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# *Racial Prejudice and Attitudes Toward Affirmative Action\**

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*Theory:* We examine the relationship between blatant racial prejudice and anger toward affirmative action.

*Hypotheses:* (1) Blatantly prejudiced attitudes continue to pervade the white population in the United States. (2) Resistance to affirmative action is more than an extension of this prejudice. (3) White resistance to affirmative action is not unyielding and unalterably fixed.

*Methods:* Analysis of experiments embedded in a national survey of racial attitudes. Some of these experiments are designed to measure racial prejudice unobtrusively.

*Results:* Racial prejudice remains a major problem in the United States, but this prejudice alone cannot explain all of the anger toward affirmative action among whites. Although many whites strongly resist affirmative action, they express support for making extra efforts to help African-Americans.

At the level of public policy, the politics of race has undergone a transformation. A generation ago, the struggle centered on efforts to dismantle public policies mandating segregation and Jim Crow and to assure African-Americans their right as citizens to use public accommodations in the same way and on the same terms as white Americans. Historic legislation and government decrees mandated that black Americans are free to vote, sit at the front of a school bus, and eat a sandwich at a luncheon counter without restrictions based on skin color. Now, a generation later, rhetoric and law-making center on efforts to combat discrimination through policies mandating the affirmative use of race as one of a permissible set of considerations in making educational and employment decisions. Whereas a large major-

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ity of white Americans now say they endorse the extension and protection of basic civil liberties to African-Americans, an equally large majority oppose affirmative action. The question is what to make of this opposition.

Broadly, two lines of argument have emerged. Some scholars (e.g., Gaertner and Dovidio 1986; Glazer 1988; Kluegel and Smith 1983; Sears 1988) see the politics of affirmative action as continuous with traditional racial politics. They attribute the clamor over affirmative action and related policies to the persistent fears and prejudices of white Americans. Others, most notably Edsall and Edsall (1991) and Sniderman and Piazza (1993), argue that the politics of affirmative action significantly departs from racial politics of the past. In their view, the current upheaval over affirmative action arises from the nature of the policy itself; many whites, otherwise unprejudiced and indeed quite willing to make special efforts to help blacks, deem the particular policy as unfair and exclusionary.

Quite obviously, the prejudice-centered and the policy-centered lines of argument need not be mutually exclusive. To believe that prejudice has nothing to do with white people's reactions toward affirmative action would be naive. But just how much does the one underlie the other? Does deep-rooted prejudice motivate most of the strongly-held opposition to affirmative action? Or, does racial animosity, by itself, account for only the fringes of resistance?

Finding answers to these questions is a matter of considerable consequence. Suppose that racial prejudice remains far more pervasive and more politically potent than traditional surveys document. Then to back away from affirmative action would allow a social cancer to triumph over good intentions. But suppose that racial prejudice alone cannot explain a good part of the resentment among whites, and that while many whites oppose affirmative action, they also feel a genuine commitment to furthering opportunities for African-Americans. Then well-intended policymakers might back alternative programs or at least employ alternative rhetoric, of potentially equal or greater benefit to black Americans, as a means to reduce resentment or resistance among white Americans.

In the following pages, we address three questions: (1) Do blatantly prejudiced attitudes still pervade the white population? (2) Is resistance to affirmative action merely an extension of this prejudice? (3) Is white resistance to affirmative action unyielding and unalterably fixed? Our answers are, respectively, yes, probably not, and no. We arrive at them through a series of experiments, some of them designed to measure racial attitudes unobtrusively, incorporated into a national survey of American adults' racial attitudes taken in 1991 (see Sniderman, Tetlock, and Piazza 1991 for a detailed description of the sample and data collection methodology).

Since much of the debate centers on the attitudes of whites, we have limited our analyses to white respondents only.<sup>1</sup>

### **Racial Prejudice as Blatant Animosity**

The more pervasive the animosity toward people on the basis of their skin color, the more serious and difficult the problem of prejudice. But how pervasive prejudice is depends on how one defines it, and defining it has become increasingly difficult over time. At earlier periods in our history, researchers generally agreed on its meaning—what Kinder and Sears (1981) call “old fashioned” prejudice. Today scholars construe prejudice in a multitude of ways; the result has been to render the very concept of racial prejudice nearly intractable (contrast Sniderman and Tetlock 1986 with Kinder 1986). Social desirability effects long have plagued traditional surveys, moreover, leaving authors vulnerable to the criticism that white Americans have represented their feelings towards black Americans as more positive than they are in order to avoid giving the impression they are prejudiced (Jackman 1978; Jackman and Muha 1984). Social desirability, if operative, can quickly become a self-reinforcing process. Some people are truly unprejudiced; others feel a need to look as though they are; then still others succumb to the social pressure; and so forth, until survey responses begin to convey a distorted picture of reality (Noelle-Neumann 1984).

