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*Cracks in American Apartheid:  
The Political Impact of Prejudice  
among Desegregated Whites*

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Despite the heroic efforts and real achievements provided by the Civil Rights movement, the United States remains today a profoundly segregated society. Here we investigate whether racial isolation affects the extent to which prejudice becomes insinuated into the opinions white Americans express on matters of racial policy. Analyzing national survey data well suited to this question, we find that racial isolation generally *enhances* the impact of prejudice on opinion; that the political potency of prejudice increases insofar as racial isolation prevails in whites' everyday lives. In the conclusion of the article, we locate our results in the broader literature on segregation and draw out their implications for racial politics into the future.

**F**or all the substantial accomplishments of the Civil Rights movement, the United States remains today in many respects a profoundly segregated society. Jim Crow is gone, swept aside by federal legislation, Supreme Court decisions, and waves of protests and demonstrations. But in communities across the country, blacks and whites are separated more completely now than they were at the turn of the century (Farley and Allen 1987; Farley and Frey 1992; Massey and Denton 1993). Current levels of racial separation are striking: in large American cities, roughly 80% of black residents would have to resettle in other neighborhoods in order for racial balance to be achieved (Farley and Allen 1987). Segregation has diminished somewhat during the last 20 years (Farley and Allen 1987; Farley and Frey 1992), but even should this trend continue, it would take nearly a *half century* for the level of black–white residential integration to creep up to the level already attained by Hispanic Americans, themselves no strangers to segregation (Farley and Allen 1987; Farley and Frey 1992). With evidence of this sort in mind, Massey and Denton (1993) adopt, as we do, the provocative term “apartheid” to describe the racial segregation that is a central and continuing feature of contemporary American social life.

An early version of this article was given at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, August 30, 1991.

Our purpose here is to examine the political implications of racial isolation. Specifically we ask how segregation affects the extent to which prejudice becomes insinuated into the opinions white Americans express on matters of racial policy. Our question is important, not least because an investigation into the political role played by racial prejudice provides a window onto the health and vitality of the American experiment with democratic politics. So Gunnar Myrdal argued 50 years ago in *An American Dilemma*; and so it is argued in *A Common Destiny*, the recent National Academy of Sciences report on the status of black Americans:

On the most general plane, Americans' attitudes about the 'color line' can be understood as a test of their commitment to democratic values. Tolerance, equality, and respect for minority rights are all core democratic values. . . . there is no doubt that the character of racial attitudes and related behaviors reflects on the success of American democracy. (Jaynes and Williams 1989, 562)

The question is important also because the white public's views on racial policy appear to shape what the national government actually does (Burstein 1985; Page and Shapiro 1983). Finally, and on a more practical note, our inquiry may provide a glimpse of where we are headed. If the country is gradually becoming less segregated, if blacks and whites are intermingling more thoroughly as time goes on, what is likely to happen to white opinion on matters of race?

Our analysis takes for granted a pair of propositions well established in previous empirical work: that many white Americans continue to harbor emotionally charged derogatory beliefs about blacks and that such beliefs figure prominently in whites' opposition to policies designed to narrow racial inequalities (Apostle et al. 1983; Bobo and Kluegel 1991a; Kinder and Sanders 1990, 1995; Kinder and Sears 1981; McConahay 1986; Sears, Hensler, and Speer 1979; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Sniderman, Brody, and Kuklinski 1984). The point we wish to add here is simply that the impact of racial resentments is itself variable. In fact, we already know that the political impact of prejudice depends in part upon the sheer prominence of racist appeals (Kinder, Mendelberg, and Dawson 1994), and in a more subtle way, on how elites construct campaigns and frame issues (Kinder and Sanders 1990; Mendelberg 1992; Nelson and Kinder 1994). The question we address now is whether the political impact of prejudice depends as well upon racial isolation.

How might this work? Two good reasons support the expectation that isolation diminishes the power of prejudice. The first is drawn from realistic group conflict theory, which locates antagonism between groups in competition over scarce resources (Blumer 1958; Campbell 1965; Sherif and Sherif 1953; Sumner 1906; Van den Berghe 1967). In this analysis, racial groups are "vehicles for the pursuit of interest in modern pluralist societies," "participants in ongoing competition for control of economic, political, and social structures . . ." (Giles and Evans 1984, 470–71). From this theoretical perspective, the perception of threat, grounded in conditions of real competition, is the engine that drives social conflict. Thus, insofar as racial proximity breeds the perception of racial threat, proximity will increase the potency of prejudice.

It seems quite plausible that proximity will be interpreted in just this way. In the view of many whites, blacks in the neighborhood threaten property values and safe schools; blacks at church violate definitions of community; blacks at work stir up apprehensions about lost jobs and promotions. Surrounded with such threats, whites may react to proposals to assist blacks with resentment and hostility (Rieder 1985). At the same time, distance from blacks allows whites the luxury of expressing racial tolerance. "Limousine liberals" whose own lives are untouched by troubled racial encounters can perhaps more easily put their prejudice aside; their views on matters of race may be derived less from judgments of the moral standing of black Americans and more from considerations of principles and values.

This sociological prediction is complemented by a psychological one, drawn from recent research in cognition. The psychological point takes off from Herbert Simon's general observation that "human thinking powers are very modest when compared with the complexities of the environment in which human beings live. Faced with complexity and uncertainty, lacking the wits to optimize, they must be content to satisfice—to find "good enough" solutions to their problems and "good enough" courses of action (1979, 3). When asked for their opinion on open housing or aid to the cities, then, people surely do not review everything they know that might bear on the question. Instead, they satisfice: they consider a sample of what they know, and a sample of convenience at that. Some considerations prove decisive; others are ignored. The relative importance of each depends, at least in part, on its momentary accessibility. "People solve problems, including the determination of their own values, with what comes to mind" (Fischhoff, Slovic, and Lichtenstein 1980, 127). We see no reason to think that this conclusion should not apply to the domain of race, generally (Devine 1989), and to opinions on complex matters like affirmative action or compensatory education, in particular. From this perspective, the meaning of proximity for whites is that their beliefs about blacks are likely to be chronically activated: under conditions of racial proximity, racial stereotypes should be comparatively accessible. By enhancing the likelihood that racial stereotypes will come to mind, proximity may increase the role of prejudice in public opinion on racial policy.

