

Fall 2006

Media, race, and attitudes toward people on welfare

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MEDIA, RACE, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD PEOPLE ON WELFARE

BY

STEPHANIE BRAMLETT

Baccalaureate of Arts, Merrimack College, 2005

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

In Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Political Science

September, 2006

UMI Number: 1437617

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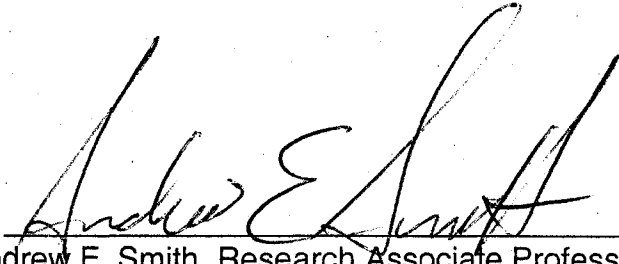
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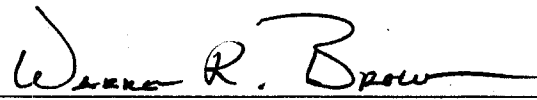
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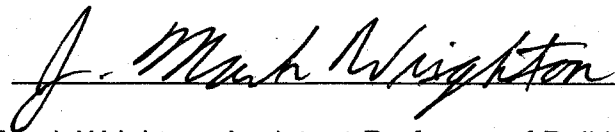
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8/17/06

8/17/06

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the women in my life who have not only taught me the value of education, but most importantly have encouraged me to follow my dreams.

Grandmother, Mom, Wanda, Katy, Mrs. Budak and the dozens of other influential women who have stood by my side: each one of you has contributed to this project in your own unique way. Whether you have patiently listened to me talk about the research or whether you have gathered the angels to pray for me...thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to thank the many people who made this thesis possible. I would like to gratefully acknowledge the supervision of Dr. Andrew Smith who graciously took on directing this research. I thank Dr. Warren Brown for his ever-present enthusiasm for political philosophy and Dr. Mark Wrighton for his continued support and advice.

I am also grateful to my professors and classmates for their thought-provoking conversations with me in the beginning stages of this project.

Finally, I am forever indebted to my mother and Daniel for their understanding, endless patience and encouragement when it was most needed.

FOREWARD

In late August 2005, three months into the hurricane season and just a few days into my graduate education, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast of the United States. Initially news reports focused on the sheer devastation of the area, but it was not long before the news tuned to criticize the government's response to the disaster. Questions began circulating around the country. Why *wasn't* all of New Orleans evacuated? Why was the FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) response so *slow*? I became interested in these questions as well and decided to take a closer look at the news.

In the days after Hurricane Katrina, news stations showed countless images of people seeking shelter, looking for their loved ones, and struggling for survival. As increased police presence in the New Orleans area hoped to deter looters, more people began to question the expediency of the United States emergency relief efforts. Suddenly criticisms were coming from everywhere: the residents of the affected areas, celebrities, and even the government itself. On NBC's Hurricane Katrina Relief Program, rap singer Kanye West boldly announced, "George Bush does not care about Black people." West's controversial opinion sparked heated debate on both sides of the political spectrum and made me question why the initial response to Hurricane Katrina was so sluggish. Could it have been the images of looting minorities and surviving Whites plastered over every news station? Or maybe it was people

simply tired of supporting the 'welfare queen'- the unemployed, single, black, mother of five. I wondered why society had these images and how they are perpetuated.

This thesis began from a mere curiosity of the events and images surrounding Hurricane Katrina, but its findings are more far-reaching. The findings urge us to examine our own racial attitudes and their relationship to the media. But perhaps most importantly, the conclusions encourage us to become responsible consumers of the media and begin to consider the extent to which it influences our lives.

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ABSTRACT

MEDIA, RACE, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD PEOPLE ON WELFARE

by

Stephanie Bramlett

University of New Hampshire, September, 2006

This research gives insight to why some Americans have negative attitudes toward people on welfare. This study begins by exploring how the construct of race has manifested itself throughout televised news broadcasts and the welfare system in the United States.

This research uses a combination of content analysis, secondary research and American National Election Survey Data analysis to explain the relationship between the media and support for welfare programs. The study investigates three main hypotheses: H₁: Blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators of crime in televised news broadcasts compared to the actual number of crimes committed by Blacks, H₂: As trust in the media increases, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease, H₃: As negative attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics increase, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease. The research found that when the proportion of Blacks shown on television as perpetrators of crime is compared to the proportion of Blacks who actually commit crimes, television is representative of reality. However, television

generally distorts the proportion of crime to focus on violent crime when, in reality, most crime is nonviolent. The relationship between trust in the media and attitudes toward people on welfare was found to be significant, but in the opposite direction than hypothesized. In addition, significant relationships in the hypothesized direction were found to exist between both attitudes toward Blacks and attitudes toward people on welfare and attitudes toward Hispanics and attitudes toward people on welfare. A regression model suggested that attitudes toward Blacks have more predictive power on attitudes toward people on welfare than either trust in the media or attitudes toward Hispanics.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why are Americans reluctant to support social welfare programs? For decades social scientists have sought to answer this question through a variety of perspectives. The term “social welfare” itself is difficult to define because it can refer to a whole range of perspectives encompassing everything from *pro bono* lawyers to food stamps. Because the term carries such broad meaning, the likelihood of an individual supporting social welfare programs also varies immensely. This study will specifically investigate individuals’ attitudes toward people on welfare. In 1996, the Welfare Reform Law created Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). On July 1, 1997 TANF became effective and replaced both the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs.¹

Much of the research that predicts whether or not people will support social welfare programs falls into two main categories: individualism and race. Although neither of these categories is exclusive, they are both useful in organizing the dynamic nature of attitudes toward welfare support.

¹ 2004 TANF Sixth Annual Report to Congress

Individualism

Much of the research on individualism does not provide a clear definition of what is meant by the term but does contain some general themes. The broad definition of individualism is an umbrella term for both freedom and choices. In the United States there is a distinction between freedom and the choices that can be made with freedom. Freedom refers to the equality of opportunity legally granted to all citizens; however, choices are largely determined by social and economic circumstances. A White upper-class man and a Black lower-class woman may legally have the same freedom, but each possesses a different array of choices. Although individualism refers to both freedom and choices, it is important to note the difference in experiences of individuality between a member of the majority (those not living in poverty) and the minority (those living in poverty).

In *The American Commonwealth* historian James Bryce writes, "Individualism, the love of enterprise, and the pride in personal freedom have been deemed by Americans not only their choicest, but [their] peculiar and exclusive possession."² Bryce understands individualism and freedom to be inherently tied. For him, individualism broadens the horizon of personal choice.

Tocqueville's classic study, *Democracy in America*, employs a different understanding of individualism and gives a vivid prediction of what influences

² Bryce, James. *The American Commonwealth*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1888.

will govern the degree to which Americans will support welfare programs.³

Tocqueville identifies the nature of the American people and warns that individualism may ultimately be destructive. From his perspective, individualism limits personal choice because people become concerned with only their own needs. Tocqueville writes that because democracy champions equality, it alleviates much of the moral duty that individuals have toward one another. He writes,

The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is a stranger to the fate of all the rest; his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind. As for the rest of his fellow citizens, he is close to them, but he does not see them; he touches them, but he does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country.⁴

Tocqueville's analysis continues to be useful in modern times. Equality fosters equality because when people consider themselves to be equal, they also perceive everything else to be consistent with equality. People embrace equality and reject inequality even when inequality is present in reality. Equal rights and supposed equal opportunity allow individuals to embrace the idea of equality as reality. Building upon this perception, individualism is a persistent characteristic of American society. Tocqueville's observations also show how the consequences of individualism in the United States have allowed the

³ Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. New York: Vintage Classics, 1831.

⁴ Tocqueville pg 318

majority to set the definition of individualism; people who have more personal choices assume that everyone has the same choices, and the society supports the assumption. His observation begs the question: What is the driving force behind American individualism?

Midgley's research suggests that the answer may be found in the spirit of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996.⁵ The act promised to alleviate some of the negative economic effects of welfare by both forcing recipients to work and reducing the overall poverty rate in the United States.⁶ In reality, welfare reform has had a negligible impact in terms of both economic prosperity and poverty. Midgley argues that instead of politics aimed at forcing welfare recipients to stop receiving aid, policies promoting sustained economic development and investment in human capabilities are more likely to succeed in reducing poverty. Although Midgley's argument makes the key point that promoting individuality by cutting people off from government resources might not produce long-term individualistic success; he links poverty to welfare.

