

**Because of Race: How Americans Debate Harm and Opportunity in Our Schools.** By Mica Pollock. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. 304p. \$29.95.

**Dangerous Frames: How Ideas about Race and Gender Shape Public Opinion.** By Nicholas J.G. Winter. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 224p. \$45.00 cloth, \$18.00 paper.  
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— Joe Soss, *University of Minnesota*

Americans today live amid abundant evidence of progress in race and gender relations. From the White House to the corporate boardroom, positions of influence are no longer the exclusive province of white men. Norms of equal treatment are widely endorsed, and overt expressions of sexism and racism are, in most public arenas, roundly condemned. Yet race and gender remain potent organizing forces in American life, generating profound inequalities in life chances and policy outcomes and shaping the ways citizens respond to a wide variety of political issues. In the United States today, our civil rights achievements are spread before us as celebrated and tangible facts; our social inequalities and injustices seem to emerge mysteriously from everywhere and nowhere at once.

The books under review provide valuable tools for thinking about how race and gender operate on this landscape and why their effects remain so pervasive and powerful. At first glance, the two could hardly seem more different. *Because of Race* is a work of anthropology that explores how everyday interactions produce racial disparities in schools and how particular modes of argument undercut efforts to remedy the harms experienced by students of color. Explicit discussions of theory are mostly reserved for the endnotes, as Mica Pollock focuses her text on a close reading of narratives and rhetorics observed during her years at the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), 1999 to 2001. By contrast, *Dangerous Frames* represents a significant effort to synthesize and extend theories of race and gender as facets of political communication, cognition, and opinion formation. Nicholas J.G. Winter's analytic approach relies on statistical analyses of carefully designed experiments

and national survey data to test hypotheses derived from his theory of group implication.

For all their differences in style and methodology, however, the two books are likely to reward readers who choose to engage them side by side. Winter's analysis of implicit political communication and cognition is complemented by Pollock's study of the explicit ways Americans communicate about questions of racial injustice. The racial harms enacted by well-meaning educators in Pollock's account become more explicable when set against Winter's analysis of how race and gender schemas structure cognition in unconscious ways. For students of race and public policy, the two books illuminate complementary aspects of what is ultimately a single political transaction: the lived experiences of racial interactions and discourses in policy settings (Pollock) and the conceptions of race that flow from such experiences and, in turn, shape preferences and practices in diverse policy domains (Winter).

*Because of Race* and *Dangerous Frames* are more than just complements, however. They also converge to underscore the contemporary limits—indeed, the intellectual and societal costs—of focusing narrowly on the possibility that people with racist and sexist attitudes consciously oppose egalitarian policy agendas and pursue intentional acts of discrimination. Pollock argues forcefully that this image misleads as a model of how racial inequalities are produced in schools today and, in fact, undermines efforts to achieve racial justice. Winter is equally persuasive in showing how this emphasis produces a distorted account of how and when understandings of race and gender guide public responses to political issues.

Drawing on the cases she encountered at the OCR, Pollock argues that Americans have entered a “new civil rights era,” “in which it seems harder than ever to determine who denies which opportunities to which children” (p. 176). Race-based denials of opportunity are rarely dictated by overt policy designs or driven by the discriminatory intentions of educators. They are more likely to be products of “the ordinary acts of many people in many places, over time, rather than ordered explicitly from on high” (p. 11). Blatant acts of racial injustice have been supplanted by systemic accumulations of everyday experiences that often appear small in isolation yet, in conjunction, have profound effects on life outcomes. Today, “racial inequality is built, allowed, and exacerbated through a complex web of ordinary policy and practice by people at various levels of systems, typically in the absence of explicitly announced intention” (p. 164).

*Because of Race* focuses primarily on the ways that efforts to promote racial justice are debated and defeated in such a policy context. Pollock elaborates and critiques the most common “rebuttals” used to derail remedial action during her time at the OCR. Such arguments rarely boil down to opponents of racial justice saying no; they arise instead as people who value racial equality

look at specific cases and say, “Yes, but . . .” Students' experiences of fleeting incidents are deemed too small to qualify as significant harms. Efforts to address them are dismissed as distractions that have little impact on systemic racial injustices. Staff at the OCR repeatedly tone down their reports as they encounter arguments that forceful conclusions will stigmatize good teachers and administrators, poison cooperative problem solving, and invite resistance by powerful actors in the system. They are challenged by school officials who cast them as “prescriptive” federal administrators “micro-managing” local educational practices—as “outsiders whose legalistic, bureaucratic ways of defining harm to children intruded into local relationships” (p. 26). They are cowed by assertions that civil rights enforcement must not infringe on policy decisions about how to educate children. In all these ways, Pollock reports, “we came to sabotage our own efforts as being somehow out of order” (p. 105).

