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Symbolic Racism

David O. Sears

Throughout our history, white Americans have singled out Afro-Americans for particularly racist treatment. Of all the many immigrant nationalities that have come to these shores since the seventeenth century, Afro-Americans have consistently attracted the greatest prejudice based on their group membership and have been treated in the most categorically unequal fashion.

In the early 1960s, optimism abounded about finally putting to rest the most glaring symptoms of this tragic flaw in American democracy. Explicit discrimination against blacks had seemingly become a thing of the past except in some vestigial practices of the old Confederacy. By the end of that decade, federal court decisions and civil rights legislation, and their active enforcement by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, had put an end to formal segregation and discrimination in almost all areas of southern social and political life as well. Most of these actions had the support of northern whites, and even white southern public opinion moved dramatically to support general principles of racial equality (Greeley & Sheatsley, 1971). As the 1970s dawned, the main formal barriers to racial equality seemed to be crumbling, with the full approval of the white majority.

But with the end of most formal barriers came recognition of still further obstacles. And during the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was disquieting evidence of continued white resistance to full racial equality. Public support for the U.S. Supreme Court became sharply polarized around its liberal civil rights decisions, and calls for the impeachment of Chief Justice Warren were common (Murphy & Tanenhaus, 1968). In 1964, in California, two thirds of the electorate voted to overturn a state law forbidding overt racial discrimination in housing, though the state had relatively few blacks and no unusual history of racial discrimination or racial conflict (Wolfinger & Greenstein, 1968). Over the next few years, riots broke out in hundreds of black ghettos across the country, generating fear and condemnation among whites. In both 1964 and 1968, George Wallace's candidacy for the presidency, with its barely disguised appeal to antiblack sentiments, did surprisingly well in both North and South. "White backlash" became a topic of anxious conversation in the White House and elsewhere. "Backlash" local candidates, such as Louise Day Hicks in Boston or Sam Yorty in Los Angeles, ran well at the polls. For the first time, moderate blacks mounted serious and sometimes successful candidacies for higher office

DAVID O. SEARS • College of Letters and Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles, California 90024.

in such majority-white electorates as Massachusetts and Los Angeles. But even then, the vote was strongly polarized by race and, among whites, by level of racial prejudice (Becker & Heaton, 1967; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears & Kinder, 1971). School desegregation plodded along "at all deliberate speed," which was very slow indeed, and its main instrument, "busing," was strongly opposed by most whites.

This seemed sharply paradoxical. Egalitarian public policies were being implemented on a massive scale, backed by overwhelming white support for the formal principles of racial equality. But there were clear warning signs of widespread opposition to further implementation. This paradox raised serious questions about the level of individual racism among whites, that is, about whites' attitudes toward blacks and toward racial equality. Various views came forward. Perhaps racism was just in hiding, momentarily cloaked by whites' need to appear tolerant in a new era insisting on overt tolerance, but ready to spring "out from under the rocks" when the coast was clear. It did seem that the old forms of racial prejudice, supporting a segregationist social system, so common in the pre–World War II generation, were dying out. Younger generations of whites were plainly more racially liberal (Campbell, 1971). But perhaps the issues were changing, and with them, the public agenda. Racism might actually have been increased in the North by the personal impact of government racial policies that for the first time directly affected the lives of northern whites. Alternatively, these new issues may have activated values that had been peripheral to racial issues when the public agenda was dominated by segregation and thus may have stimulated new configurations of support and opposition.

In that context, we proposed that a new form of racism had emerged in white America, which we termed *symbolic racism* (Sears & Kinder, 1970). This was not racism composed of derogations of and antagonism toward blacks *per se*, or of support for formal inequality. Rather, it blended some antiblack feeling with the finest and proudest of traditional American values, particularly individualism. It has now been over a decade and a half since this concept was proposed, a time of great change in American politics and in American society. Much research has been done since then. It seems appropriate to take stock of what we have learned and how the notion of symbolic racism has fared.

This chapter, then, presents a kind of current status report on symbolic racism. I will first review the original thinking behind it, describe how it was tested empirically, and summarize the key findings relevant to it. Its main critiques will be considered. Finally, I will turn to ways in which the concept has been shaped and modified in the years since it was first proposed, and I will evaluate how it helps us understand the large issues in race relations of our day.

THE SYMBOLIC RACISM APPROACH

A POLITICAL FOCUS

The notion of symbolic racism was introduced to explain a rather specific phenomenon: the political role of whites' racial attitudes. There can be no doubt that white response to an increasingly politicized black population has had a major impact on postwar American politics (Kinder & Sanders, 1986). Public opinion on racial matters throughout this period has affected who holds power and makes policy (Converse, Clausen, & Miller, 1965; Converse, Miller, Rusk, & Wolfe, 1969; Fiorina, 1981; Kinder & Sears, 1981; Pettigrew, 1971). Dissatisfaction with the national administration's pushing of racial equality—too rapidly or not rapidly enough—has contributed to growing cynicism about government in general (Miller, 1981). And some feel that a major partisan realignment is occurring, spurred in part by the politics of race (Carmines & Stimson, 1980, 1984; Markus, 1979).

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Much research had been done in the 1960s on black protest, inspired by the many ghetto riots of the era (e.g., Aberbach & Walker, 1973; Feagin & Hahn, 1973; Fogelson, 1971; National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968; Sears & McConahay, 1973). As startling as this change in blacks' actions was, it soon became evident that the black population was not in a position of great political power, owing to its small fraction of the electorate, its poverty and ghettoized location, and the magnitude of the white backlash against the riots. Because whites' attitudes as much as blacks' actions would ultimately dictate the pace of racial progress, much research attention shifted at the point to the white population.

Our own research on whites began at that time with two main goals. One was to assess the power of racism in determining whites' political responses. Hence, we have looked, since the early 1970s, at the role of whites' racial attitudes in determining their responses to racial policies such as busing (e.g., Sears & Allen, 1984; Sears et al., 1979, 1980), to black candidates (e.g., Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears, Citrin, & Kosterman, 1985; Sears & Kinder, 1971), and to tax and spending reductions affecting programs benefiting blacks (Sears & Citrin, 1985). Most of these studies involved secondary analysis of data collected for other purposes and used whatever measures of racial attitudes were available, without attempting to specify very exactly the nature of the racism at work.

Our other goal was to develop the notion of a new kind of racism: symbolic racism. Here, too, our concern was with the role of racism in determining the mass white public's political responses—but here we were particularly interested in specifying the *kind* of racism that was involved, especially whether it was a familiar and old-fashioned form of racial prejudice, or a product of real racial threats, or a new, more symbolic, form of racism (Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1982; McConahay & Hough, 1976).

THE CONTENT OF SYMBOLIC RACISM

From the beginning, a central contention was that symbolic racism was replacing "old-fashioned racism" as a determinant of whites' responses to political matters (Sears & Kinder, 1970, 1971). McConahay (1982) made this contrast most explicitly. He described old-fashioned racism as "open bigotry," particularly revolving around three specific contents: (a) pre–Civil War racial stereotypes; (b) restrictions on interracial social contacts, such as social distancing and segregation; and (c) opposition to equal access or equal opportunity for persons of all races, along with support for racial discrimination. We argued that old-fashioned racism was disappearing: relatively few whites still believed in the innate inferiority of blacks as a race or supported formal discrimination in schooling, jobs, public accommodations, and other areas of life. A vanishing set of ideas was likely to have much-reduced political power.[1]

Symbolic racism was proposed as a new form of racial attitude, composed of

[1]We used the term *generalized egalitarianism* in our earliest research, to label the same dimension later labeled *old-fashioned racism*, using the opposite pole to highlight the fact that almost everyone subscribed to general principles of racial equality (see Sears & Kinder, 1970, 1971). The point of the term *symbolic racism* was to emphasize the fact that it centers on symbols rather than on the concrete realities of life, especially of the individual's own personal life. However, as McConahay (1982) pointed out, the focus on symbolic content does not clearly distinguish symbolic racism from old-fashioned racism because the latter also focuses on symbols (e.g., "beliefs and stereotypes rooted in socialization and not in personal experience"—McConahay, 1982, p. 705). McConahay therefore prefers the term *modern racism*. A different term might have been better, in retrospect, but *symbolic racism* fit the contrast it was invented to serve—it was not old-fashioned, and not rooted in personal experience—and there is some advantage in continuing to use a label in fairly wide use.

> a blend of antiblack affect and the kind of traditional American moral values embodied in the Protestant Ethic . . . a form of resistance to change in the racial status quo based on moral feelings that blacks violate such traditional American values as individualism and self-reliance, the work ethic, obedience, and discipline. (Kinder & Sears, 1981, p. 416)

It is measured with items that are

> almost wholly abstract, ideological, and symbolic in nature . . . with no conceivable personal relevance to the individual, but have to do with his moral code or his sense of how society should be organized. (Sears & Kinder, 1971, p. 66)

Symbolic racism was therefore conceptualized as being a joint function of two separate factors: antiblack affect and traditional values.

The notion of symbolic racism was originally developed by Sears and Kinder (1970, 1971) to explain the findings of a survey on the Los Angeles mayoralty elections of 1969 that pitted a black liberal challenger, Tom Bradley, against a white conservative incumbent, Sam Yorty. The respondents were white suburbanites in the city of Los Angeles. The survey itself had been developed and conducted by Thomas Pettigrew and his collaborators as part of their program of research on white electoral responses to black mayoral candidates (e.g., Pettigrew, 1971). McConahay and Hough (1976) conducted a second survey on the same election, using some of the same items, and Kinder and Sears (1981) participated in the analyzed data from Pettigrew's follow-up survey on the 1973 Los Angeles mayoralty election matching the same two candidates. The concept of symbolic racism was, therefore, originally generated inductively to describe the results from items that had been developed by other researchers for other purposes; the items were not generated deductively to measure a preexisting concept.[2] In later studies, additional items were generated to measure the symbolic racism concept more precisely. Thus, measurement of symbolic racism has been evolving slowly over time.

