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# Managing the Socially Marginalized: Attitudes Towards Welfare, Punishment and Race

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# Managing the Socially Marginalized: Attitudes Toward Welfare, Punishment, and Race

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Welfare and incarceration policies have converged to form a system of governance over socially marginalized groups, particularly racial minorities. In both of these policy areas, rehabilitative and social support objectives have been replaced with a more punitive and restrictive system. The authors examine the convergence in individual-level attitudes concerning welfare and criminal punishment, using national survey data. The authors' analysis indicates a statistically significant relationship between punitive attitudes toward welfare and punishment. Furthermore, accounting for the respondents' racial attitudes explains the bivariate relationship between welfare and punishment. Thus, racial attitudes seemingly link support for punitive approaches to opposition to welfare expenditures. The authors discuss the implications of this study for welfare and crime control policies by way of the conclusion.

**Keywords:** punishment, welfare, racial attitudes, social control

Welfare benefits are intended to help the poor, and criminal punishment ostensibly sanctions law violators. On their face, these two policy arenas might seem distally related, but we posit they are interconnected in important ways. In the contemporary United States, an overall expansion of criminal punishment and rising incarceration rates have coincided with a contraction of welfare assistance and a reduction in the number of welfare recipients (Garland, 1985, Soss & Schram, 2008; Wacquant, 2001, 2008). These trends replicate at the state level, in that states with more generous welfare policies tend to have less punitive incarceration policies, and vice versa (Beckett & Western, 1999). This finding leads Beckett and Western (1999) to argue that penal and welfare systems have converged into "a single policy regime aimed at the governance of social marginality" (p. 44).

The expansion of criminal punishment and contraction of welfare disproportionately affect racial minorities who are overrepresented among those governed by the criminal justice and welfare systems. In addition, policy debates about welfare and punishment have been infused with racialized language and stigmatization (Edsall & Edsall, 1991). Welfare reform debates, for example, have included explicit and implicit references to "welfare queens," illegitimacy, a poor work ethic, and intergenerational welfare dependency (Hancock, 2004; Mink, 1998; Naples, 1997; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). These references, along with the term *welfare* itself, are racially coded such that they are widely understood to refer to Black women (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). In political debates, crime and punishment are also frequently understood and discussed in racial terms. The "dangerous," menacing and incorrigible qualities of criminals as racial codes for Black men has been well documented in policy debates regarding sports-based crime prevention programs like Midnight Basketball (Wheelock & Hartmann, 2007) and political campaigns (Mendelberg, 2001).

Although the convergence of criminal punishment and welfare policies is well documented, there have been few efforts to investigate whether individual attitudes concerning these policy regimes have also merged. We do not propose that policies can be reduced to their public support. Such a position would be an oversimplified account of the relationship between public support and policy formation. However, we

do feel there is reason to believe that policies and their respective public views share a mutually constitutive connection.<sup>1</sup> To the extent that public opinion and public policy are related, then support for welfare retrenchment likely coincides with public views to enhance criminal punishment.

Our exploration of the link between individual attitudes toward welfare expenditures and criminal punishment advances prior research that treats perceptions toward these policies as largely separate and unrelated. This research establishes that racial attitudes shape opinions regarding welfare (Dyck & Hussey, 2008; Gilens, 1999; Kinder & Sanders, 1996) and perceptions of criminal punishment (Chiricos et al., 1997; Quillian & Pager, 2001; Unnever & Cullen, 2010). We examine whether racial attitudes, such as perceived intergroup conflict and belief in the stereotype that Blacks have a poor work ethic, shape individual understandings of welfare and criminal punishment. Specifically, we consider the following questions: Are welfare and punishment connected at the individual level such that opposition to welfare expenditures increases as support for harsh punitive sanctions increases? If so, to what extent do racial attitudes condition this relationship? Finally, are racial attitudes significant predictors of welfare and punitive attitudes?

Our article is organized as follows. The following section further discusses the connections between welfare and criminal justice policy, including their role in regulating the behavior of marginalized populations and the surrounding racial dynamics of this arrangement. Next, we turn our attention to prior research on individual opinions toward welfare and punishment, paying close attention to how they are shaped by racial attitudes. Then, our data analysis proceeds in three steps. First, we test whether support for welfare expenditures and punitive attitudes are related at the bivariate level. Second, we examine whether this relationship holds after statistically controlling for relevant factors, including multiple indicators of racial attitudes. Employing multiple racial attitude measures allows us to conduct a nuanced and rigorous test of the role of racial attitudes. Third, we examine whether racial attitudes structure support for welfare expenditures and harsh criminal sanctions. In sum, our analysis

focuses on the link between punitive and welfare attitudes and on the role racial attitudes play in this relationship.

## **Welfare and Punishment as Social Control**

Previous research has explored the role of state policy in monitoring and regulating the behavior of marginalized groups. Garland (1985) argued that penal practice and welfare policies aligned to form mutually reinforcing social institutions of control during the latter half of the 19th century in Victorian England. During this period, the penal system was "one element in a network of social institutions that addressed themselves to the disciplinary, moral and political regulation of these lower classes" (Garland, 1985, p. 40). He goes on to argue that many broad social, economic, and political factors led to the convergence of punishment and welfare as social control policies during Victorian England. This early convergence of penal and welfare systems embodied a "rehabilitative ideal," which emphasized the state's responsibility to help reintegrate marginalized groups (Garland, cited in Haney, 2004, p. 335). Welfare and criminal justice policies have again conjoined in the United States, but this recent union is characterized by "the decline of the rehabilitative ideal" and the rise of a more punitive orientation to welfare and punishment (Garland, 2001).

Welfare and penal policy have converged as forms of social control in the contemporary United States. Drawing on Epsing-Andersen's (1990) concept of "policy regimes," Beckett and Western (1999) argued that welfare and penal policies cluster into a single policy regime that varies across states. Some states have inclusive policy regimes that "emphasize the need to improve and integrate the socially marginal and tend to place more emphasis on the social causes of marginality" (p. 44). Others adopt exclusionary regimes that "emphasize the undeserving and unreformable nature of deviants, tend to stigmatize and separate the socially marginal, and are hence more likely to feature less generous welfare benefits and more punitive anti-crime policies" (p. 44). By the mid-1990s, states with high incarceration rates tended to have less generous welfare systems, whereas states with low incarceration rates tended to have more generous welfare systems (Beckett & Western, 1999).

