

color-blind rhetoric in the judiciary and legislature, including the 1993 *Shaw v. Reno* decision that reversed minority-majority electoral districting (and thus weakened the power of the African American vote) (Kousser 1974; Klinkner and Smith 1999). Certainly, the restriction of African American voters in Florida during the 2000 presidential election seems eerily similar to the post-Redemption purging of thousands of black voters in that state. Moreover, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 would seem to be vulnerable, because many of its provisions are dependent on Congress for renewal.

Yet, the history of U.S. disfranchisement also gives some grounds for optimism. Although former slaves were abandoned by the national state and opposed by white supremacists, they were still able to defend their rights for a generation. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, despite the racially linked problems of poverty and unemployment and the continued blight of urban racial segregation, black Americans are much more powerful than their nineteenth-century counterparts. Compared with 1900, the average black income relative to average white income has doubled (T. Shapiro 2005). While most police forces were all-white in 1900, they are now integrated nationwide. Nevertheless, one lesson of the post-Reconstruction era is that even in a historical democracy such as the United States of America, there is no inherent reason to assume that the process of democratization will inexorably progress (O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986).

## Deliberation, Incivility, and Race in Electoral Campaigns

Tali Mendelberg

The troubled state of American race relations has been the subject of much hand-wringing for many decades. The color line has changed since W. E. B. Du Bois (1997) wrote about it, but it has not disappeared, and nor have its troubling consequences for democracy. One remedy to the problem, gaining increasing currency among researchers, policymakers, activists, and political observers, is civil dialogue. Some scholars and practitioners hope that more public discourse, characterized by civility and occurring across lines of race, will contribute to a climate of tolerance—a prerequisite for liberal democracy. Some of these calls are tied to a deliberative model that assumes (or at least hopes) that democracy can be greatly enhanced when people are encouraged to resolve conflicts through reason-based, respectful discourse. Increasingly, a remedy to the age-old problem posed for democracy by racial and ethnic hierarchy is to urge people to discuss the problem, and to do so with mutual respect.

In this chapter, I examine these hopes in the context of electoral campaigns. Elections are perhaps the most significant of any democratic institution. A closer look at how discourse about race unfolds during election campaigns, however, reveals that the hopes for civility are problematic. To be sure, under specific circumstances, elections can promote racial tolerance and rapprochement. In particular, they can prompt white voters to suppress their racial stereotypes and resentments when deciding matters of politics. The twist, however, is that election campaigns have this beneficial outcome not when the dialogue about race is civil, but when it seems to be uncivil.

I begin by describing the problem of race and then lay out the expectations of civil dialogue. In the heart of the chapter, I compare these expectations with the way that communication about race actually occurs, drawing on my research on race and electoral campaigns. I conclude with a revised set of expectations about the deliberative potential of elections.

### The Problem of Race Relations

Race is perhaps the greatest of American divides. In their influential study of racial views, Lee Sigelman and Susan Welch summarized the nature of this divide as follows:

According to the worldview of the typical black, significant racial discrimination persists and largely accounts for where blacks as a group stand today. As a remedy, government action is necessary, even though blacks themselves are seen as having gone a long way in helping their own cause. The prevailing white view of race relations differs dramatically . . . Because most whites perceive racial discrimination as rare, it is only logical that they are less likely than blacks to attribute socioeconomic differences between blacks and whites to situational factors . . . [and] it is hardly surprising that most whites oppose special government help for blacks. (Sigelman and Welch 1991: 165)

These divergent views of race and society make their way into party politics. As figure 7.1 shows, religion, region, and class all take a backseat to race as the chief structuring cleavage of American elections (Latinos hold views similar to those of African Americans, but not nearly with the same strength, uniformity and consistency) (De la Garza, Falcon, and Garcia 1996; Sears et al. 2000). Not included in figure 7.1 is the gender gap, but it is much smaller in every year than the racial gap (Mendelberg 2001, chap. 9). Figure 7.1 also shows that far from declining in influence over time, race is a fixture in the American political scene (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Huckfeldt and Kohfeldt 1989; Valentino and Sears 2005). Not only is race a divide in politics, it is also a divide in civil society. Despite remarkable progress, overall levels of African American segregation remain quite high (Orfield and Ashkinaze 1991; Massey and Denton 1993; Welch et al. 2001). Residential segregation is mostly impervious to class differences among African Americans, is much higher for African Americans than for Asian Americans or Latinos, and is highly sensitive to the "black" appearance of the resident (Massey and Denton 1993; Farley and Frey 1994). Similarly, in marriage, the

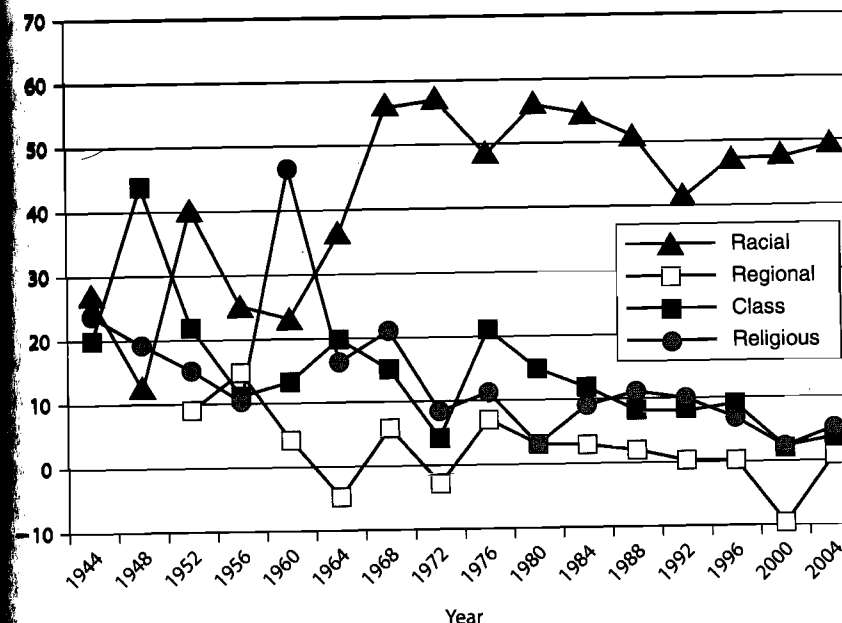


Figure 7.1. The Racial Divide Contrasted with Other Divides, Presidential Vote, 1944–2004. Note: Data are for major-party voters in the National Election Study. *Racial* = (% of African Americans) – (% of whites) voting Democratic. *Regional* = (% of Southerners) – (% of non-Southerners) voting Democratic. *Class* = (% of working class) – (% of middle class) voting Democratic. *Religious* = (% of Catholics) – (% of Protestants) voting Democratic. Source: Abramson, Aldrich, and Rhode 2007: 120.

lines of race are blurring primarily for Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, with African Americans remaining much more isolated (on average, 65% of whites, 4% of African Americans, 19% of Asian Americans, and 60% of Native Americans marry outside their group) (Mathews 1996; Pugh 2001).

