Bottom-Line Diversity:
Race and Productive Pluralism in the Post-Civil Rights Era

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Introduction

"I have a dream…" booms Dr. Martin Luther King's voice as the crowd shuffles into the University of Michigan's Rackham Auditorium. The video playing on a large screen above our heads cuts to scenes of revitalization projects in Detroit, then to a young African-American man singing, "The one thing I did right, was the day I started to fight. Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on."

The ornate auditorium is soon packed beyond capacity. More than 1,300 people, mostly students, fill the plush seats, sit in the aisles, and cram against the back wall. It is January 20, 2003, the day of the keynote speech for the University's annual MLK symposium. The University is in the midst of legal battles over its race-based admissions policies. In just a few months, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear oral arguments in the two cases against the university.

University president Mary Sue Coleman, a petite white woman dressed in a crisp beige suit, strides onto the stage to speak about the University's "fight" in the lawsuits and its staunch support for diversity. The legal cases, she explains, charge that the University unlawfully favors racial minorities. She tells us of the University's adherence to the law and its acceptance of only highly qualified minority students. The University's policies "seek out diversity," she says. They "consider a broad range of factors in admissions," with race as one of several criteria. The University has good reason to do so, Coleman notes. "Our research has demonstrated [that] essential values like respect, understanding, and goodwill are strengthened when students live and learn from people from many backgrounds."

Her closing brings the audience members to their feet, clapping and cheering. The University is working to keep the “doors of opportunity” open, she insists. “On this most important American civil rights holiday, I want to make our bottom line crystal clear: The University of Michigan has an absolute, unwavering commitment to diversity throughout our community.”

Such talk of “diversity” abounds in the twenty-first century United States, from the Oval Office to celebratory neighborhood festivals. In a 2003 national survey, nearly all the respondents said they valued diversity in their friendships and their cities or towns.[1] Many leaders across the country, like Mary Sue Coleman, officially endorse diversity as part of their organization’s core mission.

When decision-makers speak of diversity, they may mean the many ways that people differ from each other. As evident in Coleman’s remarks, delivered on a national holiday honoring an African-American civil rights activist, they often are referring to racial minorities or racial differences. However, the political and organizational leaders who advocate diversity today are not repeating King’s critique of racial discrimination. They are not echoing the black civil rights movement’s demands for integration and justice, or the claims for rights and recognition made by Chicano militants, feminists, and gay and lesbian organizers. These leaders are voicing a different vision of race, racial progress, and social change, one framed in terms of valuing and leveraging diversity.

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[1] Hartmann, Edgell and Gerteis (2005) find that 94% of respondents say that they value diversity in their friendships and 91.5% value diversity in their localities. See also Gerteis, Hartmann and Edgell (2007).

The organizational concern with racial diversity is historically new. It dates most directly to the late 1960s and early 1970s, when white college administrators and community spokespeople stressed the importance of "diversity" as they encouraged black integration into exclusively white universities and neighborhoods.[2] Since then, an organizational push for diversity has emerged in key arenas of social life. It is most notable in the settings targeted by civil rights activists and their opponents: the places Americans live, learn, and work. Diversity rhetoric and initiatives can be found in universities and schools, companies and communities, the military, and places of worship.[3] Decision-makers rhetorically laud diversity in their public statements. The theme of diversity appears on organizations' websites, during organizational events, and in internal documents. Organizational diversity activities range from affirmative admissions policies, such as those at Michigan, to mixed-income housing programs to corporate diversity trainings.

These myriad diversity efforts have been endorsed from the top down by decision-makers such as university presidents. They also have been shaped from the bottom up by challenger activists and, through their daily routine activities, by a variety of organizational members such as mid-level corporate managers and neighborhood block club leaders.

Bottom-Line Diversity is about the cultural politics of race in the post-civil rights period. It looks to organizations' diversity discourses and practices to understand the ideas about race now officially endorsed by people in positions of power. It investigates how these ideas are enacted, the controversies that arise, and the consequences. With an ethnographic eye, I study a neighborhood, a university, and a corporation known for their active recognition of diversity. I spent six years studying the activities of decision-makers and other organizational enthusiasts of diversity——the city planners and developers, the university officials and admissions officers, the corporate executives and mid-level managers—and also following the activists who question conventional notions of diversity.

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[2] Goodwin (1979), Skrentny (2002)

[3] Bartelt (2009), Berrey (2005), Berrey (2011), Dobbin (2009), Edgell (1998), Green (2004b), Lipson (2007), Lynch (1997)

The book asks: How are diversity's advocates remaking the meanings of race and social change for the 21st century? America's racial landscape has changed dramatically over the last forty years, with a growing black middle class, new immigrants from Latin America and Asia, a consensus among white people that being "racist" is unacceptable, and conservative opposition to race-conscious policies.[4] Yet, many of the fundamental dynamics of racial domination—of white privilege and racial minority disadvantage—persist, from where we live to whom we imprison.[5] These inequalities are compounded by the widening gap between rich and poor, with people of color represented disproportionately in the growing class of poor Americans but also, in very small numbers, among the wealthiest.[6]

Why have organizations interpreted such conditions in terms of diversity and what, exactly, does diversity mean when they put it to use? What makes diversity so powerfully appealing to some and so problematic to others? And how does the organizational push for diversity address ongoing inequities, if at all? The substantive goal of this book is to uncover the promises and the hidden pitfalls of treating racial differences as a matter of diversity. The theoretical goal is to explain organizational processes by which race is reconstructed in the current historical period.

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[4] Alba (2009), Bonilla-Silva (2003), Brown, et al. (2003), Collins (1983)
[5] e.g., Alexander (2010), Krysan (2011)
[6] Landry and Marsh (2011)

Anyone hoping to understand the push for diversity and its racial significance is looking head-on into a murky subject. Diversity has become a buzzword, especially for racial differences. But it is not inherently ideological. It is not only or always about race. The meanings of diversity and its ideological content depend on the ways that people understand and deploy it in their social contexts.

In this book, I show that organizational and political leaders in locales across the country are endorsing a powerful new message on race: diversity, they say, pays off for everyone. According to this ideology, racial differences are an asset. The central idea is that organizations should value diversity for instrumental reasons—namely, to advance core institutional goals. The reasoning is that diversity, and the work of valuing diversity, will benefit many different stakeholders. I call this ideology *productive pluralism.* We hear productive pluralism in Coleman's exhortation that "respect, understanding, and goodwill" improve when diverse students attend college together.

The ideology of productive pluralism draws from the traditions of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, which gained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, to insist on the inherent value of minority cultures. It combines that insistence with a neoliberal emphasis on results and market success.[7]

Coleman and many other advocates of diversity have made productive pluralism their public relations message on race. They pitch diversity as good for organizations, good for profits, even good for white people. Large corporations, for example, publicize a so-called business case for diversity, with boilerplate statements proclaiming that diversity produces an effective workforce.[8] As one of many ideologies communicated through diversity discourse, productive pluralism is noteworthy because decision-makers, in particular, endorse it as a justification for valuing diversity and because it comprises many organizational participants' interpretations of race. To date, scholars have not fully recognized the ubiquity of this set of ideas, its ideological dimensions, or the ways it constitutes organizational activity.[9]

Bottom-Line Diversity's central argument is that organizational advocates of diversity have mainstreamed the civil rights movement's ambitious goals of racial integration by trumpeting the upsides of inclusion. In the name of diversity, they present racial differences as cultural traits to be valued and assets to be leveraged to everyone's advantage. These visions of diversity become real and consequential through corporate sensitivity trainings, mixed-income housing policies, and other organizational diversity activities. They depict the presence of people of color among white people—limited numbers of the *right* kinds of people of color—as unthreatening commonsense. With the push for diversity, organizations have disavowed racism while, at once, they have redefined racial progress largely according to the worldviews and interests of key constituents. These constituents include some racial minorities but typically are white and, regardless of racial group, affluent.

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[7] On cultural pluralism, see Gleason (1984), Spillman (1997). On multiculturalism, see Goldberg (1994). On neoliberalism, see Harvey (2005).

