

HOW  
PUBLIC POLICY  
IMPACTS  
RACIAL INEQUALITY

EDITED BY  
JOSH GRIMM  
AND  
JAIME LOKE



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**MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

ROBERT MANN, SERIES EDITOR

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# INTRODUCTION

JOSH GRIMM AND JAIME LOKE

On July 15, 2017, an all-too-familiar tragedy played out in Minneapolis when forty-year-old resident Justine Damond called authorities to report what she thought was a rape occurring in an alley outside of her home. Police arrived to investigate, and not long afterward, Damond was dead from a gunshot wound to the abdomen, killed by one of the officers on the scene. Over the next few days, statements were released on both sides, police initially positing fears of ambush before promising justice, the victim's family telling the world about their loss of a caring, kind woman who was going to get married in less than a month. Inevitably, it was revealed that police body cameras were not recording when Damond was shot. This came just weeks after the officer who shot and killed Philando Castile (and was caught doing so from multiple camera angles) was acquitted of manslaughter charges. Again, the narrative was one that had been seen time and time again, with one important difference: the victim was a white woman, the officer a black immigrant.

As with so many things online, outrage ensued. Sensationalistic headlines peppered far-right populist websites. An *InfoWars* headline read: "Washington Post Worries about 'Islamophobia' after Somali Cop Kills White Woman." *The Washington Feed* stated, "Unarmed White Woman Murdered in Minnesota, Dems SILENT after Shooter's ID Revealed." *Freedom Daily* announced, "First Migrant Muslim Police Officer MURDERS Blonde Girl in COLD BLOOD—You Won't Believe DISGUSTING Reason Why."<sup>1</sup> The comments on social media focused on the hypocrisy, with one side pointing out the hypocrisy of commenters attacking the police officer when normally they default to Blue Lives Matter, and the other side explaining that every situation must be judged on a case-by-case basis.

The story is intriguing because it intersects with so many different aspects of race: immigration, politics, class, criminal justice, media por-

trayals. The policeman's status as a Muslim Somali immigrant seemed to be fused to his name, at least if you were watching conservative news networks; Fox News led almost every segment with his background, while CNN and MSNBC barely mentioned it.<sup>2</sup> Days later, Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges—who had praised Mohamed Noor's work as a police officer—was mocked by Michele Bachmann, who said Noor was an “affirmative-action hire by the hijab-wearing mayor of Minneapolis.”<sup>3</sup> Damond's story was laced with socioeconomic status markers—she lived in an “affluent neighborhood,” she was a yoga instructor, she taught meditation. And the understanding of the story can vary wildly based on which news outlet was the source of information. Overall, the story captures the complicated pervasiveness of racial prejudice in the United States.

Racism is a constantly shifting, socially constructed phenomenon through which stereotypes are created or reinforced by the perceived connection between skin color and a culturally homogenous set of characteristics regarding behavior, attitudes, and beliefs. While race is a social construct,<sup>4</sup> it has real effects,<sup>5</sup> reflecting the unequal levels of power between racial groups.<sup>6</sup> Race was constructed biologically, meaning certain traits (laziness, stupidity, aggression, and so forth) were defined as inherent in people of color—and therefore absent in whites.<sup>7</sup> Race becomes less a category and more a form of power that can, at times, be wielded by people of color but is most often relegated to whites. Despite the claims of many politicians, pundits, and even the occasional researcher, racial prejudice remains prevalent in the United States today.

