

Racial Resentment and Public Opinion across the Racial Divide

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Abstract

Research on racial resentment has been meticulously developed, tested, and analyzed with white Americans in mind—yet black Americans have also responded to this battery for the past three decades. To date, little to nothing is known about the implications of responses to the racial resentment battery among black Americans. A burgeoning literature on blacks' intragroup attitudes suggests that over time, black Americans have increasingly attributed racial inequality to individual failings as opposed to structural forces. As such, unpacking blacks' responses to the canonical racial resentment battery may provide further insight into the micro-foundations of black public opinion. Using survey data from 1986 to 2016, we engage in a systematic quantitative examination of the role of racial resentment in predicting black *and* white Americans' opinions on racial policies, “race-coded” policies, and nonracialized policies. Along the way, we highlight the existence of wide heterogeneity among black respondents and call for further investigation that identifies similarities and differences in the foundations of white and black public opinion.

Keywords

race, prejudice, racial resentment, public opinion

Scholars have long argued that the most profound political division between groups in the United States lies between blacks and whites. Blacks and whites differ in their voting behavior, as well as their evaluations of the carceral state, affirmative action policies, and welfare policies (Gilens 1999; Hurwitz and Peffley 2010; Pasek et al. 2014; Piston 2010; Rabinowitz et al. 2009; Tesler 2012; Tien et al. 2012; Tuch and Hughes 2011). Perhaps one of the greatest divisions between these two groups concerns how to understand interracial inequality. Historically, the overwhelming majority of black people blamed structural barriers to equality such as racism and prejudice (Dawson 1994; Massey and Denton 1993; Orey 2004; Pattillo-McCoy 1999), while a majority of whites blamed the individual failings of those in the black community (Anderson 1999; Ogbu 2004; Wilson 1996). However, contemporary research on blacks' explanations for inequality reveals that over time, black people have increasingly shifted away from attributing blame to structural barriers to that of individual attributions (Hunt 2007; Nunnally and Carter 2012; Smith 2014; Tate 2010). We believe that the growing convergence of attitudes pertaining to inequality among blacks and whites warrants further scholarly inquiry of two racial groups that have historically been analyzed separately.

A recent examination of this convergence focused on whites' *and* blacks' reactions to the racial resentment battery (Kam and Burge 2018). Kam and Burge (2018) find

that when black and white survey respondents are asked to stop and reflect on their answers to the racial resentment battery, blacks *and* whites on the high and low end of the scale provide similar thematic justifications for their responses. That is, blacks *and* whites on the high end of the scale are more likely to attribute blame of blacks' unequal status to individual failings, and blacks *and* whites on the low end of the scale blame structural features like racism and discrimination. Kam and Burge's (2018) findings lay the groundwork for this paper; we take the next logical step by theorizing and analyzing the role that racial resentment plays in the policy opinions of whites and blacks.

Although the research on racial resentment has been meticulously developed, tested, and analyzed with white Americans in mind, survey respondents across both racial groups have been administered this battery of items in the American National Election Study since 1986. We assess the correlation between racial resentment and other important aspects of racial attitudes: feelings toward blacks and whites, stereotypes of blacks and whites, and

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linked fate. Next, we engage in a systematic quantitative examination of the micro-foundations of opinion among black and white Americans on racial policies, “race-coded” policies, and nonracialized policies. In so doing, we examine the possibility that racial resentment can serve as a predictor of racial policy opinion and race-coded policy opinions not only among white Americans but also among black Americans. No prior analysis has examined white *and* black responses to the racial resentment battery over a thirty-year period. We move the public opinion and racial resentment literature forward by finding that the racial resentment battery can be profitably incorporated into the portfolio of “basic ingredients” that unpack the racial policy opinions not only of white Americans but also of black Americans.

Racial Resentment across the Racial Divide

Racial prejudice is age-old, but modern social scientific approaches to quantifying and measuring racial prejudice are rooted in the twentieth century. The nature of racial prejudice itself has shifted within the twentieth century, from an “old-fashioned” or “Jim Crow” form of racism that focused on biological, inherent differences between blacks and whites, to its more modern variants. These modern variants combine negative affect toward blacks with a judgment regarding the failure of blacks to conform to “American” values of hard work. Such measures have appeared under the terms *symbolic racism*, *modern racism*, and *racial resentment*.

Racial resentment, according to Kinder and Sanders (1996), refers to the sentiments held by white Americans toward black Americans. Racial resentment combines anti-black affect infused with a sense of anger and indignity, undergirded by a belief that black people have failed to conform to the classic Protestant work ethic: “At its center are the contentions that Blacks do not try hard enough to overcome the difficulties they face and that they take what they have not earned” (Kinder and Sanders 1996, 106). A four-item scale has appeared in each of the major installments of the American National Election Studies (ANES) since 1986. In their comprehensive treatment of the subject, Kinder and Sanders (1996) established the strong and robust effect of racial resentment on attitudes toward explicitly racialized policies such as affirmative action and federal spending on programs to assist minorities and toward “race-coded” policies such as welfare and crime. Subsequent work has established the relationship of racial resentment to electoral decision-making and candidate evaluation, particularly in the Obama age (Kam and Kinder 2012; Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010).

These robust findings notwithstanding, prominent scholars have raised questions concerning the underlying meaning of the battery (e.g., Carmines, Sniderman, and Easter 2011; Feldman and Huddy 2005; Huddy and Feldman 2009; Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). They contend that the role of prejudice in policy judgments is minimal and at its core, the policy judgments of whites are shaped by their principles: fairness, equality, and the appropriate role of government, and further suggest that the racial resentment battery may be conflated with these underlying principles. Use of the racial resentment battery to predict racial policy attitudes, the argument goes, may be tautological given the battery itself might be conflated with race-based policy opinions (Carmines, Sniderman, and Easter 2011). Recent experimental work by DeSante (2013) speaks to both sides of the debate demonstrating that although racial resentment correlates with principled ideologies, its relationship is highly conditioned by racial considerations. The open-ended analyses of Kam and Burge (2018) also speak to both sides of the debate by unpacking the meaning underlying the varied responses of whites and blacks to the scale. Recent work demonstrates that both prejudice and principles are integral components to the racial resentment battery.

Despite these divergent views within the literature on racial resentment, there is one common thread across them: nearly all of the public opinion research featuring racial resentment focuses on white Americans. In this voluminous line of research, we are struck by the paucity of studies of how black Americans respond to what has become the canonical measure in public opinion research on race.¹ This lacuna in the literature could in part be attributable to political impact: whites have been a majority not only of the U.S. population but also a majority of the electorate (although this will change in the not-so-far future). The lacuna could also be attributable to the epistemological conventions of the field: that this is simply how political scientists have approached the study of public opinion and race. It could also be attributable to outgroup homogeneity bias: that (mostly white) public opinion researchers have explored heterogeneity among whites but largely ignored analyses of blacks (or included a dummy variable to capture “race”). Finally, it could also be attributed to data limitations: until recently, the sample size of black people in nationally representative datasets has been too limited to sustain rigorous statistical analysis (but, note that political, epistemological, and psychological forces all can play a role in shaping what research designs are proposed and funded). Whether the lack of research on racial resentment among blacks is an intentional oversight attributable to population or political influence, a feature of the epistemological convention

that has characterized the public opinion research on race, or a practical result of data limitations, we cannot say, but we challenge that oversight here.

Racially Resentful . . . Black Americans?

How might we interpret black Americans' responses to the racial resentment battery? Or, put more bluntly, can black Americans be racially resentful? First, we point out that the focus on the resentful side of the scale (focusing on resentful people) ignores potentially important variation on the less resentful side (or as Tesler and Sears 2010, 45, call it, the "racially sympathetic side"). Our analysis of the racial resentment battery does not imply that all (or even most, for the matter) black people will come down on the racially resentful side—we are interested in *variation* from the *low* to the *high* regions of the scale.² Indeed, recent findings from Kam and Burge (2018) suggest that white and black survey respondents share highly similar open-ended interpretations of the items in the racial resentment scale, where those who score low on the racial resentment scale attribute racial inequality to institutionalized forms of discrimination and those who score high on the racial resentment scale attribute racial inequality to group-based differences in temperament and effort. In this paper, we take the next logical step beyond Kam and Burge (2018), by identifying the predictive validity of the racial resentment scale for black and white Americans.

Before assessing the predictive validity of the racial resentment scale, it is worth elaborating upon the theoretically possible ways in which black Americans might affirm propositions that seem to undercut their own group. First, consider the nature of status hierarchy and its implications for subordinate group members. Allport ([1954] 1979, 150) notes that just as subordination may induce some individuals to align with the ingroup, it can also induce others to "[see] his own group through their eyes." Although Allport notes that "self-hatred" is neither universal nor likely very common, it *can* occur to defend the ego. Similarly, system justification theory suggests that members of low-status groups may experience competing pressures as they are torn between social identity pressures to boost the ingroup and system justification pressures that encourage acceptance of the status quo (e.g., Jost, Banaji, and Nosek 2004).