[8] See also Edelman, Fuller and Mara-Drita (2001)

[9] For analyses of the instrumental logic of race in corporate diversity rhetoric, see ibid, and in legal doctrine on diversity, see Frymer and Skrentny (2004).

The organizational push for diversity serves as a political intervention and, often, a marketing strategy. It also comprises organizations' orientations to race. Through different discourses on diversity, organizational leaders and members affirm the sentiment of tolerance and can foster a shared identity among different constituents. The narrower message of productive pluralism—that valuing diversity brings functional benefits for everyone—provides an instrumental rationale for inclusion and resonates with organizational members and constituents alike. Organizations have developed a consensus on diversity in a climate hostile to race-conscious policy and preoccupied with the bottom line. Organizational diversity efforts tend to be oriented to those who expect a cosmopolitan commitment to tolerance but resist far-reaching, redistributive social change.

I developed these insights based on my in-depth investigation of three sites in the U.S. that each have a reputation for their active recognition of diversity: Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood, the University of Michigan, and a Fortune 500 company that I refer to as Starr Corporation. In these settings, organizational and political leaders trumpet "diversity" as they contend with issues of community redevelopment or college admissions or employee management. Each site represents a key arena of social life as well as a setting targeted by civil rights activists and their opponents—the places Americans live, learn, and work.

My approach is necessarily qualitative and interpretive, based on ethnographic observations and interviews as well as analysis of media coverage, legal cases, and organizational and historical documents.[10] My unique multi-case research design provides a window into three key institutional arenas. The cases for study differ in many ways, which reveals important variation in organizations' diversity efforts but can make them difficult to compare. I manage this heterogeneity by using analogical comparison, a technique pioneered by organizational sociologist Diane Vaughan.[11] Case study research based on analogical comparison isolates and examines a particular process or set of processes across different types of organizations and settings in order to elaborate sociological theory. I analyze the production, instantiations, and uses of diversity—especially its racial meanings—across my dissimilar cases to develop parallel demonstrations of theory. I also rely on the cross-case comparisons to elaborate sociological concepts that are transferable to other contexts.[12] Through this lens, I identify common themes and divergent patterns across the neighborhood, the university, and the company that I studied.

I was motivated to embark on this project in 2001, when I was doing field research about gentrification in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago. Early on, I observed community leaders across the political spectrum, from for-profit developers to tenant activists, claiming that their work was beneficial for the neighborhood's diversity. When I first looked to the social scientific literature for insights, I found little guidance on how I should understand organizations' endorsements of this vaguely racialized ideal. Most of the scholarship I came across discussed diversity uncritically, assuming that it is an inherently good thing.

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[10] On fieldwork methods, see Emerson (1983), Lofland, et al. (2005)

[11] Vaughan (1992), Vaughan (2004)

[12] Auerbach and Silverstein (2003)

Since I began this project, a small but growing number of social scientists, myself included, have turned a discerning eye on diversity.[13] Those concerned with diversity's racial dimensions have focused, in particular, on the legal debates over affirmative action. Some have provided social commentary on diversity while others have studied individuals' perceptions of it.[14] Other scholars have observed enactments of diversity discourse in individual case studies of, say, churches or universities.[15] Meanwhile, organizational researchers have looked at corporate diversity management across large companies, but they have done so to explain organizational responses to law or the efficacy of diversity programs—not the cultural dimensions of race and social inequality.[16]

I have become increasingly convinced that, even with this emergent body of research, we need a wide-sweeping, historically and empirically grounded account of how the organizational push for diversity has remade race. This requires a study "up," as anthropologist Laura Nader so aptly puts it, to understand the activities of organizational and political elites. It necessitates an investigation into the organizational routines that comprise the push for diversity and the political challenges that ensue. It calls for an analysis that cuts across multiple domains of American life, one that captures the variation in organizations' diversity discourses and detects the specific ideologies and ideas that these discourses communicate. It demands methods that capture the real-life organizational and community settings where diversity is put to use.

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[13] Collins (2011), Green (2004b), MacLean (2006), Schuck (2003), Shiao (2005), Stevens (2007), Urciuoli (2003), Urciuoli (2010), Voyer (2011)

[14] Bell and Hartmann (2007), Marvasti and McKinney (2011)

[15] Edgell (1998), Green (2004b), Stevens (2007), Urciuoli (2003)

[16] Brief (2008), Dobbin (2009), Edelman, et al. (2001), Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly (2006), Kelly and Dobbin (1998)

Theorizing Racial Incorporation

The theoretical aim of this book is to elaborate *cultural processes of racial incorporation* in organizational contexts, or the discursive, ideological, and normative processes by which organizations refashion conceptions of race following the establishment of laws and policies that support formal equality for racial minorities.[17] Since the 1960s, people of color have made important though limited in-roads into America's predominantly white mainstream and its elite.[18] The formal terms of racial incorporation were codified by the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, other new civil rights protections for racial minorities, and the implementation of some affirmative action policies. Practices of racial incorporation were spurred by activists, government bureaucrats, and the many people of color who took the risk of being the proverbial first in their profession, workplace, school, or community.[19]

Racial incorporation occurs most obviously when people of color enter social statuses and settings dominated by white people. My university and corporation case studies provide examples of this process, as does my neighborhood case study between 1970 and 1990. Racial incorporation also may occur when white people inhabit social statuses and settings as a numeric, cultural, or political minority. This has been so in my neighborhood case study since the 1990s, when the community became majority-minority. Under either set of conditions, racial minorities and white people are relatively more likely to interact on more equal, less antagonistic terms and to coexist in closer proximity, both socially and physically.

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[17] Winant (2004)

[18] For examples, see Anderson (2011), Espenshade and Radford (2009), Tomaskovic-Devey and Stainback (2007)

[19] Chen (2009), MacLean (2006), Skrentny (2002)

Racial incorporation—like any other social, political, or economic activity—is constituted, in part, through cultural meanings. It could not occur without ideas, rhetoric, and imagery.[20] Through such symbolism, we understand what it is, where it is happening, and its significance. The Civil Rights Act, for example, matters not only for the consequential legal parameters it establishes but also for the symbolic authority it grants to a vision of equality rooted in the tradition of classical liberalism. To fully grasp racial incorporation, social scientists need to measure it, test it, and document it and also to interpret it. We must consider the carriers of cultural meanings—the discourses, ideologies, values, and beliefs—through which people make sense of racial incorporation within their particular environments. We need to interrogate the organizational processes by which race is defined, deployed, and contested in light of broader social structural conditions and pressures.

The organizational push for diversity represents an effort led by elites outside the federal government to modify race within the post-1960s context of racial incorporation. Although activists have influenced organizations' diversity activities, diversity was neither central to the demands of the civil rights movement nor was it a cornerstone of civil rights legislation and enforcement.[21] Justice Lewis Powell's opinion in *Regents of California v. Bakke* (1978), concerning the use of race in college admissions decisions, framed race in terms of diversity. But Powell derived this formulation from an amicus brief submitted by elite universities, and it was not a foregone conclusion that universities or any other institution would follow his lead.[22] Law enabled the organizational turn to diversity but did not require it.

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[20] Edelman (1985 (1964)), Geertz (1973), Mead (1934)

In the pages that follow, I treat the term "diversity" as an object for scrutiny.[23] Chapters 2, 3, and 4 each focus on a single case to show the organizational push for diversity in relation to specific issues of neighborhood redevelopment or university admissions or corporate human resource management. In those three chapters, I tell of the political officials and organizational leaders and members who have taken up the push for diversity, how they have done so, and why. I chronicle the press conferences, glitzy recruitment fairs, and routine organizational activities through which diversity has come to seem like common sense. Chapter 5 highlights the challenges to diversity that political activists pose and the obstacles that activists face as they pursue their divergent agendas for race and social change. In Chapter 6, I report on the more mundane organizational work of supporting people of color—the work of protecting low-income housing or recruiting black students—which takes place in the shadow of slick organizational pronouncements of diversity's benefits.

