Critical Whiteness Theories and the Evangelical "Race Problem": Extending Emerson and Smith's *Divided by Faith*

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In their 2000 book, Divided by Faith, *Michael Emerson and Christian Smith use the case of evangelical Christians to demonstrate how uncompromising individualist ideals get in the way of clear thinking and decisive action about racial inequalities in contemporary American society. We use insights developed from whiteness studies and critical race theory to sharpen and further extend this analysis. More specifically, we suggest: (1) that anti-black stereotypes may be subtler, more pervasive, and more functionally necessary than Emerson and Smith assume; and (2) that the individualistic ideals Emerson and Smith focus on are not race neutral but, instead, are part of a taken-for-granted and vigorously defended majority white culture and identity. These points are developed through a theoretical reconstruction of Emerson and Smith's argument and a reevaluation of their methodological approach and data. Finally, we present data from a recent national survey of race and religion in American life that provide preliminary quantitative support for our revisionist claims.*

Among the scholarly works that have appeared in recent years analyzing the racial attitudes and practices of evangelical Christians (Becker 1998; Davis and Robinson 1996; Edgell and Tranby 2007; Emerson, Smith, and Sikkink 1999; Hinojosa and Park 2004; Hunsberger 1995; Hunt 2002; Kirkpatrick 1993; Laythe et al. 2002; Laythe, Finkel, and Kirkpatrick 2001), none has been as influential as Michael Emerson and Christian Smith's *Divided by Faith* (2000). The study is impressive on a number of fronts—in its careful, systematic data analysis; the clarity of its writing and presentation; and the quality of the (original) data on which the entire project is based. But what really gives *Divided by Faith* pride of place in its field, at least in our view, is the broader social and sociological significance Emerson and Smith claim for evangelicals, namely, that the expressed attitudes and ideals of evangelical Christians—especially those involving the tension between their ideological commitment to justice and equality, on the one hand, and their individualist ideals, on the other—approximate and highlight key dimensions of mainstream American racial discourse and latent values. A full understanding of the evangelical race problem, according to Emerson and Smith, thus amounts to nothing less than a better comprehension of the American race problem itself (see Emerson and Smith 2000;1–3).

We think Emerson and Smith are absolutely correct about the claim that a thorough understanding of evangelical racial attitudes can reveal a great deal about mainstream American attitudes and understandings of race and racial justice. We also think that in focusing on the tensions within evangelical discourse, Emerson and Smith have opened the way to a much broader and more profound critique of the "race problem" in America, one that locates the problems of race squarely within conventional liberal democratic discourse.

Here it is important to clarify how Emerson and Smith understand white evangelicals as both representative of and different from other whites and the dominant American racial discourse. It would be easy to assume that white evangelicals hold views on race that lean toward those of

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conservative or even reactionary extremist groups such as the KKK (see Daniels 1997; Ferber 1998; Gabriel 1998; Klee, Dressen, and Riess 1991). This is not, however, how Emerson and Smith situate and interpret white evangelical racial attitudes. What makes white evangelicals unique, according to Emerson and Smith, is not that they are more racist or supremacist, but rather that they adhere stringently and consistently to individualist, anti-structural ideals and discourse. If white evangelicals are extremist, in other words, it is not because their views are on the political margins but rather because they more strictly apply individualist, meritocratic principles. This is what some race scholars have referred to as "principled conservativism" (cf. Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). As Emerson and Smith put it, evangelical views on race "so well combine with" mainstream American civic values that "both evangelical Christians and secularists could ladle from the same kettle" (2000:2). The importance of this conception of white evangelical beliefs and attitudes—which we find reasonable, illuminating, and take as the starting point for our extension—cannot be overstated if we are to appreciate fully what evangelicals reveal about discourses of race and racism in the United States.

In this article we intend to push Emerson and Smith's argument and analysis further, drawing upon recent insights and innovations in the scholarly, critical literature on race. Our extension is focused around two main points. The first is that evangelical attitudes and ideals are more dependent upon anti-black sentiments than Emerson and Smith realize. Here, we will follow the work of Bobo and his colleagues on "laissez-faire racism" (1997, 1998)—the idea that principled conservative ideals are actually bound up with subtle (and often unspoken) anti-black stereotypes that justify or legitimate political inaction (see also Bonilla-Silva (2006) on color blindness). Our second claim, informed by critical race theory and whiteness studies, is that individualistic ideals and discourse are not as politically neutral as Emerson and Smith seem to assume. American individualism not only blinds white evangelicals to structural inequalities involving race, as Emerson and Smith correctly emphasize, but it also provides a discourse and way of thinking that allows its adherents to justify, rationalize, and legitimate the racial status quo. It achieves this effect both by assigning blame to those who are disadvantaged by race and, more importantly, by naturalizing and normalizing the very cultural practices, beliefs, and norms that privilege white Americans over others. In this respect, we suggest that evangelical individualist culture is more deeply racialized—in its foundations as well as its effects—than Emerson and Smith imagine.

These ideas are advanced on both empirical and methodological grounds. Initially, we use this more critical lens to rethink some of the relationships between the different attitudes and values presented by Emerson and Smith and reinterpret key interview quotes on which their claims are based. Methodologically, we also point out topics not fully explored in their interviews and the ambiguities that resulted from the open-ended way in which they framed their questions about the "problems" of race in America. Finally, we also present initial data from a recent survey of race and religion in America—a survey designed with the explicit intent of analyzing these ideas—that lends empirical support to our critical theoretical claims regarding understandings of privilege, the taken-for-granted nature of the white identity, and the equation of whiteness with American individualism and nationalism. Analyses that explore related issues with these same data provide additional empirical support for our revisionist account of the racial attitudes of white evangelicals (Edgell and Tranby 2007; Hartmann and Croll 2006).