The increase in incarceration over the past 30 years is well documented. In 2009, prison and jails in the United States housed more than 2.2 million inmates, for an overall incarceration rate of 743 per 100,000 in the population (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). Although the incarceration rate has increased among all racial groups during the modern era of penal policy, the increase among African Americans has been especially dramatic (see, e.g., Clear, 2007; Pettit & Western, 2004; Spohn & Holleran, 2000; Western, 2006). Although these trends in criminal punishment began in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the passage of the 1994 Omnibus Crime Control Act marked the realignment of the political landscape concerning crime control policies. Being tough on crime was no longer a conservative position, as this legislation demonstrated that liberals also supported punitive crime control measures. During the period between 1994 (the passage of the Omnibus Crime Control Act) and 2001, the population under criminal justice supervision increased nearly 28% (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 displays the increase in prison rates between 1980 and 2006.

Figure 1 also shows that as incarceration rates have soared, welfare caseloads have declined. After a drastic increase during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the percentage of the U.S. population receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) remained steady during the 1970s and then declined somewhat during the 1980s. After increasing during the early 1990s, the percentage of the population on AFDC or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) started to decline before implementation of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) and continued declining after implementation. As Figure 1 shows, the percentage of the population on AFDC or TANF declined from 5.4% in 1993 to 2.1% in 2000.

In 1996, the PRWORA replaced AFDC with TANF, placing greater restrictions on access to cash assistance. In doing so, it eliminated the entitlement put in place by the 1935 Social Security Act, meaning that cash assistance was no longer guaranteed based on financial need. The PRWORA established new time limits that limited welfare eligibility to 5 years or fewer, imposed work requirements as a condition of receiving assistance, and increased the ability of caseworkers to

sanction welfare recipients by reducing or terminating assistance. It also allowed states to implement family caps that deny benefit increases to women who have additional children while on welfare and to force mothers to identify the father of their children (Mink, 1998). In addition, certain provisions explicitly linked welfare benefits to crime control. The PRWORA imposed a lifetime ban from receiving TANF funds on individuals convicted of certain felony offenses and prohibited those accused of a parole or probation violation from receiving aid (Haney, 2004).

The expansion of criminal punishment and retrenchment of welfare has had a disproportionately large impact on African Americans. Nationwide, young black men have a 28% likelihood of incarceration during their lifetime (U.S. Department of Justice, 2003); this estimate exceeds 50% among young Black high school dropouts compared to 11% for comparable White men (Western, 2006). Incarceration has become so commonplace among young African American males that it is likened to a common life course event: "recent birth cohorts of black men are more likely to have prison records (22.4%) than military records (17.4%) or bachelor's degrees (12.5%)" (Pettit & Western, 2004, p. 164). With regards to welfare, Black welfare recipients have outnumbered White recipients (Schram, 2006). In 1999, for example, 30.5% of welfare recipients were White, 38.3% were Black, and 24.5% were Hispanic (Schram, 2006, p. 207).<sup>3</sup> Other evidence suggests that Black and White women have different and unequal experiences in the welfare system. African Americans are projected to comprise more than two thirds of the family who will be forced out of the welfare system due to the 5-year federal time limits established by the PRWORA (Duncan, Harris, & Boisjoly, cited in Soss, Schram, & Fording 2006, p. 18). Also, under the PRWORA, African American welfare recipients are more likely than Whites to be sanctioned with reduced or terminated benefits (Schram, Soss, Fording, & Houser, 2009).

As a whole, prior research rarely links welfare enrollment contractions with the expansion of criminal punishment *while* couching these changes in specific racial terms. Wacquant's (2008) work on the emergence of the contemporary "ghetto" in the new era of the penal-welfare state represents one of the few efforts to emphasize the

broader social forces contributing to the shifting roles of welfare and penal policies in managing marginalized groups. According to Wacquant (2008), the emergence of incarceration as a key institution in the lives of many African Americans reflects a reorganization of state policies, including welfare, and economic transformation:

Since the debilitating crisis of the ghetto, symbolized by the great wave of urban revolts that swept the country during the mid-1960s, it is the prison that is in turn serving as a surrogate ghetto by warehousing the fractions of the African Americans (sub) proletariat that have been marginalized by the transition to the dual service economy and state policies of welfare retrenchment and urban withdrawal. (p. 3).

As the amount of decent jobs and state assistance available to residents of poor urban communities has declined, poor African Americans have become more marginalized and more likely to be incarcerated.

## **Attitudes Concerning Punishment, Welfare, and Race**

A wealth of social science research has examined different dimensions of public opposition toward welfare (Dyck & Hussey, 2008; Gilens, 1999; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1986) and support for harsh criminal sanctions (Baumer, Messner, & Rosenfeld, 2003; Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997; Unnever & Cullen, 2010). Much of the work concerning welfare attitudes considers the extent to which economic ideology, principled opposition to government intervention, and racial attitudes explain opposition to welfare spending. This line of scholarship has been central to drawing out the underlying factors that shape public resistance to welfare programs. Equally central in literature concerning punitive attitudes has been research that examines the degree to which punitive attitudes result from a collective sense of group values or intergroup conflict and the tension between minority and majority group members.

Negative attitudes about Blacks have emerged as a key explanatory variable capable of predicting opposition to welfare spending. Belief in the stereotype that Blacks have a poor work ethic is

a particularly strong predictor of Whites' opposition to welfare (Dyck & Hussey, 2008; Gilens, 1999; Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997). The work ethic stereotype retains its importance even in the post-PRWORA environment, where welfare has become less controversial, less visible, and less racialized in public discourse (Dyck & Hussey, 2008). The perception that welfare primarily benefits Blacks also generates opposition to welfare among Whites (Gilens, 1999).