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[21] MacLean (2006), Skrentny (2002)
[22] Regents of University of California v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265 (1978)
[23] Bhattacharyya (1999):149. Desmond and Emirbayer (2009)

I trace these stories historically, to show the emergence of different diversity discourses and activities, and I locate them in their broader social and political economic contexts. I parse out the moments in which decision-makers rely on the particular message of productive pluralism and the reasons they do so. With these stories, I explain the symbolic power of diversity, the contradictions of productive pluralism, and their racial implications and consequences.

By examining the push for diversity, we can understand how organizations have taken up and reinterpreted the premise of racial equality. In this book, we see what happens when the struggle for racial justice moves from the streets to the corporate boardroom, from federal legislation to the revitalization plans of the local Chamber of Commerce. We can appreciate how top-down diversity efforts have been shaped by outsider activists and why these efforts remain unsatisfactory to so many of them, progressives and conservatives alike. And, through careful consideration of the meanings and manifestations of diversity, we can grasp the ways that organizations have challenged some patterns of white privilege, racial domination, and inequality while leaving many other patterns untouched.

Bottom-Line Diversity concludes that diversity's advocates have adopted and watered down the ideal of racial integration, for better and for worse. Organizational rhetoric on diversity offers an inspiring, assuring vision of a more inclusive society. It seems to subdue at least some white backlash. For many people, productive pluralism resonates as meaningful. This is the hope of diversity.

Yet, organizations' diversity efforts largely leave untouched the fundamental foundations of white privilege and racial minority disadvantage. Diversity discourses and programs easily devolve into a feel-good consumerism that caters to white people and the affluent while they divert us from seeking a deeper understanding of racial inequality. Productive pluralism has an unspoken class bias—valorizing people of color who conform to normatively white, middle and upper class ideals and downplaying problems of poverty. Ultimately, the push to value and leverage diversity obscures what exactly organizations are doing, and what they are failing to do, to remake the racial hierarchy. This is the smokescreen of diversity.

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In her MLK Day speech, Mary Sue Coleman was championing racial tolerance. She was endorsing the importance of racial minority inclusion and the University's obligations therein. She was doing so without promoting King's core mission of dismantling racial and economic inequities or his radical denunciation of white supremacy. Such talk of diversity's value and pay-offs provides an inspiring vision of the racial equality possible. However, it presents this equality as accomplishment achieved or within close reach, one that is universally applauded and universally advantageous. In the name of diversity, American decision-makers such as Coleman and the organizations they lead have tamed the provocative demands of the civil rights movement. They have upheld this movement's dream of a more just world while quieting its critique.

Chapter 1: Productive Pluralism and the Organizational Push for Diversity

What *is* diversity? In the American lexicon, the meaning of diversity is ambiguous. The Oxford Dictionary defines diversity as "a range of different things." We speak of a diversity of people, objects, places, and ideas. In the national vocabulary, the word conjures the (usually positive) idea of social differences. It implies that a group, organization, or place can be comprised of different elements that co-exist amicably, without extreme conflict.[24] It is, if nothing else, a convenient shorthand for referencing a variety of things at once. Diversity and its variant, "diverse," can take different discursive forms: adjective, euphemism, value, or state of being.[25] For any person at any given moment, diversity can have multiple meaningful associations that stem from different sources.

Diversity is also an abstract ideal. As legal scholar Peter Schuck writes, it is a normative principle that people associate with higher ends such as pleasure and competitiveness. Terms such as community, democracy, and fairness all share this same quality.[26] Who is willing to say that they do *not* value diversity?[27] The cultural ideal of diversity is "distinctively, if not uniquely, American," observes Schuck. "In the pantheon of unquestioned goods, diversity is right up there with progress, motherhood, and apple pie."[28] The word wears a halo.

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[24] See also Glazer (2005)
[25] E.g. Kozol (2005)
[26] Berrey, Hoffman and Nielsen (2012)
[27] Some conservative commentators are exceptions, see e.g., Coulter (2009)
[28] Schuck (2003), pp. 14,12

Yet, diversity implies race. When used without qualifiers, it commonly refers to racial, ethnic, and language groups.[29] In interviews, Americans conflate diversity with race, particularly with ethnic and racial minorities.[30] The same is true in popular media. In 2011, Marvel Comics announced a new Ultimate Spider-Man series featuring Miles Morales, a young man with an African-American father and a Latina mother. The company's editor in chief explained, "What you have is a Spider-Man for the 21st century who's reflective of our culture and diversity."[31] Even the U.S. Supreme Court codifies the word diversity as a way to conceptualize racial difference.[32]

With these features, diversity is what cultural sociologists call a keyword: an influential, binding term that is open to local interpretation but has some commonly recognized associations.[33] The meanings of a keyword—whether it is diversity, culture, the economy, or something else—depend on the social location of the speaker and their objectives, audiences, and context.[34] A keyword may be deliberately invoked it to serve particular interests. It may constitute how people make sense of the world around them.

In the U.S. today, diversity is a keyword for race. It is one that is simultaneously racialized and referentially ambiguous. It might denote racial differences, racial minorities, or a specific racial group (typically African Americans). It may indicate a long list of somehow analogous differences, with race as one of many. These might include ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age, and other attributes as well as personal predilections such as viewpoint, lifestyle, and taste. Diversity might conflate race and class. It might mean race only sometimes.[35] It might not mean race at all.

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[29] Glazer (2005), Schuck (2003)

[30] Bell and Hartmann (2007), Marvasti and McKinney (2011)

[31] Truitt (2011)

[32] *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*. 438 U.S. 265 (1978), *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.* 539 U.S. 306 (2003).

[33] Ghaziani and Ventresca (2005), Williams (1983)

[34] Urciuoli (2003) characterizes diversity as a "strategically deployable shifter."

Diversity, we often hear, should be valued and empowered.[36] At the same time, an organizational commitment to valuing diversity or leveraging diversity—like "building community" or "ensuring fairness"—contains no clear prescription for action. There is little guidance in American legal doctrine, public policy, or even cultural norms on how diversity actually should be managed.[37] Diversity programs may have nothing to do with race at all, although this might not be apparent to outside observers. The word wears a halo and also a haze.

The Paradox of Racial Equality

As sociologist Howard Winant writes, any plausible explanation of race in the contemporary period must wrestle with a core paradox: patterns of limited racial incorporation, racial stratification, and white privilege endure "in an era officially committed to racial equality and multiculturalism" and, I would add, diversity.[38] The racial dynamics of the current era follow from decades of back-and-forth challenges over civil rights reforms and racial ideology.[39] The historical-sociological lineage of these challenges goes as follows. Throughout U.S. history, a pernicious ideology of white superiority depicted racial minorities as biologically or essentially inferior.[40] This ideology buttressed an oppressive racial order, one that has exploited people of color—most extremely, black people—and denied their personhood while providing white people with unearned advantages.

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[35] Simon (2010)

[36] Swan (2010)

[37] Schuck (2003)

[38] Winant (2000), p.180

[39] Collins (2011), Graham (1990), MacLean (2006), Skrentny (2002)

In the middle of the 20th century, this exploitative racial order faced a major rebuke from civil rights activists. They challenged legalized racial discrimination and economic exclusion on the grounds of equality and justice. The federal government established new civil rights protections premised on colorblind liberalism, calling for non-discrimination and equal opportunity for individuals regardless of their membership in a minority group. For the purposes of gathering data and monitoring civil rights, the federal government codified a set of racial categories that historian David Hollinger describes as the ethno-racial pentagon: black, white, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Hispanic.[41]

In the 1970s, a more interventionist ideology of remedial racial justice also gained some legitimacy. According to this ideology of remedial justice, racial discrimination is institutionalized systematically in organizations' practices, and it should be proactively corrected to rectify the unfair disadvantages experienced by racial minorities. This set of ideas was institutionalized through some government and private sector policies of affirmative action and the legal theory of disparate impact.[42] Scholars commonly characterize this ideology and the associated policies as a structural or systemic approach to race because they target widespread, deeply engrained practices that generate racial and sometimes economic and gender inequalities.[43]

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[40] Fredrickson (2002), Hacking (2005)

[41] Hollinger (2000).

