Fighting for the Future

The Politics of Socialization in a Racially Diverse America

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Manuscript draft, January 2026

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Growing on for good or evil,
Sunshine streamed or darkness hurled;
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

– William Ross Wallace, 1865
Selection from The Hand That Rocks the Cradle

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KIDS AS POLITICAL POSSIBILITY

On election morning in November 2024, Dr. Becky Kennedy sent an email to her many followers. The podcaster, internet influencer, and best-selling author, dubbed the "Millennial Parenting Whisperer" by *Time Magazine* boasted a digital reach of at least 5 million Americans (Shafrir 2021). Her email was titled "Our kids will one day define the future" and she had a message for parents on election day:

> In moments when social media gets loud, and things feel heavy, let's lean on this important truth: what you're doing at home matters. You are raising the next generation. In a few years, our kids will be the ones making decisions, running for leadership, and shaping our society's culture... We're raising the kids who will define the future of our country and world. Let's do it.[1]

Dr. Becky's mailing list isn't designed for party activists or protesters, just tired parents. And hosting sites don't categorize her podcast as political. Yet, amid advice on smoothing bedtime routines and stopping tantrums, Dr. Becky advanced an idea about how we can change the world—one shared by Aristotle.

In *On Politics*, the Greek thinker considers how to fashion an ideal state. His treatise, comprised of eight books, opens and closes with the topic of families and childrearing. Children are "future partners in the constitution," Aristotle tells us, and if we wish them to be virtuous citizens—the kinds of citizens who govern wisely—then we must raise them and arrange our state's institutions with these goals in mind (Aristotle 1.13, 35). Parents have a special role in shaping these future citizens, but public schools are part of the process too. Together, these childrearing institutions can remake the world through shaping impressionable children in desirable directions.

Aristotle and Dr. Becky are joined in this sentiment by W.E.B. Du Bois who wrote that children can be a "healing balm" for the nation if they are infused through frank education with "the impulse to do good" (Du Bois 1920, 204). And by Susan Moller Okin (1989, 18), who in her pioneering work on gender politics argued, "The family... is a crucial place for early moral development and for the formation of

1 https://www.linkedin.com/posts/drbecky_in-moments-when-social-media-gets-loud-and-activity-7259663905868627968-FwVL

our basic attitudes to others. It is, potentially, a place where we can learn to be just."

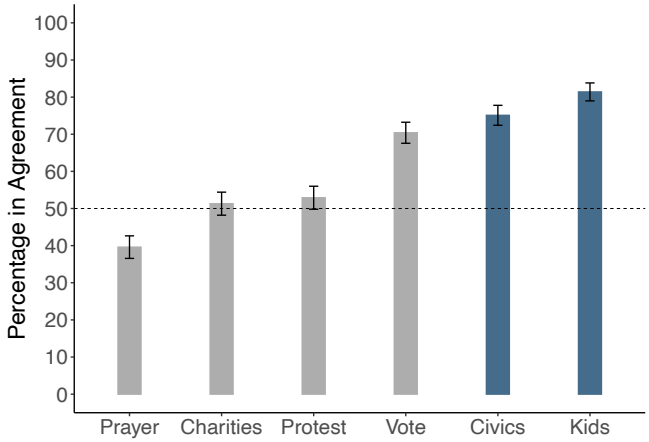
All these writers, from Dr. Becky to Du Bois, argue that political change does not just happen in the streets or statehouse but also, in the privacy of our homes. Children are influenced by adults who care for them, and so, how we raise them can shape future political orders.

Political scientists have long suspected that early experiences in childhood can shape later political attitudes, a field of study known as *political socialization* (Almond and Verba 1963; Campbell et al. 1960; Hess and Torney 1967; Easton and Dennis 1969). Traditionally, researchers working in this area take the attitudes of parents, or other childrearers, and test how related they are to those of their children (Jennings and Niemi 1968, 1974). If attitudes look similar, we declare social transmission has occurred. This replication of attitudes is the benchmark for socialization, where we treat the political preferences of socializing agents as the independent variable—the thing doing the explaining.