Similarly, negative attitudes about Blacks have emerged as a key predictor of attitudes toward crime and criminal punishment. Studies show that attitudes toward African Americans can shape perceptions of neighborhood crime (Quillian & Pager, 2001), fear of crime (Chiricos et al., 1997), and punitive attitudes (Unnever & Cullen, 2010). In addition, support for harsh criminal punishment is connected to the typification of crime as a racialized social phenomenon (Chiricos, Welch, & Gertz, 2004). That is, White respondents who viewed criminals as being primarily Black were more likely to support harsh criminal sanctions net of demographic factors, crime salience variables, and attitude measures. In related work, D. Johnson (2008) found that racial prejudice expressed by Whites and perceived racial bias on the part of Blacks largely account for the racial gap in punitiveness. Additional studies have linked racial stereotyping (Peffley et al., 1997) with higher levels of punitiveness. We expect the relationship between support for welfare spending and punitive criminal policies to diminish to nonsignificance after we include the perception that African American disadvantage is explained by a lack of hard work and effort in the multivariate models. In addition, those who perceive hard work and effort as important in explaining African Americans' economic disadvantage will likely oppose welfare spending and support punitive criminal justice policies.

With the exception of Peffley et al. (1997), we are not aware of research examining attitudes about welfare and crime. Peffley et al. found that Whites who hold negative racial stereotypes tend to judge Black welfare recipients and Black drug suspects more harshly than they judge White welfare recipients and White drug suspects. More specifically, Whites who question the work ethic of African Americans are less likely to support providing welfare to Black recipients, and

Whites who perceive Blacks as "hostile" are more likely to approve of a police search involving Black suspects (Peffley et al., 1997).

The relationship between individual attitudes and welfare and criminal justice policies is complicated to discern. In democratic societies, policies can generally be expected to be consistent with public opinion, and social scientists have noted that welfare and criminal justice policy decisions in the United States reflect public opinion. For example, in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a White backlash against welfare and other programs perceived as benefiting urban Blacks contributed to reforms placing greater restrictions on access to welfare assistance (Edsall & Edsall, 1991; Quadagno, 1994). More recently, M. Johnson (2006) found that state-level welfare policies represent public preferences. Similarly, criminal justice policy is connected to public desires to punish (Savelsberg, 1994). Yet, because public opinion can be multifaceted, whether a particular policy outcome represents what the people want may be subject to interpretation. Also, in addition to public opinion, multiple factors shape policy outcomes, including the balance of political power, racial dynamics, policy feedbacks, and institutional characteristics of the state (Amenta, 1998; Huber & Stephens, 2001; Pierson 1994; 2001a; 2001b; Quadagno, 1994; Skocpol, 1992). Even though a policy outcome may be consistent with public opinion it is rarely, if ever, caused by public opinion alone.

The connections between welfare and punishment at the policy level motivate us to examine the extent to which these issues are connected in the attitudes of individual Americans. If public opinion and policies are similarly construed, then we expect to find that opposition to welfare coincides with support for punitive criminal sanctions. The first step in our analysis is to determine whether respondents who oppose welfare spending tend to support punitive criminal sanctions.

We explore whether racial attitudes affect individual attitudes toward welfare and punishment, and if so, which specific dimensions of racial attitudes are the most salient. In addition, we also consider whether racial animus directed at African Americans mediates the relationship between opposition toward welfare and punitive attitudes.

Extant research identifies several different dimensions of racial attitudes that might affect public support for welfare and criminal punishment. This is an important point because many previous studies have employed only a single measure to capture respondents' views toward African Americans. We posit that different dimensions of racial attitudes are not equally salient predictors of opposition to welfare and punitive attitudes. Thus, one key contribution of this study is to specify which measure of racial attitudes best accounts for any connection between opposition to welfare expenditures and support for criminal punishment.

We first consider a measure of racial prejudice that is characterized by an explicit disapproval of a respondent's son or daughter marrying a person of African American descent (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Sears, Hetts, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000). Since the period of heightened civil rights activity in the 1960s, Whites' racial attitudes have shifted such that open expressions of disdain for African Americans have steadily declined (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997; Sears et al., 2000). We suggest that individuals who still express racial prejudice are more likely to oppose welfare spending and support punitive criminal policies than those who do not. We examine whether disapproving of a child marrying someone of African American descent suppresses the association between support for welfare spending and punitive criminal justice policies. Furthermore, those who disapprove of a child marrying someone of African American descent will also tend to oppose welfare spending and support punitive criminal policies.

A subtle form of racial prejudice has emerged that centers on the belief that African Americans' failure to succeed results from deficiencies in moral character and work ethic, since the Civil Rights movement ostensibly removed the obstacles that had impeded their advancement (Kinder & Mendelberg, 2000; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kinder & Sears, 1981). These contemporary views of African Americans have multiple components, with the belief that they have a poor work ethic central among them (Kinder & Sanders, 1996). Also included in these views is the belief that African Americans should work their way up without "special favors" such as affirmative action policies and that discrimination plays a minimal role in explaining racial

inequality. As previously discussed, the belief that Blacks have a poor work ethic is a key predictor of opposition to welfare (Dyck & Hussey, 2008; Gilens, 1999; Peffley et al., 1997). We consider whether the relationship between support for welfare spending and punitive criminal policies diminishes after we include the perception that African American disadvantage is explained by a lack of hard work and effort in the multivariate models. We also consider whether those who perceive hard work and effort as important in explaining African Americans' economic disadvantage tend to oppose welfare spending and support punitive criminal justice policies.

The final measure of racial attitudes in our analysis draws from racial threat theory. Racial threat, one variant of the group threat thesis, focuses on intergroup conflict between racial groups. The group threat thesis posits that dominant group members perceive a prerogative over limited social resources such as good jobs, educational opportunities, and housing (Blalock, 1967; Blumer, 1958). In this social arrangement, dominant group members view minority groups as a threat to these resources and thus utilize discrimination and social control as tools to manage minority groups. Research in this vein focuses on links between aggregate measures of racial threat, such as the percentage Black, and individual-level attitudes. For example, Baumer et al. (2003) found that individuals are more likely to support capital punishment, net of individual level characteristics, when they reside in areas with a higher concentration of Blacks. Taking from this research, we explore whether the perception that African Americans threaten public order contributes to opposing welfare spending and supporting punitive criminal sanctions. Therefore, we examine if the perception that Blacks pose a threat to public order and safety is a significant predictor of opposition toward welfare spending and support for harsh criminal sanctions.

Overall, our central aim is to examine whether opposition to welfare spending and support for more punitive criminal punishment are linked, and the extent to which any connection is due to racial prejudice and perceived racial threat. We turn to discussing the data utilized in this study.

