

Power to the People: An Intersectional Class Approach to Racial Inequality Alleviation

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## **I. Introduction**

In the past seven decades of American history, major milestones have been made on the front of racial rights. The Black Freedom struggle of the 1950s is marked by the desegregation of schools with *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1957, after the murder of Emmett Till, The Civil Rights Act of 1957 was passed reifying all races as equal. In 1961, the Freedom Rides galivanted in the South to embolden the desegregation of public transit. In the same decade, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed outlawing segregation everywhere in the U.S. In terms of voting, state and local barriers to African Americans executing their right to vote were removed by the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The last major win on the Civil Rights movement was the Fair Housing Act of 1968; this act prohibited discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing. In 1972, the Tuskegee Syphilis experiments were brought to an end. In 1978, affirmative action was upheld in the Supreme Court case of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. In 2008, the first African American was elected President of the United States.

In popular culture, the list of firsts goes on and on. Public support for racial equality became an accepted norm. African Americans were finally allowed into spaces they were previously barred from and were *allowed* to flourish. Now armed with the right to vote and the right to equal opportunity, African Americans began electing minority representation for the first time since Reconstruction and began to reach higher wealth accumulation than ever before.

Despite these various laws and accomplishments, which are milestones of these time periods, racial inequality persists in segregation, voting, housing, punishment, and various other arenas. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that over the time period from 2014-2016, Blacks held the lowest household income averaging at \$48,871, while Asian Americans held the highest

household income at an average of \$93,390 with Whites following close behind (Noël 2018). According to the Center for American Progress, in 2016, the median wealth for Black families was \$17,600 while white families' median wealth rested as \$171,000 (Hanks, Solomon, Weller 2018). Black median wealth pre-recession was 14 percent of white median wealth and has dropped and stagnated at 10 percent of white median wealth post-recession. Thus, African American families have not recovered from the recession according to this 2016 data (Center for American Progress 2018). Other numbers suggest that wealth inequality intra-race are more telling figures of disparity. According to People's Policy Project, for each race (black, white, and 'other') 75 percent of each group's wealth is owned by the top ten percent of the race (Bruenig 2019). Even further, the wealthiest 10 percent in the U.S. is 88.5 percent white, owning 77 percent of all U.S. wealth (Bruenig 2019). Finally, the propertyless are disproportionately non-white. Likewise, persistent inequality from redlining to mass incarceration to environmental racism to police slayings of black bodies disproportionately subjugates African Americans to the bottom rungs of society across health, wealth, freedom and opportunity.

Diversity initiatives and organizational policies have attempted to highlight these disparities, educate the public, and actively alleviate racial inequality at government and organizational levels. Various corporations, government agencies, and universities implement diversity and equity initiatives. Multitudes of non-profit organizations employ fact campaigns, public art, and other race-based initiatives to educate U.S. citizens on the perpetuation and enduring nature of racial inequality that has never left U.S. soil but rather evolved from slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration, redlining, predatory lending, police brutality, and modern-day White Supremacy.

Scholars, politicians, CEOs, activists, artists, and organizers have vigorously attempted to find effective ways of addressing racial inequality, yet racial inequality still persists in all arenas from health to wealth. What is the best way to reduce racial inequality and usher in effective social change?

Debates over effective mechanisms of alleviation are generally housed in two schools of thought: the top down approach and the bottom up approach. First theorized in public policy research, these approaches were created to find the most effective channel of policy implementation (Matland 1995). The top down approach argues that effective policy implementation resides in the actions of an institutional authority (Mazmanian & Sabatier 1983). In this model, implementation is most effective when an “authoritative decision” coincides with the needs and goals of the target groups, i.e. the public (Matland 1995: 146). From a sociological standpoint, policy implementation (or creation, change, etc.) can be conceptualized as a form of institutional social change. Societal issues are often examined through the lenses of the top down approach and the bottom up approach. The top-down approach essentially argues that elite representation is an effective mechanism of social change. This argument assumes if individuals who identify with a marginalized group obtain an authority position, then these individuals can solve the issue from the elite level by representing the interests of the marginalized group. Thus, a top down theorist would argue that electing more African Americans to government positions will reduce racial inequality.

On the other hand, the bottom up approach argues that effective policy implementation resides in the power of the people implementing it at the “street-level” (Lipsky 1980). In policy research, this approach focuses on how the “target population and service deliverers” view the policy as vital to its effectiveness (Matland 1995:148; Lipsky 1978). In sociological terms, this



focus on people power and public opinion coincides with a social movement approach to effective societal change. Thus, a bottom up theorist would argue that communities where collective action is exercised and the average, non-elite, individual has a voice, the negative conditions of marginalized people should be lessened. Communities where working-class individuals and minorities have more ‘people power’ should see less inequality overall, racial inequality being just one form. Matrixes of inequality are strongly related to one another, so a reduction in economic inequality would also reduce racial inequality, vice versa.

In this article, I use data on racial disparities in homeownership by state to test these two theoretical approaches to racial inequality against each other. First, I will examine key paradigms of race. Next, I will discuss how these paradigms relate to models of social change. Finally, I will empirically demonstrate that an intersectional class movement approach can alleviate racial inequality.

## **II. Paradigms of Race and Social Change**

Racial inequality is a pervasive system which invades every subsystem of American society (Reskin 2012). Thus, racialized disparities are evident across all subfields of sociological research. This includes but is not limited to residential segregation (Massey & Denton 1993), school segregation (Reardon & Owens 2014), education (Barton & Coley 2010), the labor market (Pager, Bonikowski, & Western 2009), housing and mortgage markets (Rugh & Massey 2010), credit and consumption, wealth (Oliver & Shapiro 2013), health care services (Spencer & Grace 2016; Williams & Mohammed 2009), and finally discipline, incarceration, and the criminal justice system (Alexander 2012; Western 2002). Impacting various fields of society, racial inequality exists as a deeply intertwined system of feedback. Racial inequality in one realm can

amplify racial disparities in other realms (Reskin 2012). Thus, racial inequality is an intertwined system of oppression; Its intertwined nature makes it difficult for researchers to pinpoint its sources and theorize alleviations. The complexity of racial inequality has led theorists to produce multiple theoretical paradigms for understanding racial inequality.

### ***Paradigms of Race***

There are three basic paradigms to the study of race. These ideal types are nation, ethnicity, and class (Omi & Winant 2014). The nation paradigm of race examines race as a national identity constructed by colonialism and concepts of peoplehood. Peoplehood is the connection of race and nation that creates an overall identity for a nation-state (Omi & Winant 2014). For example, the United States is highly associated with whiteness. This paradigm of race treats race and nationality as deeply intertwined. The nation paradigm does not suit my research agenda for it mainly focuses on race in an international sense; my research question involves strictly domestic racial inequality as opposed to global inequality.

Next, the ethnicity paradigm circulates topics of assimilation and cultural pluralism. Ethnicity theory treats race as a means of cultural difference. In this, racial difference is conceived as differences within beliefs, lifestyles, attitudes, religion, and language. This vein of theory emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to explain immigration patterns, integration, and discrimination (Omi & Winant 2014). Tracing past research, Omi & Winant (2014) state that ethnicity theory arose as a rebuttal to problematic biological explanations of racial difference. Ethnicity-based theory is a result of the Progressivism movement, created and established by Chicago school sociologists to combat pre-Civil Rights Movement attitudes of nativism, segregation, prejudice, and discrimination. There are two facets to ethnicity theory: Horace

Kallen's concept of cultural pluralism and Robert Park's 'race relations cycle' of assimilation. These theories conceptualized race as an ethnic and culture matter to make the argument that African Americans, as well as other ethnic minorities, should be included in all positions and spaces of society. Inclusion was largely viewed as the means of alleviating racial inequality. Upholding multiculturalism as a goal, the ethnicity paradigm argues that inclusion, both social and political, is the best solution to racial inequality.

