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## I

**Race Cycles, Racial Hierarchy,  
and Inclusionary Discrimination***A Dynamic Approach*

This book has two agendas: (1) to use the case of Cuba to examine why racial politics change and what limits the amount of improvement for subordinate racial groups and (2) to analyze racial politics in modern Cuba empirically in the context of theories that have been used to explain racial politics in Cuba specifically and in Latin America generally. It is tempting to believe that a single underlying narrative can be found to explain racial politics in post-revolutionary Cuba. The central argument of this book, however, is that at the level of both state and individual, there are often contradictory forces at work with regard to racial politics. Mechanisms of racial change have a strange duality, as they can simultaneously create greater racial equality and reinforce ideas that maintain racial hierarchy. One such mechanism is the myth of color-blindness, which has become a dominant discourse of modern nation states, including Brazil, Cuba, and later the United States (Guinier and Torres 2002).

The contradictory forces at work in racial politics have been expressed in Cuba through its history, state policy, culture, and racial ideology, and in the everyday experiences of Cubans. There has been no linear improvement in racial politics, but an iterative process of opening and closure that has been limited by racial ideology. This book explores all of these elements and their individual, varied effects on racial politics in postrevolutionary Cuba. I look first at broad historical elements and then at the day-to-day situation on the island. In

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this way, I try to bridge the gap between the study of broad structural changes and ideologies and the study of micro-level behavior and experience. I argue that a grasp of both domestic and international politics is essential to understanding racial politics in any country, and that Cuba is no exception.

The theoretical perspective I employ to accomplish these tasks is the “race cycles” perspective. This perspective takes a decidedly non-linear approach to understanding racial politics. Below, I describe the race cycles approach and how it might apply to Cuba. Later in this chapter, I contrast the race cycles approach with the linear ways in which Cuban racial politics has been studied thus far. I also evaluate postmodern perspectives on race that have sought to reinvent myths of racial democracy, or color-blindness, by questioning the salience of racial categories. Finally, I demonstrate that Cuban racial ideology reflects a pattern of “inclusionary discrimination” that explains the uneven inclusion and inequality that has been a part of Cuban politics since before the revolution.

My approach synthesizes a few important and powerful streams of social science literature. It borrows liberally from the work of Anthony Marx, who has focused on nation building and its relationship to the development of racial politics. Marx’s model, however, provides little guidance for understanding the development of racial politics beyond the moment of nation building. For this, I turn to a fusion of William Sewell’s insights on historical events as transformations of structure with McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly’s ideas about contentious politics. These perspectives, when combined with Marx and with Omi and Winant’s work on racial formation, provide a pathway to understanding how race is a structure that itself experiences transformation and interacts with other structures and historical events in a systematic fashion. We are able to relate “racial formation” on the one hand to state formation and change on the other. The race cycles model also allows us to understand how racial ideology and the agency of subordinated individuals transform racial politics. Thus, I attempt with the race cycles model to fuse a discussion of ideology, structure, events, and agency into a single perspective, whereas others have tended to address them one at a time or not to explicitly discuss their relationship to the development of racial politics.

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**Race Cycles**

The race cycles model attempts to build on the growing literature on race, World War II, and the Cold War. Books like Klinkner and Smith's *The Unsteady March* highlight how gains for blacks in the United States were driven by openings created by war mobilizations (1999). The historians Ada Ferrer, Aline Helg, and Alejandro de la Fuente have developed similar perspectives pointing to the transformations in Cuban racial politics brought about by the wars of independence, the revolution, and other key moments in Cuban history. While these books provide important critical perspectives, they do not offer a general model that can be used to understand these transformations across time and space. In this chapter, I propose a model – with an eye to building principles for other cases – that draws upon recent scholarship and offers a general and comparative framework with which to explain transformations in racial politics in Cuba.

The race cycles perspective proposed in this chapter has five central points. First, racial politics is driven by mechanisms such as state crisis, regime change, racial ideology, transnational politics, and endogenous shocks to the system, or critical events. Second, mechanisms like state crisis, transnational politics, and critical events lead to transformations in racial politics. These transformations are followed by the process of state consolidation, which relies on racial ideology to limit and ultimately halt any gains made as a result of the mechanism.<sup>1</sup> Third, because of conflicting state priorities, each mechanism provides opportunities for gains for subordinate racial groups, but it also places limitations on the magnitude and duration of these gains. The mechanisms

<sup>1</sup> I use the terms “mechanisms” and “processes” in the way that Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly use them in their book *Dynamics of Contention* (2001). In the book, “mechanisms” are defined as “a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations” (24). An extension of this process is “regular sequences of such mechanisms that produce similar (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements” (24). There are three kinds of mechanisms described in *Dynamics of Contention*, and this book focuses on all three of them: environmental mechanisms, cognitive mechanisms, and relational mechanisms. While only broader comparative analysis can reveal whether these mechanisms operate in an identical way in a variety of situations, without such language we are unable to describe in any systematic way the patterns of transformations in racial politics. Thus, the language serves to provide some general descriptions of critical variables that drive racial change, but it serves this function metaphorically rather than directly.