At this point, there is a reasonably clear consensus on the content of symbolic racism. It falls into two main categories: (a) antagonism toward blacks' "pushing too hard" and moving too fast, especially (though not exclusively) through the use of violence, and (b) resentment toward special favors for blacks, such as in "reverse discrimination," racial quotas in jobs or education, excessive access to welfare, special treatment by government, or unfair and excessive economic gains by blacks. A third possible category is (c) denial of continuing discrimination: the belief that discrimination in areas such as jobs or housing is a thing of the past because blacks now have the freedom to compete in the marketplace and to enjoy things they can afford.[3]

TESTING FOR SYMBOLIC RACISM

Operationalizing symbolic racism has involved using items from each of these categories. Table 1 shows some typical items: (a) antagonism toward blacks' demands, that is, blacks' being too demanding (McConahay, 1982; McConahay & Hough, 1976) or pushing themselves where they're not wanted (Kinder & Sears, 1981) or civil rights leaders' pushing too fast (Sears & Allen, 1984); (b) resentment about special favors for blacks, that is, government's or public officials' making a special effort to help minorities (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & Allen, 1984; Sears & Citrin, 1985), or blacks' having got more than

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[2]It should be noted that Pettigrew's analysis (1971) of such local elections as that of Louise Day Hicks, in Boston, based on similar data, closely resembles our own.

[3]McConahay (1982) has used this third category in his work, but Kinder and Sears (1981) have not. I incline toward Kinder's view (1985) that such perceptions are less manifestations of symbolic racism than colored by it, but the distinction is perhaps a subtle one.

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TABLE 1. Items Measuring Symbolic Racism

Antagonism toward blacks' demands

Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights. (Agree)[b,c]
Blacks shouldn't push themselves where they're not wanted. (Agree)[a]
Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel they haven't pushed fast enough. (Trying to push too fast)[d]
It is easy to understand the anger of black people in America. (Disagree)[b,c]

Resentment about special favors for blacks

Over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect to blacks than they deserve. (Agree)[b]
Over the past few years, blacks have got more economically than they deserve. (Agree)[b]
The government should *not* make any special effort to help blacks and other racial minorities because they should help themselves. (Agree)[c]
Do you think blacks who receive money from welfare programs could get along without if they tried, or do they really need the help? (Could get along)[a]
Do you think Los Angeles city officials pay more, less, or the same attention to a request or complaint from a black person as from a white person? (More)[a]

Denial of continuing discrimination

How many black people in Louisville and Jefferson County do you think miss out on jobs or promotions because of racial discrimination? (None)[b]
Blacks have it better than they ever had it before. (Agree)[c]

[a] Kinder and Sears (1981).
[b] McConahay (1982).
[c] McConahay and Hough (1976).
[d] Sears and Allen (1984).
[e] Sears and Citrin (1985).

they deserve (Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1982); and (c) a denial of continuing discrimination, that is perceptions of discrimination against blacks (Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1982); and lack of sympathy with the anger of blacks (McConahay & Hough, 1976).

Although these items were not, for the most part, derived in any formal deductive sense from the concept of symbolic racism, they all share its two underlying elements: antiblack affect and traditional values. All three categories of items express antiblack affect in terms of antagonism, resentment, and anger toward blacks' wishes and a lack of sympathy with them. And all express underlying individualistic values in rejecting the assumption that the individual black's fate is or should be determined by that of the group as a whole, that is, the assumption that the individual black's fate is not determined by treatment of blacks as a group, and that demands for help and special favors should not be granted to blacks as a group.

Consequently, the symbolic racism model involves a two-step process, as shown in the solid lines in Figure 1: the conjunction of traditional values and antiblack affect produces symbolic racism, which in turn produces opposition to problack policies and black candidates. This full model has been tested by Sears et al. (1985), predicting opposition to Jesse Jackson; the second step was tested by McConahay and Hough (1976) and Kinder and Sears (1981), predicting opposition to Tom Bradley, and by Sears and Allen (1984), predicting antibusing attitudes.

Some tests of this symbolic racism model have also added political conservatism as an independent symbolic predisposition predicting these same dependent variables (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & Citrin, 1985; Sears & Kinder 1971). In these cases, it is treated as independent of racism, which is carried by the symbolic racism term.
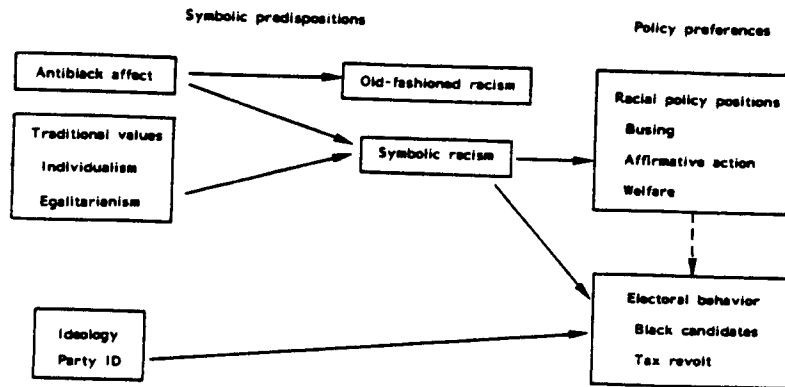
FIGURE 1. The symbolic racism approach.

A variant of the symbolic racism approach suggests that current racial policy issues can themselves become highly symbolic, thus adding their own influence over voting behavior. The most obvious case is "busing," which has been the instrument for the electoral defeat of various probusing school-board members, judges, and ballot measures. This second variant is depicted with a dotted line in Figure 1.

SYMBOLIC POLITICS

The concept of symbolic racism was developed as part of a broader theory of symbolic politics. This theory holds that much adult political behavior results from symbolic predispositions acquired before full adulthood. These predispositions are viewed as being learned, and as reflecting the norms dominating the young individual's informational environment. In adulthood, they can be evoked by symbols in the current informational environment and are presumed to be the primary determinants of adulthood policy preferences and voting behavior. This particular version of a symbolic politics theory was first tested empirically in a study of the Watts riots, in which the residues of preadult socialization were invoked to explain blacks' and whites' conflicting responses to the symbols of black protest in general, and to the rioting in particular (Sears & McConahay, 1973).

The general symbolic politics approach is depicted in Figure 2. Most studies have relied on just three basic symbolic predispositions—racial attitudes, ideological self-labeling, and party identification—as predictors of political responses to the Vietnam war (Lau, Brown, & Sears, 1978), the energy crisis (Sears, Tyler, Citrin, & Kinder, 1978), the Watts riots (Sears & McConahay, 1973), national health insurance (Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980), the California tax revolt (Sears & Citrin, 1985), and antibusing attitudes (Sears, Hensler, & Speer, 1979).

It should be emphasized that the theory of symbolic politics is a more general account of political behavior than is the symbolic racism approach per se, which is primarily focused on the dynamics of racial conflict. Studies in the more general symbolic-politics vein have often assessed the impact of racial attitudes on political behavior, but usually by treating them in an omnibus fashion, considering neither distinctions among types of racism nor their antecedents. For examples, see studies of the origins of antibusing attitudes and their role in presidential voting (Sears et al., 1979, 1980), and of the persistence of racial attitudes through the life span (Miller & Sears, 1986).
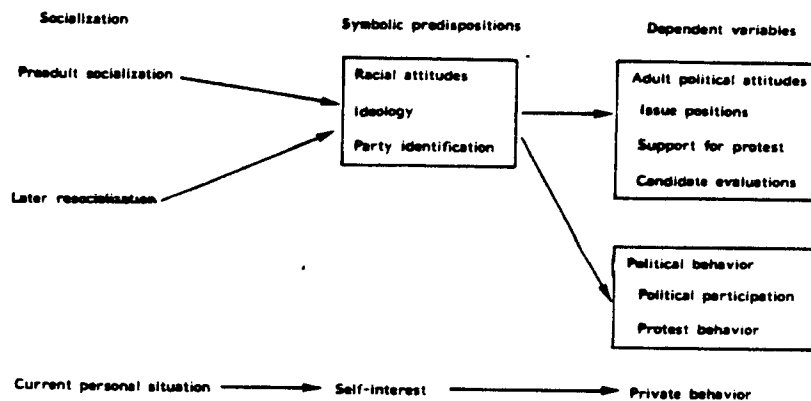
FIGURE 2. A theory of symbolic politics.

THE EFFECTS OF SYMBOLIC RACISM

THE POLITICAL EFFECTS

The first general proposition was that symbolic racism has a major effect on racial policy preferences and on voting behavior in racially relevant elections. It has therefore been tested as a predictor of whites' positions on policy issues such as busing, affirmative action, and welfare (Kluegel & Smith, 1983; Sears & Allen, 1984; Sears & Citrin, 1985), and of voting behavior in contests involving black candidates, such as Tom Bradley in Los Angeles (Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears & Kinder, 1970, 1971) or Jesse Jackson for the presidency (Sears et al., 1985), white candidates perceived as widely differing in racial policies (Sears et al., 1985), or referenda seemingly influenced by racial concerns, such as tax reduction (Sears & Citrin, 1985).

These empirical tests have typically combined symbolic racism items into scales and then correlated them with whites' policy preferences and voting behavior in multiple regression (OLS) equations. Representative data are shown in Table 2. For example, Kinder and Sears (1981) and McConahay and Hough (1976) found that, in two elections, symbolic racism related quite strongly to voting against Tom Bradley, the black candidate for mayor of Los Angeles, among white suburbanites. McConahay (1982) and Sears and Allen (1984) reported strong effects of symbolic racism on whites' opposition to busing. Kluegel and Smith (1983) reported similar effects of symbolic racism on opposition to affirmative action.