Anthropologist Oscar Lewis argued that 'a culture of poverty' exists among some groups of low-income people and is characterized by extreme individualism. He writes that although the culture of poverty may be invisible to

⁵ Midgley, James. "The United States: Welfare, Work, and Development." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 10 (2001): 284-293.

⁶ The 1996 Act had three primary functions: 1) Required that welfare recipients either worked or were actively looking for work, 2) Limited the number of months a person could receive welfare to 60 months per lifetime, 3) Gave states more control over who was eligible to receive welfare.

most Americans, the people living in the culture have remarkable blending and coping skills. Lewis explains:

The culture of poverty is not just a matter of deprivation or disorganization, a term signifying the absence of something. It is a culture in the traditionalist anthropological sense in that it provides human beings with a ready-made set of solutions for human problems, and so serves a significant adaptive function.⁷

In the article, "A New Look at Poverty in America," O'Hare also discusses the independence and exercise of free choice among the poor:

Although many people equate welfare with poverty, there is little correspondence between the two terms in government statistics or programs. About one-fourth of the poor do not participate in any major welfare program, and nearly 60 percent of welfare recipients are not officially designated as poor under the current government definition.⁸

In essence, this research looks at both Bryce's and Tocqueville's conceptions of individualism. Bryce understands individualism as broadening one's range of choices, while Tocqueville sees individualism as an obstacle to personal choice.

Although those living in poverty and those not living in poverty may define individualism differently, individualism impacts both groups' attitudes toward people on welfare. Those living in poverty exercise the freedom of personal choice; however their choices are much different from those who are not living in poverty.

⁷ Patterson 118

⁸ William P. O'Hare, "A New Look at Poverty in America," *Population Bulletin* 51(1996)

Although there is a statistical disconnection between welfare and poverty, they are colloquially regarded as synonyms. Morgan and Maskovsky argue that welfare reform should focus more on eliminating poverty, not simply reducing the number of people needing public assistance.⁹ Their research also discusses the ways in which Americans perceive welfare recipients. Although the study did not wholly elaborate on this observation, the idea does add a new dimension to how public attitudes may be formed. This concept of public perception will be revisited later in the research.

Kosonen identifies five causes for the growth of individualism: 1) the failure of the institutions of the welfare state, 2) the global decline of economic growth rates, 3) the rise of new middle classes, 4) changes in moral values and cultural deep structures and 5) the hegemonic struggle of the demarcation of private and public industry.¹⁰ This article has important implications for this research because it discusses reasons for underlying attitudes- attitudes that may not clearly show up in a poll. Strong attitudes supporting American individualism may not show up in polls because people realize the negative aspects of severe individualism, particularly the lack of social responsibility. Although Americans may not truly be compassionate, they do want to appear compassionate. Kosonen's findings are important to this research because it

⁹ Morgan, Sandra and Maskovsky, Jeff. "The Anthropology of Welfare 'Reform.'" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32 (2003): 315-328.

¹⁰ Kosonen, Pekka. "From Collectivity to Individualism in the Welfare State?" *Acta Sociologica* 30 (1987): 281-293.

begins the process of exposing those ideas that are not available at the surface of survey data or statistical evidence.

Bobo argues that social responsibility and economic individualism are the two main dimensions of stratification beliefs.¹¹ While both of these dimensions shape social welfare policy attitudes, this study argues that social welfare policy attitudes are more closely associated with one's sense of social responsibility than with one's commitment to individualism. Bobo makes the argument that Americans advance their sense of social responsibility above individualism; however, he fails to explain what social responsibility means. If social responsibility is defined as one's sense of altruism or responsibility to help one's neighbors, this research argues that Americans' small sense of social responsibility is an outgrowth of individualism as Tocqueville sees it; ultimately selfishness. Americans tend to understand social responsibility as a concept that comes out of self-interest: an individual can best support society by supporting himself or herself. The idea of the "American Dream" and equal opportunity instructs Americans that their primary sense of duty is (and should be) to themselves. These ideologies define social responsibility in a drastically different manner from its origin. When Bobo says that American's view of social responsibility is the most important predictor of attitudes, he strengthens Kosonen's original argument of underlying attitudes. Americans are so reticent

¹¹ Bobo, Lawrence. "Social Responsibility, Individualism, and Redistributive Policies" *Sociological Forum* 6 (1991): 71-92.

to engage in actual social responsibility that they have redefined it to mean individual freedom.

Race

The investigation of race has been a relatively recently researched potential cause of attitude toward public policy, but the level of its investigation has been most extensive. Because all races were not legally equal before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, studies on racial prejudice and discrimination were limited. Nearly half a century later, when policy that supports or aids racial minorities are still being turned down, political scientists have identified racial prejudice as a potential cause. For this research, the literature on race is best organized into three categories: Group Interest, Individual Interest, and Media. Although my research will ultimately seek to explain the most powerful factor that contributes to racial prejudice, understanding the different theories explaining the prevalence of racism is useful.

Race and Group Interest

Tuch and Hughes examine White's views on racial policy issues as well as the factors that mold those views by using data from the 1990 General Social Survey and the 1986 American National Election Survey.¹² The article

¹² Tuch, Steven A. and Hughes, Michael. "Whites' Racial Policy Attitudes." *Social Science Quarterly* 77 (1996): 723-745.

has three major findings: 1) Educating Whites about racial discrimination makes them more supportive of race-based initiatives, 2) Individualism is not a significant factor that affects views about government aid policies, 3) Group self-interest has a major effect on support for affirmative action and a moderate effect on equality of opportunity leveling programs. Tuch and Hughes responded to both Kosonen (1987) and Bobo's (1991) research by arguing that when comparing race and individualism as predictors of attitudes toward social welfare, race is always the larger predictor. It should also be noted that not only is individualism shown not to be the larger predictor of attitudes toward social policy, but also that its explanatory power was overshadowed by group self-interest. This research is useful because its primary theory substantiates attitudes toward race as a successful predictor of support for social welfare. This research will build on the primary theory by investigating the cause for attitudes toward race.

Davis notices that the number of Whites' expressing overt racial prejudice toward Blacks has decreased yet policies targeting Blacks continue to face extreme opposition.¹³ He seeks to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon by critiquing the Tuch and Hughes article (1996). He criticizes the survey questions Tuch and Hughes use to collect their data because the questions do not control for Whites' political outlook. An individual could have

¹³ Davis, Darren W. "White Americans' Opposition to Racial Policies: Where are the Political Explanations?" *Social Science Quarterly* 77 (1996): 746-750

been mislabeled as racist because he or she did not support governmental policies aimed to help Blacks due to his or her views on the appropriate role of government rather than any racial motivation. After replicating Tuch and Hughes' research and controlling for political outlook, Davis concluded that while political outlook plays a significant role in predicting support for policy, racial discrimination provides an even greater influence. His research strengthens the argument that race is the biggest predictor of public attitudes, yet it still does not explain what factors contribute to the construct of racial attitudes.

Like Davis (1996), Hutchings and Valentino suspected that there was a stronger correlation between political outlook and support for public policy than racial attitudes and support for public policy.¹⁴ Their research also revealed that race plays a far more integral role when it is compared to political outlook. Hutchings and Valentino did build upon Davis' findings, but they left space open for further research. It is known that attitudes toward race have a relationship with support for public policy; however, if those attitudes are not shaped by group self interest (in this case shared political outlook), then perhaps the attitudes are shaped at the individual level.

¹⁴ Hutchings, Vincent L. and Valentino, Nicholas A. "The Centrality of Race in American Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 7 (2004): 383-408.

Bovarsson investigated the construct of racially motivated group self interest through an economist's perspective.¹⁵ The author notes that from 1940-1980, Blacks made significant economic progress; however; from 1980 to 2000 Blacks have made virtually no economic progress. The article seeks reasons for this disparity. Bovarsson argues that Blacks stopped progressing economically after 1980 partly because the education attainment and quality of schools gap had nearly been closed and partly because of the introduction of racially based policies such as Affirmative Action. The research revealed that plenty of programs are in place to allow Blacks the same opportunity as Whites, but Blacks continue to have difficulty attaining equality because the programs are not well supported. The article begins to shift the 'inequality blame' from the group of policy makers to the individuals responsible for supporting the policies. Bovarsson's research suggests that individuals have a greater influence on support for public policy than group interests. People are more likely to hold private racist views than to be publicly racist because they may fear social backlash.