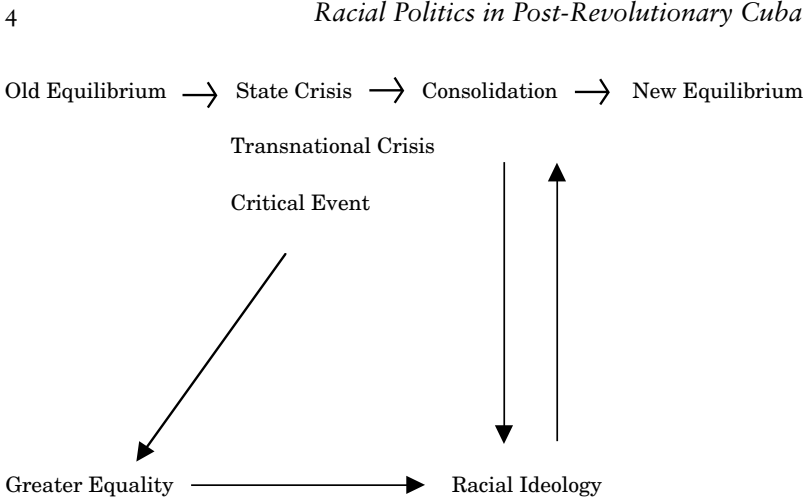


FIGURE 1.1. Race cycles model

that drive the change trend toward an equilibrium position of stagnation in the racial situation. Fourth, gains in racial politics are directly related, in a positive fashion, to the magnitude of the state crisis, but the duration of the gains is inversely related to the degree of the crisis. Finally, following a significant shock and subsequent consolidation, a new equilibrium is created that is different from the previous one. As a consequence, racial ideology and policies are altered (see Figure 1.1).

Race cycles are sporadic, and they do not necessarily cause racial politics to improve in a linear fashion. William Sewell provides theoretical guidance to bolster this point of view. When writing about transformations of structures (racial politics can be considered a structure), Sewell notes: “When changes do take place, they are rarely smooth and linear in character; instead, changes tend to be clustered into relatively intense bursts. Even the accumulation of incremental changes often results in a build-up of pressures and a dramatic crisis of existing practices rather than a gradual transition from one state of affairs to another” (1996, 843). I argue that intense bursts such as Sewell describes occur in the context of, or are driven by, mechanisms like state crisis, transnational politics, and critical events. The following sections discuss these three mechanisms, the process of state consolidation that follows them, and the role of racial ideology as an interlocutor between them.

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*State Crisis*

State crises in the form of foreign wars, civil wars, regime change, and so on are critical moments for racial politics (Helg 1995; Plummer 1996; Layton 1998; Klinkner and Smith 1999; Dudziak 2000). State crisis is one of several “environmental mechanisms,” a category described by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly as “externally generated influences on conditions affecting social life” (2001, 25). A state crisis is any situation in which the state or regime, or the sovereignty of the state or nation, is in jeopardy. While moments of state crisis tend to pose great danger for all groups within society, they also open up critical political opportunities (McAdam 1999; Kryder 2000; Dudziak 2000; Layton 1998). Such crises expand the need for the state to incorporate the support of more social groups in order to consolidate its power and achieve objectives, including its very survival (Becker 1971). During periods of state crisis, subordinate groups’ demands for rights, power, and social or political advancement are most likely to be heard.

The context of state crisis, however, also places profound limitations on potential gains. Wars (civil and otherwise) and government changes mean that many of the rules of the game of politics are suspended or changed. While subordinate groups may be able to make added demands during periods of state crisis, the call to “close ranks” that opens opportunities for outsiders can also limit both the range of issues that subordinate groups might pursue and their means to pursue them (Plummer 1996; Dudziak 2000; Kryder 2000; Parker 2005). The asymmetry in power that exists in this bargaining process means that minority groups may push, but also that they are at great risk if they choose to defy the state openly. The high degree of uncertainty that accompanies state crisis, then, creates opportunities while also often foreclosing more radical options. The Cold War enabled African Americans to fight for rights, for example, but it also required them to purge communists from black organizations (Plummer 1996; Layton 1998). Disadvantaged groups are aware in periods of state crisis that the environment of uncertainty means that things are as likely to become much worse as they are to improve.

