The racial fix and environmental state formation

Ian Carrillo [iD]

Departments of Environmental Studies and Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

Abstract

Theories of the environmental state – treadmill of production and ecological modernization – have dominated discussion of the political economy of environmental change. While the former contends that the state's mitigation of labor–capital relations engenders ecological instability, the latter posits that the state's use of business-friendly incentives can goad producers and consumers to adopt sustainable practices. However, these theories largely focus on dynamics related to class, labor, and markets, and thus overlook the role that race and racism play in the political economy. In contrast, this article argues that racial politics are not peripheral influences, but rather are central to the political economy in which environmental policy formation occurs. The author advances the argument with the concept of the racial fix, which refers to the idea that race and racism are mechanisms for circumventing barriers that slow the treadmill of production. Synthesizing long-standing and emerging research, the author outlines three dimensions – spatial, political, and cognitive – that constitute the racial fix. Overall, this article not only shows how race and racism serve as building blocks for environmental state formation, but also articulates new theoretical paths for studying the relationship between race and environment.

Keywords

Environment, political economy, race and racism, racial attitudes, racial fix, racial politics, space, treadmill of production

Introduction

Since entering office, the Trump administration has rolled back environmental regulations on multiple fronts. By exiting the Paris Climate Accord and nullifying the Clean Power Plan, Trump thwarted planetary efforts to mitigate climate change. The administration

Corresponding author:
Ian Carrillo, Departments of Environmental Studies and Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, Bren Hall 4312, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-4160, USA.
Email: icarrillo@ucsb.edu

also weakened institutional mechanisms by undermining states' rights to set pollution standards, hindering the ability to use science to inform policy, and reducing the policing capabilities of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). To echo Benegal (2018), Trump's ability to win and enact an anti-environmentalist agenda was a testament to a campaign that stoked racial grievances related to demographic change, non-white immigration, and civil rights. Moreover, the racialized mechanisms embedded in US democracy, such as the Electoral College, further tilted the scales in his favor. Race and racism therefore elevated Trump's presidential prospects and eventual ability to enshrine legislation opposed to environmental and climate regulation.

The dominant frameworks of the environmental state – treadmill of production (ToP) and ecological modernization theory (EMT) – struggle to explain this sea change in environmental policy since neither approach views race as a prominent political economic factor. ToP largely focuses on class and labor dynamics in explaining how the state's pro-growth orientation amplifies ecological disorganization. While EMT suggests the state can promote sustainability through market-friendly regulations that accurately price natural resources, the framework overlooks any form of social inequality. Race and racism have thus been under-studied within the environmental state despite their influence on the political economy, as the current moment reveals.

Recent political economic research tends to neglect racial politics, instead focusing on macro-level comparisons of pollution or the theoretical and methodological distinctions between the ToP and EMT approaches (Foster, 2012; Jorgenson and Clark, 2012; York et al., 2010). Although environmental justice scholars examine racial disparities (Norgaard et al., 2011; Sbicca and Myers, 2017), few investigate such problems through the prism of political economy (Pellow, 2002; Pulido, 2017; Pulido et al., 2016). There is therefore a need to better understand how race shapes the political economy in which environmental policies are created and implemented. This article thus asserts that racial politics are not peripheral to the political economy, but rather are central to the formation of environmental policy.

I develop the concept *the racial fix*,[1] which refers to the idea that race and racism are mechanisms for circumventing barriers that slow the treadmill of production. Synthesizing long-standing and emerging research from environmental justice, sociology of race and ethnicity, political science, and others, I outline three dimensions – spatial, political, and cognitive – that constitute the racial fix. The ToP framework, more so than EMT, provides a robust template for interrogating how the racial fix operates within environmental state formation to enable ecological disorganization. Unlike EMT, ToP offers theoretical pathways for understanding how space and inequality interact to shape environmental change and how capital seeks to circumvent constraints to growth (Bonds and Downey, 2012). Further, while accelerated industrialization is the core of the EMT thesis, there is little empirical evidence to support the claim that industrialization spurs either sustainability or racial equality (Katznelson, 2005; Massey and Denton, 1993; York et al., 2010).

In what follows, I summarize the environmental state literature, highlighting how the failure to examine how race operates within the political economy impedes understanding the sources of and solutions for environmental problems. I then review literature on the racial politics of welfare state formation with the aim of outlining how race and

racism serve as building blocks for environmental state formation. Next, I discuss the three dimensions of the racial fix, followed by a conclusion that articulates new research directions on the political economy of environmental change.

