

THE NEW WHITE NATIONALISM IN AMERICA

Over the past ten years, a new white nationalist movement has gained strength in America, bringing with it the potential to disrupt already fragile race relations. Eschewing violence, this movement seeks to expand its influence mainly through argument and persuasion directed at its target audience of white Americans aggrieved over racial double standards, race-based affirmative action policies, high black-on-white crime rates, and liberal immigration policies. The movement has also been energized, Swain contends, by minority advocacy of multiculturalism. Due to its emphasis on group self-determination, multiculturalism has provided white nationalists with justification for advocating a parallel form of white solidarity. In addition, as Swain illustrates, technological advances such as the Internet have made it easier than ever before for white nationalists to reach a more mainstream audience. Swain's study is intended as a wake-up call to all Americans who cherish the civil rights era vision of an integrated America, a common humanity, and equality before God and the law.

Carol M. Swain is Professor of Political Science and Professor of Law at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of *Black Faces, Black Interests: The Representation of African Americans in Congress* (1993, 1995), which was selected by *Library Choice Journal* as one of the seven outstanding academic books of 1994. "*Black Faces* was also the winner of the 1994 Woodrow Wilson Foundation award . . ." Award of the American Political Science Association, the D. B. Hardeman Prize of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation, and the co-winner of the V. O. Key Award of the Southern Political Science Association.

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THE NEW WHITE
NATIONALISM
IN AMERICA
ITS CHALLENGE
TO INTEGRATION

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*To Robert K. Merton
for his inspiration and support*

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P R E F A C E

This book explores the development of an emerging white nationalist movement in America that poses a threat, I believe, to the peace and repose of our multiethnic society. Appropriating to its own ends the language of multiculturalism and civil rights activism, this developing social movement, I argue in these pages, has the potential to expand its ranks among ordinary white Americans, who increasingly find themselves frustrated by a host of unresolved public policy issues in the area of ethnicity and race. Often disguising themselves in the mantle of mainstream conservatism, white nationalists have developed skills at packaging their message to conceal the radicalism of their views, and have been successful in recent years in expanding their influence into our homes, our computers, and our schools. This development, I believe, is alarming, and it is a major purpose of this book to draw attention to the danger posed by the growing influence of the white nationalist movement.

White nationalism thrives by its willingness to address many contemporary issues and developments that mainstream politicians and media sources either ignore entirely or fail to address with any degree of openness or candor. These developments include the continuing influx into the country of nonwhite immigrants and the prospect that America in the not-too-distant future will cease to be a white majority nation; the decline in high-paying, low-skill-requisite, industrial jobs as a result of globalization and other structural changes in the American economy; continuing white resentment over affirmative action policies that favor officially designated minority groups over native whites in education and employment; continued white fear of black crime; the continued emphasis on racial identity politics and the fostering of an

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ethnic group pride on the part of nonwhite minority groups; and the expanding influence and reach of the Internet. When these conditions combine with the rising expectations on the part of racial and ethnic minorities for a larger share of power and influence in American society, the stage is set for increased political conflict and turmoil.

I have written this book to heighten public awareness of the groups and leaders in the white nationalist movement and the issues they use in their recruitment efforts. I have also written it with the special hope that it will provide useful insights into the nature of America's continuing racial problems, especially for people who consider themselves to be liberals on public policy issues, because some of the policies that they support are contributing to a worsening racial climate. By liberals I refer to individuals who favor vigorous government intervention to ensure the advancement of racial and ethnic minorities and to protect them from official and private discrimination. I try here to provide liberals with information that can give them a more informed idea of the tradeoffs involved in continuing down the same path that they have embarked upon since the late 1960s and early 1970s, when our current affirmative action regime was first put in place and when nonwhite immigrants first began pouring into the country in large numbers. Although many liberal activists will probably continue to believe that the benefits for society of the expanded racial and ethnic diversity made possible by current public policies are well worth the price of social unrest, others might use the information in this book to rethink their strategies and to consider how best to help disadvantaged minority populations to improve their lot in life without alienating potential allies frustrated by current government policies. A major goal in writing this book is to inform Americans – and particularly liberal Americans – of what I see as dangers looming ahead, as well as to highlight areas of potential agreement and consensus among racial and ethnic groups where viable multiracial coalitions might be forged.