EMERSON AND SMITH'S *DIVIDED BY FAITH*

Emerson and Smith's (2000) *Divided by Faith* focuses on the connections between evangelical religious beliefs and black-white race relations to explicate what they call the "tale of paradox" between Christian-American civic ideals and the continued low socioeconomic status of African Americans. They focus on evangelical Christians, once again, not only because of an inherent

interest in the group but also because many of the key values of the liberal American civic identity—freedom, individualism, independence, equality of opportunity, etc.—derive from the blending of evangelical Christianity and Enlightenment philosophy. In evangelical circles in recent years, this orientation has been translated into a broad attempt at racial reconciliation between whites and African Americans, at least among evangelical leaders. Thus, for Emerson and Smith, evangelicals are actively engaged with issues of race and race relations in ways that are comparable to and thus revealing of the attitudes, understandings, and practices of many white Americans.

Emerson and Smith contend that in order to comprehend how evangelicals understand and deal with the "problem(s)" of race, we have to understand the cultural "toolkit" (Swidler, 1986) that white evangelicals use to organize their experiences and evaluate their reality. White evangelical views on race can be usefully summarized by three characteristic sets of assumptions about the central and irreducible role of individuals in society. The first dimension of the evangelical mindset that Emerson and Smith highlight is "accountable freewill individualism." Free-will individualism has a long history in American culture. The basic assumption is that individuals "exist independent of structures and institutions, have freewill, and are individually accountable for their actions" (Emerson and Smith 2000:76), which means that one is accountable to other people, and most importantly to God, for one's freely made choices. The second key aspect of the evangelical mindset that bears on their conceptions of race is "relationalism," which consists of a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships and derives from a theological understanding that salvation can only come from a personal relationship with Christ. This emphasis transposes itself onto and strengthens the importance of interpersonal relationships in the evangelical worldview. The third element of the white evangelical toolkit is "anti-structuralism," an inability or unwillingness to accept explanations based on social structural influences. Inherent in anti-structuralism is a belief or assumption that an overemphasis on institutions and groups tends to undermine accountable individualism. According to Emerson and Smith, these three "tools" profoundly affect how white evangelical Christians evaluate race relations and racial inequality in America.

Based upon in-depth interviews, Emerson and Smith argue that white evangelicals are often hesitant to discuss social problems having to do with race—what they call "the race problem"—or offer an explanation for why the problem exists. When pressed, evangelicals focus almost exclusively on interpersonal conflicts and offer explanations that emphasize one of the three factors: prejudiced individuals; group-based thinking; and elite (media and government) fabrication and manipulation. Evangelicals' conceptions of the "race problem" and their understandings of its causes are not only consistent with but derive directly from their core individualistic, anti-structuralist worldview. To draw out these connections Emerson and Smith focus on the explanatory rationales of evangelicals.

The first type of explanation, focusing on prejudiced individuals, is by far the most common that Emerson and Smith encountered. In this explanation, individual prejudice (of which evangelicals are very critical) is fundamentally rooted in sin and results in bad relationships. This emphasis on prejudice is strongly related to the centrality of free-will individualism and interpersonal relationships in the white evangelical "toolkit." Race problems, in this view, are the result of a few irresponsible individuals. Related to prejudice are explanations that posit that the race problem is the result of an overemphasis on groups and group characterizations. From this point of view, the problem of race is the problem of those who talk about racial groups and inequalities because this conception and discourse directly (if unwittingly) promotes a group-based, structuralist view fundamentally at odds with individualist, relational ideals. Indeed, many evangelicals claim that African Americans themselves are really the race problem because they refuse to "get out of" a group-based mentality. Following from this, white evangelicals also point the finger at a wide range of people and institutions—from black leaders to the media and the government—that they believe "hype up" the race problem to serve their own interests.

This deep mistrust in, and condemnation of, most institutions and groups reflects the profound anti-structuralism of evangelical views.

Emerson and Smith insist that the reluctance of evangelicals to explain the race problem in structural terms does not mean that they are unaware of the economic disparities between blacks and whites. In fact, Emerson and Smith claim that evangelicals are well aware of racial disparities in economic resources (albeit mostly through visual images presented by the media, rather than through personal experience; see, especially, p. 94). However—and this is the key point—evangelicals do not believe that economic inequalities are part of the race problem. Instead, they conceive of structural inequities as an entirely separate issue. While the vast majority of evangelicals hold that all people are created equally by God and express a strong belief in equal opportunity for all Americans, they refuse to accept that social outcomes could be determined by any forces other than the merit, effort, and hard work of individuals themselves.

A large majority of white evangelicals attribute economic inequality to the inferior culture or a lack of motivation by African Americans. A common explanation in this vein is an inability or unwillingness to learn "proper" or "mainstream" English. Other common arguments are that African Americans do not have good "family values" or have bad relationships with others. White evangelicals also tend to blame black Americans for failing to "catch the vision" of success and consequently to have a lack of individual initiative (2000:100). Emerson and Smith think that this is not surprising, stemming once again from the adherence to accountable individualism that necessarily presumes that individual African Americans lack initiative and so consequently should be held accountable for their inferior structural position. Evangelicals also blame the government for African-American dependence on welfare, because the government makes it easier for African Americans to collect welfare than work. In this explanation, groups and institutions are seen as obviating personal responsibility and thus are ultimately destructive. In short, Emerson and Smith claim that evangelicals' religiocultural "tools" provide the framework through which they perceive the world and allow them to account for structural inequality by blaming African Americans' deficiencies.

Emerson and Smith claim that the individualist toolkit helps explain white evangelical approaches to solving the race problem as well. Two factors, in their view, are most striking about the solutions evangelicals propose. First, evangelical solutions emphasize the need to get to know people of other races, to "love thy neighbor," and for everybody to become a Christian. Evangelicals are, in turn, extremely mistrustful of, and often vehemently opposed to, structural and state-based solutions to racial problems because they do not address what they believe to be the true roots of the problem. Secondly, evangelical solutions to race problems do not "advocate for or support changes that might cause extensive discomfort or change their economic and cultural lives" (2000:130). Thus, Emerson and Smith argue that while many evangelicals may want to see an end to race problems, they are constrained by their religiocultural tools to call only for voluntaristic, faith-based solutions that would achieve the desired effects gradually and incrementally, such as converting people to Christianity and forming strong cross-racial relationships.

