

Religion, Race/Ethnicity, and Beliefs about Poverty*

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Objective. Although an expanding literature on “stratification beliefs” has developed over the past three decades, research has neglected relationships between religion and beliefs about poverty and other inequalities. This study examines the relationship between religious affiliation and “individualistic,” “structuralist,” and “fatalistic” beliefs about the causes of poverty, and compares the beliefs of African Americans, Latinos, and whites. *Methods.* Survey data collected in 1993 from a sample of southern Californians are used to test whether several religious affiliations (Protestant, Catholic, Jew, “other religion,” and nonaffiliation) shape beliefs about poverty after controlling for race/ethnicity, SES, gender, and age. In addition, the question of whether African Americans, Latinos, and whites differ in the effects of key religious affiliations is examined. *Results.* Significant religious affiliation effects are found, net of sociodemographic controls. Protestants and Catholics are strongest on individualistic beliefs; Jews and followers of “other” religions are strongest on structuralist beliefs; Catholics and Jews are strongest on fatalistic beliefs. Finally, race/ethnic differences are found for the effects of key religious affiliations. *Conclusion.* The analyses demonstrate “religious factors” shaping beliefs about poverty, and reinforce the growing body of evidence that affiliations such as Protestant and Catholic have distinctive meanings and effects along race/ethnic lines in the United States.

Introduction

Although an expanding social scientific literature on “stratification beliefs” has developed over the past three decades, research typically has not focused on relationships between religion and beliefs about the causes of poverty and other inequalities. This neglect is curious, given the central place of religion in offering theodicies—explanations for the way social life distributes social rewards and shapes life chances (Weber, 1921, 1922). Further, this neglect occurs despite suggestive evidence that religion—par-

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ticularly as it intersects with race/ethnicity—may be an important determinant of how people think about the subject of poverty (Feagin, 1975).

One reason for the comparative neglect of religion by stratification beliefs researchers may lie in the fact that religiously based differences (e.g., traditional Protestant/Catholic cleavages such as those documented by Lenski, 1961) have apparently lessened over the course of the last several decades in American society (Hunter, 1991). Since most Americans identify themselves as either Protestant or Catholic, and since recent research suggests few Protestant/Catholic status or ideological differences in the general population, there has been movement away from considering the impact of religious affiliation on secular beliefs. Along these lines, some argue that there has been a realignment in the direction of a “conservatism/orthodoxy” versus “liberalism/secular humanism” axis of religious difference (i.e., a “fundamentalist/modernist” dimension) that has replaced older Protestant/Catholic cleavages (Hunter, 1991).¹ However, such a sweeping conclusion may be limited to patterns present in the “white” population, as recent studies of African Americans and Latinos (Hunt, 1998, 1999) document sizable Protestant/Catholic differences within these important minority groups, suggesting the continuing relevance of examining general religious affiliation differences. Indeed, only studies that are comparative by race/ethnicity (inclusive of race/ethnic minority groups) can show the extent to which traditional Protestant/Catholic cleavages persist or have been attenuated.

This study explores the interplay of religion and “stratification beliefs” by examining relationships between several religious affiliations and “individualistic,” “structuralist,” and “fatalistic” beliefs about the causes of poverty (Feagin, 1975; Kluegel and Smith, 1986). In addition, the question of whether the religious affiliation/stratification beliefs relationship differs for whites, blacks, and Latinos is explored.² I ask three questions. First, is there any relationship between religious affiliation (or nonaffiliation) and beliefs about the causes of poverty? Second, do any “religion” effects persist when controlling for the effects of other known predictors of beliefs about poverty (e.g., race/ethnicity, SES, gender)? Third, do religious affiliation and race/ethnicity intersect in meaningful ways in shaping beliefs about poverty?

¹ Another aspect of the “culture wars” thesis holds that religiously and morally based worldviews have become more powerful than traditional “sociodemographic” variables as determinants of social and political attitudes, although some recent empirical work challenges this claim (Evans, 1997). Further, Davis and Robinson (1996) challenge the metaphor of “culture war” with research showing that Americans from a national survey are not divided along moral/religious lines (with opposed views of a broad range of issues) in the way predicted by Hunter (1991).

² “Race/ethnicity” is based on respondents’ self-reports. The terms race/ethnicity and race, African American and black, and Latino and Hispanic, are used interchangeably in this study.

Background

Stratification Beliefs

The study of “stratification beliefs” involves an attempt to understand “what people believe about who gets what and why” (Kluegel and Smith, 1986). Past research suggests that beliefs about poverty are of two main types: “individualistic” and “structuralist,” though there is also reason to believe that “fatalistic” beliefs—originally identified by Feagin (1975)—may warrant more theoretical and empirical attention.³ “Individualistic” beliefs locate the causes of poverty in poor persons themselves (e.g., lack of ability, lack of effort) and are understood to reflect and reinforce a dominant ideology of individualism in the United States (Huber and Form, 1973). In contrast, structuralist beliefs locate the causes of poverty in the social and economic system (e.g., lack of jobs, discrimination) in which poor persons live. As such they represent a “system challenging” belief, existing alongside the ideology of individualism in American culture (Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Bobo, 1991). Finally, fatalistic beliefs locate the causes of poverty in nonstructural, but supra-individual (nonvolitional) forces such as luck, chance, sickness, or physical handicaps (Feagin, 1975).

