EVANGELICALS AND DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

VOLUME I: RELIGION AND SOCIETY

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Chapter 6

Race-Bridging for Christ? Conservative Christians and Black-White Relations in Community Life

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MANY PEOPLE have heard the phrase, sometimes attributed to Martin Luther King Jr., that from eleven to twelve on a Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America. Fewer may know that at least since the 1960s, some evangelical Protestant leaders and publicists have promoted racial reconciliation. Nurtured at first by three African American religious figures who were willing to identify with the primarily white-associated term *evangelical*, the promotion of racial reconciliation remained a relative exception within evangelical Protestantism until the late 1980s. Since then, a stream of books, magazine articles, study guides, inspirational speeches, and denominational public statements has earned attention for a discourse of racial healing within and beyond evangelical church circles (Wadsworth 1997; Emerson and Smith 2000; Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004).

This cultural movement has made brief appearances in the political arena. In 1997, 400 evangelical African Americans gathered in Baltimore with leaders of the Christian Coalition, including Ralph Reed and Pat Robertson, to kick off the Samaritan Project—an initiative to bring black[1] and white evangelicals under the fold of the politically conservative Christian Coalition so influential in Republican Party politics. Black and white evangelicals would work together in communities on issues such

as school choice and tax breaks for minority-owned businesses and collaborate on antiabortion and antigay rights campaigns. Republican political alliances between conservative Christian whites and blacks developed little in the decade following the Baltimore conference, however, and the Samaritan Project floundered. Although African American and white conservative Christians take similar stands on several red-button moral issues, such as homosexuality, only 7 percent of conservative Christian blacks identify themselves as Republicans, and white evangelicals are more than ten times as likely to vote Republican as their black counterparts (see Fowler et al. 2004).

The discourse of racial healing has not been only promoted by conservative political operatives in search of new constituencies. Witness the June 1995 statement on racial reconciliation issued by the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest theologically conservative Protestant denomination in the United States: "Be it further resolved, that we apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systematic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously (Psalm 19:13) or unconsciously (Leviticus 4:27); and be it further resolved, that we ask forgiveness from our African-American brothers and sisters, acknowledging that our own healing is at stake."[2] Southern Baptists evidently found legitimate and pressing motives for confronting racism, individual and systematic, in biblical teachings—the sine qua non of truth in evangelical Protestantism.

This chapter explores ordinary conservative Christians' attitudes about race and looks closely at their attempts to create or improve interracial relationships in church and community life outside the electoral political arena. These efforts, which we conceive as race-bridging practices, are noteworthy, even historic, because they take place in the context of long-established racial discrimination in conservative Christian theology and practice. Using several kinds of evidence, we place these endeavors in the context of American black-white relations. Survey data analyses from the General Social Survey and the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey reveal large differences in a variety of current attitudes on race between theologically conservative white and African American Christians and between white conservative Christians and other whites. The qualitative case studies we draw on include churches and community service organizations that identify explicitly with the racial reconciliation initiatives of evangelical leaders, and that promote interracial relationships without referring to the racial reconciliation movement. These studies do not speak to the extent of these efforts in local church and community life nationwide, or whether they are successful. Yet they are significant because the number of multiracial congregations is growing (Emerson and Woo 2006). It is imperative that we

gain a better understanding of the transformation in interracial dynamics that such growth suggests.

Race-bridging efforts speak directly to the conditions of and the prospects for democracy in the United States. Indeed, following de Tocqueville, many scholars assess the health of a democracy by its citizens' abilities to work together to solve public problems, relate to those who are different from themselves, and trust one another. From this point of view, democracy is not only a form of governance but a way of life (Dewey 1927), and a vibrant democracy depends partly on the character of civic relationships inside and between religious groups (Lichterman and Potts 2009), the kinds of relationships that Sikkink's essay in this volume also explores (see chapter 9). We have reasons to worry. Membership in a great variety of civic associations has been declining over the past four decades (Putnam 2000), while social distance between racial groups in the United States is growing (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006).

A variety of authors propose that given U.S. cultural history and the prevalence of religious groups in American community life, religion may be one important way to reweave the fraying fabric of social and associational life (Skocpol 2000; Smidt 2003; Bellah et al. 2007; Putnam 2000). That is one more reason to focus our attention on race-bridging strategies. Because conservative Protestantism is the dominant theological strain of the dominant faith in the United States today (Smith 1998), we need to understand what Americans do as conservative Protestants when they try to redefine interracial relationships. Our approach, similar to many other recent studies, focuses on the active, classifying work that people do either to expand or to narrow the circle of insiders, instead of assuming that people's ideas about insiders and outsiders directly and unambiguously reflect professionally written position statements, governmental policies or theological dicta (see Lamont 2006; Lamont and Fleming 2005; Lichterman 2005, 2008; Bail 2008; Brubaker 2004).

Although survey data reveal important differences between white and black conservative Christians on issues such as national civil rights—with whites less supportive of the policies than blacks, the case studies show that at least some white conservative Christians want to engage in race-bridging efforts. These efforts sometimes produce informal friendships, and this counts as successful race-bridging to white conservative Christians. Such efforts, however, often downplay racial identities and socioeconomic differences between groups, and evidence suggests that this downplay in turn limits the ability of whites to build bridges across racial groups. Moreover, white Christians often do not realize the extent to which they use racial differences in styles of worship and other cultural practices to draw moral boundaries between themselves and blacks (Lamont 2000).

White and black conservatives share some understandings of moral issues and uphold the singular moral authority of the Bible, yet the boundary work we infer from survey and ethnographic evidence would reinforce rather than blur racial boundaries within congregations or between whites and blacks. This boundary work would inhibit the type of egalitarian, horizontal relations that scholars of civic engagement think of as empowering and democratic (Putnam 2000; Skocpol 2000), and that some conservative Christian leaders seem to have been calling for in the past fifteen years. Our findings suggest, then, that the relation between evangelical Protestantism and democratic social life is complex. To understand it, we need to distinguish between Christian theologies of racial reconciliation or egalitarianism on the one hand and the more un-self-conscious, enduring, everyday practices that may run counter to antiracist statements on paper. Toward that end, our discussion introduces a contextual approach to religion, one that sensitizes us to the social relations and cultural styles through which people put religious beliefs, including well-intended antiracist beliefs, into practice.

This chapter focuses only on black-white relations. There are good reasons, of course, to ask how evangelical Protestants may try to create bridges toward other racial groups or religious organizations. In the United States, evangelical and more broadly conservative Christianity is growing among Latinos (Greeley 1998; Hernández 1999) and Korean Americans (Ecklund 2006) and other East Asians. But there are better reasons to limit our inquiry here. The great bulk of founders and leading popularizers of modern evangelical Protestantism in the 1940s and after were, unremarkably, white and directed their ministries to whites as a matter of course (Smith 1998). Modern evangelical racial reconciliation discourse began with a focus on relations between African Americans and whites, and the focus has remained there as racial reconciliation has become represented increasingly by white spokespersons trying to reach out to blacks (Emerson and Smith 2000, 63).