[42] Nelson, Berrey and Nielsen (2008)

The subsequent post-civil rights period has been characterized by two major ideological currents. Political scientist Anthony Marx characterizes these as different projects of racial reconstruction..[44] On one hand, a reactionary movement has advanced a neoconservative "colorblind" avoidance of race, asserting that no racial group should be explicitly favored in order to protect individuals' constitutional rights.[45] Colorblindness—which sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and many others denounce as a new form of racism—is now prevalent in public policy, court decisions, and the racial attitudes of many individual Americans, especially those who are white.[46] More recently, politicians and pundits have trumpeted an optimistic post-racialism that claims racial differences have been transcended, especially with the 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama.[47]

Another paradigm emerged in the post-civil rights period, one that venerates racial differences as cultural attributes. This began with the cultural pluralist revival of the 1970s, which found support in many circles: President Richard Nixon's administration, local festivities honoring the American bicentennial, and white people who began to identify as "ethnic."[48] Cultural pluralism reveres the distinctiveness of different ethnic and racial group identities. It poses cultural differences as a basis of unity rather than a threat to the social order. Multiculturalism, which gained popularity in the 1980s and early 1990s, continued these themes while also recognizing women's identities and criticizing assumptions about knowledge derived from the experiences of elite white men.[49] Multiculturalism became institutionalized primarily through curricula in elementary schools and college classrooms.[50] More recently, a racial cosmopolitanism has gained some currency. It is marked by an awareness of people's varied identities and elective cross-cultural affiliations.[51]

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[43] Feagin (2006), Harper and Reskin (2005). Skrentny (1996), however, characterizes the U.S. federal government's model of affirmative as a race-conscious approach that actually downplays discrimination while prioritizing the numerical representation of racial minorities.

[44] Marx (1998)

[45] MacLean (2006)

[46] Bonilla-Silva (2003), Bonilla-Silva and Foreman (2000), Bonilla-Silva, Lewis and Embrick (2004), Brown, et al. (2003), Gallagher (2003), Lewis (2001), Light, Roscigno and Kalev (2011), Schmidt (2008), Siegel (2011)

[47] Dawson and Bobo (2009) Hollinger (2008)

Cultural pluralism, multiculturalism, and racial cosmopolitanism all represent a shift away from a conception of race grounded in biological inferiority, civil rights law, institutional discrimination, or economic disadvantage.[52] And most of these post-1960s ideologies—whether they advocate color-blindness or color-consciousness—acknowledge the principle of racial equality, but they focus on problems other than structural conditions of racial inequality or the goal of group-based civil rights. Hence, critical race scholars describe our current era as post-civil rights.

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[48] Gleason (1984), Spillman (1997). For a discussion of assimilation and pluralism as idealizations of American life, see Berbrier (2004).

[49] In countries such as Australia and Canada, governments established official policies of multiculturalism and put greater emphasis on citizenship rights Kymlicka (1995). On multiculturalism and incorporation, see Alexander (2006). For a discussion of sociological theories of multiculturalism, see Hartmann and Gerteis (2005).

[50] Some scholars have characterized these shifts as an identity politics that prioritizes the recognition of distinct cultural groups, such as African-American or gays and lesbians, over economic inequality or the redistribution of material resources di Leonardo (1998), Gitlin (1996).

[51] Hollinger (2000), Kirkland and Hansen (2011)

[52] Gitlin (1996), Marx (1998), Michaels (2006)

The organizational push for diversity was born in this post-1960s period. As it has gained acceptance, though, American society continues to be characterized by an unequal racialized hierarchy—a hierarchy that is fundamental to the paradox Winant describes. Racial groupings remain a basis upon which resources are sequestered or distributed and life chances determined.[53] Of particular importance are the pervasive patterns of white privilege and racial minority disadvantage that constitute this country's system of racial domination. Of course not all white Americans are privileged in every way. Not every American of color is oppressed in every way. And race is not the only form of advantage and disadvantage that mars American society.

Nonetheless, white Americans and their descendants, on the whole, enjoy many unearned privileges.[54] White people have acquired far more wealth than their racial minority counterparts. They monopolize the best jobs and schools. By and large, they live in nicer communities. They experience greater protection by the state, better health, and greater emotional security. Advantages for white people come largely at the expense of the fortunes, opportunities, and wellbeing of people of color.[55] Such privileges have been enabled through a wide variety of unfair preferential public and private actions, past and present. These range from federal policies of housing insurance and mass incarceration to bigoted violence to tacit acceptance and inertia.[56]

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[53] Feagin (2006), Fredrickson (2002), Loury (2002), Omi and Winant (1987), Wacquant (1997)

[54] E.g., Conley (1999), Espenshade and Radford (2009), Pager (2003), Tomaskovic-Devey and Stainback (2007)

[55] Feagin and McKinney (2003), Tilly (1999)

[56] E.g., Berrey, et al. (2012), Brown-Saracino (2010), Hirsch (1983), Katznelson (2005), Krieger (1995), Lewis (2001), Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs (2010)

Despite this country's persistent system of white racial domination, racial conditions today differ in important ways compared to the days of my grandparents' racism. According to sociologist Sam Lucas, the era prior to civil rights reforms was one of condoned exploitation.[57] Elites treated the well-being and interests of people of color and women as secondary at best. They openly encouraged racial and gender inequality. The current period, Lucas argues, is one of contested prejudice. Exploitation has not been undone, but prejudiced beliefs are less common and less acceptable.

The post-1960s period of racial incorporation has been characterized by changes such as the proliferation of minority groups demanding societal acceptance and extensions of civil rights law. We now have legal protections for people with disabilities, gay marriage in some states, and condemnations of racism and sexism in the popular press. The U.S. population has become more ethnically and racially heterogeneous.[58] Small but noteworthy numbers of people of color, women, and visible gays and lesbians have become part of the American elite.[59] Interracial families are no longer illegal and their numbers have grown, as has the percentage of Americans who identify as multiracial.[60] Meanwhile, our communities have become somewhat less segregated by race since the 1980s, although they are even more segregated by income.[61]

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[57] Lucas (2008)
[58] Alba (2009)
[59] Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (2006)
[60] Brunsma (2005), Williams (2006)
[61] Farley (2010), Fischer and Mattson (2009), Telles and Sue ibid..

Such racial conditions have been further complicated and inequalities have been exacerbated by the rise of economic neoliberalism. The core ideological tenet of neoliberalism is that individual liberties should be advanced through a neoclassical model of economics, namely through unfettered capitalist markets and the retooling of government regulation to facilitate such markets.[62] While not purportedly racial, neoliberal capitalist growth processes often leverage racial meanings and racial exploitation in the service of generating profit.[63] Neoliberal reforms, such as the dismantling of social welfare programs and privatization, have contributed to economic inequality.[64] This economic inequality is characterized by a growing gulf between the fortunes of the richest Americans and those of everyone else as well as a deepening social and cultural divide between these groups.[65] Such inequality is racialized, to the disadvantage of people of color.

These myriad changes have blurred the racial hierarchy. Sociologists debate what the racial order is today. Are some Asian Americans becoming "white"?[66] What will become of America's burgeoning Latino population? Is America's bifurcated black-white racial order morphing into a tri-racial system like that found in many Latin American and Caribbean countries?[67] Scholars in this field largely agree that African Americans will remain disproportionately relegated to the bottom, despite the meteoritic rise of very visible outliers such as African-American media celebrity and billionaire Oprah Winfrey and President Barak Obama, a biracial man who considers himself black.[68]

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[62] Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002), Harvey (2005)
[63] di Leonardo (2008)
[64] Campbell and Pedersen (2001)
[65] Saez and Piketty (2003)
[66] Zhou (2004)
[67] Bonilla-Silva (2002)

These conditions pose new challenges for the organizational leaders who govern and manage increasingly heterogeneous communities, student bodies, and workforces. At the confluence of these ideological pressures, political exigencies, new laws, and demographic shifts, diversity has become a centerpiece of much organizational talk and action around race.

