
Cultural Disenfranchisement and the Politics of Stigma

ABSTRACT This article focuses attention on the pivotal role that stigmatization processes play on both legal and discursive fronts, that is, in justifying restrictive policies affecting ethnic minorities and in framing reactionary discourses in support of such measures. It argues that racial stigmatization is the key component in ongoing efforts to exclude Black and Latino citizens from full cultural citizenship in the United States, setting the groundwork for punitive and exclusionary policies aimed at disenfranchising and undermining their political agency. While legal documents record the rights and privileges accorded citizens within the nation's physical spaces, the politics of stigma, I contend, maps a moral geography: it sets the contours and limits of communal obligation, disrupting affective bonds and attachments that can spur social change. As an instrument of power, stigmatizing processes today are helping to reinstate the kinds of policies and attitudes that the Voting Rights Act intended to redress, engendering a hostile climate for Blacks and Latinos in the United States and threatening hard-won civil rights and political gains.

KEYWORDS: voting rights, stigmatization, citizenship, disenfranchisement, Blacks, Latinos

Faced with manifestations of extreme marginality and dysfunction . . . will the citizenry indignantly cry out, "What manner of people are THEY who languish in that way?" Or will they be moved . . . to ask . . . "What manner of people are WE who accept such degradation in our midst?"

—GLENN C. LOURY, *THE ANATOMY OF RACIAL INEQUALITY*

When President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965, he called it a "triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that's ever been won on any battlefield."¹ The act outlawed discriminatory practices that prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote under the 15th Amendment, abolishing literacy tests and poll taxes and giving the federal government the power to take over voter registration "wherever, by clear and objective standards, States and counties are using regulations, or laws, or tests to deny the right to vote." Passage of the Voting Rights Act had a significant widespread impact: in Mississippi alone, voter turnout among African Americans rose from 6 percent in 1964 to 59 percent in 1969. Later amended to include protection of voting rights for non-English speaking American citizens, the Voting Rights Act would also represent an important breakthrough for Latinos, particularly Mexican Americans—many with roots in the United States dating back centuries.² In the decades since the passage of the act, Black and Latino voting

1. Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks in the Capitol Rotunda at the Signing of the Voting Rights Act," August 6, 1965, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965*, Bk. 2 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1966), 841.

2. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (Feb. 2, 1848) ceded Mexican lands to the US after the Mexican-American War, guaranteeing Mexican residents of those lands full rights of US citizenship. Despite their legal status, many of these citizens are still perceived as foreigners.

power has increased dramatically, potentially reshaping the nation's political landscape.³ For example, Black and Latino voters are largely credited with putting Barack Obama in the White House for two terms. For the first time in history, African Americans voted at a higher rate than Whites in 2012; while in 2016, Latino voter rolls grew to a record 12.7 million.⁴ Clearly the nation's two largest minority groups are a political force to be reckoned with, a fact that inspires hope in some and evokes dread in others.

Minorities' increasing civic participation prefigures a kind of enfranchisement that extends beyond voting in elections: it signals the possibility of achieving full cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship involves more than legal definitions and documents. First, beyond one's relationship to the state, it involves social relations—the extent to which individuals are recognized as full members of the wider community, whatever their heritage or skin color. Second, it involves an acknowledged right to participate in the public sphere, to be seen and heard. Finally, it involves collectively imagined affiliations, notions about who belongs in the collective “we,” mostly articulated through the stories we tell about ourselves and others. While the Voting Rights Act gave African Americans and Latinos access to the electoral process, the nation's two largest minority groups have yet to achieve full cultural citizenship. In today's deeply partisan, post-Trump America, they face a two-pronged assault on their rights and dignity: on the legal front, many have seen their hard-won voting rights scaled back, while on the social front they are subject to increasingly hostile, exclusionary, and alienating rhetoric. Both of these fronts must be examined as correlated, as they have worked in unison to disenfranchise those who are perpetually deemed “out of place” regardless of what their birth certificates or naturalization documents affirm.

This article focuses attention on the pivotal role that stigmatization processes play on both legal and discursive fronts, that is, in justifying restrictive policies affecting ethnic minorities and in framing reactionary discourses in support of such measures. Building on sociologist Erving Goffman's seminal work on shame and stigma, I argue that racial stigmatization is the key component in ongoing efforts to exclude Black and Latino citizens from full cultural citizenship in the United States. This tactic sets the groundwork for punitive and exclusionary policies aimed at disenfranchising designated out-groups and undermining their political agency. It reifies preexisting racial hierarchies, legitimizing claims about the innate inferiority, criminality, or ineptitude of target others. The efficacy of such tactics accounts for its historical persistence, for as Glenn Loury explains, racial stigmatization extends far beyond stereotyping or denying opportunities to someone based on their race: “It involves becoming a disfavored or dishonored individual in the eyes of society, a kind of social outcast . . . doubting the person's worthiness and consigning

3. I use the terms *Latinos* and *African American* or *Black* throughout this essay with the understanding that this usage ignores not only the distinct cultures that comprise both Latinos and Blacks in American society—but also the fact that Latinos are a multiracial people who may identify as Black, White, Mulatto, etc. My aim is not to further essentialize these identities but to suggest that they are stigmatized as two monolithic groups in political discourses. Analysis of the ways that Afro-Latinos are differentiated from White Latinos as a stigmatized group is beyond the scope of this essay.

4. See Jens Manuel Krogstad and Mark Hugo Lopez, “Black voter turnout fell in 2016, even as a record number of Americans cast ballots,” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2017, <http://pewrsr.ch/2q8OLds>.

him or her to a social netherworld.”⁵ Thus while legal documents record the rights and privileges accorded citizens within the nation’s physical spaces, the politics of stigma, I contend, maps a moral geography: it sets the contours and limits of communal obligation, disrupting affective bonds and attachments that connect the individual and the community and which can serve, in Martha Nussbaum’s words, as the “bridge to justice.”⁶ By disqualifying individuals and groups from full cultural membership, stigmatization impedes their social integration and political participation. As an instrument of power, stigmatizing processes today are helping to reinstate the kinds of policies and attitudes that the Voting Rights Act intended to redress, engendering a hostile climate for Blacks and Latinos in the United States and threatening hard-won civil rights and political gains.

It is important to ask, as Nikhil Pal Singh does in *Race and America’s Long War*, who is an object of dread and elimination, and who is a subject of rights and inclusion?⁷ Stigmatized bodies serve as emblems of what the society rejects: through the ideological construction of stigma, racialized bodies can be criminalized, demonized, and figuratively or literally cast out. As Goffman explains, “we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human” and thus construct “an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents.”⁸ The four main components of stigmatization—labeling, stereotyping, separation, and discrimination—work to shame target groups by signaling their negative, irremediable difference. These tactics may become more extreme over time, structuring social relations, casting doubt on the group’s worthiness, and erecting social barriers that deny them full acceptance into the wider community. Negative predispositions against stigmatized groups form the basis of political choices and collective attitudes: they rationalize the target group’s differential treatment, threaten their access to civil and legal protections, and make it less likely that non-target group members will organize in their defense. Toby Miller demarcates the zone of cultural citizenship as “the right to know and speak,” distinguishing it from zones of political citizenship, “the right to reside and vote,” or economic citizenship, “the right to work and prosper.”⁹ My aim is to suggest that these are co-productive and inter-dependent: the politics of stigma excludes Black and Latinos from full cultural citizenship by facilitating and justifying their political and economic disenfranchisement. Stigma “poisons the well,” so to speak, so that the stigmatized implicitly lack the skills, authority, character, or knowledge needed for admission to the full spectrum of civic life.

