N THE EVIDENCE culled from our Indianapolis interviews, we conclude that the average White American is ambivalent toward African Americans, sometimes feeling animosity or racism, other times feeling quite friendly, and sometimes holding contradictory sentiments all at once. In this chapter we connect the findings from Indianapolis to the national surveys that have shaped scholarly understanding of Whites' racial opinions. Based on this understanding, we begin an explanation of Whites' thinking with particular reference to the wider American culture of race and, more generally, to the ways humans tend to separate the world into “us” versus “them.” The hold of racial thinking is tenacious, the roots of racist conviction or suspicion deeply embedded. This means we must probe well beneath the manifest content to understand the media’s embodiment of the culture and its potential influence on Whites. We find that Blacks occupy a liminal place in White-dominated media and society, neither fully accepted nor completely rejected.

White Public Opinion

Although surveys provide only imperfect indicators of Whites' racial thinking, a definitive review of just about all the national data convinced Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steele, Lawrence Bobo, and Maria Krysan that ambivalence is the best way to describe the typical White person’s attitudes. They write that this state is “probably closer to the truth than arguments over degrees of overt and covert prejudice.” A major indicator of ambivalence, Schuman et al. find, is that in matters of principle Whites show a clear positive movement since the 1950s toward greater tolerance, whether on intermarriage, residential integration, or voting for Black presidential candidates. But on matters of implementing practice, Whites evince less support. Thus we see less backing for government spending or affirmative intervention policies than for abstractions about equality. According to Schuman et al., “There is no real sign that the larger White public is prepared to see norms of equal treatment toward drastically reducing

Traditional racists who nation probably comprised represents a significant deed there remain about three. Moreover, survey evidence Whites tend to disguise their of appearing to be racist. We tilt more readily in the race and animosity are probably.

As we found in Indianapolis Whites for Black disadvantage explain Blacks’ status and action. Schuman et al. found compared with 45 percent ability, and 34 percent dismiss the large majority of Whites majour impediment to African vision of Blacks as a basic sot past two decades. [This racial oppression from the war affirmative action initiative or 1970s, about 75 percent of Whites face important barriers in emphasis present discrimination: 81 percent of Blacks but 66% have worse jobs, income, and]

A large majority of White of the spectrum on the discrimination. This cannot be traced to Ratio measures, discrimination due dealing with White realtors and sales clerks, among other.

To reiterate our multiplier ignorance and denial of dis racism. Nor do the desires...
norms of equal treatment reconceptualized to support substantial steps toward drastically reducing economic and social inequality in this country.”

Traditional racists who believe in Black inferiority and favor discrimination probably comprise about 20 percent of the White public. Though this represents a significant decrease since the middle of the twentieth century, there remain about three White racists for every two African Americans. Moreover, survey evidence involving race is notoriously unreliable: many Whites tend to disguise their true feelings, knowing the social undesirability of appearing to be racist. Whites’ sentiments toward Blacks may therefore tilt more readily in the negative direction than surveys indicate 4 — racism and animosity are probably more widespread than immediately apparent.

As we found in Indianapolis, the most widely held explanations among Whites for Black disadvantage partake of the discourse of denial. Asked to explain Blacks’ status and achievements, Whites most often cite low motivation. Schuman et al. found that 52 percent of respondents named this factor, compared with 45 percent citing no chance for education, 10 percent low ability, and 34 percent discrimination. 5 The authors go on to document that the large majority of Whites deny that racial discrimination persists as a major impediment to African Americans: “Thus an emphasis on past oppression of Blacks as a basic source of racial inequality has lost support over the past two decades. . . . [This] probably reflects the fading of reports of obvious racial oppression from the media and their replacement by stories about forms of affirmative action intended to benefit Blacks” (emphasis added). 6 After the late 1970s, about 75 percent of Whites rejected the idea that Blacks as a group face important barriers in jobs or housing. 7 The authors note that Blacks emphasize present discrimination more than past while Whites do the reverse: 81 percent of Blacks but 36 percent of Whites agree with the idea that Blacks have worse jobs, income, and housing “mainly due to discrimination.” 8

A large majority of Whites seem to tilt toward denial, the animosity end of the spectrum on the dimension that taps recognition of discrimination. This cannot be traced to Rashomon-like differences of interpretation. By any measure, discrimination does persist as a daily reality in Blacks’ lives when dealing with White realtors, bank lenders, employers, physicians, teachers, and sales clerks, among others. 9