Over the past fifty years, expression of racial prejudice has become more covert. University of Illinois professor Maria Krysan notes that, “In today's contemporary race relations, there's pressure to appear not racist, and embrace racial equality. The more privacy you give a white person to express their attitudes, the less liberal they become.”<sup>8</sup> Essentially, rather than the aforementioned biological explanations for observed differences, individuals chalk those differences up to cultural reasons. Devine and Elliot's essential work sought to examine a series of studies to determine if stereotypes were actually fading over time.<sup>9</sup> They added to an established list of stereotypical cues with subtler synonyms to see if attitudes persisted. They found that strong, negative stereotypes still exist toward blacks but that these have changed in form. For

instance, when the questions had first been asked in the 1930s, blatant terms for stereotypes registered strong responses that identified blacks with words such as “lazy,” “ignorant,” and “dirty.” By the 1970s, those words weren’t registering nearly as many responses; Blacks were still being associated with stereotypes, but it was through subtler synonyms, such as “arrogant” and “loud.” In their most recent adaptation, Devine and Elliot found that different words (“rhythmic” and “talkative”) were still being used to describe all blacks. In-depth interviews have garnered similar results, with respondents speaking with racial code words<sup>10</sup> or sometimes speaking in frankly racist terms by simply prefacing those statements with a disclaimer, such as the dreaded “I’m not a racist, but. . .”<sup>11</sup>

Racial prejudice studies have also changed by differentiating between implicit and explicit prejudice. Explicit prejudice is typically expressed through actions and is therefore more easily controlled, whereas implicit prejudice manifests itself through subtle behavior and language because it is much more difficult to suppress. The expression of racial prejudice may have become less blatant, but it is no less damaging. John F. Dovidio and colleagues conducted an experiment where whites were asked to evaluate applications to determine which students would be accepted for admission into a university.<sup>12</sup> The experiment included a variety of applicants with varying levels of accomplishment with SAT scores, grade point averages, and involvement in school activities. The researchers found that, regardless of race, if the application was strong, the individual was accepted into the university and, if the application was weak, that person was rejected. However, when the applications were ambiguous (for example, high GPA, low SAT), the white individuals making the decision were significantly more likely to reject black students. When asked about why certain students were rejected, the white subjects often provided conflicting explanations, suggesting that GPA was the most important indicator when referring to the acceptance of a white applicant while saying that GPA was the least important indicator when referring to the rejection of a black applicant. This implicit prejudice was also present when similar experiments were conducted involving joining a fraternity<sup>13</sup> and when applying for a job.<sup>14</sup>

Experiments can lack external validity—especially in the social sciences—which is why real-world examples can help underscore sig-

nificant findings. The country got a chance to confront its racial biases in the 2016 presidential election in a lengthy campaign filled with racial dog whistles and outright calls encouraging prejudice. Regardless of whether it was the candidate, the message, the opposition, or some combination thereof, race was a significant factor in the outcome. Researcher Thomas Wood conducted an analysis of voter data and found that “racial biases made a bigger difference in electing Trump than authoritarianism,” noting that there has not been such a clear statistical divide between racial perceptions and vote choice since 1988.<sup>15</sup>

In establishing how racial prejudice manifests in certain situations, these individual instances reveal hegemonic relationships by examining the use of racism as a strategy for maintaining power. Bonilla-Silva argues that color-blind racism is prominent in current societal conditions and that this strain of racism maintains white privilege without the fanfare.<sup>16</sup> Through this practice, whites embrace “sincere fictions” that allow for a denial of racial inequality.<sup>17</sup> According to Joe R. Feagin and Vera Hernan, sincere fictions are “personal and group constructions that reproduce societal myths at the individual and group level.”<sup>18</sup> Scholars insist more attention needs to be paid to these types of unequal power relationships (and their persistence) by looking at systematic racism, which is an institutional form of racism that has consistently benefited whites in the United States. Arguing that this country is one of the few in the Western Hemisphere built on such extreme levels of injustice (most notably, slavery and elimination of Native Americans), Feagin posits that whites have all benefited (in one form or another) from racism.<sup>19</sup> At a time when racism is changing and becoming more difficult to locate, these social structures of power need to be understood as consistent.