Shelby establishes the political implications of identifying and critiquing racist ideology within critical social theory.¹⁶ Shelby constructs Marx's definition of ideology as: those "forces" which make major impacts on social

¹⁵ Bovarsson, Orn. "Where Have the Social Sciences Come in Understanding Racial Discrimination? An Economist's Viewpoint" *The Social Science Journal* 38 (2001): 637-650.

¹⁶Shelby, Tommie. "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory." *The Philosophical Forum* 34 (2003): 154-188.

relations and progressive social change. Shelby illustrates the term “ideology” through the phenomenon of racism. Using examples from Marx, he argues that there is no good ideology because all ideology conceals the forms of oppression that manifest themselves in society. Although some ideologies such as human rights or justice clearly improve the quality of life by relieving oppression, Shelby argues that these good ideologies would be unnecessary without the presence of the negative ideologies. Regardless of how ideologies are evaluated, social ideologies are always shared by a group of people. Considering the negative stigma of racial prejudice, it can be expected that individuals will be more likely to identify with a racist ideology on the individual level than at the group level.

Race and Individual Interest

Fox uses National Election Survey data to examine whether or not Latinos influence White support for welfare.¹⁷ The research found that when Latinos and Whites had more contact, Whites’ stereotypes about Latino work ethic grew more positive, however, the Whites’ stereotypes about Black work ethic did not change. The research also found that in areas with few Latinos, Whites thought that the Latinos were lazy and did not want to spend money on welfare. In areas with many Latinos, Whites thought Latinos had better work ethic but were still unwilling to spend money on welfare. The study concluded

¹⁷ Fox, Cybelle. “The Changing Color of Welfare? How Whites’ Attitudes Toward Latinos Influence Support for Welfare”

that Whites were generally unwilling to spend money on welfare because they made a social comparison between Latino and Black work ethic. This study implies that attitudes toward welfare are formed at the individual level rather than at the group level. It does not, however, provide knowledge regarding what variables found at the individual level affect the race, which in turn predicts attitudes toward welfare.

Gilens examines the impact of racial attitudes on White Americans' opposition to welfare.¹⁸ Using the 1986 National Election Study survey data, he argues that beliefs concerning Blacks' commitment to work ethic are the most important factors in determining Whites' welfare views. According to Gilens, racial attitudes are more predictive of Whites' support for welfare than self-interest, individualism, and egalitarianism. He also finds that Whites oppose race-neutral social welfare policy and contends that their opposition stems from the negative perception of Blacks. Gilens gets to the crux of the race argument: people are not necessarily opposed to welfare policies; they are opposed to the people who benefit from those policies. If this is the driving mechanism for this lack of welfare support my research will explore the cause of modern day racism, the biggest obstacle to redistribution in the United States. Since racial minorities are highly overrepresented among the poor, policies to help the poor

¹⁸ Gilens, Martin. "Racial Attitudes and Opposition to Welfare." *The Journal of Politics* 57 (1995): 994-1014.

will disproportionately distribute resources to minorities. People who are not willing to support welfare are unwilling to support policies to help minorities.

Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi sought to explain the role that Whites aversion to racially integrated neighborhoods plays in facilitating modern segregation and factors that underlie this aversion.¹⁹ The research finds that indeed, racial preferences do play a major role in explaining the lack of racial diversity in White neighborhoods. In addition, it showed that more contact between Whites and Blacks both at home and in the workplace make Whites more willing to live with Blacks. Finally, the research concluded that although younger and more educated Whites are more willing to live with Blacks, the difference in attitude only leads to a small increase in the Black population of those neighborhoods. Although Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi explain that racial preferences can be predictors for social behavior, it does not address how those racial preferences were formed.

The literature conducted on what shapes individuals' attitude toward social welfare programs has been extensive, although not comprehensive. Individualism and race have both undeniably had an impact on attitudes towards social welfare; however, research consistently reveals that race has a substantially larger influence on whether or not people are willing to support social welfare programs. This study will rely on individual racial attitudes rather

¹⁹ Ihlanfeldt, Keith R. and Scafidi, Benjamin. "Whites' Neighbourhood Racial Preferences and Neighbourhood Racial Composition in the United States: Evidence form the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality." *Housing Studies* 19 (2004): 325-359.

than group racial attitudes because it is likely that an individual will be private about his or her negative racial attitudes. Prior research has identified negative attitudes at the individual level towards racial minorities as the biggest influence on lack of support for programs designed to help the poor, however research has not distinctly linked why this phenomenon is the case. In contrast, prior research has linked persistent poverty to racial minorities. If racial relations are improving as studies suggest, then why is America so unwilling to help the poor?

Race and Media

Although individualism and race are strong predictors of whether or not people will be willing to support welfare programs, their impact is filtered through the lens of the media. Since the first televised news broadcast was aired in the 1920s, individuals have been steadily increasing their reliance on television media for their news.

Recent research has begun to investigate the effect of the media on attitudes toward race. Considering most Americans receive their news from television, it is obvious that television influences the public. Hall argued that crime news reaffirms the “consensual morality” of society.²⁰ If society is divided between the lawprotectors and the lawbreakers and Whites are consistently depicted as lawprotectors while people of color are consistently portrayed as

²⁰ Hall (1978)

lawbreakers, policy support will reflect the negative attitudes fostered by the media.

Gilens gives insight to how Americans perceive the poor in the book, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*.²¹ He focuses on the media because it not only provides images of the poor, but it also perpetuates negative stereotypes of the poor. The implications of Gilens book on this research are that they address how perceptions of race in the media shape public attitudes.

Sotirovic investigated cognitive structures consisting of frames that people used to answer survey questions about cuts in welfare benefits.²² She first defined the media's framing as what kind of spin journalists put on welfare issues. Next, she examined whether people's reasoning about the consequences of cutting welfare budgets is affected more by the media or by some other source of influence. Finally, Sotirovic explains the effect of anticipating consequences of cutting welfare spending and individual's evaluations of improvement with the welfare situation. This article concluded that although media may not be directly responsible for changing opinions, it does reinforce and challenge opinions by framing issues.

Dixon and Linz conducted a content analysis on televised news programs to determine whether or not news programs perpetuate the

²¹ Gilens, Martin. "Racial Attitudes and Opposition to Welfare." *The Journal of Politics* 57 (1995): 994-1014.

²² Sotirovic, Mira. "Effects of Media Use on Audience Framing and Support for Welfare." *Mass Communication & Society* 3 (2000):269-297.

stereotypes of Blacks and Latinos as criminals.²³ Using intergroup, interrole, and interreality theories as indexes; the research found support for all three of their hypotheses. They concluded that on televised news programs, Blacks and Latinos were, in fact, overrepresented as perpetrators of crime when compared to Whites and to actual crime statistics.

This research will begin from the premise of race to ultimately investigate the media's role in influencing perceptions of race and how those perceptions shape attitudes toward welfare.²⁴ According to United States Census Data, Blacks and Hispanics together make up about 26.4% of the entire United States population and 46.6% of the population living below the poverty line.²⁵ More than two million American families are TANF recipients and 63.2% of those families are either Black or Hispanic.²⁶ For decades, scholars have linked race to poverty, however when coupled with negative perceptions of the poor the three variables are a devastating combination. This research will argue that people who see large numbers of negative portrayals of Blacks and Hispanics will subsequently form perceptions that Blacks and Hispanics are generally undeserving of public financial assistance. The research will also argue that the more trusting a person is of televised news, the less likely he or she is to have

²³ Dixon, T. and Linz, D. "Overrepresentation and Underrepresentation of African Americans and Latinos as Lawbreakers on Local Television News." 50 (2000): 131-155.

²⁴ Wilcox, Paula. "Beauty and the Beast: Gendered and Raced Discourse in the News" *Social and Legal Studies* 14 (2005): 515-532.