Context: Black-White Social Inequality

Although the United States is increasingly multiracial, the black-white divide has had a foundational and highly significant role in American history. Scholars have repeatedly buttressed the view that black-white relations are unique because of the enduring racial discrimination that is the legacy of slavery. Despite perceiving itself as the world guardian of democracy and freedom, the United States has been exceptionally slow to grant its main minority group, blacks, full privileges of social citizenship, especially in relation other advanced industrial societies. Rates of racial intermarriage remain lower for blacks than for any other group (Qian 1997) and rates of residential segregation remain higher (Logan, Alba, and Leung 1996). In 2000, whites in metropolitan areas lived in neighborhoods that were 80 percent white and only 7 percent black. Their black counterparts, meanwhile, lived in neighborhoods where more than 50 percent of the residents were black and only 30 percent were white (Lewis Mumford Center 2001). The persistence of residential segregation has led one scholar to conclude that "either in absolute terms or in comparison to other groups, blacks remain a very residentially segregated and spatially isolated people" (Massey 2001, 132). The sociologist Herbert Gans even argued that American society is moving toward a racial divide opposing all nonblacks to blacks (1999). Without doubt, the black-white divide continues to hew the American social fabric deeply, if unevenly, across regions.

Of course, socioeconomic inequalities between whites and blacks also persist. By 2001 nearly 65 percent of whites age twenty-five to twenty-nine had completed some college, compared to just 50 percent of blacks of the same age.[3] The 2001 national median family income for whites was $54,067 and $33,598 for blacks.[4] At the same time, more than half of all African American children under the age of six live in poverty, three times more than the proportion in the white community (Conley 1999, 10). Even those blacks who are integrated in the middle class face a comparative disadvantage. The net worth of black professionals is $12,303, versus $66,800 for whites. At income levels above $75,000, whites have a median net worth of $308,000 but blacks only $114,000. To reach middle-class status, a larger proportion of black middle-class couples both work than their white middle-class counterparts, 78 to 62 percent, respectively (Oliver and Shapiro, 1995, 96–97).

These figures suggest a clear and persistent racial gap in life chances. However, as Orlando Patterson argued, important gains have been made over the past forty years, due in large part to the civil rights movement (1997). School enrollment among blacks has grown rapidly. The gap in high school completion has decreased from 12 percent for blacks and 41 percent for whites in 1940 to 86 percent for blacks and 87 percent for whites respectively in 1995 (19–20). The median income of black families headed by a married couple was $44,307 in 1995, some 87 percent of the amount a similar white family earned, up from 68 percent in 1967 (27). Thus, social (structural) boundaries between blacks and whites remain strong, even if they do show signs of weakening (see also Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Conley 1999).

Context: Shared Theology, Segregated Practice

Conservative Protestant blacks and whites, from as early as the seventeenth century until today, have shared many religious convictions. For conservative Protestants, and especially for evangelical Protestants, the central accomplishment for any Christian believer is a personal relation-

ship with Jesus Christ. Certainty of faith and certainty in the Bible's exclusive and inerrant authority are widely shared among conservative Protestants (Smith 1998).

Yet from the start, African Americans were inducted into Christian religion in the context of institutionalized subordination. Archival records show that vigorous preaching and converting occurred among slaves and freed blacks in the antebellum period, and that white evangelical Christians attracted large numbers of blacks to the church. Traveling itinerant preachers would minister to interracial—and spatially segregated—crowds of hundreds. Whites crowded inside the churches and blacks observed from windows, or in some instances, from balconies—the places to which they were consigned. Protestant U.S. denominations developed along sharply segregated lines, such that scholars continue to speak of a black church separate from American Christian church life in general (for instance, Lincoln and Mamiya 1990), even if the formal theologies of black churches resemble those of some de facto white, conservative Protestant churches and denominations.

White evangelical Baptists and Methodists did debate the morality of slavery, the relationships between masters and slaves, and the induction of black ministers into church leadership. The ambivalence of many evangelicals over these issues became very evident in the varying positions that both Baptist and Methodist conferences began to take and implement. Many mid-nineteenth-century abolitionists were evangelical Protestants. Yet even by the turn into the nineteenth century, most evangelical churches and preachers avoided the troublesome question of slavery and made their mission instead to secure the souls of as many whites and blacks as they could (Haller 2003). Theologically conservative Christian leaders and congregations frequently condoned and sometimes actively supported segregation and subordination of African Americans up through the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s (Emerson and Smith 2000; Haynes 2002).

What has emerged from the interplay between evangelism and race relations is a dialectical tension: evangelical blacks and whites, from as early as the seventeenth century until today, have shared many religious convictions and a deep faith in God; yet those shared convictions alone have not been enough to bridge the divides between the races. Then and now, theologically conservative whites have differed from their theological black counterparts in their attitudes on many contemporary social issues, especially as these issues pertain to the economic and political mobility and social well-being of African Americans.

Racial Attitudes: The Color of Religion

The General Social Survey (GSS) and the Social Capital Benchmark Survey (SCBS) together offer an overview of individual attitudes, prefer-

ences, and practices that seem to reflect the historical and social-structural realities reviewed in the previous section (National Opinion Research Center 2002; Saguaro Seminar 2000; see also tables 6.1–6.5). The evidence provided in these two data sets is illuminating but must be interpreted carefully, given that each required a different strategy for identifying conservative Christians in the sample.[5] The SCBS included questions on the respondent's religious denomination, which enabled us to identify respondents in more specific terms than the GSS's predefined response categories of fundamentalist, moderate, and liberal. In the GSS dataset, we compare those Christians who identified explicitly as fundamentalist to other nonfundamentalist Christians. We used restrictive criteria to identify conservative Christians in the GSS and SCBS to lessen the likelihood of having captured nonconservative Christians in our subsamples. Our resulting categories likely miss some conservative Christians in each original survey.

Multivariate logistic and ordinary least squares regression analyses of certain racial attitudes show both differences and similarities between conservative and nonconservative Christians. In the GSS, respondents were asked a host of yes-no questions about the reasons for African Americans' having worse jobs, housing, and income than white people, on average. They were also asked whether they favored laws against interracial marriage. Findings from the GSS indicate that theologically conservative white Christians have more racially exclusive attitudes than other white Christians when it comes to interracial marriage, even once we control for education, gender, income, and marital status and their exposure to other racial and ethnic groups in their respective community (see table 6.1). In the GSS, although only 10 percent of those surveyed responded that they were likely to favor laws against interracial marriage, white fundamentalists were four times more likely to favor these laws than all blacks and white nonfundamentalists. Data from the SCBS point toward similar conclusions. Conservative Christian whites are significantly more likely to oppose marriage between blacks and whites, even after controlling for education, age, and income (see table 6.2). Also, compared to white women, white men are more likely to oppose interracial marriage. Among blacks, no significant difference in their views on interracial marriage exists either before or after the controls.

At the same time, GSS data reveal that both conservative and nonconservative Christian whites appear to adhere to a similar racial logic in U.S. society in terms of their connection to African Americans. Blacks and whites were asked to respond to a nine-point scale, ranging from very cool to very warm, about their feelings toward their own and the other racial group. Both fundamentalist and nonfundamentalist Christian whites expressed significantly more social and emotional distance from blacks than their black counterparts expressed about them (see table 6.3). Notably, fundamentalist Christians feel slightly less connected

Table 6.1   Racial Attitudes among Fundamentalist and Nonfundamentalist Black and White Christians

