

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Black and white. It is perhaps the deepest cleavage in American life, and from the beginning the question of freedom has been at its heart. At its founding, the United States was both the freest country on earth, a land where people came to escape the stifling constraints of Europe and its feudal legacy, and the least free, a land where people brought in chains from Africa endured the brutality of chattel slavery. The division between white and black Americans has its roots in the institution of slavery, in the starkest possible division between those who are free and those who are not. As a land “conceived in liberty,” freedom has always been the cardinal virtue of the United States, and so its deepest and most persistent public problem has always centered on its history of either obliterating or subverting the freedom of black Americans and on their efforts to overcome this history. Slavery and the legacy of segregation, discrimination, and exploitation that followed it insured that the abiding struggle for African Americans in the United States would be one of moving from subjugation to liberation. It is a struggle that did not end with emancipation or with the fall of Jim Crow, but one that continues today. Black and white Americans still constitute two groups that experience the promise of freedom very differently.

This essential link between race and the ideal of freedom shows how questions of race are inescapably moral ones. The phenomenon of race is always bound up with a complex web of normative categories that shape its meaning in American life. Throughout American history, arguments for such things as natural black inferiority, the beneficent paternalism of slave owners, abolitionism, racial equality, civil rights, and black nationalism have all relied on deep and evolving moral assumptions for their power. In this way, race always exists against shifting and contested background understandings of its moral meaning and significance. By background understandings, I mean those sets of normative categories that people draw upon to make sense of and form opinions about issues in public life. Capitalism, for example, relies on a background understanding that establishes the moral value of categories such as individual initiative and choice, deserved inequalities, and rational

self-interest. Communism, on the other hand, relies on a background understanding that gives categories like economic exploitation, alienation, and collective responsibility their normative force. People have very different moral reactions to economic issues depending on which understanding they draw upon. These kinds of normative understandings supply people with the moral language they need to make sense of, think about, and take positions on the world around them, and this is why they are so important in shaping public life. They provide the normative context in which particular issues are framed in particular ways and the moral ground upon which people struggle over them. So anyone examining issues in public life must be aware of how such issues are framed and their resolution shaped by particular normative understandings. Race is no different. Mapping and critically examining the normative understandings that Americans use to make sense of, think about, and take positions on issues tied to race is critical to any meaningful exploration of it. If we are to come to grips with the profoundly complex phenomenon of race in American life, then it is vitally important not only that we think about race, but also that we think about how we think about it—that is, that we examine the normative understandings we draw upon when doing so.

Perhaps the most important source of the normative understandings Americans rely on to shape their reactions to issues and events in public life is the political and moral tradition of liberalism. Liberalism provides Americans with the moral language they use to articulate their core political values—things like individual liberty and equality, the rule of law, rights, the free market, and so on. Liberalism's categories, therefore, have a powerful influence on how issues of race are framed in public life and on how Americans react to them. This is particularly true when we look at the relationship between race and freedom, since freedom is itself a normative ideal so central to the liberal tradition in the United States. Liberalism, in short, is one of the most important influences on contemporary understandings of race, freedom, and their relationship to each other. It provides the moral ground upon which questions of race and freedom intersect, and my aim in this book is to explore this ground. In it I offer a critical examination of contemporary American liberalism's normative understanding of race, one that centers on the role played by the concept of freedom.

I examine an understanding of race within American liberalism that has been profoundly influential since the Second World War. This understanding is that of color-blind liberalism. Color-blind liberalism claims that race is a morally arbitrary trait that should make no difference to one's prospects in life. People should be free to live their own

lives as they individually choose with no restrictions or barriers raised against them because of their race. An individual's race should make no difference to his or her freedom, and so practices such as segregation and discrimination, which block an individual's choices and restrict his or her freedom due to race, are unjust and should be eliminated. This understanding represents a powerful strand of liberal thought and practice in the postwar United States. Indeed, both the right and left sides of the American political spectrum have come to embrace some version of it, even while each accuses the other of forsaking it. This color-blind paradigm, in short, has become the dominant public philosophy of race in the United States, the normative ground upon which most of our contemporary political struggles about race unfold.