To reiterate our multidimensional conception of racial thinking, White ignorance and denial of discrimination do not by themselves constitute racism. Nor do the desires of Whites to be in the majority in schools and
neighborhoods—and legislatures. As Schuman et al. note, the latter sentiments "are at least as much a matter of power and control and of fear of being controlled by others" as they are of 'prejudice' as a separate and self-contained psychological state" (emphasis added). Note, however, that this very sense that Blacks are "others," of distinguishing an "us" whose interests clash with "them," is a prerequisite for racial animosity. If one consistently groups individuals by racial membership, one is more likely to engage in stereotypical generalizations, experience negative feelings, and reject the political activities of that group's members.

The Origins of Ambivalence and Animosity

How do Whites' misapprehensions arise? Just about everyone has two paths of social information: personal experience (including formal education, socialization, and conversation) and mediated communication. For most Whites these exist in confusing combination: Most lack a theory or integrating perspective to harmonize the two streams. Combine this with what appear to be inherent tendencies in human mental processes to notice and respond negatively to group differences. Add a culture, a stock of widely held and frequently reinforced ideas that emphasize racial difference, and imply a racial hierarchy with Whites on top. Stir in the psychic and other motivations Whites might have to maintain a sense of difference and superiority, such as a desire for group dominance. The result is a recipe for continued interracial alienation.

Our discussion begins with mental process, specifically the truism that we do not create the world afresh each waking day. In the parlance of social cognition research, people are more "theory-driven" than "data-driven." That is, we more often approach life with assumptions that lead us to confirm expectations rather than to inscribe fresh interpretations of daily experience upon a blank mental slate. This tendency toward mental inertia is the joint product of cognitive economy and of cultural influence.

Cognitive economy is supplied by habits of thinking formed through the use of mental shortcuts like schemas and frames. A schema is a set of related concepts that allow people to make inferences about new information based on already organized prior knowledge. Schemas "abstract generic knowledge that holds across many particular instances." For instance, mainstream U.S. culture includes a schema stored in many Americans' minds that associates the concept of success with other ideas such as wealth, hard work, educational attainment, cars, and good looks. Images come to mind when people have the concept of success—a picture of a suburban neighborhood. Most people are likely to engage in stereotypical generalizations, experience negative feelings, and reject the political activities of that group's members.

Frames are very much like texts and public discourse. For more or less coherent stories or moral judgments, and suggest "framed" a drive-by shooting aspects of the event that understanding about gang members' turf consciousness, hand signaling, weapons, and frame, the report obscures perhaps, the shooter's features. The gang frame is available to the audience from the underlying implicit threat of criminal behavior and its deeper causes. Once again confronted with the gang's actions rather than to criticize.

This is where culture can of schemas most widely spread permissive media messages. Likewise, with a wide variety of Blacks, especially media images, for example, help explain the tenacious myth that dampens public awareness of White ambivalence that fear, resentment, and demagoguery.

Media frames evoke building racial comity. Race person's way of behaving, we
hard work, educational attainment, intelligence, status, snobbery, fancy cars, and good looks. Images representing those related concepts readily come to mind when people hear the word or see a symbol that evokes the concept of success—a picture of a BMW, a mansion, a big executive office suite. A schema about “welfare” brought to mind by a television news story on welfare reform might trigger linked thoughts about the ideas “lazy,” “Black person,” “waste,” “liberals,” and “high taxes.”

Frames are very much like schemas, except they reside within media texts and public discourse. Frames highlight and link data selectively to tell more or less coherent stories that define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. When we say a news report “framed” a drive-by shooting as a gang war story, we mean it selected certain aspects of the event that summoned an audience’s stored schematic understandings about gang members. The story may have included visuals illustrating turf consciousness, exaggerated attachment to symbolic clothing, hand signaling, weapons, and aimless loitering. By highlighting this gang frame, the report obscures other possible mental associations such as, perhaps, the shooter’s absent father, unemployment or low wages, and clinical depression. The gang frame makes these more sympathetic connections less available to the audience. The political significance of the frames derives from the underlying implicit moral judgment, in one case condemnation of threatening criminal behavior, in the other perhaps greater understanding of its deeper causes. Once again, the typical audience member’s reaction when confronted with the gangbanger frame is to confirm long-standing expectations rather than to critically analyze the text for fresh insight.