For purposes of analysis, we construe racial prejudice as a strong, openly expressed, negative evaluation of African-Americans. To be sure, not everyone will accept this construction (an issue to which we will return); but especially given the dangers of academic politicization, it is best to define and measure prejudice in a way that is both valid on its face and consistent with classical conceptions (Allport 1954; Myrdal 1944).

How do we afford people the opportunity to tell strangers what they really think in a telephone interview? We developed the following technique to do just that. By no means perfect, it represents, we believe, an advance over existing techniques that researchers use to measure sensitive attitudes (Kuklinski and Cobb 1995b provide a detailed narrative of the psychometrics of the technique).

### *Methodology*<sup>2</sup>

Imagine a representative sample of the general population divided randomly into two. One half is presented with a list of three items, and asked

<sup>1</sup>In any event, the small number of African-Americans in the sample precludes a systematic analysis of their attitudes. Nor did we ask blacks all of the questions in the survey; some would sound nonsensical to them.

<sup>2</sup>All data and documentation necessary to replicate this analysis can be obtained from the authors.

to say how many of the three make them angry—*not which items, just how many*. The other half is presented with the same list with one item added—a race item—and is also asked to say how many of the items make them angry—*not which ones, just how many*. Suppose, for the sake of argument, some respondents in the second half take exception to two of the items, and one of the two that angers them is the race item. Asked how many items make them angry, they respond “two.” It will seem to these respondents quite impossible for the interviewer to figure out that one of the items upsetting them is racial in content. In fact, as we shall show, although the interviewer cannot tell in the course of the interview if the race item has angered a particular respondent, the analyst can determine afterwards the level of anger in the population as a whole and in strategic subsets of it.

The list experiment we employed begins as follows:

“Now I’m going to read you three things that sometimes make people angry or upset. After I read all three, just tell me HOW MANY of them upset you. I don’t want to know which ones, just HOW MANY.”

With the ground rules established, the interviewer then read a list of three items:<sup>3</sup>

- (1) “the federal government increasing the tax on gasoline;”
- (2) “professional athletes getting million-dollar salaries;”
- (3) “large corporations polluting the environment.”

To assess the level of prejudice, the three items of the baseline list were repeated with a fourth item added; it takes the form, “a black family moving in next door.” Any person who gets angry at the mere thought of a black family moving in next door is revealing a strong, negative reaction based on no more than skin color, in short, prejudice. To ensure that this item serves its intended purpose, we undertook companion validity studies as an indicator of racial prejudice that take angry responses to interracial dating. See Kuklinski and Cobb (1995b) for a discussion of these results, which resemble those reported below.

The list experiment thus consists at a minimum of two lists (there are three in our design, as we will see shortly)—one containing three items (the baseline condition) and the other (the test condition), four items. Re-

<sup>3</sup>When choosing the three nonracial items, we made every effort to avoid contrast effects. Suppose, for example, one of the items had read, “someone raped your best female friend.” This thought is so repugnant and anger-provoking to most people that any other item would sound tame in comparison. Pilot studies show the three items to be comparable in their propensities to provoke anger.

**Table 1. Mean Level of Anger Toward A Black Family Moving in Next Door, by Region (Whites Only)**

Region	Experimental Condition		Estimated Percent Angry
	Baseline	Black Family	
Non-South	2.28 <sup>a</sup> (.07)	2.24 (.05)	0
	425 <sup>b</sup>	461	
South	1.95 (.06)	2.37 (.08)	42
	139	136	

<sup>a</sup>Standard error of the estimate.