Emerson and Smith conclude by describing how the existing structural arrangement of segregated congregations helps to reinforce white evangelical views on race. In essence, the social isolation of white evangelicals allows them to minimize and individualize the racial problem, assign responsibility for inequality to blacks (with whom they have very limited contact), accept and maintain racial inequality, and suggest unworkable solutions to racial division. Emerson and Smith call for a resolution of the conflict between liberal, Christian ideals and the existing system of racial inequalities. Such a resolution would, in their view, require all Americans to recognize that the racial divide is structural, important, and something that has to be overcome if democratic and Christian values are to be taken seriously. One question is whether this project can be carried out within the framework of liberal individualism itself, as Emerson and Smith seem to assume. It is this question that informs the points we raise in the following section.

INTERNAL INCONSISTENCIES IN EMERSON AND SMITH'S ANALYSIS

We believe that Emerson and Smith are correct to see evangelical views on race as representative and revealing of dominant sociocultural factors at the heart of American (mis)understandings of race and racial inequalities. Individualism, relationalism, and anti-structuralism are, in short, not just part of the evangelical toolkit; they are also foundational for American ideals about race and its proper place in society. However, we also contend that individualistic ideals and negative attitudes toward African Americans are more intertwined and mutually reinforcing than Emerson and Smith may realize. In fact, we claim that these dominant values and ideals are part of a larger cultural schema that sits at the very core of white identity and the perpetuation of white privilege in the contemporary United States. Even more than this, we believe that these cultural norms may be getting in the way of the very structural reforms that Emerson and Smith believe to be necessary for a meaningful racial change.

Our starting point and perhaps our most basic critique of Emerson and Smith's work is that a number of key quotes that they read as examples of uncritical individualist ideology are, in our view, clear instances of respondents engaging in group-based negative stereotyping of African Americans. This stereotyping is especially evident when their respondents discuss why they believe that African Americans are doing so poor economically:

> There are a lot people just sitting back on their butts, saying because of circumstances in the past you owe me this and you owe me that. There's a lot of resentment in the White community because of that and we just kind of need to get over all of that and move forward. Everybody is responsible for their own actions. Life is not the circumstances; life is how you deal with the circumstances and how it makes you better and how you move forward. (2000:102)

> A lot of them (African Americans) don't care. They don't want to work. . . . You go downtown and you see some of these apartments, low-income housing. It's trash. I mean, they don't care and then they complain. Well, get off your duffer and do something. Make a better life for yourself. Clean up your house, pick up your trash, get some kind of job. (2000:102)

Other interviewees responded to the question of why African Americans are worse off economically with statements like: "A lot of *them* (African Americans) don't care" (2000:102, our italics); "The blacks are not willing to accept that to learn correct English is a major step toward advancing in society" (2000:101); African Americans would rather "sit at home and collect welfare" than work (2000:104); and, finally: "*They* (African Americans) have really dropped the ball when it comes to family responsibility for raising their children. I hate that the kids have to suffer for that, but the kid's responsibility is to say, 'I'm not going to let that happen to me'" (2000:101–02).

What is important to notice about these quotes is that these respondents are not just blaming *individual* African Americans for their problems, as Emerson and Smith argue, but instead blame *all* African Americans, as a group. More than this, they are using clear, almost old-fashioned, racial stereotypes and prejudices to do this. Finally, they are doing this when discussing economic inequalities. We believe that such clear group-based stereotyping and racial discourse in the context of discussions of inequality contradicts Emerson and Smith's claim that white evangelical attitudes about African-American disadvantage reflect only their individualistic explanations for the race problem.

We don't mean to argue here that evangelical attitudes toward African-American economic inequality can be explained by group-based anti-black sentiments alone. Instead, we want to suggest that there is actually a close connection between evangelical adherence to individualistic explanations for economic equality and the group-based anti-black attitudes that emerge in Emerson and Smith's interviews. In this, we follow the lead of Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Bobo and co-authors (1997, 1998), who insist that both components are essential for explaining whites' attitudes toward African Americans and racial inequality more generally. As Bobo, Kluegel, and

Smith claim, there is a "pronounced tendency of white Americans to view the 'race problem' as flowing from the freely chosen cultural behaviors of blacks themselves" (1997:20). For these theorists, individualist claims about the paths to mobility and success cannot exist without some account or explanation of African-American disadvantage (see also Bobo and Smith 1998; Bonilla-Silva 2001). Thus, the problems of race are not just the unfortunate result of a theoretical, individualistic discourse and ideals, as Emerson and Smith would have it; instead, the problems of race are also nurtured and sustained by deep-seated racialized—if not simply racist—images and ideas.

We believe that this attention to anti-black sentiments is an important qualification to Emerson and Smith's argument, one that is evidenced in a more careful reading of the respondents' quotes to questions about economic inequality. More specifically, we contend that racialized, anti-black sentiments as well as individualistic conservative ideals are part of a broader racial-cultural schema that structures and undergirds how evangelicals "understand" *both* the general problem of race and economic inequality between the races. Here it is important to recall that Emerson and Smith recognize that their respondents misunderstand and racialize the causes of economic inequalities; however, they do not see racism lurking underneath of their more generic conceptions of the problems of race. In short, Emerson and Smith see these as two different problems, one that is racialized, while the other is individualized. What is more problematic about this approach is that Emerson and Smith seem to assume that liberal ideals about individualism and fairness can be deployed to deal with and even solve structural inequalities. Our contention is that there is a much deeper tension, even an outright contradiction, between liberal ideals and structural inequities.