This formulation cares little about where parents' attitudes about socialization come from. The positions of socializing agents are treated as static or even, apolitical (but see Orren and Peterson 1967). How parents understand their role as socializer or what they actually do within a household to influence their children is rarely studied. Early work on Black socialization theorized that Black adults, specifically, would have political goals for the socialization of Black children (McLemore 1975; Walton 1985), but this idea did not take root in the broader study of political socialization. Writing more than three decades ago, Pamela Johnston Conover (1991) argued that the discipline had largely ignored the *politics in* socialization. Despite this call, twenty years later Laura Stoker and Jackie Bass (2011, 464) could still write: "Despite the attention that has been given to preadult socialization, we still have an impoverished view of the socialization practices of families, and of how what is happening within the family relates to what is happening outside of it." Scholars have advanced in documenting the political attitude development of individuals, but overlooked how the process of socialization itself might be contested or undertaken with particular political goals in mind.

Dr. Becky and Aristotle, though, seem to suggest we should think about parenting future citizens as, well, a little more political. Both advance a theory of change—an avenue through which concerned citizens might try to make the world a better place. Children are malleable, they argue, and can be influenced by the social forces around them. If we want kids to be a certain kind of citizen when they grow up, if we want the world to be different than it is now, then we might start with our kids. And if we don't have access to kids ourselves, we might target the people who do or other people's children.

Figure 1: Ways to Solve the Nation's Problems

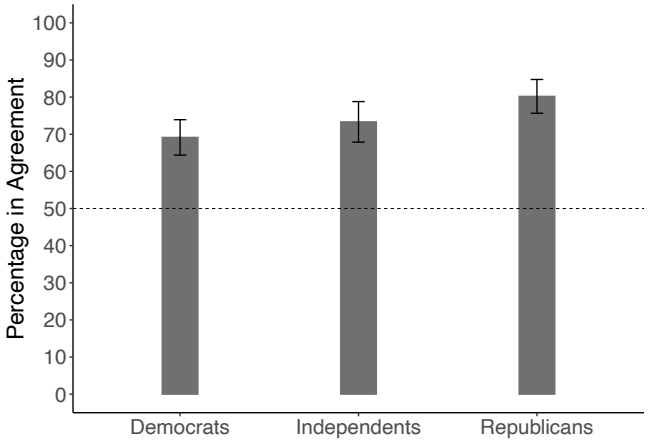


Notes: From 2022 Cooperative Election Study. Question asked: "There are many issues and problems facing our nation right now, and many ways people might try to fix these problems. Tell us how much you agree or disagree with each statement about how to fix these problems." Estimates report the proportion of respondents who either "somewhat" or "strongly agree" with the statement. 95% confidence intervals reported in bars around point estimates. The order of items was randomized. Dotted line indicates 50% so bars above this line show a majority of the sample says a particular item is a way to fix the nation's problems.

Survey data from 2022 suggest that most people agree with Dr. Becky and Aristotle—they think kids are a great way to pursue political change. We asked a nationally representative sample of Americans about different ways to fix the nation's problems. Can we fix our nation's problems through voting? Or peaceful protest? How about supporting charities or prayer? What if we teach kids to be good people or improve civic education?

Figure 1 shows that out of all of these options, people are most likely to think that *kids* are the ideal way to solve our nation's problems. The plot displays the percentage of respondents who said they either somewhat or strongly agreed that a particular action can fix our nation's problems. As political scientists, we often look to behaviors like voting and protesting—two classic forms of civic participation thought to shape the political world. In the minds of the American public, both make a strong showing: about half of Americans either strongly or somewhat agree that protest will fix the country's problems and 70% think voting is an avenue for change. Prayer (40%) and charity (51%) too have a role in solving things. But the most commonly endorsed ways to fix problems in America are the two items tied to socializing children: 81% believe that teaching kids to be good people is a way to change the direction of America and 75% report that civic education is a means to do so.

Figure 2: Partisans and Independents Agree That Children are the Future



Notes: From 2023 Cooperative Election Study. Question asked: "To what degree do you agree with the statement: The person who controls the children controls the future." The plots indicate the proportion of respondents who at least somewhat agreed with the statement. 95% confidence intervals reported in bars around point estimates. Dotted line indicates 50% so bars above this line show majorities of the subgroups agree with the statement.