The Organizational Push for Diversity

As I conceive of it, the organizational push for diversity consists of the diversity discourses used by organizations, organizational and political leaders, and organizational members as well as what they identify as diversity-related policies, programs, events, and activities. I developed this formulation inductively. When I began doing research, I observed what organizations and organizational actors in each setting designated as relevant to diversity or not. I looked for differing opinions and conflicts. I asked about activists' politics. By starting with such questions, I could see the keyword of diversity in context and the ways in which it could characterize issues of, say, housing development or employee management. In fact, my bottom-up approach to defining the organizational push for diversity helped me to see that this push largely has been driven from the top down. It enabled me to probe beyond the official pronouncements and glossy brochures that portray a unified agreement on diversity's values and benefits.

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[68] Ibid., Gans (1999), Gold (2004), Twine and Warren (2000)

The organizational push for diversity is not a monolithic movement. It varies by place and time, by the form of the organization and its broader institutional context and influences, by the people who hold leadership positions in those settings and by their constituents. In each of my cases, organizational diversity efforts were delineated by different legal constraints and were motivated by fundamentally different concerns.

At Starr Corporation, company leaders' primary organizational objective regarding racial minority incorporation was to hire and retain some managers and executives of color in a majority-white organization. Debates over diversity within Starr concerned the company's effectiveness at achieving these goals. The company's push for diversity was most evident in its corporate human resource management activities. In the 2000s, Starr's U.S. diversity initiatives were institutionalized through formal organizational structures: the Global Diversity Management Department and the five staff positions in that office, the company's employee diversity councils throughout the country, written policies and reports, and the like.

At the University of Michigan in the 2000s, administrators' primary impetus regarding racial minority inclusion was to attract and retain some students and faculty of color in a predominantly white organization. The push for diversity was apparent across many units of the University, from course requirements to scholarly research, with student admissions as the primary locus. The well-publicized debate over diversity at Michigan focused on the legality of the University's admissions policies for students of color. The University was the defendant in litigation that contested its undergraduate and law school affirmative admissions policies. This litigation culminated in two major 2003 Supreme Court cases, *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger.*[69] The Court found that the University could consider race in admissions decisions but only through an individualized review of each application. Subsequently, University leaders kept the law school admissions policy but retooled the undergraduate admissions process to incorporate new diversity strategies.

In Rogers Park in the 2000s, decision-makers' basic motivation around racial minority incorporation was to attract middle class, affluent, and white residents to a mixed-income, majority-minority neighborhood and to keep these residents from moving out. Community leaders, particularly political officials, faced pressure from various constituents to protect at least some of the non-white, non-affluent residents already living in the neighborhood, as well. Hence, the political debate over diversity in Rogers Park was focused on how to reverse the neighborhood's economic decline while protecting diversity.

Although I treat each of my three cases as a field of organizational activity, the push for neighborhood diversity in Rogers Park differs considerably from diversity efforts in a hierarchical bureaucratic organization such as Starr Corporation or the University of Michigan. The Alderman, who is the elected official that represents the neighborhood in city government, along with his staff and the leaders of the chamber of commerce and community development organizations all shared a fairly similar position on diversity. They promoted their position through often-collaborative political activities and city planning. However, these neighborhood leaders could not compel other community organizations, members, and residents to adopt the same orientation to diversity. Additionally, there were not many official diversity initiatives in the neighborhood. The most notable of these initiatives were mixed-income housing policies, which the Alderman and his allies characterized as a means of both increasing and protecting diversity—first and foremost economic diversity but also racial diversity.[70]

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[69] *Gratz v. Bollinger.* 539 U.S. 244 (2003). *Grutter v. Bollinger.* 539 U.S. 306 (2003).

At this point, you may be wondering: What does the organizational push for diversity actually accomplish? Social scientists have shown that, under certain circumstances, so-called diversity policies in both the public and private sectors have produced measurable changes in the demographic composition of organizations and communities. Some of these changes improve the opportunities and life circumstances for people of color, women, poor people, and other groups. Sociologists Frank Dobbin, Alexandra Kalev, and Erin Kelly, for example, show that holding corporate managers accountable for diversity is an effective strategy for advancing African Americans and white women into management.[71] Other scholars have found that housing policies that move poor, predominantly African-American public housing residents into mixed-income communities are associated with improvements in residents' health, mental health, and educational attainment.[72]

Still other studies demonstrate that the organizational push for diversity has been part and parcel of sweeping changes in law, public policy, and organizational management since the 1970s.[73] In companies, the mere existence of diversity management policies can signal organizational compliance with civil rights law.[74] Courts even have identified some corporate diversity activities as evidence of legal compliance.[75] In these and other ways, organizations' diversity efforts have been facilitated by law while, at once, they have transformed law.[76] Organizational diversity efforts are intertwined with shifts within the professions, as well. For example, college admissions officers, corporate human resource managers, and New Urbanist planners all depict their work in terms of what political scientist Daniel Lipson labels a diversity consensus.[77] They see appreciation for diversity as part of their professional norms and expertise.

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[70] See also Berrey (2005). The Mixed-Income Research Design Group defines such housing as "all intentional efforts to generate socioeconomic diversity in a targeted geographic area." Briggs, et al. (2009), p. 10. On the effects of mixed-income housing, see, e.g., Levy, McDade and Dumlao (2010).
[71] Kalev, et al. (2006)
[72] Levy, et al. (2010)

The organizational push for diversity also constitutes a change in the cultural politics of race and inclusion in the U.S., which is the focus of my analysis. The organizational actors who promote diversity have transformed the meanings of race, social change, and organizational engagement on racial matters. They have done so through cultural means: by constructing norms of racial tolerance, by communicating ideas and images of racial inclusion, and by institutionalizing explanations for why such inclusion matters. They have championed new ways of talking and new standards of appropriate behavior.[78] At campus diversity trainings, for instance, students learn the proper terms for talking about race and the officially sanctioned ways of acting around students of different racial backgrounds.

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[73] Berrey (2011), Dobbin (2009), Edelman, et al. (2001), Green (2004a)
[74] Edelman (1992)
[75] Edelman, et al. (2008)
[76] See also Berrey (2011), Green (2004a), Green (2004b), Schuck (2003)
[77] Dobbin (2009), Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck (2001), Kelly and Dobbin (1998), Lipson (2007).
[78] See also Voyer (2011)

My conceptualization of the organizational push for diversity rests on the presumption, now commonly accepted by sociologists who study race, that race is not biologically or genetically real.[79] But racial categories, racial groups, and the very institution of race are real in the minds of Americans. They are *made* real. They are fluid social constructs given life by law, government bureaucracy, organizational practices, beliefs and norms, and patterns of geography. What is considered race or a racial group depends on where a person lives, the historical moment they are alive, their social status and social circles, and how they personally identify.[80] Similarly, notions of racial progress and racial equality vary by place, time, and group and are instantiated through institutions such as law.[81]

My analysis of the push for diversity builds on these important insights by interrogating racial formation within organizational environments. Sociological studies of American racial ideologies and racial formation in the U.S. often attend to state practices, most notably the U.S. Census, but they typically leave other organizational processes under-analyzed.[82] Meanwhile, the organizational sociologists who study race or diversity management in organizations tend to treat race as a variable rather than a cultural construct or institution.[83]

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[79] Morning (2011). See also Hacking (2005), Haney-López (1994)
[80] Barrett and Roediger (1997), McDermott (2006)
[81] Condit and Lucaites (1993), Singh (2005)
[82] For a similar critique, see Staiger (2004).
[83] E.g., Kalev, et al. (2006), Stainback, et al. (2010)

Organizational Discourses on Diversity

Across Rogers Park, the University of Michigan, and Starr Corporation, the most striking feature of the organizational push for diversity is the extensive discussion of diversity in organizational documents and public communications and the depictions of diversity in organizational logos and tropes. Decision-makers' official discourses on diversity are a defining feature of the push for diversity. In many instances, leaders' talk of diversity turns out to be *the* primary organizational activity happening around diversity.