This is where culture comes in. We define the mainstream culture as the set of schemas most widely stored in the public’s minds and the core thematic frames that percolate media messages. Lacking much opportunity for repeated close contact with a wide variety of Blacks, Whites depend heavily on cultural material, especially media images, for cataloging Blacks. The mediated communications help explain the tenacious survival of racial stereotypes despite a social norm that damps public admission of prejudice. And they help explain pervasive White ambivalence that shrinks from open prejudice but harbors reactive fear, resentment, and denial that the prejudice itself widely exists.

Media frames evoke thoughts that have the potential for eroding or building racial comity. Racial comity betokens wide recognition that each person’s way of behaving, viewing, and valuing the world overlaps and inter-
mingles with that of others, that people in all groups can share similar schemas, understanding their society in common ways. Comity thus requires individuals to believe that group membership has limited rather than comprehensive significance, that boundaries between groups and individuals are blurry and permeable. Such a fluid perception of the social structure allows for subjective sharing, for empathy and trust. Racial animosity, on the other hand, arises from a sense that the out-group’s members fundamentally differ from the in-group in their thinking and values, and that these differences impose unfair or even dangerous burdens on the dominant group.

The Cultural Sources of Habit

Individuals’ schematic thinking, rooted in culture, reflects judgments of value while helping to impose a kind of mental order on an unstable world. To describe these influences and their cultural origins more precisely we draw upon Mary Douglas’s anthropological studies of purity and danger. Douglas shows how cultural distinctions between the safe and the dangerous parallel distinctions between one’s own group and the out-group. These symbolic differences, she argues, permeate virtually all cultures; all societies tend to erect cultural boundaries that link objects and ideas representing the realm of the pure and desired, and separate them from notions and things associated with the polluted and dangerous. In our view, these separate realms of the pure and virtuous as contrasted with the impure and hazardous should be considered “meta-schemas,” overarching associations between sets of schemas that link concepts of the good and the valued and distinguish them from the bad and feared. Thus in many Whites’ minds, a meta-schema that registers the concept of “other” or “them” loosely links ideas like “Black,” “poverty,” “crime” and so forth, and clearly distinguishes from the more valued traits connected with “us.” Pollution fears, and rules applied to keep pollution at bay, shape the way dominant groups deal with subordinate groups: “People really do think of their own social environment as consisting of other people joined or separated by lines which must be respected. Some of the lines are protected by firm physical sanctions. . . . But wherever the lines are precarious we find pollution ideas come to their support. Physical crossing of the social barrier is treated as a dangerous pollution . . . . The polluter becomes a doubly wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line and second because he endangered others.”

Now this distinction between groups is not entirely, as it were, black and white. Rather, as cultural signifiers, Blacks now traverse an ill-defined

border state, symbolically a danger/pollution and ace. Blacks are in transition from by most Whites as represented. Except for the confirmed exceptions of Blacks exhibitors, certainties, suspicions ratio Black persons. In other words, being. Liminal people are but not necessarily destructively classified and not yet classified. Rwanda. Media culture at the largest segment of the White hopes, and fears about Blacks.

A multidimensional schema establishes ideal types. Individuals may rank highly on some of the traits. For instance, the dominant understanding type. The hierarchy of ideas. Blacks. All individuals must be similar, and have less to overdo. We might suggest a new slightly known to us:

(Body traits - C)

The continuum from bad to good runs from:

- traits over which one is less conscious of cultural race - skin color and hair texture
- traits that are consciously observable - speech style, accent
- traits that are subtle, which are more or less holding a higher status.
border state, symbolically comprising an uneasy, contradictory mixture of
danger/pollution and acceptability. As communicating cultural symbols,
Blacks are in transition from being (consciously or unconsciously) perceived
by most Whites as representing the realm of disorder and perhaps danger.
Except for the confirmed racists, most Whites' belief systems contain exam-
pl es of Blacks exhibiting valued traits, and include hesitations and un-
certainities, suspicions rather than convictions of negative traits linked to
Black persons. In other words, Blacks in American culture are now liminal
beings. Liminal people are by their nature potentially polluting, disruptive
but not necessarily destructive of the natural order since they are “no longer
classified and not yet classified,” as Malkki describes the Hutu refugees in
Rwanda. Media culture reflects this in its melange of images, as does the
largest segment of the White audience in its mixture of emotions, beliefs,
hopes, and fears about Blacks.

