

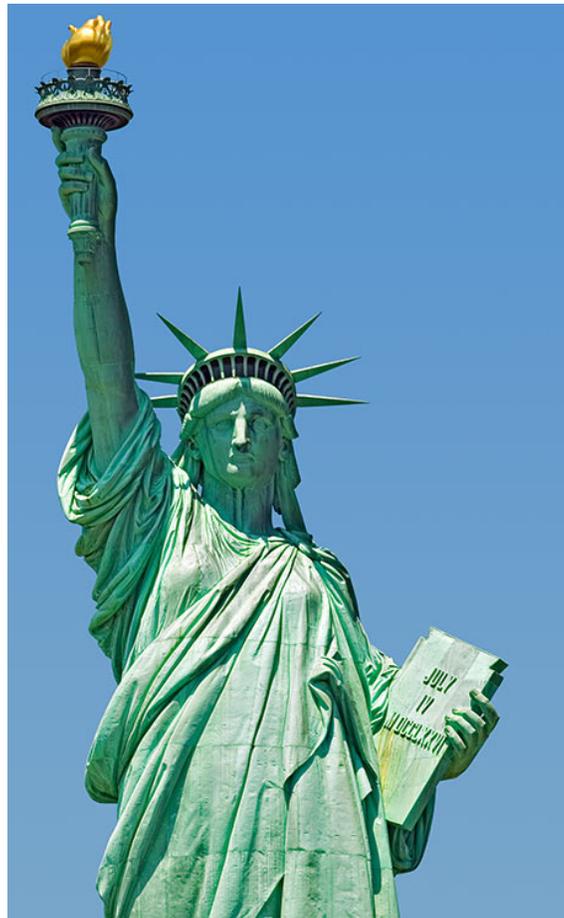


## Race and Diversity in America

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There is a new series of essays in *The New York Times Book Review* on “themes and currents of thought in particular areas of American life.” The essay on Sunday was “[Race and Diversity in the Age of Obama](#)” by Orlando Patterson, a sociology professor at Harvard. The essay makes several points that challenge conventional perceptions about immigration and race. For example, the foreign-born represent 12.6 percent of today’s total American population, which is less than the 14.6 percent reached in 1910. My guess is that many people assume that today’s percentage is much higher than during the last great wave of migration. Patterson also makes the point that “the present wave of immigrants and their children are rapidly assimilating into an ever-vibrant American mainstream culture, and at a pace greater than the Europeans who came during the



previously large wave.” In contrast, he points out that “[t]he great exception to this process of social incorporation is black Americans.” He points to two reasons: (1) black poverty (25% and three times the white rate, exactly as in 1970), and (2) “their chronic hyper-segregation, true not only of the great majority of poor blacks but of working-class and middle-class blacks as well.” According to Patterson, “In private life blacks are almost as isolated from whites today as they were under Jim Crow.” His conclusion is that race relations in American remains primarily a black-white issue, and one question is whether Barack Obama will be able to bring about meaningful improvement. The essay is worth reading and it ends with Patterson’s view of the crucial questions we are now facing when it comes to race.