There is another way to think about racial isolation, however, one that turns the expected outcome around. This account regards racial isolation not as a safe haven for liberal tolerance but as a dangerous depository for prejudice and ignorance. Whites who do not encounter blacks as a matter of daily routine are denied the opportunity of learning first hand about the character and diversity of black Americans. They are unable to accumulate information from their own experience to offset the racial stereotypes that were a likely part of their upbringing. When asked about policies to provide assistance to blacks or to protect blacks from discrimination, such whites have only their stereotypes to fall back on. In contrast, whites who regularly encounter blacks in their daily lives have a richer and more varied base of information. Should their stereotypes be activated in considering policy matters, they may have a larger reservoir of sympathetic sentiments from which

to draw as counterpoint. Less captured by categorical stereotypes, they may be less likely to act on them.<sup>1</sup>

#### DATA

With good arguments on both sides, it is time to turn to evidence. To answer our question, we need reliable measures of three central concepts: prejudice, policy, and racial isolation. And, given our interest in current conditions, the more recent the data, the better. The 1990 General Social Survey (GSS) delivers on all fronts. As part of an ongoing series of surveys of national public opinion, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) carried out extensive personal interviews in 1990 with a probability sample of 1,372 English-speaking adults living in households in the continental United States. For obvious reasons, our analysis is confined to whites ( $n = 1,150$ ). As we will see shortly, the 1990 GSS included: (1) measures of racial stereotypes; (2) a broad set of questions on public policy, ranging from policies where the racial dimension is explicit and clear (e.g., the desirability of a fair housing law that would prohibit discrimination against blacks) to cases where the racial dimension is implicit (e.g., the desirability of increased federal assistance to big cities); and (3) measures of the extent to which whites' social worlds include blacks.<sup>2</sup>

Our analysis takes full advantage of this fortuitous conjunction of evidence. In the next section of the paper we briefly take up the meaning and measurement of prejudice in contemporary American society. In the following section we estimate the impact of prejudice on white public opinion on matters of race, without regard to racial isolation. And in the third and final empirical section, the heart of the article, we determine how this impact—the effect of prejudice on opinion—is itself a product of racial isolation. With these results in hand, we close the article with some brief speculation about the significance of segregation for democratic politics.

#### PREJUDICE

Prejudice against blacks first took hold in American soil as a justification for the degradation of slavery; it persists at least in part because it continues to justify blacks' place at the bottom of American society. It does so by placing responsibility

<sup>1</sup>The basic idea here bears more than a passing resemblance to the assumption motivating the vast empirical literature on the so-called "contact hypothesis" (Amir 1969; Jackman and Crane 1986; Miller and Brewer 1984; Stephan 1985). The original notion was that the more contact between the races the better: interracial contact would educate whites about blacks; crude stereotypes would crumble in the face of ordinary everyday experience. Forty years later, we know that contact sometimes leads to greater racial tolerance, sometimes to heightened racial tensions, and sometimes it makes no difference. Consistent with these mixed empirical returns, we find no effect of what we call racial proximity (defined later in the paper) on prejudice in the 1990 GSS data. With proximity treated as endogenous, with proximity and prejudice both coded to the 0-1 interval, and with estimates provided by two-stage least squares, the structural coefficient on proximity is a mere  $-.02$ ,  $SE = .03$ .

<sup>2</sup>For details on sample design and study administration of the 1990 GSS, see Davis and Smith (1990). The study follows a modular format: not all questions are posed to all respondents, so the full sample is not available for each analysis.

for racial differences in economic achievement and social standing on the limitations and inadequacies of blacks themselves.

The seven GSS questions we use to measure prejudice are displayed in table 1. As can be seen there, the questions include a mixture of biological and individualistic forms of prejudice. Some refer to intelligence and inborn ability; others refer to effort and motivation. All the questions are categorical and abstract, in that they take as their frame of reference blacks as a group and society as a whole. Taken together, the questions offer white Americans the opportunity to comment broadly on what they take to be the essential characteristics of black Americans.

Across the various questions, the most prominent theme is the failure of blacks, in whites' eyes, to measure up to the standards of economic individualism. Almost one half of whites (44.6%) thought that blacks tended to be lazy; more than one half (56.3%) believed that blacks preferred to live off welfare rather than be self-supporting; a decisive majority (60.1%) said that blacks have lousy jobs and crummy housing because they lack the motivation to pull themselves up out of poverty. That blacks might be dangerous or disloyal or dim received some support as well, but whites' major complaint centered on the apparent failure of self-reliance to take hold among black Americans.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1 would seem to be running over with evidence of racial stereotyping, but it is hard to say with authority. By one definition, racial stereotypes are not just negative beliefs that whites hold about blacks. According to McCauley, Stitt, and Segal (1980), racial stereotypes consist of those negative qualities that whites associate *distinctively* with blacks, that are presumed to set blacks apart. Do whites see blacks as *particularly* shiftless? Do whites single out blacks as *specially* dangerous?

Many white Americans do. The first five questions in table 1 were asked about whites as well as about blacks, thereby providing a natural point of comparison. We created five new variables, based on difference scores, and display them separately in figure 1. The midpoint of the horizontal axis of each represents the point of no difference: whites who take this view believe that blacks and whites are equally intelligent, hard-working, and so forth. As figure 1 indicates, sizable numbers of white Americans are "color-blind" in this way. To the left of the midpoint appear those whites who believe that proportionately more blacks than whites possess desirable characteristics. Testifying to the power and ubiquity of racial stereotypes, virtually no whites express such a view. To the right of the midpoint, finally, are those whites who believe the reverse: that whites are more hard-working than blacks, more intelligent, and so forth. Most white Americans land here, in proportions ranging from a simple majority in the case of patriotism to an overwhelming majority in the case of self-supporting. Thus, virtually all white Americans subscribe to racial stereotypes, some much more than others.