As a keyword, diversity becomes meaningful through discourse, which sociologist Ann Swidler defines as the "transpersonal ordering of symbols and meanings which sets the terms within which particular things may be said."[84] Discourse is most readily observable in people's spoken rhetoric. Social scientists have shown that individuals communicate different ideas about race when they speak and write about diversity. One interview-based study finds that when respondents talk about diversity, they use abstract, universal language and avoid the topic of inequality.[85] In other studies, college students stress the same-ness of everyone when asked about diversity, echoing themes of cultural pluralism.[86] High school students, in the diversity essays they composed for their college applications, express a cosmopolitan awareness of cultural, religious, and racial differences.[87] Organizations, too, convey different discourses on diversity. Large companies frequently endorse a managerial rhetoric on diversity that divorces race from civil rights law and transforms it into a managerial prerogative.[88]

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[84] Swidler (2001), p. 3064
[85] Bell and Hartmann (2007)
[86] Marvasti and McKinney (2011)
[87] Kirkland and Hansen (2011)

Discourses such as these are ideological in that they serve some interests, but not all. They codify particular ideas, attitudes, events, and social relationships as desirable and taken for granted—as the standard against which all else is measured.[89] In my cases, organizations' diversity discourses establish what is appropriate to say and do about race in their respective setting. Particular discourses on diversity also become real when they are instantiated in organizational practices, such as the diversity metrics reported or the public spokespeople chosen. Through such discourse, organizations symbolically define and enact the legitimate reality of race.[90] Although this legitimacy is contested—through quiet grumbling, spectacular protests, and consequential lawsuits—the ability of organizations and organizational decision-makers to construct racial realities is emblematic of what political scientist David Kertzer calls "the hallmark of power."[91]

Within and across my three cases, organizational leaders and participants communicate different discourses on diversity. Neighborhood officials, for instance, prefer a discourse of city planning. Another point of difference across these settings is the type of diversity that organizations prioritize. While issues of race and class are closely intertwined in each locale, only in Rogers Park do organizational actors openly recognize class as an important form of diversity. At Starr Corporation, diversity managers' human resources activities treat race and gender as the core axes of diversity, while at Michigan, race takes on what one activist describes as a "singular importance" because of the *Gratz* and *Grutter* litigation. I explore these and other differences throughout book.

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[88] Edelman, et al (2001).
[89] Blommaert and Verschueren (1998), p. 26. Sewell (1985)
[90] Bonilla-Silva (2003), Fairclough (1989), Gouldner (1976), Hays (1996), Thompson (1984)
[91] Kertzer (1988), p.5. See also Foucault (1994 (1970))

However, across all three of my cases, organizational and political decision-makers express some common themes when they deploy diversity. A few are worth highlighting here, before I turn to a discussion of productive pluralism. Above all else, the official diversity discourse in each setting rest on an optimistic interpretation of the current social order and confidence about the near future. This vision is aspirational, premised in hope rather than critique. It suggests that people of color and white people can coexist—and, in many ways, already coexist—as equals. It is the positive thinking of the world we might wish for rather than, say, a reckoning with the racial hierarchies that persist.

In Rogers Park, Michigan, and Starr, the prevailing discourses on diversity also formulate race in some similar ways. All borrow the U.S. government's ethno-racial categories to define racial groups and all depict racial groups as comprised of countable individuals.[92] Starr Corporation, for example, produces quarterly reports on the racial demographics of the workforce. Such representations of race suggest that racial groups are somehow commensurate and also comparable to other numerical groups, such as women.

At the same time, diversity advocates in my three cases characterize race as culturally meaningful. They intimate that people have unique identities, viewpoints, and life experiences that follow from their affiliation with one or more racial groups.

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[92] Skrentny (2002). On the politics of categorization and the multi-racial category, Jenkins (1997), Prewitt (2005), Williams (2006).

This formulation of racial culture emphasizes the agency that people have to express and respect racial identities. Such discourse turns race into culture and suggests that racial differences are somehow equivalent to other cultural differences.

In sum, the presumption underlying organizations' diversity discourses in the settings I studied is that race can be represented numerically and expressed culturally. At the same time, these discourses pose race as one of many valued differences. Race, whether stated or implied, is not the only or necessarily the most important form of diversity.

Another similarity in the diversity discourses across all three cases is the claims that leaders make about the value of the diversity in their respective locale. They praise their community or organization for the different ethno-racial groups present. In the tradition of cultural pluralism, these decision-makers assert that the heterogeneous populations they oversee are cohesive and strong—united by diversity—rather than riddled with extreme inequalities, unfair racial preferences, or balkanized racial groups.[93] They reiterate the multiculturalist sentiment that minority groups need not entirely shed their distinct identities in order to be full, equal members. According to these leaders, the support for diversity that characterizes their respective settings is a sign of cosmopolitan tolerance. Diversity, in this perspective, is not the bigotry of the old boys club. It is not the dull homogeneity of lily-white suburbs.

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[93] See Siegel (2011) on concerns about racial balkanization.

These themes were evident in my cases as early as the 1960s. By the mid-1980s, organizational leaders in Rogers Park, at the University of Michigan, and at Starr Corporation were regularly treating race as a matter of diversity. Between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, leaders in each setting added another twist to their discourses on valuing racial diversity.

Productive Pluralism

Productive pluralism is one of the ideologies conveyed through organizational diversity discourse. What distinguishes productive pluralism, foremost, is its instrumental reasoning: diversity matters not just because it is morally right or intrinsically important but because it brings functional and practical benefits.[94] In short, diversity is an asset. Applied to race, productive pluralism's rationale takes two different but complementary forms. One version is that racial differences, in and of themselves, enhance important institutional goals. The other is that efforts to protect, enhance, and promote a mix of racial groups will advance important institutional goals. In either form, productive pluralism asserts that everyone gains from diversity, not just the group in the minority. This assertion clearly differentiates productive pluralism from an ideology of remedial racial justice, which demands solutions that aid people of color.

When the organizational decision-makers and members in my three cases make reference to diversity, they frequently relay ideas of productive pluralism alongside the discursive diversity themes outlined in the previous section of this chapter. Of course, people can signal a wide range of ideas when they speak of diversity. And they might communicate the core ideas of productive pluralism without mentioning the word diversity at all. But in much of the organizational activity that I observed, particularly in organizations' public communication on race, the term diversity and the ideology of productive pluralism were bound together.

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[94] On diversity as an instrumental justification for affirmative action, see Frymer and Skrentny (2004).

Productive pluralism melds ideas of cultural pluralism with those of neoliberalism. Like cultural pluralism, it assumes that Americans are characterized by their distinct identities—racial, ethnic and otherwise—and are united by these differences, particularly through shared values and norms. Productive pluralism revises these premises with a neoliberal twist: it justifies racial minority inclusion by drawing on key elements of free market ideology.[95] Productive pluralism's means-ends rationale reiterates such priorities as consumer choice and satisfaction, organizational competitiveness, profitable economic growth, productivity, efficiency, or returns on investment.[96] It presents racial minority identities and cultures as mechanisms for achieving such priorities and as compatible with these priorities.

In the everyday life of the community and organizations I researched, productive pluralism is communicated through organizational rhetoric, cultural norms, symbolism, and imagery such as murals, and through the design of some organizational diversity initiatives. It enjoys the official endorsements of CEOs, presidents, high-level administrators, organizational representatives, and elected officials. The Rogers Park neighborhood logo is illustrative (fig. 1.1). This logo headlines the website of the Alderman. It decorates the banners that hang lampposts throughout the neighborhood, which are sponsored by a local community development agency.

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[95] For critical analyses of diversity and neoliberalism, see Berrey (2005), Berrey (2011), Downey (1999), Duggan (2003), Michaels (2006), Ruben (2001), Urciuoli (2003).
[96] Campbell and Pedersen (2001), Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb (2002), Harvey (2005).

