is in the grips of a coronavirus pandemic, and in the United States, we are facing a crisis of faith in the fairness of our political institutions, particularly the ability of Black Americans to live without the fear of dying at the hands of the police for going about their daily lives. Race has been and continues to be intertwined with American government and politics, in general, and how the United States approaches crises, in particular. Racial minority groups have been scapegoats for the failings of American policy makers to deal with numerous crises historically and at present. Race and racism are also at the foundation of the origins of American political science. The racism at the roots of our discipline's founding have created a blindness to the significance and importance of the field of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics (REP) to the study of politics, democracy, and how American society reacts during a crisis. Our discipline is also at an inflection point that requires us to acknowledge its racist origins, confront its continued influence on the present, and finally to move forward in recognizing the importance of REP to the health and future of the discipline.

The striking evidence of fear, suspicion, intolerance, and confusion in society, providing fertile soil for demagoguery, imperil our traditional freedom, and pose a stern challenge to the political scientist. These are phenomena which surely demand our most urgent concern, on behalf of the nation at large as well as our own professional and personal interest.

This quotation sounds like the person was talking about the situation that the United States finds itself in today, but these are words from the December 1954 APSA Presidential Address by Ralph Johnson Bunche, the first Black American to receive a PhD in political science (in 1934 from Harvard), the first Black to win the Nobel Peace Prize (1950), and the first Black president of the American Political Science Association (Bunche 1954: 970). All of the elements that he was concerned about sixty-six years ago are still ones that we face today. The United States—and the world—is in the grips of a coronavirus pandemic, and in the United States we are facing a crisis of faith in the fairness of our political institutions, particularly the ability of Black Americans to live without the fear of dying at the hands of the police for going about their daily lives. George Floyd in Minneapolis;

Breonna Taylor in Louisville; Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia; Elijah McClain in Aurora, Colorado; Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta; Trayford Pellerin in Lafayette, Louisiana. Their deaths; the murders of others before them; the recent shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin; the resultant protests; and the unacceptable violence, injuries, deaths, and destruction in recent days have forced a reckoning with history and the present in many segments in the United States and around the world. Institutions are facing up to their histories and what that history says about how they function today. While the crisis of faith in our institutions arises from the larger issue of systemic racism in the United States and other corners of the world, it is the other current crisis—COVID-19—that brings us to the first virtual meeting of the American Political Science Association.

Thinking about Bunche's words in 1954—and I recommend his Presidential Address to all—I want to focus my address on how aspects of both events have a racial component, one more obvious than the other, and why research in Race, Ethnicity, and Politics (REP) is important to our understanding of that aspect of both. This may suggest a disjointed presentation, but I hope that I am able to bring the two threads together and highlight why it is important for the discipline and the American Political Science Association to do some soul-searching of our own. This is an inflection point in our national dialogue, and it is critical that our discipline acknowledges and confronts the racist origins of American political science. This soul-searching is necessary because understanding and acknowledging our origins should help us move the discipline forward in a more productive fashion.

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Crises

The world is in the throes of a pandemic that has upended virtually all aspects of our lives in the United States. Life as we know it is no more and it is unclear whether that life will return in its previous iteration. The COVID-19 virus has a distinctive racial dimension. African Americans and Latinos have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus. The effects are across all age groups, throughout the country, and it does not appear to matter where these groups live—urban, suburban, or rural areas—in the United States. African Americans and Latinos are three times as likely to become infected as their white neighbors, and are nearly twice as likely to die from the virus as Whites (Oppel et al. 2020).

Specific examples abound. In Chicago, Blacks make up only 30% of the population, but represent more than 50% of COVID-19 cases and nearly 70% of COVID-19 deaths. In Louisiana, Blacks are 32.2% of the state's population but make up 70.5% of deaths. In Michigan, Blacks are 14% of the population but represent 33% of COVID-19 cases and 40% of deaths. In New York, Blacks and Latinos are 22% and 29% of the population, respectively, but account for 28% and 34% of deaths (Oppel et al. 2020). The Johns Hopkins University and American Community Survey indicated that as of early May 2020, the infection rate for predominantly Black counties was more than three times higher than that in predominantly white counties. Additionally, the death rate for predominantly Black counties was six times higher than predominantly white counties (Yancy 2020).

Latinos are more than twice as likely as Whites to be among people who have contracted the virus in 35 of the 46 states with significant Latino populations. Sáenz (2020) found that in ten of these states, Latinos are more than four times more likely to have contracted the virus relative to their percentage share in the overall population. For example, in Tennessee, Latinos were 5.5% of the population, but were 33.8% of the cases. In Nebraska, they were 11.2% of the population, but an astounding 33.8% of the cases. Latinos were 9.6% of the population in both North Carolina and Virginia, but were 46% and 44.9% of the cases, respectively. The prevalence of meatpacking industries in these states in the South and Midwest, where Latinos are dominant in the workforce, were the sites of the outbreaks (Sáenz 2020). Sáenz included a number of other states, but these figures give you a sense of the tremendous disparity Latino populations face across the country.