The contradiction we are pointing to here is obscured in Emerson and Smith's analysis because of the way they framed their project and formed the questions that they asked of their respondents. By conceptualizing and operationalizing questions about race as a generic "problem" and assuming that liberal ideals can and should be deployed in a way so as to solve structural inequities, the question of what the problem is and who is responsible for it are left open, allowing evangelicals to express negative stereotypes about black Americans without challenging previously stated or conceived conservative individualistic ideals. Moreover, Emerson and Smith downplay the existence of such group-based and racist responses. Our speculation is that they both asked questions that perpetuated such a contradiction and then downplay this contradiction because it cannot be explained by the limited framework of the religiocultural "toolkit," as they define it. Extending from this observation, our point is that it is not accidental that evangelical ideals lead into negative racial stereotypes; these ideals actually need such stereotypes and prejudices to explain, justify, and legitimate the social inequalities they almost inevitably produce.

What we are problematizing here is a whole set of norms and values that both reproduce and privilege whiteness in contemporary American culture. Racial minorities, in general, and African Americans, in particular, destabilize these social norms and values, not because of any economic or political threat but rather because their structural location makes it difficult to conform to white evangelical expectations and norms and thus threatens to call the legitimacy and universality of these norms and values into question. Before we can more fully articulate this argument, we must take a moment to understand how the powerful theoretical tool of critical whiteness theory both supplements and moves beyond conventional sociological understandings of race relations in America that Emerson and Smith employ.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY, WHITENESS STUDIES, AND EVANGELICALS

The theoretical literature that encompasses whiteness studies and critical race theory is voluminous and continually expanding.[1] A comprehensive treatment of this work is well beyond the scope of this article; however, a review of the major theoretical components of this literature

is both useful and necessary. Critical whiteness theories postulate that the old Jim Crow era ideology of white supremacy has been replaced by a more subtle justification of structural dominance, the equation of whiteness with American civic identity (Doane 1997; Frankenberg 1994). The derivation and maintenance of this equation of whiteness and the American identity has two main elements, the structural and the cultural. Foremost among the cultural elements are the recognition of the white Anglo-American culture as the normative cultural status and thus the equivalency of whiteness with the "mainstream" (Doane 1997; Giroux 1992; Lipsitz 1995; McLaren 1997). Because of the normative nature of whiteness, white cultural interests are often confounded with national interests, further strengthening white dominance and power (Roediger 2002). Conversely, nonwhite cultures are seen as deviating from the normative cultural status and are thus inferior to whites (Crenshaw 1997). This conflation of white cultural dominance with the "mainstream" creates a situation in which whiteness can be "taken for granted" (Frankenberg 1993).[2]

The "taken for grantedness" of whiteness is strengthened by the economically superior position of whites, which gives them the ability to exercise and maintain their power and dominance over other groups. Most importantly, the "taken-for-granted" nature of white cultural, political, and economic power both creates and is created by a situation were whiteness is a hidden or invisible racial identity (Doane 1997; Lewis 2004). This "taken for grantedness" of white power, as well as the hidden nature of the white racial identity, has also been referred to as "color-blindness" (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2006; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Carr 1997; Crenshaw 1997; Gotunda 1991; Lewis 2004).

The hidden nature of white racial identity allows for a conflation of whiteness with existing social norms, values, structures, and institutions, in short, with the status quo (Doane 1997). Thus, the dominant position of whites in the socioeconomic hierarchy and the advantages that are implicit in this dominant position are taken for granted and hidden from most whites. This hidden position of advantage creates a situation in which whites perceive that individual success is based on effort and merit and that there is equality of opportunity for all individuals who work hard. Whites, then, are equated with the American civic identity because they believe in the civic liberal ideals of individualism, equality, and opportunity—belief that is made possible by their dominant racial identity. On the other hand, racial minorities are excluded from this identity because of their perceived refusal to conform to the ideals of individualism, equality, and opportunity, and their consequently inferior position in the socioeconomic hierarchy. In other words, the failures of racial minorities to improve their social and economic position, in the face of obvious (to whites) equality of opportunity, mark the racial minority as an outsider to white social and economic success, and, as such, they are excluded from the American identity and ideals. Some critical whiteness theorists have used the idea of property or a possessive investment in whiteness to describe this phenomenon (Harris 1993; Lipsitz 1995).

Many of Emerson and Smith's findings can be seen to support and be explained by this body of theory. First, when discussing the race problem, white evangelicals frequently blamed African Americans for the race problem. This presumption of black guilt demonstrates the normative nature of whiteness in America—or, in the words of George Lipsitz, the assumption that "racial polarization comes from the existence of blacks rather then the behavior of whites" (1995: 369). Additionally, it is precisely because their own race and racial privileges are so normative, and consequently hidden, that evangelicals are able to believe that equal opportunity is present in their lives (see also Bonilla-Silva (2006) on color blindness). Thus, not only are evangelicals privileging their own cultural identity and values, but they are also, consciously or not, marginalizing and excluding the African-American experience.

Another of Emerson and Smith's findings that can be reevaluated in the context of critical whiteness theories is the strong desire of evangelicals to maintain the racial status quo, both culturally and socially. The maintenance of the status quo not only guarantees economic advantage for white evangelicals, but it also ensures the normative nature of white identity and experience.

Thus, the evangelical defensiveness about American culture, their essential and unquestioned conservatism, ultimately derives from the conflation of the social status quo with white identity and privilege (Doane 1997). In fact, many aspects of the religiocultural toolkit that Emerson and Smith use throughout their argument—free-will individualism and anti-structuralism, most of all—are legitimate and sustainable only in an environment where everyone is thought to have equal opportunity, and this environment is formed through the cultural exclusion or at least marginalization of racial minorities, in this case, African Americans (see also Bonilla-Silva 1997; Bonilla-Silva and Forman 2000; Lewis 2004).

Critical whiteness theories are also crucial to our argument that the attitudes of evangelicals are deeply structured by and consonant with dominant American ideologies. For evangelicals, social norms, values, structures, institutions, and the religiocultural toolkit are intimately bundled up with ideas of race and nation. Because the norms and values that form the evangelical idea of "American-ness" are implicitly white, the demands for increased recognition for minority groups is perceived as a threat to these values and norms. However, because of the hidden nature of the equation of whiteness and cultural values, evangelicals may tend not to perceive this threat as explicitly racial, but instead as a threat to the continued existence of the evangelical culture.

