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Beyond the Civil Rights Act of 1964: Confronting Structural Racism in the Workplace

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Judy L. Hamilton**

ABSTRACT

Since 1967, sociologists have produced a compelling body of literature on structural racism that explains why severe racial disparities persist throughout American society in all social domains: employment, education, residential patterns, wealth accumulation, and so on. Structural racism perpetuates the effects of past, overt discrimination because it does its work through organizational procedures and social policies that appear to be race neutral. Dealing with structural racism requires us to focus on social structure instead of the intentions of bigoted individuals.

In this Article, we link the disciplines of sociology and constitutional history to demonstrate that the U.S. Supreme Court has refused to recognize the reality of structural racism in the workplace. Instead, the Court has developed legal doctrines that protect this hidden form of racism, assure its continuation, and disable other branches of the federal and state governments from eradicating it. The Court’s willful blindness toward race and employment ignores the reality of structural racism and instead embeds the justices’ unacknowledged racial policy preferences into constitutional law. Their doctrinal assumptions about intent, colorblindness, facial neutrality, and white innocence enable them not just to ignore structural racism but to perpetuate and affirm it.

In this Article, we first review the sociological literature on structural racism and construct a template of structural racism by identifying its six key components: (1) irrelevance of intent, (2) individualism, (3) belief in structural neutrality, (4) colorblindness, (5) white advantage, and (6) invisibility. We then provide examples of structural racism in the social domain of employment. Next we demonstrate how Supreme Court constitutional decisions regarding employment since 1964 map onto this template of structural racism: (1) the Court demands a showing of intent, (2) the Court insists on
the notion that racism is inflicted only by individuals upon individuals, (3) the Court persists in its belief in structural neutrality, (4) the Court’s anti-classification understanding of equal protection is merely a judicial formulation of colorblindness, (5) the Court’s concern for white innocence reaffirms white advantage and white normativity, and (6) the Court’s embrace of all five of these components serves to keep structural racism invisible and thereby further maintains it.

We conclude first that the Court has ignored nearly a half-century of substantial research in sociology and instead has clung to outdated assumptions about how racism operates that perpetuate racial inequality. Second, we find that at the same time, the Court does invoke structural social understanding—by ignoring intent, being attentive to group actions and effects on groups, and focusing on inadvertent effects of institutional policies and procedures—but does so only to protect whites’ interests.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, and particularly Title VII,¹ was a product of its time, that time being the Civil Rights Era (1954–1970).² It was the signature piece of legislation for that period, just

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². Historians refer to this period as the “Second Reconstruction.” See generally C. VANN WOODWARD, THE STRANGE CAREER OF JIM CROW (3d ed.)
as the Civil Rights Act of 1866 was the signature legislation of the first Reconstruction. The 1964 Act, like Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, addressed itself only to the problem of explicit racism: intentional, conscious discrimination on the basis of race by which African Americans were deliberately excluded from opportunities and benefits that whites enjoyed. The U.S. Supreme Court readily accepted the statute’s legitimacy at first, as well as that of its successors, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Fair Housing Act of 1968. This trilogy of Civil Rights Acts constituted the statutory heart of the Second Reconstruction.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act was a noble achievement, but it did not comprehend issues of structural racism. Congress did not then

1974); Manning Marable, Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006 (2007); Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877 (1988); J. Morgan Kousser, Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction (1999); Harvard Sitkoff, The Second Reconstruction, 8 Wilson Q. 48, 48–59 (1984). This is a shorthand allusion to the following thesis: In the first Reconstruction, a tragically short period of time that lasted from 1862 until 1877, all branches of the federal government moved toward a racially egalitarian society. See Marable, supra, at 3–11. This movement was stymied by the counterrevolution known as “Redemption,” which not only halted the drive toward equality but also imposed a successor regime, Jim Crow, a comprehensive structure of race control and labor coercion that southern white supremacists created to provide a substitute for slavery. See, e.g., Nicholas Lemann, Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War 184 (2006). By an eerie historical parallel, a comparable 15-year period, the Second Reconstruction of 1954–1970, again witnessed an attempt by the federal government to create a genuinely egalitarian society. See Marable, supra, at 3–11. It too was cut short by a second Redemption, in which, as in the first, the U.S. Supreme Court played a leading role. See J. Morgan Kousser, The Supreme Court and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction, 80 Nat’l F. 25, 25–31 (2000). That role is the subject of this Article.

3. Act of Apr. 9, 1866, ch. 31, 14 Stat. 27.
5. The seeming focus on African Americans and lack of attention to Latinos, Asian Americans, or Native Americans in the selection of opinions for this Article is not deliberate on our part but arises from the Supreme Court decisions themselves. The selected opinions happen to feature African Americans because the overarching patterns of racialization in our society were initiated with the enslavement of African Americans, and African Americans have commonly been the focus of legal opinions.
9. “Structural racism” refers to the sociological reality that social structures can diminish opportunities for people of color in all spheres of life. See infra Part II.
address problems created by implicit discrimination because social scientists had not yet even identified those phenomena or described their workings. We can best honor the accomplishments of the 1964 Act today by carrying forward its egalitarian impetus to attack those issues of structural racism that, in 1964, were yet to be understood.

Slavery, as a system of racial domination and subordination, was succeeded by the comprehensive racial regime that we know as segregation or Jim Crow, which lasted from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 until it began to crumble in the Second Reconstruction after 1954. Under Jim Crow, whites imposed a system of caste that assured the dominant race of superiority in all realms: social, economic, political, cultural, and legal. White supremacy was grounded in explicit racism. “Whites Only” signs policed access to public facilities, the white primary assured white political power, and segregated schools excluded people of color from all but the most minimal educational opportunity. Meanwhile, vagrancy laws, chain gangs, and convict labor created a form of crypto-slavery. Segregation ensured that opportunity was reserved for whites only and that the lot of the colored races was one of inferiority, degradation, and exclusion. Explicit racism—overt, deliberate assertions of racial dominance—maintained servitude. It was this regime of oppression that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was designed to overthrow.

As segregation was being dismantled during the Second Reconstruction, a third racial regime—structural racism—replaced it. In contrast to former slavery and servitude, this new and more subtle system of preference and exclusion is maintained by implicit racism—covertly arising from nominally impartial structural arrangements in society assisted by unconscious biases—which assures racially disparate outcomes without the need to rely on overt discrimination. Neither sociologists nor lawyers had to think much about the implications of implicit racism before 1964 because explicit racism covered the ground entirely. Racial outcomes were wholly determined by overt discrimination, and the operation of unseen bias went submerged and unattended.

11. See id.
12. A note on usage in this Article: In general, the terms “African Americans” or “blacks” are used in a context where the relevant document—constitutional amendment, statute, or judicial opinion—refers specifically to them. We use the phrase “people of color” in other contexts to indicate that the amendments, statutes, opinions, or social conditions have application to all people not of exclusively European descent.
13. See infra Part II.
In this Article, we survey in depth one social domain, the workplace, to demonstrate the necessarily time-bound limitations of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its Title VII. We do this not to critique the vast body of Title VII litigation but rather to demonstrate that the cause of racial justice must move beyond the Civil Rights Act’s focus on explicit racism and its overt manifestations to grapple with implicit racism and its structural expressions.

Though these oppressive social structures and deeply embedded racial attitudes are invisible, their effects are all too real. Depressing disparities persist between whites and people of color today in all social domains. These differences endure despite the efforts of activists, Congress, some presidents, courts, and others to close the gaps. Public schools across the nation have re-segregated. Traditional, overt racism has receded (though it has by no means disappeared), so what can account for the dismal persistence of racism’s effects? The answer is structural racism.

For more than 40 years, sociologists have been producing “an enormous body of published, refereed research,” both theoretical and empirical, that demonstrates the power of social structures to diminish opportunities for people of color in all spheres of life. Sociologists call this phenomenon “structural racism” and invoke it to explain how and why differential racial outcomes persist in American society. Their analyses focus not on the bigoted attitudes of individuals but on institutional and structural barriers that people of color encounter in all social and economic fields. Traditional Jim Crow racism may be fading, but social structures perpetuate its effects. Policies and procedures that appear on their face to be race neutral nevertheless continue to reproduce disparate outcomes.

14. This Article deliberately omits consideration of Title VII, concentrating instead on the constitutional (as opposed to statutory) dimensions of workplace racism. Professor Chambers’s contribution to this symposium amply covers that ground. See Henry L. Chambers, Jr., The Supreme Court Chipping Away at Title VII: Strengthening It or Killing It?, 74 L.A. L. REV. 1161 (2014). This Article solely concerns the application of the insights drawn from the social sciences to constitutional interpretation, not the role of social science in statutory enforcement.


17. See infra note 23.

18. See infra Part II, note 23.

19. See infra Part II.
This manifestation of racism is unseen, automatic, and self-propagating. Unacknowledged white self-interest assures that it remains both effective and elusive.

We will demonstrate in this Article that although sociologists have provided both theory and data to establish the malignant impact of structural racism, the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court have ignored these findings and refused to acknowledge this form of racism. They have foreclosed most possibilities of mitigating its impact on the lives of people of color. Instead, the justices have formulated three doctrines—the purpose-impact distinction of *Washington v. Davis*, the white innocence trope, and the modern colorblindness principle—that assure structural racism’s continued force in our lives and disable other branches of both the federal and state governments from uprooting it. The Supreme Court approaches racial controversies in ways that remove them from their social and historical context. The Court mandates instead an abstract and formalistic resolution of race-related issues, while inhibiting other public institutions from devising realistic solutions to inequality.

In this Article, we combine sociological analysis and constitutional history to demonstrate the operation of structural racism in a single area of social relations—that of employment. In Part II, we summarize the sociological understanding of structural racism and provide examples of it in the domain of employment. In Part III, we review the components of structural racism that manifest themselves in the Supreme Court’s major constitutional precedents dealing with workplace discrimination since 1964, demonstrating how the justices unthinkingly preserve racism and its effects. In conclusion, we critique the Supreme Court’s resultant differential treatment of blacks and whites.

II. STRUCTURAL RACISM: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Most Americans understand racism to be individual, intentional, and overt: “crude, explicit, obvious, and motivated by individual bias.” In this form, it is referred to as “traditional” or “Jim Crow”

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20. *See infra* Part III.

21. This Article is a preliminary component of a larger work in progress that describes the interaction of structural racism and equal protection doctrine since 1964. In that larger study, we canvass four selected social domains that impact quality of life: employment discrimination, educational opportunity, housing segregation, and wealth accumulation. Space limitations confine us to focusing on only one of them, workplace inequality, in this piece.

racism. It describes the discriminatory attitudes and behavior of an individual toward others who are different in skin color or ethnicity. However, sociologists have demonstrated for more than four decades that the phenomenon of racism is more complicated than simply the deliberate, bad-attitude behavior of individuals.23 They

have identified structural racism as founded in ordinary, day-to-day practices of organizations, like business firms and government agencies, and resulting from social policies produced by political decisions.24 An example would be the funding of public schools primarily through local private property taxes.25 These practices and policies are not consciously maintained because someone deliberately intends to discriminate on the basis of race (though they may have originated with that objective in mind). Thus on the surface they appear to be race neutral. But these policies reduce opportunities and outcomes for people of color, for example, by diminishing the quality of education in schools attended by their children. What is sociologically significant here is not anyone’s intent to discriminate but rather the non-intended effects of decisions that do not on their face implicate race. “Structural racism” is the phrase that sociologists currently use most frequently to describe the negative impact on people of color that is the product of ostensibly race-neutral policies within and among institutions.26 Sociologists have also referred to this by other phrases: “institutional racism,” “structural discrimination,” “systemic racism,” and “racialized social systems.”27


26. See supra note 23.

27. CARMICHAEL & HAMILTON, supra note 23, at 4; KNOWLES & PREWITT, supra note 23, at 4; ALVAREZ & LUTTERMAN, supra note 23, at xii.

28. Fred L. Pincus, From Individual to Structural Discrimination, in RACE AND ETHNIC CONFLICT: CONTENDING VIEWS ON PREJUDICE, DISCRIMINATION AND
In contrast to traditional racism, structural racism focuses on differential effects arising from non-intentional causes. For example, African Americans, as a group, have elevated blood lead levels as a result of their higher likelihood of living in older housing that is contaminated with lead-based paint; this has serious health consequences, especially for children. This racial disparity occurs because of social (and material) structures, yet it has important health, education, social, and economic outcomes. The impact of this type of racism is cumulative and is part of a dynamic process that takes place across social domains and over long periods of time.

In all social domains—education, housing, income, employment, wealth, health, environmental degradation, and criminal justice—differential effects appear in racial disparities that persist and in many cases even grow more pronounced over time. People of color, when compared to whites with otherwise equivalent characteristics, have higher death rates from disease and higher...
infant mortality rates, have lower high school graduation rates, suffer higher unemployment, are unemployed for longer periods, experience more frequent episodes of joblessness, experience less stable employment, and accumulate less skill and on-the-job training than whites with comparable human capital. All of these factors compound job experience deficits and accrue into substantial race differences in earnings over a lifetime. People of color work in lower-paying occupations than whites with otherwise equivalent characteristics, have lower median household income.