In large-sample survey studies, however, the importance of symbolic racism depends on the absolute level of prediction it affords—usually, how much variance it explains. The amount of variance explained depends, of course, to some extent on the reliabilities of the symbolic racism measure and the dependent variables. These, in turn, depend partly on the number of symbolic racism items available in any given study and on how well those items fit the conceptual definition of symbolic racism. Because the number of appropriate items varies widely across studies, no precise, simple, and uniform estimate of absolute impact can be made. But even in the absence of such an estimate, a ballpark estimate can be based on studies at the high end of measurement reliability, those that use substantial multi-item scales of symbolic racism. As Table 2 shows, these scales generated standardized regression coefficients (betas) of .47, .39, .36, and .34 with the use of quite reliable dependent variables, and with the inclusion of some

TABLE 2. Effects of Symbolic Racism on Whites' Political Attitudes

Study	Sample	Type of racism	Number of items	Dependent variable	Bivariate correlation	Regression analysis		
						Other variables in model	Standardized coefficient for racism scale	R^2
1. Kinder and Sears (1981)	Los Angeles suburbs (1969)	Symbolic racism	8	Vote for white vs. black mayoral candidate	—	Racial threat Opposition to busing	.36	.25
2. Kinder and Sears (1981)	Los Angeles suburbs (1973)	Symbolic racism	13	Vote for white vs. black mayoral candidate	—	Racial threat Opposition to busing	.34	.14
3. McConahay (1982)	Louisville (1976)	Symbolic racism	6	Opposition to busing	.51	Racial threat Old-fashioned racism Racial affect	.47	.28
4. McConahay (n.d.)	Louisville (1977)	Symbolic racism	5	Opposition to busing	—	Racial threat Old-fashioned racism	.39	.23
5. Sears and Citrin (1985)	California (1979)	Symbolic racism	2	Support for tax revolt	.30	Party ideology	.24	.13

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other racial attitudes in the models (Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1982, n.d.). At the low end of reliability are studies that have used only one- or two-item measures of symbolic racism. For example, Sears and Allen (1984) presented 12 analyses of opposition to busing, based on data from seven different surveys. In an effort to maintain comparability across surveys, only one symbolic racism item was used in each analysis. Even so, the betas averaged a healthy .26 (with several self-interest and demographic variables also included in each equation). Sears and Citrin (1985) used a two-item symbolic-racism scale to predict positions on an issue with no manifest racial content: support for the California tax revolt. Nevertheless, this scale generated a bivariate correlation of .30 with support for the tax revolt, as well as a beta of .24 when included in an equation with ideology and party identification. In short, multi-item scales incorporating the essence of the symbolic racism concept generated standardized regression coefficients approaching .40, with opposition to busing or relevant candidate evaluations used as the dependent variables. Even when minimal measures of symbolic racism were used, the betas still averaged around .25.

These effects of symbolic racism would seem to me quite strong, by the standards of research in this area, particularly considering the other variables used in most of these equations. In partisan elections, these effects are not as strong as those of party identification, of course. But in ostensibly nonpartisan elections, or in predicting issue positions, they are as strong as those of any other symbolic predispositions.[4]

OLD-FASHIONED RACISM

Our second general proposition was that symbolic racism now has a much stronger political impact than does old-fashioned racism. An initial question is whether the two are really independent. Symbolic racism presumably has a strong component of nonracial traditional values, whereas old-fashioned racism does not, so they should be statistically somewhat independent. Nevertheless, they share common roots in antiblack affects, so they are bound to be highly correlated. In fact, they can be distinguished empirically, especially with statistical techniques that do not demand orthogonality, such as oblique rotations of factor analyses. McConahay (1986) found two such factors in oblique rotations of racial items in two surveys in Louisville in 1976 and 1977. Bobo's oblique rotations (1983) of 1972 and 1976 National Election Studies (NES) data obtained at least two factors, very closely resembling symbolic and old-fashioned racism (though in each case the last factor was of borderline acceptability). Nevertheless, in all three studies, the old-fashioned and symbolic racism factors were highly correlated (in McConahay's data, $r = .68$ and .70, respectively, and in Bobo's, in the .50 to .60 range). Clearly a very strong common dimension of racism runs through all the items in both scales, but the two are different variants on this basic theme and can be distinguished statistically.[5]

[4]The R^2 on the most racially relevant dependent variables averages around 25% with symbolic racism, other symbolic predispositions, and demographic variables in the equation. Using more remote dependent variables or ignoring other relevant predictors reduces the R^2 to the 10%–15% range. The R^2 could be increased substantially by adding variables that are still more proximal to the equation, such as candidate evaluations, in the case of elections, or the perceived effects of a policy, in the case of issue positions (see Campbell et al., 1960; Kluegel & Smith, 1983; McClendon, 1985; Rabushka, 1982; Shanks & Miller, 1985). We have chosen not to include these variables because we doubt the necessary assumptions about one-way causality.

[5]This contrast of highly correlated but separate dimensions in whites' racial attitudes is a common finding in the literature on whites' racial attitudes (also see Bobo, 1983; Brigham, Woodmansee, & Cook, 1976; Weigel & Howes, 1985). The contrast between these two dimensions has been at the heart of our analysis from the beginning, contrary to the interpretations of Bobo (1983) and Sniderman and Tetlock (1986), who have viewed our research as ignoring this multidimensionality.

Symbolic racism does have a much stronger political impact than does old-fashioned racism. Kinder and Sears (1981) found so little old-fashioned racism among Los Angeles suburbanites that they did not even test its effects. McConahay (1982, n.d) found in two studies that symbolic racism had strong effects on opposition to busing, whereas old-fashioned racism had considerably weaker effects (betas of .40 and .31 for symbolic racism, and .10 and .20 for old-fashioned racism). Bobo (1983, p. 1206) also used two predictors closely resembling old-fashioned and symbolic racism (though he did not label them as such). The strongest effects were generated by items most closely resembling symbolic racism (such as evaluations of whether or not civil rights leaders were pushing too hard, or of black militants), but his "segregationism" measure (support for the general principle of segregation, for segregated neighborhoods, and belief in racial differences in intelligence) had only trivial effects on opposition to busing.

PERSONAL RACIAL THREAT

Our third general proposition was that symbolic racism has a far stronger influence than does personal racial threat over whites' political responses in racially relevant situations. Direct personal racial threat, which we defined as one instance of short-term material self-interest, is, of course, only one of several potential determinants of opposition to racial change other than symbolic or old-fashioned racism. But it is of special interest for several reasons. It has been one of the major manifest themes of whites' resistance to racial change: much of the rhetoric of the antibusing movement was phrased in directly self-interested terms, describing white parents who did not want their own children bused, and the *Bakke* case stemmed from a simple self-interested complaint. Moreover, widespread self-interested resistance to change would make an especially persuasive political case: helping a relatively small racial minority at the expense of serious harm to the large white majority would be hard for political leaders to justify. Finally, self-interest has a long and honored history in democratic, economic, and psychological theory: the utilitarian tradition has long taught Americans to believe in simple hedonic theories of human preference and action. In the roster of possible explanations, then, self-interest has a special claim on our attention.

Consequently, much of our research has contrasted the effects of symbolic racism with those of personal racial threat. Threat has been operationalized with a wide variety of both objective and subjective indicators of the direct impact of racial change on whites' own personal circumstances, such as having children in public schools that participate in racial busing programs, perceiving it as likely that one's own children might be bused, fearing integration of one's own neighborhood, or fearing personal victimization by blacks' crimes.

The several relevant studies have almost all shown that direct personal racial threat has little or no effect on whites' political attitudes. Kinder and Sears (1981) investigated such threats in the areas of crime, schools, neighborhood, and jobs and found that they affected neither voting for the black challenger in the Los Angeles mayoralty elections nor symbolic racism. Kluegel and Smith (1983) found similarly slender effects on opposition to affirmative action. Their numerous tests of the main effects of self-interest turned up weak and inconsistent findings (though mixed with a few potentially meaningful interactions with age, some expected and some contrary to expectation, whose *post hoc* explanation will require replication and further test). Jacobson (1985) also found weak effects of self-interest on support for affirmative action.

The most focused and extensive research, however, has been done on whites' opposition to busing. This literature has been reviewed most recently by Sears and Allen (1984). Here, the racial threats have included having children in the public schools in

school districts that bus for integration, living in all-white neighborhoods, and feeling attached to the neighborhood and unwilling to move. Some of these studies have used national data (Bobo, 1983; Kinder & Rhodebeck, 1982; Sears *et al.*, 1979, 1980), some statewide data (Gatlin, Giles, & Cataldo, 1978), and others local data (Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1982; Miller, 1981).[6] Most of these studies show no impact at all of personal racial threat on whites' opposition to busing. However, there is some modest evidence that it has significantly increased opposition in one phase of such desegregation controversies, when busing has been court-ordered but not yet implemented (Sears & Allen, 1984).

CRITIQUES

A substantial amount of evidence has therefore accumulated in favor of the three original propositions of the symbolic racism approach: that symbolic racism is a major determinant of whites' political responses to racially relevant questions, and that old-fashioned racism and direct personal racial threat are not. This work has been no freer of criticism than any other concerned with race relations, however. Let me first discuss some critiques that seem to me off-target before turning to some more genuine problems.

MEASUREMENT AND LABELING

The exact items used to index symbolic racism have varied somewhat from one study to the next. These variations have led to some confusion about the operationalization and labeling of both symbolic racism and self-interest.

One confusion seems to be between studies that test a general symbolic-politics theory and those testing for symbolic racism (Bobo, 1983; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). We have done a series of studies in the general symbolic-politics vein, testing a series of hypotheses on the role of whites' racial attitudes in American political life, but not bearing on the symbolic racism versus old-fashioned racism distinction that is central to the symbolic racism approach. One such hypothesis has been that whites' racial attitudes are socialized early in life and persist through adulthood (Miller & Sears, 1986). A second, discussed earlier, has been that whites' racial attitudes explain whites' political responses to racial issues better than does self-interest (Sears *et al.*, 1979, 1980). A third was that group-specific values were at the most politically potent level of abstraction in the sense of having greater clout over racial policy preferences than do more abstract values (Sears, Huddy, & Schaffer, 1986). A fourth suggested that racial attitudes were central to whites' reactions to Jesse Jackson's candidacy in the 1984 national elections and, in turn, to a possible realignment of southern whites toward the Republican Party (Sears *et al.*, 1985).