The 2000 Census shows that during the previous decade, the residential segregation of African Americans eroded by only a small amount (Glaeser and Vigdor 2001). This racial divide in politics and society is partly fueled by—and, in turn, helps to maintain—whites' resentment about government efforts to assist blacks, and whites' negative, stereotyped views of African Americans (Sigelman and Welch 1991, chap. 3; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Alvarez and Brehm 1997; Hurwitz and Peffley 1997; Gilens 1999; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Oliver and Mendelberg 2000; Sears et al. 2000; Mendelberg

2001; Welch et al. 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). Some commentators have gone as far as to suggest that the situation in the United States is as suggested by Andrew Hacker's (1995) book title: *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*. While many would disagree with the stark nature of this summary, many would agree that race continues to be a source of troubling inequality and conflict in American politics.

### A Remedy

Practitioners, activists, and policymakers are increasingly attempting to use civil dialogue to bridge the racial divide. Perhaps the best-known example is Bill Clinton's 1997–98 Initiative on Race, which he characterized as a “great and unprecedented conversation about race” meant to encourage tolerance and civility (*New York Times*, June 15, 1997). The National Endowment for the Humanities similarly sponsored conversations on American identity, focused in part on bridging the racial divide (Merelman, Streich, and Martin 1998). Local policymakers use deliberative interventions in situations of racial conflict (Cramer-Walsh 2004), such as in a highly controversial school desegregation case in New Jersey (Mendelberg and Oleske 2000) or in attempting to rejuvenate failing schools attended disproportionately by students of color in Chicago (Fung 2004). Activists, too, have looked with hope to public dialogue on race. In October 1998, for example, when several hundred students took over a University of Texas building to protest the *Hopwood* decision outlawing the use of race-based criteria in university admissions, they demanded that the university conduct “a series of town hall meetings.” It is difficult to quantify the trend toward deliberative solutions, but it is hard to imagine that civil rights groups of the 1960s would have demanded town meetings. What is quantifiable is the sharp growth in civic dialogue groups devoted to resolving racial tensions or misunderstandings. Katherine Cramer-Walsh (2004) reports that approximately half of all existing race dialogue groups began after the O. J. Simpson trial and the Rodney King verdict, and counts groups in 266 cities in forty-six states and the District of Columbia. A chief mission of these groups is to help people “get along,” in Rodney King’s famous phrase—to enhance tolerance through civil discourse.<sup>1</sup>

These efforts certainly seem promising, or at worst innocuous. However, what really happens during public discussions of matters of race is more complicated, and more subject to failure, than many of these calls for dialogue recognize. Before scholars and practitioners of politics take up the call for more

civil dialogue about race, they must consider its contingencies and pitfalls. My aim here is to analyze how civil dialogue plays out during electoral campaigns. Such an analysis casts into sharp relief the problems and contingencies of civility. It reveals that campaigns can, in fact, increase racial tolerance and harmony. But campaigns do so not through civil dialogue, but through an exchange of views that violates the codes of civility.

### A Civil Action

To many people, civility seems an obviously desirable quality of racial dialogue. Civility, in general, refers to courtesy, politeness, and consideration for the other (Sapiro 1999). The notion that people who speak in public forums should adhere to the codes of politeness has a strong normative force in American society. In this view, accusations of racism, even if they are accurate, erode the quality of democratic dialogue and interfere with the ability of American society to overcome its legacy of racism. In an award-winning book on race, K. Anthony Appiah puts this expectation as follows: “There is a great deal of angry polemic about race in this country today. Accusations of racism, warranted and unwarranted, abound. Rodney King, O. J. Simpson, welfare queens, quota queens, the bell curve—each of these conjures debates with a distasteful tone. In this respect, discussions of race are perhaps typical, since, as many observers have noticed, public debate on many questions has developed an uncivil inflection” (Appiah and Gutmann 1996: 179).

The argument that Americans engage in too many accusations of racism can also be found in scholarship coming from a very different quarter. Much of this scholarship is concerned with what it sees as a deterioration in the caliber of civil rights leadership, deterioration associated with the decline in civility. Some scholars point to the black power movement and the urban rebellions of 1965–68 as the beginning of the end of racial civility and the first link in the “chain reaction” leading to institutionalized racial conflict (Edsall and Edsall 1991: 48). Martin Luther King Jr. is held up as a laudable example of the color-blind and consensual style of black leadership common during the early 1960s (see Skrentny 1996); subsequent leaders representing the interests of blacks have performed much more poorly, some observers believe, because they have strayed from the vision of a nation in which “what blacks and whites have in common is more important than their differences” (Jacoby 1998: 6; see also Sleeper 1997). The empirical prediction implicit in some of this research is that whites will only re-

spond well to an exchange that they perceive as civil and that underscores the things that blacks and whites share, not to rhetoric that targets whites' racism.

A prominent example of this trend in scholarship is Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom's *America in Black and White* (1997), a major study of racial politics that consistently criticizes blacks' contemporary attempts to challenge racism. Some of the authors' criticism is directed at black citizens. The authors castigate a 1996 *Nightline* program for conducting an exchange between whites and African Americans in which many of the latter condemned what they saw as lingering racism in American society. This talk of continuing racism amounted to "a collective anti-white rant" (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997: 493). Along similar lines, a local protest in Washington, DC, designed to highlight the continuing racism in the lives of African Americans is condemned as "a bewildering distortion of the present." But the focus of much of the authors' critique of civility is the black civil rights leadership. Charges of racism, according to Thernstrom and Thernstrom, are "a staple of civil rights discourse" (498). Not only Al Sharpton's demagoguery is included as an example of uncivil, harmful discourse, but also the words of an NAACP spokesman who in 1994 criticized the disproportionate racial impact of a proposal to limit eligibility for Social Security and Medicare. Also included is the coalition that filed a lawsuit in 1995 against the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority "charging that an upcoming fare hike discriminated against the 61 percent of bus and subway riders who were members of minority groups" (498). According to the Thernstroms, the past several decades do not provide any examples in which antiracist rhetoric led to progress in race relations.<sup>2</sup> In this view, by engaging in uncivil discourse about race, the civil rights leadership undermines tolerance, harmony, and understanding between African Americans and white Americans.

The argument that contemporary civil rights leaders are uncivil, and the corollary, that this incivility harms harmonious and tolerant race relations, can claim a degree of empirical support from research on the mass media and racial stereotypes. In their ambitious study of mass communication about race, Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki (2000: 212–13) found that the media often portray prominent African American leaders as self-seeking, focused on narrow racial interests at the expense of the broader community, and too ready to rabble-rouse. These perceptions of incivility may be consequential for white citizens' political preferences. They may, for example, strengthen white citizens' opposition to welfare programs perceived as primarily benefiting undeserving blacks (see Bobo 2000, commenting on Gilens 1999). While the evidence that

black leaders are often portrayed as uncivil is compelling, however, there is only patchy evidence about the impact of antiracist rhetoric on white citizens' views. The findings discussed later in the chapter suggest that under certain circumstances, what many view as uncivil black leadership may in fact decrease the impact of white citizens' stereotypes of blacks and, in that particular sense, bring greater tolerance and harmony. Whether civil discourse breeds civility and tolerance, as some scholars and practitioners assume, is as yet unknown. But the evidence presented below implies that civil discourse is not necessary for tolerance. The process of communication need not match the desired outcome: uncivil discourse can generate more civility. A tolerant outcome, in fact, may depend on a process that may seem intolerant, discordant, calculating, and self-seeking—in a word, political.