Independent Variables	Favor Laws Against Interracial Marriage		Blacks Shouldn't Push for Rights		Racial Differences Due to Discrimination		Racial Differences Due to Inborn Disability		Racial Differences are Due to Lack of Education		Racial Differences are Due to Lack of Will	
	Logit	Odds Ratio	Logit	Odds Ratio	Logit	Odds Ratio	Logit	Odds Ratio	Logit	Odds Ratio	Logit	Odds Ratio
Fundamentalist Christian	1.06*** (.32)	2.90	.34* (.21)	1.41	-.18 (.20)	.83	-.17 (.30)	.84	-.49** (.19)	.61	.34* (.19)	1.40
White	1.84*** (.64)	6.27	.60** (.30)	1.81	-.80*** (.26)	.45	-.34 (.36)	.71	-.56** (.25)	.57	-.05 (.25)	.95
Politically conservative	-.09 (.45)	.91	.58** (.27)	1.79	-.16 (.21)	.85	.33 (.39)	1.39	.10 (.23)	1.10	.76*** (.23)	2.15
Politically moderate	-.27 (.45)	.76	.43 (.27)	1.54	-.01 (.24)	.99	.55 (.38)	1.73	.18 (.23)	1.19	.75*** (.23)	2.13
Constant	-.95		.11		-.68		-.69		-1.23**		.89	
Chi-square, df	88.04, 11		67.43, 11		18.37, 11		32.89, 11		32.53, 11		31.64, 11	
Number of observations	595		552		584		583		582		565	

Source: Authors' compilation.
Notes: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. All analyses control for education, income, gender, and marital status. Blacks, nonfundamentalists, and political liberals are the reference categories.
*** $p = 0.00$; ** $p <= .05$; * $p <= .10$

Table 6.2   Views on Interracial Marriage[a] on Key Social Traits

Independent Variables	Blacks			Whites		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Conservative Christian (=1)	.06 (.09)	.06 (.09)	.05 (.09)	-.25*** (.05)	-.22*** (.05)	-.15*** (.05)
Married		.00 (.10)	-.00 (.11)		-.01 (.06)	.03 (.06)
Divorced		-.09 (.12)	-.10 (.13)		17** (.07)	.20*** (.07)
Separated		-.23 (.17)	-.23 (.17)		.10 (.14)	.14 (.14)
Widowed		-.28 (.18)	-.26 (.18)		-.02 (.09)	.07 (.09)
Age			-.01* (.00)		-.02*** (.00)	-.02*** (.00)
Male (=1)			.11 (.08)		-.12*** (.04)	-.14*** (.04)
Education			-.02 (.02)			.08*** (.01)
Income			.02 (.02)			-.01 (.01)
Percentage black in community			.47 (3.85)			-3.57** (1.4)
Percentage white in community			.75 (3.83)			-2.72** (1.4)
Percentage Asian in community			2.26 (4.09)			-.98 (1.44)
Percentage Latino in community			.24 (4.06)			-2.69* (1.53)
Constant	2.7	2.94	2.31	2.20	3.27	5.65
R²	.00	.02	.02	.01	.09	.12
Sample size	958	958	958	4063	4063	4063

Source: Authors' compilation.
Notes: [a]Dependent variable's values range from 1 strongly oppose to 5 strongly favor. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.
*** $p = 0.00$; ** $p <= .05$; * $p <= .10$.

Table 6.3   Feelings of Connectedness on Key Social Traits

Independent Variables	Blacks[a] Model 1	Whites[a] Model 2
Fundamentalist Christian (=1)	–.12	–.44*
	(.25)	(.25)
White (=1)	–1.60***	.25
	(.22)	(.22)
White Fundamentalist	.02	.38
(Interaction Term)	(.27)	(.27)
Married	–.27*	–.26**
	(.13)	(.13)
Divorced	–.04	–.20
	(.16)	(.15)
Separated	–.31	–1.06***
	(.27)	(.26)
Widowed	–.02	.20
	(.21)	(.21)
Age	–.01*	–.01**
	(.00)	(.00)
Male (=1)	–.47***	–.29***
	(.09)	(.09)
Education	.08***	.01
	(.02)	(.02)
Income	.05**	.05**
	(.02)	(.02)
Constant	7.04	6.89
R^2	.12	.04
Sample size (N=)	1834	1835

Source: Authors' compilation.
Notes: [a]Closeness scale: 1 (not close at all) to 9 (very close) [5 = neither one nor the other].
Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.
*** $p = 0.00$; ** $p <= .05$; * $p <= .10$

to whites than nonfundamentalist Christians; the significance of this difference is only marginal, however.

The GSS reveals other racial and theological differences in intergroup attitudes. With an odds ratio of 1.40 and .61, respectively, logistic regression results show that fundamentalist Christians are more likely to disagree that racial differences between blacks and whites owe to lack of education and to agree that these differences are attributable to lack of will. These findings suggest that either a traditional Protestant or tradi-

tional American (or both) regard for individual effort is shared widely among conservative Christians across racial lines (see table 6.1).

To investigate whether political orientations might be the hidden cause of differences between whites and blacks, or white religious conservatives and other whites, we examined GSS data for the probability that political orientation matters. Respondents self-identified as either liberal, moderate, or conservative. Table 6.1 also shows that political conservatives are more than one and a half times more likely as political liberals to believe that blacks should not push for civil rights (odds ratio = 1.79). Similarly, fundamentalist Christians believe that blacks should not push for rights, although the difference is marginally significant between them and nonfundamentalist Christians (odds ratio = 1.41). Furthermore, both political conservatives and moderates are more than twice as likely as political liberals to believe that racial differences are due to lack of will on the part of blacks (odds ratios = 2.15 and 2.13, respectively).

The color of religion matters, too. Black and white fundamentalists diverge in their social attitudes and practices, which indicate that racial dynamics penetrate church walls. Whites across the theological spectrum are significantly more likely than blacks (both conservative and nonconservative Christians) to disagree that the lack of education is the cause of the mobility gap between blacks and whites (odds ratio = .57), less likely to believe that discrimination has anything to do with these differences (odds ratio = .45), and more likely to believe that blacks should not push for civil rights (odds ratio = 1.81). In 2002, conservative Christian whites, on average, visited a friend of a different race or had the friend visit their home less often (8.04 times) than conservative Christian blacks (12.06 times) and other whites (10.17 times); the difference is statistically significant (see table 6.4). In general, whites engage in these interracial visits less often than blacks; the differences are significant, as were the differences between all blacks and all whites on opposition to marrying interracially. Still, though conservative Protestant Christian whites reported spending less time with a friend of an opposite race in either their home or the friend's, they had more diverse friendship networks than nonconservative Protestant Christian whites, even after statistical controls for education, income, marital status, and age were entered into the OLS regression (see table 6.5). The SCBS friendship diversity scale includes eleven traits, including four categories of race and ethnicity, welfare status, business ownership, religious and sexual orientation, and status as a community leader, manual worker, and vacation home owner; it is therefore possible that a social trait other than race characterizes conservative white Christians networks. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that significantly more conservative Protestant white Christians in the SCBS reported having black

Table 6.4   Friendship Practices

	Black Conservative Christians	Other Blacks	White Conservative Christians	Other Whites
Percent has a personal friend who is black	94.6% N = 533	93.4% N = 2,958	63.6% N = 1,658	59.7%*** bc N = 19,146
Percent has a personal friend who is white	76.7% N = 532	73.5% N = 2,959	97.8% N = 2,959	97.8%***b N = 19,165
Percent has a personal friend who is Asian	24.9% N = 531	27.7% N = 2,953	30.5% N = 1,653	37.6%***c N = 19,108
Percent has a personal friend who is Latino-Hispanic	40.5% N = 533	44% N = 2,949	40.1% N = 1,652	44.4%***c N = 19,104
Mean diversity of friendship[i]	5.95***b N = 536	6.04 N = 2,966	6.26**c N = 1,660	6.42 N = 19,217
Mean number of times R has had a friend of a different race at home or visited theirs	12.06 N = 532	13.01 N = 2,952	8.04 N = 1,651	10.17*** bc N = 19,111

Source: Authors' compilation.
Notes: [i] The friendship diversity scale includes eleven traits, including race and ethnicity, welfare status, business ownership, and sexual orientation. [a] significant difference between conservative and nonconservative Christians; [b] significant difference between the races; [c] significant within-race difference
*** $p = 0.00$; ** $p <= .05$; * $p <= .10$

friends than nonconservative Protestant whites. This combination of findings on friendship networks bids us look more closely at the meanings of relationships represented by the statistics.

