

## **Social Responsibility, Individualism, and Redistributive Policies<sup>1</sup>**

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*Previous research supports the "consensus on individualism" hypothesis, which holds that most Americans value hard work and self-reliance, perceive an open opportunity structure, and as a result, oppose redistributive policies, whether targeted by race or designed to help the poor in general. In contrast, this paper shows that one form of egalitarianism, a sense of social responsibility, remains a potent American value. Factor analysis of 18 stratification belief items from the 1984 General Social Survey results in two dimensions — one involving social responsibility and the other economic individualism. Social responsibility is the more powerful predictor of redistributive policy attitudes. Individuals who place a higher priority on social responsibility than on individualism are more likely than those with the opposite priorities to support redistributive policies, but are also disproportionately low income, black, and less politically active. These results suggest that economic individualism appears a hegemonic value in the United States partly because of the lack of political influence and low socioeconomic status of those most committed to social responsibility beliefs.*

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**KEY WORDS:** values; inequality; social responsibility; individualism; public opinion; race and welfare policies.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Research spanning sociology, social psychology, and political science emphasizes that the American public is decidedly "individualistic." Several recent studies concluded that individualistic beliefs provide the foundation

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for popular thinking about inequality (Jackman and Muha, 1984; Kinder, 1983; Kluegel and Smith, 1986; McCloskey and Zaller, 1984; Sniderman and Hagen, 1985). Accordingly, government policies to reduce racial or economic inequality contradict the premium most Americans place on individual effort and the just rewards accruing to it.

Yet in a society where the political culture has long emphasized equality (de Tocqueville, 1835/1969; Lipset, 1979), and where there are structured patterns of inequality in income and wealth among individuals (Levy, 1987), it is to be expected that many people will develop egalitarian beliefs and values. Such ideas are culturally available, and for those of lower socioeconomic status, would also serve their own needs and interests. From this viewpoint, the degree of consensus on individualistic values observed in the United States, and the ensuing weakness of support for redistributive policies, is paradoxical.

The American consensus on individualism may be less dominant than it appears. For example, Mann (1970) suggested that there was no across-class consensus on individualism. Instead, social stability rested on the internally conflicted views of the working class that sometimes, but neither consistently nor in a highly politicized way, supported inequality-challenging ideas. This research extends Mann's formulation in suggesting that popular beliefs about inequality, especially the likely *priority* an individual attaches to egalitarian or to individualistic beliefs, should be influenced by position in the social structure. Blacks as compared to whites and those of low socioeconomic status as compared to those high in status should prize egalitarianism over individualism. That is, most individuals probably hold both beliefs to some degree but differ, on the basis of their position in the social structure, as to which is more central to their thinking (Rokeach, 1973). If so, as Mann (1970) and also Hamilton (1972) concluded, then both underlying values and policy preferences in the mass public would be more divided and complex than suggested by the consensus on individualism hypothesis.

Three findings reported below support a revised view of the importance of what we interpret as one form of egalitarianism, namely, a sense of social responsibility: (1) social responsibility is a distinct dimension— independent of individualism—of popular beliefs about inequality; (2) people committed to social responsibility support expanded racial and welfare policies despite the concurrent influence of individualist beliefs; and (3) one reason social responsibility beliefs fail to carry their full weight in political dialogue is that those people who are most committed to such ideas are also disproportionately located among politically weak and less active segments of the population (i.e., those of low socioeconomic status).

## BACKGROUND

The American value system is complex, including notions of freedom, democracy, achievement, humanitarianism, progress, efficiency, moralism, nationalism, and so on (Williams, 1979). Yet scholars agree that the core system values shaping stratification beliefs are individualism and egalitarianism (Feldman, 1984; Katz and Hass, 1988; Lipset and Schneider, 1978).

### Individualistic Beliefs

Individualistic beliefs in American political ideologies cohere around the ideas that opportunities in life are widely available and are largely unconstrained by the background attributes of individuals. Thus, any resulting inequality is seen as fair because individual effort and ability meet with appropriate rewards (Huber and Form, 1973; Kluegel and Smith, 1986). People holding these beliefs stress self-reliance and the fairness of the existing distribution of rewards.

The consensus on individualism hypothesis maintains that individualistic beliefs are widely accepted, deeply rooted, and therefore very influential on policy attitudes (Kinder, 1983). Although never entirely discounting a role for egalitarianism, researchers in this tradition argued that individual freedom and responsibility are the most fundamental of American values (McCloskey and Zaller, 1984), and that individualism reigns as a stable "dominant ideology" in the United States, with egalitarianism functioning as a weaker "challenging" belief (Kluegel and Smith, 1986).

Individualism does appear implicated in policy attitudes. Studies of racial attitudes suggest that individualistic beliefs promote resistance to equal opportunity policies. People whose attitudes blend antiblack affect and belief that blacks violate such values as hard work and self-reliance are more likely to oppose black candidates for political office (Kinder and Sears, 1981). Whites whose explanation of black-white inequality faults the individual dispositions of blacks (e.g., "they don't try hard enough") are among those most hostile to policies to help blacks (Apostle *et al.*, 1983; Bobo, 1988a; Sniderman and Hagen, 1985). Media treatment of the affirmative action issue also reflects values of self-reliance and individualism (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). Several studies concluded that individualistic beliefs contributed to the public's negative response to welfare programs and recipients (Coughlin, 1979; Feagin, 1972; Williamson, 1974).