### Electoral Campaigns, Race, and Civility

To examine these conflicting predictions about civil discourse through the lens of electoral campaigns. Citizens' attention to public affairs reaches its peak during campaigns. So what elites say about matters of race is likely to carry particularly strong effects when a salient campaign is underway. As Larry Bartels (2000: 1) put it, "political campaigns are at the center of American democracy and of the ordinary citizen's connection with the democratic process. They should be our primary occasions for political education, collective choice, elite accountability, and democratic legitimation." To be sure, electoral campaigns are seldom, if ever, conducted to further the goals of tolerance and harmony. Still, campaigns may be among the most important and influential means of discourse about race in the United States. Specifically for the case at hand, campaigns can help us examine the particular claims about the nature and consequences of leaders' discourse on race.

Campaigns are clearly conducted for victory rather than virtue. Yet the recent literature on the impact of electoral campaigns shows that campaigns do affect people's fundamental views of politics and society. For example, whether political ads are positive (promoting the good qualities of the candidate) or negative (attacking the opponent's negative qualities) may affect citizens' feelings of cynicism and alienation.<sup>3</sup> Pursuing a different research question, Rahn, Brehm, and Carlson (1999) found, along similar lines, that the 1996 election increased citizens' general trust of others, their specific trust in government, and their sense of external political efficacy. Thus, even if elections are not designed by

the candidates to serve good democratic ends, they can nevertheless increase the kind of civic orientations that are consonant with tolerance and harmony—a general desire to work for common goals with others who are different.

If we project these findings onto the case of race relations, we might expect that some campaigns enhance tolerance while others work against it. Specifically, campaigns could, under certain circumstances, lead white citizens to decrease their use of racial stereotypes when making choices among candidates and policies. The burgeoning literature on racial stereotypes suggests that basic racial predispositions change very gradually, but their *impact* can vary a great deal over a short period of time (Kinder and Mendelberg 1995; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Gilens 1999; Mendelberg 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). Therefore, I focus here on the change in impact rather than in level.

This desired *result*, however, may or may not follow from a campaign *process* that is tolerant and harmonious. According to the assumption of Thernstrom and Thernstrom (1997) and others writing in this vein, leaders who speak of matters of race on the campaign trail are expected to maintain civility. Hostile expressions and derogatory labels will undermine, not enhance, tolerance. To the extent that such expressions are present in an election campaign, the campaign does not serve the purpose of improved race relations. The evidence below, however, suggests otherwise. The more effective way to combat racial stereotypes when they are aired during elections is to engage in a form of incivility—namely, to label the expression a form of racism. When political leaders use racial words to describe the content of a campaign message, they provoke large numbers of white voters to become more aware of their own racial stereotypes and to consider the message racist and thus illegitimate. White voters subsequently give their stereotypes less weight in their political choices—in their choice among candidates running in the election and in their choice between more and less vigorous policies to ameliorate racial inequality. The political behavior of whites then begins to approach that of African Americans, with greater agreement and harmony as the result. Thus the expectation that productive communication about race rests on civility misses the reality. In elections, it is uncivil discourse that best decreases the impact of racial stereotypes (for more detail on these findings, see Mendelberg 2001).

To promote these desirable effects, an election campaign has to feature both explicit unflattering messages about African Americans and a discourse that effectively counteracts them. The norm governing matters of race determines both whether white elites will cue white citizens' negative racial predispositions,

explicitly or not, and whether this communication is likely to receive an effective rebuttal. In addition, the nature of the party system determines whether elites attempt to communicate about race at all. Thus, we must understand both the impact of norms and of party strategy on racial communication and the dynamics of implicit versus explicit communication about race. And we must understand how anti-black communication is countered effectively in electoral campaigns, and under what conditions, before we can evaluate both the desirability of civility and the capacity of public discourse to enhance racial tolerance. I elaborate on this argument below.

### Uncivil Processes and Civil Outcomes: A Theory with Three Variables

Three variables determine whether whites rely on negative racial predispositions during electoral campaigns: *racial norms*, *party strategy*, and *explicit communication*. To show how these variables work, I contrast two time periods in American history: Reconstruction, spanning the years 1864–76, and the contemporary civil rights era, beginning in 1964.

First, let us consider the variable of party strategy. Campaigns are conducted first and last to win office. Although they can bring about more tolerance and understanding, these come entirely as a side benefit, if they come at all. Campaigns do not feature much discourse about race unless at least one political party calculates that it is to its advantage to engage in such discourse. That calculation is not made unless there is salient racial conflict at the time, presenting the opportunity to capitalize on an emerging issue and turn it into partisan gain.

Racial conflict is often caused by a sudden and dramatic change in society's racial arrangements. Perhaps the most severe of these external shocks were Emancipation during the Civil War and the civil rights protests of the early 1960s. Each of these events created unprecedented conflict about the status of African Americans in society. In response to each change and its attendant conflict, one party aligned itself with greater equality or rights for African Americans (the party of the racial left), and the other party positioned itself in defense of the old order (the racial right). During the 1860s, the Republicans advocated expanded rights for African Americans, while the Democrats resisted that expansion. A hundred years later, the parties reversed positions.

Thus, with racial change comes conflict, and conflict prompts one of the two major parties to expect significant electoral gains by mobilizing anti-black views.

Repeated and prominent communication about race is not likely to occur during elections unless one party decides to "play the race card" and prime anti-black views as a means of propelling itself into office. Thus, white elites are not likely to communicate about race during campaigns unless they are presented with a controversy over the status of African Americans.

When faced with the strategic play of the race card, the party of the racial left has several strategic options:

1. *Mimic* the other party's communication, to show that despite its own relative leftward inclination on matters of race, it is no less sympathetic to white citizens' views than is its rival party.<sup>4</sup>
2. *Distract* white voters from issues of race with a competing issue, such as nationalism or class, and hope that voters' views on that issue override the impact of their negative predispositions about race.
3. *Ignore* issues of race, responding, if at all, only to nonracial aspects of the other party's appeals, and otherwise conducting the campaign as if the issue of race did not exist.
4. *Engage* the other party's appeal, challenging it as anti-black and a violation of white Americans' value of equality.

Which strategy most benefits the party of the racial left depends on another of the variables in the story: racial norms. If the norm is inegalitarian, as it was in most times and places in the nineteenth century, the strategic options open to the racial left party are limited. The *engage* strategy—discourse that attempts to neutralize racial stereotypes directly—is not a viable one. If it is to stand a chance of winning the election, the left party must show its adherence to the inegalitarian norm when that adherence is challenged. The *ignore* option, too, is likely to be ineffective when many white voters use the issue of race to make their decisions. The left party must have a powerful rebuttal to the rightwing party's racial appeals. What the left party can effectively use is the *distract* and *mimic* strategies. It can pursue the *distract* strategy to refocus voters' minds on another issue. It can use *mimic* in attempting to show, as directly as possible, that the party adheres to the inegalitarian norm. It turns out empirically that *mimic* is a common strategy, but because *distract* is effective when a salient nonracial issue exists, the party does not have to rely on *mimic* by necessity.