Finally, the last paradigm of race is the class paradigm. This approach highlights the importance of economic structures, processes, and changes as they relate to racial relations. According to Omi and Winant (2014) there are three areas of the class paradigm of race, each grounded in an economic sphere. These are exchange relationships<sup>1</sup> (market sphere), systems of distribution (economic stratification), and class conflict over labor exploitation. My conceptualization of the latter two allots to studies of competition theory (e.g. intra-class conflict), and exploitation theory (e.g. elite exploitation of the working class). All three approaches offer insights to the various possible sources of racial inequality in American society, but my research question directly pertains to competition theory and exploitation theory. In the next two sections, I provide a synopsis of both.

The class paradigm of race provides particular insights to the African American condition as opposed to the ethnicity paradigm because it highlights the historical linkage of economics to Black opportunity and status. Most African Americans have roots in ancestry who were bought,

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<sup>1</sup> **Market relations approach.** The market relations approach concerns micro-level interactions such as micro-aggressions and prejudices as well as meso-level interactions such as state intervention, state-based violence, monopolistic exclusionary practices, and discriminatory actions. This conceptual approach would best suit social psychological research questions as well as institution-based questions. The next two class theories of race, competition and exploitation examine macro processes of how race relations are composed and perpetuated. Since, my thesis conceptualizes racial inequality as an economic system, the focus of my research agenda is macro-level oriented. Thus, I will mainly engage the competition approach regarding ethnic conflict, and the class exploitation approach involving elite exploitation of the working class.

shipped, and sold as embodied goods to serve the American economy multi-generationally. Overall, the class paradigm treats race as a social construction that is reified by economic inequality.

### ***Models of Social Change***

The issues of class competition and class exploitation are both important to the study of racial inequality's origin and perpetuation, but the more important question is how to alleviate it. There is much debate as to how to alleviate the system of racial inequality. This debate has been around since the end of the Civil War. Many intellectuals, artists, and activists have theorized methods of racial uplift to combat the extensive system of racial inequality. These theories majorly fall into two camps: top down and bottom up. In this study, I will conceptualize these approaches as the representation approach (top down) and the social movement approach (bottom up), and I will connect them to the ethnicity and class paradigms of race.

### **III. Paradigms of Race Alignment with Models of Social Change**

The two dominant paradigms of race regarding domestic relations align with two different models of social change; the ethnicity paradigm of race aligns with the top down, representation model of social change, while the class paradigm of race aligns with the bottom up model of social change. I will explain these alignments throughout the next few sections.

#### ***Ethnicity & Top Down Representation Approach***

In Omi & Winant's book *Racial Formation in the United States*, the authors provide entire chapters on the treatment of race as a matter of ethnicity and race as a matter of class. This

paper will focus on two of the three paradigms of race the authors describe: ethnicity theory and class theory. Ethnicity theory treats race as a means of cultural difference. In this, racial difference is conceived as differences within beliefs, lifestyles, attitudes, religion, and language. Upholding multiculturalism as a goal, the ethnicity paradigm argues that inclusion, both social and political, is the best solution to racial inequality. This program of thought aligns directly with the present cultural belief supporting a top down approach to social change.

***Top Down Approach.*** Debates over effective mechanisms of alleviation are generally housed in two schools of thought: the top down approach and the bottom up approach. The top down approach argues that effective social change resides in the actions of an institutional authority (Mazmanian & Sabatier 1983). In this model, social change is most effective when an “authoritative decision” coincides with the needs and goals of the target groups, i.e. the public (Matland 1995: 146). The top down approach essentially argues that minority inclusion in elite, institutional forms of representation is an effective mechanism of social change. This argument assumes if individuals who identify with a marginalized group obtain an authority position, then these individuals can solve issues of inequality from the elite level by representing the interests of their marginalized group. Thus, a top down theorist would argue that communities where African Americans are fairly included in institutional dynamics, i.e. the political elite, will face less racial inequality than African American communities that are excluded, thus underrepresented, in government.

In a truly representative democracy, the will of all people is heard, and all individuals have a say in the rules and regulations of their society. It only makes sense that marginalized groups previously barred from political representation, let alone political activity, seek fair representation as key to uplifting their marginalized statuses and ultimately obtaining equality.

A major theory of the top down approach (also known as the representation approach) is the *minority empowerment thesis*. Bobo and Gilliam (1990:378) define minority empowerment as “the extent to which a group has achieved significant representation and influence in political decision making.” Overall, this thesis argues that there are various benefits to minority representation for minority communities, and that minority representation strengthens minority individuals’ links to representatives, “fosters more positive attitudes toward governments, and encourages political participation” (Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 2004:534). Similarly, other empowerment representation theorists have found that sharing a racial identity with one’s member of congress strengthens representational connections (English, Pearson, and Strolovitch 2018). Research on the topic of minority representation has created an important distinction between types of representation. Representation can exist as either descriptive representation or substantive representation.

***Descriptive Representation.*** Descriptive representation can be thought of as phenotypical representation. This occurs when minorities are politically represented by a fellow minority of the same race. This type of representation directly aligns with the ethnicity paradigm of race arguing that the incorporation of ethnic groups into positions and spaces they were previously barred from will reap benefits for the entire ethnic group. Benefits of this form of representation might include “communicative advantages” (Mansbridge 1999:642) and might increase “trust in government, efficacy, group pride, and participation” (Banducci et al 2004: 538; Tate 1991). Research has found that descriptive representation in legislatures can decrease political alienation within minority groups (Pantoja & Segura 2003). Pantoja & Segura (2003) explore this relationship among Latino voters. Having Latinos representatives in the state senate and/or U.S. House is associated with “lower levels of political alienation among Latino constituents”

(Pantoja & Segura 2003). Other recent empirical research on Latinx have found the same relationship when representation is found on the Supreme Court (Evans, Franco, Polinard, Wenzel, and Wrinkle 2017). Evans et al (2017) finds that after the appointment of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Latinx in Texas had a dramatically increased approval rating of the Supreme Court and were also more politically aware of the appointment than Whites in the state. This study provides empirical evidence of political empowerment among minorities due to minority representation. Their evidence also implies pan-ethnic effects, being that Justice Sotomayor is Puerto Rican, and most Texan Latinx are of Mexican origin.

Although evidence exists for the political empowerment thesis, descriptive representation alone does not mean that minority interests are heard and represented. Individuals who share the same race, might not share the same political leanings. Political leanings are especially likely to diverge on other axes of inequality such as gender and class. In this, African American men and African American women do not necessarily have the same interests. The same goes for class; Wealthy African Americans most certainly do not have the same interests as working class or poor African Americans. A racial group is not a monolith. In sum, sharing ethnicity with a political representative does not solve issues of dissatisfaction with the overall government for minority populations, but it is a necessary step towards encouraging political engagement of underrepresented citizens (Pantoja & Segura 2003: 457).

***Substantive Representation.*** On the other hand, there is substantive representation. Substantive representation can be described as instances when a representative represents the interests of minorities, but she herself is not a minority. This transgresses from ethnicity theory in arguing that a representative can be of a different ethnicity/race and still represent the interests of ethnic minorities. For instance, the 2016 presidential candidate, Bernie Sanders stood for

racial equality, an end to widening economic inequality, among other political stances that resonated with various minority groups. He himself identifies as an American Jew, which many characterize as White ethnic, but his politics extended to many minority populations.

There is much debate of which form of representation is better, descriptive or substantive. In particular, Carnes (2015) examines the question “does descriptive representation of the working class “crowd out” women and minorities?” Carnes (2015) theorizes that working-class descriptive representation also exists as substantive representation for political minority groups, such as women and ethnic minorities, for the interests of the working class, are many times the same interests as women and ethnic minorities especially in the Trump Era political landscape. Carnes theorizes that if one social group displaces another, three signs of this would occur. The major sign would be that politicians of the “new” group do not overlap with interests of the existing groups. In sum, working-class interests do not crowd out women and minorities because much of the working class are women and minorities, and many of the issues overlap in terms of positions to systemic inequality.