But do such views constitute a single and coherent perspective, a direct reflection of racial prejudice? We test this assumption with confirmatory factor analysis,

<sup>3</sup>Table 1 excludes those whites who refused to judge blacks (on average, slightly less than 7% of the sample).

TABLE 1

## RACIAL STEREOTYPING AMONG WHITE AMERICANS IN 1990

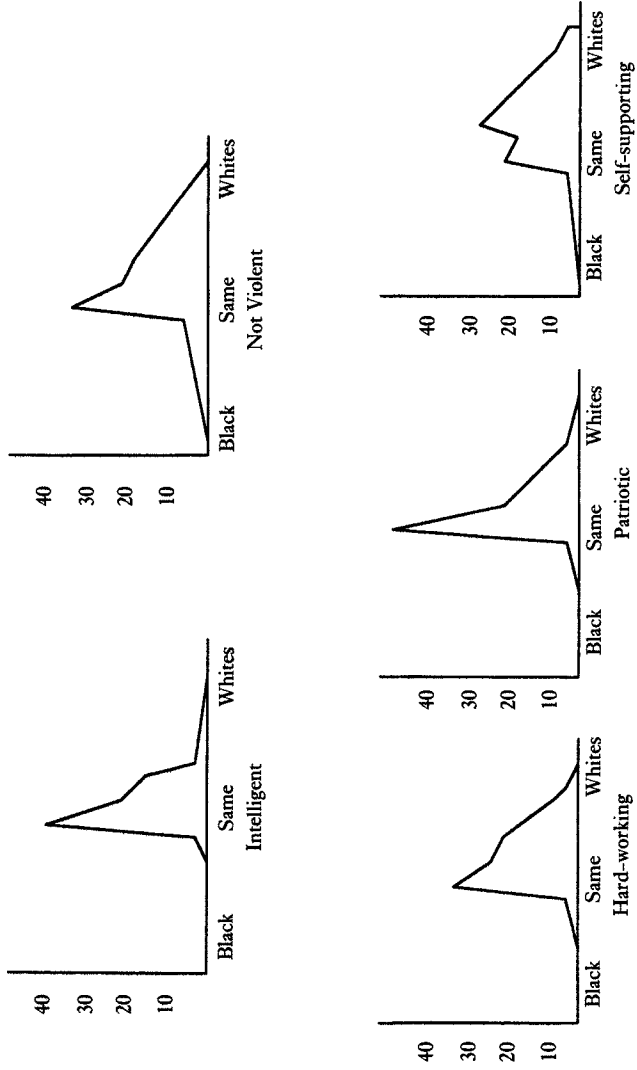
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1. Hard-working	
Almost all blacks are lazy	6.2%
—	14.4
—	24.0
Neither	33.2
—	11.0
—	3.7
Almost all blacks are hard-working	2.2
2. Violent	
Almost all blacks are prone to violence	8.6%
—	16.7
—	25.5
Neither	28.2
—	8.5
—	4.7
Almost all blacks are not prone to violence	1.6
3. Intelligent	
Almost all blacks are unintelligent	2.1%
—	7.2
—	19.6
Neither	44.1
—	13.3
—	4.9
Almost all blacks are intelligent	2.4
4. Self-supporting	
Almost all blacks prefer to live off welfare	10.2%
—	23.3
—	22.8
Neither	26.4
—	7.6
—	2.9
Almost all blacks prefer to be self-supporting	1.7
5. Patriotic	
Almost all blacks are unpatriotic	2.3%
—	4.1
—	10.6
Neither	34.8
—	17.4
—	13.9
Almost all blacks are patriotic	7.9
6. Blacks have worse jobs, income, and housing than whites because most blacks have less in-born ability to learn.	
Yes	18.2%
Don't know	3.3
No	78.0
7. Blacks have worse jobs, income and housing than whites because most blacks just don't have the motivation or will power to pull themselves up out of poverty.	
Yes	60.1%
Don't know	6.2
No	33.2

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Source: 1990 General Social Survey.

FIGURE 1  
 BLACKS COMPARED WITH WHITES, AMONG WHITE AMERICANS



Source: 1990 General Social Survey.



TABLE 2  
IS RACIAL STEREOTYPING COHERENT?

	Factor Loadings		Reliabilities
	Coefficient	S.E.	
Hard-working	.095	.004	.551
Violent	.060	.005	.163
Intelligent	.072	.004	.338
Self-supporting	.110	.004	.574
Patriotic	.066	.004	.306
Less ability	.154	.013	.153
Less will	.195	.015	.174
			Total = .775
	Chi-square with 14 degrees of freedom = 113.41		
	Adjusted goodness of fit = .943		
	Root mean square residual = .004		

Source: 1990 General Social Survey.

