

# African American, Hispanic, and White Beliefs about Black/White Inequality, 1977–2004

Matthew O. Hunt  
*Northeastern University*

*Do African Americans, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic whites differ in their explanations of the socioeconomic divide separating blacks and whites in the United States? Have such explanations changed over time? To answer these questions, I use data from the 1977 to 2004 General Social Surveys (GSS) to map race/ethnic differences in support for trends in, and the determinants of seven “modes of explanation” for blacks’ disadvantage. Trends over time indicate the continuation of a long-standing decline in non-Hispanic whites’ use of an ability-based (innate inferiority) explanation. Non-Hispanic whites’ beliefs in a purely motivational and a purely educational explanation are increasing, however, along with the view that none of the explanations offered in the GSS explain blacks’ disadvantage. African Americans and Hispanics also evidence increases in a purely motivational explanation, but they differ from non-Hispanic whites in demonstrating clear declines in structural beliefs—especially the perception that discrimination explains blacks’ lower socioeconomic status. These conservative shifts in blacks’ and Hispanics’ beliefs result in greater similarity with non-Hispanic whites over time. Notably, however, significant “static” race/ethnic group differences remain: non-Hispanic whites score highest, and blacks lowest, on a purely motivational explanation, while African Americans are more likely than both non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics to endorse a discrimination-based explanation. I conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for racial policy support.*

Just over 100 years ago, W.E.B. DuBois ([1903] 1993) made his classic statement that “the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line” (p. 5). Midway through that

---

Direct all correspondence to Matthew O. Hunt, Department of Sociology, Northeastern University, 500 Holmes Hall, Boston, MA 02115 (m.hunt@neu.edu). Earlier versions of this article were presented at meetings of the Eastern Sociological Society, American Association for Public Opinion Research, and American Sociological Association; I thank participants and audience members at those sessions for their feedback. I am grateful to David Brady, Jeremy Freese, Brian Powell, Jason Schnittker, Lauren Wise, and the *ASR* editors and reviewers for many helpful comments and suggestions. I am particularly indebted to Larry Hunt for his cogent advice on data coding, and for his critical feedback on prior versions of this article.

same century, Myrdal (1944) again focused America’s attention on the problem of persistent black disadvantage and the dilemma it poses for a nation founded on democratic principles. Still more recently, the best social scientific evidence of the last two decades continues to document African Americans’ disadvantage in areas such as jobs, education, income, assets, and health (Conley 1999; Farley and Allen 1987; Hughes and Thomas 1998; Oliver and Shapiro 1995). Recent research also documents clear social divisions in Americans’ beliefs about the causes of these racially-structured disparities (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Jackman 1994; Kluegel 1990), as well as in support for public policies designed to ameliorate such inequalities (Gilens 1999; Kluegel and Bobo 1993; Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 1999). Among the most powerful social cleavages shaping public opinion and political behavior is the black/white racial

divide, as documented by research on voter choice, partisan affiliation, political participation, and public policy views (Manza and Brooks 1999).

Following trends of increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the United States—particularly the growth of the Hispanic and Asian populations (Pedraza and Rumbaut 1996)—researchers are paying increasing attention to formerly neglected race/ethnic groups in studies of sociopolitical attitudes.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, building on work that explores black/white differences in beliefs about inequalities (Jackman 1994; Kluegel and Smith 1986) and racial attitudes (Schuman et al. 1997; Sigelman and Welch 1991), scholars are moving beyond the black/white dichotomy. Studies over the last 15 years include analyses of Hispanics (de la Garza et al. 1992; Jones-Correa 1998; Skerry 1993; Welch and Sigelman 1993) and Asians (Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Park 1995; Weitzer 1997), as well as comparisons of three or more race/ethnic groups on issues such as beliefs about the causes of poverty (Hughes and Tuch 1999; Hunt 1996) and mental illness (Schnittker, Freese, and Powell 2000), attitudes toward the funding of higher education (Steelman and Powell 1993) and residential integration (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996), and the operation of prejudice in a multiethnic context (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Oliver and Wong 2003).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> However, many studies continue to focus on non-Hispanic whites, a fact lamented by Bobo (2000) who writes that recent racial attitudes research has “thoroughly marginalized the opinions of African Americans and other racial minorities” having “unfortunate consequences for theory development and for the capacity of public opinion analysis to make useful contributions to the larger public discourse” (pp. 138–39).

<sup>2</sup> Such research has also uncovered race/ethnic differences in the determinants of beliefs and attitudes. Hunt and colleagues (2000) criticize much past social psychological work as “colorblind” in its neglect of issues of race and ethnicity in light of (1) the central attention paid to race by other subfields of sociology, (2) increasing attention to the relevance of other structural features of societies for social psychological processes (e.g., gender and cross-national differences), and (3) trends toward increasing race/ethnic diversity in the United States generally.

Regarding explanations of blacks’ disadvantage, research has fruitfully mapped trends in whites’ beliefs (Kluegel 1990), links between whites’ racial attitudes and policy preferences (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Gilens 1999; Kluegel and Bobo 1993), and basic patterns of black/white belief differences (Jackman 1994; Schuman et al. 1997; Sigelman and Welch 1991). Little work, however, has incorporated the beliefs of Hispanics, despite the rapid growth of this population and its distinctiveness from non-Hispanic whites (and to a lesser extent African Americans) on beliefs regarding poverty (Hughes and Tuch 1999; Hunt 1996). To address this gap in knowledge of beliefs about blacks’ disadvantage, and to add to a growing body of multiethnic studies on sociopolitical attitudes, I use data from the 1977 to 2004 General Social Surveys to pursue two main goals: First, I update our knowledge of non-Hispanic whites’ beliefs about the black/white socioeconomic status gap (hereafter B/W SES gap) for the 1990s and early 2000s, analyzing whether earlier observed trends have continued and whether any new trends have emerged. Second, I incorporate African Americans’ and Hispanics’ views into our understanding of these issues. Analyses compare these important minority groups with non-Hispanic whites (and with one another) on beliefs about why African Americans, compared with whites, continue to be relatively disadvantaged in areas such as housing, income, and jobs.<sup>3</sup>

## BACKGROUND

### *BELIEFS AND BELIEF TRENDS*

Most research on explanations for inequality makes a general distinction between beliefs that

<sup>3</sup> For convenience, I use the terms “race” and “race/ethnic” interchangeably, while recognizing that race and ethnicity can be viewed as either distinct or overlapping bases of identification (Cornell and Hartmann 1997). Further, I refer to non-Hispanic whites either with that term or as “whites,” and I refer to non-Hispanic blacks as either “blacks” or “African Americans.” Finally, I use the term “Hispanic” to describe persons who trace their ancestry to various parts of the Spanish-speaking world, while recognizing that this grouping contains significant racial and ethnic diversity.

locate the reasons for inequality in (1) the personal attributes of individuals or (2) features of the broader social structure (Kluegel and Smith 1986). For their part, whites have been decidedly individualistic (or person-centered) in their explanations of the B/W SES gap (Jackman 1994; Kluegel 1990; Schuman et al. 1997). In the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, a “substantial majority believed that blacks’ lower SES was due all or in part to a lack of will or effort to achieve” (Kluegel 1990:512). “Structural” explanations attributing the racial gap in SES to historical or institutional causes, such as discrimination and/or lack of educational opportunities, were less popular. These patterns are consistent with our knowledge from national studies of whites’ beliefs about other inequalities—such as wealth and poverty (Feagin 1975; Kluegel and Smith 1986)—that generally reveal the dominance of an ideology of individualism alongside less popular “system challenging” structuralist beliefs (Kluegel and Smith 1986).

Past research on beliefs about blacks’ disadvantage, however, goes a step further by differentiating between two types of person-centered explanations. So-called “traditional individualism” (which I refer to as traditional racism), involves a “belief in the innate or genetic inferiority of blacks” (Kluegel 1990:512)—a notion central to prevailing definitions of racial prejudice (Pettigrew 1982) and old-fashioned racism (Hughes 1997).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, “motivational individualism” attributes the B/W SES gap to “a lack of will or effort on the part of blacks *without an accompanying belief in innate inferiority*” (Kluegel 1990:513, emphasis added). Research on whites over the last few decades documents a decline in traditional racism (Schuman et al. 1997), without any corresponding decline in motivational individualism nor any substantial increase in structural attributions.

<sup>4</sup> I contend that traditional racism is a better term than traditional individualism for this “genetic” (Apostle et al. 1983) attribution, as the referent—lack of ability—is beyond the control of the individual. As such, this ability-based account is better understood as deterministic rather than individualistic, given the clear voluntaristic component of common usages of the latter.

The continued popularity of culturally-based explanations of African Americans’ disadvantage (e.g., motivational individualism) is attributable, at least in part, to the fact that many whites now perceive themselves to be unprejudiced and believe that barriers to opportunities for blacks have been dismantled (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Kluegel 1990). It might make sense, then, that there are clear links between motivational individualism and opposition to welfare-state initiatives such as the former AFDC (Gilens 1999) and various race-targeted policies (Kluegel 1990; Krysan 2000). Gilens (1999), for instance, demonstrates that Americans’ opposition to “welfare” programs is rooted in negative racial stereotypes (specifically, the perception of blacks as lazy and unmotivated) and a misperception that the bulk of welfare’s beneficiaries are African American.

Research also documents the converse, specifically that structural attributions (especially discrimination): (1) represent the strongest attitudinal determinant of race-targeted policy support (Kluegel 1990), and (2) are necessary for such policy support (i.e., the absence of traditional racism and/or motivational individualism alone is insufficient). Thus, the lack of increase in structuralist belief in the 1970s and 1980s (Kluegel 1990) is fundamental to the so-called “principles/implementation” gap among whites. Here, the support for racial equality in principle exists alongside widespread opposition to policies designed to ameliorate racial inequalities (Krysan 2000; Schuman et al. 1997).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Whites’ opposition to race-targeted government policies has been explained by several theoretical approaches (Krysan 2000). The symbolic racism perspective (Sears 1988) emphasizes racial resentment and anti-black prejudice—believed to be increasingly expressed in motivational terms because of the social undesirability of traditional racism. A set of realistic group conflict theories (Bobo 1993) emphasizes issues of power, material interests, threat, and group position and argues that anti-black sentiment flows less from traditional prejudice than from a zero-sum reasoning that African Americans’ gains represent whites’ losses. A principled conservatism approach (Sniderman and Piazza 1993) holds that whites’ opposition to race-targeted policies flows from race-neutral opposition to government intervention generally, and/or from objections to the way

Given the links between attributions for racial inequality and racial policy support, alongside the growing racial/ethnic diversity of the United States (including complexity stemming from increased immigration and consequent variation in nativity status), research aimed at better understanding what important minority populations such as African Americans and Hispanics believe about the B/W SES gap is important. Further, documenting whether, and how, these ethnoracial groups' beliefs have changed since the 1980s will add valuable knowledge to our understanding of race/ethnicity as a social cleavage shaping public opinion and American politics (Manza and Brooks 1999).