<sup>b</sup>Number of cases.

spondents are of course randomly assigned to the conditions, and in each respondents are asked only to report the number of things on the list that make them angry—*not which ones make them angry, only how many*. Thus they can freely express prejudiced attitudes without exposing themselves to censure.<sup>4</sup>

### Results

Deriving an estimate of racial prejudice, in this instance the percentage of respondents angry over the thought of a black family moving in next door, entails subtracting the average number of items in the baseline condition from the average number in the test condition and multiplying by 100. Throughout, we use analysis of variance to ascertain levels of statistical significance.

Table 1 reports, by region, the mean number of angry responses in the two conditions. Among non-Southern respondents in the baseline condition, the mean is 2.28, contrasted to 2.24 in the test condition;<sup>5</sup> in other words, no significant number of non-Southern whites expresses anger over

<sup>4</sup>That the list includes only four items in the two experimental conditions raises the possibility of ceiling effects. Although the possibility cannot be absolutely rejected, we feel confident that the results reported below are not an artifact of such effects. In some of our pilot studies, we presented respondents with lists of six items to read, including several that were innocuous. In four of the five studies, the results mirror those reported below, with the results in the one exception being ambiguous. Moreover, we developed a modeling strategy to identify ceiling effects in the list experiment. It identified only one, which we note later.

<sup>5</sup>Because the baseline and test conditions are independent samples, the test condition mean can be smaller than the baseline mean when the test item evokes no or little anger.

a black family moving in next door—a finding which, on its face, is a warning flag of ceiling effects; and, indeed, here, and only here, ceiling effects undermine our estimation procedure. Consequently we developed a more elaborate methodology (see Appendix)<sup>6</sup>, and taking advantage of it, we estimate that about one in every 10 whites in the non-South gets angry over the mere thought of a black family moving in next door—a figure that reaches statistical significance at the .05 level.<sup>7</sup> This figure may seem low even so, but far from suggesting that the number of prejudiced whites is low, it demonstrates that, even now, there are at least as many undeniably prejudiced whites outside the South as there are African-Americans.

Whether or not our method underestimates the level of prejudice (a matter to which we will turn later), the estimated percentage of prejudiced respondents living in the South is truly remarkable. Some 42% of Southern whites—four times as many outside the South—express anger at the idea of a black family moving in next door. The only other region that approaches this level of anger, not coincidentally, consists of those states bordering on the South. These results (also see Kuklinski and Cobb 1995a) demonstrate that racial attitudes have by no means changed as much, in one significant part of American society, as commentators often suppose. Indeed, what we have uncovered warrants strong emphasis. Contrary to the idea now in common circulation that white Southerners have, if anything, a more sensitive appreciation of how to live and work along with African-Americans as equals, our unobtrusive measure indicates that something approaching one in two Southerners is angered by the thought of a black family moving into the neighborhood.<sup>8</sup>

All in all, then, we conclude that white America has not freed itself of the racial animosity that has so scarred this country's history. Blatant racial prejudice remains a sad reality of American life, and more so in some regions than others.

### **Anger Toward Affirmative Action**

This out-and-out prejudice could motivate all of the anger toward affirmative action, a good part of it, or only some of it. The answer depends on how widespread the intense hostility toward affirmative action actually

<sup>6</sup>The credit for developing this iterative procedure goes to Barbara Mellers.

<sup>7</sup>Essentially, the algorithm compensates for the relatively low movements from two items in the baseline condition to three in the test condition and from three items in the baseline to four in the test condition.

<sup>8</sup>We must emphasize the obvious: to find a high (and statistically significant) level of prejudice in the South is not to indict everyone who lives there. More than half of the respondents living in the region do *not* express racial animosity as we have measured it.

is. If about 10% of non-Southerners express strong resentment toward the policy, for example, we would attribute it all to out-and-out prejudice. But if, say, 25% do, that conclusion would not hold.

### *Method*

To estimate the level of anger over the policy itself, we replaced the black family item with “black leaders asking for affirmative action” and administered this second test condition to the final third of our sample. Intentionally two-dimensional, the statement refers to both black leaders and affirmative action. Although analytically distinguishable, the two are inextricably combined in the hurly-burly of real politics, and it is the reactions of citizens to the issue as they actually confront it that interests us.

Note that the “black family” and “affirmative action” conditions are identically worded with the exception of the race item. This facilitates a direct comparison of the responses in the two conditions.