Maximum Likelihood Factor Analysis (Estimates based on Variance-Covariance Matrix)

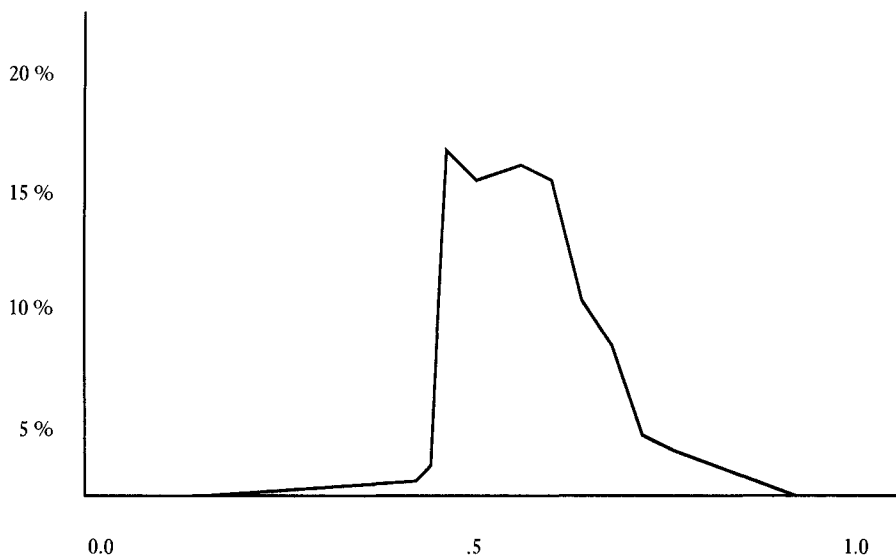
based on Joreskog's maximum likelihood model (Joreskog 1969). For convenience, we coded all seven variables to the zero-one interval, with 1.0 representing the prejudiced end of the continuum. The results, shown in table 2, indicate that a single factor model fits the observed relationships reasonably well. All seven of the items load substantially on the latent factor. Moreover, the reliabilities of the individual items are respectable, ranging from .196 in the case of violent to .525 in the case of self-supporting. The model estimates the overall reliability of the seven indicators to be .775. These results generally support the claim that we have in hand a reliable measure of prejudice.<sup>4</sup>

The consistency apparent in table 2 enables us to create an overall scale of racial prejudice, which is displayed in figure 2. The scale is centered at .61, with a standard deviation of .10. A score of 1.0 represents complete endorsement of derogatory racial stereotypes, while a score of 0.0 requires whites to say that in matters of ability and character, blacks are superior to whites, as well as to reject the claim that current inequalities are due to black inferiority of one sort or another. As figure 2 indicates, scores on the prejudice scale are more or less normally distributed, with the entire distribution displaced to the right.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Further tinkering with the factor model is of course possible and perhaps even desirable: the single factor model's fit to the evidence is far from perfect. Various modifications did indeed improve the fit, but they did so without introducing any material changes in our results or conclusions. These efforts and results are available upon request.

<sup>5</sup>To create the scale, we first coded each of the seven questions onto the 0-1 range, where 1.0 stands for a racially prejudiced answer. We then calculated a weighted average across the individual prejudice questions. Weights are given by  $B$ , the bivariate regression of the prejudice latent factor on the observed indicators, taken from the confirmatory factor analysis reported in the text. The scale weights are:

FIGURE 2  
DISTRIBUTION OF SCORES ON RACIAL PREJUDICE SCALE  
AMONG WHITE AMERICANS



Source: 1990 General Social Survey.

Measured in this fashion, the scale of racial prejudice is associated with whites' social background characteristics in a manner that is fully consistent with previous research on intolerance in general and race prejudice in particular. We find specifically that prejudice was more common among the elderly, among Southerners, and especially among those with less formal schooling.<sup>6</sup> Prejudice is also sharply associated with straightforward measures of racial animosity provided elsewhere on the 1990 GSS. In particular, whites who regarded blacks as less able, less enterprising, more dangerous, and so on were more reluctant, on their own admission, to send their children to integrated schools (the unstandardized regression coefficient,  $B$ , indexing the impact of prejudice on objections to integrated schools, with both variables coded onto the 0–1 scale, was  $.83$ ,  $SE = .11$ ). They were more likely to express distress at the prospect of blacks moving into their neighborhoods ( $B = .76$ ,  $SE = .06$ ). And they were more likely to balk at the prospect that a close relative might marry a black person ( $B = .85$ ,  $SE = .06$ ).

2.528 (hard-working); .633 (violent); 1.380 (intelligent); 2.404 (self-supporting); 1.307 (patriotic); .230 (less ability); and .213 (less will power).

<sup>6</sup>The literature on this point is enormous. For a summary of the early survey work, see Sears (1969). For a sampling of more recent research, consult Bobo and Licari (1989); Weil (1985); McClosky and Brill (1983).

## PREJUDICE AND POLICY

With some assurance that we have in hand a reliable and valid measure of prejudice, we can now move on to assess its impact on public opinion. Convenient to our purpose, the 1990 GSS carried an extensive set of policy questions relevant to race, ranging from disputes over segregation that were a central preoccupation of the Civil Rights movement on up to the current and contentious debate over affirmative action. The full set is on display in table 3, organized into four categories.

The first, represented by three separate questions, explores several aspects of opinion on racial integration. As table 3 shows, as late as 1990, a sizable minority of the white public—some 20%—continued to favor legal prohibitions of racial intermarriage. Apprehensions about “miscegenation” and the threat that blacks posed to the “purity of the white race” were of course commonplace in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American rhetoric on race (e.g., Fredrickson 1971; Myrdal 1944). It may come as an unpleasant surprise to discover that so many white Americans are still prepared to enlist “the majesty of the law” to buttress their anti-amalgamation sentiments.<sup>7</sup> Table 3 also shows that whites are generally divided over efforts to make race discrimination in the housing market illegal, and decisively opposed to the busing of black and white children for the purposes of school desegregation.<sup>8</sup>

The second category of race policies, consisting of a pair of questions, takes up the general role of the federal government in providing assistance to black Americans. The first poses the issue as a matter of special treatment, justified on the grounds of past discrimination. Put this way, the question captures at least some of the contemporary debate over affirmative action. As table 3 shows, special efforts for blacks were quite unpopular among whites in 1990 (as others find as well: e.g., Kluegel and Smith 1986; Lipset and Schneider 1978; Sigelman and Welch 1991). The second question simply requires whites to indicate their priorities on government spending. As table 3 indicates, most whites ended up endorsing the view that the federal government spends about the right amount on assistance to blacks; less than one quarter wanted federal spending on black Americans increased.<sup>9</sup>

In the next category appear three questions that represent what might be called the “new liberal welfare agenda” (Bobo and Kluegel 1991b). Each calls for government intervention, consistent with American liberalism since the New Deal, but each also attempts to create circumstances that enable poor or disadvantaged blacks to provide for themselves, consistent with American individualism. The first proposes the establishment of enterprise zones to induce businesses and industries to locate in or near black communities; the second recommends spending more

<sup>7</sup>The quoted phrase belongs to C. Vann Woodward, used ironically with reference to the Jim Crow statutes (1974, xii).

