

**Racial Resentment and White Opposition to Race-Conscious Programs:  
Principles or Prejudice?**

**Stanley Feldman**

**Leonie Huddy**

**Stony Brook University**

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## **Abstract**

White racial resentment – a form of new racial prejudice – is associated with opposition to a broad range of racial policies but its nature remains unclear. Resentment could derive from racial prejudice or stem from ideological principles – two very different bases for white opposition to contemporary racial policy. To assess the nature of racial resentment and its political effects, we examine the reactions of 760 white New York state residents to an experimentally altered college-scholarship program. Program beneficiaries' race and socio-economic class was varied and the impact of racial resentment assessed separately for black and white recipients to determine whether racial resentment produces greater support for the program when targeted at blacks than whites in line with the prejudice hypothesis, or has a stronger ideological component that drives opposition to the program regardless of recipient race. The analyses yield a potentially troubling finding: racial resentment means different things to liberals and conservatives. Among liberals, racial resentment conveys the political effects of racial prejudice and is better predicted by overt measures of racial prejudice than among conservatives. Among conservatives, racial resentment appears more ideological. It is closely tied to opposition to race-conscious programs regardless of recipient race and is only weakly tied to measures of overt prejudice. Racial resentment, therefore, is not a clear-cut measure of racial prejudice for all Americans and we suggest that researchers explore other ways in which to assess the political effects of racial prejudice across the ideological spectrum.

There has been a prolonged debate among researchers of American race relations over whether white opposition to racial policies is driven by racial prejudice or is grounded in race-blind ideological principles. The controversy has been most heated over race-conscious policies such as affirmative action which are opposed by a majority of white Americans. Pervasive opposition to affirmative action has lead some researchers to question whether opposition really stems from racism or is based instead on a principled objection to the nature of the programs themselves. This “principled” approach has been developed most forcefully by Paul Sniderman and colleagues (Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman et al 2000), who argue that race-conscious policies violate individualism, equal treatment, and other basic tenets of American culture and are opposed by many whites on ideological grounds. They also present evidence that principled opposition to affirmative action is most pronounced among conservatives (Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman et al. 1996). From this perspective, white opposition, especially conservative white opposition, represents a reasonable response to a flawed set of policies.

This principled approach has been strongly countered, however, by a second set of researchers who contend that race-conscious policies face opposition from whites that derives more from racial prejudice than any ideological objection (Kinder and Mendelberg 2000; Kinder and Sears 1981; Sidanius et al 1996). In the extreme, racism researchers argue that far from being a reasonable basis from which to critique race-conscious policies, ideology itself has become entwined with racial prejudice, so that a racially tinged form of individualism now fuels opposition to racial programs to a far greater extent than opposition to other government efforts to assist the poor (Kinder and Mendleberg 2000; Jackman 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 1999).

Neither side has produced incontrovertible evidence in support of their position, despite a proliferation of studies, resulting in an impasse that we believe has hindered the advancement of

research on white racial policy attitudes. To a very considerable extent, this research stalemate hinges on a further ongoing dispute over the nature and measurement of racial prejudice. On the surface, there is nothing contentious about the notion of general racial prejudice. It is commonly defined as a pre-existing negative attitude toward blacks that is resistant to positive information and can result in discriminatory behavior (following Allport 1954). Contention arises, however, over a second distinction between an overt form of prejudice that is readily detected and an indirect form that is more difficult to measure. The first type of *overt prejudice* is reflected in a variety of negative attitudes towards blacks that are measured as negative feelings on a positive-negative affect scale and by agreement with racial stereotype questions that portray blacks as inherently inferior to whites. From a research perspective, the major problem with this form of racism is practical, not intellectual – it is easy to define and measure but has declined substantially over time, raising the suspicion that white prejudice is no longer easily assessed by agreement with blatantly racist statements. This leads, in turn, to the concept of *new racism*, a subtle racial prejudice in which prejudice is conveyed through white opposition to black demands and resentment at their special treatment (Bobo, Kluegel and Smith 1997; Kinder and Sanders 1996; McConahay and Hough 1976; Henry and Sears 2000).<sup>1</sup> New racism is more prevalent than overt prejudice, but unlike overt prejudice it has proven difficult to both define and measure without inviting impassioned research criticism.

## **Racial Resentment**

### Racial Resentment Defined

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<sup>1</sup> We reserve the term racial attitudes for all race-related attitudes regardless of whether they are positive or negative in tone (e.g., policy views, positive and negative racial stereotypes, and prejudice).

There are a number of different measures of the new racism – including symbolic racism, modern racism, and racial resentment – but all share a common definition as support for the belief that blacks are demanding and undeserving, and do not require any form of special government assistance (Henry and Sears 2002; Kinder and Sears, 1981; Kinder and Sanders 1996; McConahay and Hough, 1976). We focus on Kinder and Sanders’ (1996) concept of racial resentment because it is assessed by questions that have appeared in a number of American National Election Studies (ANES) and is the form of new racism most accessible to empirical scrutiny by political scientists.

Kinder and Sanders (1996) date the emergence of white racial resentment to the urban race riots of the late 1960s, a time of growing black political demands. In their view, resentment was fueled by the subtle racial rhetoric of a series of presidential candidates including George Wallace, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. According to Kinder and Sanders, these political figures helped to create a new form of racial prejudice in which black failure was not the fault of government but rather caused by blacks’ inability to capitalize on plentiful, existing opportunities. They conclude that “A new form of prejudice has come to prominence....At its center are the contentions that blacks do not try hard enough to overcome the difficulties they face and they take what they have not earned. Today, we say, prejudice is expressed in the language of American individualism” (pp. 105-106). They label this new form of prejudice *racial resentment*.

Racial resentment is measured with a short scale comprised of 4 items or a longer version made up of 6 items that tap the notion that blacks don’t try hard enough and receive too many government favors (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Respondents are asked to agree or disagree with all six, or the first four, of the following statements: (1) “Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other

minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.” (2) “Over the past few years blacks have gotten less than they deserve.” (3) “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.” (4) “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.” (5) “Government officials usually pay less attention to a request or complaint from a black person than from a white person.” (6) Most blacks who receive money from welfare programs could get along without it if they tried.” Items 2, 4, and 5 are reverse scored in the final resentment scale. The first four of these items appear in Sears and Henry’s (2002) symbolic racism scale, illustrating the empirical overlap between different versions of the new racism.

McConahay and Gough (1976) argue that new racism items such as those in the resentment scale provide a socially acceptable way of expressing general racial prejudice that was detected in earlier times by agreement with overtly prejudicial statements. From this perspective, racism could be assessed with a range of statements, not only those that reflect a sense of resentment, as long as they assess prejudice without doing so in a blatant fashion. In contrast, Sears (see Sears and Henry 2002) argues that symbolic racism is specifically defined by the combination of anti-black affect and traditional values such as individualism reflected in agreement with items in the resentment and symbolic racism scales. Kinder and Sanders concur with Sears and regard agreement with statements that chastise blacks for insufficient effort and a lack of individualism as an expression of racial prejudice.

But there are differing opinions on whether the belief that blacks are undeserving of government assistance constitutes prejudice, regardless of whether this prejudice can be detected across a broad range of beliefs and actions in agreement with McConahay, or more narrowly in

beliefs about a lack of black individualism as argued by Sears, Kinder, and colleagues. Concerns about the prejudicial nature of racial resentment arise, in part, from evidence of the tight link between measures of new racism and racial policy attitudes but not other forms of overt prejudice (see for example, Bobo 2000; Sidanius et al. 2000; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman et al 1991, Stoker 1998). The powerful connection between new racism and racial policy raises two central concerns: First, are the items that refer to government assistance in the racial resentment scale responsible for the link between resentment and policy attitudes because they both measure opposition to government assistance, as Schuman (2000) and others (e.g., Sniderman and Tetlock 1986) have claimed? Second, do new racism measures influence racial policy because they convey an ideological preference for smaller government and a belief in individual effort that has little or nothing to do with racism (Sniderman et al. 2000)? If the answer is yes to either one of these questions, the racial resentment scale faces a serious challenge as a measure of prejudice. We address the first concern briefly and then turn to address the second in greater detail because, in our view, it poses a far more serious threat to the validity of the racial resentment concept.

