Beyond Discrimination and Repositioning Race compile a selection of chapters designed to consider the realities and manifestations of racial inequality in a post-Obama era. Both books use the “postracial” discourse that has become more commonplace in the Obama age as a starting point to consider the structure, nature, and consequences of racial inequality at a time when popular rhetoric elevates colorblindness and the idea that we are (or should be) past racism.

Beyond Discrimination takes an interdisciplinary approach to assessing what discrimination looks like in a post-Obama age. Pulling research from political scientists, sociologists, and criminologists, the chapters in this volume document the ways that processes of racial stratification have morphed from overt, obvious mechanisms explicitly designed to maintain white superiority over people of color to more covert, insidious processes that often avoid any mention of race but still result in the same outcomes. The book considers racial inequality in four arenas: political development, attitudes and individual behavior, politics and the state, and economics and markets. Topics cover the efficacy of affirmative action, racial bias in policing, the role of the state in legitimizing or curtailing policies explicitly designed to reduce racial inequality, rising incarceration rates, and the implicit racialization of insurance and health care policy.

While the book as a whole includes a great deal of useful information, a few chapters are particularly timely and will likely stand out to readers for the potential they have to inform current discourse. Phillip Atiba Goff’s chapter on the research on racial bias in policing has obvious implications as the #BlackLivesMatter movement continues to draw attention to ongoing cases of black men and women killed by police. As the nation grapples with questions about how to make policing more equitable and responsive to various racial groups, data on the challenges of measuring police bias as well as potential strategies for assessing and curtailing it are particularly important and welcome. Naa Oyo A. Kwate’s chapter on the marketing of health inequality is also timely, given the changes occurring in the fast-food restaurant model. Both these chapters will give readers a way to think through the more ambiguous ways that racial inequality is reproduced.

In a similar vein, readers may also appreciate some of the chapters that examine the seemingly race-neutral policies that maintain inequality in a post-Obama era. Valerie Purdie-Vaughns and Richard P. Eibach examine whether and to what extent Obama’s presidency has influenced minority students’ educational aspirations. Drawing from social psychology, they find that this particular “symbolic first” has had some effect in inspiring young children and shaping their aspirations. As we might
expect, however, structural issues in the educational system and other social settings limit the extent to which young minority children might be able to realize their educational goals and translate aspiration into achievement. Devin Fergus’s chapter on auto insurance describes how rates set by zip code rather than by individual driving records disproportionately penalize low-income minority drivers (who, incidentally, often have the least disposable income to spend on insurance). This chapter presents a powerful example of how colorblind policies can often have very racially skewed results.

For sociologists who study race and racial inequality, much of the book is a familiar revisitation of what we already know. Sociology of race has documented clearly the ways that racial processes are no longer the conspicuous, blatantly intentional mechanisms of days prior. Public policy and social customs no longer explicitly demand racial segregation, though obviously it continues in housing, education, work, and social interaction. One of the strengths of Beyond Discrimination is that it neatly collects various studies to this effect in one volume, which may be useful for researchers interested in a concise body of work that documents what we know about the ways racial processes in many social institutions have moved from overt to covert.

Repositioning Race has a similar mission. Like Beyond Discrimination, this book examines how the discourse of postracialism affects racial inequalities in the present day. Unlike Beyond Discrimination, however, this book is more concerned with establishing a "prophetic tradition" that seeks to use research as a way of benefitting black and other racial minority communities. To that end, all of the contributions in this book explore the implications of their research for black progress and mobility.

This edited volume is organized around racial theory and ideas for leadership, race in everyday experiences and interactions, and black identities in international contexts. Under this umbrella, the authors are able to address a wide array of important topics— theories of systemic racism as an approach to understanding the persistence of racial stratification, the consequences of the foreclosure crisis in worsening racial inequality, and the ways blacks in the African diaspora contextualize and perceive U.S.-born blacks. In keeping with the theme of prophetic research, all of the chapters in this book make it a point to consider how their work has implications for black communities at large. This is an interesting and welcome distinction that allows the authors—and this book in general—to move past analysis into the realm of application and utility.