Second, consider elite discourse—particularly the writings of prominent black writers. Scholars since DuBois have noted the great diversity of experiences and opinions within the black community stemming from a number of factors, including gender, age, and socioeconomic status. This diversity has caused divisions among blacks and has allowed blacks to hold and attribute both

positive and negative attitudes about their own group (Allen, Dawson, and Brown 1989; DuBois 1933; Gilliam and Whitby 1989; Shelby 2005; Washington 1903; White 2007; Wilson 1978, 1987). Orey (2004) notes that the notion of anti-black affect maps closely onto the notion of "self-hate" articulated by Shelby Steele and E. Franklin Frasier. Furthermore, the notion of individualism reflects the teachings of Booker T. Washington that have been incorporated into black conservatism, and modern black conservatives such as Glenn Loury and Walter Williams deny the continuing existence of discrimination (Orey 2004). Finally, the very adherence to the promise of the American dream and its individualistic ethos could lead (some) black Americans to affirm propositions that seem to undercut the group. As Harris and McKenzie (2015, 243) note, because blacks are socialized into a context that reinforces the promise of the American Dream, "[i]t is not surprising, then, that many—if not most Blacks—would embrace principles of individualism as part of their political worldview." Note, again, that we are *not* suggesting that all (or even many or the majority or the plurality of) black Americans will fall on the more resentful side of the scale. Our overall point is that there may be meaningful variation in where respondents are located along the entire continuum—including both the low and the high ends of the scale. We seek to conduct a rigorous quantitative analysis of the predictive validity of the racial resentment battery among both blacks and whites.

Third, consider changes over time in black Americans' intragroup attitudes. A recent body of literature from sociologists and political scientists on black Americans' intragroup attitudes suggests that over time, blacks' explanations of inequality have shifted from structural to individual attributions (Hunt 2007; Nunnally and Carter 2012; Smith 2014; Tate 2010). While some scholars argue that this shift in attitude stems from the moderate and deracialized opinions of black elites and politicians (Tate 2010), others suggest it is related to age and cohort effects: black people raised in the Jim Crow era are more likely to attribute inequality to structural barriers, while those raised outside of that era are more likely to blame individual actions for inequality (Hunt 2007; Nunnally and Carter 2012; Smith 2014; also see Lopez Bunyasi and Smith, 2019, for an excellent discussion of respectability politics and its emphasis on individual behavior over structural inequalities).

Finally, we point to existing work suggesting substantively similar interpretations of the racial resentment battery among whites and blacks. Using an original dataset of open-ended reactions of both whites and blacks to each item in the racial resentment battery, Kam and Burge (2018) find that white and black respondents registering on the high and low end of the racial resentment scale had similar thoughts streaming through their minds. That is,

while both whites and blacks on the high end of the scale were more likely to blame individual failings on blacks' economic position, those on the low end of the scale blamed structural facets of American society like prejudice and racism.

These four points suggest that we should find meaningful variation in the racial resentment scale among black Americans due to (1) status theory, (2) elite discourse, and (3) empirical trends. Furthermore, (4) this variation in racial resentment among black Americans should reflect similar substantive interpretations to the scale compared with white Americans. As racial resentment is strongly correlated with lower support for racial policies³ among white Americans (Kinder and Sanders 1996), we also expect that *racial resentment will be correlated with lower support for racial policies among black Americans (H1)*.

In focusing on black public opinion, we need to be mindful of incorporating the workhorse of the black public opinion literature, *linked fate* (Dawson 1994; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989), which significantly predicts black support for racial and redistributive policies, partisanship, and electoral decision-making (see McClain et al., 2009, for comprehensive review).⁴ In fidelity to Dawson's (1994) formulation, *linked fate* represents a given individual's assessment of how *society* perceives and acts toward an exemplar of a group (Laird 2017; McClain et al. 2009). As such, we say *linked fate* more closely resembles a given individual's assessment of the social construction and perception of the entitativity of the group (Campbell 1958): the extent to which categorization (by *society*) defines and constrains individual members of a group. A black person may concede that, in the contemporary United States, what happens to blacks as a group does affect her own chances, as a consequence of the processes of social perception and construction by society. If this is the case, then *linked fate* may serve as a countervailing force that crowds out the role of racial resentment in predicting public opinion (see, for example, Lopez Bunyasi and Smith, 2019, for a cogent treatment of this possibility). As such, *we might expect that racial resentment will have little to no effect on blacks' attitudes toward racial policies (H2), especially after we control for linked fate*.

In the current state of the literature, the imprint of racial resentment reaches beyond opinions on racial policy for white Americans. Images and frames in political communication—be they consciously perceived or not—have “racialized” a series of ostensibly nonracial policies: for example, welfare (Gilens 1999) and crime (e.g., Hurwitz and Peffley 1997, 2005; Valentino 1999; Winter 2008). If race-coding operates through the pairings of these policies and blacks via nuanced visual or verbal

campaign messages and news media coverage, then the same cognitive and affective encoding process should apply for white and black Americans. Thus, just as racial resentment predicts whites' views on race-coded policies, *racial resentment should be a powerful predictor of blacks' opinions of race-coded policies (H3a)*. But, if blacks and whites respond differentially to racial cues (White 2007), then we might not expect the same pattern of results to hold: *racial resentment might well be a powerful predictor of whites' opinions of race-coded policies but not of blacks' (H3b)*.

Finally, we test the discriminant validity of racial resentment by examining the relationship between racial resentment and nonracial policy opinions (i.e., policies that neither explicitly target nor have been implicitly linked to African-Americans or other racial groups). Thus, *racial resentment should be uncorrelated with these nonracial items, for blacks and whites (H4)*.

Racial Resentment by Race: Descriptives and Correlates

To test these hypotheses, we analyze survey data ranging from 1986 to 2016 from the ANES. Table 1 displays the racial resentment items from the ANES along with the respective racial group means for each item.⁵ We can see that for each item, white respondents on average provide a more racially resentful response than black respondents. On average, whites are actually further from the scale midpoint than blacks are; this undercuts any suspicion that blacks' responses are necessarily too extreme, too skewed, or too homogeneous to merit analysis.

Public opinion scholars who study white racial resentment typically create an additive index based on responses to the four items in the battery, and we follow suit here. Figure 1 plots the distribution of racial resentment among blacks and whites in the ANES. The average black score hovers at the midpoint, whereas the average white score is displaced to the right. In any case, we can see substantial variation among both blacks and whites.⁶ Figure 2 displays the mean levels of racial resentment among blacks and whites per year, from 1986–2016. It is notable that blacks and whites are, if anything, equidistant from the scale midpoint, and although there is some vacillation across time, there does not appear to be a stable secular trend in either group.

Next, to provide the lay of the land, we examine the correlates of racial resentment: who is more or less racially resentful? We model racial resentment as a function of demographics (education, income, generation, homeownership, sex, and region) and political predispositions (partisanship, ideological identification, and three core values: egalitarianism, limited government, and moral traditionalism). The models also include yearly

Table 1. Racial Resentment Items, ANES 1986–2016.

Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, neither agree nor disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement?	White respondents	Black respondents	Difference
Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.	0.522 (0.004)	0.311 (0.008)	0.206 (0.009)
Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.	0.729 (0.003)	0.540 (0.009)	0.189 (0.009)
It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder, they could be just as well off as whites.	0.625 (0.003)	0.465 (0.009)	0.158 (0.010)
Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.	0.631 (0.003)	0.319 (0.008)	0.310 (0.008)
Overall additive scale	0.626 (0.003)	0.411 (0.005)	0.215 (0.006)

Overall $N \sim 19,900$. Weighted analysis with linearized standard errors in parentheses below. Responses coded from 0 (*least racially resentful*) to 1 (*most racially resentful*). ANES = American National Election Studies. All differences significant at $p < .001$.

