is to see them not as standing somehow alone, but always as a function of the wider narratives in which they arise.

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RICHARD ALBA
Blurring the Color Line: The New Chance for a More Integrated America

In his latest book, Blurring the Color Line, sociologist Richard Alba argues that the next quarter century offers an unprecedented opportunity for substantial upward mobility of African Americans and Latinos into the American mainstream of good-paying jobs, integrated neighborhoods, and substantially higher rates of intermarriage. Although optimistic, Alba's case does not rest on wishful thinking. He begins with a historical analogy—the successful ascendance within the United States of formerly marginalized groups, particularly Catholics and Jews, in the middle decades of the twentieth century. He then turns to the potential for significant structural mobility with the retirement of the baby boomers between 2010 and 2030. Alba considers most of the potential contingencies that might derail the chances of assimilation and recommends public policies that could make the difference between success and failure. This is a gutsy book, one that few scholars would have dared to write and one that even fewer are sufficiently knowledgeable to undertake. Although critics can nitpick (and this will be my role in the balance of this review), Blurring the Color Line is essential reading for scholars, students, activists, and pundits in the field of race and ethnicity, and anyone interested in the promise of social science to inform the policy agenda.

Alba offers an extensive analysis of the factors that allowed the successful integration of formerly marginalized whites, including Irish and Italian Catholics, Eastern European Jews, and other descendants of early-twentieth-century immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. From the vantage point of the early twenty-first century, with eight of the nine justices on the US Supreme Court being Catholic or Jewish, it is difficult to imagine the bigotry expressed toward Catholics and Jews in the first half of the previous century. Catholics were likened to apes by the nineteenth-century cartoonist Thomas Nast, threatened by members of the Ku Klux Klan in Midwestern cities in the 1920s, and even disparaged by prominent scholars in the 1960s as lacking achievement motivation. Jews faced quotas at Ivy League colleges and encountered restrictions that made them unwelcome in many elite firms, neighborhoods, hotels, country clubs, and in all but a few college fraternities and sororities. Drawing upon a large body of empirical scholarship, Alba reports that most white ethnics, including Catholics and Jews, are now thoroughly integrated into the American mainstream, most notably illustrated by their high rates of intermarriage with Protestants.

Alba centers this transformation in the immediate decades after World War II and explains it as the result of "non-zero-sum mobility" (caused by expansion of higher education and well-paying occupations that did not require displacement of
the already privileged classes), the decline of urban ethnic neighborhoods with the enormous expansion of middle-class suburbs, and changes in a public culture that emphasized the moral worth of white ethnics. Although other scholars had made these points in isolation, Alba weaves them together in an original synthesis.

Complex explanations of societal change are inevitably post hoc, and it is difficult to generate testable hypotheses, nor does Alba attempt to do so. I suspect that the trends of upward mobility and declines in residential segregation of Southern and Eastern European immigrants began well before World II. Perhaps the postwar era simply witnessed the culmination of long-term socioeconomic and spatial assimilation of white ethnics. The tricky question concerns the origins of the cultural shift that reduced (but did not end) open bigotry toward Catholics and Jews. I agree with Alba that living as next door neighbors and increasing acceptance of intermarriage were certainly important, but the election of John F. Kennedy, the Civil Rights movement, and the political movements of the 1960s are also likely to have contributed to rapid inter-cohort change in beliefs about social inclusion.

Although I wish he had included American Indians as well, Alba’s description of the challenge of fully integrating African Americans and Latinos economically, socially, and residually is convincing. The Civil Rights movement ended the legal and moral defense of Apartheid-like social institutions, but progress in reaching economic parity and residential integration has been exceedingly slow. In some areas, such as in the criminal justice system, the gaps have widened in recent decades. Alba thoroughly documents these patterns, contrasting the almost complete incorporation of native-born Asian Americans with the signs of persistent discrimination against African Americans.

In his empirical chapter on recent trends in ethno-racial change, and especially in his later chapters on future prospects, Alba presents an unusual analytical perspective with a focus on inter-cohort changes in the relative share of each race and ethnic group in high-paying occupational categories. This perspective allows him to consider compositional change—the increasing share of minority, immigrant, and female workers—as a driving force of social change. The standard measures of disparities (gaps and ratios) mask the role of changing demography (the supply and demand of workers) as a causal force. In contrast to more pessimistic accounts, Alba foresees modest socioeconomic gains for African Americans and Latinos (between cohorts and over time) in the early twenty-first century. He concludes that these gains are propelled by an increasing share of minorities in the labor force. The analysis would have been more convincing with a Kitagawa-style decomposition of the relative effects of population composition (including age, nativity, race/ethnicity, and education) and rates on the temporal change in his dependent variables.

Alba’s informed speculation on the American future is one of the most intriguing contributions of the volume. Drawing on his prior model and findings, Alba argues that the retirement of the baby boom cohorts in the coming decades will open up a large share of “good jobs” that will advance the prospects for African Americans and Latinos. Indeed, if the future proportionate increase of minorities in the labor force (already evident in the ethno-racial composition of adolescents and children) is reflected in good jobs, there will be quantum leaps in the numbers of minorities in high-level professional and managerial occupations.
This is an important point, but it is a direct corollary of cohort replacement in the workforce. Unless changes occur in other elements of the stratification system (inter- or intra-generational mobility), a rising share of minorities in the labor force will lead to proportional shifts in all occupations, including but not limited to high-paying occupations. I would have preferred an Easterlinesque interpretation attributing the growth of minority workers in high-paying occupations as resulting from shifts in composition that will affect mobility rates of minorities. (Richard Easterlin argued that changes in age composition can lead to changes in age-specific rates.) If the absolute numbers of minorities in managerial and supervisory positions increase, minority managers may be more willing to hire additional qualified minority workers.

In his chapter on potential contingencies, Alba suggests that increases in the numbers of immigrants and women in the workforce might lead to a slower rate of minority advancement. This would be true if the number of good jobs opening up is strictly a function of the shortage of white males. But if the number of good jobs is also a function of the total size of the labor force, increases in the numbers of women and immigrants will create a proportional increase in good jobs. Additionally, greater diversity in the workforce should lead to fairer and less discriminatory employment practices.

Richard Alba is a gifted researcher who has written an insightful and provocative book that merits widespread attention. He has given us a clearer understanding of the past and of the possibilities for the future. Regardless of my quibbles, I strongly endorse Alba’s conclusions and policy recommendations, especially about the urgency of promoting greater educational opportunities for minorities. In a few decades, perhaps future scholars will observe the rapid erosion of racial and ethnic exclusion, just as Alba has predicted.

Onn Winckler

Arab Political Demography: Population Growth, Labor Migration and Natalist Policies
Revised and expanded second edition
Brighton, UK and Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2009. xiv + 328 p. $120.00; $60.00 (pbk.).

This book by Onn Winckler, now a professor in the Department of Middle Eastern History at the University of Haifa, is the latest in a series of 14 books or substantial reports he has written on Jordan, Syria, the Gulf States, and Israel-Palestine. It brings together several of the themes recurrent in these books and reports, which address topics such as the political economy of sustained, relatively high fertility in the Arab world and the peculiar geopolitical issues surrounding the migration of workers and their families both within the region and to and from other regions. Given Winckler’s institutional affiliation, the opportunities to conduct first-hand inquiries are limited; so, like outsiders in Europe and North America, he has had to rely on published data or information on websites. He has the added advantage of reading sources in Hebrew.