Consider Schuman's (2000) concerns first. He suggests that some items in the racial resentment scale are so close to racial policy that they simply assess opposition to government intervention on racial matters and have little or nothing to do with prejudice (see also Sniderman and Tetlock 1986). For example, one question in the original 6-item resentment scale asks whether blacks could get along without welfare assistance if they tried. This is uncomfortably close to a direct assessment of government welfare policy. Likewise, the statement concerning government officials paying more attention to black people could also be read as an assessment of government racial policy. Omitting these two items does not, however, undermine the powerful influence of racial resentment on racial policy (Kinder and Sanders 1996). Moreover,

when Sears and Henry (2002) stripped the four remaining resentment questions of any reference to government treatment or assistance – for example, by removing the words “without any special favors” from the question that refers to the success of other minority groups – the combined scale (along with additional similar items) retained its strong link to white racial policy views. These findings suggest that racial resentment is more than a simple assessment of racial policy.

### Is Resentment Ideological?

The claim that racial resentment is ideologically tinged is a more damning and potentially more difficult problem, in our view. We sympathize with the view that racial prejudice is difficult to measure in a tolerant social climate, and do not rule out the possibility that it remains one way for whites to express prejudice without sounding racist. Nonetheless, the current measure of racial resentment may be confounded with the expression of conservative ideology because it draws heavily on the language of individualism. Consider the third item in the resentment scale that suggests that if blacks tried harder they could be just as well off as whites. A strong individualist would agree with this statement; they would also agree with any other statement that referred to the positive effects of hard work, regardless of the target person’s race, gender, or other characteristics. As noted above, Kinder and Sanders (1996) believe that individualism has become entwined with racism so that agreement with the notion that blacks are unwilling to work hard is a form of racism. But this leaves no room for the expression of general, non-racist individualism. The inclusion in the racial resentment scale of items that tap individualistic beliefs (e.g., items 1 and 3) makes it especially difficult to determine whether its political effects are due to racism or a principled objection to government assistance to needy individuals, regardless of their racial background.



Kinder and Mendleberg (2000) attempt to resolve this dispute by contrasting the political effects of racial resentment and abstract individualism (measured with several items that assess the importance of hard work and its link to success) on a range of racial and non-racial policy positions. They find that racial resentment drives opposition to racial policies such as government assistance to blacks and college quota programs, but unlike abstract individualism does not increase opposition to general non-racial policies designed to assist the poor and needy. They also find the reverse, that support for abstract individualism drives opposition to broad social welfare policies such as food stamps and a government guaranteed standard of living, but not specific racial policies. These findings challenge the claim that the political effects of racial resentment are due, in part, to conservative support for abstract individualism.

Yet, we remain skeptical of Kinder and Mendelberg's (2000) approach. They disentangle ideology from prejudice by regressing racial policy views on racial resentment while controlling for individualism, and argue that any additional effect of resentment reflects prejudice. We refer to this as a *multivariate* approach to the separation of ideology and prejudice, a technique employed frequently by new racism researchers. The multivariate approach provides evidence that racial resentment predicts opposition to racial policies even after controlling for values such as individualism (Kinder and Mendelberg 2000). But the success of this technique rests on the validity of the individualism measure. Unfortunately, the most commonly used measure of individualism developed by Feldman for the ANES, and the one used by Kinder and Mendelberg, has low internal reliability and relatively weak links to a range of policy attitudes (Feldman 1982). Demonstrating that the political effects of racial resentment are distinct from a relatively weak measure of individualism leaves open the possibility that resentment conveys individualistic opposition to government racial programs.

We propose a second, *experimental* approach to determine the degree to which ideology or prejudice explains the powerful political effects of racial resentment. In an *experimental* approach, the target group of a given policy is randomly varied and the impact of resentment examined across different groups. The experimental approach is a powerful test of prejudice because it can detect active discrimination – greater support for a policy aimed at whites but not blacks for example – that is more difficult to observe in cross-sectional correlations between racial and policy attitudes. If resentment drives policy opposition for a broad array of groups, not just blacks, it is more likely to constitute a measure of broad political principle than specific racial belief. If, on the other hand, resentment fuels opposition to policies directed at blacks but not other groups, it is more likely to convey racial prejudice directly. We believe the experimental approach serves as a powerful test of the ideological and prejudicial underpinnings of racial resentment that is not mired in a debate over the meaning of specific items in the resentment scale.

If resentment reflects the political effects of individualism, it should be a more problematic measure of prejudice for conservatives than liberals because conservatives are more likely to endorse strongly individualistic beliefs and agree with racial resentment items on ideological grounds. This obviously raises a further question about what resentment then conveys for liberals who endorse scale items. One distinct possibility, consistent with evidence in support of Sniderman and Carmines' (1997) principled conservatism thesis, is that resentment is racial for liberals but confounded with ideology for conservatives. Sniderman and Carmines have not tested ideological differences in the underpinnings of racial resentment, but they do find that liberals are more likely than conservatives to oppose racial policies on prejudicial grounds. An extension of their argument suggests the existence of a comparable asymmetry in support for racial resentment, with resentment having strong racial overtones for liberals and more ideological

underpinnings among conservatives. Of course, this asymmetry would be just as damning to the concept of racial resentment as evidence that the scale conveys individualism more broadly because it challenges the validity of resentment as a general measure of racial prejudice.

### Disentangling Principles from Prejudice: Major Hypotheses

Continuing disagreement over the meaning of racial resentment, and the origins of white opposition to race-conscious programs more generally, demands a less contentious method of studying racial attitudes. We adopt an experimental survey design that allows us to test whether racial resentment is a measure of general prejudice by examining whether it conveys racial discrimination in support of a college scholarship program. We test two key hypotheses. First, we examine the resentment-as-racism hypothesis. This hypothesis predicts that racially resentful whites will be less supportive of programs targeted at black than white students, confirming the prejudicial nature of resentment. Second, we contrast this with the resentment-as-ideology hypothesis which predicts high levels of program opposition among the racially resentful regardless of the program beneficiaries' race, challenging the role of racial resentment as a measure of racial prejudice. Third, we examine patterns of program support and the origins of resentment separately among liberals and conservatives to determine whether resentment is broadly ideological for conservatives and racially tinged for liberals, as a further challenge to the resentment-as-prejudice hypothesis.

### **Methods**

We draw on data from the New York State Racial Attitudes Survey (NYRAS) conducted as an RDD telephone interview of New York state residents in the latter part of 2000 and the summer of 2001. Analyses are based on data from 760 white, non-Hispanic, non-Asian

respondents. The survey was conducted by the Center for Survey Research at Stony Brook University. The cooperation rate was 54% (AAPOR COOP3; [www.aapor.org](http://www.aapor.org)).

### Measures

The survey included a number of questions that touched on racial issues. We concentrate here on racial attitudes, ideology, and reactions to an experimentally altered college scholarship program.

*College Scholarship Experiment.* We examine reactions to a college scholarship program that is targeted at specific racial groups. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of 8 conditions. The stem question was “To what extent do you favor providing special college scholarships for \_\_\_\_\_ students who score in the top fifteen percent of their school class, even if their school’s grades are not in the top fifteen percent nationally?” The eight conditions referred to white, black, poor white, poor black, middle class white, middle class black, poor, and middle class students. We vary program recipient socio-economic class because class differences between blacks and whites may affect their perceived need of government assistance.