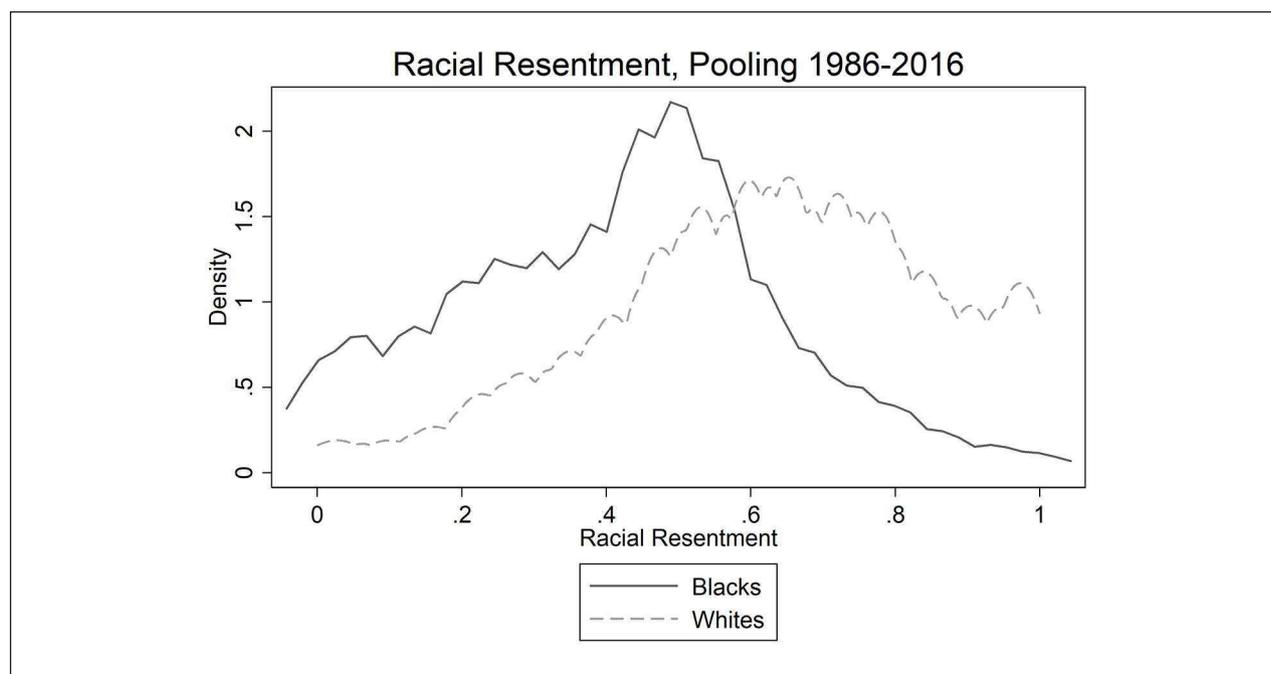


Figure 1. Distribution of racial resentment among blacks and whites, ANES 1986–2016. ANES = American National Election Studies.

fixed effects. We conduct two sets of analyses. To explore the extent to which these variables may (or may not) differentially predict racial resentment among blacks and whites, we estimate separate models for blacks and whites rather than simply pooling the data and estimating a dummy variable for race (see, for example, Masuoka and Junn 2013). Second, we estimate a fully interactive regression model, where each correlate is interacted with a dummy variable for race; this enables us to report statistical tests of how similar (or different) each coefficient is across blacks and whites. The ordinary least squares

(OLS) results in Table 2 suggest points of commonality and divergence in the correlates of racial resentment among blacks and whites.

Among both blacks and whites, the relationship between partisanship and racial resentment is nearly identical, with strong Democrats scoring lower on racial resentment than strong Republicans. White and black Baby Boomers score higher on racial resentment than members of the Silent Generation. For both blacks and whites, the strongest predictors of racial resentment are education and egalitarianism. Education is associated with

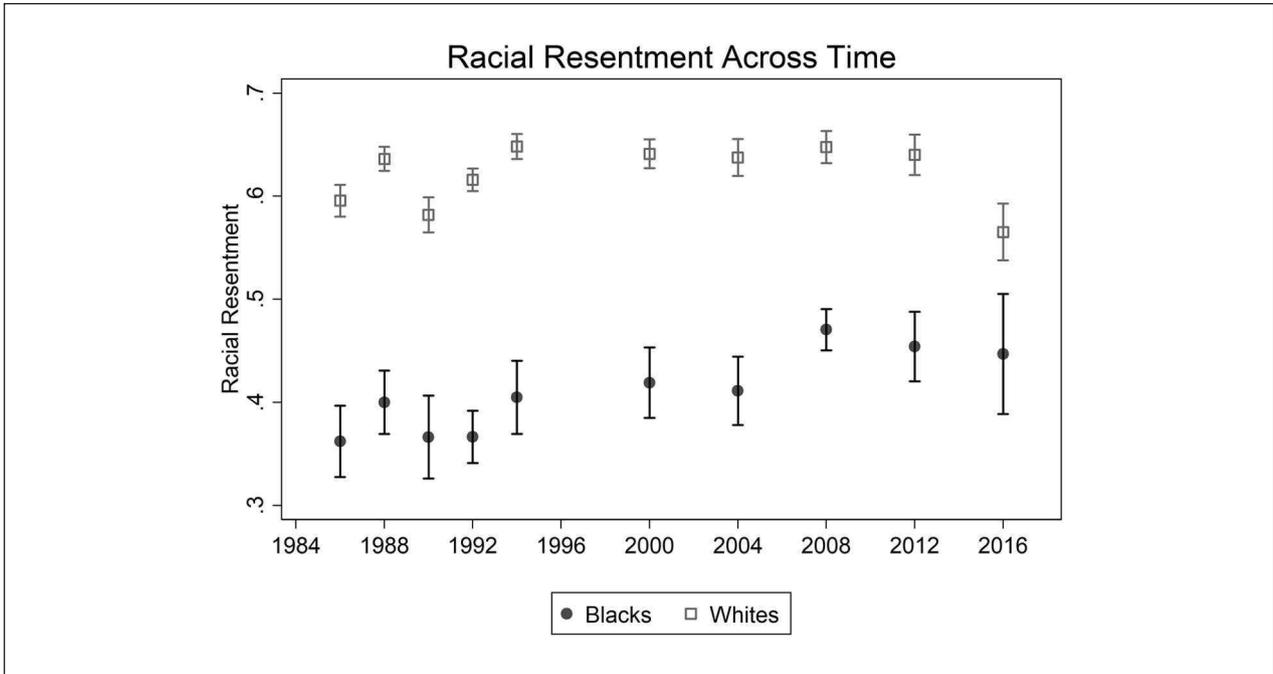


Figure 2. Racial resentment among blacks and whites across time, ANES 1986–2016. Weighted means with 95 percent confidence intervals. ANES = American National Election Studies.

Table 2. Correlates of Racial Resentment among Blacks and Whites.

	Blacks	Whites	Difference
Partisanship	0.05 [†] 0.03	0.05** 0.01	ns
Ideology	0.06 0.04	0.15** 0.02	*
Baby Boomer	0.04* 0.02	0.03** 0.01	ns
Generation X	0.03 0.02	0.05** 0.01	ns
Millennial and Generation Z	0.03 0.02	0.00 0.01	ns
Education	-0.15** 0.03	-0.20** 0.01	*
Income: 17%–33%	-0.02 0.02	0.02 0.01	*
Income: 34%–67%	-0.01 0.02	0.02 0.01	ns
Income: 68%–95%	-0.02 0.02	-0.00 0.01	ns
Income: top 5%	-0.07 0.05	-0.01 0.02	ns
Income: refused	-0.06* 0.02	0.01 0.01	*
Homeownership	0.01 0.01	0.01* 0.01	ns

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

	Blacks	Whites	Difference
Female	0.02 0.01	-0.00 0.01	ns
Region: North-Central	0.01 0.02	-0.01 0.01	ns
Region: South	0.02 0.02	0.03** 0.01	ns
Region: West	0.04 0.03	-0.04** 0.01	*
Limited government	-0.01 0.03	0.02* 0.01	ns
Egalitarianism	-0.30** 0.04	-0.33** 0.02	ns
Moral traditionalism	-0.08* 0.04	0.15** 0.02	**
Intercept	0.68 0.05	0.65 0.02	
<i>n</i>	1,599	5,993	

Table entry is the OLS coefficient with standard error below. Weighted analysis. Yearly fixed effects not shown. Third column reflects significance of interaction between covariate and black in fully interactive model. OLS = ordinary least squares. [†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

lower scores among both blacks and whites (although its predictive effect is stronger among whites). Egalitarianism, by far the strongest predictor, is associated with lower

Table 3. Correlations between Racial Resentment and Other Forms of Group Attitude.

	Racial resentment (Blacks)	Racial resentment (Whites)
Linked fate	-0.33** <i>n</i> = 1,551	NA
Feelings toward blacks	-0.13** <i>n</i> = 2,990	-0.26** <i>n</i> = 14,520
Stereotypes of blacks	-0.06* <i>n</i> = 2,307	-0.27** <i>n</i> = 10,331
Feelings toward whites	0.05 <i>n</i> = 2,709	0.07** <i>n</i> = 13,050
Stereotypes of whites	0.12** <i>n</i> = 2,291	0.18** <i>n</i> = 10,362

Table entry is the pairwise weighted correlation coefficient.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

levels of racial resentment among both whites and blacks to similar extents.

