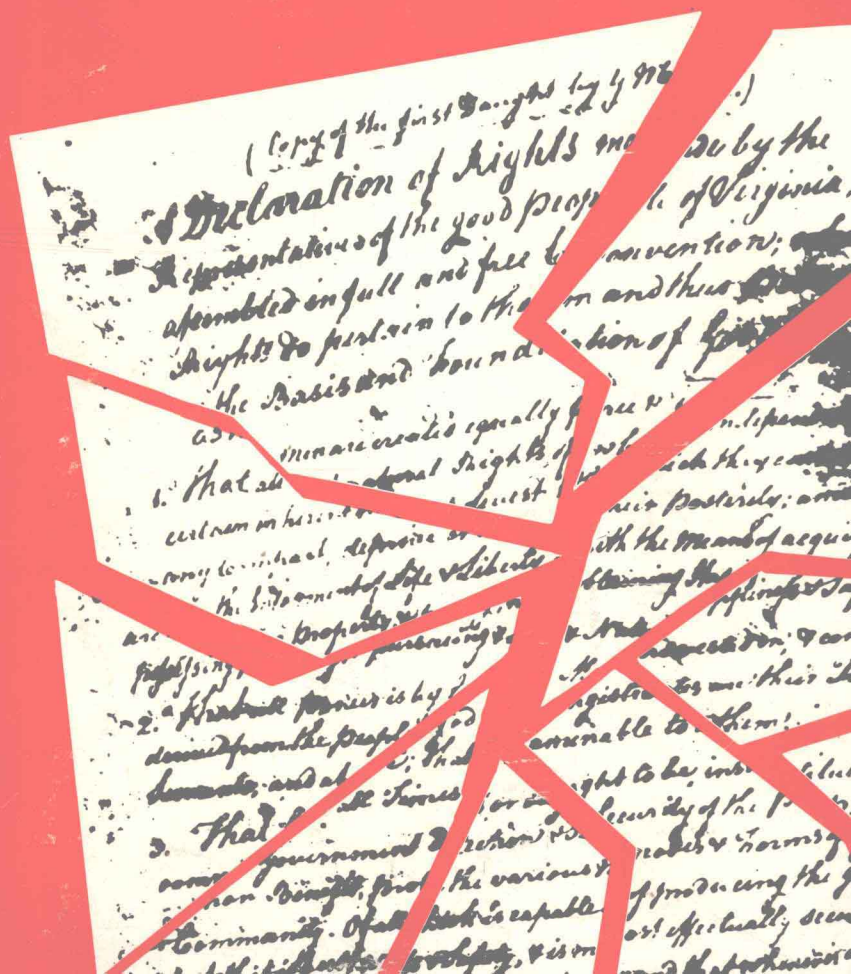


Discrimination

American Style

Institutional Racism and Sexism



Discrimination American Style

institutional racism and sexism

**Joe R. Feagin
Clairece Booher Feagin**

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Discrimination American Style

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CLAIRECE BOOHER FEAGIN, an experienced public school teacher, holds a master's degree in education from Harvard University.

For Michelle and Trevor

Preface and Introduction

As this goes to press, concern over discrimination against non-white minorities and women has receded substantially into the background. The publicly expressed concern of the 1960s over such matters seems to have evaporated. The current public concern is over the treatment of white males in "affirmative action" programs. Hand-wringing pronouncements are made about the threat that affirmative action and other anti-discrimination programs pose to such sacred ideas as "merit" and "individual opportunity." Yet, the agitation against affirmative action is less serious in our view than the neglect ("malign neglect") by the powers that be of the serious patterns of discrimination still afflicting minorities and women throughout the United States. The Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford presidencies saw a pulling back by the executive and legislative branches, as well as the mass media, from probing and investigating forays into the problems of race and sex discrimination. This pulling back, hopefully, is temporary, but it is nonetheless tragic. A basic

problem here is that of perspective. Many whites, or white males, seem to feel that the old problems of discrimination, such as that against black Americans, have been solved by the Great Society efforts of the 1960s. The new white male concern over affirmative action is doubtless, at least in part, legitimate. New government remedial programs can create bureaucratic problems. But the old discrimination problems have *not* been solved. A renewed investigation of and attack on discrimination against millions of minority persons and women are far more important tasks for this nation than actions to protect white males from the abuses, real and alleged, of affirmative action.