²⁵ United States Census Bureau 2004, See Appendix A for a table of the U.S. Census Bureau's 2004 Poverty Guidelines

²⁶ TANF Sixth Annual Report to Congress 2004

favorable attitudes toward people on welfare on the grounds of negative attitudes toward racial minorities. The following pages will investigate trust in the media as a potential cause for lack of support for welfare programs.

Chapter II

GUIDING THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this research is to understand the causal mechanisms for unfavorable attitudes toward people on welfare. The overall implications of this study are to bring to focus the effects of trusting in the media and to help policy makers gain a better understanding of why some poverty alleviation initiatives fail and how to design more politically palatable policies in the future.

This research will also encourage educators to re-examine the ways in which they teach children about the media. Media literacy began getting attention in the 1990s, particularly after the rise of children and teenagers committing violent acts mimicking characters on television, movies, or video games. These ill-fated events sparked parents and educators to teach children the difference between worldly reality and the fantasy represented by the media. While this education may have been useful in curbing future Columbine school shootings, it neglected to address the less obvious implications of the media.²⁷ This research

²⁷Aitken, Stuart C. "Schoolyard Shootings: Racism, Sexism, and Moral Panics over Teen Violence." *Antipode* 33 (2001): 593

will reveal the ways the media influences public opinion and will encourage educators to continue to teach media literacy not only for the purpose of violence control but to teach the policy implications that result from media influence.

Finally, the study will provide a resource for policy makers to use throughout the policy making process. If policy makers can understand the media's role in attitudes toward people on welfare, perhaps they can work with the media to create more positive images of welfare programs.²⁸ In addition, policy makers can review this study to get an interpretation of the failing points of current policy.

This research contributes to the understanding of why the American poor are stuck in their poverty. Other studies have investigated issues of class, ideology, and racial attitudes. However, this research examines the degree to which the media plays a role in the politics of poverty. For years scholars have used attitudes toward race to predict social phenomena, this research will discuss the means through which media influences attitudes toward people on welfare. This study will investigate how Blacks are represented on television and the correlation between individuals who trust in the media and their attitudes toward people on welfare.

In April 1999, two high school seniors enacted the second largest school massacre in the history of the United States at Columbine High School in Colorado. The students opened gunfire and killed twelve fellow students, one teacher, injured twenty-four others and then turned the guns on themselves. The shooting sparked major debate on censorship in videogames and music as well as media literacy education.

²⁸ Nash (2004)

Hypotheses

The research will explore how the portrayal of Blacks in the media detracts from public support for social welfare programs through the following hypotheses.

H₁: Blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators of crime in televised news broadcasts compared to the actual number of crimes committed by Blacks.

H₀: There is no relationship between the representations of Blacks as perpetrators of crime in televised news broadcasts and the actual number of crimes committed by Blacks.

This hypothesis will be explained with an in depth examinations of the ways in which people of color are represented in televised news broadcasts. Content analyses and case studies are employed to serve as examples of the news broadcasts and Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics provide information on the actual number of reported arrests by race.²⁹

H₂: As trust in the media increases, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease.

H₀: There is no relationship between trust in the media and attitudes toward people on welfare

²⁹ Law enforcement agencies in 46 states and the District of Columbia voluntarily provide the Justice Department with their crime statistics. More about the Justice Department's methodology can be found at http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_04/appendices/appendix_01.html.

H₃: As negative attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics increase, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease.

H₀: there is no relationship between attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics and attitudes toward people on welfare.

This research will also examine which explanation, trust in the media or attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics, has a greater impact on attitudes toward people on welfare. Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 will be statistically tested using 2004 American National Election Survey (ANES) data.³⁰ The ANES is derived from the 2004 National Election Survey (NES) and is a time series study conducted by National Election Studies at the University of Michigan's Center for Political Studies under the general direction of the Principal Investigators, Nancy Burns and Donald R. Kinder. Data collection services were provided by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. The 2004 NES was designed by Nancy Burns, Donald R. Kinder, a national Board of Overseers, a specially appointed Planning Committee, and the NES user community. The study consists of 1,212 completed pre-election surveys and 1,066 completed post-election surveys. All interviews were completed face-to-face. Pre-election interviews were conducted September 7, 2004 through

³⁰ The National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org). THE 2004 NATIONAL ELECTION STUDY [dataset]. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies [producer and distributor].

These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant SES-0118451, and the University of Michigan.

Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these materials are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding organizations.

November 1, 2004 and averaged 70 minutes in length. Post-election interviews were conducted November 3, 2004 through December 20, 2004 and averaged 65 minutes in length. The pre-election survey uses a full-sample weight that is a product of the household non-response adjustment factor, the within-household selection weight, and a post-stratification adjustment factor by age and education. The study also uses a corresponding post-election weight that is adjusted for attrition. The study was funded by the National Science Foundation (under grant SES-0118451), the University of Michigan Center for Political Studies, the University of Michigan Office of the Provost, the University of Michigan Political Science Department (College of LSA) and the University of Michigan Survey Research Center.

First, a Pearson's correlation test analysis will be conducted to determine whether or not there is statistical evidence for the hypothesized relationship between trust in the media and attitudes toward people on welfare. Next, more Pearson's correlation tests will look to determine if there is statistical evidence for the hypothesized relationships between attitudes toward Blacks and attitudes toward people on welfare and attitudes toward Hispanic and attitudes toward people on welfare. Finally, a multivariate regression substantiates Hypothesis 3 and reveals that of the tested variables, attitudes toward Blacks has the greatest influence.

This study utilizes a combination of research designs. The first section will provide evidence for the claim that Blacks are negatively overrepresented in televised news broadcasts. This qualitative section will rely on secondary

research derived from content analysis and observations. It will also use government crime statistics to compare the actual number of Blacks who were arrested for crime to the reported number of racial minorities who committed crimes.

Secondly, the research will use statistical analysis to interpret 2004 ANES survey data that collected respondents' attitudes on whether or not they trust in the media as well as their attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics. Survey data are appropriate for understanding individuals' attitudes because it allows the research to have more external validity than qualitative research alone. If the research can demonstrate that trust in the media has a statistically significant relationship with attitudes toward people on welfare, it makes a much stronger argument for the hypothesis than if it could only qualitatively speculate their relationship.

The use of survey design is justified primarily because of convention. For years, scholars have relied on survey data to predict individual's attitudes toward social issues.³¹ Although survey data have limitations, particularly because people may misrepresent opinions to meet social desirability standards, it is still the most appropriate measurement tool to use in this study. Many scholars have linked the effects of media on race; this study will add to the research on how the

³¹ Tuch, Steven A. and Hughes, Michael. "Whites' Racial Policy Attitudes." *Social Science Quarterly* 77 (1996): 723-745.

Fox, Cybelle. "The Changing Color of Welfare? How Whites' Attitudes Toward Latinos Influence Support for Welfare"

Gilens, Martin. "Racial Attitudes and Opposition to Welfare." *The Journal of Politics* 57 (1995): 994-1014.

media is linked to poverty by looking specifically to attitudes toward people on welfare.

The dependent variable in this study will be attitudes toward people on welfare. The research will also explore the effects of several independent variables including: trust in the media, attitudes toward Blacks, and attitudes toward Hispanics. Although many independent variables will be tested, the research will also look for the independent variable that explains attitudes toward people on welfare best.

Definitions

Welfare and Attitudes toward People on Welfare. Welfare programs have had a long and controversial history. In the 1984 book, *Losing Ground*, Charles Murray defines social policy, or welfare, as “merits of a transfer of resources from the haves to the have nots.”³² Murray details failed social welfare policies from 1950 through 1980. In the 1930s, President Franklin Roosevelt introduced a series of programs under the New Deal that included Social Security, Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Workmen’s Compensation, and Unemployment Insurance.

These programs were introduced to temporarily help out those who were struggling financially, but they were never meant to provide help for the chronically poor or disadvantaged. The AFDC program, which was initially only designed to help widows with children, was financially supporting thousands of single mothers by the 1950s. Although Whites were the largest group of AFDC

³² Murray, Charles. *Losing Ground* 13

recipients, Black families had lower incomes and noticeably larger families. Critics of the welfare programs focused their attention on the large number of Black welfare recipients and the image of the 'welfare queen' was formed.