During the first half of the 1860s, the norm was decidedly inegalitarian, and the controversy over slavery had embedded itself in the party system. As the issue of abolition and citizenship rights became increasingly salient, and the Re-

publican party recruited larger and larger numbers to its ranks, Democrats increasingly turned to racial tropes about sex, violence, and work, suggesting that Republicans would invite blacks to engage in more of the first two and less of the last. The racial attacks were explicit. A Democratic National Executive Committee pamphlet suggested that Lincoln would repeal "all laws which erect a barrier between you and the black man," whom Republicans believed "is your equal, entitled to vote, hold office, sit at the same table with you, and marry your daughter" (F. Wood 1968: 19–20). The Democratic *Detroit Free Press* urged Lincoln to move to Haiti or Liberia for a "congenial atmosphere," and the *Chicago Times* recounted that, as the First Illinois Colored Regiment departed, white women were there in attendance to bid farewell to black husbands, around whose necks they clung long and fondly. Black women, too, and men almost white, were locked in each other's arms" (F. Wood 1968: 19–20, 42–43). Just after Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation, Democrats in Ohio warned about the loss of whites' jobs, adopted the slogan "the Constitution as it is, the Union as it was, and the Niggers where they are," and gained sufficiently in the next election that they were able to amend the state constitution to prohibit the entry of freed blacks to the state (F. Wood 1968: 22; Klinkner and Smith 1999: 61). The pamphleteer Van Evrie warned that blacks were prone to rape white women "on the dead bodies of their husbands" (F. Wood 1968: 28). The Democratic Party of the 1860s was clearly engaged in a strategy of explicit racial appeals.

Republicans moved inexorably toward the racial left as Emancipation became a reality and as the war's end made clear that a new racial order, of some kind, was inevitable; but many prominent Republicans nevertheless went along with the inegalitarian norm by denying the charge that they favored full—that is, social—equality. While many Republicans were sympathetic to blacks' claims for rights, many others opposed slavery and supported "Free Soil" as part of the notion of a "white man's country." The leading Republican of the 1850s, William H. Seward, argued that "the African race here is a foreign and feeble element, like the Indians incapable of assimilation . . . and it is a pitiful exotic unnecessarily transplanted into our fields, and which it is unprofitable to cultivate and the cost of the desolation of the native vineyard," adding in a Senate speech that "the white man needs this continent to labor upon" (Fredrickson 1971: 141). In a debate with Stephen Douglas, Lincoln infamously defended himself against the charge that he favored interracial sexual intimacy by turning the charge around and mocking Douglas as desiring it: "I have never had the least apprehension that I or my



friends would marry negroes if there was no law to keep them from it, but as Judge Douglas and his friends seem to be in great apprehension that they might, if there were no law to keep them from it, I give him the most solemn pledge that I will to the very last stand by the law of this state, which forbids the marrying of white people with negroes" (Holzer 1993: 189–90).

Many other examples of this type of rhetoric can be found, with Republicans attempting to show that the Democrats were, in their words, the real "nigger worshippers" (F. Wood 1968: 31). Republicans responded with a *mimic* strategy.

However, while Democrats escalated their explicit messages against black equality through the state suffrage referenda and state-level elections of 1866 and 1867, Republicans increasingly mobilized public support with anti-southern appeals. This is no surprise, given that the language of the Fourteenth Amendment itself emphasizes the concern with reforming the recalcitrant South. (Of the amendment's four substantive sections, three discuss former Confederates and only one deals with equality before the law. Republicans' laudatory references to black soldiers' citizenly contributions to the war were accompanied by references to the contrast with the traitorous white South (see, e.g., Thomas Nast's drawing "This is a White Man's Government," showing a black man, representing freed blacks, sprawled on the ground as three white men representing the Democratic Party hold him down with their feet on his back, in *Harper's Weekly*, September 5, 1868). As Representative Josiah Grinnel said, "I will never prefer a white traitor to a loyalist black" (Fredrickson 1971: 184). Some Republicans viewed blacks' voting rights as a disgusting but necessary means of restraining the traitorous South; Republican member of Congress James Garfield wrote to a colleague "[I have] a strong feeling of repugnance when I think of the negro being made our political equal and I would be glad if they could be colonized, sent to heaven, or got rid of in any decent way" (Fredrickson 1971: 185). Republicans had to maintain a balance between alienating white voters staunchly opposed to social equality, and made nervous by Democratic appeals that political rights would bring this equality about, and their desire to implement political equality. Anti-sectionalism was a convenient way to walk the tightrope.

In other words, Republicans pursued a strategy of *distract* along with *mimic*. Getting tough with the South was the chief Republican theme in the late 1860s, and the rhetoric emphasized that black equality served as a means to that end. To be sure, anti-sectionalism was not *merely* a way to distract white voters from messages that denigrated blacks and their Republican allies. But it did also serve that purpose. The strategies of *ignore* and *engage* were pursued very little.<sup>5</sup>

When the norm is decidedly egalitarian, as it became increasingly during the 1950s and 1960s, the strategic options available to the party of the racial left are essentially the same—*engage*, *distract*, *ignore*, or *mimic*. The norm of racial equality does indeed remove the most extreme anti-black messages from the toolbox of the left party. A party seeking to bolster the status of African Americans no longer has to prove that it will safeguard the superiority of whites, so it has no incentive to play the race card explicitly. At the same time, an egalitarian norm renders *engage* into a viable strategic option. The increasing incentive to use *engage* signifies a meaningful way in which an egalitarian norm allows elections to bring about more tolerance and harmony in race relations. Only with an egalitarian norm, and only when the left party decides that it must counter the right's racial appeal if it is to win, will a genuine exchange take place. Only under these two conditions are whites' stereotypes aired in a prominent way during a campaign and dissenting voices heard against these views.

There is a twist to the use of *engage*, however. When the norm is egalitarian, the party of the racial right modifies its play of the race card. Recall that the race card is played only when racial conflict is salient. When the norm is egalitarian, yet salient racial conflict arises, the party that places itself on the racial right tries to mobilize white voters who resent the scope of change yet accept the basic precepts of the egalitarian norm.

Figure 7.2 illustrates both facets of whites' attitudes about race: the egalitarian norm on the basic principle of equality and, by contrast, the resistance of many whites to significant efforts to implement full racial equality. By the mid-1960s, northern whites overwhelmingly supported the *principle* of racial equality. Southern whites followed their lead a few years later. By the 1980s, the percentages supporting the principle of racial equality were so high that the question was no longer asked in national opinion polls.<sup>6</sup> Such numbers are extremely rare in the study of public opinion, indicating just how strong the norm of racial equality became.<sup>7</sup> High levels of support for the principle of racial equality can also be seen on "social distance" questions about social contact with African Americans (e.g., living in a neighborhood with some black families, having a black dinner guest) and the symbolic question of willingness to vote for a black candidate for president. The more the question highlights equality as a matter of abstract right, the more universally whites support it (see Schuman et al. 1997: 106–7, table 3.1B).