This idea—that kids are an avenue to a different political future—is widely shared across the political spectrum. We asked another nationally representative sample of adults how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "the person who controls the children controls the future." In a time when Republicans and Democrats seem deeply divided on most subjects, including how they approach their daily lives (Hetherington, Engelhardt and Weiler n.d.), Figure 2 shows Americans across the spectrum see the socialization of children as an avenue for political change. In the full sample, nearly three-quarters of Americans agree with this statement. This pattern holds across party, with a large majority of Democrats (69%), Republicans (80%), and independents (74%) saying that who influences kids now holds the key to the nation's future.

In this book, we are going to make a simple argument: people believe that what children learn when they are young matters, and because it matters, they contest it in the political sphere. We show that rather than passive players, many parents have political goals for their children and an intention to transmit particular political ideas. These goals are influenced by political events and entrepreneurs who, too, see children as an avenue for pursuing social change. Parents respond to the broader political environment as they introduce their children to politics, and people without young kids channel their beliefs about socialization into public school policy. As a result, the opinions and preferences of adults that are usually treated as the independent variable in the socializing process are themselves, sometimes, a dependent

variable. We call this process *politicized socialization*, or the way that elites, social movement leaders, and everyday citizens try to capture and control what kids learn about politics as a way of shaping the future of the nation.

Race in the United States is a central social, economic, and political cleavage and so, we take it as our case. We show that through time and in the contemporary era, activists, party leaders, social movement strategists, and talking heads incorporate childrearing into their strategy of social change. Parents respond to changes in the information environment around issues of race and channel their goals into updated socializing behaviors. Attitudes toward public school and curricular policies also change in moments of political disruption. Further, using unique samples of kids and parents that cross racial groups, we peer inside the black box of socialization to show what parents do and what their kids pick up about race. Collectively, we argue that politicized socialization is one of the ways that Americans *do politics* and that it has always been a *central strategy of race making* in the United States.

POLITICAL VS. POLITICIZED SOCIALIZATION

A foundational question in democratic theory asks how everyday people attempt to shape the political future of their nation. Typically, scholars look to behaviors like voting in elections, attending a protest, and giving to campaigns to explore this question. These acts are labeled *political participation* because they have the "intent or effect of influencing government action" (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, 38). By shaping who gets elected, the policy preferences of the public, or incentives representatives have to pursue certain kinds of policies, actions like these can impact the direction of a nation (Enos, Kaufman and Sands 2019; Gause 2022; Gillion 2013; Hill and Leighley 1992).

And yet, they are also incredibly rare. The year 2020, for instance, was characterized by widespread protest activity in the United States, but empirical work suggests that at its height, only about 10% of U.S. adults took to the streets (Buchanan, Bui and Patel 2020). Local elections can boast turnout rates in the single digits (Anzia 2014) and according to Open Secrets, just over 1% of the U.S. population donated more than three-quarters of campaign donations in 2023–2024. Even for the most common form of political participation—voting in national elections—only one-half to two-thirds of eligible voters turn out (Fraga 2018; Leighley and Nagler 2013).

Are Americans just that apathetic? Are they satisfied with the status quo? Or, maybe, they are trying to affect the political world through avenues political scientists do not yet acknowledge or understand.

Childrearing, we think, presents another kind of domain where Americans express their politics with the goal of shaping government

and society. In shaping children's exposure to political ideas, Americans believe they have an opportunity to affect the political future of the country beyond what they might be able to achieve in the immediate to near-term through their own traditional political participation. If kids are malleable, if what they learn in childhood sticks with them into adulthood, and if they will eventually become full-fledged members of society, then controlling what kids learn about politics now is a way to change the future. We call this idea the *kids are the future folk wisdom.*

The idea that parents lay the foundation of their children's future political attitudes has a long history. In the mid-twentieth century, alongside the rise of survey research, political scientists began to ask: where do people's political preferences come from? Pioneering work by scholars like Hyman (1959), Hess and Torney (1967), Easton and Dennis (1969), and Jennings and Niemi (1968) suggested that the process of acquiring political identities and attitudes begins long before a person is old enough to cast a ballot. Rather, experiences in childhood, including through discussion with family, interactions with the state, and political learning in schools, shape how we see ourselves and our society with lasting impacts on political choice (Jennings and Niemi 1981).

