1 THE NEW AMERICAN MINORITY

> An identity is questioned only when it is menaced, as when the mighty begin to fall, or when the wretched begin to rise, or when the stranger enters the gates, never, thereafter, to be a stranger: the stranger's presence making you the stranger, less to the stranger than to yourself.
>
> JAMES BALDWIN (1976)

In 1998, President Bill Clinton gave the commencement address at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. Standing before the crowd of graduating students, he told them he wanted to speak about the America of their future – an America that was changing and becoming more diverse at a breathtaking rate. The driving force behind this increasing diversity, he stated, was a new and large wave of immigration that was changing the face of the country. He described how in places like Hawaii, Houston, and New York City, there was currently no majority race. "No other nation in history has gone through demographic change of this magnitude in so short a time," he said. Then, he paused, and posed a question to the crowd, "What do the changes mean? They can either strengthen and unite us, or they can weaken and divide us. We must decide."

Eighteen years later, the changes Clinton described are upon us. In many more cities, whites, once the numerical majority, are now a minority. According to recent population projections, by 2043, whites will no longer comprise a majority of the country.[1] Our increasingly diverse nation elected its first black president in

2008. The first justice of Hispanic heritage was appointed to the US Supreme Court in 2009.[2] The 115th Congress, which began its meeting in January 2017, was the most racially and ethnically diverse in history.[3] Within the walls of our political and economic institutions, individuals of different backgrounds, heritages, and experiences have joined the ranks.

These changes have not come to pass without protest. In numerous ways, some white Americans have expressed their dismay at the changing racial composition of the country and at the strides racial and ethnic minorities have made in achieving political, social, and economic power.[4] Over the past decade, several predominantly white state legislators have moved to enact strict immigration laws. They have challenged ethnic studies courses, diversity programs, and college courses on race – particularly those perceived as derisive toward whites (Delgado 2013).[5] They have also proposed legislation requiring presidential candidates to produce birth certificates, and enacted voter identification laws, making it potentially more difficult for racial and ethnic minorities to participate in elections (Bentele and O'Brien 2013).[6]

During these legislative battles, racial tensions flared. In 2006, hundreds of thousands of Latinos gathered in cities across the United States to protest restrictive immigration legislation and to demand policies that would provide immigrants with pathways to citizenship (Voss, Bloemraad, and Lee 2011). More fuel was added to these fires in the aftermath of Barack Obama's election as the nation's first African American president in 2008. Many heralded Obama's victory as a sign of our nation's racial progress. But Obama's election also appears to have brought to the fore more insidious forms of racism and ethnocentrism (Kam and Kinder 2012; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Piston 2010; Tesler 2012a; Tesler and Sears 2010). It also did little to mend the vast divide between white and black Americans over racial policy. Americans today remain more polarized around issues of race than ever (Goldman 2012; Hutchings 2009).

These tensions took center stage during the 2016 presidential election, with the Republican candidacy and election of Donald Trump. Over the course of his campaign, Trump spoke disparagingly of Muslim and Mexican immigrants. He proposed a halt to refugees entering the country and promised to build a wall along America's southern border to stop the flow of immigrants from Mexico. Vowing

to "put America first," Trump warned of the dangers of globalization. Outside of Trump's campaign rallies, protestors, many of whom were black or Latino, clashed, sometimes violently, with white Trump supporters. Hostilities mounted even further when, only days after taking office, President Trump signed an executive order banning citizens from seven Muslim-majority nations from entering the country. Much of Trump's first year as president was marked by public outcry over immigration policies many regarded as draconian.

It appears, to answer Clinton's earlier question, that our increasingly diverse nation has in many ways divided us. What explains these rifts? Why are white Americans mobilizing en masse around issues of racial and ethnic diversity? And why were so many white Americans drawn to a candidate like Donald Trump, who was often derisive of racial and ethnic minorities, and whose campaign focused on curbing immigration and rejecting international trade agreements? Why do we now seem to be witnessing a backlash to globalization, a widespread desire to close our nation's borders, to restrict immigration, and to stay out of foreign affairs? And why have hostilities between whites and other racial and ethnic minorities grown in recent years?