There are also a few differences across whites and blacks worth noting. Conservatism correlates with racial resentment, but significantly so only among whites.⁷ White Gen-Xers score higher on racial resentment than members of the Silent Generation, but this pattern is not statistically significant among blacks (although it runs in a similar direction).⁸ There are no significant regional effects among blacks, but there are among whites: Southerners express higher levels of racial resentment than Northeasterners, and Westerners express the lowest levels of racial resentment. Moral traditionalism has opposite effects among blacks and whites: morally traditional blacks register lower levels of racial resentment, whereas morally traditional whites register higher levels of racial resentment.

Although racial resentment has not been used as a predictor of black public opinion, ingroup attitudes have not been entirely ignored in the literature. Here, we will compare the racial resentment scale with three prominent measures of ingroup attitude used in the public opinion and racial politics literatures: linked fate, the feeling thermometer, and stereotypes.⁹

How do these various measures of group attitude relate to each other? To begin, we present pairwise weighted correlations for racial resentment, linked fate, feelings toward blacks, and stereotypes of blacks. Each cell in Table 3 indicates the weighted Pearson pairwise correlation for black respondents and then for white respondents. Looking down the first column of results, we see that linked fate and racial resentment are significantly correlated at $r = -.33$ ($p < .01$). The more racially resentful a black respondent is, the lower his or her level of linked fate; the less racially resentful a black respondent is, the higher the level of linked fate. We also see that racial

resentment is modestly related to feelings toward blacks ($r = -.13$, $p < .01$) and stereotypes of blacks ($r = -.06$, $p < .05$). Racial resentment is not significantly tied to blacks' feelings toward whites, but is modestly tied to stereotypes of whites ($r = .12$, $p < .01$).¹⁰

When we examine white respondents, we see higher correlations across the measures tapping evaluations of blacks: be they racial resentment, feelings, or stereotypes. Here, the correlation between racial resentment and feelings toward blacks is significant ($p < .01$) and larger in magnitude ($r = -.26$), and the correlation between racial resentment and stereotypes of blacks is also significant ($p < .01$) and larger in magnitude ($r = -.27$). White respondents' attitudes toward blacks, as measured by the racial resentment scale, feeling thermometer, and stereotype battery, appear to be more internally consistent and less differentiated than black respondents' attitudes toward their ingroup. This pattern is consistent with the psychological literature on outgroup homogeneity, which has found that ingroup members tend to view outgroups homogeneously (e.g., Ostrom and Sedikides 1992). In addition, we see that racial resentment is modestly tied to feelings toward whites ($r = .07$, $p < .01$) and stereotypes of whites ($r = .18$, $p < .01$), which is consistent with the view of racial resentment tapping violations of the (white) Protestant work ethic.

In their recent piece, Kam and Burge (2018) argue that the racial resentment scale should be reconceptualized as a continuum reflecting attributions for racial inequality, with one side anchored by acknowledgment of structural discrimination and the other anchored by individual attributions. Here, our results provide some further nuance to that understanding. The negative correlation between linked fate and racial resentment among black respondents is particularly interesting: black respondents who acknowledge that their fate is tied to that of their group are also respondents who recognize that blacks face institutionalized barriers to equality. Black respondents who believe their fate is not tied to that of their group are also respondents who believe that racial inequality can be explained by individual effort. These correlations also suggest that racial resentment is not duplicative of stereotypes or of affective reactions. Furthermore, the direction of the relationships is fairly similar across blacks and whites, although these constructs generally appear to be more coherently connected among whites than blacks, a finding that is consistent with the outgroup homogeneity principle.

Racial Resentment and Racial Policy Opinions

Having established that variation in racial resentment among both blacks and whites does exist, that racial

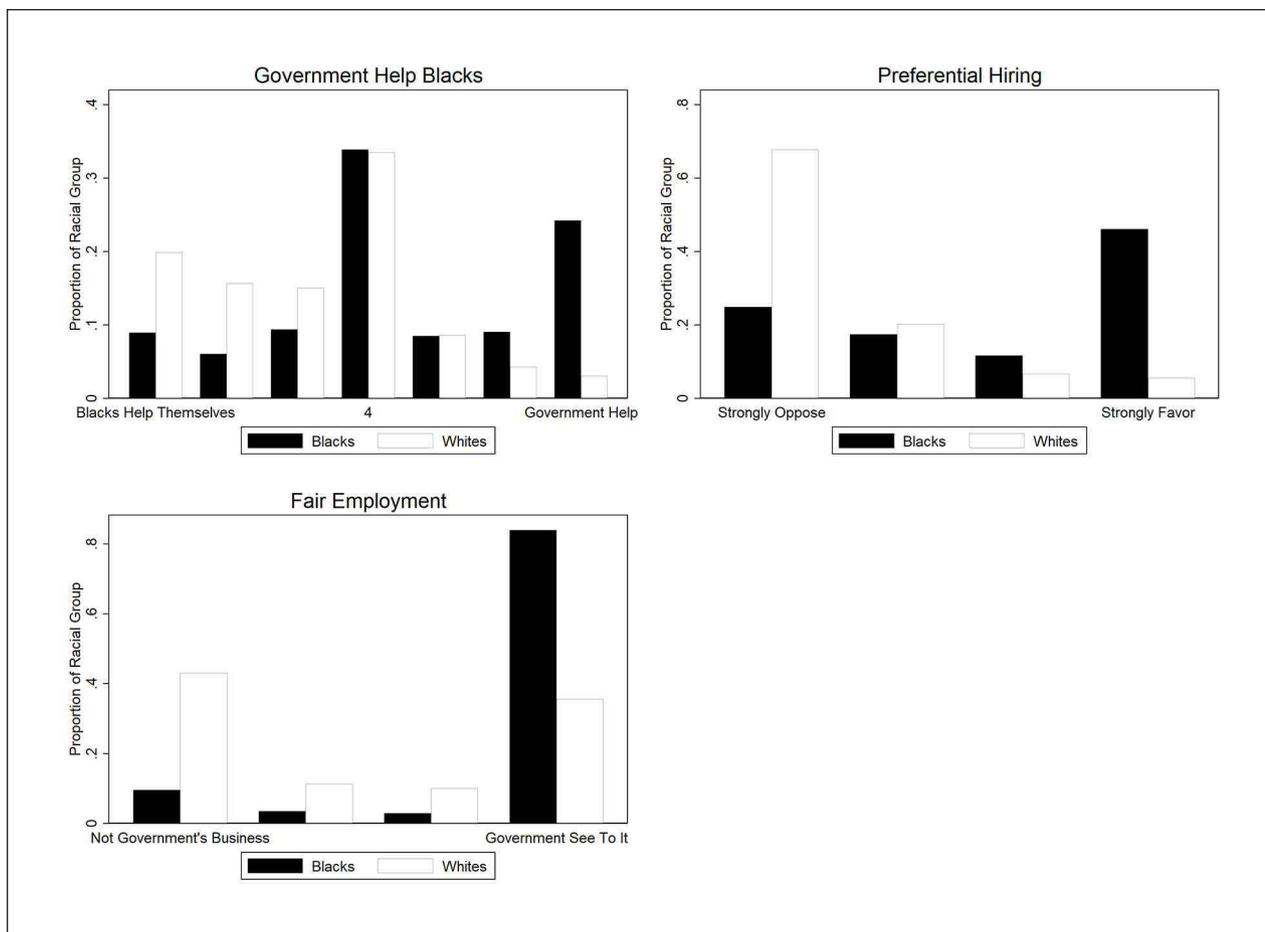


Figure 3. Opinion on racial policies, by race. Weighted data.

resentment stems from a variety of background characteristics, and that racial resentment may have a unique meaning among blacks compared with other measures of group attitude, we now examine the political consequences of racial resentment among blacks and whites. To what extent does it predict variation in public opinion among black and white Americans?

Consistent with existing work (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kinder and Winter 2001), we uncover a stark racial divide in black and white support for these policies: the mean level of support for racially liberal policies is significantly higher among blacks than it is among whites ($p < .01$ in all cases). Figure 3 also indicates that there is considerable variation to be explained among both blacks and whites in their views toward these policies. Indeed, there is significantly more variability in blacks' views toward government efforts to help blacks ($p < .01$) and blacks' views of preferential hiring ($p < .01$) compared with whites. The data clearly dispute the notion that black public opinion has insufficient variation to be analyzed.