While making precise predictions regarding trends in beliefs about the B/W gap since the 1980s is challenging (particularly across race/ethnic lines), I offer some theoretically-informed expectations regarding possible belief-trends in light of social and political changes (or lack thereof) across the past two decades. On one hand, a growing middle class of black professionals (Allen and Farley 1986; Landry 1987) and political change such as increasing numbers of black elected officials (Sigelman 1997) may increase perceptions of an open opportunity-structure—thus increasing “motivational individualism” (and/or the belief that the B/W SES gap no longer exists) and diminishing “system-blaming.” On the other hand, persistent racial segregation and continued black/white disparities in jobs, housing, education, health care, and other social indicators (Farley and Allen 1987; Massey and Denton 1993) likely sustain support for structural accounts of blacks' disadvantage (e.g., the belief in the contemporary relevance of discrimination). Further, the ideological implications of such social changes (and stagnation) likely differ by race/ethnicity owing to group-specific experiences and perceived interests (Jackman 1994; Kluegel and Smith 1986).

Among non-Hispanic whites, the relative successes of blacks in recent decades (e.g., middle-class growth) may be more salient than the fact of persisting black disadvantage, owing

to whites' “sense of group position” (Bobo et al. 1997) and the resulting threat posed by blacks' social and economic advancement. Subordinate group gains and the potential for competition within workplaces and even neighborhoods might arguably enhance motivational individualism and/or the perception that the B/W gap no longer exists. In contrast, African Americans likely remain more aware of continued black/white disparities, as well as more supportive of the view that such inequalities stem from structural factors such as discrimination (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Schuman et al. 1997). This perception of discrimination, in fact, likely transcends major social class divisions, owing to blacks' strong sense of “group identification” (Hunt 1996) and “linked collective fate” (Dawson 1994) as a disadvantaged racial minority group. Evidence that more affluent and highly educated African Americans are among the most disillusioned members of the black population (Cose 1993; Hochschild 1995) reinforces the expectation of a continued ideological divide separating blacks and whites, even in the face of growing class inequality within the African American population (Wilson 1978, 1987).

While Hispanics remain a disadvantaged minority population in the United States—a fact that should render them more structuralist than non-Hispanic whites on the issue of racial inequality—they are in a different societal position than African Americans from the standpoint of possible assimilation and relations with whites (Yancey 2003). As Dixon (2006) notes, “Blacks have long been perceived as so physically and culturally different from whites to warrant a separate ‘racial’ category both in the public mind and the legal sphere” (p. 2184). As such, many scholars regard blacks as uniquely alienated (Yancey 2003), with genuine assimilation an impossibility under current structural circumstances (Waters 1990). In contrast, some scholars see certain Hispanics as poised to follow a path toward assimilation—a path taken by so-called “white ethnics” in prior decades—via economic advancement and intermarriage (Alba and Nee 2003; Ignatiev 1995; Yancey 2003). Indeed, Bonilla-Silva (2004) argues that many Hispanics are currently treated as “honorary whites” who embrace this ethnoracial status as a means of

---

in which policies such as affirmative action are believed to violate cherished American values such as individualism.

assimilation and upward mobility.<sup>6</sup> Evidence for such “identificational assimilation” (Gordon 1964) and/or a “thinning” of ethnic identity (Cornell and Hartmann 1997) among Hispanics has been cited in Hispanics’ greater similarity to non-Hispanic whites than to African Americans on key social attitudes (Bonilla-Silva 2004; Yancey 2003). Whether Hispanics’ explanations of the B/W SES gap have become more like those of non-Hispanic whites over time is an important question, especially if one considers their growing political presence and strength on the national policy front.

### **STRUCTURE AND DETERMINANTS OF BELIEFS**

Ideologies, values, and belief systems were commonly assumed in prior research to exist in opposing pairs—for example, left versus right, individualism versus structuralism—apparently reflecting a basic cognitive tendency (Abelson et al. 1968; Levi-Strauss 1966). Recent work, however, suggests that these dichotomies are not always warranted since seemingly inconsistent or contradictory beliefs can be combined into “compromise” explanations (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Lee, Jones, and Lewis 1990). For example, with regard to beliefs about inequality, a person may combine an acknowledgment that structural barriers exist in society with the belief that anyone who works hard enough can overcome such obstacles.

Kluegel (1990) observes that person-centered and structuralist explanations of blacks’ disadvantage were not seen as mutually exclusive, and they commonly coexisted in the thinking of white individuals in the 1970s and 1980s. Further, some findings highlight how racial minorities are especially likely to combine such ideological beliefs in what has been termed a “dual” or “split” consciousness of inequality (Hughes and Tuch 1999; Hunt 1996; Kluegel et al. 1995). This resonates with arguments by Bobo (1991), Hochschild (1995), and Mann (1970) that ideological “ambivalence,” involv-

ing the combination of seemingly inconsistent beliefs, may be particularly prevalent among relatively disadvantaged groups.<sup>7</sup> As disadvantaged minorities, African Americans and Hispanics may be simultaneously more aware of both structural barriers and the necessity of individual initiative to overcome such obstacles (e.g., in the effort to escape or avoid poverty). Whether race/ethnic minorities exhibit a dual consciousness with regard to the foundations of the B/W SES gap has yet to be adequately examined, yet it is a question warranting systematic empirical attention.

Regarding the determinants of beliefs about the B/W SES gap, past research on whites (Apostle et al. 1983; Kluegel 1990; Sniderman and Hagen 1985) observed that traditional racist sentiment (i.e., an ability-based explanation) was most prevalent among persons with lower SES, and those who were older, male, conservative, and religious fundamentalists. Structuralist beliefs were most popular among persons with the opposite profile on these social and political characteristics (i.e., higher SES, younger, female, liberal, non-fundamentalists). Support for motivational individualism tended to fall in a middle ground on the key predictors. Further, current research suggests that African Americans are much more likely than whites to attribute the gap to discrimination, and they are much less likely to cite lack of will or motivation in explaining the black/white economic divide (Jackman 1994; Schuman et al. 1997; Sigelman and Welch 1991).

We know considerably less about Hispanics’ beliefs about black/white inequality. Indeed, few nationally-representative studies of Hispanics’ social and political attitudes exist

<sup>7</sup> This reasoning is consistent with Kluegel and Smith’s (1986) image that individualism is a hegemonic, cultural value shaping the beliefs of Americans at all social locations, while structuralist beliefs are more variable across the social structure, especially likely to be adhered to by the disadvantaged, and “layered onto” rather than replacing an individualistic base. Further, the greater “duality” of beliefs among minorities is also consistent with the spirit of DuBois’s ([1903] 1993) argument that African Americans exhibit a “double consciousness” flowing from the need to balance a native black soul (or self) with life in a society dominated by a (white) culture not of their making.

<sup>6</sup> This should not overshadow the fact that much assimilation is “segmented” such that many Hispanics experience downward mobility via a variety of channels in the United States (Perlmann 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

generally (but see de la Garza et al. 1992; Jones-Correa 1998). An important exception is Welch and Sigelman's (1993) analysis of 1980s U.S. survey data suggesting that, relative to non-Hispanic whites, Hispanic voters (with the exception of Cubans) are more aligned with the Democratic party and are more liberal on issues involving government spending. More recently, Yancey (2003) has shown that Hispanics' sociopolitical attitudes generally occupy a middle ground between those of non-Hispanic whites and African Americans, though in many cases they are more similar to the former. Whether Hispanics' explanations of the B/W SES gap more closely mirror those of non-Hispanic whites or African Americans (and whether and how this is changing) is an important social and political question, given the rapid growth of the Hispanic population in the United States, and the implications of these beliefs for racial policy views (Gilens 1999; Kluegel 1990; Krysan 2000).

**HAVE NON-HISPANIC WHITES' EXPLANATIONS OF THE B/W SES GAP CHANGED SINCE THE 1980S?**

A decline in attributions to innate inferiority is expected to have continued in the 1990s and through the present. Whether support for motivational individualism has changed (it remained steady from the 1970s to the 1980s), however, is an important, open-ended question given links to anti-welfare sentiment (Gilens 1999) and other racial policy attitudes (Krysan 2000). Further, whether the small increase in the popularity of structuralist beliefs (especially the belief in differing educational chances) seen from the 1970s to the 1980s has continued is an important question given the established associations between such beliefs and race-targeted policy support (Kluegel 1990; Kluegel and Bobo 1993).

**DO AFRICAN AMERICANS, HISPANICS, AND NON-HISPANIC WHITES DIFFER IN BELIEFS ABOUT THE B/W SES GAP? HAS THIS CHANGED OVER TIME?**

Past research leads to the general expectation that race/ethnic minorities will be more structuralist and less person-centered in explaining the B/W SES gap (Kluegel and Smith 1986;

Schuman et al. 1997). Two recent studies, however, point to the possibility that African Americans and Hispanics may be more likely than whites to *combine* person-centered and structuralist attributions in a "dual consciousness" of inequality (Hughes and Tuch 1999; Hunt 1996). In addition, demonstrating whether and how African Americans' and Hispanics' beliefs differ from one another, and how these groups' beliefs may have changed over time, should shed important light on the changing terrain of race and ethnicity in U.S. society (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Yancey 2003). As was the case with expectations pertaining to whites' beliefs, noted above, blacks' and Hispanics' beliefs are important given their implications for race-targeted policy support (Kluegel 1990).<sup>8</sup>

**DO THE DETERMINANTS OF BELIEFS ABOUT THE B/W SES GAP DIFFER BY RACE/ETHNICITY?**

Much research explicitly or implicitly assumes that the determinants of sociopolitical attitudes do not vary across race/ethnic lines (Hunt et al. 2000). Given the distinct experiences of race/ethnic groups in the United States, alongside evidence challenging an "assumption of similarity" regarding the determinants of beliefs and attitudes across race/ethnic lines (Hunt 1996; Schnittker et al. 2000; Steelman and Powell 1993), it is important to examine possible race/ethnic differences in the determinants of beliefs about the B/W SES gap. Why should we expect such differences? For one, the "group identification" and "linked collective fate" argu-

<sup>8</sup> See the Appendix, Table A1, for analyses confirming that the basic relationships between beliefs about the B/W SES gap and support for government aid to blacks observed for white GSS respondents (Kluegel 1990) hold in a sample including blacks and Hispanics. Specifically, the Motivation and Discrimination modes of explanation (explained below) are, respectively, the most potent predictors of opposition to, and support for, government aid to African Americans. Additional analyses (not shown) using interaction terms, and within race/ethnic subgroups, demonstrate that these basic associations generalize to blacks and Hispanics. Thus, the general assertion that these beliefs are important to study because of their policy implications holds across the race/ethnic groups analyzed in this study.

ments reviewed above (Dawson 1994; Hunt 1996) support the expectation of black/white differences in the predictive power of social class indicators such as education and subjective class identification (i.e., generally weaker effects among blacks owing to greater across-class consensus on key beliefs). In addition, several other sociodemographic factors—age/cohort, gender, region, and religious fundamentalism—provide bases for research expectations.