Most research documents the greater popularity of individualistic views of poverty among Americans, at least in past decades (Feagin, 1975; Huber and Form, 1973; Kluegel and Smith, 1986). Research suggests that public beliefs about the sources of poverty generally center around the lack of a proper work ethic, the lack of ability, and other supposed personal defects of poor persons themselves, an image consistent with Ryan’s (1971) claim that many Americans “blame the victim” when thinking about poverty. However, the historical dominance of this view may not be descriptive of more recent decades as some recent research on poverty beliefs suggests that structural challenges to individualism may actually predominate during times of social or economic strain (Hunt, 1996), as well as in support for other inequality related issues such as homelessness (Lee, Jones, and Lewis, 1990).⁴ Much less evidence exists regarding Americans’ support for fatalistic

³Most past research has focused on “individualistic” and “structuralist” beliefs because factor analyses of the set of items commonly used in survey studies (i.e., the 10 items originally developed by Feagin, 1975) point to the existence of these two underlying dimensions (as does this study). However, the fact that this set of items only contains two questions that are clearly designed to tap “fatalism” could contribute to why a distinct “fatalistic beliefs” factor generally does not appear, thus underestimating the role of fatalism in shaping peoples’ thinking about poverty. Future survey studies should address this possibility by including more items tapping the fatalism dimension.

⁴It is possible that the terms of discourse concerning popular views of the causes of issues such as poverty are changing. However, only nationally representative studies using survey items similar to those used in past decades can determine this definitively. Further, it is possible that some of the “dual” support for individualism and structuralism in recent studies may be due to differing public sympathies for different “types” of poverty (Wilson, 1996). Indeed,

beliefs, though Feagin's seminal research on the topic suggests that this type of belief is less popular than the other two types.

Regarding the antecedents of poverty beliefs, most past research suggests that persons with higher status (e.g., higher SES, whites, older persons) tend to favor individualistic explanations. Lower status has been found to increase the use of structuralist beliefs, though not necessarily at the cost of support for individualism. This pattern combining different types of belief in "compromise" explanations (Lee, Jones, and Lewis, 1990) is understood to reflect the strength of individualism as a pervasive ideology shaping the beliefs of persons at all social locations, alongside culturally available challenges to individualism (e.g., structuralist beliefs) that are more responsive than individualism to factors such as group memberships, personal experiences, and the prevailing social, political, and economic climate. As such, structuralist beliefs are typically thought to be "layered onto," rather than replacing of, individualism (Kluegel and Smith, 1986).⁵ Such "compromise" explanations, involving the combining of different types of belief, may be especially critical in the experiences of minority groups, whose structural locations and distinct experiences generate a frame of reference different from that of the majority group (Hunt, 1996).

Religion and Beliefs about Poverty

While the focus of most past research has been on various social structural correlates of poverty beliefs, there are reasons to believe that religion may be a source of support for an American "dominant ideology," as well as for structural and fatalistic alternatives to individualism. To examine this possibility, I draw a distinction between "dominant" and "minority" religious traditions. By "dominant" I mean those affiliations that are present in the majority of the population and endorsed by those of higher status. Until the 20th century, Protestantism was the sole dominant tradition in the United States; however, since then, Catholicism has become part of the dominant culture as well, as European Catholic immigrant groups have been gradually assimilated into the American mainstream, and the historically sharp lines of Protestant/Catholic difference (Lenski, 1961) have become attenuated (at least among whites) (Feagin, 1989; Hunter, 1991). By "minority" I mean

Gilens' (1999) recent study of public attitudes toward welfare recipients suggests support for both disparaging and sympathetic views of this category of poor persons in the American mass public, in large part, depending on whether the poor are perceived to be among the "deserving" or not (i.e., support for government programs designed to ameliorate poverty is particularly likely when the recipients of state support are believed to be willing and/or attempting to improve their own situations through work).

⁵ Kluegel and Smith state that "individual and structural explanations are not alternatives" (1986:17). Much research (Huber and Form, 1973; Lane, 1962; Mann, 1970) supports the "principle of cognitive efficiency," which holds that persons can endorse both types of beliefs simultaneously, rather than viewing them as alternatives in the quest for consistency (Kluegel and Smith, 1986).

religious affiliations outside the dominant traditions in a given historical context (thus, in the 19th century, Catholicism was a minority affiliation). Currently in the United States, minority affiliations include Jews, followers of “other religions” (non-Christian and non-Jewish), and the secular minority who claim no religious affiliation (though this latter category may not constitute a distinct “group,” collectivity, or tradition, an issue returned to later).

Past research on the links between religious affiliation and “stratification beliefs” in the general American population suggests some basic empirical patterns, but also includes several important shortcomings. First, Feagin (1975) reports some descriptive statistics suggesting that individualistic beliefs are most popular among white Protestants and white Catholics, followed by black Protestants, and then Jews. Regarding structuralist beliefs, Feagin found greatest support among black Protestants, followed by Jews, with white Protestants and Catholics showing the lowest levels of support. Finally, regarding fatalistic beliefs, no group had much support for this view of poverty, though black Protestants showed the most support, and Jews the least, in Feagin’s national survey data.

Kluegel and Smith (1986) build on Feagin’s findings and add the rigor of multiple regression modeling, but only examine individualistic beliefs (1986:90). These authors report that, compared with persons reporting “no religion” (who showed the least support for individualistic beliefs about poverty), “nonconservative” Protestants, “conservative” Protestants, and Catholics were ranked in that order on individualism and were uniformly higher than members of “other religions” and Jews, who ranked only slightly higher than the nonaffiliated. No findings were reported by Kluegel and Smith (1986) for the relationship between religious affiliation and either structuralist or fatalistic beliefs, nor for any differences by race in the impact of religious affiliation. Thus, the basic picture painted by past research is that individualistic beliefs are most popular among white Protestants and Catholics—the two dominant traditions—with Jews, followers of other religions, and those with no religion (i.e., the “minority” affiliations) showing less support. Regarding structuralist beliefs, the available data suggest that these beliefs are most popular among black Protestants and Jews, but less popular among the two dominant traditions of Protestantism and Catholicism (for whites). Finally, the existing research suggests little variation among religious groups of any race/ethnic background, and considerably less overall support, for fatalistic explanations of poverty.

