

# *The Conceptualization and Measurement of Symbolic Racism*

Christopher Tarman

University of California, Los Angeles

David O. Sears

University of California, Los Angeles

The conceptualization and measurement of symbolic racism have been the subjects of a number of critiques, of which we address four: (1) we briefly review the history of its past conceptualization, which has been somewhat loose, and of its past measurement, which has been more consistent than often suggested. We then address three other critiques empirically. In each case the results support the original theory: (2) symbolic racism is an internally consistent belief system; it does have individual and structural variants, but they are highly correlated and have virtually identical effects on whites' racial policy preferences; (3) the effects of symbolic racism on whites' racial policy preferences are not artifacts of shared-item content with policy-attitude items (both conclusions are replicated in quite similar form in two surveys); and (4) symbolic racism is a distinctive belief system in its own right, encompassing a set of attitudes different from those in ideological conservatism, antiegalitarianism, individualism, and old-fashioned racism (a conclusion replicated in similar form in six surveys). Perhaps most importantly, the effects of symbolic racism on racial policy preferences are the same regardless of which conventional measure of symbolic racism is used.

**T**he dismantling of the Southern Jim Crow system in the 1960s cemented basic civil and political rights for African Americans. It also catalyzed a gradual shift in the racial attitudes of the white public to the current near-unanimous support for general principles of equal treatment and nondiscrimination (Schuman et al., 1997). Nevertheless, African Americans continue to experience substantial disadvantages in most domains of life. Remedial government policies remain on the political agenda, but they have often met substantial white opposition.

Several explanations for that opposition have emerged. One is that the "old-fashioned racism" of pre-civil-rights days has been replaced by some new form of racism, such as "symbolic racism" (Kinder and Sears 1981; Sears 1988; Sears and Kinder 1971), "modern racism" (McConahay 1986), or "racial resentment" (Kinder and Sanders 1996).<sup>1</sup> A second emphasizes group conflicts stemming from structural inequalities, such as realistic group conflict theory (Bobo 1988),

<sup>1</sup> Although these have some slight conceptual differences, they have been operationalized with similar survey items and we will not distinguish among them here.

threatened “sense of group position” (Bobo 1999), or social dominance theory (Sidanius et al. 1999). A third invokes non-racial political processes, such as elites’ agenda control and the white public’s political ideologies and values, rather than whites’ racial prejudice (e.g., Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993).

Of the “new racisms,” symbolic racism and its brethren have perhaps stimulated the most attention in social psychology (Biernat and Crandall 1999), sociology (Hughes 1997; Krysan 2000; Schuman et al. 1997) and political science (Hurwitz and Peffley 1998; Sniderman, Crosby, and Howell 2000).<sup>2</sup> Numerous studies have shown that symbolic racism is strongly associated with whites’ opposition to racially targeted policies, typically outweighing the roles of other important political attitudes, such as ideology, party identification, and attitudes toward the size of government, as well as of more traditional racial attitudes (e.g., Alvarez and Brehm 1997; Bobo 2000; Henry and Sears 2002; Hughes 1997; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears et al. 1997; Sidanius et al. 1999).<sup>3</sup>

### Critiques of the Theory of Symbolic Racism

Nevertheless, the symbolic racism approach has also stimulated controversy (e.g., Hurwitz and Peffley 1998; Sniderman, Crosby, and Howell 2000; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986a, 1986b). The strong associations of symbolic racism with various political preferences are rarely disputed. Rather, most critiques have focused on the interpretation of such associations, particularly on the conceptualization and measurement of symbolic racism itself. We focus on four here, that symbolic racism (1) has been conceptualized and measured inconsistently over time, (2) may not be a single, internally consistent, and coherent belief system, (3) may generate artifactually strong associations with racial policy preferences because of content overlap between measures of the independent and dependent variables, and (4) is not a distinctive belief system in its own right, but simply reflects various other familiar constructs. We briefly discuss the first of these critiques, then subject the other three to empirical test. In so doing, we hope to answer the call for symbolic racism researchers to “unpack their central construct . . .” (Wood 1994, 682), to indicate what “. . . the most diagnostic indicators of symbolic racism [are],” and to find “. . . what types of plausible counterinterpretations need to be tested and controlled for in designing research on the topic” (Sniderman and Tetlock 1986a, 131).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Among the various other “new racisms” are “subtle prejudice” (Pettigrew and Meertens 1995), “aversive racism” (Gaertner and Dovidio 1986), and “laissez-faire racism” (Bobo 1999).

<sup>3</sup> The use of 11 different general population surveys by these studies indicates the generality of these effects.

<sup>4</sup> For reasons of space and focus we do not review conflicts with social-structural approaches to racial politics (see Sidanius et al. 1999; Bobo 2000).

*Inconsistent Conceptualization and Measurement?*

First of all, some have suggested that symbolic racism has been conceptualized and measured inconsistently over time (e.g., Bobo 1988; Schuman et al. 1997; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986a; Stoker 1998). Indeed, research on symbolic racism began quite inductively, as an effort to describe an emerging set of beliefs about race and politics in the post-Jim Crow era. Looking back, we share some of the concern about inconsistent conceptualization. Sometimes it has been treated as a single construct (e.g., Kinder and Sanders 1996; McConahay 1986; Sears and Kinder 1971) and at other times as composed of anywhere from two to five subdimensions (e.g., Kinder and Sears 1981; Sears et al. 1997). Most current writings consistently define symbolic racism as a belief system whose manifest content embodies four specific themes: that (1) racial discrimination is no longer a serious obstacle to blacks' prospects for a good life, so that (2) blacks' continuing disadvantages are largely due to their unwillingness to work hard enough. As a result, both their (3) continuing demands and (4) increased advantages are unwarranted (see Henry and Sears 2002; Sears and Henry 2003; Sears, Henry, and Kosterman 2000). Consistently defining it as a belief system with these four themes should address the conceptual inconsistency issue.<sup>5</sup>

The concern that symbolic racism has been measured inconsistently across studies, in contrast, seems somewhat overstated. Both the earliest studies of symbolic racism (Kinder and Sears 1981; Sears and Kinder 1971) and the most recent (Henry and Sears 2002; Sears and Henry 2003; Sears, Henry, and Kosterman 2000) have measured all four themes.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, the exact items used to measure them have varied across studies. A recently updated scale of symbolic racism should promote greater measurement consistency (Henry and Sears 2002).

*An Internally Coherent Belief System?*

Second, is symbolic racism a single, internally consistent and coherent belief system? The theory represents these four themes as a logically consistent view of blacks' place in society and the polity: blacks are no longer much discriminated against, so remaining disadvantages must result mostly from their own lack of effort. Recent gains are therefore undeserved, and special demands are unwarranted. But does it also reflect a psychologically coherent belief system? These themes might be just a *mélange* of four different attitudes that are only artificially

<sup>5</sup>The four themes in its manifest political content should be distinguished from its latent psychological origins in more fundamental antiblack affect and traditional conservative values, especially individualism (Kinder and Sears 1981; Sears and Henry 2003).

<sup>6</sup>Studies of "modern racism" and "racial resentment" have each used three of the four themes, the former omitting the work ethic (McConahay 1986), and the latter, excessive demands (Kinder and Sanders 1996). A further occasional theme focuses on emotions toward blacks, either on understanding blacks' anger (McConahay 1986) or, in one study, on the absence of positive emotions toward blacks (Sears et al. 1997).

conjoined in a single construct (Sniderman and Tetlock 1986b, 175–76). Or other subjective fault lines may run through them, such as between a “dominant ideology” about racial stratification (denial of discrimination and poor work ethic) and political resentments (of blacks’ demands and recent gains; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Stoker 1998), or between individualism (blaming blacks’ work ethics) and structuralism (denying structural obstacles; Apostle et al. 1983; Kluegel and Bobo 1993). In other words, there are plausible four-factor or two-factor alternatives to the theory that symbolic racism is, in its entirety, a single coherent belief system. Previous research has only assessed whether symbolic racism is consistent enough to meet conventional standards of scale reliability without explicitly testing such alternative formulations (e.g., Henry and Sears 2002; Sears et al. 1997). Here we examine its underlying dimensionality in detail, testing theoretically plausible four-factor, two-factor, and one-factor confirmatory factor analytic models, as well as conducting exploratory factor analyses in search of other possible subdimensions.

### *Tautological Content Overlap with Items Measuring Racial Policy Preferences?*

A third critique is that some symbolic racism items are “too close” in content to the policy dependent variables they purport to predict. If the same variable has indeed been placed on both sides of the equation, the coefficients for symbolic racism might better be interpreted as reflecting its tautological content overlap with policy preference measures, not the independent causal force of symbolic racism (Chong 2000; Hurwitz and Peffley 1998; Sniderman, Crosby, and Howell 2000; Schuman 2000; Sidanius et al. 1999). For example, Sniderman, Crosby, and Howell note that a racial resentment item asking whether “most blacks who receive money from welfare programs could get along without it if they tried” (2000, 269) was included in a scale predicting opposition to welfare (Kinder and Sanders 1996, p. 122), and symbolic racism items about government attention to blacks in general have been used to predict opposition to *specific* government policies providing special treatment to blacks (e.g., Sears et al. 1997). The critique seems well taken in both specific examples. To be sure, they are the exception rather than the rule in studies of symbolic racism.<sup>7</sup> Still, even occasional instances could lead both to overestimating the effects of symbolic racism and to misinterpreting them as reflecting racism when they might just reflect opposition to big government on both sides of the equation.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The welfare item is one of six racial resentment items, and the welfare policy item one of 35 policy items, used by Kinder and Sanders (1996). The government-attention item is one of 12 symbolic racism items used by Sears et al. (1997) to predict to nine racial policy attitudes.

