doso: Reinventing Democracy in Brazil (1999), Linus Pauling: A Life in Science and Politics (1995), and Turncoats and True Believers: The Dynamics of Political Belief and Disillusionment (1992). In 2004 he and his niece Ariel Hansen updated and co-edited his parents' 1962 book, Cradles of Eminence: Childhoods of More Than 700 Famous Men and Women. Prof. Goertzel may be contacted at goertzel@camden.rutgers.edu. ❑

Race in America and the 2008 Election

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The victory of Barack Obama in the Democratic primary contest has brought the issue of race to national attention in a different manner than had previously been the case. To each other, African Americans speak quite as freely about race as do whites to each other, although they are reluctant to speak interracially on the subject in public. Race has long been a politically incorrect subject to speak or write about in any psychological depth in America, though Joel Kovel has tried it in *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (Columbia University Press, 1970, 1984). This book, in which the author argues that the racism of many has gone underground to take the form of moral superiority, has mostly been ignored. In the public arena, it is much easier to condemn an in-depth search for insight as being politically incorrect than to actually talk interracially of the nuances of racial feelings. Yet, race becomes a more important subject as the proportion of non-Caucasian people increases in our society and becomes a part of the political process.

It is difficult to discuss race for a variety of complex reasons. First and foremost, there is the fear of offending and being called or viewed as a racist. This applies more to whites than non-whites, since after centuries of being the victims of racism, non-whites are sometimes given a free pass; that is, allowed to express racial attitudes that would be unacceptable if spoken by Caucasians. As whites have begun to use legislation aimed mainly at preventing "hate crimes" and "hate speech" directed at blacks, this aspect of the subject has become more nuanced.

That this essay focuses on black/white relationships, rather than including Hispanics who now outnumber blacks and it does not discuss the growing numbers of Asians in American society.

How whites feel about blacks and blacks about whites is a complex matter, especially because there is so much splitting going on individually, as well as within each racial group and society. Caucasians admire, distrust, envy, fear, hate, identify with, pity, and have contempt and guilt regarding blacks. There is admiration for African American survival and achievement in the face of slavery, segregation, lynchings, victimization, discriminations, Jim Crow laws, and the least desirable education, housing, and jobs. There is respect for the courageous black pioneers in fields previously reserved for whites. There is admiration for black and multiracial athletes, musicians, entertainers, and television personalities. Regarding white identification with and envy of blacks, when younger a talented friend of mine wished he were black so that he could play jazz like the musicians and baseball like the athletes he so admired—if only skin color could make you great at anything! In innumerable middle class homes, white teenagers daydream of being black entertainers, musicians, and sports heroes. When they feel victimized by parents, schoolmates, or teachers they can identify with blacks surviving under the most adverse of conditions. Yet, the same youngster may then feel uncomfortable when sitting next to an African American in the classroom thinking that perhaps this person is a drug dealer or gang member. Such is the nature of the massive splitting going on in our society.

Racial fantasies and myths abound: Don't blacks have longer penises? Aren't they better sexual partners, or perhaps a bunch of criminals, murderers, and rapists? If one out of nine young black men is involved with the criminal justice system, then aren't they statistically a dangerous group? Myths and realities intermix, thus intensifying or diminishing stereotypes and prejudices. These fantasies occur amidst "the basically sexualized nature of racist psychology" (Kovel, *White Racism*, 67).

A recent *New York Times*/CBS News poll reveals how differently blacks and whites experience race relations in our society. Fifty-five percent of whites report race relations to be generally good in America as opposed to twenty-nine percent of blacks. Sixty-four percent of blacks think whites

have a better chance of getting ahead in society as opposed to thirty-five percent of whites who think their racial group has this advantage, while eighty-three percent of blacks have a favorable view of Obama as opposed to thirty-one percent of whites (Adam Nagourney and Megan Thee, "Poll Finds Obama Candidacy Isn't Closing Divide on Race," *New York Times* [July 16, 2008] A1, A14).

Governmental programs sometimes help and sometimes complicate attitudes. School busing to achieve racial integration in schools prompted riots in Boston and elsewhere as ethnic whites saw it as an assault on their local schools, communities, and position in society. As Obama described in his autobiography, whole neighborhoods changed dramatically as whites (*Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* [NY: Three Rivers Press, 1995],156), in the face of blacks moving nearby, panicked and sold their homes at below the previous market value. Whole sections changing almost overnight when fear of the other combined with fear of crime: on the 1971 Independence Day weekend, three stores I serviced in the Germantown section of Philadelphia when driving a wholesale milk delivery truck went out of business as a consequence of recent robberies as whites fled and poorer blacks gradually took their places. The converse of white flight is gentrification of black neighborhoods by young white professionals and others looking for inexpensive housing. It is usually a slow process, as I learned when I participated in it in the mid-1970s and the 1980s.