## Data and Method

Our data are from the 2003 American Mosaic Survey (AMS), a national telephone survey of adults residing in the United States using random digit dialing and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). The University of Wisconsin Survey Center administered the survey to 2,081 adults during Summer 2003. The survey was designed to gather data on attitudes about race, religion, politics, and views towards the welfare and criminal justice systems, as well as respondents' background information. Although the AMS was collected in 2003, it contains measures on punitive attitudes, welfare attitudes, and attitudes toward African Americans along several different dimensions and is therefore well suited to examine the relationships between these indicators. We are aware of no other survey containing all these items, which makes the AMS well suited for this study. In addition, research indicates few, if any, significant shifts in racial attitudes (Hunt, 2007) or punitiveness (Barkan & Cohn, 2010) since 2003.

The survey administrators randomly selected households, and then respondents were randomly selected within households.<sup>4</sup> The survey response rate (36%) compares favorably with the response rates achieved by most national random digit dialing-based studies (RDD). The extent to which our data are representative of the U.S. adult population, however, is even more important than the response rate. Prior work on response bias indicates few differences between higher response rates obtained by the General Social Survey (GSS) (50–60% ) and RDD surveys achieving rates between 27% and 36% with regards to demographic information and attitudinal indicators (Keeter, Miller, Kohut, Groves, & Presser, 2000). In line with this assessment of this study, the data at hand compare well with other national surveys such as the GSS and the Current Population Survey (CPS) on responses to a selection of a demographic, belief, and behavioral measures and has been employed in several recent studies concerning attitudes concerning religion (Edgel, Hartmann, & Gerteis, 2006) and anti-Semitism (King & Wiener, 2007).

The survey design entailed a split ballot, with one module of approximately one half of all respondents receiving a battery of certain

questions and a second module receiving other questions. Only a small randomized group of survey respondents replied to all of the key racial attitude indicators as they were split among both modules. Thus, including all three racial attitude measures restricts analysis to 245 cases.<sup>5</sup> However, only a small portion of the analysis relies on the results of 245 cases. Most of the analysis includes at least 800 cases. We feel this approach ensures the largest number of cases included in the analysis while also testing the stability of estimates across different sample sizes.

## *Variables*

### *Dependent Variable*

Our dependent variable, punitive attitudes, comprises three indicators. Respondents were asked whether they *strongly agree*, *somewhat agree*, *somewhat disagree*, or *strongly disagree* with three statements concerning the treatment of criminals: the courts are too lenient with criminals, we need tougher prison sentences for repeat offenders, and a person convicted of murder should receive the death penalty. The response choices were recoded so that, for each measure, higher scores indicated stronger agreement with each statement (respondents refusing to answer and those answering "don't know" were coded as missing). The three measures were combined into a single index with a standardized Cronbach's alpha value of .69. Our punitive attitudes index ranges from 0 (low punitiveness) through 9 (high punitiveness). Descriptive statistics for the dependent variable are provided in Table 1.

### *Independent Variables*

Attitudes toward welfare expenditures comprise a single indicator. Survey respondents answered the question, "If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, should spending on welfare-type programs be: increased, decreased, or kept about the same?" We coded *increased* as 1, *kept the same* as 2, and *decreased* as 3 so that higher values indicate opposition to welfare spending. We label this independent variable *opposition to welfare spending*.

We use several indicators to capture the different dimensions of racial attitudes. To test whether open disdain toward African Americans plays an important role in linking individuals' views of welfare expenditures to criminal punishment, we use a survey item that asks respondents, "People can feel differently about their children marrying people from various backgrounds. Suppose your son or daughter wanted to marry an African American. Would you approve of this choice, disapprove of it or wouldn't it make any difference at all one way or the other?" The response categories for the "disapprove of child marrying someone black" variable are coded as 1 (*approve*), 2 (*no difference*), and 3 (*disapprove*).

As previously stated, extant research shows that covert racial prejudice has largely supplanted openly hostile views against African Americans. To capture these subtle and yet potentially salient perceptions, we include a survey measure that asked respondents, "On the average, African-Americans have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Please say whether you think each of the following factors is very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important in explaining that." "Lack of effort and hard work" is one of the factors included in the survey questionnaire.<sup>6</sup> We recoded responses so that those selecting 4 (*very important*), 3 (*somewhat important*), 2 (*not very important*), and 1 (*not important at all*). This variable is labeled "racial inequality due to lack of hard work."

We next measure perceived racial threat, which indicates respondents' perceptions of African Americans as threats to public order and safety. We constructed the "Blacks threaten public order variable" from the question, "Do African Americans pose a greater threat to public order and safety than other groups, a lesser threat, or about the same as other groups?" Responses were coded 1 if they responded *greater threat* for African Americans and coded 0 if respondents selected *lesser threat*, *equal threat*, or they were not sure.

We also statistically control for a number of demographic variables potentially correlated with punitive attitudes. Prior research suggests women are less punitive, at least with respect to consideration of the death penalty (Baumer et al., 2003).

Respondent's sex is measured as a dummy variable where males are coded as 1. We include a measure for the respondent's race with a race dummy variable, where 1 indicates whether a respondent is White and 0 for all other races. Related research suggests few differences in punitiveness for respondents with less than postgraduate education (King & Wheelock, 2007). However, because respondents with postgraduate degrees tend to be considerably less punitive, we include a dummy variable indicating a postgraduate degree (all others are in the reference category). Respondents' employment status is a dichotomous indicator where the value 1 indicates the respondent is not working but currently looking for work, and the value 0 indicates that the respondent is working. Finally, we control for income, which is measured using eight categories, the lowest being "Less than \$10,000 per year" (coded 1) and the highest being "Over \$100,000 per year" (coded 8).

We also control for several political and religious variables associated with punitiveness. For instance, we control for Christian fundamentalism as measured by whether the respondent believes the bible is the "literal word of God" (coded 1; else coded 0). We statistically control for these views because prior research suggests fundamentalists are more punitive (Grasmick, Davenport, Chamblin, & Bursick, 1992; Grasmick & McGill, 1994). Given that political conservatives are generally more likely to support the death penalty and prior research finds an association between punitive practices and conservatism (Greenberg & West, 2001; Jacobs & Carmichael, 2001), we control for social and economic conservatism. We use the following measure to account for social conservatism: "In terms of social issues, do you consider yourself conservative, moderate, or liberal?" The measure of economic conservative substituted *economic issues* for *social issues*. Responses were coded as 1 if "conservative" was selected and 0 if "liberal" or "moderate" was selected.