First, while research among whites suggests that older persons have more conservative racial attitudes (Apostle et al. 1983; Kluegel 1990), age and cohort (birth year) dynamics may operate differently among minority groups with distinct experiences and histories. For example, among minorities, the accumulation of experiences of unfair treatment across the life course could render explanations of inequality more structuralist and less person-centered with increasing age. Further, it is reasonable to expect that older cohorts of African Americans—who came of age before or during the Civil Rights era—may be more likely to embrace ideologies that blame the system rather than the person, relative to younger blacks who were raised in the post-Civil Rights era. Second, among whites, women have been found to be more structural in their explanations of inequalities than their male counterparts—a finding attributed to the assumption that white women experience more discrimination than do white men (Kluegel and Smith 1986). However, owing to the multiple and intersecting ways in which women of color are disadvantaged (e.g., race, gender, class), gender may be a less salient division around which a consciousness of inequality is structured among blacks and Hispanics (Hill Collins 1990). Third, the U.S. South is still a relatively conservative region for whites' racial attitudes (Tuch and Martin 1997). However, owing to the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, it seems reasonable to expect that Southern residence may shape racial minorities' attitudes in a decidedly less conservative direction. Fourth and finally, while religious fundamentalism is generally associated with more conservative racial attitudes among whites (Emerson and Smith 2000), blacks have long combined theological conservatism with political progressivism in ways that produce racially-distinct associations between religious affilia-

tion and sociopolitical attitudes (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

## DATA AND MEASURES

### DATA

I draw from data from selected years of the General Social Surveys (GSS) between 1977 and 2004. The GSS has been conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) in most years since 1972, and it is designed to yield a representative sample of English-speaking adults 18 years and older living in non-institutionalized settings within the United States. Typical sample size was approximately 1,500 until 1994, after which it increased to approximately 3,000 when the GSS became biennial. Response rates vary between 74 and 82 percent. All surveys have been merged by NORC into a single data file, which is described in detail by Davis and Smith (2005). While the precise wording of some questions has changed from survey to survey, the cumulative GSS data file has been refined for across-survey consistency, and it represents a valuable data source for examining trends and for aggregating samples to examine minority race/ethnic populations (Hunt 1999).<sup>9</sup>

Whereas Kluegel (1990) analyzes the beliefs of “non-black” respondents (i.e., those classified as “white” and “other” in the GSS variable RACE), I use a coding scheme that distinguishes between non-Hispanic whites, African Americans, and Hispanics (coding outlined below). Following Hunt (1999), Hispanics are identified as respondents who said that their ancestors came from countries or parts of the world that indicate Hispanic origins. This was accomplished using existing codes on the GSS variable ETHNIC, from which four categories

<sup>9</sup> The restriction to English-speaking respondents means, of course, that the GSS does not represent Spanish-only speakers—a limitation for any study attempting to analyze Hispanics (Hunt 1999). Nonetheless, the richness of the GSS data on relevant demographic and attitudinal phenomena provides a unique opportunity to compare non-Hispanic whites, African Americans, and persons of Hispanic ancestry on explanations of the B/W SES gap (and support for related policy views)—important steps for this research literature (see note 1).

were selected: those indicating (1) Mexico, (2) Spain, (3) Puerto Rico, and/or (4) “other” Spanish origins—a composite comprised of persons from Central and South America, and/or Spanish West Indies, including Cuba.<sup>10</sup> Data from all years since 1977 in which the dependent variable question (listed below) was asked were combined to produce an aggregated “sample” of 16,397 respondents (non-Hispanic whites = 13,517; African Americans = 2,022; Hispanics = 858). However, because only “non-blacks” were asked the NORC questions comprising the dependent variables until 1985, analyses designed to compare the three race/ethnic groups in this study are limited to the 1985 to 2004 samples.<sup>11</sup>

### DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The following question was asked in 1977, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004: “On the average, blacks have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are . . .

- A. Mainly due to *discrimination*.
- B. Because most blacks have less *in-born ability* to learn.
- C. Because most blacks don’t have the *chance for education* that it takes to rise out of poverty.
- D. Because most blacks just don’t have the *motivation* or will power to pull themselves out of poverty.”

Response choices were Yes or No to each of the four (A through D) statements included in this question. Following past research (e.g., Kluegel

1990; Schuman et al. 1997), yes responses to B (Ability) and to D (Motivation) are considered “person-centered,” while yes responses to A (Discrimination) and to C (Education) represent “structuralist” attributions for the B/W SES gap.<sup>12</sup> As others have noted (Kluegel 1990; Schuman et al. 1997), many respondents answer as if these explanations are not alternatives. For instance, people who say yes to the Discrimination item also tend to endorse the Education item (69.1 percent; whites = 69.6, African Americans = 69.5, Hispanics = 63.1); and nearly all persons who see inborn ability differences as a cause also choose lack of motivation (87.1 percent; whites = 88.6, African Americans = 79.2, Hispanics = 81.0). However, the reverse association does not apply: of those who say yes to the lack of motivation item, only 24.0 percent choose inborn ability as a cause (whites = 23.9, African Americans = 26.3, Hispanics = 21.3). These results are similar to those observed by Kluegel (1990) for non-black GSS respondents in the 1970s and 1980s.

Further, as in Kluegel’s (1990) study, a substantial portion of respondents in the current study endorse *both* kinds of explanation (person-centered and structuralist). For example, 5.1 percent of respondents choose both discrimination and inborn ability as explanations (whites = 4.4, African Americans = 8.4, Hispanics = 6.6); 15.2 percent see the SES gap as the result of discrimination and lack of motivation (whites = 13.4, African Americans = 23.2, Hispanics = 22.3); 6.5 percent attribute the gap to lack of education and inborn ability differences (whites = 6.0, African Americans = 9.3, Hispanics = 7.6); and 20.0 percent see it as due to lack of education and lack of motivation (whites = 19.8, African Americans = 20.9, Hispanics = 21.4). Thus, structuralist and person-centered explanations clearly coexist among non-Hispanic white, African American, and Hispanic GSS

<sup>10</sup> The GSS variable ETHNIC is a summary measure containing respondents who (1) named a single ancestry, or (2) named multiple ancestries but reported feeling closest to one of them (which is recorded in ETHNIC). Following the reasoning of Hunt (1999), I also include respondents who identified with two or more of the four Hispanic categories above, even if they felt closest to none of them. Following this logic, respondents who trace their ancestry to Puerto Rico and Mexico, but who feel closest to neither (nor to any third named ancestry), are considered Hispanic in this study.

<sup>11</sup> Analyses using the 2004 data are weighted (using variable WT2004) to correct for the “nonrespondent, subsampling design” introduced in the 2004 GSS (Davis and Smith 2005:1937–38).

<sup>12</sup> Past research has described these two basic types of explanation in various ways, including: individualistic/structuralist (Kluegel 1990), dispositional/situational (Sigelman and Welch 1991), and internal/external (Rotter 1966). I use person-centered/structuralist in this study given my preference to avoid the term “individualistic” for the Ability item (see note 4).

**Table 1.** Response Patterns for “Modes of Explanation” for the Black-White Socioeconomic Gap (Adapted from Kluegel 1990)

Mode of Explanation	Response Patterns			
	Person-Centered Items		Structuralist Items	
	Ability	Motivation	Education	Discrimination
Person-Centered				
Ability	Yes	Yes or No	No	No
Motivation	No	Yes	No	No
Mixed Modes				
Ability + Structuralism	Yes	Yes or No	Yes	(or) Yes
Motivation + Structuralism	No	Yes	Yes	(or) Yes
Structuralist				
Education	No	No	Yes	No
Discrimination	No	No	Yes or No	Yes
None	No	No	No	No

respondents since 1985, as they did among non-black GSS respondents in previous decades.

After briefly examining over-time trends in the popularity of the individual NORC items (Table 2), I turn to the use of categorical measures based on the joint configuration of different explanations—labeled “modes of explanation” (Apostle et al. 1983)—to describe belief patterns. Specifically, I use an adapted version of the seven-category measure developed by Kluegel (1990) and summarized in Table 1. Four of these modes identify respondents who employ *purely* person-centered (Ability and Motivation) or *purely* structuralist (Discrimination and Education) explanations. Two are mixed categories: the Ability + Structuralism mode contains persons who said yes to the ability item, yes or no to the Motivation item, and yes to one or both of the structuralist items. The Motivation + Structuralism mode includes persons who said yes to the motivation item, no to the ability item, and yes to one or both of the structuralist items. The last mode, None, identifies respondents who said no to *all four* explanations.<sup>13</sup> All seven modes are constructed as dummy variables where respondents who fall in a given mode are coded 1 and all other respondents are coded 0.

<sup>13</sup> See the Appendix, Table A2, for a detailed breakdown of how the 16 possible combinations of the four NORC items relate to the seven modes of explanation used as outcomes in this study.

### INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Race/ethnicity is measured with two dummy variables coded: African American (i.e., persons identified as Black on the GSS variable RACE, and who are *not* Hispanic) = 1, else = 0, and Hispanic (of any race, identified as described above) = 1, else = 0. Thus, non-Hispanic Whites (i.e., persons identified as White on the GSS variable RACE, and who are *not* Hispanic) represent the excluded/reference category in the reported regression analyses. Education is measured in years. Social Class Identification (SCI) is measured using the GSS variable CLASS, recoded into two dummy variables: Lower Class = 1, else = 0, and Working Class = 1, else = 0 (self-identified middle and upper class respondents constitute the reference category; there were too few “Upper Class” respondents to support a separate analysis).<sup>14</sup> Age/cohort is measured in years.<sup>15</sup> Gender is a

<sup>14</sup> As the reported analyses aggregate numerous GSS surveys, I use predictors that were measured consistently across the years the dependent variable measures were asked. This precludes the use of income, whose categories in the GSS shifted several times. Selected exploratory analyses run within blocks of years where the income metric was consistent suggest that the inclusion of income does not materially change the effects of the reported predictors.