Tackling these social institutions can be daunting. Identifying the issues surrounding inequality across racial lines, accepting that those issues exist, identifying the cause of those issues, and implementing changes to correct those injustices represent a significant barrier to meaningful change. However, such change can be brought about through public policy. Scholars have a difficult time agreeing on a single definition for public policy, in part because it’s such a broad topic. Speaking generally, public policy is what “government (any public official who influences or determines public policy, including school officials, city

council members, county supervisors, etc.) does or does not do about a problem that comes before them for consideration and possible action.”<sup>20</sup> Thomas A. Birkland notes that, although policy is created by governments, it’s the “public and private actors who have different interpretations of problems, solutions, and their own motivations.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, while policy is the government’s to make, ideas from the public can significantly influence the form that legislation ultimately takes. “Policymaking is part of an ongoing process that does not always have a clear beginning or end, since decisions about who will benefit from policies and who will bear any burden resulting from the policy are continually reassessed, revisited and revised.”<sup>22</sup>

This volume addresses issues related to race and public policy. The book is meant to be a broad yet in-depth examination and analysis of the state of race in the United States, focusing on race through the lens of public policy, with the aim of connecting the institutional nature of racism to continuing and sometimes explosive unrest. This book is a result of the John Breaux Symposium, an annual academic event where one important issue is selected and discussed in detail. This year’s topic, race and public policy, featured multiple panels discussing various aspects of how race is viewed and understood, including a round table of community leaders, journalists, and activists, along with a panel of academic experts discussing a variety of areas of expertise. This book stems from the latter.

Chapters included here include a mix of original research as well as essays. Based off the panel of experts, each chapter is written by a scholar who explores one aspect of race: segregation, politics, health, media, immigration, law, crime, and wealth. This book is intended to be broad—in that it covers several subjects—but also thorough, offering in-depth analysis on a variety of issues essential to understanding the intertwined, ongoing role of race and public policy.

Shaun L Gabbidon begins with a review of data exploring racial profiling before examining police killings. Gabbidon provides the historical foundations and contemporary issues tied to the practice and pays particular attention to key policies that have been crafted to remedy these concerns. He focuses specifically on the continued vigilance to maintain the balance between public safety and civil rights while still holding enforcement entities accountable.

Jackelyn Hwang, Elizabeth Roberto, and Jacob S. Rugh argue that residential segregation remains an unfortunate fixture that helps to define the American racial landscape. It is difficult to assess at times because traditional measures and methods for examining the problem overlook important aspects of segregation that characterize the metropolitan landscape in which we live today. Despite some improvement since legislation was introduced to reduce segregation roughly fifty years ago, the problem persists.

Srividya Ramasubramanian provides an overview of how race and public policy are shaped and molded by mass media in a variety of different ways due to the vast array of workers, owners, and content within media. Given the exponential expansion of media through its users, audiences have more access and influence now than ever before, all of which will continue to play an important role in public policy.

Holley A. Wilkin discusses barriers and solutions to issues surrounding race and health, with an emphasis on challenging health disparities brought on by a variety of factors, both environmental and behavioral. Through her examination of lead poisoning, tobacco, and improving access to healthy foods, Wilkin takes an in-depth look at how policy decisions have impacted overall health equity.

Mary E. Campbell and Sylvia M. Emmanuel discuss how those policies attempting to address inequality often neglect to take into account multiracial individuals and groups. By studying legal precedent, they show how problematic policies could be revised to be more inclusive.

Josh Grimm places Donald Trump's immigration policies—planned and implemented—in the larger historical context. By understanding not only the pieces of legislation passed throughout U.S. history, but also the impact of those policy decisions, Grimm provides much-needed background to help recognize patterns and trends manifesting themselves once again in the ongoing discussion on immigration.

Lori Latrice Martin examines the public policies that helped to create wealth inequality along racial lines, dating back centuries. This will help in understanding how current policies are perpetuating racial wealth inequality and black asset poverty. Martin calls on scholars to seriously consider the role of race in maintaining this inequality along racial lines.