Some of this backlash is rooted in prejudice, racism, and ethnocentrism. But as I will show, a great deal of many whites' reactions to our country's changing racial landscape do not simply manifest in outward hostility. Amidst these changes, many whites have described themselves as outnumbered, disadvantaged, and even oppressed. They have voiced their anxiety over America's waning numerical majority, and have questioned what this means for the future of the nation. They have worried that soon they may face discrimination based on their own race, if they do not already (Norton and Sommers 2011).[7] These sentiments hint at the fact that the growing non-white population, the pending loss of whites' majority status, and the increasing political and economic power of people of color in the United States has a second consequence. For a number of whites, these monumental social and political trends – including an erosion of whites' majority status and the election of America's first black president – have signaled a challenge to the absoluteness of whites' dominance. These threats, both real and perceived, have, as I will demonstrate, brought to the fore, for many whites, a sense of commonality, attachment, and solidarity with their racial group. They have led a sizeable proportion of whites to believe that their racial group, and the benefits that group

enjoys, are endangered. As a result, this racial solidarity now plays a central role in the way many whites orient themselves to the political and social world.

In the pages that follow, I examine the rise and consequences of white identity politics. My argument is rooted in the notion that an identity – a psychological, internalized sense of attachment to a group – can provide an important cognitive structure through which individuals navigate and participate in the political and social world (Conover 1984; Huddy 2003; Lau 1989; Miller et al. 1981). A great body of evidence indicates that as humans, our need to belong, to see ourselves as similar to others with whom we share common goals, is innate. We are, so to speak, primed to adopt group attachments around our social groupings, whether they be based on religion, occupation, or something else. Not surprisingly, these identities can profoundly influence our political preferences and behavior.

As we will see, this solidarity, and whites' desire to protect their group's interests, plays a key role in today's most important and pressing political and social issues. Over the course of this book, I will show that mass opposition to immigration, to government outsourcing, and to trade policies are a function of white identity. What is more, we will learn that white identity undergirds significant support for social welfare spending. Contrary to popular perceptions, many whites are supportive of more government assistance, but primarily when they believe that assistance is directed at their group. Indeed, desires to preserve Social Security and Medicare are rooted in white racial solidarity.

Most importantly, white racial solidarity is a pivotal factor in contemporary electoral politics. A great deal of work on race in political science over the past decade has focused on the profound role racial prejudice played in opposition to Barack Obama and his political agenda. But this work has overlooked the relationship between Obama's electoral success and whites' racial in-group attitudes. Perhaps because of this oversight, many social scientists and pundits were surprised by the successful presidential campaign Donald Trump mounted in 2016. This work offers a comprehensive and systematic way for us to understand support for Trump, a candidate who effectively mobilized whites around their racial identity.

For social scientists, this work makes a number of additional contributions. The theory and evidence I present expand our account of intergroup relations more broadly, demonstrating when and in what

ways dominant group identities are salient and consequential. Much of the work on racial conflict in the United States has focused on white *out-group* attitudes in the form of racial prejudice and racial resentment. I look at a whites' *in-group* attitudes, and make a strong case that such attitudes are not synonymous with prejudice, nor do strong out-group animosities necessarily follow from a strong sense of in-group identity (Brewer 1999).[8] Many whites identify with their racial group without feeling prejudice toward racial and ethnic minorities, and many more whites possess some degree of negative affect toward racial and ethnic minorities without also identifying with their racial group.

I also unpack the nature of white racial solidarity, demonstrating that many whites in the United States not only identify with their racial group, with great political consequence, but a sizeable subset also possesses a sense of group consciousness. That is, some whites not only feel a strong attachment to their racial group, but for some, that attachment is also coupled with a set of beliefs about the need for whites to work together to achieve their political goals. Furthermore, I introduce valid and reliable ways to measure both forms of white racial solidarity on public opinion surveys.

Finally, this book reconsiders our prevailing understanding of race relations in the United States. The evidence here makes clear that race is central to American politics, and pays careful and renewed attention to how the hierarchical arrangement of racial groups profoundly influences our nation's politics. This work joins a long line of research, which argues that racial conflict and racial inequality in the United States are not merely the product of learned racial prejudice; such disparities are also the product of white efforts to protect their power and status (Blumer 1958; Bobo 1999; Klinkner and Smith 1999; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Parker and Barreto 2013). Indeed, many of the whites in my account are seeking to reassert a racial order in which their group is firmly at the top.

The history of race relations in the United States has been an unsteady, often wavering, climb toward racial equality, with steps taken both forward and backward. The issues I take up in the pages to come are part of another chapter in the story of how Americans choose to confront new challenges to the nation's racial hierarchy. Ultimately, these matters cut to the core of how Americans define what it means to be citizens, the extent to which we as a nation embrace multiculturalism, and how well we choose to live up to democratic values. These

questions are complicated and knotty, but fundamental to American social and political life. This work is part of an effort to untangle them, and to better understand what divides and what unites us.