Disparities exist for other communities of color as well. In much of Arizona, and specifically in counties with large American Indian populations, American Indians have significantly higher infection rates than do Whites. In May, American Indians and Alaska Natives were 4% of the population of Arizona, but were 18% of deaths and

11% of infected cases. In New Mexico, they were 9% of the state's population, but were 57% of cases. In Wyoming, where American Indians are just two percent of the population, they represented 30% of cases (Artiga and Orgera, 2020). In an Indian Health Service (IHS) report from May 10, 2020, IHS Tribal and urban Indian facilities reported 5,500 positive cases, including over 3,300 among the Navajo Nation, which spans Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah (Artiga and Orgera 2020).

Possibly a little good news for Asian and Asian Americans, but maybe not—the disparities are not as large as for other groups. They were only 1.3 times as likely as their white neighbors to become infected (Oppel et al. 2020). But the incidence rates are still higher than those for Whites.

The reasons for these disparities are long standing and rooted in systemic inequalities. About half of American Indians live on reservations, primarily in the West, Midwest, and South. Their homes are small, with multi-generation family members living together, often without electricity and running water. Social distancing and hand-washing are difficult. Many also suffer debilitating health issues, such as hypertension, asthma, cancer, and heart and cardiovascular disease (Hedgpeth, Fears, and Scruggs 2020; Artiga and Orgera 2020).

Many Black Americans live in communities characterized by food deserts, high housing density, limited employment opportunities, and, in some areas, high crime rates. Blacks also suffer from some of the health issues that afflict American Indians—hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and limited access to health care. Low socioeconomic status alone is a risk factor for total mortality independent of any other risk factors. These health conditions put Black Americans at risk for contraction of COVID-19 and mortality from the virus (Yancy 2020).

Systemic inequalities are also demonstrated by other data. More than two-fifths of Black and Latino workers are employed in jobs that cannot be done remotely, primarily service and production work. Thus, they are leaving their homes and heading to their work environments. Only about 25% of Whites hold similar jobs (Oppel et al. 2020). Latinos, like American Indians, live in multi-generation households, and for those that work in meatpacking, the risk of exposure is tremendous (Oppel et al. 2020).

Now, if all of this is not serious enough, communities of color are also affected in ways other than health concerns during crises. As O'Flynn, Monaghan, and Power (2014) stated, it is all too easy during crises and austerity to construct a scapegoat for the situation.

Scapegoat

The concept of scapegoating is associated with the work of René Girard, a French historian, literary critic, and philosopher of social science, even though he is not the originator of the word. There have been three different

meanings of the word scapegoat—a biblical meaning, an anthropological meaning, and a psychosocial meaning (Girard 1987). The *biblical* reference is related to a ritual in Leviticus where the first of two goats is chosen to carry the sins of the Hebrews into exile. Girard says that “scapegoat’ is as good a term as any other to designate, in the Leviticus ritual, the first of the two goats and the function it is called on to perform” (1987, 73).

The *anthropological* meaning evolved in the eighteenth century and was built off of the Leviticus ritual and the biblical meaning of scapegoat. In this utilization, the term scapegoat was used to classify rituals that were based on the belief that guilt or sufferings could be transferred from the community to a ritually designated victim, often an animal, but sometimes a human. Anthropologists designated those rituals as “scapegoat rituals,” as a distinct and distinctive category of rituals. Over time, however, anthropologists came to believe that there was not a distinctive category of these rituals that could be defined, and the term “scapegoat rituals” stopped being used.

The current use of the term is the *psychosocial* meaning, with which we are all familiar. In this meaning, “the victim or victims of unjust violence or discrimination are called scapegoats, especially when they are blamed or punished not merely for the ‘sins’ of others . . . but for tensions, conflicts, and difficulties of all kinds” (Girard 1987, 74). According to Girard, scapegoating allows those who persecute the victim or victims to allude responsibility for problems or to provide solutions to the problem. It is also something that can be manipulated by people—Girard mentions specifically politicians. Girard argues that a social dimension is always present in scapegoating. The victims can be in the singular or the plural, but they are always less numerous than the persecutors. As such, they are more or less defenseless. The persecutors are a majority and their victims a minority (Girard 1987, 74–75).

Anthony Marx (2001) highlights that race is a powerful tool in scapegoating because of the culture of prejudice forged in colonialism, conquest, and slavery. Blacks were singled out as victims and are used as a tool to promote white unity. The presence of racism and prejudice fulfills the criteria of scapegoats: visible and vulnerable for displacing conflict (Marx 2001). Using race to avoid or contain white tensions, conflicts, or issues may be effective, but it comes at a cost. Real issues of concern within the majority remain unaddressed. Yet using race and race-baiting might contain the backlash against those in power who refuse to address the problem, by deflecting the anger elsewhere. Some politicians certainly appear conscious of the benefits of race-baiting and aware of the long American tradition of scapegoating Blacks. Strong anti-Black sentiment still exists in the United States, and veiled anti-Black rhetoric has salience in the political system (Marx 2001, 314–315). Brown and Stivers (1998, 706) argue that racism and scapegoating seem to go together. Gordon

Allport (1959, 9) argued that the choice of scapegoat varies with historical circumstances and that in all circumstances the displacement of aggression and blame on another individual or group is either partly or wholly unwarranted.