The experimental scholarship program fits within a class of programs referred to elsewhere as individualistic or opportunity enhancing because they benefit a subset of deserving individuals and are more popular than traditional affirmative action programs as a consequence (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995; Virtanen and Huddy 1998; Schuman et al 1997). Moderate white support for this type of program, especially among conservatives, allows for a more complete test of prejudicial and ideological opposition to race-conscious programs than does analysis of traditional affirmative action programs. The scholarship program also has considerable political reality. It is analogous to percentage-based college admissions programs adopted over the last several years in California, Florida, and Texas.

*Racial resentment.* Six items were included to tap racial resentment. The first four items are from Kinder and Sanders' (1996) racial resentment scale, described above, and include the view that blacks need to work their way up, have gotten less than they deserve, need to try harder, and slavery has made black success more difficult. To further strengthen the scale, two items were added from the General Social Survey battery on reasons for white-black economic differences, analogous to the original item concerning slavery. The first item asked the extent to which racial economic differences were due to "discrimination against blacks" and the second the extent to which it was "because most African-Americans don't have the chance for an education that would help them to rise out of poverty." These two items are strongly related to the original four and all six items were combined to form an internally reliable scale ( $\alpha=.78$ ).<sup>2</sup> Racial resentment was coded on a scale that varies from 0 to 1 with a mean of .51 and standard deviation of .23.

*Political Principles.* Several measures of political ideology were included in the survey to test the resentment-as-ideology hypothesis. An egalitarianism scale was constructed from three items (gone too far in pushing equal rights, don't give everyone an equal chance, and better if worried less about equality;  $\alpha=.47$ ); three items were combined to assess individualism (blame self if don't get ahead, hard work offers little guarantee of success, and people are poor because don't work hard or because of circumstances;  $\alpha=.41$ ), and three measured support for limited government (need strong government or free market can handle problems, more things that government should be doing, and government should be doing more to solve problems  $\alpha=.74$ ). The first two scales do not have high internal validity and we discuss the implications of this

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<sup>2</sup> Our results remain the same when analyses are replicated with the original 4-item resentment scale. We report the findings of the 6-item scale here because of its greater internal reliability.

weak measurement in the conclusion. The exact item wording can be obtained from the authors. All scales ranged from 0 to 1. Liberal-conservative ideology was assessed with a set of branched questions that was unfolded into a seven-point liberal to conservative self-identification scale that ranged from 0 to 1.

*Socio-demographic Controls.* Education, age, income, and gender are included in analyses as controls because they have influenced support for racial policy in past studies (Schuman et al 1997; Virtanen and Huddy 1998). Education and age are coded in years while income is coded as three dichotomous variables. The first is coded 1 for whites with incomes less than \$30,000 (the lower 25<sup>th</sup> percentile) and the second is coded 1 for respondents with incomes greater than \$70,000 (the upper 25<sup>th</sup> percentile). The excluded group is individuals with incomes between \$30,000 and \$70,000. The third variable was coded 1 for those who refused to provide their income (15.2% of the sample).

## **Results**

### **Support for Percentage-Based College Scholarship Programs**

We first examine support for the scholarship program by student race. Respondents were asked whether they were strongly in favor (1), somewhat in favor (2), somewhat opposed (3), or strongly opposed (4) to the program. Figure 1 depicts the means in each condition. Respondents were generally supportive of the program, consistent with past research on opportunity-enhancing racial programs (Virtanen and Huddy 1998; Bobo and Kleugal 1993; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995). There was no significant difference in program support when the program was targeted at either white or black children with no reference to their socio-economic status. Overall, 66.2% of white respondents supported the scholarship program for black students and

61.2% supported the program for white students. This is reflected in mean scores presented in Figure 1 (2.82 for black, and 2.73 for white).

\*\*\*INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE \*\*\*

A different picture emerges, however, when students are described in terms of both race and class, reinforcing the need to treat these conditions separately. Figure 1 illustrates that respondents are more supportive of scholarships targeted for middle-class white (63.7%) than middle-class black students (44.7%); they are also more supportive of scholarships aimed at poor white (83.8%) than poor black students (64.0%). These differences are sizeable; respondents express approximately 20% greater support for the scholarship program for white than for black students at each level of students' socio-economic status.

White New York state residents are also more supportive of programs targeted at poor than middle-class recipients by about the same magnitude as for race (20%), providing evidence that whites are more willing to support a scholarship program for financially needy children. Moreover, the results in the race-by-class conditions suggest one reason for the absence of a race effect in the white/black control condition. Levels of program support in the overall white condition (61%) resemble those for middle class whites (64%) but not poor whites (83.8%). In contrast, levels of support for the overall black condition (66%) are similar to levels of support observed in the poor black (64%) but not middle-class black condition (44.7%). Thus, *if* these white respondents interpreted white as “middle-class white” and black as “poor black” there would be no difference in program support when it is described in stark racial terms.

Finally, there are relatively high levels of support for the non-racial scholarship program. Just over 80% support the program for poor students, whereas 75% support it for middle class

students. On average, there is approximately 15% greater support for the scholarship program when it is described in class than in racial terms.

### Resentment as Racial Prejudice

Greater support for the scholarship program when targeted at white than black students (in the same socio-economic class) provides evidence of significant racial bias among whites. This allows for a direct test of the study's central competing hypotheses concerning the origins of racial resentment — that resentment conveys racially biased program support, *or* that resentment conveys ideology leading to increased program opposition regardless of beneficiary race. We estimated an ordered probit model to determine the effects of racial resentment on opposition to the scholarship program, controlling for egalitarianism, individualism, belief in limited government, ideological self-identification, and several demographic factors. Reaction to the scholarship program was coded so that high scores indicate *opposition*. Thus, the coefficient for resentment was expected to be positive. Support for individualism and limited government should increase opposition to the scholarship program under the assumption that the program involves government intervention to adjust racial outcomes. For similar reasons, egalitarianism is expected to decrease program opposition.

If racial resentment conveys racial prejudice it should increase opposition to programs targeted at black but not white students. To test this prediction, we included an interaction between resentment and recipient race in the analysis. An interaction between resentment and recipient class was also included to allow the effect of resentment to vary freely across the conditions. Probit coefficients were estimated separately for the race-only and the race-by-class conditions and are shown in Table 1. It is important to note that the coefficient for race in this analysis indicates the impact of race when resentment is at its minimum due to the inclusion of



an interaction between race and respondent racial resentment. Likewise, the coefficient for racial resentment indicates its effect in the white condition (when the race manipulation is 0). The coefficient for the interaction between race and resentment indicates the *change* in the effect of resentment as the beneficiaries shift from white to black students.

\*\*\* INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE \*\*\*

First consider the two race-only control conditions. The results of the probit analysis in these conditions tell a very simple story. Racial resentment has no effect on opposition to the scholarship program for white students but it has a large and significant impact on programs for black students, as indicated by a significant interaction between student race and resentment. Thus, even though there is no evidence of racial bias in *mean levels* of program support for these two conditions (Figure 1), there is a significant effect of racial resentment on evaluations of a scholarship program designed to assist black, but not white students. Ideological self-identification and political values do not explain any additional variance in white opposition to the scholarship program.