In this book we focus on this "old-fashioned" discrimination against minorities and women. A few notes on the book's organization seem appropriate at this point. Chapters One and Two look at traditional views of prejudice and discrimination, with a focus on recent conceptions of institutionalized discrimination. Chapter Two provides a typology of four basic but somewhat different types of discrimination, which we here term isolate, small-group, direct institutionalized, and indirect institutionalized discrimination. These latter two types, distinguished by intent or lack of intent, then provide a conceptual framework used in exploring specific examples of institutionalized discrimination in a broad range of areas from employment to the courts. Thus Chapter Three probes deeply into a range of employment discrimination problems, ranging from recruiting practices, to employment screening practices, to tracking systems, promotion actions, and layoff practices. Discriminatory mechanisms and results are both analyzed. Chapter Four explores institutionalized discrimination in housing—in the real estate industry and in lending and insuring organizations, as they affect homeowners and renters, minorities and women. In Chapter Five we assess the mechanisms and effects of discrimination in a number of different societal sectors, including the widely divergent areas of education, health care, politics, and the judicial system. In conclusion, Chapter Six briefly explores significant remedies for discrimination, both traditional remedies and innovative approaches which have been developed in recent years by victims, as well as by established private and public organizations. We conclude with an assessment of the future of anti-discrimination efforts.

A year as Scholar-in-Residence (1974-75) at the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights provided the time for the senior author to begin the research that eventually led to this book; and an early version of Chapters Two to Four appeared as a working paper for the use of commissioners there. Comment and criticism by various people at the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights helped to stimulate the more thoroughgoing and, hopefully, more useful analyses presented here. A summary article based on an earlier version of Chapter Two also appeared in the *American Politics Quarterly* in the spring of 1977; we have also found useful the critical responses of readers to that piece.

We cannot possibly name all those who have helped us in the research and writing of this book, but we are particularly grateful for the probing suggestions and critical comments of the following: Nijole Benokraitis, Charles Tilly, Paula Miller, John A. Buggs, Gene Mornell, Ed Dean, Gregg Jackson, Mark Yudof, Nestor Rodriguez, Barbara Romzek, Wess Robinson, John S. Butler, S. Dale McLemore, and Beryl Radin. Many of their insightful criticisms and comments, however disguised and altered, have found their way into our text. It is our hope that those concerned with researching and fighting discrimination will find this book both provocative and useful. The necessary work, however much the "malign neglect" advocates argue to the contrary, has just begun. There is much left to do in exposing, documenting, and eradicating the discriminatory mechanisms generating race and sex inequality in this society.

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Theories of Discrimination

chapter one

Traditionally discrimination has been viewed as a creature of prejudice.* Until the late 1960s the dominant perspective among popular and social science analysts of discrimination underscored prejudice and intolerance as the causes underlying discriminatory actions. Some analysts have focused on individual racists and sexists, viewing the fundamental problem as the individual motivated by hatred of a given “outgroup.” For others operating within the traditional perspective this emphasis on the individual has been coupled with a concern for patterns of segregation in the form of community practices, particularly racial practices—usually in the American South. Here prejudice, manifested in the guise of numerous racist (or sexist) individuals, is perceived as the motivation for both the

*For the moment, *discriminatory acts* can be viewed as acts that have a negative impact on minorities or women. *Prejudices* will be taken to mean negative and/or hostile attitudes toward a sexual or race/ethnic outgroup.

origin and continuation of these patterns. The prevailing model has thus been a prejudice-causes-discrimination model.

In addition, much traditional analysis before the late 1960s and early 1970s was optimistic, although sometimes cautiously so, tending to view prejudice as an archaic survival of an irrational past which could and would disappear as this society became more industrialized, rational, and progressive. This view has been coupled with the commonplace idea that the eradication of prejudice will lead to the progressive eradication of discrimination.