Environmental state formation and the question of race

The edited volume *The Environmental State Under Pressure* (Mol and Buttel, 2002) elevated the political economy as a major focus of environmental sociology, with scholars theorizing the state's role in fostering ecological stability or instability. In their chapter 'The Treadmill of Production and the Environmental State,' Schnaiberg et al. (2002) argue that the state is integral in driving the expansion of production and ecological disorganization. The authors (2002: 17–18) stress that the state creates and sustains a political economy oriented toward: (1) unending economic growth, (2) increasing consumption, (3) pro-growth alliances between capital and labor, and (4) accelerating the treadmill to solve social and economic problems. The state supports the interests of large firms, those most responsible for amplifying pollution, through the view that pro-growth policies best serve the public interest. Yet, even as foundational ToP scholarship (Gould et al., 2004; Schnaiberg, 1980; Schnaiberg et al., 2002) insightfully illustrates how labor–capital dynamics, class conflict, and technological change shape ecological disorganization, the role of race and racism is largely absent.

The environmental state debate spurred two additional research tracks, neither of which confronted racial politics. One used quantitative approaches to test ToP and EMT predictions, with a focus on economic and population indicators, among other factors. This debate analyzed macro-level trends and dedicated little attention to sub-national dynamics, such as class, race, and inequality (Jorgenson and Clark, 2012). The second track interrogated the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the EMT approach. These works criticized EMT for transposing the fallacies of modernization theory and classical economics onto environmental problems, while also identifying the structural flaws that led EMT predictions to have high rates of empirical inaccuracy (Foster, 2012; York et al., 2010).

Unlike the previous agendas, environmental justice scholars targeted racial inequalities. This research documents how racial minorities have a greater likelihood of exposure to environmental risks in air, water, and soil (Ard, 2015; Bell and Ebisu, 2012; Crowder and Downey, 2010; Downey et al., 2017; Taylor, 2014). In the 'race versus class' debate, evidence showed that race, rather than market-based class dynamics, is the major predictor for residential proximity to hazards (Mohai et al., 2009). In a rejection of the 'minority move-in' hypothesis, scholars illustrated how polluting facilities target minority communities (Mohai and Saha, 2015). Other works use critical race theory to study environmental politics, but do not examine the implications for treadmill acceleration or deceleration (Richter, 2017; Sbicca and Myers, 2017). Kurtz (2009) builds on work by Omi and Winant (1987) and Goldberg (2001) to bring race to bear on the state's role in environmental regulation, yet does not engage the ToP and EMT frameworks. While some scholars incorporate environmental justice problems into the ToP model, they primarily used a class- and citizenship-based focus to understand how grassroots groups can slow the treadmill (Pellow, 2002; Weinberg et al., 1995). Overall, environmental

justice scholarship has made important contributions studying the racialization of negative externalities, but has largely done so outside of the environmental state framework, thus leaving unanswered questions on the role of race in the political economy.

In contrast to the environmental state debates, the literature on welfare state formation has a more robust legacy of studying how race shapes politics and policy. In the following section, I review the welfare state formation literature to show how race molds the types of policies that emerge over time. This canon not only informs our understanding of how race influences the electoral, legislative, and psychosocial dynamics that underpin the political economy, but also how race acts as an escape hatch that allows the treadmill to circumvent barriers to growth.

The racial politics of welfare state formation

Welfare scholars have long recognized that race critically influences policy formation. This literature contends that racial inequalities resulting from government interventions are not glitches, but rather are intended outcomes of systemic design. Unlike the environmental state, research on welfare state formation posits that race shapes political contests over power, resources, and access to public goods. In studying the varieties of welfare states, a burning question is what social and historical conditions in a given country lead it to create and sustain a specific welfare regime. Esping-Anderson (1990) outlines three regimes: (1) a liberal regime characterized by little government intervention in market activities, (2) a conservative regime that preserves the status quo by providing different welfare access depending on class or social group, and (3) a universal regime that provides equal access to all groups. In this sense, depending on the particular regime, welfare programs are mechanisms that combat or perpetuate stratification.

In seeking to explain why the US has a liberal regime, compared to the more inclusive regimes of peer nations, scholars advanced theories of US exceptionalism. First, Lubove (1986) suggests that the citizenry's commitment to liberal values impeded the creation of a strong welfare state. Second, the traditional absence of a working class party stymied welfare development (Myles, 1989). Finally, Orloff and Skocpol (1984) contend that since democratization preceded industrialization, citizens became dependent on private patronage rather than public welfare. However, Quadagno (1994) counters that these theories understate the role of race: (1) prior to the New Deal, poor whites accessed numerous welfare programs, (2) racial segregation in employment and housing fragmented working class solidarity, and (3) mass democratization occurred well after industrialization, with black enfranchisement in the 1960s.