Given this variation in opinion on race policy among whites and blacks, how predictive is racial resentment? To make our estimates more credible, we control for the demographic characteristics and political predispositions used in Table 2 as well as yearly fixed effects. As we are interested in the degree of association between racial resentment and public opinion among black and white Americans, we model racial policy opinion as a function of racial resentment, separately for black respondents and white respondents to allow the effects of racial resentment to vary by group.¹¹ Racial policy opinions range from 0 (*conservative*) to 1 (*liberal*).

The ordered probit results in Table 4 showcase similarity rather than difference across blacks and whites in the estimated effect of racial resentment. The effect of racial resentment is negative, significant, and sizable for both black and white respondents: the more black and white respondents register racially resentful responses to the battery, the more likely they are to say that blacks should help themselves rather than expect government assistance, to dispute the notion that government should ensure fair employment

Table 4. Racial Resentment and Racial Policy Support.

	Government help blacks		Preferential hiring		Fair employment	
	Black Rs	White Rs	Black Rs	White Rs	Black Rs	White Rs
Racial resentment	-1.39** 0.16	-2.33** 0.09	-1.34** 0.18	-2.33** 0.11	-2.61** 0.34	-2.51** 0.17
Partisanship	-0.31* 0.15	-0.20** 0.06	-0.22 0.18	0.07 0.08	0.22 0.35	-0.12 0.13
Ideology	-0.71** 0.19	-0.26* 0.11	0.06 0.20	-0.30* 0.12	0.29 0.36	0.01 0.19
Baby Boomer	0.19* 0.09	-0.05 0.04	0.21 0.11	0.01 0.05	-0.32 0.23	-0.06 0.09
Generation X	0.29** 0.10	-0.16** 0.05	0.15 0.13	0.01 0.06	-0.35 0.23	-0.03 0.10
Millennial/Generation Z	0.37** 0.13	-0.02 0.07	0.24 0.16	-0.04 0.09	-0.36 0.26	0.04 0.13
Education	-0.42** 0.15	0.12 0.06	-0.66** 0.16	-0.47** 0.08	-0.16 0.31	0.03 0.13
Income: 17%–33%	-0.11 0.10	-0.08 0.07	-0.25* 0.11	-0.26** 0.07	-0.02 0.20	0.18 0.12
Income: 34%–67%	-0.08 0.10	-0.20** 0.06	-0.46** 0.12	-0.38** 0.07	-0.32 0.20	-0.03 0.11
Income: 68%–95%	0.03 0.13	-0.25** 0.06	-0.39** 0.14	-0.39** 0.08	-0.39 0.30	0.10 0.12
Income: top 5%	0.03 0.27	-0.27** 0.09	0.25 0.32	-0.43** 0.11	-0.05 0.40	0.26 0.16
Income: refused	0.08 0.13	-0.07 0.09	-0.15 0.16	-0.26** 0.09	-0.27 0.29	-0.01 0.17
Homeownership	-0.09 0.07	-0.07 0.04	0.13 0.09	-0.10* 0.05	-0.04 0.15	-0.27** 0.08
Female	0.14* 0.07	-0.03 0.03	0.09 0.08	-0.00 0.04	0.19 0.13	-0.15* 0.06
Region: North-Central	-0.01 0.12	-0.01 0.05	-0.11 0.14	0.05 0.06	-0.25 0.21	-0.02 0.10
Region: South	-0.02 0.10	-0.10* 0.05	0.08 0.10	-0.01 0.06	-0.35* 0.18	0.02 0.09
Region: West	-0.27 0.14	0.03 0.05	-0.38* 0.18	-0.10 0.06	-0.42 0.28	-0.08 0.10
Limited government	-0.06 0.15	-0.22** 0.05	-0.29 0.15	-0.30** 0.06	-0.65* 0.26	-0.59** 0.09
Egalitarianism	-0.10 0.20	0.52** 0.10	-0.29 0.23	-0.15 0.12	0.31 0.38	1.51** 0.18
Moral traditionalism	-0.08 0.18	-0.24* 0.09	-0.80** 0.21	-0.66** 0.11	-0.11 0.33	0.09 0.16
<i>n</i>	1,569	5,682	1,459	5,698	877	2,068

Ordered probit coefficient with standard error below. Weighted analysis. Yearly fixed effects and cut points not shown. Rs = respondents. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

practices, and to oppose preferential hiring policies. Figure 4 illustrates these effects. In each panel, the solid lines plot predicted support for racial policies among blacks and the dashed lines plot predicted support for racial policies among whites, holding all other variables to each group's respective mean or modal values.¹² The dashed and solid lines slope downward to a similar degree.

Given that all variables range from 0 to 1, we can roughly compare effect sizes by examining the relative magnitudes of the coefficients listed in Table 4. For the most part, the effect of racial resentment exceeds that of every other covariate, for both blacks and whites. In short, the primary measure used to explain white Americans' opinions on matters of racial policy is a

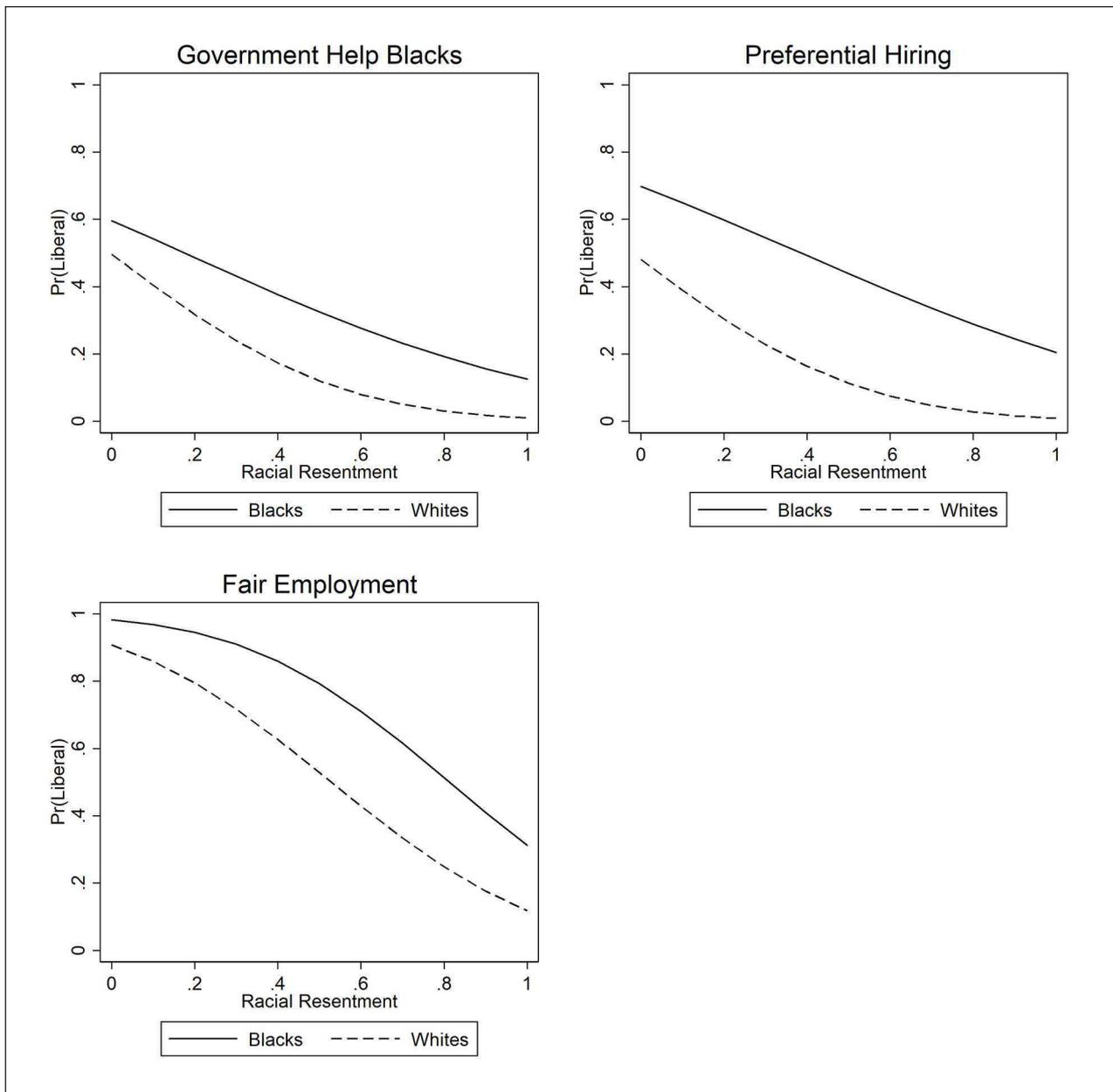


Figure 4. Racial resentment and racial policy opinions, by race. Predicted probabilities based on Table 4.

primary explanation of black Americans' opinions as well, lending support to H1.¹³