In earlier presentations of some of the ideas contained in this book, some critics have expressed the fear that in publicizing the views of white nationalists and others on the racist right I am giving them a new and better forum from which to press their claims. Others have stated their concern that in drawing attention to the racial tension caused by current affirmative action policy, I may be giving ammunition to conservative opponents of such policies who seek to eliminate them rather

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than mend them. To the first group I respond that white nationalists already have a forum, one far more powerful than any I can provide. By exposing their strategies and giving voice to some of their grievances I hope to promote greater racial harmony and to heighten America's awareness of what is at stake. What I would like to see is more scholarly assessment countering the social science data that white nationalists eagerly proffer, and I would like to see open forums on university and college campuses where ideas can be combated with other ideas rather than censored, and where hearts can be opened and perhaps changed.

If the material in this book presents a challenge to liberals, it also, I believe, offers a warning to conservatives. By conservatives I mean those who are suspicious of activist government, particularly in the domestic sphere, and who are often more willing than liberals, at least among themselves, to express criticisms of the behavior of racial minorities. A major contention of this book is that we need a reinvigorated public dialogue in the area of race where well-meaning persons of all political persuasions will not be labeled as racists or antiblack for criticizing social welfare programs, opposing racial preferences, or condemning unhealthy or irresponsible behavior in black communities. I believe there should be a place where a vigorous intellectual conversation can take place about such hot-button issues as affirmative action, black crime rates, racial differences in IQ scores, and the wisdom of racial preference programs that include immigrant minorities and their offspring. However, mainstream conservatism, in my view, crosses the line of acceptable discourse, and enters the destructive territory of white racism and white chauvinism, when it begins to argue that blacks are criminal by nature, that minorities are a menace to the high civilization that white people have created, or that the alleged genetic inferiority of black and brown peoples requires a regime of white separatism or white supremacy to preserve Western culture from degradation and despoilment. Participants in any fruitful dialogue must be united by at least some shared values and beliefs, and in the case of meaningful racial dialogue, both a modicum of goodwill and an affirmation of our common humanity are indispensable prerequisites. It is these latter prerequisites that are missing from the discourse of most of the white nationalists profiled in this book, and their example should serve as a warning to conservatives who share

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some of their views. One can only say to such conservatives: Don't go there!

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS: THE AUTHOR AS
INTERPRETER AND DATA SOURCE

In this book I break with the tradition of impersonal, value-free social science insofar as I do not pretend to be neutral and do not hesitate to interject many personal observations and comments into the body of the text. Because I care so deeply about the future of American race relations and because I have acquired valuable experiences in life that give me some insight into a number of the issues treated in this study, I have reserved for myself the right to explore hunches and draw upon personal intuitions as I interpret and evaluate the data. This is particularly true on the issue of affirmative action.

When I express reservations about certain forms of current affirmative action policy, I do so from the standpoint of a black woman with a firsthand knowledge of what it means to be poor and disadvantaged in America. I was born in rural Virginia into an abusive and impoverished farm household of twelve children with many different fathers. None of my siblings – seven brothers and four sisters – ever graduated from high school. Although I, too, dropped out of school after completing the eighth grade, I nevertheless managed to earn five college degrees from an array of institutions, starting at a community college and ending at an Ivy League university.¹ Over the years, I have been a divorced welfare mother of two sons, both of whom, I am proud to report, managed to avoid most of the serious problems that plague black males in contemporary America. I have worked as an assistant in a nursing home for the aged, as an unskilled worker in a garment factory, as a door-to-door salesperson, and as a library worker at a community college before becoming a successful university professor. My varied experiences at different occupations and class levels have enabled me, I believe, to relate better to Americans from many different racial, economic, and educational backgrounds. I have seen life in

¹ My degrees are from the following colleges and universities: Virginia Western Community College (A.A.S., 1978), Roanoke College (B.A., 1983), Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (M.A., 1984), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Ph.D., 1989); and Yale University Law School (M.S.L., 2000).

