

Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Instead, his power will depend on his ability to retain the support of the generals. Factional politics may continue to dominate, and China's ability to carry out a coherent foreign policy may be challenged in the years to come. If so, China's dissatisfactions with the world beyond its borders could be magnified, and with them the challenges to Western diplomacy. Nonetheless, Nathan and Ross conclude that American policy toward China must be built on cooperation, not conflict. They suggest that the United States work to integrate China into multilateral institutions, including the World Trade Organization. To promote continued political liberalization in China and stable U.S.-China relations, they counsel expanding educational and cultural exchanges with China as well.

Bernstein and Munro, by contrast, recommend preparing for the worst. After acknowledging that war is unlikely, they proceed to offer prescriptions that would push China to the wall—reducing the trade deficit, suspending most favored nation status, continuing to deny China membership in the World Trade Organization, supporting Radio Free Asia, and funding “various Chinese groups living in the West who publicize Chinese human rights violations and who themselves strive to form the nucleus of a democratic movement in China.” This, they argue, will “prevent China from becoming the hostile hegemon that could interfere with American pursuit of interest in Asia.”

In truth, such efforts at containment would surely increase the peril. *The Coming Conflict with China* would become self-fulfilling prophecy.

An honest debate about such matters is impossible, Bernstein and Munro contend, because of the powerful China lobby, dominated by the American business establishment and committed to an omnipotent China. In truth, as others have noted, countervailing views are voiced by human rights organizations, the right-to-life movement, organized labor, and environmental groups. In describing the factors influencing American policy, Bernstein and Munro ably explore the link between economic self-interest and the public pronouncements of such “old China hands” as Henry Kissinger. But the two authors neglect the media's tendency to oversimplify and sensationalize complex topics, and its implications for America's China policy.

Reading these two books together demonstrates the difficulty of achieving a new consensus on that policy, now that the old consensus lies shattered by the end of the Cold War and the tragic suppression of protesting Beijingers in 1989. The Middle Kingdom's entry onto the world stage marks a historic shift and a challenge to statesmanship. But to argue that the United States must gird itself for conflict is decidedly premature.

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## *The Good News About Race*

AMERICA IN BLACK AND WHITE:  
*One Nation, Indivisible.*

By Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom. Simon & Schuster. 640 pp. \$30

by James Patterson

To many Americans—including such specialists as Andrew Hacker, in his widely discussed *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile,*

*Unequal* (1992)—race relations in the United States seem altogether dismal. Recent developments, notably the racial polarization of opinion over O. J.

Simpson, appear only to confirm such pessimism. In a deeply researched and powerfully argued book, *America in Black and White*, Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom resist this tide of gloom. Seeking to update the 1944 classic *An American Dilemma*, in which Gunnar Myrdal wrote of the potential for racial harmony in the United States, the authors declare that the nation is “no longer separate, much less unequal than it was, and by many measures, less hostile.”

The Thernstroms bring strong scholarly credentials to their work. He is a Harvard University professor who has done pioneering work in social history; she is a social scientist at the Manhattan Institute and the author of a book on affirmative action and voting rights, *Whose Votes Count?* (1987). They open *America in Black and White* by looking at race relations in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, “three decades of amazing change.” Readers familiar with developments during these years may find little that is new or surprising here, but the authors cover the ground because, in their words, “the voices of racial pessimism” often downplay or misrepresent the period. “The racial problems of today are in fact not the same as those of yesterday,” they assert, “and we cannot address them with a clear head unless we understand the difference.”

The authors wring two important lessons from postwar history. First, considerable progress was made, especially in white attitudes toward black people, before the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954 and the civil rights struggles of the 1960s. Second, this progress resulted from broad social forces, notably economic growth and the northward migration of blacks in the 1940s and '50s, and not from the actions of public officials or judges.