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### Egalitarian Tendencies

Several findings from previous research cast some doubt on the overarching importance attributed to individualistic beliefs. First, there is ethnographic (Hochschild, 1981) and sample survey based evidence (Hamilton, 1972; Shapiro, 1986) that a concern with limiting inequality and meeting basic human needs are potent strands of U.S. stratification ideology. Coughlin's (1979) comparative data showed a pattern of commitment in the United States and other industrialized nations to the idea that government should provide a basic minimum standard of living.

Second, adherence to individualistic beliefs drops sharply when questions mention class-linked chances in life (Huber and Form, 1973; Mann, 1970). Many people tend to agree that the opportunities of children of the poor and the working class are not equal to those for children of the middle and upper class. Third, acceptance of individualistic beliefs is often found to have a small to moderate positive relationship to socioeconomic status. Kluegel and Smith found self-interest effects, in that those low in social status (i.e., low-income or black) were more likely to perceive inequality, to negatively evaluate inequality, and to support redistributive policies than those high in social status (Robinson, 1983).

Finally, much of the previous research has inferred the importance of individualistic beliefs based on antiblack (Kinder and Sears, 1981) or antiwelfare attitudes (Feagin, 1972) rather than directly assessing the role of such values. Recent studies with direct measures of both individualism and egalitarianism showed surprisingly strong effects of the latter on policy attitudes and weak effects for individualism (Feldman, 1984; Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Sears, 1988). The theoretical import of these findings was minimized, however, on the grounds that individualism is the more consensually accepted value and because support for redistributive policies never reaches high absolute levels. Evidence showing a strong role for egalitarianism in American public opinion is accumulating, yet the theoretical emphasis on individualism has not yet been modified.

My main hypothesis is that a commitment to a certain kind of egalitarianism is a basic and consequential component of U.S. stratification ideology. This important aspect of egalitarianism is a sense of social responsibility. Social responsibility involves a cluster of beliefs that endorse limitations to economic inequality, an obligation to meet the basic needs of all people in society, and a duty to redress unfair social inequality. These matters are a responsibility of the social collective rather than of self-reliant individuals. Social responsibility beliefs are not merely the opposite end of a single dimension running from social responsibility at the low end to individualism at the high end. Rather, social responsibility and individualism

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are concurrent ideological commitments that may assume different levels of importance across individuals. The priority individuals attach to these beliefs will vary depending upon a person's race and socioeconomic status, with blacks and those of low socioeconomic status expressing a strong commitment to a social responsibility. Persons committed to social responsibility should be more likely than those lacking such commitments to support specific policies targeted to help blacks and the poor.

### DATA AND MEASURES

The data for testing these ideas about the dimensions, correlates, and consequences of beliefs about inequality come from the National Opinion Research Center's (NORC) 1984 General Social Survey (GSS; Davis and Smith, 1986). This nationally representative cross-section sample of English-speaking adults employed a multistage probability sample and had a response rate of 79%. The total case base was 1473. For most analyses the case base is 1104 or higher, with a minimum of 122 black respondents and 982 white respondents. The attrition results from data constraints imposed on the stratification belief scales described below and refusals to report family income. The loss of cases does not bias the sample by age, education, occupation, race, or region of the country, but the percent female drops slightly (from 59% to 55%).

To determine the social location of individuals holding social responsibility beliefs, the analysis employs standard background measures of age, education, family income, occupational status (measured with the NORC Hodge-Siegel-Rossi prestige scale), race (black = 1, white = 0), region (South = 1, non-South = 0), and gender (females = 1, males = 0). Older people, males, and those living in the South are more likely to have had socializing experiences that would encourage individualistic orientations than younger people, females, and those living outside the South.

The 18 items employed in the factor analysis are introduced below in the results section. The questions tap views on the extent, causes, and legitimacy of inequality as well as views on society's response to inequality. Sixteen of the stratification belief items appeared only in the 1984 GSS as part of cross-national research carried out in collaboration with a group of German social scientists (Haller and Hollinger, 1986). The questions were initially used in German Surveys (Mayer *et al.*, 1981). Two standard GSS items ("luck over hardwork" and "equal educational opportunity" in Table I) are also used (Davis and Smith, 1986).

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Stratification Belief Questions<sup>a</sup>