Importantly, Quadagno (1994) argues that racial politics crucially shaped the creation and dismantling of the welfare state. Racial exclusion was the lynchpin that bound together legislative support for the New Deal, with affirmative votes from southern Democrats dependent on excluding black citizens. As Civil Rights laws advanced racial inclusion, the prevailing pact became unglued, with racial ideologies and narratives aiding the subsequent re-formation of the welfare state. White support for social programs eroded as racially conservative politicians associated blackness with welfare fraud and as the media over-represented black rates of unemployment and poverty (Gilens, 1999).

Politicians also began appealing to reactionary whites by using 'dog-whistle politics' as a racialized discursive strategy to delegitimize the welfare state (Haney-López, 2015).

Welfare state research offers three lessons for environmental state formation. First, in the US political economy, theories oriented to class and labor are insufficient for explaining the politics underpinning large-scale policy changes. Second, since government intervention to create universal public goods requires extending rights and privileges to previously marginalized groups, there is likely to be a counter-movement by incumbent groups who perceive a sense of loss. Third, race has a crowding-in and crowding-out effect that is important for the cognitive processes on which electoral and legislative activities depend. This article delineates how the state's mediation of polluting activities in the market – the essence of environmental state formation – pivots on racial politics. The discussion of the racial fix in the next section extrapolates on this point.

The racial fix

The 'fix' has been conceptualized as a way to solve social problems through policy tools (Gilmore, 2007). This idea derives from Harvey's (1982) 'spatial fix,' which refers to a capitalist strategy for avoiding crises of devaluation by penetrating new markets to optimize the price of money, goods, and labor. In studying the distribution and siting of environmental costs, ToP scholars use a multi-sectoral and transnational perspective that accounts for the spatial movement of production and pollution (Bonds and Downey, 2012; Hornborg, 2009). Spatial fixes therefore buttress treadmill acceleration, particularly the ability of rich nations to extract resources from and deposit waste in poor nations (Bunker, 2005; Hornborg, 2009).

Other environmental scholars have illustrated that 'fixes' are not merely spatial, but also operate in other domains. Schnaiberg (1980) notes how regulatory and technological fixes help polluting firms overcome constraints to growth. For Stretesky et al. (2013), campaign donations to industry-friendly candidates function as regulatory fixes that weaken the state's capacity for oversight. In an example of regulatory capture, Harrison (2019) describes how regulators internalize industry narratives and interpret environmental directives with a pro-industry bias. Finally, Ipsen (2020) discusses a 'legal fix' in which transnational firms engineer local laws to create ideal conditions for investment.

Fixes also occur in the spheres of class, gender, and cognition. For Bell and York (2010), polluting industries strategically invest in cultural patrimony to reinforce a class and community identity that acquiesces to environmental risks. Social psychological research reveals that men cognitively associate sustainable behavior with femininity, which discourages participation (Brough et al., 2016). Such a finding extends other research showing how the embeddedness of hegemonic masculinity in coal employment impedes environmental activism (Bell and Braun, 2010). Finally, Auyero and Swistun (2009) illustrate how treadmill elites shape cognitive processes by imposing dominant discourses that defend polluting activities.

I build on this research by articulating the importance of racial politics for environmental state formation. The racial fix refers to the idea that race and racism operate as mechanisms for circumventing barriers that slow the treadmill of production. The three dimensions that constitute the racial fix – spatial, political, and cognitive – outline the

processes that translate racial ideas into pro-treadmill actions. Drawing from the US experience, I argue that rather than being a peripheral feature of environmental governance, race and racism are central for how the state and market determine the degree of intervention in polluting activities.

Space and the racial fix

The racialization of space – imbuing racial tendencies in social and geographic relationships – has been a bedrock principle for the organization of communities and institutions (Omi and Winant, 1987). From an environmental perspective, Hanafi (2016) argues that a key racial project has been to racialize space so the distribution of environmental resources follows the same segregated pattern. In this sense, spatial segregation heightens the efficiency of environmental inequalities and creates prospects for environmental racism that may not exist in an unsegregated world.