The patterns observed for individualistic and structuralist beliefs in past research are consistent with the basic logic of the “underdog thesis”—originally developed in studies of the relationship between socioeconomic status and ideology (Robinson and Bell, 1978)—applied to the issue of “religion as status.” As originally developed, the “underdog thesis” holds that relatively disadvantaged groups, compared their more advantaged counterparts, are less likely to endorse dominant ideologies and are more likely to support

ideological challenges to the status quo. On the religious front, the distinction between “dominant” and “minority” traditions renders the findings of past research on religion and beliefs about poverty consistent with a “religious underdog” thesis. Specifically, members of the dominant traditions (Protestants and Catholics) are more likely to endorse the individualistic view of poverty than are members of historically marginalized religious groups and nonaffiliates. And, a historically marginalized religious minority, Jews (along with African-American Protestants), are more likely than the two dominant Christian traditions (Protestant and Catholic) to endorse the system-challenging, structuralist beliefs about poverty.⁶ Whether this “religious underdog” perspective explains the relationship between religious affiliation and poverty beliefs in the current study is an important question.

Race and Religion

Regarding the intersection of race and religion, research suggests that the history and meanings of religious affiliations such as “Protestant” and “Catholic” differ for blacks, Latinos, and whites in the United States. For example, among whites in the United States, Protestantism has historically fostered an individualistic view of poverty that attributes responsibility for poverty to characteristics of poor persons themselves rather than to aspects of social structure (Feagin, 1975). In contrast, however, African-American versions of Protestantism represent a more communal or collectivist affiliation most closely connected with black political activism (Morris, 1984; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998), while the Catholic affiliation for African Americans represents the more individualistic and apolitical affiliation, possibly fostering disengagement from the black community and facilitating status mobility (Frazier, 1964; Hunt and Hunt, 1975). Further, while most Latinos report an allegiance to a version of Roman Catholicism (most surveys suggest that approximately 75 percent of Latinos self-identify as Catholic) that has traditionally been unsupportive of resistance to dominant ideologies, there is evidence of a growing Protestantism among Hispanics in the United States (and elsewhere)—an affiliation that may be more conducive to political involvement and a critique of social inequality. Thus, the general conclusion that Protestant/Catholic cleavages have lessened in the latter half of the 20th century in the United States may not be applicable to minority race/ethnic groups, among whom these religious traditions have distinctive meanings and effects.

This article moves beyond past studies in several ways. First, I analyze all three types of belief identified by Feagin (1975) in a multiple regression format (despite their neglect, “fate-linked” attributions seem especially important when examining relationships with religion). Second, I analyze the

⁶ Because research on structuralist beliefs is more limited, it is not clear where nonaffiliates fit here.

effects of religious affiliation before and after controlling for the effects of several other known predictors of poverty beliefs to determine whether there are “religious factors” shaping beliefs net of the effects of sociodemographic variables. Third, building on past research suggesting that the effects and meaning of religious affiliation may vary by race/ethnicity in the United States, I explore whether race and religion intersect in meaningful ways in shaping how people think about the subject of poverty.

Data

The data used in this investigation were gathered between January and March 1993 at the Social Science Research Center at the California State University at Fullerton through random-digit-dialing and telephone interviews of persons 18 years or older residing in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. The overall response rate was just above 70 percent. Of the 2,854 interviews completed, 1,245 were with whites, 737 with Latinos, 646 with African Americans, 148 with Asians, and 62 with “others” (16 people refused to answer the race self-identification question). Given the extreme cultural heterogeneity of the Asian category (which includes Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, Indian, and others), Asians are excluded from this study in order to focus on a comparison of the three other major race/ethnic groups in the region ($n = 2,628$).⁷ The survey purposely oversampled blacks, resulting in a sample in which whites represent 47.4 percent, blacks represent 24.6 percent, and Latinos 28 percent of respondents. This race/ethnic mix was achieved by oversampling telephone exchanges in 1990 Census tracts in which the black population was greater than 30 percent.

Comparisons with 1990 Census data for the southern California region confirm the representativeness of the current sample in terms of basic sociodemographic characteristics, and a weighting correction (based on Census information) adjusts the sample to mirror existing race/ethnic and gender population proportions. This weighting procedure changes the race/ethnic percentages to: whites = 60.2 percent, blacks = 8.7 percent, and Latinos = 31.1 percent. The weighted sample is used to calculate descriptive statistics (i.e., means and standard deviations) for the total sample, but the regression models use the unweighted sample following the recommendations of Winship and Radbill (1994).⁸ Interviews were conducted in either English or

⁷ Compared with Asians, Latinos are much more ethnically homogenous in the region sampled for this study (approximately 85 percent are Mexican American or “Chicano”).

⁸ Winship and Radbill (1994) argue that when sampling weights are a function of independent variables of the model (as in the current study), unweighted ordinary least square (OLS) estimates are preferred because they are unbiased, consistent, and have smaller standard errors than weighted OLS estimates. As a safeguard, I ran the regression models both ways (i.e., with the weighted and unweighted samples) and observed similar results.

Spanish according to the respondent's wishes. Back-translation was used to maximize the equivalence of the two versions of the survey.

Measures

Beliefs about Poverty

The three dependent variables examined in this study measure the importance attributed to individualistic, structuralist, and fatalistic reasons for poverty. The items used in these measures were taken, with slight modification, from Feagin's 1969 and Kluegel and Smith's 1980 surveys of stratification beliefs (Feagin, 1975; Kluegel and Smith, 1986). In these studies, respondents were presented with a series of statements representing possible explanations for why some people are poor and were asked whether they thought a particular reason was "very important" (coded 4), "somewhat important" (coded 3), "not very important" (coded 2), or "not at all important" (coded 1), as a reason for poverty.