|                                                            | Response categories and percentage |                |                   |                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                                                            | Strongly agree                     | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree |
| 1. Government must help people ( <i>N</i> = 1434)          | 21.5                               | 35.8           | 29.3              | 13.4              |
| 2. Workers take priority ( <i>N</i> = 1413)                | 14.3                               | 29.9           | 34.2              | 21.6              |
| 3. Needs affect income ( <i>N</i> = 1415)                  | 11.5                               | 22.3           | 34.8              | 31.4              |
| 4. Constraints over effort ( <i>N</i> = 1415)              | 7.9                                | 34.6           | 36.2              | 21.3              |
| 5. Social inequality acceptable ( <i>N</i> = 1395)         | 17.4                               | 56.9           | 20.7              | 4.9               |
| 6. Income differences needed ( <i>N</i> = 1357)            | 11.3                               | 48.1           | 30.3              | 10.2              |
| 7. Social differences justified ( <i>N</i> = 1389)         | 8.6                                | 45.4           | 34.1              | 11.8              |
| 8. Business profits fair ( <i>N</i> = 1372)                | 4.8                                | 31.1           | 40.4              | 23.7              |
| 9. Equal educational opportunity ( <i>N</i> = 1439)        |                                    |                |                   |                   |
| Percent "no"                                               | 28.6                               |                |                   |                   |
| Percent "yes"                                              | 71.4                               |                |                   |                   |
| 10. Success based on talent/ability ( <i>N</i> = 1407)     | 12.1                               | 42.1           | 32.0              | 18.1              |
| 11. Live well in United States ( <i>N</i> = 1436)          | 45.0                               | 42.1           | 9.5               | 3.4               |
| 12. Economy depends on business profits ( <i>N</i> = 1415) | 24.6                               | 45.7           | 21.3              | 8.4               |
| 13. Family affects success ( <i>N</i> = 1415)              | 9.4                                | 35.7           | 33.0              | 21.9              |
| 14. Class divisions exist ( <i>N</i> = 1395)               | 16.5                               | 53.8           | 23.3              | 6.6               |
| 15. Ability and education important ( <i>N</i> = 1427)     | 40.2                               | 44.8           | 13.4              | 1.7               |
| 16. Luck over hard work ( <i>N</i> = 1459)                 |                                    |                |                   |                   |
| Percent hard work most important                           | 66.9                               |                |                   |                   |
| Percent hard work and luck equally important               | 18.1                               |                |                   |                   |
| Percent luck or others most important                      | 15.0                               |                |                   |                   |
| 17. Aid discourages work ( <i>N</i> = 1421)                | 13.2                               | 32.8           | 34.1              | 19.9              |
| 18. Individual over union ( <i>N</i> = 1420)               | 8.2                                | 24.0           | 35.0              | 32.7              |

<sup>a</sup>Complete question wording can be obtained from the author or by consulting Davis and Smith (1986).

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### Structure of Stratification Beliefs

#### *Underlying Dimensions*

If social responsibility constitutes a distinct orientation held by a significant segment of the U.S. adult population, factor analyses of a broad array of questions on beliefs and attitudes about inequality should show such an underlying construct. Frequency distributions for the questions used to address this issue are shown in Table I. Key attributes of this set of questions include, first, its heterogeneity and coverage of the domain of interest. Some of the items concern social guarantees/obligations (e.g., "needs affect income"), others concern the fairness and inevitability of inequality (e.g., "inequality results from effort"), others concern access to education (e.g., equal educational opportunity), and yet others concern the rewards for hard work (e.g., luck over hard work). Second, several items show wide acceptance of individualistic beliefs. Seventy-four percent, for example, agreed that differences in social standing result from what people made of the opportunities they had. Third, responses to several questions show support for social responsibility beliefs or doubt about individualism. Thus, 34% agreed that "everybody should get what he/she needs to provide a decent life for his/her family" and 45% agreed that what a person achieves in life depends on his or her family's background.

Two sets of alpha factor analyses were performed, under constraints described below, both of which show a cluster of social responsibility beliefs (Kaiser and Caffrey, 1965). As Table II shows, the initial extraction resulted in five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, the first of which—identified by the boxed items—taps social responsibility. However, this model was rejected because too few items loaded highly on two of the factors (third and fifth) and because of poor reliability for one of the factors (second).

A second factor analysis constrained results to two factors that yielded scales with more desirable measurement properties, involved a slightly different pattern of loadings, and an additional item falling in the "Social Responsibility" cluster. Component items of this set concern government's obligation to help those in need, the idea that workers take priority over profits, the belief that need should affect income, and agreement that various societal forces limit changes in life. The second factor is consistent with the ideal of "Economic Individualism." The component items concern the legitimacy of social and economic inequality, the fairness of business profits, and the likely rewards for having ability and talent. A separate

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Table II. Alpha Factor Analysis of Stratification Belief Questions