### *Results*

Table 2 presents estimates of the level of anger toward affirmative action by region. More than 40% of the total sample of non-Southern whites, or nearly one in every two, expresses anger toward affirmative action.<sup>9</sup> This is a sizeable proportion, considerably greater than the percentage we estimated to hold blatantly prejudiced attitudes. By no means, in other words, is the one completely a function of the other. Moreover, anger toward the policy is fairly consistent across partisanship, ideology, and education, factors that have traditionally predicted racial prejudice (Table 2).

Some 98% of Southerners—nearly all—are resentful toward affirmative action. This figure is a story unto itself. But the critical point to note here is that, just as we found in the non-South, the level of prejudice by itself cannot explain the widespread hostility toward the policy.

The percentages do not fully convey the meaning of what we have found thus far; actual numbers do. The numbers are these. On the one hand, when allowed to say what they really feel about black people, some 36 million white adults express undeniable animosity, a number that should make anyone who cares about race relations shudder. However, another 163 million do not voice such animosity even when given the opportunity, but do strongly resent affirmative action.

What should we make of this latter group? More precisely, does their anger toward affirmative action reflect a cold harshness toward African-

<sup>9</sup>The analysis of variance consists of the mean number of items as the dependent variable and region (South versus non-South), condition (baseline versus affirmative action) and the region by condition interaction as independent variables. All three independent variables are significant at  $p < .001$ .

**Table 2. Mean Level of Anger Toward Affirmative Action Policy, by Region (Whites Only)**

Region	Experimental Condition		Estimated Percent Angry
	Baseline	Affirmative Action	
Non-South	2.28 (.04) <sup>a</sup> 450 <sup>b</sup>	2.69 (.05) 450	41
Education Level			
High School or Less	2.46 (.05) 195	2.88 (.07) 196	42
Some College	2.21 (.07) 110	2.58 (.10) 119	37
College Degree or More	1.84 (.07) 141	2.20 (.09) 134	36
Partisan Identification			
Democrats	2.34 (.07) 140	2.66 (.09) 131	32
Independents	2.22 (.06) 149	2.81 (.08) 157	59
Republicans	2.27 (.07) 137	2.59 (.08) 143	32
Political Ideology			
Strong Liberals	1.92 (.15) 26	2.26 (.18) 30	34
Weak Liberals	2.13 (.08) 103	2.44 (.11) 107	31
Moderates	2.41 (.06) 139	2.89 (.08) 147	48
Weak Conservatives	2.27 (.08) 119	2.60 (.09) 105	33
Strong Conservatives	2.21 (.13) 40	2.89 (.16) 41	68
South <sup>c</sup>	1.95 (.07) 148	2.93 (.09) 146	98

<sup>a</sup>Standard error of the estimate.

<sup>b</sup>Number of cases.

<sup>c</sup>The small number of Southerners precludes estimating the level of anger within demographic groups.

Americans, a “let black Americans fend for themselves posture,” or is this anger so singularly focused on the policy that it does not preclude a genuine concern for the plight of many black Americans?

### Making An Extra Effort

We look to two experiments to help us reach the right conclusion. The first is the “making an extra effort” experiment.

#### *Method*

In this experiment, one randomly selected half of the national sample was asked:

“Some people say that because of past discrimination, qualified blacks should be given *preference* in university admissions. Others say that this is wrong because it discriminates against whites. How do you feel—are you in favor or opposed to giving qualified blacks preference in admission to colleges and universities?”

The other half received a strategically differently worded version:

“Some people say that because of past discrimination, an *extra effort* should be made to make sure that qualified blacks are considered for university admission. Others say that this extra effort is wrong because it discriminates against whites. How do you feel—are you in favor or opposed to making an extra effort to make sure qualified blacks are considered for admission to colleges and universities?”

Note that the first item explicitly mentions preferential treatment, the second, extra effort. Note also what is no less important: in both, blacks get special attention even if they only get special treatment in one. If a lack of concern for blacks (even in the absence of prejudice) underlies whites’ objections to affirmative action, then we should find little difference in responses to the two items. On the other hand, if the crucial element is preferential treatment, then respondents should respond differently to the two versions of assistance for blacks.

#### *Results*

This is exactly the case (Table 3). Only one out of four Southerners or non-Southerners expresses support for preferential treatment, while nearly 60% in both regions endorse extra effort.<sup>10</sup> Given the findings on

<sup>10</sup>The difference is significant at  $p < .001$  among both Southerners and non-Southerners.