Stigmatization has always been an essential resource in racism’s toolkit. Transforming racial minorities into objects of dread, a politics of stigma signals the nation’s boundaries of belonging: it is critical in the formation of out-groups and in facilitating their exclusion, devaluation, and containment. Stigmas attached to ethnic or racial groups, which Goffman calls “tribal stigmas,” shape social attitudes; “tribal” stigmas register and activate

5. Glenn C. Loury, *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2002), 61.

6. Martha C. Nussbaum, “Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13, no. 1 (1996): 37.

7. Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America’s Long War* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 34.

8. *Ibid.*, 3.

9. Toby Miller, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 35.

negative predispositions in the citizenry. They are strongly predictive of conscious and unconscious behaviors, including levels of active helping and passive neglecting.¹⁰ Tribal stigmas are more difficult to shed than those linked to behavior, since individuals are accused or discredited because of who they are rather than what they have done. Deviance in these cases is not the result of doing something “wrong,” for the “normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives.”¹¹ Stigma casts its object into an underclass or even subclass group that is irredeemable: the stigmatized body is not entitled to rights, respect, or even dignity. This condition represents the ontological insecurity experienced by those whose very being is the basis of their rejection or marginalization.¹²

Virtually every effort to institutionalize, enforce, and support White supremacy in United States history has been preceded by a widespread stigmatization campaign. Thus, African Americans have consistently been subjected to the politics of stigma—to being labeled, stereotyped, denigrated, and discriminated against. As the Supreme Court itself affirmed in the 1857 Dred Scott decision, “A free negro . . . is not a ‘citizen’ within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States.” In particular, the court was bound to assume that States had “deemed it just and necessary thus to stigmatize” people of African descent with “deep and enduring marks of inferiority and degradation.”¹³ Such appraisals did indeed endure well after the 14th amendment granted citizenship to African Americans in 1868 and long after they gained the legal right to vote. In fact, the stigmatization of Black bodies was crucial in maintaining the nation’s racially segregated social order and justifying Jim Crow laws. No longer able to deny outright their right to suffrage, leaders exploited the White citizenry’s racial predispositions, fanning the embers of latent biases anytime it suited their interests. These tactics paid political dividends, justifying policies aimed at curtailing Blacks’ access to the privileges and rights of citizenship. For example, in the years after their enfranchisement, African Americans mobilized throughout the South and achieved an unparalleled almost 90 percent voter turnout.¹⁴ By the 1890s, most Southern states had responded to these enthusiastic new voters by instituting poll taxes, literacy tests, and other policies aimed at disenfranchising them. In arguing for such measures, political leaders were clear that their intent was to “eliminate the darkey as a political factor” and thus ensure “complete supremacy of the White race in affairs of government.”¹⁵ Popular support for this goal, initiated by the so-called “Mississippi Plan” of 1890, would effectively draw on widely held assumptions about Blacks as “ignorant and vicious” and thus not “qualified by intelligence and character for the proper exercise” of the franchise.¹⁶

10. Amy Cuddy, Susan Fiske, and Peter Glick, “The BIAS Map: Behaviors from Intergroup Affect and Stereotypes,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92, no. 4 (2006): 631–48.

11. Erving Goffman, “Stigma and Social Identity,” *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 137–8.

12. Ron Scapp has argued that the shooting of Trayvon Martin raises an ontological question: what does it mean for a Black man “to be” in America? The suspicion that people of color are tacitly guilty of something “would always render them ‘out of place.’” See “Being in One’s Place: Race, Ontology and the Killing of Trayvon Martin,” *Ethnic Studies Review* 37–38, no. 1 (Summer 2017): 151–53.

13. Dred Scott v. Sandford, 60 US 393 (1857).

14. Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 69.

15. Virginia Senator Carter Glass, quoted in Waldman, *The Fight to Vote*, 84.

16. *Ibid.*, 84.

Such attributions were widely accepted and circulated, constituting “a socially shared sense of reality.”¹⁷ They structured social relations even in the absence of any prior contact, segregating citizens and short-circuiting the potential for building alliances or experiencing potentially transformative relationships.

These negative tactics and appraisals cannot be relegated to the distant past, however. Goffman’s theories provide a roadmap for understanding how stigmatization processes structure political and social relations in post-Trump America, deepening racial animus and partisan fault lines. The politics of stigma underlies much of what passes for policy-making today, as leaders stoke discriminatory attitudes to bolster support for punitive or restrictive policies. Conferring upon racialized bodies the stain of criminality, dereliction, or inadequacy—stigma relegates Black and Latino bodies to what Judith Butler calls “zones of inhabitability”:

“unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the “unlivable” is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.¹⁸

Many African American and Latino citizens inhabit “uninhabitable” zones—literal and figurative nether regions where their rights and privileges as citizens are not overtly negated or wholly endorsed. This is not the space of the undocumented alien—a clearly demarcated rhetorical and legal construct whose subjects belong “elsewhere.” Instead, this is the status of what we might call the “un-citizen,” one who occupies neither the realm of the ineligible noncitizen nor of the fully entitled citizen, an in-betweenness that reflects a chasm between the promise of citizenship and its fulfillment, between the word and the deed. The “un-citizen” is American by birth or naturalization but remains inherently “un-American” by nature (i.e., race) or culture (ethnicity); they are not deportable, but neither are they ever fully at home. “Home” in this sense is not merely a physical place, but “a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment.”¹⁹ Legally eligible to vote, “un-citizens” are deemed unworthy or incapable of exercising this right. As Malcolm X reminds us, “Sitting at the table doesn’t make you a diner. . . . Being born here in America doesn’t make you an American.”²⁰

The distinction Malcolm X makes between birthright citizenship and cultural citizenship remains as important today as it was in 1964 when he spoke those words, despite the many legal gains achieved since. Unlike the legal designation of “American” (“All persons born or naturalized in the United States”), “Americanness” is a cultural construct, a symbolic attribution based on widely shared notions about what values, traits, and behaviors differentiate Americans from other people. This construct avows certain key themes and idealized traits—individualism, self-reliance, the “Protestant work ethic”—drawing

17. Stephen C. Ainsley, Gaylene Becker, and Lorita Coleman, “Stigma Reconsidered,” in *The Dilemma of Difference: A Multidisciplinary View of Stigma* (New York: Plenum Press, 1986), 31.

18. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

19. Marco Antonsich, “Searching for Belonging: An Analytical Framework,” *Geography Compass* 4, no. 6 (2010): 646.

20. Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” Cleveland, OH (April 3, 1964). Full transcript available online, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~public/civilrights/ao146.html>

on both historical and mythic references for its meaning. Thus one of the ways that stigma effectively produces “un-citizens” is by dissociating individuals and groups from these formative qualities. The un-citizen is one whose identity has been “spoiled,” to use Goffman’s phrase—and is thus unalterably different; the “un-citizen” lacks the requisite character traits, history, or authenticity of the recognizably “all-American.” This state of negative exceptionalism is born out in studies using Implicit Association Tests (IAT), for example, which demonstrate strong automatic associations between “Whiteness” and “Americanness.”²¹ It is evident in our culture’s semantic slips, which like proverbial “Freudian slips” can reveal unconscious cultural attitudes.²² Melissa V. Harris-Lacewell calls attention to the tendency, even in academic scholarship, to use the term “citizen” or “American” when referring only to White citizens.²³ We might also recall the ways that America’s first Black president was often cast into the realm of the “un-citizen”—with the current president at the forefront of early conspiracy theories claiming that Barack Obama was not a “real American” or that his birth certificate was forged.²⁴ Gordon Liddy, one of President Nixon’s Watergate co-conspirators, even suggested during an MSNBC interview in 2009 that Obama might be “an illegal alien.”²⁵ Hoping to capitalize on such attitudes, the Republican National Committee harnessed these incipient suspicions by planning an aggressive fundraising campaign capitalizing on “fear” of President Obama.²⁶ Not surprisingly, a Public Policy poll conducted in 2011 found that 51 percent of Republican primary voters believed President Obama was not really American and therefore ineligible for the presidency.²⁷ We should note that John McCain, who ran against Obama in 2008, was born in the Panama Canal Zone, yet his “Americanness” was never in doubt.

There are many ways that Latinos and Blacks are exempted from full cultural citizenship in the United States, but here I will focus on the stigmatic frameworks that I see as most salient, consistent, and detrimental to their enfranchisement. These frameworks rely on deep-seated cultural associations and founding myths that are key in discourses

21. See, for example, Thierry Devos and Mahzarin R. Banaji, “American = White?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88, no. 3 (2005): 447–466.

Also see Nilanjana Dasgupta, Debbie E. McGhee, Anthony G. Greenwald, and Mahzarin R. Banaji, “Automatic Preference for White Americans: Eliminating the Familiarity Explanation,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 36 (2000): 316–328.

22. For example, Maine Gov. Paul LePage blamed a “slip of the tongue” for his remark that drug dealers were coming into the state and impregnating “White girls.” Nolan McGaskill, “Maine Gov. LePage blames ‘slip of the tongue’ for race-related comment,” *Politico* (Jan. 8, 2016).

Rick Santorum was plagued by such slips of the tongue during his run for the Republican presidential nomination. At a rally in Wisconsin on March 27, 2012, he stuttered, “We know, we know the candidate Barack Obama, what he was like. The anti-war government nig- uh, the uh America was a source for division around the world.” Quoted in Rose Burford-Rice, “‘I didn’t mean that: It was just a slip of the tongue’: Racial slips and gaffes in the public arena,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 57, no. 1 (2018): 21–42.

23. “The Heart of the Politics of Race: Centering Black People in the Study of White Racial Attitudes,” *Journal of Black Studies* 34, no. 2 (November 2003): 222–249.

24. For a detailed discussion of these tactics during the 2008 presidential campaign, see my Introduction to *Race 2008: Critical Reflections on a Historic Campaign*, ed. Myra Mendible (Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker Press, 2012).

25. Hardball with Chris Matthews, MSNBC, July 23, 2009.

26. A copy of the presentation was left in a hotel hosting the \$2,500-a-head Republican fundraising retreat. See <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0310/33866.html#ixzzokFaQyPpn>.

27. See Andy Barr, “51% of GOP voters: Obama foreign,” *Politico*, Feb. 15, 2011.

of “Americanness” and thus integral to one’s inclusion in the broader imaginary. The first depends on the power of the “work ethic” appeal, which asserts not only that Americans are self-sufficient and hardworking, but also implies that they do not depend on others (namely, the government) for their subsistence (Horatio Alger and the “self-made man” narratives). The second relies on a moral ethos, a set of myths that include icons of virtue (Honest Abe, George Washington and his cherry tree) and civilizing piety—or in Toby Miller’s description, “beloved early settlers, whose ethos is supposedly central to the United States” and particularly to the “keepers of the flame for a lost tribe of Yanqui whiteness.”²⁸ While these figures help us disavow the dishonesty, illegality, and even criminality that were also part of the nation’s founding and subsequent expansionism, they effectively mark the boundaries of cultural belonging. The nation’s foundational stories encode the language of stigma, triggering associations that brand Latinos and Blacks as qualitatively “different” and thus in need of more careful monitoring and policing.

THE LAZY FREELoadERS THEME

As Caroline Howarth explains, “Stigmatizing representations . . . are more than ways of seeing or cognitive maps: they filter into, and so construct, the institutionalized practices of differentiation, division and discrimination.”²⁹ Members of the nation’s two largest minority groups, African American and Latino, are consistently bound to these semantic borderlands, dissociated from hardworking, law-abiding, “authentic” Americans through both overt and subtle forms of stigmatization. In a 2012 Associated Press survey, for example, more than half of respondents associated words such as *violent* and *lazy* with African Americans and Latinos.³⁰ Not surprisingly, these attitudes were grist for the political mill during Obama’s 2012 reelection campaign and would make encore appearances under President Trump. At a Fox News-Wall Street Journal sponsored debate in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, in 2012, Newt Gingrich referred to President Obama as “the best food stamp president in history,” culling associations between the Black president and entitlement programs. Relying on racist stereotypes that attribute Blacks’ economic status to laziness or lack of willpower, Gingrich asserted the difference between “them” (Obama and the 95 percent of Blacks who supported him in the first election) and “us” [a majority White Republican audience, and by extension, “real” (i.e., “hardworking”) Americans]: “We believe in work. We believe people should learn to work and that we’re opposed to dependency”³¹ This stigmatizing tactic also underlies the Trump administration’s current effort to deny visas or legal permanent residency to applicants if they or their family members have received any taxpayer-funded benefit such as Medicaid, Section 8 housing

28. Toby Miller, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 72.

29. Caroline Howarth, “A Social Representation is not a quiet thing’: Exploring the Critical Potential of Social Representations Theory,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 45 (2006): 65–86.

30. “AP poll: US majority have prejudice against blacks,” *USA Today*, Oct. 27, 2012.