Ismail K. White, Chryl Laird, Ernest McGowen, and Jared Clemens argue that variation in black support for many important political

issues can be explained at least in part by the degree to which blacks attend to political messages originating from black indigenous information sources. Analyzing data from the 1996 National Black Election Study (NBES), they test the effects of exposure to mainstream and black political communication on black Americans' assessment of an ostensibly nonracial institution, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The results from this analysis highlight the role that attention to indigenous political communication can play in shaping the opinions of racial and ethnic minorities.

As this is an interdisciplinary text, you might notice inconsistencies between chapters in terminology used to describe different racial and ethnic groups. However, you'll notice a similarity of themes across the disciplines, particularly in terms of inequality and racism. Through examining a variety of issues across a wide range of topics, we hope to offer a comprehensive picture of race and public policy in the United States.

## NOTES

1. According to the story, the reason Noor killed the forty-year-old "blonde girl" is because Muslims have issues with women. Saved you a click.

2. Nina Mast, "Fox News Is Unusually Focused on the Nationality of the Officer Who Shot Justine Damond (He's Somali-American)." *Media Matters*, July 20, 2017, [www.mediamatters.org/blog/2017/07/20/fox-news-unusually-focused-nationality-officer-who-shot-justine-damond-hes-somali-american/217317](http://www.mediamatters.org/blog/2017/07/20/fox-news-unusually-focused-nationality-officer-who-shot-justine-damond-hes-somali-american/217317).

3. Miguel Otárola, "Back in Spotlight, Michele Bachmann Praises Trump, Addresses Minneapolis Police Shooting of Justine Damond," *Star Tribune*, July 20, 2017, [m.startribune.com/bachmann-praises-trump-blasts-political-correctness/435517653/?section=%2F](http://m.startribune.com/bachmann-praises-trump-blasts-political-correctness/435517653/?section=%2F).

4. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

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6. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds. *White Out: The Continuing Significance of racism* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

7. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*.

8. Anna Maria Barry-Jester, "Attitudes toward Racism and Inequality Are Shifting," *FiveThirtyEight* June 23, 2015, [fivethirtyeight.com/datalab/attitudes-toward-racism-and-inequality-are-shifting/](http://fivethirtyeight.com/datalab/attitudes-toward-racism-and-inequality-are-shifting/).

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13. John F. Dovidio, Kerry Kawakami, and Samuel L. Gaertner, "Implicit and Explicit Prejudices and Interracial Interaction," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82, no. 1 (2002): 62.
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16. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists*.
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“This is a crucial volume that examines topics from police misconduct to U.S. immigration policy in regard to systematic racism in the United States. It’s an important book for anyone interested in the interplay of policy and racial politics.” —DON HEIDER, author of *White News: Why Local News Programs Don’t Cover People of Color*

**H**ow *Public Policy Impacts Racial Inequality*, edited by Josh Grimm and Jaime Loke, brings together scholars of political science, sociology, and mass communication to provide an in-depth analysis of race in the United States through the lens of public policy. This vital collection outlines how issues such as profiling, wealth inequality, and housing segregation relate to race and policy decisions at both the local and national levels. Each chapter explores the inherent conflict between policy enactment, perception, and enforcement. Contributors examine topics ranging from the American justice system’s role in magnifying racial and ethnic disparities to the controversial immigration policies enacted by the Trump administration, along with pointed discussions of how the racial bias of public policy decisions historically impacts emerging concerns such as media access, health equity, and asset poverty.

By presenting nuanced case studies of key topics, *How Public Policy Impacts Racial Inequality* offers a timely and wide-ranging collection on major social and political issues unfolding in twenty-first-century America.

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MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS | Robert Mann, Series Editor

COVER IMAGE: A home in the city of Detroit, where housing policies have exposed low-income residents to a variety of health and safety hazards. Photograph by Daniel Garcia.

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