A multidimensional hierarchy related to the purity/danger meta-
schema establishes ideal human types in American culture. Black individu-
als may rank highly on some dimensions and approach the ideal, but rarely if
ever achieve it. Nor can isolated individual examples generalize to under-
mine dominant understandings of Blacks or to modify the culture's ideal
type. The hierarchy of ideal type attainment constrains all of us—not just
Blacks. All individuals must try to adjust, but some of us can do so more eas-
illy, and have less to overcome in order to progress higher up the hierarchy.
We might suggest a formula for social judgments of persons unknown or
slightly known to us:

\[
\text{Ideal Type Attainment} = \\
(Body traits + Communication behavior + Achievement-related status)
\]

The continuum from body traits through communication to achievement
runs from

- traits over which one has little or no control, signals one gives off be-
  cause of cultural ascriptions to physical characteristics (such as skin
  color and hair texture); to
- traits that are communication signals that one can control if one is
  knowledgeable about their meaning and motivated to fit in (such as
  speech style, accent and grammar); to
- traits that are substantive achievements especially valued by the cul-
  ture, which are not in themselves communication behaviors (such as
  holding a high status job).
We know that people judge others using speech, nonverbal communication style, and the visual cues supplied by physical characteristics and dress. For example, physical beauty that proximates ideal body traits has been shown repeatedly to predict financial success, moral approval, and other positive outcomes. Obviously, individuals attach different weights to different traits according to their own judgments; the mainstream is an average of thinking among individuals who comprise a culture. These average weights establish where an individual falls on a social hierarchy of judgment that runs something like this:

Ideal

↓

Normal

↓

Liminal

↓

Abnormal

↓

Counter-ideal

At the extremes of the hierarchy from the ideal to its opposite, this spectrum may be anchored by the general cultural tendencies Mary Douglas identifies in Purity and Danger: Still, the border between the two realms is not impermeable, but shades gradually through a series of other statuses. Those falling into the “normal” category—most Whites, actually—exhibit some though not all of the idealized traits. The liminal person has hints of these traits—some overlap with the positive end of the spectrum but some with the negative part as well. The signal of dark skin color is enough to trigger associations among many Whites with pollution and danger; even if African Americans dress and speak in a conventionally acceptable manner, employ a restrained verbal style, obtain degrees from Harvard and Yale, and run major corporations, they cannot totally surmount the barrier posed by Whites’ automatic generalizations from physical traits to moral, behavioral, and intellectual qualities and achievements.

erately, threaten dominant group members. Far from the ideal or normal, such types are regarded as posing a danger or burden to the dominant group (and perhaps other groups as well). William "Willie" Horton, a Black man convicted of murder who starred in George Bush's 1988 presidential advertising campaign, offers a prime illustration of the counter-ideal in U.S. culture, and he would partake of the scariness of the defiled, polluted realm.

It is possible for a White to fall into liminality or beyond by unconventional communication behavior, weird dress, pronounced accent, and other cultural differences—for example, becoming a "street person." But the White majority will always see such individuals as exceptional, and no amount of media imagery of White street people can change this. It is quite the reverse for African Americans. Blacks are prisoners of the widespread acceptance by Whites of what is understood to be the prototypical—the most representative—Black person. For Whites, the prototype of the Black person is a lower class or "under" class individual of little economic attainment or status. That means Blacks of outstanding attainment in several of the dimensions will be seen as atypical, as the exception. However, the very fact that most Whites now recognize frequent exceptions evidences cultural progress—the movement of Blacks into liminality from the less desirable region of the hierarchy. Liminality describes the unsettled status of Blacks in the eyes of those who produce dominant culture and of those who consume it. The cultural liminality of Black persons leads us to expect contradictions and tensions in the media's texts, and in the White audience's reactions.

Still, the mainstream culture registers the continued power of unconscious prototypical thinking that considers Whites the normal, and prototypical, human. Newsmagazine covers offer a good illustration of the sway of the White image. Several times a year, *Time* and *Newsweek* select cover topics that call for a visual representation of a person symbolizing the prototypical American. For instance, on 10 May 1999, *Time* ran a story "Growing Up Online," which depicted a White boy of about 12 years old. On 19 October 1998, *Time* ran a story "How to Make Your Kid a Better Student." The cover showed a White boy who appeared to be about 10. In fact, between 8 January 1996 and 6 September 1999, *Time* ran 30 covers illustrated by one or two anonymous persons symbolizing the prototypical American child or adult. The topics ran from "Too Much Homework" and "Why We Take Risks" to "Taking Care of Our Parents" and "Forever Young." Every single image was of a White person. *Time* did feature individual Blacks on its cover during this period, of course—
Michael Jordan, Oprah Winfrey—but never to stand in for the prototypical American. *Newsweek*, checked for the period between 21 September 1998 and 6 September 1999, ran ten covers requiring this kind of anonymous representation. All, such as one on “Migraines,” showed just one person, all White. A near-exception was one cover, on “Your Next Job,” that showed more than two persons representing prototypical Americans. It depicted ethnic diversity: a Black woman, and two White men, one of whom may have been Latino.