| Questions (N = 1145)                    | Factor loadings (varimax rotation) |       |      |      |      |                  |       |   |   |      |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|------|------|------|------------------|-------|---|---|------|
|                                         | Five-factor model                  |       |      |      |      | Two-factor model |       |   |   |      |
|                                         | 1                                  | 2     | 3    | 4    | 5    | 1                | 2     | 1 | 2 |      |
| 1. Government must help people          | .70                                | .04   | .07  | .01  | .08  | .46              |       |   |   | .07  |
| 2. Workers take priority                | .69                                | .02   | .14  | .06  | .02  | .55              |       |   |   | .07  |
| 3. Needs affect income                  | .49                                | .06   | .13  | -.10 | -.20 | .49              |       |   |   | -.08 |
| 4. Constraints over effort              | .39                                | .13   | .29  | -.17 | -.28 | .58              |       |   |   | -.09 |
| 5. Social inequality acceptable         | -.03                               | .25   | .16  | .57  | .13  | .01              |       |   |   | .55  |
| 6. Income differences needed            | -.09                               | .12   | -.15 | .49  | .17  | -.24             |       |   |   | .40  |
| 7. Social differences justified         | .07                                | .36   | .13  | .40  | .13  | .10              |       |   |   | .55  |
| 8. Business profits fair                | .11                                | .48   | .05  | .11  | .20  | .11              |       |   |   | .48  |
| 9. Equal educational opportunity        | -.05                               | .35   | .16  | -.05 | .11  | .08              |       |   |   | .34  |
| 10. Success based on talent/ability     | -.20                               | .47   | -.06 | .22  | .15  | -.18             |       |   |   | .52  |
| 11. Live well in United States          | .17                                | .40   | .16  | .08  | -.01 | .27              |       |   |   | .35  |
| 12. Economy depends on business profits | .14                                | .30   | -.10 | .20  | -.01 | .06              |       |   |   | .29  |
| 13. Family background affects success   | .20                                | -.03  | .71  | .02  | -.28 | .65              |       |   |   | -.03 |
| 14. Class divisions exist               | .13                                | -.02  | .31  | -.05 | .03  | .27              |       |   |   | .01  |
| 15. Ability/education important         | -.00                               | .25   | .43  | .26  | .13  | .30              |       |   |   | .32  |
| 16. Luck over hard work                 | .03                                | .10   | .26  | .00  | .05  | .18              |       |   |   | .12  |
| 17. Aid discourages work                | .06                                | .12   | -.00 | .12  | .36  | -.04             |       |   |   | .28  |
| 18. Individual over union               | -.16                               | .15   | -.04 | .08  | .46  | -.24             |       |   |   | .34  |
| Eigenvalue                              | 2.74                               | 2.62  | 1.38 | 1.09 | 1.03 | 2.74             | 2.62  |   |   |      |
| Variance explained                      | 15.2%                              | 14.6% | 7.7% | 6.1% | 5.8% | 15.2%            | 14.6% |   |   |      |
| Average interitem correlation           | .34                                | .21   | .40  | .32  | —    | .30              | .26   |   |   |      |
| Alpha reliability                       | .68                                | .45   | .55  | .59  | —    | .68              | .64   |   |   |      |

oblique rotation showed that the two underlying factors are statistically independent, suggesting that social responsibility is a separate value commitment, not merely a polar opposite of economic individualism. Eight of the items do not define a substantively important dimension of stratification beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

We created additive scales for each dimension with high scores on the Social Responsibility scale indicating greater commitment to social responsibility and high scores on the Economic Individualism scale indicating a greater commitment to individualism. (See Appendix A for exact wording of the items). The scales were scored to range from a low score of 1 to a high score of 18, with a mean of 9.56 (SD = 3.12) on Social Responsibility and 8.80 (SD = 2.81) on Economic Individualism. Both measures have means near the midpoint of the distribution with a coefficient of variation (ratio of mean to standard deviation) of 3.06 for Social Responsibility and 3.13 for Economic Individualism.

Both scales involve agree-disagree items, raising the possibility of a "yea-saying" response set. But there is no evidence of substantial acquiescence response bias. First, the data were collected so as to minimize this possibility. Respondents were asked the questions in a random order with interviewers shuffling cards containing the question wording. The set of items is large and is not unidirectional in wording: agreeing responses sometimes indicate egalitarian positions and sometimes inegalitarian positions. Second, the exploratory factor analyses show no sign of a "method" factor capturing a tendency to agree. The latent factors, like the actual scales based on the observed data, are statistically independent (i.e., there is no shared method bias).<sup>4</sup>

#### *Determinants of Stratification Beliefs*

Social Responsibility should have clear social roots, with blacks and those of lower socioeconomic status more likely to hold such values than their white or higher status counterparts. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses of the determinants of Social Responsibility confirm these expectations. For each scale we tested the possibility that the effects of socioeconomic factors (income, education, and occupation) differed by race. Such interactions are considered because for blacks the racial

<sup>3</sup>Four of the unused items, however, have modest loadings (between .30 and .35) on the Economic Individualism factor. In order to ensure that information is not lost the analysis uses at later points the items not included in either of the two scales.

<sup>4</sup>Further tests were performed comparing three confirmatory factor models (Joreskog and Sorbom, 1984) and using only the ten items selected for the scales. No sign of significant acquiescent response bias emerged.

experience may carry more weight in the development of stratification beliefs than socioeconomic status.

For *Social Responsibility* (column I of Table III) those with low family incomes are more likely to express a commitment to social responsibility than those with high incomes. Race and education interact so that education is negatively related to Social Responsibility among whites but has no effect on Social Responsibility for blacks. The interaction makes interpretation of the coefficient for race impossible, but an examination of predicted scores under the model shows a large black-white difference well in excess of one standard deviation unit. Social responsibility beliefs occur with greatest frequency then, among low income and education whites and among blacks.

The Economic Individualism model (column 2 of Table III) shows that commitment to this idea is greater among whites and those with high family incomes, although the effects of income and race are not as strong as those found for Social Responsibility. Education is negatively related to Economic Individualism but age is positively related to it. None of the possible race-socioeconomic status interactions is significant.

Status effects emerge for both Social Responsibility and Economic Individualism (Kluegel and Smith, 1986). Except for the negative effect of education on Economic Individualism, the stratification beliefs of those higher in status are more supportive of inequality than is true of those low in status. The education effects are consistent with Jackman's ideological sophistication argument (Jackman and Muha, 1984). The highly educated appear more enlightened about limitations to individualism. Highly educated whites, however, do not extend this recognition to a commitment to more redistributive beliefs such as social responsibility. More variation in Social Responsibility is explained (21%) than is true for Economic Individualism (7%). This is consistent with the findings of Kluegel and Smith (1986), who suggested that individualistic values are diffused elements of the cultural fabric, less dependent on specific statuses and experiences.