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America from the bottom, from the middle, and from the top, and I think I have learned something about just who is in need of special help programs and what sort of programs are likely to work.

I can speak, for instance, of the great value of having race-neutral federal grants and loans, since these were crucial to my own ability to start and continue my education. Despite the existence of affirmative action and the public perception that it supposedly allows blacks to attend colleges on free scholarships, that was certainly not my own experience during the early to mid-1980s. In addition to working, sometimes at a full-time job, I had to borrow heavily from the federal government to complete my education. It was, in fact, my experience of struggling financially at the four-year institution I attended that led me to approach the outside black business community with a proposal to establish a private academic scholarship for minorities.² Rather than straightforward racial preferences, I believe that what enabled me to overcome some of the disadvantages of my social background was a combination of both help from concerned mentors and government financial assistance from such programs as Basic Grant.

Some forms of affirmative action, I believe, are harmful to their recipients and can diminish both their efforts to achieve and their self-esteem. I have seen how the very existence of racial preferences can have the paradoxical effect of undermining initiative and self-confidence. In a society with a long history of racial prejudice and discrimination, it is all too easy for members of racial and ethnic minorities to fall into the role of helpless victim or legitimizing token. Racial preference policies, I think, often encourage this kind of behavior. Such policies carry a subliminal message of doubt and uncertainty – a message that says, in effect, that you, as a woman or member of a minority group, are less capable than a white male and will need special preference in order to compete successfully in a world dominated by superior white males. This is particularly the case at the most competitive universities, where affirmative action policies take on the greatest salience. At elite institutions the walls seem to whisper, “white

² While a senior at Roanoke in Salem, Virginia, I approached the wealthiest black businessman in the city, Lawrence Hamlar, with a proposal to establish a scholarship in honor of his deceased wife, who had served as my teacher and mentor at the community college I attended. In 1994, the Constance J. Hamlar Scholarship endowment exceeded \$250,000.

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males are superior . . . African Americans and Hispanics are inferior.” Believing that everyone else is more capable than you are, or that the world is dominated by malevolent forces out to victimize and eliminate you, is hardly conducive to high levels of personal achievement or high self-esteem.

I felt some of these forces at work while I was on the faculty at Princeton University. For ten years I was the Department of Politics’ sole African-American faculty member and one of just two blacks in the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University’s prestigious public policy institute. Many times I sat on committees and in meetings in which I had to listen to patronizing remarks about affirmative action from my mostly “liberal” colleagues, and suffered the feelings of inadequacy that many African Americans experience as they fulfill what is at best a token and marginalized role in majority white institutions, where most remain outsiders. Undoubtedly, some of what I can now see as my ambivalence about being on the faculty of a world-class university was a product both of my rapid change in social class and my personal insecurities about the role that affirmative action may have played in my own success story. Despite the fact that when I arrived at Princeton I had a solid record of scholarly achievement and a book contract from Harvard University Press – a rarity for a new assistant professor – I nevertheless worried about whether I was qualified enough to be there. Even after receiving tenure there was a period when I felt immobilized by self-doubt despite the fact that I had continued to publish and received a number of prestigious awards for my scholarly work. Affirmative action policies, I believe, can send a powerful message to whites and blacks alike that minorities are incapable of competing on their own, and it has contributed to the continued white denigration of genuine minority accomplishment.