In the second part of the book, the authors examine social, economic, and political trends since the 1960s. Here they take note of the many ways in which progress has slowed since the

1970s—mostly a period (until recently) of unimpressive economic growth. They present reams of statistics documenting race-based differences in income, crime, and family organization. They also highlight the gaps in testable cognitive skills that continue to separate black and white students. As in the historical section, though, the Thernstroms have other points to make. They hold that many of the gains achieved by blacks between the 1940s and the '60s have been maintained or amplified. African Americans have experienced rising real incomes, declining residential isolation, higher interracial marriage rates, falling poverty and high school dropout rates, much greater representation in higher education, and dramatic increases in political participation and officeholding. The Thernstroms challenge the pessimistic Kerner Report of 1968, whose authors, appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, “appear to have been so traumatized by the ghetto riots during the long, hot summers of 1965–1968 that they had deluded themselves into thinking that the condition of African-Americans in the United States had been deteriorating rather than improving since World War II.”

The Thernstroms also question theories that purport to explain the high poverty rates of African Americans. Liberal scholars such as William Julius Wilson contend that structural economic forces have wiped out industrial jobs and devastated inner-city areas. But to the Thernstroms, the culprits are the escalating rates of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and the chaotic family lives of a subset of poor black people in the cities. The authors are equally critical of the liberal formula that poverty causes crime. Between the 1960s and the '80s, they note, poverty fell while the crime rate rose. In the Thernstroms' view, “The connection between breaking the law and poverty was never very close and has been getting weaker.”

In the final section of the book, the authors assess public policies concerned with race and arrive at a dim view of

most of them, especially affirmative action in employment and education. They laud black scholars such as Shelby Steele and Thomas Sowell who criticize set-asides, busing, quotas, and other liberal efforts to promote race equality. "Race-conscious policies," the Thernstroms emphasize, "make for more race-consciousness; they carry America backward."

This summary of *America in Black and White* may make it sound like yet another conservative tract on American race relations. And at times the authors do come out from behind the cover of social science to disclose their conservative convictions. They write, for example, that Denver's experiment with court-ordered busing was "an unmitigated disaster," and that the Supreme Court's *Griggs* decision (1971) limiting the use of standardized tests in hiring was the "opening chapter in a dreary story of judicial creativity and confusion." In one of many meaty footnotes (these make fascinating reading), the Thernstroms criticize writers who charge critics of welfare and affirmative action with "symbolic racism." But it would be an error to treat this book only as political point-scoring. The Thernstroms have accumulated an immense amount of data, which they present with clarity and precision.

Why did rates of crime and out-of-wedlock pregnancy grow so rapidly in some black communities in the 1970s and 1980s? Why the disorder and disrespect for learning that seem to afflict some urban schools? In considering these controversial topics, the Thernstroms avoid such terms as "black culture" or "culture of poverty." Instead, they look to problems in the home environment of many poor black children.

But that explanation raises questions of its own. Why are those home environments so dismal in an ever more affluent society? Should we take into account the fact that feelings of *relative* deprivation might sharpen in such a society? (The authors say little about such feelings, emphasizing absolute gains.) Why, as the Thernstroms note, do most ethnic groups move up the socioeconomic ladder faster than African Americans? Did people such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan have a point in stressing the long-range consequences of those experiences—involuntary migration and slavery—unique to the history of African Americans? How much truth is there to the argument that James Baldwin and others used to highlight: that many American blacks tend toward self-hatred, which leads to failure? These matters are huge and often incendiary, and the Thernstroms, as social scientists, understandably treat them gingerly.

Despite such reticence, *America in Black and White* is a notable addition to the lengthy shelf of books dealing with contemporary race relations in the United States. While narrower in scope than *An American Dilemma*, it offers a hardheaded and well-informed accounting of our problems. Conservatives will welcome much of it, but liberals, too, will do well to think about the dubious consequences, many of them unintended, of government-directed social engineering since World War II. The Thernstroms have given us a tightly argued, richly documented, provocative book—scholarship of a very high order.

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