

# The Academy of Political Science

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# Book Reviews

**Creating a New Racial Order: How Immigration, Multiracialism, Genomics and the Young Can Remake Race in America** by Jennifer L. Hochschild, Vesla Weaver, and Traci Burch. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2012. 282 pp. \$29.95.

Americans seems stuck in decades-old debates between color-blind and race-conscious public policies like affirmative action, racially integrated schools and housing, and majority-minority districts. Because color-blind views are more popular but advocacy group support for race-conscious measures remains strong, those debates are conducted chiefly in courtrooms and agency hearing rooms, not electoral campaigns. That leaves few ways to build broad support for change.

But more may be going on. In this book, an eminent scholar of race and two of her stellar former students draw together a wide array of research to identify four factors that might alter the picture. Immigration is making America more demographically diverse. Many Americans are pushing for recognition of a wide array of multiracial identities. Genome mapping is reshaping scientific views of race. And young Americans of all backgrounds lack collective memories of Jim Crow and reject many older racial views. Asian Americans are also, on some measures, now better off than whites. Latinos, on some, are worse off than blacks. All groups are growing internally more heterogeneous. On balance, Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch suggest, these changes portend a “new racial order” sometime in America’s future.

But when it will come and what it will look like are both politically contingent. The authors see obstacles as well as opportunities. Many Americans remain attached to traditional racial identities, out of self-interest or solidarity. Entrenched structures of unequal employment, education, and incarceration pose daunting obstacles to the progress of many blacks and Latinos, even if not all. Wealth disparities among groups are particularly persistent. And undocumented Latinos, along with Muslims and Arabs, may be becoming new pariahs. We can imagine a future in which whites add some “deserving” non-white allies at the top and many “undeserving” blacks are joined by these pariahs at the bottom, in a modified but *not* radically transformed American racial hierarchy. Multiracial Americans may accept racial fluidity in some

contexts while remaining unwilling to support major structural changes needed for substantial egalitarian progress.

The tone of this book leans toward an appealing, though soberly qualified, optimism: America is more likely than not to be on its way to a new order in which racial identities multiply but mostly matter less, especially in terms of equal rights and opportunities. But just what this new racial order will look like is left vague, and much about how Americans might get there goes unaddressed. As in modern American elections, there is little discussion of new public policies that could help bring these changes about, or of the building of new political coalitions that could gain power to enact them. The focus is not on new racial policy ideas but on changes in demography, science, and popular attitudes that provide conditions under which political movements might create a new racial order.

Perhaps it is just too soon to attempt more. Perhaps, when it comes to new racial policy ideas, these Americans are as stuck as the rest of us. Still, if the nation is ever to become unstuck on race, it probably will be, in significant part, because of the changes richly documented and illuminated here. So if *Creating a New Racial Order* does not reveal the outlines of any new racial order or any major new political movements, it helps us understand why a racially transformative politics might become possible, and the problems and prospects it faces. Those understandings are likely to be valuable for years to come.

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**It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism** by Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein. New York, Basic Books, 2012. 240 pp. \$26.00.

Political scientists writing about American politics are different. Unlike many scholars in other areas, they usually like the subjects of their research. Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein have exemplified this positive perspective. Pre-eminent researchers of the American Congress, they saw the national legislature as reasonably effective and acceptably representative.

No longer. The very title of their new book proclaims it as a despairing screed on the failings of the contemporary Congress. Half of the volume is devoted to “the problem,” with chapter titles using condemnatory words—“hostage taking,” “dysfunction,” and “fiasco.” In the book’s second half, they propose extensive changes in U.S. politics, yet pessimistically doubt that the nation will soon “accomplish sweeping change, at least in a way that will recreate a functional and legitimate political process” (p. 198).