All these studies have required robust and reliable measures of racial attitudes in general, but not measures of symbolic racism in particular. Moreover, they were all based on secondary analysis of the two standard general-purpose surveys, the National Election Studies and the General Social Surveys, which have not attempted to measure symbolic racism specifically. As a result, in each study, we used omnibus scales of racial attitudes, disregarding the distinction between symbolic and old-fashioned racism. This

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[6]Some of these studies have used measures of symbolic racism, and some, omnibus measures of racial attitudes. That distinction is irrelevant here, because the purpose is simply to assess the effects of personal threat, which tends to be only weakly correlated with either (see Bobo, 1983; Kinder & Sears, 1981).

distinction was irrelevant to the hypotheses motivating these studies and could not be made precisely in most of these data bases in any case.

It is noteworthy that, even in this undifferentiated, omnibus form, whites' racial attitudes had major political effects. Omnibus scales of racial attitudes in the National Election Studies' 1972, 1976, and 1984 studies yielded betas of .39 and .31 on whites' opposition to busing (Sears et al., 1979, 1980) and .32 on their opposition to Jackson (Sears et al., 1985). But no claim was made in any of these cases about the role of symbolic racism because it had not been measured. Rather, the core of the evidence on symbolic racism comes from studies explicitly indexing symbolic racism with items such as those shown in Table 1 (or as its kin, "modern racism"), and contrasting it with old-fashioned racism (Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay, 1982; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears & Allen, 1984; Sears & Citrin, 1985). The separate purposes of these two sets of studies should be apparent, but perhaps it is worth reemphasizing the distinction here.

A second apparent confusion concerns the labels used for different measures of racial attitudes. At one extreme, when using these omnibus scales of racial attitudes, which probably encompass both old-fashioned and symbolic racism, we have consistently used general labels such as racial intolerance (Miller & Sears, 1986; Sears et al., 1979) or racial prejudice (Miller & Sears, 1986; Sears et al., 1980). At the other extreme, we have used narrow descriptive labels (such as expressive racism or racial affect) for collections of items too narrow to measure even symbolic racism fully (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears et al., 1985). In short, the term symbolic racism has been reserved for relatively pure cases of it, and other descriptive labels have been used for measures of racial attitudes that are either more general or more specific than the symbolic racism notion.[7]

A third and more understandable confusion has arisen concerning our treatment of policy attitudes on the two most controversial contemporary racial issues: busing and affirmative action. We have treated them as dependent variables in some studies, when we have tested the effects of symbolic racism and racial threat on such issue positions (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & Allen, 1984; also see Kluegel & Smith, 1983). In other studies we have treated them as aspects of symbolic racism, and thus as subsets of that independent variable, when we have tested its effects on voting behavior or positions on other policy issues (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & Citrin, 1985). It is understandably confusing when a given variable is treated as an independent variable in some analyses and as a dependent variable in others, all concerned with approximately the same model.

The reason for these disparate practices is that policy issues such as busing and affirmative action, which themselves contain the basic elements of symbolic racism, can perforce become highly symbolic issues in their own right, capable of energizing racially based responses to candidates and to other issues. This process by which new issues themselves become symbolic will be discussed later. Tests of these two separate steps in this process necessarily require treating such racial policy positions as dependent variables in the first instance, and as part of the independent variable in the second. When such policy positions have been included as part of a symbolic racism measure, the theory, the analytic strategy, and the empirical justification have been laid out quite explicitly (see Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & Citrin, 1985).

Finally, some criticism has focused on our treatment of self-interest. Some have argued that we define self-interest too narrowly and should consider benefits or threats to the group, not just to the self; that we should consider subjective as well as objective interests; that ideology should not be analyzed separately from self-interest, because they

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[7]In no study has the label symbolic racism been applied to a scale containing old-fashioned racism items, contrary to Bobo's (1983) and Sniderman and Tetlock's (1986) statements about two papers (Sears et al., 1979, 1980) which neither dealt with symbolic racism nor used the term.

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are inextricably entwined; and that our analyses of self-interest are insensitive to interacting conditions under which it would prove to be very powerful (Bobo, 1983; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). We will consider the question of group interests below, but the other points have been dealt with rather clearly elsewhere in detail. We have tested the effects of subjectively defined racial threats extensively, and they prove also to have null effects (e.g., Kinder & Sears, 1981); ideology and self-interest simply have proved so far not to be closely correlated (e.g., Sears et al., 1980); and we have reported quite an extensive roster of specific conditions under which self-interest does affect political preferences, even though these conditions prove to be the exception rather than the rule (Sears & Allen, 1984; Sears & Citrin, 1985).[8]

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY AND RESPONDENT DUPLICITY

Another issue that has complicated discussions of symbolic racism concerns the honesty of respondents' self-reported racial attitudes. One of the heartening changes in American race relations since World War II is that overt expressions of old-fashioned racism have become increasingly unfashionable. This change is heartening for the cause of tolerance because it means that most of the white public believes overt racial bigotry is not polite and, in that sense, accepts the norm of tolerance. It is not necessarily so heartening for social scientists, who must then worry about whether their respondents are telling the truth.

Fairly strong evidence has accumulated that whites do underreport their true levels of old-fashioned racism under some circumstances. Simple verbal reports do elicit less racial prejudice than do more unobtrusive measures (Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980).[9] It is also more obvious to respondents that old-fashioned racism items are measuring racism than it is that symbolic racism items are (McConahay, 1986). And in several experiments, McConahay (1986) showed that measures of old-fashioned racism are more readily biased than are measures of symbolic racism because of such situational conditions as the race of the interviewer. All this might suggest, to caricature the point, that symbolic racism measures "true" racism, whereas measures of old-fashioned racism are invalid because they simply elicit facework—the respondent's attempt to appear tolerant—and thus mere lip service to the principles of equality.

But one must be somewhat cautious about inferring too much invalidity in measures of racism. Most of the research on bias has been conducted on college students in plainly experimental situations, not on adult white respondents confronted with white interviewers in the normal survey context. Nevertheless, old-fashioned racism items do probably lend themselves to some facework, with respondents attempting to appear more racially tolerant than they really are, to gain social approval. It would be naive to assume that whites in general now feel free to express their full measure of racism, however open some individuals may be about it. There is too much available evidence on such biases.

[8]Sniderman and Tetlock (1986) were critical of virtually every aspect of the symbolic racism approach. Yet, they ultimately seemed to come to a very similar account of contemporary politics. They, too, concluded that racism continues to be a potent political factor in white America today (more in the terms of symbolic racism than in those of old-fashioned racism, though still discernible in the latter), that the level of white racism as measured in surveys can generally be trusted, that racial policy attitudes and voting behavior regarding black candidates are caused both by racism and by nonracial traditional values, and that personal racial threat does not have a major, across-the-board effect but may have an effect under special circumstances. See Kinder (1986) for a detailed response.

[9]It is interesting that the legendary LaPiere (1934) study of attitude–behavior inconsistency found widespread nondiscriminatory behavior paired with equally widespread expressed prejudice, quite the opposite of the current concern.

Nevertheless, we have argued from the beginning that symbolic racism is not *simply* a socially acceptable means of expressing genuinely inegalitarian beliefs and policy preferences (Sears & Kinder, 1970, 1971). To be sure, symbolic racism is a fairly socially acceptable way to express such strong primordial antiblack affects as fear and anger. But I would suggest that the overwhelming rejection of old-fashioned racist positions is now mostly *quite* genuine; by wide majorities, whites now really do reject the old doctrines of racial inferiority, formal discrimination, and legalized segregation.[10]

GROUP INTEREST AND GROUP CONFLICT

Our research has focused mainly on symbolic racism and personal racial threat as predictors of whites' political responses. Bobo (1983, 1986) and others have quite rightly pointed to another category of potentially important predictors: group interest. Members of a particular group may support policies (or candidates) that they view as supporting the interests of their own group and may oppose those that they view as opposing these interests.

Conventional forms of group interest theory are quite similar to self-interest theories, in that political responses are hypothesized to be controlled by perceptions of the effects of policies or candidates on the material interests of the public. They differ in whose interests are at stake—the group's or the individual's. Group interest could well rest on self-interest, in that one could perceive one's own well-being as being intimately connected to the fate of one's group. Or group interest could be independent of self-interest, in that one might favor policies that help one's group even if they do not affect one's own well-being consequentially. But a group interest theory should have little in common with symbolic racism, which speaks to value conflicts rather than material interests.

Presumably, issues of race pit the interests of blacks and whites against each other, so the most relevant version of a group interest approach is realistic group-conflict theory (Levine & Campbell, 1972). Demands and protests by blacks may trigger a realistic sense of threat among whites regarding their own group's interests and privileges, which in turn may generate opposition to policies changing the racial status quo. Bobo's statement of this idea (1983) is perhaps the most explicit: "most notions of group conflict involve both objective conditions of competition and conflict between individual group members, shifts in relative group statuses, *and the* subjective assessment of a threat posed by out-group members to individual and collective interests" (p. 1200).

A second version of the group interest idea is based on Marxist analysis:

Groups that occupy a dominant position in the social structure routinely manufacture an interpretation of reality and a set of normative presumptions that serve their interests. Dominant groups . . . seek to impose a sense of order on the pattern of social relations and to persuade both themselves and their subordinates that the current organization of relationships is appropriate and equitable. (Jackman & Muha, 1984, p. 759).

This is the view that Bobo presents in the current volume. It assumes that the dominant group develops an ideology supporting and rationalizing its privileged position, to help it maintain its hegemony. Hence, the more a subordinate group rebels and threatens that superior position, the more strongly and creatively the dominant group adheres to its superiority-justifying ideology.

In this latter form, a group interest theory potentially comes very close to a symbolic racism approach. Whites' responses against blacks' violations of traditional values can be

[10]This seems to me to remain the position of Kinder and McConahay as well (see Kinder, 1986; McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981).