Scapegoating and America’s Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups

Racial and ethnic minorities—Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and American Indians—have been convenient scapegoats for many—dare I say most—of the crises that the United States has experienced. Those who created the crises take no responsibility for what they wrought but seek to cast blame elsewhere—usually on the backs of racial and ethnic minorities. There are far too many instances to recap in this talk, but I want to highlight some of the more notorious scapegoating events in our history.

Barge (2001) identifies that one of the earliest examples of scapegoating was the institution of chattel slavery itself. She argues that the South resorted to devising explanations for slavery that would relieve slave owners of moral responsibility. The slaves became the scapegoats and responsible for their own enslavement. They, Africans, were deemed a race in need of supervision and not actually human. Slave owners were not responsible for the system, it was the defects of Africans and African Americans that necessitated the institution of slavery. Smedley (2001, 15–16) argues that the idea of Africans as a separate and distinct kind of human beings became the rationalization for slavery, as Blacks were deemed inferior to Whites, as they were “uncivilized,” and basically viewed as “savages.” As Smedley (2001, 16) says,

Increasingly focusing on physical differences, pro-slavery forces advanced what they thought was an unassailable argument for preserving slavery: Africans, because of their biological differences, were naturally inferior and thus best suited for the role of slaves. The physical characteristics of Africans had become markers of their inferior social status.

Yellow Fever and Free Blacks

In 1793, yellow fever ravaged the Philadelphia community, and more than half of the city’s population that had the means to leave left to escape the disease. Dr. Benjamin Rush, an abolitionist, wrote to Richard Allen asking him to help him enlist members of the free Black community to help him nurse his primarily white patients, under the mistaken belief that Blacks were immune to the disease. The Philadelphia Free Black community nursed much of white Philadelphia, and at least 242 of them (free Blacks) died from the disease (Murphy 2014). Matthew Carey, a newspaper publisher and bookseller, was among those who left the city during the outbreak. When the outbreak had subsided, Carey, like others, returned to the city. He wrote a pamphlet, “A Short Account of the Malignant Fever,” where he accused Blacks of profiting from the

disease and plundering the houses of the sick. In response, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones published “A narrative of the proceedings of the black people, during the late awful calamity in Philadelphia, in the year 1793: and a refutation of some censures, thrown upon them in some late publications,” detailing the courageous acts of Blacks who risked their lives to help eradicate the disease (Murphy 2014). Free Blacks, of course, were not immune from being scapegoated.

Epidemics and Chinese Immigrants

In 1832, during a cholera epidemic in New York City, the Board of Health asked medical professionals to gather as much information as possible on the “Oriental Cholera.” Like in Philadelphia in 1793, those New Yorkers that could afford to flee the city did so, leaving behind the poor to suffer in crowded conditions. China and the Chinese were blamed for the disease, and publications suggested that cholera was exclusively confined to the lower classes “of intemperate dissolute and filthy people huddled together like swine” (Lanham 2020).

In California in the 1860s, Chinese immigrants were scapegoated as the source of the Three Graces—malaria, smallpox, and leprosy. At this time, health officials focused on sanitary reform as the primary means for preventing epidemic disease. Chinese immigrants, who lived in crowded conditions, were viewed as both socially and medically threatening (Trauner 1978). Between 1870 and 1905, the Chinese were to become medical scapegoats. Local officials up and down the Pacific coast and in the Hawaiian Islands rationalized the failure of their sanitary programs by placing the blame for all epidemic outbreaks to the living conditions among the Chinese. Trauner (1978) examines how anti-Chinese prejudice in medical research was used to proffer the idea that the Chinese were an “inferior race” and thus deserve discrimination. She argues that many political elites relied on this research to justify the curtailment of Chinese immigration, resulting in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and its amendments of 1884.

Trauner carefully traces how Chinese scapegoating was not simply a matter of prejudice, but rather a deep-seated racial ideology through which political discrimination was justified. Trauner (1978, 71–72) suggests that decades of scapegoating fundamentally altered both how the Chinese perceived their place within American society, and vice versa—underscoring how historical processes can have detrimental effects long after explicit policies have been banned.

A bubonic plague outbreak in China in 1894 once again shone a spotlight on San Francisco’s Chinese population. Between 1900 and 1907, the Chinese population in San Francisco was targeted with lockdowns of Chinese neighborhoods and individuals coming in to inspect and

fumigate their homes. But that is another long story in the sorry saga of the scapegoating of the Chinese (Kalisch 1972).

Great Depression—Mexicans and Mexican Americans

In the 1910s and 1920s, the United States recruited Mexican immigrants to work in a variety of industries—railroads, construction, mining, steel, ranching, and farming (Ray 2005). Despite the need for their labor, as the United States economy entered the Great Depression in the late 1920s–early 1930s, Mexican immigrants were considered a threat to white jobs and demands for their removal increased. There was also the narrative that they were using services intended for and taking jobs from Whites. The Depression created a nationwide anti-immigrant environment, and in response, the federal government began conducting raids, abducting children and adults of Mexican descent from public places without regard to citizenship (Ray 2005, 15). La Placita Park in Los Angeles was a place where neighborhood residents gathered to listen to music, talk to neighbors, and socialize. On February 26, 1931, immigration agents descended on the park, sealed off the entrances and rounded up more than 400 people, without regard to citizenship, and deported them to Mexico (Little 2019). The La Placita raid was planned specifically as a scare tactic to get Mexican immigrants to leave, and if Mexican Americans were included, who cared. In total, approximately 1.8 million people of Mexican descent were deported to Mexico, 60 percent of whom were United States citizens (Little 2019).