In the early 1960s, President Johnson waged "The War on Poverty" and began using his administration to devise rehabilitation programs for America's poor. Johnson promoted the crusade against poverty with the antipoverty bill in 1964, which provided job training and opportunities.³³ Murray argues that these programs were highly optimistic but unrealistic. He writes, "If the people who ran the programs had suddenly found themselves poor, they probably would have been quite successful in using the antipoverty programs to rescue themselves."³⁴ The advocates of the programs assumed that people would naturally have the skills and insight to take advantage of the programs and improve their situation. However, by the late 1960s the number of government aid recipients had skyrocketed. In 1980, the number of participants in the food stamp program had grown to fifty times the coverage of the original legislation.

In this research, welfare refers to those programs funded by the government that aid families in need of financial assistance. Currently, these programs are housed in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996.³⁵ The Act reformed the objective of how the poor receive financial assistance by the institutions of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Jobs Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) programs.

³³ *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964* Public Law 88-452

³⁴ Murray Pg 34

³⁵ *The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996* Public Law 104-193

TANF gave cash stipends to poor families with children; however, the legislation placed strict requirements on who could receive aid, set a lifetime limit of no more than sixty months of federal financial aid, and allowed individual states to determine their own rules of compliance. In addition, all TANF recipients must either work or actively seek employment. The JOBS program provides free industry-specific training and education to adults.

This study will operationalize attitudes toward people on welfare using the Feeling Thermometer for People on Welfare Question from the 2004 ANES dataset.³⁶ The feeling thermometer asks respondents to rank people on welfare using a scale of one to one hundred.

Trust in the Media. This study will define media trust as the degree to which an individual trusts in the media. Trust in the media is operationalized by a 2004 ANES survey question asking people how often they can trust the media to report news fairly.³⁷

Racial Attitudes. This study will measure racial attitudes with constructed scales indicating respondents' attitudes towards Blacks and Hispanics.³⁸

³⁶ The ANES name for this variable is v045068. The exact wording of the ANES feeling thermometer question is, "I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person. How would you rate people on welfare?"

³⁷ The ANES name for this variable is v045007. The exact wording of the question is "How much of the time do you think that you can trust the media to report the news fairly? Just about always, most of the time, only some of the time, or almost never."

³⁸ Variables v045223 and v045231 were recoded into "bscale" to determine attitudes toward Blacks. The original wording for v045223 is, "Now I have some questions about different groups in our society. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the characteristics of the

people in a group can be rated. In the first statement a score of 1 means that you think almost all of the people in that group tend to be "hard-working." A score of 7 means that you think most people in the group are "lazy." A score of 4 means that you think that most people in the group are not closer to one end or the other, and of course, you may choose any number in between. Where would you rank Blacks in general on this scale?" The original wording for v045231 is, "The next set asks if people in each group tend to be "trustworthy" or "untrustworthy". Where would you rate Blacks in general on this scale?" Cronbach's alpha for the combined variable scale is .888.

Variables v045224 and v045232 were recoded into "hscale" to determine attitudes toward Hispanics. The original wording for v045224 is, "Now I have some questions about different groups in our society. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the characteristics of the people in a group can be rated. In the first statement a score of 1 means that you think almost all of the people in that group tend to be "hard-working." A score of 7 means that you think most people in the group are "lazy." A score of 4 means that you think that most people in the group are not closer to one end or the other, and of course, you may choose any number in between. Where would you rank Hispanics in general on this scale?" The original wording for v045230 is, "The next set asks if people in each group tend to be "trustworthy" or "untrustworthy". Where would you rate Hispanics in general on this scale?" Cronbach's alpha for the combined variable scale is .867.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Media vs. Reality

The first hypothesis proposes that televised news broadcasts overrepresent Blacks as perpetrators of crime when compared to the number of Blacks arrested for crime in reality.³⁹ The null for this hypothesis is that there is no relationship between the number of Blacks portrayed as perpetrators of crime and the number of Blacks actually arrested for violent crime. The analysis below explains the hypothesis.

Blacks Representation in the Media

Entman began some of the most influential work in examining the media's influence on racial attitudes.⁴⁰ He conducted a content analysis of nightly networked news programming from ABC, CBS, and NBC for three months as well as an analysis of transcripts from ABC nightly news. Entman concluded that network news generally has less crime coverage than local news, news stories that featured Blacks were largely crime related and represented Blacks as either

³⁹ This study chooses to examine the relationship between Blacks and representation in the media primarily because of the length and depth of the relationship between the Black community and the United States. In addition, the statistical crime data used breaks crime into only 'Black' and 'White' categories.

⁴⁰ Entman, R. "Representation and Reality in the Portrayal of Blacks on Network Television News." *Journalism Quarterly* 3 (1994) 509-520.

perpetrators or victims of crime, and Blacks were more likely than Whites to appear as perpetrators in violent crime or drug stories. Entman's research demonstrates a clear distinction between the way Blacks and Whites are portrayed in televised news.

Gilliam and Iyengar argue that local news typically consists of two elements: 1) crime is violent and 2) the presence of a particular suspect (often racial imagery).⁴¹ They use this contention to investigate the relative contribution of each of these elements. The research relied on the 'scripts' theory as derived from cognitive psychology. "A script is a coherent sequence of events expected by the individual involving him either as a participant or as an observer."⁴² The first part of the Gilliam and Iyengar article discusses how crime is discussed in local televised news. The research investigated 1996/1997 crime coverage in Los Angeles local news and found that although racial cues in crime coverage are partly a true reflection of the proportion of racial minorities involved in crime, the reports of the crimes committed are disproportional. For example, the number of Blacks involved in Los Angeles county crime was relatively consistent with the number of crime stories portraying Blacks as crime perpetrators; however the media distorts the type of crime. The researchers found that 83% of the crime stories were about violent crime and that although Los Angeles had an actual murder crime rate of only 1%, 17% of crime stories in the news were about murder. Furthermore, the researchers found that racial minorities make up 59%

⁴¹ Gilliam, T. and Iyengar, S. "Prime Suspects: The influence of Local Television News on the Viewing Public" *American Journal of Political Science*, 44 (2000): 560-573.

⁴² Gilliam and Iyengar pg 561

of suspects in violent crime stories.⁴³ According to 1997 California Department of Justice statistics, the greatest number of felony arrests are for property crimes, not violent crimes. In addition, nonviolent crime stories typically feature a White perpetrator, when in reality *minorities* actually make up the largest number of perpetrators for nonviolent or property crimes.

To address the second element of local televised news coverage, the authors use an experimental method to test the effects of the crime news script. Gilliam and Iyengar made two randomly assigned groups, distinguished only by the participants' exposure to a crime news script's presence or absence of the perpetrator's race. Participants in both groups watched fifteen minute videotaped local newscasts. Participants then completed a questionnaire that asked about their reactions to particular news stories, their beliefs about particular racial groups, and whether or not they could recall certain details of the new stories. The experiment found that participants responded more accurately to a Black perpetrator (70% correct) than to a White perpetrator (64% correct). Furthermore, more than 60% of the participants in the group that did not see a perpetrator falsely recalled seeing a perpetrator and in 70% of those cases the perpetrator was identified as Black. The authors conclude that the second element of crime script has a far greater influence than the first.

Dixon, Azocar, and Casas collect a random sample of television network news to investigate the portrayal of race and crime in the media.⁴⁴ The authors

⁴³ Gilliam and Iyengar pg 562

⁴⁴ Dixon, T., Azocar, C. and Casas, M. "The Portrayal of Race and Crime on TV Network News" *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*. 2003: 498- 523.

collected a random sample of four years of network programming and designed three indices of law breaking portrayals. Previous research had focused on local news, but this study widened the scope. Researchers anticipated a difference between local and network news, primarily because network news has a more diverse audience, larger news reporting staff, and a more prestigious reputation. This study attempted to overcome some of the limitations of Entman's research by using a random sample of programming and by using multiple indices of race and crime phenomena to analyze network portrayals. Derived from prior research on race and the media, the study identifies potential effects of racial portrayals on television news viewers. The authors argue that viewers may believe that the portrayals on news programs are accurate depictions of reality. "The presumption here is that viewers embrace the version of the social world cultivated by television news and incorporate it into their view of social reality."⁴⁵ The authors employ the three indices used by Dixon and Linz: intergroup comparisons, interrole comparisons, and interreality comparisons.⁴⁶ The stories were analyzed from both the crime story level and the perpetrator and victim of crime level.⁴⁷ The article's significant findings concluded that although Whites were more likely to appear as perpetrators than Blacks, Whites are overrepresented as victims of violent crime while Blacks were underrepresented.