31. Joshua Green, “Newt Gingrich’s dodgy attack on food stamps,” *Bloomberg Business Week* (Jan. 19, 2012). For my analysis of racialized rhetoric during the 2012 campaign, see Myra Mendible, “The Politics of Race and Class in the Age of Obama,” *Revue de Recherche en Civilisation Américaine* 3 (2012).

vouchers, or food stamps, the underlying assumption being that immigrants come to America in order to live on welfare. According to the Secretary of Homeland Security, Kirstjen Nielsen, the proposed rule is intended “to promote immigrant self-sufficiency” and ensure that they do not “become burdens on American taxpayers.”³² Since a stigmatized identity does not arise from the group’s actual behavior, immigrants’ economic achievements do not necessarily mitigate the perception that they are “freeloaders” dependent upon government handouts paid for by “real” Americans’ hard-earned tax dollars. Thus the politics of stigma effectively deflects or ignores critical facts. For example, a new report (2017) puts a price tag on the Latino population in the United States: over two trillion dollars. Their economic power, says the report, would rank as the seventh largest in the world if the Latino GDP (Gross Domestic Product) were its own country. Latinos also consistently rank at the top of labor force participation rates. Stigmatized as lazy, male Latino noncitizens actually have an extremely high work force participation rate, over 90 percent for workers aged 25 to 49: “Latinos work more hours, work less in the public sector, and have the lowest rates of welfare utilization,” David Hayes-Bautista, Director for the Study of Latino Health and Culture at UCLA and co-author of the report, concludes. Yet despite their low relative burden to taxpayers, “their reward is the highest level of poverty in the nation.”³³

Exploiting negative predispositions toward stigmatized groups, leaders deflect blame and accountability, projecting these on target groups who are then held responsible not only for their own but for the nation’s problems. Thus the stigmatization of Blacks as “lazy” further fuels Whites’ resentment of entitlement programs such as Affirmative Action or welfare. For example, cultural sociologist Michele Lamont found that many of the White working class men she interviewed “underscore a concrete link between the perceived dependency of blacks, their laziness, and the taxes taken from their own paychecks.”³⁴ This is informed by years of media portrayals and political rhetoric that characterizes poverty as a “Black” problem—one attributable to “welfare queens” and “deadbeat dads” of color. Again, facts do not intrude on the politics of stigma: as Martin Gilens and others have shown, this racialization of entitlement programs in the United States endures despite the fact that most individuals receiving welfare benefits are not Black.³⁵ There is also an implied causal relationship in these frames between poverty and laziness, with Black subjects of poverty more likely to be depicted in negative, unsympathetic terms: “Stories on new policy initiatives tended to be both neutral in tone and dominated by images of whites, [while] more critical stories about existing programs, such as reports

32. See Yeganeh Torbati, “Trump administration moves to restrict immigrants who use public benefits,” Reuters (Sept. 22, 2018). For the proposed text, see “Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds,” Federal Register, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/10/10/2018-21106/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds>.

33. Werner Schink and David Hayes-Bautista, “Latino Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Report: Quantifying the Impact of American Hispanic Economic Growth” (June 2017). Latino Donor Collaborative, <http://latinodonorcollaborative.org/latino-gdp-report/>.

34. Michele Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), 177.

35. Martin Gilens, “How the Poor Became Black: The Racialization of American Poverty in the Mass Media,” in *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform*, edited by Sanford F. Schram et al., (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2003), 101–130.

on the Byrd Committee's investigation of welfare abuse, were more likely to contain pictures of blacks."³⁶ Gilens contends that "the media's tendency to associate African Americans with the undeserving poor reflects—and reinforces—the centuries-old stereotype of blacks as lazy."³⁷

The notion that Latinos and African Americans are "public charges," "burdens," or "lazy" is useful when defending initiatives that marginalize, alienate, or disenfranchise these groups. For example, asked why he opposed automatically registering Alabamians when they reach voting age, Republican John Merrill, the secretary of state responsible for overseeing elections, responded, "If you're too sorry or lazy to get up off of your rear and to go register to vote, or to register electronically, and then to go vote, then you don't deserve that privilege."³⁸ Similarly, the stigma of "laziness" that plagues Latinos is deployed in defense of hardline immigration policies. For example, in explaining why President Trump would not extend the deadline to register for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) protection, White House Chief of Staff John Kelly remarked that if they "were too lazy to get off their asses" and register they would face deportation.³⁹ Here again, "lazy" serves as a useful code word for African Americans and Latinos—exploiting the politics of stigma to cast these two groups in opposition to "hardworking," "real" Americans.

PATRIOT GATEKEEPERS: CRIMINAL ALIENS, FRAUDULENT VOTERS, AND OTHER SCOURGES

Publicly mediated emotions have an impact on policy-making: leaders can transform otherwise personal grievances or events into matters of national significance, activating and cultivating predispositions as a means to mobilize voters and achieve their political ambitions. Negative feelings aroused by economic woes, security concerns, and the perceived loss of personal or national power can be harnessed to "bring publics into being, organizing diffuse, sometimes inchoate beliefs and moralities into political action."⁴⁰ In recent years, anxieties about the effects of growing domestic racial diversity as well as globalization fuel the perception that "White civilization" is under siege. This alleged erosion of White privilege—particularly White male privilege—has earned considerable media attention and evoked elegiac rants from conservative pundits in the United States.⁴¹ The economic impact of the great recession added weight to the notion that Whites are losing control. But it was the perceived status threat, rather than economic concerns, that weighed most heavily on White voters during the 2016 presidential election: a 2018 research study by the National Academy of Sciences (which

36. *Ibid.*, 111.

37. *Ibid.*, 102.

38. Pema Levy, "Don't Blame Black Voters If Roy Moore Wins. Blame Alabama's Secretary of State," *Mother Jones*, NBCnews.com, Dec. 11, 2017.

39. Frank Thorp V, "Trump chief of staff John Kelly suggests some Dreamers 'too lazy' and 'too afraid' to sign up for DACA," NBCnews.com (Feb. 6, 2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/white-house-chief-staff-john-kelly-dreamers-won-t-be-n845116>.

40. Janice Irvine, "Transient Feelings: Sex Panics and the Politics of Emotions," *GLQ* 14 no. 1 (2007): 11.

41. The perceived threat against White culture after Obama's election was a recruitment tool for Storm Front, a major White-Nationalist website, which logged 32,000 new users within the first three months after Obama's inauguration in 2008.

included both experimental evidence and panel survey evidence) found “significant political consequences from a rising sense of status threat among dominant groups in the United States.”⁴² It concluded that candidate preferences in 2016 reflected increasing anxiety among high-status groups rather than economic complaints among low-status groups.

Against this backdrop, the politics of stigma offers a panacea for what ails an anxious hierarchy: a means to tighten the reins on designated others and assuage bruised egos. Restoring America’s “greatness” becomes the rallying cry in a figurative war against internal and external threats to the “American way of life” (parodied by critics as the Make America White Again slogan). Much like the fear of miscegenation that justified restrictive policies in the Jim Crow South, today’s politics of stigma fuels the notion that Latinos and Blacks need more rigorous monitoring and control. The stigma of criminality is the engine that drives these appeals, especially in the area of immigration “reform.” It has been key in the Trump administration’s aims to “build a wall” and restrict immigration from Latin America. These efforts have had broad appeal precisely because of the public’s predisposition to associate Latinos and Blacks with criminality. While this precedes Trump’s campaign and subsequent election, it has certainly increased his political capital in both contexts.