Modern-day segregation has its foundations in socio-historical processes that racialized space. Massey and Denton (1993) survey the mechanisms that guided this effort. First, neighborhood associations enacted zoning restrictions, manipulated housing prices, and enforced restrictive covenants to preserve racial homogeneity in white neighborhoods. Second, real estate boards required agents to oppose integration, denied membership to black agents, and provided institutional support for covenants. Third, some agents engaged in blockbusting by exploiting racially anxious white homeowners and extorting black homebuyers seeking upward mobility. Fourth, New Deal redlining policies institutionalized pro-segregation ideas into mortgage markets, steering whites into suburbs and blacks into inner cities. Fifth, white residents and police used racial violence to protect the homogeneity of white neighborhoods. Finally, in rural areas, Loewen (2005) notes how 'sundown towns' used violence to expel and dispel blacks, further concentrating black populations into segregated urban neighborhoods.

An additional pathway for racializing space has been population policies that favor whites. Immigration policies, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1924 Immigration Act, sought to preserve and expand white majoritarian status by favoring white immigration and discouraging non-white immigration. Moreover, whiteness has always anchored access to citizenship and democracy (Smedley, 1993). A long-standing objective of racialized population policies has therefore been for whites to outnumber non-whites in democratic participation and representation (FitzGerald and Cook-Martín, 2014). A future section details how the racial dimensions of this numbers game have become increasingly important for identity politics and policy preferences.

Such non-environmental policies have important consequences for environmental racism. Bullard (1990) shows that minority neighborhoods are more likely to be sites for waste. For Pulido (2000), privileged white populations have preserved clean environmental amenities by steering hazardous facilities toward minority neighborhoods. Others show that firms and governments follow the 'path of least resistance' when siting hazardous facilities, with socio-political and racial discrimination dictating the site selection process (Mohai and Saha, 2015; Saha and Mohai, 2005). Further, the relationship between race, space, and hazards is so resilient that toxic exposure persists for non-whites even when changing neighborhoods (Crowder and Downey, 2010; Downey et al., 2017).

In studies of 'site fights' (Aldrich, 2008), some scholars integrate environmental justice struggles into the ToP model. Weinberg et al. (2000) show how urban recycling programs contributed to treadmill processes, as polluting firms capitalized on new business opportunities for waste management. Others similarly examine how local environmental justice movements seek to slow the treadmill through political contests with treadmill elites (Gould et al., 1996; Pellow, 2002; Sbicca, 2012). While illustrating the linkages between community development and political economy, this work tends to treat race and class as similar dimensions of a citizenship-based movement.

There are three ways in which the relationship between race, space, and waste enables a racial fix in the treadmill of production. First, racial residential sorting creates the structural conditions that permit the segregation of environmental resources with an optimal efficiency that would not exist in an integrated society. Second, the racialization of negative externalities allows governments and firms to create hegemonic narratives and institute legal norms that legitimize and perpetuate environmental inequalities. Third, a consequence of segregation is that the population with racial and class privileges not only enjoys clean environmental resources, but also has an out-of-sight, out-of-mind outlook toward the pollution that afflicts disadvantaged populations. Segregation thus facilitates racial differences in the perception and visibility of environmental goods and harms. In sum, these racialized processes provide a fix by eliminating barriers to growth and creating pathways that enhance the efficiency of future treadmill acceleration.

Politics and the racial fix

While the ToP framework contends that treadmill elites will bend electoral and legislative processes to their interests, absent is the consideration that racial ideologies bias political institutions and mechanisms against non-whites. This has implications for the political economic conditions in which environmental state formation operates, as democratic institutions retain a dual bias in favor of white populations and pro-treadmill forces. In discussing how the racial fix functions within democratic processes, this section traces (1) the racialization of US democracy and (2) the anti-majoritarian politics that currently undergird environmental state formation. In this sense, the US political tradition has both majoritarian and counter-majoritarian tendencies that advantage whiteness.

According to Du Bois (1992 [1935]: 631), race has guided 'the whole intellectual and spiritual development of civilization' in the US, with racial revanchism an important political economic force. Shklar (1991) asserts that notions of citizenship and democratic inclusion have always been racialized, as the profound inequalities associated with slavery operate as the reference point by which social progress is anchored. For Robin (2017), an animating ideal for racial conservatives has been to act as a counter-revolutionary force against movements for racial progressivism. The formation of democratic institutions has thus been embedded in racial ideologies that elevated the interests of white populations above those of non-white populations.