Figure 7.2 also reveals, however, the other side of the picture of whites' racial attitudes. Universal support for the principle of equality is not matched by uni-

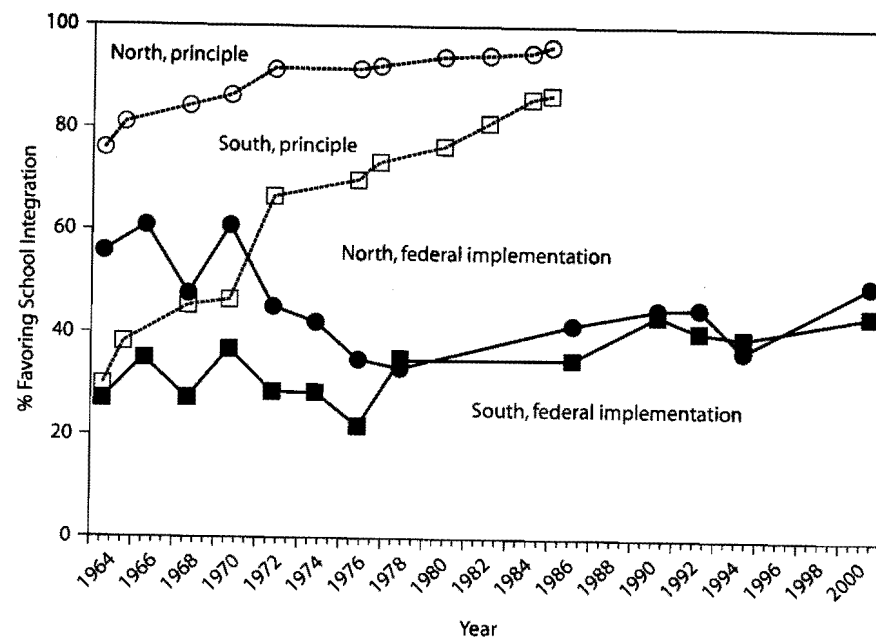


Figure 7.2. White Attitudes toward the Principle and the Implementation of School Desegregation, in the North and the South, 1964–2000. *Note:* The *principle* question is the National Opinion Research Center's, "Do you think white students and Negro/black students should go to the same schools or to separate schools?" Response options are "Same" or "Separate" (wording reported in Schuman et al. 1997: 104, table 3.1A). By 1985, the percentages supporting the principle of racial equality were so high that the question was no longer asked. The *federal implementation* question is the Institute for Social Research's, "Some people say that the government in Washington should see to it that white and black (1972: Negro) children (1964–1978: are allowed to go) go to the same schools. Others claim that this is not the government's business." Response options are "Government in Washington should see to it" or "[Government in Washington should] stay out of this area, as it is not its business" (wording reported in Schuman et al. 1997: 123, table 3.2). *Sources:* Schuman et al. 1997: 126; the 1948–2004 American National Election Study Cumulative Data File.

versal support for the *implementation* of equality. The figure shows whites' opinion on implementing school desegregation (which closely mirrors the question on principle, but mentions the efforts of the federal government).<sup>8</sup> While equality as a principle was becoming a near-universal norm of American society, equality as a government policy was becoming deeply contested as a political issue (Berinsky 1999, 2001). Clearly, many of the same white citizens who endorsed the notion that whites and African Americans should be treated equally also op-

posed the government's efforts to enforce equal rights and to assist blacks in gaining equal life chances.<sup>9</sup> Opposition to activist government, along with racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments, causes much of that resistance (Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Alvarez and Brehm 1997; Bobo and Kluegel 1997; Sears et al. 1997; Gilens 1999; Mendelberg 2001; note that Sidanius and Pratto [1999] argue that an anti-egalitarian social-dominance orientation explains the resistance).

During egalitarian periods, the party of the racial right seeks to appeal to the unease of many white voters about the scope of racial change. Yet the party must remain within the norm, lest it lose support among the very voters it seeks to attract. It cannot appear to be racist, because racism has been discredited. When the norm prohibits whites from having rights as whites and forbids privilege that relies on race, no political actor can gain from seeming to defend white privilege as such.

These two conditions—the constraint of egalitarian norms and the opportunity presented by racial conflict and lingering racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments—prompt implicit racial campaign appeals. Parties often, but not always, construct implicit appeals to mobilize racial stereotypes, fears, or resentments. But intent is a cause, not a characteristic, of racial appeals. We cannot rely on intent alone to distinguish between implicit and nonracial appeals. I define an implicitly racial appeal as one that contains a recognizable, if subtle, racial reference. Implicit references to race can be visual or verbal. The modern norm of equality was established at the same time that television came into widespread use, so the party of the right has often made use of visual cues to construct its implicit racial appeals. Television allows a party to separate the visual and verbal content of its communication. It can introduce racially loaded images but avoid using racial words that would alert viewers to the racial meaning of the message. I found in a series of experiments that implicit racial campaign communication primes white voters' racial predispositions without voters being aware that they are responding to the racial content of the message (Mendelberg 2001, chaps 7, 8). Whites increase the weight they give to their racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments after exposure to implicit—but not explicit—campaign messages (for reviews, see Mendelberg 2008a, 2008b).

Thus, when an egalitarian norm coexists with racial conflict, whites' predispositions are likely to find expression during campaigns, as the party of the right tries to mobilize white voters discontented with racial change (threatened or actual). The implicit mode of communication complicates the attempt of the left



party to pursue the *engage* option. Because, as my experiments showed, many white television viewers do not recognize a racial message when it is conveyed in a highly implicit fashion, any leader who attempts to engage in a dialogue by offering a dissenting voice is pursuing a risky strategy. The left party is tempted, instead, by its other strategic alternatives: *distract* with the potent issues of class or sectionalism/nationalism, *ignore* the issue of race and focus only on miscellaneous nonracial issues, and *mimic* with implicit racial appeals of its own. Confronted with a rightwing party that cuts into its own constituency and mobilizes new voters with implicit appeals to race, the left party faces strong incentives to avoid *engage* and to proceed with some mix of (the implicit version of) *mimic*, *distract*, and *ignore*.

With an egalitarian norm and racial conflict, then, whites' stereotypes will be expressed, but the nature of that expression will make a real exchange of views unlikely. The counterstrategy of *engage* is likely to seem less attractive than the other alternatives, and few if any prominent voices will be heard presenting antiracist views. In fact, we may even see the reinforcement of racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments as the left party mimics the right in pursuit of elective office. Then, not only is the potential of elections to erode the power of racial stereotypes unfulfilled, but the election turns into an event that reinforces that power.

But all is not as bleak as this scenario suggests. The left party can successfully pursue the *engage* option, and has done so in the past. There are three ways that lead the left party to pursue *engage*. First, if the party finds that *mimic*, *distract*, and *ignore* are not working sufficiently well, and that pre-election polls show it is lagging behind the opposition, it may decide to pursue *engage*. (Consonantly, Lau and Pomper [2004] find that attack ads are more commonly used by candidates who are behind in the polls, who are attacked, or both.) Second, some members of the party may be guided by a moral precept that works against *mimic* and perhaps against *ignore* as well. These individuals, and organizations affiliated with the party, have a stronger or wider definition of equality than that contained in the norm of equality. Third, the party may include individuals or organizations with roots in the civil rights movement, or African American leaders, whose definition of equality tends to be stronger and wider than that of the white party elite. Any of these conditions is potentially sufficient to push the party toward *engage*. Even if the party as a whole does not pursue *engage*, its strategy may splinter, with at least one faction pursuing *engage*. Under any one of these three conditions, the dialogue can begin.