Consistent with prior studies (see note 5), and based on the results of factor analysis (varimax rotation) of the complete set of survey items (see note 3), separate measures of individualistic and structuralist beliefs about poverty were constructed. *Individualistic* beliefs are measured with a scale ($\alpha = 0.67$) composed of the following items: "personal irresponsibility, lack of discipline among those who are poor," "lack of effort by those who are poor," "lack of thrift and personal money management," and "lack of ability and talent among those who are poor." *Structuralist* beliefs are measured with a scale ($\alpha = 0.70$) composed of the following items: "low wages in some businesses and industries," "failure of society to provide good schools for many Americans," "prejudice and discrimination," and "failure of private industry to provide enough good jobs." In addition to the scales tapping individualistic and structuralist beliefs, *fatalistic* beliefs about poverty are measured with a single item asking about "just bad luck" as an explanation for poverty. For the two scales, the responses were summed and divided by four so that the original metric (scores ranging from 1 to 4) is preserved and comparable to the single-item fatalism measure.

Independent Variables

Given the centrality of Protestant themes in explanations for individualistic orientations and ideologies (Durkheim, 1951; Weber, 1958), along with research documenting (1) significant Protestant/Catholic differences among whites' political beliefs and attitudes (Lenski, 1961), (2) distinctive African-American versions of Protestantism (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990) and Catholicism (Feagin, 1968), (3) the centrality of Catholicism in the Latino experience alongside a growing Hispanic Protestant minority

(Greeley, 1988; Hunt 1999), and (4) suggestive “Jewish” and “other religion” patterns for beliefs about poverty, five “affiliations” are examined: Protestant, Catholic, Jew, persons claiming an “other religion” (non-Christian and non-Jewish), and “nonaffiliates” (i.e., persons reporting no religion). Each affiliation is measured with a dummy variable in which members of that affiliation are coded “1” and others are coded “0”.⁹

Regarding other independent variables, race/ethnicity is measured with two separate dummy variables coded “1” if black, “0” otherwise and “1” if Latino, “0” otherwise (whites are the omitted category in the regression analyses). Gender is measured with a dummy variable coded “1” if female and “0” if male. To measure SES, information on personal income (10 categories ranging from “under \$10,000” to “\$75,000 or above”) and years of education (10 categories ranging from “8 or fewer” to “17 or greater”) are combined, resulting in a 20-point scale ($\alpha = 0.67$).¹⁰ Age is measured in years.¹¹

Findings

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations of study variables for the total sample and by race/ethnic subgroup. Southern Californians see both individualistic and structuralist beliefs as important (with means of 3.19 and 3.35, respectively, falling between the “somewhat important” and “very important” points on the scale). The “just bad luck” indicator of fatalistic beliefs about poverty receives less support (with the mean of 2.30 falling between the “not very important” and “somewhat important” levels).¹² About equal proportions of the sample report Protestant and Catholic af-

⁹Detailed information on specific Protestant denomination (e.g., Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal), and on the specific affiliations constituting the “other religion” category, was not available in the data used in this study. As a result, possible effects of denominational variation within the Protestant category (e.g., the “fundamentalist/modernist” dimension) could not be explored. This issue is revisited in the Conclusions section, where possible lines of future research are considered.

¹⁰Income and education are weighted equally in the SES measure. Further, models run with separate income and education measures (as opposed to the composite SES variable) yielded the same basic religious affiliation effects.

¹¹Regarding other possible predictors, a measure of church attendance (ranging from “never” to “once a week or more”) was considered and subsequently dropped owing to non-significant effects on any of the dependent variables. Further, inclusion of the church attendance measure did not alter the effects of the other predictors.

¹²It should be noted that these southern California data for individualistic and structuralist beliefs challenge the view (based on prior national studies) of individualism as a “dominant” ideology (in the sense of “most popular”). Indeed, structuralist beliefs are most popular in these data; however, recent data from the national scene would be required to determine whether this pattern is generalizable beyond the region focused on in the current study. See Hunt (1996) for a more detailed discussion of respondents’ relative levels of support for individualistic and structuralist beliefs in these data (as well as patterns by race/ethnicity).

TABLE 1
Selected Descriptive Statistics for All Study Variables for the
Total Sample (Weighted) and by Race/Ethnic Group

	Total Sample		Whites		Blacks		Latinos	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Individualism	3.19	0.60	3.07 ^{a,b}	0.57	3.25 ^{a,c}	0.60	3.41 ^{b,c}	0.58
Structuralism	3.35	0.58	3.20 ^{a,b}	0.59	3.59 ^a	0.45	3.60 ^b	0.47
Fatalism ("just bad luck")	2.30	0.98	2.25 ^b	0.90	2.28 ^c	1.03	2.43 ^{b,c}	1.11
Protestant	0.40	0.49	0.50 ^{a,b}	0.50	0.73 ^{a,c}	0.45	0.15 ^{b,c}	0.36
Catholic	0.38	0.48	0.22 ^{a,b}	0.41	0.13 ^{a,c}	0.33	0.75 ^{b,c}	0.44
Jew	0.04	0.19	0.05 ^{a,b}	0.23	0.00 ^a	0.01	0.00 ^b	0.05
Other religion	0.01	0.11	0.02 ^b	0.13	0.02 ^c	0.14	0.00 ^{b,c}	0.00
No religion	0.18	0.38	0.22 ^{a,b}	0.41	0.13 ^a	0.33	0.10 ^b	0.30
SES	5.40	2.54	6.28 ^{a,b}	2.17	5.46 ^{a,c}	2.11	3.42 ^{b,c}	2.11
Female	0.50	0.50	0.58 ^a	0.49	0.66 ^{a,c}	0.47	0.58 ^c	0.49
Age	38.84	15.28	42.54 ^{a,b}	16.05	40.67 ^a	15.69	31.65 ^b	10.57
Black	0.09	0.28						
Latino	0.31	0.46						

^aWhite vs. black means significantly different ($p < 0.05$).

^bWhite vs. Latino means significantly different ($p < 0.05$).