<sup>8</sup>A more dated version of this critique focuses on two studies done two decades ago that incorporated opposition to busing and affirmative action into measures of symbolic racism (Kinder and Sears 1981; Sears and Citrin 1982). This was theoretically confusing because such policy attitudes were treated as part of symbolic racism in these studies and as products of symbolic racism in later studies

To address this “common-content” critique, we purge symbolic racism scales of items that might partly reflect opposition to big government. If content overlap explains the effects of symbolic racism on racial policy preferences, the purged scale should have markedly reduced effects. Also, if symbolic racism has “expropriated” explanatory variance that more properly belongs to opposition to big government, use of the purged scale should allow that variance to return to its proper home, in the form of increased coefficients for nonracial conservatism.<sup>9</sup>

### *A Distinctive Belief System?*

Fourth and finally, is symbolic racism a distinctive belief system in its own right or is it just “old wine in new bottles,” its effects merely capturing variance usually conceptualized and measured in other more traditional terms? For example, its effects “may simply reflect the expropriation of causal variance due to various components of conservatism by operationally defining symbolic racism in a way that subsumes those components” (Tetlock 1994, 570; also see Hurwitz and Peffley 1998; Sniderman and Carmines 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986a, 1986b; Sniderman et al. 2000). Others question whether symbolic racism is distinct from individualism (Carmines and Merriman 1993; Kluegel and Bobo 1993), antiegalitarianism (Sidanius et al. 1999), authoritarianism (Raden 1994), or older forms of racial prejudice, such as “old-fashioned racism” (Sniderman and Tetlock 1986a, 1986b; Weigel and Howes 1985), racial stereotypes (Bobo 1988; Hurwitz and Peffley 1998; Virtanen and Huddy 1998), or ethnocentrism (Schuman et al. 1997; Weigel and Howes 1985). If other constructs are sufficient to explain racial politics, a concept of a “new racism” might not be necessary.

Previous studies are indeterminate, demonstrating both that symbolic racism is significantly related to other such familiar variables and that it has political effects beyond theirs (e.g., Henry and Sears 2002; Sears and Henry 2003; Sears et al. 1997). Previous research has not tested systematically and comprehensively whether the measures of symbolic racism cohere as a distinctive belief system independent of other such variables. Here we use confirmatory factor analyses that incorporate symbolic racism items along with standard measures of political conservatism, individualism, antiegalitarianism, old-fashioned racism, and negative black stereotypes. If symbolic racism is truly distinctive, confirmatory factor analytic models that include it as a separate construct should fit the data

(Sniderman and Piazza 1993; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986a, 1986b; Tetlock 1994). Such items have not appeared in measures of symbolic racism or racial resentment since then, but this continues to be cited as a major critique of work on symbolic racism (see Schuman 2000, 321; Hurwitz and Peffley 1998, 3; Stoker 1998, 136; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997, 615).

<sup>9</sup>Sears and his colleagues (1997, 2000) earlier have alluded in passing to such analyses but did not report the actual findings. Since the “common content” critique continues to appear in print (e.g., Sniderman et al. 2000), it would seem necessary to present the actual evidence.

better than should models that dispense with it and only use more traditional constructs.

The validity of these critiques is of some consequence. The issues go beyond methodological purity or preferences in academic theories. They go to the substantive core of America's longest-running and most difficult social problem. The symbolic racism claim is a large one—the politics of race are not merely “politics as usual,” but continue to reflect underlying racial animosity. If that claim is right, much remedial work needs to be done on the white side of the racial divide. If it is wrong, and opposition to liberal racial policies is really driven mainly by conservative views about the optimal relative balance of governments and markets in modern societies, much obligation would be placed upon blacks to adapt better to a society in which they are no longer singled out for especially unfair treatment.

### Data and Measurement

Our main analyses use data from three surveys that contained an adequate number of symbolic racism items plus the other necessary variables: the 1986 and 2000 National Election Studies (NES) and the 1997 Los Angeles County Social Survey (LACSS). The 1986 NES used a split-ballot design; we use only white respondents given the ballot with most of the questions regarding race (white  $n = 906$ ).<sup>10</sup> The 2000 NES sample was split between face-to-face and telephone interviews, but our results do not differ across them, so both were combined (white  $n = 1393$ ). The 1997 LACSS was an omnibus survey, though with considerable attention to cultural diversity. It was a list-assisted random-digit-dial sample of all telephone households in Los Angeles County, administered by a computer-assisted telephone interviewing facility (white  $n = 277$ ).<sup>11</sup> For additional analyses looking at the distinctiveness of symbolic racism from old-fashioned racism, we employed the General Social Survey (GSS) for 1994 (white  $n = 2483$ ), 1996 (white  $n = 2349$ ), 1998 (white  $n = 2241$ ), and 2000 (white  $n = 2238$ ).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>The literature addressed by this research has been limited to explaining whites' racial attitudes. Examining the racial attitudes of other ethnic groups would be well beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>11</sup>Any respondent 18 years old or older from each telephone household was eligible to be interviewed. When more than one person was eligible, the person with the next birthday was selected as the respondent. “No-contact” cases were called at least 12 times and considerable effort was made to convert refusals. The ethnic and racial breakdown of the sample closely resembled the 1990 Census estimates for Los Angeles County.

<sup>12</sup>Since 1994, the GSS has employed a biennial, dual sample design that rotates items across three random subsamples within each survey, so our 1996 variables appeared in two different ballots. We measured symbolic racism with WRKWAYUP, RACDIF1, RACDIF4, and BLKGOVT (1994), and old-fashioned racism with RACMAR, RACDIF2, MARBLK (1996B, 1998), RACSEG (1994, 1996A), RACPRES (1994, 1996A), and INTLBLKS (1996B, 1998, 2000).

The measurement provided by these surveys allowed us to test each hypothesis with two of them to ensure that all findings were replicable. The internal coherence and common-content hypotheses were both tested with the 1986 NES and the 1997 LACSS because they had considerably more symbolic racism items than did other surveys in those series. The distinctiveness hypothesis was tested with the two NES studies because they contained a considerably broader range of the other attitudes and values relevant to racial politics than did the LACSS. We used the GSS specifically to test the distinctiveness of symbolic racism from old-fashioned racism because it alone contains current measures of old-fashioned racism. In all cases, we replicated our tests across at least two surveys.

### *Racial Attitudes*

Table 1 contains the items used to measure *symbolic racism* and their mean level of support, categorized according to which of the four content themes they were intended to measure. On average, a slight majority supports the elements of the symbolic racism belief system. Most whites agreed that blacks should work harder and that blacks have received undeserved advantages, and they split about evenly the extent of current racial discrimination and whether blacks are making excessive demands. This tilt toward majority support for the symbolic racism belief system contrasts sharply with the overwhelming majority who reject the basic tenets of old-fashioned racism (see the data in Schuman et al. 1997).

The alpha reliabilities for the full symbolic racism scales were .79 (1986 NES), .75 (2000 NES), and .86 (1997 LACSS). Using the 1986 NES and 1997 LACSS, we created symbolic racism subscales: a *dominant ideology* subscale based on the “denial of discrimination” and “work harder” items (1986 NES  $\alpha = .76$ ; 1997 LACSS  $\alpha = .74$ ); and a *political resentment* subscale based on the “excessive demands” and “undeserved advantage” items ( $\alpha = .59$  and  $.77$ ). *Purged symbolic racism* scales were created by eliminating items referring explicitly or implicitly to government programs (“Work Way Up,” “Black Welfare,” “Attention from Complaint,” and “Deserve Attention”). These scales have fewer items and slightly lower alpha reliabilities (1986 NES = .68; 1997 LACSS = .77) than the full scales, providing a conservative test of our hypothesis that purged scales would not reduce the effects of symbolic racism.

*Antiblack affect* was measured in each survey using a feeling thermometer. *Old-fashioned racism* was measured in terms of explanations for blacks’ lower socioeconomic status: in the 1986 NES that (1) the races are different due to a divine plan and (2) blacks come from a less able race ( $\alpha = .54$ ), and in the LACSS, that “People in these groups [blacks and Hispanics] are less intellectually able than other groups.” Because old-fashioned racism was not measured in the 2000 NES, *stereotype* trait ratings for the intelligence, work ethic, and trustworthiness of blacks were used instead. Ratings of whites were subtracted from the ratings of blacks to create the individual stereotype items.

TABLE 1  
Items Used to Measure Symbolic Racism

Question Wording	Mean Response (0–1 scale)		
	1986 NES	2000 NES	1997 LACSS
<i>Denial of Continuing Discrimination:</i>			
* Generations of Slavery: “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.” (Disagree)	.43	.57	.48
* Discrimination: “How much discrimination against blacks do you feel there is in the United States today, limiting their chances to get ahead? Would you say a lot, some, just a little, or none at all?” (A Little)	—	—	.30
* Real Change: “Has there been a lot of real change in the position of black people in the past few years?” (A Lot)	.66	—	.66
<i>Blacks Should Work Harder:</i>			
* Try Harder: “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder, they could be as well off as whites.” (Agree)	.62	.59	.53
Work Way Up: “Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.” (Agree)	.69	.72	.68
Black Welfare: “Most blacks who receive money from welfare programs could get along without it if they tried.” (Agree)	.64	—	.57
<i>Undeserved Advantage:</i>			
* Deserve Less: “Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve.” (Disagree)	.64	.63	.56
Attention from Complaint: “Government officials usually pay less attention to a request or complaint from a black person than from a white person.” (Disagree)	.61	—	.51
Deserve Attention: “Do blacks get much more attention from the government than they deserve, more attention, about the right amount, less attention, or much less attention from the government than they deserve?” (More Attention)	—	—	.50
<i>Excessive Demands:</i>			
* Too Demanding: “Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.” (Agree)	—	—	.44
* Speed of Civil Rights: “Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven’t pushed fast enough. How about you: Do you think that civil rights leaders are trying to push too fast, are going too slowly, or are they moving at about the right speed?” (Too Fast)	.60	—	.48

Source: 1986 and 2000 National Election Studies and 1997 Los Angeles County Social Survey.