Pollock's analysis is particularly effective in revealing the limits of legalism in the contemporary era. The legal framework that guides civil-rights enforcement at the OCR requires officials to focus on the question of whether harms experienced by students of color can be deemed truly to have occurred “because of race.” As a result, slippery debates over causation and motivation routinely divert attention from efforts to understand and remedy specific denials of opportunity. Staff at the OCR are challenged to “prove” that an educator acted on race-specific intentions, they are told that there are no comparable cases in which white students have encountered situations analogous to the particular experience of a student of color, and they argue with one another about how to balance the expected value of remedies against the real potential for “because of race” legal findings to ruin the careers and reputations of educators.

In a telling comparison that recurs throughout the book, Pollock notes that such arguments have little effect on OCR's handling of disability cases, where questions typically focus on whether individuals have been disadvantaged *as* students with disabilities, as opposed to being discriminated against *because of* their disabilities. Building on this contrast, and following her reading of what families actually wanted from the OCR, Pollock ends her book with a passionate call for the pursuit of *everyday justice*. What is needed, she argues, is an approach to opportunity analysis and remedy that bypasses debates over racial causation and motivation and, instead, aims “to pinpoint how specific everyday activity in specific places exacerbates racial inequality and to clarify ways specific actors might help to equalize opportunity daily instead” (p. 139).

Winter's *Dangerous Frames* shifts attention to the ways that race and gender function as implicit frames for understanding political issues that, on their face, do not seem to be about race or gender at all. At the heart of the book is a novel theory of group implication that focuses on the

structural fit between cognitive schemas and prevailing issue frames. Extending the work of Mary Jackman, Winter argues that race and gender schemas develop different structures that emerge out of the distinctive ways that social relations along each dimension have been organized, portrayed, and institutionalized. Racial schemas are structured by the separation and competition of ingroups and outgroups, the attribution of opposing characteristics, hostile emotions, and political differences over whether individual or structural factors explain divergent outcomes. By contrast, gender schemas are structured around individual differences and functional spheres of activity, hierarchical but interdependent relations, paternalistic emotions, and political differences over whether existing relations are natural and appropriate.

Winter's central thesis is that "group implication occurs when a subtly crafted issue frame shapes an issue to match the structure of a cognitively accessible race or gender schema. The issue is then mapped analogically to the race or gender schema, and feelings about race or about gender are transferred back to the issue, influencing evaluation of the issue" (p. 31). Thus, group implication is, for Winter, "a form of reasoning by analogy [where people] understand political issues by analogy with their cognitive understanding of race or gender" (p. 19). Rather than reflecting overt racism or sexism, such processes tend to "operate implicitly, outside our conscious awareness" by shaping the underlying ways we understand and evaluate political issues (p. 21).

In a series of well-crafted experiments, Winter tests the potential for issue frames to activate race and gender schemas on seemingly unrelated policy questions, such as grandparental visitation rights, Social Security privatization, and government's role in ensuring jobs and wages. Consistent with his model, he finds that frames with different structures alter the foundations of policy preferences in expected ways; such cues have stronger effects when they are implicit, rather than explicit; and frames structured to evoke one set of predispositions (race or gender) do not simultaneously evoke the other.

Turning to national survey data on public attitudes toward welfare and Social Security, Winter makes a major contribution to the study of social politics by pushing beyond the common observation that anti-black stereotypes influence public responses to "welfare." The deeper dynamic, he finds, is that the structure of the programmatic opposition between welfare and Social Security maps neatly onto the structural opposition of outgroups possessing symbolically black characteristics (laziness, irresponsibility) and ingroups possessing symbolically white characteristics (hard work and just reward). Thus, just as whites' feelings toward blacks shape support for welfare spending, whites' feelings toward other whites shape support for Social Security spending. Winter concludes that the racialization of social provision "is more subtle, more

pervasive, and more implicit than the example of welfare alone might suggest" (p. 145).

These findings are extended in fruitful ways by Winter's analysis of how changes in framing activated gender schemas as a basis for public responses to healthcare reforms proposed in the early 1990s. As the issue became framed around questions of government interference in personal, private realms and as Hilary Rodham Clinton became central to public debates, Winter finds that public preferences regarding health care reform became more closely tied to citizens' predispositions regarding gender equality. The change in rhetoric from 1992 to 1994 was accompanied by a shift toward a more gendered basis of responding to the health care issue.

In addition to being a major contribution to scholarship on political communication and public opinion, *Dangerous Frames* deserves to be widely read by students of race, gender, and intersectionality. By focusing on the different structures of race and gender schemas, Winter adds depth to the conventional claim that intersections of race and gender involve far more than the sum of the separate dimensions. At the same time, Winter suggests that because of the uneasy fit between these divergent structures, truly intersectional policy frames and cognitions may occur less often than some suggest.

*Dangerous Frames* and *Because of Race* are welcome additions to the study of race and gender that deserve to be widely read. Their authors write with clarity and style, making these books valuable for undergraduate teaching as well as scholarly debate. Both books raise unsettling questions and, in Pollock's case, proposals for reform that merit serious discussion. Together, they invite us to revisit our basic conceptions of how, why, when, and where race and gender matter in American political life.