The descriptive statistics for all the variables included in the analysis appear in Table 1. The descriptive statistics shown are for the full AMS sample and our most restrictive model with a subsample of 245 respondents.

As Table 1 indicates, the respondents in our model closely resemble the full AMS sample on the racial attitudes measures. Compared to the full AMS sample, the respondents in our model are a bit less supportive of punitive criminal sanctions, more opposed to welfare spending, and more likely to be male. This is an important point because one potential concern with this study is the small sample size. However, we maintain confidence in our findings because most indicators included in the analysis have similar means and variances between the full sample of respondents and the subsample analyzed in this study. The subsample admittedly has a greater proportion of men than the full sample of respondents, but in all other respects the subsample mean scores and variances are either similar or identical to the full sample.

### *Analytic Strategy and Statistical Models*

Our analytic strategy proceeds in three stages. The first stage examines whether opposition toward welfare expenditures and support for punitive criminal sanctions are correlated at the bivariate level. Second, we detect any changes to this relationship once other variables are introduced.<sup>7</sup> The estimation method is ordinary least squares (OLS), because our dependent variable ranges from 0 to 9 and approximates a normal distribution. Model 1 only includes the constant term and support for welfare expenditures to assess the magnitude of the bivariate relationship. Model 2 inserts the control variables to ascertain whether any relationship between support for welfare expenditures and punitiveness holds after accounting for demographic factors, political beliefs, income, unemployment, and education.

Models 3 through 5 include all control variables and one racial attitude measure. These model specifications permit us to observe how each racial attitude measure influences the relationship between opposition to welfare expenditures and support for criminal punishment. Furthermore by examining the impact of each racial attitude indicator separately, we can maintain over 800 cases for Models 3 through 5. Model 6, the final multivariate OLS model, possesses all control variables and all three racial attitude measures. Although the subsample for Model 6 is relatively small, it is sufficient

for meeting the assumptions of linear regression analysis. Furthermore, finding a statistically significant effect is less likely with a small sample than it is with a large sample, which gives us additional confidence in our findings. The small sample would be problematic if we were interpreting “null findings” or the assumption that the covariates are not significant predictors for punitive attitudes. Because this is not our approach; the relatively small sample for Model 6 does not pose a serious concern for the results of this study.

Finally, based on the results of the regression analysis, we construct a path model to show the relationship between racial attitudes, welfare, and harsh criminal sanctions. In this path model, we treat select indicators of racial prejudice as predicting opposition toward expanding welfare expenditures and support for criminal punishment. This model does not include a direct path between views toward welfare expenditures and support for criminal punishment. Because unique predictors of welfare and punishment are not available in our data, we are unable to model a recursive relationship. That being stated, the path model we specify can yield valuable insight on the degree to which individual level racial animus simultaneously predicts for views toward welfare and harsh criminal punishment.

## **Results**

### *Multivariate Analysis*

Results of the multivariate analysis reveal a nuanced impact of racial prejudice and perceived racial threat on the relationship between opposition to welfare spending and support for harsh criminal punishment. As previously mentioned, Model 1 only contains the welfare spending variable and the constant term, Models 2 and 3 add additional predictors (see Table 2).

Model 2 contains the views of welfare expenditure variable plus the control variables. Respondents with higher incomes are significantly less likely to support punitive criminal sanctions ( $-.089, p < 0.01$ ) as are individuals who are unemployed ( $-.603, p < 0.01$ ). Respondents with postgraduate education are less likely to report supporting harsh criminal punishment ( $-1.143, p < 0.001$ ). White

respondents are more likely to hold harsh punitive attitudes relative to African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos (.373,  $p < 0.01$ ) as are those who report being economically conservative. Respondents that report holding conservative views on economic issues are more supportive of punitive sanctions than are respondents who report having moderate or liberal views (.720,  $p < 0.001$ ). Opposition to welfare spending remains a significant predictor of punitive attitudes (.634,  $p < 0.001$ ) after controlling for individual demographics and political attitudes.

Model 3 adds perceived racial threat, Model 4 includes inter-racial marriage, and Model 5 contains work ethic. The results of these models show that all three racial attitude measures are statistically significant in each of the respective models. In Model 3, respondents that perceive African Americans as a threat to public order and safety are more likely to support harsh criminal punishment (.683,  $p < 0.001$ ). Models and 4 and 5 indicate similar trends for both respondents that do not approve of their child marrying a person of African American descent (.481,  $p < 0.001$ ) and for those that reported believing that a lack of hard work explains the gap in achievement between African Americans and Whites (.483,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results support our contention that individual level racial animus is an important factor in shaping punitive attitudes. Also noteworthy is that the welfare expenditure measure is statistically significant in all three models indicating that in isolation, the racial attitude measures do not mitigate the relationship between opposition toward welfare and punitive attitudes. However, these models only provide a partial picture of how racial attitudes and perceived threat condition the relationship between views of welfare expenditures and penal sanctions.

We insert all three racial attitudes indicators in Model 6. We find that White respondents (.727,  $p < 0.05$ ) and social conservatives (.61,  $p < 0.05$ ) are more likely to support harsh criminal sanctions statistically controlling for other factors in the model. In addition, respondents with a postgraduate education (-1.314,  $p < 0.01$ ), higher incomes (-.19,  $p < 0.01$ ), and those that report being unemployed (-2.019,  $p < 0.01$ ) all tend to be less punitive. Although many of these results replicate from Model 2, we also observe important shifts from previous models. First, the coefficient for the welfare spending variable

decreases in magnitude and becomes nonsignificant (.15). This finding confirms our key assumptions concerning the role of racial attitudes in conditioning the relationship between opposition toward welfare and support for harsh criminal punishment. Because it is inappropriate to directly compare changing coefficient magnitude across these models due to varying sample sizes, we also conducted additional analysis where we estimated the baseline model with the same 245 cases included in Model 6.<sup>8</sup> In this supplementary analysis, the opposition to welfare spending coefficient decreased by 66.7% (.150–.450/.450) between the baseline and full models. Thus, including all three racial attitudes indicators decreases the effect of the welfare expenditure measure by two thirds and renders it nonsignificant. These results highlight the importance of racial attitudes in conditioning the relationship between opposition toward welfare and support for harsh criminal sanctions.