In a chapter that may have particular resonance for readers (particularly those attuned to popular culture), Robert L. Reece reads several sketches by comedian Dave Chappelle as an example of critical race theory. Having had conversations with several colleagues who use Chappelle’s sketches of the “Racial Draft” and “Clayton Bigsbee” as a means of teaching about the ways that race is socially constructed, I expect this chapter will provide an important complement and useful reading for faculty looking for ways to connect scholarly study to recognizable material.

Other chapters consider race and the lived experiences of black Americans in a global context. Antonio D. Tillis examines racial politics in the Dominican Republic, emphasizing the value of whiteness in conjunction with the country’s relationships with Haiti and its Haitian citizens to provide a complex analysis of how issues of labor and migration intersect with racial dynamics. In another chapter, Tiffany D. Joseph explores differences in how Brazilian- and U.S.-born blacks view and understand racial stratification that exists in America. Here, she emphasizes the important role that social class plays in determining these perceptions of racial hierarchies and attempts to operate within them. These chapters lend an important international focus to Repositioning Race and rightfully draw attention to the way race is lived on the world stage. They also have particular salience as the immigrant population in the United States grows and begins to include more people of color in its demographic makeup.

Both Beyond Discrimination and Repositioning Race have their strengths. They are useful, concise sources of articles that explore the fallacies and contradictions of
our postracial era and do a nice job showing how the election of a black president coexists uneasily with persistent structural disadvantage and growing racial inequality. They do this by highlighting how topics that may be familiar and innocuous to readers (auto insurance policies, popular culture) can still serve to reproduce racial hierarchies in insidious ways. *Repositioning Race* goes a step farther by thinking through how this research can be used to improve the deleterious conditions blacks continue to face in a global and international context. Both books could be useful for upper-level undergraduate courses on race because of their potential to get students thinking about the particulars of how racial inequality operates in subtle, easily overlooked ways.

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The Sociological Mind at Work and Play

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While living in San Francisco in 1963, having published *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Howard Becker was invited across the Bay to discuss his work at the University of California, Berkeley. He presented his now well-known approach called “labeling,” in which deviance may be understood in terms of how people jointly affix understandings to one another, rather than as an innate human quality indicative of natural law. Standing at the back of the room was a dubious Philip Selznick, smoking a cigar, who said: “Well, Howie, I see what you’re getting at; it’s very interesting. But after all, what about murder? Isn’t that really deviant?” Years later in Evanston, having published *Art Worlds* (1982), Becker was invited to talk in a new “Dean’s Lecture” series, where he likewise explained how art and artists achieve their notoriety through the definitions assigned to them by an interested community. Fidgeting in his seat was a skeptical dean who felt compelled to ask: “Well, Howie, that’s all very interesting but, after all, what about Mozart? . . . isn’t Mozart really a musical genius?”

These are but two of the examples that abound in a book whose goal is to explain how to reason using cases and, in so doing, to illustrate a mental craft of composing what Becker sees as an authentic sociology. How has Howard Becker gone about his work—on school teachers, medical students, artists, and marijuana users—and how might others think about their own? This book tells that story in a style that is, notoriously, conversational yet clear, and in a tone that is at once beneficent and valedictory. Becker implies a great confidence in what future generations of social scientists can do while expressing an appreciation of what past generations have done for him (and for us). This cross-generational dialogue of greetings and good-byes is magnified by the several memories instructively shared of his own master teacher, Everett Hughes at the University of Chicago, and by the book’s final chapter, “Last Words.”

Hughes obviously left a deep impression on Becker. It is difficult to think of any other person who has had more occasion to recall and write about Hughes. In so many words Becker makes it apparent to would-be sociologists that their work would stand to gain by knowing the Hughes oeuvre (1958, 1971, 1994). It formed Becker’s, whose in turn has endowed the work of sociologists across five academic generations in the United States and, increasingly, abroad, perhaps especially in France (Gopnik 2015). The cross-generational influence is felt most prominently in the work and aspirations of those who, in their study of society, take seriously people and their situated points of view.


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