<sup>15</sup> As an anonymous reviewer noted, without additional information, it is impossible to simultaneously estimate the effects of age and cohort (year of birth) in repeated cross-sectional models controlling

dummy variable coded 1 = female, 0 = male. South is a dummy variable based on the GSS variable REGION, coded 1 if the respondent resides in the South Atlantic, East South Central, or West South Central categories, 0 otherwise. Conservative is a seven-point scale ranging from extremely liberal (coded 1) to extremely conservative (coded 7). The measure of Religious Fundamentalism is based on the GSS variable FUND that classifies denominations into liberal, moderate, and fundamentalist subgroups (see Smith 1986).<sup>16</sup> I created a Fundamentalist dummy variable by assigning a code of 1 to the fundamentalist category and a code of 0 to the liberal and moderate categories. Year is a variable identifying the year of the GSS survey.<sup>17</sup>

### NON-HISPANIC WHITES' EXPLANATIONS, AND CHANGE SINCE THE 1980s

This first research question centers on whether trends documented among whites in the 1970s and 1980s persisted in the 1990s and early 2000s. Results in the first columns of Tables

for time of measurement (year of survey). I use the age measure—which is derived from year of birth in the GSS—while recognizing that age/life course (i.e., intra-individual change) and cohort succession dynamics may each contribute to over-time changes in attitudes. As one would expect, substituting cohort for age in the reported models reverses the sign of the age coefficients; the effects of other covariates are unchanged, with the exception of those for year of survey. However, the “year” effects point to the same general conclusions regarding the direction of over-time changes in beliefs, by race/ethnic group, regardless of whether cohort or age is controlled.

<sup>16</sup> On the GSS variable FUND, the fundamentalist category includes affiliations such as Southern Baptist, Pentecostal, Holiness, Church of God, Seventh-Day Adventist, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other smaller groupings. The moderate and liberal categories contain affiliations such as Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Congregational, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Disciples of Christ, and Unitarian.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to using the continuous year variable as a control, I also ran the reported regression models including variables representing the four “year clusters” used in Tables 2 and 3 (excluding the 1985 to 1989 category). This approach yields the same basic findings.

2 and 3 provide an initial look at this issue. Table 2 reports overall levels of support (percent saying yes) for each of the four NORC items used to construct the modes of explanation (Table 1). Table 3 reports descriptive results for the seven modes of explanation, which also serve as dependent variables in the reported regression analyses (Tables 4 and 5). Tables 2 and 3 report analyses for five time periods corresponding to the “late 1970s” (whites only), the “late 1980s” (1985 to 1989), the “early 1990s” (1990 to 1994), the “late 1990s” (1996 to 1998), and the “early 2000s” (2000 to 2004).

As expected, Table 2 shows that attributions to innate inferiority (Ability item) continued their long-standing decline among whites across the 1990s (and continued essentially unchanged in the early twenty-first century at around 10 percent). Unexpected, however, was a comparable decline (since the late 1980s) in the percentage of whites endorsing the lack of motivation NORC item—a contrast to the relatively steady support for this item from the 1970s to the 1980s (Kluegel 1990). Further, among whites, both structuralist items also evidence declines in popularity, albeit smaller ones than seen for the person-centered items. Thus, the basic pattern for non-Hispanic whites is decreasing endorsement of *any* offered explanation for the B/W SES gap. The increasing number of respondents who reject all four items, as documented at the bottom of the first column of Table 3, partly accounts for these trends. The clear increase in the popularity of the None mode (persons who say no to all four NORC items) is among the most striking trends since the late 1980s (nearly tripling among whites from 5.6 to 15.2 percent).

Table 3 provides additional evidence that support for traditional racism (Ability mode) declined among whites across the 1990s and into the current century. In contrast, whites’ support for the *purely* motivational mode of explanation increased across that same time period with just over one-quarter of whites (26.8 percent) in the most recent time period supporting the view that lack of will power alone explains African Americans’ continued disadvantage. When added together, the percentage of whites supporting purely person-centered accounts remained fairly steady between the late 1980s and early 2000s (around

**Table 2.** Percentage Saying "Yes" to Each Individual NORC Item Explaining the Black/White SES Gap for Selected Years (1977–2004 GSS)

NORC Item	Year	Race/Ethnicity					
		Non-Hispanic White		African American		Hispanic	
		Percent	(N)	Percent	(N)	Percent	(N)
"less in-born <i>ability</i> "	1977	26.2	(1,229)	—	—	—	—
	1985–89	20.7	(3,937)	15.8	(538)	17.3	(220)
	1990–94	15.1	(4,215)	12.2	(632)	11.5	(243)
	1996–98	9.9	(2,845)	9.8	(510)	10.8	(203)
	2000–04	10.3	(2,651)	13.9	(526)	15.4	(240)
"lack of <i>motivation</i> or will power"	1977	66.2	(1,217)	—	—	—	—
	1985–89	62.4	(3,908)	35.9	(518)	55.7	(221)
	1990–94	58.3	(4,101)	37.7	(621)	54.9	(233)
	1996–98	49.4	(2,728)	40.0	(492)	54.4	(195)
	2000–04	50.0	(2,545)	44.9	(515)	50.6	(240)
"lack of chance for <i>education</i> "	1977	50.9	(1,245)	—	—	—	—
	1985–89	51.8	(3,991)	67.8	(534)	56.1	(223)
	1990–94	51.3	(4,221)	65.9	(637)	47.2	(246)
	1996–98	43.7	(2,840)	55.1	(510)	43.9	(198)
	2000–04	43.2	(2,632)	54.0	(525)	42.8	(241)
"due to <i>discrimination</i> "	1977	40.9	(1,236)	—	—	—	—
	1985–89	39.2	(3,938)	76.6	(518)	60.6	(226)
	1990–94	35.8	(4,154)	79.6	(626)	49.8	(243)
	1996–98	33.0	(2,788)	63.8	(489)	48.2	(199)
	2000–04	31.0	(2,603)	60.7	(506)	40.7	(234)

Delivered by Ingenta to :  
Law Library, Northeastern University  
Fri, 20 Jul 2007 14:21:13

30 to 32 percent). The increase in the purely motivational mode is noteworthy since this belief pattern is a particularly potent predictor of opposition to "welfare" (Gilens 1999) and race-targeted policies (Kluegel 1990).

Regarding the structuralist modes, we observe steady support over time for the Discrimination explanation among whites, while the 1990s and early 2000s evidenced continuation of small increases in support for the Education-only mode documented by Kluegel (1990) for prior decades. When added together, the percentage of whites supporting purely structuralist accounts increased three percentage points from the late 1980s to the early 2000s (from 30.1 to 33.1 percent). Finally, whites show a dramatic decline in support for the mixed modes (when combined, from 33.5 to 19.6 percent); thus, whites have shifted over time toward the *purely* motivational or education-based explanations, or toward the view that *none* of the NORC items captures the etiology of blacks' disadvantage.

### AFRICAN AMERICANS, HISPANICS, AND NON-HISPANIC WHITES DIFFERENCES, AND CHANGE OVER TIME

Like whites, race/ethnic minorities evidence declining support for all four NORC items over time (with the important exception of the lack of motivation item among African Americans) (see Table 2). However, while the largest declines for whites were for the two *person-centered* items, the largest declines among African Americans and Hispanics were for the two *structuralist* items. Specifically, Table 2 shows that among blacks, from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, endorsement of the Ability item dropped 1.9 points while support for the Education and Discrimination items declined 13.8 and 15.9 percentage points respectively (blacks' support for the Motivation item increased 9.0 percentage points). Corresponding changes for Hispanics were declines of 1.9 and 5.1 percentage points for the Ability and Motivation items respectively, alongside declines of 13.3 percentage points for the Education item and 19.9 percentage points for the Discrimination

**Table 3.** Race/Ethnicity and Support for Seven Modes of Explanation (Table 1) for the Black/White SES Gap (1977–2004 GSS)

Modes of Explanation	Year	Race/Ethnicity		
		Non-Hispanic White Percent	African American Percent	Hispanic Percent
<b>Person-Centered</b>				
Ability	1977	12.8	—	—
	1985–89	10.0	.8	6.3
	1990–94	8.0	2.0	5.1
	1996–98	5.0	2.6	3.4
	2000–04	5.3	2.2	4.9
Motivation	1977	20.8	—	—
	1985–89	20.9	6.2	13.2
	1990–94	23.5	4.6	20.7
	1996–98	25.9	10.6	21.9
	2000–04	26.8	11.3	21.9
Person-Centered Total	1977	33.6	—	—
	1985–89	30.9	7.0	19.5
	1990–94	31.5	6.6	25.8
	1996–98	30.9	13.2	25.3
	2000–04	32.1	13.5	26.8
<b>Mixed Modes</b>				
Ability + Structuralism	1977	14.2	—	—
	1985–89	11.0	15.6	10.7
	1990–94	7.8	10.5	6.5
	1996–98	5.5	6.7	9.0
	2000–04	5.1	11.2	10.7
Motivation + Structuralism	1977	20.6	—	—
	1985–89	22.5	18.3	27.3
	1990–94	20.6	21.2	24.4
	1996–98	14.8	21.4	24.2
	2000–04	14.5	22.0	17.7
Mixed Modes Total	1977	34.8	—	—
	1985–89	33.5	33.9	38.0
	1990–94	28.4	31.7	30.9
	1996–98	20.3	28.1	33.2
	2000–04	19.6	33.2	28.4
<b>Structuralist</b>				
Education	1977	7.0	—	—
	1985–89	9.0	6.6	7.8
	1990–94	11.0	3.9	11.1
	1996–98	12.9	6.3	5.6
	2000–04	12.6	5.4	6.1
Discrimination	1977	19.5	—	—
	1985–89	21.1	48.4	29.8
	1990–94	21.1	54.8	25.8
	1996–98	22.2	42.9	23.6
	2000–04	20.5	35.4	22.6
Structuralist Total	1977	26.5	—	—
	1985–89	30.1	55.0	37.6
	1990–94	32.1	58.7	36.9
	1996–98	35.1	49.2	29.2
	2000–04	33.1	40.8	28.7
<b>None</b>				
None	1977	5.2	—	—
	1985–89	5.6	4.1	4.9
	1990–94	7.9	2.9	6.5
	1996–98	13.7	9.5	12.4
	2000–04	15.2	12.5	16.0

*(continued on next page)*

Table 3. (continued)

Modes of Explanation	Year	Race/Ethnicity		
		Non-Hispanic White Percent	African American Percent	Hispanic Percent
N	1977	1,145	—	—
	1985–89	3,665	486	205
	1990–94	3,810	589	217
	1996–98	2,513	462	178
	2000–04	2,384	485	223

item. Thus, the data reveal an unexpected conservative shift in blacks' beliefs, alongside some initial support for the expectation that Hispanics will increasingly resemble non-Hispanic whites over time (Yancey 2003).

Returning to Table 3, we see increases in the None mode for both race/ethnic minority groups similar to the trend observed among whites (and discussed below). Regarding the mixed modes, when combined, African Americans show no clear trends from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, while Hispanics' support for the mixed-modes declines about 10 percentage points (slightly less than among non-Hispanic whites). Table 3 shows no clear trends for the race/ethnic minorities support of the Ability mode, but clear increases (as seen for whites) in the endorsement of "motivational individualism"—the *purely* motivational explanation of the B/W SES gap. Considering the Ability and Motivation modes together, the percentage of African Americans and Hispanics supporting purely person-centered explanations increased from the late 1980s to the 2000s (7.0 to 13.5 percent among African Americans; 19.5 to 26.8 percent among Hispanics). Despite these conservative opinion shifts for the race/ethnic minorities, African Americans still fall well short of whites' 32.1 percent person-centered total in the most recent time period, while Hispanics move to within five to six percentage points of whites.

