FIVE Race and Beliefs
about Affirmative
Action

Assessing the Effects of
Interests, Group Threat,
Ideology, and Racism

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INTRODUCTION

Race remains among the central fault lines of American political life, with race-conscious social policy increasingly under attack. Indeed, the legal and political assault on affirmative action gathered force throughout the 1990s. The decade opened with the elevation of Clarence Thomas, arguably a beneficiary of affirmative action, but also a committed opponent, to a place as the 106th justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Federal court rulings ended affirmative action programs in higher education in the case of the University of Texas Law School and in the public schools in the case of the prestigious Boston Latin School. Voters in the states of California and Washington passed, by solid margins in both instances, ballot initiatives calling for an end to affirmative action programs.

Although these events suggest that the times may have decisively turned against affirmative action, it is particularly disappointing to realize that a full and constructive political dialogue about affirmative action has not yet taken place (Skrentny 1996; Sturm and Guinier 1996; Guinier 1998). Instead, the debate over affirmative action often seems to involve two warring camps, each of which stakes a mutually exclusive claim to moral virtue (Edley 1996). Defenders of affirmative action cast themselves as the champions of racial justice and the keepers of Dr. King's dream. Opponents of affirmative action cast themselves as the champions of the true "color-blind" intent of cherished

American values. In the eyes of affirmative action defenders, the latter are, at best, apologists for racism. Opponents see their antagonists as advancing a morally bankrupt claim to victim status and the spoils of racial privilege for African Americans and other racial minorities. Advocates within both camps increasingly turn to research on public opinion to validate their assertions. Yet the morally judgmental character of both advocacy and the extant body of research on public opinion is problematic. Both misread the meaning of race in the American experience and the role of group interests intrinsically raised by affirmative action politics.

Two sharply opposed views of public opinion on affirmative action dominate research. In one account, the controversy and often the intense opposition to affirmative action among white Americans is centrally rooted in antiblack racism (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears et al. 1997). In the opposing account, whites' deep discomfort with affirmative action is said to reflect high-minded value commitments and little if any antiblack animus (Lipset and Schneider 1978b; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). In either view, ironically, affirmative action policies are seen as unlikely to fare well at the bar of white public opinion.

Although there is a debate here of serious scholarly moment, I wish to bring into critical focus three features or presumptions shared by both the racism school of thought and the values and ideology (read: principled objections) school of thought about public opinion. First, both approaches contribute to the distorted view that opposition to affirmative action among whites is monolithic. It is not (Steeh and Krysan 1996).[1] Affirmative action policies span a range of policy goals and strategies (Chermerinsky 1997), some formulations of which (e.g., race-targeted scholarships or special job outreach and training efforts) can be quite popular (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Bobo and Smith 1994).

Second, the racism and the principled objections arguments focus on one element of public opinion: policy preferences themselves. Perceptions and beliefs about the possible benefits and costs of affirmative action are almost never explored. From the vantage point of making a constructive contribution to the policy process, this is disappointing. It is much easier to envision changing such beliefs than ending racism or fundamentally reshaping values and ideological identities. While what one believes about the effects of affirmative action does not singularly determine policy views in this arena, such beliefs surely are an important element in the larger politics of affirmative action.

Third, scholarship advancing both types of accounts shares an emphasis that has thoroughly marginalized the opinions of African

Americans and other racial minorities.[2] This has had unfortunate consequences for theory development and for the capacity of public opinion analysts to make useful contributions to the larger public discourse. Ignoring the voices of people of color results chiefly in a severe underestimation of the role of group interests in the politics of affirmative action and facilitates the stalemate of opposing claims of moral virtue on the left (i.e., the valorous nonracists) and the right (i.e., the valorous color-blind). Ironically, a focus on interests might better facilitate constructive dialogue and compromise. Interests should be understood in both the short-term and the long-term senses. Whereas the short-term interests of racial groups in affirmative action may seem zero-sum in character, the long-term interests most assuredly are not. What is more, our legal and political system routinely grapples with how to reconcile conflicting interests and arrive at sustainable compromises. Such compromises are, after all, the art of politics. Our institutions have a much harder time adjudicating opposing claims of rights and of moral virtue as compared to those based on interests. Left at this level of discourse, a sort of self-righteous tyranny of the majority is ultimately likely to prevail.

Thus, in this chapter, I examine beliefs about the costs and benefits of affirmative action. I pursue a multiracial analysis, assessing the views of black, white, Latino, and Asian respondents to a set of questions contained in the 1992 Los Angeles County Social Survey (LACSS). I expressly examine the effects of perceived group competition and threat on beliefs about the effects of affirmative action. All of this is done while taking seriously the ideas advanced in the racism and principled objection schools of thought about public opinion on affirmative action.

BACKGROUND

General assessments of public opinion on affirmative action point to three noteworthy patterns. First, there has been considerable stability in basic policy views. Contrary to the tenor of media framing, which both claims and in its own portrayal embodies a more sharply negative trend in recent years (Entman 1997), the general trend has been for stability in public opinion (Steeh and Krysan 1996). Second, the exact wording of questions heavily influences the observed level of support for affirmative action. This pattern is unlikely to involve a simple methodological artifact. It appears to reflect substantively important differences in the character of the policy goals and strategies used.

Elsewhere I have discussed this as a difference between opportunity-enhancing forms of affirmative action and outcome-directed forms of affirmative action (Bobo and Kluegel 1993; Bobo and Smith 1994; see also Lipset and Schneider 1978b). Programs with the goal of improving the human capital attributes of minorities tend to be far more popular than those aimed at equalizing outcomes. And programs that call for the application of quotas and clear-cut racial preferences are highly unpopular, even among blacks (Schuman et al. 1997). Third, opinions on affirmative action usually differ by race, with blacks a good deal more supportive than whites (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Kinder and Sanders 1996). Indeed, depending on the exact question and policy, the situation is often one of majority black support for a specified form of affirmative action and majority white opposition, though neither group is univocal in outlook (Jaynes and Williams 1989).

There are few scholars who would dissent from this summary. The debate is joined, however, over the question of the social wellsprings of white opposition to affirmative action. Here the research literature divides between those arguing for the importance of racism and those arguing for the importance of cherished values and ideological commitments.

THE RACISM HYPOTHESIS

The large body of work on symbolic racism (Sears 1988; Sears et al. 1997) and isomorphic arguments about abstract racial resentments (Kinder and Sanders 1996) posits that a new form of antiblack racism has risen. This racism is more subtle than the coarse racism of the Jim Crow era, which bluntly advocated racial segregation, discrimination, and the inherent inferiority of blacks to whites. It involves a blend of early learned antiblack feelings and beliefs with traditional American values of hard work and self-reliance. It is expressed in resentment and hostility toward blacks' demands for special treatment and toward government recognition of blacks' demands and in unreasoned denial of the modern potency of racial discrimination or bias. It has no meaningful dependence on material contingencies in the private lives of individual whites: it is a learned attitude rather than a reflection of socially rooted instrumentalities.