These concerns for white cultural preservation appear in several quotes from Emerson and Smith's respondents. Consider the following response from an evangelical woman when asked if she thinks this country has a race problem:

> I think so. This may sound really bad, but I think it is more going the other way. I mean we have tried for thirty years to become a unified nation and now it is a big black push to be separate again. You know, like the Million Man March was for separation. It is very frustrating. I am no a racist and I don't notice my friend's color. But it is frustrating when "oh, this is black heritage month, and this is Asian awareness and this is . . ." Well when is there a basic white month? I think people end up going through school in Vermont—it's a white state, there are very few blacks—and they have repeated demonstrations on campus because there is not enough diversity. Well, if you have a chance to go to Boston where there is a big black population, why would you want to go to Vermont and be only black student? But they were pushing affirmative action to increase the diversity. It's a frustration. (2000:70)

This point is made even clearer in another response to the same question about the race problem:

> I see a little bit of a problem with a kind of reverse racism in the black community. We reached a point where a lot of whites want to accept blacks and give equal opportunity and so forth. I see some sort of a resistance to that in the black community. (2000:81)

While these two evangelicals express anti-black sentiment, they do not do so in attitudes about economic inequality (where Emerson and Smith typically find these sentiments), but instead, in frustrations at separatism and divisiveness that they believe is expressed in black cultural events and protests. These respondents believe that "we" have been working since the civil rights movement toward becoming a unified nation again, but that events like "black heritage month" are a threat to that unity. For these respondents, such events undermine the cultural unity that they believe Americans should strive for, a "unity" that white Americans both dominate and are privileged by.

For evangelicals, events that celebrate diversity ironically highlight a failure of African Americans to assimilate and, as such, are a threat to the core of evangelical culture, which, again, they equate with American culture without recognizing its racially specific character. Stated another way, the demand for cultural recognition and equality by minority groups undermines the cultural homogeneity (read: whiteness) of evangelical culture. The key point here is that this is not a universalist claim but a deeply cultural vision of unity in which what holds Americans together is a set of cultural norms that all should aspire to. However, this vision is also racial, in which these same cultural norms are implicitly (or explicitly) white. What the respondent doesn't see when asking "where is the white month?" is that in many respects every month is

a white month in America since white culture dominates and defines the mainstream. Only in a cultural environment in which the systems that support and perpetuate white cultural domination are hidden can such arguments persist. In short, for these respondents, the problem of race is reinterpreted as a threat against the hegemony and homogeneity of the existing white nation. Yet, neither this white cultural hegemony nor the structural privileges that go with it are ever acknowledged, most likely because they are taken for granted, allowing the respondents to put the race problem back on the shoulders of "misfit" minorities.[3]

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PRELIMINARY EMPIRICAL TESTING OF CRITICAL WHITENESS THEORIES

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So far, our argument has been a theoretical exercise, animated by a reconceptualization and rereading of Emerson and Smith's empirical evidence. In order to provide some grounding for our claims, we empirically examine four different phenomena that our critical theoretical interpretation of Emerson and Smith's generative analysis has identified as important. These phenomena include: (1) values about nationalism and individualism; (2) awareness of and explanations for racial inequality; (3) the holding of group-based stereotypes; and (4) the salience of racial identification. Specifically, our critical interpretive framework lead us to expect that white Christian conservatives will be more individualistic and nationalistic than other Americans, more likely to blame African Americans for racial inequality, less aware of the economic and social advantages they gain because of their whiteness, and more likely to believe that there are cultural differences between themselves and other groups.

Our framework is less clear as to the extent to which white evangelicals should claim their racial identity and culture as important to them. On the one hand, many critical whiteness theories posit whiteness as a "hidden" identity that is both taken for granted and normalized, so we would expect that white evangelicals would be less likely than others to claim their racial identity as important to them. On the other hand, our critical reevaluation of Emerson and Smith's work reveals that many evangelicals engage in clear group-based stereotyping in describing the causes of economic inequality and have interpreted demands for group recognition and equality as a threat against the hegemony and homogeneity of the core evangelical culture and, by extension, the existing white nation. This perceived threat may highlight existing in-group/out-group racial boundaries and result in an increased emphasis on racial identity for white evangelicals. Because, to our knowledge, this question has never been asked in a survey, the results will have important implications, whatever they reveal, for how we conceptualize whiteness and its relation to identity formation and racial inequalities.

Data

We use data from the American Mosaic Project (AMP) to begin to test these expectations. The AMP is a multiyear, multimethod investigation into the bases of solidarity and diversity in American life. In particular, this article uses data from a random-digit-dial telephone survey ($N = 2,081$, response rate 36 percent)[4] conducted during the fall of 2003 by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center. The survey was designed to gather data on attitudes about race, religion, politics, and American identity, as well as demographic information, and data on social networks. Households were randomly selected, and then respondents were randomly selected within households. The survey, on average, took slightly more than 30 minutes to complete.

Appendix A contains comparisons between the AMP, GSS, and the CPS on key demographic, belief, and behavioral measures in order to test for nonresponse bias. The results of these comparisons lead us to conclude that there is no evidence of systematic nonresponse bias in our sample and racial subsamples.

Methods and Variables

The methods used to test these expectations include cross-classifications and dichotomous logistic regression. While fairly basic, these statistical techniques provide interesting insights and new, baseline empirical data on evangelical attitudes.

Emerson and Smith measure embeddedness in a particular conservative religious subculture as self-identification as an evangelical or fundamentalist; however, our dataset does not contain an item on self-identification, making an exact parallel to Emerson and Smith impossible. Instead, our measure of conservative Protestant identity includes all those who attend or prefer a conservative Protestant denomination as defined by Steensland et al. (2000). We believe that the choice to attend, or a preference for, a conservative Protestant denomination is a reasonable indicator of participation and embeddedness in an evangelical and conservative religious subculture.