Note: Items denoted by the asterisk (\*) are included in the symbolic racism scale purged of items referring to government action or special favors. The responses keyed as highest in symbolic racism are shown in parentheses. Means are based on samples of 906, 1393, and 277 white respondents, respectively.



### *Non-Racial Attitudes*

In all surveys, *ideology* and *party identification* were measured with the standard 7-point scales running from “strong liberal” to “strong conservative” and “strong Democrat” to “strong Republican,” respectively. In the NES, scales were also generated by combining these items with the difference scores between the thermometer ratings of liberals and conservatives and those of the two political parties (1986,  $\alpha = .81$  and  $.85$ ; 2000,  $\alpha = .84$  and  $.88$ ). Attitudes about the *role of government* in the LACSS used a choice between “The government should do more to solve national problems,” or “the government is doing too many things better left to business and individuals.” In the 1986 NES, the standard 7-point services and spending item was used. Three-item *antiegaltarianism* scales were used in all three surveys (1986 NES  $\alpha = .68$ ; 2000 NES  $\alpha = .57$ ; LACSS  $\alpha = .62$ ).<sup>13</sup> The 1986 NES contained a six-item *individualism* scale ( $\alpha = .60$ ) and an eight-item *moral traditionalism* scale (i.e., tolerance of different lifestyles, the breakdown of moral standards, and sexual mores;  $\alpha = .81$ ).

### *Racial Policy Preferences*

Separate measures were used for attitudes about three different racial policy domains, as in other research on these problems (e.g., Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears et al. 1997; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). The first was *federal assistance* to blacks: should government help blacks or should they help themselves (1986 NES and 1997 LACSS) and spending on programs benefiting blacks (1986 NES,  $\alpha = .60$ ). Second was *government-guaranteed equal opportunity*: equal opportunity (1986 NES and 1997 LACSS), school integration (1986 NES), and fair treatment in jobs (1986 NES,  $\alpha = .66$ ). The third was *affirmative action*: racial preferences in hiring and promotion and quotas in college admissions (1986 NES,  $\alpha = .74$ ) and an end to affirmative action programs (LACSS). To ease comparisons across data sets, omnibus *racial policy* scales were created from all these items (1986 NES  $\alpha = .82$ ; LACSS  $\alpha = .68$ ).<sup>14</sup>

Each item was placed on a 0–1 scale before being combined to minimize variance differences among them in creating scales and to ease interpretation of the strength of regression and other coefficients. Conservative attitudes were keyed as high. The regression analyses also included controls for the demographic vari-

<sup>13</sup> Both the six-item NES antiegaltarianism scale (Feldman 1988) and the six-item LACSS social dominance orientation scale (Sidanius et al. 1999) are composed of two weakly correlated subscales, of which we use the one (“less equal treatment”) that appears to measure basic values about equality (Sears, Henry, and Kosterman 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Confirmatory factor analyses using EQS indicated that a three-factor model of these racial policy items do fit the data better than a single-factor model (in 1986 NES, [ $\Delta$ SCALED  $\chi^2/d.f.$ ] = 3.20,  $\Delta$ AGFI = .07; in 2000 NES, [ $\Delta$ SCALED  $\chi^2/d.f.$ ] = 2.08,  $\Delta$ AGFI = .02). However, the racial policy factors in both years were so highly correlated (average  $\phi = .76$  and  $.87$  respectively) that an omnibus racial policy scale seems statistically justified.

ables most highly correlated with white Americans' racial attitudes: age, education, gender, and South vs. non-South region (NES only).

## The Internal Coherence of Symbolic Racism

Is the symbolic racism belief system truly an internally coherent and consistent psychological construct? To test the dimensional structure of symbolic racism, we used structural equation modeling of the symbolic racism items in the 1986 NES and the 1997 LACSS (the four symbolic racism items in the 2000 NES were insufficient for this purpose).

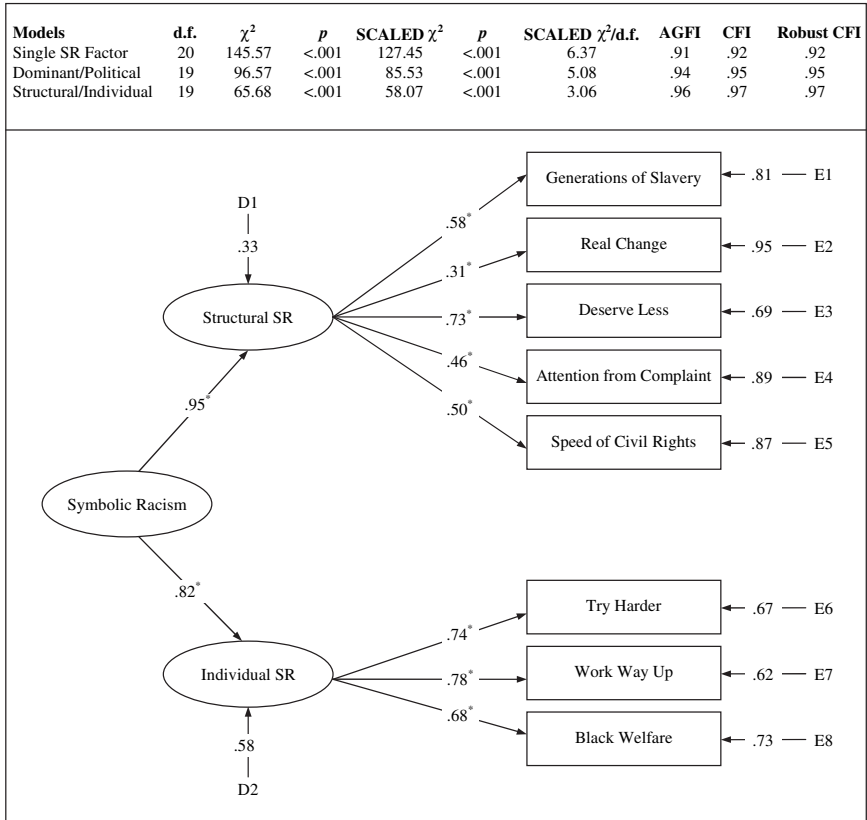
### *Factorial Structure of Symbolic Racism*

Symbolic racism theory hypothesizes that it represents a single and coherent belief system. Therefore, we begin with a one-factor model using all available symbolic racism items in the two surveys, employing confirmatory factor analyses in EQS, a standard structural equation modeling technique (Bentler and Weeks 1980). To evaluate the fit of any given model, we report the conventional  $\chi^2$  statistic and the SCALED  $\chi^2$  statistic, which index the closeness-of-fit between the model and the data; models are generally considered acceptable when the  $\chi^2$  statistics are small and nonsignificant.<sup>15</sup> However, power increases with sample size, so trivial differences in large-sample analyses may cause one to reject the model when it is correct. So we also report several fit indices that are not sensitive to sample size: the Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI) developed by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1984), and two incremental fit indexes, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and its companion measure which is derived by using robust standard errors (Robust CFI). These indices run on a 0–1 scale, with higher numbers indicating a higher relative amount of the observed variances and covariances accounted for by the model. Models are generally considered acceptable when they surpass a cutoff value of .90.

The data on goodness-of-fit for the 1986 NES are shown at the top of Figure 1. They show that a single-factor model generally hovers slightly above the borderline of acceptability, with three of the five fit indices surpassing the cutoff level. Four of the five fit indices for the 1997 LACSS, however, show that the

<sup>15</sup> We did not specify correlated errors or cross-loadings of items onto other latent variables. Results were based on maximum-likelihood estimators since they are fairly robust to the violation of non-normality (Hu and Bentler 1995). Because of concerns about kurtosis in the data (Mardia's Coefficient was 5.62 for the 1986 NES, 27.61 for the 2000 NES, and 17.92 for the 1997 data), robust standard errors and Satorra and Bentler's SCALED  $\chi^2$  test statistic were used to adjust the ML results. Simulations have shown that robust standard errors and the SCALED  $\chi^2$  test statistic yield the most satisfactory results under varying conditions of dependence, normality, methods, and sample size (Hu and Bentler 1995). We used two absolute-fit indexes, (SCALED  $\chi^2$ )/d.f. and AGFI, for comparison across models. Standardized parameter estimates were evaluated using the standard cutoff point ( $\alpha = .05$ ) for statistical significance.

FIGURE 1  
Two-Factor Model with Symbolic Racism as a Second-Order Factor, 1986 NES



Note: The statistical significance of the standardized parameter estimates was evaluated at  $\alpha = .05$  using Robust standard errors. For identification purposes, factor loadings for the Generations of Slavery and Black Welfare items and the variance of the global symbolic racism factor were fixed at 1.0, and the two second-order factor loadings were constrained to equality.