**Table 3. Percentage of Respondents Favoring Preferential Treatment of Blacks and Extra Efforts to Aid Blacks, by Region (Whites Only)**

Region	Experimental Condition	
	Preferential Treatment	Extra Effort
Non-South		
Favor	26%	61%
Oppose	74%	39%
	n = 674	n = 696
South		
Favor	23%	59%
Oppose	77%	41%
	n = 215	n = 215

prejudice we uncovered earlier using the unobtrusive measure, both of these figures undoubtedly reflect social desirability effects. The difference across the two conditions is what interests us. Since there is no reason why respondents should be more inclined to hide their true feelings on one version rather than the other, we take this difference to be real. In short, although whites overwhelmingly reject affirmative action if it involves preferential treatment, a clear majority favor going the extra mile to assure that all blacks meriting assistance receive it.

### **Support for Compensation in the Face of Discrimination**

Our second experiment pushes even further. It is designed to determine if whites will respond positively to affirmative action—even to affirmative action with explicit racial quotas—provided it is presented as a response to the unfairness with which African-Americans have been treated.

#### *Method*

The experiment takes three conditions. In the “baseline” condition, one-third of the sample, randomly selected, was asked the following question.

“Do you think that large companies should be required to give a certain number of jobs to blacks, or should the government stay out of this?”

In the other two conditions, respondents were presented with a reason potentially justifying racial quotas, but—deliberately—the reason varied.

**Table 4. Percentage of Respondents Favoring Government Intervention on Behalf of Blacks, by Experimental Condition and Region (Whites Only)**

Region	Experimental Condition		
	Control Group	Blacks Underrepresented	Companies Discriminate
Non-South			
Government to Intervene	26%	20%	43%
Government to Refrain	74%	80%	57%
	n = 422	n = 463	n = 480
South			
Government to Intervene	18%	18%	36%
Government to Refrain	82%	82%	64%
	n = 137	n = 164	n = 126

Thus, in one condition, they were told that “There are some large companies where blacks are underrepresented,” and then asked whether a certain number of jobs should be given to blacks in this case; in the other, they were told that “There are some large companies with employment policies that discriminate against blacks,” and then asked if these companies should be required to give a certain number of jobs to blacks. If the hostility toward affirmative action stems from a rejection of or indifference to the claims of blacks to fair treatment, then the distributions across the three conditions should look much the same.

### Results

They do not (Table 4). Three-fourths or more of Southern and non-Southern whites oppose government action in the first two versions. On the other hand, some 36% of Southerners and 43% of non-Southerners *support* affirmative action in the face of overt discrimination. The change among non-Southerners, especially, is substantial.<sup>11</sup> As important, there is no difference whatever between responses in the “baseline” condition and in the “statistically underrepresented” condition. This is as important because it means that respondents in the “discrimination” condition are responding to the *particular* reason given—that blacks have been treated unfairly—rather than merely responding to the fact that a reason for supporting affirmative action had been given.

<sup>11</sup>The mean of the third version is significantly different from the means of the first and second conditions at  $p < .01$  among both groups.

Even in the “discrimination” condition, a majority of whites do not support affirmative action. Although this distribution unquestionably reflects some *underlying prejudice*, it does not follow logically, let alone ideologically, that people must support racial quotas and preferential treatment at a company if it has been found guilty of discrimination. It is perfectly possible to believe that the appropriate remedies are to compensate the specific individuals who have been discriminated against and to ensure that the company does not engage in discrimination thereafter without going on to favor racial quotas. Indeed, just because people are not compelled to favor affirmative action generally, it is impressive that so large a number of whites, their general aversion to affirmative action notwithstanding, regard it as fair to impose it on a company if they have reason to believe that it has treated blacks unfairly.

### Alternative Explanations

To summarize: blatant prejudice continues to be a major problem in the United States; but attributing all the anger toward affirmative action to it would be a mistake. Many whites dislike the policy even though they harbor no ill feelings toward African-Americans. To the contrary, many of these whites express a willingness to support extra efforts by government on behalf of African-Americans.

In the next few pages, we briefly entertain several rival hypotheses. Each represents a potentially viable alternative to what we have argued. Some are more viable than others; none, we believe, undermines the validity of our analysis.