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interpreted as their defense of an ideology that justifies their hegemony. Whites' long-standing individualistic ideology asserts that all people of whatever color have equal opportunity, and that it is up to the individual to work hard enough to succeed. This ideology disadvantages blacks because they, by reason of their color, do, in fact, have less real opportunity and cannot be expected, as individuals, to succeed as well as whites. Moreover, individualism renders illegitimate government policies intended to benefit an entire group because they advantage the undeserving as well as the deserving. Hence, whites' political responses to demands on behalf of blacks as a group, and to government policies that especially advantage blacks as a group, should, according to this second version of group interest theory, be intimately related to their support for individualistic values. This prediction is very similar to that of the symbolic racism approach. The main difference lies in the role of threat to group hegemony, which is not part of the symbolic racism approach.

The group interest approach has been developed empirically in most detail in two papers by Bobo (1983, 1986; see also Rothbart, 1976). His analyses make two main points. One is that the group interest approach provides another explanation for the same basic data that the symbolic racism approach has generated. He has attributed the relationship between whites' antagonism toward black militants and demanding civil-rights leaders, on the one hand, and their opposition to busing, on the other, as reflecting the clash of blacks' demands with whites' defense of their group's privileged positions (Bobo, 1983). Similarly, he has attributed the effects of symbolic racism on opposition to racial policies to hegemony-justifying ideology. In terms of the symbolic racism items shown in Table 1, by rendering illegitimate blacks' collective demands and special government action to aid blacks as a group, white hegemony will be maintained; similarly, denying continuing discrimination against blacks makes illegitimate both blacks' demands and special favors granted to them (Bobo, 1986). His second point, mainly qualitative and historical, is that this analysis successfully accounts for postwar changes in white public opinion on racial issues (Bobo, 1986).

In principle, this notion that group interest contributes heavily to whites' resistance to change is highly plausible. Vanneman and Pettigrew (1972) and Pettigrew (1971) developed such ideas in their important early work on fraternal deprivation, especially with regard to whites' voting in the 1960s for George Wallace. The notion is also consistent with the results from various empirical inquiries into the political ramifications of a group-based calculus (e.g., Guimond & Dubé-Simard, 1983; Klein, 1984), as well as with much political theory. Development of the group interest approach is also useful because it crystallizes an important alternative to the self-interest and symbolic racism approaches. It emphasizes whites' sense that blacks pose a threat to their collective situation—to their economic position, status, or power—whether or not they are threatened personally themselves. The group interest approach is easily contrasted with the self-interest approach, which involves a direct threat to the self, and with symbolic racism, which involves a challenge to one's values and arousal of antiblack feelings, whether or not material interests of the self or group are threatened.

However, two distinctions seem to me central in contrasting the symbolic racism, group-interest, and self-interest approaches, and Bobo's research has not yet succeeded in making them (see Sears & Kinder, 1985, for a more detailed account of this point). One concerns attitudes toward the relevant groups. Symbolic group affects should be distinguished from perceived benefits for or threats to the in-group. A symbolic politics approach concerns itself centrally with symbolic affects toward groups (see Conover & Feldman, 1981). However, it views such evaluations as independent of any tangible costs or benefits to group well-being. A person might disparage groups such as punk rockers or the fifth-century B.C. Spartans or might cheer on the Boston Celtics and the African

National Congress, even though feeling that none of those groups are likely to tangibly aid or harm his own group's well-being.

The home turf for group interest theory, in contrast, is a group conflict in which tangible goods are at stake, such as a territorial dispute over oil-rich lands or two Mafia families' feuding over the control of drug trafficking in a particular area (though even apparently tangible stakes may often be trivial on inspection, and one may therefore be led to suspect that the conflict is mainly symbolic, as in the case of the British-Argentine war over the Falkland Islands). The key question is which is involved in whites' opposition to problack policies: symbolic group affects or some perception of tangible threats posed by blacks to the interests of whites as a group? The available research has not yet succeeded in making this contrast.[11]

A second consequential distinction is between self-interest and group interest. Bobo suggested that, for group interest to be really powerful, it must evoke self-interest, in the form of perceived interdependence of the self's outcomes with those of the group. A symbolic politics approach would assume that group symbols (such as *black militants* or *Zionists* or *niggers*) can be potent political forces even in the complete absence of any perceived self–group interdependence over tangible outcomes. Although the group interest alternative is well worth exploring, I am skeptical that its more self-oriented versions will be the most fruitful. So far, the best evidence is that white public opinion is not much influenced by direct, personal racial threats. What is more likely is that the major impacts of group conflict will involve more symbolic versions of group interest, in which affects toward the groups in question are no more than that and do not imply much real or felt material interdependence between the self and either the in-group or the out-group.

Bobo also failed to distinguish group interest from group conflict. Even if whites' sense of their own collective interest is powerful, they still may vary in the extent to which they perceive the two races' interests as necessarily in conflict. Whites vary considerably in whether or not they see blacks' and whites' real interests as necessarily in conflict. They disagree about whether or not school desegregation will produce educational gains for black children without corresponding losses for white children, or whether President Reagan's economic program will aid both blacks and whites, rather than providing gains for affluent whites at the expense of poor blacks. In both cases the non-zero-sum assumption may, in fact, be right or wrong, but that is irrelevant.

Additional research may or may not show that the central ingredients of a group conflict theory influence resistance to change in the racial status quo. The challenge will come in attempting to test *directly* for evidence of differential effects of (a) perceptions of threat to the hegemony of the dominant group, (b) perceived group conflict, and (c) antiblack affect and violations of traditional values without any particular sense of group threat. Jessor and Sears's analysis (1986) of the 1985 NES pilot study is directed to exactly that point: whites' opposition to racial policy is not related significantly to perceived interdependence with either the in-group as a whole (whites) or the out-group as a whole (blacks). It is dependent, however, on perceived conflict between the racial groups, and on various versions of antiblack affect, as the symbolic racism approach would expect.

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[11]For example, I would argue that Bobo's two indicators of group interest, items evaluating black militants and civil rights leaders, reflect symbolic racism instead. Whites might have negative affects toward such symbols as *black*, *militant*, or *protest* for any number of reasons other than racial competition over scarce resources. Whites may dislike black militants because of their aggressive championing of blackness. The Anglo tradition has been to dislike blackness for its own sake, long before European explorers traveled to Africa (Jordan, 1968). And much research conducted in the 1960s concluded that part of whites' ambivalence about civil rights protest was based on a distaste for direct confrontation as a style of politics.

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Predictors

Demographics R^2
(adjusted)

Black thermomete
Individualism
Equality
  Cumulative R^2

Ideology
Party ID
  Cumulative R^2

Racial policy
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Jackson evaluation
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THE BROADER THEORY

The symbolic racism approach was intended first and foremost to account for whites' responses to racially relevant political attitude objects, especially racial policy and black candidates. As indicated above, the data seem to support rather strongly its three central propositions: (a) that symbolic racism has a powerful role in determining whites' responses to such attitude objects, whereas neither (b) old-fashioned racism nor (c) personal racial threats do. But the symbolic racism approach went well beyond such proximal predictors of whites' current political responses. As depicted in Figure 1, the theory, if it may be called that, also asserted that symbolic racism stems (d) from residues from preadult socialization, (e) and from antiblack affect and traditional American values, and (f) not from current racial threats. It also contended (g) that affects toward racially relevant attitude objects dominated cognitions toward them, and (h) that such attitude objects could themselves become so affectively charged as to themselves become symbolic, and to function similarly to symbolic racism. It is appropriate now to turn to these additional points.

Perhaps the most complete test of the full symbolic-racism model, including its presumed antecedents, uses the 1984 National Election Studies pre- and postelection surveys. This analysis is quite supportive, as shown in Table 3. Antiblack affect and traditional values both have a strong impact on whites' racial policy preferences. Together, they added over 20% to the variance explained by basic demographic variables, and their effects are reduced little by the addition of controls on ideology and party identification. Similarly, evaluations of Jesse Jackson were strongly influenced by anti-

TABLE 3. A Symbolic Racism Analysis of the 1984 Presidential Election[a]

Predictors	Racial policy		Evaluations of Jesse Jackson		Reagan–Mondale preference
Demographics R^2 (adjusted)	3.0%	3.0%	3.6%	3.6%	6.3%
Black thermometer	.20**	.20**	.24**	.20**	−.01
Individualism	.03	.00	.02	−.03	.08**
Equality	.30**	.22**	.22**	.09*	.06**
Cumulative R^2	17.9%	—	15.5%	—	—
Ideology	—	.17**	—	.07	.12**
Party ID	—	.06	—	.17**	.64**
Cumulative R^2	—	21.2%	—	—	—
Racial policy	—	—	—	.19**	.04*
Cumulative R^2	—	—	—	22.8%	—
Jackson evaluation	—	—	—	—	.11**
Cumulative R^2	—	—	—	—	69.5%
N	1,912		1,893		1,934

[a]From the 1984 National Election Studies pre-/postnational survey. The individualism and equality measures were six-item scales; ideology and party identification were three-item scales based on bipolar self-ratings and thermometer evaluations of each pole; racial policy was the mean of four items on aid to minorities, spending on blacks, perception of whether or not civil rights leaders were pushing too fast, and support for busing; and thermometer evaluations of Jackson, Reagan, and Mondale were used to construct the last two dependent variables. Each column is a separate regression equation with the dependent variables shown at the top. Entries are standardized regression coefficients (betas). Pairwise deletion was used. The demographic controls in each equation included region, education, income, subjective social class, sex, and dummy variables for being Jewish or Catholic.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .001$.

black affect, traditional values, and racial policy, the last mediating some of the effects of the first two. These data support the main thrust of the symbolic racism approach: antiblack affect and traditional values have stronger effects on racial policy than do such conventional political variables as ideology and party identification, and along with racial policy, they retain strong effects on evaluations of black candidates even when these conventional political variables are controlled for. Though this analysis is generally supportive of the overall model, it would be useful to look more carefully at each of its components.