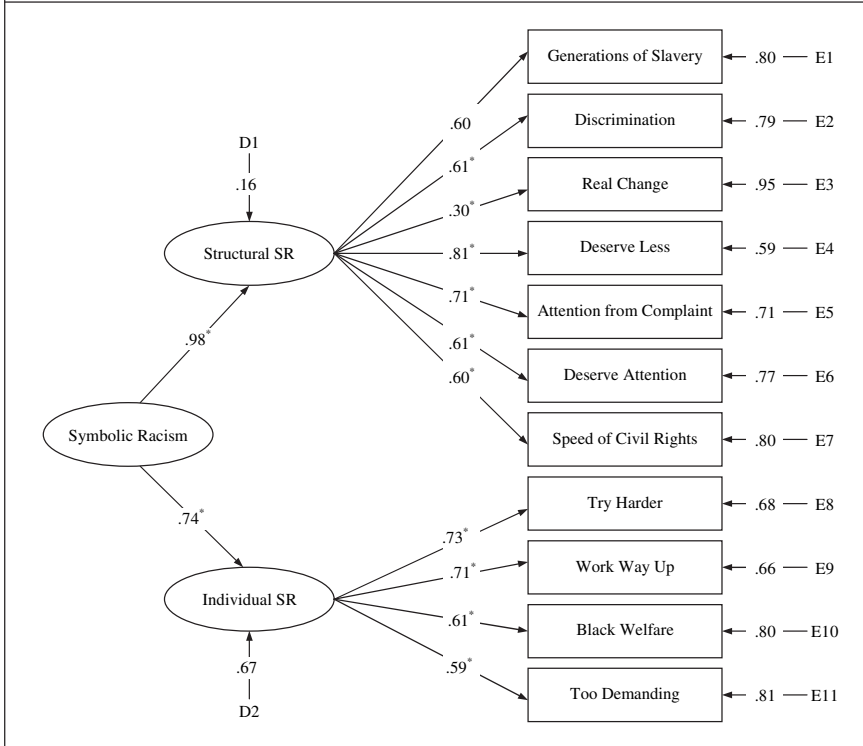
single-factor model generally falls short, as shown at the top of Figure 2. All in all, the pure one-factor model is of borderline acceptability.

The second obvious alternative would be a four-factor model, given the four different themes in the usual measures of symbolic racism. This should be a conservative test of the symbolic racism model because item similarity is greater within each of the four themes than across them, presumably advantaging a four-factor model. In the LACSS, the fit indices yield a mixed message (the four-factor model could not be tested with the NES because it contained too few symbolic

FIGURE 2

Two-Factor Model with Symbolic Racism as a Second-Order Factor, 1997 LACSS

Models	d.f.	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	SCALED $\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	SCALED $\chi^2$ /d.f.	AGFI	CFI	Robust CFI
Single SR Factor	44	123.03	<.001	101.06	<.001	2.30	.83	.89	.91
Dominant/Political	43	122.12	<.001	100.30	<.001	2.33	.83	.89	.91
Structural/Individual	43	68.18	.01	57.38	.07	1.33	.91	.96	.98
Four SR Factors	38	69.97	.001	50.69	.08	1.33	.89	.95	.98



Note: The statistical significance of the standardized parameter estimates was evaluated at  $\alpha = .05$  using Robust standard errors. For identification purposes, factor loadings for the Generations of Slavery and Black Welfare items and the variance of the global symbolic racism factor were fixed at 1.0, and the two second-order factor loadings were constrained to equality.

racism items). As shown in Figure 2, the standard  $\chi^2$  measure and the AGFI indicate that we should reject the model, while the other statistics indicate that the model fits the data pretty well. The further complication is that, as symbolic racism theory would expect, the latent variables have large intercorrelations, averaging .83. Indeed, there is a perfect correlation between the latent variables representing Denial of Continuing Discrimination and Undeserved Advantages, so

a more parsimonious model would at the very least collapse those two factors together. In the interest of parsimony, then, we reject the four-factor model of symbolic racism in favor of the one-factor model.

Another possible subdivision within symbolic racism is between the sociological concept of *dominant ideology*, which explains blacks' position in the social hierarchy as stemming not from racial discrimination but from their deficient work ethic (that is, the "deny discrimination" and "work harder" themes), and *political resentment*, that blacks have been getting more than they deserve and that they are too pushy and demanding (that is, the "excessive demands" and "undeserved advantage" themes). However, the fit indices for this distinction do not yield a uniformly favorable result. The fit indices for the NES data indicated that splitting the symbolic racism items into dominant ideology and political resentment subfactors would be an acceptable fit to the data, while analyses of the LACSS data indicate that it would not be an acceptable fit.<sup>16</sup>

Another plausible bifurcation of the symbolic racism themes contrasts external or *structural* attributions about race, primarily reflecting denial of continuing racial discrimination and the belief that society provides blacks with too many undeserved special advantages, with internal or *individual* attributions about blacks, reflecting beliefs that blacks should try harder to get ahead and be less demanding in their calls for equality. Confirmatory factor analyses testing this two-factor model separate the individual and structural items quite neatly, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. The fit indices and factor loadings are also shown there. The two-factor models appear to fit the data fairly well in both datasets, falling within acceptable limits according to three of the six absolute fit indexes and all four incremental fit indexes.<sup>17</sup> This attributional two-factor solution also provides a significant improvement over the one-factor model in both samples.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the fit indexes show that there is little difference between the attributional two-factor model and the four-factor model in the LACSS sample, providing another reason to reject the less parsimonious four-factor model.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the structural and individual factors emerging from these confirmatory factor analyses are extremely highly correlated with each other (LACSS:  $\phi = .73$ ; NES:  $\phi = .77$ ).<sup>20</sup> As a result, we present models representing

<sup>16</sup> 1986 NES  $\phi = .77$ ; 1997 LACSS  $\phi = .96$ . Data not shown but results can be obtained on request.

<sup>17</sup> An alternative interpretation of this two-factor solution is methodological, since it also tends to divide "agree" from "disagree" items. To check on this, we created measures of acquiescence bias from the number of "agree" responses to other sets of Likert items balanced in direction (in the NES, six individualism and six antiegalitarianism items; in the LACSS, four items each on the causes and remedies of crime). That measure was regressed out of the symbolic racism items and the models shown in Figures 1 and 2 were reestimated. The results were almost identical in all respects; e.g., the AGFI was .97 and .91, respectively, rather than .96 and .91.

<sup>18</sup> LACSS ( $\Delta$ SCALED  $\chi^2/d.f.$ ) = .97,  $\Delta$ \_GFI = .08; NES ( $\Delta$ SCALED  $\chi^2/d.f.$ ) = 3.31,  $\Delta$ AGFI = .05.

<sup>19</sup> ( $\Delta$ SCALED  $\chi^2/d.f.$ ) = .00,  $\Delta$ AGFI = -.02.

<sup>20</sup> Kluegel and Bobo (1993) found a weaker correlation between the individual and structural forms of symbolic racism in the 1986 NES. However, they included an extraneous item and excluded some of our symbolic racism items. A strict replication of their analysis but including the latter repeats the

symbolic racism as a second-order factor in Figures 1 and 2.<sup>21</sup> The standardized loadings of the structural and individual factors on the second-order, global symbolic racism factor were .98 and .74, respectively, in the LACSS, and .95 and .82 in the NES, all highly significant.

Considering confirmatory factor analyses of these a priori models, then, the single-factor model is not an optimal fit to the data, and the four-factor model as well as the two-factor model distinguishing dominant ideology and political resentment are not appreciably better fitting (especially considering the greater item similarity within than between themes). So, we reject them as less parsimonious. The attributional two-factor model fits better than the others.

To confirm this, we turned to exploratory factor analyses to allow as much flexibility as possible in search of possible solutions, using maximum-likelihood extraction with oblique rotations, which allow items to load on both factors. In both datasets, the best solution was again a two-factor model contrasting “structural” and “individual” symbolic racism.<sup>22</sup> Since the two factors are highly correlated with each other (LACSS:  $\phi = .63$ ; NES:  $\phi = .54$ ), we would conclude that they are two closely related variants of the same underlying belief system. Our confidence in this conclusion is enhanced by the quite parallel findings across the two surveys.<sup>23</sup>

### *Consequences and Correlates of the Two Variants*

One test of whether these two variants are really slightly different pieces of a common underlying belief system, as opposed to being truly different constructs, is to see if they have different consequences and correlates. We developed subscales for both variants in each data set by averaging the items that fell together

results shown in Figure 1 ( $\phi = .84$ , as opposed to their .44; details on request). Also, controlling for correlated measurement error yields stronger estimated negative correlations between structuralism and individualism (Nelson 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Like their first-order counterparts, second-order factors are simply latent variables that can explain the variance in the first-order factors (with imprecision as indicated by D1 and D2). Since the second-order factor loadings had to be constrained to equality for identification of the model, we did not gain any degrees of freedom nor did the fit of the model change. However, we were able to analyze further the correlation between the two first-order factors.

<sup>22</sup> The initial analysis in each dataset recognized two factors: in the NES, the first had an eigenvalue of 3.25 and explained 40.7% of the variance, and the second, 1.06 and 13.3%, respectively; in the LACSS, the first had an eigenvalue of 4.54 and explained 41.2% of the variance, and the second, 1.18 and 10.7%, respectively.