This new attitude is elicited when political leaders or discourse invokes issues or labels that call to mind blacks. Whites respond in terms of this underlying psychological animus against African Americans. One effect of this symbolic racism is the rejection of policies such as affirmative action. Research has shown that measures of such attitudes

are the central factor—more important than ideology, values, personal risk of loss, and perceived group threat—in determining whether whites support or oppose affirmative action–type policies (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears et al. 1997).

It is quite important in this research that specific types of attitudes and their effects on policy views be understood as "racism." These outlooks are held to rest heavily on fundamentally irrational antiblack feelings and fears rather than objective, realistic conflicts of interest (Sears 1988). The symbolic racism researchers are quite explicit in the judgment that such attitudes and their political effects are morally wrong and deserving of approbation, no matter the exact terminology. As David Sears argued, "There is no doubt that *racism* is pejorative, but so is *prejudice;* none of us like to think we are either racist or prejudiced" (1988, 79, emphasis in original). This point is pressed further by Donald Kinder and Lynn Sanders, who claim that most other prominent analysts of white racial attitudes have "white-washed racial prejudice" (1996, 269–72).

By implication then, the symbolic racism approach would expect to find that beliefs about the effects of affirmative action are heavily tainted by racism. Viewed from this vantage point, such beliefs constitute little more than a polite vocabulary for ventilating the underlying racial resentments. As a result, the theory suggests, we are likely to find a strong, if not central, association between symbolic racism and beliefs about the effects of affirmative action for blacks.

THE PRINCIPLED OBJECTIONS HYPOTHESIS

The symbolic racism research has been criticized on a remarkably wide variety of grounds. The most widely discussed and accepted alternative theoretical account of views of affirmative action posits that important values and ideological outlooks, thoroughly devoid of antiblack animus, prompt many whites to reject affirmative action. As Paul Sniderman and Thomas Piazza argued: "At the deepest level though, racial politics owes its shape not to beliefs or stereotypes distinctly about blacks but to the broader set of convictions about fairness and fair play that make up the American Creed" (1993, 176).

This hypothesis about principled bases of objections to affirmative action has a special twist. To wit, not only is racism a small part of the modern politics of race, but also it is only among the politically unsophisticated that racism carries force. Among politically sophisticated individuals who understand what it means to hold a conservative identity and values, it is these high-minded and race-neutral consider-

ations that motivate opposition to affirmative action (Sniderman and Piazza 1993).

Accordingly, the influence of racism has been vastly exaggerated by the symbolic racism researchers (indeed in a manner and to a degree that has led to a harmful politicization of social science scholarship; see Sniderman and Tetlock 1986; Tetlock 1994). Furthermore, Sniderman and Piazza suggest that as the larger civil rights movement shifted its focus from fundamental civic equality and a rhetoric of color-blindness to a focus on equal social rewards and a rhetoric of race-based entitlements, it lost the moral high ground. Blacks and their allies placed themselves in fact at odds with the values embodied in the American Creed (Sniderman and Piazza 1993).

The broadest implication of this approach is that beliefs about the impact of affirmative action for blacks should be most negative among those who identify themselves as politically conservative and among those who most strongly adhere to the values of the work ethic. Apprehension about the consequences of race-based social policy should flow naturally from their conservative inclinations and underlying value commitments. If the full perspective is correct, we should find that the association between political ideology and values and beliefs about affirmative action is strongest among highly educated whites. Viewed from this perspective, believing that affirmative action has unwanted consequences is a legitimate, uncontrived, and indeed logical expectation, given some individuals' ideological and value orientations.

THE GROUP POSITION AND PERCEIVED THREAT HYPOTHESIS

This approach springs from sociologist Herbert Blumer's (1958) theory of race prejudice as a sense of group position. He argued that critical elements of prejudice were feelings of entitlement to social resources, status, and privileges and perceived threats to those entitlements posed by members of other groups. In this view, any social system with long-standing racial identities and institutionalized racial inequality in life chances sets the stage for "realistic" or meaningful struggle over group interests defined along racial lines (Bobo 1997c).

The core argument here is that racial politics unavoidably involves a nettlesome fusion of racial identities and attitudes with racial group interests. It suggests that many whites will oppose affirmative action not so much because they see a race-based policy as contravening their loftiest values or because they have learned a new, politically relevant set of resentments of blacks, but rather because they perceive

blacks as competitive threats for valued social resources, status, and privileges.

In short, the group position approach contends that there are real interests at stake in the debate over affirmative action. A policy aimed at the reduction of educational and employment disadvantages faced by racial minorities (and by women), to the extent it is effective, of necessity means a diminution of the privilege previously enjoyed by white males. From the vantage point of those in the fields of law and disciplines other than political psychology (e.g., economics and sociology), the inherent clash of interests raised by affirmative action policies seems obvious. As economist Lester Thurow put it: "Yet any government program to aid economic minorities must hurt economic majorities. This is the most direct of all of our zero-sum conflicts. If women and minorities have more of the best jobs, white males must have fewer. Here the gains and losses are precisely one for one" (Thurow 1994, 240). Or as sociologist Stephen Steinberg explained: "[O]ne thing is clear: without government, both as employer and as enforcer of affirmative-action mandates, we would not today be celebrating the achievements of the black middle class. Indeed, it is precisely because the stakes are so high that affirmative action is so fiercely contested" (Steinberg 1995, 167–68).

It is essential to counter some misperceptions about an interest-based argument. One can recognize a basis in interests for the politics of affirmative action without accepting the disingenuous claim that discrimination against minorities and women is replaced by equally illegitimate discrimination against white males, without endorsing the ahistorical view that affirmative action policies were motivated solely by a desire to serve the interests of a particularistic group, and without accepting the claim that coalition formation and consensus building become impossible. Affirmative action is mainly pursued in order to stop discriminatory practices that unduly privilege white males. It is aimed at eliminating the routine "mobilization of bias" that would otherwise reproduce unfair white male advantage (Carnoy 1994). Doing so does, therefore, come at some cost to many white males, but it does not render them the victims of discrimination in reverse. Contrary to the now conventional media labeling, affirmative action, at its core, is not about "special preferences." As the eminent stratification sociologist Barbara Reskin recently explained:

> Affirmative action does not replace one form of favoritism with another, it replaces cronyism with objective personnel practices. Its suc-

cesses have not been achieved through discrimination against white men. Federally mandated affirmative action programs neither require nor allow employers to give preference to workers because of their sex or race. Giving preference to an unqualified candidate because of her or his race or sex constitutes illegal discrimination, regardless of whether the beneficiary is male or female, white or minority. In the early 1970s, some employers reserved a specific number of jobs for women and minorities, but this practice virtually disappeared after the courts ruled that it violated the 1964 anti-discrimination law. While the affirmative action efforts of some contemporary employers are undoubtedly unfair to individual whites or men, reverse discrimination is rare. (1998, 90)

On two counts, the claims that a discourse of interests vitiates support for affirmative action and that the policy springs from a narrowly particularistic logic are incorrect. First, it is precisely in order to obtain fair access to education and employment opportunities that affirmative action programs are pursued. Thus, contrary to the position taken by Sniderman and his colleagues, the rationale for the policy has always made an appeal to broad American ideals of opportunity, justice, and fair play. This was true when John F. Kennedy campaigned for the presidency and made civil rights an important component of his agenda. It was clearer still when early in his administration he issued Executive Order 10925, which first used the phrase "affirmative action." According to historian Carl Brauer, Kennedy's executive order established:

> [t]he President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (PCEEO) by combining two existing but largely ineffectual committees. He directed the new panel to "ensure that Americans of all colors and beliefs will have equal access to employment within the government." In addition, he ordered the committee to conduct a racial survey of the government's employment practices in order to provide a "yardstick by which to ensure future progress." (1977, 79)

Of course, the turning point in launching affirmative action policy and in articulating the principled basis for affirmative action came with Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order 11246 in 1965 and his associated speech at Howard University. The speech makes explicit the goal of appealing beyond merely racial considerations in order to achieve fairness. As Johnson remarked in the oft-quoted speech:

> "But freedom is not enough. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'you are free to compete with all the others,' *and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.* Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity—not just legal equity but human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and as a result." (Quoted in Steinberg 1995, 113–14, emphasis added)

Given the historic and long-standing effort to justify affirmative action on the grounds of American values of fairness, justice, and opportunity, it is ironic that some public opinion analysts proceed as if the only basis for the policy has been an abstract desire for race targeting (see Sniderman and Carmines 1997a).

Second, taking a long-term view makes it clear that the societal benefits are substantial. According to a recent comprehensive study of the impact of affirmative action for minorities at elite colleges and universities, there are several broad benefits that flow from taking race into account in admission practices. William Bowen and Derek Bok (1998) found that affirmative action in higher education contributed substantially to the expansion and solidification of a black middle class, served to more fully integrate blacks into American society, and exposed both blacks and whites to positive integrated environments. Furthermore, they found that the black graduates of these elite institutions were somewhat more likely than their white peers to obtain professional degrees in the fields of law, business, and medicine. The black graduates were substantially more likely to be highly civic-minded and socially involved individuals as well.

The group position framework also maintains, then, that much of the white opposition to affirmative action springs from a desire to maintain a privileged position in the American racial hierarchy. The theory holds that this desire is manifest politically in perceptions of group threat and competition from minority groups members. Hence, the greater the sense of competitive threat felt from blacks in general is, the more negative the beliefs about the likely effects of affirmative action should be. Although it would be appropriate to interpret such an explicitly racialized motive for opposition to policies aimed at racial equality as an aspect of racism, doing so is not essential to the group

position and perceived threat argument.[3] Indeed, since racial identities and racial group interests are seen as historically emergent and contingent, the crucial implication is that it is the understandings of group interests and what affects those understandings that is analytically and politically most important. With respect to the rhetoric of racial politics then, the group position and perceived threat argument stands in sharp contradistinction to both the symbolic racism and the principled objections arguments. Judgments of the moral worth of the bases of views of affirmative action can certainly be made, but at some level, interests and perceived threats are simply that: interests and perceived threats.

DATA AND MEASURES

The data come from the 1992 Los Angeles County Social Survey, a countywide, random-digit-dialed, computer-assisted telephone survey of adults living in households. The survey oversampled telephone numbers in zip code areas with high concentrations of blacks (65 percent or more) or Asians (30 percent or more) to generate larger numbers of black and Asian respondents. To capture Los Angeles's large Latino population, a Spanish version of the questionnaire was developed. A total of 1,869 respondents were interviewed: 625 whites, 483 blacks, 477 Latinos, and 284 Asians. Owing to a split-ballot design, this analysis is based on a randomly selected third of respondents who were administered the questions on affirmative action for blacks.[4]

Symbolic racism was measured with a scale based on three Likert-response-format items: "Most blacks who receive money from welfare programs could get along without it if they tried"; "Government officials usually pay less attention to a request or complaint from a black person than from a white person"; "Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors." Scale scores range from 0 to 1, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of symbolic racism.

The principled objections hypothesis was tapped with three different measures concerning political ideology, inegalitarian outlooks, and commitment to the work ethic or individualism. *Political ideology* was measured by self-identification on a one- to seven-point scale ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. *Inegalitarianism* was measured by using responses to two Likert-type items: "Some people are just better cut out than others for important positions in society";

"Some people are better at running things and should be allowed to do so." *Individualism* was measured using responses to two Likert-type items: "If people work hard they almost always get what they want"; "Most people who don't get ahead should not blame the system: they really have only themselves to blame." Both sets of measures are drawn from the measures of core American values developed for the National Election Study (NES) surveys by Stanley Feldman (1988).

Perceived threat was measured with responses to four Likert-type items: "More good jobs for blacks means fewer good jobs for members of other groups"; "The more influence blacks have in local politics the less influence members of other groups will have in local politics"; "As more good housing and neighborhoods go to blacks, the fewer good houses and neighborhoods there will be for members of other groups"; "Many blacks have been trying to get ahead economically at the expense of other groups." These items and their properties are discussed in fuller detail elsewhere (Bobo and Hutchings 1996). It is worth noting here that these items constitute a conservative approach to tapping perceived threat. The items always expressly invoke at least two groups, speak to relatively concrete resources, specify a zero-sum relationship, and use neutral language. All of these steps are taken in order to avoid the type of conceptual ambiguity and confusion that still surrounds the notion of symbolic racism.