However, the problematic aspects of civility now become clear. If the proponents of civility are correct, then a campaign lacking in civility cannot bring racial tolerance and harmony. Yet it is the reference to racism that creates an exchange of views on matters of race during campaigns. The exigencies of party strategy often produce a widely heard rebuttal only when African American politicians and leaders, who often occupy the leftmost region of the American political landscape, enter the discourse. And they rely on the kind of language forged during the civil rights movement to critique racial hierarchy—language that fueled protests and demands for significant change. When an implicit appeal is challenged, it is challenged with language that evokes the long history of racism and connects the appeal to that history. It is rendered into one more link in the long chain of racial oppression. I call this rhetorical form the *black protest strategy*.

This strategy, I have found, is highly—and perhaps surprisingly—effective. It may surprise because it can work even among people who believe that discrimination is a thing of the past, who feel that African Americans are lazy and should advance on their own efforts more than they do, and who are not sympathetic to the notion that white leaders today may be continuing to practice a form of racial injustice through campaign messages. The black protest strategy can prompt people with these beliefs to recognize the racial element in the campaign message and in their own response, to consider the possibility that this element lies outside the norm, and to inhibit their racial response to the message.

### A Closer Look at the Dynamics of Modern Campaigns

I summarize here several findings in my research to illustrate these points for the egalitarian era of post-1964, beginning with 1988.<sup>10</sup> In early June of 1988, the presidential campaign of Republican frontrunner George H. W. Bush found itself seventeen points behind Democratic frontrunner Michael Dukakis. Lee Atwater, Bush's chief campaign strategist, who cut his political teeth in the 1970s running implicitly racial campaigns for former segregationist Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, orchestrated an implicitly racial strategy for the ailing Bush campaign. For the rest of the campaign, especially during mid-June and even more so in October, the Bush campaign publicized the case of William Horton Jr., an African American man convicted of murder, sentenced to a Massachusetts prison, and released on weekend furloughs under a program instituted by Governor Dukakis's predecessor. On one of his furloughs, Horton escaped and assaulted a white couple in their home. The Bush campaign and the Republican

National Committee told the story of Horton through speeches by the candidate, television ads, and vivid mailings, arguing that Dukakis had refused to end the furlough program and should therefore be viewed as a misguided and extreme liberal. The news media picked up the story and disseminated it widely. As constructed by the Bush campaign and conveyed by the news media, the message highlighted Horton's image. Yet for nineteen of the twenty-two weeks that Horton received attention, hardly anyone mentioned his race verbally, or used any other racial word in connection with his case. While his race was everywhere to be seen, it was nowhere to be heard.

On October 21, that implicit strategy was put to an end. Jesse Jackson did so by challenging the Horton message as an appeal that used a black criminal to rile whites' racial fears and stereotypes.<sup>11</sup> Jackson was, at the time, the preeminent civil rights leader, a public figure who had risen to prominence because of his association with the cause of black equality. Yet during the primaries, Jackson had emerged as Dukakis's main challenger for the Democratic nomination, running well even among white voters. Jackson's rhetorical challenge to the Horton message came from the black protest tradition in which he was steeped.<sup>12</sup> Two days later, Lloyd Bentsen, Dukakis's white running mate, seconded Jackson's accusation of racism against the Republican Party and the Bush campaign.

The reception to the accusation of racism ranged from skeptical to hostile (except in the black press; see Kinder and Sanders 1996). The news media treated the charge of racism as yet another sling of mud in a distastefully dirty campaign. Every television news segment broadcast about Horton treated the accusation as an instance of negative campaigning or covered it as a strategic, calculated move (Mendelberg 2001: 148, table 5.1).<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, more important than the skepticism is that for the remainder of the campaign, the racial elements of the Horton story were no longer conveyed implicitly. While Horton's image was still widely broadcast on television news, it was now accompanied by the Democratic accusation of racism and a verbal description of Horton's race.

Because the 1988 presidential campaign was sharply divided into implicit and explicit phases, I was able to estimate the impact of the implicitly racial message separately from the impact of the explicitly racial message. My analysis made use of the National Election Study's large random sample of white voters. I estimated the impact of voters' racial resentment on their pre-election evaluations of the candidates.<sup>14</sup> Because respondents are randomly assigned to date of interview, I was able to make use of a quasi-experimental design to find out the ex-

periment to which the implicit and explicit phases primed whites' racial predispositions (Mendelberg 2001, chap. 6).

The results show, first, that the implicit phase was highly effective in priming racial resentment, to Bush's advantage. When the Bush campaign initiated its "October offensive," the networks obliged with frequent showings of Horton's image on the evening news. Just as the October offensive began, the impact of racial resentment on white voters' choices increased sharply: the more resentful, the more inclined to support Bush, and much more so than in September. However, on the day after Jackson's charge, the impact of racial resentment declined sharply, and Bush lost support among white voters.<sup>15</sup> As long as the Republicans' Horton message was conveyed implicitly, racial resentment played a large role in white's decisions; but after the racial message was rendered explicit by Jackson's charge of racism, voters' racial resentment lost its power. Jackson's charge was effective. Of particular importance, Jackson's charge had an effect on resentful white voters, seeming to prod them to reexamine the basis for their political choices—a reexamination that is arguably a mark of tolerance.

Just what was going on inside the minds of these white voters is difficult to say. I therefore conducted an experiment to try to find out what mechanisms might lead resentful whites to become aware of the racial elements of a message and to question their own racial response (Mendelberg 2001, chap. 8). The norms experiment was conducted with a random sample of whites living in New Jersey. First, subjects (who had been interviewed by phone in advance) were presented with a computer display that showed their views on "ethnic relations" in relation to the Democratic party (placed on the left), the Republican party (placed to the right of the Democratic party), and the Ku Klux Klan (placed on the far right). This norm display was designed to manipulate voters' perception of their standing relative to the norm of equality. Half the voters were randomly assigned to the *extreme* condition, in which their own views were placed just to the right of the Republicans, with the KKK as the next reference group on the right. The other half was assigned to the *mainstream* condition, placed between the two parties. Then the participants were randomly assigned one of several manufactured television news stories. In all versions of the news story, a gubernatorial candidate criticized welfare programs. In one version, his criticism was accompanied by images of African Americans who received welfare, but included no racial words; this was the implicit message. In a second version—the explicit message—the same criticism and images were joined by the words "African Americans." Thus, the messages were identical except that the explicit message

verbally targeted African American welfare recipients. Finally, the subjects in the experiment answered a series of questions on their political opinions, their emotional reactions to the norm display, and their perceptions of the message.

The norm display did not affect everyone in the same way. However, those who did feel upset by their norm placement ended up rejecting the implicitly racial appeal and questioning their own response in the process. Not only people relatively low in racial resentment, but highly resentful people, too, rejected the Republican candidate who engaged in an implicitly racial appeal—if they were emotionally upset by their normative placement.

In addition, those who classified the explicit message as “racial”—over half of those exposed to that message—rejected it and the candidate who used it, especially if they were resentful.<sup>16</sup> Resentful whites who saw the appeal as racial not only tended to reject the candidate, but also moderated their opposition to egalitarian race policies (such as affirmative action) to a significant extent.