<sup>23</sup> We replicated the factor analyses on the six symbolic racism items available in the 1992 NES. Results from the confirmatory factor analysis mirrored the results presented in Figures 1 and 2, with both factors highly correlated ( $\phi = .75$ ). An exploratory factor analysis, however, showed only a single underlying dimension with an eigenvalue of 2.77 that explained 46.1% of the variance. Similarly, using only exploratory factor analyses, Henry and Sears (2002) found the same two-factor solution in one other survey and a one-factor solution in another. These findings replicate our results and they also emphasize just how slight a distinction the two variants represent. Details on request.

TABLE 2

## The Consequences of Different Symbolic Racism Subscales

Symbolic Racism Scales	1986 NES Racial Policies	1997 LACSS Racial Policies
Full	.60***	.65***
Structural	.54***	.58***
Individual	.52***	.58***
Dominant Ideology	.54***	.63***
Political Resentment	.52***	.60***

*Source:* 1986 National Election Study and 1997 Los Angeles County Social Survey.

*Note:* Entries are bivariate correlation coefficients. Positive entries mean that negative racial attitudes are associated with more opposition to policies designed to help blacks. All variables are coded (0–1). Pair-wise deletion of missing values is employed.

\*significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*significant at  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*\*significant at  $p < .001$ .

in the two-factor structures presented in Figures 1 and 2.<sup>24</sup> The reliabilities remained high in both the 1986 NES and the 1997 LACSS (structural subscale  $\alpha = .65$  and  $.81$ ; individual subscale  $\alpha = .77$  and  $.76$ ).

First, the two subscales correlated very similarly with the composite racial policy scales in both the NES ( $r = .54$  and  $.52$ ), and the LACSS (both  $r = .58$ ), as shown in Table 2. Two other possible subscales, dominant ideology and political resentment, also proved to have almost identical correlations with the composite policy scales in both the NES ( $r = .54$  and  $.52$ ) and in the LACSS ( $r = .63$  and  $.60$ ), as also shown in Table 2. At the bivariate level, then, it appears not to matter at all which of the conventional measures of symbolic racism is used: they have almost identical effects on racial policy preferences. This is further evidence for the internal consistency of the symbolic racism belief system.

To pursue the point further, we tested the effects of the two subscales adding the controls ordinarily used to test the effects of symbolic racism (for example, see Hughes 1997; Sears et al. 1997).<sup>25</sup> Again, the two subscales have very similar effects, by several criteria. First, as shown in Table 3, when the two variants are entered separately in different models, their coefficients on the composite racial policy scales are almost identical, averaging  $.49$  for the structural subscale and  $.46$  for the individual subscale. When entered simultaneously in a single equation, they also have nearly identical effects on the composite policy scales, averaging  $.32$  and  $.34$ , respectively. To check on the stability of this equivalence across tests, we broke down the racial policies in the 1986 NES into the usual three subscales (the 1997 LACSS had too few policy items to make that feasible). As can

<sup>24</sup>The Real Change item had by far the lowest standardized first-order factor loadings and item-total correlations. Its manifest content is also somewhat ambiguous. As a result, we concluded that it was not a good indicator of symbolic racism and dropped it from all subsequent analyses.

<sup>25</sup>The exact control variables are the same as those used in the analyses shown in Table 5 below.

TABLE 3

The Relative Impacts of the Structural and Individual Symbolic Racism Subscales on Whites' Opposition to Policies Designed to Help Blacks

	1986 NES				1997 LACSS
	Federal Assistance	Affirmative Action	Equal Opportunity	Racial Policies	Racial Policies
	b	b	b	b	b
	(se)	(se)	(se)	(se)	(se)
Effects of Subsets of Symbolic Racism					
Each Subscale Alone					
Structural Subscale	.35*** (.04)	.49*** (.06)	.42*** (.06)	.42*** (.04)	.56*** (.08)
Individual Subscale	.34*** (.03)	.42*** (.05)	.40*** (.05)	.39*** (.03)	.53*** (.07)
Both Subscales Together					
Structural Subscale	.22*** (.04)	.35*** (.06)	.27*** (.07)	.28*** (.04)	.36*** (.08)
Individual Subscale	.26*** (.04)	.30*** (.05)	.30*** (.06)	.29*** (.03)	.38*** (.08)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> (%)					
1. Structural Subscale Only	33.2	20.4	23.6	39.2	47.7
2. Individual Subscale Only	35.5	20.7	24.9	41.3	49.0
3. Both Subscales	37.5	23.9	26.6	45.1	52.6
Unique R <sup>2</sup> Explained With:					
4. Structural Subscale Only: (3) – (2)	2.0	3.2	1.7	3.8	3.6
5. Individual Subscale Only: (3) – (1)	4.3	3.5	3.0	5.9	4.9
R <sup>2</sup> Shared By Both Subscales: (3) – (4 + 5)	31.2	17.2	21.9	35.4	44.1
Number of Cases	772	772	691	769	254

Source: 1986 National Election Study and 1997 Los Angeles County Social Survey.

Note: Entries in the top panel are unstandardized multivariate regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Regression coefficients for the other variables in each model are not presented in this table; they are listed in Table 5. Full results will be made available upon request. Positive entries mean that higher levels of symbolic racism are associated with more opposition to racial policies. All variables are coded (0–1). Entries in the bottom panel are adjusted R<sup>2</sup> (%).

\* significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* significant at  $p < .001$ .



be seen, the two variants yield almost identical coefficients to each other on each policy subscale.

We then assessed the unique variance explained by each subscale. We estimated the increment to  $R^2$  that each subscale added in a second stage of hierarchical regression equations, after the other subscale had been entered in the first stage. As shown in the bottom panel of Table 3, the increment in  $R^2$  that either subscale added in the second stage was very small relative to the shared variance explained in the first stage. That is, they explain mainly overlapping variance in policy preferences; each subscale explains little unique variance apart from the other.<sup>26</sup>

Do the individual and structural variants reside in different broader belief networks, or, in more psychological language, in different “nomological nets”? To test this we computed the correlations of the two symbolic racism subscales with the other attitudes, values, and demographic variables usually thought central to racial politics. These are presented in Table 4. The direction and significance of the correlations do not differ materially, though there are some modest differences in size. Consistent with symbolic racism theory, both variants are significantly related to antiblack affect and old-fashioned racism, though the individual variant is in most cases somewhat more highly correlated with these indicators of racial prejudice (as well as with a lack of higher education and residence in the South, the demographic indicators usually most closely associated with old-fashioned racism; see Schuman et al. 1997). Antiegalitarianism, on the other hand, is a little more closely linked to the structural variant.

To sum up, symbolic racism seems to be a quite coherent and unified belief system underlying the white public's attitudes toward racial politics. A priori structural equation models of symbolic racism found that a model of symbolic racism as a unified whole fits better than two alternatives, that its four constituent themes are distinct or that it breaks into dominant ideology and political resentment factors. A two-factor attributional model (individual vs. structural attributions for blacks' disadvantage) proved to be the best fitting, however, in both confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses. But the difference between these two factors is so slight that they seem best interpreted as two quite similar variants of the same underlying psychological construct: (1) they are highly correlated with each other and with the second-order factor of global symbolic racism; (2) they have almost completely overlapping effects on racial policy preferences across all policy domains; and (3) they correlate similarly with other attitudes (differing mainly in that the individual variant has somewhat stronger links to traditional racial prejudice), suggesting that they have similar social and psychological origins. We would conclude that these are slight variations within a

<sup>26</sup> Another approach used EQS models. The simplest models had only indirect paths of each symbolic racism subscale to policy dependent variables through a superordinate symbolic racism latent factor. Adding direct paths from each subscale to the dependent variables were superfluous. This too indicates that the two subscales had little independent political effect; their effects are almost entirely overlapping.

TABLE 4  
Correlates of the Symbolic Racism Sub-Scales

Correlates	1986 NES	1997 LACSS	1986 NES	1997 LACSS
	Individual Subscale	Individual Subscale	Structural Subscale	Structural Subscale
	r	r	r	r
<b>Racial Attitudes</b>				
Antiblack Affect	.24***	.21***	.31***	.11
Old-Fashioned Racism	.35***	.32***	.12***	.16*
<b>Political Attitudes</b>				
Party Identification	.07*	.34***	.09**	.38***
Ideology	.23***	.39***	.25***	.39***
Role of Government	.05	.22***	.10**	.23***
<b>Non-racial Values</b>				
Individualism	.23***	—	.17***	—
Antiegalitarianism	.13***	.23***	.26***	.36***
Moral Traditionalism	.22***	—	.23***	—
<b>Demographics</b>				
Age	.11***	-.02	.13***	-.04
Education	-.39***	-.29***	-.28***	-.13*
Gender	-.04	.10	.09*	.09
Region	.20***	—	.11***	—

Source: 1986 National Election Study and 1997 Los Angeles County Social Survey.

Note: Entries are bivariate correlation coefficients. Positive entries mean that negative black attitudes, conservative political attitudes, and conservative nonracial values are associated with more negative assessments of blacks. Years of age, levels of education, male gender, and Southern region are coded as if they are conservative. All variables are coded (0–1). Pair-wise deletion of missing values is employed.

\* significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* significant at  $p < .001$ .

consistent overall symbolic racism belief system. Other plausible distinctions within it prove not to be of great consequence. These findings are quite robust; they were replicated in almost identical form in two quite different surveys.