34. "The highest infant mortality rate was for non-Hispanic black women with a rate 2.4 times that for non-Hispanic white women. Analysis on trends and variations in infant mortality reveals not only considerable differences in infant mortality rates among racial/ethnic groups but the persistence of disparities over time." Id. at 2.

35. “Across the United States, the AFGR [Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate] was highest for Asian/Pacific Islander students (93.5 percent). The rates for other groups were 83.0 percent for White students, 71.4 percent for Hispanic students, 69.1 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 66.1 percent for Black students.” NAT’L CTR. FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, PUBLIC SCHOOL GRADUATES AND DROPOUTS FROM THE COMMON CORE OF DATA: SCHOOL YEAR 2009–2010, available at http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013309/findings.asp [http://perma.cc/FSV4-VLUP] (archived Apr. 10, 2014).


40. Id. at 85.

41. Tienda & Stier, supra note 38, at 149, 162–63.

42. Tomaskovic-Devey et al., supra note 39, at 64, 82.

43. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, U.S. DEP’T OF LABOR, THE EDITOR’S DESK, EARNINGS AND EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION, RACE, ETHNICITY, AND SEX
and higher poverty rates, and accumulate significantly lower levels of wealth. Such racial disparities provide an urgent reminder that people of different races are still not on a level playing field.

Structural racism identifies the cause of such racial disparities in the processes, procedures, policies, historical conventions, assumptions, and beliefs regarding operational functioning that occur within, between, and among the social institutions that make up a society’s infrastructure. It is the result of institutional arrangements that distribute resources unequally and inequitably.

Structural racism explains unequal racial outcomes by focusing not on prejudiced individual behavior but on social infrastructure. A society’s infrastructure is made up of all the various and interrelated institutions that affect people’s lives and social


46. The median wealth of white households [(113,149)] is 20 times that of black households [(5,677)] and 18 times that of Hispanic households [(6,325)], according to a Pew Research Center analysis of newly available government data from 2009. These lopsided wealth ratios are the largest since the government began publishing such data a quarter century ago and roughly twice the size of the ratios that had prevailed between these three groups for the two decades prior to the Great Recession that ended in 2009.


47. See supra note 23.
relationships. A metaphorical comparison may help here. In the same way that our transportation physical infrastructure is made up of roads, bridges, railroads, ports, and airports, our social infrastructure consists of institutions such as schools, courts, hospitals, homes, and workplaces. Structural components of both of these kinds of infrastructures have a significant, but often unseen, impact on people’s lives. To illustrate: the interstate highway system has helped to drastically reduce auto fatalities. The fatality rates for both urban and rural interstates have been significantly lower than those for all other categories of highways every year. Because of structural features such as overpasses, divided roadways that separate opposing traffic by median strips, and uniform signage and markings, traveling on interstate highways is safer than traveling on two-lane roads. This is not because individual drivers on secondary roads are worse drivers and certainly not because those drivers intend to cause accidents or nurture hostile attitudes toward other drivers. Rather, the different outcomes are due entirely to structural features. The drivers’ states of mind are irrelevant. In the same ways that motorists on secondary roads are impacted by structural features such as intersections and proximity to oncoming traffic, so are people of color affected by social structural features such as dependence on local property taxes for public school funding, reliance on social networks for job information, subjective decision-making that is affected by unconscious assumptions and stereotypes, and business decisions made for rational, profit-oriented reasons.

In a racialized society, racial groups are related to each other by systems of domination and subordination, and social institutions are both structured by and contribute to the maintenance of the racial order. Racialization is “a set of conditions and norms that are constantly evolving and interacting with the socio-political environment,” mutating over time and space.

The earliest inquiries into the structural nature of racism focused on institutions. The term “institutional racism” first appeared in

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49. Id.
50. See Omi & Winant, supra note 23, at 79; Bonilla-Silva, Rethinking Racism, supra note 23, at 476; Bonilla-Silva, White Supremacy, supra note 23, at 11, 12, 67.
1967 in the writing of Stokely Carmichael\textsuperscript{52} and Charles V. Hamilton, who argued that “[i]nstitutional racism . . . is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life. [It] originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation.”\textsuperscript{53} They reinforced this with a compelling illustration:

When . . . five hundred black babies die each year because of the lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more are destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and discrimination in the black community, that is a function of institutional racism . . . . It is institutional racism that keeps black people locked in dilapidated slum tenements, subject to the daily prey of exploitative slumlords, merchants, loan sharks and discriminatory real estate agents. The society either pretends it does not know of this latter situation, or is in fact incapable of doing anything meaningful about it.\textsuperscript{54}

African Americans have been injured more by the day-to-day operation of institutions like schools and the job market in the past three decades than they have been by the deliberate actions of bigoted white individuals. Sociologists have demonstrated that not only could racial disparities result from the regular functioning within institutions, but racial inequalities could also result from interactions between institutions within a social domain such as employment, education, health, wealth, law, and even among institutions across social domains.\textsuperscript{55} Our understanding of the

\textsuperscript{52.} Sometime around 1969, when Carmichael went into self-imposed exile in Ghana, he adopted the name Kwame Toure to honor his African patrons Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure. We use his Trinidadian birth name because it is more familiar to general readers and that is how it is universally catalogued.

\textsuperscript{53.} CARMICHAEL & HAMILTON, supra note 23, at 4.

\textsuperscript{54.} Id.

cumulative effect across social domains reaches back to Gunnar Myrdal’s explication of the cumulative causation principle, where “there is no single ‘cause’ [of urban poverty], but rather a web of mutually reinforcing connections in which elements serve both as causes and effects.”

Structural racism crops up in all social domains: housing, health and medical care, wealth accumulation, employment, etc.


56. GUNNAR MYRDAL, AN AMERICAN DILEMMA: THE NEGRO PROBLEM AND MODERN DEMOCRACY 75–77 (1944).

57. Galster, supra note 55, at 191.


61. BLAUNER, supra note 23; BROWN ET AL., supra note 23; BONILLA-SILVA, WHITE SUPREMACY, supra note 23; ANDREW HACKER, TWO NATIONS: BLACK AND WHITE, SEPARATE, HOSTILE, UNEQUAL (1995); MASSEY & DENTON,
income, taxation, environmental justice, and transportation, among others. Scholars have identified the structural basis of racism in such fields as education, criminal justice, economics, 


political science,69 urban geography,70 philanthropy,71 and, of course, law.72

A. Components of Structural Racism

Structural racism has numerous components, but six comprise its core: (1) the irrelevance of intent to discriminate; (2) the ideology of individualism; (3) belief in structural neutrality; (4) the normativity of white advantage; and (5) the myth of colorblindness. Uniting all of these is (6) the invisibility of structural racism.

68. OLIVER & SHAPIRO, supra note 23; Marianne Bertrand & Sendhil Mullainathan, Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination, 94 AM. ECON. REV. 991 (2004); Shulman, The Causes of Black Poverty, supra note 61; Shulman, Why is the Black Unemployment Rate Always Twice as High as the White Unemployment Rate?, supra note 61.


1. Absence of Intent

A principal difference between individual racism and structural racism is the role of intent. As the sociologist Fred Pincus observed, “[T]he key element in structural discrimination is not the intent but the effect of keeping minority groups in a subordinate position.” 73 Individual racism is intentional: A bigot means to cause harm to another because of skin color or ethnicity. However, when sociologists analyze structural racism, intent is irrelevant. 74 Though occasional outbursts of old-style, intentional racism flare disturbingly often, “more often racism consists of routine acts of everyday racism that are not viewed as racist by the person performing them and therefore are not intentional. It is this unintentional racism . . . that produces a good deal of institutional racism and resulting racial inequality.” 75

Professor John Powell has described structural racism as an example of a complex system of interconnected relationships and processes that operates according to the principles of systems theory, 76 where causation is not singular, autonomous, and linear but is instead cumulative over time as well as within and across social domains. 77 Viewing racism through the lens of systems theory, where causation involves “elements of dynamic complexity such as accumulations, time delays, and other nonlinearities,” highlights the senselessness of legal insistence on causation by individuals’ intent. 78 Professor Powell uses another systems example, that of the ecological understanding of climate change, to point out the futility of trying to place responsibility on individuals alone for problems like structural racism or global warming, noting that both result in

73. Pincus, supra note 28, at 84.
74. KNOWLES & PREWITT, supra note 23, at 5; Chesler, supra note 23, at 45; BLAUNER, supra note 23, at 9–10, 187–88; FEAGIN & FEAGIN, supra note 23; Pincus, supra note 28, at 84; Robert Blauner, Talking Past Each Other: Black and White Languages of Race, in RACE AND ETHNIC CONFLICT: CONTENDING VIEWS ON PREJUDICE, DISCRIMINATION, AND ETHNOVIOLENCE 18, 21 (Fred L. Pincus & Howard J. Ehrlich eds., 1984); BROWN, supra note 23, at 43; SMITH, supra note 59, at 33, 53; Pager & Shepherd, supra note 23, at 199.
77. Powell, supra note 76, at 795–96.
78. Id.
serious harm because of “cumulative and mutual actions of many actors and institutions.” Just as requiring a showing of intent to cause global warming is pointless for collective action in responding to climate change, it is useless for reforming the structural bases of racial inequities. “A systems approach changes the focus from assigning culpability to solving a problem and redressing a harm. Parties may be called upon to address harms they may not have directly caused or intended to cause.”

Racial disparities arise without intent through institutional and social policies that are meant to be race neutral. They are implemented by well-intentioned people but nevertheless perpetuate and exacerbate racial inequality. Researchers in a related discipline, psychology, have found that unconscious bias plays a significant role in thought processes and behavior, and they have thereby buttressed the sociological argument that intent is not a requisite component of racism. Social psychologist Susan Fiske describes

79. Id. at 797.
80. Id. at 798.
81. See supra note 74.
these biases as “unconscious, subtle biases, which are relatively automatic, cool, indirect, ambiguous, and ambivalent.” Social psychologists have demonstrated that the notion of intent does not accurately describe how people actually think and act; they demonstrate that unconscious racial biases play a causal role in perpetuating inequality.

Negative racial attitudes and perceptions persist in the culture and are learned and reinforced at unconscious levels. These unconscious beliefs and associations continue to shape people’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses in automatic and uncontrollable ways. Unconscious stereotypes are pervasive, predict behavior, vary from one person to another, and affect the judgments, perceptions, and actions of people even when they believe themselves to be free of bias or prejudice. Individuals may consciously disavow racist attitudes and sincerely support the general goal of racial equality, yet harbor submerged mental associations that link people of color with laziness, crime, poverty, drugs, violence, immorality, and a host of other negative racial stereotypes. Conscious ideals and unconscious imagery coexist in unacknowledged tension. These unrecognized negative attitudes

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83. Fiske, supra note 82, at 123.


affect their holder’s behavior, and this regularly produces discriminatory outcomes that are not intentional.\textsuperscript{87} All people in our culture cannot help but breathe this cultural air pollution, thereby absorbing these negative racial attitudes and perceptions. Thus, people of color also absorb cultural negative images of themselves, a concept described as “internalized subordination.”

Since people are not consciously aware of their unconscious biases, psychologists have developed indirect techniques of measuring them, most commonly using priming and latency methods.\textsuperscript{89} The priming method consists of showing a word or image to the subject very briefly before beginning a task. The primed word or image is shown so briefly that it cannot be consciously recognized, so the prime is subliminal.\textsuperscript{90} Research demonstrates that racially primed subjects are more likely to consistently produce racially stereotypical judgments and behaviors.\textsuperscript{91} The most common latency method is the Implicit Association Test in which target concepts are paired with attributes on a computer that measures speed at categorizing words or images.\textsuperscript{92} The subject is to match a pairing of, for example, a racially identifiable name (e.g., “Betsy” or “Ebony”) and a pleasant or unpleasant concept (e.g., “Flower” or “Poison”) with the appropriate category of “Black–Pleasant,” “Black–Unpleasant,” “White–Pleasant,” or “White–Unpleasant.”\textsuperscript{93} Subjects invariably are faster at identifying the pair of concepts when “Black” is matched

\textsuperscript{87} Id. at 5.


\textsuperscript{89} Lincoln Quillian, Does Unconscious Racism Exist?, 71 SOC. PSYCHOL. Q. 6, 7 (2008); Fazio & Olson, supra note 82, at 300.

\textsuperscript{90} Lincoln Quillian, New Approaches to Understanding Racial Prejudice and Discrimination, 32 ANN. REV. SOC. 299, 315 (2006).

\textsuperscript{91} Id. at 315; Devine, supra note 82, at 15.


\textsuperscript{93} Quillian, supra note 90, at 316; Greenwald, supra note 82, at 1473–74.
with “Unpleasant” (e.g., “Ebony–Poison”) and “White” with “Pleasant” (e.g., “Betsy–Flower”) even when they express no black–white preference on explicit measures. Psychometric studies in the field of psychology disclose racial biases in persons who are not only unaware of them but are disturbed to find that they hold them. The authors of these studies have concluded that a majority of white Americans harbor unconscious and unwanted negative associations about blacks.