The great strength of the AMP survey is that it contains questions that were specifically designed to address issues of race and religion, as well as test critical whiteness theories. The dependent variables used in these analyses are meant to test white conservative Protestant attitudes toward the four phenomena identified above. The first set of dependent variables captures values about individualism and nationalism in America. In this set of questions, respondents were asked to evaluate if they believed that *democracy, economic opportunity, individual freedoms, American culture and values, American influence in the world,* and *having shared moral values* are very important for making America what it is. (Appendix B provides a more detailed description of each variable.)

The next set of dependent variables captures white conservative Protestants' preferred explanations for racial inequality and advantage. Half of the respondents received questions that asked what they believe are the important explanations for African-American inequality. The other half of respondents were asked what they believe are the important explanations for white privilege. The first two dependent variables explore explanations that focus on white power and domination as important explanations for African-American disadvantage and white privilege. Particularly, respondents were asked if they believe that *prejudice and discrimination*, as well as *laws and social institutions*, are important explanations for African-American disadvantage or white privilege. The next two dependent variables capture individualistic explanations that blame African Americans themselves, or credit whites, for their socioeconomic position. These two items ask about *family upbringing* and *effort and hard work*, or lack thereof, as explanations. The next dependent variable in this set is a structuralist explanation and asks respondents whether *access, or a lack of access, to good schools and social connections* is an important explanation for African-American inequality and white privilege.

The third set of dependent variables investigates the extent to which white conservative Protestants believe that there is cultural difference between themselves and members of racial, religious, and social groups. In particular, respondents were asked if they somewhat agreed (or less) that *African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, recent immigrants, White Americans, Jews, Muslims, Conservative Christians, Atheists,* and *Homosexuals* shared their vision of American society. The reference category for each variable is those who more than "somewhat agreed" with the vision of American society of a given group. At their core, these questions are about a deeply cultural content that others either do or do not share. Therefore, someone who shares your vision of American society may value the same things about America, believe in the same set of rights and principles, and understand what it means to be an American citizen in the same way. These people are clearly "like me." On the other hand, those who do not share your vision of America may not share these things and, consequently, they are clearly the "other" or an outsider when it comes to politics and the national culture.

The final dependent variable used in the analyses investigates the *salience of racial identification* among white conservative Protestants. Respondents were asked the extent to which their racial identity was important to them. It is important to emphasize that these analyses are

TABLE 1
IMPORTANCE OF CORE AMERICAN VALUES: WHITE CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANTS AND OTHER AMERICANS

	White Conservative Protestants	Other
Democracy	88.1%	82.4%
Economic opportunity	79.1%	83.5%
Individual freedoms	94.9%	92.3%
American culture and values	68.8%*	61.0%
American influence in the world	47.5%	42.3%
Having shared moral values	69.6%**	52.8%

* χ^2, $p < 0.05$, 2-tailed.
** χ^2, $p < 0.01$, 2 tailed.

by no means complete or comprehensive, but instead are designed to provide some preliminary empirical testing of the theoretical framework outlined above and point the direction for further research in this area.[5]

Results

Table 1 reports white conservative Protestants' attitudes toward individualism and nationalism. In this analysis, we use cross-classifications to understand white evangelical attitudes about the importance of certain core American values for making America what it is. White conservative Protestants are generally more likely to believe that American culture and values, as well as having a set of shared moral values, are important to our American identity. While these results probably come as no surprise to many religion scholars, including Emerson and Smith, the importance of a common national culture and values to the evangelical mindset was not described as a cause or consequence of the cultural tools explanation for evangelical racial attitudes. However, these results do demonstrate the importance of culture and a shared set of moral values to the evangelical mindset and are consistent with the emphasis in critical whiteness theories on individualism and national solidarity based on a common culture and set of norms.

Table 2 uses cross-classifications of the white conservative Protestant dummy variable and various explanations for African-American disadvantage and white advantage. White conservative Protestants are less likely to believe that laws and institutions work against blacks and that a lack of access to good schools and social connections is an important explanation for black disadvantage. Similarly, white conservative Protestants are less likely than others to believe that prejudice and discrimination, as well as laws and institutions, play a hand in white advantage. White conservative Protestants are also more likely to believe that effort and hard work are an important explanation for white advantage. Comparing the African-American disadvantage and white advantage results suggests that white conservative Protestants are also less aware of white privilege than they are of black disadvantage.

Thus, white conservative Protestants are less likely to perceive that there are structural barriers for African Americans, and they are unable to see that white advantage could be due to racism or other structural barriers. Instead, they tend to believe that effort and hard work mainly account for white success. These findings are consistent with Emerson and Smith's cultural tools explanation for evangelical attitudes on race; in fact, part of their analysis was based on similar questions asked in the GSS. However, these findings also provide support for the critical theoretical framework we advanced by demonstrating that white conservative Protestants are

TABLE 2
EXPLANATIONS FOR BLACK DISADVANTAGE/WHITE ADVANTAGE: WHITE
CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANTS AND OTHER AMERICANS

Black Disadvantage	White Conservative Protestants	Other	White Advantage	White Conservative Protestants	Other
Prejudice and discrimination against blacks	71.3%	80.2%	Prejudice and discrimination in favor of whites	54.9%**	67.9%
Laws and institutions work against blacks	32.2%**	48.5%	Laws and institutions benefit whites	38.8%**	58.2%
Lack of effort and hard work	67.6%	65.2%	Effort and hard work	94.3%*	85.3%
Differences in family upbringing	86.9%	83.8%	Differences in family upbringing	85.3%	76.7%
Lack of access to good schools and social connections	72.8%**	85.8%	Access to good schools and social connections	80.2%	86.2%

*χ^2, $p < 0.05$, 2-tailed.
**χ^2, $p < 0.01$, 2-tailed.

unable or unwilling to see a white privilege that is based on discrimination or institutions, thus confirming the taken-for-granted nature of whiteness.