Over time, scholars have refined our understanding of political socialization and how it works. We know, for instance, that weakly held policy beliefs are not transmitted to the same degree as core outlooks like partisanship (Jennings and Niemi 1968; cf. Iyengar, Konitzer and Tedin 2018). We know that certain factors, like parenting style and parent-child closeness, can increase or decrease the likelihood that children will adopt their parents' attitudes (Dinas 2014; Jennings, Stoker and Bowers 2009; Ojeda and Hatemi 2015; Tedin 1974; Westholm 1999). We've found that genes, masquerading as social influence, can have an independent effect on political orientations, suggesting that kids might not be so malleable after all (Alford, Funk and Hibbing 2005; Hatemi, Alford, Hibbing, Martin and Eaves 2009; Hatemi, Funk, Medland, Maes, Silberg, Martin and Eaves 2009; Kleppestø et al. 2019; Settle, Dawes and Fowler 2009) And, we've learned that the relationship between parents' and children's attitudes tends to degrade over time (Jennings and Niemi 1981).

As social scientists, we have reason to believe that socialization is not a process of total control. Rather, children are agents themselves with personalities, the ability to influence others including their parents, and a whole life course to tumble through (Carlos 2021; Dahlgaard 2018; Gash and Tichenor 2022; Margolis 2018; Pedraza and Perry 2019; Wong and Tseng 2008).

And yet, as we'll show, many Americans—in fact, most Americans—endorse the tenets of the kids are the future folk wisdom. They think kids respond to and are shaped by social influences. They believe that

these influences stick with them into adulthood. They see parents as the most important factor shaping children—although schools are not far behind in their estimation. And they agree with Dr. Becky that "we're raising the kids who will define the future of our country and world."

Given this, Americans across the political spectrum pursue opportunities to make their children, and American children more generally, reflect their political goals. Whereas political socialization helps us understand how children become political agents, *politicized socialization* explores the contestation over how children are introduced to politics and the conditions under which their caretakers respond to new ideas.

The kids are the future folk wisdom is widespread, we argue, but *what* kids should learn about politics or the values they should be socialized into are not. Rather, because people think that kids are malleable *and* because they have different visions for what makes an ideal political future, childrearing is contested. Political entrepreneurs put forward competing visions of what the world should look like and within these political projects, child socialization is a tool for achieving them.

One important kind of political entrepreneur we'll consider in this book are social movement actors. Social movement tactics are often embraced by minorities or historically disenfranchised groups excluded from self-governance (Anoll 2018; Gause 2022; Gillion 2013; Harris and Gillion 2010). Without (equal) access to pre-set institutional channels for change, these actors instead turn to extra- or non-institutional forms of participation like marches, civil disobedience, press conferences, boycotts, and sit-ins (Amenta et al. 2010; Snow, Soule and Kriesi 2008). Through these actions, social movements introduce new frames and information into the political system, draw attention to problems, and provide solutions (Benford and Snow 2000). As we'll show, social movements also embrace socialization as one of their tactics, seeking and creating cultural change (Amenta and Poletta 2019).

But any given social movement does not exist in isolation. Rather, movements are part of an ongoing, complex political system with push-and-pull, pressure and response (Omi and Winant 2015; Parker and Barreto 2013; Wasow 2020; Weaver 2007). Movements spawn counter-movements. And progress on one political project is almost always met with objections from those who liked and benefited from the status quo. This contestation, reformulation, and repurposing of ideas *is politics* (King and Smith 2005; Kingdon 1984), and at its center, time and again, we'll show, are questions about how to socialize kids. People seek a world that aligns with their goals. Kids are a means to pursue those goals.