Color-blind liberalism has proven itself a very effective paradigm in the fight to end *de jure* segregation, to reduce the most blatant forms of discrimination, and to extend basic civil and political rights to black citizens. It also remains a powerful foundation for efforts to address many forms of continuing discrimination and to open up more social and economic opportunities to African Americans. But color-blind liberalism also suffers from severe shortcomings that prevent it from offering a full and compelling understanding of race in American life. In its excessive individualism, it overlooks the profound importance of culture, of membership in cultural groups, and of the influence these factors have within the institutions, practices, and meanings of civil society. Color-blind liberalism's understanding of race is not completely wrong, but it is seriously incomplete and therefore inadequate.

This does not, however, mean liberalism is without hope. Indeed, it has the resources to overcome the shortcomings of its current understanding of race by expanding its view of freedom to include those elements ignored by the color-blind paradigm. Liberalism can do this by taking a closer look at its core commitment to individual autonomy, or the ability of people to make decisions about and control the course of their own lives. Autonomy is an ideal closely related to freedom, but it is a richer concept than the notion of freedom generally celebrated in liberalism, especially the American variety. It turns out that autonomy hinges on the very things color-blind liberalism overlooks—things like culture, membership in cultural groups, and the institutions, practices, and meanings of civil society. By focusing on these kinds of factors, autonomy provides a way for liberalism to expand its understanding of race and provide a richer and more compelling account of the relationship between race and freedom.

An expanded liberal understanding of race in American life recognizes that the individualistic categories of the color-blind paradigm are appropriate in some areas, but that in other areas, we need to pay atten-

tion to the importance of culture and cultural group membership to individual autonomy, factors too often minimized or completely ignored in liberal approaches to race. This means taking an explicitly group-conscious view much of the time, especially when it comes to civil society, though this does not include endorsing a notion of formal group-rights as some scholars and activists have suggested. Rather, it means accounting for the critical role black civil society plays in providing the cultural, social, economic, and political resources necessary for the autonomy of African Americans as members of a historically oppressed and marginalized cultural group. It also means expanding the liberal approach to public policy to include efforts to strengthen institutions within black civil society and to give African Americans as a group more control over state institutions such as schools and police forces that have a direct impact on their communities.

In short, my goal in this book is to develop an argument about how contemporary American liberalism understands race, what is inadequate about this understanding, and how it can formulate a better one. I do this by paying particular attention to the value of freedom and its requirements within liberalism, especially for African Americans as a cultural group in a land that, from slavery to the present, has been less than accommodating when it comes to the promise of freedom. I argue that if liberalism is to fully grasp and help contribute to the continuing struggle by black men and women to secure the promise of freedom in the United States, then it must recognize that African Americans have always experienced and continue to experience the ideal of autonomy very differently. This is a unique experience with autonomy that has two closely related dimensions. First, black Americans have always faced and continue to face distinct barriers to autonomy given their membership in a historically subordinated and exploited cultural minority. Second, this membership frequently means they must draw the kinds of resources needed to construct an autonomous life, as well as to overcome threats to it, from the distinct and unique space of black civil society, a network of institutions, practices, and meanings defined and dominated by African Americans themselves. In both of these ways, then, the autonomy of African Americans hinges on a complex and unique set of cultural, social, economic, and political factors, and American liberalism must recognize and account for this fact in trying to come to grips with the continuing struggle for freedom by black men and women in American life. Using the issue of race and freedom in this way, then, my argument examines, challenges, and expands American liberalism's normative understanding of race, and it is my hope that doing so will help open up the liberal dialogue on race to include factors we have spent too little time talking about in the past.

LOCATING THE ARGUMENT

Too often political theory is simply the realm of constructing, refining, and deconstructing abstract principles and concepts, just as the realm of political practice is too often focused exclusively on strategic questions or cost-benefit analyses. We rarely spend much time at the intersection of the two. We either refine our theoretical paradigms with an occasional aside about the need for political action, or we loosely mention a few concepts like freedom or equality before turning to the nuts and bolts of policy debates. Spending some time at the intersection of theory and practice means thinking about how our normative ideals and commitments translate into political action, and about how the institutions and practices of public life embody certain moral assumptions and values. If theory is to have any relevance, we have to think about how it can guide action, and if political practice is to have any coherence, we have to think about what normative principles are at stake. It is not that people who study political matters do not see the important relationship between theory and practice; it is simply that they usually focus predominately on one or the other. My argument tries to keep one foot in either camp, engaging them both and exploring their relationship. It is an exercise in applied political theory, one based on the idea that looking at specific political contexts is one of the best ways to explore difficult problems of abstract theory, as well as the idea that political philosophy is most valuable when it can lead us toward new and more fruitful approaches to seemingly intractable political dilemmas like that of race in the United States. The intersection of theory and practice is where students of abstract political philosophy on the one hand and political activists, researchers, and policy analysts on the other have something to offer each other. My goal here is just such an exchange. With this in mind and before turning to the argument itself, I should say a few things about where it sits in the contemporary philosophical and political landscape, what some of its specific philosophical and political aims are, and how it utilizes some of its central concepts.