Minority groups are also often in particular danger during violent times. When the state is threatened, race can become a convenient, though blunt, standard for determining friends and enemies. The events of World War II in the United States again offer an excellent case in

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point. While the war expanded opportunities for African Americans, the vulnerability of Japanese Americans suggests that war presented both great opportunity and great danger for minority groups. Similarly, during the bloody civil wars in Central America, indigenous peoples faced violence and repression despite the fact that few indigenous peasants were actively involved in the conflicts. As Said, Goldberg, and others note, race can become a proxy for judging good versus evil, modern versus primitive, capitalist versus communist, and so forth. During times of crisis, subordinate racial groups often become scapegoats and are used to help mobilize and eliminate dissident elements (Said 1979; Goldberg 1993). In Cuban history, I argue, three moments represent significant state crises that expanded opportunities for black Cubans: the Cuban wars of independence from Spain, the Cuban Revolution, and the war in Angola. These crises all involved the need to mobilize blacks behind state projects, and they all created significant opportunities in other areas of social, political, and economic life for blacks.

### *Transnational Politics*

Other types of events, however, can have powerful effects on racial politics, stretching the scope of racial politics beyond national boundaries. The Cuban state has used race as a means of accumulating international prestige and building support for the Cuban nationalist project worldwide. International forces are a powerful but undertheorized mechanism for change in racial politics. They can serve as environmental mechanisms that create new environments and change conditions affecting social life; they can also serve as “relational mechanisms.” MacAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly defined relational mechanisms as those that “alter connections among people, groups, and personal networks” (2001, 26). This study addresses relational mechanisms in a transnational context, but the basic definition remains the same. Connections among people alter the landscape, as well as opportunities for contestation and social change. Several writers have studied how both World War II and the Cold War set the stage for the civil rights movement in the United States (Plummer 1996; Layton 1998; Klinkner and Smith 1999; Dudziak 2000; Kryder 2000; McAdam 1999). World War II made it necessary for the federal government to mobilize blacks in order to win the war, and the Cold War made it necessary to reform racial problems in the United States because of the growing ideological

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battle in the South and the specter of Soviet propaganda on racial issues. The Cold War, then, is an example that invites the exploration of transnational politics as a mechanism for transformation in racial politics.

Diplomatic conflicts can open opportunities for minority groups. The process of mobilization and the call to close ranks against a common ideological enemy open new opportunities for making claims against the state. Ethnic minorities can manipulate the needs of the state to mobilize public opinion in order to bargain for greater reforms. The state's need to respond to the real or imagined threat of minority defection forces it to adopt reforms. The development of cross-national alliances can also play an important role in internal racial politics. Cross-national alliances are often the products of international conflicts or potential conflicts. Providing resources that previously did not exist, alliances can offer greater economic opportunities to the parties involved, and they can increase the symbolic importance of internal constituencies. There is substantial evidence, for example, to prove that the ideological battle over the so-called Third World made U.S. blacks important symbolically in ways that had previously not been the case: Embarrassment over the treatment of U.S. blacks produced a symbolic imperative to improve conditions in order to win a propaganda battle with the Soviet Union (Plummer 1996; Layton 1998; Dudziak 2000). Black activists used their position in this propaganda battle to promote the cause of civil rights, bolstering their claim in reference to the Soviet Union and the atrocities of the Nazis. Similarly, the need for better bilateral relationships with Mexico, China, and Korea opened opportunities for naturalization to the nationals of these countries residing within the United States and temporarily changed the terms of their racialization (Chung 2002; Menchaca 2002). Allying with other nations, moreover, may cause greater resources to flow to a variety of internal constituencies, and in some cases to racialized groups. New trading partners, subsidies, and other benefits of alliances can be positive for both dominant and subordinate groups.

Cuba's alliance with the Soviet Union provided critical resources for the Cuban government, allowing for economic growth and programs of redistribution to occur simultaneously. The alliance made resources available for blacks to advance toward equality and improve their standard of living under the rubric of Cuban socialism and nationalism. Cuba also played an important and critical role in the black struggle

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for freedom in the United States. Cuba's discursive and material support of revolutionary nationalist movements like the Black Panthers and other Black Power organizations embarrassed the United States in the context of the Cold War and helped to encourage reform within the United States.

### *Critical Events*

The state, however, is not the only agent of change in race relations. Critical events are environmental mechanisms that shape racial politics outside of the contexts of state crisis and transnational politics, changing the landscape of contention. Critical events capture the state's and the public's attention but do not threaten the very survival of the state or the regime. They may also concatenate with other mechanisms like state crisis and transnational politics. They can unfold literally overnight or at a glacial pace. It is difficult to define "critical events" in a satisfactory manner, yet they are an important variable. William Sewell's definition of "historical events" is helpful here; while Sewell admits that even his definition leaves open ambiguities, it is the best analytical tool we have to understand the nature of events as causal variables for social change. Sewell defines three key components of historical events: "(1) a ramified sequence of occurrences that (2) is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that (3) results in a durable transformation of structures" (1996, 844). Racial politics are one such structure that can be transformed by critical events.