<sup>8</sup>Whites who favor laws to make marriage between blacks and whites illegal are also likely to oppose fair housing (Pearson  $r = .28$ ); opinions on school busing, however, are virtually independent of either of the other two (Pearson  $r = .01$  for intermarriage and  $.13$  for fair housing).

<sup>9</sup>Responses to the two questions under this category are quite strongly correlated: Pearson  $r = .42$ .

TABLE 3

## WHITE AMERICANS' OPINIONS ON RACE POLICY

Segregation	
1. Do you think there should be laws against marriages between blacks and whites?	
Yes	20%
Don't know	3
No	77
2. Community referendum on housing?	
Homeowners can sell to whomever they choose	43%
Neither, don't know	5
Homeowners cannot refuse to sell on account of race or color	52
3. In general, do you favor or oppose the busing of blacks and white children from one school district to another?	
Favor	29%
Don't know	6
Oppose	65
General federal assistance	
4. Some people think that blacks have been discriminated against for so long that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standards. Others believe that the government should not be giving special treatment to blacks.	
Strongly agree that government is obligated to help blacks	7%
—	9
—	36
—	18
Strongly agree that government shouldn't give special treatment	30
5. Assistance to blacks.	
Spending too much (government) money	26%
About the right amount	50
Spending too little (government) money	24
Individualistic remedies	
6. Giving business and industry special tax breaks for locating in largely black areas.	
Strongly favor	8%
Favor	34
Neither favor nor oppose	27
Oppose	24
Strongly oppose	7
7. Spending more money on the schools in black neighborhoods, especially for preschool and early education programs.	
Strongly favor	18%
Favor	49
Neither favor nor oppose	17
Oppose	12
Strongly oppose	4
8. Provide special college scholarship for black children who maintain good grades.	
Strongly favor	17%
Favor	52
Neither favor nor oppose	15
Oppose	11
Strongly oppose	5

TABLE 3 (continued)

Implicit racial policy	
9. Death penalty for person convicted for murder.	
Approve	78%
No opinion	6
Disapprove	17
10. Assistance to big cities.	
Spending too much (government) money	27%
About the right amount	53
Spending too little (government) money	21
11. Welfare.	
Spending too much (government) money	39%
About the right amount	41
Spending too little (government) money	20

Source: 1990 General Social Survey.

money on early education for blacks; and the third calls for designating college scholarships for black children who maintain good grades. As table 3 indicates, all three attracted considerable support from whites. Clear majorities approved of the two education initiatives, and, on balance, white opinion also favored tax breaks for businesses willing to locate in black communities.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, table 3 also includes three policy questions that make no explicit mention of blacks and whites at all. We include them together and in our analysis because each has an implicit racial dimension, even if it is rarely acknowledged in public debate. The first represents the domain of crime and punishment and refers specifically to the death penalty. In the last quarter century especially, crime has become a coded way for politicians to talk about race, to signal to whites that they have their interests at heart. Capital punishment may be an especially effective venue for trafficking in racial fears and apprehensions, since, according to the figures reported in table 3, capital punishment for convicted murderers is extremely popular among white Americans. Also included in this set is federal assistance to big cities. If cities are the dangerous and deteriorating places where black Americans make their home, then aid to the cities may be understood as license to give away benefits and programs to those who refuse to help themselves. However this may be, table 3 indicates that whites seem quite divided over the plight of large cities in general. The last question of this set, and of the entire table, concerns federal support for welfare. After a full decade of conservative government bent on reducing social programs, fewer than one white American in five argued that the government should spend more on welfare. To put this figure in perspective, when the identical question was posed, this time about government assistance *to the poor*, white support for increased spending more than tripled (to 63.2%). Like crime and

<sup>10</sup>Responses to the three questions are highly correlated (average Pearson  $r = .54$ ). These questions appeared on only one form of the 1990 GSS; the number of cases available for their analysis is correspondingly reduced:  $n$  is roughly 560.

aid to the cities, then, welfare may be for some whites a symbol of government's misguided generosity to black Americans.

Our immediate object is to estimate the impact of prejudice on this broad array of policies, from fair housing to welfare spending. As we do so, we must take into account alternative explanations. White opposition to fair housing or welfare spending surely includes causes in addition to prejudice. Here we take into account three additional factors in particular that are likely both to affect opinion on matters of race and be correlated with prejudice. First and foremost is conservatism. Contemporary American conservatism consists of several related strands, each of which might contribute to public opinion on race: resistance to the intrusions of government as a matter of principle; general opposition to egalitarian claims; hostility to liberalism; and commitment to individualism (Feldman 1988; Kinder and Sanders 1990; Sniderman, Brody, and Kuklinski 1984). White opinion on policies designed to assist blacks might also have a basis in group conflict, the sense among whites that blacks pose a threat to their collective interests, status, and power (Bobo 1988a, 1988b; Kinder and Sanders 1990). Finally, the extent to which whites are willing to support assistance for blacks may be determined by the degree to which whites recognize a problem in the first place. Those who believe that discrimination belongs to the American past, that, if anything, blacks are advantaged by current practice, may see little point to government intervention on blacks' behalf today (Apostle et al. 1983; Kluegel 1985).<sup>11</sup> Written in equation form:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Opinion on policy} = & a_0 + B_1 \text{Prejudice} + B_2 \\ & \text{Conservatism} + B_3 \text{Group threat} + B_4 \text{Discrimination} \quad (1) \\ & \text{still a problem} + B_{(5-s+k)} Z^*, \end{aligned}$$