The relationship between resentment and support for the scholarship program when targeted at black and white students is even clearer when depicted graphically. Figure 2 shows the predicted probability of support for the scholarship program across the range of the racial resentment scale separately for black and white recipients. When resentment is low, there is significantly *more* support for scholarships for black than white students. As resentment increases there is virtually no change in support for the program for whites, but a substantial decrease in support for blacks. In the latter case, the probability of support drops from above .9 to almost .2 across the range of resentment (and there are observations across the entire range of the scale). At the highest level of resentment there is significantly more support for the program

for white than for black students ( $p < .01$ ). Results from the race-only conditions provide preliminary evidence that racial resentment conveys racially charged opposition to race-conscious programs.<sup>3</sup>

\*\*\* INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE \*\*\*

The estimates of the ordered probit equation for the four race-by-class conditions in Table 1 confirm findings from the race-only conditions. As in the previous analysis, there is a significant interaction between resentment and student race with racially resentful whites expressing stronger opposition to the scholarship program when it is targeted at black than white students. With four conditions in this experiment it is much easier to see the effects of resentment in graphical form, which are presented in the lower half of Figure 2. It is clear from this figure that support for the scholarship program declines somewhat with increasing resentment in all conditions but its decline is enormous in both black conditions: the probability of program support is above .9 in the poor-black condition when resentment is at its minimum value but drops to as low as .1 when resentment is at its maximum value.

The findings for the four race-class conditions are complicated somewhat by a sizeable but non-significant interaction between resentment and class in Table 1 ( $p < .08$  with a two-tailed test). As racial resentment increases, support for programs targeted at poor blacks and whites drops more precipitously than support for programs targeted at middle-class students. Indeed, there is no decline in support for programs targeted at middle-class white students across the

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<sup>3</sup> We only examined reactions to programs targeted at black and white students. Based on work by Citrin (Citrin et al 2001) and colleagues, there is reason to think that racial resentment would also shape reactions to programs targeted at Hispanics, although perhaps with less intensity than for blacks (Sears et al. 1996).

racial resentment scale as seen in Figure 2.<sup>4</sup> In other words, racial resentment conveys somewhat greater opposition to programs targeted at the poor regardless of student race.

Finally, the coefficient for self-identified ideology is significant in this equation – conservatives are more likely than liberals to oppose scholarship programs – suggesting an additional role for ideology across all four race-by-class conditions. But individualism, support for limited government and egalitarianism have no additional effect on program opposition, as observed in the race-only conditions. This non-finding cannot be dismissed as an artifact of the multivariate model. There are relatively weak links among the three specific beliefs and ideological self-placement. The highest correlation is .38 (self-placement and egalitarianism); the weakest is .21 (individualism and limited government). Moreover, none of the three beliefs predict program opposition when ideological self-placement is removed from the analytic model in Table 1. Age and gender also significantly influence program opposition which increases with age, and is higher for men than for women.

When taken together, the results from the race-only and race-by-class conditions provide tentative evidence in support for the resentment-as-prejudice thesis. As white racial resentment increases, opposition to the scholarship program increases to a far greater degree when the target group is black than when it is white. However, the results of the race-by-class analysis also indicate that the effects of resentment extend to programs targeted at the poor, muddying the interpretation of the scale and suggesting that resentment is tapping into other non-racial sources of program opposition. We turn next to consider the resentment-as-ideology thesis.

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<sup>4</sup>The interaction between target race and class, and the three way interaction between target race, class, and racial resentment were not close to statistical significance in initial probit analyses and were dropped from the equation to avoid unnecessary complexity.

## Racial Resentment and Ideology

We have amassed preliminary evidence that resentment conveys white racial opposition to the scholarship program, but also have some tentative evidence that resentment is partly ideological because it fuels opposition to all programs for the poor regardless of their race. We turn to a separate analysis of liberals and conservatives as a further test of the ideology hypothesis. Conservatives are more likely than liberals to hold highly individualistic beliefs and may score more highly on the resentment scale for that reason. We therefore examine the possibility that resentful conservatives oppose the scholarship program across racial lines for ideological reasons, whereas liberal opposition is largely driven by racial prejudice (since they have fewer ideological reasons for agreeing with the resentment items).

There is a substantial correlation between resentment and ideological identification among whites in the sample ( $r = .39$ ), but there is also sufficient variation in resentment to allow for separate analyses among the two ideological groups. The mean of resentment is .43 for liberals ( $sd = .24$ , range = 0 – 1) and .59 among conservatives ( $sd = .19$ , range = .125 – 1). To test the principled conservatism thesis, analysis of the race-by-class conditions is replicated separately for liberals and conservatives. Each group includes those who initially declared themselves liberal or conservative and moderates who said they felt closer to liberals or conservatives in a follow-up question. By this criterion, 43.8% of the white sample are liberal and 47.6% are conservative.

The results of the two ordered probit estimates are shown in Table 2, including race-by-class and race-by-class-by-resentment interactions. The estimates among liberals look very similar to those in the entire sample and suggest even stronger racial underpinnings to the resentment scale among them. The interaction between resentment and race is larger than for the

sample as a whole and the coefficient for resentment (in the white middle class condition) is virtually zero. The results for conservatives are very different and more difficult to interpret because of the sizeable and near-significant interaction terms. We thus shift our attention to Figure 3 which displays the relationship between resentment and the probability of scholarship support in each of the four race-class conditions, separately for liberals and conservatives.

\*\*\*INSERT TABLE 2 AND FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE \*\*\*

Figure 3 demonstrates that resentment has the same effect among liberals as it does in the sample as a whole (compare the bottom section of Figure 2 and the top panel in Figure 3).

Among liberals, racial resentment is associated with a substantial decline in support for scholarships for poor and middle-class black students. At low levels of resentment, liberals are strongly supportive of scholarship programs for all groups except middle-class whites. But as resentment increases, liberal support for scholarships designed for poor and middle-class black students drops from over .9 to almost .1. In contrast, liberal support for scholarships for middle-class and poor whites remains largely unchanged as resentment increases. Neither slope is statistically different from zero even at generous probability levels. At high levels of resentment liberals are vastly and significantly more likely to support the scholarship program for white students than for black students, regardless of class.

The picture for conservatives is quite different, however. Conservatives who score low in resentment are strongly supportive of the scholarship program for poor blacks and whites regardless of class, suggesting that conservative ideology by itself does not preclude program support. The one exception is programs targeted at middle-class black students which meet with universal conservative disapproval. As resentment increases, support for the scholarship program declines regardless of target group, and the decline is significant for all groups of students except

middle-class blacks.<sup>5</sup> In essence, resentful conservatives are more likely to oppose the scholarship programs regardless of students' racial group. This fits with the resentment-as-ideology thesis, and provides an important challenge to the notion that resentment is a simple measure of racial prejudice.

It is important to note that while resentment has broad political effects among conservatives that transcend the specific racial targets of public policy and contradict the resentment-as-prejudice thesis, conservatives are not free of racial bias. A close look at Figure 3B shows greater conservative support for programs directed at middle class whites than middle class blacks over much of the range of racial resentment. Similarly, support for poor whites is higher than for poor blacks across the range of the resentment scale. Mean levels of program support tell an even clearer story. Conservatives are most supportive of the program when targeted at poor whites (M=1.98), followed by middle class whites (M=2.22), poor blacks (M=2.63), and finally middle class blacks (M=3.02). When the four conditions are subject to ANOVA, there is a significant main effect for race and class, but no significant interaction between them. Thus, like liberals, levels of conservative support for this program are higher in the white than in the black conditions. Unlike liberals, however, this conservative racial bias is not conveyed by racial resentment.

To ensure that these findings reflect real ideological differences and not the quirks of the ideological self-identification measure, we replicated analyses by splitting the sample into those who scored high and low on individualism (in analyses not shown here). The findings are almost identical to those observed among liberals and conservatives. Racial resentment was essentially

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<sup>5</sup> Ideological strength had no noticeable effect on any of the coefficients when added to the probit analyses, suggesting that resentment does not act as a proxy for ideology.

racial for respondents who scored low on individualism. In contrast, program support decreased for all four race and class groups as racial resentment increased among highly individualistic whites, although this decline was somewhat less pronounced for white than black beneficiaries. This is similar to the pattern observed for conservatives.