ANTIBLACK AFFECT

The central justification for using the term *racism* was the presumption that antiblack affect played a role in the effects of symbolic racism. Presumably, antiblack affect is acquired fairly early in life, according to numerous studies of children's racial socialization (see Harding, Proshansky, Kutner, & Chein, 1969; Proshansky, 1966). It is probably acquired nonverbally in many cases, with or without direct interracial contact. It is a spontaneous and direct affect, perhaps without strong cognitive mediation, in the vein described by Zajonc (1980). It may be experienced subjectively as fear, avoidance and a desire for distance, anger, distaste, disgust, contempt, apprehension, unease, or simple dislike (see McConahay, 1986).

However, if predictors with no manifest racial content (e.g., traditional American values alone) could explain opposition to racial policies and black candidates just as well, or if symbolic racism could explain opposition to nonracial policies and white candidates just as well as it did more racially relevant attitudes, then invoking the term *racism* would be unnecessary and indeed inappropriate. So the involvement of antiblack affect is a key element.

It is clear to almost everyone, researchers and respondents alike, that old-fashioned racism items do, in fact, index antiblack attitudes, but such is not the case for symbolic racism. Some other researchers question whether it measures racism at all (e.g., Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986), and ordinary people often tend not to perceive it as reflecting racist content (McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981). What evidence do we have that antiblack affect is really involved, rather than, say, antipathy toward excessively greedy demands that might have been made by any group?

Three general strategies have been used to isolate a distinctive effect of antiblack affect. It should be a factor if (a) direct measures of antiblack affect have significant effects; (b) the effects of symbolic racism (or racial attitudes in general) persist with controls on relevant other *nonracial* attitudes, such as general political ideology; and/or (c) symbolic racism influences evaluations of *racially relevant* attitude objects (e.g., liberal black candidates) more than those of comparable racially neutral objects (e.g., liberal white candidates). Let us evaluate the success of each strategy in turn.

Direct measures of antiblack affect have, to date, been rather crude. Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957) and others argued that a single evaluative factor underlies most such attitudes. In that vein, the main measuring instrument has been the "feeling thermometer" used by the National Election Studies, which measures simple evaluations of "blacks," "whites," and other objects on a warm–cold scale. Little effort has been made to measure any more qualitatively differentiated types of affects toward blacks (though see the recent effort of Jackman & Muha, 1984, to separate warmth from closeness).

The effects of this most direct measure of antiblack affect on whites' racial policy preferences are illustrated in Table 3 with data from the National Election Studies. It has a raw correlation of .24 with racial policy and retains a strong effect (standardized regression coefficient of .20) in a fully specified symbolic-politics model. The effects of antiblack affect on racial policy are fairly typical. In the 1972, 1976, and 1980 NES surveys, it

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correlated .20, .25, and .28 with the same racial-policy scale. It had a significant effect on opposition to busing in McConahay's (1982) analysis of 1975 Louisville data, even though scales of both symbolic and old-fashioned racism were included in the equation.

The direct role of antiblack affect in determining policy and other preferences is an important, but not the only, basis for asserting that racism plays a role in these political evaluations. Another consists of evidence that measures of symbolic racism predict racial policy and evaluations of black candidates with key nonracial dimensions controlled. Table 3 shows that both racial policy and Jackson evaluations were strongly influenced by racial attitudes with ideology and party identification controlled. Sears and Kinder (1971) found that symbolic racism continued strongly to influence preferences for Mayor Yorty with general political conservatism controlled. Similarly, symbolic racism contributed to support for the California tax revolt even with controls on ideology and preferences about the magnitude of government spending (Sears & Citrin, 1985).

Third, there is evidence that such racial attitudes influenced evaluations of the black candidate, Jesse Jackson, more than those of such liberal whites as Walter Mondale or Gary Hart, and had no effect at all on evaluations of the conservative white, Ronald Reagan (Sears et al., 1985). Similarly, the standardized regression coefficients for the black thermometer on presidential choice in the 1968–1984 NES surveys ranged from +.05 to −.03, and for racial policy, from .04 (1976) to .14 (1972), with a mean of .08 (with demographics, party identification, and ideology also in the equations). All of these candidates were white, of course. The only national white candidate whose evaluations were strongly affected by racial attitudes in this period was George Wallace.[12] All this points to an essential role for specifically antiblack affect, but its influence focuses particularly on racial policy positions, evaluations of black candidates, and voter choice in black–white contests.

These data simply treat the thermometer ratings for "blacks" in general. But there is evidence that whites have more differentiated evaluations of blacks than that, when different subgroups of blacks are considered. Oblique rotations of factor analyses of an extended range of racially linked thermometer evaluations indicate that "blacks" fall on the same factor as "working-class blacks," "black politicians," and "black young people," but "black activists," "black militants," and "civil rights leaders" fall on a second factor in factor analyses of the evaluation of various black groups.[13] These two dimensions also yield very different levels of negative affect toward blacks. Just as few whites today endorse segregation, few dislike blacks categorically; the scale mean on the items in the first factor was 62.9. On the other hand, whites are typically much more negative toward black activists; the scale mean on the items in the second factor was 43.5 (Jessor & Sears, 1986).

These two dimensions suggest that mainstream blacks are both differentiated from and evaluated considerably more favorably than black radicals. Moreover, these mainstream blacks fall on the same factor as "whites" and "white politicians" when these latter items are included in the factor analysis. This does not mean that antiblack affect is unimportant; the black thermometer has a significant effect almost no matter how it is treated.[14] But it does suggest that one component of antiblack affect is tied to negative

[12]In 1968, the black thermometer and racial policy drew raw correlations of .22 and .32 and betas of .12 and .19 on his evaluations; in 1972, correlations of .11 and .40 and betas of .03 and .22. But by 1980, even he was not evaluated in racial terms: correlations of .07 and .18 and betas of .04 and .08.

[13]In this analysis, based on the 1985 NES pilot study, both factors are fairly strong, yielding eigenvalues of 3.58 and 1.27, though they are correlated (r = .40).

[14]For example, if the difference between evaluations of blacks and of whites is used instead of the black thermometer in Columns 2 and 4 of Table 3, the effects change very little; the betas are .21 and .20, respectively.

evaluations of black radicals (Jessor & Sears, 1986; also see Rusk & Weisberg, 1972). Research on these feeling thermometers has not yet sufficiently disentangled black radicalism from radicalism in general.

Finally, there is some evidence that this second factor of antiblack affect, focused on black activism, is linked more tightly to contemporary politics than is the first, focused on mainstream blacks. In the 1984 National Elections Study, an expanded measure of antiblack affect, comprised of thermometer evaluations of blacks, civil rights leaders, and black militants, correlated more strongly with racial policy and Jackson evaluations than did the simple black thermometer and had considerably stronger effects on them in full symbolic-politics models (Sears et al., 1985).

TRADITIONAL VALUES

The original conception of symbolic racism was that it represented a blend of antiblack affect with traditional Protestant values. The latter have been enumerated variously as including values of hard work, individualism, thrift, punctuality, sexual repression, and delay of gratification, as opposed to laziness, seeking of favoritism and handouts, impulsivity, and so on (see Kinder & Sears, 1981; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Sears & Kinder, 1971, Sears & McConahay, 1973).[15] An important point about these values is that they contain no manifest racial content. People also apply them to many situations in society that have no relevance to racial conflict at all, and on such occasions, they are presumably completely irrelevant to racial matters. It is only when they are mixed with antiblack affect that individual racism of a symbolic nature can be said to be present.[16]

Most of these values fall into the general category of *individualism*. Yet, it is by no means the only traditional value that applies to racial policy. Lipset and Schneider (1978), Feldman (1983), and others have suggested that whites' attitudes toward racial policy represent trade-offs between individualism and equal opportunity, which they argue is just as fundamental an American value. Both values are very commonly held by Americans because almost all believe that people's outcomes should depend to some degree on the work that they do, and that equal opportunity should be provided to all, to some extent. However, both could have independent effects because the two values are not logically opposed, people do vary in their levels of commitment to them, and, indeed, it is easy to imagine people who variously believe in both, one, or neither.

Several recent studies have tested the relative effects of these traditional values on racially relevant dependent variables and, somewhat to our consternation, have found that egalitarian values are uniformly the stronger of the two. In the 1984 NES study, equality values had a substantial impact on racial policy and evaluations of Jesse Jackson, but individualism had no impact on either one, as shown in Table 3. Feldman (1983) reported a similar result with somewhat different items from the 1972 NES survey. Sears, Huddy, and Schaffer (1984), using the 1983 NES pilot study, found that egalitarian values substantially influenced racial policy (with antiblack affect included in the equation), but

[15]In this book (Chapter 5), Bobo observes that many of these same values emerge in old-fashioned racism as well. In this, he is, of course, quite right; they were particularly prominent in early European, especially Anglo, stereotypes of Africans and, later, slaves: happy-go-lucky, lazy, sexual, dirty, musical, childish, and so on (see Jordan, 1968). But I would argue that they are more involved in the manifest content of symbolic racism because they are central to all three of its content areas. They seem to me peripheral to two main areas of old-fashioned racism—social distance and formal discrimination—though clearly involved in old-fashioned stereotyping.

[16]Such values can have antiblack effects in the absence of such individual racism because they can produce institutional racism (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Jones, 1971;1971; Knowles & Prewitt, 1969).

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that individualism failed to have a significant effect. In their own national survey, Kluegel and Smith (1983) found that equal opportunity values strongly predicted support for affirmative action, whereas individualism failed to have even statistically significant effects. In a national survey done in 1983, Huddy, Sears, and Cardoza (1986) found that egalitarian values had twice as strong an effect as individualism on a standard racial-policy item on special aid to minorities. Egalitarian values also had significantly enhanced support for various versions of bilingual education, whereas individualism had no effect in any case.