This contestation over childrearing has important political implications. First, it exposes a new place that politics happens. Traditionally, childrearing has been thought of as part of the private sphere—a place

governed by powers separate from those of the state and where work not counted as labor was done by women (Okin 1989). We expose the public and political components of childrearing and detail a logic that explains why political actors care about and target this space. Seeing childrearing as political helps to understand important moments in U.S. history, including the Civil Rights Movement's focus on desegregating public education, and recent "anti-critical race theory" campaigns.

Second, examining politicized socialization teaches us about how people do politics in their everyday lives. Generally, political scientists think of behaviors like voting in elections, attending a protest, and giving to political campaigns as ways to engage. We reveal a new way that the American public tries to influence government action: through raising children to be certain kinds of citizens. Bedtime stories, dinner conversations, and choices about where to send children to school are all intimately political acts; they often have political intentions, and they too might have political ramifications.

Third, considering politicized socialization allows us to see another avenue through which social movements can influence the political sphere well beyond their immediate effects. Social movement scholars often focus on four indicators of movement impact: mobilization of supporters, biographical effects, policy change, and cultural impacts (Amenta et al. 2010; Anoll, Israel-Trummel and Engelhardt N.d.; Shuman et al. 2023). We introduce a new kind of cultural impact with the potential for eventual substantive policy effects: changing how children are introduced to the political world. If indeed childrearing is contested in the push-pull of movement and countermovement forces, then the full effects of activist organizing may not manifest in this generation, but the next.

WHY RACE?

Our theory of politicized socialization is broad and there are likely many topics that children learn that are contested in the public sphere. Still, our primary interest in this book is race socialization.

Race is a central cleavage in American politics, dating back prior to the founding of the nation (Fraga and Segura 2006). We fought our only civil war over the topic and throughout time, race predominates class, gender, or other social categories in organizing social movements. Today, race continues to predict policy attitudes, participation, partisanship, and electability (Hutchings 2009; Tesler and Sears 2010; Valentino, Hutchings and White 2002; Westwood and Peterson 2022).

Although race objectively matters for a wide range of political experiences, it is itself a constructed concept (Davis 1991; Haney López 2006; Omi and Winant 2015; Sen and Wasow 2016). Racial categories have changed over time in the United States, with their boundaries

fluid and flexible, and they respond to human institutions (Davenport 2018; Deaux 2018; Haney López 2006; Prewitt 2013; Williams 2006). Rather than "originating in nature, genes, or the body," we see race as reflecting "the role of power and human interests in creating a system of human differentiation that need not have existed" (Roth, van Stee and Regla-Vargas 2023, 42). As a result, throughout this book, we rely on self-reported race from survey participants as our main measure of racial category.

The very fact that race is subject to social construction makes it contentious. The American Civil War erupted over the question of slavery—a system that could only be maintained with a particular racial ideology (Hirschman 2004). Issues of race have consistently divided political elites in the United States, even as the particular policies at stake—slavery, segregation, affirmative action, etc.—have changed. Regardless of the policy specifics or the very real differences across time and context, these fights over race are always about the arrangement of social groups and the maintenance or dismantling of racial hierarchy (King and Smith 2014; Omi and Winant 2015).

Beliefs about what race is and how it maps onto categories of inclusion or exclusion are what Omi and Winant (2015) refer to as a *racial project*. Racial projects are,

> ...simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines (Omi and Winant 2015, 125).

That is, racial projects put forward competing ideas about how to sort people and, given that, define what each group deserves.

Alternative racial projects are often in conversation with each other and change over time. King and Smith (2014) explain how racial projects evolve and argue that at *critical ideation junctions* a particular racial project can come to dominate how policy issues are understood, taking the upper-hand in the ideological discourse. Through reformulating and repurposing old ideas, and using cultural images to symbolize core concepts, racial projects can influence policy making and the attitudes of everyday Americans.[2]