Liberalism

Liberalism is a broad tradition of political thought and practice in the West running from the middle of the seventeenth century through the present, a tradition that has been particularly influential in the United States. Liberalism has many different strands and internal differences, but it is a coherent tradition built around several common themes (Gray 1986). It assumes the equal moral worth and basic rational capacity of individuals, claims that each person has a basic set of moral rights and

duties that flow from this equality and rationality, and argues that this means individuals should remain as free to live their own lives as possible, so long as they refrain from harming others. Liberalism's traditional concern is with limiting the power of political leaders to abuse their subjects' liberty. In this quest, it generally supports constitutional government, the rule of law, and representative political institutions. It is committed to a wide sphere of individual privacy protected by strong civil and political rights; it includes a tradition of tolerating political, philosophical, and religious differences among individuals; and it generally supports private property rights and some form of market economy. Liberalism rests on a moral dedication to individual freedom. It tries to give people the room to frame their own plans of life, develop their own talents, and act on their own preferences with as little external interference as possible. In short, it tries to give individuals the space to be their own masters, to rule themselves as far as they are able. This is why the principle of individual autonomy is so central to the liberal project and why it plays such an important role in the argument to follow.

I engage three debates within contemporary liberal theory. The first is the liberal-communitarian debate that began in the years following the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971), reached full strength in the 1980s, and has continued in one form or another until the present. While some communitarians reject liberalism altogether, many others consider the communitarian critique a corrective to some of liberalism's excesses, a way to strengthen liberalism from within. My argument supports this position, claiming that the shortcomings of color-blind liberalism can be overcome, at least in part, through a more communitarian reading of liberalism. The second debate is over liberalism's relationship to social difference. Many political theorists criticize liberalism for contributing to the subordination of certain groups based on differences such as gender, ethnicity, race, sexual preference, age, disability, and so on. Some of these critics consider liberalism irreconcilably hostile to a truly emancipatory politics of difference, while others think liberalism has the internal resources to solve its problems with difference. My argument takes the second position, claiming that American liberalism can overcome its current problems with race-based differences.

The third debate is a narrower one that draws on both the communitarian and politics-of-difference exchanges and centers on the question of how liberalism should respond to the problem of cultural pluralism in ethnically or racially diverse states. The most influential writer on this issue is Will Kymlicka (1989; 1995a), who argues that contemporary liberalism does not properly account for the particular group interests of cultural minorities in its excessive focus on the uniform and universal

rights of individuals. In response to this oversight, Kymlicka claims that liberalism should make room for certain types of group-specific rights that protect some kinds of cultural minorities in multicultural states. My argument engages Kymlicka's work in several places and considers how it might apply to African Americans in the United States. Ultimately, I find Kymlicka only partially helpful. His diagnosis of contemporary liberalism is often correct, but his prescriptions are not appropriate in the specific case of race and American liberalism, a fact he himself seems to acknowledge. In this way, the argument is partially an attempt to develop an alternative answer to the broad problem Kymlicka identifies in his work.

The communitarian, politics-of-difference, and multiculturalism debates within liberalism usually come in rather abstract formulations. While theoretical contributions of this kind are certainly important, there is also a real need for work on the implications such debates have in more concrete political settings. Without this kind of work, such debates often become stuck in the abstract realm with partisans fine tuning elegant but increasingly ungrounded arguments like mechanics endlessly laboring over race cars without ever rolling them out of the garage to see how they actually do on the track. The communitarian, politics-of-difference, and multiculturalism debates within liberal political theory are increasingly in danger of becoming stuck at the abstract level. It is time to spend more time and effort looking at how they work themselves out in more specific political contexts. As an exercise in applied political theory, my argument is such an effort. It tries to pull these debates out of the garage to see how they fare on the track, and a rather difficult one at that. The specific issue of race in the postwar United States provides an excellent opportunity to see what implications these kinds of debates have in a unique applied setting.