It seems, then, that the black protest strategy works during election campaigns, in part by getting resentful whites to reexamine their views on race. That the black protest strategy succeeds even outside its natural audience of unresentful voters implies that the prediction that dialogue on race must be civil in order to benefit relations between the races stands on weak empirical ground. In fact, the way a campaign provides for the communication of stereotypes, fears, and resentments *and* for their rebuttal almost guarantees that the civility expectation will be stretched and perhaps violated. The findings on the 1988 presidential campaign discussed above suggest that when a prominent civil rights leader calls attention to whites’ racism, he can prompt a decrease in the impact of whites’ stereotypes and bring white voters closer in their behavior to black voters—even if the media coverage casts the discourse as uncivil. Of course, it is quite possible that had the media covered the accusation as a civil exchange, public response would have been still more positive. That black civil rights leaders can succeed despite the media’s coverage does not mean that the media do not inhibit their effectiveness. Still, the contention that black protest erodes civility does not square with a much more complex reality.

The more contemporary case of Barack Obama’s presidential campaign in 2008 illustrates some of these dynamics. This is not a surprise, given that the racial fundamentals outlined in figures 7.1 and 7.2, and the patterns of racial inequality and division discussed above, have not altered in the past decade. Obama’s candidacy represented by far the most successful political candidacy of

any African American, but this does not mean he was able to avoid race (*ABC News*, June 4, 2008). Obama faced not only the usual potential difficulties of a Democrat representing the party of the racial left, but the additional difficulties of running as an African American. He responded by pursuing all four of the strategies outlined above, at different times during his candidacy. Most consistently and throughout the campaign, Obama’s team pursued a strategy of *distract*, focusing on the nonracial issues that appeared likely to be his strong suits—focusing, especially, on Americans’ economic difficulties, a time-honored *distract* issue for the party of the racial left (*Washington Times*, August 27, 2008; *USA Today*, February 9, 2007; *Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 2008). As long as he could, and for most of the campaign, Obama pursued *ignore*, with subtle invitations to the mass media to portray his candidacy as post-racial and his persona as transcending race (*New York Times*, November 30, 2007; *Boston Globe*, August 19, 2007). When the Reverend Wright controversy flared, and Obama was linked with his controversial and racially outspoken black pastor, Obama at first ignored the matter (*MSNBC*, March 18, 2008). When the scandal refused to die, Obama abandoned *ignore* and took up *engage*. He did so with remarkable eloquence and unusual depth, presenting a strong defense of his racially liberal vision of the country and its racial problems (*Time*, March 18, 2008). *Engage* seemed to have worked well for Obama at this point, as public opinion warmed rather than cooled toward him (*CNN*, March 21, 2008). Another use of *engage* was Obama’s response to a John McCain television ad questioning his ability to lead, in which Obama’s image was juxtaposed with irrelevant visuals of young, attractive blonde celebrity women—potentially reprising a similar ad attacking Harold Ford, a black Democrat, in his run for the Senate from Tennessee, that used a sexually suggestive visual of a white woman in an implicit appeal to racial stereotypes of blacks’ sexuality and to whites’ age-old fears of sexual threat from black men (*New York Times*, July 31, 2008). Obama immediately reacted to the McCain ad by asserting that it was designed to remind voters, to Obama’s detriment, of his race (*ABC News*, August 1, 2008). Finally, while Obama’s use of *mimic* was limited, it was indeed there, in his occasional call for black fathers to take more responsibility for their families (*New York Times*, June 16, 2008). It is impossible to know without rigorous study which of these communication strategies were effective, but it is clear that Obama’s case demonstrates the same underlying racial patterns and the same set of communication strategies as those witnessed in the past.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The civility assumption informs a variety of writings on racial politics and a range of well-meaning reform efforts by practitioners. When it comes to electoral campaigns, however, the prediction that racial tolerance rests on civil discourse fails to find support. The reality of racial politics is much too complex to sustain it. I offer here some implications for the civility assumption, for deliberative democracy more generally, and for racial politics.

### *Campaigns and the Possibility of Dialogue*

The civility assumption ignores the fact that whether dialogue occurs is highly contingent. The conditions that lead whites to communicate about their racial views during campaigns are not the conditions conducive to dialogue and reflection. Racial communication does not occur during elections unless there is salient racial conflict. With such conflict, the parties diverge on the issue of race, and the rightwing party plays the race card by priming voters' stereotypes, fears, and resentments. That racial stereotypes are expressed in campaigns under the auspices of racial conflict makes trouble for the expectation that stereotypes can be rebutted politely. Campaigns are often about interests and power, not only—or even at all—about reflection and openness to other views. The most extreme example of this considered here is the case of the post-Reconstruction elections in the South, which imposed the white majority will onto a disadvantaged black minority, robbing African Americans of hard-won social and economic progress and political rights.

Still, campaigns do provide an opportunity for a specific type of dialogue about the nature of racism. With a norm of equality, when whites express racial stereotypes, these views do encounter a strong and widely disseminated dissent. When this kind of dialogue takes place, campaigns can decrease the extent to which white citizens rely on their racial stereotypes, fears, and resentments in making decisions about politics. The discourse of campaigns may not be deliberative, but under specific circumstances it can lead to an exchange about deeply conflicting and intolerant views. The consequence is an increase in racial tolerance.

Those who wish to actualize the potential for beneficial race relations in political campaigns should also be aware of the important distinction between implicit and explicit expressions of stereotypes. Under the current norm of equality, the implicit type is much more likely to occur, but this type of expression is not conducive to fruitful dialogue about race. Rendering implicitly racial ex-

pression into its explicit form—that is, alerting whites about the racial content of the message—may initiate a process that weakens the force of stereotypes in politics.

The civility assumption's focus on consensus is therefore misguided (for an incisive critique of consensus, see L. Sanders 1997). An exchange leading to tolerance does not require the political parties to agree on matters of race. Although, in the long term, it would be optimal for the parties to agree to an effective program of full racial equality, thus removing issues of race from politics, this has never happened in American history and probably will not happen for a very long time. Instead, the party of the racial right can continue to differentiate itself from the party of the racial left, but express its conservatism in anti-racist ways. The kind of antiracist rhetoric that fits with a right-leaning program consists of messages that criticize a strong federal government and advocate local control and individual responsibility, but do so using counter-stereotypical references in place of stereotypical or ambiguous ones. In one of my experiments with white Michigan voters, when I showed a randomly chosen group a conservative message that criticized welfare recipients and in which all the recipients were white, they relied on their racial predispositions much less than did people who saw the same anti-welfare message with African American welfare recipients (Mendelberg 2001, chap. 7). Thus the party of the right can make a relatively easy move toward more deliberative elections by engaging in counter-stereotypical communication.

### *Civility*

I have been treating the black protest strategy as an obvious violation of civility. However, let us consider the implication of the finding that this strategy actually leads to the kind of self-reflection and tolerance that practitioners of deliberative efforts seek to encourage among citizens. In my view, this finding implies that we should reexamine the meaning of civility. If a narrow definition of civility leads us to reject the black protest strategy as illegitimate, even as we find that the effects of the strategy are deliberately desirable, then we should redefine the meaning of civility to include some protest forms of discourse.