Overall, the preceding analyses provide very mixed support for the resentment-as-prejudice thesis. Racial resentment clearly conveys racial animosity among white liberals. Increasing levels of resentment among liberals are associated with a steep decline in support for scholarship programs for black but not white students. And these effects are quite independent of ideology or other general political principles. The findings for white conservatives are less clear cut but suggestively support the resentment-as-ideology thesis. As resentment increases, conservative support for the scholarship program declines regardless of the race of its intended beneficiaries. Thus, racial resentment shapes conservative opposition to the scholarship program but is not clearly racial in flavor. Evidence that resentment is more clearly racial for liberals than conservatives should not obscure the fact that liberals support the scholarship program to a greater degree than do conservatives (as seen in Table 1).

#### Determinants of Racial Resentment

If there are differences in the character of racial resentment for liberals and conservatives it should also be evident in the determinants of the scale for each group. We thus estimate a pair of models of racial resentment to determine whether overt prejudice predicts resentment among liberals and ideological values shape resentment among conservatives. In addition to resentment, the survey included several other racial attitudes questions including a measure of *overt racial prejudice* that was constructed from four items – whether African-Americans are less well off because they are less intelligent than whites, the belief that economic differences between blacks

and whites arise because “most African-Americans just don’t have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty”, negative feelings about a close relative marrying someone who is black, and about living in an area with some black neighbors. The items were combined to form an internally reliable scale ( $\alpha=.69$ ). Racial prejudice was scaled from 0 to 1 with a mean of .35 and a standard deviation of .23. A measure of *negative racial stereotypes* was also constructed from questions tapping group stereotypes of blacks. Using a scale that ranged from 1 to 10, respondents were asked to locate blacks on the following dimensions: lazy or hardworking, not all violent or very violent, and self-supporting or living off welfare. The three items were combined to form a scale that ranged from 0 to 1.

To assess the true impact of overt prejudice on resentment, its effects were assessed as an interaction with self-monitoring – a widely used scale constructed from 4 items that measure how closely individuals adapt their behavior to the prevailing social environment (see also Terkildsen 1993). The impact of prejudice was expected to be greater among low self-monitors since they should be less subject to social desirability pressures. In addition to the racial attitude measures, the analysis included egalitarianism, individualism, limited government, education, age, income, and gender.

Several researchers have suggested that whites, especially liberal whites, experience considerable ambivalence from the inherent tension between their negative racial beliefs and tolerant principles (Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Gaertner and Dovidio 1986). As a further test of the principled conservatism thesis, we examined whether this ambivalence extends to the expression of racial resentment by estimating heteroskedastic regressions that allow the error variance for resentment to vary systematically. This variance equation is specified as a function of equality, individualism, and limited government along with racial prejudice, self-monitoring,



education, age, and gender. We also include an interaction between equality and prejudice since our key prediction is that the *conflict* between egalitarian values and prejudice should significantly increase ambivalence, especially among liberals.

The maximum likelihood estimates of these heteroskedastic regression analyses for liberals and conservatives, shown in Table 3, indicate that there are important differences across the two groups. Looking first at the mean equations, there is strong evidence that negative racial attitudes influence resentment among liberals. The coefficient for the racial prejudice measure is significant and its interaction with self-monitoring is also large and significant. Among those lowest in self-monitoring the effect of prejudice on resentment is .43. As self-monitoring increases, the effect first goes to 0 and then becomes significantly negative, suggesting that liberal high self-monitors “disguise” their negative racial views to express significantly lower levels of racial resentment than would be expected on the basis of their overt racial attitudes. Negative stereotypes of blacks are also significantly related to the racial resentment scale among liberals and there is a sizeable but non-significant interaction between self-monitoring and stereotyping.

\*\*\* INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE \*\*\*

In contrast, negative racial attitudes have a much weaker effect on resentment among conservatives. The coefficient for the prejudice scale is smaller than for liberals and barely significant in a one-tailed test; moreover, there is no interaction between prejudice and self-monitoring. To put this into perspective, the effect of racial prejudice on resentment is more than three times larger for liberals low in self-monitoring than for comparable conservatives. Negative racial stereotypes have no significant impact on resentment among conservatives. These findings further undermine the resentment-as-prejudice thesis for conservatives. Yet, the flip side of that

prediction, that racial resentment would have a stronger ideological foundation among conservatives, was not supported. Both egalitarianism and individualism are significant predictors of resentment for conservatives and liberals, and if anything these principles have greater impact on resentment among liberals. Thus, racial resentment is less clearly racial but is no more ideological among conservatives than it is among liberals.

The estimates of the variance equations also show major differences between liberals and conservatives. As expected, the coefficients for equality and the interaction between equality and prejudice are large among liberals. The negative coefficient for equality indicates that ambivalence *decreases* with increasing egalitarianism among non-prejudiced liberals. The large positive coefficient for the interaction terms means that ambivalence *increases* with support for equality among highly prejudiced liberals – the ratio of the predicted standard deviations in this case is just over six times. As expected, the conflict between negative racial attitudes and equality generates considerable ambivalence in resentment among liberals. But no such effect emerges for conservatives.

The results of the heteroskedastic regression analysis concur broadly with the effects of resentment on support for the scholarship program. Both sets of analyses indicate that racial resentment is highly racial among liberals: it predicts liberal opposition to scholarships for blacks but not whites, and is strongly determined by overt negative racial attitudes. Liberals experience substantial ambivalence concerning racial resentment especially when their attitudes toward blacks conflict with egalitarian sentiments. This combination of effects means that when we replace resentment with overt racial prejudice in the probit estimates of program support (in analyses not shown here) overt prejudice leads to greater opposition to programs directed at

blacks than whites among liberals but not conservatives. This lends further credence to the racial nature of liberal resentment.

In contrast, resentment has more of an ideological flavor among conservatives. Racial attitudes only weakly influence racial resentment among them and resentment produces broad opposition to the scholarship program across racial lines. But it remains difficult to draw firm conclusions about the ideological nature of resentment among conservatives because resentment was not strongly related to any of the three political beliefs assessed in the study. This could mean that resentment is confounded with ideology but not with the beliefs measured here – individualism, egalitarianism, or views of big government. Or it could mean that we were unable to demonstrate the ideological nature of resentment because two of the three ideological belief measures had low internal reliability.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides decidedly mixed support for the concept of racial resentment. Consistent with the expectations of new racism researchers, resentment accounted for racial bias in support of the experimental college scholarship program examined in this study, reinforcing its role as a measure of racial prejudice. But these effects were confined to self-identified liberals. Racial resentment did not explain racially biased program support among conservatives and was not linked to other negative racial attitudes among them. This leaves the concept of racial resentment in real doubt. If resentment measures prejudice among liberals but not conservatives it cannot function successfully as a broad measure of racial prejudice.

The prejudicial nature of resentment among liberals was crystal clear. Resentment explained racial discrimination in program support among liberals and was strongly influenced by overt prejudice and racial stereotyping, effects that were further masked by social desirability

pressures. Resentment was also riddled with racial ambivalence. Liberals who were both egalitarian *and* racially prejudiced exhibited deep conflict over the expression of resentment.<sup>6</sup>

Conservatives also discriminated between black and white students, expressing stronger support of the scholarship program when targeted at whites than blacks, but conservative discrimination was not explained by racial resentment. Among conservatives, opposition to the program for black *and* white students increased with rising resentment, making resentment a powerful but non-racial source of program opposition. Moreover, racial resentment was only weakly grounded in overt prejudice among conservatives. Nonetheless, it is difficult to conclude that resentment constitutes a clear measure of ideology among conservatives. Despite its apparently ideological effects on opposition to the scholarship program we found no evidence that resentment was more closely tied to values like individualism and limited government for conservatives than for liberals. Our failure to find concrete evidence of the ideological underpinnings of racial resentment for conservatives may be due to poor measurement of the general values or it may suggest that resentment taps other beliefs for conservatives such as an opposition to race-based programs of any kind.