⁴⁵ Dixon, Azocar, and Casas pg 501

⁴⁶ Dixon and Linz 2000

⁴⁷ The crime story level comprised all news crime stories in the sample with the exception of the O.J. Simpson case. The perpetrator and victim crime level coded both the crimes and race of all mentioned in the news stories.

Poindexter, Smith, and Heider examine the visibility and coverage of racial minorities in local televised news, specifically Blacks, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans.⁴⁸ The study investigates a variety of geographic regions, newscasts, markets, and time periods to determine if local news racially segregates its coverage of news stories. The study uses framing as the theoretical framework to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What is the presence of people of color and how are they framed in local television news?

RQ2: Is there racial segregation in the assignment of news stories?

RQ3: What role, if any, does race play in news sources and the order in which they are used in the story?

The study used content analysis to examine 596 news stories from twenty-six different stations in twelve cities in 1987 and then again from 1989-1998. The study revealed that Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans were rarely visible as anchors, reporters, and subjects in the news.⁴⁹ Blacks did anchor and report in some markets, but they were only used as news sources more than other groups when two or more people were interviewed.

⁴⁸ Poindexter, P., Smith, L., and Heider, D. "Race and Ethnicity in Local TV News: Framing, Story Assignments, and Source Selections" *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 2003: 524

⁴⁹ Poindexter, Smith, and Heider 533

Blacks Representation in Reality

Table 1: Population of the United States and Crime in the United States by Race (Black and White)

| | U.S. Population Composition | U.S. Crime Composition |
|-------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Black | 14% (37,502,320) | 33% (411,063) |
| White | 86% (236,057,761) | 67% (840,488) |
| Total | 100% (273,560,081) | 100% (1,251,551) |

Due to lack of consistent data in United States Crime composition, this research excludes other racial groups

<http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/NC-EST2004/NC-EST2004-03.xls>

Table 1 depicts the representation of Blacks and Whites in the United States and the participation of Blacks and Whites in crime in the United States. Proportionally, Blacks do commit more crimes than Whites, but a further breakdown of crime is necessary to substantiate Hypothesis 1.

Table 2: Federal Bureau of Investigation Crime Statistics 2004, Violent and Nonviolent Crimes

| | Violent | Nonviolent | U.S. Crime Composition |
|-------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Black | 40% (128,630) | 30% (282,433) | 33% (411,063) |
| White | 60% (185,665) | 70% (654,823) | 67% (840,488) |
| Total | 100% (314,295) | 100% (937,256) | 100% (1,251,551) |

Violent crimes are offenses of murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Property crimes are offenses of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Due to lack of consistent data in Federal Bureau of Investigation crime statistics, this research excludes other racial groups

http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_04/persons_arrested/table_46-49.html

U.S. Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Investigation "Crime in the United States" Table 49.

Table 2 illustrates the racial breakdown of arrests according to 2004 Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics. The chart shows that for both Blacks and Whites; more arrests were made for nonviolent crime. Arrests that involved a Black perpetrator were made more than twice as often for nonviolent crime than for violent crime. However, according to the racial media research suggested by the Gilliam and Iyengar article in this section, Blacks are typically portrayed on television as perpetrators of *violent* crime when in reality Blacks are usually arrested for being perpetrators of nonviolent crime.⁵⁰

Although there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis, the findings for Hypothesis 1 can be interpreted in two different ways. The first interpretation is that the hypothesis is incorrect. Media research shows that televised news broadcasts portray Blacks as the main perpetrators of crime and in fact, Blacks do proportionally commit more crime than Whites.⁵¹ However, a second interpretation looks to the misrepresentation of the types of crime shown in televised news broadcasts and the types of crime Blacks actually commit. At this level of analysis, it is clear that the media does not accurately depict the types of crime that Blacks commit in reality.

Trust in the Media

Hypothesis 2 predicts that the more people trust in the media, the less likely they are to have favorable attitudes toward people on welfare. Overall, people in the United States are mixed in their trust of the media with 1% saying

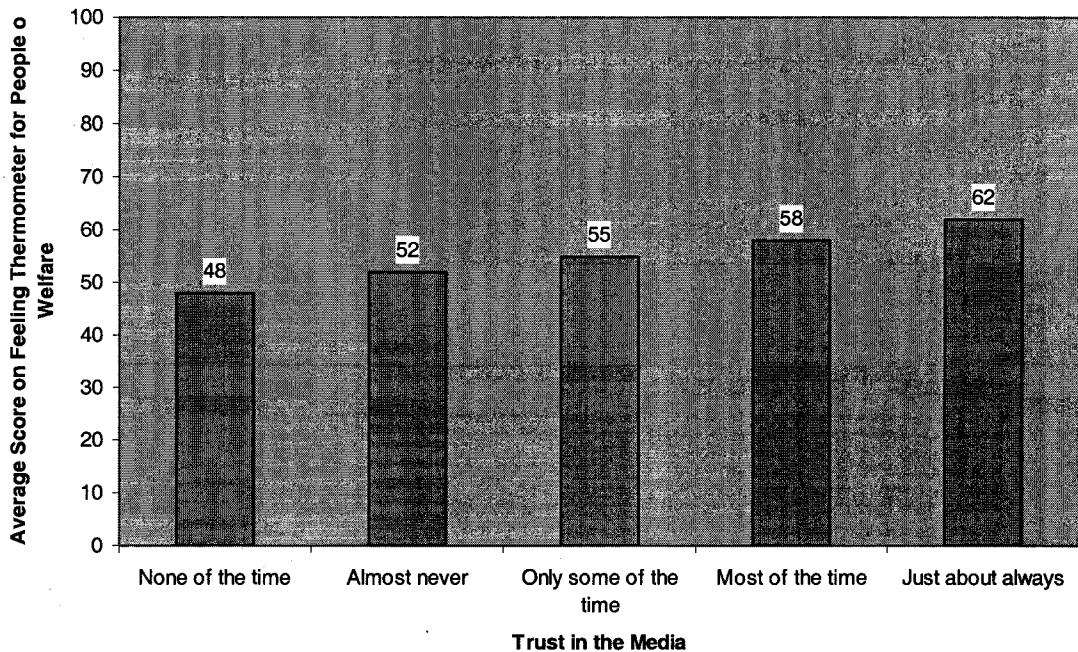
⁵⁰ Gilliam and Iyengar pg 564

⁵¹ Entman 514

that they trust in the media “None of the time,” 8% trusting in the media “Almost never,” 56% trusting in the media “Only some of the time,” 33% trusting in the media “Most of the time,” and 2% trusting in the media “Just about always.”⁵² In order to test the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between trust in the media and attitudes toward people on welfare, this research will utilize a Pearson’s correlation test between trust in the media and attitudes toward people on welfare. Chart 1 suggests that there is a relationship between trust in the media, but the relationship is in the opposite direction than predicted in the research hypothesis that as trust in the media increases, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease.

⁵² ANES 2004 response distribution for v045068

Chart 1: Average Score on Feeling Thermometer for People on Welfare Scale by Trust in the Media



$r=.096, p=.002, n=1064$

Considering the found relationship, this research rejects the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between trust in the media and attitudes toward people on welfare. This finding, however, does not support the research hypothesis that greater trust in the media leads to less favorable attitudes toward people on welfare, but rather indicates that as individuals have more trust in the media, their attitudes toward people on welfare improve.