^cBlack vs. Latino means significantly different ($p < 0.05$).

affiliations, with smaller numbers reporting no affiliation, and even fewer reporting a Jewish or an "other" religious affiliation.

The means in Table 1 also suggest that the three race/ethnic groups comprising the sample differ dramatically on most of the study variables. Regarding religious affiliation, all three groups differ: blacks are the most "Protestant" and Latinos the least, Latinos are most "Catholic" and blacks the least, whites are the most likely to be nonaffiliated and Latinos the least. Further, whites are, hardly surprisingly, the most likely to report being Jewish, and whites and blacks are significantly more likely than Latinos to report being a member of an "other religion." It is also worth noting that all three groups significantly differ on SES, with whites having the highest status, and Latinos the lowest; the black subsample is significantly more female than the white or Latino subsamples; and whites are oldest on average, followed by blacks, with Latinos averaging a full nine years younger than blacks. These differences set the stage for the examination of the central research questions.

TABLE 2

One-Way ANOVA Results for the Relationship Between Religious Affiliation and Each Type of Poverty Belief

Individualistic Beliefs about Poverty						
Group	Mean	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Catholic	3.34	—	yes	yes	yes	yes
(2) Protestant	3.20		—	yes	yes	yes
(3) No religion	3.04			—	ns	ns
(4) Other religion	2.94				—	ns
(5) Jew	2.93					—
$F = 24.48, p < 0.001$						
Structuralist Beliefs about Poverty						
Group	Mean	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Other religion	3.61	—	ns	ns	yes	yes
(2) Catholic	3.50		—	ns	yes	yes
(3) Jew	3.44			—	ns	ns
(4) Protestant	3.36				—	ns
(5) No religion	3.33					—
$F = 10.23, p < 0.001$						
Fatalistic Beliefs about Poverty ("Bad Luck")						
Group	Mean	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Catholic	2.48	—	ns	yes	yes	yes
(2) Jew	2.40		—	ns	ns	yes
(3) No religion	2.24			—	ns	yes
(4) Protestant	2.21				—	yes
(5) Other religion	1.78					—
$F = 11.89, p < 0.001$						

NOTE: For each dependent variable, groups are rank ordered according to means. There are 10 possible two-group mean comparisons. "yes" indicates that a group mean is significantly different from the comparison group ($p < 0.05$ for both "least significant difference" and "Duncan's multiple-range" tests). "ns" indicates a nonsignificant two-group comparison. "yes" and "ns" are only listed once for each possible two-group comparison in order to avoid redundancies (i.e., results of comparisons are not listed below the diagonal).

Question 1—Is There a Relationship Between Religious Affiliation and Beliefs about Poverty?

Table 2 reports the results of one-way analysis of variance models run separately for the relationship between religious affiliation and each type of poverty belief. Regarding individualistic beliefs about poverty, Catholics register the highest mean on this variable, followed by Protestants, nonaffiliates, persons with an "other religion," and Jews. The overall difference

among these means is statistically significant ($F = 24.48, p < 0.001$). And, regarding specific two-group comparisons, members of the two dominant religious traditions (Protestants and Catholics) differ significantly ($p < 0.05$) from every other affiliation in the endorsement of individualistic beliefs about poverty, and Catholics are, somewhat surprisingly, significantly more individualistic than Protestants. Thus, compared with Kluegel and Smith (1986) who found individualistic beliefs more popular among Protestants than Catholics (in a national sample), these southern California data suggest a different tentative initial impression. Whether these patterns hold when controlling for other background variables is analyzed later using multivariate regression models.

Regarding structuralist beliefs about poverty, persons reporting an “other” religious affiliation support this type of belief most strongly, followed by Catholics, Jews, Protestants, and persons with no religion (in that order). The overall difference among these means is statistically significant ($F = 10.23, p < 0.001$). Comparison of specific group differences shows that persons claiming an “other religion” and Catholics are both significantly more structuralist in orientation than Protestants and nonaffiliates.

Regarding fatalistic beliefs, Catholics are most likely to endorse this reason for poverty, followed by Jews, nonaffiliates, Protestants, and persons claiming an “other religion.” The overall difference among these means is statistically significant ($F = 11.89, p < 0.001$). Specific group comparisons reveal that Catholics are significantly more likely to endorse “bad luck” as a reason for poverty in comparison with nonaffiliates, Protestants, and persons with an “other religion.” Finally, the “other religion” category is significantly less likely than all other affiliations to endorse this view of poverty.

Thus, to summarize: there is clear variation in the way that religious affiliation shapes poverty beliefs. For example, Protestants are more likely than the minority affiliations to endorse individualistic beliefs but not the two ideological alternatives (structuralism and fatalism), whereas Catholics score relatively high on all three types of poverty belief. Results of analyses designed to determine whether these patterns persist when controlling for other ways respondents differ are turned to next.

Question 2—Do Any “Religion” Effects Persist when Controlling for Other Predictors of Poverty Beliefs?

To examine whether the religious affiliation differences in poverty beliefs persist when controlling for other ways members of the examined religious affiliations differ (i.e., whether there are “religious factors” shaping stratification beliefs), a series of OLS regression models were run. Table 3 reports the regression of each type of poverty belief on three sets of independent variables. Model 1 contains only religious affiliation, Model 2 adds the sociodemographic controls, and Model 3 adds “race by religion” interaction

TABLE 3
 OLS Estimates of Beliefs about Poverty Regressed on Selected Independent Variables (N = 2,113)