### Stratification Beliefs and Policy Attitudes

Social responsibility emerges as a strong dimension of American beliefs about inequality and has clear social roots, but it may yet have less to do with an individual's important social policy attitudes than economic individualism. The results of OLS regressions predicting racial and social welfare policy attitudes, however, show just the opposite. Attitudes toward race targeted policies were measured by responses to a question asking: "Some people think that blacks have been discriminated against for so long

that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standard. Others believe that the government should not be giving special treatment to blacks. Where would you place yourself on this scale (1 = no special treatment and 5 = government obligated to blacks), or haven't you made up your mind on this?" (mean = 2.47, SD = 1.27). Summed responses to four questions on support for increased government intervention in social problems, more spending on health care, more assistance for the poor in general, and more redistributive income taxes tap social welfare policy attitudes (average interitem correlation = .36, alpha = .66, range 1–22, mean = 11.05, SD = 4.15).

A discerning test of the impact of social responsibility on these types of policy attitudes requires introducing two sets of control variables beyond the usual background factors. First, because the interest here is in reactions to race-targeted and to social welfare policies it is necessary to take into account feelings toward blacks. A reliable five-item scale of antiblack prejudice is employed in the analysis.<sup>5</sup> Second, because we are interested in the unique contribution of values about inequality to policy attitudes it is necessary to take into account other sociopolitical identities—namely, party identification and self-identification as a liberal or conservative—that are not themselves values but are subjective states routinely found to influence policy attitudes. In addition, the analysis tests for interactions involving race and the socioeconomic factors, prejudice, and the stratification belief scales.<sup>6</sup>

### *Racial Policy Attitudes*

Support for government assistance to blacks is strongly influenced by a person's commitment to social responsibility, but as the significant interaction term shows, this effect is much stronger for whites than for blacks (column 3 of Table III). Economic individualism does not affect racial policy attitudes. Social responsibility plays a larger role in how whites react to racial policy issues than suggested by the consensus on individualism

<sup>5</sup>The antiblack prejudice scale is an additive scale composed of five items, with GSS mnemonics shown in parentheses, on attitudes toward residential segregation (RACSEG), school segregation (RACSCHOL), a black dinner guest (RACDIN), black pushiness (RACPUSH), and laws prohibiting racial intermarriage (RACMAR, average interitem correlation = .38, alpha = .69). This scale taps traditional or old-fashioned prejudice, not modern or symbolic racism (Sears, 1988), or feelings of perceived threat (Bobo, 1983, 1988b).

<sup>6</sup>Models were estimated in nested steps beginning with a background and status effects model at the first stage, adding the social identity variables and antiblack sentiment at the second stage, adding the stratification belief items at the third, and finally testing for the race interactions. For clarity, the tables present only the final model for each of the policy attitudes.

**Table III.** Final Models from Multiple Regression Analysis of Stratification Beliefs, of Racial Policy, and Welfare Policy Attitudes<sup>a</sup>

| Independent variables               | Social responsibility       | Economic individualism      | Racial policy               | Welfare policy              |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Constant                            | 15.04 <sup>d</sup>          | 10.22 <sup>d</sup>          | .96 <sup>c</sup>            | 9.09 <sup>d</sup>           |
| Stratification beliefs              |                             |                             |                             |                             |
| Social responsibility               | —                           | —                           | .11 <sup>d</sup><br>(.29)   | .54 <sup>d</sup><br>(.41)   |
| Economic individualism              | —                           | —                           | -.02<br>(-.04)              | -.09 <sup>b</sup><br>(-.06) |
| Economy depends on business profits | —                           | —                           | —                           | -.46 <sup>d</sup><br>(-.10) |
| Live well in United States          | —                           | —                           | —                           | -.32 <sup>b</sup><br>(-.06) |
| Status and background               |                             |                             |                             |                             |
| Education                           | -.28 <sup>d</sup><br>(-.27) | -.18 <sup>d</sup><br>(-.20) | .03 <sup>b</sup><br>(.08)   | -.18 <sup>d</sup><br>(-.13) |
| Family income                       | -.03 <sup>d</sup><br>(-.19) | .01 <sup>c</sup><br>(.10)   | -.00<br>(-.00)              | -.01 <sup>b</sup><br>(-.06) |
| Occupational prestige               | -.01<br>(-.06)              | -.01<br>(-.04)              | -.00<br>(-.00)              | .00<br>(.01)                |
| Race (black = 1)                    | 1.03<br>(-.10)              | -.56 <sup>b</sup><br>(-.06) | 1.01<br>(.25)               | 1.28 <sup>d</sup><br>(.10)  |
| Sex (female = 1)                    | .23<br>(.04)                | -.13<br>(-.02)              | -.14 <sup>b</sup><br>(-.05) | .20<br>(.02)                |
| Region (South = 1)                  | -.23<br>(-.03)              | .60 <sup>d</sup><br>(.10)   | -.09<br>(-.03)              | -.45 <sup>b</sup><br>(-.05) |
| Age                                 | -.02 <sup>d</sup><br>(-.10) | .02 <sup>d</sup><br>(.10)   | .01 <sup>d</sup><br>(.16)   | -.01<br>(-.04)              |
| Social identity                     |                             |                             |                             |                             |
| Independent                         | —                           | —                           | -.19<br>(-.04)              | .95 <sup>c</sup><br>(.06)   |
| Democrat                            | —                           | —                           | .01<br>(.00)                | .92 <sup>d</sup><br>(.11)   |
| Liberal ideology                    | —                           | —                           | .13 <sup>d</sup><br>(.14)   | .41 <sup>d</sup><br>(.12)   |
| Antiblack sentiment                 | —                           | —                           | -.12 <sup>d</sup><br>(-.24) | .03<br>(.02)                |