What does all this tell us? When editors think “an American person,” they automatically think “White.” When they are trying to show a group of “American persons,” they consciously recognize the need to show diversity and throw it in. In a sense this summarizes the duality of thinking among media workers, registering nicely the limits of cultural integration. Automatically, media personnel (most presumably White) think of the normal American as a White person. But when cued by the need to represent a group of Americans they realize they should add in some non-prototypical types, they recognize their responsibility to reflect America’s ethnic diversity. Seeing images like this tell White audiences (some of whom get annoyed at “political correctness”) that America is indeed multi-hued: deal with it, these illustrations say. Yet, if genuine race-blindness ruled the day, if the covers represented a random sample of Americans, four or five of the forty covers would have shown a Black model.

However, such a pattern of choice would violate the very nature of prototypical thinking. For racial representation to rotate randomly, it would be as if one could think of the concept *bird* and sometimes the idea *robin* would pop up and other times, less often but occasionally, *penguin* or *ostrich* would come to mind. In fact, most people asked to name a typical bird consistently say *robin* or *sparrow.* Prototypical thinking means a thinker will visualize a single fixed type every time a concept like *person* or *bird* comes up. So (mostly White) media workers and media content reflect the nature and limits of human thinking—no surprise there. What we need to do, however, is grasp the implications of these unavoidable characteristics for the way American society deals with race.

The Persistence of Memory

Our focus on the media notwithstanding, we fully recognize that memories and impressions of racial distinctions and racial hierarchy reside deep within the White American psyche. The psychology of this John. They describe how where psychologists discover prejudice. For example, subjects—whether White, black, or Latino—were asked to rate on a 21-point scale, numbers from 1 to 7, how much they believed that *white* were more positively disposed to *blacks* than *blacks* were to *whites.* They were shown pictures of 25 different faces, 10 White, 10 Black, 5 Latin American, and 5 Asian. They were then asked: “Would you like to work for this person?”

The resistance to inter-racial contact helps explain the invisible smile of White dominance and the invisibility of Black, Latin American, and Asian people. Yet Whites have an interest in both preserving and eroding this favoritism, maintaining a positive identity, gaining the rewards that come from having connections to others. In a national survey, 75 percent of African Americans said they preferred White, and 59 percent of White African Americans. Given that race would mean the average Black American today would mean the average Black American today
within the White American psyche as a persistent threat to the hope for racial comity. The psychology of this conundrum is summarized by Rothbart and John. They describe how “minimal groups” form in lab experiments, where psychologists discovered it is easy to foment in-group/out-group prejudice. For example, subjects in a classic series of experiments were told they either belonged to the group of persons who overestimate the number of dots in a pattern projected on a screen or to the group that underestimates dots. Subjects then developed an affinity for and identification with their presumed group: “In short, merely categorizing the subjects implicitly raised the expectation that ‘we’ are better than ‘they’ which resulted in subjects disproportionately remembering unfavorable behaviors associated with the outgroup.” People have a tendency to “maximize the difference between the boundaries of groups and often treat overlapping distributions of characteristics as if they were non-overlapping.” In consequence, people tend to see members of other groups as pretty much all the same. This means that favorable impressions of an out-group individual may cause more positive attitudes toward that individual, but will not generalize to challenge the negative group stereotype: “In effect, atypical category members are not category members at all. . . . We give too much weight to those individuals who confirm the stereotype and not enough weight to those who disconfirm the stereotype. This in turn implies that only a few stereotype-confirming individuals, against the background of many stereotype disconfirming individuals, would nonetheless serve to maintain the stereotype.”

The resistance to information that refutes stereotypes exemplifies and helps explain the invisible pull of deep-seated cultural judgments theorized by Mary Douglas.