We conducted a series of supplementary analyses to examine the sensitivity of these results to our specifications. First, we investigated the linear additive specification for *Racial Resentment*. We included a quadratic and found no evidence to suggest the effect of *Racial Resentment* takes a quadratic specification.¹⁴ Next, we investigated whether the variation in *Racial Resentment* works differently on the low versus high side. To do so, we broke the *Racial Resentment* variable into two

distinct variables representing variation on the low side (0–0.5 on the original scale) and variation on the high side (0.5–1 on the original scale). We find that the coefficients representing variation on the low side were essentially indistinguishable from the coefficients representing variation on the high side, for both whites and blacks, suggesting that both sides of the racial resentment scale are motivating racial policy opinions, similarly for both whites and blacks.¹⁵

Next, we examined if particular items in the racial resentment battery were driving our results. This also

enables us to probe if specific items have stronger resonance among blacks or whites (or both). We created fifteen subscales based on all possible combinations of the four questions (one subscale with all four items, four subscales with three items each, six subscales with two items each, and four subscales with each separate item). We replicated our analyses for each of the fifteen subscales, for blacks and whites separately.¹⁶ The predictive power of any subscale rises as the number of items increases (for both whites and for blacks), but no single item seems to work better or worse for blacks or whites. The mean coefficients for subscales containing each specific item rest within a narrow band (ranging from -0.32 to -0.37 for black respondents and ranging from -0.44 to -0.48 for white respondents), and the t -statistics are all highly significant. This exercise suggests that no single item is driving the results for either whites or blacks. Moreover, it provides some reassurance against the concern (described above) that the racial resentment scale is tautological: we find that the one item (“try harder”) that unambiguously lacks policy content is no more or less predictive of policy opinions (for whites or blacks) than the other items in the scale.¹⁷

We then inquired into the specificity of our results: to what extent are these effects attributable to racial resentment and not some other form of group attitude? To lend credibility to our findings, we re-analyzed our models of black opinion, adding each of the various forms of group attitude we discussed above: linked fate, feelings toward blacks, and stereotypes of blacks.¹⁸ Table 5 lists the effects of racial resentment and these respective group attitudes, and we see that the coefficient on racial resentment barely budges with the inclusion of these group attitudes added individually (models II–IV) and added all at once (model V). Moreover, notice that racial resentment is the only measure with a consistently strong and significant effect across these three dependent measures. Linked fate is not a significant predictor in any of the three models, whereas racial resentment is a significant predictor, undercutting H2. Warm feelings toward blacks significantly predict racially liberal policy stances in the three models, but this relationship falters when we control for linked fate and stereotypes. Positive stereotypes of blacks are a significant predictor in only one of the three models.

When we repeat model V for white respondents (omitting linked fate because the question is not administered to whites), we reach basically the same conclusion: racial resentment significantly predicts opinion across the three policy items and barely budges upon the inclusion of these other group attitudes. Feelings toward blacks are not significant predictors, and stereotypes of blacks are significant in only one of the policy items (government help blacks, $b = 0.36$, $SE = 0.18$, $p < .05$).

Finally, when we include racial resentment and attitudes toward whites (feelings toward whites and stereotypes of whites), we find that racial resentment continues to be significantly correlated with these racial policy items, whereas feelings toward and stereotypes of whites are not—for neither black nor white respondents.¹⁹

Racial Resentment and “Race-Coded” Policy Opinions

The imprint of racial resentment reaches beyond opinions on racial policy for white Americans. Images and frames in political communication—be they consciously perceived or not—have “racialized” a series of ostensibly nonracial policies: for example, welfare has become race-coded (Gilens 1999) as has crime (Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Hurwitz and Peffley 1997, 2005; Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman 1997; Valentino 1999; Winter 2008). If race-coding operates through the implicit pairings of these policies and blacks via nuanced visual or verbal campaign messages and news media coverage, then the same cognitive and affective encoding process should apply for white and black Americans. But, if blacks and whites respond differentially to racial cues (White 2007), then we might *not* expect the same pattern of results to hold. To date, racial resentment has been found to predict conservative attitudes toward welfare and the death penalty among white Americans (e.g., Kinder and Sanders 1996). Do these findings apply to black Americans?

Consistent with previous research, Figure 5 displays a racial divide between white and black Americans’ support for federal welfare spending, with blacks reporting significantly more liberal views on these two issues. However, there is also reasonable variation across both blacks and whites in their attitudes toward welfare spending and the death penalty. On both items, black opinion has significantly more variability than white opinion ($p < .001$, $p < .0001$, respectively).

As before, we estimate the effect of racial resentment among blacks and whites separately, using an ordered probit regression model that controls for the same suite of demographics and political predispositions. The dependent variables, as before, are coded from 0 (*conservative*) to 1 (*liberal*). The results in Table 6 show that higher levels of racial resentment among whites are associated with decreasing support for welfare spending and decreased opposition to the death penalty, consistent with the “race-coding” literature. Among blacks, the coefficients on racial resentment are also negative but smaller in magnitude in both models; however, the coefficient on racial resentment misses the conventional significance cut-off of $p < .05$ in the death penalty

Table 5. Racial Resentment, Controlling for Other Forms of Group Attitude among Blacks.

	Government help blacks	Preferential hiring	Fair employment
Model I			
Racial resentment	-1.62** 0.20	-1.35** 0.24	-2.59** 0.35
Model II			
Racial resentment	-1.66** 0.21	-1.31** 0.24	-2.45** 0.37
Linked fate	0.02 0.11	0.05 0.14	0.27 0.18
Model III			
Racial resentment	-1.60** 0.21	-1.29** 0.24	-2.61** 0.36
Feelings toward blacks	0.51* 0.25	0.79* 0.31	0.87* 0.39
Model IV			
Racial resentment	-1.64** 0.21	-1.28** 0.24	-2.52** 0.35
Stereotypes of blacks	0.32 0.23	0.99** 0.28	0.49 0.35
Model V			
Racial resentment	-1.68** 0.21	-1.20** 0.25	-2.41** 0.37
Linked fate	0.01 0.11	0.08 0.14	0.25 0.18
Feelings toward blacks	0.41 0.28	0.40 0.34	0.73 0.41
Stereotypes of blacks	0.18 0.25	1.05** 0.30	0.49 0.37

Ordered probit coefficient with standard error below. Models control for covariates in Table 4. Weighted analysis.

*p < .05. **p < .01.

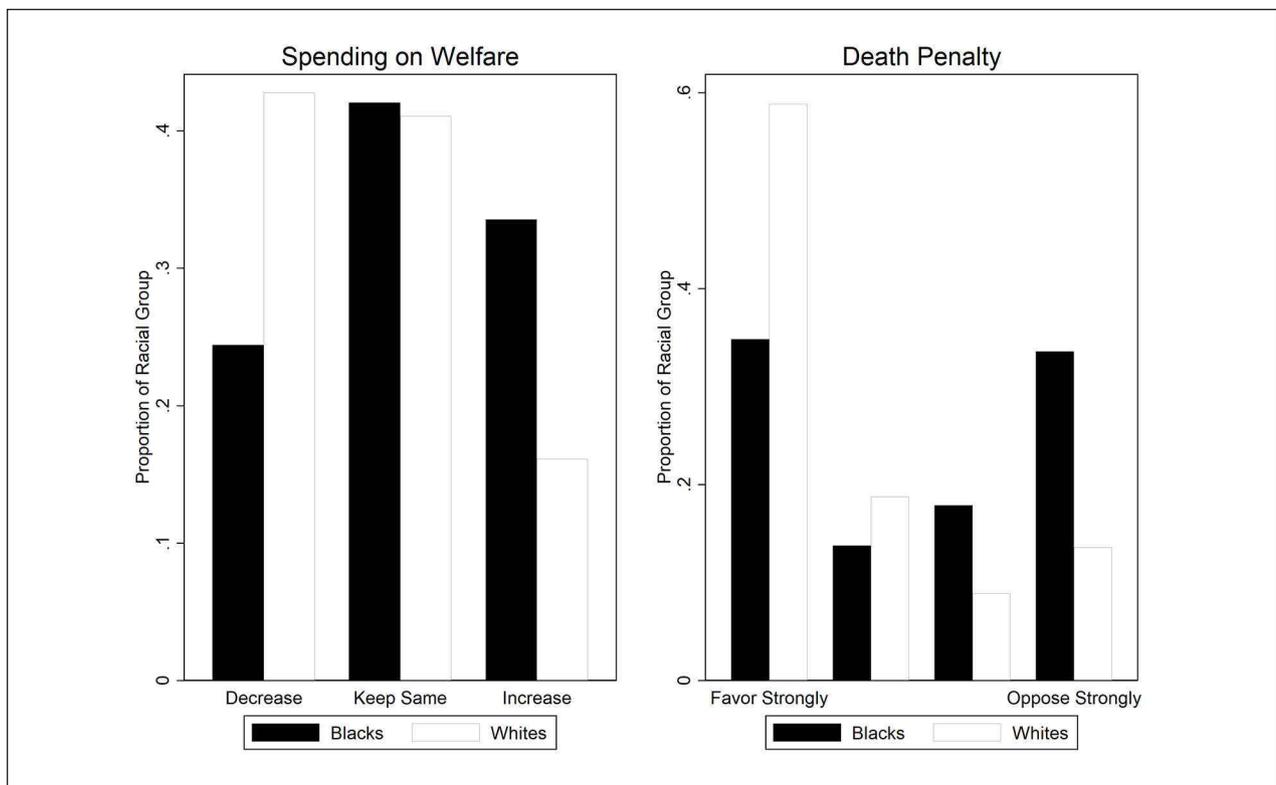


Figure 5. Opinion on “race-coded” policies, by race. Weighted data.