The way affirmative action programs are administered at many universities is also troubling. It has been my experience that, at least in academia, the right class pedigree for black scholars is valued by some institutions just as highly – and in some cases even more highly – than a record of solid scholarship. This applies to both hiring and tenure decisions where lower standards sometimes seem to apply to the well bred. When one considers that the original justification for affirmative action policies was to give the “shackled runners” (Lyndon Johnson’s metaphor) a boost up after a long life of deprivation and disadvantage,

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one sees how perverse this development really is. Some predominantly white institutions seem to be more interested in having a small number of well-bred middle-class minority tokens than minority scholars from more modest backgrounds.

Minority scholars hired under such circumstances often display a degree of class snobbishness that is rarely discussed outside of minority circles. Many affluent African Americans I have encountered in academia act as if all academic positions and awards should go to their group as some kind of special entitlement. They also seem to be made uneasy when minorities from lower-class backgrounds achieve more than individuals from their more privileged backgrounds. Surprisingly, I have even encountered such feelings among middle-class blacks who have achieved much on their own and have received the social recognition that one would suppose would make them feel more secure and less threatened by the achievement of others.

One other effect of affirmative action in academia is to stifle open discussion and dissent about the wisdom of the policy itself, especially among those in the groups intended as its beneficiaries. For a minority scholar to express reservations about affirmative action is to risk all sorts of accusations about one's motivations. "How dare you?" is often the response to any black critic who challenges the white supporters of affirmative action at our elite universities or questions the integrity of their alliances with those they often disdain in private conversations.

In criticizing many aspects of affirmative action policy, I do not, of course, wish to deny the goodwill of at least some of its supporters and the genuine concern that many have for helping those truly in need. Nor do I wish to suggest that grades and test scores should be the only criteria that universities can legitimately use in determining who they accept into their undergraduate or graduate programs. Indeed, I think such an approach can miss a great deal about a person's real accomplishments. Because I transferred with an associate's degree and a solid academic record into a four-year college from a community college that had an open-door admission policy, I was not required to take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) that so many black students score poorly on. And although I graduated magna cum laude from a solid liberal arts college (while working full-time as a community college librarian assistant), my Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores were unimpressive, despite my having met the academic requirements of the

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highest honor societies at my undergraduate school. So I can sympathize with students of all races who have had excellent grades and past academic performance but nevertheless fail to score high on standardized tests. In addition, like most of the Americans whose survey responses I analyze later in this study, I believe that what constitutes merit within an academic context can be legitimately expanded to take account of the obstacles an individual has had to overcome in life. But real problems exist with affirmative action programs as they currently exist in academia and elsewhere, and I feel obligated to say what is wrong with them. I would particularly like to see the community college route that gave me a second chance utilized by more students from disadvantaged backgrounds, because it represents an important option rarely discussed in the current affirmative action debate.

So I believe I can speak as an American who has seen this country from many different vantage points and can empathize with the plight of the nation's truly disadvantaged. Over the course of less than twenty years I have moved from an underclass background to my present status as solidly entrenched in the comfortable middle class, and I have also had over this period an enriched religious and spiritual evolution that has taken me from traditional Christianity through the New Age movement and back again to traditional Christianity with what I believe are new insights and expanded perspectives. The biblical teaching that we are all children of God – and all members of one and the same divinely created human race – is one that has conditioned my thoughts on racial issues and guided much of my efforts on this project. I have written this book with a sense of urgency because I believe that America is deeply in trouble regarding its race relations. In the course of researching this study I have gone from being a Pollyanna on race matters to a Cassandra, who warns of an impending and unprecedented level of racial conflict that will stem from America's unresolved policy controversies surrounding not only affirmative action but black-on-white crime and liberal immigration policies as well. My wish is that as many individuals as possible will be challenged, provoked, and perhaps even persuaded in places by reading and reflecting on the material contained in this book. Just as with my first book, *Black Faces, Black Interests*, which generated considerable controversy when published several years ago, I fully expect to be vindicated by the passage of time.