We also introduce controls for two other aspects of racial attitudes that tap important dimensions of antiblack attitudes. Intergroup *affect* is measured with a feeling thermometer score ranging from 0 to 100, with high scores indicating more positive affect. Racial *stereotypes* are measured with an index composed of three items that used seven-point bipolar trait ratings. Respondents rated blacks on the trait dimensions of intelligent/unintelligent, prefer to be self-supporting/prefer to live off of welfare, and easy to get along with/hard to get along with.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

RACE AND BELIEFS ABOUT AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Are beliefs about the effects of affirmative action sharply divided by race, with racial minorities perceiving overwhelmingly positive outcomes and whites perceiving overwhelmingly negative outcomes? Responses to the four questions on the impact of affirmative action, shown in table 5.1, present a somewhat more complicated pattern. To

TABLE 5.1   Race/Ethnicity and Beliefs about the Impact of Affirmative Action for Blacks

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL	N
Affirmative action for blacks is unfair to whites.							
White	11%	34%	24%	23%	8%	100%	216
Black	5%	13%	17%	45%	20%	100%	173
Latino	5%	25%	32%	35%	2%	99%	160
Asian	4%	30%	35%	25%	6%	100%	88
Affirmative action in education gives an opportunity to qualified blacks who might not have had a chance without it.							
White	9%	50%	22%	16%	3%	100%	217
Black	29%	55%	5%	10%	1%	100%	172
Latino	8%	58%	22%	11%	2%	101%	161
Asian	8%	46%	29%	16%	1%	100%	87
Affirmative action for blacks may force employers to hire unqualified people.							
White	13%	47%	13%	21%	6%	100%	217
Black	5%	22%	10%	44%	19%	100%	173
Latino	3%	36%	20%	38%	3%	100%	161
Asian	7%	32%	20%	37%	5%	101%	87
Affirmative action in the workplace for blacks helps make sure that the American workforce and economy remain competitive.							
White	2%	27%	24%	39%	8%	100%	216
Black	17%	43%	17%	18%	4%	99%	173
Latino	2%	53%	24%	18%	4%	101%	160
Asian	5%	32%	28%	31%	5%	101%	87

be sure, there is a large and significant racial group difference in response to each item, with blacks (especially) and Latinos usually more likely to adopt favorable views of affirmative action than are whites. However, Asians' views are typically closer to those of whites than to those of blacks or Latinos. And in no instance does even the black-white difference reflect diametrically opposite views. Indeed, to a degree that should discomfit both the racism school and the principled objection school, white opinion is neither monolithic nor uniformly negative. Nearly one-third of whites (29 percent) perceived affirmative action for blacks as helpful to American economic competitiveness, one-third rejected the idea that affirmative action is unfair to whites, and nearly 60 percent agreed that affirmative action provides educational opportunities for qualified blacks who might not otherwise get a chance. The point where affirmative action encounters the most negative perceptions among whites is acceptance of the idea that

it leads to hiring unqualified blacks (60 percent gave agreeing responses).

This picture of quite real, but muted racial differences in perceptions of the effects of affirmative action is more readily appreciated by examining results for a simple summary scale based on the four items (α reliability = .66), as shown in figure 5.1. Scores of 0 on the scale indicate maximally favorable perceptions of affirmative action, and scores of 5 indicate maximally negative views of affirmative action. First, there are highly reliable race differences in the likelihood of perceiving affirmative action as having negative effects [$F(3, 625) = 18.09$, $p < .00001$]. Second, even among whites, the mean score on the Perceived Negative Effects of Affirmative Action scale rises just above the midpoint of 3.0. Third, the figure highlights what some would interpret as an American racial hierarchy in views of affirmative action. At the bottom of the racial hierarchy, and thus least likely to hold negative perceptions of affirmative action, are African Americans, followed by Latinos and then Asians; whites, at the top of the hierarchy, are most inclined to hold negative perceptions.

To this point, the results provide at least some initial suggestive evidence for a more interest-group-based understanding of views of affirmative action. Views are differentiated by race in predictable ways. Blacks, the group whose historical experiences in the United States have most consistently embodied a lower-castelike status, are the least willing to embrace negative views of affirmative action.

It is entirely possible, however, that what appear to be race-based differences in opinion are really differences in socioeconomic background or other demographic composition characteristics (e.g., native-born status) that we should be cautious to interpret as reflecting racial group interests. In order to address this issue, table 5.2 estimates a series of regression equations where perceived negative effects of affirmative action are the dependent measure. Model 1, which includes only a set of dummy variables identifying black, Latino, and Asian respondents (with white respondents as the omitted or contrast group) reiterates the results of figure 5.1. There are significant differences between blacks and whites and between Latinos and whites. However, there is no statistically discernible difference in the likelihood that Asians and whites view affirmative action as having negative effects. Overall, a simple control for race explains about 12 percent of the variation in beliefs about the effects of affirmative action.

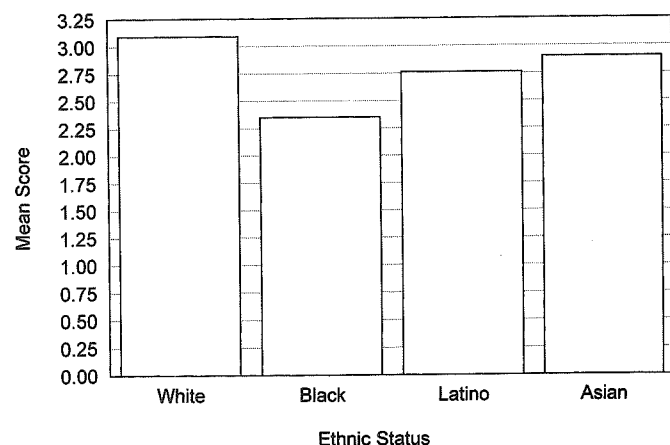Does the impact of race on views of affirmative action diminish

Figure 5.1. Race and Mean Perceived Negative Effects of Affirmative Action (1992 LACSS)

upon introducing controls for social class characteristics, such as education and income, and other demographic factors, such as age, sex, and native-born status? No. Indeed, if anything, the black-white and the Latino-white differences grow larger after introducing social class and demographic characteristic controls (compare model 2 to model 1). The black-white gap widens by about 10 percent, and the Latino-white gap widens by about 8 percent.

Those arguing from the principled opposition point of view might reasonably conjecture, however, that much of what appears as a "race" difference is rather a difference in ideology and values that, primarily for historical and political reasons, overlaps with race. If this is true, we should find that controlling for ideological conservatism, inegalitarian values, and individualism should considerably diminish racial group differences. As model 3 shows, controlling for ideology and values slightly reduces the black-white difference (9 percent) and the Latino-white difference (2 percent), but still leaves highly reliable racial group differences in each case. It should be noted that in this race-pooled model there are no significant effects of inegalitarianism or individualism on perceived negative effects of affirmative action. Only ideological identification itself appears to matter.