Liberalism has been particularly influential in the United States. It is not the hegemonic ideology that Hartz (1955) took it to be, but it is the country's principal political language. This is why contemporary political labels such as *liberal* and *conservative* can be misleading. What we call liberal and conservative positions today are generally different interpretations of the same broad liberal tradition. Unlike many other countries, where conservatives challenge the central tenets of liberalism itself, conservatives in the United States generally support a classical, laissez-faire version of liberalism with its emphasis on property rights and a strictly limited state, while those labeled liberals tend to support a modern reformist or activist version more compatible with today's welfare state. To avoid confusion, I use the terms *liberal* and *liberalism* in this book in their more general sense to indicate the broad intellectual and political tradition of liberalism I described above, the tradition most

Americans across the political spectrum identify with in one form or another. To refer to more specific positions along the contemporary American political spectrum, I use the terms *left* and *right*. Furthermore, by left and right, unless otherwise indicated, I do not refer to the political extremes—white separatists, militia groups, American communists, and so on. Rather, these terms correspond to those on either side of the broad political mainstream in the United States—positions we would expect left-leaning progressive Democrats and right-leaning conservative Republicans to take. To illustrate using the issue of race, I use the term left to refer to the typical views and policies advocated by such individuals and groups as Jesse Jackson, Ted Kennedy, Carol Moseley-Braun, Charles Rangel, the NAACP, the ACLU, and the Urban League. The left generally includes those who tend to favor such things as affirmative action policies, stronger antidiscrimination enforcement, and more programs to fight poverty and unemployment. The term right, on the other hand, refers to the typical views and policies advocated by such individuals and groups as Newt Gingrich, Clarence Thomas, Trent Lott, J. C. Watts, Pat Buchanan, the Christian Coalition, and the Heritage Foundation. The right generally includes those who tend to favor such things as ending affirmative action, dismantling or devolving to the states responsibility for antipoverty programs, and resisting diversity-based changes in school curriculums that conform with what they see as excessive “political correctness.”

One of my central arguments in this book is that, while these mainstream left and right positions in the United States differ in many important ways when it comes to issues of race, they have both embraced the paradigm of color-blind liberalism in the last several decades, though they have done so in very different ways with very different policy implications. In the next chapter, for example, I show how debates over policies such as busing and affirmative action are defined by the underlying normative assumptions of the color-blind paradigm, assumptions both sides of these debates endorse. This is why color-blind liberalism has become the dominant public understanding of race; both the left and right sides of the mainstream political spectrum in the United States have adopted some version of it, and so its categories now frame the way most issues of race unfold in American life.

The centrality of the liberal tradition in the United States, however, does not mean that nonliberal traditions do not play significant roles as well, especially when it comes to race. First, the language of ascriptive hierarchy has had a critical impact on the history of race in this country (Smith 1993), and the reactionary and racist right continues to employ the rhetoric of overt racism, black inferiority, and segregation. There are still a significant number of Americans who oppose the extension of

basic civil and political rights and fundamental equality under the law to black citizens. This language, however, is no longer part of the political mainstream, and to the extent that its ideas do find mainstream support, they must do so by avoiding explicit expression and instead rely on code words and implicit appeals. The political mainstream has at least rhetorically embraced the language of color-blind liberalism. Second, and more importantly for my argument here, many on the radical left have always pushed for alternatives to America's liberal political order, though they have generally had little real success as the history of the United States has been one of liberal reform rather than radical revolution. This radical left tradition, however, has always been an important strand of thought and practice when it comes to race, and it has had particular appeal to African Americans given liberalism's often dismal record on racial justice. Throughout American history and continuing today, challenges to the country's dominant liberal ideology in the radical tradition have come from African American intellectuals, activists, revolutionaries, labor organizers, communists, legal theorists, theologians, cultural critics, and social scientists. These include people like Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Ida Wells, W. E. B. DuBois, A. Philip Randolph, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Cornel West, Gayraud Wilmore, James Cone, Manning Marable, Patricia Williams, Derrick Bell, and James Jennings. A distinct but often closely related nationalist tradition among black Americans has also developed a radical critique of the American liberal order through such people as Martin Delany, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Huey Newton, Malcolm X, Harold Cruse, Stokely Carmichael, and Molefi Kete Asante.¹ These radical and nationalist traditions within black political thought and practice step outside the reformist tradition of mainstream liberalism to encourage black group unity, autonomy, and self-help; to focus on white supremacy as a pervasive cultural, social, and economic force in American life; and to press for the fundamental and radical reorganization of the social and economic foundations of American life.