These deportation raids were not confined to states like California and Texas, but also occurred in other states, such as Michigan, Colorado, Illinois, Ohio, and New York. Despite there not being a federal law or executive order authorizing the raids, President Herbert Hoover’s administration implicitly approved of them. The administration used the slogan “American jobs for real Americans”—racially coded words for getting rid of Mexicans, who were not viewed as “real” Americans—and actively worked with local and state governments to pass laws and arrange agreements that prevented anyone of Mexican descent, including Mexican Americans, from holding certain jobs. Ray (2005) indicates that some laws banned Mexican Americans from government employment, and companies like Ford, U.S. Steel, and the Southern Pacific Railroad agreed to lay off thousands of Mexican American workers.

U.S. Auto Industry’s Decline and Asian Americans

In the 1970s and 1980s, the big three U.S. automakers—General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford—were in decline. Automation and globalization, the waning industrial sector, and the increasing cost of union contracts contributed to the automakers’ decline. The Japanese auto industry was

making inroads into the U.S. market with smaller and more efficient cars. In response, the United Auto Workers union, in an effort to keep down discontent among its members, adopted the slogan “Buy American,” which Frank (2002) describes as cultivating “institutional paranoia” among rank-and-file members. Union members began to make demands on the union leadership for more protections and rights, while union leadership dragged its feet on these issues, as they were pushing for labor-management cooperation—“helping GM get lean and mean”—giving the impression of positive action to the rank and file (Frank 2002, 44–45). As such, the “Buy American” slogan was amplified, blaming the problem on Japanese imports rather than all of the ills brought about by deindustrialization and the U.S. automakers’ decision to continue producing large and gas-guzzling cars. “Buy American” quickly turned into a nationalist rallying call and spiraled downward into vicious anti-Asian racism directed not only at the Japanese auto firms but at all people of Asian descent, including Asian Americans (Frank 2002, 33–34).

In communities around Detroit, Asian Americans were harassed on a day-to-day basis. In one incident that harassment turned deadly. Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, was the victim of a racial hate crime by two white men, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz in 1982 (Johnson 1996). Chin was murdered in the parking lot of a Detroit nightclub by Ebens and Nitz, the latter having just been laid off by Chrysler and associated his problems and those with the broader auto industry with Chin’s race and ethnicity. The two beat Chin to death with a baseball bat after tracking him down with their cars when he left the club. At their trial, the judge, Charles Kaufman, ruled that the murder was the result of nothing more than a barroom brawl, found Ebens and Nitz guilty of manslaughter, and imposed a \$3,000 fine, \$780 in court costs, three years’ probation, and no jail time (Frank 2002).

HIV and Haitians and Haitian Americans

In December 1982, the U.S. National Cancer Institute was quoted as announcing that HIV was introduced into the United States gay population from a virus in Haiti (Farmer 2006). The theory had no research backing it up, but that theory was then pushed by other physicians and scientists investigating AIDS (Farmer 2006, 3). In March 1983, the Centers for Disease Control officially identified four high-risk groups for the contraction and spread of AIDS—“homosexuals, Haitians, hemophiliacs, and heroin users—called the 4-H disease” (Farmer 2006, 211). They subsequently misidentified Patient Zero, a French-Canadian flight attendant that was supposed to have contracted HIV in Haiti and brought it to the United States. (A 2016 study indicates that the HIV virus was in the United States prior to Patient Zero and his trip to Haiti; Branswell 2016).

Farmer (2006) indicates that as a result of this identification of Haiti and Haitians and Haitian Americans as the source of HIV, Haitians in the United States and Haiti suffered tremendously. As with Asian Americans and the auto industry, Haitians and Haitian Americans suffered bullying and violence in schools and other public spaces. Thousands of Haitian Americans were evicted from their homes, many lost their jobs, and the tourism industry in Haiti took a substantial hit.

A December 2017 *New Yorker* article discussed how the painful scapegoating history of the 1980s was revived by the Trump administration when it made the decision to end Temporary Protected Status. Trump expressed outrage that despite his executive order barring refugees, particularly those from seven predominately Muslim countries, 15,000 Haitians had been granted visas to enter the United States. Trump is quoted as saying, “They all have AIDS” (Danticat 2017).

H1N1 and Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and other Latinos

In April 2009, a flu pandemic broke out in the United States—the H1N1 flu outbreak. Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and other Latinos were quickly stigmatized as carriers of the virus because the alleged origin of the outbreak was Mexican pig farms (McCauley, Minsky, and Viswanath 2013), hence the designation of the flu as the swine flu. The effects were catastrophic for Mexican nationals, Mexican Americans, and Latinos in the United States in general. Markets for products from Mexico disappeared and Mexican nationals were stigmatized. In the United States, radio hosts portrayed Mexicans and Mexican Americans as carriers of the disease and said if people ate in Mexican restaurants, they were likely to get the disease. The Southern Poverty Law Center indicated that the attacks on Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and other Latinos showcased just how far nativists were willing to go to blame immigrants for a public health problem (Scherr and Holthouse 2009).