For the purely structuralist modes of explanation, in contrast to the relatively steady support (and even slight increases) observed among non-Hispanic whites, African Americans' and Hispanics' endorsement of the Discrimination mode of explanation clearly *declined* from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, while their support for the Education mode shows no clear trend. The result is that the percentage of African Americans and Hispanics endorsing purely

structuralist explanations has decreased markedly since the late 1980s (from 55.0 to 40.8 percent for African Americans; from 37.6 to 28.7 percent for Hispanics). The net result of these conservative shifts among blacks and Hispanics is growing similarity with non-Hispanic whites (in fact, by the late 1990s, Hispanics had actually changed positions with non-Hispanic whites as the least structuralist group). As with the person-centered modes, this conservative trend in structuralism is unexpected for blacks, but it is generally consistent with the identification-al assimilation perspective outlined for Hispanics (Yancey 2003).

Given the evidence of convergence in beliefs across race/ethnic lines (Tables 2 and 3), a logical question is whether significant race/ethnic "static" group differences exist. Table 4 provides an affirmative answer. Because the seven modes of explanation are dichotomous, I use binary logistic regression to estimate the effects of race/ethnicity and a set of social and political characteristics variables shown in past research to affect whites' beliefs about the B/W SES gap.

Regarding the purely person-centered modes of explanation, net of the effects of other included predictors, African Americans are significantly less likely than both whites and Hispanics to believe that innate inferiority alone (or in combination with lack of motivation) explains blacks' disadvantage. Further, both racial minorities are significantly less likely than whites to endorse the purely motivational explanation, and African Americans are also significantly less likely than Hispanics to do so. Thus, when controlling for other ways in which these groups differ, whites score highest on the purely person-centered explanations. Hispanics align more closely with whites on the indicator of traditional racism, but they occupy more of a middle ground between whites and African

**Table 4.** Binary Logistic Regression Estimates of Seven Modes of Explanation for the Black/White SES Gap (1985–2004 GSS, N = 14,138)

Independent Variable	Person-Centered		Mixed Modes		Structuralist			None
	Ability	Motivation	Ability + Structuralism	Motivation + Structuralism	Education	Discrimination	None	
African American	-1.583*** (.178)	-1.547*** (.093)	.453*** (.092)	.176** (.067)	-508*** (.112)	1.364*** (.059)	None (.102)	
Hispanic	-.251† (.176)	-.368***† (.098)	.347* (.142)	.331*** (.092)	-.375*** (.143)	.245***† (.091)	-.203 (.132)	
Education	-.140*** (.013)	-.066*** (.008)	-.160*** (.012)	.010 (.008)	.152*** (.011)	.117*** (.008)	.008 (.011)	
Lower Class	-.347 (.181)	.135 (.102)	.015 (.131)	-.004 (.101)	-.305 (.164)	.092 (.099)	-.047 (.148)	
Working Class	.117 (.075)	.262*** (.046)	-.228** (.070)	-.119* (.047)	-.243*** (.064)	.055 (.045)	.106 (.064)	
Age	.018*** (.002)	-.007*** (.001)	.024*** (.002)	.001 (.001)	-.010*** (.002)	-.007*** (.001)	-.011*** (.002)	
Female	-.369*** (.070)	-.109* (.042)	.065 (.065)	.109* (.043)	-.005 (.057)	.175*** (.042)	-.032 (.059)	
South	.608*** (.073)	.383*** (.045)	.131 (.068)	-.176*** (.047)	-.262*** (.064)	-.522*** (.047)	.212*** (.063)	
Fundamentalist	.140 (.077)	.212*** (.047)	-.100 (.073)	-.010 (.050)	-.238*** (.071)	-.101* (.050)	-.084 (.068)	
Conservative	.096*** (.027)	.154*** (.016)	.018 (.024)	.032* (.016)	-.013 (.021)	-.233*** (.015)	.109*** (.022)	
Year	-.040*** (.006)	.028*** (.004)	-.047*** (.006)	-.033*** (.004)	.019*** (.005)	-.014*** (.004)	.085*** (.005)	

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.  
 † = African Americans and Hispanics differ significantly ( $p < .05$ ).  
 \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

Delivered by Ingenta to :  
 Law Library, Northeastern University  
 Fri, 20 Jul 2007 14:21:13

Americans on the purely motivational explanation of blacks' disadvantage.

The mixed modes reveal quite different patterns of difference by race/ethnicity. Specifically, while African Americans are least likely to see innate inferiority *alone* as responsible for blacks' disadvantage, they are significantly *more* likely than whites to combine the endorsement of this item with a structuralist explanation (as are Hispanics). Further, both racial minorities are significantly more likely than whites to subscribe to the view that motivation, along with some structuralist explanation, accounts for the B/W SES gap—evidence consistent with other recent research suggesting that racial minorities are more likely than whites to exhibit a dual consciousness in explaining inequalities (Hughes and Tuch 1999; Hunt 1996).

Regarding the purely structuralist explanations, African Americans and Hispanics are significantly less likely than whites to see the B/W SES gap as resulting solely from differing educational chances.<sup>18</sup> The observation that whites are more likely than minorities to endorse the Education-only mode is consistent with, and adds a race dimension to, Kluegel's (1990) argument (in line with the thinking of Jackman and Muha 1984) that this category may

serve a particular function for privileged individuals who are also sensitive to racial inequality. Adherents can recognize racial injustice without challenging the legitimacy of the economic system from which their privilege derives. To see the economic gap as a result of the failings of educational institutions alone is consistent with the belief that economic institutions function fairly, permitting those who acquire the necessary educational credentials to occupy privileged positions if they work hard. (P. 520)

Consistent with expectations, African Americans are significantly more likely than whites to view the B/W SES gap as the result

of Discrimination. In addition, African Americans differ significantly from Hispanics in this regard. Table 4 demonstrates that Hispanics appear to occupy a distinct middle ground (between non-Hispanic whites and African Americans) regarding support for the two modes of explanation most closely linked to racial policy support: Motivation and Discrimination (see note 8 and the Appendix, Table A1). Finally, results for the social and political characteristics predictors are largely consistent with past research using whites (Apostle et al. 1983; Kluegel 1990; Sniderman and Hagen 1985), though this table masks several important race/ethnic differences in determinants, which are discussed below (Table 5). Before turning to those analyses, however, the determinants of the None mode deserve comment given the dramatic increase in this outcome over the past decade.

Table 4 also shows that whites (versus blacks), younger/late-born respondents, Southerners, and self-reported conservatives are most likely to exhibit this belief pattern. Kluegel (1990) speculates that this mode could capture those attributing the gap to "God's will," or it could indicate a perception that the gap does not exist. The fact that fundamentalism registers no significant effect (and the coefficient is negative) may argue against the first idea, though more systematic research is needed.<sup>19</sup> However, there may be some validity to the second speculation as suggested by a recent national survey (*Washington Post* 2001). Specifically, when polled about how blacks are faring relative to whites in the areas of jobs, income, schooling, and health care, between 40 and 57 percent of respondents (depending on the issue) reported believing that the average African American is as well off, or better off, than the average white person in these areas—evidence suggesting belief in the nonexistence of a race-based SES gap.<sup>20</sup> Another possibility is suggested by a

<sup>18</sup> Thus, while minorities are equal to (Hispanics) or more likely (African Americans) than whites to endorse the NORC "lack of education" item (Table 2), their lesser tendency to endorse this mode of explanation is a function of it being a purely educational belief pattern; as the results for the mixed modes show, minorities are more likely to combine structural attributions with person-centered ones.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Powell and colleagues (2006) find that "God's will" attributions for several outcomes, including sexual preference, are actually more prevalent among the less religious.

<sup>20</sup> There were differences by race/ethnicity, however, with African Americans less likely than non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics to see blacks as "as well or better off" than whites. Thus, the argument that nonperception of a B/W gap underlies the

recent national poll on beliefs about poverty documenting that “drug use” was the most popular explanation (across race/ethnic lines) on a recent survey asking respondents about the causes of poverty (National Public Radio 2001). To the extent that people racialize the issue of poverty (Gilens 1999), this “drugs” attribution could account for some of the increasing support for the notion that none of the four explanations offered in the GSS account for the etiology of the B/W SES gap—a possibility that NORC and other pollsters should consider when designing and undertaking future surveys.

### DETERMINANTS OF BELIEFS, AND POSSIBLE VARIATIONS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

To answer the final research question, the regression analyses from Table 4 (minus the race/ethnicity dummy variables) were repeated within each race/ethnic group to assess whether the effects of covariates vary by race/ethnicity. To test for significant differences between race/ethnic groups, I constructed fully saturated race-by-covariate interaction models for each dependent variable (not shown) and evaluated the significance of the Wald test statistic for each interaction term. Results from separate regression models conducted within each race/ethnic group are presented for ease of interpretation and appear in Table 5.<sup>21</sup>

Before discussing the effects of selected social and political characteristics variables, it is worth noting that the effects of the “year” vari-

---

observed increases in the None mode may be a more plausible explanation for whites and Hispanics than for African Americans. For African Americans, the increase in the None mode may be more rooted in other causes not tapped by the four NORC items.

<sup>21</sup> Relative to African Americans and non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics are more likely to be foreign-born. To explore possible nativity-status effects, I ran supplementary analyses among the Hispanic subsample using a native-born/foreign-born dummy variable (a measure of generational status showed generally similar results). Multivariate analyses reveal that the native-born score significantly ( $p < .05$ ) higher than their foreign-born counterparts on Discrimination, and significantly lower on Motivation + Structuralism and None. Given the relative rankings of the three

able largely mirror the Table 3 results. Whites and Hispanics show declining support for the Ability mode (though the negative slope is n.s. among Hispanics). All three race/ethnic groups show increasing support for “motivational individualism” over time (though, again, the slope is n.s. among Hispanics). For the mixed modes, Table 5 shows (as seen earlier) that it is only whites and African Americans among whom support for Ability + Structuralism is declining, while among whites and Hispanics support for Motivation + Structuralism is clearly declining. Regarding the purely structuralist modes, Table 5 shows that whites are unique in their increasing support for the Education-only explanation, while for the Discrimination mode, African Americans evidence the largest decline over time. Finally, Table 5 reconfirms that all three race/ethnic groups show increases over time for the None mode.

Given the number of race/ethnic group differences in the effects of various covariates in Table 5, I focus primary attention on Motivation and Discrimination—the two most policy-relevant outcomes.

**SCI AND EDUCATION.** Table 5 shows that the previously-observed positive association between working-class identification and the Motivation mode (Table 4) is unique to non-Hispanic whites, who differ significantly from blacks in this effect. In contrast, among African Americans and Hispanics, self-identified working-class respondents are significantly more likely than their middle-class counterparts to support the Discrimination mode, and both minorities differ significantly from whites in this regard. Thus, SCI carries different implications for ideological beliefs across race/ethnic lines.