Overall, these indicators show that U.S. blacks as a whole have less exclusive racial attitudes and privilege their own racial category less than whites as a whole do. Within these broad outlines, conservative Christian whites maintain stronger boundaries than other whites on a variety of indicators. In all, the survey data on attitudes, along with an historical legacy of institutionalized racism in American Protestantism, support the view that American conservative Protestantism remains racialized. In this context, white evangelicals' current race-bridging efforts take on special significance for American religious history as well as American civic life.

Theoretical Framework: Religion in Civic Action

Survey analysis can take us only so far. The remainder of our analysis takes a contextual approach to religion (Lichterman 2007), one that we

Table 6.5   Diversity of Friendship Networks, Key Social Traits

Independent Variables	Blacks Model 1	Blacks Model 2	Blacks Model 3	Whites Model 1	Whites Model 2	Whites Model 3
Conservative Christian (=1)	−.24* (.14)	−.27* (.14)	−.13 (.14)	−.04 (.07)	−.04 (.07)	.12* (.07)
Married		.77*** (.16)	.32** (.16)		.32*** (.08)	.15* (.08)
Divorced		.60*** (.20)	.43** (.19)		.26** (.11)	.35*** (.10)
Separated		.12 (.27)	.12 (.26)		−.02 (.20)	.18 (.19)
Widowed		−.00 (.29)	.18 (.27)		−.67*** (.13)	−.30** (.13)
Age		−.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)		−.01*** (.00)	−.01*** (.00)
Male (=1)		.26** (.13)	.24** (.13)		.07 (.06)	−.06 (.05)
Education			.35*** (.04)			.22*** (.02)
Income			.20*** (.04)			.21*** (.02)
Percentage black in community			−.24 (5.94)			−1.94 (1.96)
Percentage white in community			.63 (5.90)			−2.40 (2.0)
Percentage Asian in community			7.86 (6.29)			−1.51 (2.07)
Percentage Latino in community			−1.02 (6.25)			−.89 (2.19)
Constant	6.16	5.86	3.70	6.32	6.81	7.33
R²	.00	.02	.12	.00	.03	.10
Sample size	1909	1909	1909	8366	8366	8366

Source: Authors' compilation.
Notes: [i] The friendship diversity scale includes eleven traits, including four categories of race and ethnicity; religious orientation; sexual orientation; welfare status; is a community leader, manual worker, business ownership, and vacation home owner. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.
*** $p = 0.00$; ** $p <= .05$; * $p <= .10$

believe is well suited to telling us how religious people get involved in civic life and how religion informs their efforts. First, ours focuses on cultural frameworks that are mobilized in and around action, not on abstract belief systems embedded in theological texts (Swidler 1986; Wimmer and Lamont 2006). We aim to see what people say and do in church and community life as conservative Christians, rather than taking sacred texts or belief systems as direct causes of what people do. For this study's purposes, conservative Protestantism is a loose cultural repertoire of images, vocabularies, and skills that we can see and hear people using in everyday life, rather than a set of silent beliefs or private motives inferred from survey data (Lichterman 2008). We investigate how conservative Christians do things with this cultural repertoire, including drawing boundaries between people "like us" and "not like us" (Lamont 1992; Lamont and Molnar 2001). Second, a contextual approach holds that when people act as religious people, they draw on secular as well as religious culture. Even if their religion is conservative, people do not live out religious dictates in a cultural vacuum. Religion is embedded in other cultural understandings that accompany action (Hall 1997; Ammerman 2007). Finally, and also crucial to a contextual perspective, social and institutional resources condition the ways people use religious idioms or styles of action as much as those of any other cultural repertoire (Sewell 1992; Lamont 1999; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). People of different races or classes bring different cultural and social resources to the same religious texts, so that acting in a Christian, moral, or even conservative way can vary for different groups.

Previous scholarship has tended to treat religion differently, as an independent variable that has effects on social attitudes or behaviors. In a prominent statement on conservative Protestantism and race, for instance, the sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith explained that white evangelicals favor interpersonal, individualistic responses to racism because their theology conditions them to do so (2000). In this view, theological beliefs such as accountable freewill individualism are cognitive building blocks that make it difficult for evangelicals to construct racial issues in social-structural terms, and also doom concrete attempts at race-bridging to failure.

Why does this difference in approach matter for understanding conservative Christian race relations? Theological or denominational teachings may offer some of the cognitive building blocks people use to answer survey questions on beliefs about the causes of and solutions to racial inequality. Yet, in everyday life, people use those building blocks to build different kinds of relationships. Theologies, formal or fragmentary, are not the only resources on which people—especially lay people—rely when trying to engage in interracial relationships. Our contextual approach helps us understand how black and white conservative

Christians may share theological beliefs yet relate to their beliefs differently, with different consequences for both attitudes and actions. If African Americans understand themselves as inextricably members of a collectivity—sharing a linked fate with other African Americans based on historical experience (Dawson 1994)—then they will interpret theological beliefs in ways that most white conservative Protestants do not. The contextual approach also helps us understand why the attempts of white political conservatives to ally with African American religious conservatives have borne relatively little fruit to date (Robinson 2006). For our purposes here, the approach illuminates why even the best-intentioned efforts of white religious conservatives to foster interracial relationships can produce tensions and miscommunication across racial groups.

It may seem like common sense that, at least for conservative Protestants, biblical dictates by themselves have strong effects on what people say and do. We do not dispute correlations drawn in other studies between religious preferences and voting behavior. Rather, we think that in addition to asking what conservative Christian survey respondents say about God, society, and politics, we also should ask what conservative Christians say and do in everyday life, and discover how religion enters into the process. The contextual perspective bids us ask what conservative Christians do with biblical dictates as well as other elements of their cultural environment and how they interpret sacred texts; the texts do not speak and produce action by themselves (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). The biblical scholar Stephen Haynes has shown, for instance, that even biblical dictates long used as rationales for racial subordination have been interpreted differently and also have been reinvoked to justify a succession of racial regimes, from slavery to post–Civil War segregation (2002). Properly speaking, southern conservative Christians were not driven by the Bible to support slavery and then racial segregation. Rather, as Haynes observed, they used biblical passages that were especially convenient for, but not naturally tied to, racist purposes. That is why we ask how conservative Christians attempt to build interracial relationships when they are acting as conservative Christians, rather than assume that we can explain their action directly from values or beliefs, or infer their action from sacred texts.

Race-Bridging

We call the action we are studying *race-bridging*. This term encompasses a variety of efforts at creating relationships across racial groups. When we say *bridging*, we refer to actions in process. Bridging for us does not necessarily mean successful outcomes of efforts to reduce social inequality between groups. It means efforts at creating enduring relationships

across what the actors perceive to be social or cultural distance. The bridging term has become popular especially through the work of Robert Putnam, whose *bridging social capital* refers to efforts at creating relationships across social distance, successful outcomes of those efforts, and the social resources for those efforts (2000; for critiques of the social capital concept, see Lichterman 2006, 2005; Somers 2005).

Unlike Putnam, we are particularly concerned with the actors' social and cultural assumptions on which these bridges are built. Some may promote color blindness, others may recognize social-structural asymmetries, and others still may celebrate diversity. These strategies rely on different ways of conceiving differences between groups, relations between groups, different notions of intergroup power, and therefore different understandings of how to create successful interracial collaboration (Besecke 1999; Lamont 2000).