Methodological problems may explain this found relationship. The ANES study notes that the study was part of a time-series and may not include the same question order for all of the studies in the series.⁵³ Although question order

⁵³ 2004 ANES codebook

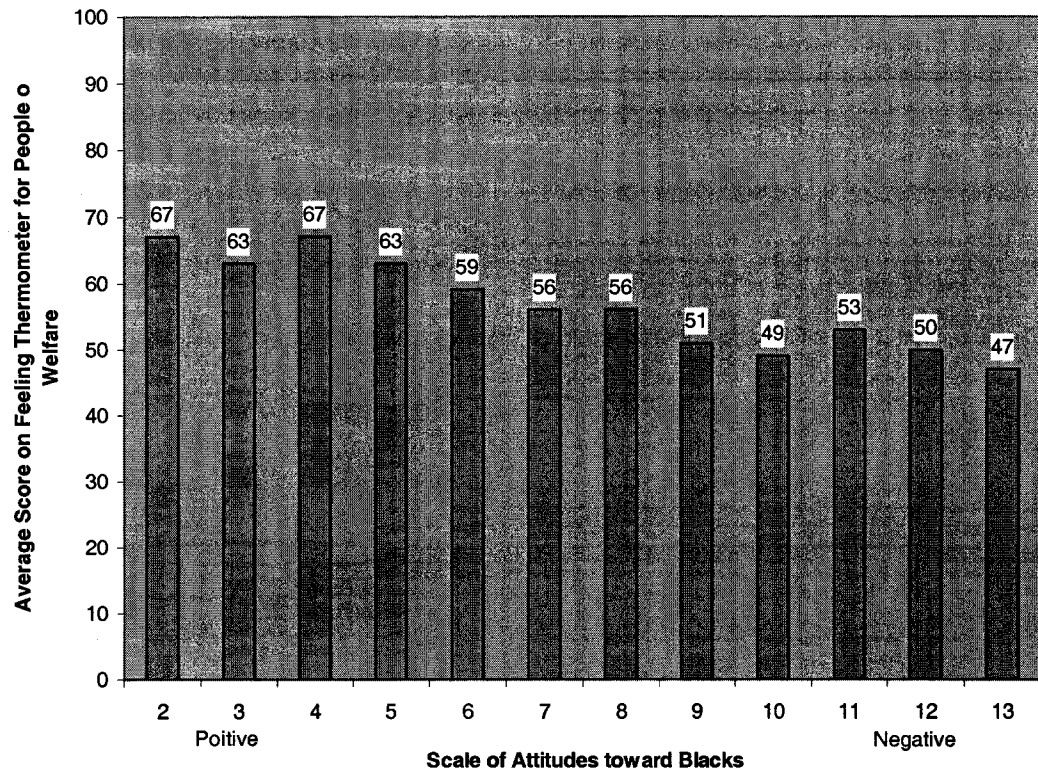
effects may be to blame for the insignificant correlation, other factors were probably bigger contributors to the results. Interviewer response effects such as social desirability may have been factors in the lack the predicted correlation between trust in the media and support favorable attitudes toward people on welfare. The lack of a relationship could also be due to the perceived bias of the media that liberals are more trusting of the media anyway and more likely to have favorable attitudes toward people on welfare.⁵⁴

Attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics

The third hypothesis in this research predicts that as negative attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics increase, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease. In order to test the null hypothesis that is that there is no relationship between attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics and attitudes toward people on welfare, this research will utilize Pearson's correlation tests between attitudes toward Blacks and attitudes toward people on welfare, and attitudes toward Hispanics and attitudes toward people on welfare. Chart 2 demonstrates that there is a relationship between attitudes toward Blacks and attitudes toward people on welfare in the same direction as predicted by the research hypothesis that as negative attitudes toward Blacks increase, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease.

⁵⁴ Sutter, Daniel. "Can the Media be so Liberal? The Economics of Media Bias." *CATO Journal*; 20 (2001): 431.

Chart 3: Average Score on Feeling Thermometer for People on Welfare by Attitudes toward Blacks



$r = -.223, p = .000, n = 1021$

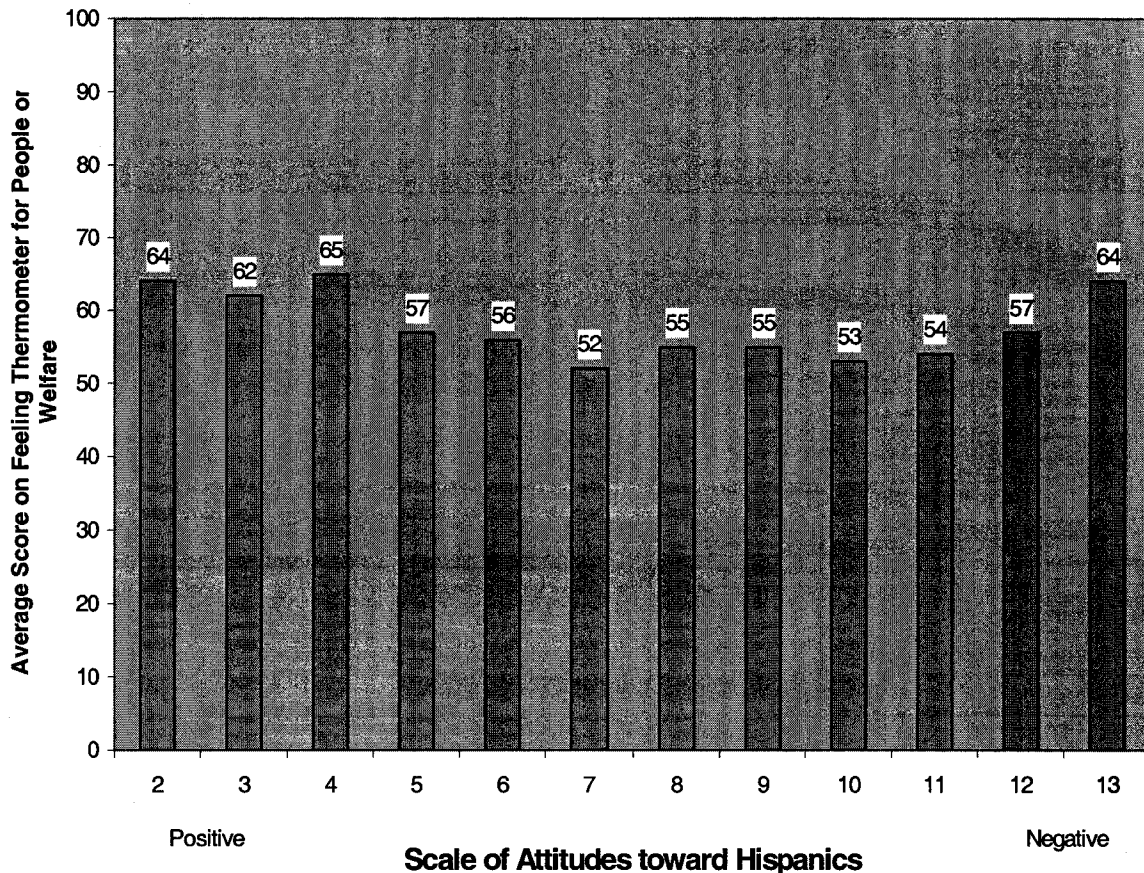
¹Scale created by combining v045223 and v045231 from ANES 2004. Scale points 13 and 14 were recoded together because of the small number of cases.

Considering the found relationship, we reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between attitudes toward Blacks and attitudes toward people on welfare. While the relationship is not particularly strong ($R^2 = .05$), this finding supports the research hypothesis that as negative attitudes toward Blacks increase, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease.

Chart 3 shows demonstrates that there is also a relationship between attitudes toward Hispanics and attitudes toward people on welfare in the same direction as predicted by the research hypothesis that as negative attitudes

toward Hispanics increase, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease.

Chart 3: Average Score on Feeling Thermometer for People on Welfare by Attitudes toward Hispanics



$r = -.102, p = .001, n = 1003$

¹Scale created by combining v045224 and v045232 from ANES 2004. Scale points 13 and 14 were recoded together because of the small number of cases.

Considering the found relationship, this research rejects the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between attitudes toward Hispanics and attitudes toward people on welfare. The Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) indicates that there is a statistically significant correlation between attitudes toward Hispanics and attitudes toward people on welfare. Again, while the relationship is not

particularly strong ($R^2=.01$), this finding supports the research hypothesis that as negative attitudes toward Hispanics increase, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease.

Although the Pearson's correlation coefficient tests are useful for explaining how trust in the media and attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics individually relate to attitudes toward people on welfare, multivariate regression will predict which variable best explains attitudes toward people on welfare. Table 3 depicts how much trust in the media, attitudes toward Blacks, and attitudes toward Hispanics predict attitudes toward people on welfare. The "Original Model" column regresses trust in the media, attitudes toward Blacks, and attitudes toward Hispanics. The "Trimmed Model" uses stepwise multivariate regression to create a line of the average relationship between the independent and dependent variable and then removed the insignificant variable (attitudes toward Hispanics) from the model.