Where does that leave the concept of racial resentment? We tend to agree with McConahay and Hough (1976) that it is difficult to accurately measure racial prejudice in contemporary American society, creating the need for subtle measures of racism. We part company with new racism researchers, however, in our belief that racial resentment is an inadequate measure of prejudice because it confounds prejudice and political ideology. In our

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<sup>6</sup> Our findings are at odds with Alvarez and Brehm's (1997) conclusion that racial policy attitudes are permeated by white uncertainty not ambivalence; in contrast, we find clear evidence that ambivalence underlies racial resentment among liberals.

view, better measures of prejudice are needed that have manifest racial content but evade social desirability concerns.

Several interesting approaches to the measurement of prejudice have been developed in social psychology that may provide a partial solution to the social desirability problem. A number of studies have measured reaction time latencies to judge the valence of racial and non-racial words or decide that a string of positive, negative or neutral letters constitute a word after exposure to a sub-conscious racial or non-racial prime (Fazio et al. 1997; Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz 1998; Lepore and Brown 1997; Wittenbrink et al. 1997). Although these techniques are easier to implement in laboratory experiments than in surveys, recent developments in the measurement of survey response times may facilitate the adoption of these methods in political science (Bassili and Fletcher 1991). Another approach that shows promise is drawn from studies of motivated reasoning. Instead of having people respond directly to questions about blacks, Saucier and Miller (2003) asked respondents to evaluate the strength of pro- and anti-black conclusions derived from a series of factual statements with racial content. Theory and research suggests that people will be more likely to endorse arguments that are consistent with their existing attitudes, and Saucier and Miller's measure had good measurement properties and predicted racial attitudes and behaviors.

Both unobtrusive measures of racism –based on either reaction time or motivated reasoning – are significantly related to measures of modern racism (Saucier and Miller 2003; Sinclair and Kunda 1999; Wittenbrink, Judd, and Park 1997). This connection between subtle forms of racial negativity and the new racism lend further support to McConahay's view that new racism reflects broad racial prejudice, not just the narrow expression of racial resentment. The notion that prejudice can be detected by varied subtle measures is encouraging and should

be pursued by racism researchers who wish to avoid the conceptual and methodological problems that have troubled the racial resentment scale.

Moreover, we urge researchers to combine the development of subtle measures of prejudice with the use of experimental policies and vignettes in which the target or recipient group is randomly varied, as in the current study. The experimental college scholarship program described to New York state residents in our survey was clearly subject to racial bias: the program garnered less support when targeted for black than white children of the same economic background. It also helped to shed light on the prejudicial nature of racial resentment. Experimental designs, similar to the one used in this study, provide a straightforward way of demonstrating whether proposed measures of racial prejudice cleanly account for racial discrimination.

### Race-Conscious Policies

In addition to examining the meaning of racial resentment, the current study was designed to provide greater insight into the underpinnings of racial policy attitudes. The findings made very clear the advantages of using an experimental approach in this respect. The scholarship program was more likely to be opposed by both liberals and conservatives when it was targeted at black than white students, providing direct evidence of racially biased opposition to the program. Our findings leave no doubt that white residents of New York state were more likely to oppose a college scholarship program for black than white children of similar socio-economic background. Additional experiments along these lines are needed to determine the extent to which prejudice influences white opposition to racial policies more broadly.

Finally, our results hold important implications for the future of race-conscious programs more generally. In this study, race-neutral programs targeted for the poor or the middle class

received stronger support than race-conscious programs. Does this mean that a color-blind approach would meet with greater approval from the American public? Possibly, although it is very difficult to eliminate prejudicial responses to such policies. Gilens (1998) documents the role played by the media in linking welfare programs to race by portraying welfare recipients as disproportionately black. Is it possible to continue to champion “percentage” college entrance and scholarship programs like those instituted in Texas, California and Florida without raising a debate that touches explicitly on race? If nothing else, one of the criterion applied to the success of such programs is the degree to which they re-institute the same proportions of minority students in colleges as before the demise of affirmative action programs (Yardley 2002). This hints at the difficulty in framing policies as race-neutral even when they are consciously designed to be so.

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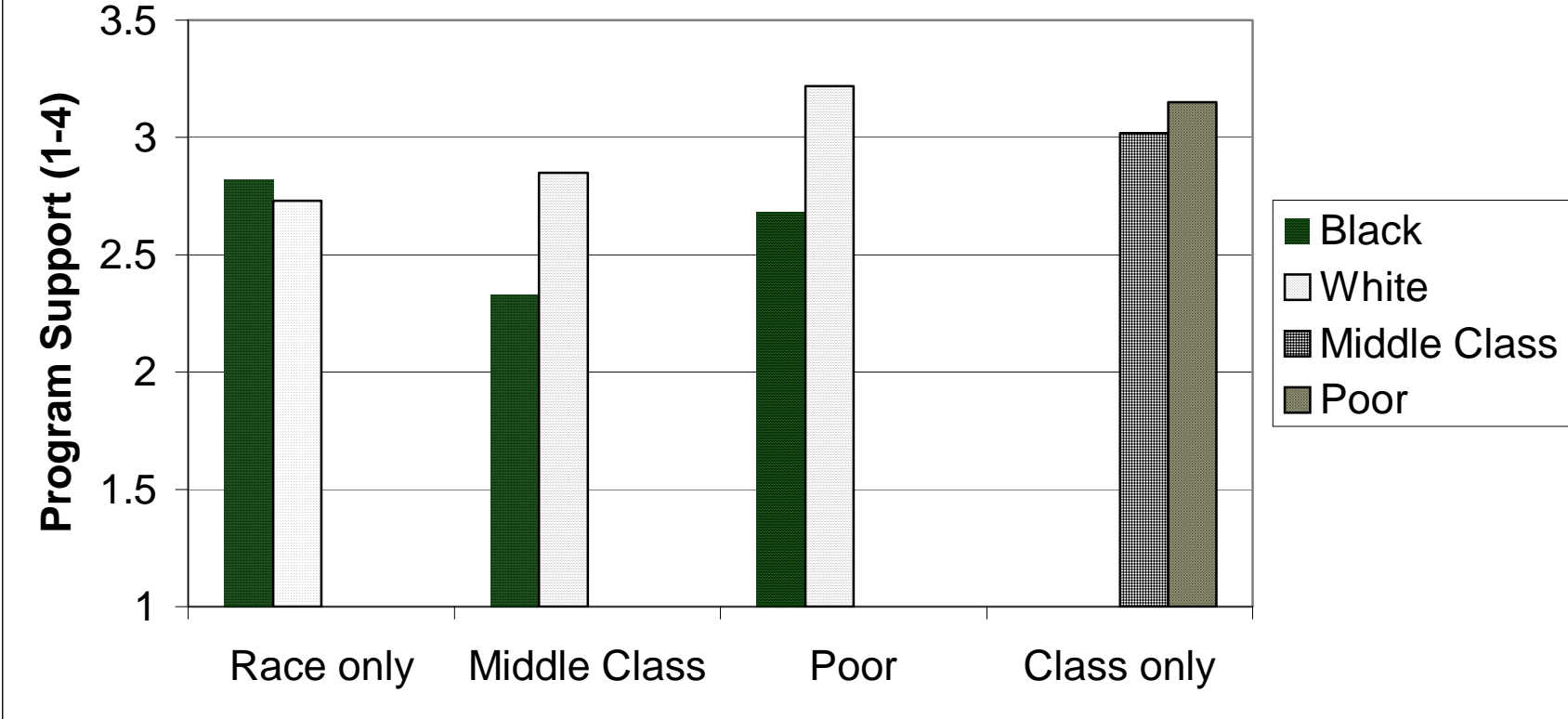
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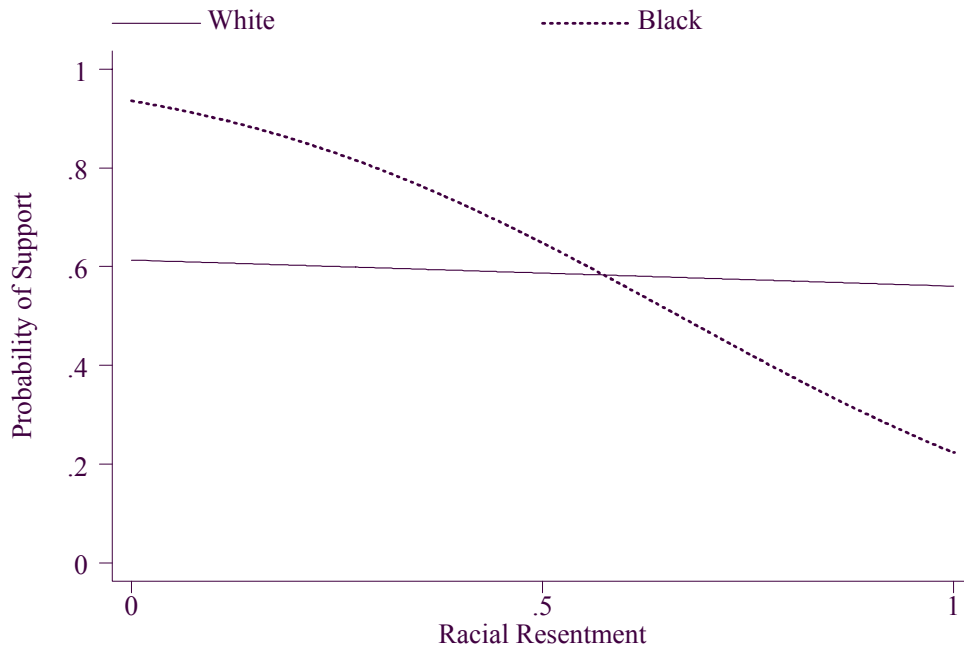
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**Figure 1**  
**Program Support by Recipient Race and Class**