where  $Z^*$  is a vector of  $k$  social background characteristics, included for purposes of additional statistical control ( $Z^* =$  Age, Region, Education, Religion, Gender, Family Income, Head of Household Occupational Prestige, and Head of Household Employment Status).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Our measure of conservatism is a linear composite, consisting of averaged responses to a set of questions: opposition to government regulation; the sense that equality has been pushed too far; rejection of the liberal label; and belief that the fault for poverty rests with the poor themselves. Coefficient  $\alpha$  for the composite scale of conservatism = .47. Conservatism, measured in this way, is mildly correlated with prejudice (Pearson  $r = .25$ ). We measure group conflict with a single question, one that asks respondents to judge how often whites lose out on jobs and promotions that go instead to equally or less qualified blacks. Answers to this question are positively correlated with prejudice (Pearson  $r = .17$ ). Finally, we assess whites' perceptions of the scope of current discrimination with a composite scale, based on averaged responses to three questions. The first inquires into the extent to which current inequalities between blacks and whites can be explained by the persistence of race discrimination; the second asks whites for their opinions about the extent to which blacks continue to face discrimination in the work place; and the third asks about the persistence of discrimination against blacks in the housing market. Measured in this way, the view that discrimination is no longer a problem is slightly, but significantly, correlated with prejudice (Pearson  $r = .14$ ).

<sup>12</sup>In another version of this analysis, we also included a measure of party identification on the right-hand side of equation (1). Because its estimated effect never even *approached* statistical significance for any policy variable, we dropped it from further consideration.

TABLE 4  
 IMPACT OF PREJUDICE ON RACIAL POLICY VIEWS  
 WHITE AMERICANS, 1990 (OLS)

Segregation	Direct Effect	Total Effect
Racial intermarriage	.47 (.20)	.52 (.13)
Fair housing	.27 (.18)	.50 (.14)
School busing	.08 (.17)	.35 (.13)
General federal assistance		
Special federal efforts	.45 (.11)	.74 (.09)
Federal \$ for blacks	.55 (.18)	.83 (.14)
Individualistic remedies		
Enterprise zones	.18 (.14)	.29 (.11)
Early education	.29 (.13)	.41 (.10)
College scholarships	.13 (.13)	.24 (.10)
Implicit racial policy		
Death penalty	.15 (.16)	.34 (.12)
Cities	-.10 (.19)	.13 (.15)
Welfare	-.03 (.18)	.26 (.17)

Source: 1990 General Social Survey.

Results are shown in table 4. Each row of the table represents a different policy, beginning at the top with racial intermarriage and ending at the bottom with federal spending on welfare. The table presents unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, with the estimated standard errors in parentheses. For convenience in interpretation, both prejudice and the policy variables are coded on the 0-1 interval.

As indicated in table 4, the political impact of prejudice varies substantially across the four policy domains. Its effect is most pronounced on the general role the federal government should play in providing assistance to blacks. Indeed, prejudice's effect here is quite remarkable. Its impact is less dramatic but still powerful

on policies designed to reduce segregation; more modest on individualistic remedies for racial inequality; and vanishingly small on policy disputes that are racial only by implication. In our results then, the direct effect of prejudice ranges from the substantial, as in the case of whether the federal government is obliged to make special efforts on behalf of black citizens, to the trivial, as in the case of federal support for welfare.

We are interested not only in the direct effect of prejudice, but in its *total effect* as well. In addition to the direct effects we have just summarized, prejudice may influence opinion through its effects on other determinants of opinion. In particular, prejudiced whites may be inclined to adopt a conservative point of view, to see blacks and whites locked in a competitive struggle, or to declare that discrimination on account of color is now gone from the American scene. To estimate the total effect of prejudice, we estimate equation (2):

$$\text{Opinion on policy} = a_0 + B_1 \text{Prejudice} + B_{(2-2+k)} Z^*, \quad (2)$$

where  $Z^*$  is defined as before.<sup>13</sup>

The estimated total effect of prejudice is also on display in table 4, policy by policy, as before, with the OLS coefficients appearing down the right-hand column. The results generally follow the pattern already noted. The obvious difference is that the effects are (naturally) larger. Under this specification, the effect of prejudice is now visible even on implicitly racial policy, and its effect on the government's obligation to black citizens is huge. All in all, the impact of prejudice on racial policy opinions revealed in table 4 is considerable. From reservations about racial intermarriage to support for capital punishment, whites' views turn importantly on their feelings toward blacks.

#### PREJUDICE, POLICY, AND RACIAL ISOLATION

Now we see how, if at all, the political significance of prejudice is itself affected by the extent to which whites encounter blacks in their everyday lives. Table 5 presents the survey questions we use to assess racial isolation. The first aspect of isolation is based on a sequence of questions, each of which asks whites to report on the presence of blacks in their neighborhoods. As table 5 reveals, almost half of white

<sup>13</sup>This specification assumes that prejudice is not influenced by conservatism, racial group threat, or by perceptions of discrimination. Although defensible, this assumption can certainly be questioned. It seems least plausible in the case of conservatism, since it is not difficult to imagine that sentiments toward African Americans might in part be the product of more general outlooks on equality and individualism that our measure of conservatism is intended to summarize. It is also the most consequential of the assumptions, since of the three explanations of white opinion in addition to prejudice, conservatism is by far the most powerful. Fortunately, when we tested the assumption underlying equation (2) by estimating a pair of equations, one for prejudice, the other for conservatism, treating each as an endogenous cause of the other, we found no evidence that prejudice is influenced by conservatism. In this specification, with estimates provided by 2SLS, the effect of conservatism on prejudice = .01 ( $SE = .13$ ). This result supports our specification of the total effects equation given in the text. Moreover, when we reestimated equation (1), treating both prejudice and conservatism as endogenous, we found, if anything, stronger effects of prejudice than reported in table 4. Details provided upon request.