For the sake of completeness, we take the further step of introducing a battery of explicit racial attitude measures (model 4). Even this, however, fails to eliminate significant race effects. Most dramatically, once we remove the impact of several types of arguably "antiblack"

TABLE 5.2 OLS Regression Models of Perceived Negative Effects of Affirmative Action for Blacks ($N = 497$)

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4
Race/ethnicity				
White (omitted)				
Black	−0.127°°°	−0.134°°°	−0.123°°°	−0.092°°°
	0.015	0.016	0.015	0.015
Latino	−0.048°°	−0.052°°	−0.051°°	−0.056°°
	0.016	0.019	0.018	0.017
Asian	−0.024	−0.008	−0.001	−0.015
	0.020	0.022	0.022	0.020
Social background				
Education		−0.006	−0.006	−0.000
		0.004	0.004	0.004
Age		0.000	−0.000	−0.000
		0.000	0.000	0.000
Male		0.019	0.016	0.013
		0.012	0.012	0.011
U.S. native		0.029†	0.030†	0.042°°
		0.017	0.016	0.015
Family income ($10,000s)		−0.007°	−0.007°	−0.003
		0.003	0.003	0.003
Ideology and values				
Conservatism			0.020°°°	0.015°°°
			0.004	0.003
Inegalitarianism			0.040	0.004
			0.033	0.031
Individualism			0.047	−0.028
			0.032	0.031
Racial attitudes				
Affect				0.000
				0.000
Stereotypes				−0.006
				0.035
Perceived threat				0.235°°°
				0.041
Symbolic racism				0.252°°°
				0.041
Constant	0.602°°°	0.677°°°	0.541°°°	0.255°°°
	0.011	0.060	0.065	0.071
Adjusted R^2	0.121	0.132	0.190	0.316

Note: Figures listed are unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors.
†$p < 0.10$.   °$p < 0.05$.   °°$p < 0.01$.   °°°$p < 0.001$.

attitudes, the Latino-white difference actually grows larger. To be sure, the black-white difference narrows nontrivially (about 25 percent), but it remains sizeable.

To borrow Cornell West's (1993) pithy observation: race matters! Beliefs about the consequences of affirmative action are importantly shaped by racial group membership and therefore, we would infer, by the differential short-term stake or interest that racial groups have in affirmative action policies (see Jackman 1994 for a similar argument).

WHITES' BELIEFS ABOUT THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

It could be argued that by pooling the responses of blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asians we are masking potentially important distinctive patterns in the views of white respondents. In particular, both the principled objection school and the racism school arguments were formulated initially as accounts of the attitudes of white Americans. To this end, table 5.3 reports regression models of the determinants of the perceived negative effects of affirmative action measure among white respondents only. This part of the analysis also considers the claim of the principled objections theorists that the views of the highly educated exhibit less dependence on racial attitudes and a greater influence of ideological and value-based reasoning. We do so by specifying interactions among level of education and each of the values and ideology measures and the two theoretically central racial attitude measures: perceived threat and symbolic racism. For this part of the analysis, level of education is treated as a dummy variable distinguishing college graduates from those without college degrees. Among whites, virtually no LACSS respondent had fewer than eleven years of schooling, and a very high fraction (fully 40 percent) had completed college. Thus, this is an admittedly truncated examination of the education interaction hypothesis, but a truncation that reflects the real distribution of education levels among white adults in Los Angeles County.

Consistent with the results from the pooled race models (table 5.2), the only element of the values and ideology argument to exhibit a significant relation (at conventional levels of statistical discernability, $p <$ .05) to perceived negative effects of affirmative action is conservative self-identification. If a more generous criterion for statistical discernability is applied ($p < .10$), which may be justifiable in this instance, given the overall small number of cases and the arbitrariness of the conventional standard, then both *inegalitarianism* and *individualism*

TABLE 5.3   OLS Regression Models of Perceived Negative Effects of Affirmative Action for Blacks (White Respondents Only, $N = 163$)

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
Constant	.178 (.080)°	.127 (.091)
Social background		
College degree	−.002 (.021)	.128 (.123)
Age	.001 (.001)	.001 (.001)
Male	.028 (.021)	.030 (.021)
Family income ($10,000s)	.008 (.005)	.008 (.005)
Ideology and values		
Conservatism	.020 (.006)°°	.022 (.009)°
Inegalitarianism	.119 (.012)†	.116 (.028)†
Individualism	−.122 (.062)†	−.151 (.080)†
Racial attitudes		
Affect	−.000 (.001)	−.000 (.001)
Stereotypes	−.109 (.080)	−.115 (.082)
Perceived threat	.218 (.089)°	.184 (.111)
Symbolic racism	.380 (.081)°°°	.498 (.107)°°°
Interactions		
College ° conservatism	—	−.003 (.013)
College ° inegalitarianism	—	.013 (.121)
College ° individualism	—	.052 (.127)
College ° perceived threat	—	−.007 (.179)
College ° symbolic racism	—	−.264 (.156)†
Adjusted R^2	.332	.327

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Figures in parentheses are standard errors.
†$p < 0.10$.   °$p < .05$.   °°$p < .01$.   °°°$p < .001$.

influence beliefs about affirmative action. The effect of *individualism*, however, is in the opposite direction of that expected under the principled objections hypothesis: the more whites are committed to notions of reward for hard work, the less likely they are to hold negative beliefs about the effects of affirmative action for blacks.

The effects for perceived threat and symbolic racism are more straightforward. Both significantly enhance whites' perception of negative impacts of affirmative action, particularly for symbolic racism. And these two variables contribute the lion's share to the overall 33.2 percent of the variance explained in perceptions of the negative effects of affirmative action under model 1.

Model 2 allows for possible interactions between level of education and the values and ideology measures as well as the perceived threat and symbolic racism measures. None of the interaction terms meets conventional criteria of significance. Given the small Ns, however, it is worth noting that the effect of symbolic racism does appear to be

smaller among the college educated ($p < .10$). However, there is no evidence of a heightened effect of ideology for either value measure among the better educated. There is no sign that the effect of perceived threat is contingent on level of education. The model including the interaction terms, furthermore, does not yield a meaningful improvement in variance explained over the model specifying no interactions. On the whole then, the education-interaction hypothesis is not borne out. The relatively limited capacity of education to reduce the level or impact of some forms of intergroup negativism has, of course, been anticipated by Mary Jackman's ideological refinement thesis (Jackman and Muha 1984).

RELATION TO POLICY PREFERENCES

This analysis is primarily concerned with beliefs about the consequences of affirmative action. Such beliefs have been unstudied and may help identify a way for more constructive dialogue between public opinion analysts and those trying to fashion a progressive coalition for affirmative action (Sturm and Guinier 1996; Bowen and Bok 1998; Guinier 1998). Still, the question arises of how these beliefs relate to policy preferences on affirmative action. While it is beyond the scope of this analysis to develop a model of the determinants of affirmative action policy views, preliminary results suggest a very close association between beliefs about the effects of affirmative action and actual policy preferences. Among white respondents, the perceived negative effects scale has a Pearson's correlation of .68 ($p < .001$) with a three-item scale of affirmative action policy views.[5] Among the social psychological variables examined to this point, this is the single strongest bivariate correlation with affirmative action policy views. In addition, the perceived negative effects of affirmative action have a strong net impact, even if added to a regression equation predicting opposition to affirmative action policy, only after controlling for education, age, sex, family income, conservatism, inegalitarianism, work ethic, symbolic racism, and perceived threat (partial $b = 3.17$, $p < .001$, where the dependent opposition to affirmative action variable runs from a low score of 0 to a high score of 5.0). Hence, there is a sound empirical basis to expect beliefs about the effects of affirmative action to play a part in the actual policy views individuals are likely to hold.