Both descriptive and substantive representation theories have a lot to offer in examination of inequality systems. In terms of Black-White racial inequality, it is possible for substantive representation that is not descriptive to still benefit African Americans. But the risk still stands that representatives outside of the Black community may implement change to substantive issues that do not provide maximum benefits for the community (i.e. FDR’s New Deal see Katznelson 2005). In sum, empirical evidence has found various benefits to descriptive minority representation. Thus minority representation is a possible alleviator of racial inequality, but other factors can obstruct the possible benefits of minority representation making both descriptive and substantive representation inefficient to racial inequality alleviation.



*Exclusion and Competition as Sources of Racial Inequality.* The exclusion of African Americans from various positions and domains within society can be attributed as a source of prevailing racial inequality. Exclusionary, segregationist antagonisms have repeatedly barred African Americans from obtaining equal rights and political power. Racial competition theory argues that racial inequality is a product of racial tension between similarly-classed individuals. Competition theorists, focusing on working class individuals, argue that conflict between the White working class and the Black working class produces racial inequality as an enduring product. In this conflict, the beneficiaries are the White working class, gaining the best jobs, higher compensations, and more benefits; the losers are the Black working class (Tomaskovic-Devey & Roscigno 1996; Wilson 1978; Lieberman 1980).

Competition theory successfully attempts to explain threat behavior of the White working class in response to Black population size and proportion (Gullickson 2010; Andrews, Casey, Hardy, & Logan 2017; Du Bois 1935; Muller 2018). Various empirical studies have found that Black-White inequality is directly tied to Black population size (Gullickson 2010; Andrews et al 2017). The larger the Black population, the higher the racial inequality. The competition framework argues that conflict and discriminatory practices are sourced from perceived threat within the dominant group of competition over resources and power (Blalock 1957; Bonacich 1972; Olzak 1986). Thus, as the African American population grows in a particular geographic location, e.g. the Great Migration, the more likely African Americans are perceived as a threat to White populations. This is most likely tied to emotions and ideologies of resource scarcity, cultural invasion, or job insecurity.

Similarly, this pattern holds true for violence rates as well. Rates of “white-on-black lynchings” as well as “black executions in the U.S. South” within the Postbellum period have

been displayed as being higher where Black-White economic competition is more prevalent and where White workers' economic situation "was more precarious" (Gullickson 2010:191-192; Beck & Tolnay 1990; Olzak 1990). Similarly, Wilson (1978:137) argues that competition between African Americans and Whites was a major source of the creation of Jim Crow laws, stating that Jim Crow laws were created by "the most threatened of White Southerners" post-Reconstruction.

Extending on competition theory, whiteness studies as well as womanist studies have highlighted the roles of racial boundaries within the labor market in producing the benefit of a "psychological wage" (Roediger 1991:13) or "caste mentality" of taste and consumption (Townes 1993:52) for White workers, which many times outweighs the benefit of higher wages. One example of this psychological wage can be seen within the rise of department stores. By 1920, the rise of the department store brought the glamour of consumption previously held exclusively by the elite to middle class society (Townes 1993). This produced a new divide within the labor market, where White women sought glamorous work rather than factory labor. Workplaces where Black women were barred from, such as department stores, were thus seen as an extreme privilege and sign of superior status to White women even if the benefits were inferior or equal to that of factory work. Townes (1993:52) delves into the peculiarities of store workers' consumption stating "store workers sacrificed eating to dress well and live in better neighborhoods than factory workers although both groups were earning comparable wages." This example is an extension of competition theory in that it highlights Whites' need for power and status in response to perceived cultural threat of African American populations.

There are various benefits to employing a competition approach to the study of racial inequality's source and perpetuation. First, it successfully analyzes sources of racial conflict

between individuals who share class, but not racial identity. Second, this approach highlights the importance of threat in relation to ethnic minority population size. Third, this approach highlights the pervasive nature of identity-based antagonisms as it relates to resources, power, and perceived status.

The ethnicity paradigm suggests that racial inequality produced by competition of individuals of similar class, but different ethnic backgrounds, can be alleviated by the inclusion, or assimilation, of African Americans into spaces and positions where they were previously barred. Similarly, the top down approach to racial inequality argues that the inclusion of African Americans into authority positions provides them with legitimate means to rectify their marginalized status. Both ethnicity theory and the top down approach pose similar arguments assuming that racial inequality can be solved when minorities succeed in societal inclusion and ascend to equal positions as Whites. This can be seen as a two-step process: they must first gain acceptance to then gain elite representational power.

***Issues with Ethnicity Paradigm & Top Down Approach.*** Ethnicity theory is problematic in a variety of ways. First, it minimizes race to culture assuming that racial identity is “more voluntary and consequently less imposed, less “ascribed”.” (Omi & Winant 2014: 22, original emphasis). Minimizing racial identity as a choice further promotes problematic bootstrap, neoliberal logics. This way of thinking suggests that the best assimilators earned their way to equality. This problematizes ethnic minorities that hold on to traditions and other cultural aspects of their lives but also seek racial equality. The ethnicity paradigm assumes that minorities must work their way to equal footing via institutionally acceptable means, such as representation. The second key issue to ethnicity theory is that it equates the condition of African Americans to the condition of European (White) and Asian immigrants. African Americans cannot ‘assimilate’ the

same ways as other minority groups. The sociopolitical and economically-oriented history of African Americans' position in the U.S. has barred Blacks from societal inclusion for over three centuries.

There are also flaws to the representation approach to racial inequality. With this approach, marginalized individuals are still at risk of their interests not being heard. The main assumption is that marginalized groups' representatives hold allegiance to that group once in power, but what if the representatives crowd around self-interests or the interests of elites, rather than the interests of their constituents? Due to this issue, representation (top down) theorists have pointed to other important factors in satisfying minority political satisfaction and engagement.

In history, a notable theorist who cited representation as the key to racial equality, was W.E.B. Du Bois. In the rise of his career, Du Bois supported the idea of the "Talented Tenth," first coined by Reverend Henry Lyman Morehouse, a Northern White abolitionist. The idea of the talented tenth is as follows: it is the responsibility of the "educated few" of a race to uplift the "unsophisticated masses" of the race (Sullivan 2003). In 1903, Du Bois published his essay "The Talented Tenth" supporting this representational idea, but later in his career he defaulted on this position. In 1948, Du Bois revised his theory of black leadership stating:

When I came out of college into the world of work, I realized that it was quite possible that my plan of training a talented tenth might put in control and power, a group of selfish, self-indulgent, well-to-do men, whose basic interest in solving the Negro problem was personal personal freedom and unhampered enjoyment and use of the world, without any real care, or certainly no arousing care as to what became of the mass of American Negroes, or of the mass of any people.

- W.E.B. Du Bois ([1948] 1995)

During this time, Du Bois shifted from a representational approach to a group-centered one. This brings us to the theoretical approach that challenges representation, the social movement approach.

### ***Class Paradigm of Race and the Social Movement Approach***

As previously noted, the class paradigm treats race as a social construction that is reified by economic inequality. To explain Black-White racial inequality, the class paradigm proves to be the most relevant to this struggle due to the historical and political context of African American identity and status. The ethnicity paradigm does not suit an examination of Black-White inequality for two reasons. First, the ethnicity paradigm highlights racial/ethnic inequality across race, but not within race. This paradigm assumes that wealthy African Americans have the same interests and condition as poor and working-class African Americans. This assumption allows for research to miss vital intra-race disparities. No racial group is a monolith; axes of class and gender diverge the interests of individuals within racial categories. If African American representatives are only wealthy, the interests of poor and working-class African Americans are still left unheard and underrepresented. Second, the ethnicity paradigm mostly concerns the topics immigration and assimilation, but most African Americans are not immigrants and do not have a history of immigration, but rather their history is sourced in forced shipment and various blockages from societal inclusion.

The class paradigm of race accounts for these fallacies and aligns with a social movement approach to social change in several ways. First, I will explain the social movement approach. Then, I will highlight the similarities of the class paradigm of race and the social movement approach.