The deindustrialization of American cities is one example of a critical event that unfolded over an extended period of time, while the currency crisis that set off ethnic violence in Asia in 1999 is a critical event that happened literally overnight. These critical events were both economic transformations. Changes in race relations are sometimes an unintended consequence of broader economic restructuring that both offers opportunities and presents limitations for ethnic minorities. As modes of production shift, shifts in family relationships, migration, and how people consume and utilize their leisure time are not uncommon. Some types of restructuring, such as the transition to an industrial economy, can open opportunities, while other types, like the move from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy, can harm opportunities for minorities because they involve a contraction of possibilities rather than an expansion. Similarly, a severe and deep economic crisis can foment racial animosity and harm minorities because



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it creates greater competition for scarce resources. Thus, economic decline limits resources and harms minority interests. Economic crises in general, then, have the opposite effect of other kinds of crises.

There are also other types of critical events, such as social movements or events that have broad symbolic import. Taeku Lee's work on the violence surrounding the Selma, Alabama, march in 1965 indicates that it was a social movement that took on broad symbolic significance; it interacted with other incidents of contestation and symbolic politics to shift attitudes about U.S. civil rights policies (2002). The murder of Martin Luther King Jr. and the subsequent rebellion in 1968 deeply transformed U.S. racial politics. The Rodney King beating and rebellion, too, took on both national and international significance (Hunt 1997; de la Fuente 2001). These critical events were watched in Cuba, China, and Africa and had ripple effects on all parts of the United States. Similarly important critical events include, for example, the protests in Soweto, South Africa, and the Emmitt Till lynching, which was covered extensively in Cuba.<sup>2</sup> Many critical events are protests, and frequently they are contentious interactions – like Bloody Sunday in Ireland – that bring issues of minority justice to the forefront. It is also possible for state institutions to generate critical events that are not simply responses to pressure to reform, but that themselves open new possibilities for contestation and agency. The 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, for example, fueled substantial debate on racial issues and led to ugly incidents in which the federal government had to enforce federal law. Again, these incidents were not just structural reforms; they took on a broader symbolic significance and created openings that social movement activists attempted to exploit. Protests and important symbolic incidents usually happen, however, when contestation over a potential state consolidation heightens protest movement activity, and these incidents are usually more effective in the context of a state crisis or of significant transnational political developments.

It is critical to note, finally, that these kinds of events and their influence on racial politics are deeply affected by regime type. During critical

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that one of the most famous Cuban poems on race and anti-colonialism, written by the black Cuban poet Nicolas Guillen, is entitled "Elegy to Emmitt Till." The events surrounding Till's murder by a white mob for whistling at a white woman captured the imagination and shocked the consciousness of blacks not only in the United States but also in Cuba and elsewhere.

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events, uncertainty creates opportunities – and also danger – for out-groups. Challenges to the existing racial regime are more likely in places where there is greater freedom to express dissent within civil society. Thus, regimes that allow more freedom of the press and of expression are more susceptible to demand protest activity that extends cycles of change in race relations. In the case of Cuba, we will see that the extensive power of the state has generally prevented demand protest activity. Racial ideology and negative stereotypes can also work during critical events to limit possibilities for minorities by creating hegemonic narratives that disarm, dismiss, or attack agents of disadvantaged groups. There is a duality to critical events and a strong tendency toward equilibrium in race relations contained within the need to find comfort in the midst of uncertainty.

### *State Consolidation*

Racial politics are often an arena in which broader anxieties about the direction of society are played out, and state consolidation – the mechanism that follows state crisis – tends to return racial politics to a state of normalcy, or equilibrium. Following a crisis, states have a strong desire to consolidate their power and hegemony. State consolidation produces a contraction effect that halts many of the gains made by marginalized groups during the crisis period; the more threatening these gains are to state cohesion, the more swift and violent the state consolidation will be. The need to build consensus, eliminate dissent, and produce certainty and assurance among actors generally means that the progress of marginalized racial and ethnic groups is slow, if it does not cease altogether, during periods of state consolidation. The needs of the emergent state or regime take precedence over all else in a manner that tends to produce a new equilibrium. As the new order emerges from the more chaotic situation that preceded it, the state has a strong incentive to declare the race problem “solved.” As Goldberg notes, the modern state uses race as a primary means of establishing its rationality, and in many cases the rationality of the state is articulated in terms of its avowals of “color-blindness,” regardless of whether or not racial problems have actually been solved (2002).

States that are more authoritarian in nature are also more effective at consolidation. Their ability to intervene with active and direct coercion aids the consolidation process, while states that must use forces