The scapegoating did eventually spur pushback: condemnations from public health groups, advocacy organizations, and some government officials; proposals for how to reduce stigmatization; suggestions on how to meet the needs of Hispanics during the epidemic; and a plea from the National Association of Hispanic Journalists asking their colleagues to elevate fact-based reporting over “inflammatory rhetoric”. President Obama held a town hall meeting with Latino public-health professionals and grassroots leaders, where he promised that the nation’s response to the outbreak would guard against discrimination and include Hispanic communities (Schoch-Spana et al. 2010).”

COVID-19 and Asians and Asian Americans

This brings us to where we began—COVID-19 and the scapegoating of China, Asians, and Asian Americans.

President Trump and others in his administration insist on calling the coronavirus the China virus or other incendiary and racist names, blaming China for the advent of the virus in the United States. The phrase “They never should have let this happen” is a talking point of the current administration. A report released on July 1, 2020, by the Pew Research Center indicates that Asian and Black Americans have experienced an increase in discrimination amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Ruiz, Menasce Horowitz, and Tamir 2020). Black and Asian Americans are also more likely than their white and Hispanic counterparts to say they have been subject to slurs or jokes because of their race or ethnicity, but Asian adults are the most likely to say this has happened to them since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak.

Reports from across the country are illustrative of the experiences of Asians and Asian Americans. The Anti-Defamation League (2020), along with the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Committee, tracks as many reports of intimidation, physical assault, and verbal harassment as possible. Here are some examples:

May 22, San Leandro, CA: A woman was arrested after posting handwritten fliers on homes that read, in part, “If you are a woman or man and was born in other country, return, go back to your land immediately, fast, with urgency” and “In this place, no Asians allowed.”

May 23, Seattle, WA: A man harassed Asian people at a park and an Asian woman in her car, saying, “Where are you from . . . where is your ID?” and “Chinese disease . . . they bring it here!” Later, the man allegedly yelled anti-Asian remarks inside an Asian restaurant.

June 6, Denver, CO: Two Asian Americans were verbally accosted while walking on the street by a woman who told them they “smell like shit” and “You guys are all disgusting! You all!”

June 14, Newark, DE: Fliers targeting Asian and Asian American students were found at off-campus housing at the University of Delaware, Newark. The flyers included the message “Kill China Virus.”

July 31, Bronx, NY: A man was arrested after harassing an Asian woman on the subway. The man reportedly spat on the woman and yelled at her, “Asians caused the virus!” and “Go back to China! Go back to Manhattan!”

There are hundreds of these types of events, and they continue to occur.

Racism and the Foundations of American Political Science

Given the salience of race in so many aspects of the history and events happening now in the United States, why has the discipline of political science been reluctant, and at times openly hostile to scholars of color, especially those

whose research falls in the subfield of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics? As James Farr put it in a 2004 piece on how APSA dealt with the question of civic engagement, who could be engaged, and race, which is more than appropriate at this point in time, “Silence or relative inattention . . . became a disciplinary heritage when dealing with race” (Farr 2004, 39). As we stop being silent, we should not approach this in a defensive posture, but with an honesty and reflection that will move our discipline forward, particularly as how we deal with scholarship on Race, Ethnicity and Politics and those scholars who work in that area, many of whom are scholars of color.

There is a famous quotation, again by Ralph Johnson Bunche, in 1940 at a Conference on the Interdisciplinary Aspects of Negro Studies, held at Howard University and sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies, where he talked about the resistance of political science to publish any articles on Blacks:¹

Concerning the statement made by Dr. Locke, I think we ought to devote some attention to actual possibilities for the publication of articles on the Negro utilizing present available media. In some fields this is relatively easy. Anthropologists deal with the Negro as a respectable topic, and the journals of anthropology take such articles without hesitation. In respect to my own field, which concerns the political status of the Negro, except in so far as papers having to do with colonial problems and the like are involved, there isn't a very cordial reception for papers dealing with the Negro. (Herskovits 1941, 108)

The truth of Bunche's statement was affirmed by the other attendees of the conference, with the economist Abram Harris asking if anyone expected the *Journal of Economics* or *Political Science Quarterly* to publish articles on Blacks or even articles that touched on issues related to Blacks (McClain et al. 2016). He was stating a fact, one that was present in 1940 and, in many ways, persists in some segments of the discipline today (Dawson and Wilson 1991; Holden 1983; Katznelson and Milner 2002; Rich 2007a, 2007b; Wilson 1985; Wilson and Frasure 2007).