Table 6. Racial Resentment and “Race-Coded” Policy Opinions.

	Spending on welfare		Oppose death penalty	
	Black Rs	White Rs	Black Rs	White Rs
Racial resentment	-0.66** 0.18	-0.96** 0.10	-0.32 0.18	-1.42** 0.10
Partisanship	-0.30 0.19	-0.19** 0.07	0.08 0.19	-0.29** 0.08
Ideology	-0.39 0.20	-0.51** 0.12	-0.28 0.20	-0.42** 0.12
Baby Boomer	0.24* 0.10	-0.16** 0.05	0.05 0.11	-0.08 0.05
Generation X	0.19 0.12	-0.16** 0.06	-0.08 0.13	-0.12* 0.06
Millennial/Generation Z	0.27 0.14	-0.21** 0.08	0.08 0.15	0.00 0.08
Education	-0.67** 0.16	-0.14 0.07	0.12 0.17	0.58** 0.08
Income: 17%–33%	-0.25* 0.11	-0.07 0.07	-0.12 0.11	0.02 0.08
Income: 34%–67%	-0.30** 0.11	-0.32** 0.07	-0.10 0.11	-0.13 0.07
Income: 68%–95%	-0.25 0.15	-0.33** 0.08	-0.37* 0.14	-0.08 0.08
Income: top 5%	0.48 0.37	-0.24* 0.10	-0.14 0.41	-0.06 0.11
Income: refused	0.16 0.16	-0.15 0.10	-0.25 0.16	-0.01 0.10
Homeownership	-0.04 0.08	-0.17** 0.05	0.09 0.08	-0.08 0.05
Female	0.04 0.08	0.10* 0.04	0.20* 0.08	0.20** 0.04
Region: North-Central	-0.02 0.13	0.10 0.05	0.17 0.13	-0.05 0.06
Region: South	-0.07 0.11	0.08 0.05	0.01 0.10	-0.17** 0.05
Region: West	-0.02 0.17	0.07 0.06	0.06 0.18	-0.13* 0.06
Limited government	-0.20 0.16	-0.45** 0.05	0.16 0.16	0.01 0.06
Egalitarianism	0.09 0.21	0.76** 0.11	0.12 0.23	0.03 0.12
Moral traditionalism	-0.27 0.21	-0.35** 0.10	0.10 0.21	0.01 0.11
<i>n</i>	1,447	5,213	1,341	5,042

Ordered probit coefficient with standard error below. Weighted analysis. Yearly fixed effects and cut points not shown. Rs = respondents. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

model ($p \sim .057$). Figure 6 illustrates the magnitude of the relationship between racial resentment and opinions on these race-coded policies. The slopes of the lines are steeper for white Americans than black Americans; indeed, the line depicting opposition to the death penalty is nearly flat among blacks. The results, thus, are not dispositive for H3a and H3b.²⁰

Racial Resentment and Nonracialized Policy Opinions

In this last section, we investigate the role of racial resentment on nonracialized policy opinions. These analyses serve as a discriminant validity test. In the ANES, respondents were asked their views on whether

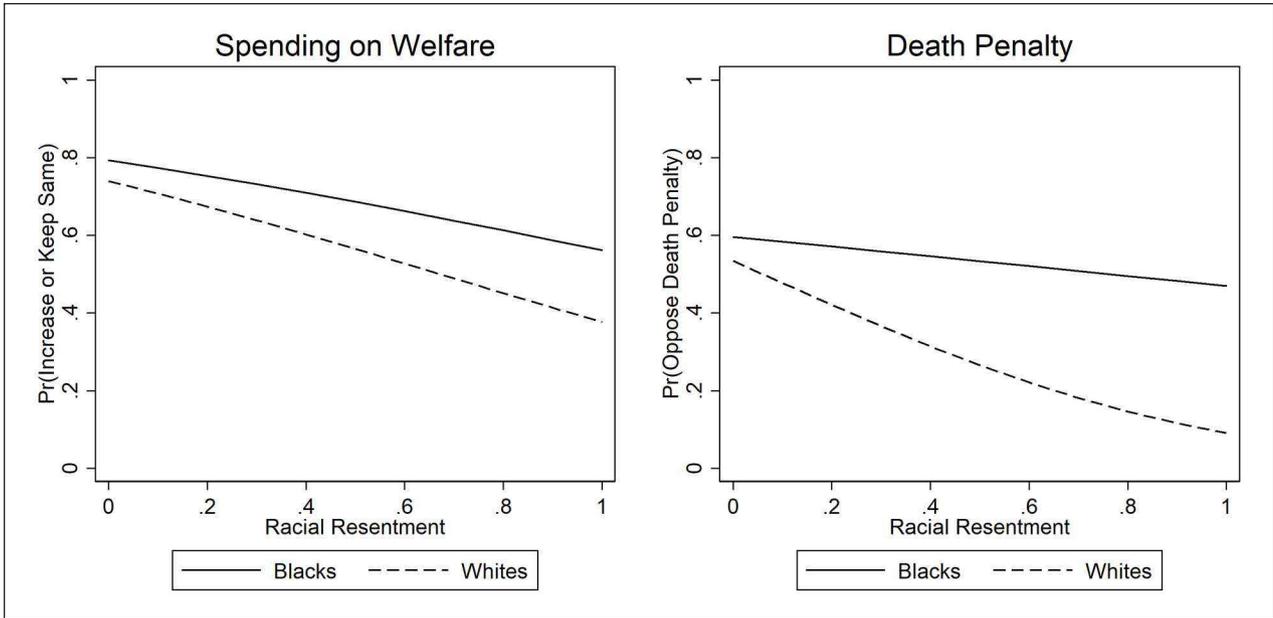


Figure 6. Racial resentment and “race-coded” policy opinions. Predicted probabilities based on Table 6.

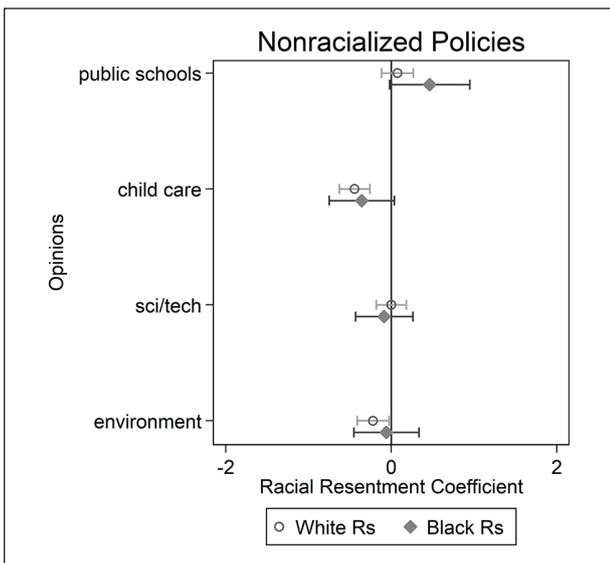


Figure 7. Racial resentment and nonracialized policy opinions, by race. Ordered probit coefficients with 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted analysis. Models control for variables in previous analyses.

federal spending for public schools, child care, space/science and technology, and protecting the environment should be increased, decreased, or kept the same. We recode all variables to range from 0 “decrease or cut out entirely” to 1 “increase.” As before, we use ordered probit to model opinion on these budgetary items as a function of racial resentment, political predispositions,

and background characteristics. Because these policy items are explicitly and implicitly *not* about race, we have no reason to suspect that racial resentment would be a significant predictor of opinion for either blacks or whites. And this is generally what we find, as summarized in Figure 7.²¹ Consistent with H4, racial resentment works the same way for blacks and whites, this time as a factor that is largely irrelevant to the micro-foundations of opinion.