---

race/ethnic groups on the seven modes-of-explanation (Table 4), the results of these supplementary analyses suggest that being native-born moves Hispanics toward non-Hispanic whites on Motivation, Ability + Structuralism, and Education; toward African Americans on Ability, Discrimination, and None; and toward both other race/ethnic groups on Motivation + Structuralism. These results should be seen as suggestive rather than conclusive, however, given that most nativity-status differences are non-significant, and given the underrepresentation of segments of the Hispanic population in the GSS.

**Table 5.** Binary Logistic Regression Estimates of Seven Modes of Explanation for the Black/White SES Gap Within Race/Ethnic Subgroups (Non-Hispanic White N = 11,587; African American N = 1,808; Hispanic N = 743) (1985–2004 GSS)

Independent Variable	Race/Ethnic Subgroup	Ability	Motivation	Ability + Structuralism	Motivation + Structuralism	Education	Discrimination	None
Education	White	-.151*** (.014)	-.072*** (.009)	-.149*** (.013)	.012 (.009)	.151*** (.012)	.128*** (.010)	.017 (.013)
	African American	-.082 (.062)	-.057 (.035)	-.186*** (.028)	-.011 (.022)	.114** (.040)	.107*** (.019)	-.028 (.036)
	Hispanic	-.072 (.054)	.027 (.033)	-.210*** (.044)	.009 (.031)	.216*** (.052)	.024 (.030)	-.013 (.045)
Lower Class	White	-.528* (.208)	.219* (.111)	.099 (.163)	-.051 (.124)	-.506** (.199)	.191 (.124)	.019 (.170)
	African American	.442 (.519)	-.439 (.344)	-.197 (.255)	.199 (.206)	.659 (.356)	-.053 (.181)	-.283 (.358)
	Hispanic	.383 (.616)	-.426 (.475)	.095 (.485)	.016 (.386)	-.582 (.769)	.450 (.357)	-.598 (.571)
Working class	White	.134 (.079)	.289*** (.049)	-.142 <sup>a</sup> (.080)	-.151** (.053)	-.273*** (.068)	-.019 <sup>a,b</sup> (.053)	.186** (.070)
	African American	-.163 (.382)	-.183 (.188)	-.517** (.169)	-.015 (.130)	.202 (.238)	.304** (.107)	-.109 (.203)
	Hispanic	.012 (.360)	.149 (.199)	-.333 (.282)	.178 (.186)	-.435 (.294)	.366* (.185)	-.640* (.263)
Age	White	.020*** (.002)	-.006*** (.001)	.029*** <sup>a,b</sup> (.002)	.002 <sup>a</sup> (.001)	-.011*** (.002)	-.010*** (.002)	-.011*** (.002)
	African American	-.006 (.011)	-.020*** (.006)	.011* (.005)	-.006 (.004)	.002 (.007)	.006 (.003)	-.010 (.006)
	Hispanic	.010 (.012)	.005 (.007)	.003 (.010)	-.007 (.007)	-.011 (.013)	.001 (.007)	-.006 (.010)
Female	White	-.401*** (.074)	-.131** (.045)	-.007 (.073)	.106* (.048)	.026 (.061)	.295*** <sup>a,b</sup> (.048)	-.098 <sup>a,b</sup> (.064)
	African American	-.006 (.356)	.221 (.191)	.266 (.168)	.110 (.124)	-.305 (.211)	-.248* (.101)	.392 (.207)
	Hispanic	-.333 (.333)	-.118 (.188)	.227 (.273)	.052 (.176)	-.069 (.283)	-.086 (.171)	.452 (.265)

(continued on next page)

Delivered by Ingenta to :  
Law Library, Northeastern University  
Fri, 20 Jul 2007 14:21:13

Table 5. (continued)

Independent Variable	Race/Ethnic Subgroup	Ability	Motivation	Ability + Structuralism	Motivation + Structuralism	Education	Discrimination	None
South	White	.652*** (.077)	.403*** (.048)	.089 (.079)	-.189*** (.054)	-.383*** <sup>a,b</sup> (.071)	-.612*** <sup>a,b</sup> (.057)	2.19*** (.069)
	African American	.534 (.357)	.197 (.179)	.368* (.160)	-.137 (.119)	.432* (.214)	-.322*** (.098)	.281 (.192)
	Hispanic	-.207 (.374)	.294 (.199)	.026 (.292)	-.261 (.195)	.527 (.291)	-.201 (.190)	-.109 (.294)
Fundamentalist	White	.142 (.081)	.209*** (.050)	-.100 (.084)	.004 (.056)	-.257*** <sup>b</sup> (.078)	-.159*** (.060)	-.028 <sup>a</sup> (.074)
	African American	-.128 (.354)	.139 (.189)	.090 (.169)	-.028 (.124)	-.164 (.215)	.142 (.103)	-.516*** (.191)
	Hispanic	-.166 (.499)	.124 (.251)	-.848 (.484)	-.048 (.251)	.526 (.354)	.223 (.236)	-.288 (.379)
Conservative	White	.109*** (.028)	.149*** (.017)	-.009 (.027)	.029 (.018)	-.011 (.022)	-.261*** (.018)	.131*** (.024)
	African American	-.082 (.119)	.140* (.063)	.059 (.054)	.049 (.042)	.002 (.074)	-.076* <sup>c</sup> (.035)	-.058 (.067)
	Hispanic	.017 (.120)	.237*** (.069)	.101 (.094)	-.017 (.064)	-.002 (.103)	-.239*** (.063)	.027 (.091)
Year	White	-.046*** (.007)	.026*** (.004)	-.058*** <sup>b</sup> (.007)	-.039*** <sup>a</sup> (.004)	.024*** <sup>a,b</sup> (.005)	-.008 <sup>a</sup> (.004)	.081*** (.006)
	African American	.075* <sup>c</sup> (.032)	.056*** (.017)	-.034* <sup>c</sup> (.014)	.003 <sup>c</sup> (.011)	-.016 (.019)	-.037*** (.009)	.114*** (.019)
	Hispanic	-.034 (.029)	.029 (.016)	.024 (.022)	-.044*** (.015)	-.027 (.024)	-.017 (.015)	.095*** (.023)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> White versus African American slope difference significant ( $p < .05$ ).

<sup>b</sup> White versus Hispanic slope difference significant ( $p < .05$ ).

<sup>c</sup> African American versus Hispanic slope difference significant ( $p < .05$ ).

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

Delivered by Ingenta to :  
Law Library, Northeastern University  
Fri, 20 Jul 2007 14:21:13

The pattern observed for whites is consistent with relative deprivation (Runciman 1966) and group conflict perspectives (Bobo 1993; Jackman 1994); self-identified working-class whites may be especially prone to seeing blacks as illegitimately rewarded by government intervention (e.g., affirmative action), and consequently they emphasize accounts of blacks' continued disadvantage that are most consistent with conservative racial policy outlooks (Gilens 1999; Kluegel 1990). The significant inverse association between education and motivational individualism among whites (Table 5) reinforces this interpretation.

In contrast, among African Americans and Hispanics, working-class identification (and higher levels of education) significantly predicts the Discrimination mode of explanation. These findings are generally inconsistent with "group identification" and "linked collective fate" predictions of a consensus on perceived discrimination across social class lines (Dawson 1994; Hunt 1996). Further, that self-identified middle-class blacks are significantly less likely than their working-class counterparts to use the Discrimination mode suggests that growing social class differentiation among blacks may be shaping the opinions of certain relatively-advantaged African Americans in a conservative direction (Smith and Seltzer 1992). On the other hand, the positive association between education and perceived discrimination supports the view that more advantaged African Americans remain among the most disaffected (Cose 1993; Hochschild 1995).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> To explore whether the seemingly contradictory effects of class identification (SCI) and education on the Discrimination mode among African Americans is a function of simultaneous estimation of these two factors, I re-ran models (otherwise identical) excluding SCI and education in turn. The effect of education is unchanged when SCI is excluded. The effect of the "working class" variable is diminished only slightly, and it remains significant ( $p < .05$ ) when education is excluded. Moreover, the reported significant race-by-education and race-by-SCI interactions (differences of slope) persist when models are run without SCI and education respectively. Future research should explore why these two indicators of social status point to different conclusions regarding blacks' use of the Discrimination mode.

AGE/COHORT. Younger/later-born whites and African Americans are significantly more likely than their older/earlier-born counterparts to endorse the purely motivational mode of explanation, and these age/cohort effects are significantly stronger for African Americans than for whites (and Hispanics). Further, while younger/later-born whites are significantly more likely than their older/earlier-born counterparts to support both structuralist modes, African Americans register essentially null effects of age/cohort (and differ significantly from whites in the impact of age/cohort on the Discrimination mode). The declining propensity of African Americans to adopt structuralist viewpoints, alongside blacks' increasing adherence to the purely motivational explanation (see "year" effects), may reflect changes in socialization patterns in the post-Civil Rights era, wherein more recent cohorts of African Americans are increasingly unexposed to, or rejecting of, traditional "system-blame" orientations. Declining religious participation, particularly among African American youth in urban contexts, may underlie these trends, given the black church's role as a long-standing source of a structuralist alternative to American individualism.

GENDER. Compared with white men, white women are significantly less prone to motivational individualism, and they are significantly more likely to support the Discrimination mode. Whites differ significantly from African Americans and Hispanics in the latter effect. Thus, as suggested above, gender is a more salient axis of difference for white women than for women of color (Hill Collins 1990). The significant race/ethnic slope differences indicate that, *relative to whites*, among blacks and Hispanics, it is men who are relatively supportive of the idea that discrimination explains African Americans' lower status in American society.

REGION. Compared with residents of other regions, Southern whites are significantly more likely to be motivational individualists, and they are significantly less likely to adopt the purely structuralist modes of explanation. Whites differ significantly from both race/ethnic minorities in this relationship between region and the

purely structuralist modes. While the South is still a relatively conservative region regarding the racial attitudes of whites (Tuch and Martin 1997), among African Americans and Hispanics, Southern residence appears less inhibiting of the perception of discrimination (and actually increases the view that poor schools are the culprit)—in all likelihood, owing to the racial legacy of that region.

**RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM.** Compared to their more religiously liberal counterparts, white religious fundamentalists are significantly more likely to be motivational individualists and significantly less likely to use the purely structuralist modes. Whites differ significantly from Hispanics in the effect of fundamentalism on the Education mode and from blacks on the effect of fundamentalism on the Discrimination mode. Links between religious fundamentalism and conservative outlooks on racial inequality are more prevalent among non-Hispanic whites than the race/ethnic minorities (Emerson and Smith 2000).<sup>23</sup> These differences reinforce the notion that religious affiliation and theological conservatism have different meanings and implications for political orientations across race/ethnic lines in the United States (Hunt 2002; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

Findings such as those reported in Table 5 suggest that merely testing whether race/ethnic groups diverge on general levels of support for racial attitudes and stratification beliefs is insufficient. Researchers should also seek to uncover whether factors shaping such beliefs differ across race/ethnic lines; failure to employ such analyses and comparisons risks perpetuating a colorblind understanding of the formation of

sociopolitical attitudes (Bobo 2000; Hunt et al. 2000).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study explores race/ethnic differences in explanations of the black/white gap in socioeconomic status in the United States and produces a complex set of results regarding trends in, adherence to, and the determinants of, these beliefs.