One could argue that some of the ideas and positions taken today in the discipline have a history that is rooted in the theories of the founding scholars and anchored in the history of the definition of what are legitimate areas of inquiry. The truth about the foundations of political science has been recognized by some, specifically Jessica Blatt (2014, 2018), Rogers Smith (2004), Farr (2004), Vitalis (2017), and co-authors and me (McClain et al. 2016). My apologies to others whose works we might not have identified. The origins, however, have not been fully appreciated for how they have shaped what is valued in the discipline and what is not. Rogers Smith (2004) argues that since the founding of the United States, conflicts over race have been woven into the DNA of the nation. Yet political science as a discipline, Smith says, has never viewed the study of race as important.

The period between 1881 and 1895 was a time when men trained in German universities returned to the United States determined to identify the origins of societal institutions and to study history “scientifically” (Dyer 1980). These German-trained scholars argued that the origins of English civilization could be traced to the Teutons (Dyer 1980, 45; see also Rabban 2013, 89–90) and that the histories of constitutional liberty were tied to the achievements of Teutonic countries and the superiority of Teutonic societies. Smith (2004) identifies the early graduate programs in history and political science at Johns Hopkins University and Harvard University, and the programs combining political science, constitutional law, and history at Columbia University as imbued with Teutonic theory. Individuals trained and teaching in these graduate programs included Henry Baxter, whose students at Johns Hopkins included Woodrow Wilson (Dyer 1980, 46). Wilson’s attitudes about race and Black Americans have been well documented by historians (Blumenthal 1963; Dennis 2010). One need only read Wilson’s introduction to the film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) to recognize his belief in the superiority of Whites, the inferiority of Blacks, and his view that the film represented an accurate portrayal of Reconstruction. Theodore Roosevelt, after graduating from Harvard, spent a year studying law at Columbia University, where he encountered John W. Burgess, professor of political science and “one of America’s most committed ‘Teutonist’ exponents of white superiority” (Dyer 1980, 7). By the late 1800s, when individuals such as Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, and institutions such as Hopkins, Harvard, and Columbia had exerted their influence, unquestioned racism was part of the bedrock of the political science discipline.

John W. Burgess’ Influence

John W. Burgess, a professor at Columbia and the major professor of Charles Merriam, is considered the founder of the discipline of American political science (Walton and Smith 2007, 30–31). Burgess, as Blatt (2014, 1063) notes, “was central to political science’s emergence as a distinct field.” He founded Columbia’s School of Political Science (1880), the first in the United States to grant PhDs in the field, and was the initiator of *Political Science Quarterly* (1886), the first United States political science journal. On Burgess’ importance to political science, Gunnel (2004, 73) writes that “more than anyone else, Burgess established the disciplinary, professional and intellectual foundations of modern political science.”

Burgess’ intellectual and personal views were formed by his upbringing and place of birth. He was first and foremost a Southerner, born in 1844 in Tennessee to a slave-holding Unionist family (McKinley 2013; Blatt 2014; McClay 1993, 57). He saw slavery as a positive institution, one that involved sympathetic masters and well-treated slaves (McKinley 2013, 49–50). He believed

that slave-owners took good care of their property, that slaves did not work long hours or very hard, and that Blacks were an inferior race. Burgess’ view was that the South was not treated fairly after the Civil War, that white Southerners’ way of life and slavery had not been appreciated, and that war was not an appropriate way to settle governmental questions (McClay 1993, 56–58). Blatt puts Burgess’ views more starkly: “he was also an especially committed and vehement racist, even by the standards of late nineteenth-century America (Blatt 2018, 13).

Burgess’ views of Blacks are exemplified by the passage in his 1902 *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866–1876*:

It was a great wrong to civilization to put the white race of the South under the domination of the negro race. The claim that there is nothing in the color of the skin from the point of view of political ethics is a great sophism. A black skin means membership in a race of men which has never of itself succeeded in subjecting passion to reason, has never, therefore, created any civilization of any kind. To put such a race of men in possession of a “State” government in a system of federal government is to trust them with the development of political and legal civilization upon the most important subjects of human life, and to do this in communities with a large white population is simply to establish barbarism in power over civilization. (133)

Burgess also held that American Indians, Africans, and Asians should never be a part of, be active in, or even be considered a part of the political population (Blatt 2018, 13).

These elements formed Burgess’ view of how the discipline of political science would develop and evolve. Blatt (2018, 14) cautions that simply dismissing Burgess’ racism, while lauding him as the founder of our discipline, misses a much broader and fundamental point: “his racial ideas shaped his political science and the vision for the discipline that he did so much to realize.”

In addition to political science, Burgess, with his former student and Columbia colleague William A. Dunning, co-founded the Dunning School of Historiography, which was comprised of a group of scholars whose view of Reconstruction was sympathetic to white Southerners and adopted the anti-Black and racist views of Burgess. These scholars viewed Blacks as inferior and the rights granted them during Reconstruction as a colossal error. McKinley (2013, 71) contends that “Burgess was the godfather behind the Dunning School’s racism.” Dunning was president of both the American Political Science Association (1921–1922) and the American Historical Association (1913).