Furthermore, we find that only two of the three racial attitudes indicators are statistically significant in the final OLS regression model. Respondents who would not approve of their child marrying a Black person are more likely to support punitive criminal sanctions than those who would approve (.514,  $p < 0.01$ ), net of the other factors included in the model. Second, respondents who believe that African Americans on average do not do as well as Whites because of a lack of hard work and effort are also more likely to support punitive criminal sanctions than those who do not possess such beliefs (.612,  $p < 0.001$ ). When the perceived threat measure is the sole racial attitude indicator, in the multivariate models, it is statistically significant, but the inclusion of any of the other racial attitude predictors reduces the perceived threat predictor to nonsignificance. Although somewhat counterintuitive, this finding suggests that the racial dynamics that fuel the relationship between respondents' views of welfare spending and punitiveness is not one of perceived threat as we thought might be the case. Rather, analysis of these data suggest that views of Black inferiority (as expressed by resistance towards inter-racial marriages and the belief that Blacks are lazy and do not work hard) are the key concepts that link views in these two policy arenas. In this way, the results of Model 6 also illuminate the importance of investigating the role of multiple racial attitudes indicators when modeling for punitive attitudes.

As a final note on the multivariate regression models, we also observed a change between Model 2 and Model 6. Namely, the social conservative variable is nonsignificant in Models 2 through 5 but is now statistically significant in Model 6. There are several factors contributing to it. First, social conservatism is correlated with religious fundamentalism ( $r = .314, p < 0.001$ ) and economic conservatism ( $r = .194, p < 0.001$ ). We estimated Model 2 without these two variables and social conservatism becomes significant ( $.577, p < 0.001$ ). Second, additional analysis<sup>9</sup> of the 47 non-White respondents showed that there is a correlation between the social conservative variable and punitiveness even though this relationship does not hold for White respondents. Last, the effect of the socially conservative indicator is suppressed until all three racial attitude measures are included in the model. If we exclude racial attitudes measures from the last model, the coefficient for social conservatism becomes nonsignificant ( $.596, p = .057$ ).

In sum, accounting for all three racial attitude indicators in the model un masks unique contributions of the White dummy variable and social conservative indicator in the models. Although the OLS models shed light on the role racial prejudice plays in conditioning the relationship between opposition toward welfare expenditures and individual-level punitiveness, they do not fully capture the nature of this intersection in the way we envision it. To better test for a more complicated relationship between these factors, we employ a path model.

### *Path Model Analysis*

We constructed a path model that represents our vision of how racial prejudice, support for welfare expenditures, and punitive attitudes are interconnected (see Figure 2). The results of the multivariate analysis guided construction of a parsimonious path model that only includes the statistically significant racial attitude indicators from Model 3. We specify the path model so that racial attitudes predict attitudes toward welfare and punishment. As previously stated, data limitations prohibit us from testing for a recursive path between opposition to welfare spending and punitive attitudes. The model has paths from the covert and overt racial prejudice indicators (the

intermarriage and hard work variables, respectively) to the welfare and punitive attitude measures. The purpose of the path model is to test whether these specific dimensions of racial attitudes simultaneously predict opposition to welfare spending and support for punitive criminal sanctions.

The path model yields results that replicate the results of the OLS models and are consistent with our assumptions concerning the link between covert and overt racial prejudice and punitive attitudes. In addition, it suggests that racial prejudice is a salient predictor of opposition towards welfare expenditures. Disapproval of interracial marriage is a statistically significant predictor of opposition to welfare spending (.154,  $p < 0.05$ ) and of support for punitive criminal sanctions (.210,  $p < 0.01$ ). Our measure of covert racial prejudice, racial inequality due to lack of hard work, is a significant predictor of punitive attitudes (.346,  $p < 0.01$ ). In contrast, the hard work and effort indicator is only a marginally significant predictor of attitudes towards welfare spending (.122,  $p = .099$ ).

Overall, the results of the path model support the conclusion that respondents' understandings of welfare and criminal punishment are shaped by their antipathy toward African Americans. The findings indicate that respondents who would disapprove of their child marrying someone of African American descent are more likely to oppose welfare spending and more likely to support harsh criminal punishment than those who approve of interracial marriage. At the same time, respondents who view racial inequality as resulting from a lack of hard work on the part of Blacks score significantly higher on the punitive attitude scale than those who do not view racial inequality as resulting from a lack of hard work.

We were surprised that the hard work and effort measure is not a more robust predictor of opposition to welfare spending given that previous research indicates that Whites who believe Blacks have a poor work ethic are more likely to oppose welfare (Gilens, 1999; Kinder & Sanders, 1996). We would not interpret our results as challenging previous scholarship because the absence of a significant relationship between these variables could be the result of our small sample size. Furthermore, the coefficient for our hard work and effort

measure was significant at the 0.1  $p$  value in the expected direction. In addition, we feel this bolsters our findings because the results affirm many of our key hypotheses despite the small sample.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the analysis generally support our hypotheses. The bivariate analysis indicates a connection between individual attitudes toward welfare and punishment, in that those who oppose welfare spending are also more likely to support punitive criminal sanctions. This resembles the inverse relationship observed between welfare and punishment at the level of policy and supports our first hypothesis. Racial attitudes, however, mitigate the relationship between support for criminal punishment and opposition to welfare expenditures.

The results of the OLS regression analyses (see Table 2) support many of our expectations. Consistent with our hypothesis, the regression models show a significant relationship between opposition to welfare spending and support for punitive criminal sanctions that even holds after we introduce demographic and other control variables. This relationship changes little when statistically controlling for one racial attitude measure but accounting for all three simultaneously decreases the relationship between welfare spending attitudes and punitive attitudes to non-significance. Respondents who disapprove of interracial marriage and believe that a lack of hard work and effort explains why Blacks are, on average, economically worse off than Whites express more support for punitive criminal sanctions. Our results do not support the notion that respondents that perceive Blacks as a threat to public order and safety would express more support for punitive criminal sanctions than respondents that did not perceive them as a threat.

This curious finding is not necessarily inconsistent with existing literature in that perceived threat to public safety is not as salient in shaping punitive attitudes compared to perceived economic threat (King & Wheelock, 2007). It is also plausible that perceived threat is not a salient predictor of punitive attitudes relative to other racial attitude measures. As previously discussed, when perceived threat is

the only racial attitude measure in the model, it is a statistically significant predictor of punitive attitudes and it is not until the other racial attitudes are included that it becomes non-significant.