**Figure 2**  
**Predicted Probability of Support for Scholarships by Racial Resentment**

**A. Race-Only Conditions**



**B. Race-by-Class Conditions**

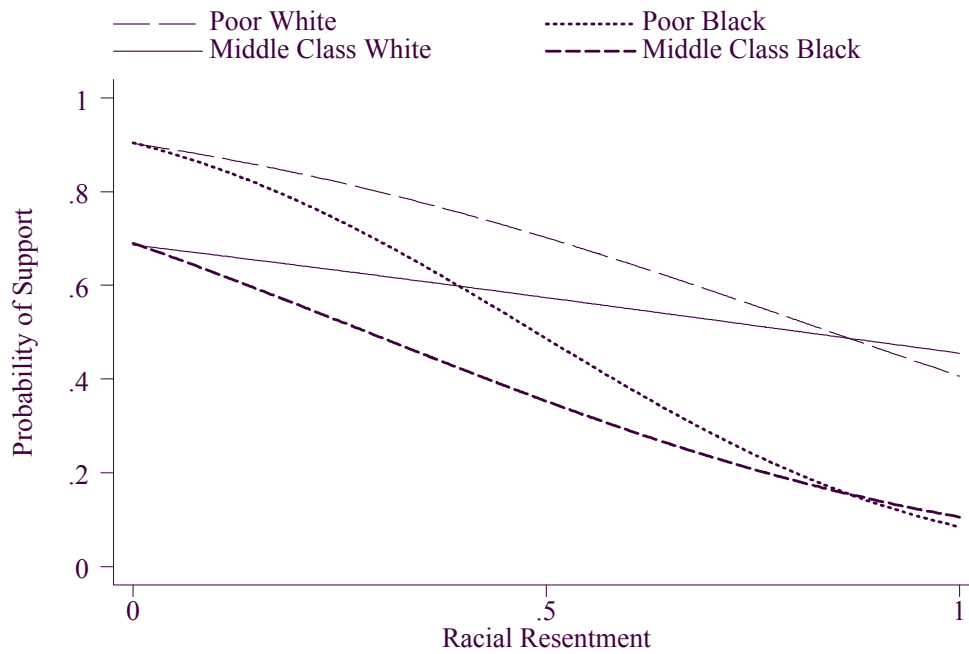
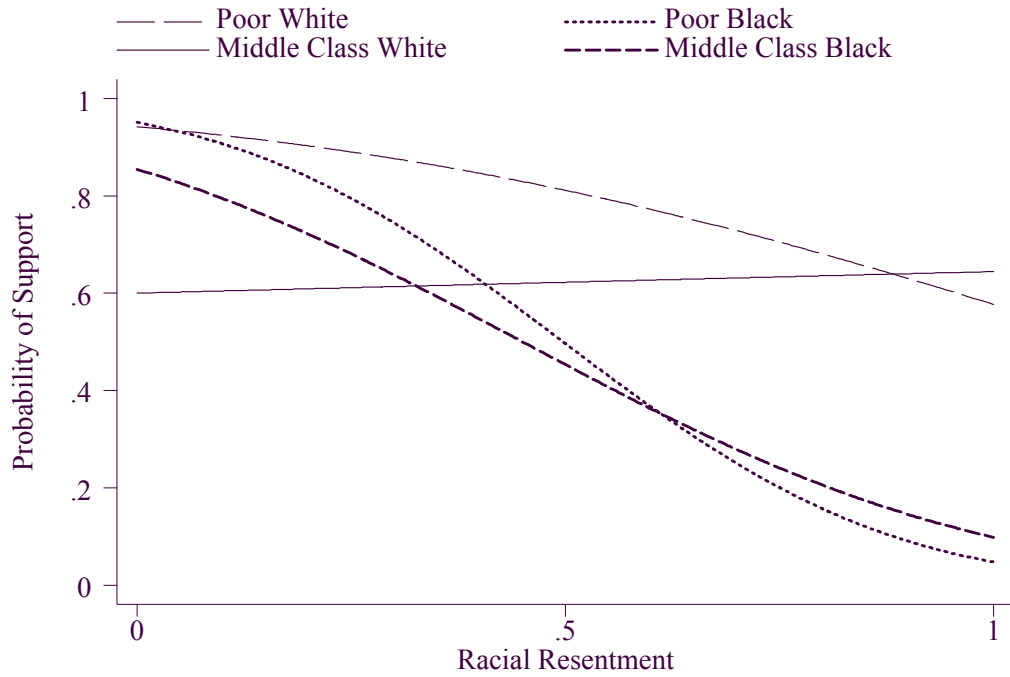