The extensive evidence presented by psychologists on unconscious prejudices is important beyond its confirmation of sociological findings that intent is irrelevant to structural racism. Unconscious prejudices play a role in structural racism because they can be a factor in organizational processes—which are structured on the assumption that decision-making is always conscious and rational—that lead to racial disparities. Unconscious prejudices conflict with conscious attempts to be neutral or objective.

In the employment area, this unconscious–conscious conflict can play a role in the evaluation of resumes of potential employees, potential employees’ performances in interviews, and current employees’ performances toward promotion. For example, an employer may perceive a job candidate to be competent but feel some reservations that he or she cannot pinpoint consciously and therefore decides against hiring that person. Or someone perceived as racially different may be simultaneously respected (consciously) but disliked (because of unconscious stereotypes), as frequently exemplified by whites’ reactions to black professionals. The conflict between unconscious prejudices and conscious attempts to be neutral can result in confusing interactions where nonverbal (unconscious) behavior conflicts with verbal messages. For example, our body language may not match what we are saying in words. This mismatch of unconscious body language and conscious verbal communication can cause social discomfort, the origin of which is impossible to articulate. When this happens in the

94. Quillian, supra note 90, at 316; Greenwald, supra note 82, at 1473–74.
97. Id. at 148.
98. See id. at 130.
99. Id. at 151; NAT’L RESEARCH COUNCIL, supra note 32, at 59; Quillian, supra note 90, at 319.
workplace, such as in a job interview, it could often be the people of color who are held responsible for the discomfort.

Unconscious–conscious conflict can produce discomfort that may lead to racial avoidance,100 which in turn can lead to a hostile work environment. Racial avoidance also makes it difficult to even talk about racial issues, which further exacerbates racial tensions in workplaces and society generally.

The unconscious–conscious conflict is likely to influence decisions in ambiguous situations101 or decisions that must be made under time pressure.102 Sociologist Lincoln Quillian suggests that the time pressure to make a “quick decision may prevent conscious inhibition of stereotype activation” as may occur in the urgency of a police officer’s decision of whether to shoot at what may appear to be a threatening subject.103 Other occupations are often associated with factors that decrease cognitive capacity as well, such as fatigue, information overload, and time pressure in the provision of healthcare.104 While some evidence suggests that it may be possible under certain conditions to reduce unconscious stereotypes,105 it is far from clear that interventions are capable of producing lasting change. Indeed, Banaji and Greenwald observe that unconscious bias appears to be “dauntingly persistent.”106

Social psychologists have been refining their research on unconscious bias for several decades.107 The reality of unconscious
bias is so well established by extensive research that understanding of it has permeated other disciplines including economics,\textsuperscript{108} sociology,\textsuperscript{109} neuroscience,\textsuperscript{110} and of course law.\textsuperscript{111} In addition, several books have recently appeared for non-academic audiences that discuss how the human brain functions beyond conscious awareness including the absorption of stereotypes and their impact on behavior.\textsuperscript{112} It is disturbing to contemplate that general audiences understand this concept while some Supreme Court justices apparently cannot.

Thus, from a sociologist’s perspective, reinforced with findings from psychology, any legal doctrine that mandates intentional discrimination as a \textit{sine qua non} for a finding of a constitutional violation, or as a prerequisite for judicial relief, will by definition miss all instances of structural racism. No matter how egregious the social reality, any court maintaining such a posture is thereby protecting the continued oppression caused by structural racism.

\textbf{2. Individualism}

Individualism has long been identified as an essential element of the American character,\textsuperscript{113} and this powerful American tradition contributes to a common belief that social phenomena are nothing

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{108} Marianne Bertrand et al., \textit{Implicit Discrimination}, 95 Amer. Econ. Rev. 94 (2005).
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Quillian, \textit{supra} note 89; Quillian, \textit{supra} note 90.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Jennifer T. Kubota et al., \textit{The Neuroscience of Race}, 15 Nature Neuroscience 940 (2012).
\end{itemize}
more than the aggregate of individuals’ actions. “Because white America’s strong belief in ‘rugged individualism’ has such a long history, public sentiment in the United States favors individual initiative over social and economic structures as an explanation for poverty and welfare.” Our understanding of racial disparities has long been dominated by this atomistic approach. This has produced two antithetical ways of accounting for racial disparities. The first blames white individuals’ intentional racial prejudices. The second condemns individual people of color for being incompetent, ignorant, or lazy. This second understanding assigns blame to individual victims for being morally, culturally, or psychologically flawed. Numerous studies confirm that such stereotypes about people of color persist today. The one thing these two disparate explanations have in common is that they are both individual oriented—that is, they assume that individuals have effective control of their lives—and ignore structural forces that shape peoples’ chances in life, forces that are beyond the control of individuals.

One of the earliest explorations of structural racism identified this individualist bias with a clarity that has not since been surpassed:

For too long American society has believed in the mythology that social ills are in truth nothing but the aggregate of individual defects. If a black man is unemployed or uneducated or poorly housed, it must be due to some failure to ‘achieve’ on his part. Or, if we do not directly place blame on his character defects, we suggest that there is some prejudiced employer or inadequate teacher or bigoted realtor who is bringing about the condition . . . . Some social ills are not adequately explained by simply alluding to individual defects. There are social ills which are

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114. FRAZIER ET AL., supra note 70.
structured into the very operations of the society, which are inevitable given the institutional arrangements.116

Viewing the problem of racial disparities through an individual-oriented lens limits the scope of solutions to those that are similarly individual oriented. Such solutions include the unproven belief that racial disparities would disappear if only individual whites could overcome their prejudices or if only individual people of color would become more ambitious, more hard-working, more ethical, etc. If we cannot understand the structural causes of racial disparities, we will not be able to see the possibilities of structural solutions.

3. Belief in Structural Neutrality

Numerous social scientists have described the third component of structural racism, the apparent neutrality built into social structures that appears on the surface to be neutral, but in fact, affects people of color in harmful ways.117 Our social structures frequently have devastating negative consequences on communities of color, even though the ways in which these structures operate appear neutral on the surface and have no intent to harm. There are several ways in which neutral social structures operate to reproduce racial disparities. First, historical events can be embedded in present circumstances in such a way that processes that otherwise might be neutral act to perpetuate disparate racial outcomes. Race-neutral economic decisions can be detrimental to poor people generally. Because such a high percentage of people of color are poor,118 such

116. KNOWLES & PREWITT, supra note 23, at 133.
decisions also have adverse racial consequences. For example, because of historical racial segregation, the seemingly neutral policy of financing public schools primarily through local private property taxes has a racially differential effect resulting from the wealth disparities between taxing districts. Second, decisions made on purely economic grounds can produce racial disparities, as when grocery store chains decide not to locate stores in poorer neighborhoods, contributing to neighborhood food environments that provide challenges to healthy eating, in turn contributing to higher risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Similarly, decisions made for non-racial public policy reasons can inadvertently have racial outcomes, such as including an incarcerated population in the census district in which the prison is located instead of the inmates’ home districts, resulting in overrepresentation of some white rural communities and underrepresentation of communities of color in state legislatures.

Lastly, internal organizational processes can also have negative racial outcomes, even though the intent of organizational actors is to be neutral. Organizations provide “contexts in which ostensibly race-neutral policies can structure and reinforce existing social inequalities.”

119. Pager, supra note 101, at 89.
120. KOZOL, supra note 25, at 5–55; Kelly, supra note 25, at 397.
122. ALEXANDER, supra note 67, at 193.
123. William T. Bielby, Minimizing Workplace Gender and Racial Bias, in 29 CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGY 120, 123–24 (2000); SMITH, supra note 59, at 33.
124. Pager & Shephard, supra note 23, at 199.
who are watched “more closely and sanctioned more often and severely” than whites.\(^\text{125}\) Such targeted workplace bullying is often a matter of following organizational procedures.\(^\text{126}\)

Likewise, unconscious prejudices are embedded in “assumptions regarding dependability, presentability, communication skills, and work ethic,” and employers using ostensibly neutral criteria in hiring and promotion decisions exercise subjective discretion as they “invoke a relatively flexible set of filters for ‘who fits the job best’ and ‘who might be best for the promotion.’”\(^\text{127}\) Because Vincent J. Roscigno repeatedly found superficially neutral organizational policies that result in significant racial disparities, he wrote that we should “reconsider foundational assumptions of much sociological work relative to structure and agency, [and] the supposed neutrality of bureaucratic organizational forms.”\(^\text{128}\)

Just as with internal organizational processes, entire social domains can depend on supposedly neutral processes and procedures that negatively affect people of color and advantage whites. We will provide examples of this in the social domain of the law in our discussion of the 1989 cases in Part III.

4. White Advantage and White Normativity

When white Americans do become aware of racial disparities, they perceive people of color to be “disadvantaged” relative to some neutral social norms. Thus we speak of “racial disadvantage” or “underprivileged” to describe racial disparities. But the opposite side of the disadvantaged/underprivileged coin is advantaged/privileged.\(^\text{129}\)

Sociologist Peggy McIntosh wrote, “As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary

\(^{125}\) Roscigno, Social Closure, supra note 61, at 28, 41.
\(^{126}\) Id. at 41.
\(^{127}\) Id. at 31, 41.
\(^{128}\) Roscigno, Power, Revisited, supra note 24, at 360.
\(^{129}\) The word “privilege” can suggest conscious intent; it thereby provokes strong negative reactions that interfere with dialogue and understanding across race lines. The resulting swarm of uncomfortable connotations, including guilt and self-justification, often prevents whites from considering the advantage–disadvantage dichotomy. For these reasons, we use the phrase white advantage, though the phrase “white privilege” is more commonly encountered. See HALLEY ET AL., SEEING WHITE: AN INTRODUCTION TO WHITE PRIVILEGE AND RACE (2011); PAULA S. ROTENBERG, WHITE PRIVILEGE: ESSENTIAL READINGS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF RACISM (2008). The current controversy over “check your privilege” nicely illustrates the perils of attributing privilege. Marc Santora & Gabriel Fischer, At Princeton, Privilege is: (a) Commonplace, (b) Misunderstood or (c) Frowned Upon, N.Y. TIMES, May 2, 2014, at A15.
aspects, white privilege which puts me at an advantage.”\(^{130}\) McIntosh describes white advantage as “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” that she can count on cashing in every day.\(^{131}\)

A simple, everyday example of disadvantage for people of color—and of corresponding advantage for whites—is the underlying assumptions about skin color in “nude” hosiery, in adhesive bandages, and in crayons labeled “flesh.” Such products match European rather than African skin tones. For whites, finding products that do match their skin color is so common, so natural and appropriate, that it seems normal, and it never occurs to them that it is an advantage. Conversely, people of color may be reminded that their skin color is not considered “normal” every time they seek products that approximate their own. This white advantage is difficult for whites to see because for them it is normal.

Another example of white normativity involving skin color can be seen in the text accompanying a picture of First Lady Michelle Obama wearing a gown designed for a White House state dinner in November 2009, which was widely disseminated in print media. The dress designer initially described the gown’s color as “nude,” while the Associated Press referred to it as “flesh” colored.\(^ {132}\) But accompanying pictures in news stories offered stark visual evidence of the underlying misassumption that white skin should be the default or norm. In response to reader objections to this assertion of white normativity, subsequent descriptions employed truly race-neutral terms like “peach-toned” or “champagne” to describe the gown’s color.\(^ {133}\)

This unrecognized sense of normality contributes to the invisibility of white advantage and thus of structural racism. While these simple examples of unthinking media bias do not account for the great variety of racial disparities, they do convey the assumption of normality entertained unthinkingly by most whites in other areas. More egregious consequences flow from assumptions that all-white schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and churches are “normal.”

\(^{130}\) Peggy McIntosh, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, 49 INDEP. SCH. MAG. 31, 31 (1990).

\(^{131}\) Id.


\(^{133}\) Wade, supra note 132; Stewart, supra note 132.
Structural factors invariably ensure that such all-white institutions are significantly better resourced, yet whites generally are not aware of their advantaged positions.