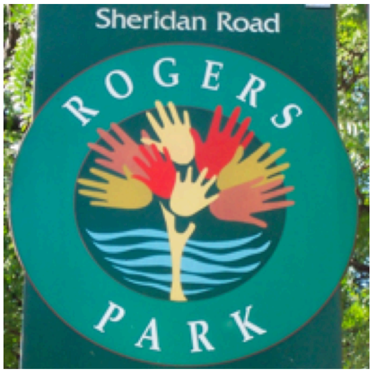

Figure 1.1. Rogers Park neighborhood logo

The logo features a tree comprised of different colored hands, growing solid and strong. With this one image, we witness the racialized and referential ambiguity of diversity as well as the instrumental logic of productive pluralism. People vary by their cultural backgrounds, which might be racial or otherwise, but are fundamentally the same. Their collective diversity comprises a colorful, cohesive, and peaceful social order. Likewise, people's cultural differences generate higher-order goods—whether cosmopolitanism, vibrant community, quality of life, or growth—to everyone's benefit.[97]

When productive pluralism is expressed through organizational public relations messages, it rests on different reasoning and stresses differing pay-offs depending on the context. At the University of Michigan and in Starr Corporation, the message of productive pluralism had been crafted by communications professionals and was spelled out in a clearly reasoned rhetorical claim. University officials had a name for it—the diversity rationale—which originates in legal doctrine. Executives and managers at Starr had a name for it, too—the business case for diversity—which follows from corporate industry HR practices. The logic of both the diversity rationale and the business case for diversity specify that the existence of diverse populations and their interpersonal interactions will generate demonstrable and widespread benefits.

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[97] For a discussion of growth as the primary imperative of urban politics, see Logan and Molotch (1987)

In Rogers Park, local leaders communicate productive pluralism more implicitly through their spoken characterizations of the community and the images on neighborhood banners and murals. Their instrumental reasoning is twofold: the existence of a heterogeneous population brings widely shared benefits, and both the neighborhood's diverse population and the benefits of this diversity can be sustained through carefully crafted redevelopment strategies. According to these decision-makers, diversity is good for redevelopment, and redevelopment is good for diversity.

Across my three cases and within each case, the ideology of productive pluralism comprises the worldviews of many organizational participants. Many people assumed that their organization or community was better for its racial diversity. At both Michigan and Starr, organizational participants often were aware that the core ideas of productive pluralism constituted the proverbial party line on diversity. They might agree with these ideas. They might ignore them. Some spent considerable time formulating, practicing, and performing the sound bites of productive pluralism. In Rogers Park, organizational members and activists were less consciously reflective about some messages of productive pluralism. Most of these individuals seemed to accept as commonsense the notion that diversity, in at least some forms, was good for development. However, there was much debate in the neighborhood over the consequences of gentrification—whether it enhanced diversity or hurt it.

Ideas of productive pluralism are apparent in many organizational and political settings beyond these three sites. They are visible in the mundane activities of local government, companies, schools and universities, non-profit civic groups, and religious institutions. They have been sanctioned at the highest levels of U.S. government. The Supreme Court's decision in *Grutter* justified the use of race-conscious affirmative admissions policies by citing the diversity rationale. Writing for the majority opinion, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor explained, "diversity promotes learning outcomes and better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce, for society, and for the legal profession." Justice Powell's opinion in the 1978 *Bakke* case, which O'Connor cited as precedent, was in fact the U.S. government's first major endorsement of diversity as a legal concept and the first legal justification for considering race based on diversity's functional and practical benefits.[98]

Academics who do diversity management research, particularly social psychologists and organizational behavior scholars affiliated with business schools, have provided scientific backing for some of the tenets of productive pluralism. These researchers have tested the changes and task-based outcomes that occur when work groups, teams, and classrooms are comprised of people who differ demographically—especially by race and gender—or who hold differing viewpoints. The objective of this research is to identify the influence of such diversity on participants' skills and perceptions, workgroup success, and corporate performance.[99] Researchers have found some (but by no means equivocal) empirical support for productive pluralism's premise that diversity generates positive results. This academic orientation to productive pluralism is captured in the title of Scott Page's 2007 book, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies.* His book was praised by *The New York Times, Science,* and other outlets for its compelling proposition that a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives is essential to solving problems and making better decisions.

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[98] Shuck (2003)

The Power of Productive Pluralism

Productive pluralism—the ideological assertion that valuing racial differences, as assets, advances important institutional goals—is a response to the current racial and economic order and a rendering of that order. Decision-makers in Rogers Park, at Michigan, and across Starr rarely try to find out if diversity actually pays off for people of color or anyone or anything else. Organizational diversity activities are not, by and large, driven by a pragmatic concern with how to best leverage social differences.

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[99] For examples, see Gurin, et al. (2002), Jehn, Greer and Rupert (2008), Page (2007), Thomas and Ely (2001)

Rather, productive pluralism is a cultural idea that serves political purposes and constitutes social relationships. Decision-makers' visions of what makes something an asset and what counts as an acceptable institutional goal are necessarily partial. These visions are shaped by decision-makers' own concerns, interests, and worldviews, as well as by those of their most powerful constituents. These constituents include some racial minorities but typically are white and, regardless of racial group, usually are relatively affluent.

The biases of productive pluralism are especially evident in what decision-makers designate as *unproductive.* Political officials and developers in Rogers Park denounce the so-called concentration of poverty and subsidized housing in areas of the neighborhood where racial minorities and poor people are more likely to live. Administrators at Michigan deny that their admissions practices try to rectify minority disadvantage. HR managers at Starr complain of government regulations mandating affirmative action and other policies explicitly intended to redistribute resources to people of color. Applied in these ways, productive pluralism suggests that government regulation and other policies deliberately intended to redistribute resources downwards are antithetical to diversity.

Similarly, productive pluralism prescribes that organizations and organizational decision-makers voluntarily foster diversity to facilitate its pay-offs. The message is that diversity should be managed by the light touch of limited policy intervention.[100] Supposedly, markets will respond and the benefits of diversity will accrue accordingly. This reasoning implies that there is no need to radically restructure organizations or alter prevailing institutional conditions in order to accommodate minorities. The idea here is that racial progress can be accomplished not through political agitation or regulatory intervention but instead through organizations' elective efforts. This anti-regulatory stance is a core tenet of neoliberal reforms. A similar stance is advocated by the neoconservative movement, which endorses colorblindness and opposes (downwardly) redistributive government interventions, race-conscious and otherwise.

When organizational and community leaders advocate productive pluralism, they present what they consider important institutional goals as universally shared. The CEO of Starr Corporation claimed, "A culturally sensitive, diverse workforce is better able to … generate the wealth of ideas that are key to innovation." Although not depicted as such, institutional goals such as innovation are ideological. They are biased to the interests of people in powerful positions and resonate with their perspectives and those of their key constituents. The innovations that Starr executives fancy—the inventive new product lines and resourceful strategies for minimizing costs—probably are not priorities for those lower-level workers who clean the bathrooms or pack boxes on the factory floor. Such innovations, along with other market-oriented goals, very well may harm these seemingly non-innovative workers. However, just as neoliberalism asserts that profitable growth will provide everyone with a higher standard of living, the logic of productive pluralism asserts that the rewards of valuing diversity will be widely shared.

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[100] Glazer (2005), Schuck (2003) also observe the imperative of managing diversity, although they identify it as a heavy-headed, largely misguided attempt by the government to engage in social engineering.

Productive pluralism's formulation of racial progress upholds unspoken but powerful normative ideals of personhood.[101] Its formulation of diversity's benefits lauds the homeowner who takes good care of his property, but not the public housing tenant who demands better services from the housing authority. It valorizes the student who excels in her academic work and seeks out friends of different backgrounds, but not the one who drops out of college, overburdened with debt, or who prefers to live in a dorm with like-minded Latino or African-American students. These ideals of institutional personhood are prejudiced in ways that favor people who are white and affluent, and sometimes those who are WASP, male, and heterosexual.[102] They also delimit a narrow range of cultural identities as tolerable. In its fullest expression, productive pluralism deems racial minorities acceptable and productive as long as their distinctive racial identities are colorful but not-too-threatening variants on the norm.[103]

The ideology of productive pluralism grants a comfortable status to white and affluent people*.* This ideology disconnects the obstacles that people of color encounter from the fortunes that white people enjoy. According to its reasoning, white people are neither villainous racists nor the beneficiaries of unfair advantages. Nor are they victims of reverse racism either. Rather, white people can be part of the proverbial solution, enhancing diversity through their accepting attitudes and unique perspectives. They, themselves, even can count as diverse. The implication is that white people should not feel threatened by affirmative action or other diversity efforts targeted to people of color. Similarly, productive pluralism provides a comforting class narrative to those who are affluent. It does so by ignoring the topic of class or else applauding the racial identities of middle class and wealthy constituents while remaining silent on racial issues that affect low-income people of any racial background.