Why does egalitarianism have this consistent, and rather strong, advantage over individualism? It is not because of any confounds with antiblack affect. Table 3 is representative of most of these analyses in showing that egalitarian values are stronger both in simple bivariate correlations and in more fully specified symbolic racism models that include antiblack affect. The advantage it could conceivably stem from superior measurement of egalitarian values. This seems unlikely because, in the 1984 NES study, the reliability (Cronbach alpha) of egalitarianism was actually lower than that of individualism, (.59 to .65, for six-item scales). In several of these cases, there was actually more variance in individualism than in egalitarianism. Moreover, Table 3 shows that individualism had somewhat stronger effects than egalitarianism did in predicting Reagan–Mondale preference, so it is not generally inconsequential. So the advantage of egalitarianism does not seem to be trivially methodological.

It seems most appropriate, then, to conclude, at least provisionally, that egalitarianism does have stronger effects than individualism. If this conclusion proves to be correct, it would alter our view of symbolic racism. It would imply that resistance to racial change is more rooted in genuine resistance to equality than is implied by our original emphasis on perceptions that blacks violate nonracial individualistic values such as ambition, hard work, and delayed gratification. It would be a more pessimistic view of race relations.

THE ROLE OF CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGY

General political conservatism played no central role in the original symbolic racism model, as depicted in Figure 1. But there are reasons to believe that it might be centrally involved in such political matters. There is substantial evidence that Americans' ideological self-labels, like their party identifications, are highly stable over time (Converse & Markus, 1979), and that they are fairly strong determinants of policy and candidate preference (Conover & Feldman, 1981; Levitin & Miller, 1979; also see Sears et al., 1979, 1980, 1985; Sears & Citrin, 1985). This evidence suggests that ideological self-descriptions are important symbolic predispositions. Other interpretations of ideology are common, of course, particularly those beginning with normative definitions of ideology (Converse, 1964; Kinder & Sears, 1985). However, many persons who do not meet that normative definition still have and use such a self-label quite meaningfully, as just indicated.

These ideological self-labels tend not to be closely related to simple antiblack affect. For example, over the 1968–1984 NES studies, their mean correlation with the black thermometer item was +.04. On the other hand, they correlated +.29, on the average, with the racial policy scale shown in Table 3. These correlations are consistent with various causal hypotheses.

Many political activists on the left view general conservatism as simply a rationalization for white racism. However, a number of studies have showed that self-labeling as a political liberal or conservative contributes to racially relevant dependent variables above and beyond the effects of symbolic racism or racial attitudes more generally, and adding it to the predictive equation does not markedly diminish the role of racism (Sears & Citrin,

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In the intervening years, sociopsychological theory on such matters has expanded considerably. One could now identify at least three general points of view, ranging from the dominance of affect to the dominance of cognition (though there are, in addition, those who despair of ever being able to isolate the effects of affect from those of cognition). The affect-dominant view is that affect is experienced immediately, quickly, and spontaneously, without any necessary cognitive content (Zajonc, 1980), and that affects are strong and enduring, whereas cognitions are epiphenomenal and are readily manipulated to rationalize those feelings (Festinger, 1957; Rosenberg, 1960). This view has much in common with Allport's original analysis of racial prejudice (1954), that one's personal values influence the cognitive categorization process, producing "partisan" or "autistic" thinking that serves simply to rationalize one's values (see pp. 24, 164).

This affect-dominant view might be contrasted with the wide variety of models that assume decision making to be centrally influenced by such cognitive variables as expectations, attributions, and intentions. Among these models are value-expectancy theories (Edwards, 1954; Feather, 1982), rational choice theories (Page, 1978), theories of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), and some attribution theories (Kelley, 1967). In some of these theories, affect has a substantial independent role as an unexplained prior, such as the subjective utility of a particular choice alternative. But in others, affect is a mere by-product of cognition; for example, the attributions made about a particular event dictate the affects toward it (Weiner, 1982).

The original notion of symbolic racism had its psychological roots mainly in the first of these three viewpoints: affects are classically conditioned responses to specific stimuli, and supportive cognitions are, in large part, rationalizations of those primitive affective responses. As in Zajonc's theorizing (1980), affect is more closely associated with a particular stimulus and does not depend on cognition; it is primary and basic.

Two contrary theories hold that racial policy preferences are determined more cognitively. One is that they are generated by moderately rational assessments of the societal costs and benefits of the policy in question; for example, attitudes toward busing are determined by assessments of its probable educational benefits, juvenile crime, prejudice reduction, and so on (Armor, 1980; Rothbart, 1976; Stinchcombe & Taylor, 1980). A second treats cognitive attributions of blacks' outcomes as determinants of policy preferences. Whites tend to believe that blacks' various disadvantages are partly due to their not trying hard enough to get ahead (Rothbart, 1976; Schuman, 1969), even though they are less likely to believe in blacks' native inferiority. And Feldman (1983) showed that both external attributions of the causes of poverty that emphasize unequal opportunity and internal attributions that focus on lack of adherence to the work ethic are related to explanations for racial inequality and to policy preferences (also see Kluegel & Smith, 1983).

A complete theory should take such cognitive variables as cost–benefit expectations and attributions into consideration. The major analytical problem is to determine their causal role: Are they causes, or effects, or both? Although it would be nice to believe that new statistical technologies, such as two-stage least-squares regression, can unravel these tangled causal flows, I am skeptical that they will take us very far in this direction. Finding appropriate instruments, highly correlated with one but not both of the variables whose causal relation is in question, seems to me likely to prove the exception rather than the rule in this literature.

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described low correlations between antiblack affect and conservatism as strong disconfirmations of the symbolic racism model, as if conservatism were thought also to be a mere rationalization for antiblack affect. Both interpretations are incorrect; the notion of symbolic racism suggests that both traditional values and conservatism produce variance in racially relevant political responses independent of that produced by antiblack affect (e.g., Sears & Citrin, 1985; Sears et al. 1979, 1980, 1985).

Two sets of recent findings suggest the value of a more cognitively driven view. Simple thermometer evaluations of "blacks" have relatively weaker effects than do more specific subgroups of blacks (Bobo, 1983; Jessor & Sears, 1986). One interpretation is that affect toward "blacks" most influences policy preferences when embedded in a more cognitive context. The greater impact of the thermometer evaluations dealing with more specific and connotatively consensual labels of subcategories of blacks, such as black militants or working-class blacks, might be explained this way.

Second, a simple symbolic-politics theory would predict that affects toward racial equality would be a simple function of affects toward its two constituent elements: race and equality in general. But one recent study (Sears et al., 1986) showed that racial equality values had considerably more impact on racial policy than did their two constituent elements: antiblack affect and general equality values. This finding suggests that embedding antiblack affect in the equality context gave it a force that it did not have as an isolated and thus cognitively more spare symbol. Perhaps such symbols, when presented completely in the abstract, are too cognitively impoverished to evoke a strong response.

The critical political factor, then, may be whether a given symbol evokes cognitive schemata in many members of the general public. Fiske (1982) contended that affects influence our attitudes and behavior primarily when we have a cognitive schema about the domain in question, because affect is stored with the knowledge structure; when the schema is not evoked, neither is the affect. A newspaper story about an unemployed, unmarried black woman on welfare, with three illegitimate children, receiving no spousal or child support, might trigger the affects associated with blacks on welfare, primarily because the story evokes a familiar schema about them. Hence, embedding symbols of equality explicitly in a racial context may evoke schemata in many Americans that the more abstract consideration of either alone does not.

One important implication would be that, without such consensual schematic thinking, public opinion may be too splintered to be mobilized readily by any given symbol. A second implication is that any individual may have multiple schemata about one attitude object. Different schemata may be evoked (or "primed") by different cues in the informational environment. Media attention to one issue area as opposed to another may dictate the basis on which a president's performance is evaluated (Iyengar & Kinder, 1985), perhaps because media attention evokes a particular schema. Public support for tax reduction may vary as a function of which schema is most widely evoked: one focused on welfare-state programmatic goals or one dominated by cynical evaluations of government inefficiency, waste, fraud, and so on (Sears & Citrin, 1985). Similarly, McConahay (1986) suggested that whites high in modern racism may be quite ambivalent about blacks, capable of swinging strongly between support and opposition depending on the most salient cues (or, in the present terms, on which schema is evoked). And Kinder and Sanders (1986) have recently shown that whites' attitudes toward affirmative action are more powerfully determined by racial attitudes when affirmative action is presented as providing unfair advantages to blacks than when it is presented as reverse discrimination against whites. Changing the meaning of the attitude object changes the predispositions it elicits.

WHEN ATTITUDE OBJECTS BECOME SYMBOLIC

This discussion of symbolic racism embeds it in the general framework of a more general theory of symbolic politics. Although this theory has not been fully elaborated in any one place, some of its elements have been (e.g., in Huddy et al., 1986; Sears, 1983, 1984; Sears & Whitney, 1973; Sears et al., 1986). It begins with the notion that mass politics is centrally influenced by symbolic predispositions. These are affective responses to particular symbols that are (a) stable over time—indeed, often quite long-standing within

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Some of these symbolic predispositions fit the classic model of early-socialized at-titudes. In the United States, antiblack affect seems typically to be acquired early in the school years (Katz, 1976), and most have acquired a political party identification before late adolescence (at least, until recently; see Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Converse, 1975; Shanks & Miller, 1985). But some symbolic predispositions may be acquired in adulthood, often in response to attitude objects that are associated with other powerful symbols or experiences. These new symbolic predispositions can presumably be detected by the same tests as are used with earlier-socialized ones: stability, consisten-cy, and power.

Several previous studies have dealt with attitude objects that become newly symbolic in adulthood. There is evidence that "the Watts riot" became newly symbolic for many adults in the mid-1960s, especially for blacks in the Watts area and environs, who in-creasingly came to believe, in the weeks and months following that riot, that it had been a symbolic political protest (rather than a meaningless outburst or set of instrumental criminal actions), and that it would have positive effects for blacks. These two beliefs became more consistent with each other over time, giving rise to "protest ideology," in which the violence was disapproved but was viewed as an effective means of protest. Young blacks in particular seemed to become resocialized to this new view of protest (Sears & McConahay, 1973, Chapter 11).