Table 3 contains results from a series of dichotomous logistic regression results.[6] These regressions document the attitudes of white conservative Protestants, as compared to the rest of the population, toward various demographic groups. White conservative Protestants are about 40 percent more likely than others to believe that African Americans only somewhat or do not at all share their vision of American society [$(e^{0.326} - 1)$ $(100\%) = 38.52\%$]. Similarly, white conservative Protestants have higher expected odds than others of reporting that atheists and homosexuals, respectively, only somewhat or do not all share their vision of American society. On the other hand, white conservative Protestants are less likely than others to believe that whites only somewhat agree or less with their vision of American society. White conservative Protestants are also less likely than others to believe that conservative Christians only somewhat agree or less with their vision of American Society.

These results lead us to believe that decisions about cultural inclusion can be based on both social and racial status. African Americans, a racial group, and the social groups of atheists and homosexuals seem to be outside of the cultural vision of American society held by white conservative Protestants. On the other hand, white Americans, a racial group, and conservative Christians, a social group, are seen as more closely conforming to, and being a part of, the white conservative Protestants' vision of American society. Thus, for white conservative Protestants, there are clear boundaries on who is "like them" and who is not and these boundaries are based on racial and social characteristics. While Emerson and Smith did not include similar questions in their survey or interviews, these results seem to contravene the centrality of free-will individualism and interpersonal relationships to the white evangelical toolkit and the recent emphasis on racial reconciliation among many evangelicals. However, in combination with our findings above, these findings are consistent with critical whiteness theories in that the normative nature of whiteness leads it to be conflated with national interests such that groups that do not conform to the social and racial norms of white conservative Protestants are not part of a shared American culture. However, the finding that white conservative Protestants believe that whites share their vision of

TABLE 3
RESULTS FROM LOGISTIC REGRESSIONS OF THE LIKELIHOOD
OF BELIEVING THAT A PARTICULAR GROUP ONLY SOMEWHAT AGREES
WITH CONSERVATIVE PROTESTANT'S VISION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

	B	SE	Constant	SE	F	N
African Americans	0.326*	(0.163)	0.073	(0.071)	3.74*	1997
Hispanics	0.202	(0.165)	0.154*	(0.072)	1.49	1975
Asian Americans	−0.022	(0.166)	0.108	(0.072)	0.02	1928
Recent immigrants	0.086	(0.173)	0.426*	(0.075)	0.24	1866
White Americans	−0.338**	(0.169)	−0.404***	(0.069)	4.01*	2081
Jews	−0.017	(0.168)	0.015	(0.073)	0.01	1879
Muslims	0.226	(0.213)	1.219***	(0.091)	1.13	1805
Conservative Christians	−0.821***	(0.166)	0.425***	(0.073)	24.56***	1988
Atheists	0.554**	(0.184)	0.759***	(0.076)	9.10**	2081
Homosexuals	0.459**	(0.166)	0.270***	(0.070)	7.61**	2081

*$p < 0.05$, 2-tailed.
**$p < 0.01$, 2-tailed.
***$p < 0.001$, 2-tailed.
Note: The independent variable in each regression is a dummy variable indicating white conservative Protestant, with all others as the reference category.

TABLE 4
IMPORTANCE OF RACIAL IDENTIFICATION: WHITE CONSERVATIVE
PROTESTANTS, OTHERS, AND OTHER WHITES

White Conservative Protestants	Other Whites	All Other
44.1%**	35.10%	–
44.10%	–	45.84%

*χ^2, $p < 0.05$, 2-tailed.
**χ^2, $p < 0.01$, 2-tailed.

America may indicate that whiteness is not as hidden of a category as some whiteness theorists predict. We investigate this in the next analysis.

Finally, Table 4 uses the question of the importance of the respondent's racial identification to determine how much emphasis white conservative Protestants place on their racial identification—an empirical question relevant to several different lines of theorizing in whiteness studies. Interestingly, white conservative Protestants are more likely than other whites to believe that their race is very important to their identity, while there is no statistical difference between white conservative Protestants and the population as a whole when it comes to this question. What makes this result interesting is that some critical whiteness theories, as we outlined above, posit whiteness as a "hidden" identity, a collective category that is both taken for granted and normalized, and thus never fully consciously perceived. However, these results suggest that whiteness, at least for conservative Protestants, is a very visible and real thing.

This result is consistent with our explanation that demands for recognition and equality by racial minorities, or even just the simple presence of racial minorities and economic inequality

between the races, destabilizes and threatens the set of norms, values, and expectations that constitute the core evangelical culture and the broader national collective identity. In reacting to this threat, evangelicals may be simply trying to claim and preserve the identity and culture they associate with their own racial identity. This finding is consistent with Smith's (1998) subcultural identity theory about evangelicals as well as arguments by Doane (1997) and Gallagher (2003) that whiteness has a reactive component when the group perceives that its identity is being threatened. This contention is also reinforced by our findings from the previous table that conformity to American identity in the eyes of white conservative Protestants is explicitly racial. In a context in which culture is so racialized, is it any wonder that white evangelicals believe that their race is important to them?

CONCLUSION

We have used Emerson and Smith's (2000) seminal study of white evangelical Christians to develop a critical theoretical framework that reveals the deep cultural links between individualist ideals and anti-black sentiments, and the (mostly hidden) racialized assumptions about the structure of mainstream American culture that marginalize and exclude those who are not white. These assumptions provide a discourse of individualist ideals that allows its adherents to legitimate the racial status quo. In this sense, American individualism not only blinds white evangelicals to structural inequalities involving race, but it also assigns blame to those who are disadvantaged by race and normalizes and naturalizes cultural practices, beliefs, and norms that privilege white Americans over others. Individualist cultural norms and ideals, then, are not paradoxical to racial inequality, as Emerson and Smith suggest; instead, they may preclude the very structural reforms they believe to be necessary for meaningful racial change. These ideas were supported by some new survey data that show that common American beliefs about inequality and the need for a common culture are also profoundly racialized. The goal here was to bring a more critical, racial perspective into the sociological study of religion in the United States.