### Content Overlap in the Measurement of Symbolic Racism and Policy Preferences

The “common-content” hypothesis is that symbolic racism has strong associations with whites’ racial policy preferences only because the items used to measure both sets of variables are so similar in content. To test this hypothesis empirically, we purge symbolic racism items whose content might possibly overlap with the content of racial policy preferences and then reestimate the effects of symbolic racism. If this alternative interpretation of the effects of symbolic racism is correct, this purged symbolic racism scale should have markedly reduced correlations with policy preferences, and smaller (and perhaps even non-

significant) regression coefficients than those for the full scale. Instead, nonracial indicators of conservatism should show substantially increased effects, and the model with the purged scale should explain markedly less variance because of the loss of “tautological” items as predictors.

None of these expectations is borne out. First, symbolic racism continues to have strong correlations with racial policy preferences even when it is purged of items relevant to government. The correlations for the full scales average .62, and for the purged scales, .57, considering both surveys, a modest reduction that might have been expected in any case because the purged scales were based on fewer items and had slightly lower reliabilities. Turning to the regression equations shown in Table 5, the coefficient for the purged symbolic racism scale is slightly lower, but the reduction in slope is not statistically significant in either survey.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the coefficients for the measures of nonracial conservatism scarcely budge when the purged symbolic racism scale is substituted. Those for ideology rise very slightly, while those for role of government decrease slightly or stay the same, but the average for the partisan attitude terms rises only from .08 to .09. In no case is the change reliable. Finally, the adjusted  $R^2$  dips only slightly when the purged symbolic racism scale is used.<sup>28</sup>

In sum, the strong effects of symbolic racism on racial policy preferences seem not to be explained by content overlap with the dependent variables. Purging symbolic racism scales of items with reference to government do not markedly reduce their effects on racial policy preferences, the effects of nonracial conservatism do not step in to replace those of the purged items, and the overall level of explanation provided by the models does not decrease markedly despite the loss of predictors thought to be tautological with the dependent variables.<sup>29</sup> Again, the bottom line is that all conventional measures of symbolic racism have about the same effects.

### Symbolic Racism as a Distinctive Belief System

But is symbolic racism a genuinely distinctive and independent belief system, or is it merely redundant with older concepts that have traditionally been used to explain racial attitudes, such as political conservatism, old-fashioned racism,

<sup>27</sup>In the NES sample,  $b_{\text{diff}} = .11$ ,  $se_{\text{diff}} = .06$ ; in the LACSS:  $b_{\text{diff}} = .18$ ,  $se_{\text{diff}} = .11$ .

<sup>28</sup>Again the main results are quite parallel across the two surveys. In the LACSS, symbolic racism did correlate more strongly with partisan dispositions (see Table 4) and had somewhat stronger, and antiblack affect somewhat weaker, effects on policy preferences (see Table 5). These differences might be due to changes over time, locale, or sample composition, but explaining them would be a side point: the key finding is the approximate equivalence of various subscales of symbolic racism, which is strongly replicated across the two surveys.

<sup>29</sup>In general, the stronger effects of symbolic racism are not simply due to any greater reliability of a scale with more items. In the LACSS its reliability was lower than ideology and higher than inegalitarianism; in the NES, lower than that of ideology and moral traditionalism, equal to that of inegalitarianism, and higher than that of individualism.

TABLE 5

The Relative Impacts of the Full and Purged Symbolic Racism Scales on Whites' Opposition to Policies Designed to Help Blacks

Predictors	1986 NES Racial Policies				1997 LACSS Racial Policies			
	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)	b	(se)
Symbolic Racism								
Full Scale	.57***	(.04)	—	—	.73***	(.08)	—	—
Purged Scale	—	—	.46***	(.04)	—	—	.55***	(.08)
Racial Attitudes								
Anti-Black Affect	.13***	(.03)	.15***	(.03)	.08	(.06)	.10	(.07)
Old-Fashioned Racism	-.03	(.03)	-.03	(.03)	-.07	(.05)	-.07	(.05)
Political Attitudes								
Party Identification	.04	(.03)	.04	(.03)	.06	(.06)	.09	(.06)
Ideology	.13**	(.05)	.15**	(.05)	.14*	(.06)	.16**	(.06)
Role of Government	.08**	(.03)	.07**	(.03)	.05	(.04)	.05	(.04)
Nonracial Values								
Individualism	-.05	(.04)	.02	(.04)	—	—	—	—
Anti-Egalitarianism	.12***	(.03)	.13***	(.03)	.19**	(.07)	.21**	(.07)
Moral Traditionalism	.02	(.04)	.04	(.04)	—	—	—	—
Demographics								
Age	.04	(.03)	.03	(.03)	.13	(.07)	.11	(.07)
Education	.03	(.03)	.02	(.03)	-.08	(.06)	-.12	(.06)
Gender	.04**	(.01)	.05***	(.01)	.08**	(.03)	.07*	(.03)
Region	.03*	(.01)	.03*	(.01)	—	—	—	—
Constant	.14**	(.05)	.19***	(.05)	.03	(.06)	.14*	(.06)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> (%)	44.6		41.6		52.0		47.5	
Standard Error	.17		.17		.21		.22	
Number of Cases	769		769		257		257	

Source: 1986 National Election Study and 1997 Los Angeles County Social Survey.

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. Positive entries mean that negative black attitudes, conservative political attitudes, and conservative non-racial values are associated with more opposition to racial policies. Years of age, levels of education, male gender, and Southern region are coded as if they are conservative. All variables are coded (0–1). Pair-wise deletion of missing values is employed.

\* significant at  $p < .05$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* significant at  $p < .001$ .

individualism, or antiegalitarianism? To analyze this, we carry out confirmatory factor analyses containing measures of symbolic racism as well as these other constructs. Do the data fit better a model with a separate and distinctive symbolic racism factor, or is a separate symbolic racism factor unnecessary because the symbolic racism items more naturally migrate to the latent dimensions reflecting other constructs? We employ data from the 1986 NES, which had measures of all these concepts, and from the 2000 NES, which did not have old-fashioned racism or individualism but did have negative black stereotypes (the 1997 LACSS

did not include any of these three). We tested five different a priori models with confirmatory factor analyses, again using EQS. This required equating the number of items for each construct, as nearly as possible, to avoid predetermining the outcome by overloading the analysis with items for any particular construct.<sup>30</sup> We tested these five models:

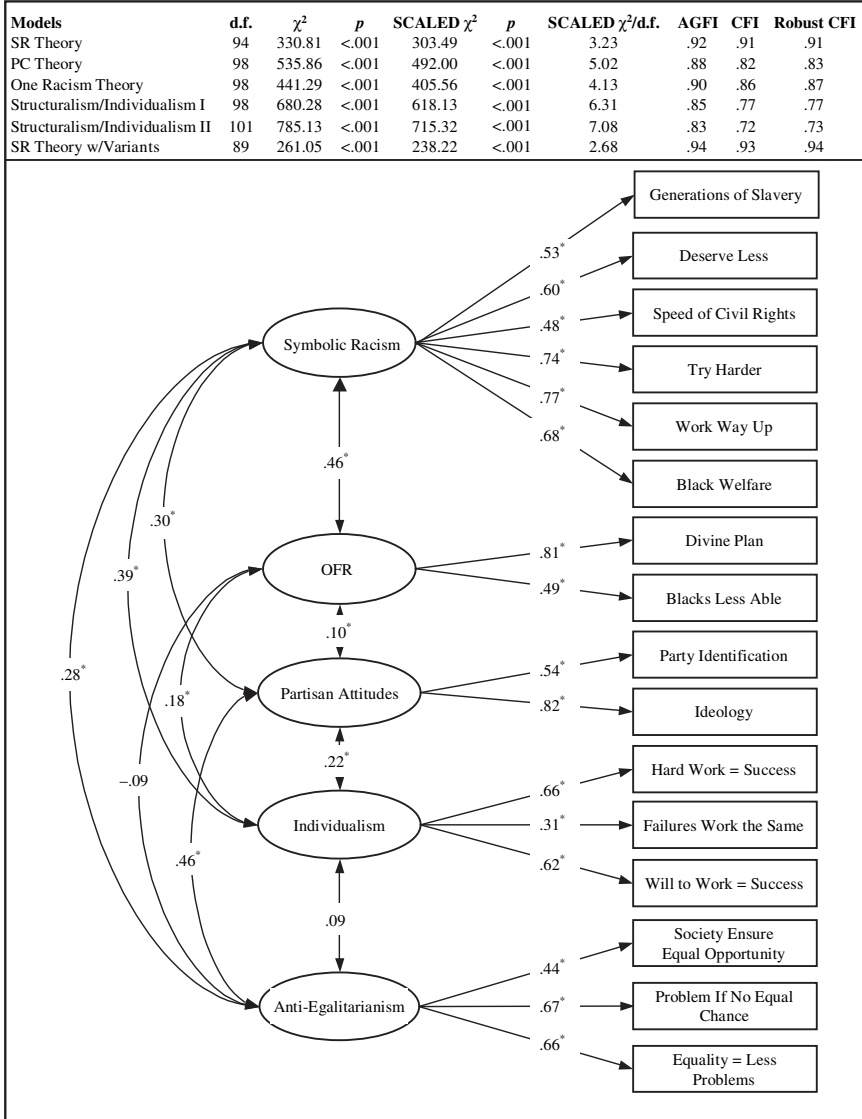
- (1) The *symbolic racism* model (“SR Theory”) specifies distinct latent variables for symbolic racism, old-fashioned racism, partisan attitudes, individualism, and antiegalitarianism.
- (2) The *principled conservatism* model (“PC Theory”) tests the view that symbolic racism taps politically conservative attitudes instead of racism (Sniderman and Tetlock 1986b; Tetlock 1994). It specifies one less separate latent construct in each survey, merging symbolic racism with party identification and conservatism.
- (3) The *one-racism* model (“One Racism Theory”) tests the view that symbolic racism is not distinct from older forms of prejudice (Bobo 1988; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986a, 1986b; Weigel and Howes 1985). It combines the items measuring traditional prejudice and symbolic racism into one global racism factor.
- (4) A *weak attributional* model (“Structuralism/Individualism I”) tests the view that symbolic racism is a heterogeneous subset of a larger cluster of racial (other than traditional racial prejudice) and nonracial attitudes that cleave along structural vs. individual lines (Kluegel and Bobo 1993). This model includes a structuralism factor (combining antiegalitarianism with the denial-of-discrimination and undeserved-advantage symbolic racism items), an individualism factor (combining individualism with the work-ethic and excessive-demands symbolic racism items), a traditional racial attitudes factor, and a partisan attitudes factor.
- (5) Finally, a *strong attributional* model (“Structuralism/Individualism II”) tests the view that strong individualists incorporate old-fashioned racism into their individualism because they see racial disparities as resulting from blacks’ own deficiencies, both genetic and behavioral (Kluegel and Bobo 1993). It replicates the fourth model but merges traditional racial attitudes into the individualism factor.