My argument attempts to bring many of the factors emphasized by these radical and nationalist traditions into the mainstream liberal understanding of race. I try to open up the liberal dialogue to include these kinds of concerns, arguing that much of what these traditions uncover is not in conflict with liberalism at all, but rather necessary to a liberal understanding of race that is genuinely concerned with individual autonomy. Doing so can help produce an expanded understanding of race within American liberalism, one that retains the strengths of the color-blind paradigm while, at the same time, going beyond its limits. In moving beyond the cramped confines of the color-blind paradigm, where most contemporary debates over race are stuck, such an approach

draws on parts of the radical and nationalist traditions for its strength, but it remains thoroughly liberal itself, meaning that it is still able to make its appeals within the broad language of mainstream American politics.

This kind of effort is particularly important if we are to see the reemergence of the left on issues of race in the United States. Following the accomplishments of the civil rights movement by the mid-1960s, the left lost much of its power to lead on issues of race. It quickly fragmented as many activists embraced or returned to radical or nationalist positions and many white supporters either lost interest in issues of race or drifted rightward and eventually became neoconservatives or Reagan Democrats. I think the left has seen its vigor and influence on issues of race decline in the last several decades, at least in part, because it continues to rely on a cramped and incomplete view of race, something many on the left acknowledge but have difficulty responding to in an innovative and politically compelling way. The expanded approach I develop can help revitalize the left's influence on issues of race by broadening its appeal. It offers a more coherent and comprehensive approach that combines a strong focus on structural factors like discrimination and economic disadvantage with attention to things the left has had difficulty accounting for, things like moral standards, group values, and strong families, neighborhoods, and religious institutions. The time is certainly ripe for the left to embrace such an approach, given the growing movement in political discourse, coming from both the Democratic and Republican parties, toward a focus on issues like the strength of civil society, the importance of moral values, and the need to revitalize a sense of community and civic responsibility in America. So, in short, the notion of autonomy found in liberal political theory provides a way to broaden the mainstream liberal dialogue on race to consider factors too often overlooked, and it can do so in such a way that helps revitalize the American left by giving it the basis for a much more comprehensive and influential approach to issues of race. In this way, my aim is not only to use the specific issue of race to contribute to debates within liberal political theory, but also to use liberal political theory to develop a more compelling approach to the persistent dilemma of race in American public life.

Race

Race is not an essential characteristic; it has no fixed biological or genetic nature. It is instead a social construct that a race-conscious society uses to mark off certain groups and to structure certain power relations. It relies on a set of cultural meanings forged in particular histori-

cal and social contexts and attached to particular bodies (Omi and Winant 1994; Fields 1990; Smedley 1993). With no essential nature, race is an arbitrary, shifting, and contestable construct, but this does not mean it is any less real. Its existence may not be a biological or genetic fact, but it certainly is a cultural, social, and political fact, and so it makes sense to talk about its existence and importance in American life. Unlike many other countries, the United States historically deploys a very rigid division between black and white, with little room for a mixed-race category between the two. The American model is bifurcated rather than graduated; it relies on a culturally and often politically enforced "one drop rule" that classifies anyone with discernable black features—skin, hair, nose, lips—or a known black ancestor as black (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1993, 74–79; Smedley 1993, 9).

This way of dividing people insures that race is not the same as ethnicity. Race transcends and cuts across ethnic lines, leaving wide ethnic differences within broader racial categories, a fact readily acknowledged when it comes to white Americans but rarely so when it comes to black Americans. This is why it is not accurate to consider African Americans just another ethnic group. Not only is there significant ethnic variation among black people in this country, but their experience as a subordinated racial group is also much different than that of most traditional, especially European, ethnic groups. As a racially defined group, African Americans have faced forced immigration; enslavement; and systematic, institutionalized, and state-sponsored violence, intimidation, segregation, and discrimination like no European ethnic group. They have faced a racial hierarchy built into the very structure of American society that white ethnic groups have not (Takaki 1987a). Indeed, it is the very existence of a racial hierarchy that has allowed various ethnic groups to enter this country and adopt the identity of white Americans; the racial caste system has provided a floor above which these white ethnics struggle to find their place in American society.² So we cannot collapse race into ethnicity. It is a distinct social construct in the United States with its own meanings and significance, and my argument examines this construct's place in contemporary American liberalism.