The Anti-Defamation League reports that unlike the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis, who openly display their racism and bigotry, many anti-immigrant groups use patriotic themes and coded language to demonize immigrants and foreigners. They describe immigrants as “third world invaders” who will destroy American culture, “colonize” the country, or attack our “way of life.”⁴³ The National Council of La Raza documents numerous references to immigrants as criminals, including terms such as “flotsam and jetsam that seeks to float into our territory,” “lawlessness and chaos,” “a beautiful nation turned into a jungle,” “drug running,” and “rampant criminality.”⁴⁴ Television commentator Pat Buchanan railed on Fox News stating, “You’ve got a wholesale invasion, the greatest invasion in human history, coming across your southern border, changing the composition and character of your country.”⁴⁵ A study of the way the press frames policy issues regarding Latino immigrants found that they are frequently portrayed as undocumented, often alongside images of border arrests and detentions. Even when Latino immigrants are shown working, they are disproportionately engaged in low-skilled activities. The analysis demonstrates a “tendency to frame immigrants in a negative light, consistent with a ‘threat’ narrative but inconsistent with actual immigrant demographics.” The authors argue that these “findings are particularly important in light of research establishing that such portrayals contribute to more hostile attitudes about immigration in the United States as well as greater support for punitive immigration policy among Whites.”⁴⁶ Immigration-related media

42. Diana C. Mutz, “Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States* (PNAS) 115, no. 19 (May 8, 2018), <http://www.pnas.org/content/115/19/E4330>.

43. Anti-Defamation League *Immigrants Targeted: Extremist Rhetoric Moves into the Mainstream* (New York, NY: Anti-Defamation League, 2008).

44. “Code Words of Hate: Demonization of Minorities throughout U.S. History,” NCLR Factsheet (2010), http://co458192.cdn.cloudfiles.rackspacecloud.com/Code_Wordsfactsheet.pdf.

45. Hannity and Colmes, Fox News, November 26, 2007.

46. Emily M. Farris & Heather Silber Mohamed, “Picturing Immigration: How the Media Criminalizes Immigrants,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 6, no. 4 (2018): 814–824.

spectacles construct knowledge about Latinos generally and about immigration, citizenship, and national belonging. These often draw on what Leo Chavez calls the “Latino Threat Narrative,” which posits that Latinos are somehow “different” from previous immigrant groups and that they are unwilling or incapable of assimilating.⁴⁷

Stigmatization ignores reality in favor of the politically expedient. Thus facts are irrelevant in efforts to pass tough—even cruel—anti-immigrant policies, such as the zero-tolerance policy enacted by President Trump that separated undocumented parents from their children. Garnering support for these kinds of measures, he repeatedly exploited stigma as a political weapon, for example, branding Central American and particularly Mexican immigrants as “rapists,” “murderers,” or “gang members,” and most recently, accusing a caravan of asylum seekers of harboring Middle Eastern terrorists. President Trump’s proposed changes to immigration policies also target immigrants from Latin America and Africa. In a particularly telling remark, the president asked lawmakers during an immigration meeting, “Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?”⁴⁸ Immigrants from the countries in question, specifically Haiti, El Salvador, and African countries, carry the burden of stigma—unlike those associated with countries that the president deems more “desirable”—namely, Norway. The racial stigmas underlying such assessments are not lost on most Americans.

The stigma of disease and criminality, endorsed at the highest levels of American politics, has been normalized to such an extent that even the most absurd accusations about Latino immigrants are repeated with a straight face. Thus the right-wing magazine *The New American* ran a story about the caravan headlined: “Will Migrant Caravan Kill Your Child—With Disease?” David Ward, a former agent of United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, claimed during a Fox News segment that the migrants in the caravan were “coming in with diseases such as smallpox and leprosy and [tuberculosis] that are going to infect our people in the United States,” although smallpox and leprosy were both eradicated decades ago. President Trump’s characterizations of Latinos as dangerous people clamoring to breach the country’s borders supports such hysteria: “You wouldn’t believe how bad these people are,” he said during a round-table discussion at the White House. “These aren’t people, these are animals, and we’re taking them out of the country at a level and at a rate that’s never happened before,” presumably referring to MS-13 gang members coming across the border. Although MS-13 is actually a domestic gang (founded in Los Angeles), the implications suggested by such rhetoric are clear: referring to some undocumented immigrants as “animals” further alienates, differentiates, and endangers not just “illegals” but all Latinos.⁴⁹ Since President Trump’s election, for example, hate

47. Leo R. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 5.

48. Eli Watkins and Abby Phillips, “Trump decries immigrants from ‘shithole countries’ coming to US,” CNN, Jan. 12, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/11/politics/immigrants-shithole-countries-trump/index.html>.

49. This kind of stigmatizing rhetoric mirrors use of the “superpredator” stigma popularized in the mid-1990s, a designation mostly used against Black male juveniles that equated them with predatory animals. As a result, over 80 percent of juveniles sentenced to life without parole under the superpredator dragnet in Illinois, for example, were minorities. See Priyanka Boghani, “They Were Sentenced as ‘Superpredators.’ Who Were They Really?” PBS Frontline, May 2, 2017.

crimes against Latinos have risen sharply, and native-born Latinos are increasingly subjected to casual insults and harassment in their daily lives.⁵⁰ Beyond the emotional damage inflicted on persons stigmatized as “invaders,” “animals,” or “infestations,” there is the risk that such characterizations work to authorize and elicit violent responses. Referring to the caravan of Central Americans walking toward the United States border seeking asylum, President Trump warned that soldiers could fire at anyone who throws rocks: “They want to throw rocks at our military, our military fights back. I say, consider it a rifle.”⁵¹ The notion that United States military personnel would fire upon asylum seekers at our southern border—many of whom are women and children—would be intolerable were it not for a politics of stigma that has predisposed citizens to tolerate such contingencies.