Yet Whites have important motivations that may work in the opposite direction: maintaining a positive image of themselves as moral, and, relatively, gaining the rewards that come from acting generously and making human connections to others. Support comes from a 1997 Gallup poll in which 75 percent of African Americans claimed they had a close friend who was White, and 59 percent of Whites claimed similar close friendships with African Americans. Given population proportions, this claim, if true, would mean the average Black must have three or four close White friends. Although this seems highly unlikely (by our lights, few people have more than three or four close friends in total), the overestimation seems to reflect a yearning for racial reconciliation. And there are some harder data indexing
progress: 12 percent of all new marriages by Blacks in 1993 were with Whites, which is four and one-half times the rate in 1970, and these unions are producing children at equal rates to unmixed marriages, unlike in the past. Rates of interracial dating have also risen dramatically. In 1997, U.S. Today (3 November, p. 10A) reported that 57 percent of young people claimed to have dated persons of another race, a marked increase from 17 percent in 1980 (though other data suggest that younger Whites are less progressive racially compared to older generations). Some real advances have occurred.

But even if more Whites than ever fantasize about having close Black friends or actually date or marry African Americans, political understanding remains underdeveloped. Steeped in individualist American culture, Whites are not predisposed to develop sophisticated structural explanations and solutions for conditions among Blacks. That orientation renders them less ready to notice discrimination or accept political activity by Blacks as a group. When confronted either with factual data about group disparities, such as crime or poverty rates among Blacks, or with specific incidents conforming to stereotyped expectations, Whites, lacking an alternative way to make sense of the information, may readily develop animosity.

Thus Patterson notes that Black families are over three times more likely to be poor than White; that in 1995 single women accounted for 70 percent of African American births; and that “on any given day almost one in three (32.2 percent) of Afro American men between the ages of 20 to 29 is under some form of criminal justice supervision, in either prison or jail, or on probation or parole. . . .” As discussed further in chapter 6, media—reflecting the emphases and vacuums of elite discourse—do not often provide White audiences a way of explaining such data without resorting to pejorative inferences. Animosity—fear, perhaps, or political rejection—in this light becomes an understandable, even rational, response to limited, conflicting, and often negative information and varied motivations. By subscribing to one or more of the sentiments that comprise the animosity syndrome, Whites, consciously at least, can avoid succumbing to a full-blown racist ideology they know is morally wrong.

What the Media Do

The years since the mid-1960s have seen enormous increases in the media presence of Blacks, visibility that inherently denies the precepts of tradi-
tional racism by showing capable, successful Blacks in a variety of roles from news anchors to fictional doctors, judges, and detectives. Across the genres, from big-screen productions like *Amistad, Beloved, and A Time to Kill* to the reverential paens broadcast on Martin Luther King Day, media also take overt positions denouncing traditional racism and endorsing civil rights. Explicitly, media images deny White superiority and the legitimacy of White privilege. In their most obvious dimensions, they promote tolerance, inclusiveness, and (limited) acceptance by Whites of Blacks. At the same time, less overt media signals—and equally important, systematic absences from media content—may work against the development of greater interracial empathy and trust.

Beyond this, media images still contain traces of long-standing cultural presumptions not only of essential racial difference but of the hierarchy that idealizes “Whiteness.” Many Whites lack a convincing schematic explanation for their negative social observations about Blacks, both factual—higher Black crime, lower occupational attainment—and fanciful. Suspicions that there may be something to the notions of essential racial difference and White superiority can easily fill the void. So, even though most media personnel oppose outright racism and may even consciously preach against it, media could nonetheless sustain the foundations of animosity. When they endorse racial difference and hierarchy, however subtly and unconsciously, the media may reinforce tendencies toward prejudiced thinking apparently built into human cognition.

In this chapter and throughout the book, we are concerned with the dominant tendencies in media, their causes, and their likely implications for society as a whole. Of course there is variation around the central tendencies. At times the media promote, or at least open a door to, increased empathy on the part of Whites. At other times, they can stimulate old habits of racist or ethnocentric thought. Quite often both these seemingly contradictory tendencies and others coexist in a single television show, news report, or film—and in the results of public opinion interviews. Media texts can do double and triple duty, and individual audience members can react in surprising or conflicted ways to them. That said, however, despite the potential for varied, idiosyncratic readings by disparate, unconnected, and unorganized individuals, most audience members, alone or in their like-minded families and peer groups, take the path of least cognitive resistance. Consequently, they do not actively resolve contradictions in media texts by developing their own
new theories or modifying existing schematic understandings. Most often, they either miss the contradictions, noting just the material that confirms their existing thoughts and ignoring the rest, or they recognize the contradictions without changing their basic orientations. If there is one overarching lesson of cognitive psychology, it is that most persons are “cognitive misers” who do not exert much energy to resolve complexities and contradictions in the information that comes their way. Thus it seems to us legitimate to focus most intensively upon the frames, images, and themes that dominate the media by sheer quantitative count and by their powerful congruence with those racial schemas that research reveals to pervade the thinking of most White Americans.