2 It's important to note here that, in the current political environment, racial projects are tightly tied to party (Smith and King 2024). Since the 1970s, the American political parties have realigned themselves and polarized on economic, racial and social issues (Campbell, Layman and Green 2021; Layman et al. 2006; Schickler 2016; Wolbrecht 2000). Increasingly, Democrats hold liberal racial attitudes while Republicans hold more conservative ones (Chudy 2021; Engelhardt 2021*b*). Further, segregation between Democrats and Republicans is increasing, affective polarization has emerged, and consumption of news already consistent with one's underlying attitudes is the new norm (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Brown and Enos 2021; Cho, Gimpel and Hu 2013; Garimella et al. 2021; Iyengar et al. 2019; Lang and Pearson-Merkowitz 2015;

We expect that political entrepreneurs seeking to cement one racial project or another may turn to political socialization—through parents, through schools—as a means to do so. If people believe that kids are the future and that their racial attitudes are set when they are young, then social movements and other actors involved in the struggle to advance their racial project may incorporate kids' education into their broader toolkit of social activism. Indeed, we show that at many previous critical ideation junctions in American racial history, socialization has been part of the project.

Outside of political science, scholars have argued for some time that parents of color deliberately engage in socialization strategies to counter exclusionary and discriminatory racial systems (Christophe et al. 2022; Collins 1990; Hughes et al. 2006; Lesane-Brown 2006). In response to experiences of discrimination, or to buoy their children against racial oppression, parents practice both *protective* techniques to navigate racism and *proactive* techniques centered around building positive racial identities through family, culture, and religion (Hughes et al. 2006; Lesane-Brown 2006; Stevenson 1994; Walton 1985). While this research originally focused on Black families, it has since expanded to examine socialization among other non-White citizens whose children may be similarly harmed by socialization from majority-White society (Ayón 2016; Ayón, Nieri and Ruano 2020; Ayón, Ojeda and Ruano 2018; Hughes and Chen 1997; Juang et al. 2018; Nieri, Yoo and Tam 2024). These efforts by parents are important: there's evidence they can lessen the negative effects of racist interactions, increase self-efficacy, and even bolster success in school (Constantine and Blackmon 2002; Lesane-Brown 2006; Sellers, Chavous and Cooke 1998; Stevenson and Arrington 2009).

To date, this work on race socialization has largely focused on non-White families but in recent years, a small literature has begun to explore how White families introduce their kids to racial politics. This work suggests that White families, on average, talk less about race (Sullivan, Eberhardt and Roberts 2021) and that when parents do broach the subject, their choices often reinforce existing racial hierarchy and social arrangements (Abaied and Perry 2021; Bonilla-Silva 2014; Hagerman 2018; Underhill 2018). In their position atop the American racial hierarchy, White parents are afforded the privilege of being race-mute (Flagg 1997; Pratto and Stewart 2012). As a result, events in the news or social movement activity might be especially important for shaping the socializing activities of White people compared to people of color, for whom everyday experiences with discrimination push race into family discussion.

Peterson, Goel and Iyengar 2021). This means that partisanship is an increasingly important part of attitude formation (Barber and Pope 2019; Gadarian, Goodman and Pepinsky 2022; Highton and Kam 2011; Lenz 2012)—a point we'll come back to throughout the book.

While race is chronically salient in U.S. politics, contextual disruptions can draw attention to certain racial cleavages among the mass public, or create political openings for marginalized groups to challenge the current order (Amenta et al. 2010; Kingdon 1984; McAdam 1999). Economic unrest, war, and demographic change, for instance, have a way of shifting the political opportunity structure (Kriesi 2008; McAdam 1999). During these "unsettled times," people are particularly prone to seek new ways of being and adopt alternative ideologies or values (Swidler 1986). *Contextual disruptions*, as we'll call them, may bring increased focus to race in the United States and along with it, to race socialization.