From his theory of the state, Burgess saw Reconstruction as the case of the federal “State” illegitimately exercising its power over the former Confederate states, and those states rightly fighting the federal government’s attempts for control, and limiting states’ rights. The consequence of that attempt was, from Burgess’ view, the ill-conceived, corrupt, and oppressive Reconstruction period. He states, among other things, that

From the point of view of a sound political science, the imposition of universal negro suffrage upon the Southern communities, in some of which the negroes were in large majority, was one of the “blunder-crimes” of the century. There is something natural in the subordination of an inferior race to a superior race, even to the point of the enslavement of the inferior race, but there is nothing natural in the opposite. (1902, 244–245)

The early professional journals of the discipline, such as *Political Science Quarterly*, played a central role in propagating and perpetuating the racism of its founders. As mentioned previously, *Political Science Quarterly* was the first political science journal to be published in the United States. Burgess served as editor, along with Archibald Alexander, Richmond Mayo-Smith, Edmund Munroe Smith, Frank J. Goodnow, George H. Baker, and Edwin R. A. Seligman. In the first volume of *Political Science Quarterly*, issued in March 1886, Burgess presents his views of nationality and the state in his article, “The American Commonwealth: Changes in its Relation to the Nation.” As with most of his other writings, he discusses the difficulties of creating national unity in the United States because of the presence of Blacks and later “Mongols” within the country.

For more than a century, the legacy of Burgess and his colleagues persisted in the pages of the journals of our discipline, seeping through in recurring racist assumptions and arguments. For instance, an analysis of all articles in *Political Science Quarterly* from 1886 to 1990 found five articles in early issues of the journal—from 1898, 1905, and 1907—that justified slavery as an institution, as well as early articles on segregation that defended that practice (Walton and McCormick 1997, 234).

Criticism of and Challenges to Teutonic Racism

Burgess was not without his critics, among both White and Black scholars, but most lacked the standing and influence to change the direction of Burgess and the Dunning School’s views of Reconstruction regarding the capacity of Blacks to function successfully in politics. Theirs was the dominant view among many white historians and political scientists, but some White, and many Black, sociologists and historians of the time challenged Burgess and his colleagues. In 1913, Burgess’ student Charles Beard criticized the racist notions of Teutonic civilization and government. Black historians, including Carter G. Woodson, and John R. Lynch, a Reconstruction state legislator and member of the U.S. House of Representatives, also identified Burgess as the most prominent scholar to insert racism into the study of Reconstruction (McKinley 2013, 69).² W.E.B. Du Bois lodged the most famous critique, which he first delivered in a paper at the American Historical Association’s 1909 meeting during a panel that included Dunning and some of Dunning’s students. According to Smith (2013, 33), the paper actually impressed Dunning but did not alter the mainstream historical scholarship at the time.

Despite his brilliance Du Bois could not overcome his lack of power to reframe the debate in the discipline (McClain et al. 2016).

In 1935, Du Bois published a monumental work that redefined Reconstruction and highlighted the central and positive role that Blacks played both socially and politically during that era—*Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part of which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*. In this work, Du Bois called out academics whose views of American history perpetuated negative visions of African Americans. One of those culprits was John W. Burgess, whom Du Bois criticized in two key sections of his book (McClain et al. 2016).

In Chapter 5, Du Bois called out Burgess and his infamous quotation about “black skin”:

A great political scientist in one of the oldest and largest of American universities wrote and taught thousands of youths and readers that ‘There is no question now, that Congress did a monstrous thing, and committed a great political error, if not a sin, in the creation of this new electorate . . . The claim that there is nothing in the color of the skin from the point of view of political ethics is a great sophism. A black skin means membership in a race of men which has never of itself succeeded in subjecting passion to reason; has never, therefore, created any civilization of any kind’. (381)

In Du Bois’ view, such statements earned Burgess a place alongside individuals such as Chief Justice Roger B. Taney—people who believed that “Negroes are not men and cannot be regarded as such” (652).

As for the Dunning School and Columbia University, Du Bois criticized them as the prime purveyors of anti-Black sentiment and white supremacy masquerading as dispassionate scholarship. He takes them on as follows:

The Columbia school of historians and social investigators have issued between 1895 and the present time sixteen studies of Reconstruction in the Southern States, all based on the same thesis and all done according to the same method: first, endless sympathy with the white South; second, ridicule, contempt or silence for the Negro; third, a judicial attitude towards the North, which concludes that the North under great misapprehension did a grievous wrong, but eventually saw its mistake and retreated. (642)

In his last chapter, “The Propaganda of History,” Du Bois further analyzed Burgess, contemporaries who share his racist mindset, and the institutions they influenced. Du Bois wrote that the attack on the history of Reconstruction was led by universities, namely Columbia and Johns Hopkins (642), and that the key thing American children were taught about Reconstruction is “all negroes are ignorant, were lazy, dishonest, and extravagant” (635). That prompted Du Bois to write in his final chapter: “This chapter, therefore, which in logic should be a survey of books and sources, becomes of sheer necessity an arraignment of American historians and an indictment of their ideals” (1935, 648).

Despite Du Bois' critique of Burgess and earlier criticism of the Dunning School, their view of Reconstruction continued to prevail until, as some scholars suggest, the beginning of the modern civil rights movement in the mid-twentieth century (Scott 1989; Holt 1998). Nevertheless, Du Bois' work, along with that of John Hope Franklin and others, contributed significantly to the development of sustained and increasing criticism of Dunning and his students, and a revision of the study of Reconstruction in history. The question we are left with at this point is: How has this founding of the discipline of political science shaped the present-day narrative about race in the field?