This book, then, is not intended to be a general theory of American multiculturalism. Instead, it examines the relationship of one minority group, black Americans, to the dominant group in the United States, white Americans, and the importance of this relationship for liberalism and its core value of freedom. The United States is a country of remarkable ethnic diversity, which exists within and across racial categories. There are also other groups defined by racial categories in addition to black and white Americans, groups like Asian Americans and indigenous Americans. Finally, there are groups such as Hispanic Americans

that are defined using both ethnic and racial categories. Any comprehensive view of American multiculturalism must account for all these different kinds of groups, but it is also important for us to examine specific parts of this broader phenomenon, because different dynamics are at work in the relations between different groups. This is particularly true of African Americans, a group that has much in common with the experience of other ethnic and racial minorities, but one that has also faced a unique experience in the United States. We might think of this as the reality of African American exceptionalism; the African American experience has its own distinct history and dynamics and must be explored on its own terms. So rather than addressing the larger phenomenon of American ethnic and racial pluralism, I examine only one aspect of it, the line separating black from white Americans. While this line does not represent the whole of American multiculturalism, or even the entire story of race in the United States, it does represent a profoundly important dimension of American life and a critical issue within American liberalism. I mention other racial and ethnic groups along the way, but only as they relate to my central concern with black and white Americans.

Culture, Cultural Groups, and Civil Society

The closely related concepts of culture, cultural groups, and civil society play a key role in my argument, so it might be helpful to explain how I use these concepts from the start. Culture is a notoriously slippery concept. On its most basic level it refers to the symbolic meanings shared by a people—meanings expressed in their language, stories, rituals, songs, expressive styles, works of art, and so on. These meanings provide the basic norms, habits, values, assumptions, and expectations that make everyday social interaction possible. They shape the way people understand the world around them and relate to each other within it. My argument here, however, takes a broader view of culture, one more often found among anthropologists than sociologists, that goes beyond the realm of social meanings alone to tie culture to the character of social structures as well.³ According to this view, culture influences the entire range of ways people organize their collective life together, both symbolically and structurally. This certainly includes the realm of social meanings, but it includes the web of social institutions, networks, and practices surrounding people as well, because all of these are indelibly formed by culture. It is what determines their character, breathes life into them, makes them real and meaningful. The cultural and the social are inescapably intertwined, because we are at the same time cultural as well as social beings. Culture, in short, is what shapes the deep symbolic

and structural background against which everyday social relations take place. It does this, however, only through the mediating roles played by groups and by civil society.

Culture is necessarily a collective phenomenon. Without social interaction and dialogue, culture cannot exist, and so it is something individuals must participate in with others in public life. In the words of Clifford Geertz, "Culture is public because meaning is" (1973, 12). Culture, therefore, only exists within groups. Such groups can come in many forms, they can overlap considerably, and we can belong to many of them. Americans, for example, participate in a common culture defined by certain meanings, institutions, and practices. But Jewish Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Mormons may also participate in different subcultures defined in the same way. Even the members of the U.S. Navy, a street gang in Detroit, or a software development division at Microsoft share in common subcultures defined by particular meanings, institutions, and practices. What this means is that an individual's relationship to a whole host of culturally defined meanings and social structures is mediated by the various groups to which he or she belongs, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Group memberships of one kind or another, therefore, are vital to the way culture shapes a person's social existence. Among such groups in the United States, ones marked off by race and ethnicity have always been among the most important, and it is the role played by this kind of cultural group that I examine here. My particular concern is with the importance of white and black Americans as distinct cultural groups.