Conclusion

More than twenty-five years ago, Smith (1987, 441) characterized black Americans as “virtually invisible to serious students of American values.” He lamented a “false homogeneity wherein black Americans are all but inscrutable: They are all presumed to think alike.” The existing work on *racial prejudice* in the United States goes even further down this path: black Americans are not only ignored in this literature—but viewed as objects of evaluation rather than agents with opinions. Research in the racial and ethnic politics literature has advanced in incorporating and analyzing the micro-foundations of black Americans, but we are struck by the degree to which these two literatures operate as ships passing in the night. Here, we have investigated the extent to which a tool developed for the literature on white racial prejudice can be used for unpacking and explaining heterogeneity in opinion among not just whites but also blacks.

Our statistical analyses of the ANES suggests that the predictive validity of racial resentment on racial policy is more similar than different across whites and blacks: just as the literature has shown that whites who are racially resentful are more hostile to racially liberal policies, we show that blacks who are racially resentful are also more hostile to racially liberal policies. And the flip side applies as well: whites and blacks who score low on the racial resentment scale are more supportive of racially liberal policies. Racial resentment packs a more consistent and potent explanatory punch compared with other forms of group attitude: linked fate, feelings toward blacks, and stereotypes of blacks.

Just as racial resentment predicts views on race-based policies, political scientists have found that racial resentment predicts views on “race-coded” policies as well—at least among whites. Our evidence suggests that the relationship between racial resentment and black Americans’ views on “race-coded” policies deserves further investigation. We turned up mixed results: with racial resentment significantly predicting views on welfare but not views on the death penalty. We find these results tantalizing and worthy of further, fine-tuned examination. Finally, we use a variety of domestic budgetary policies as a “placebo” test—to identify a case where racial resentment should be unimportant, and we find that it is similarly irrelevant among both blacks and whites.

The average black respondent is situated below the midpoint of the racial resentment scale. The average white American respondent is situated above the midpoint of the racial resentment scale. We see no reason that a group with average scores above the midpoint should be inherently privileged in analyses compared to a group with average scores below it. We have shown that there is substantial variation among both white and black Americans in how much they disagree and agree with these items—variation that helps unpack policy opinions when it comes to race. Our findings demonstrate that there is important and meaningful variation in policy preferences of black Americans, and they also identify an important common explanation across whites *and* blacks that can help unpack heterogeneity in public opinion on race both across and within racial groups.

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Notes

1. As Kam and Burge (2018) demonstrate, the vast majority of published journal articles that use the racial resentment scale focuses on whites only. Only a handful of articles have examined the racial resentment battery for both blacks and whites (Bobo and Johnson 2004; Buckler, Wilson, and Salinas 2009; Zigerell 2015).
2. Applicability of the term “resentment” deserves elaboration. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines resentment as a sense of “ill will, bitterness, or anger” or “an indignant sense of injury or insult received or perceived.” In his *Handbook of Social Psychology* chapter, McGuire (1985, 265) uses the term to indicate that members of disadvantaged groups may harbor “resentment against one’s own kind, who are, however unintentionally, the reasons for one’s suffering.” Resentment seems an entirely plausible term.
3. Here, we adopt the terminology of Kinder and Sanders (1996, 116) in defining racial policies as “policies that deal explicitly and unambiguously with race.” In our case, as with Kinder and Sanders (1996), we focus exclusively on those policies that explicitly target African Americans, but we fully acknowledge that racial policies as a matter of terminology span a diverse array of policies that go beyond those policies that target African Americans.
4. Recent work has begun to raise questions about the continuing relevance of linked fate for black public opinion, especially in light of the growing heterogeneity among blacks in the United States. See, for example, Capers and Smith (2015).
5. Appendix, replication syntax, and data are available in the Supplementary Material link on the *Political Research Quarterly* website.
6. Here and throughout, to improve cross-year comparability, we analyze only respondents interviewed face-to-face.
7. Ideological identification may work differently among blacks compared with whites (Hajnal and Lee 2011; Philpot 2017). Philpot (2017) argues that the ideological building blocks of blacks and whites differ: blacks’ ideology is rooted in attitudes about social welfare and religion whereas the ideology of whites is based on their attitudes about social welfare, religion, morality, and limited government. The different meaning of ideology across blacks and whites may explain why ideology is significantly correlated with whites’ racial resentment but not blacks,’ but we note that an extensive exploration of racial differences in ideological identification is beyond the scope of this paper.
8. For a more extensive analysis of age–period–cohort variation in the levels and effects of white racial resentment, see DeSante and Smith (forthcoming).

9. Linked fate appears in a branch–stem question format in the 2004, 2008, and 2012 installments of the ANES. Due to format changes, we set aside 2016. The feeling thermometer can be considered a measure of “pure” affect, in which respondents report evaluations ranging from 0 (*cold*) to 100 (*warm*). Black respondents demonstrate ingroup favoritism, rating their ingroup (blacks) with an average temperature of eighty-two and the outgroup (whites) with an average rating of seventy-one. Whites also show ingroup favoritism (an average rating of whites of seventy-two and an average rating of blacks of sixty-three). How whites and blacks evaluate whites is actually quite similar (a mean of seventy-two for white respondents; seventy-one for black respondents): it is in how they evaluate blacks that they diverge. The stereotype battery asks respondents to evaluate whites and blacks along various traits, for example, from lazy to hardworking. For each available year, we averaged trait assessments of whites and trait assessments of blacks and rescaled these assessments to range from 0 (*negative trait evaluations*) to 1 (*positive trait evaluations*). When asked to evaluate blacks as a group, black respondents evaluate blacks as a group more highly than white respondents evaluate them ($M = .65, SE = .006$, compared with $M = .51, SE = .003$). When asked to evaluate whites as a group, black and white respondents evaluate whites as a group similarly ($M = .64, SE = .006$; $M = .66, SE = .002$, respectively). As with the feeling thermometer, how whites and blacks evaluate whites is quite similar: the point of divergence is in how they evaluate blacks. Consistent with Kinder and Kam (2009), blacks display ingroup favoritism when it comes to the feeling thermometer but not when it comes to stereotypes.
10. These findings are similar to those reported by Tesler and Sears (2010).
11. Our approach builds upon that of Kinder and Winter (2001) who explore the differential effects of micro-foundations of opinion on the racial divide in public opinion toward racial policies. Kinder and Winter (2001, 447) rely on a three-point closeness measure to tap ingroup identification among African-Americans, finding that “In-group identification is generally a weak predictor of opinion.” They also examine the predictive power of racial resentment battery, *but only for whites*, finding that racial resentment contributes to white Americans’ opposition to racial policies. We build upon this work by explicitly identifying the role that racial resentment (along with other measures of attitudes toward blacks) plays in explaining opinion among *both* black and white Americans.
12. See the Online Appendix Part I, Section F, for the specific values.
13. We do not expect constancy of effect sizes across blacks and whites; we are arguing instead that the relationship between racial resentment and racial policy opinions should be positive among blacks, as it is positive among whites. Wald tests of equivalence suggest the effect of racial resentment is significantly larger among whites compared with blacks for government help ($p < .001$) and preferential hiring ($p < .001$) but not fair employment (*ns*).
14. Results available in Online Appendix Part II, Section A.
15. Results available in Online Appendix Part II, Section B.
16. Results available in Online Appendix Part II, Section C.
17. We probed further into this tautology concern by analyzing respondents’ evaluations of African American political candidates (Barack Obama and Jesse Jackson). In line with existing work (e.g., Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012; Tesler and Sears 2010), we find that racial resentment predicts white respondents’ feeling thermometer ratings of Barack Obama and Jesse Jackson. We also find that racial resentment predicts black respondents’ ratings of these candidates, although the magnitude and precision of the estimates are weaker among blacks compared with whites. A full exploration of these results is beyond the scope of this paper but worthy of future study. These analyses appear in Online Appendix Part II, Section D.
18. To enhance comparability across specifications, the analyses are restricted to 2004, 2008, and 2012, the years in which these alternative measures of attitudes toward blacks co-occur.
19. Only one of the twelve estimated coefficients is significant: traits of whites are significantly related to black respondents’ views of preferential hiring ($b = -.58, SE = .28, p < .05$, two-tailed). All other coefficients on stereotypes of whites and feelings toward whites are indistinguishable from zero, for black and white respondents.
20. Wald tests of equivalence suggest the effect of racial resentment may be larger for whites compared with blacks for welfare ($p < .14$, two-tailed) and is significantly larger for the death penalty ($p < .000$).
21. Wald tests of equivalence suggest the effect of racial resentment is indistinguishable among whites and blacks for each of the four nonracial policy items.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental materials and replication materials for this article are available with the manuscript on the *Political Research Quarterly* (PRQ) website.

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