Under the guise of protecting America’s borders, White nationalists exploit the politics of racial stigma to actively recruit soldiers. Stigmatizing rhetoric clears the way for vigilantism masquerading as justice, establishing relationships between state and non-state actors who express shared goals. Since the 1970s, White supremacist groups and so-called patriot groups have been actively patrolling the border. David Duke (White nationalist who served as Republican State Representative for Louisiana from 1989 to 1992) founded Klan Border Watch in 1977, and other groups followed, with names such as “Save Our State,” “Voices of Citizens Together,” “Civilian Homeland Defense,” “Minuteman Civil Defense Corps,” “Border Guardians,” and “Border Patriot Alliance,” names resonating with American historical and patriotic themes. Some are armed with AR-15s and most mimic politicians’ rhetoric, paradigms, and posture.⁵² Contrary to popular perception, these should not be discounted as “fringe” groups. Many actually identify with the state, seeing themselves as an extension of local law enforcement rather as law-breakers themselves; many have entered the mainstream, winning approval or complicity from news celebrities such as Lou Dobbs and Sean Hannity or by actor and former governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. In Texas, for instance, the Bee County Sheriff attended minutemen meetings with other law enforcement officials and stopped going only after someone shouted, “Can’t we just shoot them!?”⁵³ Such alliances are forged and maintained by stigmatizing rhetoric that demeans Latino culture as inherently lawless. Anti-immigration politicians fan these flames, repeatedly claiming that Latino immigrants have a higher proclivity to commit crime and are therefore a threat to public safety—despite numerous studies showing that

50. Some examples: a woman wearing a T-shirt with the Puerto Rican flag at a neighborhood park is repeatedly harassed by a White man telling her it is “un-American” and asking whether she is a citizen (See Susannah Cullinane and Amanda Jackson, “A Man Harasses a Woman for Wearing a Puerto Rico Shirt,” CNN, July 11, 2018); a woman approaches her neighbor’s Mexican-American landscaper (a native-born US citizen) and tells him he does not belong here, that his people are rapists and murderers and he should “go back to Mexico.” (See “You’re all illegal. Go Back to Mexico,” Chicago Tribune Media Wire, June 26, 2018). For a list of documented incidents of the “Trump-effect,” go to Americasvoice.org and click on their “Trump Hate Map.”

51. Caitlin Dickson, “Trump, stoking caravan fears, says troops will fire on migrants if they ‘throw rocks,’” Yahoo News, Nov. 1, 2018, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/trump-stoking-caravan-fears-says-troops-will-fire-migrants-throw-rocks-003953495.html>.

52. See Roxanne L. Doty, “States of Exception on the Mexico-US Border: Security, ‘Decisions,’ and Civilian Border Patrols,” *International Political Sociology* 1 (2007): 113–137.

53. Sang Hea Kil, Cecilia Menjivar, and Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Securing Borders: Patriotism, Vigilantism and the Brutalization of the US American Public,” *Sociology of Crime, Law, and Deviance* 13 (May 2009): 307.

immigrants actually commit crimes at a lower level than native-born Americans. Goffman reminds us that a stigmatized group identity is fabricated and not based on negative attributes that the group “could in fact be proven to possess” but on our assumptions about what they are. Thus, Lou Dobbs often asserts on his program that one third of those in federal prisons are noncitizens, a claim that has repeatedly been proven false.⁵⁴

An affective matrix of suspicion and resentment underlies such responses, revealing attitudes that shape policy preferences. Research shows that Whites overwhelmingly oppose policies regarding increase in immigration, affirmative action, bilingual education, and welfare/public benefits; some rationalize the shooting of unarmed young Black men or of “illegals” as acts of “self-defense.” Despite the variety of histories, backgrounds, and groups that are lumped together under the “Hispanic” label, stigmatizing processes make no such distinctions. As a study based on numerous in-depth interviews conducted by sociologists concluded, “Whites make no distinctions among Latinos by national origin, status, or generation. Respondents use racialized stereotypes to express that Latino culture is inferior, and they frequently describe Latinos as similar to African Americans.”⁵⁵ Thus the stigmatizing tactics used against Latinos and African Americans share recurrent themes. While “cimmigration” (the racialized shaming and stigmatizing of immigrants as criminals) disproportionately affects Latinos, these tactics draw from the same wellspring that historically fed anti-Black politics. For example, criminalizing Black bodies was integral to the implementation of the “Republican Southern Strategy,” which beginning in the 1960s, exploited negative stereotypes of Black criminals in order to win the White Southern vote and gain support for tough crime policies. The strategy relied on code words rather than blatantly racist appeals, masking its intent by tapping latent associations. As Michael Tonry argues, “The Republican Southern Strategy, and its more subtly coded successors, cynically manipulated the anxieties of southern and working class Whites by focusing on issues such as crime and welfare fraud that served as code words for race.”⁵⁶ Disavowed, race was shoved into the closet, as it were, and stigma took over the house. In 1981, Lee Atwater, political consultant and strategist for the Republican Party and developer of the Willie Horton ads used in the 1988 presidential campaign against Michael Dukakis, explained,

You start out in 1954 by saying, “Nigger, nigger, nigger.” By 1968 you can’t say “nigger”—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states’ rights and all that stuff. You’re getting so abstract now [that] you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than Whites.⁵⁷

Although the Southern Strategy is no longer official Republican Party policy, its principal tactic, stoking prevailing negative White attitudes toward African Americans and

54. Ruben Rumbaut et al., “Debunking the Myth of Immigrant Criminality,” Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, June 1, 2006, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/debunking-myth-immigrant-criminality-imprisonment-among-first-and-second-generation-young>.

55. Celia Olivia Lacayo, “Perpetual Inferiority: Whites’ Racial Ideology toward Latinos,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 3 no. 4 (2017): 566–579.

56. Michael Tonry, “The Social, Psychological, and Political Causes of Racial Disparities in the American Criminal Justice System,” *Crime & Justice* 39 (2010): 304.

57. Bob Herbert, “Impossible, Ridiculous, Repugnant,” *New York Times*, October 6, 2005.

Latinos, endures—shaping assumptions about who is a criminal and who is a victim and whose rights can be infringed upon with impunity.

Thus we have seen recent efforts to fuel White resentment with dire predictions and scare tactics in order to restrict Latino and Black voting rights. Data show that states where minority turnouts increased following Obama's election were more likely to pass restrictive policies and that these passed more frequently in legislatures under Republican control. In fact, many state lawmakers seem bent on reversing hard-won gains made in the post-Civil Rights era, perhaps fearing the threat that a multicultural constituency poses to candidates who have built their political muscle on appeals to racism, xenophobia, or nativism. Racial stigma maintains attitudes that cast doubt on the legitimacy of Black and Latino voters, spawning multiple efforts to limit their access to the polls: scaling back early-voting initiatives, repealing same-day voter registration, restricting registration drives, redistricting in ways that dilute Black and Latino voting blocks, and pushing for rigid voter identification statutes. The Supreme Court's 2013 ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder* greatly reduced federal oversight of voting rules in states and counties previously covered by the Voting Rights Act. As a result, states with a history of discrimination are no longer accountable to the Department of Justice. Recognizing the impact this would have on minority enfranchisement, Catherine Lhamon, chair of the United States Commission on Civil Rights (a bipartisan federal watchdog agency), aptly noted that "these kinds of mechanisms send a message to voters of color in particular that we are less American than other Americans."⁵⁸ A recent study of these trends found that "restrictive proposals were substantially more likely to be introduced in states with larger African-American . . . and higher minority turnout, as well as in states where both minority and low-income turnout recently increased."⁵⁹ It is also no coincidence that measures restricting turnout were most prevalent in congressional districts that saw the fastest growth of Latino eligible voters in the country.⁶⁰ In a recent study on the effects of more restrictive voter ID laws, researchers at the University of California San Diego found a clear link between voter ID laws and voter turnout among racial minorities.⁶¹

Strict voter ID laws have a real effect on who votes and who does not, increasing the gap in voter turnout between Latinos and Whites and between Blacks and Whites and thus securing Whites' electoral power. Again, stigmatizing rhetoric helps justify such measures. Sponsors of a strict voter ID bill introduced in Arizona in 2011, for example, were caught on tape devising a plan to depress the turnout of Black voters, referring to them as "aborigines" and "illiterates" who would ride "H.U.D.-financed buses" to the polls.⁶² After Obama's re-election in 2012, North Carolina passed HB 589, which eliminated early voting entirely, eliminated same-day registration, and established onerous ID requirements.