***Social Movement, Bottom Up Approach.*** As discussed previously, the top down approach of alleviation suggests that racial inequality in the U.S. can be eliminated if minority groups gain power via representation. Conversely, the social movement approach is the bottom-

up approach to alleviation which argues that ‘people power’ is the best mechanism for dramatic social change within not just politics, but also culture (see Piven & Cloward 2012 for example).

The bottom up approach argues that effective policy implementation resides in the power of the people implementing it at the “street-level” (Lipksy 1980). In policy research, this approach focuses on how the “target population and service deliverers” view the policy a vital to its effectiveness (Matland 1995:148; Lipksy 1978). In sociological terms, this focus on people power coincides with a social movement approach to effective societal change. Thus, a bottom up theorist would argue that communities where collective action is exercised and the average, non-elite, individual has a voice, the negative conditions of marginalized people should be lessened. Since African Americans are overrepresented in the poor and working class, collective action of those at the bottom of the economic system would answer the interests of the Black community and solve issues of racial inequality, as well as economic inequality.

***Class Paradigm & Social Movement, Bottom Up Approach.*** The class paradigm and the social movement, bottom up, approach align in their key arguments and treatments of racial conflict. The class paradigm of race treats racial categories as economical tied. In this, race is intertwined with economic conditions and opportunities. This conceptualization of race allows for researchers to examine the issue of economic inequality as closely tied to and a perpetuator of racial inequality. If racial inequality is a product of economic inequality, individuals that exploit the economic sphere also perpetuate racial inequality.

***Elite Exploitation as a Source of Racial Inequality.*** As previously, examined, competition theory is expansive in its explanations of the ethnic conflict between individuals who share class, but largely ignores the impact of elite interests. Class exploitation theorists seek to fill this void. Class exploitation theory argues that elite Whites are the beneficiaries of racial

conflict between the White working class and the Black working class. In this approach, the elites are seen as instigators of racial conflict with the goal of undermining working-class solidarity, which in turn, depresses wages for all workers (Bonacich 1972; 1980). In this approach, the focus is on elites as the driving force of racial divisions and conflict. In this vein of thought, a racially divided working class weakens labor power, and thus allows for greater exploitation of labor coupled with increased capital accumulation for elites.

In the case of Black-White inequality, divisive tactics were employed by the White landowner elite as means of labor disunification (Tomaskovic-Devey & Roscigno 1996). The elite resorted to various means to prevent class solidarity including employing African Americans as strikebreakers (Townes 1993) and playing on racial fear, encouraging “racially split labor markets, low-wage job growth...and discourage[ing]..unionization” (Tomaskovic-Devey & Roscigno 1996:569). In the North Carolina context, a populist party of Black and White farmers created a Farmers Alliance to combat the landowning planter elite. The elite defeated this interracial coalition and effectively instituted Jim Crow legislation (Tomaskovic-Devey & Roscigno 1996). The elite employed this tactic to continue their exploitation of the working class and essentially prevent a unified class opposition.

Histories of segregation have led to other enduring inequalities. Focusing on the importance of place Andrews, Casey, Hardy, and Logan (2017) find empirical evidence of a positive and significant relationship between segregation and intergenerational mobility. Specifically, histories of segregation between 1880-1940 produce less mobile societies in the early 1980s, one hundred years later (Andrews et al 2017). From this evidence, one can assume that the elite strategy of dividing of the working class produces economic inequality for all in these places of high segregation, or that failed racial coalitions of workers stuck in competition

produced this enduring pattern of inequality. Either approach, exploitation or competition, could be valid, so we are unsure of the source of this particular pattern. But what we do know for sure is that segregated workforces coincide with intergenerational inequality.

***Bottom Up, Social Movement Approach as Solution to Racial Exploitation.*** If representation alone was an adequate alleviator of racial inequality, racial inequality would have ended with the ascension of President Barack Obama to the highest representative seat in U.S. government. This idea was supported by a multitude of Americans. The election of President Obama ushered in post-race ideologies, colorblind ideologies, and ideas that the significance of race in determining life chances and outcomes was no more. Two terms later, many Americans have abandoned this belief that representation alone can create systemic change. Although, higher rates of representation across all levels would possibly increase the voices of marginalized people, top down approaches alone are limited to institutionalized rules, regulations, and scope. Thus, many Americans took it to the streets, as well as churches, schools, workplaces, etc. The rise of Black Lives Matter along with other racial equality groups signified a growth in the bottom up approach to racial inequality.

Social movements have the power to defy institutions, create and challenge norms, lifestyles, ways of thinking, and perceptions of the sanctity of our institutions. Black Lives Matter is a continuation of the Black freedom struggle that has taken place in the U.S. since slavery. The current Black freedom struggle targets the structural mechanisms that keep people of color marginalized. Scholars, writers, and lawyers such as Michelle Alexander, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Paul Butler, and Bryan Stevenson have characterized this new Black freedom movement as one that challenges the current political landscape of mass incarceration, police brutality, and the exploitation of black and brown bodies for profit. Michelle Alexander typifies this



exploitation of black people as “the new Jim Crow” and depicts this enduring struggle in the following quote:

Today’s lynching is a felony charge. Today’s lynching is incarceration. Today’s lynch mobs are professionals. They have a badge; they have a law degree.  
- Alexander (2012).

This anti-New Jim Crow Movement has shifted many Americans’ views of the criminal justice system and has produced mass distrust over the sanctity of U.S. institutions.

Social movement actors across ethnicity have employed scholarship, such as Alexander 2012; Pager 2003; Western 2002; Butler 2018, as well as artistic expression, such as the Equal Justice Initiative’s National Memorial for Peace and Justice as well as The Legacy Museum, to raise the issue of the system of racial inequality and its engrained nature to the character of the U.S. political and economic landscape.

Other social movements have successfully tackled issues of racial inequality as well. Though, lesser known for its connection to racial inequality, the labor movement has a notable history of fighting for racial equality off and on since the 1860s. What is particularly striking about the labor movement, is that it is seen as a strictly economic, class-based movement. Its history is also tainted with the dregs of fueling racial antagonisms and perpetuating a color caste. The labor movement has many times failed workers of color, but there are various instances where it has acted as an ally. I argue that the present labor movement acts as an engine of intersectional equality promoting both class-based and racial identity-based equality. I will employ the present labor movement as a case-in-point of the most promising form of racial inequality alleviation, an intersectional class approach.

### *Summary of Competition and Exploitation Theories*

Both competition theory and exploitation theory are grounded in the overarching framework of a political economy. By this I mean, both competition theory and exploitation theory's explanations and grounds revolve around the issues of capital production and distribution. Who gets to produce and who earns more capital is decided by politically-laden mechanisms. Competition theory highlights the importance of spatial and historical context as well as population size in producing racial inequality (Andrews et al 2017; Tomaskovic-Devey & Roscigno 1996). Exploitation theory successfully provides theorists with a link between class dynamics and racial inequality. Both approaches provide valuable insights to the sources of racial inequality, but there are weaknesses to both approaches. Competition theory ignores the power and position of the elite in creating a racial divide and competition amongst the working class. Theorists state that the weakness of exploitation theory is its overarching assumption that the elite act in a unified, monolithic manner (Tomaskovic-Devey & Roscigno 1996). Various research has found that the elite are unified on issues of class (Murray & Schwartz 2019; Murray 2017; Mills 1981[1956]; Domhoff 1967), but this is beyond the purview of this paper. With the assumption that the elite are unified, the following argument serves to remedy the issues class competition and class exploitation and fill the gaps of the representation approach.

### **IV. Intersectionality as Remedy**

It is safe to say that any approach that ignores class hurts the oppressed, but also any approach that ignores identity-based oppression is bound to fail. I argue that there is a strong need for integration of these two approaches. Class politics can be combined with identity politics in an intersectional way to strategically address the disease of power stratification, not

just one symptom of the oppression. There are social movement organizations that exist that implement an integrative approach of these two veins of thought. For this study, I will focus on one particular movement that integrates both class and identity is strategies of inequality alleviation, the U.S. labor movement. I contend that labor unions are intersectional mobilizations that seek to remedy vast forms of oppression by targeting class inequalities while paying due attention to identity-based oppression, such as racism and sexism.