	Individualistic Beliefs			Structuralist Beliefs			Fatalistic Beliefs		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Catholic	0.127*** (0.029)	0.032 (0.033)	0.040 (0.047)	0.117*** (0.027)	0.036 (0.030)	0.170*** (0.042)	0.222*** (0.049)	0.227*** (0.058)	0.049 (0.082)
Jew	-0.285*** (0.082)	-0.148+ (0.081)	-0.146+ (0.082)	0.050 (0.077)	0.268*** (0.073)	0.313*** (0.073)	0.225 (0.140)	0.327* (0.141)	0.294* (0.142)
Other religion	-0.244* (0.109)	-0.193+ (0.106)	-0.196+ (0.106)	0.203* (0.102)	0.267** (0.095)	0.279** (0.094)	-0.386* (0.185)	-0.346+ (0.184)	-0.372* (0.184)
No religion	-0.178*** (0.037)	-0.135*** (0.037)	-0.143** (0.047)	-0.041 (0.035)	0.040 (0.033)	0.119** (0.042)	0.009 (0.063)	0.072 (0.064)	0.072 (0.082)
Black		0.141*** (0.032)	0.149*** (0.039)		0.356*** (0.029)	0.451*** (0.034)		0.064 (0.055)	0.028 (0.067)
Latino		0.190*** (0.038)	0.156* (0.065)		0.306*** (0.034)	0.407*** (0.058)		-0.030 (0.066)	-0.285* (0.113)
SES		-0.048*** (0.006)	-0.048*** (0.006)		-0.028*** (0.005)	-0.030*** (0.005)		-0.051*** (0.010)	-0.049*** (0.010)
Age		0.004*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)		-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)		0.005*** (0.002)	0.005*** (0.002)
Female		-0.046+ (0.026)	-0.046+ (0.026)		0.126*** (0.023)	0.122*** (0.023)		0.012 (0.045)	0.017 (0.045)
Black * Catholic			-0.009 (0.088)			-0.388*** (0.079)			0.293+ (0.153)
Black * No religion			-0.052 (0.087)			-0.191* (0.078)			-0.136 (0.151)
Latino * Catholic			0.021 (0.079)			-0.197** (0.071)			0.443*** (0.138)
Latino * No religion			0.131 (0.105)			-0.161+ (0.094)			0.221 (0.183)
Constant	3.210	3.277	3.280	3.381	3.310	3.269	2.219	2.260	2.289
R ²	0.04	0.11	0.11	0.01	0.15	0.17	0.01	0.03	0.04

NOTE: Unstandardized coefficients reported (standard errors in parentheses). + = $p < 0.10$; * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$. "Protestant" is the omitted religious affiliation category; "white" is the omitted race/ethnic category.

terms (used to answer the final research question). In these regression models, Protestants are the excluded religious affiliation category. After empirically examining all relevant comparisons, Protestant was chosen because (1) it is the largest affiliation for whites and blacks, and the second largest for Latinos, and (2) it allows for direct examination of possible differences between the two dominant traditions, as well as how the minority traditions (and nonaffiliates) differ from Protestants.¹³

Regarding support for individualistic beliefs, Model 1 reiterates the Table 2 finding that Catholics are highest on this belief while the members of the various minority traditions (Jews, followers of “other religions,” and nonaffiliates) are all significantly less likely than Protestants to endorse individualistic reasons for poverty. Model 2 shows that the previously observed Protestant/Catholic difference does not remain statistically significant when controlling for other ways members of these affiliations differ; however, the finding that Protestants are significantly more individualistic than the minority traditions does persist. Thus there does appear to be a “religious factor” operating independently of the effects of race, SES, and other sociodemographic factors in shaping individualistic beliefs about poverty, with the dominant Christian traditions most likely to support this view (for discussion of the effects of race and the sociodemographics, see Hunt, 1996).

Regarding structuralist beliefs, Model 1 shows that, compared with Protestants, Catholics and members of “other” religions are most supportive of this explanation for poverty. However, the significant Catholic effect disappears when controlling for other background characteristics in Model 2, although the “other religion” effect persists, and a positive effect of being Jewish appears. Thus, it appears that members of the “minority traditions” are most likely to use the “system-blaming” explanation for poverty. That Jews and members of “other” religions subscribe to structuralist beliefs at significantly higher levels than Protestants suggests a “non-Christian” factor promoting support for the structuralist interpretation of poverty.

For the fatalistic explanation of poverty, Model 1 suggests that Catholics are more likely than Protestants to endorse “bad luck” as a reason for poverty, while members of “other religions” are significantly less likely than Protestants to do so. These effects persist, and a positive effect of being Jewish appears, after introducing Model 2 controls.¹⁴ Thus, “fatalism” appears to be most pronounced among Catholics and Jews, and least popular among those persons reporting an “other” religious affiliation.¹⁵

¹³ Additional models run with Protestants *and* Catholics (i.e., both current “majority” affiliations) serving as the reference category revealed the same basic patterns of effects for the minority affiliations.

¹⁴ Regarding “main effects” not reported before in the literature, fatalistic beliefs appear most popular among persons with low SES and older persons.

¹⁵ The Protestant/Catholic difference in fatalism is consistent with arguments suggesting a relative Protestant intolerance of notions of luck or chance in human affairs (Hunter, 1987),

To summarize: after controlling for race and other sociodemographic variables (Model 2), individualistic beliefs about poverty are most popular among the two dominant religious traditions (Protestants and Catholics); structuralist beliefs are most popular among the minority traditions (Jews and followers of “other religions”); and fatalistic beliefs—representing a supra-individual but nonstructural explanation—are most popular among Catholics and Jews. These patterns for individualistic and structuralist beliefs are largely consistent with the “religious underdog” thesis introduced above. Specifically, members of the dominant traditions (Protestants and Catholics) are more likely to endorse the historically dominant ideological interpretation of poverty than are members of the historically marginalized religious groups. Religious minorities are more likely than the two major groupings of Christians to endorse the system-challenging, structuralist view of poverty. Further, it should be noted that although nonaffiliates are more likely than the dominant Christian traditions to reject individualistic beliefs, they are unlike the minority religious affiliations (Jews, other religionists) in failing to register any distinct effects on structuralist or fatalistic beliefs (perhaps because nonaffiliates do not represent a socially organized group or collectivity whose members are pushed toward some ideological alternative to individualism). Finally, how fatalism fits into this patterning of stratification beliefs is less obvious following examination of Models 1 and 2, but may become clearer after interactions between race and religion are explored.