If we examine meanings of civility across time, we learn that the notion of civility has often been used in part as a way of maintaining social hierarchy. Virginia Sapiro (1999) shows that codes of civility typically prohibit certain actions from occurring in public and relegate them to the private sphere. The actions that are required to remain in the private domain depend on race, class, gender,

and other markers of hierarchy. Historians of the American South, for example, have shown that violent vengeance brought honor and social esteem to white men but punishment to African American men (Fischer 1989). White men who lynched African Americans at the close of the nineteenth century were considered highly civil; the act was perceived by most whites as a defense of the most vulnerable and cherished members of the white community (women) against what whites perceived as the extremely uncivil transgressions of the racial order by black men. Violent revenge was a mark of civility for those in privileged racial (and gender) categories, but a mark of incivility—a threat to the social order—for those in subordinate categories.

Historical work also suggests that calls for civility are most insistent when challenges to the social order are most feared. Sapiro (1999) finds that during the nineteenth century, people who occupied lower strata of society were expected to keep their discontents to themselves, not express them in the public sphere, and certainly to keep them out of political institutions. Codes of civility were instrumental in maintaining the social order in the face of rapid economic and geographic change. As Sapiro (1999, 11) puts it, “civility facilitates communication, but it can also choke it off, especially among those who are of relatively low status or those whose communication might call particular attention to themselves or their needs.”<sup>17</sup>

In his account of the sit-in movement in Greensboro, North Carolina, William Chafe (1980) notes that the protest directly targeted the constraints of civility. Civility was perceived by many African Americans to be among the most powerful means of keeping their claims quiescent, and thus became an obstacle to overcome. The requirements of civility can relegate challenges to racial hierarchy to the category of behaviors to be controlled and circumscribed. When these behaviors do make their way into the public sphere, the requirements of civility invite many to castigate such behaviors as a violation of norms of public conduct, ranging in severity from rude to uncivilized to outright barbaric.

Theorists who recognize the antideliberative effects of civility make room for uncivil discourse. “Both in a public forum and in everyday talk, there are justifiable places for offensiveness, non-cooperation, and the threat of retaliation—even for raucous, angry, self-centered, bitter talk, aiming at nothing but hurt,” Mansbridge (1999: 223) argues; “subordinates sometimes need the battering ram of rage.”<sup>18</sup>

But while notions of civility lend themselves to authoritarian uses and can inhibit the expression of grievances by disadvantaged groups, some form of civil-

ity is necessary for communication, including democratic deliberation. The key is for disadvantaged groups not to be penalized as uncivil for the mere attempt to challenge practices and messages that disadvantage them (for a similar point, see I. Young 1996; L. Sanders 1997). When African American leaders criticize a campaign message on the grounds that it perpetuates racial hierarchy, they are engaged in protest and are likely to face condemnation for uncivil behavior. Certainly that was the case with Jesse Jackson in 1988, whose charge of racism was covered by the mainstream media as yet another episode of dirty campaigning. In other instances of challenges to white elites' discourse (e.g., that of Michael Huffington during his California senatorial campaign in 1994; and, outside the campaign context, of New York's mayor Rudolph Giuliani in 1998), the charge has always been highly controversial and strikes many as uncivil (Mendelberg 2001: 100). Yet this kind of protest is actually to the benefit of racial democracy. In fact, protest and other forms of action deemed uncivil are often most powerful when they reveal implicit meaning.

An instructive alternative to the concept of civility comes from the work of Patricia Gurin.<sup>19</sup> Her brief on behalf of the University of Michigan in the *Grueter* case argues for the university's affirmative action practices in part on the grounds that universities with higher proportions of racial minorities produce more informal social interaction and more effective classroom learning about racial diversity. Most relevant here, she argues that affirmative action produces a crucial benefit—what she calls “compatibility of differences.” This is the perception that racial and ethnic groups share not only basic values but also an “understanding of the potential constructive aspects of group conflict, and belief that differences are not inevitably divisive to the social fabric of society.” Civility advocates tend to home in on the former and neglect the latter. Gurin's contribution is to pair the two and produce a synthetic whole.

As mentioned earlier, civility is a cousin of tolerance, and as we probe civility we are also led to unpack tolerance. As Wendy Brown (2001) argues, to tolerate means to suffer something that one would rather not suffer, something that remains on the outside looking in. It is the act of the powerful, whose position bestows on them the automatic privilege of acceptance by others. Tolerance does not promote genuine understanding. A more transformative version of deliberative democracy aims not for tolerance but for mutuality, reciprocity, altered values (S. Rosenberg 2007). Other versions set the bar lower, either out of a pragmatic calculation of what is possible or because they seek to optimize individual rights or are suspicious of the strong hand of public institutions. The

problem with these other versions is that by expecting mere tolerance, they stand to perpetuate inequality and undermine the full democratic potential of deliberation.

### *Deliberative Democracy*

Although this discussion has focused on empirical scholars and practitioners, it also has implications for more theoretical treatments of deliberation. Deliberative theorists say that democratic discussion must entail openness to ideas with which we disagree, even if we disagree vehemently. They urge us to enter into the discussion intent on listening as well as talking. In the words of Simone Chambers (1996: 119), "to communicate means that we seek to understand and convince; to be rational means that we offer reasons that can be understood and can convince; to be in agreement means that we understand each other fully and have been freely convinced." A deliberator must not deliberate without also seeking to understand the other side.

But in politics, speakers often seek to convince much more than they seek to understand. Or, if they seek to understand, they do so only strategically, to better argue against the other side.<sup>20</sup> And when they seek to convince, they often do not seek to convince the other side but rather a third party, one capable of furthering their side in the political struggle. In the world of politics, democratic discussion is often more competitive than communal, more conflictual than consensual (on this point, see Walzer 1999; Karpowitz 2006).

This does not mean, however, that deliberation is an irrelevant ideal, even in the most conflictual of our political institutions—the electoral campaign. We should recognize, however, that meaningful deliberation in a conflictual situation does not require that participants "seek to understand" or offer logical reasons, or that they end up understanding "each other fully." Rather, it requires more, rather than less, partisan competition, one that equalizes the ability of marginalized voices to be heard, loud and clear. Deliberation and competition do not necessarily exclude each other; under certain conditions, they can reinforce each other. The black protest strategy has shown us one way in which this is achieved—and not only in the person of the now-beatified Martin Luther King, but through the example of some of the civil rights movement's controversial heirs.

In addition, thinking seriously about racism and deliberation invites us to treat with skepticism any model that does not consider at length how resources can be distributed equitably in preparation for deliberation. Michael Brown

et al. (2003: 32) argue that racial equality requires the government to play a key role in addressing "the accumulation of economic and social advantages in white communities, and the concomitant disaccumulation of social and economic capital in communities of color" produced by markets, private institutions, and the government itself. It is the accumulation of advantage and disadvantage, and the government's necessary role, that deliberation models must address, and do so in practical terms. Of course, all models of deliberation posit such equity, but the positing is usually done by assumption—the deliberators have equal resources, because they must do so for the model to work. How deliberators obtain these resources is not well explored (see Mendelberg and Oleske 2000). The black protest strategy is one way of cleaving open this closed circle. If it leads white voters to lessen the weight given to negative racial stereotypes and resentments in making policy choices, then government may be more likely to consider policies designed to ameliorate racial inequality. These policies, in turn, can equalize the resources needed for effective deliberation. If we are truly serious about equalizing resources for effective deliberation, we must offer realistic ways to achieve that equalization. Interestingly, discourse itself contains a partial answer—some forms of discourse, such as the black protest strategy, can break the closed circle.