TABLE 5

## RACIAL ISOLATION AMONG WHITE AMERICANS, 1990

Blacks in the neighborhood.	
On this block	24.7%
1–3 blocks away	19.0
4–8 blocks away	7.1
Further, not in neighborhood	49.3
Attend church with blacks?	
Yes	35.8%
No*	64.2
Racial composition of workplace.	
Mostly black	1.7%
Half and half	6.8
Mostly white	30.8
All white**	60.7

Source: 1990 General Social Survey.

\*Includes those who do not attend church.

\*\*Includes those who either work alone or who are not part of the labor force.

Americans say that there are no blacks in their neighborhood at all, while roughly one quarter claim at least one black family on their block. The next question indicates that just about one third of whites say they attend church with blacks. And the final question in this set reveals that only a small fraction of whites—less than 10%—report working with substantial numbers of blacks.

For purposes of analysis, we created a composite scale, Racial Proximity, based on equally weighted answers to the three questions.<sup>14</sup> Scale scores range in principle from 0.0 to 1.0, where 0.0 means no blacks in the neighborhood, at church, or at work. The scale is of course tilted toward the low end: nearly one quarter of whites earned a score of 0.0; not one received a score of 1.0. Overall, the scale has a mean of .32 and a standard deviation of .25.

Does racial proximity, measured in this fashion, enhance the impact of prejudice on public opinion, as suggested both by realistic group conflict and cognitive theory? Or does proximity supply the kinds of experiences that lead to a diminished role for prejudice? To find out, we estimated the following equation:

$$\text{Opinion on policy} = a_0 + B_1 \text{Prejudice} + B_2 \{ \text{Prejudice} \times \text{Proximity} \} + B_{(3-3+k)} Z^*, \quad (3)$$

where  $Z^*$  is defined as before.

It would be convenient for our purposes if racial proximity were randomly distributed. But surely it is not. Whites living in close proximity to blacks probably differ in all sorts of significant ways from whites living far from blacks. In consequence of this presumed fact, our statistical analysis treats proximity as endogenous. This means that we treat the interaction between prejudice and proximity as

<sup>14</sup>Responses to the three are positively associated, with the Pearson correlations hovering around .2.

TABLE 6  
 IMPACT OF PREJUDICE ON RACIAL POLICY VIEWS  
 AS CONDITIONED BY RACIAL PROXIMITY  
 WHITE AMERICANS, 1990 (2SLS)

	Prejudice	Prejudice $\times$ Proximity
<b>Segregation</b>		
Racial intermarriage	.48 (.22)	-.48 (.35)
Fair housing	.42 (.18)	-1.09 (.31)
School busing	.29 (.18)	.21 (.26)
<b>General federal assistance</b>		
Special federal efforts	.85 (.12)	-.43 (.19)
Federal \$ for blacks	.91 (.20)	.09 (.32)
<b>Individualistic remedies</b>		
Enterprise zones	.18 (.14)	.10 (.22)
Early education	.45 (.13)	-.14 (.22)
College scholarships	.22 (.13)	.02 (.20)
<b>Implicit racial policy</b>		
Death penalty	.54 (.17)	-.32 (.29)
Cities	-.07 (.23)	-.17 (.40)
Welfare	.34 (.26)	-.60 (.45)

Source: 1990 General Social Survey.

endogenous as well. Thus, following the logic and procedures set out by Achen (1985), we estimate equation (3) with two-stage least squares. The price we pay for consistent estimates of the interaction between prejudice and proximity is larger standard errors than we would like, a point to keep in mind as we review the results.<sup>15</sup>

The results are displayed in table 6. As indicated there, proximity generally operates to *diminish* the impact of prejudice. This conclusion applies to three of the

<sup>15</sup>The first stage or "assignment" equation predicting {Prejudice  $\times$  Proximity} included the following variables, each multiplied by prejudice: region of residence (South Atlantic, East North Central,

four domains of racial policy that we investigate: to policies that would prohibit discrimination and enhance integration (e.g., fair housing); to the government's general obligations to blacks (e.g., special federal efforts for blacks); and to policies that are racial only by implication (e.g., federal support for welfare).

The exception to this pattern comes on programs designed to enhance equality of opportunity that are deliberately formulated to reinforce individualistic values. We noticed earlier that this set of policies was unusual: such policies generally received a warmer reception among whites than did others; and, not coincidentally, prejudice seemed to play a lesser role in their determination. The distinctiveness of these policy solutions continues in table 6. In contrast to what we see elsewhere in the table, proximity appears quite irrelevant to the prominence of prejudice in whites' opinions toward individualistic solutions to racial inequality.

Within the other three domains, however, the estimated effect of the multiplicative term—{*Prejudice* × *Proximity*}—is consistently negative. In two cases the effect easily surpasses statistical significance; in three others, the effect approaches significance (keep in mind that our statistical procedure yields large standard errors which make statistical significance more difficult to achieve). In all five cases, furthermore, the estimated effect is sizable. Consider whites' views on racial intermarriage as one example. The findings displayed in table 6 indicate that while the impact of prejudice on opposition to marriage between blacks and whites is strong among those whites living in isolation from blacks, it disappears entirely among those whites living in close proximity to blacks. More generally, our results suggest that under conditions of racial proximity, the role played by racial prejudice in white public opinion is considerably reduced.<sup>16</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Racial segregation remains a conspicuous feature of American society. Schools, neighborhoods, churches, workplaces, friendships, and marriages continue to reflect the tenacious power of the color line. Our purpose here has been to examine the

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East South Central), residence in largest central city of particular regions (South Atlantic, Pacific, and West South Central), religion (Catholic, Jew, none), age, Hispanic, size of place of residence, size of place of residence in West North Central, occupation and work status (skilled laborer, farm worker, homemaker), low income, and SRC belt code (12 largest central cities, next largest central cities, other urban counties, and rural counties). The equation was estimated with OLS: adjusted *R*-squared = .17, standard error of the regression = .14. Additional details provided upon request.