Table III (Continued)

| Independent variables               | Social responsibility     | Economic individualism | Racial policy               | Welfare policy |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Interactions                        |                           |                        |                             |                |
| Race $\times$ Education             | .22 <sup>b</sup><br>(.27) | —                      | —                           | —              |
| Race $\times$ Social Responsibility | —                         | —                      | -.08 <sup>b</sup><br>(-.23) | —              |
| Race $\times$ Antiblack Sentiment   | —                         | —                      | .13 <sup>b</sup><br>(.23)   | —              |
| Adjusted $R^2$                      | .21                       | .07                    | .26                         | .40            |
| $N$                                 | 1130                      | 1130                   | 1104                        | 1104           |

<sup>a</sup>Cell entries are raw coefficients and figures in parentheses are standardized coefficients.

<sup>b</sup> $p < .05$ .

<sup>c</sup> $p < .01$ .

<sup>d</sup> $p < .001$ .

hypothesis. In addition, there is a significant interaction between race and prejudice. Antiblack attitudes play no part in the racial policy attitudes of blacks but substantially decrease support for racial policy change among whites. The eight stratification belief items omitted from the scales, whether introduced singly or as a set, have no significant effects on racial policy attitudes. The model explains 26% of the variance in racial policy attitudes, with approximately 5% of the explained variance (or one-fifth of the total) due to Social Responsibility.

#### *Welfare Policy Attitudes*

Both Social Responsibility and Economic Individualism influence social welfare policy attitudes, with people who score high on the former expressing support for expanded social welfare commitments and high scores on Economic Individualism reducing such commitments (Column 4 of Table III). Two of the eight omitted stratification belief items, both of which fall conceptually closest to Economic Individualism (they concern the necessity of business profits to the economy and the basic high standard of living in the United States), are negatively related to welfare policy attitudes. Yet the net contribution to variance explained by Social Responsibility (increment to  $r^2 = .12$ ) exceeds the combined effect of that of Economic Individualism and the two related items (increment to  $r^2 = .03$ ). Again, social responsibility beliefs exert substantially more influence on welfare policy attitudes than the consensus on individualism hypothesis would anticipate. Socioeconomic status also directly influences welfare

policy attitudes, with the less well educated and those with low family income more likely to support welfare policies than their higher status counterparts (a trend toward more pro-welfare policy attitudes among blacks vanishes after we introduce the Social Responsibility scale). None of the race interactions were significant. The final model explains 40% of the variance in welfare policy attitudes, with about 14% due to the stratification belief measures (about one-third of the total).

One ambiguity in these results is that the Social Responsibility scale includes three items that mention government, thus potentially confounding independent and dependent variables. All of the component items of the Social Responsibility scale lack the balanced choice format and prospective, future-oriented policy direction qualities typical of the policy attitude dependent measures. Also, two component items of the Social Responsibility scale make no mention of government (the items labeled "needs affect income" and "family background affects success" in Table I) and each item is strongly related to the policy attitudes.

The policy attitude models were recomputed using only the single needs affect income item as an indicator of Social Responsibility. The single item is a significant predictor of racial (partial  $\beta = .17, p < .001$ ) and social welfare policy attitudes (partial  $\beta = .24, p < .001$ ). It does almost as well as the full Social Responsibility scale, with the variance explained dropping only from 25% to 23% for racial policy and from 40% to 31% for welfare policy attitudes. This change does not improve the relationship between Economic Individualism and the policy attitude measures. Nearly identical results obtain if we instead use the single family background affects success item. Hence, it is unlikely that a confounding of independent and dependent variables produces the results reported in Table III.

#### **Stratification Beliefs, Political Dynamics, and Belief Priorities**

The strong association between social responsibility and an individual's racial and social welfare policy attitudes implies larger constituencies and support for such policies than suggested by the current political climate. Social responsibility sentiments are not felt in the political arena to their fullest, we hypothesize, because the people most committed to these beliefs are politically dissatisfied and inactive. The lower socioeconomic status of those supporting social responsibility is consistent with this hypothesis (Burnham, 1982; Vanneman and Cannon, 1987; Verba and Nie, 1972).

To test and illuminate this possibility we examined the correlation between three measures of sociopolitical participation (whether the person

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reported voting in the 1980 presidential election, whether the person was a member of a political club or group, and total number of organizational memberships in any of a list of 15 types of groups and organizations) and a typology based on the stratification belief scales that is sensitive to individual differences in likely value priorities. To do this, we created a typology where "Social Collectivists" are those scoring high on Social Responsibility (approximately one standard deviation above the scale mean) but low on Economic Individualism (approximately one standard deviation below the mean); "Ambivalents" are those scoring within approximately one standard deviation of the mean on both scales; and "Individualists" are those scoring high on Economic Individualism (approximately one standard deviation above the mean) but low on Social Responsibility (approximately one standard deviation below the mean, notes to Table IV provide a fuller description of cutpoints used for the typology).