Figures 3 and 4 graphically present the results of the symbolic racism model and the fit indices for all five models for the 1986 NES and 2000 NES, respectively. According to all fit indices, the SR Theory model is the best-fitting model in each survey. Only one of the other models, in only one survey

<sup>30</sup>The optimal test would, of course, use as many items for each construct as are available. But we limited the number of symbolic racism items to avoid forcing an independent symbolic racism factor by including a disproportionate number of such items. We employed only 16 of the possible 20 items from the 1986 NES, choosing items with the highest item-total correlations, but results using all 20 variables were nearly identical. The 2000 NES had similar numbers of items measuring each construct and so was not adjusted.

FIGURE 3

Five-Factor Model of Symbolic Racism, Old-Fashioned Racism, Partisan Attitudes, Individualism and Anti-Eglitarianism, 1986 NES



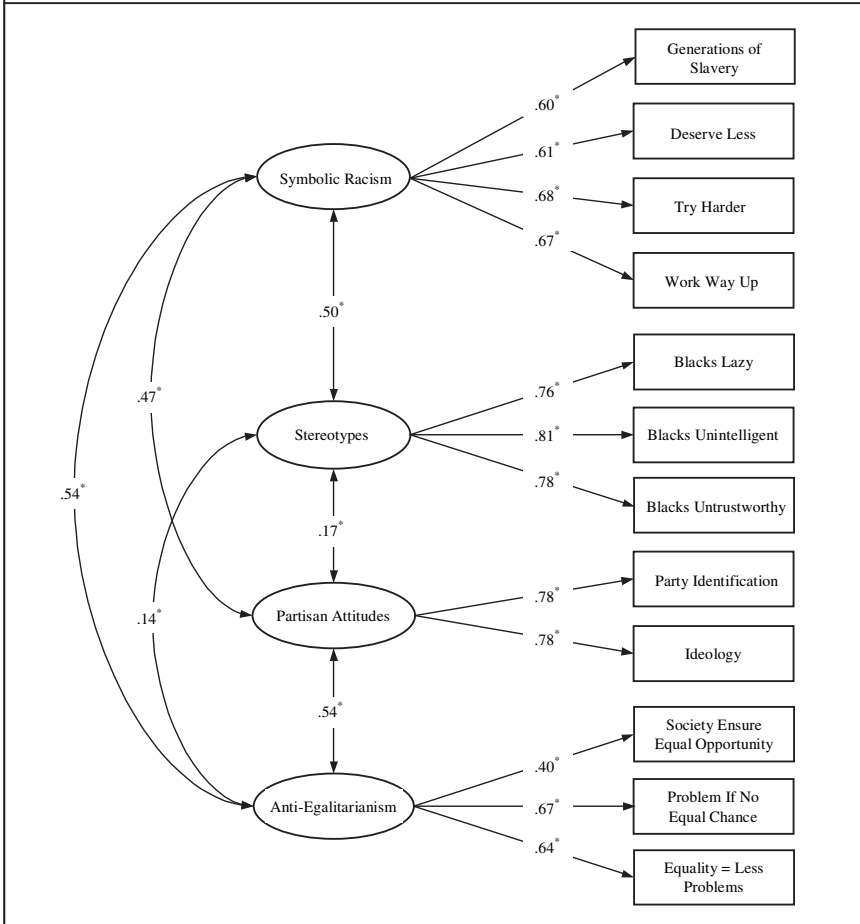
Source: 1986 National Election Study (NES).

Note: The statistical significance of the standardized parameter estimates was evaluated at  $\alpha = .05$  using Robust standard errors. All variances of the latent factors were fixed at 1.0.

FIGURE 4

Four-Factor Model of Symbolic Racism, Negative Black Stereotypes, Partisan Attitudes and Anti-Egalitarianism, 2000 NES

Models	d.f.	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	SCALED $\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	SCALED $\chi^2$ /d.f.	AGFI	CFI	Robust CFI
SR Theory	48	225.90	<.001	205.98	<.001	4.29	.97	.96	.96
PC Theory	51	719.78	<.001	660.06	<.001	12.94	.87	.85	.84
One Racism Theory	51	1062.44	<.001	957.20	<.001	18.77	.76	.77	.77
Structuralism/Individualism I	48	309.66	<.001	276.20	<.001	5.75	.93	.94	.94
Structuralism/Individualism II	51	820.19	<.001	733.11	<.001	14.38	.84	.83	.82
SR Theory w/Variants	44	84.64	<.001	76.80	.002	1.75	.98	.99	.99



Source: 2000 National Election Study (NES).

Note: The statistical significance of the standardized parameter estimates was evaluated at  $\alpha = .05$  using Robust standard errors. All latent factor variances were fixed at 1.0.

(Structuralism/Individualism I in the 2000 NES), even passes the usual absolute threshold for fit acceptability, but it does not provide a better fit to the data than does the SR Theory model.<sup>31</sup> In other words, adding a separate factor for the symbolic racism items substantially improves the fit to the data over models that dispense with a separate symbolic racism factor.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, we again find a slight improvement in fit by splitting symbolic racism into its individual and structural variants. Although the SR Theory model provides an acceptable fit to the data, the fit indices for the models that distinguish those variants are all somewhat better.<sup>33</sup> However, the two variants of symbolic racism are highly correlated ( $\phi = .87$  and  $.74$ ). This again suggests that these items are tapping the same underlying attitudinal structure and can be treated as slightly different variants of the same belief system.

What about the main theoretical alternatives? First, much has been written about how symbolic racism is simply another indicator of general conservatism rather than being specifically racial. These results do not bear this out. In both the 1986 and 2000 NES, the items used to measure symbolic racism load onto a different factor than ideology and party identification; the PC Theory model does not provide an acceptable fit to the data; and the symbolic racism and partisan factors are correlated at only the  $\phi = .30$  and  $.47$  level, respectively.

Second, symbolic racism seems also to be distinct from more traditional racial attitudes. Combining symbolic racism with either old-fashioned racism or negative black stereotypes in the One Racism Theory model does not fit the data as well as keeping them separate. But this is perhaps our weakest test because we were limited to only two old-fashioned racism items in the 1986 NES, and we were not able to replicate our findings in the 2000 NES since it did not contain any old-fashioned racism measures. For this specific purpose, we turned to recent General Social Surveys because they have the most adequate measures of both racial attitude dimensions (though not of all the other dimensions shown in Figures 3 and 4). We conducted exploratory factor analyses including all available items measuring the four themes of symbolic racism and all available unarguable measures of old-fashioned racism. Table 6 clearly shows that in all cases the two forms of racism are quite distinct.<sup>34</sup> The two factors are modestly

<sup>31</sup> Symbolic racism is conceptualized as reflecting antiblack rather than pro-white or mixed attitudes, but we used black-white stereotype difference scores in Figure 4 to control on possible response sets. Using only the black stereotype items did not alter the poor fit of the "one racism" model.

<sup>32</sup> Again, exploratory factor analyses using maximum-likelihood extraction with oblique rotations strongly replicate the confirmatory factor analyses. They yield distinct factors in both the 1986 and 2000 NES, with each factor representing a different construct. The symbolic racism items do not load appreciably on any other factor, nor is the symbolic racism factor strongly correlated with the other factors, averaging only  $.22$  and  $.40$  in the two surveys.

<sup>33</sup> 1986 NES ( $\Delta$ SCALED  $\chi^2/d.f.$ ) =  $.55$ ,  $\Delta$ AGFI =  $.02$ ; 2000 NES ( $\Delta$ SCALED  $\chi^2/d.f.$ ) =  $2.54$ ,  $\Delta$ AGFI =  $.01$ .

<sup>34</sup> The only item that shows evidence of loading on both factors is the attribution of blacks' socioeconomic disadvantage to a lack of motivation, a core theme in symbolic racism, but hardly a new theme in white Americans' views of blacks. Even so, it loads most heavily on the symbolic racism factor, as expected.