SEVERAL INTERPRETATIVE ISSUES
THE PROBLEM OF RATIONALIZATION

From one vantage point, the seeming importance of the perceived costs and benefits of affirmative action is misleading at best. Beliefs about the impact of a policy, while putatively quite pragmatic and defensible on their face, may simply mask less honorable motives for opposing the policy. In this case, opposition to affirmative action, while actually rooted in some form of animus toward blacks, may be cloaked in the language of sensible concern with unwanted effects of the policy. Certainly, the impact of symbolic racism can be interpreted in this fashion. But three patterns argue against a strong version of this interpretation. First, there is a degree of internal complexity to the perceived costs and benefits of affirmative action, as there is to the policy views themselves. Why should fully 59 percent of the white respondents concede that "affirmative action in education gives an opportunity to qualified blacks who might not have had a chance without it" if all they are interested in doing is masking opposition to affirmative action? It would be cognitively simpler to deny any positive or beneficial effects.

Second, racial background itself, ideological conservatism, perceived threat, and symbolic racism are significantly related to the beliefs about the impact of affirmative action for blacks. What one believes about affirmative action's effects is thus not neatly reducible to an underlying antiblack animus. In the light of these multiple sources and the intractable ambiguity of what measures of "symbolic racism" actually mean, it is inappropriate to treat such beliefs as mere rationalization.

Third, even when pitted against other concepts, the perceived negative effects measure has highly significant effects on affirmative action policy views. Most important, even if the perceived costs and benefits variable is the last measure introduced into the equation, it continues to have significant direct effects on opposition to affirmative action. That is, even if we stack the deck against it by including first the other putatively more important measures (i.e., symbolic racism), we still find effects for perceived negative effects of affirmative action. If these views were merely a stalking horse for symbolic racism or for perceived group threat, or for both, then in the presence of these other factors it should add nothing more to our capacity to account

for the level of opposition to affirmative action. Instead, it has considerable net effects.

To be sure, the potential problem of rationalization is not fully resolved by these considerations. Further research will be necessary to accomplish such a goal. For example, it would be useful to conduct survey-based experiments that include either accurate information or persuasion efforts directed at influencing the perceived consequences of the policy. If either the perceived consequences or the actual affirmative action policy attitudes, or both, go unchanged in the presence of a credible and persuasive message, then indeed the roots of the perceptions and attitudes reside elsewhere.

ON SCOPE AND THE DIFFICULTY OF DISCUSSING GROUP INTERESTS

It would be a mistake to interpret the argument or the evidence presented here as positing the singular and overarching importance of group interests to the dynamics of race politics. This research is not advanced as an effort to identify a new master motive or another "simple and sovereign" approach. First, it is a beginning effort to correct a serious omission in our thinking about affirmative action and about the politics of race more broadly. To wit, prior scholarship on public opinion about affirmative action has been preoccupied with a stark dichotomous choice: it is a matter of values and ideology, *or* it is a matter of antiblack attitudes of some kind. Such formulations are needlessly simplistic and overlook altogether both what people perceive about the likely impact of a policy and the role for group interests in shaping the perceptions of policy consequences and the policy attitudes themselves. Second, it is an effort to place public opinion research on firmer, more credible ground for speaking constructively to the modern politics of race. Ignoring or minimizing a substantial factor in what makes affirmative action a controversial matter is a counterproductive form of intellectual "denial."

Given the logical implication of affirmative action policy (Thurow 1994; Steinberg 1995), the empirical evidence on race-based differences in opinion, and the importance of perceived threat among whites, why are scholars so reluctant to consider group interests as one element in the politics of affirmative action? One aspect of the problem is the strong bias toward "either/or" formulations. For instance, Sniderman and Edward Carmines, in a flight of hyperbole, argue that it is both "wrong and wrong-headed" (1997a, 115) to see a conflict of interest involved in the politics of affirmative action. They

contend that "if the issue of race really were to reduce to group interests, given that blacks constitute only a small fraction of the citizenry, there never would have been a successful biracial effort in behalf of racial justice" (p. 115). This declaration reflects astonishingly simplified either/or thinking rather than a careful consideration of the available evidence.

A hypothetical example drawn from academe can quickly illustrate the extremity and shortsightedness of the claim made by Sniderman and Carmines. In the current period of resource scarcity in higher education, more and more academic departments find that when faculty retire, they are not automatically granted a replacement slot. Instead of simply allocating slots to departments, there are often college- or divisionwide competitions for a finite number of slots. The department that persuades the dean gets the slot. Imagine then, if you will, a scenario wherein a History department and a Political Science department have each had a recent retirement. The dean responds by offering only one replacement slot, to be granted to the department that makes the best case for a new hire. This is a zero-sum conflict of interest between the History department and the Political Science department. Imagine further that most members of both departments ardently defend their own department's "right" to make the next hire, though neither accomplishes complete internal unanimity on this point. That both departments have an unambiguous "interest" in securing the slot foreordains neither deep and irreconcilable conflict between the departments nor complete unanimity within departments on how to respond. Real conflicts of interest, based on some corporate or group characteristic, frequently arise without necessitating (1) that the corporate or group interest at stake be the only operative factor, (2) that mutual within-group unanimity of viewpoints emerge, or (3) that a pitched "warre of all against all" be the only avenue of response. It would indeed be foolish to conclude that the only evidence of a significant role for group interests requires that such interests be the singular, monolithic, and irreconcilable source of a dispute. Yet this is effectively the standard that Sniderman and Carmines suggest be applied.

In a scenario like the "one slot" situation, I suspect that the perceived benefits (or costs) of obtaining the slot, how generally vulnerable or threatened (or secure) members of a department feel about their status within the university, and some general ideas and values about the elements of a proper liberal education would all come to bear to differing degrees. But I also suspect that the odds would run

strongly against departmental affiliation having *no* bearing on how most individuals responded precisely because real, short-term interests are at stake. It is in this sense that I argue interests are a necessary element of our thinking about the politics of affirmative action and, further, that the reluctance to recognize the role of interests simultaneously does damage to social scientific theory and weakens the capacity to forge a progressive political strategy.