The United States has faced a number of these contextual disruptions in recent years. The nation has undergone rapid demographic change that is drawing attention to race in new ways and reformulating groups (Craig and Richeson 2014; Davenport 2018; Waters and Jiménez 2005). The COVID-19 pandemic swept the world, closing schools, daycares, and workplaces while producing racialized patterns in fatalities (Hill and Artiga 2022). These events laid the foundations for widespread protest in the Summer 2020 under the banner, Black Lives Matter (Buchanan, Bui and Patel 2020). Together, the national attention to issues of race coupled with increasing time spent between parents and children opened an opportunity window that amplified race socialization as a movement tactic. We show that in this moment, racial projects included ideas about how to teach kids about race and that parents and school policy responded to these conditions.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

Our goal in this book is threefold. First, we will show that political entrepreneurs, including social movement actors, target socialization and childrearing as part of their strategy for political change. This happens in the private sphere of the home and the public sphere of schools. Second, we establish that everyday Americans, motivated by the kids are the future folk wisdom, have political goals for childrearing and that these goals are influenced by the political environment. Third, we show that the choices and actions parents make to introduce children to racial politics are consequential. That is, kids pick it up. Collectively, we call this process *politicized socialization*. In Chapter 2, we introduce a theory about how these three elements—elites, socializing agents, and kids—are related.

Then, we turn to the first of our goals: the rhetoric and actions of political entrepreneurs. In Part I of the book, we demonstrate that the kids are the future folk wisdom motivates choices about political change and political strategy across time and case. We show its influence in Western political thought, its emergence at critical ideation junctions on race (Chapter 3), and how it manifests in the contem-

porary period (Chapter 4). We consider, for instance, government documents motivating the establishment of Indian boarding schools and analyze cable news television transcripts to show the frequency of the kids are the future folk wisdom in discussions on race from both the political right and the left.

In Part II of the book, we consider the actions of socializing agents as they engage with children. We trace the contours of the kids are the future folk wisdom in public opinion, showing that it is pervasive and generally shared across partisanship, parental status, and racial group (Chapter 5). Parents who most strongly embrace the folk wisdom are also more likely to engage in intentional political socialization with their kids. Further, we show parents don't always want to make their kids into carbon copies of themselves. Rather, the kids are the future folk wisdom produces polarization on partisanship and racial attitudes as some parents desire their children to be more extreme versions of themselves.

Next, we demonstrate that the political environment can shift the race socialization choices of parents (Chapter 6). We use the specific case of White parents' behavior following the Summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. We show that in response to a changing information environment, an estimated 15.9 million White parents reported engaging in a *new* socializing behavior consistent with Black Lives Matter goals. This included taking children to protests, buying a book or toy for their child related to race/racism, and having conversations about racial inequality in America. As a way of validating these self-reports, we show changes in consumer behavior in young adult and children's picture books and also consider whether these actions persisted over time.

Childrearing at home is one way Americans think we can shape kids' future political beliefs, but it is not the only way. In Chapter 7, we consider the "other" socializer—public schools. We examine changes in legislation centered on race before and after George Floyd's murder in May 2020 and explore broader public sentiment toward curricula in schools. In an experiment, we show how these attitudes are responsive to social movement cues and messages: beliefs about what children should be taught in the public sphere are shaped by political forces.

The first and second part of the book focus on adults, examining how political entrepreneurs and everyday people respond to the political environment and infuse childrearing with political goals. But one might wonder—*does* any of this matter? Are children in fact malleable and influenced by the race socializing choices of their parents?

In Chapter 8, we introduce the Political Attitudes Dyad Study (PADS), a survey of 500 parents and their teenage children, with an oversample of Black parents. We explore the relationship between children's racial attitudes and their parents' using a number of mea-

sures: racial feeling thermometers, racial resentment, racial policy attitudes, and an original battery of situational behaviors with implications for racial politics. We find that compared to Jennings and Niemi (1968), the congruence between parents' and teens' racial attitudes is substantial. Children look more like their parents in terms of racial attitudes than ever before.

Throughout our book, we use a wide range of data to support our claims. Table 1 documents and describes our fifteen data sources. These include posts on public Facebook parenting pages, bills introduced in statehouses on race education, information from the *New York Times* Bestseller lists, unique cross-sectional surveys of American parents, data that oversamples racial minorities, and even data documenting the attitudes 14-17 year old children. Our book is mixed-methods, asking questions first and then determining the data and approach best suited to answer the question.