More examples of white advantage come from McIntosh’s invisible knapsack and relate to employment: being able to take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers suspect that the hiring was because of race; having a bad day at work and not wondering whether each negative episode has racial overtones; doing well in a challenging work situation without being called “a credit to your race”; not being expected to speak for all the people of your racial group; when pulled aside by the boss, knowing you have not been singled out because of your race; leaving work meetings feeling that you are a welcome member of a team rather than feeling isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared; or making occasional mistakes at work without having them attributed to the bad morals, ignorance, or illiteracy of your race.134

5. Colorblindness

Colorblindness, the fifth component of structural racism, is an aspiration based on the belief that everyone, white people as well as people of color, should not care about race, or even notice it, in our dealings with each other.135 At the individual level, this is admirable, and most people do try to treat others with equal respect. Although this may be a commendable personal goal, it cannot end racial disparities for two reasons. First, the evidence presented by psychologists described above indicates that our conscious intent cannot override our unconscious programming. Second, colorblindness actually fuels structural racism because it keeps us from noticing racial disparities and their structural causes. Colorblindness “‘white-washes’ the racial status quo” because white people of goodwill who understand racism only as intentional prejudice may exempt themselves from responsibility for their participation in the structural system by taking comfort in their own benevolent attitudes toward people of color.136 Sociologists and psychologists have demonstrated that a purposeful intent to discriminate is a narrow and unrealistic view of the reality of racism.137 A purposeful intent not to discriminate—that is, to be

134. McIntosh, supra note 130.
136. Brown, supra note 23, at 64.
137. See supra note 74 and authorities cited therein; supra note 82 and authorities cited therein.
colorblind—is a similarly narrow and unrealistic view of how to combat racism. Colorblindness as an approach to end racism cannot succeed because it encourages people to act only at an individual level and thereby blinds them to their organizational and social roles in perpetuating structural racism.

The colorblindness ideal leads to socially destructive extremes. If we try to be blind to race, we may then try not to talk about race or consciously use race in our thinking. The result is that the colorblind ideal avoids the use of race even to counteract racial inequality (such as hiring practices that aim for equal opportunity or the collection of racial data in the Census). But racism is implicated in any action that sustains racial hierarchy and racial inequality, whether it involves injuring people of color or favoring whites. Avoiding thoughts about race in an effort to be completely colorblind is in reality, therefore, paradoxically racist, perhaps inadvertent but all the more effective for that.

President John F. Kennedy once said, “[T]he great enemy of truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.” Kennedy aptly described the situation facing us as we struggle to attain racial equality. The myth of colorblindness is the great enemy of racial equity. On its face, colorblindness seems like a morally appropriate response. In reality, colorblindness is a powerful myth that keeps structural racism firmly in place.

6. Invisibility

The structural arrangements that perpetuate racial disparities are so embedded within the social infrastructure that they appear normal and thus effectively invisible to someone who does not know how to look for them. Thus, the fact that they produce racial inequalities goes unnoticed. Because of the high levels of segregation in housing and the workplace in our society, white Americans are generally

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138. John F. Kennedy, Commencement Address, Yale University (June 11, 1962), available at http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3370 [http://perma.cc/CQQ3-TLBC] (archived Apr. 10, 2014). Kennedy went on to say, “Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. . . . We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.”

not exposed to racial disparities in their day-to-day lives and are thus often unaware of the extensive harm caused to people of color. Therefore, white Americans can believe that the playing field is level, while Americans of color know keenly that is not the case. People tend to ignore issues that do not negatively impact their own lives. Racial issues are usually not salient for white people, so they disregard racial issues and assume that those issues are not important.

Each of the facets of structural racism contributes to its invisibility and thus to its perpetuation. The obsolete and deeply flawed idea that racism is exclusively a product of intent allows structural racism to escape notice.140 Individualism prevents us from noticing social structures.141 Belief in the neutrality of social structures enables those structures to perpetuate racially disparate outcomes.142 The normativity of white advantage keeps it invisible.143 Colorblindness and its current incarnation, post-racialism,144 share a false belief that the playing field is now level, thus keeping us from comprehending the reality of severe racial disparities in quality of life and seducing us into believing that race-based decision-making or race-based remedies are unnecessary.145 All of these facets contribute to the invisibility of structural racism, and the invisibility in turn contributes to its perpetuation.146

B. Structural Racism in the Employment Context

Because structural racism is pervasive yet unseen, a detailed (though non-exhaustive) review of how it functions in one particular social domain, employment, is both necessary and useful to demonstrate how it simultaneously privileges whites and operates to exclude or impede blacks’ access to its benefits. We will review examples that occur within organizations, as well as instances of structural racism that occur in the recruitment process, the hiring process, and that continue once people are on the job.

140. See supra Part II.A.1.
141. See supra Part II.A.2.
142. See supra Part II.A.3.
143. See supra Part II.A.4.
145. See supra Part II.A.5.
146. See supra Part II.A.6.
1. Information About Job Opportunities Is Disseminated Primarily Through Social Networks

Many people obtain jobs through social contacts such as relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Because of widespread segregation in American society (residential, educational, occupational, and social), people of color are less likely to hear about job openings because white social networks have few connections with black ones and vice versa. Recruiting new workers via word-of-mouth through friends and friends-of-friends has a racial impact yet is “passive and unobtrusive. One need not be a racist to use one’s position to benefit friends and acquaintances.” A natural inclination toward bias in favor of one’s “ingroup” has as its correlative a disinclination to take chances on hiring a member of an “outgroup.” “Being white is a resource in the sense that it provides access to a segregated network of information, trust, and privilege,” Steven Shulman wrote. Because whites and blacks live in largely segregated neighborhoods and move in different social circles (fraternal and civic organizations, bowling leagues, churches, garden clubs, sports teams, and other private associations), “they have different access to information about jobs, most of which is circulated informally. Furthermore, they have differential access to those in charge of allocating jobs, almost all of whom are white.”

2. Information About Job Opportunities Is Disseminated Selectively

Even when employers expand their recruitment efforts beyond social networks, they may undertake selective recruitment practices to avoid targeting populations they believe to consist of less

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148. BROWN, supra note 23, at 18.
151. Id. at 1011–12.
desirable workers. These selective recruitment practices consist of advertising only in suburban neighborhood papers and avoiding metropolitan newspaper advertisements, posting job notices only at suburban or private schools, and avoiding recruitment through state employment and welfare programs.\footnote{152}{Kathryn M. Neckerman & Joleen Kirschenman, Hiring Strategies, Racial Bias, and Inner-City Workers, 38 SOC. PROBLEMS 433, 438 (1991).}

3. Candidate Requirements Structurally Discriminate When Unrelated to Necessary Job Skills

When a job can be performed successfully by a person without a college degree and there is no direct connection between a college education and the skills required for the job, the requirement that an employee have a college degree discriminates against people of color, who are less likely to have one.\footnote{153}{Pincus, supra note 28, at 84–85.} Similarly, requiring previous job experience can screen out people of color in industries historically dominated by whites.\footnote{154}{Bielby, supra note 123, at 122.} Requiring good credit histories of job applicants structurally discriminates against people of color who are more likely to have faced financial obstacles in trying to pay bills or have not been able to build up credit histories because of other structurally discriminatory practices.\footnote{155}{John W. Schoen, Bad Credit Sidelines Some Jobless Workers: Temporary Financial Setback Can Be a Long-Term Barrier, NBC NEWS (Feb. 23, 2010, 8:07 AM), http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35512038/ns/business-eye_on_the_economy [http://perma.cc/8WJ2-DC8N] (archived Apr. 10, 2014).}

4. Stereotypes About Group Characteristics Affect Perceptions of Job Candidates

Most whites perceive people of color through a filter of unconscious assumptions (described above as unconscious bias) about dependability, presentability, communication skills, and work ethic.\footnote{156}{Roscigno, Social Closure, supra note 61, at 31.} For example, blacks are viewed as different from whites in terms of language skills.\footnote{157}{TREPAGNIER, supra note 75, at 24–30 (listing and discussing various racial stereotypes). It was this problem—whites’ doubts about blacks’ communications aptitudes—that provided the factual background for \textit{Washington v. Davis}, 426 U.S. 229, 232–36 (1976). \textit{See infra} Part III.}

White job applicants often fare better than job applicants of color with equivalent credentials. One well-known study, where fictitious resumes randomly assigned with African-American- or white-sounding names were sent to help-wanted ads in Boston and

\begin{itemize}
  \item[153] Pincus, \textit{supra} note 28, at 84–85.
  \item[154] Bielby, \textit{supra} note 123, at 122.
  \item[156] Roscigno, Social Closure, \textit{supra} note 61, at 31.
  \item[157] TREPAGNIER, \textit{supra} note 75, at 24–30 (listing and discussing various racial stereotypes). It was this problem—whites’ doubts about blacks’ communications aptitudes—that provided the factual background for \textit{Washington v. Davis}, 426 U.S. 229, 232–36 (1976). \textit{See infra} Part III.
\end{itemize}
Chicago newspapers, found that white names received 50% more callbacks for interviews.\textsuperscript{158} The racial gap in this study was consistent across occupation, industry, and employer size.\textsuperscript{159} In a similar study with similar results, racially different job applicants, who were matched on demographic characteristics and interpersonal skills and given equivalent resumes, were sent to apply in tandem for hundreds of entry-level jobs: White testers received callbacks and job offers twice as often as black testers.\textsuperscript{160} Recent studies demonstrate that unconscious prejudices play a role in screening job applicants\textsuperscript{161} and interviewing them.\textsuperscript{162} Yet other studies have incorporated the Implicit Association Test as part of the research methodology along with the evaluation of resumes, thereby documenting the role of unconscious bias in screening.\textsuperscript{163} “Given that many hiring decisions are presumably based on ‘gut-feelings’, implicit attitudes and stereotypes, more so than their explicit counterparts, may exert a substantial impact on how employers contemplate and make decisions regarding human resources.”\textsuperscript{164}

5. Once in the Labor Force, People of Color Experience Discomfort and Stress Through the Social Relations They Experience on the Job

Sociologist Vincent Roscigno describes examples of derogatory name-calling, racial slurs, racial jokes, harassment that may or may not be explicitly racial, or refusal to provide resources with which to accomplish the job that are provided to whites in the same position.\textsuperscript{165} Such behavior “isolates minority employees in their

\begin{small}
158. Bertrand & Mullainathan, \textit{supra} note 68, at 991.

159. \textit{Id}.


165. Roscigno, \textit{Social Closure, supra} note 61, at 34.
\end{small}
workplaces, undermines their capacity to perform their jobs properly, and impacts their sense of dignity in quite meaningful ways. Moreover, it reifies racial hierarchy on a daily basis, and in ways seldom captured by standard analyses of racial inequalities at work.”  

These behaviors may be instances of overt racism directed at people of color in the workplace, but the structural impact arises in several ways. For example, diminished job satisfaction may lead to reduced job performance, which may affect promotion opportunities for the workers of color. Reduced job performance by workers of color may impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization as a whole. Structural implications also arise when the employer does not have appropriate or adequate procedures in place to prevent such behaviors and discipline offenders.

At times, behaviors intended to be positive can be rooted in negative racial assumptions, such as perceiving the competent job performance of an employee of color as remarkable or offering ample praise to subordinates of color while simultaneously withholding raises and promotions. Workplace incidents seen as patronizing disempower workers of color. If employees rebuff what was meant as a generous gesture, they may be seen as difficult or even as troublemakers. If they stay silent about what they see as patronizing behavior, they suffer emotional stress. That stress, in turn, may be a factor in the greater turnover in more diverse work groups.

6. Social Networks Constrain Job Performance

In addition to the impact of network communication about job openings described above, social networks also affect people once they are on the job. Segregation of social networks within the workplace reduces informal information sharing, which is important for newcomers in the workplace for achievement and success. Such segregation also restricts access for people of color to informal

166. Id.
167. TREPAGNIER, supra note 75, at 66.
168. See id. at 64–79.
169. See id.
170. See id.
171. See id.
172. Id. at 79.
173. Id. at 66.
mentoring, contacts, and relevant knowledge important for advancement.174

7. Employers Sometimes Apply Seemingly Neutral Workplace Policies in a Differential Manner

Roscigno refers to the application of neutral workplace policies in a differential manner as “disparate policing of minority employees” and gives these examples: A black employee was given a poor performance review for breaking cutters at a metal manufacturing facility but white workers had not been held accountable for the same infraction; a black worker was fired for taking a break in a restricted area when other employees routinely took breaks in the same place; a black employee was demoted for unauthorized use of a company vehicle when all other employees signed out vehicles in the same way for more than 20 years without any discipline.175

8. Supervisors Often Exercise Decision-Making Power Based on Subjective Assessments

In the same way that unconscious negative assumptions affect perceptions of job candidates, they can also affect subjective assessments of employees of color, thereby reducing the chances of promotion. Supervisors are the “gatekeepers” of the workplace and wield considerable influence on the careers of subordinates.176 A white manager charged with selecting “management material” who promotes whites with less experience and seniority to managerial positions may well be relying on these unconscious assumptions about potential or competence.177 Tristin Green eloquently describes the role of unconscious prejudice: “It creeps into everyday impressions of worth and assignment of merit on the job, lurking constantly behind even the most honest belief in equality, perpetuating the very injustice that we decry.”178

175. Roscigno, supra note 61, at 28–30.
178. Green, supra note 72, at 91.
9. The Seniority System Can Structurally Recreate an Organization’s White Workforce Through Lay-Offs

Because people of color are often among those most recently hired and are not among employees with greater seniority, they are among those who are first laid off. Last-hired-first-fired impacts them disproportionately. The seniority system most affects people of color in organizations with a history of exclusion accompanying recent efforts aimed at inclusion. One of the principal cases considered in Part III, Wygant v. Jackson Board of Education, involved just this problem, and the facts of that case provide a textbook example of how structural racism operates without malignant intent on anyone’s part. Seniority-related issues provide much of the fodder for the innumerable white firefighters’ suits that have become a major vehicle for challenging affirmative action programs.