Social Science Perspectives

The traditional orientation toward discrimination described above has been at the center of much social science analysis, as well as of popular and media analysis. Most social science analysis until recently has adopted a prejudice—discrimination (prejudice-causes-discrimination) model and has tended to be optimistic about the assimilation of nonwhite minorities into the fabric of the society. The greater part of the sociological and social psychological literature on discrimination, particularly in mainline journals and influential books, has been preoccupied with issues tied to prejudice and prejudice-motivated discrimination. For example, the monumental and still influential work in race relations by Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, tied racial discrimination closely to racial prejudice. Myrdal defined *race prejudice* as “the whole complex of valuations and beliefs which are behind discriminatory behavior on the part of the majority group” and which contradict the “equalitarian ideas of the American Creed.” Thus both individual acts of discrimination and the segregation patterns implemented by a large number of individuals in the South reflected local prejudices. Because, in Myrdal’s view, prejudice and the discrimination it provokes contradict the fundamental American Creed emphasizing freedom and equality, their continued existence results in a basic moral conflict or dilemma for Americans and their society. Changes will come only when the “century-long lag of public morals” can be overcome; “in principle the Negro problem was settled long ago.”¹ Here Myrdal eloquently summarized the thinking of the small group of social scientists working on these

discrimination problems in the 1940s, views whose influence has persisted well into the present.

Myrdal's influence on such subsequent analysts as Merton and DeFleur and Westie was substantial. In the late 1940s Robert K. Merton carried the discussion of the gap between the American Creed and discriminatory conduct one step farther with the innovative suggestion that knowing a person's prejudices may or may not enable you to predict the actions. Thus Merton suggested a four-fold typology of prejudiced discriminators, prejudiced nondiscriminators, unprejudiced discriminators, and unprejudiced nondiscriminators. Merton's influential discussion of the critical type, the unprejudiced discriminator, is, unfortunately, very brief; he views such discrimination as intentional, but motivated by the social pressures of prejudiced family members, friends, fellow workers, or customers rather than by personal prejudices.² Subsequent researchers, as a result, have been particularly interested in individuals whose attitudes (prejudices) and behavior (discrimination) are inconsistent—the cases of Merton's prejudiced nondiscriminator and the unprejudiced discriminator.

Since Myrdal's and Merton's time, social science researchers have also framed their research hypotheses in terms of the prejudice → discrimination model. There have been several dozen studies of the prejudice → discrimination linkage. One typical approach has been to measure the extent of verbally expressed prejudices of a number of people by means of a written test and then to relate this measure to some type of discriminatory behavior considered relevant to the prejudices expressed (or not expressed). The discriminatory behavior measured has been of a very limited sort—such as a white subject's willingness or reluctance to sign a release to be photographed with blacks; or to sign an endorsement of open housing as public policy. The findings of the studies of this sort have varied considerably. Several have found that prejudice is correlated with the limited discriminatory actions assessed, although a few have found *no* correlation between prejudice and discrimination as measured. Most have been concerned with explaining why prejudice does not consistently predict discrimination. In the 1950s two pioneer researchers, DeFleur and Westie, suggested that the discrepancy between attitudes and behavior might be explained for the majority of subjects

by their attempts to do or say what their social reference groups wished them to do or to say. That is, reference groups were suggested to be mediators of the linkage of racial or ethnic prejudice to behavior.³

Subsequent research substantiated this hypothesis. Pressures in the social environment, particularly those of family and friends, have been shown to have a strong impact on behavior, somewhat apart from the impact of personal prejudices. The views of reference group members have been found to be important in proportion to the visibility of an individual's discriminatory act. The model implicit in this later research has been one of individuals linked to primary groups, to family and friends, whose effects on a person's behavior can be somewhat independent of the prejudices of that person. Prejudice is still a central concern of this later research, the focus still on individuals and their discriminatory behavior, but with the prejudices of others in informal social contexts introduced to explain inconsistencies found in studies relating attitudes to behavior. Serious attention to what social scientists call the secondary group, to the organizational or institutional context in which most individuals find many of their actions shaped, is generally missing from this tradition of research on prejudice and discrimination. Missing too is measurement of serious discriminatory practices.⁴