<sup>16</sup>In the case of racial intermarriage, the impact of prejudice among those whites living in isolation from blacks is given by:  $[.48 + (0 \times -.48)] = .48$ . Among those (hypothetical) whites living in close proximity to blacks, it is given by:  $[.48 + (1.0 \times -.48)] = .00$ . In principle, the significant interaction terms we see in table 6 could be produced by racially prejudiced whites becoming less likely to rely on their racial attitudes under conditions of racial proximity; or racially tolerant whites becoming more likely to rely on their racial attitudes under conditions of racial proximity; or both. A more detailed analysis of the interaction suggests that it is due primarily to racially prejudiced whites becoming less likely to rely on their racial attitudes under conditions of racial proximity. These results are available upon request.

implications of racial isolation for politics, for the prominence of prejudice in white public opinion on matters of race in particular. We asked whether racial isolation affects the extent to which prejudice becomes insinuated into the opinions white Americans express on matters of racial policy.

Our results leave little room to doubt that prejudice influences white opinion, deeply and profoundly. We observe its effects across a wide range, from opposition to racial amalgamation to support for capital punishment. White opposition to federal assistance to blacks or to open housing cannot be reduced to prejudice alone, of course. Nor do our results deny that policies which target blacks as beneficiaries can be formulated in ways that are comparatively innocuous in racial terms, as in establishing enterprise zones or providing educational assistance to black children. Finally, curtailing welfare benefits or cutting back on aid to big cities is not only code for keeping blacks in their place. Conceding all this, it is hard not to be impressed by the resilience and potency of prejudice on display in our results.<sup>17</sup>

This is an important conclusion, but it leaves to the side whether the continuing significance of prejudice is affected by the racial isolation that still prevails in contemporary American society. We find that racial isolation generally increases the importance of prejudice to white public opinion. This result, which holds up across a variety of policies and is often sizable, runs against both our reading of realistic group conflict theory and one prominent strand of cognitive theory. Why?

Our interpretation turns on the meaning of racial proximity. We suggest that proximity represents the possibility of everyday commerce and exchange between whites and blacks. It is not the same as threat, and should not be confused with it, even if, under certain circumstances, proximity may lead to threat. More often, proximity appears to offer to whites the opportunity to become acquainted with the diversity and commonality of their fellow black citizens. Such learning may not overturn conventional stereotypes (Jackman and Crane 1986), but it does seem to supply additional and distinctive grounds for opinion. In contrast, segregation leaves whites without grounding in their own interpersonal experience. Under these altogether typical circumstances, the politics of race is not about what whites know best and close at hand, then, but about a society they know only vicariously or indirectly. Racial isolation may leave many white Americans susceptible to propaganda, rumor, and their own stereotypes—to “fears of the imagination,” as Gordon Allport (1954, xv) once put it.

Our basic result may seem inconsistent at first glance with a standard finding first reported by V. O. Key. In *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949, 5), Key shows that for more than one hundred years the political response of southern whites was most reactionary and oppressive in the black belt: those regions characterized by concentrations of black populations where, as Key put it, whites had

<sup>17</sup>As such, these findings replicate other results, based on independent samples, set in different contexts, and using conceptually similar but operationally different measures of prejudice (Kinder and Sanders 1990, 1995).

“the deepest and most immediate concern about the maintenance of white supremacy” (5). It was in the black belt where support for secession and war was greatest, where the subsequent drive for black disenfranchisement came with greatest force and effect, where the Populist revolt was crushed, and where, in the 1950s and 1960s, defense of segregation was fiercest. As the great migration carried blacks out of the rural South to urban centers everywhere, Key’s hypothesis has been replicated over and over: as the proportion of blacks in the local population increases, the political reaction of local whites hardens (see Glaser 1994 for recent results and a guide to the literature). This finding is typically, and we think correctly, interpreted in terms of perceived racial threat. The result is certainly important, but by our argument, it has no direct bearing on the results that we have presented here.

When we began this investigation, we had hoped that we would be able to identify whites who were in fact racially threatened. The 1990 GSS provides measures that appear to be just what we need. For example, to complement the measure of workplace proximity, respondents were asked whether their place of employment followed affirmative action policies and whether they actually knew of whites harmed by such policies there. These questions allowed us to build a measure of personal racial threat. When we finished identifying those whites who were obviously and genuinely threatened, however, we had essentially run out of cases.<sup>18</sup> The lesson here is partly methodological, on the utter impracticality of attempting to estimate interactions between prejudice and threat, even with large national sample surveys. But there is a substantive point to be made as well. That real personal racial threat is uncommon reminds us again of how deeply segregated our society remains even today.

Taken all around, our results seem to hold out both promise and warning, in the present and into the future. On the one hand, we find prejudice to be a major ingredient in white public opinion on matters of race. This finding shatters the optimism that characterizes much writing on contemporary racial attitudes, which tends to be deeply impressed by the transformations in race relations that have taken place in the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century and optimistic about the future. On the other hand, we also find that proximity generally reduces the impact of prejudice. We take this to be a hopeful sign, though it must be kept in mind that movement toward an integrated society has been maddeningly slow and not without reversals. But should racial isolation diminish, public opinion on matters of race may gradually come to resemble public opinion on less explosive matters. We look forward to the day when public deliberation over racial

<sup>18</sup>At the outset, fewer than 10% of white Americans reported working with significant numbers of blacks. Of these, only a bare majority (56%) claimed that their employer followed affirmative action policies. And of these, finally, only about one quarter (28%) were able to report a case of harm to a white employee. All in all, we identified just a shade more than 1% of all whites as racially threatened at work (1.3% to be precise). Cases disappeared nearly as rapidly in the measurement of residential threat.

discrimination or affirmative action is governed by the play of ideology, interests, and principles; when prejudice is set aside. We look forward to it but do not expect to see it soon.

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