Countless instances of all the above examples of structural racism in the domain of employment occur in organizations across the country. Structural racism in other social domains reduces employment opportunities even further.

10. Job Opportunities Are Often Lost Because of Incarceration

Due to structural racism in the justice system, blacks are imprisoned at rates that far exceed their representation in society overall.

Nearly 60% of the prison and jail population is African American or Latino, far out of proportion to their overall share of the national population... If current trends continue, one in three black males born today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime, as can one in six Latino males. Among the factors contributing to the extreme racial disparities in incarceration is the impact of supposedly race neutral policies. “[W]hile greater involvement in some crimes is related to higher rates of incarceration for African Americans, the weight of the evidence to date suggests that a significant proportion of the

179. Bielby, supra note 123, at 123.
180. SMITH, supra note 59, at 60–61.
183. ALEXANDER, supra note 67, at 6.
disparities we currently observe is not a function of disproportionate criminal behavior."\textsuperscript{185}

The high incarceration rate of black and Latino males means that while incarcerated, they are not developing resumes through work experiences and are missing educational opportunities that may have been stepping stones to employment. They are not in the pipeline to take on positions of further responsibility in those occupations in the future. In addition to extended absence from routines of work and skill building, lengthy exposure to the physical and psychological trauma prevalent in prison environments affects an individual’s ability to work.\textsuperscript{186} Incarceration disrupts social and family ties, which are crucial to finding a job, and employment opportunities are greatly diminished because of overt institutional policies and employer assumptions.\textsuperscript{187}

11. Lack of Education Credentials Diminishes Job Opportunities

Structural racism in education has resulted in a substantial racial disparity in high school graduation\textsuperscript{188} and dropout rates.\textsuperscript{189} Racial disparities in income levels affect the percentage of high school graduates who can afford to go to college. Both impact the racial disparity in education credentials of people looking for employment.

12. Suburbanization Puts Jobs Out of Reach

“Relocation of employment opportunities to the suburbs created a spatial mismatch between inner-city minorities and outer-city jobs.”\textsuperscript{190} Disinvestment and accompanying lack of retail business in

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{186} PAGER, supra note 101, at 31. (“Incarceration may further damage an individual’s ability to work through prolonged exposure to physical or psychological trauma endemic to prison environments.”).
\textsuperscript{187} PAGER, supra note 101, at 37–39.
\textsuperscript{188} For information on high school graduation rates, see supra note 35.
\textsuperscript{190} FRAZIER ET AL., supra note 70, at 58. See also Michael A. Stoll et al., Within Cities and Suburbs: Racial Residential Concentration and the Spatial
\end{footnotesize}
communities of color greatly reduce accessible job opportunities. Structural racism in transportation exacerbates the difficulty of physically getting to work when a job is found: Automobile ownership is lower in poor neighborhoods because of cost, and public transportation is often underfunded, inadequate, and stressed by high demand.\footnote{Bullard et al., supra note 65.}

These examples of structural racism in employment demonstrate multiple ways in which social structures operate to produce racial disparities in employment that do not necessitate intentional, individual racism.

III. THE SUPREME COURT AND STRUCTURAL RACISM IN EMPLOYMENT

Ivan Bodensteiner considers the Supreme Court itself to be “the major barrier to racial equality” in America today.\footnote{Ivan E. Bodensteiner, The Supreme Court as the Major Barrier to Racial Equality, 61 Rutgers L. Rev. 199, 199 (2009).} Girardeau Spann believes that “[t]he [Roberts] Court wants to preserve existing racial inequalities.”\footnote{Girardeau A. Spann, The Conscience of a Court, 63 U. Miami L. Rev. 431, 432, 449 (2009) (“I have been driven to the conclusion that the Supreme Court, as a matter of conscience, considers racial discrimination to be good for America. That conclusion offers the only plausible account of the Court’s repeated insistence on displacing populist efforts to promote racial equality with the Court’s own, more-regressive, version of expedient racial politics.”).} At first, such judgments seem harsh and extravagant, but sober reflection in the light of the analysis below only confirms them.

Since 1971, the U.S. Supreme Court has promulgated doctrines in the field of workplace discrimination that make it impossible for the justices to see structural racism, much less take it into account in formulating doctrine. As a rough index of the Court’s myopia, a Westlaw search undertaken on March 3, 2014, disclosed that the phrase “structural racism” has never appeared in the opinions of the United States Supreme Court. Nor do the synonymic phrases “aversive racism,” “structural discrimination,” or “systemic racism” make an appearance in its opinions.\footnote{The sole exception, a reference to “institutional racism” by Justice Thomas, is discussed infra note 198.} Lest we conclude that this merely reflects the lack of awareness of social science findings in legal scholarship generally, we should note that the search turned up 350 law review hits for the same phrase, “structural racism,” along

with 219 for “aversive racism,” 407 for “systemic racism,” and 1,185 for “institutional racism.”

In addition, the U.S. Supreme Court has promulgated doctrines in the field of workplace discrimination that:

- lead it to explicitly, resolutely reject what it call “societal discrimination” as a basis for legal relief;
- ignore entirely the problem of implicit bias;
- invent doctrines like the purpose–impact distinction that ensconce structural racism as legally protected and invulnerable to challenge, so that for constitutional analysis, the justices recognize only intent, not effects;
- adopt the perpetrator’s perspective rather than the victim’s;
- make judging in the new order formalistic and frequently acontextual;
- denounce relief aimed at groups and mandate individual-based remedies; and
- disable other institutions, like Congress and the states, from eradicating structural racism.

This has resulted in an inversion of the fundamental values of the Civil Rights Era into a witches’ Sabbath of equal protection doctrine. The Court’s new reading shields racially discriminatory effects from constitutional challenge, while the justices condemn efforts to achieve true equality and racial justice by taking race into account as violative of equal protection. Where the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment was originally meant to protect blacks and other people of color from oppression, the Court now deploys it to protect whites from threats to white advantage.

Since 1971, the justices have been extraordinarily obtuse in matters of race, particularly structural racism. Most of them do not recognize or acknowledge it. The Court’s majority has unfailingly protected structural racism in cases where it has been challenged, especially those involving workplace discrimination. The members of the conservative bloc, Chief Justices William H. Rehnquist and John Roberts, Justices Antonin Scalia, Sandra Day O’Connor, Lewis Powell, Clarence Thomas, and Samuel Alito, have gone out of their way to confirm the legitimacy of all instances of structural racial inequality. They seem to be disciples of Justice Felix Frankfurter, who opined that the “Constitution does not require legislatures to

195. A musical analogy may be suggestive to some: This inversion of values is like the degeneration of the beloved motif, the idée fixe, in the first movement of Berlioz’s “Symphonie Fantastique” into the grotesque, hideous parody of itself in the fifth movement.

196. The exceptions were Justices William J. Brennan, Thurgood Marshall, the later Harry Blackmun, and David Souter, with Ruth Bader Ginsburg, John Paul Stevens, and Stephen Breyer frequently joining in.
reflect sociological insight, or shifting social standards.” Justice Clarence Thomas has mocked those who seek to devise legal remedies for institutional or structural racism as “conspiracy theorists.”

A landmark moment occurred when the Court first encountered the related problem of affirmative action in university admissions. In his solo opinion in *Regents v. Bakke*, Justice Lewis Powell dismissed “societal discrimination” (his phrase for structural racism) as “an amorphous concept of injury that may be ageless in its reach into the past.” (Why antiquity should justify an injustice he did not bother to explain.) He doubled down on that dismissive attitude in *Wygant v. Jackson Board of Education*, insisting that “this Court never has held that societal discrimination alone is sufficient to justify a racial classification.” As a justification for redress, he said, it is “insufficient and over expansive.” Justice Sandra Day O’Connor repeatedly rejected “societal discrimination” as a basis for relief in *Richmond v. Croson*. Chief Justice John Roberts capped this refusal to recognize structural racism as a legitimate subject of the Court’s concern in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District* by insisting with as much finality as he could muster that “assertions of general societal discrimination are plainly insufficient.” These tiresomely redundant claims miss the point, perhaps intentionally. Admittedly, generalized racist attitudes at large “out there” cannot be a basis for relief, even for a clearly proven wrong. But structural racism is something else altogether: a proven social reality that harms millions of Americans every day in ways that are obvious and have been demonstrated beyond cavil in the literature of social science. The Court has thereby placed itself in the untenable position of rejecting an understanding that for four decades has commanded unanimity among social scientists, has been validated countless times by empirical studies as we have

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201. Wygant, 476 U.S. at 276.
204. See supra Part II, note 23.
demonstrated at length in Part II, and identifies the principal form of racial discrimination in American society today.

What can account for this extraordinary performance? The justices are captives of a mindset produced by a conservative ideological and political revolution that has taken place since 1964. In its doctrinal components, the Court’s race-related cases reinstate a Lochnerian formalism that masks a determination by the conservative wing of the Court to advance that ideological agenda, the program of what Paul Krugman has called “movement conservatism.”

A. Intent: Washington v. Davis, Feeney, and McCleskey

In Washington v. Davis, the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department administered tests to recruits for the police academy that gauged reading ability and comprehension, as well as verbal ability. The test filtered out a disproportionate number of black applicants, and the trial court found that it had not been proven to measure subsequent performance on the job. It nevertheless upheld the use of the exam as non-discriminatory and reasonably related to job requirements. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit reversed, relying on the Griggs v. Duke Power Co. disproportionate impact test (which was a statutory, not a constitutional, criterion). In Washington v. Davis (1976), the Supreme Court, in turn, reversed the court of appeals, stating that “we have not held that a law, neutral on its face and serving ends otherwise within the power of government to pursue, is invalid under the Equal Protection Clause simply because it may affect a greater proportion of one race than of another.” Justice Byron White invoked by way of explanation “the basic equal protection principle that the invidious quality of a law claimed to be racially discriminatory must ultimately be traced to a racially discriminatory purpose.” He linked that to the anti-classification principle, which interprets the Equal Protection Clause to forbid any state classification by race unless it meets stringent strict scrutiny requirements:

207. Id.
208. Id. at 232–36.
212. Id. at 240.
Disproportionate impact is not irrelevant, but it is not the sole touchstone of an invidious racial discrimination forbidden by the Constitution. Standing alone, it does not trigger the rule that racial classifications are to be subjected to the strictest scrutiny and are justifiable only by the weightiest of considerations.\textsuperscript{213}

Justice White did make one concession to civil rights plaintiffs: “Necessarily, an invidious discriminatory purpose may often be inferred from the totality of the relevant facts, including the fact, if it is true, that the law bears more heavily on one race than another.”\textsuperscript{214} He admitted that “we have difficulty understanding” how any facially neutral statute could be discriminatory simply because it generated unequal results, thereby conceding for the first time that the Court did not understand the workings of structural racism.\textsuperscript{215} (To be fair, sociologists were only beginning to work out the theory at that time.\textsuperscript{216}) The triumph of the purpose–impact doctrine announced in \textit{Washington v. Davis} solidified the racial stratification of American society. In this sense, it was the \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson} of the 20th century.\textsuperscript{217}

\textit{Washington v. Davis} demonstrates the workings of Alan Freeman’s distinction between the perpetrator perspective and the victim perspective in the law of equal protection.\textsuperscript{218} Under the perpetrator perspective, racial discrimination consists of a willful violation of some legally binding norm.\textsuperscript{219} To show an actionable wrong, a civil-rights petitioner must prove the respondent’s wrongful intent plus actions by a specific person who committed an identifiable discriminatory act.\textsuperscript{220} In analogous criminal law terms,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{213} \textit{Id.} at 242.
  \item \textsuperscript{214} \textit{Id.} at 242. A year later, the Court identified other indicia of discriminatory purpose, thereby slightly easing the burden of proving a prima facie case of discrimination, but in dicta Justice Powell’s majority opinion required that the disparate effects be “stark” to constitute determinative proof of intent. Village of Arlington Heights \textit{v.} Metro. Dev. Corp., 429 U.S. 252, 266 (1977) (involving exclusionary zoning rather than employment discrimination).
  \item \textsuperscript{215} \textit{Washington}, 426 U.S. at 245.
  \item \textsuperscript{216} The concept of structural racism began to emerge in sociological literature in the works of van den Berghe, and Louis L. Knowles and Kenneth Prewitt, published in 1967 and 1969, respectively. See supra note 23.
  \item \textsuperscript{218} Freeman, \textit{Legitimating Racial Discrimination Through Antidiscrimination Law}, supra note 72, at 1052–56.
  \item \textsuperscript{219} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{220} \textit{Id.}
\end{itemize}
there must be both mens rea and actus reus. The remedy must be limited to punishing the violation and be no broader than that particular violation. This understanding of “discrimination” is based on ideas of causation and fault, which sound in tort. There must be a blameworthy cause of the harm complained of (the discriminatory act), a purpose to discriminate, and a harmful effect (a measurable wrong to the victim). The perpetrator perspective is blind to structural racism because it requires intent, stringently defined. The victim perspective, on the other hand, looks to the effects of societal structures. It asks whether the conditions complained of (e.g., workplace disadvantage) are the product of racial oppression, understood both sociologically and historically.