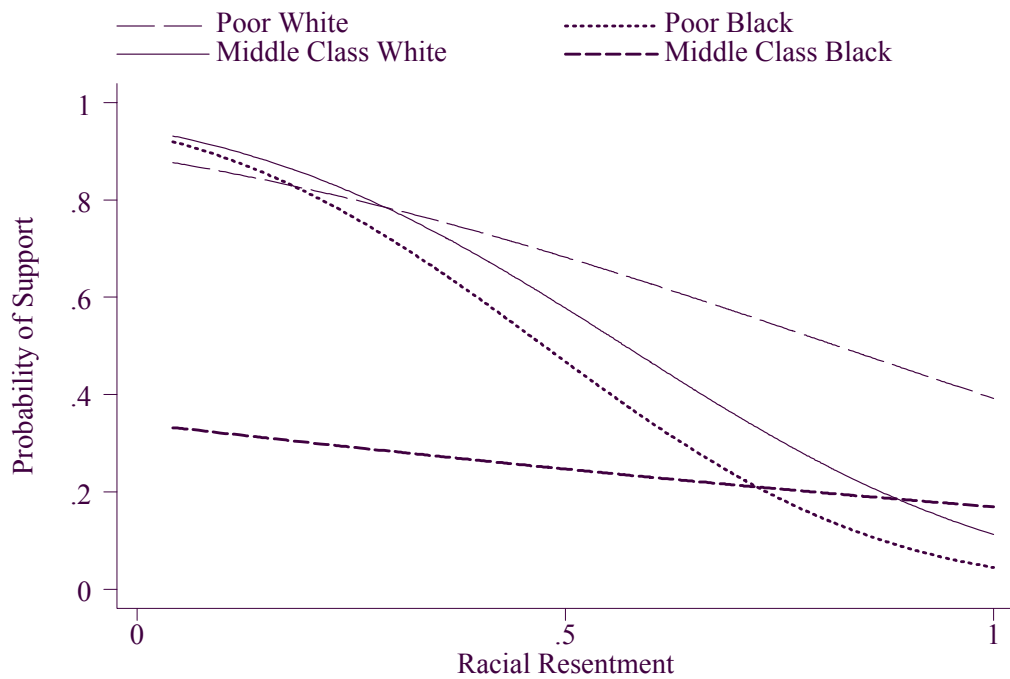
Figure 3

Probability of Support for Scholarships by Racial Resentment:  
Race by Class Conditions by Ideology

A. Liberals



B. Conservatives



**Table 1**

**Determinants of Scholarship Program Opposition:  
Probit Estimates for Race-Only and Race-by-Class Conditions**

	<u>Race-Only Conditions</u>			<u>Race-by-Class Conditions</u>		
	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>z</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>z</u>
Race (black)	-1.23	.48	-2.56	-.01	.30	-.04
Class (poor)				-.81	.30	-2.68
Resentment	.13	.75	.18	.60	.49	1.23
Black x Resentment	2.14	.87	2.48	1.14	.53	2.14
Poor x Resentment				.94	.54	1.75
Equality	-.07	.47	-.15	.45	.30	1.52
Individualism	.20	.45	.44	.20	.25	.81
Limited Government	.22	.28	.80	-.10	.17	-.59
Conservative	.22	.33	.64	.64	.21	2.99
Education	-.007	.040	-.17	.010	.025	.42
Age (10 years)	-.046	.062	-.74	.080	.035	2.28
Female	-.06	.20	-.31	-.35	.12	-2.87
Income < \$30,000	-.42	.29	-1.44	-.22	.16	-1.35
Income > \$70,000	.12	.24	.52	-.23	.16	-1.49
Income NA	-.08	.34	-.25	-.17	.18	-.95
threshold 1	-.84	.44		-.60	.28	
threshold 2	.29	.44		.48	.28	
threshold 3	1.18	.46		1.32	.29	
Likelihood ratio	27.76			114.23		
Probability	.009			.000		
N	135			361		

*Note:* Entries are maximum likelihood estimates of probit models. All scales are coded to range from 0 to 1 with high scores indicating high racial resentment, egalitarianism, individualism, belief in limited government, and conservative self-identification.



**Table 2**

**Determinants of Scholarship Program Opposition:  
Probit Estimates for Race-by-Class Conditions Among Liberals and Conservatives**

	<u>Liberals</u>			<u>Conservatives</u>		
	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>z</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>z</u>
Race (black)	-.86	.50	-1.74	2.01	.92	2.20
Class (poor)	-1.27	.53	-2.39	.38	.84	.46
Black x Poor	.69	.75	.91	-2.33	1.29	-1.81
Resentment	-.16	.76	-.22	2.82	1.09	2.57
Black x Resentment	2.59	.99	2.61	-2.27	1.51	-1.50
Poor x Resentment	1.46	1.05	1.39	-1.32	1.45	-.91
Black x Poor x Resentment	-.46	1.52	-.30	4.02	2.09	1.92
Equality	.20	.46	.43	.39	.44	.89
Individualism	-.07	.41	-.17	.29	.35	.83
Limited Government	-.17	.28	-.60	.20	.25	.79
Education	.014	.037	.37	-.017	.042	-.41
Age (10 years)	.099	.054	1.84	.062	.052	1.18
Female	-.26	.19	-1.37	-.46	.19	-2.47
Income < \$30,000	-.40	.25	-1.61	.04	.24	.15
Income > \$70,000	-.20	.23	-.91	-.20	.25	-.80
Income NA	-.39	.29	-1.36	-.02	.26	-.09
Threshold 1	-.87	.41		.50	.59	
Threshold 2	.23	.41		1.60	.60	
Threshold 3	1.04	.42		2.47	.61	
Likelihood ratio	50.44			54.04		
Probability	.000			.000		
N	169			165		

*Note:* Entries are maximum likelihood estimates of probit models. All scales are coded to range from 0 to 1 with high scores indicating high racial resentment, egalitarianism, individualism, belief in limited government, and conservative self-identification.

**Table 3**

**Determinants of Racial Resentment:  
Maximum Likelihood Estimates For Liberals and Conservatives**

<u>Mean Equation</u>	<u>Liberals</u>			<u>Conservatives</u>		
	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>z</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Std. Error</u>	<u>z</u>
Self-monitoring	.29	.16	1.79	.15	.19	.81
Education	-.008	.004	-2.03	-.002	.004	-.46
Age (10 years)	-.001	.006	-.16	.003	.006	.45
Female	.00	.02	.14	-.01	.02	-.31
Equality	-.36	.05	-7.28	-.22	.04	-5.18
Individualism	.18	.04	4.10	.13	.04	3.47
Limited Government	.04	.03	1.12	.01	.03	.32
Prejudice	.43	.09	4.72	.13	.07	1.83
Prejudice x Self Monitor	-.65	.20	-3.24	.08	.18	.43
Stereotyping	.35	.14	2.39	.19	.14	1.37
Stereotyping x Self Monitor	-.36	.35	-1.03	-.56	.36	-1.54
Income ≤ \$30,000	.02	.03	.74	.02	.03	.69
Income ≥ \$70,000	-.03	.02	-1.18	.02	.03	.93
Income NA	-.04	.04	-1.14	-.03	.03	-.92
Constant	.21	.07	3.02	.44	.07	5.93
 <b><u>Variance Equation</u></b>						
Equality	-2.02	.58	-3.49	.30	.71	.42
Individualism	-.29	.36	-.80	-.43	.31	-1.38
Limited Government	.02	.26	.09	-.22	.22	-.98
Prejudice	.00	.44	.01	-.47	.41	-1.15
Prejudice x Equality	4.11	1.52	2.70	-1.08	1.61	-.67
Self-monitoring	-.53	.39	-1.36	-.60	.39	-1.58
Education	.012	.030	.39	.014	.034	.41
Age (10 years)	-.009	.051	-.18	-.028	.050	-.55
Female	-.00	.17	-.01	-.08	.17	-.46
Constant	-3.23	.23	-14.14	-3.15	.22	-14.19
Likelihood ratio	181.24			79.30		
Probability	.000			.000		
N	294			331		

Note: Entries are maximum likelihood estimates. All scales are coded to range from 0 to 1 with high scores indicating high racial resentment, egalitarianism, individualism, belief in limited government, conservative self-identification, and self-monitoring.