In addition to this empirical literature, there are a number of more theoretical social science analyses which continue to accent prejudice as the prime determinant of discrimination. A few contemporary examples of the prevalent prejudice—discrimination model will suffice. In a still widely cited analysis, Allport has suggested that few prejudiced "people keep their antipathies entirely to themselves," but act their feelings out in a variety of ways, ranging from the least energetic to the most energetic—from commenting unfavorably about the outgroup to discriminating violently against the outgroup. Simpson and Yinger have seen discrimination as flowing from unfair distinctions, from stereotyped views of outgroup characteristics. In his recent general text Tumin defines *discrimination* as "the translation into consequential behavior of prejudicial beliefs." Kinloch views discrimination as "applied prejudice in which negative social definitions are translated into action and political policy." And in his 1975 critique of institutional racism models, Butler vigorously argues that discrimination involves only the

conscious actions of racially prejudiced people, of intolerant bigots. While this prejudice—discrimination perspective has seen a growing number of critics in the last few years, it remains a common view among contemporary analysts, be they journalists or social scientists.⁵

In addition to emphasizing prejudice, many social scientists have, explicitly or implicitly, viewed racial discrimination as “an aberration rather than a fundamental principle of American society.”⁶ Economic analysts such as Gary Becker have viewed discrimination as motivated by an irrational “taste” for discrimination, and as allegedly representing greater economic costs to the society than benefits. From the perspective of a number of leading economic analysts, greater awareness and rationality in the economic sphere should lead to the eradication of prejudice-generated discrimination and to great social, if not economic, benefits to the society.⁷ Sociological analysts operating in the dominant assimilationist tradition, men such as Robert Park in the past and Milton Gordon, Talcott Parsons, and Nathan Glazer in the present, have underlined the importance of the ongoing assimilation or inclusion process in which every outgroup, white or nonwhite, has suffered some degree of discrimination; thus they often view race discrimination as different only in degree from problems suffered earlier by white European immigrant groups. For many who take this perspective, the inevitable decline in prejudice will lead to opportunities for significant minority advancement, and probably to full assimilation and inclusion. Prejudice and the discrimination it generates are typically viewed as irrational elements which will eventually wither away in the normal societal processes of urbanization and industrialization. Many still view traditional remedial techniques for discrimination optimistically. Prejudice and prejudice-generated discrimination, being essentially irrational, are not so basic to American society that they will not soon be eradicated.⁸

The literature we have just discussed focuses heavily on non-white minorities, with little more than hints or implications for prejudice and discrimination affecting women, especially nonminority women. Until quite recently social science and popular literatures have been silent on the issues of sex prejudice and sex discrimination, as well as the related questions of female upgrading and inclusion. It would have been logical to extend the empirical research on race prejudice and discrimination to women, focusing on such things as

inconsistencies in attitudes and behavior and the progressive inclusion of women into all aspects of the society. Yet a traditional literature analogous to that on nonwhites has not yet emerged. A few brief analyses of the position of women have assumed, implicitly or explicitly, a prejudice → discrimination model.

A pioneering analysis in the 1940s by the Myrdals pointed up the importance of prejudices and stereotypes* concerning the intellectual and emotional inferiority of women in fostering discrimination; the situation of women and blacks was seen as similar in this regard. Another author, Helen M. Hacker, developed a view of women as a minority group analogous to nonwhites, a group whose barbed stereotypes as the weaker, more irresponsible, sex played an important role in shaping and rationalizing the discrimination they encountered. And Allport, in his classic study *The Nature of Prejudice*, argued, rather briefly, that inaccurate stereotypes about women were tied to discrimination against them.⁹ There is a concern here with prejudiced individual discriminators, with subordinate group self-conceptions, and with the analogous victimized circumstances of women and blacks. As in the case with the traditional race discrimination model, a serious concern with institutions, organizations, and bureaucracies, as well as with covert and subtle types of discrimination, is usually missing. In any event, sex prejudice and sex discrimination were not major foci of analysis until the late 1960s.

Movement toward an Institutional Emphasis

It is not surprising that prejudice has received so much emphasis in conventional assessments of discrimination, particularly race discrimination, for such attitudes have been both blatant and conspicuous in the United States. The negative racist and sexist attitudes of individuals and the consequent prejudice-generated discrimination have long been very serious societal problems. Yet numerous recent public opinion polls have shown a sharp decline in,

**Stereotypes* have often been viewed as synonymous with prejudices, although some accent the cognitive aspect of stereotyping, the uncritical beliefs about the hated outgroup.