Washington v. Davis had immediate, far-reaching, and deleterious effects on civil rights litigation. At the doctrinal level, its pernicious purpose requirement metastasized to frustrate Thirteenth Amendment badges-of-slavery claims of racial discrimination based on anti-black animus and voting rights claims based on the Fifteenth Amendment. It restrained lower courts from vigorous civil rights enforcement, thus becoming the foremost setback to the movement since 1954. It “places the nearly impossible burden of proof and persuasion on those who have experienced the exclusion . . . [I]t asks the victim to go into the mind of the perpetrator and demonstrate that there exists an unconstitutional motivation.” Its “discriminatory purpose” requirement severely reduced both the volume and the success rates of constitutionally based civil rights litigation. Few claims based on intent were filed thereafter, even fewer were successful, and almost none were awarded damages. At the appellate level, virtually no appeals (less than 1%) were


224. *Id.* at 1054–55.

225. *Id.* at 1052–53.

226. *Id.*


successful, while few trial court decisions were appealed.232 The resulting disparity between the volume of potential claims (vast) and the number litigated to a successful conclusion (few) conforms to the Miller/Sarat pyramid model of litigation, with the discouraging result that most claims of racial discrimination are not even filed, much less won.233 It produced the undesirable and paradoxical result that since 1990, an ever-increasing volume of employment discrimination litigation results in fewer awards in individual cases: more law, less justice. “The typical plaintiff receives neither their day in court nor a meaningful remedy.”234 It is at best a system of “uncertain justice.”235 The “discriminatory purpose” requirement of Washington v. Davis was the object of unanimous contemporary criticism,236 and its reputation has not improved over the years.237

Going beyond Washington v. Davis, the Court raised an almost insurmountable barrier to civil rights plaintiffs in employment discrimination cases in a 1979 decision, Personnel Administrator v. Feeney.238 Plaintiff, a woman, challenged the veterans’ preference


233. Id. (citing R. E. Miller & Austin Sarat, Grievances, Claims and Disputes: Assessing the Adversary Culture, 15 LAW & SOC’Y REV. 525 (1981)).


235. See id.


program of Massachusetts’s civil service hiring practices, which had the effect of excluding women from higher echelons of civil service and confining them to traditionally female clerical occupations. The Court took up any slack that might have been left in *Washington v. Davis*’s intent requirement by holding that it implies more than intent as volition or intent as awareness of consequences. It implies that the decision maker, in this case a state legislature, selected or reaffirmed a particular course of action at least in part ‘because of,’ not merely ‘in spite of,’ its adverse effects upon an identifiable group.

Mere awareness of a possible result, no matter how likely or even certain that result, is insufficient to prove or even infer motivation.

For constitutional purposes, this adopted a standard of intent and foreseeability greater than the torts negligence standard, something closer to malice. Tort law draws a distinction between intentional torts, where the plaintiff must prove defendant’s intent to commit an act that will have particular consequences, and torts of negligence, where the standard is that “the person acts knowing that the consequence is substantially certain to result.” The latest iteration of the Torts Restatement offers this example to illustrate this negligence concept of intent:

> The Jones Company runs an aluminum smelter, which emits particulate fluorides as part of the industrial process. Jones knows that these particles, carried by the air, will land on neighboring property, and in doing so will bring about a range of harms. Far from desiring this result, Jones in fact regrets it. Despite its regret, Jones has knowingly, and hence intentionally, caused the resulting harms.

Similarly, the Model Penal Code provides that an individual criminal defendant acts “knowingly” where “he is aware that his conduct is of that nature or that such circumstances exist.” Why are these standards inoperable and irrelevant for equal protection?

In a contemporary capital sentencing case, *McCleskey v. Kemp*, the Court went even further in exalting intent, making it virtually impossible for a defendant of color to prove that a legislature acted in a way that made it more likely that he or she would be sentenced

239. *Id.* at 260.
240. *Id.* at 279.
243. *Id.* at cmt. c illus. 3 (2010).
244. *Model Penal Code* § 2.02 (establishing requirements of culpability).
to death because he or she is not white. 245 A person sentenced to death must now “prove that the . . . Legislature enacted or maintained the death penalty statute because of an anticipated racially discriminatory effect.” 246 Moreover, “to prevail under the Equal Protection Clause, [defendant] must prove that the decisionmakers in his case acted with discriminatory purpose.” 247 The Court thus moved the goal posts still further away from civil rights plaintiffs: On top of the Washington v. Davis purpose requirement, a plaintiff under Feeney must show something approaching actual malice and under McCleskey that the legislature’s malice was directed specifically at him or her or at least at his or her class of cases.

Once the intent requirement was raised to such alpine heights, the Court ended up with this perverse result: Policies that in their effects discriminate against blacks can be successfully challenged only by proving discriminatory intent by standards almost impossible to satisfy. But programs benefiting blacks and Latinos are subjected to a scrutiny so strict that almost none can meet it, at least for constitutional equal protection claims, including those from other social domains such as education. 248

B. White Advantage: Wygant v. Board of Education

A recurrent theme in employment discrimination cases is white innocence. 249 This motif was broached in the raucous politics of the northern anti-busing effort in the early ‘70s, where angry middle- and lower-class whites complained that they were forced to bear all the costs of desegregation while the elites who mandated the program sent their children to private schools and thereby evaded those burdens. 250 White ethnics commonly complained that their ancestors either had nothing to do with slavery and were indeed in some ways as badly off as enslaved people or had migrated to America after the abolition of slavery. 251 Either way, neither living whites nor their deceased forebears bore any responsibility for the

246. Id. at 288.
247. Id. at 292.
251. Id.
sufferings and deprivations of blacks, so it was unjust to force them to compensate for black losses by being deprivied of opportunities that they had a racially based right to expect. A noisy proponent of these views was an Italian-American law professor who denounced WASP exploitation of his hardworking immigrant father. Drawing on that supposed experience, he categorized “white ethnic groups” as the real victims of discrimination who were now having the burdens of racial justice foisted upon them. “I owe no man anything, nor he me, because of the blood that flows in our veins,” he trumpeted. Professor Antonin Scalia would soon have an opportunity to translate his sentiments into constitutional law.

The idea quickly migrated from the streets to the courts. Justice Powell was the first to invoke white innocence in his Bakke opinion of 1978: “There is a measure of inequity in forcing innocent persons in respondent’s position to bear the burdens of redressing grievances not of their making.” From there the theme of white innocence returned in one form or another in most affirmative action employment cases. The conservative wing of the Burger Court found the innocence theme irresistible and mandated a balancing of equities between black employees who had actually suffered from discriminatory employment practices and white employees “innocent of any wrongdoing.”

The trope of white innocence proved decisive in a case that is second only to Davis in demonstrating how the Supreme Court protects structural racism: Wygant v. Jackson Board of Education. Justice Lewis Powell’s plurality opinion in that case is a systematic compendium of the legal–doctrinal affirmation of structural racism. The facts of Wygant provide a case study of how structural racism operates. A substantial minority of the residents of Jackson, a medium-sized city in southern Michigan, were people
of color, but the city had a long history of racial discrimination in hiring them as teachers. To deal with simmering racial tensions in the schools, respondent Board of Education negotiated a contract with the teachers’ union providing that if layoffs became necessary, they would honor seniority, except that minority layoffs would not exceed the extant ratio of minority employees overall.

When layoffs came, the effect of this provision was that some of the most junior white teachers were laid off before some junior black teachers. The Court was therefore faced with the choice of either affirming a nominally race-neutral seniority system that would disproportionately lay off black teachers, or a race-conscious, negotiated agreement that would result in the preservation of recent, modest, and hard-won gains in minority hiring. Either it did not occur to the Powell bloc that a last-hired-first-fired policy would reduce the already thin ranks of black teachers, who were disproportionately few because of recent overt discrimination or they deemed it of no significance. If the burdens of an economic downturn were not proportionately shared by whites and blacks, the automatic operation of the seniority system (established in a context of racial discrimination) would cause white–black teacher ratios to revert back toward Jim Crow era levels, without any need for current racial animus to produce the disparate results. The system blindly, automatically, and invisibly generated racially disparate outcomes that shoved blacks out of recently gained employment opportunities. That is structural racism.

Perhaps sensing this, the lower courts upheld the layoff agreement, emphasizing that it was not necessary for plaintiffs to prove intentional racial discrimination. District Judge Charles W. Joiner acknowledged the reality of what he called “societal discrimination” and the consequent need for black “role models” for minority students. The Supreme Court plurality would have none of this. “This Court never has held that societal discrimination alone is sufficient to justify a racial classification,” Powell rebuked the lower court judges. The sole doctrinal function of racially

261. Justice Marshall noted in his dissent that no blacks were hired to teach in the public schools until 1954. Id. at 297 (Marshall, J., dissenting). In 1969, when the litigation began, only 4% of the faculty citywide was minority. Id.

262. Id. at 270–71.

263. Id. at 271.


265. Id. at 1201.

266. Wygant, 476 U.S. at 274, reaffirmed in Grutter v. Bollinger, 539 U.S. 306, 373–74 (2003) ("[T]he Court has soundly rejected the remedying of societal discrimination as a justification for governmental use of race." (citing Wygant, 476...
disparate outcomes was to suggest (though not prove) intentional discrimination. Powell dismissed without consideration the possibility of ever demonstrating structural racism: “Societal discrimination, without more, is too amorphous a basis for imposing a racially classified remedy.” 267 O’Connor concurred: “A governmental agency’s interest in remedying ‘societal’ discrimination, that is, discrimination not traceable to its own actions,” can never satisfy the compelling-interest element of the strict scrutiny test. 268

Once unmoored from social realities, the Court drifted off into airy speculation that had no statistical grounding: “Societal discrimination is insufficient and over-expansive” and remedying it would harm “innocent people,” Justice Powell wrote. 269 “There are numerous explanations for a disparity between the percentage of minority students and the percentage of minority faculty, many of them completely unrelated to discrimination of any kind.” 270 Having thereby foreclosed the possibility of linking doctrine to social reality, the Court has never turned back to rethink its indifference to structural forces. Instead, it withdraws into a fantasy world of wishful or magical thinking: “Absent employment discrimination by the school board, ‘nondiscriminatory hiring practices will in time result in a work force more or less representative of the racial and ethnic composition of the population in the community from which employees are hired.’” 271 The Court’s enthusiasm for this idea has not been diminished by the fact that it has no basis in reality and no evidence that such a desirable outcome has ever occurred.

In her Wygant concurrence, O’Connor reformulated the strict scrutiny requirement to soften its impact but nevertheless injected the theme of white innocence again: An affirmative action program may not “impose disproportionate harm on the interests, or unnecessarily trammel the rights, of innocent individuals.” 272

Those who, like Powell and O’Connor, voice concern about harm to innocent victims invariably refer to white victims; they

U.S. at 274 and Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co., 488 U.S. 468 (1989)). “Societal discrimination” is the Court’s term for its understanding of a form of racism beyond that of individual bigotry.

268. Id. at 288 (O’Connor, J., concurring).
269. Id. at 276.
270. Id. Justice Powell did not think it necessary to identify any of these explanations.
272. Wygant, 476 U.S. at 287 (O’Connor, J., concurring). Powell also adverted to white innocence. See id. at 281–82.
ignore the harm done by structural racism to innocent black individuals and groups. In the innocence trope, the victims are always (though implicitly) white. This is not a matter of overt racism but rather of white normativity: To be white is to be automatically exempt from all burdens of unjust discrimination, intentional or structural. When whites do not receive a hoped-for opportunity that they believe is rightfully theirs (protections for seniority on the job, admission to a public university), then by definition they must be victims of some kind of unjust and discriminatory policy. If whites and blacks are seen to be locked in a zero-sum game, where gains for one come at the expense of the other, then it seems intuitive that whites, individually and collectively presumed to be “innocent” of actions that have contributed to black oppression, are treated unfairly if they miss an opportunity where an affirmative action program is in place. It may be intuitive, but it is erroneous. Careful studies have demonstrated that whites stand no better chance of being admitted to selective educational institutions when no affirmative action program is in place than they do under such a program.\textsuperscript{273} When she invoked innocence, Justice O’Connor was obviously not thinking about innocent blacks who suffer the effects of structural racism.