Yet a second possible basis for the reluctance to see interests as part of the politics of affirmative action has to do with the nature of racial groups. To speak of "interests" in the context of race seems to accord "race" a deeper ontological reality than the concept should rightly possess. This reluctance has a sensible foundation inasmuch as the concepts of race and racial groupings are social constructions rather than naturally occurring categories. As such, racial categories and identities derive their force and power from the human capacity to create socially significant symbols or meaning. It is in direct recognition of this consideration that I draw a fundamental distinction here between short-term and long-term interests. Racial categories and identities are ultimately malleable rather than fixed. As a result, there can be no fundamental, long-term conflicts of interest between racial groups. However, in the presence of socially significant racial identities and communities that also embody sharp race-linked divisions in the command of economic resources, access to and command of political resources, and enjoyment of broad social esteem, there are quite profound material and socioemotional "stakes" in the politics of race. Social policies designed to greatly reduce or eliminate those race-linked inequalities of necessity entail a reduction in the extent of group privilege for some and a corresponding improvement in condition for others.

There is yet a third possible basis for the reluctance to recognize the role of interests, which involves the taken-for-granted nature of white privilege and the traditional rhetoric and strategy of the civil rights movement. It is, I suspect, simpler for many liberals to treat the race problem as an abstract moral question than it is to confront the reality of racial privilege. Ironically, it is what we now regard as the moral power and rhetoric of traditional civil rights leaders that reinforces this tendency. In conventional analyses, whether advanced by the racism school or the principled politics school, there are "good guys and bad guys," and it is easy to view one's self as standing in the camp of the morally virtuous. The rub, however, is that white skin privilege is a categorical benefit, not merely something enjoyed by

those openly hostile to blacks or other minorities. Such a recognition means forfeiting some degree of claim to innocence, and that is a cognitively difficult task, even for the well-intentioned. As a result, analysis and discourse that confront group-based interests and privileges can make uncomfortable even those of genuine goodwill. And it does, therefore, run the risk of making coalitions more difficult to forge. But coalitions forged on the basis of partial understanding or plainly erroneous beliefs are just as fragile, if not more fragile, because the underlying social reality will inexorably assert itself.

One of the important, but paradoxical accomplishments of the civil rights movement has been to cast open bigotry into deep disrepute. It is an important accomplishment inasmuch as the sacrifice, courageous struggle, and lofty rhetoric of civil rights crusaders gave witness to a nation that it had to change if it wanted to live up to its highest ideals. For most white Americans, this accomplishment is seen in the sweeping positive transformation in racial attitudes that has occurred over the past five decades (Schuman et al. 1997), a transformation that much social scientific evidence suggests runs deep enough that most white Americans want to preserve a self-image as racially egalitarian individuals (Gaertner and Dovidio 1986). The accomplishment is paradoxical in that large and systematic racial inequalities persist and are actively justified in the absence of coarse bigotry. That is, there is still extensive white privilege in life chances and the systematic reproduction of such privilege without Jim Crow racism and the historic political actors who once advocated for it. The dilemma of the new "laissez-faire racism," as I have developed more fully elsewhere (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bobo and Smith 1998), is that you don't need coarse, biological racism to facilitate the maintenance of white skin privilege and black disadvantage. Yet in the popular mind, racism is now narrowly equated with cross burnings, hooded Klansmen, and the Jim Crow rantings of the likes of George Wallace and Lester Maddox. The failure to recognize interests and privilege, as well as the justification of such conditions, as part of the problem of racialized politics is a serious constraint on the capacity to understand the social phenomenon under investigation and impedes constructive response to the current racial divide.

CONCLUSIONS

The empirical results support several conclusions. *First, whites and racial minority group members do not hold diametrically opposed*

views of the costs and benefits of affirmative action for blacks. Although much of the media discourse about affirmative action highlights intense group conflict, especially between blacks and whites, there is far more overlap in outlooks than such packaging recognizes (Entman 1997). While the results point in manifold ways to the central importance of race to affirmative action politics, the arena for potential common ground is larger than the general discourse or the tenor of recent scholarship on public opinion about affirmative action has properly acknowledged. To be sure, beliefs about the effects of affirmative action do not foreordain specific policy positions. Yet much of the "politics" of affirmative action is a discourse about the effects of such a policy. These results point to some useful wellsprings of favorable and potentially more consensual views of affirmative action.

Second, much of why "race matters" would appear to reflect group-based interests. This is, we submit, the only reasonable interpretation of the powerfully robust racial difference in opinion that separates the views of blacks and of Latinos from those of whites. Certainly, this is not a context where one would argue for a heritable proclivity to favor affirmative action. Yet group differences are just one possible indication of an interest basis to public opinion. But even in terms of understanding the effects of perceived group threat and, to a degree, of symbolic racism on whites' beliefs, it is something about how individuals understand their "place" in the American *racial order* that appears to be at stake. That is, it would be a mistake to interpret these results as simply confirming the advocacy of those on the left who wish to don the armor of moral superiority and classify opponents of affirmative action as transparent racists. These are racial attitudes situated in a powerfully racialized economic and political context where there is a meaningful and indisputable short-term difference in group interests.

William Julius Wilson (1987) convincingly argued that liberals lost their hegemonic position in the discourse on social welfare and poverty policy because they failed to acknowledge important, if often unsettling, realities about the nature of life in poor ghetto communities. Liberal analysts of public opinion on affirmative action have effectively committed the same error by ignoring or disparaging the all too transparent social reality of the differing stakes that blacks and Latinos, on the one hand, and whites and to a degree Asians, on the other hand, have in the preservation and implementation of affirmative action. By not addressing the role of interest groups and perceived group interests and by stressing instead moralistic judgments of who is and

who is not a racist, the door was opened wide to a conservative response that cast opponents of affirmative action as the truly moral figures in the debate. Thus, the transparent fact that political advocacy for affirmative action has come principally (though far from exclusively) from the traditional civil rights community, especially from black organizations explicitly seeking to advance the interests of the black community, is not addressed at all by liberal analysts of racial attitudes. The extent of this failure remains so great that even the most recent efforts to revive symbolic racism theory (e.g., Sears et al. 1997) commit again the grave error of classifying attitudes toward civil rights leaders and black political activism as an "abstract racial resentment," namely, symbolic racism (see Bobo 1988a; Bobo 1988b; Tuch and Hughes 1996b; and Hughes 1997 for a critique). By having legitimated and made central a discourse of values and morality, liberal analysts have made it easy for conservative analysts to cast the demands made by blacks and other minorities as morally corrupt self-aggrandizement.