Intersectionality is an analytical framework composed by Kimberlé Crenshaw that claims interlocked systems of power create the various systems of oppression. Thus, identity-focused issues are not separate from issues of class inequality but are interlocked within a system of power and marginalization. Intersectionality is always linked to the analysis of power; It has a focus on political and structural inequalities, not just identity categories. This concept is not purely an academic concept, but it is also a method of analysis as well as a practice (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall, 2013) Employing intersectionality as a tool, academics can analyze the multidimensional ways race and gender interact with class within the labor market (Cho et al 2013: 785). Activists and scholars alike prove how action and practice can inform theory (Cho et al 2013: 786). I argue that the labor movement has put intersectional action to practice for years. Intersectional lenses go beyond simple distinctions of sameness and difference (Cho et al 2013) and examine all issues of oppression as being connected to interlocked forms of power. Unions at their core operate to challenge corporate/managerial domination and disrupt the status quo of power distribution, shifting power from the employer to the oppressed workers. When unions account for the various matrixes of domination include race, sex, and gender, they are effectively employing an intersectional approach to inequality alleviation.

### ***Case-in-Point: The Labor Movement***

In this study, I focused my argument around the labor movement as a quintessential example of a bottom-up approach to racial inequality alleviation. There are two major reasons to examine the labor movement in this way. First and most importantly, unions exemplify how identity and economic prospects are deeply intertwined. In this, being a member of a union reaps relatively more benefits for minority groups and effectively lessens the widened disparities minority groups face. Second, unions are generally described as strictly class-based machines, but an analysis of union impact directly highlights that economic issues of inequality are sociopolitical issues as well. Examining the labor movement as an intersectional class movement directly disproves Wilson's (2011) assertion that racial inequality is no longer economic in its features and consequences but sociopolitical. Labor unions are essentially described as class-based political machines, but these entities directly impact social relations as well. As argued throughout this paper, economic issues of distribution, labor, and capital have various social implications including discrimination, segregation, racial violence, access to housing, and access to good education. Also, unions are an interesting case to explore because in their history of segregation and integration.

***Unions' Segregationist History.*** Historically, unions have been hegemonically white and male. Battles have been fought over this problematic trend time and time again. During the Civil War, the interests of labor activists and civil rights activists were aligned under the Republican party (de Leon 2017). After the Civil War, the interest groups split over group goals; The labor activists saw the race problem as solved, while civil rights activists saw the race issue as only just beginning to receive the attention it was owed. Viewing civil rights as a solved issue, the labor movement moved onto targeting wage slavery as their next big issue. William H. Sylvis, a

labor leader of this period and the eventual president of the National Labor Union, states this clear post-race position in the following statement:

When the shackles fell from the limbs of those four million blacks it did not make them *free* men... We are all one family of slaves together; and the labor reform movement is a second Emancipation Proclamation (Todes 1942: 76; emphasis original, quoted in de Leon 2017: 16).

Another post-race labor quote can be found in an 1889 issue of the *Journal of United Labor* in the following statement:

America is cursed by a worse system of slavery today than the Southern States were thirty years ago. Then the slave had a life policy that insured him food, clothing, shelter, and medical aid as long as he lived; but, to-day, what has the wage slave to depend upon...? (Journal of United Labor, 1889, quoted in de Leon 2017: 16).

These quotes reflect a similar colorblindness and dismissive attitude toward White structural privileges that is also reflective of twenty-first century racial discourse. This discourse led a once racially unified labor movement to split and seek separate means to their material and cultural goals. Civil rights activists turned to partisan channels and found a home in the republican party just as the republican party abandoned the labor cause (de Leon 2017). Many Black labor activists of this period abandoned social equality as a goal and declared that “society is regulated by individual preferences” (Colored Men’s Convention, 1869, as quoted by de Leon 2017: 20).

Unions have contradicted their positions on inequality for a lengthy period of time spanning from pre-civil war to the Trump Era. Unions have functioned as machines of inequality in various ways. One major way unions promoted inequality was in recruitment (see Cornfield 1991 for historical review of the AFL and CIO). Researchers argue that union shortcomings are linked to who they recruited, or rather, who they purposely avoided recruiting.

Because of union shortcomings in recruiting, large sectors of the economy, including service occupations held majorly by women and people of color were basically untouched by unions during postwar decades of labor's greatest strength. Union's reluctance to address issues of the civil rights movement and feminist movements, and the Black Lives Matter movement (Larson 2016) halts the labor movement's possibilities for growth and ultimately leads the labor movement to continually produce contradictory goals.

In the past, unions have committed to barring Black people, women, and immigrants of color. For instance, Atlanta Chevrolet local, St Louis General Motors Local 25, Detroit Hudson Motor Car plant, and other locals openly barred, intimidated, and discriminated against black workers in the 1940s (Boyle 1995). This was evident across the entire auto production industry. Thus, black people were barred from multiple opportunities and could not seek union refuge in times of high union density and pro-union public opinion. So, racial inequality was perpetuated and inadequately addressed by unions for some period of time.

Despite this trend, many locales in the UAW quickly overcame racial problems and began to see Black worker interests as tied to White worker interests. In Detroit, the migration of African Americans was met with various "hate-strikes" by White workers that felt Black workers threatened their jobs (Lichtenstein 1982: 125-126). By 1943, these "hate-stikes" began to disappear, as wildcat strikes over other issues increased (Lichtenstein 1982: 125-126). Unity across Black and White workers was not the natural outcome of this period, but this particular unity was a result of direct involvement of Black and White communist union organizers working together to politically educate White workers and organize Black workers. In the mid-1950s, communists were purged in the U.S., and racial division weakened the labor movement once more, causing union decline. In 1954, the peak of union membership, the percent of union

membership in wage and salary workers was 34.8 percent (Mayer 2004). In 2018, the percent of wage and salary workers who are members of unions has fallen to 10.5 percent (BLS 2019). Recently, however, Black workers have become overrepresented in unions, meaning Black workers and White workers are again working together.

### ***The Positive Impact of the Labor Movement***

The labor movement has had a tumultuous and contradictory history, but in the periods where it has fought for equality, working people and the general public have won massive political and economic gains. The Center for American Progress reported that union membership lessens the racial wealth gap between families of color and white families (Weller & Madland 2018). Similarly, the researchers found that nonwhite union members were impacted more positively by the “union wealth effect” and saw bigger gains from union membership. Similarly, deunionization cost African American males roughly \$49 a week (Rosenfeld & Kleykamp 2012). In addition, sex inequality is also a major area of inequality research that proves the relevance of union power in lessening inequalities. If union membership had remained at high levels, among women, the black-white weekly wage gap would be 13%- 30% lower (Rosenfeld & Kleykamp 2012). Arguably, the decline of unions is patterned with the trend of rising inequality of various forms in the U.S.. Over time, unions have drastically decreased, and racism continues to systematically hurt African Americans, Latinx, and immigrants of color. During the recession, many jobs and wealth were lost at all income levels. Recovery for some populations has occurred, but according to Pew Research Center, racial and ethnic wealth inequality gaps among the middle class widened and have yet to recover (Kochhar & Cilluffo 2017).

The labor movement has shifted back in forth throughout history as a promoter of inequality and equality. Research has found that in the 1940s, the 15 most highly unionized states where interracial unions were strong, possessed more equal rates of unemployment reductions across white and black workers (Zeitlin and Weyher 2001). The Congress of Industrial Organization was the first national collection of interracial unions; before its creation, the racial division of labor was characterized as a color-caste system where black workers were the “last hired, and the first fired” (Zeitlin and Weyher 2001). Before integrated unions, this was an accepted, widespread reality. Many unions of the present possess and implement equality mechanisms to fight racial inequalities in hiring and firing.