In her concurrence, Justice O’Connor seemed to suggest that the strict scrutiny test, in either its uncompromising Scalia version or her softer one,\textsuperscript{274} can operate only in situations of Pareto inefficiency,\textsuperscript{275} where it is still possible to make some (blacks) better

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{273} See Goodwin Liu, The Causation Fallacy: Bakke and the Basic Arithmetic of Selective Admissions, 100 Mich. L. Rev. 1045 (2002); William G. Bowen & Derek Bok, The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions (2000). White disappointment is almost always a result of the highly competitive character of the admissions process at such institutions. See Liu, supra, at 1046 n.8. The “causation fallacy” posits that if one black is admitted, one white will lose that opportunity. Id. at 1046. In reality, the disappointed white missed out because of the large number of whites with superior qualifications to him or her in the candidate pool. Id. at 1052–54. He or she probably would not have been admitted anyway, even if no affirmative action program were in place. Id. This presents a potentially fatal standing problem when whites challenge affirmative action programs, but the Supreme Court has carefully avoided looking into that issue. Id. at 1058–59.
\item \textsuperscript{275} “[U]nder certain specified conditions[,] . . . every competitive market equilibrium is ‘Pareto efficient’ (also called ‘Pareto optimal’). A state of affairs is defined as Pareto efficient if it is the case that compared with it, no one’s utility can be raised without reducing someone else’s utility.” Amartya Sen, Markets and Freedoms: Achievements and Limitations of the Market Mechanism in Promoting Individual Freedoms, 45 Oxford Econ. Papers 519, 521 (1993). Sen uses
off while not disadvantaging anyone else (whites). If that is so, then once Pareto optimality is reached—no one can be made better off without someone being made worse off—the abstract logic of strict scrutiny would seem to prohibit any further efforts to meliorate the effects of employment discrimination. In one sense, this is merely a fancy way of suggesting that whites will oppose any affirmative action program that imposes any costs at all on them. Or, to put it another way, the white majority will accede to black gains only if they come cost-free (to whites). But if the strict scrutiny test comes with some embedded but unstated Pareto-efficient upper limit, it will severely cripple any affirmative-action effort—which is exactly what happened after 1986.

The white-innocence assumption leads to the logical error of false symmetry, a modern version of Anatole France’s “bridges of Paris” argument. The flawed assumptions, when unpacked, go as follows: For more than three centuries, blacks suffered overt, explicit oppression under slavery and then in post-Reconstruction servitude. To remediate that in the Civil Rights Era, laws attempted to open up opportunities for them and abolish the lingering effects of past discrimination. To this, whites responded with a claim of “reverse discrimination”: it is now they, innocent whites, who are victims of overt oppression. Thus, as there is an equivalence of wrongs, so there must be an equivalence of remedies. If we prohibit oppression of blacks, we must now prohibit the “oppression” that whites suffer by losing white advantage as blacks are given equal access to opportunities. But this is far-fetched, the logical fallacy of false equivalence again; no white person is discriminated against as blacks were until recently. They lose only the monopoly of benefit

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277. “The majestic equality of the laws, which prohibits the rich as well as the poor from sleeping under bridges, from begging on the streets, and from stealing bread.” ANATOLE FRANCE, LE LYS ROUGE 118 (1894) (authors’ translation). This bridges-of-Paris (“les ponts”) argument is a commonplace cultural referent to the concept of false symmetry, equating two things that are not identical.

278. Whites now consider bias against white people as a greater social problem than bias against blacks. See Michael I. Norton & Samuel R. Sommers, Whites See Racism as a Zero-Sum Game That They Are Now Losing, 6 PERSP. ON PSYCHOL. SCI. 215 (2011).
that had been provided by overt racism and the preferred or exclusive access that comes with white advantage, together with the lingering residues of unearned privilege and opportunity.

The Wygant plurality dismissed out of hand a justification for affirmative action plans that promoted black teachers as role models for their students.279 White normativity made it impossible for the plurality to see how vital role models were to people who had previously experienced barriers to opportunity automatically erected because of their race. It did not seem to occur to the justices that black teachers would be role models not only for black students but, as importantly, for white students as well. Underlying this is an assumption that white students will have a whole and complete view of the world with only white faculty—an example of the unexamined belief that white advantage is normative.280 Powell instead imposed a linkage between role models and quotas or percentages. He insisted that the role-model theory would lead to “discriminatory hiring and layoff” policies that would have “no logical stopping point” and would be “ageless in their reach into the past and timeless in their ability to affect the future.”281 There was no logical connection between the importance of role models and quotas, nor was it necessary to inject one. The Board could have justified retention of black teachers without demanding proportionality. But the majority’s unthinking impatience with the role model idea deprived equality advocates of an essential argument for affirmative action.

Thus, the Court sees innocence only in whites and is oblivious as to how its perception of innocence is blind to the innocence of people of color. Similarly, the Court sees faculty role models only in whites; because faculty have traditionally been white, white faculty role models became normative. This is white advantage in action.

C. Individualism: Wygant (Again)

Justice Powell was at pains to refute Justice Marshall’s lengthy dissent in Wygant and challenged one of its core ideas: Marshall “sees this case not in terms of individual constitutional rights, but as an allocation of burdens ‘between two racial groups.’”282 Powell retorted: “This is really nothing more than group-based analysis.”283

282. Id. at 281 n.8.
283. Id.
The Constitution does not allocate constitutional rights to be distributed like bloc [sic] grants within discrete racial groups . . . . But that assumed the very point in controversy. To deal with structural racism, we—and the Court—must think in group terms because it is groups, not individuals, who have been the principal focus of racialized societies.

Justice Scalia thus got it exactly wrong when he wrote that “[t]he relevant proposition is not that it was blacks, or Jews, or Irish who were discriminated against, but it was individual men and women, ‘created equal,’ who were discriminated against.” Similarly, Justice Thomas perverted the meaning of Brown v. Board of Education I when he claimed that “[a]t the heart of this interpretation of the Equal Protection Clause lies the principle that the government must treat citizens as individuals, and not as members of racial, ethnic, or religious groups.” If we do not think in terms of groups, structural racism will remain invisible to all of us. Powell and his successors refuse to concede that and maintain that only individuals may be rights claimants: “[T]he petitioners before us today are not ‘the white teachers as a group.’ They are Wendy Wygant and other individuals who claim that they were fired from their jobs because of their race.”

Thus the hyper-individualism that infects American law generally has a particularly distorting effect here, disabling us from seeing the true nature of inequality in American life. Sociologists have identified this insistence on individualism as a key component of structural racism.

D. Superficial Neutrality: The Annus Horribilis of 1989

Though the Court’s equal protection agenda did not shrink after 1989, few major constitutionally based employment claims like those discussed above came before the High Court, as the justices’ attentions shifted to policing racial gerrymanders and shutting down school integration efforts. But 1989 was an active terminal year for constitutional workplace discrimination litigation.
in the High Court, as four major decisions further embedded structural racism by making it more difficult for plaintiffs to identify it and seek the law’s aid in rooting it out. Three of these cases dealt with procedural questions, which concealed their significance for lay people. But they were precursors of a trend that has characterized the Rehnquist and Roberts Courts: the use of procedural innovations to make employment discrimination cases more difficult to succeed. The technique of restricting or negating substantive rights by erecting devious, technical, procedural hurdles characterized both the Rehnquist and Roberts Courts, providing its conservative members with a stealthy way to frustrate rights claims that they opposed, without incurring the odium that open and direct attacks on the rights themselves might invite. These technical, procedural hurdles are examples of the structural arrangements embedded in social and organizational infrastructure that appear to be neutral. Their assumed neutrality causes them to be invisible; they are nonetheless effective in perpetuating racial disparities.

Through a quarter-century of litigation, the federal courts had worked out a series of rules for allocating the burdens of proof and persuasion in Title VII cases. But in a case that was coeval with this Title VII litigation, Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio, a five-justice majority made what Justice Stevens’s dissent called “changes in [those] elementary and eminently fair rules,” making it extremely difficult for plaintiffs to win Title VII disparate impact cases. An Alaska salmon cannery employed two tiers of workers: white-collar and skilled technical workers, who were nearly all white, and unskilled cannery floor workers, who were predominantly Filipino workers.
and Alaska Native. Justice White for the majority rejected evidence based on that racial imbalance, mandating instead that plaintiff must prove “a specific or particular employment practice that has created the disparate impact,” even though he conceded that the new requirement would be “unduly burdensome.” This insistence on identifying specific employment practices as the cause of disparate impacts arises from a misunderstanding of racism as existing only in the form of individual bigotry. It betrays the Court’s misunderstanding of how the superficial neutrality of social structures and policies produce racial disparities. It also reveals the Court’s misunderstanding of how structural racism arises from the interactions between various social structures and policies. To conclude that racism was not taking place at the cannery just because overt racism was not in evidence was to ignore the reality that structural racism was silently operating to produce the same disparate outcome. Any number of factors itemized above as examples of structural racism in the workplace could have been functioning either singly or in combination to produce such a racial disparity in employment. These factors could include: selectively disseminating information about job openings or using social networks to disseminate such information; requiring previous job experience for cannery jobs historically held only by whites; and unconscious attitudes about candidates’ skills and aptitudes affecting hiring decisions, as well as supervisors’ perceptions of employee behavior with respect to job performance. The Court’s newly mandated tight linkage between “a particular practice” and results would make proof of discrimination virtually impossible.

Wards Cove was a major setback for voluntary affirmative action programs. This led Justice Blackmun in dissent to lament that in the conditions of such a “plantation economy” as that of the cannery, with a proven track record of confining non-whites to lower-paid unskilled positions, “[o]ne wonders whether the majority still believes that race discrimination—or, more accurately, race discrimination against nonwhites—is a problem in our society, or even remembers that it ever was.” This apparently stung the majority. Justice White in a footnote dismissed Blackmun’s critique as “hyperbolic.” Merely because “race discrimination” is

296. Id. at 646–48.
297. Id. at 657.
298. See supra Part II.B.
300. Wards Cove, 490 U.S. at 662 (Blackmun, J., dissenting).
301. Id. at 649 n.4.
extensive in the United States, White averred, “does not mean, however, that it exists at the canneries—or more precisely, that it has been proved to exist at the canneries.”

Martin v. Wilks, another in the endless procession of white firefighter suits, provided another example of achieving substantive results—here, weakening consent decrees that had settled Title VII actions—through procedural maneuvers that would be invisible or incomprehensible to casual lay observers. In litigation dating back to 1974, black firefighters in Birmingham, Alabama, reached a consent decree with their municipal employer that mandated remedies for an admitted history of racial discrimination. These provided specific goals for the hiring and promotion of black firefighters. A group of white firefighters who had declined to participate in the original litigation and hence were not parties to the consent decree then sued to challenge promotions based on the consent decrees as “reverse discrimination” that denied them advancement opportunities because of their race. Normally, a party who chooses not to assert his or her right in some litigation that might affect his or her situation is precluded from challenging the result. A majority speaking through Chief Justice Rehnquist nevertheless permitted the white firefighters to challenge the consent decrees by making an exception to the decades-long-standing procedural rules regarding impermissible collateral attack. The decision cast a long shadow, threatening disruption of existing consent arrangements and discouraging future use of the consent decree by injecting an element of uncertainty and lack of finality into any settlement.

Patterson v. McLean Credit Union was both a substantive and procedural setback for African Americans seeking to challenge workplace discrimination. Brenda Patterson brought an action

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302. Id.
304. Id. at 758.
305. Id.
306. Id. at 760.
307. See id. at 762 n.3 and authorities cited therein. This is known as “impermissible collateral attack.” The non-participating parties are said to be “sitting on the sidelines” and are precluded from getting into the game after it is over.
308. See id. at 791–93.
under 42 U.S.C § 1981 claiming that she had been denied promotion and fired because of her race.\textsuperscript{310} Section 1981, descended from section 1 of the 1866 Civil Rights Act,\textsuperscript{311} guarantees that “all persons . . . have the same right . . . to make and enforce contracts” as whites.\textsuperscript{312} The defendant argued, and a five-justice majority agreed, that this language applied only to initial hiring decisions and did not cover subsequent discriminatory acts.\textsuperscript{313} Justice Anthony Kennedy soothingly suggested that the plaintiff still had remedies available to her under Title VII because it was a later and more comprehensive regulatory scheme.\textsuperscript{314} Thus “we may preserve the integrity of Title VII’s procedures without sacrificing any significant coverage of the civil rights laws,”\textsuperscript{315} But that was cold comfort because section 1981 created an action for damages, thus providing a stronger deterrent to workplace racism, while Title VII authorized only an award of back pay.\textsuperscript{316} The kinds of discrimination Patterson alleged could not be rectified by back-pay awards. Moreover, as Justice Brennan argued in dissent, a capacious reading of section 1981 was more consonant with the Framers’ intentions and the spirit of the First Reconstruction when it was originally enacted.\textsuperscript{317}

In its 1989 cases, the Court read expansive and empowering statutes in a crabbed, stingy way, formally and hypertechnically draining off their transformative potential. The justices treated the ideal of equality as a matter of politics rather than constitutionality, tweaking supposedly neutral procedures to attain outcomes benefiting white plaintiffs but thwarting litigants of color. The effect was to enable whites and white institutions to maintain the racial status quo.\textsuperscript{318}