Table 3: OLS Regression of Attitudes toward People on Welfare

| Variables | Original Model | Trimmed Model |
|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Constant | 66.268*** (4.341) | 66.335*** (4.083) |
| Trust in the Media | 1.807* (.915) | 1.826* (.303) |
| Attitudes toward Blacks | -2.345*** (.354) | -2.131*** (.303) |
| Attitudes toward Hispanics | .263 (.355) | _____ |
| Adjusted R ² | .055 (19.362) | .053 (19.404) |
| N | 997 | 1018 |

An F test indicated that these models were significant at the .001 level. Coefficients are unstandardized, with standard errors in parentheses. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

The R^2 value explains the percentage of variance explained in the dependent variable. The Trimmed Model Summary shows an Adjusted R^2 value of .053 with a standard error of the estimate of 19.404. In this model, the Adjusted R^2 demonstrates that about 5% of the variance in attitudes toward people on welfare is explained by trust in the media and attitudes toward Blacks. Although the overall model is statistically significant, it fails to predict 95% of the variance in attitudes toward people on welfare and is therefore not a powerful model.

The ANOVA examines the significance of the model as a whole. The F test tests whether all of the independent variables together significantly predict attitudes toward people on welfare and whether the variance explained by the line is greater than the unexplained variance. The ANOVA showed a significant F value of 29.328 ($p=.001$, $df=1018$).

In this analysis, both trust in the media and attitudes toward Blacks were significant. The constant value of 66.335 refers to the location that the model crosses the Y-axis. The t-test for the constant and attitudes toward people on welfare is valued at 16.247 and is significant at the .001 level. As attitudes toward Blacks become more negative, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease by 2.131. This finding is consistent with prior research that suggests negative attitudes toward Blacks are the driving force behind negative attitudes toward people on welfare. As trust in the media increases, favorable

attitudes toward people on welfare also increase. This finding is consistent with the findings in the second hypothesis.

A Pearson's correlation test may explain why attitudes toward Hispanics were not found to be statistically significant in the original model. When attitudes toward Hispanics and attitudes toward Blacks were correlated, the Pearson's correlation coefficient was .513 and significant at the .001. This finding suggests a strong relationship between attitudes toward Hispanics and attitudes toward Blacks resulting in a high degree of multicollinearity causing attitudes toward Hispanics to drop out of the model.

The findings in Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 indicate that attitudes toward Blacks are a much stronger predictor of attitudes toward people on welfare than is trust in the media. Not only are attitudes toward Blacks more closely correlated to attitudes toward people on welfare (as demonstrated in Hypothesis 3), but attitudes toward Blacks also have more predictive power than trust in the media when placed in a model that predicts attitudes toward people on welfare.

Chapter IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research tested the disparity between the criminal representation of Blacks in the media and the actual crime statistics for Blacks, the relationship between trust in the media and attitudes toward people on welfare, and the relationships between attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics and attitudes toward people on welfare. After an in-depth look at televised news content analysis research and Federal Bureau of Investigation crime statistics, not enough support was found to reject the null in Hypothesis 1, that Blacks are overrepresented as perpetrators of crime in televised news broadcasts compared to the actual number of crimes committed by Blacks, but evidence was found to question the legitimacy of crime stories in the news.

Contrary to the predicted direction of Hypothesis 2, that as trust in the media increases, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare decrease, this research found that trust in the media and attitudes toward people on welfare are correlated. The findings suggest that as people trust in the media more, favorable attitudes toward people on welfare also increase. Evidence was also found to

support Hypothesis 3 that as negative attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics increase, support for welfare programs decrease. Finally the research found that when trust in the media, attitudes toward Blacks, and attitudes toward Hispanics are all used to predict attitudes toward people on welfare together, attitudes towards Blacks is the most significant predictor.

The failure to find the predicted relationship between trust in the media and attitudes toward people on welfare may be due to a variety of factors. If the evidence for Hypothesis 1 is accepted (a higher percentage of Blacks are portrayed as perpetrators of violent crime in televised news broadcasts than the percentage of Blacks who actually commit violent crime), then the findings suggest that individuals are willing to have favorable attitudes toward people on welfare even though they see a large proportion of a visible welfare group recipient committing crimes in televised news broadcasts. So, why does America have such favorable attitudes toward groups of people who are disproportionately depicted as perpetrators of violent crime? One answer may be that individuals are simply not strongly influenced by the media. In recent times, people have more media options, particularly where they get their news. News is no longer limited to radio, newspapers, and a few television stations but can now be found everywhere; including cable news networks and the Internet. Perhaps the prevalence of the media has desensitized people to its content and thus decreased its influence.

Another explanation may be that individuals have favorable attitudes toward those on welfare because they think that the welfare system is reducing

the amount of overall crime. Considering the perceived link between welfare and poverty discussed in Chapter 1, individuals believe that poor people on welfare will be less likely to commit crimes. This alternate hypothesis could be tested with a survey question asking people about the perceived purpose of welfare. However, it could also be the case that the media simply does not have as big of an influence as Hypothesis 2 assumed. Although people do watch televised news broadcasts, the imagery depicted on television may not have long-lasting effects.

Although the research yielded some unexpected results, it does add to the existing body of literature about why some individuals have negative attitudes toward people on welfare. This research may help other scholars rule out the negative racial images in the media as a potential cause for negative attitudes toward people on welfare. It does not take on the task of examining many other factors that may contribute to negative attitudes toward people on welfare, but it does address attitudes toward Blacks and Hispanics. It also leaves an opening for future research on the effects of media on other attitudes toward other groups of people.

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APPENDIX: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU POVERTY GUIDELINES⁵⁵

Following the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive 14, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation using Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition uses money income before taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps).

Income used to compute poverty status:

- Money income
 - Includes earnings, unemployment compensation, workers' compensation, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, public assistance, veterans' payments, survivor benefits, pension or retirement income, interest, dividends, rents, royalties, income from estates, trusts, educational assistance, alimony, child support, assistance from outside the household, and other miscellaneous sources.
 - Noncash benefits (such as food stamps and housing subsidies) do not count.
 - Before taxes.
 - Excludes capital gains or losses.
 - If a person lives with a family, add up the income of all family members. (Non-relatives, such as housemates, do not count.)

Measure of need (poverty thresholds):

- Poverty thresholds are the dollar amounts used to determine poverty status
- Each person or family is assigned one out of 48 possible poverty thresholds
- Thresholds vary according to:
 - Size of the family
 - Ages of the members
- The same thresholds are used throughout the United States (do not vary geographically)
- Updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U).
- Although the thresholds in some sense reflect families needs,

⁵⁵ Copied directly from: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/povdef.html>

- they are intended for use as a statistical yardstick, not as a complete description of what people and families need to live
- many government aid programs use a different poverty measure, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) poverty guidelines, or multiples thereof
- Poverty thresholds were originally derived in 1963-1964, using:
 - U.S. Department of Agriculture food budgets designed for families under economic stress
 - Data about what portion of their income families spent on food

Computation:

- If total family income is less than the threshold appropriate for that family,
 - the family is in poverty
 - all family members have the same poverty status
 - for individuals who do not live with family members, their own income is compared with the appropriate threshold
- If total family income equals or is greater than the threshold, the family (or unrelated individual) is not in poverty

People whose poverty status cannot be determined:

- Unrelated individuals under age 15 (such as foster children)
 - income questions are asked of people age 15 and older
 - if someone is under age 15 and not living with a family member, we do not know their income
 - since we cannot determine their poverty status, they are excluded from the “poverty universe” (table totals)
- People in:
 - institutional group quarters (such as prisons or nursing homes)
 - college dormitories
 - military barracks
 - living situations without conventional housing (and who are not in shelters)

Authority behind official poverty measure:

- The official measure of poverty was established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in Statistical Policy Directive 14.
- To be used by federal agencies in their statistical work.
- Government aid programs do not have to use the official poverty measure as eligibility criteria.
- Many government aid programs use a different poverty measure, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) poverty guidelines, or Statistical Policy Directive 14.
- To be used by federal agencies in their statistical work.

- Government aid programs do not have to use the official poverty measure as eligibility criteria.
 - Many government aid programs use a different poverty measure, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) poverty guidelines, or variants thereof
 - Each aid program may define eligibility differently
- Official poverty data come from the Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), formerly called the Annual Demographic Supplement or simply the "March Supplement."