Among non-Hispanic whites, continuation of a long-standing pattern of decline in support for traditional racist sentiment (i.e., belief in the innate inferiority of African Americans) is observed in the 1990s and early 2000s. And, while declines in support for the popularity of the NORC lack of motivation item are observed across the years studied, increases are seen in the popularity of the *purely* motivational mode of explanation (motivational individualism)—a change from the steady levels of support for this belief pattern seen among whites in the 1970s and 1980s (Kluegel 1990). In addition, whites also show fairly steady support for the Discrimination mode of explanation over time, as well as small increases in endorsement of the Education-only explanation across the 1990s and early 2000s. As whites have gravitated toward purely person-centered or structural explanations, or toward the view that none of the NORC items explains blacks' disadvantage, support for mixed modes of explanation has declined.

African Americans and Hispanics also demonstrate increasing support for motivational individualism and the None mode, but they part company with whites in demonstrating *decreasing* support for the purely structuralist modes—particularly Discrimination. These conservative opinion shifts among Hispanics are generally consistent with identificational assimilation arguments predicting increasing similarity with non-Hispanic whites over time (Yancey 2003). Future research should consider whether patterns of segmented assimilation and/or differing paths of social mobility by nationality, immigration status, economic status, and/or skin color—including whether and how such factors may influence selection into omnibus surveys such as the GSS—contribute to the apparent trends toward conservatism on Hispanics' beliefs about the B/W SES gap.

<sup>23</sup> Emerson and Smith (2000) suggest that most white evangelicals perceive little to no systematic discrimination against African Americans and deny the existence of any ongoing racial problem in the United States. The authors interpret this as less a function of active racism than of a religious worldview emphasizing individualism, free will, and personal relationships. As a result, the perception of systematic injustices is made unlikely, and most "racial problems" are seen as issues to be dealt with by changing the sinful individuals at fault (e.g., via personal repentance and conversion).

The conservative shifts seen among African Americans are less easily explained, but they clearly indicate that the opinion gulf between whites and blacks—at least regarding explanations for blacks' disadvantage—is narrowing. The fact that *among* African Americans, younger respondents/more recent cohorts and self-reported conservatives are significantly *more* likely to be motivational individualists, while the less educated, Southerners, females, conservatives, and the self-identified middle class are significantly *less* likely to support the Discrimination mode (Table 5), provides some direction for future inquiries into the apparent growing conservatism on this dimension of blacks' stratification beliefs. Other possibilities include changes in the perception of group interests, the actual level and/or nature of discrimination, and/or differential selection into the GSS by economic status as class variation magnifies among blacks. Whatever the causes, the net result of the race/ethnic differences in over-time trends is convergence across race/ethnic lines regarding beliefs about the B/W SES gap, though significant race/ethnic "static" group differences remain (Table 4).

Hispanics clearly warrant separate examination in stratification beliefs research, as their differences from non-Hispanic whites and African Americans in the current study are complex. Hispanics are most similar to African Americans in their significantly stronger endorsement of the mixed modes of explanation, relative to non-Hispanic whites. This dual consciousness finding is consistent with two other recent studies documenting that racial minorities simultaneously balance individualist and structuralist beliefs at greater rates than do whites (Hughes and Tuch 1999; Hunt 1996). Such patterns suggest that the *seemingly* inconsistent belief elements comprising the mixed modes may not be seen as such—that is, the perception of lack of motivation and discrimination may be part of the same process wherein these beliefs may be made *simultaneously* salient through experiences with (or contact with fellow group members who have experienced) the motivation-altering consequences of discrimination. On other outcomes, however, Hispanics differ significantly from (1) African Americans but not whites (Ability mode), and (2) from both African Americans and whites (Motivation and

Discrimination modes, in which Hispanics fall between the two other groups).

Among non-Hispanic whites, the examined social and political characteristics variables (Table 5) operate largely as documented in earlier research (Apostle et al. 1983; Kluegel 1990; Sniderman and Hagen 1985). However, significant race/ethnic minority group departures from non-Hispanic whites in the effects of selected covariates (Table 5) reinforce calls for more explicit examination of the beliefs of race/ethnic minorities in public opinion research (Bobo 2000) and in social psychological analyses generally (Hunt et al. 2000). Failure to do so risks perpetuating explanations of sociopolitical attitudes that represent a "white" worldview, owing to the neglect of non-whites in past research. To that end, research should strive to build on recent multiethnic studies of other topics in order to advance our knowledge of a range of racial attitudes and stratification beliefs for which non-Hispanic whites have been the primary focus of past studies. As part of that effort, research should more explicitly examine empirical relationships between beliefs about racial inequality and other stratification beliefs. For instance, Wilson (1996) suggests that research should seek to expand knowledge of beliefs about different types of poverty. When coupled with Gilens (1999) demonstration that Americans racialize this issue (i.e., overestimate the degree to which the poor are African American), research into beliefs about different aspects of economic inequality could usefully augment our understanding of how different categories of people are racialized by the lay public—an issue that has implications for debates in the area of welfare state politics (Quadagno 1994).

Researchers should also seek to more fully examine the beliefs of other "race" groups, such as Asians (excluded from this study because of sample size limitations). Future survey studies designed to maximize racial diversity (e.g., by oversampling various populations) would be helpful in this endeavor and would also allow for analysis of cultural variation within larger ethnoracial categories (e.g., Korean, Chinese, and Japanese Americans *within* the Asian category; Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban Americans *within* the Hispanic category)—including within the non-Hispanic white population (Coverdill 1977; Waters 1990). Future

research should also explore potential differences by nativity/generational-status, and other important indicators of assimilation and acculturation (e.g., language use) more thoroughly than is possible with the GSS. Finally, in light of the evidence presented in this article with regard to a growing conservatism in African Americans' and Hispanics' explanations for racial inequality, future research should examine whether such trends generalize to other stratification beliefs and racial attitudes, including support for various income and race-targeted policies (Bobo and Kluegel 1993). In the wake of the controversial 2003 U.S. Supreme Court decision on affirmative action, continued challenges to such race-targeted policies, and grow-

ing diversity across racial, ethnic, and nativity-status lines in the United States (Alba and Nee 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Pedraza and Rumbaut 1996), few topics are likely to elicit more public and scholarly interest.

*Matthew O. Hunt* is Associate Professor of Sociology at Northeastern University. His primary research interests involve intersections of race/ethnicity, social psychology, and inequality in contemporary societies. His work has appeared in *Social Forces*, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Du Bois Review*, and other publications. Ongoing projects include studies of perceived discrimination among African Americans, patterns of interregional migration in the United States, and antecedents and consequences of U.S. stratification ideology.

**Table A1.** Binary Logistic Regression Estimates for the Effects of Modes of Explanation for the Black/White SES Gap on Support for Government Aid to Blacks (1985–2004 GSS)

Mode of Explanation	Government Spending for Blacks		Government Aid for Black Standard of Living	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Ability	.153 (.151)	.248 (.158)	.092 (.225)	.141 (.230)
Ability + Structuralism	1.331*** (.118)	0.147*** (.129)	1.725*** (.150)	1.439*** (.158)
Motivation + Structuralism	1.444*** (.097)	1.344*** (.103)	1.375*** (.134)	1.188*** (.137)
Education	1.269*** (.114)	1.227*** (.121)	1.347*** (.151)	1.291*** (.156)
Discrimination	2.369*** (.094)	2.046*** (.101)	2.445*** (.125)	2.089*** (.130)
None	.580*** (.127)	.462*** (.135)	.411* (.187)	.319 (.192)
N	6,469		7,395	

Note: "Motivation" mode = omitted category. Standard errors in parentheses. Model 2 controls for race/ethnicity, education, social class identification, age, gender, region, fundamentalism, conservatism, and year of survey.

*Government Spending for Blacks.* Interviewer statement: "We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it (3), too little money (1), or about the right amount (2)." Problem named = "Improving the conditions of blacks." Responses recoded: 1 = too little money; 0 = otherwise.

*Government Aid for Black Standard of Living.* Interviewer statement: "Some people think that blacks have been discriminated against for so long that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standards. Others believe that the government should not be giving special treatment to blacks. Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you made up your mind on this?" Response options = five-point scale, from "I strongly agree that government is obligated to help blacks" (1) to "agree with both" (3) to "no special treatment" (5). Responses recoded: 1 = government is obligated to help blacks (original responses 1,2); 0 = otherwise (original responses 3,4,5).

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

**Table A2.** Relationship of 16 Logical Combinations of Four NORC Items to Seven Modes of Explanation (Table 1) (1985–2004 GSS)

Acronym	NORC Items				Percent	Cum. Percent	Mode of Explanation
	Ability	Motivation	Education	Discrimination			
A	Yes	No	No	No	.4	.4	Ability
AM	Yes	Yes	No	No	6.2	6.6	Ability
M	No	Yes	No	No	21.5	28.1	Motivation
AED	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	.8	28.9	Ability + Structuralism
AD	Yes	No	No	Yes	.3	29.2	Ability + Structuralism
AE	Yes	No	Yes	No	.5	29.7	Ability + Structuralism
AMED	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2.7	32.4	Ability + Structuralism
AMD	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	1.3	33.7	Ability + Structuralism
AME	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	2.8	36.5	Ability + Structuralism
MD	No	Yes	No	Yes	4.8	41.3	Motivation + Structuralism
MED	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	6.1	47.4	Motivation + Structuralism
ME	No	Yes	Yes	No	8.4	55.8	Motivation + Structuralism
E	No	No	Yes	No	10.2	66.0	Education
ED	No	No	Yes	Yes	18.6	84.6	Discrimination
D	No	No	No	Yes	6.1	90.7	Discrimination
NONE	No	No	No	No	9.5	100.2	None

Note: Cumulative percentage exceeds 100 percent because of rounding error.