Pro-slavery interests institutionalized racial exclusion in democratic practices in numerous ways. The Electoral College is an emblematic and lasting case. Amar (2015) notes how southern slaveholders impeded the emergence of a direct popular vote for president on the grounds that their small voter pool – with slaves excluded from the

voting population – would present a disadvantage against states with more citizens. Slaveholders successfully lobbied for the Electoral College and the Three-Fifths Compromise, which counted slaves in the apportionment of electoral votes. Slave interests consequently retained a structural advantage in the House of Representatives and presidential elections. Before Lincoln, every president was either a slaveholding southerner or a northerner allied to southern slavery. From the 1880s to the 1960s, racist practices that subjugated black citizens ruled the south. In that era, racial conservatism was not only a staple of southern political attitudes, but also permeated the federal government as southern Democrats leveraged their institutional power to racially shape legislation, such as the New Deal (Avidit et al., 2018).

In a post-Civil Rights era, racial conservatives adopted more covert tactics to democratically suppress non-whites. From the 1970s onward, mass incarceration and anti-drug policies disproportionately imprisoned black populations, a strategy the Nixon administration would later admit was a racially coded way to politically punish black populations (Baum, 2016). Subsequent 'tough-on-crime' policies stripped voting rights, which disenfranchised 5.8 million citizens by 2014, with blacks over-represented (The Sentencing Project, 2014).

As demographic shifts diminished the long-standing white majoritarian advantage, counter-majoritarian strategies to suppress non-white voter participation became more common. The closure of polling stations in minority districts, cutting early voting periods, voter roll purges, and instituting poll taxes and voter ID laws disproportionately disenfranchise minority voters (Anderson, 2018). While racial conservatives claim such measures are needed to combat voter fraud, research shows that such a problem is non-existent (Ansolabehere et al., 2015; Huseman, 2018). Additionally, racial conservatives in statehouses intensified gerrymandering to create a structural advantage that favors white rural voters and allows preferred candidates to win a majority of seats with a minority of votes (Anderson, 2018). This artillery of voter suppression tactics accelerated after the 2013 *Shelby County* v. *Holder* Supreme Court ruling, which declared that states no longer needed federal pre-clearance for changes to election rules as required under the 1965 Voting Rights Act (Ang, 2018).

When investigating how democracy operates within the treadmill of production, it is argued, on the one hand, that elites will undermine democratic preferences that do not conform to pro-growth interests and, on the other hand, that the working class will see their interests aligned with the treadmill and therefore vote in favor of further acceleration (Schnaiberg, 1980). In both instances, democracy has little effect on slowing the treadmill. This stance stands in contrast to the conventional environmental justice view that the state, endowed with legitimacy through the democratic process, will exercise its authority to regulate market activities that harm society. However, in a recent shift, environmental scholars are increasingly skeptical of the democratic state's capacity to slow the treadmill. For Pulido (2017), the state consistently fails to enforce regulations and neglects civil rights and environmental justice directives enshrined in law. Moreover, Pulido et al. (2016) suggest that scholars should reassess the state's theoretical role and consider that the state's natural allies might be polluters rather than the general public.

Indicating a growing convergence with the ToP approach, environmental justice scholars have recently articulated a critical view of democracy's capacity for treadmill

deceleration. In an analysis based on class and rurality, Ashwood and MacTavish (2016) argue that democratic capitalism produces a 'tyranny of the majority' scenario in which environmental costs are imposed on the minority. Kurtz (2009) suggests that investing regulatory power in 'the racial state' will inevitably lead to the racialized distribution of pollution. Finally, Pellow (2016) contends that the state has struggled to enact environmental justice principles precisely because of its other long-standing role as a defender of authoritarianism, racism, and patriarchy.

This section outlines several ways – exclusion, suppression, and neglect – in which political processes are racialized. While majoritarian status long favored white voters, racial conservatives increasingly use counter-majoritarian strategies to retain power in the face of diminishing numerical advantage. The contradictory nature of these tactics is evidence of the power of capital and its allies to engineer public opinion and policies to achieve its objectives. The 2016 election highlighted how the racialized US political tradition and counter-majoritarian efforts interacted to tilt the scales in favor of candidates hostile to environmental regulation. Such consequences will not be short-lived, as the structural over-representation of white citizens in the Electoral College, the Senate, and the Supreme Court will guide environmental state formation for the foreseeable future. The following section extends this argument by examining racial identity politics.

Cognitive linkages and the racial fix

Racial identity politics mold the electoral and legislative landscape upon which environmental state formation depends. While identity politics and psychosocial trends are not a focus of the environmental state literature, they are nonetheless important construction materials for the political economy. This section outlines how racial identity politics influence public perceptions of and support for the state intervention required to mitigate environmental problems. I further argue that a feedback loop exists in which attitudes and policy reinforce one another.