Overlooking White Identity

To political scientists, the claim that whites possess a racial identity should come as a surprise. Historically, the study of identity, especially as it has pertained to race or ethnicity, has often been one-sided, focusing on the concept's development and its role among subordinate or minority groups. Hughes (1948) noted how common it was "to study ethnic relations as if one had to know only one party to them" (p. 479). But, as he put so eloquently, we cannot fully understand group relations through the study of one group anymore "than a chemical combination by study of one element only, or a boxing bout by observation of only one side of the fighters" (p. 479).[9]

And yet racial identity among whites has been especially ignored or rejected by social scientists. When considering whether white Americans feel a sense of anxiety about the status of their racial group, or whether whites possess a sense of racial identity that has political consequences, for the past fifty years, the answer generally has been "no." For the most part, scholars have argued that racial solidarity among whites has been invisible and politically inconsequential. Whites, by nature of their dominant status and numerical majority, have largely been able to take their race for granted. Sears and Savalei (2006) describe this position well:

> In general, whites remain dominant in American society – numerically, socially, economically, and politically – and overt, explicitly racial conflict is now relatively rare. As a result, whites' whiteness is usually likely to be no more noteworthy to them than is breathing the air around them. White group consciousness is therefore not likely to be a major force in whites' political attitudes today.
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> *(2006, p. 901)*

The scholarly consensus has been that whites do not, by and large, think about their whiteness – at least not in a way that is politically meaningful. They are not, according to the conventional wisdom,

influenced by an inward attachment to their racial group, or by a sense of group identity. Whiteness, according to this line of reasoning, for all intents and purposes, is invisible. Thus, for whites, our perspective on their attitudes and behavior when it comes to race has been almost exclusively outwardly focused; it attends to the nature and consequences of racial prejudice, resentment, and animus among whites, particularly that which is directed toward blacks.

I argue, however, that now is the time to reconsider the scope of racial attitudes associated with whites' political evaluations, preferences, and behaviors. Most of the scholarship concluding that white racial solidarity is generally invisible or without consequence was conducted between the 1970s and the early 2000s. During this time, the nation looked quite different than it does today. The United States was far less diverse, and most racial conflict was situated primarily between black and white Americans. There was also little doubt that whites constituted an overwhelming numerical majority of the American population and fully controlled government institutions at all levels.

Today's racial and ethnic landscape is vastly different than it has been at any other time in our nation's history. Due to immigration and differences in birth rates across racial and ethnic groups, the relative size of the white population is shrinking. The United States is now one of the most racially and ethnically diverse countries in the Western world. Because of the rapid racial and ethnic diversification of the country, we must reevaluate our theories about the nature of racial conflict and racial attitudes, many of which were established under a black–white paradigm. Issues of race, of diversity, of globalization, and of immigration are fundamentally altering our political parties, our political attitudes, and our political institutions (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Hajnal and Lee 2011). Our theories must be updated and reconstructed to account for a much greater array of groups under changing circumstances.

This book offers a framework for understanding racial conflict in today's more racially and ethnically diverse nation. I contend that, today, whites' racial attitudes are not merely defined by prejudice; many whites also possess a sense of racial identity and are motivated to protect their group's collective interests and to maintain its status. As well shall see, whiteness is now a salient and central component of American politics. White racial solidarity influences many whites' worldview and guides their political attitudes and behavior.

White Nationalism

The backlash to our nation's growing diversity has undoubtedly contributed to the rise of more insidious groups, often associated with white supremacy, such as the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, skinheads, white nationalists, and some militia movements.[10] It has almost certainly fostered the rise of individuals calling themselves members of the "alt-right," a somewhat amorphous, reactionary group that supports white nationalism, and whose members generally endorse efforts to protect the white race.[11] Many argue that these groups have become more mainstream, and they certainly gained significant media attention during the 2016 presidential campaign when they vehemently supported Trump.[12]

Understanding the rise and the consequences of these movements is important. But that is not the aim of this book. The whites I describe here are not marginalized extremists who actively participate in the production of a white, masculine, and patriarchal ideology – one that advocates for the separation of groups and the superiority of whites (Ferber 1998). The whites in my account are a much broader group and far greater in number. In fact, whites high on racial solidarity comprise approximately 30–40 percent of the white population and, like most whites, the vast majority of those who identify with their racial group reject assertions of white supremacy and racism. And while these whites may share some of the same political views as their more extremist counterparts, they are not one and the same. This sizeable portion of white Americans are not especially interested in the separation of groups and the denigration of other races and ethnicities. Instead, as we shall see, they are primarily concerned with their in-group and desire to protect its status. Nevertheless, this work may provide somewhat of a cautionary tale. With evidence in hand that elites can appeal to whites' racial interests explicitly and successfully, there is potential for the ranks of white nationalists to grow.