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into four major parts. Part I consists of five chapters that introduce the new white nationalists and their core beliefs. In Chapters 1 and 2, I try to show that white nationalists are not the sort of people we may think they are. They are not, for instance, to be equated with the members of the older racist right represented by organizations like the Ku Klux Klan or the American Nazi Party. While sharing some of the same ideological beliefs as members of the older racist right, contemporary white nationalists are now part of a movement that has jettisoned most of the images and tactics of the older racist right organizations, as well as many of their more bizarre rituals and beliefs, in an attempt to expand their influence to a larger and more mainstream audience. Chapter 2 presents an overview of some of the literature and ideas that undergird white nationalism and discusses how these ideas might be received in mainstream America. In Chapter 3, I provide a summary of some of the core elements in the traditional white supremacy belief system and discuss movement literature. Chapter 4 covers recent immigration and demographic changes – developments which, if they continue on the same track, will lead to the eventual minority status of white Americans. Chapter 5, the last chapter in Part I, presents data on crime and white nationalists' concerted efforts to heighten Americans' awareness of black-on-white violent crime.

Part II consists of four chapters focusing on different aspects of the affirmative action issue – a high voltage policy controversy that white nationalists seek to exploit in their efforts to woo mainstream whites. Chapter 6 covers the history and politics of the policy, and is followed by a chapter that discusses the importance of media framing in understanding the issue. Chapter 7 also presents data from public opinion polls and presents further material on the affirmative action issue from a series of ethnically homogeneous focus groups consisting of Asian, African-American, Latino, and Euro-American participants. In Chapter 8, I present the views of white nationalists and explain how they frame and describe affirmative action and related issues. Chapter 9 rounds out the material in Part II and focuses on the legal and constitutional history of affirmative action in higher education.

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I devote a great deal of effort to discussing affirmative action policy because I believe this issue is one of the most useful grievances for white nationalists seeking to rally support among mainstream Americans. Indeed, surveys and focus groups show that a majority of Americans strongly oppose racial preferences and racial quotas. I believe that resentment over the perceived injustice of affirmative action has the potential to cause many otherwise well-adjusted young white Americans to come to see themselves as victims of reverse discrimination and to displace their anger over this situation to the members of the minority groups who benefit from racial preference policies.

Part III examines the impact that living in a racially charged environment can have on young Americans. In Chapter 10, I present information on the growing competitiveness for college admission and how this affects everyone, and then present case studies of three young white Americans who competed for freshman seats during the latter half of the 1990s. This chapter illustrates different potential modes of adaptation of young people to the new competitive environment, including anger, disappointment, frustration, and resignation. The remaining two chapters in Part III discuss multiculturalism and the recruitment strategies of white nationalists.

Part IV presents three concluding chapters on potential remedies to the unresolved public policy issues that white nationalists seek to exploit in their efforts to build support for their political agendas. In Chapter 13, I show that in the area of affirmative action in higher education, there is considerable agreement between blacks and whites about how colleges should determine who gets admitted to their entering classes. There is a consensus in favor of class-based rather than race-based affirmative action, and a consensus for the determination of merit based on the consideration of handicaps and barriers that an individual has had to overcome to reach a given level of achievement. Chapter 14 discusses the potential of religion to promote racial and social harmony by examining its negative and positive effects on American society. Because I believe that many of America's social problems can be addressed by teaching biblical principles that emphasize brotherly love, a common creator, and equality before the law, I focus on the monotheistic religions as I argue in favor of increased partnerships between religious and political leaders. In addition, this chapter includes a section on African Americans, faith-based approaches to

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social problems, and the challenge that homosexuality poses to traditional Christians and to the white nationalists who often include gays and lesbians among their targets of hate. Chapter 15, the final chapter, offers two sets of policy recommendations designed to address the kinds of issues and concerns that white nationalists seek to exploit during their interactions with mainstream Americans. The first set is aimed at America's social, political, and institutional leaders, and the second set is geared specifically for African-American leaders.

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Carol M. Swain
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