A burgeoning literature in social psychology and political science points to strong cognitive linkages between racial identity and partisan preferences. One sub-area examines the spillover of racialization, the process 'whereby racial attitudes are brought to bear on political preferences' (Tesler, 2012: 691). Tesler (2012, 2015) shows that Obama's ascent primed racial attitudes in the public. For instance, unlike the flagship initiatives from past white presidents, a strong correlation existed between racial resentment and political preferences in public opinion on Obama's proposals, such as healthcare and tax policy.

Second, research on group threat examines white responses to declining majoritarian status. Craig and Richeson (2014, 2017) find that whites anticipate confronting more discrimination as their majority status diminishes and that such perceived threats to group status will likely impede positive interracial relations. Enos (2017) shows that subtle racial cues from non-whites may threaten majoritarian group status and animate racial conservatism in whites. Other research reveals the overlap between group threat and the spillover of racialization. For instance, when whites perceive a threat to their relative position in the racial status hierarchy, they show an increase in racial resentment

toward non-whites and a decrease in support for welfare programs (Wetts and Willer, 2018). For Major et al. (2018), whites with a strong ethnic identity are more likely to adopt racially conservative views related to immigration and support political candidates that have similar policy stances.

A third sub-area studies the relationship between identity politics and voting preferences, with a focus on the 2016 election. Analyzing demographic change and voter attitudes, Smith and Hanley (2018) illustrate that racial resentment against non-whites, rather than economic anxiety, was the strongest factor for predicting a pro-Trump vote. For Sides et al. (2018a), the Trump campaign 'hunted where the ducks are' by activating long-standing racially conservative views in the voter base. Sides et al. (2018b) also detail how the racialization of policy preferences, particularly for racial conservatives, during the Obama era created a landscape in which racial identity politics strongly predicted partisan behavior in the 2016 election.

While environmental scholars are increasingly interested in how the relationship between cognition and partisan preferences shapes the polarization of views on environment and climate, they tend to focus on non-racial explanations. One explanation is that biased media messaging and misinformation campaigns from ideological groups have shaped popular discourse and fomented strategic ignorance (Boykoff, 2013; Cann and Raymond, 2018; Carmichael and Brulle, 2017; Dunlap and Jacques, 2013; Egan and Mullin, 2017; Oreskes and Conway, 2011). A second suggests that economic factors, such as recessions and business cycles, influence public opinions on climate policies (Kahn and Kotchen, 2011; Scruggs and Benegal, 2012). Finally, Shao (2017) explores how personal experiences with extreme weather can mitigate political and religious ideology.

However, there is a limited but growing body of environmental research on the cognitive linkages between race and partisan preferences. In a novel study on the spillover of racialization on environmental policy, Benegal (2018) shows that racial prejudice is strongly associated with attitudes on climate change and climate science, even when controlling for partisanship, ideology, and education. Thus, similar to welfare state formation, racial attitudes have mapped onto partisan preferences for environmental policy. Other research focuses on the partisan identity of the Tea Party, an important conservative constituency in which 71% of members deny human-made climate change (Yale, 2011). Willer et al. (2016) document that racial anxiety related to whites' declining majoritarian status is the strongest predictor for identification as a Tea Party member. Hochschild (2016) illustrates how, despite living in highly polluted areas, white Tea Party enthusiasts are distrustful of environmental regulation out of the belief that the federal government provides unfair benefits to racial minorities and immigrants. This research suggests that there is an important correlation between racial identity politics, especially racial conservatism, and anti-environmentalist partisan preferences.

Hochschild (2016) additionally shows an overlap between anti-environmentalism and evangelicalism, where the Curse of Ham has informed a white worldview (Dochuk, 2010). Civil rights judicial rulings animated the modern evangelical political movement which, after feeling their freedom of association was under attack, ardently backed the dog-whistle politics that weakened welfare programs (Noll, 2010). More recently, the

perception that Obama undermined the white Christian worldview prompted 81% of evangelicals to cast a pro-Trump vote, a larger share than the previous four Republican candidates (Smith and Martinez, 2016; Wong, 2018). More than any religious group, 72% of evangelicals reject the anthropogenic climate change thesis (Funk and Alper, 2015), as it contradicts the belief that divine providence grants humans dominion over nature. Scott Pruitt, a devout evangelical and Trump's first EPA director, argued that environmental regulation was an assault on heavenly endowed personal liberty, a logic he used to justify regulatory rollbacks (Brody, 2018).