The 1989 decisions were so egregious that Congress felt obliged to intervene. Noting that the Supreme Court had cut back dramatically on the scope and effectiveness of civil rights protections in a series of its recent decisions, the Civil Rights Act of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[310] Patterson, 485 U.S. at 617. It prudently decided in Patterson to decline that radical move. The reargument attracted a galaxy of eminent counsel on both sides of that issue on brief and as amici.
\item[311] Civil Rights Act of 1866, 14 Stat. 27 (1866).
\item[312] Patterson, 491 U.S. at 176 (quoting 42 U.S.C § 1981).
\item[313] Id. at 176.
\item[314] Id. at 181.
\item[315] Id. at 181–82.
\item[317] Patterson, 491 U.S. at 191–200 (Brennan, J., dissenting).
\end{footnotes}
1991 overturned each of the four decisions.319 Rejecting Patterson, it expanded section 1981’s “make and enforce contracts” provisions to include performance, modification, termination, and enjoyment of benefits and explicitly stated that the statute applied to private discrimination.320 It explicitly overruled Wards Cove by name.321 It reaffirmed the disparate impact strand of Title VII but produced a weak compromise on the business-necessity defense.322 It made the employer’s independent-motive defense inapplicable to issues of personal liability.323 It removed the ability of non-parties to upset a consent decree if they were adequately represented by the original parties or knew or should have known of the proceedings.324 Finally, it affirmed the Griggs validation of a disparate impact reading of Title VII.325 For good measure, it also authorized punitive damages for malicious discrimination.326 Seldom has Congress so decisively rebuked the justices’ overreaching, though the statute itself was vague and the consequences ineffective and disappointing.327

E. Colorblindness: The Anticlassification Principle

Current readings of Brown v. Board of Education differ as to the exact nature of the right established by that case. Is it the right of people of color to be free of an oppressive disability imposed on

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321. Id. § 3, 105 Stat. at 1071.
322. Id.
323. Id. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 “reversed” Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins, 490 U.S. 228 (1989), the fourth of the 1989 employment discrimination suits. In Price Waterhouse, a plurality (uncharacteristically speaking through Justice Brennan) determined that when an employee proved that gender (or race) played a role in employment decisions, his or her employer could avoid liability by showing that it had an independent reason for its actions. Id. The plurality held that such a showing would constitute a complete defense to the action. Id.
them by the State, a denial of opportunity that made them something less than full citizens? Scholars commonly refer to that reading as the “antisubordination value.” Or is it instead something much more narrow and shallow: a right not to have the State determine one’s opportunities in society by an arbitrary classification, such as the chimera of race? That is known as the “anticlassification value.”

By 1976, as conservatives began to complain of “reverse discrimination” in response to affirmative action programs, scholars began to explore the differing potentials presented by these inconsistent interpretations. Owen Fiss contended that Brown should be read as a guarantee against oppression, recognizing groups as rights-holders. Paul Brest endorsed what he called “the antidiscrimination principle” (referred to here as “antisubordination”) as a “prohibition[] of race-dependent decisions that disadvantage the members of minority groups.” But an ambivalence blurred Brest’s formulation: “[T]he antidiscrimination principle disfavors race-dependent decisions and conduct—at least when they selectively disadvantage the members of a minority group.” This formulation, stripped of the qualifying “at least” phrase, can be taken out of context to become the naked anticlassification principle. As Fiss and Brest wrote in 1976, the Supreme Court was beginning to accept the anticlassification reading as canonical for the understanding of equal protection. This blunted Brown’s potential for social transformation and redirected its moral energies to protecting whites’ opportunities.

Anticlassification is not merely a counterpoint perspective to antisubordination. Antisubordination reflects the widely shared understanding that sociologists have developed for more than 40 years of how structural processes produce racial disparities. We must openly acknowledge the racial imbalance inherent in structural forces and take overt racially explicit steps to counter them. Anticlassification, on the other hand, spurns these findings in the fields of both sociology and psychology. It is a lawyer’s and judge’s construct, not a social scientist’s, based on no more than fanciful or


329. See Siegel, supra note 328, at 1541.


331. Brest, supra note 236, at 2.

332. Id. at 6.

wishful speculation about how some notional society ought to work. Anticlassification is the judicial formulation of colorblindness.

In the generation since Fiss and Brest wrote, a majority of the justices have endorsed the anticlassification approach over antisubordination, with disastrous results.\(^{334}\) If *Brown* means nothing more than that the State may not classify by race and if that rubric is applied mechanically, then all race-conscious efforts to ameliorate present legacies of racial oppression in the past may be held unconstitutional. If the justices continue to insist on clinging to the notion of anticlassification—which is completely disconnected from the reality of structural and unconscious racism—then we are left with the banal formalism of: “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race,” a bumper sticker trying to pass itself off as a constitutional aperçu.\(^{335}\) This approach spells disaster not only for efforts to achieve a level playing field in employment but also dooms *Grutter v. Bollinger* to reversal and condemns future generations to replicate an inescapably racist society.\(^{336}\)

The anticlassification reading favored by the Burger, Rehnquist, and Roberts Courts has at least two malignant effects. First, it inverts the original meaning of *Brown v. Board of Education* and subverts the work of those who enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The justices who produced *Brown* and the Congress that passed the 1964 Act understood that they were putting an end to an entire social system in which the dominant and privileged white race used its power to strip African Americans of opportunity, civic status, and dignity. After *Brown*, the Equal Protection Clause was read to prevent official status degradation. The Court’s holdings during the Second Reconstruction, 1954–1970, were mostly consistent with this understanding. When the 39th Congress adopted the Fourteenth Amendment in 1867 and sent it out to the states for ratification, the members intended to protect blacks from the oppressions of whites. When the Fifteenth Amendment banned deprivation of the vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude,”\(^{337}\) the Framers were again being race-specific, protecting blacks. Anticlassification readings ignore the Framers’ solicitude for the freed people and substitute a faux constitutional understanding under which government may not take race into account, either to oppress or to protect and equalize.

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334. See id.
337. U.S. CONST. amend. XV, § 1.
Second, the anticlassification reading provides an effective doctrinal cover for structural racism in all social domains. If the canonical meaning of the 20th century’s most important Supreme Court decision is shrunk to the puny and sterile mantra that government may not classify by race, then the only effective remedial actions that the federal and state governments may take to combat the lingering effects of all forms of racism will be illegitimate. In order to deal with the structural effects of workplace inequality, for example, government action must not only be proactive but also explicitly race conscious. The claims of moral equivalence are specious and rest on the fallacy of false symmetry: The races do not stand on an equal footing with respect to three-and-a-half centuries of oppression.338 Whites enslaved blacks, not the other way around; whites imposed Jim Crow on blacks, not the reverse. Whites continue to benefit in countless ways from past discrimination; blacks do not. Classification by race is essential if remedies are to be effective and trying to avoid it by the self-deception of colorblindness only perpetuates the wrongs of the past.

IV. CONCLUSION

Supreme Court decisions since 1964 involving constitutional challenges to employment discrimination have mapped precisely onto the template of structural racism. These decisions exemplify components of structural racism, thereby cementing it into the social foundations of America. Therefore, one might reasonably conclude that the Court has ignored structural analysis. In reality though, the justices have actually demonstrated that they do think in structural terms—but only to protect whites’ interests.

This began in Washington v. Davis, where Justice White rejected the Griggs statutory criterion of disparate impact for constitutional interpretation.339 But with unintended irony, he justified his conclusion by a results-oriented test that amounted to a policy-grounded disparate impact test for white people: A holding for the petitioners “would be far-reaching and would raise serious questions about, and perhaps invalidate, a whole range of tax, welfare, public service, regulatory, and licensing statutes that may be more burdensome to the poor and to the average black than to the more affluent white.”340 For the first but not the last time, the Supreme Court applied a racial double standard for the Davis purpose and

339. See supra Part III.A.
effects test: Where the status quo of white advantage is threatened, the Court relies on the effects on whites with no requirement of proving malevolent intent. But where blacks challenge policies that disadvantage them, the Court demands proof of wrongful intent under a standard that became ever more daunting. Programs benefiting people of color are subjected to impossibly strict scrutiny.

This began a consistent pattern where the justices refused to do structural analysis when the interests of blacks are adversely affected. At the same time, they invoked structural considerations to protect whites’ opportunities and prevent disrupting the status quo of wealth distribution. Under the *Washington v. Davis* effects test, all that white plaintiffs need to do to challenge an affirmative action plan is to demonstrate that they will lose an opportunity (an effect), with no need to demonstrate malignant intent. But blacks challenging discrimination must prove intent under *Davis* by standards that are usually impossible to meet.

People of color asserting a denial of equal protection now face at least four daunting obstacles:

First, the justices mandate a showing of intent for black plaintiffs, which, under the doctrinal progression from *Davis* to *Feeney* to *McCleskey*, is now effectively unattainable. Conversely, the Court permits white plaintiffs to focus solely on the effects on them.

Second, the Court accords only to whites an important advantage: the mantle of innocence. While the Court has repeatedly presented itself since *Bakke* as the paladin of white innocence, the majority (excluding Justices Marshall, Brennan, and Blackmun) has been unable to see people of color as innocent victims—victims of centuries of slavery followed by post-emancipation servitude, with effects that still dominate our society. In the *Civil Rights Cases*, Justice Joseph Bradley demanded that African Americans no longer be “the special favorite of the laws” (as if they ever had been). But American law has always treated white people as the favorites of the law and continues to do so by securing the structural advantages of whiteness, including innocence and victimhood.

Third, the Court’s majority insists that only individual people of color, not groups, can be victims of racial injustice and remedies may only be for individual people of color. The justices have grown increasingly hostile to remedies covering groups and restrict the procedural avenues, such as the class action, that make group remedies possible at all. Yet the justices approve group remedies, but for whites only, whenever they invalidate programs or actions taken to overcome effects of past discrimination in employment.

Most recently in *Ricci v. Stefano*, for example, a five-justice majority held that the employer’s decision to discard the results of a civil service examination required for firefighters’ promotions constituted a “racial preference” in favor of black candidates.\(^{342}\) It thereby converted whites’ disappointment and inconvenience in retaking the exam into the basis for a finding of “intentional discrimination.”\(^{343}\) The white plaintiffs were beneficiaries of a group remedy, though they had demonstrated neither intent to discriminate nor individualized harm.

Fourth, the Court placed nearly insurmountable obstacles to awarding damages for black plaintiffs presenting constitutional claims, by the narrowest possible reading of section 1981 in *Patterson v. McLean*.\(^{344}\) Yet the Court has reduced standing requirements for whites claiming personal injury (such as in *Wygant*), merely presuming injury rather than requiring white plaintiffs to show tight causal linkages.

Besides applying differential criteria to black and white plaintiffs, the justices have repeatedly rejected the possibility of basing claims on what they term “societal racism”—the pervasiveness of racial discrimination throughout American society. Yet, ironically—given the Court’s insistence on applying to black plaintiffs the traditional paradigm of racism limited to overt individual bigotry—the Court accords to white plaintiffs the benefit of a structural perspective that focuses attention:

- on groups and away from individuals;
- on effects on those groups as opposed to injury to individuals;
- on assumed injury to each member of the group as a result of the aggregate effect on the group, as opposed to a demand for demonstration of injury to each individual; and
- on inadvertent effects of institutional policies and procedures as opposed to insistence on evidence of intent to discriminate.

The Court has indeed been using a structural understanding of racism sub rosa—but has applied this structural approach only to whites. We draw two conclusions here: First, the Court does in fact

\(^{342}\) *Ricci v. DeStefano*, 557 U.S. 557, 585 (2009). *Ricci* was resolved as a Title VII claim; the Court expressly declined to reach the constitutional issue. *Id.*

\(^{343}\) See *id.* Note that among the 18 successful plaintiffs, one was described as “Hispanic.”

\(^{344}\) See *Patterson v. McLean Credit Union*, 491 U.S. 164 (1989); *supra* Part III.D.
understand how structural elements affect racial advantage and disadvantage; and second, the Court has not adhered to its self-professed belief in colorblindness when doing so might jeopardize some white interest.

These opportunistic doctrinal inconsistencies suggest that attempts to meet the challenges of structural racism in the American society of the 21st century will fail if we do not move beyond the perspective of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and devise new doctrines for a new day. Just as laws designed to ban denial of suffrage on the basis of race are ineffectual to deal with modern suffrage restrictions like photo identification laws or reduced voting schedules, so the laws of a half-century ago predicated on overt discrimination in the workplace cannot meet the structural problems encountered by the Brenda Pattersons of our time. Colorblindness and anticlassification have led us down a one-way street: The justices forbid taking race into account when doing so would meliorate blacks’ situations by relieving the effects of past oppression. But they are alert to distinctions of color when necessary to protect white advantage.

Fifty years on, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 has done its work well. But it has proven effective only when deployed against an evil that was the only known evil of its time. Our challenge now is to go beyond the time-bound vision of 1964 to remove the roadblocks that the Supreme Court keeps erecting that frustrate the quest for racial justice.