Exploring Conservative Christians' Race-Bridging Strategies

Others have surveyed the evangelical literature on racial reconciliation. Our goal here is to discern patterns of race-bridging from the point of view of the actors. Again, a contextual analysis holds that ordinary citizens and church leaders alike do not simply put religious teachings or how-to manuals into practice in a single, obvious way or in randomly varying ways. Rather, they create interracial relationships in a relatively few, patterned ways (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003).

We draw on a small collection of available case studies that reveal some of the folk categories that white conservative Christians work from when they try to create relationships and collectivities with African Americans. Close-up case studies exist for two kinds of local sites in which white conservative Christians attempt race-bridging. In some of these sites, race-bridging was an explicit goal. In others it was implicit as whites attempted to develop friendships with blacks while downplaying racial differences, with a goal of creating Christ-like relationships. These sites include multiracial congregations and religiously based community service organizations, both important locations of civic life in the United States (Lichterman and Potts 2009).

The Multiracial Congregation   The multiracial church cases we discuss are evangelical Protestant, and all have significant white and African American participation (at least 20 percent each) and, in some cases, other racial-ethnic groups. They are located in different parts of the American South or Midwest. Multiracial congregations are defined in the research literature as congregations in which no single racial group constitutes more than 80 percent of the whole. There are few in the

United States—only 7 percent of all congregations, by the best estimate (Emerson and Woo 2006). It is worth taking these seriously though as sites for race-bridging, not only because they may be growing in number but also because they may foster more open racial attitudes: George Yancey found that compared with other church attenders, whites who attend interracial churches—churches in which African Americans are present—felt less social distance toward African Americans and were less likely to stereotype African Americans (1999).

The Religiously Based Community Service Organization   Cases include several community service organizations sponsored either by evangelical churches or individuals affiliated with evangelical churches or associations (see table 6.6). The first is Adopt-a-Family, an organization headed by a nonprofit group with a largely evangelical board of directors. It was a loose network of eight evangelical congregations, each of which organized volunteer groups to adopt a family whose breadwinner was leaving the welfare rolls and attempting to enter the paid workforce (in accordance with the welfare policy reforms of 1996). Adopting meant supporting family members informally, by driving a mother to appointments with doctors or potential employers, helping a son get a driver's license, or babysitting children while a parent looked for work, for example. The second is the Religious Antiracism Coalition, which brought together a pastor group of roughly twelve core members, five evangelical, the others mostly mainline Protestant. The group publicized opposition to racism by holding a multicultural celebration timed to coincide with a KKK march. They also held a monthly speaker series on topics related to race issues. Third is the Two Moms project. This organization cooked and served free dinners twice monthly at the neighborhood center of a low-income minority neighborhood. The fourth case is the Main Street Southern Baptists, a social outreach group attached to a Southern Baptist church in Mississippi that participated in the state's charitable choice program for faith-based groups that received government money for offering social services.

The case studies are not a statistical sample of bridging attempts, for which no sampling frame is available. Close-up research on race-bridging by religious groups remains relatively rare; rather than sample from available cases, we analyzed all the studies identified through an extensive literature review.[6]

The Dominant Strategy

Evidence points toward a dominant, white, conservative Christian race-bridging strategy and at least one variant seemingly preferred by black conservative Christians. We identify these patterns by drawing on par-

Table 6.6   Qualitative Case Studies of Conservative Christian
Race-Bridging

Case Name	Type of Case	Study
Wilcrest Church	Multiracial congregation	Emerson and Woo 2006; Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005
Crosstown Community Church	Multiracial congregation	Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005
International Church of Christ	Multiracial congregation	Jenkins 2003
Grace Fellowship Church	Multiracial congregation	Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004
Faith Community Church	Multiracial congregation	Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004
Joy Bible Church	Multiracial congregation	Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004
Main Street Southern Baptist	Community service outreach	Bartkowski and Regis 2003
Adopt-a-Family	Community service organization	Lichterman 2005
Religious Anti-Racism Coalition (RARC)	Community service organization	Lichterman 2005
"Two Moms" project	Community service project	Lichterman 2005

Source: Authors' compilation.

ticipant descriptions and contrast them where appropriate with African American understandings. We then focus on several kinds of tension observed when whites and blacks tried to worship or work together. We characterize these tensions sociologically as indicative of a color-blind strategy.

From the point of view of conservative white Christians, race-bridging had to be a Christ-centered strategy, and so we name it that. In this mode, participants tried hard to privilege Christian identity over other identities when engaging with others. As one member of a multiracial church in the Northeast put it, only Jesus Christ could bring the races together, because only Jesus Christ doesn't discriminate. Any other basis for interracial relationships would be biased (Emerson and Woo 2006). Thus, Christ culture was a kind of racial zero-point, as an assistant pastor in Atlanta who described racial reconciliation explained: "There's a Christ-controlled culture that somehow we need to embrace" (Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004, 128). Within the Christ-centered strategy, race-bridging was not a civic, political, or moral end in itself but rather a

means to becoming a better emulator of Christ. In this context, racism was defined as a sin that any good Christian must address like other sins, to be "right with God."

The relatively little available literature on this Christ-centered approach implies that it is more the product of cultural and theological themes in evangelical Protestantism than a self-conscious political strategy to trump race with religion (Emerson and Smith 2000). The Christ-centered style of creating relationships in local community life may have important political affinities and consequences, but sociologically speaking it is risky to assume that most local churchgoers or participants in community service efforts are political operatives consciously promoting a Christian Right ideology. Scholars frequently have observed a gap between the politics or ideology of national religious leaders or interest groups, whether liberal or conservative, and the less systematically organized, less ideological views expressed by local congregants (for instance, Wuthnow and Evans 2002; Hunter 1994). This is not so surprising considering that only a minority of churchgoers of any denomination get involved in politics through their congregations (Chaves 2004).[7]

Simplifying the Social Map

Churchgoers tried to achieve Christ-centeredness by downplaying the importance of racial differences and racial lenses—similar to the way they saw Christ ignoring differences between rich and poor. Successful race-bridging in this strategy was evident when one no longer saw race or felt a racial identity. This strategy was particularly common at multiracial congregations such as Faith Community and Grace Fellowship churches. Some white congregants spoke of achieving a Christ culture and losing other cultural attributes attached to racial or ethnic identity. Others said with pride that when they walk into a room, they simply didn't "see color" (Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004, 135). This facilitated the creation of personal relationships across racial groups, as illustrated by an African American congregant who said that his congregation "helped me to develop relationships with people outside my race. . . . I've gotten to know other people on that more personal level where I've said, 'wow, you know, it's not that much of a difference'" (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005). Multiracial congregations aimed to foster such relationships. For example, the demanding International Church of Christ structured discipleship within the church to encourage interracial relationships. Members had daily contact with what the church called discipling partners, and these discipling groups rotated members regularly. This heightened the likelihood of close, cross-racial contacts that would help crystallize the church's multiracial identity over time, at least ideally in the eyes of church leaders (Jenkins 2003).

Community service projects adopted the same strategy of downplaying race and encouraging a focus on commonalities among churchgoers and outsiders. At the orientation meeting for Adopt-a-Family volunteers, for instance, the trainer, an African American Christian day-care teacher, told volunteers that though she knew about "cultural differences," these differences were barriers to "seeing people with God's eyes" (Lichterman 2005, 133). For their part, volunteers monitored their own social biases. For instance, two volunteers in one group reminded each other not to push breast-feeding on a mother who had already decided on bottles for her newborn because doing so would be judgmental and risk highlighting social differences. They tried hard not to see race, as the following scenarios describe, which only underscores that they did indeed imagine themselves bridging racial differences in some way, even though they called their efforts not racial reconciliation but Christ-like care. In this view, Christ, not race, was what mattered most for one to develop a successful relationship with a member of another racial group.