In seeking to explain polarized viewpoints on climate and environment, social scientific research increasingly shows the cognitive linkage between racial conservatism and anti-environmentalism, an association that has important pro-treadmill effects. Slowing the treadmill depends on regulations that emerge from electoral, legislative, and bureaucratic processes which, while enhancing the public's freedom to enjoy clean environmental amenities, inevitably require reducing the freedom of businesses to pollute. A critical way anti-environmentalist politicians have won elections and enacted deregulatory agendas is by using racialized critiques of government to delegitimize the very idea of state intervention. In this sense, the partisan preferences that underpin the political economy of environmental change have been racialized, with racial identity politics paving the way for the removal of impediments to the treadmill's acceleration.

The cognitive association between racism and anti-environmentalism reveals the centrality of nativism – the belief that European-Americans are the rightful benefactors of the US project – to the racial fix. The nativist current running through the spatial, democratic, and cognitive dimensions shows a political economy that is not only structurally biased in favor of white populations but also primed for a racial backlash when dominant group status is threatened. Trump's recent discourse and policies – defending white supremacists, promoting the border wall, disparaging Black Lives Matter activism, and banning Muslim refugees – draw from the US's nativist tradition and place nativism as the centerpiece of his strategy for preserving the electoral support needed to advance an anti-environmentalist agenda. The racial fix thus operates on multiple fronts in the political economy to translate racist ideas into pro-treadmill actions.

The three dimensions of the racial fix illustrate that there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between racial politics and environmental policy. A feedback loop exists in which the racial hierarchies inherent to pro-treadmill forces are created, defended, and sustained over time. Following claims from Pager and Shepherd (2008) that racial systems seek to reproduce their own survival, we see that the treadmill responds to periodic shocks, such as the Civil Rights movement or a declining white majority, by innovating racialized mechanisms that perpetuate ecological disorganization.

However, the feedback loop is susceptible to disruption (Reskin, 2012), and recent research has illuminated strategies for counteracting the influence of race on environmental policy. While polluting companies intentionally target low-income rural communities where a core feature of whiteness is acquiescing to hazardous risk, this 'cowboy' personality can also be harnessed to combat and rebel against treadmill actors (Hochschild, 2016). Haney-López (2019) shows that working class voters across all races are receptive to political messaging that frames racism as a tool elites weaponize to divide working

people. This race–class framing helps to counter-balance the racial fear messaging that has been central to fracturing the New Deal, whose core commitments sought to provide equal opportunity and pathways for upward mobility for working people. The racial fix should therefore not be viewed through a fatalistic lens, but rather seen as a surmountable barrier to be negotiated and navigated through coalition building.

Directions for future research

This article advances our understanding of environmental state formation by articulating how the treadmill of production uses the racial fix to bend social forces to its interests. The racial fix dimensions suggest new research directions on environmental state formation. In particular, there are still key knowledge gaps on the relationship between race and space. For instance, no causal association between race and toxic exposure has been established. An audit study of housing markets could be useful for causally linking race with residential pollution and interrogating how private sector actors, such as real estate agents, racialize the relationship between space and waste. Unlike the prominence of audit studies in other sociological research (Pager and Shepherd, 2008), they are largely absent in environmental sociology.

ToP and environmental justice scholars have recently converged on the view that the state's position as a defender of capitalist and anti-democratic interests leads to pro-treadmill outcomes. Ashwood (2018) extends this argument by theorizing non-state alternatives for slowing the treadmill. Additional questions for race and politics might include: Do congressional districts or states with high levels of gerrymandering and/or voter suppression possess higher rates of pollution? How do polluting firms implicitly or explicitly racialize democratic mechanisms? Such questions interrogate how treadmill elites use racial ideologies to co-opt democracy.

Regarding cognitive processes, the coupling and potential de-coupling of racial conservatism and anti-environmentalism merits further study. Drawing from behavioral economics research (Carlsson and Johansson-Stenman, 2012), one could examine how and under what conditions race has crowding-in and crowding-out effects on coordinating with public goods. Despite not being an original objective of the ToP framework, understanding how race-oriented psychosocial processes influence the political economy is increasingly necessary.