Fear of black violence in inner city slums is a major, mostly unstated, factor in race relations. Though most of the violence is in the form of black-on-black crime and murder, the burglaries, muggings, and robberies of businesses still drives whites from neighborhoods that feel less secure to them. The most dramatic violence was in the form of urban riots, especially upon the death of Martin Luther King. During the recent commemoration of his life, on the fortieth anniversary of his death, the media asserted that there had been riots in over 100 American cities immediately after his assassination. After Obama's early victories in the primaries, Democratic leaders and the media started to fear that if Obama did not get the nomination there would be black riots and African Americans would turn against any other Democratic nominee. Douglas Wilder, the mayor of Richmond and formerly the first African American governor of Virginia, warned in February 2008 that if Hillary Clinton won the nomination due to the votes of super delegates, then the nominating convention would be "riotous." His colleagues quickly hushed up this terrifying prospect. The great fear was not simply of a convention that would be riotous, as was the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, but the prospect of enormous riots in the streets of large city ghettos; disappointed expectations can have an explosive quality.

Affirmative action laws are unpopular among most white workers, especially in periods of diminishing well-paying jobs. Affirmative action in higher education spurs muttering about unfair advantages and envy among whites who are not accepted nor awarded competitive scholarships given to blacks, whether or not they openly express it.

Meanwhile, African American feelings about Caucasians are complex. They admire, distrust, envy, fear, hate, identify with, and have contempt for whites, who often appear artificial—without "soul." Like ethnic groups seeking to make it in America, they want what whites have but they do not want to give up their own heritage. For studying hard and listening to teachers advocating middle class values, black children in the slums sometimes mock their studious fellow students as being "white." African Americans who have "made it" in white society can be quite sensitive to suggestions that they did so only because of affirmative action. Like people generally, blacks want more economic and political power in society. Sometimes they want to reverse the power relationship in which they are in the weaker position, and want to feel dominance over whites. Such was the case of my former landlady, a very generous, intrusive black nurse, who would only rent the apartment in her two-family house to whites.

The desire to see blacks simply as victims contributes to the difficulty of discussing race—as Obama has found out when Jesse Jackson was heard on an open microphone saying he would like to cut the Senator's "nuts off" for publicly criticizing absent black fathers rather than focusing criticism on "the Man" (that is, the white man) as the cause of all black problems. Although African Americans as a group are victims of slavery and racism, the reality is much more complex. The

legacy of racism is a heavy burden on African Americans who are disproportionately poor and uneducated. Besides their traditional middle class and many who have prospered as governmental workers, there are also large numbers who have benefited from affirmative action programs in business, education, and government. High-achieving blacks usually take umbrage at the idea that they had special opportunities due to affirmative action, but they can also be haunted by it, fearing that they are seen as "charity cases." Others, like Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama, raise this issue in terms of their having to overcome prejudices with the performance bar being raised higher and higher. In her senior thesis, "Princeton-Educated Blacks and the Black Community," she also expressed the feeling of being a visitor in the white world of Princeton. Blacks who make it in white society sometimes feel that they can never trust America and that they must always be on guard against expressing themselves as freely as they would within their own group. Michelle Obama has been subject to enormous criticism for having said on February 18, 2008 in Milwaukee that, "for the first time in my adult life, I am proud of my country because it feels like hope is finally making a comeback." This is an unremarkable sentiment to many from her background, but it is taken by many conservative commentators and blogs to mean she and other blacks cannot be trusted to be patriotic Americans.

Multiracialism is a fairly new phenomenon in American society. Even with most American states having laws again miscegenation when Barack Obama was born forty-seven-years ago, there certainly was racial intermarriage, but marriage to anyone of African descent meant that their children were seen as black and their white heritage was ignored. The decrease in racism has given people the option of identifying themselves by both rather than one parent and racial category. The greater society may or may not accept the person's dual or multiple identifications. For example, I have little doubt that the brother and sister, adopted separately at birth by my youngest son, will at a glance be seen by most people as simply black despite their natural parents' mixed heritage of African American, Caucasian, and Native American.

Why there are now a large number of African Americans and multiracial faces in the metropolitan New York media market is an interesting question, especially in the light of their prior exclusion except for a slight stereotypical presence. I suspect one reason is that that viewers incline to pay closer attention to change, and this represents a big change. (Note that advertisers are more concerned about the public's eyes being on the television screen than on the content.) Freud's term, "the narcissism of minor differences," may provide some help in explaining this phenomenon of being drawn to slightly different faces on the screen. There is an undue focus on differences of no great importance, and I would include race in itself (but certainly not in its elaboration in society) as one of these. In looking to those who are slightly different, as in skin color, people often project special qualities onto them, making them heroes or villains. Thus, many voters can project great wisdom into Obama or see him as a villain, confusing his name with that of Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein.

Since it is the Democratic candidate who has prompted the current focus on race, I will conclude with some of what he as a thirty-four-year-old published on the subject in his autobiography with psychological insight, pessimism, and his mother in mind. "The emotions between the races could never be pure; even love was tarnished by the desire to find in the other some element that was missing in ourselves. Whether we sought out our demons or salvation, the other race would always remain just that; menacing, alien, and apart" (*Dreams,* 124). His current efforts to be a racial healer are bringing many of these fantasies and feelings to the fore, as well as an intense drive to foster racial political correctness.

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