The Two Moms project started with a similarly simple social map. Inspired by prayerful reflection, two mothers decided to serve meals in a neighborhood because, they explained, they knew how to cook, and needed to find someplace where there were needy people to serve. They emphasized needs over differences—racial or other. The neighborhood they chose had a large minority population. That was not supposed to matter, though, and they did not mention it in their story of how prayer led them to the neighborhood (Lichterman 2005).

In both church and community service settings, downplaying racial (and class) difference was motivated by a well-intended effort to avoid discriminating unfairly by race. If Christ is all that really matters then one would do well to try ignoring or minimizing other markers of personhood. Doing otherwise might risk failing the Christ-centered strategy and reproduce discriminatory racial boundary-drawing.

This latter possibility is exemplified by the pastor of Main Street Southern Baptist. His congregation participated in the state-sponsored Faith and Families of Mississippi program that gave money to churches to assist former welfare recipients. Presuming that these helping relationships would be interracial, the pastor said that participants in this program would realize that "if they are going to get involved in having a church and a mentorship, they. . . are going to have to face some responsibilities they don't want to face." In an interview he offered, unprompted, that "southerners have always seen themselves as having to help, say, the black community. . . . Even when you had the active Ku Klux Klan and the marchers and everything, there's always been a desire to help. And I don't think that's ever been on a racial basis" (Bartkowski and Regis 2003, 116). This quote implies that the helper

quite clearly is white and those helped are black. The pastor did not think southerners helped on a racial basis, yet in this account the black community is uniformly in need of help by a southern community assumed to be white (Bartkowski and Regis 2003). The pastor could not help but symbolize race aloud while discussing religiously based benevolence.

Emphasis on Informal Interpersonal Relations

In multiracial churches, many blacks as well as the great majority of whites defined racial reconciliation as working successfully when people are socializing informally and keeping up interpersonal relations across racial lines. One African American congregant characterized it as "doing everyday normal things with them just like I would with somebody who was black. Going out to dinner with them, our kids playing together." A white man put it similarly: "When church lets out . . . it's not pockets of people, it's not, oh the Asians are over here, the white people are running out the door . . . the black people are pocketed and hugging and loving on each other over here. It's everybody, all intertwined, intermixed" (Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004, 126). Leaders of one congregation contacted local restaurants, asking them to offer two-for-one dinner coupons so that congregants could invite a family of another race to dinner.

Community service efforts similarly relied heavily on socializing as a race-bridging strategy. Adopt-a-Family church volunteer groups arranged picnics, parties, and in one case a baby shower, with their "adopted" families so that the volunteers and the families could get to know one another. When volunteers complained that an adopted mother was often uncommunicative, or that the baby shower was an awkward gathering, it became all the more clear that they considered easy interpersonal socializing the sign of a successful bridge.

African American members of congregations and community service projects quite often appeared to have shared whites' valuation, and sheer enjoyment, of interpersonal socializing across race. However, they also emphasized other elements of a race-bridging strategy more than whites did. In the churches Jeremy Rehwaldt-Alexander studied, some black respondents stated that friendly socializing by itself was not enough, and that congregants needed to discuss public policy issues. Black and white members of the Joy Bible Church, discussed later, agreed that discussion of political issues were a critical part of the racial reconciliation process. Survey data corroborate this greater concern of blacks with exchanging about society and politics. Conservative Christian blacks were significantly more likely to interpret racial differences in terms of different educational opportunities and discrimination than conservative Christian whites were. They were significantly less likely

than conservative Christian whites to oppose black collective action to secure rights, or to risk airing some divisive differences over worship or leadership style in their own churches.

Points of Tension in the Dominant Christ-Centered Strategy

In the Adopt-a-Family community service group, church volunteers sometimes tried to suppress the salience of socioeconomic differences between racial groups in order to sustain the Christ-centered strategy. Volunteers trained in social work would systematically downplay their knowledge of inequality within the community. When early in Adopt-a-Family's history these members suggested that the program should consider the families' social networks and neighborhoods when planning activities, the suggestions fell flat and were not picked up. Picnics and parties were held in parks or in church social halls, but not in the homes of volunteers or families, so that social class differences would not be so obvious. It became clear that this was a point of potential tension when a church volunteer told the researcher that her adopted family's apartment that was too "small and dark" for group events like the afternoon barbecue currently in progress, but that such an event could not take place at her house either because the adopted family's mother "would see that our social backgrounds are different. I wouldn't want that to become a factor in the relationship" (Lichterman 2005, 159). In a similar vein, this church group invited adopted family members to social events in their small church basement hall because the group considered it less socially threatening than inviting mother and kids to "go off with old white guys" to a private home (Lichterman 2005, 156).

Despite these efforts to downplay socioeconomic differences across racial groups, race-bridging was difficult. In their relation with service recipients, the volunteers of Adopt-a-Family were often put into awkward situations of sharing pleasantries and trying to build relationships without exchanging significant information about who they were. At one event for the families of all of the church volunteer groups, a painfully quiet dinner was followed by brief comments from the director of Adopt-a-Family and an invitation to stay around and play board games. At the baby shower, church volunteers had a difficult time getting the mother being celebrated at this event to say anything about her new baby—result of a pregnancy she had originally wanted to abort—and ended up putting a great deal of conversational energy into jokes about the new stroller they bought as a shower gift.

Styles of Worship and Timing

Frustrations over differing worship styles were present in several of the multiracial congregations in our sample. Wilcrest Church, for instance, made ongoing efforts to diversify its music at worship—in one instance, by adding an immigrant percussionist from Cameroon to its all-white worship band. At least one white member was not happy about the addition, and said in an interview that "if our worship changes much more, I will be embarrassed to invite others to come. The pace of some of the music, the loudness, it is just not right" (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005, 50). Most of Wilcrest's nonwhite congregants interviewed said that they wanted a wider variety of music than the typically white hymns and praise music that dominated their worship. Similar sensibilities and divisions were apparent at Grace Fellowship and Faith Community churches.

In several of the congregations studied, researchers observed or heard interviewees say that different timekeeping habits were a barrier to interracial worship. One Sunday school teacher was annoyed that black members of his adult class came up to a half-hour late to his one-hour Sunday course (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005). In examples like these, whites see not arriving to worship or meetings at the stated starting time as not taking things seriously. This was the case in the three multiracial congregations Rehwaldt-Alexander studied.

Similar sentiments characterized Adopt-a-Family volunteers. Members of one church volunteer group aired their frustrations one afternoon when their adopted family had not shown up an hour after the picnic starting time. Frustrations and mistrust mounted when they telephoned the family's home and heard an account of an accident and a hospital visit that they found hard to believe. The group's informal leader said that these were the difficulties one encounters when the "church community interacts with the non–church community" and that when one "adds races in" it gets more difficult still. Another member observed in a perplexed, somewhat dismayed voice that black church services might start late and last for hours. And, as we have already seen, although they tried to be Christ-centered and color-blind, white volunteers remained aware of racial differences, and felt awkward about being painfully different from adopted family members.

Differences in music and timing of activities can become grounds for evaluating people's worthiness or desirability, that is, for engaging in moral boundary work toward blacks by associating their behavior with lower moral worthiness (Lamont 1992). But does this boundary work matter in the bigger picture? Social research strongly suggests that it does: Tastes in music are not minor matters of leisure but integral to core personal identities (DeNora 2000) and social identities—racial and class

identities, among others—that are anything but trivial (Bryson 1996; see also Lamont and Molnar 2001).