58. "An Assessment of Minority Voting Rights Access in the United States," US Commission on Civil Rights, 2018 Statutory Report, https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/2018/Minority_Voting_Access_2018.pdf.

59. See Keith Gunnar Bentele and Erin O'Brien, "Convincing Evidence that States Aim to Suppress Minority Voting," Scholars Strategy Network, Sept. 3, 2013, <http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/content/convincing-evidence-states-aim-suppress-minority-voting#sthash.ZP7X4vI6.dpuf>.

60. Antonio Flores and Mark Hugo Lopez "Key facts about Latinos in the 2018 midterm elections," Pew Research Center, Oct. 15, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/15/key-facts-about-latinos-in-the-2018-midterm-elections/>.

61. Zoltan Hajnal, Nazita Lajevardi, and Lindsay Nielson, "Voter Identification Laws and the Suppression of Minority Votes," *The Journal of Politics* 79 no. 2 (2017): 363–379.

62. Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 85.

This law affected over 1.2 million people. It was ultimately struck down by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, which noted that it intentionally and “disproportionately affected African Americans.” Texas has a long and ugly history of blocking Blacks and Latinos from voting. According to the Texas Civil Rights Project, “Texas is the most restrictive state in the union when it comes to voter registration” after laws implemented in 2011 by the GOP-led legislature.⁶³ Out of three million unregistered voters in Texas, 2.2 million are Latinos and 750,000 are African Americans—more unregistered voters than the total population of 20 states. Its strict voter-ID laws have repeatedly been struck down by the courts for discriminating against people of color, but the state’s restrictions on voter-registration drives, which prevent millions of Black and Latino citizens from participating in the political process, have received scant attention. Interestingly, at the time of Obama’s election in 2008, no state required identification to vote. That same year, strict voter identification laws were implemented in Georgia and Indiana, and by 2015, 34 states had passed some form of voter identification law.

During the 2018 midterm elections, Georgia stood out for its voter suppression tactics: it had closed 214 polling places in recent years, cut back on early voting, and purged one and a half million people from its rolls since 2012, including nearly 670,000 in 2017 alone. In response to Stacey Abrams’ campaign, an African American woman vying to become the first to be elected governor, efforts to stigmatize and thus repress minority voters only increased. The Associated Press reported that the secretary of state, Brian Kemp, who was also Abrams’ opponent in the race, was blocking 53,000 voter registrations in Georgia—80 percent of these African Americans and other people of color.⁶⁴ In response to the resulting outcry, Kemp, a loyal supporter of President Trump, countered that Abrams was “banking on illegal immigrants to secure victory for her at the ballot box,” a claim he supported with a clip from *Fox & Friends* accusing Abrams of including “documented and undocumented” people among her supporters. Again, the notion that Black and Latino citizens are more likely to engage in illegal practices or to conspire with “aliens” would strain credulity were it not for their always already “spoiled” identities.

While Georgia is one of the most salient examples of attempts to justify disenfranchisement, it is certainly not the only state where conflicts of interest alone should stir public outrage. A recent ProPublica investigation focused on events in Dodge City, Kansas—a city with a majority Latino population where the single poll station in town (located next to the country club in the White part of the city) was moved outside the city limits before the election, then mailed notices to new voters listing the wrong address for the relocated polling station.⁶⁵ The Secretary of State, Kris Kobach, had been given unprecedented power to prosecute election crimes by the former governor, Republican Sam Brownback. Kobach built his political career on restricting immigration and tightening voting requirements. He helped draft Arizona’s “show me your papers” law in 2011, which authorized

63. Ari Berman, “Texas’s Voter-Registration Laws Are Straight Out of the Jim Crow Playbook,” *The Nation*, Oct. 6, 2016.

64. Days before the 2018 midterm election, US District Judge Eleanor Ross in Atlanta ruled against Kemp’s restrictions.

65. “New Voters in Dodge City, Kansas given wrong polling location,” *Mercurynews.com*, Oct. 25, 2018.

local police to demand citizenship papers from anyone they suspected of being in the country illegally.⁶⁶ Kobach also advocated for restoring the citizenship question in the 2020 Census forms, a question eliminated in 1950. In 2013, claiming widespread voter fraud, Kobach signed a statute into Kansas law requiring proof of citizenship in order to register to vote, a law also struck down by the judge who found “no credible evidence that a substantial number of noncitizens registered to vote.”⁶⁷ In fact, a detailed study by a Loyola University law professor found that between 2000 and 2014, there were only 31 reported instances of voter impersonation out of more than 1 billion ballots cast—most of these actually due to administrative or other errors rather than intentional deception or fraud. Even before the trial, Kobach was fined \$1,000 for making “patently misleading representations” about voter fraud documents, a fine he conveniently paid with a state credit card. Similarly, President Trump has repeatedly made unsubstantiated claims about widespread voter fraud—even tweeting that he would have won the popular vote in 2016 if not for the “millions of people” who voted illegally. Thus in 2017, when Trump created the short-lived “Voter Fraud Commission,” he selected Kobach. Most telling, however, is the fact that the same official who led efforts aimed at restricting voters’ access was charged with overseeing the 2018 Kansas midterm elections in which he ran for governor of the state. After Kobach lost to his Democratic opponent, the founder and editor of the neo-Nazi Daily Stormer website, Andrew Anglin, praised Kobach as “a solid, solid guy” and expressed the hope that he would join Trump’s administration. Anglin had urged his followers to vote in the midterms exclaiming, “You can take it to the bank: American elections are now a race war. It is us against the brown hordes.”⁶⁸ Based on Anglin’s own rhetorical framing, it appears that the “brown hordes” won this round—as Kobach lost his election bid.⁶⁹

Despite questionable evidence to support the notion that voter fraud is a real problem, despite research that shows that these laws are passed almost exclusively by Republicans in states with large Black populations, and despite evidence showing that poll workers disproportionately ask minorities for identification, why are most Americans not outraged by such vote suppression maneuvers? A March 2014 Rasmussen poll found that 78 percent of Americans support more restrictive voter ID requirements.⁷⁰ An American Barometer

66. Key provisions in this law were struck down by the Supreme Court in 2012.

67. Jessica Huseman, “How the Case for Voter Fraud Was Tested—and Utterly Failed,” ProPublica, June 19, 2018. For a book-length study of voter fraud allegations, see Lorraine Minnite, *The Myth of Voter Fraud* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010).