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[101] On political ideals of personhood and citizenship, their pretense of universality, and their assumption of a white, male, Christian subject, see Smith (2003) and Young (1990). On policies of personhood, see Carr (2011).

[102] On the model minority, see Kim (2001). On the ideal of the "typical" (white) student, see Stevens (2007).

[103] See also Swan (2010).

The Appeal of Diversity in the Post-Civil Rights Era

Scholars and social commentators have responded to the puzzle posed by Winant—that Americans pledge to equality while white advantage and minority disadvantage persist—with wildly divergent interpretations. Many laud diversity, along with affirmative action, as a means to greater social justice. Alternately, conservative observers such as sociologist Fredrick Lynch argue that diversity hampers racial progress because it is just another word used by liberals to conceal unfair, counterproductive minority preferences.[104] Critical race scholars have condemned the concept of diversity, as well, but on very different grounds.[105] Diversity, they argue, undermines a commitment to remedial intervention and provides cover for persistent inequities. As sociologists Joyce Bell and Doug Hartmann write, diversity too easily becomes merely “happy talk.”[106] Some observers even consider diversity an accomplice to colorblind racism.[107]

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[104] Lynch (1997). For similar criticisms see Glazer (2005), Wood (2003)

[105] Collins (2011), Embrick (2011), Marvasti and McKinney (2011)

Others consider Winant’s paradox altogether irrelevant. Literary scholar Walter Ben Michaels, in his polemic *The Trouble with Diversity,* argues that the problem of racial inequality is far overstated and that the popular preoccupation with racial identity diverts attention from economic inequality.[108]

While I arrive at some similar conclusions as other critical sociologists, my assessment of diversity is more firmly ambivalent. Mary Sue Coleman and the other diversity advocates I studied cannot be neatly characterized as, say, guardians of inclusion or duplicitous hacks. Further, I understand the push for diversity as driven not just by the motivations of individuals or people in power but also by organizational demands, pressures, and routines. Those who advocate diversity are constrained by the limits of their own offices, established organizational routines, field-level expectations, and the dictates of law.

The organizational push for diversity holds tremendous cultural appeal because it underscores the positive aspects of inclusion. The emphasis on the value of diversity and its widespread pay-offs are conducive to multiple, sometimes conflicting purposes.[109] This vision of race may facilitate the work that a university president does to foster a common campus identity. It might make a white resident might feel more comfortable in a community where white people are not a super-majority. It might make an African-American renter or a recent immigrant from

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[106] Bell and Hartmann (2007)
[107] Moore and Bell (2011)
[108] Michaels (2006). See also Duggan (2003).
[109] Edgell (1998), Kalev, et al. (2006)

Mexico feel more comfortable in that same community. It might affirm all these individuals' personal values of cross-cultural tolerance and even anti-racism. In such instances, organizations' diversity efforts can ease intergroup tensions and improve conditions for people of color.

But diversity discourses and the ideology of productive pluralism, in particular, can rationalize diversity policies and programs that are ineffective. The façade of diversity can hide organizational inaction. It even can sugarcoat activities that hurt racial minorities, particularly those who are poor.

The organizational push for diversity also holds sway at this paradoxical moment because it remakes racial realities in ways that shield decision-makers' vulnerabilities. As anthropologist Bonnie Urciuoli writes, people prefer not to probe the warm-fuzzy ambiguity of diversity "because 'everyone knows what it means,'" or so they say.[110] When organizational and political leaders invoke the racialized keyword diversity, they allege unity among their constituents where it does not necessarily exist.[111] This term may enable decision-makers to coordinate stakeholders that have divergent goals, as it downplays their differences and suggests some kind of solidarity.

In the face of threats for taking action *and* threats for inaction—from advocacy groups, investors, regulators, plaintiffs lawyers, voters, and general publics of residents, students, employees, and consumers—diversity's advocates cast both a halo and a haze around their race-related activities. Their intentions, which vary widely, often cannot be discerned. They may invoke diversity deliberately and strategically to provide political cover for particular actions. They may be expressing a worldview they have come to assume. They may be enacting ideas into which they have been socialized or trying to fulfill the expectations of others in their settings and professions. Regardless, the organizational push for diversity can buffer decision-makers. Appeals to diversity can safeguard organizations from scrutiny on racial matters. They deny charges of discrimination. Leaders indicate that they, too, are tolerant and cosmopolitan, signaling: *Trust us. We're not racist. We're doing right on race.*

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[110] Urciuoli (2010), p. 49.

[111] Downey (1999), Edelman (1985 (1964)), Elder and Cobb (1983)

The Cultural Dynamics of Post-1960s Racial Incorporation

The organizational push for diversity and the ideology of productive pluralism are important cultural processes of racial incorporation in the post-civil rights period. They represent a momentous change in American racial politics, something distinct from the centuries-long struggle to validate the fundamental personhood of people of color. Historically, this political struggle was championed by activists of color, especially African Americans, with support from some white allies. The contemporary push for diversity is an endeavor led, in many respects, by private and public organizations, and some of its most prominent backers are white.

By treating racial inclusion as a matter of valuing and leveraging diversity, organizations other than the federal government have mainstreamed the ideal of racial integration. Through their proclamations of diversity's benefits, the leaders of these organizations have made minority inclusion seem like unthreatening common sense. They signal that limited numbers of people of color—those respectable homeowners, good-natured students, or hard-working professionals—are welcome in white-dominated settings and the upper echelons of elite power. In so doing, these decision-makers have helped to make racial minority incorporation more palatable to those whose might otherwise resist but whose cooperation is essential if people of color are to gain greater access to predominantly white, resource-rich communities, schools, and companies.

By considering organizational discourses, ideologies, and practices of diversity, we better understand the cultural dynamics of contemporary racial accommodation. In the current period, organizational participants are engaged in contentious fights and more mundane negotiations over the nature and terms of minority accommodation. In the settings I studied, decision-makers heralded diversity in ways that prevented, deflected, and redirected debates over the displacement of poor and racial minority residents, race-conscious admissions decisions, and corporate executives' commitments to employees of color. Sometimes, organizations' diversity efforts defused attacks on controversial programs—in my cases, these included programs of affirmative action and subsidized housing, which rely on some pretense of remedying inequities. But these same efforts also can normalize or exacerbate racial inequalities.

An examination of the organizational push for diversity also illustrates the cultural complexities of modern-day racial inequality. In Rogers Park, at the University of Michigan, and at Starr Corporation, decision-makers managed racial accommodation through diversity strategies that rejected minority exclusion, at least in principle, but did not renounce white advantage. We learn something about racial domination more generally from this insight: racial domination today often depends on the obscuring of both white privilege and racial minority disadvantage, especially the disadvantages experienced by poor people of color. Organizations' diversity discourses and practices play a part in this. They can provide a misleading impression of effective action and problems solved. Racial hierarchies commonly are misrepresented as benign expressions of cultural differences.

Organizational diversity efforts rarely aim to create substantive equality between racial groups. The decision-makers who oversee these efforts do not seek to entirely undo racial segregation or radically redistribute resources. Ultimately, the top-down push for diversity serves as a partial but insufficient answer to the unfinished project of racial justice.

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Not everyone agrees with diversity advocate's interpretations of racial progress or with organizations' diversity strategies of managing minority accommodation. Before I consider the voices and concerns of activists and of many people of color and poor people, which get close attention in Chapters 5 and 6, I first consider the distinct dynamics of the organizational push for diversity in each of my three cases. I begin with the Rogers Park neighborhood, where neighborhood politicians, non-profit organizations, the local chamber of commerce, and members of the real estate industry heralded diversity as they worked to promote redevelopment and economic growth.

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