#### *Differences in Thresholds*

The list experiment, which we used to ascertain the level of prejudice, asked people to indicate how many items make them angry. An alternative would have been to ask how many items they *oppose*. To oppose the idea of a black family moving in next door is surely a sign of prejudice, and presumably more respondents will oppose it than actually become angry over it. In other words, in focusing on reactions of anger, we have selected a test-criterion that sets a high threshold and thus underestimates the prevalence of prejudice among whites.

We intentionally selected the term “makes you angry or upset” for two reasons. First, while the dominance of the cognitive perspective in social psychology during the 1970s and 1980s strongly influenced the study of racial attitudes and perceptions (Hamilton 1979; Hamilton and Gifford 1976; Tajfel 1970), psychologists are returning to original constructions of prejudice as largely affective (see the chapters in Mackie and Hamilton 1993, for example); our measure comports with the latter conception. Obvi-

ously, anger is not the only form of affect. But, (and second), anger implies salience. If the thought of a black family moving in next door angers people, there can be no doubt about its meaningfulness to them (Krosnick 1988a, 1988b). Anger and fear probably motivate behavior more than any other negative emotion (Marcus et al. 1995; Ortony, Clore, and Collins 1988).

Ultimately, the effect of our choice of terms is an empirical question. Therefore we conducted additional studies in which we compared responses to the two terms. The results indicate that substituting the term "oppose" for "make you angry" increases estimates by another 12% (Kuklinski and Cobb 1995b). Assuming the figure to hold for a national sample, this means that more than 50% of Southerners and slightly more than 20% of non-Southerners oppose a black family moving in, disheartening figures, needless to say. But it must also be noted that some 75% of American whites nationwide indicate they oppose affirmative action. Even if prejudice is more widespread than we have reported, it still falls far short of explaining all of the turmoil over affirmative action.

Yet additional evidence comes from comparing the reactions to affirmative action of the most and least racially tolerant whites, as determined by a classical measure of prejudice, i.e., negative stereotyping. Employing this procedure<sup>12</sup>, we have compared levels of anger over affirmative action among the most racially tolerant third of the white population and the least tolerant third. The result is clear-cut. Levels of anger are just as great among the former as the latter.

### *The Problem of Censoring*

Devine's creative experiments (1989; Devine and Monteith 1993) suggest that whites must regulate their attitudes to overcome negative images of African-Americans, images that are imbedded in the very fabric of (white) American society. This censoring process entails whites recognizing their initial, negative reactions and then consciously working to overcome them.

Perhaps, one might argue, a majority of white Americans now censor their negative feelings on something as blatantly prejudiced as opposing a black family moving in, but consciously or unconsciously consider it legitimate to target their animosity on affirmative action, especially since many elites have opened the door by challenging the program.

If taken to its extreme, the assertion categorizes anyone who opposes

<sup>12</sup>The survey asked respondents whether a variety of negative adjectives—"aggressive or violent," "lazy," "boastful," "irresponsible," and "complaining"—accurately describe blacks. Given the strong intercorrelations among responses to the five items (from .38 to .58), we constructed an index.

affirmative action as prejudiced. This translates into 75% or more of the white population, a figure that most students of public opinion will find hard to believe. Moreover, testing the hypothesis with survey data (and possibly experimental data) borders on the impossible. Mental processes such as censoring are not readily amenable to observation. So construed, prejudice becomes unmeasurable.

But suppose that we discovered an unconscious link, such that some people unknowingly transfer society-based negative images to affirmative action. Other than as an indicator of how far American white society has yet to go to eliminate stereotypes, how would we interpret the finding? Would we, in short, label the phenomenon “prejudice?”<sup>13</sup> Presumably one would first want to determine how individuals respond when made aware of the unconscious process, not an easy task. Moreover, there still would be a question of causal direction. On the one hand, negative images of African-Americans could lead whites consciously or unconsciously to resent affirmative action. On the other, it is at least conceivable that rhetoric surrounding affirmative action primes negative stereotypes, which in turn then generates the hostility toward the program (Sniderman and Piazza 1993). At this point, research into racial attitudes threatens to be intractable.

#### *A Contaminated Measure?*

We noted earlier our use of the term “black leaders pushing for affirmative action” to identify the level of anger over the program. We also offered our rationale, i.e., the statement portrays part of the context within which debates over affirmative action have been taking place. Nonetheless, a nagging question—does reference to black leaders cause an overestimation of anger toward the program itself?—warrants an answer.