68. The Southern Poverty Law Center, “Midterm elections in Trump era bring high engagement from racists, extremists,” Nov. 7, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/11/07/midterm-elections-trump-era-bring-high-engagement-racists-extremists>.

69. He was defeated in a deep red state by one of the record number of women running for office this election cycle: Democrat Laura Kelly.

70. Courtney Coren, “Rasmussen Poll: 78 Percent of Voters Support Voter ID Laws,” Newsmax, March 25, 2014. Also see, Ariel R. White, Noah L. Nathan, and Julie K. Faller, “What Do I Need to Vote? Bureaucratic Discretion and Discrimination by Local Election Officials,” *American Political Science Review* 1 (2015): 1–14; Jon C. Rogowski and Cathy J. Cohen, “Black and Latino Youth Disproportionately Affected by Voter Identification Laws in the 2012 Election,” in *Black Youth Project*, 2014; and Lonna Rae Atkeson, Lisa Ann Bryant, Thad E. Hall, Kyle Saunders, and Michael Alvarez, “A new barrier to participation: heterogeneous application of voter identification policies,” *Electoral Studies* 29 no. 1 (2014): 66–73.

poll conducted by Hill.TV and the HarrisX polling company found that 49 percent of those polled believed that voter fraud was a bigger issue than voter suppression. In October of 2018, *The Hill* reported that according to the pollster, “voter suppression is rooted in fear of changing demographics.” I would suggest that many citizens have been predisposed to suspect Latinos and Blacks of conducting potentially criminal behavior, of being more likely to commit fraud, or of being too ignorant or misinformed to vote. This adds insult to injury, as not only is it disconcerting that such attitudes persist—even if unconsciously—but that they are so widely shared and normalized in America’s political culture.

Our outrage, revulsion, disgust, distress, or, more mildly, concern in response to an unjust or unfair act against another can trigger our participation in social action. As Judith Butler notes, “Our ability to respond with outrage depends upon a tacit realization that there is a worthy life that has been injured or lost.”⁷¹ Negative predispositions facilitate moral disengagement, as stigmatized individuals or groups are less likely to evoke empathy or to be seen as “worthy victims.” News stories about “worthy victims” will make a more explicit effort to humanize victims and to evoke empathy than stories about “unworthy” victims. We must be able to identify with the person enough to warrant them blameless and therefore to perceive them as victims. Stigma distances and dissociates, short-circuiting our capacity for empathy and involvement. In this case observers can morally disengage, while perpetrators can resort to what psychologist Albert Bandura calls “euphemistic labelling,” for example, describing attacks as retaliation or self-defense. Perpetrators’ sense of guilt is reduced by this sort of labelling, which changes the way they think about events and victims. The politics of stigma can thus predispose citizens to “blame the victim” or misattribute culpability. Numerous studies support the assertion that both conscious and subconscious negative associations influence such judgments. Studies show that when asked to envision a drug addict or a violent criminal, most White people assume that the offender is Black. In one study, participants were shown pictures of Black and White criminal suspects, only some of whom were carrying guns. Asked to imagine that they were police officers, participants were told they should shoot suspects holding guns. The findings strongly confirm implicit bias: “Among suspects carrying guns, Whites were less likely than blacks to be “shot”; among suspects not carrying firearms, blacks were more likely to be shot. This aspect of cultural disenfranchisement can have deadly consequences for stigmatized groups. It may help to explain why after a uniformed Black security guard restrained an active shooter in a bar recently, the police assumed he was the bad guy and shot him dead, or why a legally armed young Black man trying to protect shoppers at a mall shooting was himself shot and killed by police.”⁷² The predispositions that individuals bring to a situation shape its meaning, prompting different reactions to the same event. As Samantha Reis and Brian Martin have shown, “the concept of identity can help explain

71. Judith Butler, “Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect,” in *Frames of War* (London: Verso, 2009), 54.

72. Jemel Roberson, a 26-year-old security guard, hoped to become a police officer. See Pierre Meilhan and Darran Simon, “Suburban Chicago Security Guard was Killed by Police While ‘doing his job,’ Lawyer Says,” CNN.com, Nov. 14, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/13/us/security-officer-police-shooting-suburbanchicago/index.html>. Similarly, Emantic Fitzgerald Bradford Jr., was licensed to carry a gun and had prior military training. See John Elegen, “An Alabama Mall Shooting, a Black Man’s Death, and a Debate over Race and Guns,” *New York Times*, Nov. 29, 2018.

why individuals support either the perpetrator or target: whichever one is seen as part of one's own group is more likely to be defended."⁷³ To individuals who bear racial stigmas, even routine daily encounters are potentially dangerous.

As an instrument of power, stigmas legitimize and facilitate the dehumanization or devaluing of certain bodies, fueling support for a range of punitive policies, discriminatory gestures, and even violent confrontations. In the years leading to the signing of the Voting Rights Act, thousands marched and countless suffered or died in the struggle to achieve suffrage and recognition as full citizens. Fifty years later, the struggle is less overt but no less important. Members of a stigmatized group can be excluded, alienated, disenfranchised—even killed—with impunity, for the victim is always already guilty. Identified with a flawed and indelible set of traits, stigmatized groups are relegated to the margins of society, bound to an identity that is static and devoid of agency. When stigmatized persons internalize the negative qualities ascribed to them and do not recognize these as cultural constructs, their capacity for self-respect, social agency, and community can be deeply, even fatally, compromised. This is perhaps the most profound effect of cultural disenfranchisement, as stigmatized groups may respond by relinquishing their claim to full participatory citizenship, feeling powerless to affect political change and thus staying home on Election Day.⁷⁴ ■

73. Samantha Reis and Brian Martin, "Psychological dynamics of outrage against injustice," *Peace Research: The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 40, no.1 (2008): 5–23.

74. According to Pew Research, just 16.0% of eligible Latinos ages 18 to 35 voted in 2014, while the black voter turnout rate declined for the first time in 20 years in the 2016 presidential election. See Jens Manuel Krogstad and Mark Hugo Lopez, "Black voter turnout fell in 2016, even as a record number of Americans cast ballots," Pew Research Center, May 12, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/12/black-voter-turnout-fell-in-2016-even-as-a-record-number-of-americans-cast-ballots/>. Latinos and African Americans seemed to reverse this trend during the 2018 midterm election however, perhaps in response to the onslaught of highly visible attacks they faced from the nation's leaders. As a result, New Mexico elected Michelle Lujan Grisham, the first Democratic Latina governor in the US; Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a 28-year-old Bronx-native, unseated 10-term incumbent Rep. Joe Crowley in New York's 14th Congressional District. African Americans Stacey Abrams and Andrew Gillum in Georgia and Florida, respectively, came within just a few thousand votes of victory in states where Republicans have long dominated. Taking into account studies that showed that Obama's race cost him 10% among Whites but gained him 2% among Blacks, we are left to wonder how these candidates might have fared in a climate where "Blackness" was not stigmatized. See D. Kinder and A. Dale-Riddle, *The End of Race? Obama, 2008, and Racial Politics in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).