Networks and Friendships at Church

The case of Crosstown Church suggests that taken-for-granted differences in relationship style might combine with racial intolerance to strain relationships among members of multiracial churches (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005). Two white families explained to the researchers that they were going to leave the multiracial church because their son and daughter were the only white members of their church youth group. They were uncomfortable and had a hard time making friends with kids who were "loud," acted differently, had "different lifestyles." Perhaps the simple perception of being a white minority in a majority-black group might impel white members to depart, no matter how consonant the group's religious practices were with them. Other studies have commented little on this aspect of interracial relationship-building, emphasizing simply that interpersonal sociability matters to congregants. It makes sense to think that different styles of relationship-building and different styles of selfhood would affect the fortunes of a multiracial congregation that defines its mission strongly in terms of interpersonal relationship goals. In the ICOC congregation that discipled intensively, for instance, leaders sometimes assigned members to discipling groups on the basis of race or ethnicity, counter to the larger principle of interpersonal, interracial solidarity, because they assumed people of like backgrounds would understand each other's personal lives better (Jenkins 2003).

Encountering the Unsaved

For evangelical Christians, those who are not Christian, no matter what race, may appear morally inferior. This may even extend to Christians who are not congregational members. This is of course a matter of drawing sharp group boundaries, as was the case in Grace Fellowship and Faith Community churches. Pastors said that the real dividing lines were not between races but between Christian believers and those outside the church. Because the blacks to whom congregants reached out were not in their churches, congregants assumed them probably not saved, not truly Christian (Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004, 204–5). At Crosstown Church, one white family that had sought out a multiracial congregation also left the church because the teenage son found it hard to form friendships in the church youth group, which was reaching out to inner-city youth in an adjacent, largely working-class, and African American town. In the words of his mother, the organizers "were really

reaching out to the [black working class] kids. And so, it was geared for sort of non-Christian kids." Implying that lower-income black youth probably are not Christian, she characterized her son as a "white suburban kid" in need of a different church in which they could "keep him growing spiritually." The Christ-centered intention here came cloaked in a set of preferences and assumptions regarding race and class as well as religion—assumptions that would be hard to articulate from within the dominant Christ-centered strategy (Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson 2005, 74). That social differences were muted and not openly discussed was likely to reinforce the homophilic character of the life of these congregations.

Discussions of church leadership suggested a similar issue in Grace Fellowship and Faith community churches. African American members complained that they could not take on leadership positions because the positions paid too little to live on. Because these evangelical churches defined freedom from financial debt as part of the essence of being a good Christian, systematic differences in the likelihood of having debts to pay off translated into lower chances of becoming church leaders (Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004).

White evangelical members of the Religious Antiracism Coalition (RARC) similarly emphasized Christian identity without reflecting fully on the consequences of this emphasis for race relations. When evangelicals joined discussions on how to publicize antiracism in their city of Lakeburg, they said repeatedly that they wanted to focus primarily on the racial divisions within the church—here meaning within the "circle of Christianity," as one pastor put it. The church was racist, they acknowledged, and needed to work on its own sins. Yet their approach strengthened the boundary between Christian and non-Christians. The RARC spent much more time discussing the possibility that non-Christians would participate in an anti-KKK event than they did discussing ways to boost attendance at the event by minorities, Christian or not. The maintenance of religious boundaries took precedence over publicizing antiracist efforts (Lichterman 2005).

Christ-Centeredness as Color Blindness

Many scholars argue that the ideology of color blindness is a neoliberal response to the establishment of equal opportunity legislation and policy (see, for example, Frankenberg 1993; Doane 1999). It lends support to the false notion that race no longer matters because of the accomplishments of the civil rights agenda in the 1960s and 1970s. Not acknowledging the importance of racial inequality often reinforces an unequal distribution of educational, economic, and social resources between minorities and whites. Color-blind positions also frequently discourage

whites in more privileged social positions to question why their social location and life opportunities are different from those of the less fortunate. In this way color blindness sustains continual residential segregation and attendant disparities in local schools where minorities are the majority (Massey and Denton 1993). It maintains exclusive social networks among professionals (Collins 1989) and a sense of entitlement to placement in selective academic courses and schools (Wells and Serna 1996).

A further consequence of the race-blind approach is that it limits people's understandings of the different contexts in which whites and minorities live. Although conservative Christians often implied or said explicitly that race did not matter in their own relationships, racial and social differences were often salient, belying the raceless, dominant Christ-centered approach. Despite their good intentions, the individuals described in these case studies kept themselves from pondering or criticizing the social realities in which African Americans are embedded.

An Alternative: Christ-Centered and Socially Reflexive

One multiracial church in the sample of qualitative cases, Joy Bible Church, presented a somewhat different race-bridging strategy (Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004). Congregants discussed racial reconciliation in terms similar to those used at other churches, that is, by emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relations. They used a vocabulary of social justice rarely present in the other congregations, however, and spoke little if any about color blindness. Joy Bible Church interviewees valued pleasant interpersonal socializing as a means to creating interracial relationships, but also learned to value interracial teaching about group differences. The pastor, an African American, advocated that white congregants learn about racism from blacks, implicitly challenging the status equality that conventional socializing presumes, and in some ways reversing the surrounding society's social hierarchy. In contrast with the other conservative Christian groups, Joy Bible Church's practice was closer to that of race-bridging discussion programs that a variety of churches and secular organizations have used (Study Circles Resource Center 1997).

The congregation also became interested in race issues beyond the congregation itself. On one occasion, 100 church members attended a hearing on affordable housing. A member interpreted the event in terms of racial reconciliation: "People look out and see Joy Bible Church, they see all these different races and all these different people . . . that's how you are going to fight racism" (Rehwaldt-Alexander 2004, 238) In the same spirit, the church sponsored a low-cost medical clinic and a mul-

tiracial summer camp. The church's own staff included many African Americans and whites; the pastor reported that the church needed to work more on finding Latino personnel. It is possible of course that congregants shared left-liberal politics as much as faith in Christ, making it possible for them to openly discuss racial inequality. Although people in the other cases might interpret Joy Bible Church's race-bridging as un-Christ-like, Joy Bible Church congregants may have embedded their religious faith in an activist sensibility widely shared at this church but not in others.

In this case, instead of distinguishing Christ-like from non-Christ-like approaches, white and African American congregants learned to have what the pastor called a difficult conversation about race. The pastor instituted ongoing and sometimes tense churchwide dialogues about race relations in which many congregants participated. They learned to see themselves on a more complicated social map, so as to gain a better understanding of differences in experience and conditions across racial and class group divides. Congregants tried to relate to other congregants as people with racial identities, as well as Christians. United by a specifically Christian commitment against racism, they aimed to weaken racial boundaries. They thus tried to make racial identity itself an object of critical reflection, rather than to focus on racially blind Christ-centeredness. They had a socially reflexive understanding of their racial identities in relation to those of others (Lichterman 2005).

Something similar happened to the Two Moms organization. Having come into a low-income neighborhood as servants of Christ, the project leaders discovered that residents perceived them in more prosaic and social terms, as outsiders with paternalistic if well-intended ideas. The mothers engaged in difficult conversation, that is, held a public forum with neighborhood residents about their free-meals effort. Afterward they began organizing the meals alongside neighborhood residents rather than doing it for them. Only after this public meeting did they come to feel trusted and appreciated.