This article's focus on studying the racial fix at the national-level of the US overlooks other important contexts. First, internal geographic variance within the US may show the racial fix operates in complicated and unclear ways. For instance, in the US Rust Belt, black industrial workers may be pro-treadmill despite disproportionate exposure to environmental risks in the workplace and home. This dynamic raises questions about how race and labor interact to shape strategies for slowing the treadmill in environmentally hazardous labor markets that employ large numbers of non-white workers. Second, it would be useful to examine the racial fix outside of the US context. For example, in Brazil, home to the world's largest carbon sink, right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro invokes explicit racism, sexism, and LGBT-phobia to build electoral support (Silva and Larkins, 2019). He further seeks to delegitimize environmental regulation by portraying climate change as a Marxist conspiracy and a mask for rich nations' colonizing

aspirations. The case of Brazil has lessons for the US and other nations in that it reveals the need to understand how capital utilizes intersecting social mechanisms, such as class, gender, race, religion, sexuality, imperialism, and regionalism, to advance its interests in the environmental political economy.

In conclusion, with ecological disorganization intensifying across the globe, it is vital to understand the social forces that undermine regulatory policies. In the US, investigating the failure to combat environmental and climate harm requires confronting the racial politics that permeate private and public life. By centering race in the political economy, this article offers a template for diagnosing the socio-racial origins of environmental problems, politics, and policies.

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ORCID iD

Ian Carrillo https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8468-0992

Note

1. This article's use of *racial fix* differs from past use of a similar term. Pedroni (2011) acknowledges that spatial fixes can be racial fixes, but does not develop the term further. Mumm's (2017: 104) use of the term refers to the phrase 'the fix is in.'

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Author biography

Ian Carrillo is a current recipient of a National Science Foundation SBE Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. He is affiliated with the Departments of Environmental Studies and Sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He studies how race, class, and environment interact to shape inequality, with a focus on Brazil and the US. He received his PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His work has been published in *Environmental Sociology* and *Latin American Perspectives*. In 2021, he will be joining the University of Oklahoma as an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology.

Résumé

Les théories de l'État environnemental (*environmental state*) – celle de l'engrenage de la production (*treadmill of production*) et celle de la modernisation écologique –dominent les débats sur l'économie politique du changement environnemental. Suivant la première, la réduction par l'État des relations entre le travail et le capital engendre de l'instabilité écologique, tandis que suivant la seconde, le recours de l'État à des mesures incitatives favorables aux entreprises peut pousser producteurs et consommateurs à adopter des pratiques durables. Mais ces théories sont surtout axées sur des dynamiques liées aux classes sociales, au monde du travail et aux marchés, au risque de passer sous silence le rôle de la question raciale et du racisme dans l'économie politique. Dans cet article, je soutiens au contraire que les politiques raciales, loin d'avoir une influence secondaire, sont au contraire essentielles à l'économie politique dans laquelle intervient l'élaboration des politiques environnementales. J'étaye mon argument à l'aide du concept de *racial fix* (solution raciale), qui renvoie à l'idée que la race et le racisme sont des mécanismes permettant de contourner les obstacles susceptibles de ralentir l'engrenage de la production. En faisant la synthèse des recherches passées et récentes, je décris les trois dimensions – spatiale, politique et cognitive – qui constituent la solution raciale. Le propos général de cet article consiste à non seulement montrer comment la race et le racisme servent de fondements à la formation de l'État environnemental, mais aussi à exposer de nouvelles pistes théoriques pour l'étude du lien entre race et environnement.

Mots-clés

Attitudes raciales, économie politique, engrenage de la production, environnement, espace, politique raciale, race et racisme, solution raciale

Resumen

Las teorías del Estado ambiental (la del engranaje de la producción y la modernización ecológica) han dominado la discusión sobre la economía política del cambio ambiental. Mientras que la primera sostiene que la mitigación de las relaciones trabajo-capital por parte del Estado engendra inestabilidad ecológica, la segunda postula que el uso por parte del Estado de incentivos favorables para las empresas puede incitar a los productores y consumidores a adoptar prácticas sostenibles. Sin embargo, estas teorías se centran principalmente en dinámicas relacionadas con la clase, el trabajo y

los mercados, y por lo tanto pasan por alto el papel que juegan la raza y el racismo en la economía política. En contraste, este artículo argumenta que las políticas raciales no son influencias periféricas, sino que son centrales para la economía política en la que ocurre la formación de políticas ambientales. El argumento se desarrolla con el concepto de la solución racial (*racial fix*), que se refiere a la idea de que la raza y el racismo son mecanismos para sortear las barreras que ralentizan el engranaje de la producción. Sintetizando investigaciones de larga tradición y emergentes, se describen las tres dimensiones (espacial, política y cognitiva) que constituyen la solución racial. El propósito general de este artículo no es solo mostrar cómo la raza y el racismo sirven como bloques de construcción para la formación del Estado ambiental, sino también articular nuevos caminos teóricos para estudiar la relación entre la raza y el medio ambiente.