The realm through which the influence of culture and cultural groups is most deeply felt is civil society. It is the collection of institutions, practices, and meanings around which our public life is built, but which are not tied directly to the state. It is the public space that lies between the formal realm of the state and our purely private lives. Civil society includes institutions such as churches, synagogues, and mosques; professional and neighborhood associations; trade unions; social clubs and sports teams; corporations, firms, and small businesses; colleges and universities; museums and galleries; the press; the entertainment industry; and hospitals and child care centers. In short, it encompasses the complex web of non-state social networks and institutional arrangements—as well as the practices, norms, and assumptions that structure them—in which we live out our lives. In this way, civil society provides the social space in which culture and cultural groups operate, the ground in which they come embedded. The institutions, practices, and meanings of civil society are where culture and the groups that mediate it find concrete expression, take on particular forms, and exercise their influence. All this means that an individual's life in civil society is deeply rooted in

the role of culture and cultural groups in shaping the particular form and content of the institutions, practices, and meanings of civil society.

As we can see, the concepts of culture, cultural groups, and civil society are complex and intertwined, and I flesh out their meaning, relationship, and importance along the way. Essentially, I argue that all three concepts are critical to an understanding of race in the United States, but that color-blind liberalism has little or no room for them. The ideal of individual autonomy, however, provides an excellent way to open up the liberal understanding of race to just these very concepts.

THE ARGUMENT'S OUTLINE

Chapter 2 describes color-blind liberalism, reviewing its central assumptions and categories. It then looks at its sources in the postwar era. These include the broad tradition of American liberalism, academic political theory, intellectuals and social scientists, the civil rights movement, the courts, political elites, and public attitudes. The chapter then explores how the color-blind paradigm now frames most debates over race in American life, and it concludes by discussing the view of freedom employed by color-blind liberalism. Chapter 3 considers the strengths of color-blind liberalism and reviews efforts by the left to respond to issues of race in the last several decades following the zenith of the civil rights movement. It then discusses the critical shortcomings of the color-blind paradigm, shortcomings that prevent it from offering a complete and compelling understanding of race in American life.

Chapter 4 explores the concept of autonomy and its role in the liberal project. Drawing on the work of political theorists like John Stuart Mill, Joseph Raz, and Charles Taylor, it argues that autonomy demands that liberals pay attention to the very things color-blind liberalism overlooks—things like culture, cultural group membership, and civil society. Autonomy, therefore, provides liberalism with a fruitful way to address issues of multiculturalism in states containing a variety of cultural groups. Chapter 5 outlines how a liberalism informed by autonomy can develop a richer and more compelling understanding of race in the United States. It centers on how the strengths of the color-blind paradigm can be retained, but only in an expanded approach to race that also considers the issues color-blind liberalism alone overlooks. It rejects, however, proposals to do this through a theory of formal group rights. The chapter goes on to focus on the shape of American civil society and how the institutions, practices, and meanings of black civil society provide African Americans with the cultural, social, economic, and political resources necessary for autonomy. The black church serves as

a particularly important example of an institution that works to provide these kinds of resources. The chapter concludes by looking at how black communities also continually struggle to overcome those forces that threaten autonomy within the space of black civil society itself.

Chapter 6 describes how the expanded understanding developed in the previous chapter can serve as a better guide to public policy on issues of race. It pays particular attention to the intersection of the state and civil society as an area in which public policy can help African Americans in their struggle to secure the resources necessary for autonomy. The chapter's discussion considers policy issues in the areas of civil rights, the safety net and economic policy, social welfare spending and black civil society, economic development, education, and police protection. It concludes with a caveat about the limits of public policy and final remarks on the book's central argument.

This book is a work of synthesis. In it I attempt to integrate theory and practice, issues of race with concepts of freedom, the liberal tradition with the contributions of radicals and black nationalists, and individualistic color-blind principles with group-conscious ones. Along the way I draw on the work of many different kinds of writers, scholars, and activists—from those who never once mention race to those who seem to mention it in every sentence, from black Marxist Christians to white liberal atheists, and from those focusing on the theoretical intricacies of hypothetical veils of ignorance to those focusing on the very real intricacies of education policies designed to eliminate ignorance. Not every writer I rely on could possibly agree with the entire argument, and indeed it is quite possible none of them would. But that is not my goal. Instead, my aim is to weave together an original and challenging argument about race, freedom, and American liberalism, one that depends heavily upon the insights of many others who have explored these topics before, but one that also makes important connections not made before. If the argument as a whole says something new and ultimately useful about these issues upon which so much has already been written, then it has done its job. It is to this job that I now turn.