Several follow-up studies suggest not. In them, we compared responses to our original item with those generated by alternatives such as “affirmative action programs for African-Americans,” “affirmative action programs,” and “university scholarships earmarked for black students.” What stands out is the consistency of responses across the whole set of differently worded statements.

#### **Implications**

Let us underline what we have not claimed. Nowhere do we claim that the anger toward affirmative action we have uncovered is “right.” Perhaps whites believe that prejudice and discrimination do not exist when in fact they do. If many whites respond viscerally to the words “affirmative action” without knowing precisely what the program is intended to do, their

<sup>13</sup>We certainly would interpret it as an indicator of society-wide racism.

anger will often be misguided (although, in fairness, the policy's purpose has itself become muddled over time). Our sole purpose has been to establish the sources and frequency of anger at affirmative action, not to pass normative judgments.

Nor do we mean to imply that public opinion should dictate the direction of public policy. Had that been the case earlier in this nation's history, we never would have seen the historic civil rights legislation of the 1960s. Elected officials inherit a responsibility to lead as well as follow.

But public opinion does have implications for strategic politics. Our results underline the risks that liberals and the Democratic party face among the general citizenry. On the one hand, to abandon a policy that has benefited thousands of deserving African-Americans can only exacerbate the perception among them that they are being left behind. On the other, to continue to associate issues of race with affirmative action can only provoke yet more anger among the majority of whites in this country. And this risk is likely to grow, not shrink, over the medium run. As more time passes, as memories of legalized segregation and overt exploitation fade, we can expect a growth in the number of whites who believe African-Americans share at least partial responsibility for their circumstances and, going a step further, who believe that continuing problems African-Americans face are a consequence not merely of their circumstances but of their own motivations and desires. If so, anger and resentment over affirmative action will increase, not decrease.

In principle, resolving the dilemma may not be as difficult as we have portrayed. Many white Americans say they are committed to government programs to give African-Americans special assistance. If we are willing to take their word, the support and sympathy are in place. What elected officials and other key players in the continuing civil rights movement must do is play to this sentiment. This might entail moving away from explicitly racialist politics, and especially the categorical and exclusionary language that has come to be associated with affirmative action, without losing sight of the special needs and claims of African-Americans, including those that affirmative action programs currently address.

Unfortunately, what sounds right in principle often becomes perilous in practice. This peril takes the form of prejudice. There is a fine but crucial line between reshaping affirmative action programs as a strategy to broaden support and dismantling them out of a cold lack of concern for African-Americans. And there is always the risk that even well-intended policy changes will play into the hands of the prejudiced.

Although the politics of race has changed, one challenge has not: how to ensure that good will and benevolence reign over malice and hatred.

How to maximize that goal within the context of (white) public opinion warrants public debate and deliberation.

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## APPENDIX

### Iterative Estimates

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To generate the most accurate estimates for the probabilities of anger for the non-South population, we wrote a computer program that used the observed frequencies from all three conditions. In the baseline condition, there were four possible responses (i.e., people could say they were angered by 0, 1, 2, or 3 items). To predict observed frequencies we formulated a model that was represented as a set of equations, one for each possible response. For example, in either of the test conditions, a person could be angered by "1" item if and only if one of the three baseline items (and *not* the test item) was upsetting, or the test item (and *none* of the baseline items) was upsetting. The prediction equation for "1" item specified each of these outcomes and all possible ways they could occur. To generate predictions or expected frequencies, the model required a set of predicted probabilities. To predict the probability that a person would be angered by "1" item, the model needed: (1) an estimate of the probability of being angered by 1 baseline item and not the test item, and (2) the probability of being angered by the test item and not the baseline item. By iteratively adjusting these unknown probability estimates, the program solved for a set of predicted probabilities that generated better and better expected frequencies. To be more precise, the program made numerous iterations with the help of a Fortran subroutine, STEPIT, to minimize a  $X$  statistic. The  $X$  statistic was simply the sum of the squared deviations between observed and estimated frequencies, each relative to the estimated frequency. Output from the program included a set of parameters that, when put in the prediction equations, came closest to predicting the observed frequencies. These parameters are minimum chi-square estimates based on data from all three conditions.

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