Question 3—Do Race and Religion Interact in Shaping Beliefs about Poverty?

To explore whether any religious affiliation/stratification beliefs relationships vary across race/ethnic lines, a series of models that specify relevant interaction effects are examined. Specifically, for each dependent variable, Model 3 reproduces Model 2 and adds interaction terms for “race by religion.” These interaction effects show the joint impact of race and religious affiliation over and above the effects of these factors individually (since dummy variables for both race and religious affiliation are also entered in the model). This third research question is posed because of the different history and meanings of affiliations such as Protestant and Catholic along race/ethnic lines in the United States.¹⁶ Only the three largest affiliations—

perhaps traceable, in part, to the historic Protestant rejection and distrust of ritually based and “magical” dimensions of Catholic and other religious practices.

¹⁶ The interaction models are also important given the growing body of evidence challenging an “assumption of similarity” regarding the determinants of beliefs and attitudes across race/ethnic lines (Hunt et al., 2000). For example, Hunt (1996) documents differences between whites and both blacks and Latinos regarding the relationship between “self-explanations” for personal outcomes and beliefs about the causes of poverty. Further, Jackson (1997) reports differences in the relationship between three role characteristics (role accu-

Protestant (the omitted category), Catholic, and nonaffiliate—are examined in the interactions owing to sample size constraints (i.e., insufficient numbers of Jews and “other religion” followers across the three race/ethnic subgroups).

While Model 3 results show no significant interactions for individualistic beliefs—a pattern of effects consistent with the widespread endorsement of such thinking by most varieties of Americans (Kluegel and Smith, 1986)—the intersection of race and religion does have a significant impact on support for the structuralist view of poverty, suggesting that distinctive subgroup experiences do make a difference for ideological challenges to individualism. Specifically, Model 3 shows a positive link between Catholic affiliation (vs. Protestant) and structuralist beliefs for whites ($b = 0.170$, $p < 0.001$), perhaps reflecting some residual legacy of a Catholic “underdog” consciousness (an issue returned to below). The interactions demonstrate that this Catholic/structuralist beliefs link is significantly less pronounced for both blacks and Latinos. These patterns reinforce the image of distinctive black Catholicism, i.e., less collectively oriented than their Protestant counterparts (and their white co-religionists in this instance), as well as the idea that Catholicism among Hispanics is relatively uncondusive to the development of a structural or oppositional consciousness (Hunt, 2000).

We also see in Model 3 that the relationship between nonaffiliation (vs. Protestantism) and structuralist beliefs differs for the three race/ethnic groups. While Model 2 suggested no relationship between the nonaffiliated and structuralist beliefs, isolating effects specific to whites, blacks, and Latinos shows that white nonaffiliates (compared to Protestants) are more likely to endorse structuralist beliefs, while among blacks and Latinos the effect of being nonaffiliated is significantly less positive (showing that it is especially among the race/ethnic minorities that nonaffiliation leads to the lack of endorsement of this ideological alternative to individualism). In sum, and interpreting these Model 3 effects relative to the omitted Protestant category, it is clear that white Protestants are the subgroup most likely to reject structuralist views. Further, the black Protestant effect is consistent with the findings of Feagin (1975), who reported that black Protestants were the “race/religion” group most likely to blame the system for poverty. The Latino Protestant effect suggests support for arguments identifying a distinctive Protestant minority in the Hispanic community—perhaps, as among blacks, with a more collective or communal orientation than their Catholic counterparts.

Finally, regarding the interaction model run for fatalistic beliefs about poverty, the main finding here is that the generally positive link between

mulation, role status, and role combinations) and mental health for blacks, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and non-Hispanic whites. Both authors discuss their findings in the context of their implications for social science research that assumes that social processes operate similarly across race/ethnic lines.

Catholicism and attributing poverty to "bad luck," originally seen in Models 1 and 2, is particularly pronounced for blacks and Latinos. Seen in combination with the interactions for structuralist beliefs, the picture painted by the fatalistic beliefs interaction terms suggests that whites are the primary source of the Catholic/structuralist beliefs link, while blacks and Latinos are the primary source of the Catholic/fatalistic beliefs link. This variegated pattern could be a function of the fact that, historically, white Catholics were ethnic minorities (e.g., Irish, Italians, Poles) who emigrated from Europe beginning in the 19th century (Feagin, 1989). These "white ethnics" (Alba, 1990; Steinberg, 1989) were relatively disadvantaged ethnic minorities in a society dominated by "White Anglo Saxon Protestant" (WASP) culture (Baltzell, 1964) and in this social and historical context, Catholicism served as a central basis of collective identity around which a sense of group consciousness as ethnic minorities was forged. While these "white ethnics" have since largely assimilated (Hochschild, 1995) and Catholics have joined Protestants as part of the dominant culture (a factor that may account for the degree of Catholic support of the individualistic view of poverty), there is likely a degree of institutional memory among Catholics of days when "white ethnics" were second-class citizens in a highly stratified, WASP-dominated America. This history could account for why white Catholics are relatively structuralist in their view of poverty compared to white Protestants, and also compared to nonwhite Catholics (for nonwhites, Protestantism is the main religious basis of a structuralist consciousness).