"Vietnam" became a symbol through the late 1960s and the early 1970s, initially generating quite inconsistent attitudes (Verba, Brody, Parker, Nie, Polsby, Ekman, & Black, 1967), weakly linked with preexisting predispositions (Lau et al., 1978). But by 1980, it had itself become a powerful symbolic predisposition, dictating attitudes toward newly arising symbols of international intervention (Sears, Steck, Lau, & Gahart, 1983). "Proposition 13" took on some considerable symbolic value for Californians in the late 1970s, and it remains a potent symbol whenever they consider taxes (Sears & Citrin, 1985). "Bilingual education" has considerable symbolic value, especially when formu-lated in terms of maintaining a child's fluency in a native non-English language (Huddy et al., 1986). Similarly, "Jesse Jackson" became a potent symbol in the 1984 campaign because he became a personalized symbol of blacks' demands. By the end of that cam-paign, the Jackson symbol itself appeared to become a significant contributor to pre-Reagan votes and Republican party identification, especially among southern whites (Sears et al., 1985).

In this same vein, I would argue that "busing" and "affirmative action" have become symbolic in recent years. It is easy to demonstrate this for "busing"; it generates highly stable attitudes (Converse & Markus, 1979), which are highly consistent with other racial attitudes (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears et al., 1979), and has considerable force over voting decisions (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & Citrin, 1985). Less work has been done on attitudes toward affirmative action, but it yields similar patterns (Kluegel & Smith, 1983).

The process by which such an object becomes symbolic is one that requires further research. Some preliminary ideas have been laid out earlier (Sears, 1983, 1984), having to do with the information flow on the object, its association with other symbolic predisposi-tions, the consensus on its meaning, social polarization, and the like. But a fuller descrip-tion is beyond the scope of this chapter.

LONG-TERM SOCIAL CHANGE

If the political role of old-fashioned racism has been usurped by symbolic racism, one might legitimately ask how and why this has happened. Both old-fashioned racism and

symbolic racism are assumed to be socialized fairly early in life and stable within individuals over long periods of time. If that assumption is correct, however, two implications would follow: early socialization on race should have changed, from a focus on old-fashioned racism to one on symbolic racism; and persistent cohort differences should be detectable, with the older generation retaining its old-fashioned racism, and the younger, its symbolic racism. None of these assumptions has yet been tested adequately (see Miller & Sears, 1986).

Why might the nature of early socialization on racial issues have changed? As political events have transpired, the attitude objects presented to the mass public plainly have changed. Many changes have occurred in American race relations since World War II (Farley, 1984; Wilson, 1978). Southern resistance and legal segregation have largely been overcome, and "reverse discrimination" and "busing" have come forward as issues. The old objects focused principally on race, blacks, and racial issues; the new objects pit individualistic values against egalitarian ones, perhaps, along with the ever-present symbols of race. Similarly, the change in the political climate has changed the nature of the white political candidates involved in racial issues, and thus, the symbolism surrounding them. The notorious southern racists of an earlier era, such as Senator Bilbo, Governor Faubus, Governor Ross Barnett of Mississippi, "Bull" Connor, and the early George Wallace standing in the schoolhouse door, were symbols of massive southern resistance to change. In the late 1960s, they were replaced by northerners like Sam Yorty, Frank Rizzo, and Louise Day Hicks, who fought racial change directly but without being so explicitly antiblack. In the late 1970s and 1980s, they, in turn, have been replaced by conservatives such as Ronald Reagan, Ed Meese, David Stockman, and Ed Koch, for whom racial issues are quite secondary, although their nonracial values have major implications for the well-being of blacks. Such changes in attitude objects, along with the continued high salience of racial issues, ought to change the content of early political socialization on race, within the family, in the media, in the schools, on the playground, and everywhere else.

Such change in early political socialization is suggested by Ward's findings (1985). The generation he interviewed, born after World War II, tended to be split on issues of symbolic racism, whereas their parents were split on issues of old-fashioned racism (specifically, miscegenation). Ward assumed that the old-fashioned racism in some of the parents resulted in the socialization of a "reservoir of racism" in their offspring, which manifested itself in the latter's symbolic racism some 20 years later. So the parent–child correlations on racism were very high, but the issues that split the two generations were quite different, reflecting the change in the racial attitude objects on the public agenda.

A second possibility is that there has merely been a change in cultural expression while the same underlying attitudes remain. This is the more ominous implication of the finding that racial policy preferences are better predicted by egalitarian values than by individualism. Symbolic racism may really be composed of resistance to racial equality; only the battlefield has changed, not the war. To be sure, the old-fashioned rednecks were at least up-front about their prejudice, so a white person's assurance of tolerance may be a mixed blessing for blacks. But in the long run, a reduction in overtly demeaning communication is sure to have a positive effect in many aspects of our society.

CONCLUSIONS

The line of research centering on symbolic racism holds that racism continues to pervade white America, that it continues to have a powerful effect on racial policy preferences and voting behavior, and that such effects are largely symbolic and surpris-

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ingly independent of any direct impact that racial issues have on whites' private lives. The form that white racism takes today is quite different than that of 30 years ago; overt bigotry is much reduced. This is part of what has plainly been a major change in the cultural climate about race. These changes most probably reflect genuine changes in the white public's attitudes, though, to some extent as well, a change in patterns of overt expression. Either way, major changes have occurred in the policies and practices of our public and private institutions.

Although these liberalizing changes are important and should be applauded, it remains important to assess the extent to which whites' political positions continue to depend on race. Our efforts have addressed this question. Clearly any one research program can take only one cut at such a complex matter. And we have focused particularly on the contrast of symbolic racism with self-interest because, frankly, much of the political debate has centered on that contrast.

Some find offensive the underlying dynamics postulated by the symbolic politics approach, especially the notion that racism lurks behind attitudes seemingly innocent of manifest racial content. Bobo (1983), for example, suggested using the term *sophisticated prejudice* instead of *symbolic racism* because *racism* is too pejorative. There is no doubt that *racism* is pejorative, but so is *prejudice*; none of us likes to think we are either racist or prejudiced. Many people do not believe that holding the views reflected in the symbolic racism items shown in Table 1 means that one is really racist; they feel that one can agree to such items without being racist.

It is a cliché to note that the measurement of any underlying dimension is, with present technology, only probabilistic; the score of any one individual is determined by numerous factors other than the theoretical dimension of primary interest, including error of measurement. Nevertheless, if there is a single individual in the United States, black, white, red, yellow, or brown, who is not somewhat racist and prejudiced against blacks, this condition strikes me as a remarkable feat of resistance to a quite overwhelming saturation of centuries of cultural socialization. It is difficult to read Shakespeare's *Othello* without being impressed by how ingrained racist assumptions about blacks have been in the Western world since the beginning of extensive contact between Europe and Africa. Cultural norms on such matters are so ubiquitous that it seems to me doubtful that variation in their acceptance is anchored by their complete absence. I see little to be gained by pretending that what we are dealing with is somehow nicer than racism. Perhaps it is a consequence of our adherence to individualistic values that we tend to take such matters personally; certainly, many do. It is hard for me to see why individuals should hold themselves morally responsible for reflecting some rudiments of a nearly universal cultural socialization, even though it does seem proper to feel some obligation to resist its most destructive elements.

A second offensive aspect of the symbolic racism approach stems from its assumption that racism is often an irrational response to long-standing predispositions rather than a reasonable response to the realities of life. This is sometimes taken as a charge that the individual is often irrational. That charge, too, seems to me to have some truth in it. It should be noted that a fundamental and seemingly rather straightforward assumption of the symbolic politics approach is that the process is politically symmetrical. I would presume that the political left, right, and center are all quite even-handedly subject to the same psychological dynamics. Hence, support for radical or problack causes, such as support for a protest interpretation of ghetto riots, is determined just as fulsomely by symbolic predispositions as is support for conservative or antiblack positions (e.g., see Sears & McConahay, 1973).[19]

[19]For a contrary interpretation of the symbolic politics approach, see Sniderman and Tetlock (1986).

Plainly, the cultural climate in America has changed since World War II. Almost all institutions have been at least formally desegregated, and many in much more than a token sense (Farley, 1984). Government can no longer indulge in flagrantly discriminatory actions. Few whites any longer prefer strict segregation or believe in major, inherent, intractable racial inferiorities. All these changes are real. Moreover, they are changes of great societal importance because consensual social norms govern a great deal of public behavior, both official and informal (however much private attitudes may depart from the norm). Openly discriminatory legislation is no longer a serious possibility, and it is rarely possible to be openly insulting to blacks on racial grounds. Both barriers are firmly grounded in white opinion.

Nevertheless, our findings suggest that underlying racism continues to have an important political force. The old forms do not; politicians can no longer make political hay by preaching segregation and racial inferiority. But the new forms do; politicians can complain about demands and special favors and can insist that blacks need no special government action to achieve parity. Indeed, the Reagan administration has gone to court to dismantle affirmative action agreements painstakingly negotiated by local governments.

Any observer of American life would be guilty of wishful thinking if he or she imagined that racism would suddenly disappear, after nearly five centuries as a major complex of national and cultural belief. It is deeply ingrained throughout Western culture. It appears not to be as responsive to reality experiences as one might wish, whether they consist of benign interracial contacts or simply the absence of personal racial threats. Discovering whether symbolic racism is mostly antiblack affect and traditional values or a selfish defense of group privilege will require more pointed research. Either way, the needs that black leadership now press have come into conflict, we argue, with traditional American values that have had nothing themselves to do with race, adding strength to whites' resistance to change. This threatens, perhaps, to freeze blacks in their current status, surely not a pleasant prospect.

The symbolic racism view is not, then, a particularly optimistic one. It may seem old-fashioned to suggest it, but if it is correct that socialization and education are partly responsible for racism, they can also be partly responsible for its reduction. Differences of color have produced stereotypes and prejudice throughout history and in a vast variety of cultures. But any whose memory still spans the lynchings of Negroes in the 1930s and the exclusion of blacks from the professional baseball and basketball leagues of the immediate postwar period must feel optimistic about what has been accomplished in this land, and about what further must be within our reach.

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