Unions have made strong and radical statements against racial inequality. In 1937, the United Auto Workers President Homer Martin stated that “Negro Workers” “have all the benefits and rights of our union... We feel very strongly on this matter. We don’t discriminate” (Meier, Rudwick, & Rudwick 2007). Similarly, during the Trump Era, the AFL-CIO called for the labor movement to be allies to the Black Lives Matter movement, a movement that seeks to eradicate racism in policing (Larson 2016). Thus, various unions over the years have stood against racial inequality and made it a priority.

Labor unions have purposely and consequentially benefitted minority groups. In their peak years, unions provided a “wage premium” for union members which was greater for African Americans than for whites (Callaway & Collins 2018). Individuals of lower education levels and lower income levels also saw greater wage premiums than individuals of higher socioeconomic statuses (Callaway & Collins 2018). Similarly, it has been found that the presence of unions and manufacturing jobs positively affects black workers’ relative wages (McCall 2001).



Ironically, union decline directly coincided with a rise in overall economic inequality over the recent decades (Callaway & Collins 2018). Studies have found that union decline is directly related to income inequality (Card 2001, 1996; Western and Rosenfeld 2011). This overall trend suggests that this relationship is not coincidental, but rather directly related. Union decline worsens economic inequality between blacks and whites (Rosenfeld 2010). Regarding wage inequality, the consequences of this trend disproportionately hurt women, especially black women (Rosenfeld 2010). This point is a direct reflection to Crenshaw's (1990) theory of intersectionality. In this theoretical approach, women of color are members of two subordinated groups, for identify as both women and black. This intersection of identities positions them at the bottom of two matrixes of domination.

Unions have evolved from entirely economic/ class-harnessing machines to social movement organizations with multicultural goals of racial equality, sex and gender equality, and environmental sustainability. Unions have become machines of intersectional application to target multiple intersecting forms of oppression. All in all, worker power leads to various racial, sex and gender, and other structural issues to be represented.

## **V. Theory & Hypotheses**

There are two general approaches to the alleviation of racial inequality: top down and bottom up. The top down approach suggests that if minorities obtain descriptive representation, their interests will be alleviated and assessed at the elite level, and racial inequality will lessen. Conversely, the bottom up approach argues that representation is not the key to racial inequality alleviation, but rather the coalesce and collective action of the people at the bottom, the poor and the working class, is the key to alleviating racial inequality. To test these two theoretical

approaches to racial inequality against each other, I will use data on racial disparities in homeownership by state. To test the bottom up, social movement approach, I will analyze the relationship between labor union coverage percentages to racial inequality in homeownership rates by state at the multivariate level.

Hypothesis 1: States with larger union coverage rates have less racial inequality in homeownership.

Similarly, I will analyze the relationship between Black representation and racial inequality in homeownership by state at the multivariate level to test the top down, elite representation approach.

Hypothesis 2: State with higher percentages of Black representation have less racial inequality in homeownership.

To prove my argument that an intersectional class (bottom up) approach is a more effective alleviator of racial inequality, I must demonstrate that union coverage rates have a greater effect of lessening racial inequality than African American political representation.

Hypothesis 3: Union coverage rates have a greater effect of lessening racial inequality than Black representation.

## **VI. Methods**

### ***Background: Social Implications of Racial Economic Disparities***

Racial economic disparities have been the topic of much research (McCall 2001; Kerr & Walsh 2014; Killewald, Pfeffer, & Schachner 2017). Racial disparities are present and enduring within research on wealth accumulation (Killewald et al. 2017), wages (McCall 2001; Kerr & Walsh 2014), job attainment (Pager 2003; Pager 2007; Pager, Bonikowski, & Western 2009;

Pager, Western, & Sugie 2009) home foreclosures (Rugh & Massey 2010) and incarceration (Alexander 2012; Butler 2018; Bonilla-Silva 2006). After the recession, many of these disparities were exacerbated.

Theorists have directly attributed racial economic disparities to the size and concentration of the black population (Gullickson 2010; Tomaskovic-Devey and Roscigno 1996). The larger the proportion of the black population, the higher the disparities between blacks and whites (Gullickson 2010; Tomaskovic-Devey and Roscigno 1996; Becker 1957; Sundstrom 2007; Kerr & Walsh 2014). The same pattern holds true for instances of racial violence. The probability of racial conflict in the form of white-on-black racial violence is also directly related to the size of the minority groups (Olzak 1992; Tolnay and Beck 1995). Even further, rates of black lynching and black executions were higher when white working conditions were more precarious, and whites perceived blacks as economically threatening competition (Gullickson 2010).

There are important periods in history where black-white disparities were lessened by various bottom-up approaches. The Civil Rights Movement and the Labor Movement are key examples of bottom-up approaches to lessening inequality. The Labor Movement in particular is an interesting bottom-up, social movement, approach to examine regarding the issue of racial inequality. Thought to be only a class-based mobilization, the labor movement has made significant strides on the fronts of racial equality, sex and gender equality, and environmental sustainability. In history, labor has also positioned itself as an enemy to racial equality, sex and gender equality, and environmental sustainability when it strictly identified as majority white male institution. Fast forward to the 2018, black workers have a higher union membership rate than all other racial groups (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018). Black workers are more likely than anyone else to join a union during this time.

### *The Sociopolitical as Economic*

Racial concentrations of minority groups face high levels of discrimination, segregation, competitive racial conflict and incarceration. Blacks witness racial economic disparities that serve as a feedback loop for other racial disparities such as housing, education, and incarceration. Wilson (1978; 2011: 57) argues that race is no longer the primary predictor of life chances for blacks, but rather class alone is more predictive of blacks' life chances. Even further, Wilson (2011) argues that race relations have shifted from economic to 'sociopolitical' and he claims that race tensions now deal more with racial conflict in consumption rather than the sphere of production. By consumption, Wilson (2011:57) means education, residential areas, and other public goods.

I argue that conflicts of consumption are very permanently intertwined with conflicts of production. In this, I argue that the sociopolitical is always also economic. Both racial conflict over production goods and consumption goods produce racial disparities favoring whites, in turn, subjugated and limiting the mobility of blacks. Labor unions depict this intertwined relationship by impacting not just issues of production—wages, job placement, and income—but also the consumption of supposed 'sociopolitical' goods—housing, education, etc. Unions have become machines of intersectional application that target multiple intersecting forms of oppression. Worker power can be conceptualized as an intersectional bottom-up approach to alleviating racial inequality in production and consumption. To demonstrate this trend, I prove that class is not disconnected from racial identity by analyzing the relationship between labor power and racial inequality in homeownership, for homeownership is a leading goal of consumption within the American Dream. I suspect that union coverage percentages by state are indicative of racial

inequality rates within a state. States with low union coverage percentages most likely have severe racial inequality in homeownership.

### ***Data Sources***

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016
2. U.S. Census Bureau 2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
3. 24/7 Wall St for Racial Inequality by state<sup>2</sup>.
4. National Conference of State Legislatures 2016

### ***Dependent Variable: Homeownership Inequality***

The focus on my empirical analysis is racial inequality in homeownership. Homeownership is an American ideal characteristic of the American Dream. It is a marker of high level consumption but is also tied to economics and racial politics. Homeownership is profoundly stratified by race and ethnicity (McCabe 2018). Callis & Kresin (2015) reported that in 2015, only 43 percent of African Americans lived in home of their own compared to roughly 73 percent of whites. McCabe (2018) explores racial differences across individuals' motivations to buy homes as well as what homeownership means to them. McCabe found that non-whites are extremely more likely to identify status attainment as a major reason to own a home. In this, respondents define homeownership as a mark of success. Similarly, McCabe (2018) finds that African American respondents are 80 percent more like than whites to identify homeownership as a tool for strengthening citizenship, and they are more than twice as likely as whites to identify homeownership as a valuable mechanism for sharing intergenerational wealth. Finally,

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<sup>2</sup> This data was published August of 2017 and includes black population percentages and homeownership rates, from which I calculated black to white ratios for each state.