There is obviously much work still to be done. Namely, more complex statistical methods and controls should be used to make sure that the results we have put forward in this article are robust. Further, qualitative techniques should be used to further test and refine the ideas derived from our rereading of Emerson and Smith's data and analysis. Finally, it is important to do work that confirms our (and Emerson and Smith's) assumptions that white evangelicals represent and embody attitudes and understandings that are core to dominant conceptions of race, racial inequality, and racial justice in the United States. What is at stake in all of this is not just a better understanding of white evangelical Christian racial attitudes and identities, nor even those of whites taken as a whole, but of the American race problem most broadly conceived.

NOTES

1. Much of the most influential work in whiteness studies is being done in the fields of history and cultural studies, and includes such works as David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991) and *Colored White* (2002), Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (1995), and George Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1998). Sociological contributions include Ruth Frankenberg's seminal work *White Women, Race Matters* (1993), Ashley Doane Jr.'s piece in *The Sociological Quarterly* (1997), and Joe Feagin's *Racist America* (2000). Critical race theory is an even larger

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APPENDIX A
COMPARISONS BETWEEN AMERICAN MOSAIC PROJECT SAMPLE AND OTHER NATIONAL SAMPLES ON KEY DEMOGRAPHIC, BELIEF, AND BEHAVIOR MEASURES

Measure	AMP	GSS	CPS
Average age (in years)	44.4	45.6	44.2
Female	51.6%	56.5%	52.6%
Married	58.9%	45.4%	58.8%
Republican	35.1%	33.7%	NA
Attained college degree	23.9%	15.4%	24.3%
Catholic	25.5%	24.1%	NA
Attends church every week	22.3%	17.8%	NA
Thinks the Bible is the actual word of God	32.4%	34.8%	NA
Whites			
Average age (in years)	45.9	46.9	46.6
Female	50.5%	55.3%	51.9%
Married	61.8%	48.7%	61.2%
Republican	39.7%	39.2%	NA
Attained college degree	25.2%	16.8%	27.2%
Catholic	23.8%	25.9%	NA
Attends church every week	23.1%	17.5%	NA
Thinks the Bible is the actual word of God	29.2%	31.5%	NA
African Americans			
Average age (in years)	40.3	43.2	42.0
Female	55.5%	64.0%	58.3%
Married	43.4%	28.2%	37.9%
Republican	14.8%	12.1%	NA
Attained college degree	18.9%	9.1%	17.0%
Catholic	10.5%	10.8%	NA
Attends church every week	17.3%	19.4%	NA
Thinks the Bible is the actual word of God	51.3%	52.7%	NA

Note: Hispanics are not included in this table due to data limitations in the GSS. Data are weighed to match the gender by age distribution of the United States and to account for survey design characteristics, including nonresponse.

Data Sources: American Mosaic Project, University of Minnesota 2003, Principal Investigators: Penny Edgell, Joe Gerteis, and Doug Hartmann; General Social Survey, National Opinion Research Center 2000, data available at www.icpsr.umich.edu/gss; Current Population Survey, Census Bureau, September 2003 Basic Monthly Data, data available at www.bls.census.gov/cps.

APPENDIX B
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR VARIABLES USED IN ANALYSES

Independent Variables	Description of Variable	%	SE
White conservative Protestant	Respondent is white and attends or prefers a church that is part of a conservative Protestant denomination (1 = white conservative Protestant)	19.1	0.012
Nationality and Individualism			
Democracy	Democracy is very important for making America what it is today (1 = very important, 0 = less than very important)	83.5	0.012
Economic opportunity	Economic opportunity is very important for making America what it is today (1 = very important, 0 = less than very important)	82.6	0.012
Individual freedoms	Individual freedoms are very important for making America what it is today (1 = very important, 0 = less than very important)	92.8	0.008
Culture and values	American culture and values are very important for making America what it is today (1 = very important, 0 = less than very important)	62.5	0.015
Influence in the world	America's influence in the world is very important for making America what it is today (1 = very important, 0 = less than very important)	43.3	0.015
Shared moral values	Having shared moral values is very important for making America what it is today (1 = very important, 0 = less than very important)	56.0	0.016
Group Stereotypes			
African Americans	African Americans only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	53.3	0.016
Hispanics	Hispanics only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	54.8	0.016
Asian Americans	Asian Americans only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	52.6	0.016
Recent immigrants	Recent immigrants only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	60.9	0.016
White Americans	White Americans only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	38.5	0.015
Jews	Jews only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	50.3	0.016
Muslims	Muslims only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	77.9	0.014

(*Continued*)

APPENDIX B
(Continued)

Independent Variables	Description of Variable	%	SE
Conservative Christians	Conservative Christians only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	56.5	0.016
Atheists	Atheists only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	70.2	0.014
Homosexuals	Homosexuals only somewhat agree or less with my vision of American society (1 = less than somewhat agree, 0 = more than somewhat agree)	58.8	0.015
Racial Inequality and Privilege			
Black discrimination	Prejudice and discrimination are important explanations for African-American disadvantage (1 = important explanation)	78.5	0.019
Black institutions	Laws and institutions working against African Americans are important explanations for African-American disadvantage (1 = important explanation)	45.2	0.022
Black hard work	A lack of effort and hard work by African Americans are important explanations for African-American disadvantage (1 = important explanation)	65.7	0.022
Black families	Poor upbringing in African-Americans families is an important explanation for African-American disadvantage (1 = important explanation)	84.4	0.018
Black schools	A lack of access to good schools and social connections are important explanations for African-American disadvantage (1 = important explanation)	83.2	0.017
White discrimination	Prejudice and discrimination in favor of whites are important explanations for white advantage (1 = important explanation)	65.6	0.021
White institutions	Laws and institutions benefiting whites are important explanations for white advantage (1 = important explanation)	54.6	0.022
White hard work	Effort and hard work by whites are important explanations for white advantage (1 = important explanation)	86.9	0.015
White families	Good upbringing in whites families is an important explanations for white advantage (1 = important explanation)	78.3	0.018
White schools	Access to good schools and social connections are important explanations for white advantage (1 = important explanation)	85.1	0.016
Racial Salience			
Racial identification	Respondent believe that their race or ethnicity is very important to them (1 = very important, 0 = less than very important)	45.5	0.015