The results reported in Table IV show that: (1) Social Collectivists are a slightly larger portion of the population than the Individualists, but that the largest group of Americans are Ambivalents; (2) Social Collectivists are of lower socioeconomic status (especially on family income) than the Ambivalents who, in turn, are of lower status than the Individualists; (3) Social Collectivists are more likely to support increased government help for blacks and for the poor; (4) Individualists and Ambivalents are more likely to participate in politics than Social Collectivists (especially in voting); and (5) Social Collectivists who do vote choose the Democratic candidate far more often than the Individualists do (this relationship is only slightly reduced by controlling for party identification and political ideology). It should be added that 50% of blacks fall into the Social Collectivist category as compared to only 28% of whites. Blacks are only 11% of the sample but they make up over 18% of the Social Collectivists.

The low socioeconomic status Social Collectivists are less likely to participate, in part, because they do not trust or expect government to be responsive to their needs and interests. Social Collectivists express significantly lower confidence in each of the three branches of the federal government than the Ambivalents and pure Individualists, with the latter group expressing the greatest confidence in government ( $F = 14.20$ ,  $df = 2/846$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The higher one's confidence in government the more likely one is to participate politically. For example, voters score as more confident in government than nonvoters ( $F = 4.69$ ,  $df = 1/868$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

In short, "effective" public opinion (Blumer, 1948; Hamilton, 1972) is likely to be that of the Individualists. Individualists are of higher status, have more conservative policy attitudes, and participate politically more than Social Collectivists. Inasmuch as the upper stratum of political-

Table IV. Typology of Stratification Beliefs and Mean Socioeconomic Status, Policy Attitudes, and Sociopolitical Participation

| Stratification <sup>a</sup><br>belief typology | Percent<br>distribution | Socioeconomic status <sup>b</sup> |                             |                             | Policy attitudes           |                             | Sociopolitical participation <sup>c</sup> |                   |                        |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
|                                                |                         | Education                         | Occupation                  | Family<br>Income            | Racial                     | Welfare                     | Voted<br>1980                             | Political<br>club | Presidential<br>choice |
| Social collectivists                           | 30%<br>(402)            | 12.2 <sup>d</sup><br>(402)        | 38.01 <sup>d</sup><br>(378) | 20.85 <sup>f</sup><br>(378) | 2.88 <sup>d</sup><br>(394) | 13.16 <sup>f</sup><br>(401) | 1.68 <sup>e</sup><br>(370)                | 1.04<br>(398)     | 1.70<br>(401)          |
| Ambivalents                                    | 49<br>(650)             | 12.6<br>(649)                     | 39.53<br>(613)              | 25.82<br>(593)              | 2.42<br>(630)              | 11.08<br>(649)              | 1.71<br>(585)                             | 1.04<br>(643)     | 1.86<br>(647)          |
| Individualists                                 | 20<br>(270)             | 12.8<br>(270)                     | 41.38<br>(256)              | 31.07<br>(248)              | 2.10<br>(256)              | 8.81<br>(269)               | 1.80<br>(256)                             | 1.06<br>(267)     | 1.94<br>(270)          |
| Grand mean                                     | 99%                     | 12.5                              | 39.45                       | 25.35                       | 2.50                       | 11.25                       | 1.72                                      | 1.04              | 1.83                   |
| Total N                                        | (1322)                  | (1321)                            | (1247)                      | (1219)                      | (1280)                     | (1319)                      | (1211)                                    | (1308)            | (1318)                 |
| Eta                                            | —                       | .07                               | .08                         | .18                         | .22                        | .37                         | .09                                       | .05               | .04                    |

<sup>a</sup> Social collectivists are defined as those scoring between 13 and 18 inclusive on Social Responsibility and 6 or lower on Economic Individualism. Individualists are defined as those scoring between 13 and 18 inclusive on Economic Individualism and 6 or lower on Social Responsibility. The Ambivalents are those who were moderate on both scales (scoring between 7 and 12 inclusive). The small number of people ( $N = 48$  or 3% of the total) scoring low (6 or lower) on both scales and the small number of people ( $N = 43$  or about 3% of the total) scoring high on both scales (13 or higher) were excluded from this analysis.

<sup>b</sup> The figures for family incomes are in thousands of dollars.

<sup>c</sup> The presidential choice variable is scored 1 for Reagan, 2 for Anderson, and 3 for Carter.

<sup>d</sup> Significance of  $F$ :  $p < .05$ .

<sup>e</sup> Significance of  $F$ :  $p < .01$ .

<sup>f</sup> Significance of  $F$ :  $p < .001$ .

economic elites is probably heavily counted among the Individualists, it is not hard to surmise why control of political institutions, media treatment of inequality related issues, and thus the struggle for the hearts, minds, and votes of the Ambivalents often favors the Individualists.