African Americans and Latinos cite social status of homeownership as a reason more than twice as often as whites; McCabe (2018) connects this trend to these minority groups' histories of systematic exclusion. Thus, homeownership is vital to non-white Americans' conception of success, status, the American Dream. Homeownership is not simply strictly economic or strictly sociopolitical consumption. It is both. Its deep ties to racial inequality suggests that inequality within homeownership intersects both race and class. If the labor movement impacts the racial dynamics of homeownership inequality, this clarifies my argument that 1) An intersectional movement can alleviate both racial inequality and class inequality and 2) Race and class are deeply intertwined making the sociopolitical almost always economic.

While homeownership is a vital characteristic of the American Dream, many Americans are barred from attaining this level of status, security, and wealth. For decades, unfair housing policies have created an environment that produced and continually reproduces economic inequality (Tach & Emory 2017). In U.S., there is a strong history of the exploitation of minority populations within the housing market. Black and Latinos were disproportionately affected by the foreclosure crisis of 2007 (Hall, Crowder, & Spring 2015a), and many have yet to recover. A long history of predatory lending (Hall, Crowder, & Spring 2015a), redlining, and other forms of racial residential segregation (Hall, Crowder, & Spring 2015b) have significantly disadvantaged minority homeowners causing dramatic racial disparities in housing and in overall wealth that will last for decades.

In this study, homeownership inequality is a ratio measure of White and Black homeownership recorded in 2017. This was calculated by dividing Black homeownership percentages by White homeownership percentages, creating a ratio of homeownership.

### ***Predictor Variables***

***Union Coverage.*** The 21<sup>st</sup> century labor movement exists as an intersectional mobilizing force. African Americans are the most likely to join a labor union, and minorities groups that are union members receive a “wage premium” as a benefit of the labor movement. I argue that union coverage is predictive of racial inequality in homeownership rates by state due to its intersectional qualities of racial and class inequality alleviation. Union coverage is measure of the amount of people covered by union representation in their workplaces. This is the proportion of individuals, by state, whose terms and conditions at work are made by collective bargaining between a labor union and an employer. This measure includes values for each state for the year 2016.

***African American Representation.*** I include African American representation as a possible predictor of variation in racial inequality within homeownership. The literature suggests that states where the Black population has fair African American representation, Black residents will have their interests heard in government. In this, the ethnicity paradigm and top down approach assumes that fair Black representation in elite spaces is expected to act as an alleviator of systemic racial inequality. This theoretical approach assumes that Black interests are essentially homogenous within race and across class. Including this measure as a predictor variable tests the validity of this theory. The representation measure is calculated as a rate (percent of Black legislators divided by percent of state population that identifies as Black). Using a rate measure of Black representation in regards to Black racial makeup of each state allows for a comparable evaluation of states that have fair racial representation relative to racial makeup of the state.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Simply using the percent of Black legislators is not indicative of fair representation in a state but is actually indicative of the Black racial makeup of a state (i.e. states with a high Black population size will most likely have a

### *Control Variables*

Right to work: This is a dummy variable coded 1 if the state was a right-to-work state in 2016.

GOP Control: This is a dummy variable coded 1 if the state legislature is republican dominated for the year 2016.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

*Table 1: Union Coverage & Racial Inequality in Homeownership*

|                                       | N  | Mean   | St. Deviation | Min    | Max    |
|---------------------------------------|----|--------|---------------|--------|--------|
| Dependent Variable                    |    |        |               |        |        |
| Homeownership Inequality              | 50 | .504   | .126          | .0971  | .6975  |
| Homeownership Inequality <sup>2</sup> | 50 | .2691  | .1111         | .00943 | .48651 |
| Independent Variables                 |    |        |               |        |        |
| Predictor Variables                   |    |        |               |        |        |
| Union Coverage                        | 50 | 11.246 | 5.023         | 2.6    | 25.2   |
| Fair Representation                   | 50 | .765   | .42           | 0      | 2      |
| Control Variables                     |    |        |               |        |        |
| GOP Control                           | 49 | .653   | .481          | 0      | 1      |
| Right to Work                         | 50 | .5     | .505          | 0      | 1      |

### *Analytic Strategy*

I propose that the union coverage predicts state level racial inequality rates in homeownership. To support this claim, I must demonstrate that union coverage, a measure of

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higher percent of Black legislators). Using percent of Black legislators actually confuses findings on racial inequality. When first employing my regression model, I used the percent measure instead of the rate explained above. Incorporation of the percent measure creates findings that suggests that states with high percentages of Black representatives actually possess more Black-White racial inequality in homeownership. In this, these findings suggest that Black representation causes inequality. The literature suggests this is untrue. Instead, using this percent measure indicates that there is high inequality where there are large Black populations. This is an obvious finding and is not the focus of this paper.



union presence, has some effect on state racial inequality in homeownership. Homeownership inequality must be explained by union coverage and not Republican control, Right to Work legislation. I contend that fair racial representation might also explain racial inequality in homeownership, but I suspect it will have a smaller impact than union coverage. To test these hypotheses, I employ an Ordinary Least Squares Regression.

### ***Regression Diagnostics***

For racial inequality in homeownership, I conducted an Ordinary Least Squares regression model to examine the relationship between racial inequality in homeownership and union coverage. First, this method assumes that the errors of the dependent variable are normally distributed. I find that racial inequality in homeownership (Refer to Figure 1 in the Appendix) is negatively skewed, so I square all values of this dependent variable. This transformation makes the dependent variable sufficient normally distributed (Refer to Figure 2 in the Appendix). The second assumption is linear relationships between dependent variable and independent variables. There are no curvilinear relationships (Refer to Figure 3 in Appendix), so I proceed. The third assumption is no multicollinearity. The highest correlation among independent variables does not reach 0.8 or higher, so multicollinearity is not present. The fourth assumption is no influential outliers. I drop all outliers from my model, so my ultimate N for this model is 43. The last assumption is no heteroscedasticity. Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroscedasticity is not significant, so there no sufficient evidence that racial inequality in homeownership is not homoscedastic.

## VII. Findings and Discussion

Table 2 Union Coverage & Racial Inequality in Homeownership OLS Regression

| Independent Variables     | Racial Inequality in Homeownership<br>(Rate_homeown^2) |
|---------------------------|--|
| Predictor Variables       |  |
| Union Coverage            | -.0128***<br>-.7693<br>(-3.74)                         |
| Fair Black Representation | -.0311<br>-.1293<br>(-.90)                             |
| Control Variables         |  |
| GOP Control               | -.0294<br>-.1628<br>(-.86)                             |
| Right to Work             | -.0432<br>-.251<br>(-1.17)                             |
| Constant                  |  |
| Cons_                     | .5089***<br>(7.86)                                     |
| Number of Observations    | 43   |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>   | .2373  |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>     | .0563  |

Note: The first number is the unstandardized regression coefficient, and the second number is the standardized regression coefficient, the third number in parentheses is the T value. P values= \*≤.050, \*\*≤.010, \*\*\*≤.001

This model of the relationship union coverage and Black representation have to racial inequality in homeownership accounts for 23.7% of the variation in racial inequality in homeownership by state while controlling for Right to Work status and GOP control of legislature. I find evidence to support hypothesis 1 that union coverage does in fact have an

alleviating effect on racial inequality within homeownership rates. Union coverage is a negative and significant ( $b = -.0128$ ,  $P \leq 0.001$ ) predictor of racial inequality in homeownership. A one standard deviation increase in union coverage yields a 0.57 decrease in racial inequality in homeownership. Though small, union coverage does have a beneficial, alleviating impact of racial inequality in homeownership rates by state. Thus, states with high union coverage rates have statistically significant lower rates of racial inequality in homeownership. This relationship proves my theoretically argument of a bottom up approach.

Regarding African American representation, I do not find support for hypothesis 2. The rate of African American representation within a state has no statistically significant effect on racial inequality in homeownership. Thus, I find support for hypothesis 3. Union coverage rates have a greater effect of lessening racial inequality than Black representation.