The Discipline's Past as Prologue?

At one point recently in a piece written with several co-authors, I naively or maybe hopefully thought that the types of arguments and views held and proclaimed by Burgess, Dunning, and others in the founding generation have been discredited, and few today would subscribe to them. Yet in the July 2020 volume of *Society* a commentary by a political scientist disabused me of the notion that Burgess' ideologies and worldviews were a thing of the past. The sentiment in the essay is a throwback to the early racist foundations of our discipline. The commentary focused on the continuing prevalence of poverty in the United States. The author's perspective is summed up in this passage from the piece:

Today, the seriously poor are mostly blacks and Hispanics, and the main reason is cultural difference. The great fact is that these groups did not come from Europe. Fifty years after civil rights, their main problem is no longer racial discrimination by other people but rather that they face an individualist culture that they are unprepared for. Their native stance toward life is much more passive than the American norm. In America, they face less hardship than they did where they came from, but also more competition. They now must strive to get ahead in school and the workplace while avoiding crime and personal problems. They also must take much more responsibility for themselves than they did before. In short, they have to become more individualist before they can "make it" in America. So they are at a disadvantage competing with the European groups—even if they face no mistreatment on racial grounds. (Mead 2020)

On July 31, 2020, the article was retracted, with comments from the journal saying, in part, that it was published without proper editorial oversight and that the editor-in-chief regrets publishing it and offers his apologies.

The absurdity of the stereotypic tropes and lack of historical knowledge of the groups the author disparages suggests that it is a waste of intellectual effort to argue with the person. But the important point is that these ideas from a time long gone still pervade our discipline and create considerable challenges for us as a discipline. Political science scholars need to recognize the persistence of these challenges and to understand the reasons behind the continued marginalization of scholars who study the politics and behaviors of racial minority groups in political

science, as well as the reluctance of some scholars in the discipline to formally accept Race, Ethnicity, and Politics as a legitimate field of inquiry. We also continue to see derogatory comments about REP and scholars of color on at least one blog site frequented predominantly by graduate students. This suggests that maybe these ideas are still being propagated in our graduate programs. These racial ideologies that spurred the development of political science continue to structure the ways in which issues of race and ethnicity are understood within the discipline today.

"The blindness of the present makes it difficult to see the past," Duke President Vincent Price told the university's Institutional History Committee at a meeting on September 23 of this year. Those words resonate with me as I think about our discipline's own institutional history. While progress has been made in the acceptance of REP—and I will be the first to acknowledge that we have made progress—the history of the discipline has built-in structural inequalities that we political scientists need to be aware of and keep in mind as we think about removing the last vestiges of Burgess' legacy. In an attempt to help move us in that direction, I formed the Presidential Task Force on Examining Issues and Mechanisms of Systemic Inequality in the Discipline. I am extremely grateful to four of our colleagues who agreed to co-chair the taskforce—John Garcia, of the University of Michigan; Cathy Cohen of the University of Chicago; Carol Mershon of the University of Virginia; and Niambi Carter of Howard University. Each has taken on a different aspect of these systemic inequalities and created mini-task forces. John Garcia is examining citation patterns and inequities for scholars of color. Carol Mershon's group is examining climate and context issues at meetings, in departments, and in the discipline writ large. Niambi Carter's group is looking at graduate training, graduate student experiences, and what happens in graduate school that continues to create individuals who perpetuate systemic inequalities. Cathy Cohen and her colleagues are examining tenure and promotion standards and systemic factors that may work against scholars of color.

There is no Pollyanna on my part that the results and recommendations from this task force will be the magic elixir that washes away all of the systemic inequities that have built up on our discipline. But my hope is that their recommendations will take us farther down the road to creating a more equitable and open discipline that values all types of scholarship, all scholars who work in these areas, and that we finally put John Burgess and his ilk to rest.

Acknowledgements

My presidency of APSA occurred at the time two events with racial dimensions occurred—the murder of George Floyd and others and COVID-19—that focused attention to a reexamination of institutions and processes in the

United States. While my presidential task force was already organized to focus on systemic inequalities in the discipline, these two events informed my thinking and became the basis for my presidential address. I want to thank the three Duke PhD students—Jared Clemons, Jasmine Smith, and Miguel Martinez—who helped with the research for this address and contributed immensely to my thought process as I developed this talk.

Notes

- 1 Some of the material in this section is drawn from McClain, Paula D., Gloria Y. A. Ayee, Taneisha N. Means, Alicia Reyes-BarriénteZ and Nura Sedique. "Race, Power, and Knowledge: Tracing the Roots of Exclusion in the Development of Political Science in the United States," *Politics, Groups and Identities* 4, 3 (September 2016):467–482.
- 2 Among those Blacks challenging Burgess were James R. L. Diggs, a founder of the Niagara Movement; John R. Lynch, a Reconstruction state legislator and member of the U.S. House of Representatives; and Norman P. Andrews of Howard University, a student of Carter G. Woodson; and Woodson himself (Smith 2013, 31–32).

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