Conclusion

White and black conservative Christians have identities other than religious ones. These identities and the social preferences that accompany them inform their use of religious teachings—the dictate to make Jesus Christ central in their lives, for instance—and influence their race-bridging efforts. Our contextual perspective thus helps us understand the mother who believed that that the spirituality of her white suburban son was hindered if the church surrounded him with a group of black inner-city youth. To her, moral, racial, and religious identities had to coincide for spiritual growth to occur. Our analysis also helps make sense of the

fact that for some, the boundaries of the Christian community include only individuals who have similar views on worship or timekeeping habits. When individuals assume that being a good Christian means being respectably suburban, or singing hymns that happen to derive from white-associated musical traditions, they are bringing nonreligious, social categories into their understanding of their religious practices and their definition of their religious community, even as they believe they are doing what Jesus would do.

When white gestures of friendliness, like a hand on the shoulder, were interpreted as condescending by blacks, the director of Adopt-a-Family explained it this way: "Race is—the dominant—way of talking, and it's not just race. It's not just racial. It's how to be with each other. If I put my hand—an innocent gesture—it gets so complicated!" (Lichterman 2005, 156). For this man, the core problem of social life is the challenge individuals face regarding how to be with each other. In this context, governmentally enforced policies based on race could seem of secondary importance at most. Conservative Christians might perceive them as a cold-hearted distraction from the work of "upping our compassion levels," to quote a favorite expression among Adopt-a-Family volunteers.

A focus on the race-bridging strategies of conservative Christians shows us how their preferred styles of everyday, local relationships may influence their political imaginations. It helps us understand the context through which some white, conservative Christians may interpret national policies and programs, including their lesser support for equal rights, compared to other whites. Committed to interpersonal closeness (Smith 1998) and hesitant to see people in terms of social structure, they may see civil rights or affirmative action policies as wrongheaded or irrelevant.

The combination of survey data and case studies support Emerson and Smith's pessimistic prognosis for the continued dominance of colorblindness within Christian conservatism in the United States (2000). Our analysis suggests that the Christ-centered strategy most popular among white conservative Christians more generally downplays racial differences and often devalues religious and cultural practices associated with African Americans. This strategy cultivates unequal relationships that are at odds with the civic ideal that motivates much current writing on the health of American civic life (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Putnam 2000). The decline in the civic engagement of Americans over the past thirty years reflects in large measure the diminishing participation of socially subordinate—low-income, nonwhite—citizens (Wuthnow 2002). Whatever its virtues, the dominant Christ-centered strategy seems unlikely to contribute to reversing this trend. Indeed, it steers people away

from publicly acknowledging racial categories and racial inequality, which may be necessary to change attitudes and sensibilities tapped in the survey data. The Christ-centered strategy also does little to weaken the strong sense of distance that many white conservative Christians have in relation to African Americans—a sense of distance reinforced by a commitment to the view that racial differences are less important to believers than sharing Christian beliefs. An alternative approach is to cultivate difficult conversations about race. Yet given survey evidence on social distance between white conservative Christians and African Americans, it is unlikely that these difficult conversations will soon become widespread in conservative churches.

White conservative Christians surveyed appear to draw stronger racial boundaries than the individuals pictured in the case studies, who may not be visible in aggregated survey responses concerning race relations. It would be useful to survey systematically the racial attitudes in race-bridging groups and compare those with attitudes found among the broader samples. Moreover, studies reviewed here do not offer comparable criteria for successful race-bridging in multiracial churches or community service organizations. Although people in some of our ethnographic cases clearly were frustrated with their race-bridging efforts, we are unable to assess whether these efforts as a whole succeed by the members' own standards. We resist specifying standards, preferring instead to document the repertoire of approaches used in the United States.

Further work should investigate race-bridging approaches historically and across institutions. More studies should investigate our hunch that conservative Christians' race-bridging strategies inform their political orientations. Important survey research on religion and voting behavior teaches us much about recent political change in the United States but less about how exactly religion informs ordinary people's politics or civic engagement (Wuthnow 1999), or how public involvement informs people's religious commitments. We need more research that asks how people use religion in everyday settings—churches, civic associations, rallies and protests, for instance—to make political candidates and policies meaningful to them. Common sense dictates that religious people use religious teachings as rationales or ideological frames for their politics. Although people certainly do use religion this way, research shows that they also use religion in other ways to get their bearings on the public world (see Lichterman 2008).

Finally, we need research that can locate religiously based race-bridging strategies within a broader context, so that we can assess their relative importance in relation to race-bridging strategies that emphasize shared citizenship, consumption, or work. This broader agenda may

illuminate aspects of racialized culture that have yet to be considered systematically and are likely to have enormous implications for how Americans define democracy and community in the future.

Notes

1. Our paper uses black and African American interchangeably. Following widespread usage, we do not capitalize color terms for race.
2. SBC.net, available at: http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp ?ID=899.
3. National Center for Education Statistics, available at: http://nces.ed.gov/ programs/coe/2002/section3/indicator25.asp.
4. U.S. Bureau of the Census, available at: http://landview.census.gov/hhes/ income/histinc/f05.html.
5. In the GSS, respondents who identified as fundamentalist were counted as conservative Christians (the other categories were moderate and liberal.) Of course, not all conservative Christians would count as fundamentalists in the proper sense of the term (see Smith 1998); important differences between evangelicals and fundamentalists often fly under the radar of survey research, not to mention popular discourse. The Social Capital Benchmark Survey allowed respondents to identify with particular denominations, and using Smith as our initial guide, we chose and coded conservative Christian denominations that had a sufficient number of respondents for reliable analyses (1998, 2000). We intentionally used a restrictive coding strategy, so as to select only those denominations very safely considered very largely conservative theologically. They included Southern Baptist, Independent Fundamentalist Churches, Lutheran-Missouri or Wisconsin Synods, Pentecostal-Assembly of God or Pentecostal, and Church of God.
6. Proceeding inductively, we read through the cases, searching for patterns of interaction within them, in the same way that ethnographers analyze patterns of interaction in their field notes. Existing overviews of evangelical Christian social relations informed but did not exclusively determine our search for these patterns (Smith 1998; Emerson and Smith 2000; Warner 1988). We focused closely on styles of relationship, stated and implicit goals of relationship-building, and actors' own assessments of those relationships. Following the constant-comparative method, we developed classifications for the emerging patterns, and coded those classifications when we found them in the case studies, checking continuously see if codes used in one case could apply to others (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987). Coding in this way revealed a dominant strategy that held across congregations and community service organizations, and two strong components of that strategy that most of the cases displayed.
7. It may be easy to assume that local congregations' race-effacing, Christ-centered style of building relationships must have been designed intentionally to serve the interests of people hoping to diminish African American political power or opportunities. Yet we learn more about local churchgoers' race-bridging, and its relation to national politics, if we resist that assumption and

focus at least initially on what conservative Christians say and do, where.

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Chapter 7

Where Is the Counterweight? Explorations of the Decline in Mainline Protestant Participation in Public Debates over Values

JOHN H. EVANS

CHARLES TAYLOR defines the public sphere as "a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these" (1995, 185–86). The public sphere in liberal democratic societies exists to promulgate the values of the public, which can be communicated to the elites who lead us. That is, we have public debates about our values, and about the policies that might flow from such values. For example, a fairly vigorous public debate has continued in recent years about the Iraq war. This debate is partly about policies, such as whether having more soldiers in Iraq would lessen sectarian violence. The debate is also, and often implicitly, about values that support or lead to various strategies or policies. For example, the pottery barn rule, famously articulated by Colin Powell, is essentially a values statement: people who break something are obligated to fix it. Certain policies probabilistically flow from this value.

In America, religion has been a major influence on public debate about values and policies, both through the pronouncements of religious institutions, and through individual religious citizens who express through