### ***Fair Representation***

Even though the regression suggests fair African American representation is not significant, it is possible that some unmeasured factor is masking the effect. If there is an effect of representation, treatment effects will isolate that effect by balancing all measured and unmeasured covariates via propensity score matching. In this, a treatment effects model creates two groups, a treated group and an untreated group. Via propensity score matching, these two groups are the same on all measured and unmeasured covariates. Thus, they only differ on the variable of interest, fair racial representation. For this, I create a binary variable for fair representation, "Fair." Fair is coded 1 for state legislatures that have equal or greater African American representation in reference to the African American population size and coded zero for

state legislatures where African American representation is less than African American population size.

*Table 3. Treatment Effects of Fair Racial Representation*

| <b>Treatment</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>St Deviation</b> | <b>Min</b> | <b>Max</b> |
|------------------|----------|-------------|---------------------|------------|------------|
| Fair (0 vs 1)    | 50       | .7          | .463                | 0          | 1          |

### ***Analytic Strategy***

In the previous OLS regression, I found that after meeting the assumptions, states with higher union coverage rates exhibit lower Black-White racial inequality homeownership rates. I also found no statistically significant relationship between racial representation and racial inequality in homeownership. To examine if there is truly no effect, I will employ propensity score matching and treatment effects.

To employ propensity score matching, I first must use a logistic model to estimate to probability that any state has high racial inequality. These modeled probabilities are known as propensity scores. With propensity scores, I can match cases resulting in for each value of the propensity score, the distribution of the covariates of racial inequality in homeownership is the same in the experimental and control groups. Grouping these groups based on propensity scores replicates a miniature version of a randomized experiment in respect to the observed covariates.

Then, I take the average outcome in the treated (experimental) group and subtract it from the average of the untreated (control) group to get the treatment effect. Treatment effects provide

the magnitude and significance of a particular predictor variable's sole effect on the dependent variable.

Once again, my variable of interest is fair racial representation. Refer to Table 3. Fair is a measure of black representative percentage in reference to black population size. States coded 1 for fair have Black representation equal to or greater than the percentage of the black population. Thus, states coded 0 have unequal, or unfair Black representation. By using fair, I am measuring the effect of representation on racial inequality rates.

### ***Treatment Effect Diagnostics***

When finding propensity scores, I first employ a logistic regression to assess the balance of my treatment and control groups. The groups must be balanced to move on to the other assessments of propensity scores and treatment effects. The Logit model does not have to follow the assumptions of multicollinearity or outliers. I employ a Propensity Score test; the assumption for this test is balanced groups. In this, the treatment and control groups covariates must be close to the same for each independent variable. They are roughly equal, meaning the groups are balanced. The groups must be balanced to assess the treatment effect of the independent variable of interest, fair representation. I find that both groups are balanced when fair representation is the treatment. With this test, I find that both the treatment and control groups are roughly equal on all covariates and thus, it can be assumed that they are also roughly equal on all unmeasured variables as well.

Finally, I employ a Treatment Effect test using propensity score matching to isolate the causal effect fair representation has on racial inequality in homeownership while controlling for union coverage, right to work status, and GOP control.

*Table 4. Treatment Effect of Fair on Racial Inequality in Homeownership*

| Racial Inequality Homeownership | Coef    | Std Err | Z    | P> z |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|------|------|
| Fair (1 vs 0)                   | -.05261 | .05616  | -.94 | .349 |

***Treatment Effect Findings and Discussion***

When testing for the treatment effects using propensity score matching, I found that there is no significant evidence to support the claim that fair representation has any effect on racial inequality in homeownership. Refer to Table 4. So, we can assume that, fair African American representation, as a rate and as a binary variable, neither causes nor alleviates racial inequality in homeownership due to lack of significant treatment effect findings.

**VIII. Conclusion**

This article produces significant findings for race scholarship and political sociology. Many have theorized the best alleviators for racial inequality. My study provides empirical evidence of two powerful arguments. First, intersectional class social movement activity, e.g. labor movement presence, alleviates racial inequality at the state level. Second, racial representation does not alleviate or perpetuate racial inequality. This is not to say racial representation is not important. Representation is important for political engagement among other pros. What this research implies is that voting in African American representatives, such as Barack Obama, Stacey Abrams, or Kamala Harris, etc. has not and will not alleviate Black-White racial inequality. Though these individuals exist as racial champions and racial role models, they have strong ties to elite class interests. President Barack Obama’s entire cabinet

was selected by an elite group whose messenger was Michael Froman. Similarly, Stacey Abrams has a history of elite ties and positions including practicing as a corporate lawyer, working as a VP for a financial firm, occupying a CEO position at a legal consulting firm serving mostly corporate clientele, and serving on the board of directors for the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee. Likewise, Senator Kamala Harris during her time as Attorney General of California refused to prosecute Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's old company OneWest for illegal activities that hurt various Americans. Ironically, in 2016, she was the only Democratic U.S. Senator to receive a donation from Steven Mnuchin. Representatives cannot be entrusted as the sole mechanism of alleviating racial inequality, because many of these representatives have corporate interests in mind. Thus, alleviation lies in the hands of the oppressed.

What this study clarifies is that racial inequality can be alleviated by direct, collective action of the oppressed. Elections alone are not the means of alleviating racial inequality, but rather intersectional direct action of the poor and working class, men and women, African Americans, Whites, Latinx, the disabled, etc. can ensure racial justice and economic justice.

Despite these significant findings, there are a few limitations to this study. First, I employ union coverage as a proxy for state-level bottom up mobilizations. There are various other measures of grassroots activity at the state and metropolitan level. There might be other better measures of bottom up activities that seek to alleviate racial inequality such as counts of mobilizations or counts of non-profit organizations and social movement organizations centered on around the issue of racial inequality.

Another limitation is the measure of GOP control. This control variable might not be a great control for red state-blue state differences when observing state-level differences in housing inequality, because homeownership inequality is shaped by much longer-term effects

than elections within 4-5 recent years. Homeownership inequality is shaped by an overall political-economic climate that spans decades.

Even given the limitations, the implications of this research are expansive. My findings inform scholars, policy advocates, and social movement organizations of the importance of intersectional race-class mobilizations to racial and economic inequality alleviation. Representation alone is not enough.



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## Appendix

Figure 1 Histogram of Racial Inequality in Homeownership Rate

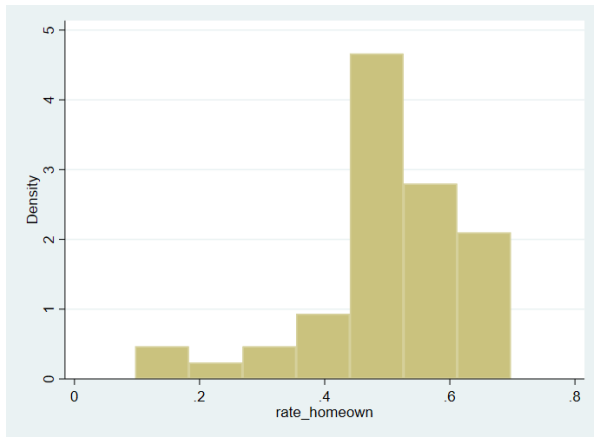


Figure 2 Histogram of Transformed Racial Inequality in Homeownership Rate<sup>2</sup>

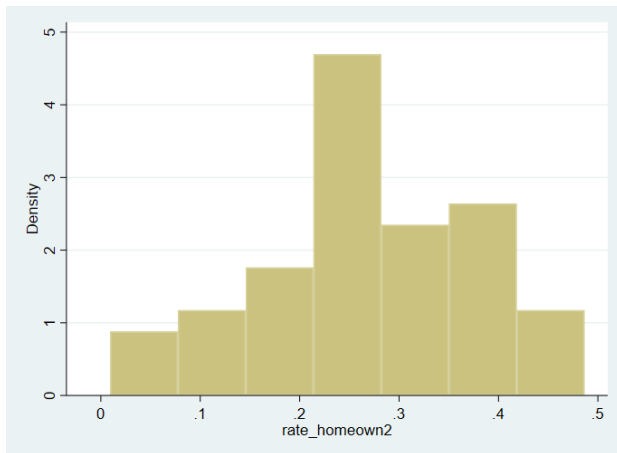


Figure 3 Graph Matrix of Covariates