The White Working Class

In response to today's political and social upheaval, many pundits and academics have turned their attention squarely on the white working class (Gest 2016; Hochschild 2016; Vance 2016). By their account, many of these whites have been left behind by the consequences of

globalization, their jobs shipped overseas or displaced by immigrants. Angry and disenfranchised, they are lashing out and are susceptible to political appeals by elites espousing more protectionist policies and who promise to restore manufacturing jobs. For some commentators, the politics of white identity is the politics of the white working class.

There is, however, far more to the story. Many whites who possess a racial identity are, by some measures, members of the working class. But the phenomena I describe are not limited to whites situated in blue-collar jobs. This is, therefore, not merely a tale about the white working class. A much wider swath of whites view their racial group as dispossessed, persecuted, and threatened by America's changing racial dynamics. The politics of white identity is not wholly or even primarily rooted in economic disenfranchisement; it is far broader and more pervasive.

From Where We Have Come

To understand the role of white racial solidarity today, we must go back in time. From the country's very beginnings, race, particularly whiteness, was intricately connected to America's national identity. One year after the US Constitution was adopted and a year before the Bill of Rights was ratified, the US Congress passed the Naturalization Act of 1790. It was the first statute in the country to codify laws regarding national citizenship.[13] The Act explicitly limited naturalization to any "free white persons" who had lived in the United States for at least two years, excluding American Indians, slaves, free blacks, and indentured servants from citizenship. In subsequent years, as the immigrant population in the United States began steadily to tick upward, racial restrictions on citizenship were left intact, and naturalization laws became increasingly restrictive.

Between the 1840s and 1850s, America experienced one of its first significant, postcolonial waves of immigration. An oppressive caste system and a potato crop decimated by blight encouraged three million Catholic Irish to flee their home country for the United States.[14] In recent decades, the Irish have generally been subsumed under the umbrella of whiteness, but in the early decades of the nineteenth century their racial status was far more ambiguous (Ignatiev 1995). In fact, according to Jacobson (1999), the vagueness of the term "white

people" as first written into the Naturalization Act of 1790 contributed to a new set of ideological tensions in the nation in the 1840s and 1850s. While "established codes of whiteness" were initially inclusive of all Europeans (p. 72), the influx of Catholic Irish at least temporarily prompted an effort to restrict the boundaries around race. The foreignness, lower economic status, and Catholicism of this group of immigrants challenged the religious and ethnic composition of the United States, engendering hostility among old-stock Americans (Billington 1938).[15] This animosity gave way to a pervasive nativism in the 1850s known as the "Know-Nothing" movement.[16] Supporters of this movement formed a political party called the American Party, which was anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant. The party's leaders demanded more restrictive naturalization laws.

The Know-Nothings did not obtain enough power to accomplish their political goals with much rigor, and political divisions, particularly over slavery, fueled the party's decline after 1856. But the sentiments espoused by the Know-Nothings have reverberated over the course of the nation's history. Each subsequent wave of immigration has provoked national conversations around the preservation of America's identity as a white nation, and one in which whites maintain political, social, and economic power.

By the early part of the twentieth century, such sentiments reached new heights, with significant political consequence. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous novel, *The Great Gatsby*, in which one of the central characters, Tom Buchanan, remarks to his wife, "[t]he idea is if we don't look out the white race will be – will be utterly submerged … It is up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things." Fitzgerald's book is set at the beginning of the Roaring Twenties, in the aftermath of World War I, and following intense domestic racial tensions resulting in the race riots of 1919's Red Summer. It was published in 1925, just after the passage of the American Immigration Act of 1924, which slowed down to a trickle the massive waves of European immigrants who had arrived during the previous two decades. The Act established strict immigration quotas, sharply curtailing "non-white" immigrants from Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe. Many proponents of this law embraced the argument espoused by Tom Buchanan; they were supremely interested in controlling the ethnic composition of the US population and believed in the racial superiority of Northern Europeans. They also saw the