This leaves the question of why black and Latino Catholics are more likely than white Catholics to be fatalistic on the subject of poverty. One possibility is that, since Protestantism appears to be the religious source of "structuralism" among nonwhites, "fatalism" may represent another culturally available alternative belief for nonwhite Catholics in a society where people routinely seek an ideological alternative to individualism (Kluegel and Smith, 1986). This pattern seems particularly plausible in light of recent evidence suggesting that persons commonly and simultaneously endorse different ideological accounts of inequality (Lee, Jones, and Lewis, 1990; Hochschild, 1995), a tendency that may be particularly evident among race/ethnic minorities (Bobo, 1991; Hunt, 1996). Further, there is no shortage of research suggesting that fatalism is common in the Catholic tradition forged in the Latin American world (Martin, 1990); and regarding African Americans, some past research suggests that black Catholics have been less supportive than their Protestant counterparts of "collective" political action (Hunt and Hunt, 1977). These patterns could help explain these two groups' (Latino and black Catholics) relative leaning toward fatalism as an alternative to individualism.

Conclusions

This article has examined relationships between five religious affiliations and three types of belief about the causes of poverty among African Americans, Latinos, and whites. The general thrust of the findings points to the conclusion that religious affiliation matters for a variety of ideological beliefs. These religious affiliation effects exist net of the effects of other sociodemographic variables shaping poverty beliefs, suggesting that there are “religious factors” at work shaping peoples’ ideological thinking about inequality.

In addition to evidence of religious factors shaping ideological beliefs about poverty, support is found for a “religious underdog” thesis (viewing religion as status), holding that followers of historically dominant religious traditions will be more likely to endorse ideological beliefs supportive of the status quo (and reject challenges to it) than will followers of minority religious traditions and nonaffiliates. In line with this thesis, I observe that Protestants and Catholics—the dominant religious traditions in the United States—are most likely to endorse the historically dominant individualistic interpretation of poverty. In contrast, minority religious traditions—Jews and followers of other religions—are most likely to support structural challenges to individualism. Catholics and Jews are most likely to make attributions to “bad luck,” the fatalistic view of poverty. Finally, it should be noted that nonaffiliates, while relatively rejecting of individualistic beliefs, do not register any distinct effects on structuralist or fatalistic beliefs. This could be a function of the fact that as nonreligionists, these persons are relatively atomized and unconnected to a religiously based tradition that would otherwise steer members—as in the case Jews and followers of other nonmainstream religions—to either or both ideological alternatives to individualism.

The other main implication of my analyses is that race and religion intersect in important ways in shaping beliefs about poverty. Significant race/ethnic group differences are found for the relationship between religious affiliation and both structuralist and fatalistic beliefs. For Protestantism, the most important differences are observed for structuralist beliefs. Specifically, among whites, Protestants are significantly less likely than the other examined affiliations to endorse structuralist beliefs, while among blacks and Latinos the Protestant variable is significantly more positively aligned with structuralist beliefs—patterns consistent with previous research suggesting that for race/ethnic minorities in America, Protestantism is more communal or collectivist in orientation—encouraging adherents to look beyond the explanations provided by individualism (Morris, 1984; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998)

Regarding the impact of Catholic affiliation, among whites, Catholics are similar to Protestants on individualistic beliefs, but are significantly more

likely than Protestants to “system blame” for poverty. This Catholic/structuralism link among whites is likely traceable to the history of (and institutional memory among) white ethnic immigrants in the United States, who were historically marginalized by a dominant WASP culture (Feagin, 1989; Ignatiev, 1995). Further, the fact that white Catholics have largely since been assimilated into mainstream American culture likely accounts for the levels of individualism observed among this group. Thus, the simultaneous support for individualistic and structuralist accounts of poverty is not surprising given evidence of such belief patterns among other groups who have experienced a history of discrimination along with more recent movement toward mobility and assimilation (Hunt, 1996).

Among African Americans and Latinos, being Catholic shows markedly different effects (centering around the two ideological alternatives to individualism). Specifically, for blacks and Latinos (unlike for whites), being Catholic compared to being Protestant is significantly *less* predictive of structuralism and significantly *more* predictive of fatalism. These “Catholic” patterns may be observed for blacks and Latinos, more so than for whites, because among race/ethnic minorities, Protestantism is the main religious source of structuralist beliefs. This leaves fatalism as a remaining ideological alternative to individualism for black and Latino Catholics in a social and political climate where Americans are often ideologically conflicted (Mann, 1970; Bobo, 1991) or “ambivalent” (Hochschild, 1981, 1995), and, as a result, seek “compromise” explanations (Lee, Jones, and Lewis, 1990) arising from the need for an alternative account of inequality to supplement the explanatory limits of individualism.

Finally, though the focus of this study of stratification beliefs was on the intersection of race/ethnicity and religious affiliation (focusing on differences across major affiliations), future research should examine possible implications of denominational variation among Protestants (as well as the detailed affiliations comprising the “other religion” category of this study). While the data used in this study precluded such empirical specifications, it is possible that measures tapping the “fundamentalist/modernist” dimension among Protestants could help further specify some of the findings reported herein.¹⁷ Speculation aside, however, the findings of this study clearly underscore the importance of examining the intersections of race and religion in research on stratification beliefs. Although some researchers argue (based largely on studies of whites) that social and cultural differences between

¹⁷ For example, given that (1) black and Latino Protestants are more likely than white Protestants to be fundamentalists, along with (2) some research suggesting that fundamentalist Protestants may be more liberal (or “populist”) than their theologically modernist counterparts on issues of economic inequality (Davis and Robinson, 1996), being able to specify denominational variation among Protestants could contribute to our understanding of the intersections of race and religious affiliation observed in this study (e.g., the finding that black and Latino Protestants are more likely than white Protestants to support structuralist beliefs about poverty).

Protestants and Catholics in America are few and decreasing, this study documents differences in ideological beliefs about poverty between these two major religious affiliations among African-American, Latino, and white southern Californians. Further, the fact that race/ethnic differences are observed in the *patterns of effects* of these affiliations suggests that the research practice of drawing conclusions about religious institutions (and other social phenomena), without making comparisons between race/ethnic groups, may be an increasingly questionable social scientific exercise.

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