We do not mean to suggest the media consistently promote a particular racial mindset. Still less do we want to imply that media workers are fully aware of their contributions to public thinking. Media images can promote Whites’ acceptance of presumptions about Blacks without either their producers or their audiences realizing it—without overt assertions, without obvious stereotyping. Or media content can reinforce an audience member’s guilty conjecture, rooted in centuries-old elements of Euro-American culture, that certain unfavorable traits widely ascribed to Blacks might be true. Simply by failing to explain a pattern of such images as unkempt Black criminals or welfare mothers, media may bolster baleful thoughts. Yet given their conventional assumptions and practices, it is probably impossible for media to offer explanations, at least not with enough clarity, frequency, and vividness to challenge the sway of the deep-seated culture. And this is the dilemma: blame is not easy to assign, nor solutions easy to discern.

We shall write from here on of media material that, both by what it contains and what it omits, tends to encourage or discourage stereotyping, denial, political rejection, or negative emotional responses to Blacks. These are the major components of racial animosity, and their opposites the major components of comity.

The remainder of the book shines a broad light across the range of media outlets, genres, and images. Here are the issues and the chapters that focus most heavily on them:

- How might media contribute to Whites’ stereotyping of Blacks? We explore media depictions of the social meanings and predictive value of race in chapter 4, comparing Black and White images in network news.

- Exactly how might news responses to Blacks? This is of violence and crime in local.

- Does the news tend to experience of discrimination. Whites’ tendency to engage attention in chapter 6, an.

- Relatedly, how might race identity and bound; problems experienced disprop rejection component of and themselves as sharing group into particular attention to these.

- With the exploration of typing, negative emotions, as a backdrop, chapter treats black political leaders more threatening than Whitson and Louis Farrakhan.

- What about the major entainment and advertising concerned with the way B each other and among the trations of interpersonal and racial classifications, pre structural impediments, in the suspicion of White personal behavior marks link Blacks symbolically; occupy center stage in relationships in prime-time version advertising, and chap.
• Exactly how might news stimulate Whites' negative emotional responses to Blacks? This is our focus in chapter 5, a close look at images of violence and crime in local television news.
• Does the news tend to illustrate or to omit the African American experience of discrimination, thereby undermining or contributing to Whites' tendency to engage in denial? This question receives particular attention in chapter 6, an examination of poverty in the news.
• Relatedly, how might reporting practices heighten the salience of racial identity and boundaries between groups? Does coverage of problems experienced disproportionately by African Americans foster the rejection component of animosity by encouraging Whites to see themselves as sharing group interests in opposition to Blacks? We give particular attention to these questions in chapter 7, on affirmative action.
• With the exploration of images that may reflect and promote stereotyping, negative emotions, denial, and conflicting racial group identifications as a backdrop, chapter 8 offers a summary probe of the way news treats black political leadership and activity. Is Black power considered more threatening than White? Case studies of reporting on Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan provide the focal point of the chapter.
• What about the majority of the content that Whites consume, entertainment and advertising? In exploring this material we are particularly concerned with the ways Blacks and Whites are shown interacting with each other and among their racial peers. In what manner might depictions of interpersonal contact reinforce or undermine the salience of racial classifications, prevalence of negative stereotyping, denial of structural impediments, and experience of negative emotions—and the suspicion of White superiority? How do these portrayals of interpersonal behavior mark the liminal status of Blacks, and do they indeed link Blacks symbolically to the dangers of pollution? These questions occupy center stage in chapter 9 on Black and White images and relationships in prime-time television entertainment, chapter 10 on television advertising, and chapter 11 on Hollywood film.

As the rest of the book will show, dominant patterns in the most widely distributed media provide less sustenance for racial comity than fodder for maintaining Blacks' liminality in the culture—for the ambivalence and animosity exhibited by Whites in Indianapolis and around the United States.