TABLE 6  
Exploratory Factor Analyses of Symbolic and Old-Fashioned Racism Items

	1994		1996A		1996B		1998		2000	
	SR	OFR	SR	OFR	SR	OFR	SR	OFR	SR	OFR
Symbolic Racism										
Discrimination not responsible	<b>.57</b>	-.09	<b>.49</b>	-.05	<b>-.57</b>	-.12	<b>.55</b>	.09	<b>.53</b>	-.12
Lack of motivation responsible	<b>.41</b>	.26	<b>.43</b>	.22	<b>-.38</b>	<b>.31</b>	<b>.52</b>	.21	<b>.51</b>	<b>.34</b>
Should work way up, no special favors	<b>.48</b>	.13	<b>.71</b>	-.02	<b>-.61</b>	.13	<b>.55</b>	.10	<b>.53</b>	.13
Too much govt. attention	<b>.68</b>	.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Old-Fashioned Racism										
Laws against interracial marriage	-.09	<b>.65</b>	-.01	<b>.57</b>	.04	<b>.60</b>	-.19	<b>.74</b>	.05	<b>.45</b>
No relatives marry black	—	—	—	—	-.23	<b>.38</b>	.27	<b>.44</b>	—	—
Whites can segregate neighborhood	.09	<b>.65</b>	.03	<b>.75</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—
No black president	.08	<b>.51</b>	.01	<b>.44</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lack of inborn ability responsible	-.01	<b>.53</b>	-.02	<b>.50</b>	.03	<b>.45</b>	.08	<b>.36</b>	-.14	<b>.70</b>
Lack of intelligence	—	—	—	—	.01	<b>.45</b>	.11	.23	.10	<b>.45</b>
Interfactor correlation (phi)	<b>.45</b>		<b>.41</b>		<b>-.35</b>		<b>.42</b>		<b>.31</b>	

Source: The General Social Surveys (GSS).

Note: Entries are coefficients from exploratory factor analyses (maximum likelihood, oblique rotations). The 1996 survey used a split-ballot design; the two analyses were conducted on different ballots. Bolded entries exceed .30.

correlated, of course, given that they share common negative references to blacks. But the evidence seems clear that symbolic racism is distinctively different from old-fashioned racism.

In sum, analyses from three different surveys indicate that symbolic racism is a discrete belief system, tapping an attitudinal dimension different from other conventional belief systems, such as conservative ideology, traditional racial prejudice, individualism, or antiegalitarianism. Only one of the confirmatory analyses indicated that a model without a separate factor for symbolic racism would be an adequate fit to the data, but even that model fit the data less well than the SR Theory model. A separate factor representing symbolic racism is necessary to fully model whites' attitudes and values relevant to race. Again, we find two highly correlated variants within the symbolic racism belief system, but they too are best treated as distinctive from these other conventional constructs.

## Conclusions

The theory of symbolic racism was first proposed 30 years ago to explain whites' continuing resistance to racial equality in the post-civil-rights era. Since then, symbolic racism has often been shown to be a strong predictor of whites' opposition to liberal racial policies and black candidates for elective office. But the theory has also come under vigorous attack. Our agenda here was to test empirically three prominent, though heretofore largely speculative, critiques about the conceptualization and measurement of symbolic racism.

First, is symbolic racism really a coherent and internally consistent psychological construct? We conclude that symbolic racism is best interpreted as a single logically and psychologically consistent belief system. It is expressed in terms of two slightly different, but highly correlated attributional variants, and in that sense, the present analyses offer evidence of some differentiation within that belief system. But they seem to reflect the same underlying psychological dimension. Most important, symbolic racism is sufficiently internally coherent that all of its subparts have nearly identical effects on racial policy preferences. Second, does symbolic racism only artifactually predict racial policy preferences because measures of both share the same content (i.e., opposition to an expansive federal government)? On empirical test, this initially plausible speculation does not explain away the effects of symbolic racism. The purged items have, however, been eliminated from the new symbolic racism scale in recognition of the interpretive complications they pose (Henry and Sears 2002). Third, we found that symbolic racism is a distinctive belief system, rather than simply borrowing elements from other more traditional constructs widely used to understand race and politics among whites: conservative ideology, individualism, antiegalitarianism, and old-fashioned racism. It is a psychologically important construct in its own right.

All of our findings are replicated across at least two surveys containing appropriate measurement for testing them; surveys that differ significantly in timing,

and in most cases, in survey methods, samples, and geography as well. So, we have confidence in their reliability. We believe that these findings should substantially reduce the plausibility of these particular critiques of the theory.

One final concern is with possible biases in survey research introduced by social desirability pressures against the direct expression of racial antagonism. For example, perhaps old-fashioned racism has simply gone underground rather than being replaced with a new manifest content, as the theory of symbolic racism suggests. Such biases might or might not be common in survey studies of racial attitudes, and they might or might not significantly threaten the basic conclusions of studies such as our own. A thorough discussion of this issue would go well beyond the scope of this paper, but we can address it briefly.

Three such threats seem most plausible. One is that true racial antagonism may simply be underreported. Such underreporting is suggested by evidence that white respondents tend to express more tolerant attitudes to black than to white interviewers (e.g., Fazio et al. 1995; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Schuman et al. 1997). Or they may decline to respond to racial items rather than revealing their true racial antagonism (Berinsky 1999). More racial antagonism seems to be expressed when interviewers cannot link respondents' antagonism specifically to race (in the so-called "list experiment" by Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilen 1997). Laboratory studies of "implicit" prejudice have also been interpreted as reflecting "true" racism, in contrast to the presumably censored version measured in surveys (e.g., Fazio et al. 1995; Greenwald and Banaji 1995).

On the other hand, such artificial suppression of expressed racial antagonism may not greatly jeopardize the findings reported above. Black interviewers probably do reduce whites' expressed racial antagonism, but less than 1% of the whites in the 1986 NES were interviewed by blacks. Few white respondents declined to answer the racial attitude questions used here, so whites must only rarely have avoided honest expressions of racial antagonism by declining to state an opinion.<sup>35</sup> The "list experiment" technique is provocative, but it has not been validated and disconcertingly, its estimates of bias range widely over studies. The idea of "implicit" prejudice has attracted much research, but it is not self-evidently a more valid index of "true" prejudice than are survey measures: it too is influenced by race of interviewer (e.g., Lowery and Sinclair 2001); its relationship to survey measures yield mixed results (e.g., Fazio et al. 1995; Wittenbrink, Judd, and Park 1997); and it may simply be a different form of racial antagonism rather than a better measure of it, and possibly less relevant to deliberate and thoughtful behaviors such as arriving at political judgments (Dovidio et al. 1997; Fazio et al. 1995).

<sup>35</sup> In the 1986 NES, the average percentage with missing data was 3% on both the symbolic racism and the old-fashioned racism items. Berinsky's (1999) evidence that some whites declined to respond, rather than honestly reporting their opposition to integration, rested heavily on two older NES racial policy items. They had far more stringent screens for opinionation than more contemporary items have; e.g., in the 1986 NES, an average of 33% gave no opinion on those two items, against an average of only 6% on the other five policy items we used above.

A second possibility is that social desirability could artificially inflate the association between symbolic racism and racial policy preferences, if it suppresses true racial antagonism on both sets of measures in correlated fashion. This too seems unlikely to explain our findings. For one thing, the most obvious expressions of racism (e.g., old-fashioned racism, blatant racial stereotypes, and the black feeling thermometer) should be suppressed even more than symbolic racism. However, they have far weaker associations with racial policy preferences than does symbolic racism (e.g., Hughes 1997; Sears et al. 1997). Also, nonwhite interviewers produced no stronger correlations between symbolic racism and racial policy preferences in the 1986 NES than did white interviewers, even though they presumably introduced stronger social desirability pressures. The average correlations between the six symbolic racism scales and the composite racial policy scale were identical ( $r = .55$ ) for data gathered by the two sets of interviewers.<sup>36</sup>

A third possibility is that artificial suppression of true racial antagonism inflates error variance in all racial attitude measures. If so, the predictive power of causal models about racial politics, such as the symbolic racism model, may actually be underestimated due to inflated error variance. That should not threaten our findings because it should simply make confirmation of the theory of symbolic racism more difficult. In sum, response biases in survey questions on race are of concern. So far, such biases do not seem to be of sufficient magnitude to jeopardize our main conclusions, however.

We have two main conclusions, then. One is that symbolic racism is best interpreted as a single logically and psychologically consistent belief system. And it is distinctively different from other psychological constructs traditionally thought central to the white public's response to racial politics. The present analyses, however, offer greater nuance about differentiation within the symbolic racism belief system than does previous research.

The second is that symbolic racism has about the same effects no matter which standard measure of it is used. It remains the strongest explanation for whites' opposition to racial policies no matter whether it is measured in terms of structural or internal symbolic racism, dominant ideology or political resentment, or measures purged of references to government. After the many published speculations about possible differences among measures of symbolic racism, the main story turns out to be straightforward. All measures of symbolic racism have about the same effects.

The bottom line seems clear, then. The theory was initially more intuitively induced than rigorously deductive, and therefore somewhat imprecise. The process of critical scholarly scrutiny has unquestionably sharpened it. But on

<sup>36</sup>Data collected by white interviewers (872 white respondents) generated six correlations that ranged from .60 to .52; those collected by black interviewers (34 white respondents) yielded correlations ranging from .59 to .50.

empirical examination, the theory proves to have generally been on the mark, and to remain current today.

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Christopher Tarman (ctarman@ucla.edu) is a Ph.D. Candidate of political science, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1484. David O. Sears (sears@issr.ucla.edu) is Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Political Science and Director of the Institute for Social Science Research, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1484.

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