The path model (see Figure 3) further explores the relationship between racial attitudes, support for welfare, and punitive attitudes. As we had proposed, disapproval of interracial marriage predicts opposition to welfare spending and support for punitive criminal sanctions. The data also indicate that respondents who feel that African Americans are economically worse off than Whites because of their own lack of hard work are significantly more likely to support harsh criminal punishment and marginally more likely to oppose welfare expenditures. As discussed above, these findings provide limited support for our third hypothesis. We are not aware of other research that examines the relationship between concern about the work ethic of Blacks and attitudes towards criminal punishment.<sup>10</sup> Thus, concern about the work ethic of Blacks may have a broader impact on the individual outlooks of Americans than previously thought. However, because this study is unable to include a recursive relationship between opposition toward welfare and punitive attitudes, future research should examine whether a recursive relationship emerges between opposition toward welfare and punitive attitudes. Future research efforts might also want to explore whether state context contributes to the way in which racial attitudes, opposition toward welfare expenditures, and support for harsh criminal punishment are inter-related.

Based on the results at hand, we theorize that individual-level opposition to welfare spending and support for strong criminal sanctions reflects a desire to establish social control over marginalized groups. This proposition extends Beckett and Western's (1999) suggestion that penal and welfare systems have converged into "a single policy regime aimed at the governance of social marginality" (p. 44) to the level of individual attitudes. Furthermore, we suggest that the perceived need for such social control or "governance" is driven by the fact that individuals located in penal and welfare systems are disproportionately minorities and the related perception that they have

engaged in undesirable behavior. Such behaviors include engaging in crime, being dependent on welfare, and, for welfare recipients, and having children outside of marriage.

Policies and public opinion reflect the stigmatization of welfare receipt and criminality. Welfare recipients are generally categorized as members of the undeserving poor, rather than as poor people who deserve public assistance and sympathy (Katz, 1998; Steensland, 2006). Convicted criminals are stigmatized to an even greater extent, as evidenced by the increasing severity of criminal punishment and by the growing class of felons who have been stripped of basic rights of citizenship, including the right to vote. Receiving welfare assistance and criminality place individuals on the wrong side of moral divides and subject them to intensive scrutiny and regulation. Although benevolent intentions, such as the desire to promote economic self-sufficiency and to protect people from crime, certainly play a role in this scrutiny and regulation, the racial logic embedded in these programs and policy arenas conditions their link with each other. Similarly, racial attitudes connect welfare and punishment at the individual level and explain preferences for punitive approaches.

Public perceptions of African Americans as undeserving welfare recipients and incorrigible criminal threats have not gone unnoticed in the political arena. Politicians have strategically utilized White fears and stereotypes to win elections (Mendelberg, 2001) and to shift legislative outcomes (Wheelock & Hartmann, 2007). Many of these perceptions fit neatly into conservative arguments in support of expanding criminal justice and contracting public assistance. By the mid-1990s, however, political liberals and conservatives alike called for expanding crime control and reforming welfare. Unable to challenge the prevailing racial logic of welfare recipients and criminals, some liberals have operated within this paradigm even while arguing for less punitive welfare reforms and penal policies than conservatives. Thus, racialized understandings of welfare and criminal punishment have influenced the politics and public perceptions of crime, punishment and welfare.

## Notes

1. Social scientists have debated the role of public attitudes in policy formation. Some argue that elites set the stage for policy formation and then work to garner support for specific pieces of legislation (Beckett, 1994), others posit that the link between policy and public opinion is a populist one whereby political leaders are beholden to their constituency and thus seek to advance legislation that already has considerable public support (Savelsberg, 1994). We do not attempt to advance either of these positions and only rely on the notion that public opinion and public policy are connected in deep and important ways.
2. The 2001 estimate excludes probationers in prison or jail.
3. Remaining welfare recipients are racially classified as Asian, Native American, Other, or Unknown (Schram, 2006, p. 207).
4. The survey's purpose was to collect data on respondents' attitudes about the role of race in American society; therefore, African Americans and Hispanics were oversampled to ensure adequate representation of these populations for making comparisons across racial groups. This oversampling was accomplished by calling more heavily in areas that have high concentrations of African Americans and Hispanics (the survey was conducted in Spanish when requested).
5. Although this is not ideal, we conducted additional analyses with different combinations of the racial attitude indicators to include additional cases and the results generally replicate. In addition, we show how our sample compares with the full AMP sample in the following description of the variables used in our analyses. We discuss the implications for a small sample and why we maintain confidence in the results later in the following section.
6. Other explanations for racial inequality consisted of racial discrimination and social institutions. These were excluded from this study because our attention is focused on covert racial prejudice.
7. We specify support for punitive criminal sanctions as the dependent variable but this model specification was somewhat arbitrary. Support for welfare expenditures could have been the dependent variable since our primary argument rests on the prediction that the relationship between the two is spurious after we include racial attitude measures. However, the tradition of punishment and welfare research tends to specify punishment as the dependent variable both theoretically (Garland, 1985, 2001) and empirically (Beckett & Western, 1999).
8. The results of these additional analyses are available from the authors upon request.
9. Available from the authors upon request.

10. As previously mentioned, extant research links concern about the work ethic of African Americans to opposition to welfare and other racial social policies (Gilens, 1999; Kinder & Sanders, 1996).