## REFERENCES

- Abelson, Robert P., Elliot Aronson, William McGuire, Theodore Newcomb, Milton Rosenberg, and Percy Tannenbaum, eds. 1968. *Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.
- Alba, Richard D. and Victor Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Allen, Walter R. and Reynolds Farley. 1986. "The Shifting Social and Economic Tides of Black America, 1950–1980." *Annual Review of Sociology* 12:277–306.
- Apostle, Richard A., Charles Y. Glock, Thomas Piazza, and Marijean Suelzle. 1983. *The Anatomy of Racial Attitudes*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Bobo, Lawrence. 1991. "Social Responsibility, Individualism, and Redistributive Policies." *Sociological Forum* 6:71–92.
- . 1993. "Whites Opposition to Busing: Symbolic Racism or Realistic Group Conflict?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45:1195–1210.
- . 2000. "Race and Beliefs About Affirmative Action: Assessing the Effects of Interests, Group Threat, Ideology, and Racism." Pp. 137–64 in *Racialized Politics: The Debate About Racism in America*, edited by D. O. Sears, J. Sidanius, and L. Bobo. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bobo, Lawrence and Vincent L. Hutchings. 1996. "Perceptions of Racial Group Competition: Extending Blumer's Theory of Group Position to a Multiracial Social Context." *American Sociological Review* 61:951–72.
- Bobo, Lawrence and James R. Kluegel. 1993. "Opposition to Race-Targeting: Self-Interest, Stratification Ideology, or Racial Attitudes?" *American Sociological Review* 58:442–64.
- Bobo, Lawrence, James R. Kluegel, and Ryan A. Smith. 1997. "Laissez-Faire Racism: The Crystallization of a Kinder, Gentler, Antiblack Ideology." Pp. 15–42 in *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and Change*, edited by S. A. Tuch and J. K. Martin. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Bobo, Lawrence and Camille Zubrinsky. 1996. "Attitudes on Residential Integration: Perceived Status Differences, Mere In-Group Preference, or Racial Prejudice?" *Social Forces* 74:883–909.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2001. *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner.
- . 2004. "From Bi-Racial to Tri-Racial: Towards a New System of Racial Stratification in the USA." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27:931–50.
- Conley, Dalton. 1999. *Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth, and Social Policy in America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Cornell, Stephen and Douglas Hartmann. 1997. *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Cose, Ellis. 1993. *The Rage of a Privileged Class*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Coverdill, James E. 1977. "White Ethnic Identification and Racial Attitudes." Pp. 144–64 in *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and*

- Change*, edited by S. A. Tuch and J. K. Martin. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Davis, James A. and Tom W. Smith. 2005. *General Social Surveys, 1972–2004: Cumulative Codebook*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, National Opinion Research Center.
- Dawson, Michael C. 1994. *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- de la Garza, Rodolfo O., Louis DeSipio, F. Chris Garcia, John Garcia, and Angelo Falcon. 1992. *Latino Voices: Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Cuban Perspectives on American Politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Dixon, Jeffrey C. 2006. "The Ties That Bind and Those That Don't: Toward Reconciling Group Threat and Contact Theories of Prejudice." *Social Forces* 84:2179–2204.
- DuBois, W.E.B. [1903] 1993. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. 2000. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Farley, Reynolds and Walter R. Allen. 1987. *The Color Line and the Quality of Life in America*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Feagin, Joe. 1975. *Subordinating the Poor*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gilens, Martin. 1999. *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gordon, Milton M. 1964. *Assimilation in American Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought*. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman.
- Hochschild, Jennifer. 1995. *Facing up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hughes, Michael. 1997. "Symbolic Racism, Old-Fashioned Racism, and Whites' Opposition to Affirmative Action." Pp. 45–75 in *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and Change*, edited by S. A. Tuch and J. K. Martin. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Hughes, Michael and Melvin Thomas. 1998. "The Continuing Significance of Race Revisited: A Study of Race, Class and Quality of Life in America, 1972–1996." *American Sociological Review* 64:785–95.
- Hughes, Michael and Steven A. Tuch. 1999. "How Beliefs About Poverty Influence Racial Policy Attitudes: A Study of Whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians in the United States." Pp. 165–90 in *Racialized Politics: The Debate About Racism in America*, edited by D. O. Sears, J. Sidanius, and L. Bobo. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hunt, Larry L. 1999. "Hispanic Protestantism in the United States: Trends by Decade and Generation." *Social Forces* 77:1601–23.
- Hunt, Matthew O. 1996. "The Individual, Society, or Both?: A Comparison of Black, Latino, and White Beliefs About the Causes of Poverty." *Social Forces* 75:293–332.
- . 2002. "Religion, Race/Ethnicity, and Beliefs About Poverty." *Social Science Quarterly* 83:810–31.
- Hunt, Matthew O., Brian Powell, Lala Carr Steelman, and Pamela B. Jackson. 2000. "Color-Blind: The Treatment of Race and Ethnicity in Social Psychology." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63:352–64.
- Ignatiev, Noel. 1995. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge.
- Jackman, Mary R. 1994. *The Velvet Glove: Paternalism and Conflict in Gender, Class, and Race Relations*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Jackman, Mary R. and Michael J. Muha. 1984. "Education and Intergroup Attitudes: Moral Enlightenment, Superficial Democratic Commitment, or Ideological Refinement?" *American Sociological Review* 49:751–69.
- Jones-Correa, Michael. 1998. *Between Two Nations: The Political Predicament of Latinos in New York City*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- . 2007. "Explaining the Black-White Gap in Socioeconomic Status, 1977–1989." *American Sociological Review* 55:512–25.
- Cluegel, James R. and Lawrence Bobo. 1993. "Dimensions of Whites' Beliefs about the Black-White Socioeconomic Gap." Pp. 127–47 in, *Prejudice, Politics, and the American Dilemma*, edited by P. M. Sniderman, P. E. Tetlock, and E. G. Carmines. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cluegel, James R., David S. Mason, and Bernd Wegener, eds. 1995. *Social Justice and Political Change: Public Opinion in Capitalist and Post-Communist States*. New York: Aldine DeGruyter.
- Cluegel, James R. and Eliot R. Smith. 1986. *Beliefs About Inequality*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Krysan, Maria. 2000. "Prejudice, Politics, and Public Opinion: Understanding the Sources of Racial Policy Attitudes." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26:135–68.
- Landry, Bart. 1987. *The New Black Middle Class*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Lee, Barrett A., Sue Hinze Jones, and David W. Lewis. 1990. "Public Beliefs About the Causes of Homelessness." *Social Forces* 69:253–65.
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1966. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lien, Pei-te, M. Margaret Conway, and Janelle Wong. 2004. *The Politics of Asian Americans: Diversity*

- and Community. New York and London: Routledge.
- Lincoln, C. Eric and Lawrence H. Mamiya. 1990. *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mann, Michael. 1970. "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy." *American Sociological Review* 35:423–39.
- Manza, Jeff and Clem Brooks. 1999. *Social Cleavages and Political Change: Voter Alignments and U.S. Party Coalitions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Massey, Douglas S. and Nancy A. Denton. 1993. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Myrdal, Gunnar. 1944. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- National Public Radio. 2001. "NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School 'Poverty in America' Poll." Retrieved June 21, 2006 (<http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/poll/poverty/>).
- Oliver, J. Eric and Janelle Wong. 2003. "Intergroup Prejudice in Multiethnic Settings." *American Journal of Political Science* 47:567–82.
- Oliver, Melvin L. and Thomas M. Shapiro. 1995. *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*. New York: Routledge.
- Park, Kyeyoung. 1995. "The Re-Invention of Affirmative Action: Korean Immigrants' Changing Conceptions of African Americans and Latin Americans." *Urban Anthropology* 24:59–92.
- Pedraza, Silvia and Ruben Rumbaut. 1996. *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*. Belmont, WA: Wadsworth.
- Perlmann, Joel. 2005. *Italians Then, Mexicans Now: Immigrant Origins and Second-Generation Progress, 1890–2000*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Pettigrew, Thomas F. 1982. "Prejudice." Pp. 1–30 in *Dimensions of Ethnicity*, edited by S. Thernstrom, A. Orlov, and O. Handlin. Cambridge, MA: Belknap.
- Portes, Alejandro and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 2001. *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Powell, Brian, Claudia Geist, Catherine Bolzendahl, and Danielle Fettes. 2006. "God, Genes, and Gays: Views Regarding Children's Development and Definitions of *The Family*." Department of Sociology, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. Unpublished manuscript.
- Quadagno, Jill. 1994. *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rotter, J. B. 1966. "Generalized Expectancies for Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement." *Psychological Monographs* 33:300–03.
- Runciman, Walter G. 1966. *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Social Inequality in Twentieth Century England*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Schnittker, Jason, Jeremy Freese, and Brian Powell. 2000. "Nature, Nurture, Neither, Nor: Black-White Differences in Beliefs About the Causes and Appropriate Treatment of Mental Illness." *Social Forces* 78:1101–32.
- Schuman, Howard, Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo, and Maria Krysan. 1997. *Racial Attitudes in America—Trends and Interpretations*. Rev. ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.
- Sears, David O. 1988. "Symbolic Racism." Pp. 53–84 in *Eliminating Racism: Means and Controversies*, edited by P. A. Katz and D. A. Taylor. New York: Plenum.
- Sears, David O., Jim Sidanius, and Lawrence Bobo. 1999. *Racialized Politics: The Debate About Racism in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Sigelman, Lee. 1997. "Blacks, Whites, and the Changing Guard in Black Political Leadership." Pp. 177–200 in *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and Change*, edited by S. A. Tuch and J. K. Martin. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Sigelman, Lee and Susan Welch. 1991. *Black Americans' Views of Racial Inequality: The Dream Deferred*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Skerry, Peter. 1993. *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Smith, Tom W. 1986. "Classifying Protestant Denominations." *GSS Technical Report No. 67*. Chicago, IL: NORC.
- Smith, Robert and Richard Seltzer. 1992. *Race, Class, and Culture: A Study in Afro-American Mass Opinion*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Sniderman, Paul M. and Michael Gray Hagen. 1985. *Race and Inequality: A Study in American Values*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House.
- Sniderman, Paul M. and Thomas Piazza. 1993. *The Scar of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press.
- Stelman, Lala Carr and Brian Powell. 1993. "Doing the Right Thing: Race and Parental Locus of Responsibility for Funding College." *Sociology of Education* 66:223–44.
- Tuch, Steven A. and Jack K. Martin. 1997. "Regional Differences in Whites' Racial Policy Attitudes." Pp. 165–76 in *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and Change*, edited by S. A. Tuch and J. K. Martin. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Washington Post. 2001. "Washington Post/Kaiser/Harvard 'Racial Attitudes' Survey." Retrieved June 19, 2006 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/sidebars/polls/race071101.htm>).
- Waters, Mary C. 1990. *Ethnic Options: Choosing*

- Identities in America*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Weitzer, Ronald. 1997. "Racial Prejudice Among Korean Merchants in African American Neighborhoods." *Sociological Quarterly* 38:587–606.
- Welch, Susan and Lee Sigelman. 1993. "The Politics of Hispanic Americans: Insights from National Surveys, 1980–1988." *Social Science Quarterly* 74:76–94.
- Wilson, George. 1996. "Toward a Revised Framework for Examining Beliefs About the Causes of Poverty." *Sociological Quarterly* 37:413–28.
- Wilson, William J. 1978. *The Declining Significance of Race*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Yancey, George. 2003. *Who is White: Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Non-Black Divide*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.