Third, and perhaps above all else, the talk of values and ideology— of a putatively principled basis of objection to affirmative action— receives very limited support in this analysis. To be sure, ideological identification has a real net effect on beliefs about the impact of affirmative action among whites. However, part of the gross effect of ideology stems from its correlation with explicitly racial attitudes, and, what is more, the effects of perceived threat and of symbolic racism are a good deal more consequential.

Of course, it has been easy to overplay the argument from principles. Those on the right who wish to don the armor of moral innocence in their war against affirmative action are ready to accept this view. Certainly, seminal elite treatises (Glazer 1975) and media discourse (Entman 1997) have placed such exaggerated and inappropriate emphasis on the term "preferences" and have so routinely packaged affirmative action as a profound break with an American tradition of resisting government recognition of "groups" that the real historical record is easily misunderstood. Explicitly race-based policies, usually actively antiminority in design, have characterized major social policies in the United States almost from the very founding of the nation (Takaki 1994)—so much so that the logic of affirmative action policies, rather than contradicting the American historical pattern, is actually entirely consistent with it. As eminent historian John Higham explained:

There was nothing novel or constitutionally irregular about govern-ments or private bureaucracies favoring a class of citizens who need special help. Consider, for example, the Freedman's Bureau, which Congress created in 1866 to assist newly freed former slaves in the con-quered South, or the long history of federal water policy, tax laws, and veterans legislation—all of which singled out a particular group for gov-ernment benefits. (1997, 20)

Indeed, given the historic intertwining of race and the understanding of values in the United States, it is somewhat paradoxical, if not Or-wellian, that a "values and ideology" argument is ever credibly posi-tioned as completely race-neutral. Eminent historical sociologist Or-lando Patterson argues persuasively that conservative scholars have pursued a disingenuous argument against group-based claims in the racial context when in fact they vigorously support group, or "corpo-rate," claims in many other contexts. He writes:

The fundamental flaw in conservative thinking is the refusal to ac-knowledge the peculiar demands of representational behavior and col-lective life. Insisting that the representative should treat individuals ex-actly the same as in face-to-face interactions is perverse, hypocritical, and downright obtuse, in light of the treatment of corporate constitu-encies.

American conservative representative leaders are in hopeless intel-lectual disarray on this matter. Not only is the socioeconomic system that they cherish founded on the principle of corporate responsibility and action, but conservatives, more than any other group, are prone to appeal to collective ideals and agency when it suits them. Which group of people urges their fellow Americans to be patriotic and gets most upset when protesters exercise their First Amendment right to burn the flag? And what is patriotism if not the most extreme commitment to a belief in a supraindividual entity called the nation? Which group of Americans wants us all to pursue a common national culture with a single common set of virtues and ideals grounded on a common set of religious beliefs? (Patterson 1997, 116)

Patterson goes on to deride the conservative claim that government should never recognize racial groups in the form of affirmative action as a matter of principle. He argues, "That the conservatives object to such a policy on the grounds that collective agency and liability do not exist is sheer hypocrisy and self-contradiction. Collective reparation is a well-established principle in the law of nations" (Patterson 1997, 122).

Race, at least in terms of the traditional black-white divide, has long been the axis along which full and genuine membership in the polity was established and which set the boundaries for determining what constituted appropriate or inappropriate treatment of individu-als (Bobo 1988b; Prager 1987; Steinberg 1995). Race has been so pro-foundly implicated in American politics that it played the central role in reshaping national partisan political identities and party alignments in the post–World War II period (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Edsall and Edsall 1991a).

In sum, neither U.S. history nor the wellsprings of public opinion provides much support for the values and ideology position. Given the resounding rejection of this "theory" in a range of studies using differ-ent samples and measures, the time may have arrived to lay it to rest with finality (see Bobo 1991; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Meertens and Pettigrew 1997; Sears et al. 1997; Sidanius, Pratto, and Bobo 1996). Absent some powerful new evidence, the principled objection hypoth-esis stands as at best a logical possibility, albeit historically implausible and repeatedly disconfirmed by a number of empirical analyses.

Students of public opinion on affirmative action will better under-stand the social phenomenon they study and make more useful contri-butions to the national dialogue on race if (1) research reaches beyond policy preferences to include beliefs about the effects of affirmative action, (2) race and racial group interests are repositioned to a more central analytical place, and (3) multiracial analyses and comparisons become more commonplace. Without denying that racism remains a problem or that ideological conservatism matters for whites' attitudes, affirmative action is also very much about the place racial groups should occupy in American society.[6]

Blacks and Latinos face real and tangible disadvantages and sys-tematic modern-day racial discrimination. They are more likely to live below the poverty line, indeed far below it as compared to whites (Harrison and Bennett 1995); they are far less likely to complete col-lege degrees (Hauser 1993), a form of certification that increasingly draws the line between a middle-class standard of living and a life of constant economic hardship (Danziger and Gottschalk 1996); and they will almost certainly face discrimination in searching for a place to live (Massey and Denton 1993) or for employment (Holzer 1996; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1991; Turner, Fix, and Struyk 1991). The removal of affirmative action in higher education has immediate and potentially disastrous effects on the positions of blacks and Lati-nos (Weiss 1997). It is increasingly clear that lessening the pressure

brought by government for affirmative action and for activist civil rights enforcement produces real and often drastic declines in the economic and educational fortunes of blacks and Latinos (Carnoy 1994). Despite all the high, abstract, and moralizing rhetoric, affirmative action is simultaneously about concrete matters of who gets what.

A rhetoric centered around a mutual recognition and accommodation of legitimate interests is a far more promising basis for racial progress than are the brickbats of moral superiority now wielded so vigorously by those on the left and those on the right. Furthermore, advocates of affirmative action would do well, first, to shed the perception that white public opinion is monolithic on this question and, second, to set about the eminently political task of promoting ideas and values consistent with affirmative action, as did leaders from the civil rights era, such as Kennedy, Johnson, and King. Such framing of issues by elites is a critical factor shaping public opinion. The far from overwhelming vote in California in favor of Proposition 209 and more recently the defeat of an anti–affirmative action measure in Houston suggest that there is more promise of an effective pro–affirmative action strategy than the current air of liberal defeat recognizes. As I have argued elsewhere:

> The assumption that public opinion is known or fixed in a certain direction is probably more constraining than is public opinion itself. Reformers of the left or the right who take the contours of public opinion for granted or who assume that there is little need to promote actively particular issue frames and reinforce the values, assumptions, symbols, and catch phrases that lend meaning to questions of public policy are likely to falter before the bar of public opinion. (Bobo and Smith 1994, 395)

Lani Guinier is quite right. In order to move beyond race, we will most assuredly have to work through race in all its implications (Guinier 1998, 240). This will require a sensible and honest focus on the things that are really at stake. But if we do so, there are good reasons to believe that a progressive coalition for policies such as affirmative action and an even broader sense of "sustainable community" can be achieved.