With this plethora of data in hand, we think it's clear that socialization around race is political: it is shaped by political events, it is contested in the political sphere, and it is a regular feature of American political strategy. Political theorists, ideologues, and everyday Americans see the child as a site to seed new political orders. As a result, political elites often target child-rearing practices as part of their strategy for (resisting) political change, and parents respond by updating how they speak to and introduce their children to political topics. While past treatises on political socialization have imagined a process that is static or exogenous to politics itself, we show instead that parenting practices, school curriculum, and generally how children are introduced to the political world is heavily shaped by social movements, partisan polarization, and political elites' rhetoric.

In shaping children's exposure to political ideas, Americans believe they have an opportunity to affect the political future of the country. And to some degree, our data suggests they might be right. Parents' racial attitudes more closely predict those of their children's than they did half a century ago. And yet, in the push-pull of politics, of movements and counter-movements, change is slow. Progressive forces are always met with status quo-focused resistance. Still, what is clear is that in the arsenal of social change, the education of children is a means that Americans consider. After all, family is "the first school of social justice" (Okin 1989, 103).

Table 1: Dataset Descriptions and Location in Book

Name	Chap.	Description
2022 CES (Cooperative Election Study)	1	Original module within omnibus survey. Nationally representative opt-in sample (N=1,000). Fielded online September 29–November 8, 2022.
2023 CES	1, 7	Original module within omnibus survey. Nationally representative opt-in sample (N=1,000). Fielded online November 8–December 10, 2023
2024 CES	9	We use only the publicly available common content. Nationally representative opt-in sample (N=60,000). Fielded online October 1–November 4, 2024.
2016-2020-2024 ANES Panel	6	The American National Election Study is a national probability sample. The 2024 ANES included respondents who completed the 2016 and 2020 studies, who comprise the 2016-2020-2024 Panel. We analyze the subsample of White adults with children under 18 at home (n=435).
Youth-Parent Socialization Study	8	National probability sample of graduating class of 1965 (N=1,669) and their parents. Fielded in March 1965 by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center.
Parenting in Polarized Times Survey (PPTS)	5, 7	Original survey. Fielded by YouGov to an opt-in sample of 3,800 American adults to achieve a national sample with oversamples of Black and Latino Americans and parents (n=1,300 Black, n=1,200 Latino, n=1,300 White). Fielded online April 30–May 20, 2025.
Racial Parenting Survey (RPS) Wave 1	6	Original survey. Fielded via Lucid Marketplace to a quota sample Non-Hispanic White parents of White school-aged kids (N=1,083). Fielded online December 18–20, 2020.
RPS Wave 2	6, 9	Original survey. Fielded by YouGov to a fresh cross-section Non-Hispanic White parents of White kids (N=1,500). Fielded online June 23–July 7, 2021.
RPS Wave 3	6, 9	Fielded by YouGov to a fresh cross-section Non-Hispanic White parents of White kids (N=1,000). Fielded online December 16–December 27, 2021.
Political Attitudes Dyad Study (PADS)	8	Original survey. Fielded by YouGov to a nationally representative opt-in sample of parent-teen dyads (n=400) and an oversample of Black American parent-teen dyads (n=100). Fielded online December 7, 2023–January 03, 2024.
Curricular Experiment	7	Original survey. Fielded via Lucid Theorem to a diverse convenience sample of White Americans (N=1,232). Fielded March 11–13, 2022.
Cable News Transcripts	4	All transcripts of all shows tagged as either part of Fox News or MSNBC between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2022 on Nexis Uni.
Facebook Parenting Pages	4	Posts from CrowdTangle's list of popular U.S.-based parenting pages. Post data downloaded via CrowdTangle's now defunct platform. Posts cover three months before and after George Floyd's murder on May 25, 2020.
NYT Bestsellers Data	6	Collected from weekly lists of the top ten bestselling young adult hardcover and kid picture books. Data covers each week of 2020.
Race Education Legislation	7	Original dataset of proposed state legislation on the topic of education. We started from PEN America Foundation's collection of educational gag orders from 2021–2023. We used LegiScan to extend this data back in time and collect a complementary set of liberal education bills. The data covers racially conservative and liberal education bills from 2018 to 2023.