

# This Week's Citation Classic®

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Pettigrew T F. *A profile of the Negro American*. Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1964. 250 p.  
[Department of Social Relations, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA]

The research literature on black Americans is reviewed and analyzed within a social psychological perspective. The volume opens with analyzing reactions to oppression; considers the concept of race and black American health, intelligence, and crime; and closes with an interpretation of racial protests in the 1960s. [The *SSCI*® indicates that this book has been cited in over 275 publications since 1966.]

## Black Americans in the Liberating 1960s

Thomas F. Pettigrew  
Adlai E. Stevenson College  
University of California  
Santa Cruz, CA 95064

and  
Fakulteit der Psychologie  
Universiteit van Amsterdam  
Weesperplein 8  
1018 XA Amsterdam  
The Netherlands

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This volume was written at Harvard University during the hot summer of 1963 when the Civil Rights Movement dominated the headlines. It began as a chapter for a more general work on American race relations. But when my mentor, Gordon Allport, read it in draft, he scribbled on the first page, "This is no chapter—it's a book!" Only then did I consider it as a book in itself and, with additional material, publish it the following year.

*Profile* summarizes what was then known in social science about black Americans. Most citations refer to two of the book's organizing ideas. The *racial role* concept is introduced to help explain how oppressed group status translates into psychological status. And a new application is made of the concept of *relative deprivation*—the importance of group comparisons relative to a referent group. With survey evidence that

blacks had begun to use whites as direct comparisons, the volume advanced a relative deprivation explanation for why black Americans had, after three long centuries of slavery and segregation, finally mounted a drive for change in the 1960s.

Though often favorably reviewed as an analysis in the environmental tradition, it does allow for environmental-genetic interaction. Such an emphasis already dominated biological thinking, but it had not then fully diffused into social science.

The honors that have flowed from the book and its substantial sales and citations have both pleased and surprised me. Certainly, its timeliness helped. Soon after its publication, a social science book club adopted it and gave it wide circulation. Then, as new courses on black Americans were belatedly started on American campuses, *Profile* became widely assigned as a supplementary text.

I take particular satisfaction in the fact that the book has been popular on predominantly black campuses. Several cohorts of black college students have read the volume and have often mistaken me for a black American. Indeed, I have accepted numerous invitations to speak on black campuses, and sometimes I surprise audiences when they discover that I am a Southern-born and -reared white American.

The race relations research literature is vastly larger today, perhaps four times larger. Neither I nor anyone else has recently faced the daunting task of assembling it in the manner *Profile* did a generation ago. I plan an entirely new volume in the 1990s, and I have written interpretations of recent black American changes.<sup>1,2</sup>

My recent attention has centered on searching for universals in intergroup conflict, especially the European treatment of minorities. This work has impressed on me the uniqueness of the black American situation. Unlike many of the world's minorities who are recent arrivals, black Americans are deeply established and seen as "belonging." This uniqueness will be a focal point of my revision.

1. Pettigrew T F. New black-white patterns: how best to conceptualize them? *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 11:329-46, 1985.  
2. ———. New patterns of racism: the different worlds of 1984 and 1964. *Rutgers Law Rev.* 37:673-706, 1985.

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