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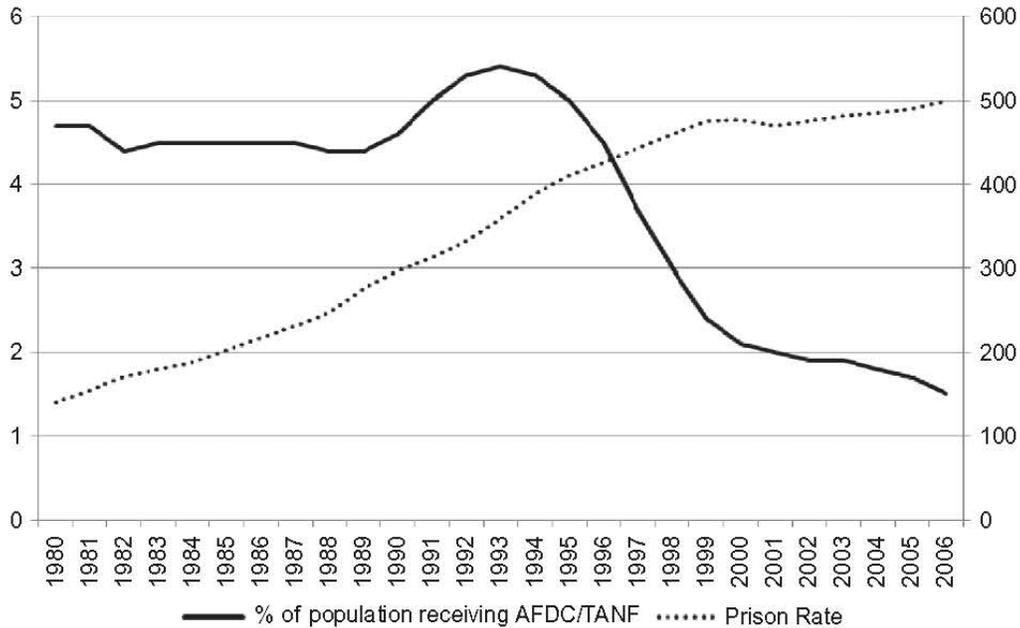
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**FIGURE 1** Percentage of the population that has received aid to families with dependent children/temporary assistance to needy families benefits and prison rates in the United States, 1980–2006.

Sources. U.S. Department of Justice (2003, 2007), Carter et al. (2006), U.S. Census Bureau (2008), U.S. House of Representatives (2004).

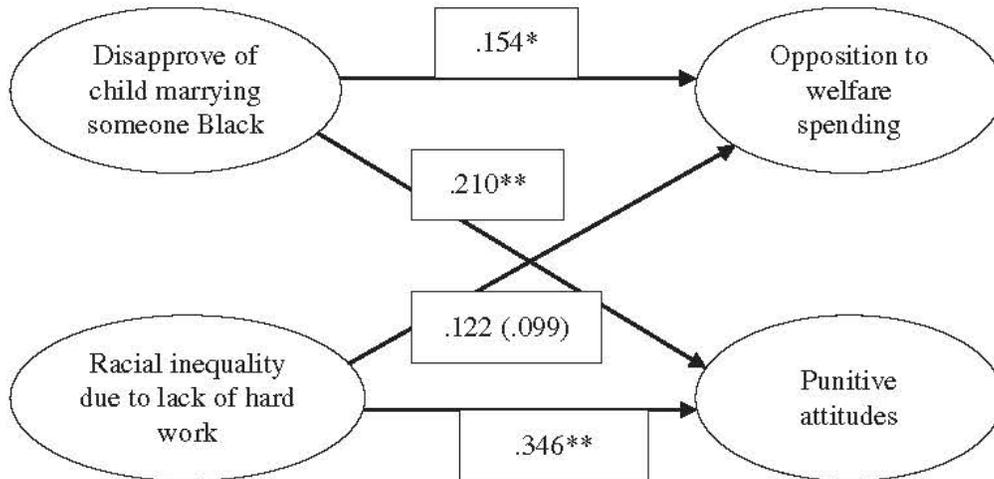
**TABLE 1** Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Range	Mean (standard deviation)		
		Full Sample	(N)	Subsample (N = 245)
Punitive attitudes	0–9	6.13 (2.3)	1875	5.93 (2.2)
Opposition to welfare spending	1–3	2.01 (.68)	2001	2.22 (.65)
Perceived threat				
Blacks threaten public order	1–3	2.07 (.49)	1084	2.09 (.56)
Overt racial prejudice				
Disapprove of child marrying someone black	1–3	2.11 (.65)	1087	2.14 (.69)
Covert racial prejudice				
Racial inequality due to lack of hard work	1–4	2.80 (.97)	992	2.86 (.94)
Demographic and political				
Income	1–8	5.44 (1.88)	1883	5.37 (1.90)
Male	0–1	48.4% (.5)	2081	53.3% (.5)
Post graduate degree	0–1	.14 (.35)	2081	.143 (.35)
Social conservative	0–1	.33 (.47)	2067	.36 (.48)
Economic conservative	0–1	.42 (.49)	2078	.43 (.5)
Religious fundamentalism	0–2	1.20 (.65)	2029	1.17 (.63)
Unemployed	0–1	.07 (.25)	2074	.045 (.21)
White	0–1	75% (.43)	2081	80% (.39)

**TABLE 2** Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models with Punitive Attitudes as Dependent Variable

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.	b	S.E.
(Constant)	4.534***	.163	4.32***	.250	3.460***	.395	3.868***	.372	3.205***	.413	3.327***	.764
Opposition to welfare spending	.788***	.076	.634***	.078	.733***	.103	.657***	.105	.501***	.113	.150	.209
White			.373**	.123	.261	.162	.308	.174	.437*	.176	.727*	.342
Religious fundamentalism			.517***	.085	.281*	.113	.204	.113	.452***	.127	-.207	.228
Post graduate degree			-1.143***	.150	-1.316***	.198	-1.053***	.192	-.940***	.212	-1.314**	.382
Economic conservative			.720***	.110	.636***	.143	.508**	.147	.811***	.161	.440	.273
Male			-.094	.367	.057	.133	.094	.137	-.052	.149	-.389	.255
Income			-.089**	.002	-.171***	.038	-.130**	.038	-.107*	.042	-.190**	.071
Social conservative			.149	.209	.320	.338	.163	.154	.141	.416	.610*	.293
Unemployed			-.603**	.211	-.974**	.301	-.581*	.280	-1.192***	.314	-2.019**	.607
Blacks threaten public order					.683***	.133					.084	.247
Disapprove of child marrying someone black							.481***	.107			.514**	.195
Racial inequality due to lack of hard work									.483***	.080	.612***	.137
	<i>N</i> = 1825 <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .055		<i>N</i> = 1645 <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .183		<i>N</i> = 890 <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .240		<i>N</i> = 883 <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .189		<i>N</i> = 806 <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .237		<i>N</i> = 245 <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> = .303	

\**p* < 0.05, \*\**p* < 0.01, \*\*\**p* < 0.001.



**FIGURE 2** Path analysis: Effects of overt and covert racial attitudes on opposition to welfare spending and punitive attitudes.

\**p* < 0.05, \*\**p* < 0.01.

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