### CONCLUSIONS

The research has three key findings. First, social responsibility—which we interpret as one form of egalitarianism—is one of two largely independent dimensions to stratification beliefs, the other of which emphasizes economic individualism (Feldman, 1984). Second, stratification beliefs contribute to an individual's racial and social welfare policy attitudes net of the effects of socioeconomic status, sociopolitical identities, and prejudice. Contrary to recent theoretical emphasis on individualism, however, policy attitudes in the mass public are more closely associated with a person's social responsibility beliefs than with his/her beliefs about the necessity and fairness of inequality (see also Sears, 1988). Third, the strong connection between policy attitudes and social responsibility beliefs given weak pressure for policy change is probably explained by the greater status and higher participation—hence more effective opinions—of those who are “pure” Individualists. Pure Social Collectivists do exist, but the conditions that accompany such commitments appear to weaken the translation of those priorities into political action and influence.

These findings extend Mann's (1970) criticism of an earlier generation of value consensus theories. Mann argued that the social cohesion of liberal democracies rested on a lack of consensus on system challenging values among the working class as opposed to across class consensus on system legitimating values such as individualism. Stability and the absence of acute class conflict, according to Mann, were based on the inconsistency of working-class belief systems, which mixed some individualistic and some inequality challenging beliefs, and to the depoliticized nature of working-class hostility to political and economic elites. My research suggests that the “inconsistency” in the beliefs of those of lower socioeconomic status is perhaps better understood in terms of likely underlying value priorities. That is, acceptance of individualistic beliefs among people of lower socioeconomic status is unlikely to involve a set of *priorities* that gives greater weight to individualism than to ideas that would mitigate or even openly challenge social inequality (e.g., social responsibility). Just the opposite appears the case.

In addition, we should not underestimate the collectively oriented and inequality-challenging potential of beliefs common among those of lower

socioeconomic status. These data show that both the policy leanings and electoral choices of lower socioeconomic status respondents are frequently guided by a set of priorities that place social responsibility above individualism. An implication of these results, then, is that the absence of political parties and candidates that articulate the interests of social structurally based status groups—and the resulting disengagement from politics among those of lower socioeconomic status that this fosters—sustains the veneer of popular consensus on individualism.

Individualism is unquestionably a major component of the American value system. However, the consensus on individualism hypothesis needs to be recast. For many Americans, limiting inequality and meeting at least the basic needs of all people are significant social concerns. And rather than acting mainly as a check on the potential excesses of individualism, social responsibility appears for some people to express an underlying value commitment. Individualistic priorities lead some people to oppose redistributive policies whereas social responsibility priorities lead others to support government efforts to reduce racial and economic inequality.

To be sure, the balance struck between social responsibility and individualism is a dynamic social construction. From the vantage point of public opinion and electoral politics, the balance of power lies with the large number of ambivalent Americans who express about equal degrees of commitment to social responsibility and to individualistic ideals. Advocates of expanded social spending during the 1930s and 1940s stressed that providing greater security and checks against the vicissitudes of a market economy would enhance individual liberty; such inequality reducing actions would serve rather than undermine the value of individualism (Orloff and Skocpol, 1984). Those pursuing a social collectivist agenda today would do well to appeal to the large number of ambivalent "Middle Americans" (Gans, 1987) in exactly these terms.

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## APPENDIX

### Social Responsibility:

(1) "It is the responsibility of government to meet everyone's needs, even in case of sickness, poverty, unemployment, and old age" (government must help people). (2) "The government must see to it that everyone has a job and that prices are stable, even if the rights of businessmen have to be restricted" (workers take priority). (3) "Personal income should not be determined solely by one's work. Rather, everybody should get what he/she needs to provide a decent life for his/her family" (needs affect income). (4) "What one gets in life hardly depends at all on one's own efforts, but rather on the economic situation, job opportunities, union agreements, and the social services provided by government" (constraints over effects). (5) "In the United States there are still great differences between social levels, and what one can achieve in life depends mainly upon one's family background" (family background affects success).

### Economic Individualism:

(1) Differences in social standing between people are acceptable because they basically reflect what people made out of the opportunities they had" (social inequality acceptable). (2) "Only if differences in income and social standing are large enough is there an incentive for individual effort" (income differences needed). (3) "All in all, I think social differences in this country are justified" (social differences justified). (4) "Generally speaking, business profits are distributed fairly in the United States" (business profits fair). (5) "If someone has a high social or economic position, that indicates the person has special abilities or great accomplishments" (success based on talent ability).

### Social Welfare Policy Attitude:

(1) "Some people think that the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all poor Americans; they are at Point 1 on this card (scored 5). Other people think it is not the government's responsibility, and that each person should take care of himself; they are at Point 5 (scored 1). Where would you place yourself on this (1 to 5) scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?" (2) "some people think the government in Washington is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and private businesses (scored

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1). Others disagree and think that the government should do even more to solve our country's problems (scored 5). Still others have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this (1 to 5) scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?" (3) "In general, some people think it is the responsibility of the government to see to it that people have help in paying for doctors and hospital bills (scored 5). Others think that these matters are not the responsibility of the federal government and that people should take care of themselves (scored 1). Where would you place yourself on this scale (1 to 5), or haven't you made up your mind on this?" (4) "Some people think that the government in Washington ought to reduce the income differences between the rich and the poor, perhaps by raising the taxes of wealthy families or by giving income assistance to the poor (scored 7). Others think that the government should not concern itself with reducing income differences between the rich and the poor (scored 1). What score between 1 and 7 comes closest to the way you feel?"

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